

# When identity projects go wrong – an exploration of identity- inconsistent consumption using techniques of neutralisation

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## Abstract

The research relates to identity projects and the question of why consumers still purchase identity-inconsistent products. Specifically, the research aims to explore what happens when identity projects goes wrong.

Identity projects is the theory that consumers actively seek to create, enhance, transform or maintain a sense of identity (Belk 1999). Much research in the literature focuses on how identity constructs help consumers positively while the research on the stigmatisation of individual responsibility of 'wrong identity' remains scarce (Larsen and Patterson, 2018).

This research borrows the theory of neutralisation (Sykes and Matza, 1957) from criminological studies to explore what happens when identity projection goes wrong. Specifically, the research seeks to investigate how consumers view and justify their identity-inconsistent purchases. Despite its popularity, the theorisation of neutralisation is still largely understudied. The majority of research on neutralisation tends to only focus on additional techniques, while the question of where these techniques are intended for is left unasked (Maruna and Copes, 2005). This research aims to enrich the literature by investigating the function and purposes of each neutralising technique in consumer behaviour.

Using 48 semi-structured in-depth interviews on 24 female university students' fashion consumption, the findings confirm that neutralising techniques have been used widely to shield consumers from the guilt arising from identity-inconsistent consumption. Further analysis indicates consumers do not always relate consumption with their identity projects, thus challenging identity projects's strong position in terms of an 'active concern of identity creation'. Rather, through the technique of neutralisation, consumers create a sense of narrative for future identity inconsistent consumption.



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## Abbreviation list

*In alphabetic order*

ASA – Asian

AtHL – Appeal to higher loyalties

AtAV – Appeal to alternative values

CDSER – Comparison-driven self-evaluation and restoration

CtC – Condemnation of condemners

DoI – Denial of injury

DoOF – Denial of original form

DoR – Denial of responsibility

DoV – Denial of victim

EUR – European

LARPING – Live action role playing

NT – Neutralisation techniques

PG – Postgraduate

UG – Undergraduate

## Style list

### *In alphabetic order*

**Bohemian** – Although it embraces a sense of flowing liberty in décor choices and can be associated with eclectic style, Bohemian style is more than that. The word “Bohemian” comes from the French word for “gypsy,” and it applies to those who live unconventional (usually artistic) lives examples.

**Hipster** – A hipster is someone whose fashion choices and music interests fall outside the mainstream. In the 1960s, hipster mainly referred to low-slung, hiphugging pants, but by the 1990s it described an urban subculture made up mostly of young and educated bohemian types living in gentrified neighbourhoods.

**Lolita** – is a fashion subculture from Japan that is highly influenced by Victorian and Edwardian children's clothing and styles from the Rococo period. A very distinctive property of Lolita fashion is the aesthetic of cuteness. This clothing subculture can be categorized into three main substyles: 'gothic', 'classic', and 'sweet'

**Mori** – 'Mori' means forest in Japanese, and mori girls look like fairytale forest wanderers in their loose dresses, vintage prints and quaint accessories. Mori girls choose to live their lives on their own terms, stopping to appreciate the little things that others overlook amidst the hustle and bustle of daily life.

**Normcore** – Normcore is a unisex fashion trend characterized by unpretentious, normal-looking clothing.

**Preppy** – Preppy is a subculture in the United States associated with old private North-eastern university-preparatory schools. The terms are used to denote a person seen as characteristic of a student or alumnus of these schools. Characteristics of preps in the past include a particular subcultural speech, vocabulary, dress, mannerisms, etiquette, reflective of an upper-class upbringing.

**Tomboy** – A tomboy is a girl who exhibits characteristics or behaviours considered typical of a boy, including wearing masculine clothing and

engaging in games and activities that are physical in nature and are considered in many cultures to be unfeminine or the domain of boys

(Source: Wikipedia)

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## Preface

The journey of this PhD started almost five years ago where I had my MA in Marketing in 2011 and tried various jobs in the field of marketing trying to establish myself as a young, dynamic and full of knowledge individual. Obviously, that didn't work out as well as planned.

This can be traced back to my bachelor's degree in Philosophy, which is in philosophy. I always had that romantic yet unrealistic idea of sustaining myself as a poor but knowledgeable philosopher who thinks for a living. Then when I graduated in 2009, financial crisis hit me hard, then recession pretty much lasted forever. So, I had to think about job perspectives and employability. Before my master's degree, I always thought degrees like business studies or marketing specifically, are really a means to an end for jobs. Obviously, the degree changed my mind, I loved brand avoidance and especially identity research.

This is probably the reason why there are still traces of brand avoidance theories and anti-consumption research in my doctoral research, which has been a complete departure from my master's dissertation. However, in 2014, when I barely started my doctoral research, I was so certain and clear that I wanted to pursue identity-avoidance and anti-consumption research.

After spending my first year going through journal articles, it became clearer and clearer that I wanted to do ethnographic research because this idea of 'socially desirable responding' really bothered me. I became suspicious and sceptical on research papers that are purely based on interview or focus group data, to the point that I even asked some scholars how to reduce the impact of socially desirable responding at conferences and symposiums. Ethnographic research provided me a new lens of observing social phenomenon based on consumers' action instead of words (however interestingly, there is still this debate of practical

consciousness and discursive consciousness in my mind), and the fact that my second supervisor used ethnography for her PhD was a nice coincidence. I was so certain that I was going to observe consumers' consumption behaviour in the most immersive way at supermarket and in their homes that I was nearly ready to submit my ethics approval at the time.

It obviously did not happen.

I went to a symposium in London and met some nice and interesting scholars from Australia. They pretty much did what I wanted to do, but better (in case of interest, it's Moraes et al., 2012 in the reference list). That obviously had destroyed my plan for the whole set up of my doctoral research. Supervisors tried to convince me that qualitative research was always different depending on the person conducted the research. A tiny change in setting, on the other hand, could change the results completely. However, I was so obsessed with the idea of individuality and original, that I was determined to change the whole base of my work. That took much longer than I expected. In that dark period of my PhD, I've spoken to scholars with experimental research background (hence, the paragraph on AB gap and positivist's roots), and social marketing theorists. Tried netnography, participation observation, survey and many other means of research. There was about 6-9 months' that I did not do any writing, but merely going through all different approaches in the field to see how I wanted to change my doctoral research.

Then I found techniques of neutralisation.

It is not only neutralisation has made me change the design of my research altogether, throughout this 9 months, my supervisors had been really helpful in throwing different ideas at me, especially the paper by Hitchings (2001) that addresses discursive consciousness through different interview design. However, the theory of

neutralisation provides a new lens into looking at identity negotiation, because of its focus on justification and narrative account. Therefore, I was thrilled to file my ethics approval to start my data collection as soon as possible (already in my third year of research).

However, the more I investigated this theory of neutralisation, the more I realised that it was under-developed. There was a lot more work needed than simply applying it on to analysing identity navigation. I have even contacted the original author who brought this theory into consumer research for some ideas and opinions. However, the reply I got from him was not promising or enlightening. Therefore, I decided that before moving on to using the theories straightaway, I would have to investigate the fundamental functions of those techniques (see chapter 5).

Overall, the PhD journey took much longer than expected with quite a lot of bumps here and there. There are traces of almost all kinds of theories in my doctoral research including attitude-behaviour gap, action-value gap, cognitive dissonance and habits. Even though most of them are not relevant to my doctoral research now, they helped me get to where I am now.

# Chapter 1 Introduction

## 1.1 Introduction – Consumption and identity research

*“The individual has always had to struggle to keep from being overwhelmed by the tribe. If you try it, you will be lonely often, and sometimes frightened. But no price is too high to pay for the privilege of owning yourself.”*

- Rudolph Kipling (1935, interview)

*“The notion that there are especially authentic parts of the self, and that these parts can remain cloaked from view indefinitely, borders on the superstitious. This is not to say that lay belief in a true self is dysfunctional. Perhaps it is a useful fiction, akin to certain phenomena in religious cognition and decision-making.”*

- Nina Strohminger, Joshua Knobe and Geore Newman. (2017, p. 557)

The genealogy of consumption is longstanding and has been central to many disciplines. With its history tracing back to as far as classical philosophy, consumption studies have seen the light in motivational research in consumer psychology during the early post-war years; ecological humanism in the 1960s; anthropology and philosophy around the 1970s, and sociology of modernity in the 1990s (Jackson, 2005).

Motivation researchers in social psychology, for instance, are interested in designing and marketing products that translate into consumption; while anthropologists and sociologists concentrate on how our consumption reflects what society has become (Jackson, 2005). Even within the field of sociology, there is a debate about whether to put consumers as the object of the interest or to centre the attention on the process of exchange (Warde, 2015). The

dichotomy conceptualises consumption in two completely different historical roots. On one hand, studies on consumers tend to examine the roles taken and the values consumers hold to understand the process of exchange (Zukin, 2004); while on the other hand, research on the process of consumption usually concentrates on social organisation where consumer goods are incorporated (Warde, 2015).

Other than the variation of disciplines' different interests, studies on consumption have encompassed various stages across various disciplines. Each of the different avenues has its focus on different aspects of consumption. Earlier stage study was prompted by the focus on the economic system and mass production and consumption (Warde, 2014). Consequently, research stemming from this period centred on the relationship between needs and wants (Roberts, Dant and Lim, 2015). Therefore, consumption at the time was considered to be nothing more than a process of deliberate and personal choice.

It was not until 1980s that the landscape of consumption research was transformed, owing to the cultural turn in social science (Santoro, 2011). With its unique interest in subcultures and social organisations, cultural studies managed to transform the understanding of consumers from '*an epiphenomenon of capitalist production, wherein the consumer was if not a dupe at least passive, to a central principle of social order and a realm for individual agency and choice*' (Warde, 2015: p.120). Thus, consumption is no longer understood as a means to fulfil needs, but a process that has elements of emotions, desires and irrationality.

As a result, a compelling academic brand-named consumer culture theory (CCT) was born at the time to focus on the dynamic relationships among consumers, the marketplace and cultural meanings (Arnould and Thompson, 2005). Central to CCT is the concept that consumer culture does not cause action, but rather, it

conveys – *'frames consumers' horizons of conceivable action, feeling and sense-making interpretations more likely than others'* (Arnould and Thompson, 2005: p.869). In other words, consumer cultures cannot be measured, tested, or generalised, but should be observed, explored and discussed.

Subsequently, the cultural turn leads to one stem of research that sees consumption as the construction of symbolic lifestyles (Trigg, 2001). Consumption is understood as means of communicating self-identity to others (Belk, 1988). Embedded within the link between identity and consumption lies the symbolic role consumer goods possess (Dittmar, 1992).

In other words, without the added symbolic attachment of the product, it is hard to see how products could be seen as the extended self in our life (Belk, 1988). Subsequently, the symbolic role material products possess facilitate 'social conversations' between individuals and their social identities, group processes and intergroup relations, and cultural meanings (Jackson, 2005; Abrams and Hogg, 2017).

Years of consumer research has demonstrated the intertwined nature of identity and consumption (e.g. Ruvio and Belk, 2013; Weiss and Johar, 2013). Recent developments in identity and consumption have concluded that consumption begins and ends with the self (Bagozzi, 2013). As a dominant part of our identity, consumption is important not only because others evaluate and categorise people based on possessions, but also, research has demonstrated that consumption changes our perceptions of ourselves, to the extent that even our digital avatars would affect our sense of selves (Blascovich and Bailenson, 2011).

Indeed, identities reflect who we are, because they are the constructs of all our characteristics, traits and social memberships (Oyserman et al. 2012). Identities might not be accurate measures of one's self-concept because they change over time (Ruvio and

Belk 2013); can be controlled (Wilcox & Stephen 2013); change over social contexts (White et al. 2012). However, individuals still feel that they know themselves, possibly based on the experiences and autobiographical memories they have had since they were born (Fivush, 2011). Consumption has become more and more important in terms of identity formation in the contemporary world. At a surface level, people are still inclined to categorise people based on their professions, however, at a non-verbal level, people are prone to define others by their possessions (e.g. clothing, accessories, or cars they drive). Moreover, it is not only other people whose judgement is based on our possessions. Hirschman, Ruvio and Belk (2013) reveal that our possessions in turn alter our understanding of our self-identities.

So, whether you enjoy the like of luxurious department shopping experiences at the heart of London or prefer to do savvy digital shopping on online comparison sites, consumers tend to use their identities, or specifically, the identities they would like to be seen by others, to guide their choices in a consistent matter (Chugani et al., 2015). Indeed, consumption is always at centre stage where consumers construct, perform and negotiate their individual and collective identities. Through consumption, consumers can 'perform' and 'become' the people of their choice (Giddens, 1991), and as a result, consumers have always been regarded as identity-seekers (Arnould and Thompson, 2005).

In summary, this doctoral research situates itself in consumer culture to explore how it affects personal self-identity, social interactions in the marketplace. Instead of seeing culture as a homogeneous shared meaning like how Asian behave in this way or how Europeans behave differently, this doctoral research questions the heterogeneous construction of meanings from consumers points of view. Consumer culture is, for example, a viewpoint that explores how consumers think and believe, rather than a top down view to categorise them based on their characteristics in the

traditional research in consumer behaviour (e.g. the research in consumer behaviour that predicts consumption, or modelling decision making process based on high or low involvement of products). In other words, consumer culture is part of a broader consumption picture (Szmigin and Carrigan, 2006; Arnould and Thompson, 2019), where it exists within the realm of consumption, but yet in the lens of consumers' interpretation and reaction in the marketplace.

## 1.2 Problem identification and research questions

Research in identity consumption tend to focus on three areas of self-concepts. Specifically, research based on an individualistic approach; research concerning multiple elements of selves and research in the context of social interactions.

The individualistic approach concentrates on how possessions as extended selves contribute to consumption (Belk, 1988). There is an assumption of a 'true self' (or real self, core self) that exists independently of the other self-concepts. Consequently, consumers make consumption choices based on this sense of 'true self' (Strohinger and Nichols, 2016). However, as suggested by (Strohinger et al., 2017), there is no scientific way of proving or disproving the concept of 'true self'. Therefore, rather than addressing the concept as an objective in a scientific way, true self could be used as a tool to understand the values of the person observed. In other words, if a consumer believes vegetarianism is bad and insists that urges to have meat products represent his/her true self, even though what counts as part of his/her true self is subjective, the account shows what he/she prizes the most (Strominger and Nichols, 2016).

Consumer research on multiple elements of selves concentrates on the dynamic nature of the self. In other words, how the different elements of self react with each other is at the centre of multiple self-concepts. Specifically, three areas of research address the

interactions among multiple selves: conflicting selves (Erikson, 1968); compensatory consumption (Rucker and Galinsky, 2013) and impulsive consumption (Block and Wilcox, 2013).

Finally, the last area looks at how the self-identities react in social contexts. Consumption is not a simple action of causation, it is rather a social, cultural and economic process for identity construction (Belk, 1988) and expression (Zukin and Maquire, 2004). Therefore, both social identity theory from social psychology and role identity theory from sociology aim to investigate how social selves contribute to consumption in a social situation.

Altogether, the use of goods and service to construct identity has become a vital part in consumer research (Arnould and Thompson, 2005). Essentially, identity projects assumes that consumers *'are actively concerned about the creation, enhancement, transformation and maintenance of a sense of identity'* (Larsen and Patterson, 2018: p. 195). Consumption thus demands consumers' continuous negotiations through a marketplace with a plethora of commodities and experiences (Holt, 2002). Consequently, identity projects is seen as an individual responsibility to be consuming the right things at the right time (Cronin et al., 2014), in terms of both what you consume and what you avoid (Hogg et al, 2009). Furthermore, the pressure of attaining distinction through consumption heavily relies on consumers' on-going understanding and negotiation with the symbolic values of commodities (Arnould and Thompson, 2005). In other words, consumers are operating under a tremendous amount of pressure in negotiating their identities to construct market-mediated individuality (Thompson and Haytko, 1997).

However, despite its popularity in consumer research, most of the identity research focusses on how identity projects help consumers positively (Larsen and Patterson, 2018), research on what happens when identity projects goes wrong remains scarce. That is,

consumers are under a tremendous amount of pressure to get their identity projects consistent and express themselves in the way they want to be seen, but not enough research specifically addresses the aftermath of how consumers deal with this stress (or if they actually do deal with) if they got inconsistent identities across.

This is especially true in fashion marketing, where consumers are seen to have considerable freedom in generating personalised fashion identities (Parmentier and Fischer, 2011), and resist dominant fashion narratives (Thompson and Haytko, 1997). The fashion industry has been chosen for this research because it is highly relevant for both product symbolism and congruence theory (Hogg and Banister, 2001). In other words, in the context of fashion, consumers are even more pressurised into projecting their 'desired' self-identities because they are able to create 'desired' identities successfully (Murray, 2002). However, as this research seeks to explore the general identity negotiation in marketplace, fashion industry has been chosen as a platform because of its relevance.

Further, the limited research which addresses this question assumes an active response from consumers to get the identity projects right. However, this 'strong' and 'active' position of consumer identity projects is assumed. That is, no research to date has investigated what happens immediately after consumers realise their identity projects goes wrong. Therefore, the research seeks to fill in this gap by adopting theory of neutralisation to investigate what happens when identity projects go wrong.

The theory of neutralisation originated from criminological studies providing space for identity negotiation and reconstruction because fundamentally it is a tool for justification and narrative accounts. It has been widely used in the past decade as a means to maintain internal consistency in consumer research, even though nearly all of the application of neutralisation theory is on consumer mis-

behaviour or non-participation in ethical consumption (e.g. Gruber and Schlegelmilch, 2014; Koay, 2018).

Thus, this research seeks to introduce the neutralisation theory to consumer research and aims to explore what happens when identity projects goes wrong with the following research questions:

1. What are consumers' reasons for identity-inconsistent consumption?
2. How do they perceive and justify their identity-inconsistent consumption themselves?
3. What are the roles of neutralisation techniques in consumers' identity projects?
4. What are the implications for consumers' identity projects?

### 1.3 Contributions

By exploring 'what happens when identity-project goes wrong', this doctoral research contributes to the area of consumer culture in the following ways. The doctoral research makes several contributions to identity projects theory both methodologically and theoretically. Specifically, the doctoral research:

1. Discovers three new techniques of neutralisation in identity research;
2. Explores the functions of each technique of neutralisation;
3. Use the function of technique of neutralisation to reveal how identity navigation works;
4. Establishes a weak and reactive definition of identity projects as opposed to a strong and active definition assumed in the literature.

None of the above four main contributions have been attempted in the literature before. Particularly, identity-inconsistent consumption is under-researched because most studies concentrate on identity in conflict (except for Suzuki and Satoshi

(2012)'s research on how cultural differences affect synthetic and dialectical thinking).

The doctoral research would be potentially valuable for both marketing manager from the private section and policymakers and strategists in public sectors. First, private sector could be benefited from more insights into consumers' preferences and how their different parts of self-identities were salient at garment purchases.

Public policy makers could use an increased understanding of how ordinary people defend their guilt to determine which part of their self-identities were salient, and consequently to develop marketing campaigns that encourage consumers to activate either the personal sense of self-identity or the social side of self-identity. (for example, depending on the techniques used by consumers, policy maker can choose to target on their social lives if they are using more external reasons like DoR or DoIM, or personal sense of 'true self' if they use JoPP more often).

#### 1.4 Doctoral research overview

For the purpose of clarity, the structure of this doctoral research is summarised in figure 1.1

Figure 1.1 Doctoral research structure

<b>Chapter 1</b> Introduction – consumption and identity research
<b>Chapter 2</b> Literature review Part I: Identity consumption in consumer research Part II: The technique of neutralisation and consumer research
<b>Chapter 3</b> Methodology
<b>Chapter 4</b> Research findings
<b>Chapter 5</b> Discussion
<b>Chapter 6</b> Conclusion

Following this introduction chapter, the next chapter reviews the relevant literature and is divided into two parts. The first part of the literature reviews relevant material on identity consumption in consumer research covering identity consumption and reasons based on a personal sense of 'true self', multiple selves, social selves and external mass marketing. The second part of the literature reviews and introduces techniques of neutralisation to identity projects, providing a framework for this research.

Chapter 3 outlines and discusses this doctoral research' philosophical underpinnings and methodological approach. Specifically, this doctoral research is situated within the paradigm of Kantian's transcendental idealism and takes the position of a social constructionist's epistemology. In accordance with symbolic interactionism, the doctoral research supports the view that all social knowledge is social constructed. That is, any knowledge gained in this doctoral research is constructed through the interaction between the researcher, the participants and data. Consequently, in-depth interview was chosen for this research because of its advantages in gathering rich qualitative data for theory building.

Chapter 4 presents the data collected from 48 in-depth interviews where participants' reasons for identity-inconsistent consumption were outlined and analysed. The data is broadly divided into four aspects of identities following the framework from the literature chapter.

Chapter 5 discusses the findings by using the technique of neutralisation as an analytic tool. The functions of each neutralisation technique is explored and discussed. Subsequently, a discussion of how neutralisation techniques contribute to consumers' identity projects is provided.

Finally, Chapter 6 concludes the doctoral research by summarising the contributions and implications of this doctoral research. On top of that, limitations of this doctoral research are provided with recommendations for future research.

## Chapter 2 Literature review

The purpose of this chapter is to a) introduce the key streams of literature in relation to this doctoral research and b) to introduce the technique of neutralisation to identity consumption research. Accordingly, this chapter is divided into two parts.

Part I reviews the self-identity consumption literature in terms of the historical development in consumption research and identity consumption research (2.1) and how different approaches have been used to understand self and consumption (2.2). Part II introduces technique of neutralisation into identity research (2.3) and concludes with how neutralisation techniques could benefit identity negotiation.

### 2.1 Introduction – self, identity and consumption

A theme that transcends all identity-related research is that ‘self’ is at the centre of our identity-construction. ‘*Gnoti seauton*’ (know thyself), the ancient Greek phrase, inscribed on Temple of Apollo at Delphi, shows the examination of self-knowledge could be traced as far as the beginning of human civilisation, showing it is a fundamental need for people to understand who we are and what we believe.

The first formal account of self can be traced back to 1890 when James (1890) argued that one’s empirical self was organised by memories and habits. Largely influenced by Rene Descartes, James (1890) believed the sense of ‘I’ was way more important than the contents of what ‘I’ think or do. While James focused the self as an agent, Cooley (1964) concentrated rather on the social contents of self, namely, the looking glass self. The looking glass self-emphasised the self as relational to others. According to Cooley (1964), the contents, feelings of one’s self was not important, comparing with how others viewed him/her. In line with this thought, Kinch (1963) suggested a circular model of self that was

maintained, reinforced and modified based on interactions with others.

However, it is almost impossible to perceive how individual view themselves, but rather having a sense of a collective view, Mead (1934)'s focus on how social interactions affect self-perception received popularity and later influenced both Tajfel and Turner (1982)'s social identity theory, and Stryker (1987)'s identity theory. In terms of consumption, it is natural to connect brands and products that relate to our preferred selves. For instance, a self identified pro-environment consumer is more likely to consume ethically sourced products. However, even though the connection between identity and consumption has been documented in various streams of disciplines in the past six decades, the lack of consistent but inclusive definition of identity has resulted in obscure confusions (Reed et al., 2012). Despite the existence of overlaps, self and identity each has its own focus. Yet researchers tend to use them interchangeably as if they were synonymous (Swann and Bosson, 2010). Thus, the aim of this section is to separate the entangled meanings of the two concepts, by reviewing the development of each one.

When talking about 'self', one usually refers to attributions and characteristics about 'me'. Self-reflection is a common practice we all experience in life. Logically speaking, to reflect, or to think of the self, the action requires both a 'subject' (I), and an object (me) (Oyserman et al. 2012). Moreover, the awareness of this process is also critical, as explained by John Locke, self is nothing but a thinking thing (Locke, 2013).

In psychological terms, reflexivity capacity is generally agreed to be critical to the understanding of self, which includes both the mental content (me) and the mental capacity of thinking in modern uses (Callero 2003; Owens et al. 2010). However, theories differ on how memories help sustain the self. On one hand, the self is regarded as

a collection of memories, that the mental contents (me) of the self exists independently of social structures and contexts. On the other hand, the self is considered a unique cognitive capacity, that the mental contents of self is subject to particular contexts (Oyserman et al. 2012). In other words, the former perspective suggests a stability of mental contents of self, while the latter focuses on the motivation to use cognitive capacity.

In addition to the different opinions on the function of memories, there are different approaches in conceiving 'self' from different perspectives as listed in Table 2.1 below:

Table 2.1 Different approaches to 'self'

<b>Immersed individualistic sense of self</b>	Individual perspective  Collective perspective  Immersed perspective
<b>Between-society differences</b>	Cultural psychologists → 'me' and 'us'  Social identity theorists → context dependent
<b>Field and observer memories</b>	Immersed perspective  Distal perspective

The immersed individualistic sense of self favoured by clinical psychologists describes 3 perspectives a person takes when addressing his/her 'self'. The individual perspective focuses on how one's 'self' is separate and different from others; while the collective perspective concentrates on similarities when forming relationships with others. The immersed perspective, on one hand, focuses on how 'self' is conceived in individuals' minds, while on the other hand, can imagine how the 'self' might be viewed from other minds. Each perspective concentrates on certain aspects of the mental contents (me) and consequently makes the other two less likely to be activated when reflecting on one's 'self'.

Cultural psychologists draw attentions on societal influences on the mental contents, that is, the 'me' versus 'us' focuses of the self. For example, (Markus and Kitayama 1991) conclude that East Asians tend to think in a collective (us) perspective while north Americans largely think in an individual (me) perspective. However, social identity theorists have established (with empirical evidences) that the individual or collective perspectives are not fixed by cultural differences but by specific contextual situations (Brewer, 1991). The two perspectives have different mental procedures and thus influence perceptions.

Another different way to look at self is by taking either an immersed perspective or a distal perspective (Kross 2009). The former perspective refers to people seeing themselves as actors afflicted by other people or situations, while the latter describes situations where people imagine how they are perceived through the eyes of other people. According to Nigro and Neisser (1983), memories have both of the two perspectives. Memories with an immersed perspective are more likely to take perspectives of an observer, and consequently, they tend to concentrate on broader areas and goals (Wakslak et al., 2008). On the other hand, memories with a distal perspective take perspectives from the actor and thus contain more emotional contents and may mix the current self and future self (Pronin et al., 2008).

Naturally, one can take multiple perspectives in reflecting the 'self'. For example, although taking a collective and distal perspective might be more natural than an individualist and distal perspective, people can be encouraged or persuaded to reflect in one way than the other (Oyserman et al. 2012). As a result, people can self-regulate to facilitate future needs based on evaluations of themselves using multiple perspectives. (See the next section for multiple self-concepts).

*Self-concept and multiple self-concepts*

Self and self-concept (as well as identity) are often used interchangeably in the literature from various disciplines including sociology (Callero, 2003; Owens et al., 2010); social identity theory (Brewer, 1991) and social psychology (Baumeister, 1998; Swann and Bosson, 2010). However, even though self-concept is directly related to the mental contents (me) of the self, it is a completely different notion. One definition of self-concept in the identity and marketing literature is *“the totality of an individual’s thoughts and feelings having reference to himself as an object”* (Hogg & Banister 2001, p.78). In other words, self-concepts are cognitive structures that involve mental concepts of who oneself is, was and will become (Oyserman and Markus, 1998).

In general, there are 3 areas of interest in the study of self-concept, and much of the literature concentrates on the content and evaluative judgement (Oyserman et al. 2012). Typical research on content includes self reporting multiple self-concepts (i.e. negative self; ideal self; current self; etc.); while research on evaluation judgement often targets on self-efficacy and self-esteem. Alternatively, content and evaluative judgement could be investigated together by means of scaled scoring systems. In addition, studies on the structure of how self-concepts are organised are favoured by a range of scholars because structures matter in altering emotions. For instance, people with multiple self-concepts might articulate some aspects better than others (Oyserman et al. 2012), and those aspects of self concepts might effectively facilitate further self-regulation, while the others result in disengagement (Schwinghammer et al., 2006).

As a significant part of this research, multiple self-concepts (as part of the study of contents of self-concepts) have always been used interchangeably with multiple selves in the literature (e.g. Kelly, 1955; Ogilvie, 1987; Banister and Hogg, 2004). However, as described above, multiple aspects of one’s self are more likely to be a differently organised self-concept structure than actual multiple

selves. Therefore, it is more accurate to attribute 'ideal', 'unwanted' or 'actual' perspective as 'ideal self-concept', 'unwanted self-concept' or 'actual self-concept'. The notion of multiple self-concepts could be originated from Rosenberg (1979). Ogilvie (1987) further divides the self-concepts into the ideal self-concept, the real self-concept and the undesired self-concept. The ideal self-concept, in Freud's framework, is the idealised perception of heroes, heroines and parents in an infant's mind, namely, the superego (Freud, 1965). The dichotomous construct of the human construction system proposed by Kelly (1955) automatically confirms the dual existence of the ideal and real self (Ogilvie, 1987). In other words, the ideal self will be meaningless without the reference to the real self just like the sense of cold will lose its meaning without the reference to the sense of hot. Notably, the continuous endeavour towards the achievement of individuals from the present self contributes to an emphasis on the existence of an ideal self that is separated from the real self (Ogilvie, 1987). However, Diener (1984) criticised the above theory by providing a comparison between self and others. That is, instead of comparing one's real self with the ideal self, the alternative comparison between the one and others has also been demonstrated and contributes to the construction of the pursuit of happiness (Ogilvie, 1987). Additionally, comparisons between the past self and the present self has also been proposed as an alternative to the telic nature (Brickman, et al., 1978). The undesired self is also derived from the real self, which literally means the self that one is scared of becoming (Hogg and Banister 2001; Hogg et al. 2009). It is expected to be more experience based and consequently less abstract than the ideal self as a result of self judgements on well-being (Ogilvie, 1987). According to Banister and Hogg (2004), people not only are motivated to approach the ideal self, but also will avoid the undesired self. Therefore, both of the concepts have

significant impacts on the construction of human behaviours (Grubb and Grathwohl, 1967).

The multiple self-concepts provide incentives for individuals to make consumption choices. Particularly, the approach to the ideal self-concept and the departure from the undesired self-concepts consequently explain specific consumer behaviours (Hogg et al. 2009). Moreover, Ogilvie and Lutz (1984) showed that people are likely to behave with references to the undesired self-concept rather than the ideal self-concept. In other words, *'without a tangible undesired self, the real self would lose its navigational cues'* (Ogilvie 1987, pp. 380). This is due to the fact that the negation initiates an urge to maintain self-esteem, which is crucial to human beings (Hogg et al. 2009).

### *Identity*

There is clear overlap between identity and self-concepts for they both have focus on the mental contents of self. Nevertheless, the deliberate choice of two terms can indicate the degree of agency in some cases (Woodward, 2002). In addition, the use of identity can be seen as a way of making sense some of the aspects of self-concept (Hogg, 2003; Tajfel and Turner, 2004). In other words, identity can be used specifically because it provides space to accommodate an interrelationship between personal identity and socially (constructed) identity (Woodward, 2002). That is to say, people can therefore actively engage in shaping, or managing their social identities based on different social situations. Social identities, according to Tajfel (1981), are a combination of one's knowledge of the in-groups; one's feelings about being part of the in-groups and one's knowledge of the overall position of the in-groups comparing with the out-groups. The social identity theory is crucial to the formation of the structure, order, hierarchy and etc. of a society (Hogg and Abrams, 1998), as well as helping consumers to decide which reference groups are desired (Escalas and Bettman

2005; Hogg et al. 2009). The role of the reference group is critical, as empirical evidences have demonstrated that consumers are more connected to those brands that have more consistent images with the image of an in-group and less connected to those brands that have consistent images with their outgroups (Escalas and Bettman 2005.).

Similar to the complexity of multiple self-concepts, people can have multiple identities, although theorists disagree on the relationship between identity and self-concept. Identity theorists (e.g. Stryker and Burke, 2000) advocate a consistent identity across various social situations, where identities are completely separate from self-concepts. On the other hand, social identity theorists (e.g. Tajfel, 1981; Tajfel and Turner, 2004), as discussed above, believes identities are part of self-concepts. So in the most extreme scenario, people present a unique identity in every different social interaction.

In summary, despite overlaps, self, self-concept and identities each has its own focus. Yet researchers tend to use them interchangeably as if they were synonymous (Swann and Bosson, 2010). However, instead of trying to change terminologies when reviewing the literature accordingly, the researcher will use 'self and identity' in its loose term and use these three concepts concisely only when they have been discussed separately.

In addition, no matter how counter-intuitively, contemporary research has demonstrated that the 'self' may not be as steady and monolithic as we want it to be; and the existence of a 'true self' still remains agnostic to social scientists (Strohming et al., 2017). The development in multiple self-concepts on the other hand enables us to construct (Belk, 1988) and navigate among different identities in different social situations and contexts (Mercurio et al., 2013). Consumption, in other words, is never a cognitive reasoning tradition as it used to be understood (Bettman, 1979; Howard,

1989), but has strong ties with self and identity (Leary and Tangney, 2003).

## 2.2 Approaches to self-identity and consumption

This following section seeks to review the different approaches in the literature to connect identity and consumption. Specifically, 2.2.1 reviews the self and consumption connection based on a single personal sense of self; 2.2.2 extends the self-concept to a dynamic, multiple self-concepts; 2.2.3 examines how consumers prioritise different parts of self-concepts in a social context and 2.2.4 specifically addresses identity consumption in marketplace.

### 2.2.1 The personal sense of self – extended self into possessions

When talking about ‘self’, one usually refers to attributions and characteristics about ‘me’. Self-reflection is a common practice we all experience in life. Logically speaking, to reflect, or to think of the self, the action requires both a ‘subject’ (I), and an object (me) (Oyserman et al. 2012).

Belk (1988)’s classical article *“Possessions and the extended self”* introduced the idea of how consumers think of their possessions as part of themselves. Specifically, Belk (1988, p. 160) argued that it is *“an inescapable fact of modern life that we learn, define, and remind ourselves of who we are by our possessions”*. The shift of focus to ‘what we have’ is now ever so important to understand ‘who we are’, because our possessions are seen as a part of our extended selves (Belk, 1988; Escalas and Bettman, 2005 Cutright et al., 2014). Consequently, the self is now both internal personal construct and external objects.

The term possession, according to Belk (1988) could both be understood as a tangible extension of one’s self (e.g. a pair of glasses that enables us to see further); and be used symbolically to present identities we want others and/or ourselves to believe that we have (e.g. a fragrance that signals independence). The research

on how tangible possessions act as extended selves is rich. For instance, Chang et al., (2018) explore how tweens in foster care home use clothing selection to give meanings to social interaction.

Through focus groups and in-depth interviews on 18 foster care tweens, Chang and colleagues find clothing items from the birth family or important people for tweens are most meaningful in terms of giving meaning to personal or social roles in the foster home (Chang et al., 2018). Other examples on how physical possessions represent extended selves include: how transpeople with conflicted identities use possessions as strategic presentations to communicate their extended selves to others (Ruvio and Belk, 2018); how townhouse residents use interior products at the social area of the house as means to convey uniqueness (Erasmus et al., 2016); how migrants from Latin America who live in Belgium use cultural products as their cultural self-extension (Gaviria, 2016).

On the other hand, consumer research on intangible possessions remains scarce but vital. Kunchambo et al., (2017) offer a theoretical alternative to see nature as a special extended self. In their paper "*Nature as extendedself: Sacred nature relationship and implications for responsible consumption behaviour*", Kunchambo and colleagues discuss how boundaries between self and nature potentially regulate consumption behaviour, and contend that in order to motivate sustainable consumption, consumers need to see nature as part of their selves (Kunchambo et al., 2017). Similarly, in Higgins and Hamilton (2016)'s three years' ethnographic research, they explore the self-transformation through pilgrimage consumption at Lourdes, one of the largest Catholic pilgrimage destinations. On the other hand, Gruen (2017) specifically looks at how consumption of short-term duration of access could prevent consumers from incorporating the access-based product or service into their extended self. By comparing the two car sharing companies Zipcar and Autolib, Gruen (2017) claims that through the focus of design, access based consumption can in fact achieve

ownership, consequently furthering the understanding of extended self into access-based consumption.

Notably, there is a rich stream of research residing within the scope of intangible possessions which is a result of the rise of internet and technology. According to Ruvio and Belk (2013), the many types of digital interfaces that allow consumers to present selves to others have changed the notions of self and self-extension. Virtual self-extensions nowadays include web pages (Schau and Gilly, 2003), blogs (Kretz and de Valck, 2010), YouTube (Hediger, 2010) and social media sites (Gilpin, 2010). The virtual platform is much more flexible and interactive compared with physical possessions (Ruvio and Belk, 2013). Various research studies have been done in this area including how travel writers construct online selves and use their writing to transform themselves (McWha et al., 2018); how online consumers selectively share music on social media to look clever (Johnson and Ranzini, 2018); and how gamers trade in their pre-loved games as a means of sustainable disposal (Demsar and Brace-Govan, 2017). In addition, a recent study conducted by Atasoy and Morewedge (2018) finds evidence in the game industry that consumers value digital goods less than physical goods, challenging the influence of psychological ownership of digital products and consequently calling for a need for a digital self-extension framework.

A recurring theme across all above research on extended self is the assumption that there is a true self (or real self) that exists independently of the extended self. In other words, even though the universal definition of the 'self' remains a disputed topic, consumers still think of their 'self' as the defining motivation behind their consumption (Strohming and Nichols, 2016).

It then naturally leads to the question of whether there is a true self that lies inside us that is different from those selves that fall outside of us (Strohming et al., 2017). The real-life conflict that we

sometimes experience probably is the best instance of the 'feeling of the true self'. For example, when there is an additive consumption choice, even though both of the options seem to come from different selves, people tend to believe at least one of the selves is more authentic than the other selves (Arpaly and Schroeder, 1999).

This intuitive belief sparked vast amounts of research being done in psychology and philosophy to test whether we truly have a 'true self', and if so, what are the main components of the true self (e.g. Bargh et al., 2002; Zwiessler et al., 2015). However, this popularity does not seem to have affected consumer research. The amount of research even remotely related to true self and consumption remains scarce, with the only exceptions being Astakhova et al., (2017) and Belk (2013). Astakhova and colleagues experiment on different types of self-congruities and contend that a fit between brand identity and one's 'true self' would help develop a passion for the brand (Astakhova et al., 2017). On the other hand, in Belk's paper '*Extended self in a digital world*', Belk confirms the theory from Bargh et al., (2002); and Leman (2012) that consumers feel they are able to express their 'true self' better online than in everyday life, consequently contributing to more online sharing and self-disclosure (Belk, 2013).

However, it is worth noting that neither of these studies seeks to prove or disprove the existence of 'true self'; rather, the focus is on consumers' feeling of 'true self' and how this feeling affects consumption. Similarly, Strohming and colleagues provide accounts from this perspective: instead of addressing the concept in an objective scientific way, true self could be used a tool to understand the value of the observers. That is, if someone believes that vegetarianism is bad and insists that the urge to consume meat products represents the true self, even though what counts as part of the true self is subjective, the account still shows what the individual prizes most (Strohming and Nichols, 2016).

Furthermore, extensive research has demonstrated possessions enable consumers to reflect, restore and create new aspects of self-identity, which in turn explains consumption choices. Firstly, as we will discuss in detail in the next section, individuals often have multiple identities motivated by different aspects of the selves that are important to them (Markus and Kunda, 1986). The desire to reflect a salient identity consequently translates to relevant consumer behaviour. For instance, Puntoni and colleagues connect gender identity salience with perceived vulnerability to breast cancer (Puntoni et al., 2011). Secondly, when experiencing identity threats, consumers are more likely to use possessions to restore their salient identities by bolstering the self (Gao et al., 2009). This type of compensatory consumption triggers specific purchase patterns and will be discussed further in 2.2.3. Finally, consumers also use possessions to reflect their ideal identities, and strongly believe that the subsequent consumption will enhance their performance (Samper, 2011).

Thus, it is apparent that who we believe we are plays a vital role in determining what we buy (Levy, 1959; Belk, 1988; Berger and Heath, 2007). Products and possessions become salient in conveying the idea of who we are, or who we want to be.

### *Emotions*

Broadly speaking, emotion is the feelings people have in situations. According to Turner and Stets (2005), emotions could be divided into primary and secondary types. Primary type is universal in nature and thus could be shared across cultures, including happiness, sadness, anger and fear (Ekman, 1992). On the other hand, secondary emotions are formed by the mixing of two or more primary emotions (Turner 2000). For instance, primary emotions such as fear and anger usually create hate or jealousy as secondary emotions.

Specifically, emotion in identity theory is studied rather on how individuals react in various situations rather than the formation of primary and secondary emotions (Turner and Stets, 2005). Early theories tend to only concentrate on the positive and negative association with emotions (Mead, 1934), because predicting possible emotions based on the primary four could be long and tedious (Burke and Stets, 2009).

Contemporary identity research on emotions emphasises the interactional (McCall and Simmons, 1978), the structural (Stryker, 2004) and perceptual control (Burke, 1991) factors. The interactional theorists believe people's negative emotions emerge when their prominent identities get challenged in social interactions (McCall and Simmons, 1978). As a result, people use strategies, or in McCall and Simmons (1978)'s language, mechanisms of legitimation, to cope with negative feelings when they arise. Structural theorists rather focus on the different roles people have in social networks, where people with shared meanings are more likely to enter and maintain a social relationship (Stryker, 2004). The role expectations associated around role identities in turn lead to positive and negative emotions. Similarly, Burke's (1996) perceptual control model is not far away from the structural modal, the focus here is on how emotions are examined within the control system. The idea behind the emphasis on emotions is identity feedback. The discrepancy between identity standards and performances lead to negative emotions (Burke and Stets, 2009), which motivates self-regulations (Coleman and Williams, 2015).

Research in the former two areas of emotion remains scarce, with most of the research focusing on identity salience in role identity as mother (e.g. Lazarus and Folkman, 1984; White and Mullen, 1989). Ellestad and Stets (1998), for example, discovered that even though prominent identity is covert, the coping strategies people use to manage the emotion is overt. On the other hand, the idea of

perceptual control sparked a series of laboratory studies (Stets and Asencio, 2008; Stets and Osborn, 2008), contributing to the idea that emotions are evaluations of the self, viewing the self an object.

A different approach to address the relationship between the self and emotion, proposed by Coleman and Williams (2014), is to view emotion as vital part of performing identities, instead of feedback of them. In other words, Coleman and Williams (2015) claim that emotions are regulated and reviewed continuously in identity performance so as to better enact those identities. In their experimental studies (Coleman and Williams, 2013), they found evidence supporting the idea that people regulate their emotions in terms of enhancing those that are consistent with their identity profile, and decreasing the emotions which are inconsistent. Furthermore, this regulation strategy often comes with a consumption of a product (Coleman and Williams, 2013), which in turn explains why products with inconsistent identities are sometimes purchased by consumers.

The two streams of research on emotions (emotions as identity feedback and emotions as part of identity performance) provide room for self and identity research in emotional terms other than cognitive terms. Furthermore, the research on emotion provides rich explanation of the motivations behind seemingly inconsistent consumption in identities. However, as claimed by Burke and Stets (2012) experimental settings usually yield different results from natural settings. It is still unclear how people react emotionally when feedback from others exceeds their own standard, nor do we know when products would be consumed or the type of products consumers would purchase in natural social interactions.

### 2.2.2 Multiple identities

The previous section discussed how possession as extended self influences consumption choice by means of reflecting, restoring and creating identities (Belk, 1988; Cutright et al., 2014), and how

emotions act as both feedback of identity (Turner and Stets, 2005) and as a vital part of identity performance (Coleman and Williams, 2014). The underlying assumption of the concepts is how consumers' sense of self radiates to the world by means of consumption. Studies in this field have largely focused on how possessions reflect either the holistic sense of self or one aspect of the self that is prominent (Ruvio and Belk, 2013).

This section extends the understanding of identity and consumption by addressing the dynamic nature of self. That is, the notion of multiple selves and identities naturally lead on to studies of how these selves react with each other. In particular, three stems of research address the interactions among multiple selves, which are conflicting selves (Erikson, 1968; Ruvio and Belk, 2013); compensatory consumption (Rucker and Galinsky, 2013) and impulsive consumption (Block and Wilcox, 2013; Shrum and Zhang, 2013). However, before moving on to the three aspects of the dynamic self, it is worth detailing the theoretical underpinning behind the multiple selves and identities.

The notion of multiple selves and identities originates from 1979, when Stryker (1980) connected self-concepts with multiple role identities in social structure. Ogilvie (1987) further divides the self-concepts into the ideal self, the real self and the undesired self. The ideal self-concept, in Freud's framework, is the idealised perception of heroes, heroines and parents in an infant's mind, namely, the superego (Freud, 1965). The dichotomous construct of the human construction system proposed by Kelly (1955) automatically confirms the dual existence of the ideal and real self (Ogilvie, 1987). In other words, the ideal self will be meaningless without the reference to the real self just as if the sense of cold will lose its meaning without the reference to the sense of hot.

The multiple self-concepts provide incentives for individuals to make consumption choices. Particularly, the approach to the ideal

self and the departure from the undesired self consequently explain specific consumer behaviours (Hogg et al. 2009). In a cultural comparison study, Ma, Yang and Wilson (2017) analysed 344 selfie photos from Twitter (UK sample) and Sina Weibo (Chinese sample) and confirmed that selfies reflect consumers 'ideal self' even though the criteria for judging the 'ideal self' are different across culture. For instance, in order to enhance their projected 'ideal selves' online, Chinese participants consume specific products (e.g. houses and TVs) to show improvements in their living standards (Sun and Wu, 2004). Furthermore, consumers do not always have a fixed picture of their ideal self. Ridgeway et al., (2017) investigated how garments created with optical illusion prints or patterns affect their perceptions of body shape. Through 15 in-depth interviews with women on their personalised avatars, created based on their body scans, Ridgeway and colleagues found their participants have both personal ideals and their perception of the ideals deemed desirable by the society. While all participants agree they use clothing garments to enhance their appearances and hide undesirable body parts, the struggle between the societal ideal their personal ideal is constant (Ridgeway et al., 2017).

On the other hand, consumer researchers in this area often use the self congruity theory to link consumers' own self-concepts with their perceptions of brand identities (Sirgy, 2018). For instance, Japutra and colleagues found that ideal self-congruence affects emotional brand attachment that result in compulsive consumption (Japutra et al., 2018). Kumagai and Nagasawa (2017) further differentiates the effectiveness of this self and brand congruence theory among well-known luxury, wellknown non-luxury and unknown brands and contended that ideal selfcongruity contributes to luxury attitude positively; non-luxury negatively and has very little impact on unknown brand, indicating a difference in terms of how brand positioning affects ideal self based consumption.

Moreover, Ogilvie and Lutz (1984) showed that people are likely to behave with reference to the undesired self rather than the ideal self-concept. In other words, '*without a tangible undesired self, the real self would lose its navigational cues*' (Ogilvie 1987, pp. 380), because the negation cultivates an urge to maintain self-esteem (Hogg et al. 2009). On the other hand, Chatzidakis and Lee (2012) demonstrated that the 'reasons for' consumption are not always the direct opposite of 'reasons against' consumption. In other words, reasons for selecting Fairtrade products could be based on pro-environmental movements; but reasons against Fairtrade are not likely to be anti-environmental concerns. Therefore, research on undesired self-concepts captures qualitative insights that are hard to explore otherwise.

However, despite the outcry for research on undesired self and Anticonsumption (Hogg et al., 2009; Lee; 2009; Chatzidakis and Lee, 2012), consumer research in this area remains scarce. Much of the research in this area is located in either brand avoidance and brand dis-identification (e.g. Hegner et al., 2017; Jayasimha, Chaudhary and Chauhan, 2017; Wolter et al., 2016), or ethical consumption in general (e.g. Garcia-de-Frutos, et al., 2018; Gatzweiler, Blazevic and Piller, 2017), with only a few exceptions. Lee and Anh (2016), for instance, focused on the consequences of anti-consumption.

In their netnographic research, they related anti-consumption values to consumer well-being (CWB) and contended that experiential spending provides more CWB than traditional material possessions. Furthermore, Liu, Keeling and Hogg (2015) investigated how consumers manage their everyday self-presentation to attain CWB through consumption strategies. In their exploratory study, Liu et al., (2015) found that when there are wellbeing challenges, consumption has been used to avoid undesired experiences, to facilitate desired experience, to create intimacy between parties or to survive in an otherwise difficult

circumstance. Thus, consumption is not simply a straightforward process of approaching ideal self and avoiding undesired self; to some consumers, it is a conscious and intentional decision to manage self-care and social encounters.

### *Identity conflict*

The notion of multiple selves naturally leads to the studies of identity conflict. Identity conflict is the experience people have when one identity or more identities must be given up in order to sustain other identity(-ies) (Burke and Stets, 2009; Horton et al., 2014). For example, a pro-environmental consumer (identity 1: ethical) who supports Fairtrade might have to consume from other ranges of products because he/she recently becomes unemployed (identity 2: unemployed worker) and has two children to feed (identity 3: parent). In order to maintain identity 2 and 3, he/she must give up identity 1 as an ethical consumer. The experience creates dissonance (Marcussen, 2006); drains energy (Rothbard, 2001) and causes stress (Hirsh and Kang, 2016), because identities guide our thoughts and affect our behaviour (Burke and Stets, 2009). In a longitudinal ethnographic study on transgender participants' conflicting identities, Ruvio and Belk (2018) proposed a model of five stages including conflict emergence, identity negotiation, acceptance, sharing and resolution, to demonstrate how each of their role identity's possessions reflect participants' internal conflicts. The symbolic meaning of possessions thus surface to the level of consciousness (Ruvio and Belk, 2018) and shed light to research on identity-conflict.

### *Compensatory consumption*

On the other hand, compensatory consumption describes choices made by consumers under identity threats (Wicklund and Gollwitzer, 1981; Mandel et al., 2017). In other words, products with symbolic values that are incongruent with consumers'

prominent identities are responses to psychological needs. For example, Willer et al. (2010) demonstrated that when men's masculinity is under threat, they are more likely to purchase from brands or products that are traditionally associated with masculinity. Other empirical evidence that consumers use products to compensate special needs include threat to intelligence (Gao et al., 2009); status and power (van Kempen, 2007; Rucker and Galinsky, 2008); personal freedom (Levav and Zhu, 2009); self-affirming (Lisjak et al., 2015) and self-improvement (Allard and White, 2015).

### *Controlling the self*

The ability to control our behaviour based on long-term goals rather than short-term temptation is probably the most powerful mechanism behind the social order (Tangney et al., 2004) as well as the key to a happy and healthy life (Block and Wilcox, 2013). Impulsive consumption, on the other hand, is a result of lack of self-control. Traditionally, impulsivity is acting without thinking, where the consumption is motivated by short-term rewards rather than long-term goals (Wilcox et al., 2011). The conflict between spending a limited amount of money now and saving it for future, or a more rational use is a constant struggle among consumers, with 90% of consumers admitting such purchases at least occasionally (Hausmann, 2000). The consequence of failing to control the over-spending self not only affect personal financial situation (Haws et al., 2011), but also contributes to dire societal consequences (Thaler and Sunstein, 2008). Research in this stream usually focuses on how personality traits differ in terms of high self-control and low self-control contrast (Bearden and Haws, 2012), or cultural differences in self-construal and subsequent goal activation (Shrum and

Zhang, 2013). Central to this area of research is the idea that self-regulation is a practice that could improve self-control, which in turn provides resistance to impulsivity.

In sum, the three areas of self and identity, discussed in this section, all share the idea that selves are dynamic and are subject to change in different situations. Consumption choices are not simple cause and effect based on congruity of product identity and self-identity, but also a mixture of conflicting selves, or responses to identity threats. Furthermore, research on self-control demonstrated that through practice, consumers have the power to control their selves in order to achieve long-term goals. The next section will concentrate on how multiple identities are constructed, negotiated and compromised through social interactions.

### 2.2.3 Social identity

The previous section discussed how self and identity influence consumption in terms of *individual* agency. The beliefs and assumptions consumers have affect consumption choices based on either their sense of true self, or their multiple selves.

It is indeed logical to assume personal beliefs and attitudes connect to consequent actions. For instance, if a consumer identifies herself as an ethical consumer, it is very likely that she buys Fairtrade products from an ethically sourced supermarket. However, the last two sections have also demonstrated that consumption is not a simple causation. The same ethical consumer described above may be have certain emotion that changes her view on that supermarket on the day; or her other conflicting selves (e.g. unemployed or low confident) might be more salient at the time to stop her from buying Fairtrade products; or the consumer might have found another similar product that she could relate to more as self-extension more than the Fairtrade counterpart.

Overall, the individualistic approach only partially explains consumption based on a rational choice model (Jackson, 2005),

while consumption is a social, cultural and economic process for identity construction (Belk, 1988) and expression (Zukin and Maquire, 2004). This section will extend the individuality agency of self-concept further to the sociality of self, by offering two dominant theories in both sociological psychology (social identity theory) research and sociological research (identity theory).

### *Social identity*

Social identity theory, developed by Tajfel and Turner almost five decades ago, was a theory intended for social psychology that investigates intergroup relationships (Tajfel and Turner, 1979). It received immediate popularity around the world, even though the theorisation in Europe claimed to have different agenda comparing with the North America cohort (Jaspars, 1986; Hogg et al., 1995).

The idea behind social identity theory is that people define themselves based on different social categories they feel like they belong to, and this self-definition is motivated by their own sense of self (Hogg, 1992). Social identity theory recognises a person's need to be part of various social groups (Hogg and Abrams, 1988), and those groups each represents a social identity that determines what one should think and behave. It is worth noting that these social identities are not only descriptive, but also evaluative, according to Hogg et al. (1995). Consequently, members of social groups are highly motivated to use various behavioural strategies that highlight the differences between in-groups and out-groups that are favoured by the former, for the protection of self-concepts.

Specifically, people label those who share similar identities to them as ingroups and those who are different as out-groups (Stets and Burke, 2000). This membership formation and categorisation is pivotal to one's selfconcept because people will seek to use strategies to maintain the positive affiliation (Marques et al., 1998). A dissociative group, on the other hand, is a group that individuals aim to avoid (Englis and Soloman, 1995). It is different from out-

groups because it is what people actively avoid while outgroups are merely what they are naturally not. For example, a vegetarian might see a vegan group as out-group but a meat group is a dissociative group he/she wants to avoid. According to White and Dahl (2007), consumers are more likely to distance themselves from a dissociative group than an out-group in general. Hence, dissociation is an active effort to differentiate oneself from undesired identities rather than simply a difference between in-groups and out-groups.

Initially, social identity theory only covered personal identity and social identity. The former describes what individuals think of themselves are while the latter represent the group identity that is shared by its members (Hogg et al., 2017). This simple binary relationship quickly extended to more textured concepts to incorporate cultural differences. That is, three different types of self (individual self, relational self and collective self) was added by Brewer and Gardner in (1996), and consequently, at least four additional identities were introduced to reflect this addition (person-based identities, relational identities, group-based identities and collective identities) (Brewer, 2001). Centre to this complication is the idea that self-concept is not monolithic but compartmentalised (Hogg et al., 2017). In other words, individual's salient social identity is fluid and changes in context (Brewer and Pierce, 2005).

Essentially, social identity theory studies the intergroup (and outgroup) relationships through memberships (Tajfel and Turner, 1979) which provides a psychological basis for further research on ingroup/outgroup bias. For example, Brewer (1991)'s optimal distinctive theory was introduced to establish peoples' dichotomous desire of both being part of a group and differentiating themselves from their reference groups at the same time. The optimal distinctive theory is especially potent in explaining dissociation from a convergence and divergence

perspective (Brewer, 1991; Berger and Heath, 2007). That is, according to Snyder and Fromkin (1970), it is especially relevant for consumers with higher uniqueness needs because similarities with others suggest a loss of personal identity. Hence, in order to maintain their individuality, this type of consumer may deliberately pretend to be different (Fromkin, 1970; Berger and Heath, 2007).

Consumer research on dissociation in optimal distinctive theory is rich and extensive. For instance, Dunn et al. (2013) demonstrated that dissociation happens when one aspect of one's social identity is threatened or viewed negatively. As a result, consumers may seek to dissociate from certain products or brands to reaffirm their self-worth. On the other hand, White and Argo (2009) find that participants who already suffered from threatened gender identity were more likely to purchase female identity products. Moreover, a number of studies have shown that the social component in consumption makes dissociation a self-representational process (White and Dahl, 2006; Berger and Heath, 2007). In other words, in order to be associated with their ideal selves, consumption in public light is different from consumption that happens online or privately. Further, Dommer et al., (2011) introduce horizontal and vertical differentiation to explain how consumers differentiate themselves. The former situation happens when consumers with lower self-esteem deliberately look for alternative social interactions with out-groups if they were socially excluded from their reference groups. The latter scenario is when consumers actively looking for means to be superior to the in-groups. For example, a consumer from a lower socio-economic status group deliberately purchases a higher-end product to differentiate him/herself from their reference group. In the extreme cases, comparison-driven self-evaluation and restoration (CDSER) is a form of social influence identified by Shalev and Morwitz (2011) to describe consumers who would re-evaluate their understandings on certain traits with reference to the possessions of others. For instance, when a consumer seeking to

maintain a high-profile identity sees another consumer from an undesirable group (lower socio-economic group) possessing a highend product, he/she might re-evaluate the understanding on this specific product and decide to purchase it in order to restore the high-status trait.

In sum, the social identity research introduced by Tajfel and Turner (1979) provides a psychological basis for studies on intergroup relationships that extend beyond an individualistic approach (Jackson, 2005). That is to say, social identity theory does not restrict itself only on individuals' understanding on their identities and individuals' perspectives on other members of the group.

### *Identity theory*

Identity theory was first developed in 1968 by Sheldon Stryker at Indiana University. Central to the theory is the idea that self is in the reciprocal position to society (Stryker, 1968). In other words, identity theory has its root firmly grounded in sociology compared with social identity theory which, in contrast, is a social psychology theory used to explain intergroup relations.

Identity theory is strongly connected with symbolic interactionism in terms of how society influences self and subsequently affects social behaviour, but yet rejects the idea that society is '*relatively undifferentiated, co-operative whole*' (Stryker and Serpe, 1982), but '*complexly differentiated but nevertheless organised*' (Stryker and Serpe, 1982). Subsequently, self in identity theorists' view, reflects the structure of society, is multifaceted but organised. Those multifaceted components are role identities in identity theory.

With its root in symbolic interactionism, role identities are a self-definition people assign to themselves through a process of labelling (Hogg et al., 1995). Consequently, variation of self-concepts is thus based on the different roles people play within a society (James, 1950).

Identity theory now has developed significantly to embrace the dynamic nature of self and identity theories. For example, situational influence has been brought up by (Stets and Carter, 2012) to accommodate cognitive situational meanings. The concept of multiple identities have also been incorporated to understand how people react when two or more role identities are salient at the same time to evaluate the hierarchy of role identities (Burke, 2003). Additionally, Burke (2006) considers how identity of one person changes over time while studies on conflicting identities (see section 2.2.4) focuses on how conflicting identities change one's sense of self.

#### 2.2.4 Identity consumption in marketplace

As shown in the previous sections, research in identity consumption tend to focus on three areas of self-concepts. Specifically, identity research based on an individualistic approach, multiple elements of self-identities and in the context of social interactions are the three focuses of self-identity consumption in consumer research.

Altogether, the use of goods and service to construct identity projects has become a vital part in consumer research (Arnould and Thompson, 2005). Consumption thus demands consumers' continuous negotiations through a marketplace with a plethora of commodities and experiences (Holt, 2002). Consequently, identity projects is seen as an individual responsibility to be consuming the right things at the right time (Cronin et al., 2014), in terms of both what you consume and what you avoid (Hogg et al, 2009). However, the pressure of attaining distinction through consumption heavily relies on consumers' on-going understanding and negotiation with the symbolic values of commodities (Arnould and Thompson, 2005). In other words, consumers are operating under a tremendous amount of pressure in negotiating their self-identities to construct market-mediated individuality (Thompson and Haytko,

1997). Therefore, in this section, how identity consumption should be taken into the marketplace is discussed.

#### *Brand consumption and avoidance*

The terminology 'brand' is often taken for granted but lacks a unified definition (Lee, 2009). It is not difficult to name successful consumer brands (e.g. Apple; HSBC; or John Lewis) but the literature still disagrees on a unified definition on 'brand' (Stern, 2006). In general, academics agree that 'brand' at its most basic level, is a constellation of multi-dimensional value (de Chernatory and Dall'Olmo Riley, 1998). However, the broad and vague definition of this notion may be problematic in including all entities with names and symbols. Thus, this research follows Lee (2009)'s three criteria to define a brand. Firstly, a brand must be unique from other brands. Secondly, a brand must have added values in its name. Lastly, there must be a commercial use of this associated value (i.e. brand equity). From this definition, it is evident that brand name is positive asset, but also, there is room for negative brand equity, which in turn reduces brand equity. In other words, the additional associated values (positive or negative) help explain consumer behaviour that are based on them.

#### *Symbolic consumption*

The concept of symbolic interactionism was first developed in 1930 (Mead, 1930) as a theory of psychological behaviour to understand individuals' interpretation of interactions with others within the society (Hudson and Ozanne, 1988). Levy (1959) defines symbolic consumption as the trend for consumers to concentrate on intangible added value of an object, other than the economic value. Additionally, Grubb and Grathwohl (1967) argue that intangible added value will only be meaningful if it can be perceived and generally agreed by a group of people, that is, the recognition from the social group, by means of the fashion system and social communication (McCraken, 1988).

This relationship between self-concept and symbolic consumption has been identified for more than half a century. With reference to Westfall's experiment on automobile purchasing pattern (Grubb and Grathwohl, 1967); Birdwell and Grubb's study on beer industry, and Tucker and Panter's test on personality and product usage (Dolich, 1969). Extensive empirical evidence has demonstrated the connection that exists between self-concept and symbolic consumption. The 'congruence hypothesis' is the concept describing the degree to which meanings have been associated with products and/or brands (Grubb and Grathwohl 1967), based on the assumption that people tend to purchase products or consume from brands that are compatible with their ideal self-concepts, and avoid purchasing products or consuming from brands that are associated with their undesired self-concepts (Hogg and Banister, 2001). Research stemming from brand and self-identity relationship has developed into various areas including conspicuous consumption (Huang and Wang, 2017); relational shared identities (Kara, Vredevelde and Ross, 2018); brand community (Bradford and Sherry, 2018); moral identity (Li, Lam and Liu, 2018) and online consumer brand identification (Augusto and Torres, 2018; Farzin and Fattahi, 2018). The idea behind this type of motivation is that consumers use brand consumption partially to construct their self-concepts and consequently in creating their identities (Escalas and Bettman, 2013). In other words, brands as a constellation of the values become consumers' mental representations of their self-concepts.

Contrarily, brand avoidance draws the attention on active rejection of brands (Lee, Motion and Conroy 2009). The concept of brand avoidance is one of the many anti-consumption behaviours in general (others including consumer resistance, boycotting, activism, culture-jamming, dissatisfaction, complaining behaviour, organisational disidentification, voluntary simplification and etc.) (Banister and Hogg 2004; Cherrier 2009; Hogg et al 2009; Iyer and

Muncy 2009). But few scholars specifically looked at brand avoidance, until the publication of the paper “Brand avoidance: a negative promises perspective” (Lee et al, 2009) and the book “Brand Avoidance” (Lee, 2009) that has provided an emergent theoretical model.

In relation to this doctoral research, identity brand avoidance motivated by unwanted self-identity, according to the emergent model of brand avoidance (Lee, 2009), is caused by negative reference group, inauthenticity and deindividuation. As discussed in section 2.2.5, negative reference group emphasises the need for the sociality of self-identity. That is, consumers are motivated to maintain a positive social identity in their groups and conversely dissociate with groups with negative identities. For instance, a lawyer may avoid clothing brands with ‘rock’ or ‘hippy’ identities in order to maintain the professional identity at work. On the other hand, deindividuation is a concept often mentioned in psychology as a perceived loss of attention by individuals (Festinger et al, 1952). Zimbardo (1969)’s research later shows several inputs can lead to behaviours that are highly irrational and intensive. In other words, the need to be unique motivates people to do certain things because the opposite proposes a loss of personal identity that is essential to them (Kim 2009). Further, this type of consumer may deliberately pretend to be different to maintain their individuality (Kim 2009). Finally, inauthenticity contributes to brand avoidance when there is a discrepancy between brands’ proposed value and the consumer’s perception (Goulding, 2000). In other words, if consumers think a brand fails to symbolise what it claims to, they are motivated to avoid it. For instance, even though Burberry puts itself forward as a leading luxury British heritage brand, certain consumers might identify the brand as an over-expensive mainstream brand. Thus, the ‘inauthentic’ British heritage identity might motivate avoidance.

In summary, this section reviews different understandings in the literature on self and identity by gradually moving from the individualistic approach, to the dynamic self (on multiple selves) in the social context (social self). The author seeks to demonstrate the fluidity and dynamic nature of self and identity and how identities should always be studied in a social context in marketplace.

However, despite its popularity in consumer research, most of the identity research in the literature focus on how identity projects help consumers positively (Larsen and Patterson, 2018), the research on what happens when identity projects goes wrong remains scarce. Further, the few research which answers to this question assumes an active response from consumers to get the identity projects right. Therefore, the research seeks to fill in this gap by means of primary research to investigate what happens when identity projects go wrong. The next section will therefore seek to provide a new research mechanism borrowed from criminological research, namely, the neutralisation technique.

## 2.3 Neutralisation theory

### 2.3.1 Introduction

The theory of neutralisation originated from criminological studies providing space for identity negotiation and reconstruction. It has been widely used in the past decade as means to maintain internal consistency in consumer research, even though nearly all of the application of neutralisation theory is on consumer mis-behaviour or non-participation in ethical consumption (e.g. Gruber and Schlegelmilch, 2014; Koay, 2018).

Thus, this section aims to link neutralisation theory with identity consumption in consumer research by reviewing neutralisation theory in criminology and deviant behaviour, as well as the recent application on consumer mis-behaviour. The section will start with a detailed discussion of neutralisation theory's origin and purpose in criminology, in order to provide a reference for its

development in consumer research. Secondly, neutralisation theory's recent popularity in consumer research will be analysed and evaluated. After that, there will be a critique on how neutralisation in the literature falls short on its evaluative function rather than as a descriptive method. Finally, this section will summarise what neutralisation theory could offer as potential analytical tool for identity projects beyond consumer mis-(behaviour).

### 2.3.2 Theory of neutralisation in criminology

#### *The original five techniques*

The technique of neutralisation was first introduced by Sykes and Matza (1957) as a defence mechanism against guilt used by juveniles for their delinquency. The theory was developed to argue against subcultural theorists' view at the time that delinquent boys rebelled against the dominant middle-class values by replacing them with their own new, and often delinquent set of values (Cohen, 1955). Instead, Sykes and Matza (1957) contended that the extent to which delinquent boys rejected conventional values had been overstated. That is to say, even the lower-class delinquents still possessed a level of commitment to the dominant values of society. There are a number of reasons. Firstly, if delinquents have truly replaced and internalised their own new set of values, guilt or shame should not arise when they participate in illegal activities (Sykes and Matza, 1957). Further, the fact that delinquents often participate in social activities like other law-abiding citizens (e.g. sports) suggest delinquents do have a sense of moral right or wrong which is influenced by conventional values. Thus, the question remains if delinquents are committed to even the minimal social order, how do they justify their illegal actions or neutralise the guilt and shame which normally dissuade the law-abiding others from committing crime?

Sykes and Matza (1957) suggested that the action was largely based on “*unrecognised extensions of defences to crimes*”, where the justification is seen to be only valid to delinquent but not to the conventional legal system (Sykes and Matza 1957, p. 666). The technique of neutralisation thus offers room for linguistic defences for blurring the moral part of the law and neutralising the guilt by having a sense of narrative identity. That is to say, offenders might be able to maintain their sense of morality (to keep their self-images) and violating it at the same time (Bandura et al., 1996). It is worth noting that neutralisation is completely different from outright deceit, if the technique is to be used by defenders, they must at least partially believe in what they use (Mills, 1940).

In Sykes and Matza (1957)’s original work on neutralisation, five techniques have been described which allow offenders to justify their illegal activities, namely: denial of responsibility, denial of injury, denial of victim, condemnation of condemners and the appeal to higher loyalties (See Table 2.3 for the original five techniques and language often used by delinquents).

Table 2.3 Five neutralising techniques and examples

Denial of responsibility (DoR)	<i>Accidental or beyond control</i>
Denial of injury (DoI)	<i>No real harm is done</i>
Denial of victim (DoV)	<i>Unknown victim or ‘bad’ victim</i>
Condemnation of condemners (CtC)	<i>Motivations and intentions of the blamer</i>
Appeal to higher loyalties (AtHL)	<i>Higher group values</i>

(Summarised based on Sykes and Matza, 1957)

Denial of responsibility is commonly agreed as the main technique that delinquents use to neutralise guilt (Cohen, 2001). If offenders can find ways of relieving themselves of responsibility for their wrongdoing, they can then minimise the impact they have from social disapproval. There are a number of variations of the forms of denial of responsibility, but at the centre of it is how offenders see themselves as victims of circumstances beyond their control (Maruna and Copes, 2005). Typical verbal examples would be 'it is not my fault' or 'I have no control over...'

The second technique, denial of injury, rather concentrates on denying the harm that the offender has caused. That is to say, offenders feel they can be exempted if nobody is hurt by their illegal actions. For example, despite being illegal in most countries, marijuana users exempt themselves by denying there would be 'actual harm' to anyone (Priest and McGrath, 1970). This type of offender often sees their actions as inappropriate rather than harmful (Maruna and Copes, 2005).

In relation to denial of injury, offenders use denial of victim when the harm is inevitable. Instead, offenders choose to deny the victim to neutralise their guilt or shame. This could happen in two ways. Firstly, offenders might shift the responsibility to victims by claiming that victims have done something wrong to begin with. Therefore, by appealing to a Robin Hood type of street justice, some offenders would target crimes against drug dealers, or controversial businessmen as means of restoring social justice with illegal actions (Jacobs, 2000). Alternatively, another form of denial of victim occurs when there is no clear victim. For instance, Dabney (1995) found that taking items found on company property without a clear owner might not be considered to be stealing.

Condemnation of condemners is the technique delinquents use to blame the blamers. So instead of concentrating on the wrongdoing of their actions, delinquents would question the intentions or

motivations of the ones who expressed disapproval. For example, Eliason and Dodder (1999) found that poachers would often blame game wardens who hunt illegally themselves, and thus lose the moral high ground to judge or punish. Similarly, delinquents often claim police as being corrupted or politicians as being deceiving in order to neutralise the guilt as a result of their crime (Maruna and Copes, 2005).

Finally, appealing to higher loyalties occurs when offenders neutralise their guilt by claiming their unethical behaviours are justified because of a certain group to which they belong. This does not mean that they are not aware of their moral or legal culpability, but rather, values and norms from the other group temporarily become of higher importance compared with the conventional norm. For instance, unethical behaviours from offenders may be neutralised by claiming they have got kids to feed (Vandivier, 1996). Equally, profits for shareholders might be taken as neutralisation for business misconduct as means of justifying wrongdoings. It is worth noting that higher loyalties do not necessarily imply the importance of them; rather, defenders use AtHL as a means of defence to shield themselves from guilt.

Overall, Sykes and Matza (1957)'s five neutralisation techniques were by no means exhaustive, but they had provided a fundamental base for further research on delinquency neutralisation. Research in the field of criminology has since expanded the techniques into defence of necessity (Benson, 1985); the claim of normality (Coleman, 2002); the claim of entitlement (Conklin, 2004); the metaphor of the ledger (Klockars, 1974) and justification by comparison and postponement (Cromwell and Thurman, 2003).

### 2.3.3 Problems of neutralisation theory research

With its wide application across various disciplines, neutralisation theory has helped the understanding of human behaviours in a large number of areas. The concept has been successfully

integrated into various frameworks including rational choice theory (Clarke and Cornish, 1985), learning theory (Akers, 1985), control theory (Hirschi, 1969) and ethical consumer decision making (which is primarily based on Ajzen (2001)'s theory of planned behaviour) (Chatzidakis et al., 2007).

However, perhaps the greatest achievement of neutralisation theory does not even lie within the account that delinquents and consumers provide, but why they have said and neutralised in one way instead of the other. As suggested by Mills (1940), the reason why different people choose different reasons for their actions is not without reasons. In other words, how different people consciously frame their events is not in itself interesting; but how they have attached meanings into those events reflect and reveal their personality, self and identity (Brunner, 2002). Therefore by studying the excuses or justifications delinquents and consumers provide, social scientists can then trace back to the primary cause of their behaviours (Sykes and Matza, 1957).

Nevertheless, despite the tremendous development in accounts and selfnarratives (McAdams, 1999), research using neutralisation theory continues to only list and apply it in different fields of research (Maruna and Copes, 2005). This significant lack of theorisation happens in both the sociology of deviance and other fields. Studies on neutralisation tend to borrow the theory and test its application in other fields rather than theorising to meet the developments in relevant areas. (e.g. Fooks et al. (2013) on corporate social responsibility; Mona and Chatzidakis (2012) on political xenophobia).

On a different note, neutralisation theory was born prior to the cognitive revolution that happened in psychology which endeavoured to shift the focus of psychology from the closed environment laboratory-type of behaviourist model to meaning-making, narrative-based research (Bruner, 1990). Nonetheless,

despite its natural focus on internal dialogues and narrative accounts that are central to this socio-cognitive revolution, subsequent work on neutralisation theory has never extended it into a systematic study of cognitive or narrative theory (Maruna and Copes, 2005).

Moreover, Hirschi (1969) flagged an important issue associated with neutralisation theory. It is not clear from Sykes and Matza (1957)'s work if neutralisation happens before, or after the action. That is to say, whether neutralisation can be seen as an internalised neutralising device (Grove et al., 1989) or post-behavioural rationalisation. Diane (1999) contends that neutralisation theory would lose its credibility if people neutralise before their actions because after all, it becomes a description of the reactions that people have when they choose to be inconsistent. Hamlin (1988) offered an answer to this question by claiming that it is the guilt and shame delinquents (or consumers) want to neutralise in order to restore equilibrium. Therefore, delinquents (or consumers) can only neutralise when they have been questioned, because that is the time when they start to face their inconsistencies. Nevertheless, subsequent research found little evidence in either of the dichotomy, owing to the fact that it is almost impossible to reliably collect evidence of pre-action neutralisation in criminology research.

Additionally, in Sykes and Matza (1957)'s original paper, they contended that neutralisation theory should always be used in connection with other perspectives including demographics and backgrounds of delinquents due to the fact that the theory itself fails to be the primary deviation (Maruna and Copes, 2005). Nevertheless, it is not rare to see subsequent research, especially in consumer research, often taking neutralisation as a standalone theory to explain consumer behaviour.

Neutralisation research, or in fact most of research in social sciences, generally takes two forms. The first type of study usually adopts a qualitative and inductive method to investigate how neutralisation techniques have been used by people. The second type seeks to test hypotheses of neutralisation using surveys or true experiments. However, according to Hamlin (1988), all studies conducted still fail to support or reject neutralisation theory because of several challenges.

Firstly, a significant amount of survey has been done to compare whether people who have committed crime have more traces of neutralising techniques than those who do not. This is simply a misrepresentation of what Sykes and Matza (1957) aimed to achieve, for it fails to test whether neutralisation precedes crime (or inconsistencies). On the other hand, opinion-based surveys describing neutralising techniques often fail to determine whether it is the unconventional value that respondents support or the neutralisation techniques they agree (Maruna and Copes, 2005). For example, a simple question like 'if everyone else is doing it, then it is fine to do it' could be understood as either agreeing with the statement itself or agreeing with the legitimacy.

Secondly, convenient samples like university students are too often used for most of the survey-based research (e.g. Agnew and Peters, 1986; Dodder and Hughes, 1993). Generalising neutralising theories in criminology from criminology students or sociology students will not be appropriate for either their prior understanding or complete opposite mind-sets where backgrounds and demographics emphasised by Sykes and Matza (1957) are completely neglected. In addition, data collected from places like police custodies or prisoners have got a specific institutionalised closed setting that often disregards situational context outside of institutions (Foglia, 2000).

Finally, the most frequently cited problem of any survey-based research is its artificiality. The arbitrary nature of answering questions on a piece of paper which often has a socially desirable responses almost immediately shuts respondents off from reconstructing such an event in their own experience.

On the other side of the spectrum, even though in-depth interview-based research often provides insights into participants' inner motivations, this type of research has done little to further the development of neutralisation theory (e.g. Harris and Daunt, 2011; Piacentini et al., 2012).

Besides, the power relation between interviewers and interviewees (who immediately is pressurised into a defending position) create unavoidable bias in favour of neutralisation theory (Hindelang, 1970; Cromwell and Thurman, 2003).

Furthermore, the lack of a comparison group in interview-based neutralisation research makes it hard to determine whether those techniques are unique to the participants involved, or widely accepted conventional values in society (Maruna and Copes, 2005).

#### 2.3.4 The Potential of neutralisation

##### *Social cognition and neutralisation theory*

Sykes and Matza (1957) pressed the importance of developing a systematic analysis on neutralisations' internal structure with close reference to the delinquents' subjective world and value system. However, this urge has unfortunately not been prioritised if not completely ignored in the criminological community (Maruna and Copes, 2005), and consequently in other fields. Researchers seem quite satisfied with the list of five techniques, regardless of the achievements of social cognition's advancements in the past few decades.

Cognitive psychology studies the mental process of thinking, including perception, attention, language, memory, intelligence

and etc. The field of study can broadly be divided into impersonal and interpersonal (social) sides. The former focuses on how individual processes stimuli from the external world, while the latter takes the perspective of how interpretations can be reflected in one's interactions with the world. Because of its close relations with symbolic interactionism (as in symbolic interaction investigates the interactive aspects of social cognition) (Howard, 1994), it only seems logical to connect neutralisation theory with social cognition. Maruna and Copes (2005) attempted the connection in relation to the following aspects: explanatory style, excuse theory, narrative psychology and cognitive dissonance.

### *Explanatory style*

The customary use of neutralisation techniques could be seen as one's explanatory style. Explanatory style is the tendency to construct similar kinds of accounts for different occasions (Peterson et al., 1995). People tend to instinctively construct explanations for their negative actions (as well as positive ones, but less regularly), and these constructs of explanations are seen as responsible for repeat further actions (Caspi and Moffitt, 1995). That is, the outcome of the negative action affects individuals' understandings and judgements on the cause of such events, and consequently influencing later behaviours (Weiner, 1985). For example, if one's headache is cured after taking Tesco paracetamol 500mg rather than the usual Boots paracetamol 500mg that might or might not work, one is very likely to have more confidence on Tesco paracetamol 500mg (despite it being medically identical to the Boots' alternative), which then results in repeat consumption. (Although ironically, the Tesco option will possibly work better in the future as a result of medical placebo effect).

A large amount of research has been done to investigate how biases are understood and constructed in three prominent perspectives.

They are summarised with examples as in table 2.4 If I have been fired by my boss today:

Table 2.4 prominent perspectives of how one example could be processed internally using the explanatory style

<b>Internal</b>  (It is totally my fault because I am always late for work);	<b>External</b>  (It is not my fault because I live so far away from work);
<b>Stable</b>  (I am a lazy person and I cannot change that);	<b>Unstable</b>  (I will learn from this and stop being lazy);
<b>Global</b>  (I will not be able to achieve anything because of my laziness);	<b>Specific</b>  (I will never be lazy for work ever again).

(Summarised based on Maruna and Copes, 2005).

Explanatory style offers room for specific behavioural patterns and subsequent research has demonstrated changing those thinking patterns can effectively change consequent behaviours (McGuire, 2000). For example, studies have found out people tend to use internal, stable and global (left column) approach for positive things and external, unstable and specific (right column) reasoning for negative things that happen in their lives (Seligman, 1991). Similarly, people struggling with depression tend to use the left column for negative things and thus they are likely to exaggerate the extent to which bad things can influence them (Cohen, 2001).

There has been evidence in the criminological literature, relating offenders' explanatory style with people suffer from depressions. Maruna (2001; 2004) found habitual offenders exhibited almost the same styles of thinking as those who suffer from depression. Other research has found general correlations between depression and crime (McLeod and Shanahan, 1993). This correlation somehow contradicts neutralisation theory with explanatory style because

the former generally suggests a shift of responsibility to external forces (DoR; DoV; CtC and AtHL) while the latter suggests offenders, especially long-term career criminals display an internalised style. In other words, when habitual offenders are being charged, using neutralisation techniques, they are more likely to blame the legal system and conventional values (external) while depressed mental health service users are often blame themselves (internal) when being sectioned.

Barriga et al. (2000) suggest the underlying reason could be due to differences between self-serving distortions and self-debasing distortions. Self-serving cognitive distortion aims to protect the self from a negative selfconcept while self-debasing acts to diminish self-esteem (Lefebvre, 1981). Therefore, while neutralisation techniques are often used by offenders to neutralise their guilt and shame, depressed mental health service users are more likely to victimise themselves to diminish self-efficacy.

### *Excuse theory*

Sykes and Matza (1957) defined excuses or justifications with moral exemption as techniques of neutralisation. With its origin firmly rooted in social psychology, research on excuse theory tends to only focus on the positive side of excuses (Schlenker et al., 2001). As suggested by Snyder and Higgins (1998), excuse making has various psychological benefits to deal with stress and anxiety. Furthermore, excuse making has various social benefits. That is, offenders make excuses to show their alignment to social order when there is violation of it (Felson and Ribner, 1981). Nevertheless, Schlenker et al. (2001) demonstrated that overuse of excuses could rob one sense of self-control.

Essentially, theory of neutralisation is one form of excuse theory that has the focus of moral release. The rapid development on excuse theory in terms of the benefits from both psychological and social perspectives could therefore shed positive light on studies of

neutralisation. On the other hand, overuse of neutralisation theory could therefore lead to one's loss of self-control.

### *Narrative identity*

Despite nearly five decades' research on neutralisation, little effort has been made to advance the concept into an integrating theory which guides model building (Ward, 2000). Rather, research has always been focusing on the techniques themselves rather than the internal structures of the techniques suggested by Sykes and Matza (1957).

Following from Ward (2000)'s proposition to concentrate on the cognitive schemata underlying rather than patterns and symptoms inspired Maruna and Copes (2005) to contend that neutralisation techniques are external displays of individuals' self-concept and identity. In other words, one's identity narrative is used to guide behaviour and people construct story to make sense of what and why they do certain things (McAdams, 1995; Giddens, 1991).

Consequently, identity narrative helps us interpret, organise, structure and even ignore information to make sense of our behaviour. Neutralisation theory conveniently fits into one of the ways one constructs and understands the narrative. That is, one's negative action (like crime or mistake) plays an important role in his/her life story that one would make effort to explain and justify to minimise guilt (McAdams, 1999). Consequently, neutralisation techniques could be seen as means to create a sense of narrative of the self which is experiencing dissonance, guilt or shame.

### *Cognitive dissonance, shame and self-esteem*

A vital but often neglected question of neutralisation theory is the purpose of it. As described before, neutralisation theory aims to relate the negative action with various techniques, but what exactly is the purpose of neutralising shame and guilt? Research in the literature largely focuses on connecting neutralisation's benefits

with protecting oneself from shame and guilt, loss of self-esteem, remorse, cognitive dissonance, pain of conscience, social stigma, but little has been done to investigate what neutralisation actually intends to achieve (Maruna and Copes, 2005).

One way of investigating the purpose of neutralisation theory, suggested by Maruna and Copes (2005), is to look at another theory that was published at the same year, cognitive dissonance. Cognitive dissonance theory suggests that individuals will seek to reduce the dissonance arising from inconsistencies between their beliefs and actions (Festinger, 1957). There are two ways to reduce the dissonance, according to Festinger (1957), either by changing the action (he/she intends to do), or by altering beliefs (he/she has before). For example, a dedicated environmentalist who enjoys smoking may experience cognitive dissonance because smoking is bad for environment. In order to reduce cognitive dissonance, the environmentalist can either change his/her action --- stop smoking or adjusting his/her belief --- smoking is 'really' bad for environment.

Since then, a large number of experiments have been conducted in psychology and social psychology to understand human behaviour. Aronson (1992) suggests that cognitive dissonance is particularly effective when one's self-concept is at risk. He argues that people endeavour to protect their self-concept from inconsistencies, and one of the most commonly used ways to do so is by appealing to denials. 'That was not what I intended to do' or 'I did not have any other choice' are classic examples individuals use to distort some of their inconsistent beliefs. Wicklund and Brehm (1976) use an example of a smoker to establish that the ultimate cause of cognitive dissonance is the feeling of personal responsibility. Furthermore, Stice (1992) relates this dissonance to the concept of shame, claiming that dissonance and shame share very similar properties including negative experiences, consequences and exit conditions. In Nathan Harris (2001)'s framework of shame and

shaming, they borrowed the concept of 'ethical identity' (to be differentiated from ethical consuming identity in consumer behaviour research) from moral philosophy to establish that shame could be seen as a threat to a person's identity, and the feelings of shame are often related to a variety of negative experiences such as depression and social isolation (Tangney, 1995).

On the other hand, self-esteem has been regarded as the key element of studies on defence mechanisms. Costello (2000) claims that people with higher self-esteem tend to neutralise their actions more than those who do not. Similarly, Leary and Baumeister (2000) found the connection between aggressive offenders and higher self-esteem, despite numerous research in the past suggested the correlation between high self-esteem and resilience and determination (Shrauger and Sorman, 1977). Kaplan (1975) answered this problem with a dynamic relationship between self-esteem and delinquency, which is, low self-esteem prompts illegal activities, which then temporally results in an increase in self-esteem.

However, Covington (1984) concluded that compared with self-esteem, neutralisation was best understood as the protection from social stigma. The need to insulate oneself from stigma offers room for rationalisation, and hence makes it possible to prevent crime, or desistance. Therefore, as suggested by the theory of cognitive dissonance, the ultimate aim of neutralisation might be individuals' attempt to retain a sense of consistency.

#### 2.2.5 Theory of neutralisation in consumer research

##### *Application of neutralisation techniques in consumer research*

Since its launch in 1957, neutralisation theory has been popular in both criminology and sociology of deviance. A significant number of studies have been conducted to understand serious crimes as rape (Bohner et al., 1998); murder (Levi, 1981); genocide (Alvarez, 1997) and less serious deviant behaviours like bingo (King, 1990); children

beauty pageants (Heltsley and Calhoun, 2003) and victimisation of battered wives (Ferraro and Johnson, 1983).

But it was not until the late 20<sup>th</sup> century that the technique of neutralisation has been introduced for the first time in consumer research by Vitell and Grove (1987) for establishing a conceptual framework in marketing ethics. Two years later, Grove et al. (1989) applied the conceptual framework to understanding consumer misbehaviour.

However, despite the technique of neutralisation's rapid development in criminology and sociology of deviance, its application in consumer research remains under-researched (Gruber and Shlegelmilch, 2014), with only a few studies conducted to help advance knowledge in consumer behaviour, including online consumer misbehaviour (Harris and Dumas, 2009); online pirating (Thongmak, 2013); service consumer misbehaviour (Harris and Daunt, 2011); unethical acquisition in retailing (Strutton et al., 1997); shoplifting (Cromwell and Thurman, 2003); and other illegal activities. Even then, this research has been entirely focussed on consumer misbehaviour, where there is a clear distinction between moral wrongness and rightness. Table 2.5 summarises the use of neutralisation theory in the past decade in consumer research.

Table 2.5 Neutralisation theory in consumer research

<b>Context</b>	<b>Authors</b>	<b>Contribution to neutralisation theory</b>
Ethically questionable consumer behaviour	Fukukawa et al. (2019)	How neutralisation moderates ethically questionable behaviours
	Dooston et al. (2018)	NT addition - claim of entitlement in consumer research

	Dooston et al. (2016)	NT application in new context.
Controversial communitybased platforms	Ertz et al. (2018)	Neutralisation techniques and nonneutralisation techniques in combination
Youth drinking and identities	Cocker et al. (2018)	Neutralisation is used to perform and manage multiple identities in risky health context
Counterfeit luxury products	Koay (2018)	New application in counterfeit luxury products
	Bian et al. (2016)	New application in counterfeit luxury products
Climate change	Talbot and Boiral (2015)	NT application in new context.
Green consumption	Johnstone and Tan (2015)	Addition of two new neutralisation techniques: protecting one's sense of self and consumer attachment to the brand
Sustainable consumption	Antonetti and Maklan (2014)	How guilt and pride affects neutralisation techniques

	Gruber and Schlegelmilch (2014)	NT application in new context.
Fair trade	Brunner (2014)	Differentiating internal and external types of NT
	Chatzidakis, Hibbert and Smith (2007)	Conceptualising NT in FT with TPB
Corporate social responsibility	Fooks et al. (2013)	NT application in new context.
Digital piracy	Thongmak (2013)	New application in online piracy
	Harris and Dumas (2009)	New application in online piracy
	Goode and Cruise (2006)	Development of neutralisation framework
Multichannel research shopping	Chiou, Wu and Chou (2012)	New application + difference in occupational use of NT (students vs professional)
Unethical retail disposition	Rosenbaum, Kuntze and Wooldridge (2011)	8 NT applications in ethical retail disposition

	Rosenbaum and Kuntze (2003)	New application in unethical retail disposition
Cyberloafing	Lim (2005)	New application in cyberloafing
Inappropriate retail behaviour	Strutton , Vitell and Pelton (1994)	Neutralisation as explanatory framework
	Vitell and Grove (1987)	Neutralisation introduced to consumer research

Similarly, the latest focus on neutralisation techniques and ethical consumption still suggests a distinction between morally acceptable and morally discouraged activity. For example, Chatzidakis et al. (2007) applied neutralisation theory to Fairtrade (FT) consumption. In order to support this claim, Chatzidakis and colleagues used face to face interviews to support the idea that the technique of neutralisation is widely used in more normatively flexible circumstances like ethical consumption and recycling (Chatzidakis et al., 2007). They applied the original model of five categories of neutralisation and investigated how consumers used them as coping strategies to deal with dissonance and restore attitudinal consistency.

Table 2.6 application of neutralisation technique in ethical consumption

Denial of responsibility	Ethical consumption is too expensive; lack of knowledge; etc.
Denial of injury	I don't think my contribution could change anything; etc.

Denial of victim	n/a
Condemnation to condemner	Ethical consumption should be a top-down approach rather than forcing responsibilities to individuals; etc.
Appeal to higher loyalties	I have got a family of 6 to feed; etc.

Chatzidakis et al., (2007)' research provides empirical evidence of how consumers use neutralisation to restore attitudinal equilibrium in Fairtrade (as summarised in table 2.6). Moreover, it also provides room for studies on neutralisation in other areas. For example, Piacentini et al. (2012) investigated how UK university students have been using neutralisation techniques to make sense of their excessive alcohol consumption; De Bock and Van Kenhove (2011) used neutralisation techniques to understand ethical consumers' double standard in defining their own social responsibilities and corporate social responsibility; Antonetti and Maklan (2014) went on to argue that through the reduction of personal responsibility neutralisation, consumers are persuaded that their decision affect sustainability outcomes. Table 2.7 presents a list of neutralising techniques identified in various fields.

Table 2.7 Neutralising techniques identified in different fields of research

<b>Technique</b>	<b>Example</b>	<b>Context</b>	<b>Reference</b>
1. Denial of responsibility	<i>My supervisor abused me first</i>	Juvenile delinquency	Sykes and Matza (1957)

2. Appeal to higher loyalties	<i>I do it for the clan</i>	Juvenile delinquency	Sykes and Matza (1957)
3. Condemning the condemners	<i>System is corrupted</i>	Juvenile delinquency	Sykes and Matza (1957)
4. Denial of injury	<i>Nobody's hurt</i>	Juvenile delinquency	Sykes and Matza (1957)
5. Denial of victim	<i>I didn't hurt anyone</i>	Juvenile delinquency	Sykes and Matza (1957)
6. Defence of necessity	<i>I did what was necessary, I had no other choice</i>	Criminology	Minor (1981)
7. Claim of the metaphor of the ledger	<i>I also helped her in getting insurance, so it cancels out</i>	Professional crime	Klockars (1976)
8. Denial of the necessity of the law	<i>I didn't see the point of that law</i>	White-collar crime	Coleman (2005)
9. Claim of entitlement	<i>Men were born equal, so I just took what was supposed to be mine</i>	White-collar crime	Coleman (2005)

10. Claim of relative acceptability	<i>My supervisor did something even worse</i>	Deviant behaviour of students	Henry and Eaton (1999)
11. Claim of individuality	<i>I don't care what others think of me</i>	Deviant behaviour of students	Henry and Eaton (1999)
12. Justification by comparison	<i>If not shoplifting, I'd be doing something worse</i>	Shoplifting	Cromwell and Thurman (2003)
13. Justification of postponement	<i>I just don't think about it beforehand</i>	Shoplifting	Cromwell and Thurman (2003)
14. One-Time Usage	<i>I only did it once</i>	Consumer fraud via product returns	Rosenbaum et al. (2011)
15. First-time, only-time crime	<i>It was the first time I did it, and the last time I promise</i>	Consumer fraud via product returns	Rosenbaum et al. (2011)
16. Outsmart the system	<i>The system is flawed, I just took advantage of a flawed design</i>	Consumer fraud via product returns	Rosenbaum et al. (2011)
17. Denial of benefit	<i>Fair trade can't help much</i>	Fair trade in-commitment	Brunner (2014)

18. Denial of need	<i>Farmers at developing countries aren't poor</i>	Fair trade in-commitment	Brunner (2014)
19. Accusation	<i>Developing countries' own fault</i>	Fair trade in-commitment	Brunner (2014)
20. Personal principles	<i>I buy cheapest products no matter what</i>	Fair trade in-commitment	Brunner (2014)

The increasing amount of research on ethical consumption empirically supports the idea that neutralisation techniques are being used in more normatively flexible areas (e.g. Chatzidakis et al., 2007; Rosenbaum et al., 2011; Brunner, 2014; Dooston et al., 2016; 2018; Ertz et al., 2018; Koay, 2018; Cocker et al., 2018; Fukukawa et al., 2019) outside criminology and deviant studies, moreover, there is strong evidence suggesting the need to justify one's actions to restore consistencies that happen in the absence of social norms. As Hazani (1991, p. 146) claims, techniques of neutralisation are '*universal modes of response to inconsistency*', which can thus be used wherever there are inconsistencies. Cromwell and Thurman (2003) share a similar view and claim the purpose of neutralisation is to minimise cognitive dissonance induced by guilt.

Consequently, this provides room for neutralisation theory to be integrated into a variety of new disciplines. For example, using social identity theory, it might help understand how consumers restore their consistency, using the technique of neutralisation, when they purchase products from an out group. Moreover, individual's need to maintain a consistent identity might shed light on the question of why they consume from brands with identities

they want to avoid overall. So, by investigating their neutralisation techniques, used to justify their identity inconsistent consumption, it might contribute to the understanding of consumers' identity-related consumption overall.

Neutralisation theory, despite its wide recognition in criminology and deviant sociology, is rather badly theorised. The recent rise in neutralisation research's application to ethical consumption in consumer behaviour has provided room for its integration into other disciplines and frameworks. However, as a theory which primarily focuses on narrative accounts and personal justification, more work needs to be done to refine it rather than repeating the theory in its original 1957 form. It is worth noting that neutralisation techniques are fundamentally tools that individuals use to protect their self-concept from inconsistencies. There is strong evidence to believe that there is room for neutralisation studies outside of sociology of deviance and criminology.

As discussed in previous sections, research in identity consumption tend to only focus on specific parts of self-identities, while consumption is a market-mediated activity that involves interactions and negotiations among different parts of self-identities. There is a general lack of research in the field to investigate how consumers negotiate their identities.

On top of that, research in the consumer literature assumes heavy individualistic responsibility in terms of getting identity projects right (Arnould and Thompson, 2005). However, consumption rather demands consumers' continuous negotiations through marketplace with a plethora of commodities and experiences (Holt, 2002), especially the pressure of achieving distinction through on-going understanding and negotiation with symbolic values of commodities (Arnould and Thompson, 2005). In other words, consumers are under tremendous amount of pressure in getting

their identities right to construct market-mediated individuality (Thompson and Haytko, 1997).

In addition, research in the literature tends to focus on how identity work contributes to consumers' wellbeing positively (Larsen and Patterson, 2018); there is a lack of research investigating what happens when consumers' identity projects goes wrong.

Therefore, this doctoral research seeks to fill the above gaps by investigating what happens when identity projects goes wrong using techniques of neutralisation. By using a theory primarily concentrates on justification and narrative account, the doctoral research fundamentally seeks to understand how consumers negotiate their identities in a market-mediated commodified yet individualistic experience.

## Chapter 3 Methodology

This chapter is divided into four parts. Firstly, the main research aim and research questions will be listed. Secondly, the researcher's theoretical stance will be discussed in terms of its relevance to the current research. After that, the research methods used for data collection will be discussed along with the actual procedures involved. Finally, the research rigour including validity and reflexivity will be assessed to conclude the chapter.

### 3.1 Research aim and research questions

The aim of the research is to explore how consumers see and justify their identity-inconsistent consumption with the following research questions:

1. What are consumers' reasons for identity-inconsistent consumption?
2. How do they perceive and justify their identity-inconsistent consumption themselves?
3. What are the roles of neutralisation techniques in consumers' identity projects?
4. What are implications for consumers' identity projects?

### 3.2 Research philosophy

#### 3.2.1 Introduction

Section 3.2 presents and justifies the theoretical aspect of the chosen methodology, which could be summarised as follows:

Ontology	Kantian transcendental idealism
Epistemology	Social constructionism
Guiding Paradigms	Interpretivism

The researcher believes in Kantian transcendental idealism and consequently aims to conduct her research to understand social

mechanisms rather than a causal relation investigation favoured by positivists. Fundamentally, the researcher questions the possibility of conducting social research under the positivist paradigm, especially in the field of social psychology. Because not only there is no establishment in social science that could prove the independent existence of cause (beliefs) and effect (behaviour), but also, the researcher believes the ultimate goal of social science is not to make predictions based on closed laboratory experiments, but to investigate patterns and hidden rules that are important to every member of society.

The structure could be broadly divided into three sections. Firstly, the researcher seeks to justify her chosen theoretical stance. Next, there will be a critique of competing paradigms in philosophy of social science (methodology of) in the literature of the research interest. Finally, a conclusion will be drawn to summarise the section.

### 3.2.2 Philosophical assumptions

Blaikie (2009) argues social research should consider both the philosophical assumptions of social reality and knowledge justification, as well as the procedures involved in the development of new knowledge. Generally, inside the field of social science research, researchers from different backgrounds tend to have a very different understanding of Research Philosophy, especially after the publication of Kuhn's *The Structure of Scientific Revolution* in 1962, where the term *Research Paradigm* has multiple meanings including theoretical perspective, ontological and epistemological stances (Kuhn, 1996). This doctoral research follows the route of Norman Blaikie and Michael Crotty which differentiates ontological and epistemological considerations from research paradigm, where the latter is defined as the broader philosophical attempts to understand the social world (Blaikie, 2009; Crotty, 1998; Machamer and Silberstein, 2002). That is to say, ontological and

epistemological assumptions only illustrate researchers' understandings on where reality lies, what constitute as social reality and/or true knowledge and how knowledge can be extracted and justified. Thus, positivism and interpretivism are research paradigms rather than ontological and epistemological positions.

### *Ontology*

Ontology is the study of being. In a social science perspective, it is the study of the nature of social reality, and hence it guides the research and determines methods to be used (Blaikie, 2009; Bryman, 2008). Broadly speaking, there are 2 mutually exclusive ontological positions in social research, namely, realism and idealism. Despite the various forms of realism, it generally indicates a stance where there is a single independent reality which can either be approached through experiences (naïve realist or empirical realist), reasons and logics (conceptual realist) or cannot be perceived accurately due to flaws of human senses and processes of interpretation (cautious realist) (Blaikie, 2009). On the other side of the spectrum lies the idealism which advocates the plurality of social realities and claims they are nothing more than ideas and representations of individual minds (Guba and Lincoln, 1998). These 2 opposing ontological positions are often well-represented by two groups of philosophers of science. Whilst the former position often welcomed by a positivist (or a naturalist) who advocates the perfection of research methodology to achieve the social reality, the latter is often seen as a threat of undermining the certainty of knowledge. For example, as in Locke's *Essay concerning Human Understanding*, despite the ambiguous use of the word idea, he argued what we knew from the physical world were nothing more than ideas that we sensed through sounds, smells and tastes which were all minddependent (Locke, 1689), and Berkeley further claimed physical things only exist if they could be perceived or sensed (Berkeley, 1710). Furthermore, in his paper *Enquiry concerning Human Understanding*, Hume identified the most

difficult problem of the certainty of knowledge was all we could perceive were merely our perceptions and ideas; we could neither perceive the substance itself, nor the cause (or creation) (Hume, 1748). For example, one might think A causes B as throwing a brick to the window (A) usually breaks the window (B), however, one can never perceive the causation between A and B but two frequently occurring events, namely, me throwing a brick (A) and the window breaks (B). Thus, without the ability to perceive the causation, we could never be 100% certain that B will continue to happen whenever A, just as we can never be 100% sure that the sun will rise the next morning, without being able to perceive the movement of interstellar movements and cosmological theories (which ironically are assumptions rather than facts too). This particular scepticism was often regarded as the biggest criticism to both the empiricists and the rationalists for it completely undermined the certainty of research or knowledge.

It was not until Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* that science has been safeguarded again, at a cost. Kant generally accepted idealism, although in a quite different perspective. According to his theory of transcendental idealism, not only do we act according to our causality-based sensual experiences, but also in time and space (Kant, 1781). So our perceptions of the world are products of our spatial, temporal and causal-structural order at our unconscious level. And since we cannot escape from our flawed and biased senses, where our perceptions can only be representations of the real world, so we can never perceive the reality directly ourselves, or in Kant's world, the thing-in-itself (Kant, 1781). In other words, the world is empirically real but transcendently ideal (Schopenhauer, 1818). Thus, causality is valid and only valid in the empirical world. Although few scholars in social science have embedded transcendental idealism into their research, nor can this doctrine be easily reflected through the ever so complicated philosophical stance taken in publications and doctoral research,

the author argues that Kantian transcendental idealism is appropriate and suitable to her own paper, and is well compatible with the social constructionism epistemology and an ethnomethodology paradigm.

The author agrees with Kant's proposed transcendental idealism in the following ways:

1. The author assumes that there is an independent reality but we cannot perceive or experience it directly but the representation of it. In other words, we cannot achieve absolute certainty but a level of confidence within our empirical world. This is due to the fact that we can only understand the world through our flawed senses which could be deceiving us, which is rare when applying a Cartesian sense

of scepticism (Descartes, 1641). This is especially true in the field of social research, where human beings, as the main subject of interest, behave under a complicated process of reasoning and are influenced by stimuli with contradicting reasons for purchasing/non-purchasing can co-exist. Furthermore, we are all born into different cultural, social, political backgrounds, where our beliefs and desires are more or less shaped and biased in one way or another. A selfie stick might be frowned upon in a western perspective but welcomed in an eastern mind. Therefore it is harsh to claim that the former perspective is right while that latter is wrong (or vice versa) but merely socially constructed meanings which are all representations of the social reality we cannot accomplish. Consequently, the author believes the responsibility of a social scientist is not to uncover the reality (not only because it is not achievable through our flawed and biased senses, but also because we are only able to apply reason and causations on representations of the

single reality), but to discover rules and patterns of how representations of that single reality forms and how and why one representation is similar or different to another representation.

2. The author recognises individuals' understandings of the social reality because in the field of marketing, brands are inevitably socially shared values with a historical context (Lee, 2009). In other words, brands often have to radiate specific identities as added brand equity where those identities are socially constructed and agreed based on social, political, cultural and other various factors (Guba and Lincoln, 1998). So consumers from different cultures or socio-economics status may perceive the brand image (representation) differently.
3. In context of the author's own doctoral research, the ontological position could be understood in the following matter:
  - a. Suppose A is the single independent social reality
  - b. A1, A2, A3 ... An are representations of that single social reality;
  - c. A1, A2, A3 ... An are all different from each other but share at least 1 or 2 entities in common;
  - d. Thus, the author does not seek to understand what A is, but to understand how A1, A2, A3 ... An are representations of A and what might be the mechanisms of making A1 the representation of A in certain groups/communities/cultures etc.

In context:

- a. Suppose A = the reason(s) why consumers claim to avoid Primark but buys Primark
- b. A1 = A group of consumers with lower self-esteem to approach their out-group  
  
A2 = A group of consumers only advocate ethical consumption when they are accompanied by their peers  
  
A3 = A group of consumers behave differently when they buy things for others  
  
...  
  
An = N
- c. The author does not seek to understand what is the reason (or a combination of reasons) why consumers claim to avoid Primark while they actually do shop at Primark, but to understand how and why self-esteem interferes shopping choices (A1); why ethical consumption is only possible under peer pressure for some consumers (A2) and etc.

### *Epistemology*

Epistemology is the study of knowledge and its relationship with people (Crane and Farkas, 2006). It defines the philosophical stance a researcher holds in justifying the legitimacy and adequacy of possible knowledge (Crotty, 1998). There is no doubt that epistemology assumptions are always linked with ontology assumptions, because after all, true knowledge is where the reality lies.

Historically, two opposing schools of scientific knowledge dominated research from 16<sup>th</sup> century. At one end of the continuum are the empiricists who believe knowledge comes from human senses and observation (Hume, 1748; Schopenhauer, 1818).

They believe if one can perceive the world objectively, then one will be able to theorise and conceptualise the world correctly (Blaikie, 2009). At the heart of this epistemological assumption is the belief that true knowledge can be testified through experiences. That is to say, if certain events occur regularly enough, they can then be generalised and used to predict future events. Nevertheless, although this empiricist's approach might sound reasonable enough in natural science research, it can hardly be established in the field of social research due to the complexity of human beings, unreliable human senses as mentioned above, and unperceivable nature of social factors. On the other end of the continuum, rationalists advocate the innate knowledge that is shared by all human beings in their structures. This approach is often rejected nowadays due to the lack of evidence in justifying unobservable reality (Blaikie, 2009).

However, this doctoral research adopts constructionism which rejects both empiricism and rationalism. Constructionism is the view that knowledge is the process of human beings' sense-making process with the physical world and other individuals (Crotty, 1998). Regarding this particular research, consumers construe symbolic meanings of brands and social phenomenon under interactions with other consumers in the society. Their attitudes toward a certain brand are largely determined by social norms, backgrounds and people around them (Belk, 1975).

It is worth noting the difference between constructivism and social constructionism. Both of the concepts agree with socially constructed knowledge, but the former emphasises on an individual mind while the latter focuses on a collective results of social interactions (Blaikie, 2009; Crotty, 1998). In the context of this research, the author focuses more on the socially constructed meanings among individual consumers, brands and society that shape consumers' attitudes, intentions and behaviours. Hence a social constructionism is more appropriate.

The social constructionism is inevitably compatible with the Kantian transcendental idealism ontology, in which it agrees with a multiple sociallyconstructed realities.

### *Theoretical perspectives*

Interpretivism appreciates the social world and emphasises the importance of understanding people's social roles within it (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2007). It has its roots in phenomenology where people perceive, experience and try to explain phenomena around us (Audi, 1995) and symbolic interactionism, which believes people continuously form and adjust interpretations of the world through interactions with others (Saunders et al., 2007). Central to this interpretivist's view is the fidelity to the social world rather than pursuing specific methodological generalisation (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995). Moreover, unlike positivism, interpretivism rejects the very idea of generalising universal laws to predict behaviours overall, because interpretivists believe human beings understand and interpret the world differently (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995). It is thus meaningless to establish a causal-effect relation when everyone reacts to the stimuli differently from others. Rather, an approach which enables the observer to learn and interpret the world as how participants do is needed because it explores the underlying reasons that motivate participants to behave in such ways (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995) (More details in section – a positivist's root below).

Hence, this study adopts an interpretivist view because it seeks to understand behaviours which are largely influenced and shaped by social norms, and people have different interpretations and preferences when choosing/avoiding certain identities. Specifically, this research takes ethnomethodology as the guiding research paradigm, which is compatible with interpretivist's perspective (see section Ethnomethodology in the next chapter).

### 3.2.3 The role of theory

#### *A positivist's root*

As mentioned before, traditionally in consumer research literature, scholars tend to adopt a social psychology approach. Attitude-behaviour gap or intention-behaviour gap has been regarded as the dominant model to understand why consumers do not translate their expressed attitudes into actual consumption (Padel and Foster, 2005; Moraes et al., 2012; Carrington et al., 2014). As a result of general public's concerns on organisational misconduct and social responsibilities (Boulstridge and Carrigan, 2000), along with an increase in consumer power (Jackson, 2007), more and more companies now are using corporate social responsibility (CSR) as a strategy to increase competitive advantage (Klein, 2001). However, as Boulstridge and Carrigan (2000) point out, the link between consumers' purchasing behaviours and companies' CSR is not proven. So whether to invest huge amount of effort and money on CSR is completely unjustified. Moreover, this raises a more fundamental question of whether consumers' attitudes matter in predicting their actual behaviours.

This coincides with what happened 40 years ago in social psychology when little correspondence was found between measures of attitudes and behaviours (Wicker, 1969), which then led to an abandonment on studies of attitudes and behaviours from a number of psychologists. However, the subsequent 40 years' research has demonstrated the imperfect but strong correspondence between attitudes and behaviour (Glasman and Albarracin, 2006), which then leaves the question of why ethical consumers' attitudes do not correspond to the actual increase in consumption. Maio (2011) suggests this is mainly caused by an unequal measure of attitudes and behaviour, that is, the measure of consumers' ethical attitudes are much more broad and abstract than the measure of actual behaviour. For example, it is far vaguer

to ask consumers whether they generally support ethical consumption than to ask if they would support ethical consumption every Wednesday afternoon at their routine weekly grocery trips to ASDA. The motivation behind a broad or vague attitude measure is the interest of researchers to predict a variety of behaviours (Maio, 2011). Nevertheless, human beings often have a number of attitudes interfering at the same time, if not competing (Festinger, 1957) in making specific decisions, as Fishbein and Ajzen (1974) pointed out, a number of relevant behaviours must be assessed at the same time to test if an abstract attitude matters. On the other hand, other researchers have been trying to address this issue from a different perspective. Instead of focusing on understanding why consumers do not translate their attitudes into behaviours, they are more interested in bridging this gap by using other methods like new consumption communities (Moraes et al., 2012); habit cues (Verplanken and Wood, 2006).

The difference in these two approaches might be fundamentally caused by two completely opposing research paradigms. On one side of the spectrum, the endeavour to understand human behaviours by means of randomised controlled trials or quantifiable data is evidently rooted in positivism. It is perhaps one of the oldest and the most debated questions of philosophy of social science over whether we can or should conduct social research in the same way as the natural sciences. Positivists' believe that different sciences can and should be reducible to natural science (and eventually physics, as in all human behaviour could be reduced to psychology, which then can be reduced to biology and chemistry and finally physics) and its dedicated pursuit on a single, unified research method have cultivated decades of social researchers seeking methodological perfection.

According to Comte and Saint-Simon, social reality is part of the world and thus can and must be investigated using standard scientific methods (Blaikie, 2009). Therefore, it is social scientists'

responsibility to identify 'social laws' that govern the social world. Followed from this Comte's positivism, the logical positivist went on arguing social science must be value free because all scientific knowledge must be from observations and theories that must also be definable in observational terms (Kincaid, 1996). And this school of thoughts have been carried on by a large number of social psychologists. Examples like true experiments on mood's influence on attitude-behaviour consistency (Elen et al., 2013) and hypothesis tests of comparison-driven self-evaluation and restoration (Shalev and Morwitz, 2012) both have a significant focus on increasing the testability of the research. Elen et al. (2013), for instance, single out mood as a moderator of attitude-behaviour consistency, to test 3 hypotheses that makes it possible to observe the effectiveness of mood alone without interferences of other influences. The favouritism of hypothesis tests in a positivist paradigm came from Karl Popper's claim that good social science should be falsifiable and should survive severe tests (Risjord, 2014).

However, experimental research often faces criticisms in various ways. For example, John Stuart Mill (1987) famously questioned our ability to isolate other factors of a social phenomenon (Risjord, 2014). Mill questions our capacities to manipulate a single cause with other factors completely fixed. Secondly, participants are from different backgrounds and cultures, it is rather difficult to set up a control group that is identical to experimental groups (Risjord, 2014). Some endeavour to answer this criticism by randomly assigning one group of participants as a manipulation group. So as long as all participants joined voluntarily from a similar group (usually undergraduate students recruited in exchange of module credits in America), the authors could somewhat claim the sample used are from similar backgrounds. Additionally, experiments conducted in a fixed environment may fail to identify real causes of a complicated social phenomenon (Risjord, 2014). That is to say, a social phenomenon is much more complicated than an isolated

condition set up in a laboratory setting. Shielding respondents from the real world may prevent social researchers from observing interferences and interactions among a number of causes.

Causation is not a linear process and counterfactual pre-emptions and overdetermination often do happen in real world (Lewis, 1973), especially in an over-researched area like attitude-behaviour gap. It is a socially perceived gap when people do not act in line with their expressed attitudes (Boulstridge and Carrington, 2000). It is a form of inconsistency where a significant number of explanations have been proposed, including cognitive dissonance (Festinger, 1957), the role of habit in theory of planned behaviour (Verplanken and Wood, 2006), moral norm (Godin, Conner and Sheeran, 2005) and mood (Elen, et al., 2013). Furthermore, there is an issue of whether subjective self-reported data collected from individuals can be used at the face value when concepts like inconsistency is not an idea often welcomed by participants. In an extreme case of conducting social research when there is an obvious morally rightness or wrongness element involved, whether we could still use subjective data has made researchers reflect on their research methodologies and paradigms underpinned.

#### 3.2.4 Conclusion

Therefore, the author rejects the possibility of conducting her research in a positivist's paradigm not only because social psychology often fails to demonstrate the independence between beliefs/desires and actions, but also, the author believes the ultimate objective of her research is not to identify the causal relation, but the unwritten rules within the in-groups and out-groups of identity avoidance culture and how consumers make sense of their inconsistent actions themselves. Through the ethnomethodology research paradigm, the author believes that this so-called attitudebehaviour gap /action-value gap needs to be

investigated in a more holistic way rather than simply comparing measures of attitudes and behaviours.

Moreover, the traditional model TPB adopted by various researchers needs to be investigated carefully because TPB assumes a rational process of behavioural prediction (Turaga et al., 2010), while consumption is largely influenced by one's culture, social and economic process (Zukin and Maguire, 2004) as well as an identity formation process (Hogg et al., 2000). Therefore, the proposed internet ethnography that observes and participates in consumers' daily operations will be ideal to identify patterns and rules through consumers' own sense-making process.

### 3.3 Research methods and procedures

In this section, the specific methods used for various stages of data collection will be described and discussed. Specifically, how participants were recruited and managed will be discussed first, followed by discussions of the methods used to code and organise data in order to use thematic analysis to generate themes and patterns of neutralising techniques. Finally, the methods used for examining the validity and reflexivity will be justified. It is worth noting that the procedures discussed below are in a logical structure; whilst in reality, interviews were organised based on the availability of the participants. For example, the second interview of HN04 happened before the first interview of VS26.

The exact procedure of data collection is as followed:

<b>Research methods</b>	48 semi-structured interviews with a month's break
<b>Sample</b>	Female university students at UWE from Europe or Asia
<b>Recruitment</b>	Flyers across campus + social media platform
<b>Main study</b>	Semi-structured interview

	Semi-structured interview (at least a month later)
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### 3.3.1 Recruiting procedures

Because the current research sees participants as a source of data to build up theories of why consumers still purchase identity-inconsistent garments, instead of seeking representativeness of the wider population, it is thus irrational to recruit participants for the sake of representativeness as in a positivist's research (Esterberg, 2002). Therefore, participants are selected based on their ability to contribute to the area of identity-inconsistent garments consumption. Consequently, the number of interviews conducted is determined by the point of saturation as themes emerged (Taylor and Bogdan, 1998).

#### *Sampling*

Sampling is the process of selecting an adequate number of people from the whole population and it is evidently more practical to use a representative sample rather than the whole population (Sekaran, 2003). The purpose of sampling is to choose right sample size and the most representative group of people (Bradley, 2007). The recruitment process for this research started with purposive sampling, which simply means sampling with a predetermined purpose to meet the research objective (Saunders et al., 2007). Purposive sampling is a non-probability sample that is also known as judgmental sampling (Hair et al., 2007). In other words, the researcher uses her own judgement to select the appropriate participants based on the research objectives. Specifically, because the aim of this research is to explore the reasons why consumers still purchase identity-inconsistent garments, it is thus irrational to recruit participants who have an indifferent opinion on garments styles. In addition, participants who purchase garments purely based on quality or price do not qualify either if they have established no thoughts into garment styles. Consequently, an ideal

candidate is conscious of styles different brands want to project. However, it does not imply candidates need to get styles right and know exactly what each garment's style is. Rather, as long as candidates are conscious that there are different styles in the marketplace and make choices based on those styles.

On the other hand, as mentioned earlier, because the research seeks to build theories for themes-emerging, a pre-determined sample size is not needed because it is difficult to predict the point of saturation. In other words, the sample size is determined by the theories emerged (Glaser, 1992).

Consequently, the main population of this research is 'ordinary consumers', because the literature (along with screening interviews) suggest that every 'normal consumer' maybe have personal thoughts to share about clothing styles they do not agree with. This means the recruitment of participants would not need to be as selective nor restricted. In other words, it was not necessary to recruit specific consumers who had experienced dissonance in identity-inconsistent purchases in the past. Rather, the inconsistencies and justifications should be probed at the interviews. As a result, the population of this research is 'ordinary consumers'.

On the other hand, the sampling frame of this research is female university students. Students were selected not only because of the convenience (Hair et al., 2007), but also, students as young consumers have a long purchasing life and they are at the stage of experimenting identities (Ross and Harradine, 2011). On top of that, students also represent potential future high spenders with more disposable income (Ross and Harradine, 2018). The main criticism against student population is essentially the question of its generalisability to a wider population. However, as this research seeks to build theory rather than seeking representational sample for generalisation, the sample is selected based on the ability to

contribute to the research objective. Consequently, participants in this research were therefore selected based on their knowledge and experiences of identity consumption and avoidance. On top of that, initial screening interviews were conducted to filter students with an indifferent attitude towards garments identities. In addition, female university students were selected because research has demonstrated that young female consumers spend more on garments and clothing is a primary source for self-expression (Taylor and Cosenza, 2002).

Furthermore, although previous research in the literature has demonstrated the relationship between fashion consumption and self-expression (e.g. Hogg et al., 2009), fashion and garments consumption were chosen here simply as the platform to debate. This is because fashion the focus of this doctoral research is to investigate how participants justify their inconsistencies, rather than concentrating on new consumer behaviour pattern at fashion consumption.

Table 3.2 Research participants

<b>Participant</b>	<b>Ethnicity</b>	<b>Level</b>	<b>Course</b>
VT01	Asian Chinese	UG	Business and Management
DH02	European	UG	Psychology
HN04	Asian Chinese	UG	Business and Management
DT05	Asian Chinese	UG	Biology
JM06	Asian Chinese	UG	Business and Management
QY07	Asian Chinese	PG	Public Health
KK09	European	UG	Psychology
AG10	European	UG	Psychology
CT11	Asian Chinese	UG	Animation

YA16	European	UG	International Business
JN14	Asian Chinese	UG	Business Management and Marketing
MZ13	European	UG	Criminology and Law
OM17	European	UG	n/a
RN18	European	PG	Marketing
JO20	Asian Chinese	UG	Journalism and PR
NC22	Asian Chinese	UG	Accounting and Finance
ER23	European	UG	Psychology
BJ24	European	PG	Psychology
CC25	Asian Chinese	UG	Economics
VS26	Asian Chinese	UG	Economics
BM27	European	UG	Psychology
KC28	Asian Chinese	PG	Human Resource
AV30	European	PG	Science Communication
LC29	Asian Chinese	PG	Biological Engineering

Table 3.3 Breakdown of participants

13 Asian Chinese	11 European
18 Undergraduates	6 Postgraduates (2 PhD; 4 Master)
11 Business School	13 Others

#### *Recruiting flyers and social media flyer*

Initially, flyers (Appendix I) were distributed around UWE Frenchay campus (including teaching blocks, cafes, student union and

student refectory) to recruit participants. However, the attention received from potential participants were scarce in the first few weeks. Only three participants had shown interest and contacted the researcher to take part. All three participants were undergraduate students at business school. In order to maximise participation from students from other departments and/or at other campuses, the same recruitment flyer was posted on an open public UWE Facebook group. On top of that, additional snowball sampling was used to increase the number of participants. Snowball sampling is the process when participants were asked to recruit other participants that fitted the selecting criteria (Saunders et al., 2007). In this research, five participants who were friends of already qualified participants were recruited using snowball sampling.

The flyer used simple terminologies to attract students who were interested in shopping, to prevent leading candidates into certain areas. Because although identity consumption often exists in consumers' decision-making process, consumers are not always conscious of them (Lee, 2009). Contact details (email and mobile number) of the researcher had been left with an incentive of £10 Amazon voucher also advertised after the completion of two interviews to attract more participants. This direct voucher incentive was used because studies have shown it being more effective than prize drawn (Heyman, 2019).

As a result of the online flyer, participants from other faculties (than business school), other level of studies (Master students and PhD students) and other campuses (Bower Ashton campus based in Ashton Park area of Bristol where art students were based; city centre campus where one psychology PhD student was based) had shown interest in participating the research.

On top of that, after screening 15 participants, the researcher found clear differences between Asian Chinese students (students who were from China, Singapore and Malaysia but with Chinese

ethnicity) and European students. Specifically, during the screening interviews, European students tended to experiment on different styles to express their self-identities to others, while Chinese students used styles of garments to respond to external pressures like culture, subculture, family and friends. However, despite the difference, most of the participants still present themselves in similar styles as female university students. Thus, the researcher decided to deliberately recruit more Asian Chinese students to investigate their difference in motivations by posting the same flyer in Chinese (Appendix II). It is worth noting even though almost half of the participants were Asian Chinese students, the research does not seek to become a study of cultural differences in consumption differences. Rather, because culture is part of the social self-construct as discussed in literature review, it is relevant to at least describe the cultural impact on consumers' perception on their identity-inconsistent consumption.

Over the course of two months, 24 participants were chosen based on the screening interview described in section 3.3.1.3 below.

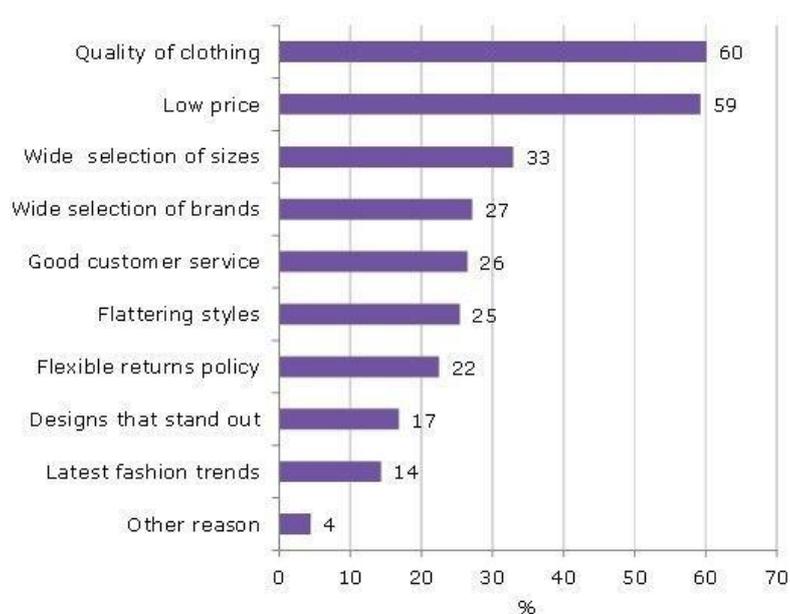
#### *Screening interview*

As mentioned before, ideal candidates were those who were conscious about various symbolic identities different brands sought to deliver. For example, if a candidate fails to recognise the difference between a punk style and a preppy style, then the candidate would not be classified as a qualified participant. Having said that, it is not necessary for the candidates to identify style accurately, as long as they are aware of the differences. That is, as long as the candidates know their preferred styles and styles they do not agree with, then it does not matter if the candidates think hipsters are the same as punk styles.

As a result, the initial screening chat of 15 minutes was conducted with each candidate before the main study period began, either on campus, or via social media platform. Overall, the chat covered

three different areas. Firstly, the frequency of shopping trips was checked to filter those who were not particularly interested in clothing shopping. Even though the first stage should be filtered automatically by the design of the flyer, the researcher still found two of candidates who showed little interest in garments either because they did not pay too much attention on the flyer, or they were only interested in the incentive provided. Secondly, favourite styles and the least favourite styles were discussed to filter candidates who would only make decisions based on financial criterion and nothing else. However, the researcher did not try to minimise the financial impacts on garments consumption, because even though some of the choices like quality and price are not of research interest, they still remain the dominant decision-making factors in terms of garments consumption as shown Table 3.1. Finally, candidates were asked if they had regretted buying anything because of styles because after all, the research is mainly interested in why consumers purchase identity-inconsistent garments.

Table 3.1 Reasons for shopping at a retailer



(Source: Mintel, 2018)

Although the data collection process only began after the screening interview, the screening interview proved to be essential, not only to filter unwanted candidates, but to ease the tension at the first interview. On the other hand, the 15 minutes' interview also gave candidates opportunities to raise questions regarding the research aim and procedures. Nevertheless, the aim of the research was not given in a comprehensive way until the end of the research, and participants, who requested it, were debriefed. Table 3.2 lists the participants recruited for the main study.

Overall, 24 participants were recruited for this study. Of these, 13 of the participants were Asian Chinese and 11 were European students. Most of the participants were undergraduate students (18), with only six postgraduates. Lastly, the students recruited predominantly came from Business School due to the large population of business students at Frenchay campus.

### 3.3.2 First in-depth semi-structured interview

After the initial screening interview, the main research process began usually within a week. The main research consisted of two in-depth interviews in the form of semi-structured interview, which has the benefit of flexibility (Saunders et al., 2007; Cooper and Schindler, 2008). According to Cameron (2005), semi-structured interviews are especially useful to find out the reason why certain structures or patterns are formed, which fits the agenda of this research.

The researcher prepared a moderator guide which covers the four aspects of identity consumption in marketplace from literature, although the exact order of the questions varied.

#### *General questions involved in moderator guide*

After the general introductions and administrative tasks such as consent form, questions around individual's lifestyles and hobbies were asked, not only for the sake of ice-breaking, but also to build

a rapport with each participant. Questions concerning favourite styles/brands were asked again here, which were vital for reference later on justification and neutralisation. For example, if a participant claimed at this stage that she did not agree with rock style, when later in the interview it was revealed that she was in possess of various leather jackets and spikey accessories, it then led to questions of how the participant sees and justifies the inconsistencies herself. Therefore, the first section largely focussed on what participants think of their 'true selves' and whether they believed there was a true self or not.

Specifically, the interview started with introduction to the research and icebreaking with questions including *'where do you like to spend your holidays'* and *'why did you choose this course at UWE'*. Next, a set of questions regarding participants' own understanding of personal sense of 'true self' and their subsequent style choices was asked. Questions in this area would cover *'what is your personality'*, *'why do you like this style, is it because you enjoy Bach's theatrical style of music?'* After that, identity consumption based on multiple selves were covered to include questions like *'do you always wear punk style of clothing?'* or *'do you think your preppy style of clothing is 'you' or what you want other people to think?'*. Then, questions relating to social self were asked in the form of *'do your friends all dress like that?'* or *'do your parents agree with this style?'*. Finally, general questions on whether the participants had regretted buying some garments or if there was a piece of garments that 'lived' in their wardrobe without being worn, were asked to specifically target at participants' identity-inconsistent purchases and their justification.

Overall, the first semi-structure interview was designed to build a rapport of each participant identity consumption in marketplace activity. In general, the main objective of the first interview was to gain a thorough understanding of how participants think their preferred choice of styles and their shopping habits. The first

interview not only acted as the rapport building on how each participant perceived styles of garments and their own multiple self-identities, but also determined how the second interview was structured and what it focused on.

Accordingly, semi-structured interviews are considered appropriate for the first interview, not only because of the complexity of notions like self-concept and identities, but also, discussions on self-concept and identity avoidance would inevitably touch on areas of negative personal experiences that need to be dealt with carefully.

#### *Research agenda, first interview*

During the interview, some participants struggled to imagine styles. Therefore, enabling techniques were used to facilitate the nature of discussion (Bryman, 2009). For example, pictures of 20 popular university student styles were given when they struggled to remember styles they liked or disliked (Appendix III). Participants were asked to put the 20 pictures in three piles. The first pile was the styles they liked and would wear; the second pile described the styles they disliked and wouldn't wear; while the third pile consisted of the styles where they could not decide. The pictures were helpful because participants found it hard to remember the styles that they did not usually wear. The positive and negative words associated with the pictures of styles they described usually indicated their attitudes on those identities.

The second stage of the first interview endeavoured to investigate how participants with multiple self-identities and how those self-identities changed over time. As shown in the literature review, consumers experience identity shift over time either internally or externally (Ahuvia and Belk, 2007). So participants were asked to describe how their styles changed over time. Since it was natural to forget about how past styles were formed and abandoned, probing questions such as *“what did you think about the style that time as comparing to now”* or *“did your friends/parents agree with what*

*you dressed that time*” were used to encourage participants to start thinking about the struggle in the past. Additional prompts like *“remembering a picture of you and your friends at college”* and *“do you often recycle your clothes and could you remember what types of clothes you normally get rid of”* were also used to help participant recall forgotten styles because these prompts were proven particularly useful when the topic is not usually remembered (McCracken, 1988). The focus on the style change prompted participants to justify their changes and provided room for neutralising their inconsistencies.

The third stage concentrated on how participants changed their styles around different situations and how they perceived the change themselves. The literature review on social identity theory above has established how consumers from different cultures think about their appearance among friends and families, along with the fact that student groups form a particular reference groups with a combination of different cultures and social classes, probing questions of *“are your friends around you dress the same way”* and *“do you feel like you dress differently when you are back home (country/region)”* were included to prompt conflicts or submission in participants’ own culture.

Finally, the fourth stage targeted on how marketplace activities changed consumers’ perceptions on their identities. For example, because the research was taken place at the festive period (Christmas and New Year) where retailers had put a tremendous amount of sales on to boost consumption, how participants reacted and behaved differently as opposed to usual opened more discussions that needed neutralising.

Overall, the first in-depth interview sought to build a rapport and discussed how participants see themselves. Semi-structured interviews were used instead of unstructured interviews because the research largely targeted on probing participants to defend

their inconsistencies using techniques of neutralisation rather than purely accepting their accounts.

### *Second in-depth interview*

The second in-depth interview took place at least a month after the first in-depth interview. This was since the researcher wanted to see within the month's break, if participants would have bought any identity-inconsistent garments. Within the month break, the researcher had checked the pictures posted by participants on their social media platforms (WeChat and Facebook). On top of that, the gap was left for investigating if participants' consumption choices had changed after their neutralisations at the first interview. That is, if a participant used AtAV (appeal to alternative values) as her neutralising technique for specific style, whether she continues to use AtAV for this style in the second interview or not is directly related to research objective 3 which investigates functions of neutralising techniques. On the other hand, if her consumption pattern within that month did not change, the second interview would instead be focusing on the change of attitudes expressed by such participant.

Thus, the second interview started by asking what participants had bought in the past month. Because the first interview started between the end of October and beginning of November, questions around Black Friday sales and Christmas shopping list or New Year garments shopping were asked to identify festive consumption behaviour. In general, the second interview largely concentrated on how participants neutralised their inconsistencies and whether those neutralising techniques used in the first interview would change their attitudes or future consumption. Thus, even though questions were tailored to fit with each participant's agenda, the main idea was to outline inconsistencies and see how participants defend the inconsistencies.

Additionally, although the research does not collect data from participants' social media platform, in between the two interviews, the researcher had observed participants' social media (including Facebook, Instagram and WeChat) with their consents to identify inconsistent styles. The resulting differences were not used in data analysis, but rather raised as a question during the second interview as part of the justification process.

After the second interview, participants were given a £10 Amazon voucher as incentive mentioned in the flyers. The researcher then debriefed participants if they had shown interests in the actual purpose of the research.

### 3.3 Data management and analysis

The majority of the 48 interviews were conducted in a pre-booked interview room at UWE Frenchay library to reduce disturbance. Three interviews, however, were conducted in a quiet café off-campus due to the availability of three participants. Each interview was recorded on both digital recorder and a smart phone to prevent loss of data. One disadvantage of recorded interviews is participants' awareness of the recording device could create a barrier to natural and honest answers. However, participants were made aware of the purpose of the research before the consent form was signed. So, they were aware that interviews were recorded and transcribed for further data analysis (see Appendix III for consent form).

The advantage of recording interviews is to free the researcher from taking interview notes. Instead, the researcher could focus on listening and responding to participants more naturally. In addition, transcription of interview provides a record of data for future reliability checks, as well as additional studies from a different perspective. On top of that, recordings of conversation are better

at delivering colloquial meanings like sarcasm or intonations. (Esterberg, 2002).

In terms of the length of interviews, the researcher sought to spend one hour in the first sets of interview and 45 minutes for the second interview. However, in reality, most of the first interviews took longer than an hour while the second interview tended to last for one hour.

Therefore, all 48 in-depth interviews were transcribed and uploaded onto NVivo 11 Pro (and converted to 12 Pro later in the years), which is a qualitative data analysis tool. NVivo is a software built for qualitative research with its focus on data storage and organisation (NVivo, 2019). No matter how time-consuming, the researcher transcribed all interviews because transcription is considered the best way to familiarise oneself with the data (Riessman, 1993).

The research uses thematic analysis to analyse the data. According to Braun and Clarke (2006), thematic analysis is a data identifying, analysing and reporting tool. A theme represents patterned answers in relation to the research objective (Braun and Clarke, 2006). It is vital to acknowledge that themes do not 'emerge' from data. Rather, researchers play this vital role in identifying patterns of interest and creating links with data (Taylor and Ussher, 2001). In this research, even though many themes could 'emerge' from data, only themes relevant to research questions were selected and coded. In other words, the nodes are divided and put into different categories based on research questions including techniques of neutralisation used and reasons participants provided for identity-inconsistent purchase (A screenshot of NVivo Pro 12's nodes are available in Appendix VII). At the surface, these two research questions seem to be asking the same question; however, nodes that describes techniques of neutralisation are researcher's own analysis on participants' words instead.

It is worth noting that this research takes an inductive approach to build theories rather than fitting into an existing framework. Therefore, the researcher coded the themes to meet the research questions specifically. Nevertheless, as suggested by Braun and Clarke (2006), researchers cannot detach themselves freely from theoretical or philosophical commitments. Therefore, themes 'emerged' from this research still reside in the literature of three areas of identity consumption.

Ideally, data analysis should start after all interviews have completed. However, in reality, coding and data analysis follow an iterative process (Spiggle, 1994), which means the researcher moves backwards and forwards between the process of data collection and data analysis. The whole data collection period of this research lasted five months. In the whole process of data collection and data analysis, the researcher was constantly in the process of reading and re-reading themes related to reasons for identity inconsistent consumption and techniques of neutralising data. Most interviews were transcribed and coded on the same day of the interviews, while themes newly emerged were constantly being compared with other themes from earlier interviews for review and re-coding (Braun and Clarke, 2006).

### 3.4 Research Rigour

Evaluation of a research is a pivotal process before the application of data collection because unwanted results collected will waste time and effort. Traditionally in quantitative research, external and internal validity are used to measure the value of the research in terms of generalisability and reliability respectively (Hammersley, 1998). While its usefulness is welcomed and widely-accepted under a positivism paradigm, it is not appropriate to assess this qualitative research under the same manner due to various reasons discussed in the research philosophy section.

However, this does not imply a qualitative research with only in-depth interviews can thus be freed from rigorous assessments. A number of researchers including Lofland (1974), Guba and Lincoln (1981), Athens (1984) have all attempted different criteria to evaluate qualitative research, based on their understandings of the purpose of research. This research shares Martyn Hammersley (1992)'s view that research is designed and conducted to seek true knowledge that is relevant to the interest of the general public at some level. Hence, validity (true knowledge) and relevance will be the dominating criteria to define a good qualitative research.

#### 3.4.1 Validity

It is worth noting that the validity used here is not the validity often associated with a positivist paradigm that concerns the reliability and generalisability; it is instead a criterion to define whether the research represents the reality it intended to (Hammersley, 1992) rather than the reproduction of the reality. Therefore, validity in qualitative research concentrates on adequacy (Spiggle, 1994), with three criterion, namely, plausibility, credibility and evidence to support the former two.

Plausibility determines the likelihood of observed phenomena to be accepted as true. According to Hammersley (1992), some phenomena are easily accepted at face value while the others often need further justifications and/or extra evidences. Similarly, Spiggle (1994)'s interpretive research quality criteria also stress the importance of usefulness, which questions if the interpretation is reasonable but also provides distinctiveness at the same time. This research seeks to insure plausibility by adopting a variety of different techniques as discussed before (including interview moderator's guide, probing questions and enabling techniques often used in qualitative research) combined with the one month's gap.

Credibility is commonly included in qualitative research as an indicator of quality (Lee, 2009). Various terminologies have been mentioned including 'fit' in grounded theory (Glaser and Strass, 1967) and 'authenticity' (GoldenBiddle and Locke, 1993 and Lincoln and Guba, 1985). Central to this notion is the question of how accurate the representation of phenomenon is. In other words, the interpretation of the phenomenon as well as the interviews need to be assessed carefully. The researcher endeavoured to improve the credibility during the interview by continuously repeating interviewees' own words back to them to ensure their meanings were understood correctly and accurately.

When a claim requires further justification rather than being taken for granted at the face value, extra evidence is needed to show the plausibility and credibility (Hammersley, 1992). This research uses triangulation over one month to make sure themes and patterns formed were unchanged or changed with a justification provided by participants. On top of that, the moderator guide provides credibility to ensure each semi-structured interview was conducted covering same aspects.

On top of that, according to Long and Johnson (2000), validity is established through three aspects, namely, content, criterion-related and construct. Content reliability usually is dependent on sampling and construction of instruments. As discussed in the sampling section, the research follows a theory building sequence and identity consumption does not limit itself to a certain group of population. Therefore, even student sampling is often critiqued for its generalisability, this research adopts an inductive route to build theory than generalising to wider population.

Furthermore, semi-structured in-depth interviews were selected as the most appropriate research methods for this doctoral research. However, one unavoidable limitation on in-depth interview is what people say and do in real life. In other words, the attitude behaviour

gap (Ajzen and Fishbein, 1969). On top of that, the 48 interviews were conducted in a closed office with a recording device, as opposed to a natural setting where fashion consumption usually takes place. So, one could argue data gathered in the interviewing room was compromised because the experiences of consumption usually take place in the marketplace.

Moreover, one criticism often associated with interviews relates to the difference between discursive consciousness and practical consciousness (Bourdieu, 1977; Giddens, 1989). This 'discursive consciousness' often challenges the reliability of interviews on mundane consumption in social practice (Thrift, 2000), because it suggests mundane practices are habitually done (Bourdieu, 1977; Hitchings, 2011). Even though this research does not place itself in the area of social practice, fashion consumption could be perceived as a mundane practice to certain consumers. Therefore, following from this criticism, it could be contended that participants in the interviews for this doctoral research were re-constructing their experiences of shopping, rather than describing the true experiences of what happened when they were shopping.

One way to address this criticism of discursive consciousness is to look at the design of this research. The research used techniques of neutralisation as tools to make sense of consumers' own reasons for identity-inconsistent consumption. In other words, the researcher acknowledges the intrusive nature of interviews and recognises participants' consumption might have been done habitually. Therefore, instead of building theories based on participants' reasons for identity-inconsistent consumption, the researcher used techniques of neutralisation to analyse and evaluate their accounts. In other words, the reasons why participants wore identity-inconsistent garments were not important, but rather, how participants defended themselves were the focal point of this research. Consequently, even though at the interviews participants were asked to 'remember' why they bought

and wore garments, it was the techniques of neutralisation they used 'at the interviews' that formed the themes of this research. Thus, this doctoral research is not a research asks participants to talk about their mundane practice where their accounts are compromised.

### 3.4.2 Relevance

According to Hammersley (1998), for a research of to have value it should always be relevant to a public concern. The plurality of the social realities presupposes the multiple ways of interpreting data and phenomena.

Therefore it is researchers' responsibility to state the purpose of the research, which shapes the descriptions of the phenomenon.

To date, this research is the first one to investigate what happens when consumers' identity projects go wrong. Much of the research in the literature assume an 'active' and 'strong' position consumers have in order to respond to this stigmatised individual responsibility. However, no research to date has challenged this 'active' and 'strong' assumption. Therefore, the research contributes to consumer research by addressing the immediate reaction consumers discover their identity-inconsistent purchase. On top of that, it is also the first research uses neutralisation techniques in consumer research without a presupposed moral dilemma (see literature review on neutralisation theory). It therefore contributes to criminology and deviant research in terms of internalised neutralisation, but also to consumer research in terms neutralisation theory. Further, if inconsistency itself is proven enough to trigger dissonance rather than guilt, the research further contributes to social psychology.

Further, despite the tremendous development in accounts and self-narratives, discussions on neutralisation theory in the literature continue to only describe and apply its original form (Maruna and

Copes, 2005). Studies on neutralisation in the literature tend to borrow the theory and test its application in other fields rather than breaking down each technique to its function. Therefore, this doctoral research analyse the meaning of each technique of neutralisation in relation to the consumer identity projects.

### 3.4.3 Reflexivity

Reflexivity is a concern often associated with qualitative research because of the partiality of the data collected (Brewer, 2000). It is defined as the way social scientists' personalities and past experiences affect the research (Brewer, 2000). It is an unavoidable feature of social research because social scientists come from certain cultures and backgrounds which has shaped the way the social scientist's interpretations and presentations of the data (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995). Therefore, it has been often used as a criticism to the absolute certainty claimed by naturalist researches which is based on empirical realism. However, instead of existing as a criticism that undermines the validity of all research, reflexivity is often discussed as a critical evaluation of data, which considers areas including field relations, social settings and etc. that influences the interpretation and presentation of data collected (Brewer, 2000). Brewer (2000) listed a number of questions to be considered by qualitative researchers, which acted as the guidelines of this research:

1. Relevance of the setting and the topic;

Because this research seeks to understand why people purchase from brands whose identities they want to avoid and how they justify their inconsistencies, therefore it is relevant to have a month's gap between the two interviews to observe any change in consumption after the neutralising techniques have been used.

2. Unresearched topic justification;

This research does not include gender considerations into the research, even though men and women behave differently in clothing shopping. Other demographics including age, geography and state of finance (different from Socio-Economic Group) will all influence behaviours inside the shop. They are not included in the study because of the limitation of the time and energy the researcher has as a PhD student. So this research is only representational in explaining university students (both undergraduates and post-graduates), and it does not claim to be representative of the entire population. Future studies are recommended to include other demographic aspects.

### 3. Integrity assessment;

The researcher is aware of the fact the relationship with the interviewees will have a significant influence on the research. Thus, the researcher adopted common sales techniques to mirror the participants' moods, dressing codes and personalities to relate to participants for a calm and natural environment. As mentioned before, the mood of the participant has thus been noted in each interview. Furthermore, the researcher reflected and evaluated the process after each interview to show the strengths and weakness of the design and aim to improve.

### 4. Data assessment;

Each interview was transcribed and coded into word documents and uploaded to NVivo software as soon as possible. Transcriptions of older interviews have been reread at least once a week to identify patterns and themes. Alternative explanations have been written down to discuss and justify why one reason was used instead of another. Contexts and details have always been included to enrich the data and allow readers to evaluate the situation themselves.

## 5. Complexity indication

Cases that failed to generate pattern and answer research questions (i.e. when consumers did not feel the need to neutralise their inconsistencies) have been listed separately to determine whether it is a problem of sample selection or of research technique cause. The rapport of each participant has been constantly checked with questions like *"I thought you liked Topshop, but you haven't bought anything from them for 2 years, how come?"*.

### 3.4.4 A reflexive account

During the period of data collection, I conducted 48 interviews myself with 24 participants, mostly in a very small and quiet rooms at Frenchay library. All in-depth interviews have a certain degree of involvement with participants. Because the dual design of interviews, I got to know my participants more than the usual professional set up of semi-structured interviews. Moreover, because I am a student doing 'coursework' myself, students tend to open more to me because they too had to finish 'coursework' for universities and hence the recruitment process went better than expected.

As an interviewer, initially I chose to distant myself from participants to observe and analyse their behaviour because the distance from normal perspective can help avoid the taken-for-granted actions and attitudes (Baker and Foy, 2008). However, because of this female student self-identity, participants naturally got closer and were more willing to ask me the same questions during the interviews. For example, one PG; EUR student I recruited ended up in the same student sport society (archery) with me. After knowing that, she then became more open on her dissonance between 'being pretty' and also 'being a feminist', and ended up telling me the whole society constraint on feminism and her daily

struggle to express her feminist's ideas but at the same time loving cute and girlish styles of clothing.

On top of that, as an international student studying the UK for years, I did have experienced the cultural difference and cultural shock a lot of my Chinese students did. As a result, the Asian Chinese students I interviewed had a very different dynamic comparing with the European students. Half of the Asian students would constantly seek approval from me, who is an older PG international student who had been living the UK for a while. For example, a small group of my participants knew each other because they were from the same universities in Malaysia. They were all in the UK for the first year (if not first month at my screening interview). Because Malaysia's tropical environment, Bristol has become the first city for them to experiencing and experimenting different winter styles of clothing (most of them have been abroad and have experienced winter, but it is different from living in a different city for two years experiencing climate). Therefore, at the interview, several Malaysian students constantly asked my opinions on choices of winter styles and brands as both to keep warm and look fashionable. While I often have a casual attitude towards clothing styles, I then realised this approval seeking probably has probed them more into accepting wrongdoing (which means they were more likely to use neutralisation techniques which accepted wrongdoing than denial of original form, for instance, which denies any wrongdoing). On top of that, because this small group of Malaysian students all knew each other back at home, they probably struggled more on this blending in and standing out of group dynamic. For example, one of the Malaysian students kept buying clothing of different styles to blend in different groups (see HN04 in next chapter). In the end, she even created a style that she wanted to be seen as a professional interviewee at the second interview to fit in with 'my self-identity expectation'.

In a way, this small group of Malaysian students triangulate their answers because not only they knew each other themselves, but also, they were referring to each other's shopping habits and behaviour at their interviews. As a result, it then became easier to probe into their inconsistencies when their friends' words had been considered.

#### 3.4.5 Research Ethics

There are several questions regarding this research need to be addressed:

1. The aim of the study was not revealed to the participants until the end of the research. As discussed before, this was purely because the researcher did not want to lead participants to think in certain direction, so as to minimise the impact of socially desirable responding. Instead, participants were told that it was a research of consumer behaviour across culture, which was not the actual research aim, but a small aspect of the research. Therefore, the sole reason why the aim was not revealed was for the validity of the research, and in no way should the hidden aim results in conflict with participants;
2. The consent form (Appendix III) covered various aspects including confidentiality, anonymity, voluntary participation and freedom to withdraw was sent to participants before the data collection process. The data collection did not start until both parties had initialled and signed the form, and a copy of the form was emailed to the participants afterwards;
3. The researcher did not include any data that is irrelevant to the study and the participants were told at the beginning of the research and constantly reminded afterwards that their participations were voluntary. In addition, anonymity and confidentiality were maintained throughout and after the

research; all identities were coded or replaced with symbols/numbers. Participants knew they could withdraw anytime in any format (written or verbal) and all data collected would be pulled out and destroyed accordingly. All handwritten information (including notes and interview data) was stored in a locked drawer and once it has been transcribed and coded onto the computer, it was shredded immediately. Information stored on computers was password-protected to secure the confidentiality;

4. The research plan went through University of the West of England's ethics committee prior to the beginning of the research;
5. This research received no funding from public or private bodies, thus it does not have any form of stakeholder which can shape or change the research interest other than the researcher's own.

### 3.5 Summary

The research was an exploratory study to understand how consumers' use of neutralisation techniques justify their identity-inconsistent consumption. A social constructionist's approach with interpretivism research philosophical stance was used to gather and analyse qualitative data. Screening interviews were conducted initially to select qualified participants, followed by two main sets of semi-structured in-depth interviews on each participant because of in-depth interviews' advantage in investigating underlying reasons and unobvious rationales (Cameron, 2005). Various methods of recruiting participants were used through purposive, convenient and snowballing sampling. Various interview techniques including enabling and projective techniques were utilised to prompt genuine answers.

The interpretation of the data collected were through an abductive and iterative process. Various checks were used to ensure the research was reliable as possible. For example, the second interview taking place a month after the first interview was to ensure interviewees' attitudes stayed unchanged within a month's gap. Conversely, when participants did change their views on a style, it contributed to how consumers' use of techniques of neutralisation can shield themselves from inconsistencies. Thus, the two interviews complemented with each other to address how neutralisation helps with identity projects.

Overall, the thematic analysis showed a number of reasons consumers provided for identity-inconsistent consumption. Eight neutralising techniques were identified in the research. The next chapter seeks to present the findings.

## Chapter 4 Research findings

This research takes an interpretive approach and uses qualitative data to develop an understanding of how consumers see and justify identity-inconsistent consumption in fashion context. Techniques of neutralisation have been applied as tools to further reveal participants' mental process when justifying their identity-inconsistent purchase.

In the literature, 20 neutralising techniques have been identified in consumer misbehaviour (see Table 2.7).

Table 2.7 Neutralising techniques identified in different fields to date:

Technique	Example	Context	Reference
1. Denial of responsibility	<i>My supervisor abused me first</i>	Juvenile delinquency	Sykes and Matza (1957)
2. Appeal to higher loyalties	<i>I do it for the clan</i>	Juvenile delinquency	Sykes and Matza (1957)
3. Condemning the condemners	<i>System is corrupted</i>	Juvenile delinquency	Sykes and Matza (1957)

4. Denial of injury	<i>Nobody's hurt</i>	Juvenile delinquency	Sykes and Matza (1957)
5. Denial of victim	<i>I didn't hurt anyone</i>	Juvenile delinquency	Sykes and Matza (1957)

6. Defence of necessity	<i>I did what was necessary, I had no other choice</i>	Criminology	Minor (1981)
7. Claim of the metaphor of the ledger	<i>I also helped her in getting insurance, so it cancels out</i>	Professional crime	Klockars (1976)
8. Denial of the necessity of the law	<i>I didn't see the point of that law</i>	White-collar crime	Coleman (2005)
9. Claim of entitlement	<i>Men were born equal, so I just took what was supposed to be mine</i>	White-collar crime	Coleman (2005)
10. Claim of relative acceptability	<i>My supervisor did something even worse</i>	Deviant behaviour of students	Henry and Eaton (1999)
11. Claim of individuality	<i>I don't care what others think of me</i>	Deviant behaviour of students	Henry and Eaton (1999)
12. Justification by comparison	<i>If not shoplifting, I'd be doing something worse</i>	Shoplifting	Cromwell and Thurman

13. Justification of postponement	<i>I just don't think about it beforehand</i>	Shoplifting	Cromwell and Thurman
14. One-Time Usage	<i>I only did it once</i>	Consumer fraud via product returns	Rosenbaum et al. (2011)
15. First-time, only-time crime	<i>It was the first time I did it, and the last time I promise</i>	Consumer fraud via product returns	Rosenbaum et al. (2011)
16. Outsmart the system	<i>The system is flawed, I just took advantage of a flawed design</i>	Consumer fraud via product returns	Rosenbaum et al. (2011)
17. Denial of benefit	<i>Fair trade can't help much</i>	Fair trade in- commitment	Brunner (2014)
18. Denial of need	<i>Farmers at developing countries aren't poor</i>	Fair trade in- commitment	Brunner (2014)
19. Accusation	<i>Developing countries' own fault</i>	Fair trade in- commitment	Brunner (2014)
20. Personal principles	<i>I buy cheapest products no matter what</i>	Fair trade in- commitment	Brunner (2014)

As discussed in the literature, in the context of criminological research, the neutralising techniques used by criminals are only valid in their eyes. Therefore, the criminals' justifications cannot be used to overturn their crime, but merely to ease the guilt (Sykes and Matza, 1957). However, in the context of identity-inconsistent consumption, the justifications by consumers are aimed at other members of the society, because the choice of identity-inconsistent consumption is neither illegal nor deviant, but merely contradicts cultural values on occasions, or sometimes their own values. Therefore, during the 48 in-depth interviews, participants have been using techniques of neutralisation to seek approval and support from the interviewer, while only one (DT05, UG, ASA) participant did not see the need to justify their inconsistencies at all.

An analysis of 48 transcripts provides evidence to suggest that participants mainly have two types of reasons for their identity-inconsistent consumption: intrinsic reasons based on personal motivation and extrinsic reasons based on others' perception. Furthermore, techniques of neutralisation have been continuously used to justify identity-inconsistent consumption.

The qualitative data in this research has also demonstrated that identity-inconsistent consumption was not an easy discussion topic for participants. While most of the participants expressed their true opinions over why they purchase garments with unwanted styles, a small group of participants showed an indifferent attitude in selecting garments based on self-identity. On the other hand, as Chatzidakis and Lee (2012) have demonstrated before, the reasons for and reasons against are not directly opposite to each other. The data from the 24 participants did confirm that they were more certain about the self-identities they did not wish to be associated with.

Overall, eight techniques of neutralisation have been identified in this research. Namely, denial of responsibility (DoR), appeal to alternative values (AtAV), justification of postponement (JoP), denial of importance (DoI), denial of original form (DoOF), justification of special uses (JoSU), justification of personal principles (JoPP) and one-time or short-time usage. The following sections (4.1 to 4.7) will show how participants use different techniques of neutralisation to justify their identity-inconsistent consumption with only one exception (4.8), who does not see the need to justify inconsistencies in styles. The order of the list is determined by popularity of the techniques.

#### 4.1 Denial of responsibility (DoR) – victims of circumstances beyond control.

DoR in Sykes and Matza (1957)'s original work, is a technique that delinquents use to neutralise guilt. As discussed in the literature, if offenders can find ways of relieving themselves of responsibility for their wrongness, they can minimise the impact they have from social disapproval or even just a sense of wrongfulness (Cohen, 2001). Central to the idea of DoR is how offenders see themselves as victims of circumstances beyond their control (Maruna and Copes, 2005).

In the context of consumer research, even though there is no apparent rightness or wrongness in purchasing garments with identity-inconsistency, consumers still seek to maintain a sense of identity-consistency, even though nearly all applications of neutralisation theory to date is on consumer misbehaviour or non-participation in ethical consumption (Gruber and Schlegelmilch, 2014).

In comparison to the criminological studies, participants in this research seek to justify their inconsistencies by seeing themselves as 'victims' of circumstances beyond their control.

#### 4.1.1 Blend in and stand out of reference groups

Previous research has demonstrated that consumers purchase products to construct and present their self-identities to others (Belk, 1988). Consequently, they take up self-identities that represent them in a positive light (Escalas and Bettman, 2003) and avoid self-identities that they do not wish to be associated with (Berger and Heath, 2007), so explaining consumption behaviour because of an individual's need to be part of a social group (Hogg and Abrams, 1988).

As discussed in the literature, social identity theory makes people label those who share similar identities to them as in-groups and those who are different as out-groups (Stets and Burke, 2000), and the theory identifies a person's need to be part of a social group (Hogg and Abrams, 1988). A dissociative group is one that individuals aim to avoid (Englis and Soloman, 1995), which is different from out-group because the latter is merely one that an individual is not in.

From the interviews, the reasons of 'blending in' and 'standing out' from reference groups are the most popular reasons participants provided for choosing identity-inconsistent garments. Naturally, denial of responsibility (DoR) is the most commonly used neutralisation technique when participants choose to see themselves as 'victims of' their actions:

*P: I don't know, I just like it, they were quite interesting. And probably that time, you wanted to be noticed, so probably because of that, I decided to wear it to be unique, in some way, because I knew that no-one also would do it. So when I was passing the street, everyone was like what, what is this? I love them. I was like having a Nike sneakers, and some jackets of boys' styles, which were quite unique then, because more girls were like pinkish and that kind of things, so I was like quite opposite.*

**KK09 (UG, EU)**

KK09's excerpt above is a classic example of using garments to 'stand out'. Although KK09 did not have a specific reference group that she had in her mind to be different from, the idea behind being different according to her was to 'stand out' from the norm.

On the other hand, HN04 tried to 'blend in' with her friends:

*P: I think it happens as well. If the group of friends I'm hanging out with are very sporty, because most of my friends are quite active, so lots of them are quite sporty; but if the girls are quite girlish, then I'd probably put something girlish on. I think social influences affect me a lot. So other than the environment, I would change style depending on who I'm hanging out with.*

#### **HN04 (UG, ASA)**

From the excerpt above, it is clear HN04 uses various styles to 'blend in' with her friends. It is worth noting that HN04 does not even have one specific group of friends that she wants to blend in, rather, she would dress according to different groups of friends' styles accordingly.

The two examples above are just two of the many examples that participants use garments according to reference groups. Commonly, participants are keen to dress to fit in with their groups of friends, while at the same time staying out of groups that they do not consider as friends (e.g. in KK09's case, it is the mass culture of girlish peers). It is compatible with the social identity theory in the literature that consumers use items as extended self (Belk, 1988) according to their reference groups (Stets and Burke, 2000). Further, the excerpts above show that participants would actively use garments with inconsistent identities to navigate around different reference groups, even though this navigation is not always as straightforward as 'blending in with friends' and 'standing out from unwanted groups':

*P: I feel really white girl in it, you know the white girl stereotype? I'm like on point with that, when I'm wearing it.*

*I: Do you like that stereotype?*

*P: Not especially, but me and my friends all fit it really well, so we just embrace it. Like whenever we are wearing something particularly stereotypical we are just like 'white girls' and not to see the photo in any... I just Snapchat, no one should ever see it.*

### **AG10 (UG, EUR)**

The above excerpt demonstrate AG10 and her friends' distaste of the 'white girl stereotype'. But instead of staying out of this stereotypical self-identity, they decided to 'embrace' it by making fun of the stereotype by using Snapchat, a social media platform that only shows a picture for 30 seconds, among themselves. It is easy to mis-interpret this as identity-inconsistent usage because at the first sight, it seems like AG10 is 'blending in' with an unwanted reference group (white girl stereotype). However, the fact that AG10 only does this with her friends, along with the fact that the group of friends only use Snapchat for sharing those pictures, indicates that it is this friend circle that AG10 seeks to 'blend in', by wearing what the friend group likes making fun of.

Additionally, participants sometimes struggle to find the balance of 'blend in' or 'stand out' when they enter a new social situation:

*P: I come to university, it's different coz I'm trying not... coz I'm aware I'm not a typical student, well, I haven't come straight from one degree to another degree, so I'm trying to figuring out where everything is now, as far as social standings and tables that kind of thing. So it's back to not making too much effort and trying to blend in, but at the same time I kind of have got the rebellious streak in me and like yeah, but you have the amazing sleek and the amazing things, keep hold of that, and don't let that just disappear.*

### **RN18 (PG, EU)**

RN18 was a new Master student who struggled to identify with her new reference groups. Instead of joining the master's degree straight from undergraduate studies, RN18 started her master after she had been working in the industry for several years. Therefore, on the one hand, she thought she might want to fit in with her 'new' student self-identity by not putting effort and wearing hoodies, while at the same time, RN18 also wanted to stand out from this 'lazy' student self-identity because she had been working in the industry. Thus, RN18 carefully designed her weeks to have two different styles just so she could keep both identities: I: So you think Monday is your over-the-top time?

*P: Yeah, it feels like a good time, good day, it's the start of the week, you want to be positive, you want to be in the right frame of mind, so normally I'll wear something really striking, because it helps me feel really confident and I feel like I'm ready for the week.*

*I: What kind of striking thing?*

*P: So this past Monday, I love black, so I just wore a black turtle-neck, black jeans, black leather boots and I have my black gloves, which I was just a power cat woman in suit, toned down cat woman suit. And then I wore a really nice coat with that, like a blue coat just to add the colour to it.*

*I: It's still the classics simplicity style, did you put...?*

*P: Yeah, that blue coat adds the touch of colour.*

*I: And Thursdays?*

*P: Being today, I completely toned it down, just like an ordinary jacket, jeans trainers T-shirt.*

*I: Is it a sense of deliberation or just happened that way?*

*P: I think I did decide to keep it low-key on Thursdays.*

**RN18 (PG, EUR)**

As a result, RN18 makes a clear distinction between her Monday dressing styles (striking and powerful) and Thursday ones (laidback and low-key).

Furthermore, because of the malleable nature of self-identity, it is sometimes difficult to determine to which reference groups participants want to 'blend in' or 'stand out':

*P: I grew up in a town in south Wales, is still well-known for being chavvy. So it was great if you wanted tracksuits, very tight sports clothing or that kind of thing, or if you're a female at that time you would go for the short denim skirts that are very short, very small like this, and that wasn't really what I was looking for. And I quite liked the idea of black jeans and really funky tops, everything ended up with safety pins and in everything, that kind of spikey bracelets and things. I guess I don't really want to fit in... I didn't like the fashion there was at the time, so I had to go with a different one. And to feel confident enough to do that, it was like immersing myself into feel that confidence. It was real commitment into that because what was going on didn't really suit me, it was practically difficult.*

*[...]*

*P: There was a sort of subgroup yeah, about 10, 15 people in my school, that were kind of in a nice protective bubble. And all kind of match my thoughts and my thinking really similarly in that. Okay, this feels quite good, I don't really know what else suits me, let's cling together. And my families were really supportive and were okay taking me out looking like a member of The Adam's Family.*

*[...]*

*P: I started then to move back to wearing less extreme things. I discovered that actually bright colours could be nice too, and sometimes when you need to go to church on a Christmas Eve with your nan, maybe it's okay to wear other T-shirts. There was a little bit of I can't, you know, I really like what I wear but it's not really...*

*Most of my friends that were into that kind of thing weren't into university, I was still 17 and I was like okay, solo now, okay, might be a little bit less bald on my own. I kind of filtered my way back just a little bit less extreme, toned it down a little bit, maybe got rid of the spikey bracelets, but kept the cool leather jackets that were usual sizes instead of oversized and down to my feet. Kept the clumpy boots, maybe it was okay to wear coloured T-shirts as well. I guess I was slightly aware that I was going away to uni at 18, how am I going to present myself there as well without being too off to the extreme, that nobody wants to be that unusual person in halls that just looks and speaks so differently to everyone else that they don't understand. There was a bit of self-conscious and a bit of fear about fitting in that kind of thing.*

*[...]*

*P: Sometimes it was about my appearance, and about my size. I was about 30 pounds heavier than what I am now in first year, so I was already like, it was setting me off for the balance like oh god I'm 18 and I left home and I don't know what I am doing and I look much bigger than the people I'm sharing the flat with. I had short and spikey hair when I had all those long curls, and you know, I was absolutely fine on my own and suddenly moved in to this group of people I was like oh god, they are all very different to me. I can't wear what they wear.*

*I: Did you do anything afterwards, after you figured out that you're a bit self-conscious around them though?*

*P: I tended to stick to my own outfits that I bought had the fear that I would try on something of as they have that either I wouldn't fit, or...*

*I: So you bought more clothes then?*

*P: Yeah, so I bought my own things. We went out together a few places, and I would see the kind of things that they bought, maybe*

*follow the themes but not go there. I lost some of the weights afterwards, but still choose not to wear stuff that are too tight, or kind of just bring stuff to...*

*[...]*

*P: It became more 'me' actually, I really enjoy spending time with people that I met in work going, oh my god you turn up in a knitted floor-length cardigan, you can wear whatever you want, can't you? Look at that. They always just an epiphany, you know, later in life, that people you know, that like to get to enjoy the quality of differences in people, than maybe I felt more obliged to be part of that, that cultural set of let's all look female university students.*

#### **BJ24 (PG, EU)**

BJ24 painted a picture of how she grew up in a small town in south Wales and moved to a big city in Bristol for her education. Within her two decades of life, she had changed multiple times to 'blend in', 'stand out', then 'blend in' again to various reference groups. BJ24's style started from being a 'goth' to stand out from a traditional 'chavvy' and 'sporty' mainstream around the time when the two styles were the dominant ones in her village. However, this 'standing out' from the mainstream made her aware of the loneliness of being different from the rest of people, until she finally found '*about 10, 15 people in her school*' to '*form a nice protective bubble*'.

BJ24 then went to the university when her '*nice protective bubble*' vanished. She decided to '*tone it down*' and wanted to '*fit in*' with the mainstream because '*nobody wants to be that unusual person in halls that just looks and speaks so differently*'. Therefore, she would tone down her extreme fashion styles and go out shopping with flatmates to 'learn' about the themes and 'follow' their 'female university students' identity. Finally, when BJ24 started working, she decided to accept her 'true self' (or in her words, more 'me'

again) because her colleagues were positively surprised by her courage to wear what she wanted.

The change of styles in BJ24's life reveals how she reacted to the people around her. It is difficult to determine whether she sees styles as reactions to her reference groups, or if her chosen styles are her true self as she thinks. However, one thing that is clear in the excerpts is that her constant changes of styles, as a reaction to her reference groups, is dependent on how the reference groups react to her.

In summary, all above excerpts present one type of participants' reasons for identity-inconsistent purchase, that is, to blend in and/or stand out from certain friend circles. In terms of neutralising techniques, all justifications used by participants are based on external reasons that are beyond participants' control, in other words, participants 'had to' buy or wear identity-inconsistent garments because their reference groups are more important.

#### 4.1.2 Fashion trends, parents, culture and community

In the context of identity-inconsistent consumption, DoR is one of the most popular techniques used widely by participants in a variety of forms to claim their inconsistencies are beyond their controls, and it is not restricted in blending in or standing out of a reference group. Rather, the perception of a style might change based on reference group's opinion. For example, HN04 disliked crop tops to begin with but her friends changed her mind:

*I: Even though you might think it looks just alright, or do you actually change your mind afterwards?*

*P: I think I would change my mind, like if I think I'd wear it again, I would get it; but if I still feel like this is not something I would wear normally, I won't get it.*

*I: Do you remember any example like the latter?*

*P: Yes, a crop top, because I didn't like crop tops, I felt awkward wearing crop tops. But then my friends kept recommending me crop tops and kept giving me fashion advice like what you could match it with if you were wearing crop tops, so I ended up getting one to give it a go. And I have started buying crop tops since then.*

*I: So your friends could change your understandings on some styles?*

*P: Yeah, largely.*

*I: Is that always from the same friend, or different friends?*

*P: Different friends.*

#### **HN04 (UG, ASA)**

From the excerpt above, the reason HN04 provided for her first identity inconsistent crop top was her friends' recommendation as part of her DoR. HN04 denied responsibility for purchasing the identity-inconsistent garment crop top. Rather, HN04 thought it was her friends who '*kept recommending me crop tops and kept giving me fashion advice like what you could match it with*' that were responsible.

Moreover, after a while, HN04 started buying crop tops because her opinions on crop tops had been changed. Nevertheless, HN04 still thought friends were the reason why she started purchasing identity-inconvenient crop tops to begin with. So, even after her mind had been changed, she still used DoR to shield her from the guilt arising from inconsistencies. In other words, DoR not only was used as an excuse to neutralise her inconsistencies; DoR itself then becomes the very reason for HN04 to purchase identity-inconsistent garments in the future.

Similarly, JO20 used DoR and thought fashion trends and her friends were the cause of her identity-inconsistent consumption:

*P: I don't know if my pink cap could match with the black bomber jacket, but I'll give it a go. I think even though some styles don't really suit me, I'd want to try them because of the fashion trend and my friends around me.*

### **JO20 (UG, ASA)**

From the excerpt above, JO20 also used DoR to justify her purchase on identity-inconsistent pink cap, shifting the responsibility to fashion trend and her friends around her. It is worth noting the difference between JO20's use of DoR to purchase the pink cap is not the same as blending in or standing out like 4.1.1. Rather, JO20 uses fashion trend as a catch-all phrase to shift the responsibility of having identity-inconsistent purchases. In other words, DoR here becomes her very reason for identity-inconsistent purchase, rather than a post-action justification for reference groups.

On the other hand, LC29 thought her reasons for identity-inconsistent purchases were because of her mum:

*P: Yes, there is. I think when I'm in the UK, it's purely up to me; while in China, my parents might have some opinions on the way I'm dressing. [...] For example, my parents would prepare some clothes for me to wear when I'm home, so they'll be the clothes that my mum likes, instead of what I like.*

*[...]*

*P: For example my parents would prepare some clothes for me to wear when I'm home. So they'll be the clothes that my mum likes, instead of what I like*

*I: What kind of clothes does your mum like?*

*P: Very difficult question. My mum likes floral printed patterns.*

*I: Like Ted Baker style?*

*P: Not really. Ted Baker is more like country flowers, while my mum prefers more retro flowers.*

*I: Retro flower?*

*P: I don't understand either.*

### **LC29 (PG, ASA)**

From the excerpt above, LC29 denied the responsibility for wearing identity inconsistent clothes. Rather, she claimed her identity-inconsistent garments were usually what her parents wanted her to wear. Therefore, even though she did not 'understand' the 'retro flower' style her mum liked, LC29 still wore them when she was in China. From the list of participant characteristic in chapter 4, LC29 thought of herself as being trendy and follows fashion. However, whenever she was back at home, she wore what her parents wanted her to wear without resistance.

Here, LC29 used DoR to shift the responsibility of having identity-inconsistent garments to her parents. DoR is often connected to reasons participants provide based on social selves, because it is comparatively easier to shift responsibilities to people around, rather than taking responsibility internally with reasons based on personal sense of 'true self' or multiple selves.

Naturally, the other area where DoR is most commonly used is when participants shift responsibility to marketing activities:

*P: Some people look nice in [Bohemian style], I bought one like this before, but I rarely wear it, maybe because it really doesn't suit me.*

*I: Why did you go get it to begin with then?*

*P: Because it was trendy at the time, I would get something if it's trendy at the time, but then it just doesn't suit me.*

### **JM06 (UG, ASA)**

From the excerpt, the reason why JM06 bought bohemian style was because it was trendy, even though she admitted that the style didn't suit her. The justification provided was an example of DoR in

which the responsibility for purchasing identity-inconsistent garments was attributed to trend and fashion.

Similarly, AG10 also bought brogues which were not her style:

*P: Yeah, the brogues. It took me a while to get to like... I don't know... My sister got some quite early on when they were just coming into fashion. Then it took me a while and I've got something like a tan-coloured one, from [Primark].*

### **AG10 (UG, EUR)**

From the excerpt above, AG10's negative opinion on brogues had changed over time when brogues came into fashion. In order to neutralise her inconsistencies on brogues, AG10 chose to use DoR to shift the responsibility to fashion. It is not surprising that consumers follow fashion trends to select their garment styles. Participants in this research demonstrated they have been gathering fashion ideas via social media platforms, window shopping, fashion magazines, friend circles and online blogs. However, most participants still only purchase garments with consistent identities when those identities are in trend, with a few participants changing their views on styles they used to dislike. In other words, the striking fact is that fashion not only determines what consumers purchase, but also, fashion has the power to gradually change some consumers' negative feelings towards styles.

On the other hand, QY07's distaste for mature styles of garments did not make her stop wishing for Hermes:

*P: I think the like of Hermes, is probably influenced by others, which is quite important. For example, everyone in the world including those celebrities are pursuing [Hermes], you'd be curious to find out. And it's really expensive, and always in high demand. It's not like something you can always get if you have a lot of money. And the*

*brand has its own loyalty system as you'll need to spend a certain amount of money to be able to get that specific bag. And you'll need to queue, and the quality and stuff. So if everyone's buying it, there must be some logic into this. I like it doesn't mean that I'll buy it.*

#### **QY07 (PG, ASA)**

From the excerpt above, it was apparent that the only reason why QY07 wants garments from Hermes was because of its popularity in the market. QY07 justified her inconsistencies using DoR, shifting responsibility to 'everyone'. In her words, *'if everyone's buying [Hermes], there must be some logic into this'*.

Finally, VT01's opinions on Jordan shoes seemed to have changed over years too:

*P: Just used to them, I think it's because of the culture in Beijing, because when I was young, everyone had Jordan shoes. If you were in high school and without a pair of Jordan, you wouldn't survive there.*

*I: Really? Something I've never experienced.*

*P: It was very trendy then. I think when I was younger, [I bought them] because of the trend, but then I started watching NBA, I think I might have been brainwashed, so every time after NBA, I would want a new pair of Jordan.*

#### **VT01 (UG, ASA)**

From the excerpt above, VT01's reason for purchasing Jordan shoes was to fit in with her high school culture where *'if you were in high school and without a pair of Jordan, you wouldn't survive there'*. Therefore, the neutralising techniques used here is DoR by shifting the responsibility to the high school culture in Beijing at the time. What is interesting in this excerpt is how VT01's opinion on Jordan shoes has changed after wearing them and watching NBA that every time after watching an NBA match, she would want a new

pair of Jordan. In VT01's own words, she thought '*she might have been brainwashed*'. Nevertheless, even though she was conscious of this 'brainwash', she did not '*stop wanting a new pair*'.

VT01's feeling of weakness against the marketplace speaks for a number of other participants, where discount and promotion were justified by most of the participants using DoR:

*i: So there's a pair of leather pants, a waterproof jacket and a duck feather vest. Let's start with your leather pants, why did you buy it?*

*P: It was really really cheap in Bicester Village, and I really wanted a pair of trousers back then, and didn't find anything I liked at the time, so I walked back to get that pair in the end.*

*I: So you felt like you definitely wanted something at the time?*

*P: Yeah, really wanted a pair of trousers, so the leather trousers are alright, the quality-wise.*

*[...]*

*I: So can you describe what kind of atmosphere was that in Bicester Village, like everyone just keeps buying stuff?*

*P: Because the exchange rate at the time was quite low, so everything looked cheaper.*

*I: So the price is the only reason?*

*P: Yeah, really cheap.*

### **LC29 (PG, ASA)**

From the excerpt above, LC29 claimed the reason for her identity inconsistent black leather pants purchased at Bicester Village was because of the discount. Bicester Village is an outlet shopping centre located in Oxfordshire with stores selling luxury and designer brands (Bicestervillage, 2019). The atmosphere in Bicester Village, according to LC29, is where everything looks low price. Therefore, even though leather pants were not LC29's style usually, she still

went back to get the pair because she was in the mood of impulsive consumption. As a result, LC29 attempted to justify this inconsistent purchase by shifting the responsibility to the low price and the atmosphere of Bicester Village.

Similarly, JO20 bought a pair of trainers from Adidas because of a promotion:

*P: Maybe because when my mum used to buy me trainers, they were all coincidentally from Nike, so I then carry on buying from Nike after that.*

*I: Have you bought any trainers from Adidas before?*

*P: Yeah.*

*I: Why did you buy it then?*

*P: Because there was a promotion.*

### **JO20 (UG, ASA)**

JO20 was loyal to Nike not only because of the brand, but also because her parent always purchased Nike for her since she was young. However, JO20 still ended up with a pair of Adidas because there was a promotion. The technique she used for this inconsistency was DoR to shift the responsibility to sale.

In summary, promotion and sale are the most popular reasons how participants end up with identity-inconsistent garments. Participants in this research tend to neutralise this inconsistency by using DoR to shift responsibility to external factors. However, while promotions and discounts remain the most popular justifications for identity-inconsistent purchases, participants seem to have taken the justification further by neutralising their 'upcoming' inconsistencies prior to consumption:

*I: Have you bought anything impulsively then?*

*P: Yeah, of course. But then every time I bought something like this, I'd regret after I wore it a couple of times.*

*I: What normally makes you buy something impulsively?*

*P: When it's really cheap.*

*I: Would it be a disaster on Christmas sale?*

*P: Yeah, I'm terrified, they say there's a Black Friday sale soon.*

### **JO20 (UG, ASA)**

From the excerpt, JO20 was fully aware that she would purchase garments that she would regret at the upcoming 'Black Friday' sale, but still, JO20 found it difficult to control herself when there was a promotion. In other words, as discussed by Maruna and Cope (2005), the use of neutralisation techniques might eventually rob consumers of the sense of free will, especially when responsibilities can be easily directed externally to the market activities.

In summary, DoR has been used widely by participants to neutralise the guilt from identity-inconsistencies with extrinsic reasons including blending in or standing out from reference groups, fashion trends, parents, culture, sales and discounts. What those reasons have in common are they are all 'circumstances' that are usually based on participants' social identities or external marketing events. That is, it is not uncommon to see participants justify their identity inconsistent purchase based on what their friends are wearing, what their culture dictates or how powerful trends and promotions are. Centre to DoR is the idea of 'victimising' oneself and consequently shifting responsibilities to externalities. That is one of the reasons why participants often use DoR to justify inconsistent consumption based on reasons for social identities and marketplace activities, because these two aspects seem to be beyond participants' control.

The danger to this feeling of loss of control is that the use of DoR may eventually rob consumers of their sense of control (Maruna and Copes, 2005). The ability to control our behaviour based on long-term goals is probably the most powerful mechanism behind social order (Tangney et al., 2004) as well as the key to a happy and healthy life (Block and Wilcox, 2013).

#### *Presents from or for others*

The things participants have in their wardrobes are not purely a result of a shopping trip; they might also be gifts from families and friends:

*P: I think the vest is destroying all the mix-matching efforts, like no matter what you wear, as long as you put a vest like this on, you would look really out-dated. So I would only wear this when I want to look out-dated. Because it was black and with a hood...*

*I: So how did you end up with it?*

*P: A gift from a friend, so I brought it here, although it is very warm, because I'm a cold person.*

#### **LC29 (PG, ASA)**

From the excerpt, LC29's reason for wearing her identity-inconsistent vest was that it was a gift from her a friend. Therefore, even though negative description like '*really out-dated*' was used on the vest, LC29 still brought it to the UK with her. Furthermore, instead of focusing on the 'really outdated' identity the vest has, LC29 chooses to overlook the identity and to concentrate on the function of the vest. Therefore, even though LC29 really cares about her trendy and fashionable appearance, she still wore the 'outdated' vest because it was a gift from her friend. It is not clear whether this friend of hers is important in her social group; however, the fact that they live in two different countries while she still wears the vest outlines the power of gift in changing LC29's choice of garments. Therefore, it is obvious that LC29 was using

DoR to blame the fact that the vest was a present that she 'had to' wear, as a victim of 'social pressure'.

On the other hand, when buying presents for other people, participants have shown that it is not always what they would personally like or agree with:

*I: Have you got any siblings?*

*P: Yeah, 2. They want Dr Marten boots, I was gonna get them last week, but I kept forgetting, I find them stupidly heavy, and expensive. What's the point if you're gonna walk so long, and if you don't take care of them, they crack, like the material splits, because it's some kind of leather, and if they sit too long...*

### **CT11 (UG, ASA)**

From the excerpt, even though CT11 disagrees with Dr Marten boots completely, because "they are stupidly heavy and expensive"; she still bought two pairs for her siblings. Gift-giving is essentially a social process that involves impression management (Segev et al., 2012). In other words, CT11 bought identity-inconsistent garments to make her siblings happy.

#### *Other people*

Other people influence our perception of a style sometimes, whether it is an identical twin sister who makes CC25 change her view on floral patterns, or BJ24's example of trying to be different from her younger sister:

*P: I think one type of clothing, I remembered trying it on in H&M in Malaysia, it's very big flower patterns. I didn't really like it, but then [my twin sister] took it to try it on in the dressing room, so we somehow swap clothes? So I tried it on for her, she's like actually it doesn't look that bad, I was like are you sure, I thought it looks really ugly, and she said, no no, you look really good, plus you look really*

*slim in that shirt. Oh really, let me think, well actually it's not that bad, so I ended up buying it. And it was on sales.*

### **CC25 (UG, ASA)**

Consumption is a social activity and the self is never totally isolated from other people in the same family, community and culture. Not only do consumers have the need to be part of a social group, they also grow up within families, communities and cultures that have an impact on their choices of preferred identity. From the excerpt, CC25's fashionable identical twin sister easily influences her opinions. Similarly, BJ24's sister's dressing style has influenced BJ24 too, but in an opposite way:

*I: Do you and your sister look alike by any chance?*

*P: We are completely different, but we were dressed alike when we were smaller because the age gap is quite small. So it might have been a... well I don't want to wear what she's wearing anymore, kind of thing.*

### **BJ24 (PG, EUR)**

From the excerpt, BJ24 has a completely different style comparing with her sister. In fact, BJ24's younger sister has got a completely opposite personality to BJ24 as well. While BJ24 is a self-claimed practical and down-to-earth type of person; her younger sister, on the other hand, has always been interested in fairy tales and make-ups. Thus, our family members (or siblings in this case) do have an impact in our choice of styles, positively, or negatively.

As a result, participants tend to justify their identity-inconsistencies by shifting the responsibilities to other people, be it twin sister in CC25's case or younger sister in BJ24's occasion.

#### *Community*

On the other hand, community and culture both have influenced the choice of our styles:

*P: I grew up in a town in south Wales, is still well-known for being chavvy. So it was great if you wanted tracksuits, very tight sports clothing or that kind of thing, or if you're a female at that time you would go for the short denim skirts that are very short, very small like this, and that wasn't really what I was looking for. And I quite liked the idea of black jeans and really funky tops, everything ended up with safety pins and in everything, that kind of spikey bracelets and things. I guess I don't really want to fit in... I didn't like the fashion there was at the time, so I had to go with a different one. And to feel confident enough to do that, it was like immersing myself into feel that confidence. It was real commitment into that because what was going on didn't really suit me, it was practically difficult.*

#### **BJ24 (PG, ASA)**

BJ24's community culture defines if she dresses either in a chavvy style, or a rock style. This dichotomous choice might not be true to everyone in her community, but it certainly was from her perspective. So when the community or local area atmosphere pushes her into another direction, even though she does not agree with the other direction to begin with, and had to force herself into feeling confident.

Similarly, DH02's style is influenced by her family and her partner's family's culture:

*P: The reason I don't wear them is because I come from a family where like... I don't know, we don't dress like that, we are a little bit more respectful. Also I've got a boyfriend who comes from quite a strict African family. So if I was to wear something like that around his family or around him, that'll probably disgust him probably.*

#### **DH02 (UG, EUR)**

From the excerpt, the reason why DH02 dislikes crop top and a sexy style is a result of her upbringing and her boyfriend's 'strict African family'. It is unclear if DH02 herself would prefer sexy style without

her family's and her partner's family's impact; however, the fact that she chooses to defend her choice using both of the families shows that her families' opinions come before her own choice of styles.

Similarly, JN14 tried a tomboy style because of the popular culture around Malaysia at the time:

*P: They looked cool, I think it was a bit trendy at the time, there were a few girls in my school were dressing like tomboys, plus there was a Taiwan drama at the time where the main character was dressing up like a boy, I found her really cute and cool. So I tried it, but it was ugly.*

#### **JN14 (UG, ASA)**

From the excerpt, the reason why JN14 tried a tomboy style was clearly a result of its popularity in Malaysia when she was in school. Therefore, the reason why JN14 ended up with identity-inconsistent garments was a result of both her immediate community in school and her culture at the time.

#### **4.1.3 Marketplace activities**

##### *Brand loyalty*

Brands are symbols of communication, constructed through the interaction between the brand, the consumer and within the society (Lee, 2009). Therefore, consuming a brand is based on the meaning a brand possesses within a social-historical context; which means, the choice of avoiding a brand is also a socially construed phenomenon.

As discussed in the literature, the terminology 'brand' means a constellation of multi-dimensional value (de Chernatory and Call'Olmo Riley, 1998). It is well established that consumers use brand consumption partially to construct their self-concepts and creating their identities (Escalas and Bettman, 2013). In the context

of fashion consumption, that means, consumers are more likely to purchase from brands with a similar image to their self-concepts, or their ideal self-concepts (Bhattacharya and Elsbach, 2002). On the other hand, consumers are equally likely to reject brands with meaning, values and associations that are distant or opposite to their self-concepts or ideal self-concepts (Banister and Hogg, 2004; Thompson and Arsel, 2004). This is especially important in the fashion industry because consumers define themselves not only by the garments they wear, but also by styles they avoid (Wilk, 1997). One of the important premises of this research concerns the reasons why consumers choose to avoid certain identities. In the literature review section, this specific 'undesired self' has been lightly touched on by Dr Michael Lee in his book 'Brand Avoidance', pointing out that consumers are motivated to avoid the symbolic unappealing promises that brands portray (Lee, 2009). That is, the unwanted self that consumers seek to avoid motivates them to avoid certain brands.

The qualitative data in this research indicated that almost all of the participants were motivated to avoid certain brands because of either the perceived incongruent brand identities or the incongruent styles that the brand portrays. Therefore, the emphasis is on the negative feedback given by consumers, and not limited to first-hand experience. That is, consumers might choose to avoid certain brands based on their negative perception of the brands, as well as other added values including word of mouth (WOM), other stereotypical brand users or even the positioning of the brand in the accessory sector. In other words, any additional added values (or decreased in this case) that communicate negative information to consumers (Keller, 1998).

For example, the reason why ER23 avoids Blue Banana is because of the incongruent identities:

*I: Is there any style you don't like at all, that you would never try to buy anything?*

*P: The punk, rock sort of big chains, black leather, not a fan of that at all. Have you ever been to Blue **Banana**? And they have those Converses that they go up to here? Not my thing at all.*

*I: Would you call it punk kind of style?*

*P: Like emo, I don't really know what sort of style it is to be honest, say sort of emo, metal, rock...*

*I: Why don't you like them?*

*P: I just feel like it's very heavy, and dark, and a bit weird.*

### **ER23 (UG, EUR)**

From the excerpt, it is clear that ER23 would never shop at Blue Banana because of the punk and rock identities that are associated with it.

However, despite the fact that participants do not agree with the brand identities, data from this research have demonstrated that sometimes they still purchase from those brands. For example, qualitative data in this research have demonstrated that brand positioning is one of the important reasons for participant's identity-inconsistent purchases:

*I: Yeah, I was going to say that you like... as you mentioned about the age difference. Like the brand you mentioned just now that you wouldn't buy it but you'd consider it, Karen Miller. You'd think about it because it's mature, it's like those clothes you'd wear when you're going to work. But don't you think Hermes is not the kind of products of your age? So why do you still like it.*

*P: [...] I think the like of Hermes, is probably influenced by others, which is quite important. For example, everyone in the world including those celebrities are pursuing [Hermes], you'd be curious to find out. And it's really expensive, and always in high demand. It's*

*not like something you can always get if you have a lot of money. And the brand has its own loyalty system as you'll need to spend a certain amount of money to be able to get that specific bag. And you'll need to queue, and the quality and stuff. So if everyone's buying it, there must be some logic into this. I like it doesn't mean that I'll buy it*

#### **QY07 (PG, ASA)**

From the excerpt above, QY07 chooses Hermes not because she likes Hermes' style, but because *'everyone in the world including those celebrities are pursuing it'*, even though *'it's really expensive'* and *'it's not like something you can always get if you have a lot of money'*. Being a luxury brand, Hermes' strategy in high-end celebrity endorsement and scarcity in the market makes participants QY07 *'curious to find out'*. Therefore, even though QY07 thinks Hermes is too mature and too *'work-like'*, she still pursues the brand purely because of its popularity and scarcity in the market.

It is worth noting that even though QY07 claim that her like of Hermes is *'probably influenced by others'*, the choice is more likely to be a result of the market. The reason why this excerpt is not in the reference group section is because *'everyone in the world are pursuing Hermes'* is a description of QY07's opinion of the market, rather than a specific reference group. Therefore, QY07's purchase of identity-inconsistent brand Hermes is a result of Hermes' brand positioning rather than her own understanding of the symbolic value Hermes represents.

On the other hand, AG10 likes Primark for a totally opposite reason:

*I: Why do you like Primark?*

*P: Cheap. And they change what's in there all the time. So people won't necessarily know that you got them from Primark. They just*

*have so much stuff, I can't go in there and not buying something.  
Very rare.*

*[...]*

*I: Talking about Primark, it's very interesting...*

*P: It's very bad.*

*I: It feels like you almost need to defend yourself a little bit when you're buying from Primark, but at the same time you love that shop don't you?*

*P: So cheap, and they change their stocks like every 5 min. It's so dangerous to go in there, you'll always gonna find something, always.*

### **AG10 (UG, EUR)**

From the excerpt, the reason why AG10 prefers to shop at Primark is because of Primark's fast fashion strategy. That is, in her words, 'people won't necessarily know that you got them from Primark'. This brandless-ness strategy adopted by fast fashion sweeps away the shame arising from consuming at 'cheap' and 'unethical' brand identities.

#### *Merchandise*

Some participants, on the other hand, purchase identity-inconsistent garments because of TV series:

*I: And the other thing I was a bit surprised was, how did you end up with an active jacket from Adidas?*

*P: I don't know if I've told you before, I was watching a Japanese TV series, the leading actress was wearing the red jacket there, which I found quite nice.*

*I: So you were influenced by the TV series?*

*P: Yeah, I think she looks really nice in that. Although I don't think I'd look as nice in that, I still want it.*

### **QY07 (PG, ASA)**

From the excerpt, QY07 ended up with a sport jacket from Adidas even though she was against sporty identity. However, because of a popular TV series at the time, QY07 ended up with a jacket from Adidas. Similarly, the excerpt below shows how KC28 bought an identity-inconsistent garments because of a Japanese anime.

*P: Yeah, but there was actually a reason, coz I was watching One Piece, the character Robin there looked really nice, but then, I'm not an anime character. And there's another character call Flamingo, he's got a pink furry jacket, so I wanted.*

*I: So all because of anime characters?*

*P: Yeah, and it was trendy that year too, but they didn't really look nice on me.*

### **KC28 (PG, ASA)**

#### **4.2 Appeal to alternative value (AtAV)**

The second technique, appeal to alternative values is adapted from appeal to higher loyalties (AtHL), from criminological research, when offenders neutralise their guilt by claiming their unethical behaviours are justified because of a certain group to which they belong (Sykes and Matza, 1975). Offenders are fully aware of their moral or legal wrongness but values and norms from the other group temporarily are considered to be of higher importance compared with the conventional norm (Sykes and Matza, 1975). Similarly, AtAV is used when consumers neutralise their guilt by claiming their identity-inconsistent purchase is justified because of other more important values. Like DoR, when consumers use AtAV to justify their identity-inconsistent purchases, they are fully aware of their inconsistencies. However, by temporarily stressing the importance of the alternative value, consumers can shield the guilt from inconsistencies.

In the context of shopping, because there are no illegal or unethical actions involved in identity-inconsistent consumption, AtHL in the context of identity consumption then takes another form: appealing to alternative values. In other words, participants neutralise their identity-inconsistent consumption by appealing to alternative values that temporally possess higher importance compared with the conventional norm.

For example, AG10 liked Cath Kidson even though she wanted to avoid the 'white girl stereotype':

*P: [Cath Kidson] is just so pretty, it really doesn't help with that white girl stereotype, but I just love it, like it's so very pretty there, so can't say no.*

#### **AG10 (UG, EUR)**

However, despite her effort to avoid the white girl stereotype, her partiality for Cath Kidson makes her focus on a different value, which is temporally more important than the white girl stereotype she tried to avoid. Therefore, by using AtAV, AG10 shield herself from the guilt arising from the inconsistencies.

Similarly, LC29's justification on her black leather pants provides an example of AtAV:

*I: So that pair of leather pants are from Bicester Village, do you feel like it's because it's a bit difficult to go there [...], so you have to buy something there to make it worth the trip?*

*P: Yeah, I think it's worth it actually. I think the leather pants are really warm, which is true, but then my thighs are a bit too fat, so I don't look nice in them, and I've been mocked by others.*

#### **LC29 (PG, ASA)**

LC29 had expressed her distaste for leather clothing in general because of the punk and rock identity associated. However, she still bought a pair of leather trousers at Bicester Village. Nevertheless,

LC29 tried to convince both the interviewee and herself to focus on the fact that *'leather pants are really warm'*. That is, by temporally concentrating on the alternative value (warmth), LC29 found peace with her mind even though she *'doesn't look nice in them'*, and she *'has been mocked by others'*. Furthermore, the alternative value LC29 used to neutralise was in fact a temporal suppression of the importance of her social identity (i.e. being mocked by other) in exchange of her personal sense of self (i.e. warmth being important to LC29). Thus, AtAV can consequently be seen as a temporal exchange of the importance of personal sense of self and social self in LC29's case.

The alternative value could also be in the form of a higher value, but not necessarily within the limit of garment styles. For instance, AV30's support of a feminist' ideology does not always translate into her choice of style at work:

*P: The thing is, I really support feminists' views, so I can't possibly approve this kind of culture. But the same thing I often notice myself using it to my advantage because you know I'm small, and I have long hair, and I know it's really easy for me to be feminine enough for my country and to get some advantages. I don't know, I know it sounds really bad, but my male colleagues treat me nice, if I look good. And I might feel comfortable with them being very helpful and stuff, so for example in my first job, I totally did it.*

### **AV30 (PG, EUR)**

From the excerpt, despite her distaste in sexism and women stereotypes at workplace in her own country, AV30 still surrenders to the 'reality' because of the advantage she could gain from male colleagues. In other words, by temporally appealing to the value of work advantages, AV30 shielded herself from the guilt arising from wearing feminine styles of clothing. Furthermore, unlike LC29, AV30's AtAV is a temporal increase of the importance of social

identity (i.e. work identity) in exchange for her personal identity (i.e. feminist's value).

On the other hand, OM17 appealed to another type of value to justify her silver rings and studs:

*I: Why do you not like silver?*

*P: I don't know, it just doesn't appeal to me. If I go to the jewellery section, I'd rather look at all the gold jewellery.*

*I: It's funny, coz all of the things you're wearing is like that colour...*

*P: Yeah, today. Some days I do wear silver, like this ring, is Pandora, so I didn't really have a choice, it's just a present, a gift; so kind of like little studs, I wear silver. I've got gold studs, I've got gold everything, but rings, without this one... it's the only silver ring I have. Every other ring I have is gold. I don't have any silver hoops, or silver necklace...*

#### **OM17 (UG, EUR)**

OM17 was quite determined that she did not like silver jewellery until she realised the ring and studs she wore at the interview were both silver. OM17 then went on defending her choice by claiming the ring was a present from Pandora, therefore, she did not have a choice but to wear it. On the surface, it seems that OM17 was contending that wearing gifts from others was more important than her own choice of jewellery. However, the fact that OM17 mentioned the ring was from Pandora indicated that the alternative value might be also be because the ring was from Pandora.

In summary, by temporally appealing to the alternative value or higher value, participants managed to neutralise the guilt arising from identity-inconsistent purchase. Fundamentally, AtAV is a temporal exchange of importance between personal sense of identity and social identity. Thus, AtAV provides room for

participants to conveniently activate the value best at shielding guilt arising from inconsistencies.

#### 4.3 Denial of importance (DoIM)

Denial of the importance, as one of the new themes emerging from this research, also accepts the inconsistencies. By denying the importance of trivial violation, participants also seek to minimise the impact of how inconsistencies affect them.

Denial of importance is a new theme identified in this research, where the participants simply deny what they have done is significant enough to be discussed.

For example, NC22 cared about how she presents herself and often spent a long time dressing up before she went out, because she believed that people around her would judge her based on how she was dressed:

*P: I only wear pyjamas at home, my mum is a bit... like if I don't change into pyjamas immediately after I'm home, mum would tell me off like don't wear the same clothes that you've been wearing outside of the house.*

#### **NC22 (UG, ASA)**

However, when it came to buying food down in the building where she lived, she chose to temporarily ignore all of the rules, even though there were still neighbours, acquaintances and friends that might see her in her pyjamas:

*I: What kind of pyjamas do you have?*

*P: Like real pyjamas, like those you bought in a pyjama shop, those you really can't go out, unless I'm going downstairs to get some food.*

*I: Will you?*

*P: Yeah, because the shops are right under the building I live, like if they are 10 meters further away, I wouldn't be in my pyjamas, but they are just there, McDonald's, café, and stuff. There are other shops a bit further, that I wouldn't be wearing my pyjamas there.*

*[...]*

*I: So the reason why you don't want to wear your pyjamas further is because you don't want to be seen in pyjamas, but then people can still see you if you're in your pyjamas down the building?*

*P: But then it feels different.*

*I: It feels like those shops are yours?*

*P: I think they are, it's like obviously I live in that building, I'm just here to get some snacks, other people do that too. I think the more important reason why I wouldn't wear pyjamas out is because I think it's unhygienic, and I only wear pyjamas home which is insulated from all the unhygienic atmosphere, and the way down the stairs doesn't feel that unhygienic yet, so I'm in that clean zone, and I would only be there for a couple of minutes.*

*NC22 (UG, ASA)*

From the excerpt above, NC22 denied the importance of wearing pyjamas outside of her flat if the shops were only five minutes away. At first, NC22 tried to provide 'valid' reasons by introducing rules including hygiene, distance, and different groups of people. However, those reasons still failed to explain why a further five minutes' walk would change the perception completely.

This is a classic example of the neutralising techniques that enabled participants to temporally deny the importance of their actions. NC22 failed to provide a logical reason why wearing pyjamas to the shops that were five minutes away from her flat would make a fundamental difference when she believed other people often judged her based on what she wore. Therefore, by denying the

importance of the five minutes' distance, NC22 managed to temporally shield herself from the feeling of inconsistencies.

VT01 also used DoIM to defend her inconsistent dressing style:

*I: I think you do change depending on how people around you change right?*

*P: Yeah.*

*I: Which makes you have a lot of different styles.*

*P: Because I don't think dressing style is not that important to me, it's not like I need a faith there, as long as I'm happy.*

#### **VT01 (UG, ASA)**

VT01 had a variety of styles and she chose clothes from contrasting styles including classic, punk, sexy and sweet. From the table of participant characteristics, VT01's choices on styles were largely dependent on external factors like the people she was going to meet; the dress code of the meet up, as well as what she assumed to be the best ideal styles that described her ethnicity or age. As a result, she would still purchase styles she disagreed with to please the external parties. Consequently, VT01's DoIM was to deny the importance of having her dressing style overall, even though she believed that dressing styles reveal people's personality:

*P: I think one is because it's consistent with my personality, because I think I am like this, I'd like others to know that I am strong, not someone really gentle and like an obedient girl, like a lady. And at the same time, because I'm abroad, I don't want others to think that I'm one of those easy to be bullied kind. So I think sometimes your dressing style shows what your personality is.*

#### **VT01 (UG, ASA)**

However, the excerpt does not imply that VT01's decisions on styles are completely based on other people. VT01's choice of clothing style, on the other hand, is rather dependent on the brand and brand positioning. As a result, VT01 tends to neutralise the inconsistencies based on brand identity, rather than her own style.

Similarly, LC29 denied the importance of gender-neutral style:

*P: Yeah, but then I would get some casual blazers as well, blue and white striped ones, which I don't think I'll have to wear them to work, I can just wear them when I'm shopping or going out with friends, a bit gender neutral.*

*I: Thought you don't like gender-neutral stuff?*

*P: No I don't like it, but if it's a bit more formal, it's fine.*

*I: So if it's a bit formal, it's fine?*

*P: Well, you can just forget about it, it is only a small part of my life. The majority of my clothes are preppy and the cute style.*

### **LC29 (PG, ASA)**

From the excerpt above, LC29 clearly did not agree with a gender-neutral style. However, the fact that she had 'some casual blazers with blue and white strips' made her eager to justify the inconsistencies. At first, LC29 tried to use AtAV (i.e. formal was the alternative value) but soon realised that she really did not like it. Thus, by claiming '*it is only a small part of my life, the majority of my clothes are preppy and cute*', LC29 temporarily ignored the importance of one example of identity-inconsistent purchase.

It is worth noting that DoIM is often used as a last resort by participants. Participants often start with other neutralising techniques to justify their inconsistencies until the alternative option is exhausted. For example, LC29 started justifying her

gender-neutral blazer by using AtAV until she realised that the alternative value did not overturn the inconsistency. Similarly, NC22 started defending her pyjamas by introducing seemingly 'valid' reasons until she realised the 'valid' reasons failed to explain the distance between five minutes and ten minutes' walk. DoIM seems often to be the last resort participants use to shield the guilt arising from identity-inconsistent purchases/usages.

Because DoIM is often seen used as a last resort, it is often seen in combination with other neutralisation techniques, especially when other techniques fail to justify the inconsistencies. For example, when NC22 tried to justify the fact that she wore pyjamas to shops that were five minutes away from her flat, she started by reasoning with hygiene and distance until she realised it was not possible to justify the inconsistencies in this way. Thus, as a last resort, NC22 used DoIM to minimise the impact of inconsistencies by denying the importance of that five minutes' distance.

#### 4.5 Denial of original form (DoOF)

Denial of original form is the second new themes identified in this research. Participants used DoOF to neutralise the inconsistencies by completely redefining the identity of garments purchased. Different from most of the other techniques, DoOF is in complete denial of any inconsistencies. In order to neutralise the feeling of inconsistency, arising from the identity-inconsistent garments, participants choose to re-define a garment's identity, or even create new values to cover the identity of that item:

*I: You don't like that style, but you still have two of them?*

*P: Yeah.*

*I: Why did you buy them to begin with?*

*P: One of them is like a turtleneck, so it's a short top, but it's not really a crop top. It's like, if you have high-waist jeans, it's not really a crop top. And the other one, I think it was because it was on sale.*

*That's about it. It was more like a summer top instead of a crop top.  
Yeah, summer top.*

### **MZ13 (UG, EUR)**

From the excerpt above, MZ13 clearly disagreed with crop tops and sexy or revealing styles. However, despite the negative feelings, MZ13 still owned two crop tops that made her uncomfortable. As a result, MZ13 used DoOF to neutralise the feeling of inconsistency by denying the two crop tops were even crop tops. That is, by wearing a pair of high-waist jeans, the turtleneck crop top would not be considered a crop top anymore by MZ13. On the other hand, the other crop top that MZ13 bought on sale was justified by using a combination of DoOF and DoR. In other words, MZ13 used DoR to shift the responsibility to sales, and then denied the original form of the crop top by calling it a summer top.

Similarly, AV30 has expressed her distaste for feminine clothing with flowers on it. However, she still bought one jumper with enormous flowers all over. By introducing new definitions to the embroiled flowers, for example, AV30 managed to break the link between feminine identities and her choice of clothing.

*I: I was gonna ask you that thing about your pink jumper, 'coz I remember something you said about you really didn't like flowers on your clothing, because it's really feminine and childish, and pink?*

*P: Yeah, but in this case they are very stylish? [...] The are not those photos of flowers, or realistic pictures of flowers, those are types of flowers that look like they are from Japanese or Chinese paintings. [...] They're like smart flowers. [...] Like it's engraved.*

*I: Engraving. So if it's engraving style it's fine, but if it's anything else... weak flowers are not okay, but strong flowers are okay?*

*P: Yep. You can see this flower is part of the picture. [...] you can tell that they are not flowers for being flowers, they are part of the tiger, if that makes sense.*

### **AV30 (PG, EUR)**

In her defence, AV30 tried to re-define the flowers on her newly purchased pink jumper three times, including calling it smart flowers, emphasising the engraved nature of the flower and appealing to cultural values. All of the effort is spent on denying the flower on her jumper is simply flower, but a smart, engraved and culturally sound flower, denying its very nature.

It is worth noting that DoOF is the first neutralising technique in this research where participants completely deny the identity inconsistencies. Other techniques like DoR or AtAV mainly focus on shifting responsibility to externalities or introducing alternative values to neutralise the guilt, while DoOF involves completely denying any inconsistency. Therefore, unlike other techniques, when participants are using DoOF, it probably reveals identities they want to avoid the most.

#### **4.4 Justification by postponement (JoP)**

Justification of postponement was introduced by Cromwell and Thurman (2003) in their research on neutralising techniques used by shoplifters. In their research, JoP happens when offenders suspend the assessment of norm-violating action to a later time.

Participants in this research also used JoP to justify their impulsive shopping:

*I: How did you end up buying them if you didn't like them before?*

*P: Maybe when I just wanted a piece of clothing before?*

*I: What do you mean?*

*P: So like sometimes I feel like I need some clothes, I would just go buy some, as long as they suit me at the time. But then after I get home, they might just look alright, so I wouldn't wear them much.*

### **LC29 (PG, ASA)**

From the excerpt above, LC29 described a scenario when she purchased garments without much consideration. LC29 claimed she was in the mood that she would '*just go buy some, as long as they suit me at the time*'. Therefore, by temporally suspending the assessment of norm-violating action (i.e. identity-inconsistent purchase) to a later time, LC29 managed to shield herself from inconsistencies.

#### 4.5 Denial of original form (DoOF)

Denial of an item's original form is another a new theme that emerged from the data. In order to neutralise the feeling of inconsistency, arising from the identity-inconsistent garments, participants choose to re-define a garment's identity, or even create new values to cover the identity of that item:

*I: You don't like that style, but you still have two of them?*

*P: Yeah.*

*I: Why did you buy them to begin with?*

*P: One of them is like a turtleneck, so it's a short top, but it's not really a crop top. It's like, if you have high-waist jeans, it's not really a crop top. And the other one, I think it was because it was on sale. That's about it. It was more like a summer top instead of a crop top. Yeah, summer top.*

#### **MZ13 (UG, EUR)**

From the excerpt above, MZ13 clearly disagreed with crop tops and sexy or revealing styles. However, despite the negative feelings, MZ13 still owned two crop tops that made her uncomfortable. As a result, MZ13 used DoOF to neutralise the feeling of inconsistency by denying the two crop tops were even crop tops. That is, by wearing a pair of high-waist jeans, the turtleneck crop top would not be considered a crop top anymore by MZ13. On the other hand, the other crop top that MZ13 bought on sale was justified by using a combination of DoOF and DoR. In other words, MZ13 used DoR to

shift the responsibility to sales, and then denied the original form of the crop top by calling it a summer top.

Similarly, AV30 has expressed her distaste for feminine clothing with flowers on it. However, she still bought one jumper with enormous flowers all over, and she neutralises the inconsistencies as follows:

*I: I was gonna ask you that thing about your pink jumper, 'coz I remember something you said about you really didn't like flowers on your clothing, because it's really feminine and childish, and pink?*

*P: Yeah, but in this case they are very stylish? [...] The are not those photos of flowers, or realistic pictures of flowers, those are types of flowers that look like they are from Japanese or Chinese paintings. [...] They're like smart flowers. [...] Like it's engraved.*

*I: Engraving. So if it's engraving style it's fine, but if it's anything else... weak flowers are not okay, but strong flowers are okay?*

*P: Yep. You can see this flower is part of the picture. [...] you can tell that they are not flowers for being flowers, they are part of the tiger, if that makes sense.*

### **AV30 (PG, EUR)**

In her defence, AV30 tried to re-define the flowers on her newly purchased pink jumper three times, including calling it smart flowers, emphasising the engraved nature of the flower and appealing to cultural values. All of the effort is spent on denying the flower on her jumper is simply flower, but a smart, engraved and culturally sound flower, denying its very nature.

It is worth noting that DoOF is the first neutralising technique in this research where participants completely deny the identity inconsistencies. Other techniques like DoR or AtAV mainly focus on shifting responsibility to externalities or introducing alternative

values to neutralise the guilt, while DoOF involves completely denying any inconsistency.

#### 4.6 Justification of special use (JoSU) or Justification of one-off use (O/SU)

Justification of special use is a new theme in this research. Participants in this research has used JoSU to disconnect their own responsibility if their identity-inconsistent garments were only used for a special use.

##### 4.6.1 Work

*P: A bit boring, a bit smart.*

*I: Too smart?*

*P: Yeah. Well it depends where she's going. For everyday, definitely not.*

*I: If you are going to work everyday...*

*P: Yeah, work, that's fine.*

#### **AG10 (UG, EU)**

It is not unusual to see an excerpt like above where participants like AG10 thought work identity was supposed to be boring and black and white. Therefore JoSU is often used when a participant's usual identity concedes to another identity. In other words, JoSU often reveals a culture where participants think it is acceptable to compromise their own identities.

Some candidates would go further than compromising on work identity. For instance, BM27 dislikes pretty style because of bad past experiences with her so-called '*pretentious boarding-school course-mates*'. However, when she was at work for the jewellery shop back home, she would '*actively*' put on preppy clothing not only because of the specified dressing code, but also, to '*make her boss happy*':

*P: Yeah, this IS preppy, but I think the only reason I put it here, when I'm back home I work at high end jewellery store, and I have to dress really proper. And because I'm young, my boss lets me, and I'm the youngest out of all the women that there that they are in their 30s, he wants me to dress professional, but at the same time he still wants me to look quite hip and young, that's what he tells me, because he's like oh maybe we'll attract a different crowd instead of you wearing the standard female suit, he thinks I'm too young to be wearing. That, he wants me to look very very sophisticated, but still have a young touch to it. So he likes it when I wear shirts and a sweater, and like obviously I have to wear smart pants all the time, but I wouldn't take it to the step of wearing a skirt, that's too much, or this hair. But I'll usually have my hair done and have a shirt, I'd wear a shirt and I'll wear a sweater over it if I have to for work and stuff.*

#### **BM27 (UG, EUR)**

Therefore, work identity itself seems to be enough justification for participants to put on clothes with identities they do not agree with.

#### **4.6.2 Holidays**

Holiday is another popular justification that participants use for their inconsistent purchase. For instance, even though AG10 did not agree with a hippy style, because she thought '*it makes no sense*'; however, when she was on holiday, the hippy style immediately became justifiable because hippy clothing is supposed to be loose and comfortable:

*I: If you look at hippies' clothing separately, would you buy like part of it? It's really popular to buy like their really baggy trousers.*

*P: Yeah. No, I've got some of those on holiday.*

*I: Okay.*

*P: I wear them on holiday.*

*I: You wear hippie clothes on holiday?*

*P: No, no no. Just those trousers. I've got like those elephant ones which are really generic to get. But I got them before I knew they were generic okay. And they are very cooling. They are nice, but I don't really wear them here, at all, ever.*

#### **AG10 (UG, EUR)**

From the excerpt above, AG10 used a number of different neutralising techniques to justify the inconsistencies. AG10 started with DoIM to minimise the importance by saying she only had hippy trousers and nothing else. Next, AG10 used DoR to shift the responsibility for buying it because she '*got them before she knew they were generic*'. After that, AG10 focused on the alternative value of 'cooling' of the hippy elephant pants. Finally AG10 concluded with JoSU because she '*doesn't really wear them here, at all, ever*'. This combination of four techniques demonstrates AG10's effort in denying that hippy style could be associated with her identity.

#### **4.6.3 Photos**

Similarly, most participants seem to agree identity-inconsistent usage could be compromised when they were taking social media photos:

*I: I think you told me last time that you actually preferred those dark coloured clothing.*

*P: Yeah, and then I find you won't look nice in photos if you wear dark colours every day.*

*I: So you bought this sweater for taking photos?*

*P: Yeah, bought it for going abroad really.*

#### **HN04 (UG, ASA)**

The excerpt above showed how HN04 justified inconsistent identity, using JoSU, by emphasising how she might look brighter in photos. Similarly, in spite of her distaste of bohemian style, KC28 would still use bohemian style of clothing if she was on a beach holiday:

*P: This one is quite bohemian, so it feels a bit lazy. The reason why it's in the middle is because it's not my personality, I'd wear it every now and then, when I'm at the beach or on holiday, or otherwise it'll be a problem for photo shooting.*

#### **KC28 (PG, ASA)**

KC28 went on justifying the special use by introducing different 'rules' for holidays:

*P: Then it'll depend on the purpose of my journey, if I'm going to the beach, like Gibraltar, my purpose there is to relax, I might bring more this kind of bohemian clothing; but if I'm going out for sightseeing purposes, like in Paris, the photos I'd be taking there would be more like street shots, so I would bring some clothes that are slightly more colourful than I would wear day-to-day. Like really pink, or bright red, so I would wear something like this for different purposes.*

#### **KC28 (PG, ASA)**

This justification of special use is especially salient among Asian participants. Most of the Asian participants in this research expressed similar opinions that it is acceptable to look different when taking photos.

#### **4.6.4 Special occasions**

Other special occasions that participants have used identity-inconsistent garments include wedding, party, and festivals. For instance, HN04 has a very definitive picture of what wedding dress she planned to wear, because it was what brides normally look like:

*P: One sec... These two, I think this one is too sexy, I don't like being too sexy, but I do wear it sometimes.*

*I: When would you wear it?*

*P: I think only at my wedding.*

*I: Does it need to be sexy at your wedding?*

*P: A little bit of sexy I think.*

*I: So why do you think you want to be a little bit of sexy at your wedding?*

*P: I don't know, just what was in my impression, showing a little bit of cleavage, or a bit lacy, and fish tail and deep V-neck style.*

#### **HN04 (UG, ASA)**

Therefore, even though HN04 disagreed with sexy styles in general, she would still put on a wedding dress 'showing a bit of cleavage, a bit lacy, and fish tail and deep V-neck' because of her impression of brides.

On the other hand, JN14 bought an identity-inconsistent dress for a nonspecific occasion that failed to emerge:

*P: Not entirely, coz it was a strap dress, but the material was quite nice, 100% cotton. I just don't know where to wear it.*

*I: So you bought it for occasions, but you failed to find an occasion for it?*

*P: Yeah.*

*I: So sometimes when you buy clothes that are not your styles, you are picturing occasions that you could wear them, like parties or beaches. But when you've actually got them, there aren't many of those occasions, because you don't actually party or go to the beach that often?*

*P: Yeah, exactly; and even when there is an occasion coming up, another dress might be more suitable.*

#### **JN14 (UG, ASA)**

From the excerpt above, it was clear that JN14 bought the dress for an occasion that she was not aware of. JoSU in this case was an excuse for her to purchase identity-inconsistent garments and at the same time a justification after she had bought the garments. JoSU thus has become a narrative for JN14 to purchase garments without a clear idea of what the special occasion or special use is.

#### **4.6.5 Special uses**

Other than reasons based on different aspects of self-concept and marketplace activities, there are occasions where participants deliberately purchased identity-inconsistent garments for special reasons. For example, in an extreme case, BJ24 put on a style she completely disagrees to upset a relative:

*P: Yeah, I did, which I bought because a relative really annoys me was getting married, and had quite a strict colour scheme, they didn't let me know about, so I bought a really bright dress that didn't fit into the colour scheme and wore it to the wedding. I'm a mature adult. And it was great fun, it's okay. Haven't found a way to wear it since, coz it felt a quite old style of dress. Like a bit older than my style normally*

#### **HN04 (UG, ASA)**

From the excerpt above, HN04 used her identity-inconsistent manly clothing styles for the purpose of physical security. In other words, it is evident that consumers do use clothing styles to portray identities not only for their ideal selves.

Overall, most participants purchase garments based on their sense of personality, or in their own words, personalities. Some participants consider their personalities stable and unchanged, so

their garment consumption usually reflect their stable personalities; others think even though they have a variety of different styles, they reflect a fragment of their unchanged personality, rather than having multiple personalities. It is worth noting that even though majority of the participants think their garments should at least partially reflect their personalities, a small group of them (e.g. KC28) are still happy to wear garments that are incompatible with their personalities, as long as there is a 'valid reason' (e.g. when KC28 is on holiday or at the beach). These 'valid reasons' include holidays, special occasions, work and photos and naturally translate into JoSU to neutralise inconsistencies based on the importance of those reasons.

For example, Asian participants in this research particularly like using JoSU for holidays and photos. To those participants, even though they accept they are responsible for the inconsistencies, they are exempted because it is understandable that people wear different garments to look nice on holidays or at photo shooting. The interesting idea here what participants classed as culturally acceptable. According to Maruna and Copes (2005), the origin of neutralisation theory stresses the social nature in the wider culture. In other words, accounts participants provided to justify their inconsistencies revealed what they believed were publicly acceptable. In context, JoSU used by participants in this research reveals that people are expected to wear 'nicer' and 'brighter' garments when they were in holiday pictures, at least in the context of Asian culture. Therefore, neutralisation techniques like JoSU may reveal more about a culture than an individual (Mills, 1940).

#### 4.6.6 Compensation

As discussed in the literature, compensatory consumption describes choices made by consumers under identity threats (Wicklund and Gollwitzer, 1981; Mandel et al., 2017). That is, products with symbolic values that are incongruent with

consumers' prominent identities are responses to psychological needs. For example, JN14 describes her use of feminine garments to compensate her phase of tomboy:

*P: Yeah, I think so, bought mini-skirts and some tight-fitting dresses, and I found them really pretty and they flattered my silhouette. But after that, I found them uncomfortable, especially those tight-fitting dresses, they do look nice on you, but if you have too much food, your belly would be way too obvious. So if I know I'm going out for food, I'd wear something comfy, I wouldn't really choose really feminine clothing. You know that phase after tomboy, I would deliberately try to wear something feminine to show that I was different, but after a while I stopped because they were not as comfy. So I then started to wear feminine clothes that are compatible with my own style, not like something I just wear to follow the trend.*

#### **JN14 (UG, ASA)**

From the table of participants' characteristics, JN14 had a phase of 'tomboy' in her teenage life. However, after she grew up, she would deliberately try to '*wear something feminine to show that she is different*' until she accepted in the end that feminine clothes were not what she wanted. Therefore, in line with the literature, the feminine clothing style that is inconsistent with JN14's preferred style (comfortable and tomboy) was followed to compensate her psychological need (Allard and White, 2015) to be different from her tomboy phase.

Similarly, KC28 used an analogy with new relationships to describe this feeling of unsatisfied psychological needs:

*P: The last time... although I didn't find a good matching jacket, I found 2 black skirts there I liked, in different patterns. So I decided to get the dress at the same time. I did find a jacket, which I wasn't really satisfied with, but it was okay. I think at the time I wanted*

*to look for other jackets, because I wasn't completely happy with jacket, but then I bought it because of the dress, so I bought everything together.*

*[...]*

*P: Yeah, I think I'm like this sometimes. I think it's a psychological issue, like you've got something, you start thinking about what to match it with, and then you might not be entirely happy with the purchase, so you just keep spending money until you are entirely happy. It's a bit like relationship, when you've met someone, and before you start talking, you might think it's fine, he might not like me; but as soon as he has shown some interest in talking to you, even though you don't know if he likes you or not, you would keep talking with him. And then after a while of talk, you would wonder if you should take his contact number, because you liked him at the very beginning. So it's like it's fine, just keep talking, maybe there is something between us. So sometimes I feel like buying clothes are like starting new relationships.*

### **KC28 (Master, ASA)**

KC28 was trying to find a matching jacket for an occasion when she discovered only two matching black skirts and one matching black dress. KC28 bought the skirts and the dress on the day along with a jacket to match the skirts and dress. However, because she still did not have the matching jacket she planned to buy, she ended up going back to shop a few more times afterwards to compensate that feeling of unsatisfied needs.

The analogy KC28 used for this specific compensatory consumption was interesting. KC28 compared the purchase of a new garment to the start of a new relationship, where the initial bond could only commence after you '*keep talking with him*'. Therefore, the compensatory consumption KC28 was in fact experimenting

different styles to fit in with the original piece of clothing that she was 'in love with'. Hence, KC28's identity-inconsistent purchase happens when she experiments with different styles to match with the one style she was in love with.

KC28 did not seem to justify the purchase of the two unwanted garments to begin with. However, JoP was used to temporarily 'forget' about the inconsistencies here.

Justification of postponement (JoP) was introduced by Cromwell and Thurman (2003) in their research on neutralising techniques used by shoplifters. In their research, JoP happens when offenders suspend the assessment of norm-violating action to a later time.

Participants in this research also used JoP to justify their impulsive shopping:

*I: How did you end up buying them if you didn't like them before?*

*P: Maybe when I just wanted a piece of clothing before?*

*I: What do you mean?*

*P: So like sometimes I feel like I need some clothes, I would just go buy some, as long as they suit me at the time. But then after I get home, they might just look alright, so I wouldn't wear them much.*

#### **LC29 (PhD, ASA)**

From the excerpt above, LC29 described a scenario when she purchased garments without much consideration. LC29 claimed she was in the mood that she would '*just go buy some, as long as they suit me at the time*'. Therefore, by temporally suspending the assessment of norm-violating action (i.e. identity-inconsistent purchase) to a later time, LC29 managed to shield herself from inconsistencies.

However, other than having very specific special uses, there is another branch of special uses that are far less concrete:

#### 4.6.7 Age limit

A vast number of participants in this research believe that their selves change over time:

*I: Why do you think you have to be using them for a while to be able to see?*

*P: Well, it's a bit like clothes in a sense, like some clothes the first time you wear them, they might look alright, but then you try it again, you might not like them anymore.*

*I: Really?*

*P: Yeah, have you never bought something and thought that was totally you, and then after a while, it didn't feel like it was you anymore?*

#### **QY07 (PG, ASA)**

From the excerpt, QY07 acknowledges the fact that her 'self' would change over time and thinks it is perfectly normal. Instead of having an unchanged personal sense of 'true self', participants' reasons for identity-inconsistent consumption based on multiple selves target at the fluidity of self-concepts:

*I: When you go back to visit your mum and dad, I assume they are still in Wales, do you actually put on different clothing?*

*P: Not usually, but I've been told sometimes I do, slightly pushing the boundaries a little bit. It's a very safe place to be, they are not going to be like, what are you wearing? It's very accepting. And to distinguish from my sister, who still lives at home.*

#### **BJ24 (PG, EU)**

From the excerpt above, BJ24's past self (gothic) was not a self-identity she wants to maintain. She has been trying to rebuild her self-identity after she left home and has shown regret in her account that it is not the time of her life she wants to remember. However, when she goes back to the town she grew up in, she

would put on a style closer to her past self, only because she is the most comfortable around her family.

On the other hand, a group of participants do have very specific rules over how one should dress according age. That is, sexy or smart styles to them are definitely the styles when you start working while cute and Lolita styles should only be worn in your teens:

*... I think you should wear things according to your age. Although I think you can wear something different, in day-to-day life you should wear... I think we should embrace what we are experiencing at different stages of life. So like for the time being I'm still at college where I could still pretend to be young, why would I try the sexy style that I could keep using in the next 30 years or so? I'll treasure the moment when I'm still young.*

**HN04 (UG, ASA)**

*P: Yeah, and my hairstyle before must have been matching with the clothes I wore, like before I would probably have a more fashionable hairstyle, to wear clothes like that, I probably would dye my hair as well, in 2 different colours.*

*I: Have you?*

*P: Yeah, I have, but I wouldn't do it now, coz my age determines what my hairstyles might be, like you probably would be after some extravagant hairstyles, and you'll probably become more mature and reliable.*

**KC28 (PG, ASA)**

In both cases, both HN04 and KC28 have clear pictures of what they want to wear in the future and what they should not wear for the time being. This idea of dressing according to age is very common among Asian participants. Both HN04 and KC28 agreed that dynamic and young dressing styles should be expressed when they

were young, and a sense of more matured style should be what they wore when they were working. To them, dressing style should always reflect their age. In other words, their styles of future self are already limited, while their styles of past self were determined by their age. Therefore, HN04 and KC28's reasons for identity-inconsistent consumption are based their assumptions of their ages' limitation. In other words, the age limitation is the alternative value that participants justify their inconsistencies in consumption.

#### 4.6.8 Ideal/negative self-identities

As discussed in the literature, multiple self-concepts provide incentives for individuals to make consumption choices. Particularly, the approach to ideal self and departure from the undesired self explain motivations behind consumption choices (Hogg et al., 2009).

In line with the literature, there is evidence of consumption based on participants' constructs of ideal selves, even though those ideal selves are completely different if not entirely opposite of what their identities.

Below are three quotations from HN04 on hipster style:

##### *Quotation 1*

*I: Let's talk about this question another time after I've shown you some pictures later, which might be helpful. But is there any style that you don't like, but you'd still wear it?*

*P: Hipster style.*

*I: Would you wear hipster clothing?*

*P: Yeah.*

*I: Why?*

*P: Sometimes when I want to feel younger.*

*Quotation 2*

*I: Well, why do you only want to use hipster style when you want to change? Why would you choose hipster?*

*P: Because I think it's quite carefree to me, it's like you don't care what others think of you.*

*Quotation 3*

*I: What do you think is a hipster style?*

*P: I think it's probably like denim and ripped jeans, and ankle boots or shoes, and mostly grey, white or black top.*

*I: So what do you think hipsters' personalities are like?*

*P: Very carefree and ignores what other people think.*

*I: [...] So the reason why you go to Topshop is because you want a carefree look sometimes?*

*P: Yeah, sometimes when I'm stressed, I would want to put on hipster clothing and take a walk.*

*I: Take a walk?*

*P: Yeah, just to go out, like for a shopping trip with friends or something.*

*I: So hipster literally means freedom to you?*

*P: Yeah, I think so. I look up to it, but I won't try it often.*

*I: Why not?*

*P: Because if I fail, I'd look weird. I think I'm a bit reserved in this way.*

*I: So hipster is a bit out of the line to you?*

*P: Sometimes yeah, when I see some really extraordinary style, I'd think they are a bit out of the line. Like if there are way too many accessories on them, they look like a Christmas tree, that's pretty unacceptable.*

*I: Why would a hipster style ends up like a Christmas tree?*

*P: Like they have a lot of accessories, like they might think these are fashion elements that they have to put them on, and when they put too many elements on them they would look ridiculous. I don't like that kind of hipsters, I would prefer a more classical hipster, like he/she still likes fashion elements, but he/she knows where the attention should be, I think I like this kind of hipsters.*

*I: So a hipster with his/her own style, not someone who only follows the trend.*

*P: Yes, like he/she has a style, not like he/she's following the style.*

*I: Like independent stylist?*

*P: Yeah.*

#### HN04 (UND, ASA)

From the three excerpts above, HN04's interpretation of a hipster style is very different from a conventional definition of hipster. The definition of a hipster style comes from a hipster subculture where mainstream clothing is unfavourably viewed (Weeks, 2014). Rather, an alternative lifestyle with alternative clothing styles like vintage or thrift-store garments is most frequently attached to the hipster identity (Granfield, 2011).

Participants in this research understand a hipster style in different ways. Typically, European participants think a hipster style is negative and pretentious while their Eastern counterparts think the hipster style is independence and different. However, regardless of what the true definition of a hipster style is, HN04 does not have a clear idea of hipster. That is, rather than thinking of a hipster style using examples of clothes and garments associated with it, HN04 puts a variety of different elements together and concludes that any style that signifies carefree and cool is a hipster style.

This was evident when she was describing what hipsters usually wear in the above three excerpts. For example, in quotation 3, HN04 believed a hipster style was consisted of '*mostly grey, white or black*' garments, which was compatible with her usual '*normcore*' style of clothing; on the other hand, when asked again in the same conversation, she also described the hipster style as '*over-accessorised*' and thought '*they look like a Christmas tree*', which was '*pretty unacceptable*'. Furthermore, HN04 went on differentiating types of hipsters. In her words, she prefers '*a more classical hipster*' who '*likes fashion elements*', but '*knows where the attention should be*'.

Therefore, it is apparent that HN04 is following what a hipster identity represents rather than a hipster style in general. This is quite different from the usual construct of using style to convey

identities. In HN04's words, she was certain that a hipster style was 'cool and carefree', 'extraordinary and fashionable' and often 'over-accessorised'. This could be because that HN04 connects hipster with 'carefree and cool', which are the ideal identities that HN04 wants to have. Therefore, regardless of what hipster actually means to her, as long as a style radiates 'carefree and cool', it is 'hipster' in HN04's eyes.

Nevertheless, even though HN04's definition of a hipster style might be completely different from a conventional definition of hipster, the ideal identities that HN04 attached onto hipster (carefree) still makes her consume hipster styles even though she does not like it, especially when she is stressed.

From HN04's point of view, the choice of her ideal identities might be based on her unwanted self. In other words, HN04 wanted to be 'cool and carefree', because she did not think she was cool and carefree enough. In other cases, the construct of ideal self could be based on pure external factors like in VT01's case:

*I: Why do you think a goddess style is better than a cool style on social media platform?*

*P: Coz most people like gentle and cute types, so it's kind of beneficial to myself.*

*I: Who are most people?*

*P: Most of my acquaintances, they might know of me through my council. I: What do you mean by your council?*

*P: I used to work for council, at student council, so I have come across a lot of people that we might co-organise things together etc, and they might like a cuter image. And I really want to maintain an image of a traditional Chinese, very decent and self-controlled at the same time.*

*[...]*

*P: I think if I were a foreigner, and when I see a Chinese girl like that, I don't think I'd like this type of girl, I would like a girl who is quiet and gentle, decent, with long hair.*

*I: Did someone tell you about this, or was it purely your assumption?*

*P: I think it that way, most of people think I'm cute, so I might as well just maintain a cute identity.*

### **VT01 (UND, ASA)**

Unlike HN04, VT01's ideal identities of cute and gentle came from her assumptions relating to other people's opinions. From the sample characterisation table, it was obvious that VT01's preferred styles were punk, rock and theatrical. However, her assumption that others would prefer a foreign Chinese girl who was gentle, quiet and decent, made her choose 'goddess' style and present it on social media.

This particular choice of 'goddess style' may seem to be also a result of culture perception and social influences. However, the reason why it is located in the ideal self section is because this construct is largely based on her own assumption of what other people might have thought of.

On the other hand, one-off use or special use was first introduced by Rosenbaum et al. (2011) in their paper discussing consumer fraud via product return. In the context of product return, the misbehaviour was neutralised by consumers by claiming they had only used products once. Therefore, the fault was minimised and neglectable. In the context of identity consistency, participants in this research have been using the similar technique by claiming they only wore the identity-inconsistent garment once. Therefore, the occasion was so rare that it almost did not count. It is worth noting that the use of O/SU indicates participants' acceptance of the fault,

while at the same time denying any moral obligations. It is the only technique participants use to 'accept' and 'deny' responsibilities at the same time, making it hard to determine the impact of such inconsistency.

*I: How long were you in punk style?*

*P: Bought a few outfits like this, because some friends were in that style around me, so I thought it was cool. But I only have been wearing them for a few months, and among those couple of months, I wasn't really wearing them all the time?*

#### **JN14 (UG, ASA)**

JN14's neutralisation of short-time usage of punk style indicated that she had acknowledged the inconsistencies. Instead of denying the wrongdoing like DoOF, where participants were in complete denial of any wrongdoing, neutralisation of one-time or short-time usage highlights the acceptance of wrongdoing to minimise the impact of inconsistencies.

Similarly, AG10 used one-time or short-time usage to justify her high heels:

*I: I didn't think you would buy heels, 'coz you said you really hated them?*

*P: I literally have 3 pairs for my entire life.*

#### **AG10 (UG, EUR)**

From the short excerpt above, AG10's claim that she only had three pairs of high heels was an acceptance of the inconsistencies. In other words, onetime or short-time usage is a neutralising technique seeks to minimise the impact of inconsistencies by emphasising the limited nature of the occurrences.

#### 4.7 Justification of personal principle (JoPP)

Personal principle is a neutralisation technique used by consumers because of a personal principle they claim to have. It is first introduced in Brunner (2014)'s research on fair trade in-commitment where consumers claim their other principles (e.g. I buy cheapest products only; or I only does my grocery shopping in Sainsbury's). These principles might vary in forms, but central to the idea is one universal rule or a set of rules that override any other rules that are involved in decision-making.

In the context of this research, this technique is usually used when participants aim to neutralise their inconsistencies by asserting a 'principle' from either their personal sense of 'true self' or from their emotions or moods at the time, because participants feel like their choices of styles should have a connection with something deep inside.

##### 4.7.1 Personality

*I: Let's start with the cool kind of style, why choose cool?*

*P: I think because it's in my personality, dashing personality.*

*I: Dashing personality? Like free and relaxed?*

*P: Yeah, I'm very direct, I would like to be seen by others as strong. I: So do you think that you're not strong enough, so you would dress strongly; or do you think you're strong already, that's why you want to reflect your personality?*

*P: I think one is because it's consistent with my personality, because I think I am like this, I'd like others to know that I am strong, not someone really gentle and like an obedient girl, like a lady. And at the same time, because I'm abroad, I don't want others to think that I'm one of those easy to be bullied kind. So I think sometimes your dressing style shows what your personality is.*

**VT01 (UG, ASA)**

As shown above, VT01 describes her personality to be consistent with 'cool' style, which she believes it to be punk and rock and presents a strong identity to other people. However, it is also evident that the way she describes her 'strong' personality is closer to describing an ideal self, the way that she would like to be seen by others. In other words, VT01 likes thinking of her 'true self' as 'strong' because she would '*like others to know that I am strong*' and doesn't '*want others to think that I'm one of those easy to be bullied*'. In fact, most of VT01's self-identities are results of how she wanted to be seen by others. In a way, her personal sense of 'true self' is always determined by her social self-identities:

*P: I used to work for council, at student council, so I have come across a lot of people that we might co-organise things together etc, and they might like a cuter image. And I really want to maintain an image of a traditional Chinese, very decent and self-controlled at the same time.*

*I: And you're not?*

*P: Well, more or less, well, you don't need to say it out loud. Because I think a lot of foreigners would see it, so I have to create a good image for a Chinese.*

#### **VT01 (UG, ASA)**

The 'cool' punk and rock dressing style here seem to serve as a means to project a self-identity to other people, rather than a true construct of her personality, even though she believes her personality stays unchanged and is always part of her:

*P: Maybe it's also because of my personality, I was a bit carefree before, very cool, and strong, so I needed a lot of attention, whilst now, I wouldn't be as compelling, it's not like I've lost that part of my personality, I just think it'll be beneficial to me if I were not that compelling.*

#### **VT01 (UG, ASA)**

The excerpt above shows VT01's acceptance that her style has changed over the years and does not always have to reflect her 'strong' personality but insists the 'strong' personality is still part of her.

Similarly, KK09 believes different styles are reflection of different moods, and they express some features of 'personality':

*I: So do you feel like you are using your clothing to reflect your personality?*

*P: Yes, because I like being in harmony, like being myself. I don't like having faces, or putting masks. So why I said one day I would have this mood and I'll go for this style, because it suits me the best that day. I'll surely express myself in many ways, and one of them will be fashion, probably.*

*I: So is it right to say that you have got 3 major personalities, which are...*

*P: Probably mood more than...*

*I: More than the personality?*

*P: Yeah, I think so, the moods are expressing some special characteristic features of personality.*

### **KK09 (UG, EUR)**

The quotation above is KK09's explanation of how her three, almost contradicting styles reflect her moods. Regardless of the actual styles she prefers, she strongly believes that different moods each represent a fragment of her personality that is unchanging.

With the belief that there is an unchanging, stable personal sense of 'true self' in mind, even though there is no scientific way to prove the existence of 'true self', a significant number of participants provide reasons for their identity-inconsistent purchase based on their opinions of their 'true self'.

Some participants tended to link their personalities with their choices of styles. For example, KC28 disagreed with bohemian style because she related it with laziness:

*P: This one is quite bohemian, so it feels a bit lazy. The reason why it's in the middle is because it's not my personality; I'd wear it every now and then, when I'm at the beach or on holiday...*

#### **KC28 (PG, ASA)**

From the quotation above and table 4.1, it is clear that KC28 does not like bohemian style because she thinks the style is incompatible with her personality. However, she admits wearing it sometimes for special occasions like beach holidays. Similarly, JM06 relates her personality to that of cats:

*P: I think my personality is like a cat, like really independent and cold, I'm not an extravert, so I won't wear something wild or outstanding. I don't really want to catch people's eyes, that's why I'm mostly in cold coloured things.*

*I: So you think your clothing style is quite cold and introvert too? P: Yeah, comparatively low-key I think, because I don't really like really bright colours.*

#### **JM06 (UG, ASA)**

From the excerpt above, JM06 prefers low-key and cold styles because she thinks her personality is cat-like and independent. Therefore, her garments usually reflect her personality in terms of normcore or low-key.

Overall, most participants purchase garments based on their own perceptions of their 'true self', or in their own words, personalities. Some participants consider their personalities stable and unchanged, so their garment consumption usually reflect their personal sense of 'true self'; others think even though they have a variety of different styles, they reflect a fragment of their

unchanged personality, rather than having multiple personalities. It is worth noting that even though majority of the participants think their garments should at least partially reflect their personalities, a small group of them (e.g. KC28) are still happy to wear garments that are incompatible with their personalities, as long as there is a 'valid reason' (e.g. when KC28 is on holiday or at the beach). Therefore, the personal sense of 'true self' provides room for identity consumption, even though participants do not always consider garments consumption should necessarily reflect their personalities. In fact, moods and deindividuation are two main reasons participants provide for identity-inconsistent purchases.

#### 4.7.2 Emotions or moods

As discussed in the literature, emotion is a feeling people have in situations and could be broadly divided into primary and secondary types, according to Turner and Stets (2005). Primary emotions are shared among cultures (Ekman, 1992) while secondary emotions are a mix of two or more emotions (Turner, 2000). According to Coleman and Williams (2014), people regulate their emotions in terms of enhancing those that are consistent with their identity profile and decreasing the emotions which are inconsistent. Thus, this regulation strategy often comes with a consumption of products, and in turn this strategy explains why identity-inconsistent products are sometimes purchased (Coleman and Williams, 2014).

Participants in this research tended to use the word "moods" rather than emotion to express feelings they have in situations. Although mood and emotion do have different meanings in a psychologist's view, the two terms are used interchangeably because an emotion and a mood may feel the same from people's perspective (Beedie, Terry and Lane, 2005). Data from this research demonstrated that emotions provide rich explanations in motivations behind identity-related consumption too:

*P: Yes, I have, mostly dresses, like I would buy some dresses and think they don't suit me, but after a few months, they actually look nice on me.*

*I: Why do you think there's a difference?*

*P: I think it's just different moods, like I would find a piece of clothing that might not be suitable for the event I'm going to, or compatible with my mood recently.*

#### **HN04 (UG, ASA)**

From the quotation above, HN04's opinions of certain styles tend to change after having the garments for a while. The reason she thinks that her opinions change is because her mood changes all the time. Therefore, rather than bridging the choice of style with her personality, HN04 seems to think her changes of moods affect her change of style. This coincides with KK09's opinion discussed above in the personality section:

*I: So do you feel like you are using your clothing to reflect your personality?*

*P: Yes, because I like being in harmony, like being myself. I don't like having faces or putting masks. So why I said one day I would have this mood and I'll go for this style, because it suits me the best that day. I'll surely express myself in many ways, and one of them will be fashion, probably.*

*I: So is it right to say that you have got 3 major personalities, which are...*

*P: Probably mood more than...*

*I: More than the personality?*

*P: Yeah, I think so, the moods are expressing some special characteristic features of personality.*

#### **KK09 (UG, EUR)**

From the quotation above along with the table of participants characteristics, KK09 has three different, if not contradicting styles, to *'express herself'* based on three different moods. Specifically, KK09 likes classy styles, rock style and vintage styles. Even though she admits that the three styles sometimes contradict each other, they only represent one specific mood that KK09 is in at the time. However, instead of admitting her identity-inconsistencies in terms of garment styles, KK09 rather finds harmony by admitting the malleable nature of moods, rather than relating the choice of three styles based on her multiple personalities (or multiple selves in fact). Moreover, KK09 thinks each one of the three moods represents *'some special characteristic features'* of her personality. Therefore, even though KK09 has multiple and inconsistent styles, the reason she provides for identity-inconsistent consumption is still based on a single, personal, sense of true personality, that can have a variety of different moods.

Some participants tend to use their moods or emotions as feedback. That is, the discrepancy between standards and performances may lead to negative emotions and motivates self-regulations (Burke and Stets, 2009). For example, HN04 feels *'bored'* of being the same person with the same styles all the time:

*I: [...] But is there any style that you don't like, but you'd still wear it?*

*P: Hipster style.*

*I: Would you wear hipster clothing?*

*P: Yeah.*

*I: Why?*

*P: Sometimes when I want to feel younger.*

*[...]*

*I: Do you have any occasion that you'll dress in hipster style?*

*P: Like when I'm going to parties with friends.*

*I: So why would you be hipster, is it because you want to look younger?*

*P: Just a bit different, how do I put it? Like to unleash your inner self. It's like you're always that boring type of person, you would like to change a style when you're out partying.*

#### **HN04 (UG, ASA)**

The quotation above shows HN04's deliberate use of a hipster style to show that she is not always the same person as her friends, cultures, or other forces want her to be. So, even though HN04 claims that she does not like hipster styles, the boredom of wearing her everyday normcore and casual smart makes her want to change into a more exciting style. Therefore, boredom is the identity feedback from the discrepancy between her identity standards and performances, which then lead to negative emotions (Burke and Stets, 2009; Coleman and Williams, 2014).

Similarly, JM06's feeling that she has been labelled by the friends around her makes her want to escape from the identity and uses different styles:

*P: They think checked things are my style, like blue and green checked items, or anything in blue really, or anything in cold colours really. So I've got my own identity, which I feel like I've already been labelled, so I want to try something different.*

#### **JM06 (UG, ASA)**

The rebellious feeling from JM06's quotation is similar feedback to HN04's case of boredom, but stronger. This is compatible with interactional identity theorists' claim that people in social situations use strategies and mechanisms of legitimation to cope with negative feelings arising from suppressing their own feelings in social networks (McCall and Simmons, 1978). Thus, boredom is the

identity feedback and hipster styles are HN04 identity-inconsistent consumption to regulate the boredom.

Furthermore, in QY07's opinion, having items of each style indicates her boredom of only having a limited amount of styles:

*I: Then, I don't really know why you would buy a pair of wide leg trousers, I don't think it's your style really?*

*P: It's not, but I think it's okay to have 1 or 2 items of each style. Need to have a few of them of each style.*

*I: Why?*

*P: Because you can always try something new.*

### **QY07 (PG, ASA)**

From the quotation above, even though QY07 agrees that wide leg trousers are not her style, she still has got one pair of them because she always wants something new. The boredom in her case is a feedback of the day-to-day taking back control of her life.

Other participants, on the other hand, see emotion as vital part of performing identities, instead of feedback of them. According to Coleman and Williams (2014), emotions are regulated and reviewed continuously in identity performance to better enact identities:

*P: And I think it's... I get into Accessorize or something, I just must have all the hats. I like to think they are flattering, I don't know, but they make me happy, they keep my head warm, and they are in a variety of colours, like I buy hats in colours that I won't buy clothes in.*

*[...]*

*I: Is it because you used to go through that...?*

*P: Yeah, there're still hints of that in what I wear, still too much metal things but it makes me happy.*

### **BJ24 (PG, EUR)**

The above two quotations are just two examples of BJ24's use of 'happiness' for her identity-inconsistent use of garments. Throughout her two interviews, it is apparent that her style changes constantly based on the friends around her, whether to stand out from the group she does not want to be in, or to blend in with the group she is close to. However, from the quotations in the previous section, along with the table of characteristics, BJ24 continuously uses 'happiness' as the reason, if not the only reason, why she purchases identity-inconsistent garments.

This is compatible with Coleman and Williams (2014)'s claim that people regulate their emotions in terms of enhancing those that are consistent with their identity profile. BJ24's use of gothic items, even *'just hints of that in what she wears'*, is her mechanism to enhance happiness which is consistent with her identity profile.

In summary, both 'boredom' and 'happiness' are the causes for participants' identity-inconsistent purchase. It may seem on the surface that that participants in this circumstance did not intend to justify their inconsistencies. However, the fact that they must reinstate their principles indicate that Justification of personal principle (JoPP) were used to neutralise the guilt here.

#### **4.7.3 Deindividuation**

Deindividuation is a subtheme under undesired self in Lee (2009)'s original model of brand avoidance, where a brand is typically perceived to be mainstream. Therefore, the consumption of that brand may take away consumers sense of individuality and consequently causing brand avoidances. Similarly, several participants have expressed their feelings of uniqueness being important to their choice of clothing:

*P: I think the one style I probably wouldn't ever wear would be, I think this is just because I have negative feelings connected to it, it's when I was like in Plymouth, when I went to boarding school in Plymouth, it was quite preppy. I really hated it.*

*I: You hate preppy?*

*P: It's not like I don't like it, coz obviously when I was in Spain, I have to dress up and stuff. But the way the girls were dressed, on the days we were allowed to come in, there was always like once a year, we could come in without uniforms or something, and they all had their Jack Wills sweaters on, jeans, I don't even know. They'd all have the same shoes on, I just hated it, because they all just look the same. Maybe because... I don't know why, I just don't like it, I just couldn't wear it, I just think it's too simple. I'm just kind of a person that really likes when people look very different. I know I'm contradicting myself, coz I don't like goth yeah; but when people dressing differently, I like seeing a group of differently dressed people. But when everyone looks exactly the same, as in like that preppy look, I just don't really like it, maybe just because I'm around it so much.*

### **BM27 (UG, EUR)**

Although BM27's distastes in preppy might be caused by both 'negative reference group' (see section 4.4 on social identities), the emphasis in the excerpt is rather targeting on the fact that she feels negative that everyone is wearing in the same style, rather than disliking that particularly outgroup. Deindividuation, in Lee (2009)'s brand avoidance, happens when there is a brand considered mainstream. Consumers avoid sharing the value of that mainstream by boycotting certain brands to protect their sense of individuality. However, in BM27's case, it is rather a style that has been considered 'mainstream' in her college. The sense of individuality or self-identity being robbed still applies in this case. However, as BM27 admitted earlier, the deindividuation only happens when she

was at college in Plymouth. Later in her life, when she was working in Switzerland, she still wore preppy clothes because the sense of deindividuation was not there anymore. That is, the immediate surrounding environment also has an impact on why consumers still wear identity-inconsistent garments.

Overall, the reasons participants provided for identity-inconsistent consumption, based on personal sense of 'true self', varied. Most of the participants in this respect agreed that styles reflect their personalities, or some fragments of their unique personality. Some participants believed personality stayed unchanged and their styles reflect their malleable moods, which represented part of their core personality (or true self); others believed personalities change over time and therefore clothing styles changed accordingly. Moods and emotions, used by participants interchangeably, provided rich explanations in motivations behind identity-inconsistent consumption. On top of that, deindividuation was the extreme case when participants thought their personal sense of individuality and self-identity were robbed

Overall, this research identifies five personal principles claimed by five different participants including happiness, special sentiments, luxury brands, match with other things and live action roleplaying game (LARPING).

The first example of a classic personal principle is '*I buy it because it makes me happy*', and happiness alone, to BJ24, seems to be able to justify any expenditure on identity-inconsistent consumption, because happiness, in this case, is more important than everything else:

*I: Is it because you used to go through that [Goth phase]? P: Yeah, there's still hints of that in what I wear, still too much metal things but it makes me happy.*

[...]

*P: Not for special occasions just makes me feel happy. I wanted it, so I must have it.*

### **BJ24 (PG, EUR)**

The excerpt above is just one of the many examples of JoPP that BJ24 used for identity-inconsistent purchases. Throughout the two interviews, BJ24 had used JoPP of happiness to justify her inconsistent purchase on her 50+ number of hats; bracelets with spikes; gothic garments and bold dresses at nighttime. To BJ24, happiness seems to guide her consumption choices. As she described herself, *'I wanted it, so I must have it'*.

On the other hand, VT01's personal principle is her special sentiment for Burberry:

*P: Well, it's just kind of sentiment, because I like Burberry's perfumes, and small accessories, and their new lipsticks, and I like everything in that shop. So I would buy everything, even though I don't like some things that much, because I think it's a sentiment [...]*

*I: So you love Burberry so much that whatever it does, you'd try to cope with it? I can't understand that at all.*

*P: Do you not think their products are good?*

*I: I do, but I also choose other things [...]*

*P: I just like it, however illogically/*

*I: Illogically?*

*P: [...] There are some handbags that are a bit ugly, like the tote bags, like a friend of mine has got one, but then it's perfect, perfectly ugly. But then if I were to go shopping, I might get one in the end, no matter what?*

### **VT01 (UG, ASA)**

From the excerpt, VT01 uses the special sentiment to justify her partiality to Burberry products. This special sentiment came from

her brand loyalty to Burberry, and later translated into her personal principle. Therefore, even though VT01 was aware that some products from Burberry were 'ugly', she would still purchase those products because they were from Burberry.

VT01 was only loyal to Burberry because it had become a personal principle, or her extended self (Belk, 1988). On the other hand, QY07's personal principle was for luxury brands in general, even though Burberry was mentioned:

*I: And why did you choose to buy scarves from Burberry then, I feel like you have quite a complex with luxury products.*

*P: Yeah, I do, because I think luxury products, especially those European brands, are all designed for old people, or very mature women. If you look at their designs, the luxury products are mostly designed in a very mature style, they are not for a younger generation where the products are exquisite and trendy, they are really dated, which I sincerely don't think it's the style for my age. I don't think I have a high enough disposable income, and why would I spend so much money on something that expensive.*

*[...]*

*I: Yeah, I was going to say that you like... as you mentioned about the age difference. Like the brand you mentioned just now that you wouldn't buy it but you'd consider it, Karen Miller. You'd think about it because it's mature, it's like those clothes you'd wear when you're going to work. But don't you think Hermes is not the kind of products of your age? So why do you still like it?*

*P: It's like you like... [37'11]. I think the like of Hermes, is probably influenced by others, which is quite important. For example, everyone in the world including those celebrities are pursuing [Hermes], you'd be curious to find out. And it's really expensive, and always in high demand. It's not like something you can always get if you have a lot of money. And the brand has its own loyalty system*

*as you'll need to spend a certain amount of money to be able to get that specific bag. And you'll need to queue, and the quality and stuff. So if everyone's buying it, there must be some logic into this. I like it doesn't mean that I'll buy it.*

#### **QY07 (PG, ASA)**

From the excerpt, QY07 clearly disagreed with Karen Millan and Hermes' garments because they were designed for an older generation. However, because of Hermes' position in luxury brands, QY07 would still purchase garments from it and other luxury brands.

In a special case, LARPING (Live action role-playing) is CT11's special principle in justifying her inconsistent style:

*I: [...] Do you think your interest in larping and cosplay would affect your normal way of dressing?*

*P: In a way, I think of the stuff I don't usually buy, and think that could make a really good prop or something, or that could be modified into a nice piece of something, and I'll just get it.*

*I: Do you actually separate those things that would be useful for larping, and those things that you normally would wear?*

*P: Sometimes it doesn't. I could be like if I'm up for it, I feel like purple today, I'd just grab the jacket and go out, so it kind of blends tougher depending on my mood.*

#### **CT11 (UG, ASA)**

CT11's interest in LARPING has made her consumption choice broader than day-to-day usage. As a result, CT11 always would end up with garments with identity-inconsistent style for the purpose of LARPING. Nevertheless, CT11 did not strictly differentiate garments for her daily life and garments with extravagant styles to express an anime character. Therefore, the interest in LARPING has made her

choice of daily clothing both reserved and flamboyant, which were contradictory.

Consequently, there was always a need for CT11 to justify her identity inconsistent purchases. Her interest in LARPING thus provided an explanation for her neutralisation.

In summary, participants have used JoPP to neutralise the guilt arising from their identity-inconsistent purchases. It is worth noting that JoPP is often used to justify participants reasons based on their personal sense of self. In other words, JoPP is a neutralisation technique with a temporal denial of multiple identities and social identities.

#### 4.7 Summary

In summary, the qualitative data in this research thus provides an answer to show how consumers use techniques of neutralisation to cope with the stigmatised and individualised ‘moral fault’ (Skeggs, 2004). The use of eight techniques not only shield consumers from the guilt arising from the identity-inconsistent consumption (e.g. DoR; AtAV; DoOF; JoSu; ToPP), but also minimise the impact brought about by consuming garments from conflicting identities (JoP; DoIM; O/SU).

**Table 4.3** Techniques of neutralisation used in this research:

Technique	Meaning	Example
DoR	Denial of the responsibility of inconsistent purchase by shifting responsibilities to externalities;	<i>‘My friends bought it for me’</i>

AtAV	Appealing to alternative values by introducing a different value that is more important than the one in question;	<i>'I don't usually wear it, but it would give me more convenience at work'</i>
JoP	Justification of postponement by temporally shutting down the thinking process;	<i>'I didn't want to get it, but I just wanted something at the time'</i>
DoIM	Denial of importance of any wrongdoing;	<i>'I only wear that outside of my house for less than three minutes'</i>
DoOF	Denial of a garment's original form to deny any wrongdoing;	<i>'It's not a flower, it's a smart flower'</i>
JoSU	Justification of special use by associating the garment use with a more important event;	<i>'I don't usually wear this, but I'm at a wedding';</i>
JoPP	Justification of personal principle by emphasising the importance of personal principle;	<i>'I know it's not my style, but it makes me happy';</i>
O/SU	One or short time of usage to minimise the impact of	<i>'I only have three pairs of high heels in my life'.</i>

In addition, the natural focus on internal dialogues and narrative accounts of techniques of neutralisation provide explanations on how consumers defend and convince themselves when inconsistencies happen. In other words, the different functions of techniques of neutralisation reveal consumers' internal conflicts in terms of how they accept or deny the inconsistencies; which identity is more important to their personal self-concept and how consumers navigate among a plethora of identities.

## Chapter 5 Discussion

Chapter 4 offers reasons participants provided for identity-inconsistent consumption, along with their techniques of neutralisation used to defend themselves. Specifically, eight techniques of neutralisation have been used by participants to neutralise guilt arising from identity inconsistencies.

Chapter 5 discusses the findings by applying techniques of neutralisation to the reasons participants provided for identity-inconsistent consumption. The chapter can be divided into three parts. Firstly, technique of neutralisation has been discussed to demonstrate their unique functions. Next, the functions of neutralisation will be used to reveal identity hierarchies and show how consumers navigate identities when their identity projects goes wrong. Finally, a weak and reactive definition of identity projects will be proposed as opposed to an active position that is assumed in the literature.

### 5.1 Eight techniques of neutralisation

The doctoral research offered qualitative evidence that consumers use techniques of neutralisation to defend themselves from identity-inconsistencies. Overall, eight techniques of neutralisation were identified in the research, each had its own function.

Table 4.3 Techniques of neutralisation used in this research:

Technique	Meaning	Example
DoR	Denial of the responsibility of inconsistent purchase by shifting responsibilities	<i>'My friends bought it for me'</i>

	to externalities;	
AtAV	Appealing to alternative values by introducing a different value that is more important than the one in question;	<i>'I don't usually wear it, but it would give me more convenience at work'</i>
JoP	Justification of postponement by temporally shutting down the thinking process;	<i>'I didn't want to get it, but I just wanted something at the time'</i>
DoIM	Denial of importance of any wrongdoing;	<i>'I only wear that outside of my house for less than three minutes'</i>
DoOF	Denial of a garment's original form to deny any wrongdoing;	<i>'It's not a flower, it's a smart flower'</i>

JoSU	Justification of special use by associating the garment use with a more important event;	<i>'I don't usually wear this, but I'm at a wedding';</i>
JoPP	Justification of personal principle by emphasising the importance of personal principle;	<i>'I know it's not my style, but it makes me happy';</i>
O/SU	One or short time of usage to minimise the impact of	<i>'I only have three pairs of high heels in my life'.</i>

### 5.1.1 DoR

DoR in Sykes and Matza (1957)'s original work, was a technique that delinquents use to neutralise guilt. As discussed in the literature, if offenders could find ways of relieving themselves of responsibility for their wrongness, they could minimise the impact they had from social disapproval or even just a sense of wrongfulness (Cohen, 2001). Central to the idea of DoR was how offenders saw themselves as victims of circumstances beyond their control (Maruna and Copes, 2005).

In the context of consumer research, even though there was no apparent rightness or wrongness in purchasing brand with identity-inconsistence, consumers still sought to maintain a sense of consistency, even though nearly all applications of neutralisation theory to date were on consumer misbehaviour or non-participation in ethical consumption (Gruber and Schlegelmilch, 2014).

In comparison to the criminological studies, participants in this research sought to justify their inconsistencies by seeing themselves as 'victims' of circumstances beyond their control. However, the 'circumstances' were usually based on their social identities or external marketing events. For example, it was not uncommon to see participants justify their identity inconsistent purchase based on what their friends were wearing, what their culture dictated or how powerful trends and promotions were. Centre to DoR was the idea of 'victimising' oneself and consequently shifting responsibilities to externalities. That was one of the reasons why participants often used DoR to justify inconsistent consumption based on reasons for social identities and marketplace activities, because these two aspects seem to be beyond participants' control. The danger to this feeling of loss of control was that the use of DoR may eventually rob consumers of their sense of control (Maruna and Copes, 2005). The ability to control our behaviour based on long-term goals was probably the most powerful mechanism behind social order (Tangney et al., 2004) as well as the key to a happy and healthy life (Block and Wilcox, 2013).

The research has seen several forms of external responsibilities being chosen by participants to shift responsibilities externally. For example, blending in and standing out from reference groups seemed to be the most popular reason why participants chose a style that was inconsistent from their own 'preferred' styles. Other reasons including gifts from other people, gifts for other people,

culture, community culture, and marketplace activities like promotion or merchandise. What they had in common was the fact that consumers saw themselves as victims of uncontrollable force that were external to them. Therefore, it was acceptable to have inconsistencies because they too were victims.

### 5.1.2 AtAV

The second technique, appeal to alternative values was adapted from appeal to higher loyalties (AtHL), from criminological research, when offenders neutralised their guilt by claiming their unethical behaviours were justified because of a certain group to which they belonged (Sykes and Matza, 1975). Offenders were fully aware of their moral or legal wrongness but values and norms from the other group temporarily were considered to be of higher importance compared with the conventional norm (Sykes and Matza, 1975). Similarly, AtAV was used when consumers neutralised their guilt by claiming their identity-inconsistent purchase was justified because of other (if not more important) values. Like DoR, when consumers used AtAV to justify their identity-inconsistent purchases, they fully accepted their inconsistencies. However, by temporarily stressing the importance of the alternative value, consumers could shield the guilt from inconsistencies.

Section 4.2 in the previous chapter had presented several alternative values participants provided for their identity-inconsistent purchase, ranging from highlighting the functional value of leather pants (LC29) to a higher moral ground of feminism (AV30). What they had in common is participants' temporal appeal to a different value to divert the focus of inconsistencies. In other words, AtAV was a temporal exchange of importance between personal sense of self-identity and social identities, which provided room for participants to conveniently activate the value best at shielding guilt from inconsistencies.

It was worth noting that the alternative value does not always have higher values. Rather, AtAV was rather a post-action justification that provided a sense of narrative for consumers to shield themselves from guilt. Furthermore, AtAV often revealed how consumers navigated themselves among identities. For example, when OM17 was justifying her use of silver Pandora ring, she was temporally stressing the importance of her social identity (gifts from others) as opposed to her personal taste (gold jewellery). However, the temporal compromise on her personal taste did not indicate that OM17 always wore jewellery based on her social identity. Rather, the compromise was a peace of mind that OM17 had when facing inconsistencies at the interview. Nevertheless, neutralisation techniques often reveal culture by showing what it is culturally acceptable to defend in a situation (Maruna and Copes, 2005). Therefore, in this case, OM17's account also revealed it was culturally acceptable to weigh social identity more than personal identity.

### 5.1.3 JoP and DoIM

Justification of postponement was introduced by Cromwell and Thurman (2003) in their research on neutralising techniques used by shoplifters when offenders suspend the assessment of norm-violating action to a later time. Different from DoR and AtAV, JoP is a technique used by participants when they acknowledge the wrongness. That is, JoP fundamentally is a technique to minimise the impact of inconsistencies.

Similarly, denial of the importance, as one of the new themes emerging from this research, also accepts the inconsistencies. By denying the importance of trivial violation, participants also seek to minimise the impact of how inconsistencies affect them.

From this research, DoIM was often seen as a last resort. In other words, DoIM was often seen in combination with other neutralisation techniques, especially when other techniques failed

to justify the inconsistencies. For example, when NC22 tried to justify the fact that she wore pyjamas to shops that were five minutes away from her flat, she started by reasoning with hygiene and distance until she realised it was not possible to justify the inconsistencies in this way. Thus, as a last resort, NC22 used DoIM to minimise the impact of inconsistencies by denying the importance of that five minutes' distance.

#### 5.1.4 DoOF

As mentioned in the previous chapter, denial of original form was the second new theme identified in this research. Participants used DoOF to neutralise the inconsistencies by completely redefining the identity of garments purchased. Different from most of the other techniques, DoOF was the only techniques that is **in complete denial** of any wrongdoing. By introducing new definitions to the embroidered flowers, for example, AV30 managed to break the link between feminine identities and her choice of clothing. It was thus obvious that DoOF was a denial of inconsistency. Therefore, unlike other techniques, when participants were using DoOF, it probably revealed identities they want to avoid the most.

#### 5.1.4 JoSU and O/SU

Justification of special use was a new theme in this research. Participants in this research used JoSU to disconnect their own responsibility if their identity-inconsistent garments were only used for a special use. For example, Asian participants in this research particularly like using JoSU for holidays and photos. To those participants, even though they accepted they were responsible for the inconsistencies, they were exempted because it was understandable that people wore different garments to look nice on holidays or at photo shooting. The interesting idea here what participants classed as culturally acceptable. According to Maruna and Copes (2005), the origin of neutralisation theory stresses the social nature in the wider culture. In other words, accounts

participants provided to justify their inconsistencies revealed what they believed were publicly acceptable. In context, JoSU used by participants in this research reveals that people are expected to wear 'nicer' and 'brighter' garments when they were in holiday pictures, at least in the context of Asian culture. Therefore, neutralisation techniques like JoSU may reveal more about a culture than an individual (Mills, 1940).

On the other hand, one-off use or special use was first introduced by Rosenbaum et al. (2011) in their paper discussing consumer fraud via product return. In the context of product return, the misbehaviour was neutralised by consumers by claiming they had only used products once. Therefore, the fault was minimised and neglectable. In the context of identity consistency, participants in this research have been using the similar technique by claiming they only wore the identity-inconsistent garment once. Therefore, the occasion was so rare that it almost did not count. It is worth noting that the use of O/SU indicates participants' acceptance of the fault, while at the same time denying any moral obligations. It is the only technique participants use to 'accept' and 'deny' responsibilities at the same time, making it hard to determine the impact of such inconsistency.

#### 5.1.5 JoPP

Personal principle is a neutralisation technique used by participants based on a personal principle they claim to have. It is first introduced in Brunner (2014)'s research on fair trade in-commitment where consumers claim their other personal principles to be more important. These principles might vary in forms, but central to the idea is one universal rule or a set of rules that overrides any other rules that are involved in decision-making. Similarly, participants from this research demonstrated the use of JoPP to temporally stress the importance of personal principle. Therefore, the use of JoPP is a temporal departure from other

aspects of selves, stressing the importance of personal sense of self-identity.

JoPP was widely used among participants to protect their sense of 'true self'. Expressions like '*it makes me happy*' or '*it makes me look slimmer*' were often used to stress the importance of personal sense of self.

In summary, each neutralising technique has its own function that is different from other techniques. Table 5.1 summarises functions of each technique:

Table 5.1 Neutralising techniques identified and their functions

DoR	Accept wrongdoing, but denial of responsibility; may lose sense of self-control
AtAV	Accept responsibility; reveal identity navigation by stressing another aspect of self-concept
JoP	Accept wrongdoing, deny importance
DoOF	Deny wrongdoing or responsibility by introducing new rules
DoIM	Accept wrongdoing, deny importance; last resort when other techniques are exhausted
JoSU	Accept wrongdoing; accept responsibility; reveal what is publicly acceptable
O/SU	Between acceptance and denial by refusing to think

JoPP	Temporal shift from other aspects of selves to personal sense of self
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On top of that, the research acknowledges that identity projects is market mediated (Larsen and Patterson, 2018), where consumers are fed with only a commodified form of differences in terms of identity consumption (Halnon, 2005). Thus, on top of the three aspects of selves and identities, how marketing activities have contributed to identity inconsistent purchase was also identified as one of the main themes for identity-inconsistent consumption.

All in all, the doctoral research uses technique of neutralisation to explore what happens when identity projects went wrong. Although techniques of neutralisation have been applied in consumer research since 1987, the application of this theory restricts itself to the area of consumer mis-behaviour and ethical consumption. Therefore, the first contribution of this research is to provide evidence that consumers also neutralise identity-inconsistencies, hence showing there is room for neutralisation studies outside of misbehaviour and misconduct, as suggested by Hazani (1991). Moreover, as discussed in the literature, despite the popularity in accounts and self-narrative, discussion on neutralisation theory in both criminological research and consumer research still only touch its original form (Maruna and Copes, 2005). Studies on neutralisation theory tend to only borrow the theory and test the application in different field rather than investigating each technique's own function. Therefore, the second contribution of this doctoral research is to provide in-depth analysis into meaning of each technique in relation to consumers' identity projects.

## 5.2 'I' and 'We' – JoPP and DoR

The literature on self-identity research in identity projects restricts itself from addressing how different parts of self-identity would be salient at a chosen scenario. However, techniques of neutralisation naturally are good at revealing identity navigation because the

function of each neutralisation technique highlights the different part of self-identity. As shown in 5.1, JoPP, for instance, temporally highlights the importance of one's individual self (as opposed to one's social self) while DoR for blending in and standing out from a reference group stresses the importance of social self.

In Chapter 4, five personal principles have been used by participants to neutralise the guilt arising from identity-inconsistent purchase, including happiness, special sentiments, luxury brands, outfit matching and LARPING. The five personal principles are either connected to participants' personal sense of 'true self', or their emotions and moods at the time. In other words, JoPP in nature highlights the personal sense of 'true self' to combat inconsistencies. This personal sense of 'true self' has been debatable in consumer research because even though the existence cannot be proved scientifically (Strohming and Nichols, 2016), consumers still think of their 'true self' as the defining motivation behind their consumption. By using JoPP, participants have demonstrated that sometimes personal sense of 'true self' does motivate specific consumption choices, even though the choices could be inconsistent from their other values.

On the other hand, DoR concentrates on shifting the responsibilities of inconsistencies to other external factors. The other factors could range from people around us, or reference groups that we want to blend in or stand out, to a bigger picture of what we think society and culture dictates us to behave in certain ways. It is not surprising that more participants are willing to use DoR to shield themselves from inconsistencies because people tend to use external, unstable and specific reasoning for negative things (Seligman, 1991; Maruna and Copes, 2005).

The contrary between this external (DoR) and internal (JoPP) focus has divided the two techniques of neutralisation into a focus of 'I' and 'we'. That is, while JoPP naturally focuses on one's personal

sense of ‘true self’, DoR tends to highlight the social aspect of one’s self-identity. This difference in parts of self-identity thus becomes a perfect lens to check how consumers navigate their self-identities when questioned. That is to say, if JoPP has been used to defend an identity, it means consumers’ personal sense of ‘true self’ was highlighted while DoR is an indication of a conformity to social identities and role identities.

This is especially interesting when one consumer uses both (or even more) techniques for different identities. For example, AV30 has used DoOF; DoR; AtAV and JoPP for different identities. See Table 5.2 for a summary of her extended style:

Table 5.2 AV30’s extended style summary

Ideal selves	Feminist; independent; relaxed and voluntary simplicity
Preferred styles	Professional; smart casual; punk and rock
Unwanted identities	Childish; girlish; overly feminine
Inconsistent purchases	Floral pink jumper + dresses
Neutralising techniques	DoOF; DoR; AtAV; JoPP

AV30 was from what she described as a patriarchal country where the culture determined how women should dress and behave. Specifically, women in her country were expected to dress in a feminine way and move elegantly without ‘manly’ postures. Therefore, as a feminist, AV30 constantly struggled to balance her feminist ideology with her social groups, to the extent that her

friends would criticise her interests (e.g. archery and climbing as opposed to dancing) and the rough postures.

In terms of garment choices, AV30 preferred professional and smart casual style because of her feminist beliefs. On top of that, she also chose punk and rock because she thought these two styles represented independence and uniqueness. On the other hand, she did admit that the two clothing identities normally attracted the wrong groups of people. So, she was minimising the times she wore them unless she was extremely comfortable.

Overall, there were two garments she bought that were inconsistent with her preferred styles - the pink floral jumper and dresses in general. With pink and flowers often associated with feminine and girlish identities, AV30 immediately went on defending herself using DoOF (see next section for discussion on DoOF)

Regarding the dress, AV30 kept buying dresses but seldom wearing them, it was clear that she liked dresses personally but not the identities associated with dresses in the patriarchal culture. Unlike DoOF she used for her pink floral jumper, AV30 completely accepted her inconsistencies here because of personal principles and ideological clash. In fact, she has used three different techniques to neutralising the inconsistencies (DoR; JoPP and AtAV)

Neutralising techniques thus reveal a hierarchy of how she negotiates her identities in different social situations, In this case, personal identity (feminine) is not as important as her social identity (work). Moreover, when she used DoR for gaining advantage at work, the fact that she accepted the inconsistencies (just not the full responsibility) also revealed a cultural value that it is acceptable in her country to give up your personal value for a work identity. Hence, neutralising techniques also reveal what is acceptable in defending yourself in either a small group culture, or a national culture.

Similarly, VT01 uses a number of techniques to neutralise her inconsistencies:

Table 5.3 VT01's extended style summary

Ideal selves	Cool and carefree
Preferred styles	Theatrical and luxurious
Unwanted identities	Fast fashion in general; revealing, dazzling and colourful
Inconsistent purchases	Burberry
Neutralising techniques	DoR; AtAV; JoPP; DoIM

VT01 was born in China as the only child in a big family. She has been used to be the centre of the attention in her family, until several years ago, there was a new born baby took away the attention in her family. VT01 thus became conscious of this sudden lack of attention and started questioning the way she acted around other people.

In terms of her clothing style, the change of attention is evident. VT01 often struggles between standing out and blending in because she believes she needs to be more mature because she is not the youngest in the big family anymore. Therefore, even though she was interested in punk and rock styles in the past and thinks they still reflect her personality, she deliberately dresses in more mature and sweet styles now to make people around her happy.

VT01 has quite a different approach to Burberry because of her so-called special sentiments. That is, even though she disagrees with some designs from Burberry, she would still buy everything from Burberry store if she could afford them (JoPP).

Apart from the special sentiments for Burberry, VT01 has a combination of different styles to meet different needs but struggles to wear what she really likes. Instead, VT01 tends to wear garments she assumes others would like to see on her, even though those styles were only her assumptions. For example, when she was studying in Malaysia, she loved dressing in cute and little girl style because she thought other people would rather meet a Chinese girl who was submissive and nice. However, this assumption was never justified because she never asked anyone if this assumption was true. In terms of neutralisation, VT01 used AtAV usually to justify her inconsistent style around other people because she believed her social self was more important to her than her personal sense of 'true self'. In fact, her personal sense of 'true self' was very clear to her because she thought 'punk and rock' styles reflected her personality really well. However, in social situations, VT01 often gave up her personal sense of true self to please different social groups around her. In addition, VT01 uses DoIM to ignore the importance of her dressing style. In her own words, *'Because I don't think dressing style is that important to me, it's not like I need a faith there, as long as I'm happy'*, which proved her happiness was usually dependent on her social self.

Nevertheless, there was one occasion that she used JoPP to highlight the importance of her personal sense of 'true self', namely, the special sentiments of Burberry. Throughout her justification for this identity inconsistent purchase on Burberry products, VT01 solely used JoPP to stress this 'special sentiment' that she would get Burberry products no matter how ugly the products were.

In summary, different techniques' own functions indicate how participants chose navigate among their identities. To VT01, her personal sense of true self was usually given up because of the

importance of her social selves; while AV30's thought childish identity was the identity she wanted to ignore the most.

The current consumer literature has yet to identify a method to see how different aspects of self-identity reacts with each to make consumption choice. Thus, one of the most important contribution of this research is that it sheds light on revealing the process of identity navigation and negotiation by using theories of neutralisation. Prior research in consumer research literature tends to only look at how one aspect of self-identity leads to consumption. For example, how compensatory consumption from multiple self-identities lead to identity threat and consumption (Mandel et al., 2017) or how consumers use consumption to demonstrate dissociation of a group (Dunn, et al., 2013). However, the use of neutralisation theory has provided a fresh lens in investigating multiple self-identities interact in different social contexts.

### 5.3 Acceptance and denial – the case of DoOF

As highlighted in section 5.1, unlike most other techniques of neutralisation, DoOF is a complete denial of any wrongdoing. The other seven techniques of neutralisation all have a degree of acceptance of wrongdoing, and all have their own ways of shielding consumers from guilt arising from inconsistencies. Whether by shifting responsibility to external factors like reference groups or society (DoR), or accepts wrongdoing but denies importance (DoIM), the other seven techniques all acknowledge the inconsistencies. Nevertheless, DoOf is in complete denial of any wrongdoing, which in a way reveals the self-identities consumers want to avoid the most.

In AV30's example detailed in 5.2.1, the pink floral jumper was the inconsistent purchase that AV30 bought over the period of Christmas. With pink and flowers often associated with feminine and girlish identities, AV30 immediately went on defending herself

using DoOF by insisting that embroided flowers were not normal weak flowers but strong and smart flowers, and thus breaking the link between feminine and childish identities and her choice of clothing.

Comparing to her distastes in dress and the feminine style it implies, AV30's use of DoOF on pink floral jumper indicates that pink and childish styles are probably what she wanted to avoid the most. Because rather than accepting her inconsistencies while shifting responsibilities using other techniques, AV30 chose to re-define what embroided flowers mean and insisted the pink floral jumper did not represent the childish and girlish styles that were usually attached.

Therefore, DoOF usually is a clear indication of what consumers want to avoid the most.

#### 5.4 Neutralisation and identity projects

It is also worth considering here the extent to which marketplace activities impact and restrict consumer activities. From the interviews, almost all participants feel vulnerable to marketplace activities like promotions, brand loyalties, and sometimes merchandising. And in most cases, participants would always choose to use DoR as means to neutralise their inconsistencies. As highlighted in the previous section, DoR is often used when consumers shift responsibilities of their wrongdoing to other external forces including friends, family, culture, community and also marketing activities, which are all beyond their control. The worrying fact that marketplace activities seem to rob our sense of control highlights consumers' vulnerability and hence questioning consumers' agency in the marketplace.

Examination of participants' interviews suggest that consumers not only feel *'terrified [because] they say there is a black Friday sale soon'* (JO20, UG, ASA), but also were anxious about the lost of control over this need like *'sometimes I don't even want to buy*

*anything, then it's on sale, I just get in to have a look and end up with lots of things'* (QY07, PG, ASA). Despite their understanding of how marketing activities work, participants' sense of freedom to deviate is questionable.

As mentioned before, identity projects is the notion that people are actively concerned about the creation, enhancement, transformation and maintenance of a sense of identity (Belk, 1988; Larsen and Patterson, 2018). The literature proposed a question of what happens when identity projects go wrong. By using techniques of neutralisation, this research endeavours to explore how consumers justify their identity-inconsistent consumption, or in other words, what would consumers do when their identity projects goes wrong?

Throughout the data collection process, all 24 participants in this research demonstrated a deliberation in constructing, enhancing, transforming and maintaining the sense of a consistent identity, or otherwise, techniques of neutralisation would not be used to shield the guilt arising from the inconsistencies. On top of that, almost all 24 participants have experienced dissonance when they get the identity wrong.

As discussed by Thompson and Haytko (1997), consumers are always in danger of getting the identity consumption wrong mainly because identity projects are now seen as an individual choice (Smith et al., 2008). In the matter of identity, consumers are under tremendous stress as they seek to negotiate both personalised and commodified experiences (Larsen and Patterson, 2018), when they are equally fed a mass-marketed, pre-packaged, commodified form of difference (Halnon, 2005). While the majority of the consumer research in the literature sheds a positive light on how identity consumption helps consumers construct identities, there is very little effort being made to understand how consumers themselves deal with such stress in getting the identity consumption right.

The qualitative data in this research thus provides an answer to show how consumers use techniques of neutralisation to cope with the stigmatised and individualised 'moral fault' (Skeggs, 2004). The use of eight techniques not only shield consumers from the guilt arising from the identity inconsistent consumption (e.g. DoR; AtAV; DoOF; JoSu; JoPP), but also minimise the impact brought about by consuming garments from conflicting identities (JoP; DoIM; O/SU). In addition, the natural focus on internal dialogues and narrative accounts of techniques of neutralisation provide explanations on how consumers defend and convince themselves when inconsistencies happen. In other words, the different functions of techniques of neutralisation reveal consumers' internal conflicts in terms of how they accept or deny the inconsistencies; which identity is more important to their personal self-concept and how consumers navigate among a plethora of identities.

Furthermore, the current literature on identity projects, however scarcely, seem to focus on consumers' response under the pressure of getting it wrong (Harju and Huovinen, 2015; Sandikci and Ger, 2010; Scaraboto and Fischer, 2013). This is largely because the definition of identity projects indicates an active attitude from a consumers' perspective, that they would respond to a personalised but stigmatised identity projects if they get wrong. However, the data from this research has demonstrated a 'reactive' and 'weak' response from consumers when their identity projects goes wrong. In other words, consumers do not always struggle between the personalised and commodified experiences in the market. Rather, their identity consumption is often chaotic and complicated, and once they have noticed their inconsistencies, they have several strategies to create a sense of narrative to shield themselves against this stigmatised identity projects. Therefore, an adapted definition of a weak sense of identity projects is rather that consumers are mildly concerned about a sense of identity. When

the consistency is challenged, they create a sense of narrative to shield themselves from guilt arising.

### 5.5 Summary of discussion

Overall, this chapter seeks to discuss how each techniques of neutralisation have its own unique function, and how these functions could be used to explore consumers' identity navigation. Specifically, eight techniques of neutralisation have been used by participants where three themes are new to the fashion consumption context (that is, appeal to alternative values, denials of original form and Justification of special use).

Although techniques of neutralisation have been applied in consumer research since 1987, the application of the theory restricts itself to the area of consumer mis-behaviour and ethical consumption (Maruna and Copes, 2005). This doctoral research thus contributes to neutralisation theory and identity consumption by linking the two concepts together for the first time. In other words, for the first time, this doctoral research provides evidence that inconsistencies alone are sufficient to trigger techniques of neutralisation in consumer research.

In addition, despite the tremendous development in accounts and self-narratives, discussions on neutralisation theory in the literature continue to only touch its original form (Maruna and Copes, 2005). Studies on neutralisation in the literature tend to borrow the theory and test its application in other fields rather than breaking down each technique to its function. Therefore, this doctoral research provides in-depth analysis into the meaning of each technique of neutralisation in relation to the consumer identity projects.

On top of that, the doctoral research also contributes to identity navigation by presenting technique of neutralisation as an analytical tool to show identity navigation. Prior research in consumer research literature tends to only look at how one aspect of self-identity leads to consumption. For example, how

compensatory consumption from multiple self-identities lead to identity threat and consumption (Mandel et al., 2017) or how consumers use consumption to demonstrate dissociation of a group (Dunn, et al., 2013). However, the use of neutralisation theory has provided a fresh lens in investigating multiple self-identities interact in different social contexts.

Lastly, the discussion in this chapter re-defines the strong and active sense of identity projects. By looking at how consumers use techniques of neutralisation to justify their identity-inconsistent consumption, it is clear that participants have their own mechanisms to create a sense of narrative for their identity projects. That is, this doctoral research challenges the view that consumers are active identity seekers who constantly construct, transform and negotiate their identities in the stigmatised market-mediated identity projects. Rather, this doctoral research argues that consumers use a defence mechanism to create a sense of narrative to shield themselves from inconsistencies when their identity projects go wrong.

## Chapter 6 Conclusion

### 6.1 Introduction

The final chapter will start with listing the contributions of this research, followed by discussion on the implications of the research findings. After that, section 6.4 will address the limitations. Finally, section 6.5 will conclude the doctoral research with recommendations for future research.

### 6.2 The research and research questions

The doctoral research has sought to explore the question of what happens when identity projects go wrong. In particular, the doctoral research aims to investigate how consumers perceive and justify their identity-inconsistent consumption. From the literature, it is clear that much of the research in consumer research focussed on how identity consumption contributes positively to consumers' identity projects and research on what happens when identity projects go wrong remains scarce (Larsen and Patterson, 2018). On top of that, even among the few studies on how consumers might respond under the pressure of getting the identity projects right, a strong and active role of how consumers might react is assumed.

Therefore, this research sought to understand what happens when the identity projects goes wrong. The research aimed to explore how consumers use techniques of neutralisation, which is a tool borrowed from criminological studies, with a natural focus on internal dialogues and narrative accounts (Maruna and Copes, 2005), to justify their identity inconsistent consumption and what the justifications reveal about identity navigation. On top of that, the doctoral research endeavours to address the gaps in the literature with the following set of research questions:

1. What are consumers' reasons for identity-inconsistent consumption?

2. How do they perceive and justify their identity-inconsistent consumption themselves?
3. What are the roles of neutralisation techniques in consumers' identity projects?
4. What are implications for consumers' identity projects?

The underlying rationale for these research questions was to explore how consumers react when their identity projects goes wrong. The fundamental philosophical underpinning was social constructionism with the belief that all knowledge is constructed socially through interactions. Therefore, this doctoral research is not about generalisability because fundamentally, culture cannot be measured but has to be observed (Armould and Thompson, 2005).

Therefore, qualitative data was deemed to be most appropriate for meeting the objectives and for building theories so that an original contribution could be made to the area of identity projects. 48 in-depth interviews were conducted on 24 female university students who were familiar with fashion styles and consumption.

Research question 1 attempted to identify the reasons consumers provided for identity-inconsistent consumption. The rationale behind this research question was to provide a base for further analysis of the techniques of neutralisation. Participants did not necessarily have a clear and definitive answer to why they purchased identity-inconsistent garments to begin with. However, by pointing out identity-inconsistent garments they possessed at interviews, the participants naturally defended their inconsistencies as suggested by Maruna and Copes (2005) suggested would happen. Therefore, research question 1 provided participants' accounts for future analysis.

Research question 2 sought to understand how consumers *perceive* and *justify* their inconsistencies. Differently from objective 1, this question focussed on the participants' views on their inconsistencies rather than on the reasons for consumption.

Research question 3 investigated the roles of neutralisation techniques in consumers' identity projects. As the discussion of research objective 1 and 2 show, each technique of neutralisation has its specific function in creating the sense of narrative for identity-inconsistent purchase. On top of that, multiple techniques used by the same participant indicate the hierarchy of identities in terms of what identities could be compromised and what cannot.

Consequently, question 4 is achieved by analysing and evaluating how consumers use neutralisation techniques to shield guilt arising from inconsistencies in their identity projects. As a result, a weak and passive definition of identity projects is proposed.

The findings of this doctoral research demonstrated the complex nature of consumption, indicating how identity negotiation can include consumers' various parts of self-identities at the same time. The findings also indicate that identity projects is not always an active and constant mental process, rather, it is a constant struggle to satisfy different needs including both social and personal.

### 6.3 Contribution

The doctoral research makes several contributions to identity projects theory both methodologically and theoretically. Specifically, the doctoral research:

1. Discovers three new techniques of neutralisation in identity research;
2. Explores the functions of each technique of neutralisation;
3. Use the function of technique of neutralisation to reveal how identity navigation works;

4. Establishes a weak and reactive definition of identity projects as opposed to a strong and active definition assumed in the literature.

Overall, the four contributions of this doctoral research are the use of the role of neutralisation in the identity projects, the explanation of each neutralisation techniques' unique function, the use of neutralisation techniques' function to reveal identity navigation and the establishment of a weak and passive definition of identity projects, as opposed to a strong and active definition of identity projects.

First, the doctoral research uses techniques of neutralisation to explore what happens when the identity projects goes wrong. Although techniques of neutralisation have been applied in consumer research before, the application of the theory restricts itself to the area of consumer mis-behaviour and ethical consumption, where there is a clear distinction between moral rightness and wrongness. However, as suggested by Maruna and Copes (2005), there is strong evidence to suggest that there is room for neutralisation studies outside of misbehaviour and misconduct (Hazani, 1991), because fundamentally, the theory of neutralisation is of a tool individuals use to protect their self-concept from inconsistencies. Therefore, for the first time, this doctoral research provides evidence that inconsistencies alone are sufficient to trigger techniques of neutralisation in consumer research.

Second, despite the tremendous development in accounts and self-narratives, discussions on neutralisation theory in the literature continue to only touch its original form (Maruna and Copes, 2005). Studies on neutralisation in the literature tend to borrow the theory and test its application in other fields rather than breaking down each technique to its function. Therefore, this doctoral research

provides in-depth analysis into the meaning of each technique of neutralisation in relation to the consumer identity projects.

Third, the research also contributes to revealing identity navigation by linking techniques of neutralisation as an analytic tool. Prior research in the field tends to only look at one part of self-identities and how they contribute to consumption. However, the use of neutralisation theory has provided fresh lens in investigating how multiple self-identities interact in various situations.

Finally, this doctoral research re-defines the strong and active sense of identity projects. By looking at how consumers use techniques of neutralisation to justify their identity-inconsistent consumption, it is clear that consumers have their own mechanisms to create a sense of narrative for their identity projects. That is, this doctoral research challenges the view that consumers are active identity seekers who constantly construct, transform and negotiate their identities in the stigmatised market-mediated identity projects. Rather, this doctoral research argues that consumers use a defence mechanism to shield themselves from inconsistencies when their identity projects go wrong.

In terms of other smaller side contributions, this doctoral research provides evidence of identity inconsistent consumption and its popularity. Identity-inconsistent consumption is under-researched with the exception of Suzuki and Satoshi (2012)'s research on how cultural differences affect synthetic and dialectical thinking. The majority of the research concentrate on identity in conflicts, assuming the connection between identity conflicts and inconsistent consumption (e.g. Ahuvia, 2005). However, this research provides evidence that identity-inconsistent consumption may have very little relevance to identity in conflicts, but is simply a result of consumers' getting the identity projects wrong.

On top of that, three new techniques of neutralisation have been introduced to understand consumers' reasons for identity-

inconsistent purchases. Among the three new techniques, denial of the original form (DoOF) is completely different from the rest of the neutralisation techniques. By denying the original form, it is evident that consumers was in complete denial of any wrongdoing, as opposed to any other neutralising techniques which only focus on shifting responsibilities or introducing new values.

#### 6.4 Implications

From an academic perspective, knowledge of how consumers use neutralisation techniques for their identity projects contributes to the advancement of consumer culture. In terms of practical implications, how marketing managers can use this weak sense of identity projects to create the neutralisation-like sense of narrative should be helpful to stimulate consumption. Nevertheless, it is vital to locate this study in the academic perspective. That is, the theoretical underpinning and the research strategy of this doctoral research determine the theory building nature of this research, as opposed to the focus of generalisability. Consequently, the practical implication of this doctoral research should be interpreted at the theoretical level.

The practical implications of this doctoral research mainly lie in the following three areas:

a. Evidence of identity-inconsistent purchase;
b. Techniques of neutralisation;
c. Weak sense of identity projects.

First, the doctoral research provides evidence that consumers' experienced dissonance when their garments' identities were inconsistent with their preferred identities. Even though participants had means to neutralise the inconsistencies, the fact that they felt 'uncomfortable' when being reminded of their inconsistencies suggest identity-inconsistence would prevent

purchase. There is research suggesting that additional information (in this case, identity), may increase risk aversion (Caplin and Leahy, 2001). Therefore, if a garment retailer has already achieved competitive advantage in other prospects (e.g. quality or price), the extra effort spent on creating an identity may cause avoidance. Furthermore, when a brand has a specific niche target market (e.g. Blue Banana for gothic styles), consumers' decisions to purchase and avoid may be based on identity heuristics, especially when they are under time pressure. Thus, such brands may want to limit the distinction of its target style (e.g. gothic style) and blur it with other similar styles (e.g. rock, punk style) by introducing new lines of garments to increase target markets.

Second, the findings in this doctoral research suggested that participants use the techniques of neutralisation to create a sense of narrative to neutralise their inconsistencies. These techniques are often used to shift responsibilities to externalities (DoR) or to create additional values (AtAV) after consumption. However, marketing managers may also use these techniques to suggest consumption in their marketing promotions. For examples, promotional slogans like '*new year, new style*' (DoR), '*happiness is the reason why I like it*' (JoPP) may internalise the neutralisation techniques and thus promote consumption. In addition, the findings in this doctoral research also indicated that culture, community and friends (i.e. social selves) were the main reasons consumers chose to avoid certain styles and brands. Therefore, marketing managers may choose neutralisation techniques that temporally focus on personal sense of true self (e.g. JoPP) to shift the attention from social self to personal sense of true self.

Third, a weak and passive sense of identity projects was suggested in the doctoral research, as opposed to the strong and active definition in the existing literature. In other words, consumers do not always care about their identities unless they are reminded. Therefore, in terms of practical implications, even if there are

consumers who actively seek to construct, transform and negotiate their identities for their identity projects, the majority of the participants in this research have demonstrated that their choices of fashion consumption are mainly a result of social activities. Therefore, retailers are recommended to concentrate on conventional marketing strategies in terms of creating the social environment, rather than solely creating the identity for a niche target market.

Finally, the research would be potentially valuable for policymakers and strategists in public sectors. Public policy makers could use an increased understanding of how ordinary people defend their guilt to determine which part of their self-identities were salient, and consequently to develop marketing campaigns that encourage consumers to activate either the personal sense of self-identity or the social side of self-identity. (for example, depending on the techniques used by consumers, policy maker can choose to target on their social lives if they are using more external reasons like DoR or DoIM, or personal sense of 'true self' if they use JoPP more often).

## 6.5 Limitations

All research has limitations, therefore, section 6.5 will address some of the limitations of this doctoral research in terms of sampling, discursive consciousness and interview settings.

Firstly, most participants were female students who were at UWE. As a result, the overall sample consisted of young and educated female individuals, with lower disposable incomes compared with professional workers. That is, compared with people from other age groups or occupation, participants for this doctoral research were less likely to have access to more expensive fashion brands, rather than 'typical' student brands (e.g. Topshop or Primark). Moreover, although participants do have access to most fashion shops online, the availability of physical retailers in the area of Bristol limit and

shape their fashion choices. Therefore, the wider implication of this doctoral research needs to be considered with caution. Nevertheless, this doctoral research is a qualitative research that seeks to build theory on how techniques of neutralisation relate to a weak sense of identity projects. Therefore, the doctoral research has its focus on explaining the behaviour of ordinary participants, rather than seeking to represent a wider population. Having said that, future research can include a different range of sample to see if social classes, genders, occupations (at work identity play especially) could enrich the literature largely.

Next, at a methodological level, semi-structured in-depth interviews were selected as the most appropriate research methods for this doctoral research. However, one unavoidable limitation on in-depth interview is what people say and do in real life. In other words, the attitude behaviour gap (Ajzen and Fishbein, 1969). On top of that, the 48 interviews were conducted in a closed office with a recording device, as opposed to a natural setting where fashion consumption usually takes place. So, another criticism could be data gathered in the interviewing room was compromised because the experiences of consumption usually take place in the marketplace.

Moreover, one criticism often associated with interviews relates to the difference between discursive consciousness and practical consciousness (Bourdieu, 1977; Giddens, 1989). That is, interviews happen after the event, therefore, interviewees can only construct an unsatisfactorily washed out account of what might have happened (Thrift and Dewsbury, 2000). This 'discursive consciousness' often challenges the reliability of interviews on mundane consumption in social practice (Thrift, 2000), because it suggests mundane practices are habitually done (Bourdieu, 1977; Hitchings, 2011). Even though this research does not place itself in the area of social practice, fashion consumption could be perceived as a mundane practice to certain consumers. Therefore, following

from this criticism, it could be contended that participants in the interviews for this doctoral research were re-constructing their experiences of shopping, rather than describing the true experiences of what happened when they were shopping.

One way to address this criticism of discursive consciousness is to look at the design of this research. The research used techniques of neutralisation as tools to make sense of consumers' own reasons for identity-inconsistent consumption. In other words, the researcher acknowledges the intrusive nature of interviews and recognises participants' consumption might have been done habitually. Therefore, instead of building theories based on participants' reasons for identity-inconsistent consumption, the researcher used techniques of neutralisation to analyse and evaluate their accounts. In other words, the reasons why participants wore identity-inconsistent garments were not important, but rather, how participants defended themselves were the focal point of this research. Consequently, even though at the interview's participants were asked to 'remember' why they bought and wore garments, it was the techniques of neutralisation they used 'at the interviews' that formed the themes of this research. Thus, this doctoral research is not a research asks participants to talk about their mundane practice where their accounts are compromised.

On top of that, as discussed in chapter 3, there are methods to help with the interview process so that participants can talk about their experiences. Hitchin (2011) lists five methods to help with the interview process and these were used throughout the interviews.

<b>a. To ask about the seemingly obvious;</b>
<b>b. To present alternative;</b>
<b>c. To suggest hypothetical situations;</b>
<b>d. To allow time;</b>

**e. To attend to how respondents react.**

It could be argued that an observational study could minimise the impact of discursive consciousness and provide rich qualitative data from a different perspective. In observational studies, consumers may spend less time contemplating reasons for consumption and purchase garments 'practically' without justification. However, observational studies often 'describe' a phenomenon (Taylor and Bogdan, 1998) rather than 'explaining' the underlying reasons. The aim of this study is to understand how consumers justify their identity-inconsistent consumption, while a research method only 'describes' the phenomenon is not capable of exploring fundamental reasons. As a result, in-depth interview were considered to be more appropriate than observational studies.

#### 6.6 Future research

Identity projects is a topic that is of growing interest's consumer culture research. Therefore, there are many opportunities for other research to be added to this area. Based on the previous two sections on implications and limitations, several avenues of future research could be interesting.

As mentioned in the previous section, a potential limitation of this doctoral research might be its reliance on only qualitative data from interviews. While this limitation has been addressed in the previous section, future research could incorporate other forms of data to triangulate or enrich the data findings from this research. For example, longitudinal participation observations might enrich the literature in terms of how consumers' identity projects change over time. Further, given the increasing amount of online consumption, netnography is a research method that holds great potential for future consumer research.

Similarly, as discussed in section 6.4, this doctoral research limits itself to recruiting only female university students in a university based in the southwest of the UK. Although students from different levels of studies were used, future research could use participants from diverse socio-economic classes to explore if consumers with more disposable income would use a different set of neutralisation techniques for their identity projects. Furthermore, future research could also investigate which identities consumers are more likely to defend, based on demographic information like gender, socio-economic class and culture to establish relationships between neutralisation techniques and demographic information.

Also of importance would be the exploration of neutralisation techniques used in contexts other than fashion consumption. Fashion consumption was chosen for this doctoral research because prior research has demonstrated that garments are important for self-presentation (McNeill, 2017). However, other areas like mundane consumption and conspicuous consumption may provide interesting data on identity-inconsistent consumption and how it is justified.

Furthermore, considerable work remains to be done on how functions of neutralisation techniques can be developed further to investigate more controversial situations. For instance, the sample used in this research is largely undergraduate students who only started experimenting styles because they have just got the freedom. Different life stages could be compared to see how choices of styles can change and how consumers at a different life stage might react to this identity-inconsistencies. It will be interesting to see if they have a totally different set of defence mechanism to shield the guilt, or if they are more willing or less willing to defend. Further, professionals who work in fashion industry (e.g. fashion bloggers or models) who potentially have more pressure in getting their 'identity projects right' could be

recruited to explore their neutralisation procedures if their project goes wrong.

## 6.7 Conclusion

As stated at the introduction of this doctoral research, consumers use consumption to express their identities. A tremendous amount of research has been conducted in consumer research to demonstrate how consumers use consumption to construct, transform and navigate their identity projects. However, much of the previous research focussed on how identity projects help consumers positively. The question of 'what happens when identity projects goes wrong' is under researched. Moreover, the existing definition of identity projects assumes a strong and active role. In other words, consumers are actively concerned about constructing, transforming and negotiating their identities (Larsen and Patterson, 2018). However, the qualitative data from the 48 interviews of this doctoral research demonstrate that consumers, on the other hand, have a weak and passive attitude to their identity consumption until they are questioned about it. And even then, participants use techniques of neutralisation as defence mechanisms to shield guilt arising from inconsistencies.

Overall, provides a theoretical contribution by conceptualising techniques of neutralisation into identity projects. In addition, the doctoral research provides answer to the question of 'what happens when identity projects goes wrong'. The data from the in-depth interviews demonstrate how consumers use techniques of neutralisation to shield themselves from guilt arising from identity-inconsistent consumption. Furthermore, the doctoral research proposes a soft and passive definition of identity projects as opposed to the assumption of a strong and active definition. Finally, the doctoral research offers some managerial implications by supplying techniques of neutralisation in promotion that may be helpful in stimulating consumption.

## 6.8 Final reflection

Even though this doctoral research contributes to understanding consumers' identity projects, the following discussion is worth being presented as a researcher's personal development and intended publications and conferences.

Firstly, at the screening interview stage of data collection, I have deliberately filtered potential participants that have expressed an indifferent feeling towards fashion and choice of styles due to the aim of this research. However, being a largely indifferent shopper myself, I felt hard to relate to those participants who have strong and clear understanding of fashion styles and how they would use fashion commodities to communicate various (sometimes contradictory) identities to me. Even this 'distance' was intentional to begin with, I should have shown more interests during interviews on participants' passionate and creative discussion on how they experiment their self-identities. As a postgraduate researcher myself, I forgot that most UG students are at the age of experimenting different styles and they probably have just left their home (or even home countries) for the first time. Naturally, it will lead to many contradictions in identity-consistencies.

Second, in terms of social media 'lurking', the phase between the first and second interviews, I should have asked participants directly and instantly why they had their identity-inconsistent purchase when they had just posted photos online, to prompt for more immediate response, rather than waiting for the second interview where they had to remember and re-created the memory (which resulted in more discursive consciousness). Having said that, I only had my ethical approval for 'lurking' instead of 'striking for conversation' on participants' social media. However, this could easily be prevented if I already planned to have this immediate response and included this in my ethics approval.

Finally, the doctoral research largely locates itself in the development of consumer culture, which is the area of publication that I am looking for. Therefore, journals including Journal of consumer marketing and Journal of Consumer Research are potentially the areas I want to publish my research.

During the 5 years of research, I have attended and presented at various symposiums and conferences including:

1. Attending and presenting at UWE doctoral symposium 2015; 2018;
2. Attending and presenting poster at Consumer Culture Theory conference, 2018 in Odense, Denmark;
3. Attending and presenting at ESRC funded doctoral symposium at University of Glasgow in 2015; and London in 2016

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## Appendix I Flyer - English

### Do you like shopping?

I'm a PhD student doing my thesis on consumer behaviour in UWE.

As part of my research I am running interviews. If you know your style and like shopping, I'd love to have a chat with you about your purchases.

Not only will you get a chance to share your views and contribute to some exciting theories, you may also learn something about your own purchasing behaviour!

As a small token of my gratitude, you will receive a **£10 Amazon voucher!**

There will be 2 interviews within 2 months. Each interview will take up to 1 hour!

So if you are interested in helping, please contact me below to find out more!

Heather: <a href="mailto:Zanbvrus.du@gmail.com">Zanbvrus.du@gmail.com</a>

Appendix II Flyer - Chinese

喜欢逛街？热衷买买买？

我是UWE Business School的一名中国研究生

我手上现有一个你可能感兴趣的研究，需要再两个月的时间内完成两次45-60分钟的采访。为此，您将有机会获得价值10英镑的Amazon抵用卷。

采访的内容正是您所感兴趣的着装风格与时尚潮流。

说不定因此您还能发现自己不为人知的消费习惯，并且对学术的发展起到积极的作用哦。

如果您有兴趣的话请以如下的形式联系我！

源青:	源青:	源青:	Heath)源青:	源青:	源青:	源青:	源青:	源青:	源青:
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University of the  
West of England

### Appendix III Consent form

#### Consent Form

Name of researcher: Yuanqing Du

1. I understand the purpose of this research.
2. I understand that taking part in this research is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving any reason.
3. I understand that all information about me will be treated in strict confidence and that I will not be named in any written work arising from this study.
4. I understand that the researcher will be discussing the progress of her research with her supervisors at University of the West of England.
5. I understand that any information about me will be used solely for research purposes.
6. I understand all data will be coded and encrypted, so no identity could be traced.

Name of Participant and signature

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## Appendix V – Interview transcription AV30 and AV30 -2

### Transcription AV30

I: Thank you for coming to the interview, I probably should've done the brief with you before I started, but this is a consumer research on consumer behaviour across culture. If you need a proper debrief about the ultimate meaning or objective of this research, I'm gonna do it after the second interview to you, okay?

P: Okay.

I: Otherwise I have covered the consent with you, and there will be a £10 gratitude to you after the second interview to you as well, where you can either choose cash or amazon voucher, which I don't mind but tell me later.

P: Okay. Thank you.

I: So can I start by asking some questions about yourself, like what you are doing in uni, and which year you are in? Why did you choose to come to Bristol, or UWE, specifically?

P: Okay, I'm doing my master here in science communication. And I chose Bristol, I chose England because this country has the [widest] choice with such degree. I was particularly interested in science communication. I chose Bristol just because, I don't know, I liked the description of the university, I like the campus, and there was an opportunity to get into here, so I did it.

I: Okay, how did you get in here? Did you apply oversea like directly from Russia?

P: Yeah, I applied directly from Russia, I sent my recommendation letters from my teachers.

I: Like references?

P: Yeah, references. I had to collect references from my university teachers, which was kind of hard, because I haven't seen them for

3 or 4 years, but they were really helpful, they were really nice. And I had to get reference letters from my employer, she was really nice too. And I had to collect tons of documents for my visa as well, because it was really hard to obtain English visa.

I: Is that Tier 4 visa you are having?

P: Yeah, it's Tier 4.

I: Why science communication, and what do you do for science communication?

P: Science communication, because I have always been interested in science, but for some reasons I chose another major for my university initially.

I: What was your major?

P: Chinese language and culture, basically.

I: I should've done the interview with you in Chinese.

P: Yes that would be a bit of struggle for me now. The thing is [science communication] is the closest I can get to science without actually doing science. So, basically the meaning of science communication is communicating science to people, like explaining stuff, doing kind of entertainment in science field, just basically connecting scientists and lay people.

I: Are you trying to bridge the gap between science and the public basically?

P: Yeah.

I: Yeah, make sense. So you said you are doing master in science communication, and you started about 4 months ago, 3 months ago?

P: Yeah, I started in September.

I: So when you are not studying here, what do you like doing? Do you have any hobbies, interests, stuff?

P: I like drawing, nothing too special. I also like, I'm a bit crazy about analysing movies and film, I like to watch videos about these. Like why direct this, why screen-write this, how these colours influencing our perceptions and stuff. I'm just crazy about such videos, my friend doesn't understand me on this.

I: Is that documentaries you're talking about? Like how to film, or is that actually film?

P: It's actually analysing the movie. They take some movies, I don't know, for example, Silence of the Lamb, and then look at how the frame is done, and look at how it influences our thoughts [when] watching the movie. [...] Look why he's dressed like this, look at the colours, so basically they analyse how movie influences our feelings and thoughts through non-verbal means. For some reasons, I really like it.

I: It sounds really interesting, I think I remember watching one of these, how different colours, especially...

P: I think we are talking about the same video, it's really famous. I have tons of channels with this content, and I really love this.

I: Okay. I think I was thinking about the Grand Hotel Budapest, that one is quite colourful and the director made another movie, it's probably Amelie?

P: Amelie? It's not the same director. It's a French director. Aww, what's his name? Whatever, but it's not the same director. Anyway, I also like popular science videos, especially about biology and neuroscience and stuff like that.

I: Science videos? Like telling you why things are, or is it like...?

P: Some of them are literally teaching you about stuff, the others analyse some narrow concepts like, I don't know, why memory works this way, or...

I: Like psychology?

P: Yes, not so much about psychology but more about neurology.

I: Neurology? Neural science?

P: Yeah. Or what were the symbols of kings' power in medieval times, surprisingly [...] extremely interesting videos, so yeah, I like stuffs like that.

I: Like very scientific documentaries basically?

P: Yeah, but small[er], I usually watch them on Youtube.

I: Oh yeah, okay, fair enough. There might a couple of videos that... I'll talk about this later, but watching those film and movies, and painting, anything else?

P: Um, let me think. Surprisingly enough, I like videos about make-up and stuffs sometimes.

I: About?

P: Make-ups.

I: Make-ups?

P: Yeah, and I like trying doing this sometimes, like really change the way of my make-up. I just like trying it and see how it looks.

I: Do you follow fashion bloggers, or like V-loggers basically?

P: Yeah, I follow one, but she is the best.

I: What's her name?

P: I don't remember. I can send you the link afterwards.

I: If you want, yeah. I've got a friend doing this now as well, and she's my colleague in uni. Well, she's a PhD student as well, and her research is on how marketing companies change influence on their bloggers, like fashion bloggers and how it directly influences the way of the market, like consumer market. It's quite interesting because she's quite interested in the area I think. So did you say

that you did your major in Chinese and culture? Chinese language and culture?

P: Yeah.

I: Were you in China for a bit then?

P: Yeah, I lived in China for 1 year after my 4<sup>th</sup> year in university. Yeah, I lived in Jilin, it was extremely good.

I: Probably a bit cold?

P: Um, it was okay. Yeah, it was cold in winter, and we have troubles for heating, but scenic was amazing, yeah, one of the best years in my life I think.

I: Cool. Have you been to any other places in China yet?

P: Yeah, I've been to Beijing and Shanghai and Xi'an, and Dalian...

I: You have been to more places than I have. Was that for tourism purposes or was it for research?

P: Like literally half of it was for tourist purposes, Dalian and Shanghai; and Xi'an and Beijing for work purposes.

I: Work and Shanghai and Dalian for tourism.

P: Yeah.

I: Okay, have you been to any other places in the world apart from China then?

P: Yeah, I've been to quite a few I think. I've been to Greece a lot, Greece and Cyprus. And I've been to France when I was little, to Disneyland. And I've been to Germany just last year and I visited my aunt and uncle. I've been to Munich and it was really good, so fun.

I: Mostly Europe then?

P: Yeah, mostly Europe.

I: I suppose it is closer isn't it, to Russia, isn't it? Comparing to America and stuff?

P: Comparing to China as well. Well I have to go to China from Moscow, so it's like 8 hours.

I: Oh! I always have that image that Russia is directly above China.

P: Yeah, that's the thing, Russia is too big. If I'm going from Moscow, it's literally 8 or 9 hours.

I: 8 hours! If I fly from London to Shanghai, it's about 8, well it's about 11 hours. Well, I suppose most of the time on the plane was actually in Russia. Cool, traveling stuff. Do you like shopping?

P: Yeah, more or less.

I: More or less, how often do you shop?

P: It's hard to say because I do it spontaneously, usually.

I: Spontaneously, okay.

P: Yeah.

I: Do you prefer to shop online or offline?

P: I like online shopping most of all. I think I like online shopping for clothes more than going to real shops, because they rarely have my sizes, and that leaves me a bit disappointed. But for all the other stuff I like to buy in real life.

I: In real life. That's virtual life [...]. All the other stuff meaning, like grocery or...?

P: Like groceries and I don't know, graphic novels, and...

I: Anything else, basically?

P: Yeah, everything else like toys, I don't know...

I: Toys. I'm not going to dig any deeper for toys, but anyway.

P: You went there, okay.

I: When you are doing online shopping for clothing, where do you normally go?

P: ASOS. ASOS.com.

I: Yeah?

P: Because they have a full house section for me, petite or something?

I: Petite.

P: Yeah, for small people. And the clothes from this section really, you know, okay for me.

I: Anything else? Anywhere else I meant.

P: I tried a few other websites, but the problem is they are Russian, they are in Russia.

I: That's fine.

P: So I was on a website with different hoodies, I like hoodies.

I: Do you like hoodies?

P: Yeah, I really love hoodies. And what else? I think I shopped on some other Russian website for funny shirts, shirts with crazy pictures.

I: Shirts with crazy pictures?

P: Yeah.

I: What's a crazy picture?

P: I don't know, some fun stuff. I remember I had a picture of Leia and Chewbacca, but they look like cartoons, and Leia was playing Chewbacca's hair, in the same way as in Star War.

I: Is it on the shirt, like that kind of shirt?

P: No, like T-shirt.

I: Oh T-shirts. Sleeveless T-shirts?

P: Yeah.

I: So shirts or T-shirts.

P: Yeah.

I: With crazy pictures, okay. Um... when you are in Britain, well, Bristol, where do you normally do your shops? Where have you been? It could be online as well.

P: Um, well, I did online shopping here already. And I went to Cabot Circus, I went through normal stuff like H&M, Zara stuff.

I: Where have you been apart from H&M and Zara?

P: I went to Matalan here near ASDA.

I: Yeah I know where it is yeah.

P: I literally went there just to buy my red pants.

I: Is that chino?

P: What?

I: Is that chino?

P: Chinos? I have no idea. The thing is, this is supposed to be male pants for a boy aged 12.

I: Okay.

P: I was so proud buying that.

I: It works. So online you normally go with ASOS when you are in Britain; offline you probably go for the mainstream kind of clothing, high street clothing. Is there any shop offline that you would never go?

P: You mean, that I don't like?

I: You don't like yeah.

P: Over branded? Over expensive? Like...

I: Oh, over expensive like luxury brands?

P: Yeah, not because I can't afford them, but I wouldn't buy them anyway because it just makes no sense to me to spend this much money on clothes.

I: How much money is a lot of money to you, on clothing?

P: I wouldn't pay like... I mean, if you are talking about shirts or pants, I think £100 is way too much. I don't know, £70 is still...

I: Still a little bit...

P: Yeah. It's a bit hard for me to analyse this, because you know, I have different currency. So I don't have this feeling of pounds, I always have to transfer...

I: So does it mean that you would never buy clothes probably from Harvey Nichols?

P: What?

I: Harvey Nichols?

P: Harvey Nichols?

I: Okay, House of Fraser?

P: Oh yeah, I don't think so.

I: You don't think so, just over-priced clothes. Any particular like other shops that you wouldn't go to apart from being a bit too expensive?

P: For example, I would never buy luxury watches or something.

I: Luxury watches?

P: Yeah, the thing is I met another person who's crazy about [watches], he literally just went crazy about, you know, ran to the shop. He was like oh my god, I want this watch.

I: Who is that?

P: You don't know him, I just met him once.

I: Is that your friend?

P: He's not my friend, he's a...

I: Acquaintance?

P: Acquaintance of my friend.

I: Acquaintance of your friend?

P: And we went to town together, and he was all about luxury branded stuff. And he literally went to the shop, and he was like oh my god, I want this watch for new year and stuff, you know. It's extremely expensive, extremely luxury, just over-priced watch. I can't understand this, this is just a watch, why would you spend this much money...

I: Okay, you don't like over-priced watch either. Any particular style you don't like though, for clothing?

P: Okay, let me think for a sec.

I: Or let's start with the style you normally go for first I guess. Like what kind of style do you pull it off on daily basis, or you like wearing?

P: Ah, okay. Surprisingly enough, I like office style.

I: Office? Office lady like?

P: Yeah. I even wear it in everyday life.

I: Pretty smart.

P: I guess yeah. I just feel comfortable in this, and I feel a little bit, you know, more mature.

I: Okay.

P: Yeah, but normally I really like a little bit rock style.

I: Rock style?

P: You know, heavy boots and hoodies, and you know, leather jacket, and stuff like that.

I: A little bit punky.

P: Yeah, a little bit punky, you are right.

I: Okay, anything else? Are you going through your wardrobe at the moment?

P: Yeah. I don't like overly, you know, stereotypically overly feminine stuff.

I: Like girlish stuff?

P: Yeah, like girlish, extremely girlish.

I: Like can you give me an example of extremely girlish style? Is it to do with colour, or is it to do with...?

P: Like shirts with huge [...]

I: Huh? Oh, the really deep V-neck stuff?

P: Yeah.

I: Oh you mean too sexy?

P: Yeah.

I: You don't like too revealing or sexy?

P: Yeah. I don't like too sexy, too revealing, and when there are flowers everywhere.

I: Girlish like, like young girlish?

P: Yeah, I hate miniskirt.

I: You hate miniskirt?

P: Yeah, I feel really weird in them.

I: You feel really...?

P: Weird and uncomfortable in them.

I: Okay, fair enough.

P: It's okay, I don't really like skirt or whatsoever. I like dresses but I don't like skirts.

I: Oh, you like the really long, no, not really long, like a full body dress instead of miniskirts.

P: Yeah, and I like dresses. I sometimes wear like official office skirts to my knees...

I: Knee-length skirts?

P: Same goes to my dresses.

I: Why don't you like mini-skirts, is it because they are too short? Do you feel like they're too revealing, or is it feel like too girlish or feminine?

P: They are just uncomfortable for me, because I like to move freely, to make wide steps and stuff. I don't know, I'm trying to think why I don't like them.

I: Do you prefer pants and...

P: Yeah, I feel a bit vulnerable I think.

I: Feel what?

P: Vulnerable?

I: Vulnerable?

P: Yeah.

I: [Vulnerable] to what?

P: Wearing miniskirts.

I: You feel vulnerable towards what?

P: I don't know, I just feel not confident enough with them.

I: Confident enough, okay.

P: I feel like I can't move freely, and I have to always think about how I sit.

I: By how you sit, is like not too revealing, when you said, not because you're a little girl inside, and you'll be vulnerable towards... okay, that's fine. So apart from the miniskirt, is there anything else you don't like the style, or you wouldn't go for?

P: Hmm...

I: I should give you some pictures.

P: I think they'd help.

I: Yeah, help a little bit yeah. When I give you the pictures, can you put them into three different piles? The first one is the styles you like, and you would normally go for it; second pile is the style you don't like and you wouldn't go for it; and the third one is anything in between, like I can't decide, I really like that one, but I wouldn't wear it, or I really don't like that one, but somehow I'm still wearing it, or anything between them. And try to focus more on the styles, rather than an individual piece, if you know what I meant.

P: Okay.

I: Thank you. There you go, they are all yours.

P: Is that Taylor Swift?

I: Try not to focus on the model's face. Yeah, she is.

P: Sorry...

I: Is that the first one, then second one, then third one?

P: Yeah.

I: I think I can tell. Can I have a look at the first pile please? Thank you. It's fine I'll go through [them] with you. What style is it do you think?

P: Smart casual?

I: Smart casual, and is that the office like thing you were talking about just now?

P: Yeah, I think so.

I: And do you often wear these kinds of things?

P: Yeah, I think so. I think it's the most part of my wardrobe is like this.

I: Cool.

P: Yeah, this is literally what I'm wearing right now, just different colours.

I: So you think it's smart casual and stuff as well?

P: Yeah.

I: Even though she's wearing miniskirt?

P: Oh my god, I didn't notice. Oh you spoiled everything for me.

I: I'm sorry.

P: Oh yeah, this is a bit punky stuff that I was talking about.

I: Oh, punky. Do you... I know you mentioned about you like rock and punk stuff, is it anything related to your choice of music, or...?

P: Yeah, it literally is the music I like.

I: Punk and rock?

P: Yes, heavy one. Heavy industrial metal and stuff like that.

I: Were you in a band before or anything?

P: What? [Me] in a band? No.

I: So you just like that type of music?

P: Yeah.

I: Is there any other music you like, apart from the really heavy metal punk [and] rock?

P: I like... I'm trying to think about how it is called. What is Muse style called, because I remember it has a name.

I: Muse?

P: Muse... those kinds of groups.

I: I know they exist, but I've never listened to their music before. I can give you a few words to see if it fits. Could be acoustic? Pop? Classical?

P: I would say it's something like pop rock or something.

I: Pop rock? Like Queen?

P: Yeah, something like that.

I: Probably something like that, really light rock.

P: Also I listen to folk rock in Russian, because we have a few good groups in this, quite big bands. And I like classical music, I have several favourite composers who I really love.

I: Who are they?

P: Vivaldi and Grieg. Grieg is my favourite ever.

I: Okay.

P: And some Mozart's stuff. I think those three are my favourites.

I: It's quite diverse. I don't know about the second one...

P: Grieg. He's Norwegian. Norwegian? He's amazing.

I: I know Vivaldi and Mozart, but... Is Vivaldi the one who always likes palace kind of music or am I thinking about someone else?

P: If you are thinking about violin, it's probably Vivaldi, because he literally writes everything about violin, I love violin, that's why I love him I think.

I: Do you play violin yourself?

P: No, I play flute.

I: So you use wind, but you like strings?

P: I didn't choose flute.

I: You didn't choose, okay.

P: Yeah, my mother made me. After a certain time I was like why didn't she give me violin, and she said it would be too hard for you. No, but I like violin, and I hate flute.

I: Fair enough, I tried violin myself I just couldn't make a sound, so I gave up. So that one is...

P: Okay, I know it, this one is strange, but for some reason I really liked it.

I: Strange? Why do you think it's strange?

P: Because it's too... well actually I think she is wearing miniskirt.

I: Just forget about miniskirt, and look at the style.

P: No, it's definitely something I would love to wear it.

I: You think it's different, interesting?

P: Yeah, it's a little bit [sexier], than I usually look.

I: Yeah, but I thought you don't like sexy.

P: What?

I: You don't like sexy clothing.

P: Yeah, I don't like it, that's why I feel weird, but I really like this outfit, and I think I would definitely try wearing something like this.

I: What do you like about it?

P: I don't know, the overall look? And she's red-haired.

I: Is that the only reason?

P: I don't know, maybe it helps me to associate myself with her.

I: Okay.

P: I like the jacket, and I wear something like this, just not this shirt.

I: Yeah, like a top. Do you...?

P: And I like this clothes, I have stuff...

I: This pattern?

P: Yeah, this pattern.

I: Um, do you think these two styles are different?

P: This one is a little bit more feminine, but they are really close in my opinion.

I: Yeah, I was thinking that she's probably a bit more punk. Well, she's definitely [a] punk, and a bit of rock, but that one is just slightly more masculine than that one isn't it?

P: Yeah, yeah.

I: Is that the reason why you like this one as well, or...? Why do you [like] this one even though you don't like miniskirts, you don't like being overly sexy? Why do you still like this one?

P: I don't know, I feel like it's how I would like to be sometimes.

I: How you would like to be?

P: Yeah, she looks so you know, so confident and relaxed.

I: Relaxed and confident, is that what you want to be?

P: Yeah.

I: Although you like kind of smart casual kind of clothing, I can see they are confident-related to smart casual, but I can't see the, office lady like, it's not very relaxed, isn't it?

P: Yeah, she's more chilled. You can see she's chilled.

I: Is that the type of person you would want to be, you said?

P: Yeah.

I: Chilled and relaxed?

P: Yeah.

I: And a little bit sexy.

P: Um, maybe.

I: So when you said you don't like the feminine clothes, what kind of feminine clothes do you not like?

P: It's just... well, when you look at me, you can see that I'm not overly... I mean I'm small, I don't have curves and stuff. So I feel like I look silly in overly feminine stuff, because it doesn't work for me.

I: Have you been to China? Sorry. Okay, so when you said you don't like feminine stuff, is it because you don't like those styles particularly, or is it because you can't handle that style?

P: Well, I don't like when it's overly feminine because it just looks stupid to me, but just normally feminine stuff, yeah I'm kind of okay with it, but I don't wear it because I feel like it doesn't suit me.

I: Okay. (Sorry someone just turned the light off over there, I was just wondering what is going on). So this is the pile you wouldn't wear, this one I totally understand, 'coz it's too sexy and revealing and whatever that is, isn't it?

P: Yeah.

I: Cool, that one?

P: This one, aww, look at this. How this called, the bow?

I: Oh, the bow.

P: Yeah, the little bow, and this lashes and stuff, it's just, no, I wouldn't ever wear it.

I: Why wouldn't you wear it, is it because [of] too many details?

P: It's what I meant when I'm talking about overly feminine, I mean these.

I: Oh, these.

P: Yeah.

I: Okay, I see what you mean now. The flares and stuff and bows.

P: Yeah.

I: So you wouldn't wear anything with bows on it?

P: No.

I: Do you think it's too cute?

P: Yeah, it's too cute and too... I mean I'm small and not mature enough.

I: Are you?

P: So if I wear something like this I would just look like a 15-year-old or something.

I: That'll be nice.

P: No.

I: That one?

P: This one...

I: Everyone's looking and oh is that Taylor Swift, I said hmph.

P: The thing is, I tried wearing something like this from time to time, but I really don't like myself in such kind of things.

I: What kind of things?

P: Really feminine... well, yeah, I think we are going through the same place again and again. Really really feminine and gentle, and...

I: Is it because you ...

P: All these you know, all these gentle lines, and these tight...

I: Tight fitting?

P: Yeah, tight-fitting top and...

I: You mentioned an interesting word 'gentle', do you feel like you want to be stronger?

P: Yeah, I think so.

I: Like having a stronger image to other people, therefore, it's the reason why you don't like feminine clothes?

P: Yeah, maybe. The thing is, sometimes I try to, like a said, I tried to wear something like this, because I feel like I want to be... like this is the time for me to be feminine and stuff.

I: When is the time?

P: Like when we are going out or something.

I: Going out with friends?

P: Like, okay, this is a time for being feminine, but I just don't feel comfortable, and think I feel stupid and vulnerable and... just I don't like it.

I: Do you feel like other people are judging you based on what you [look], like what you are dressing?

P: Yeah.

I: Has anyone told you so? Like commented on your dress?

P: Yeah, usually in a positive way, but still, I feel like people notice what I'm wearing.

I: Yeah? So?

P: So sometimes I might be overthinking what I'm wearing.

I: Yeah, but it's not going to be... I meant, I've never come across anyone, apart from my mum, would probably tell me that you look

ugly, change your clothing before, you know, the Chinese stereotypical tiger mum, whatever. But, in my experience when you go out, especially, nobody would actually say something like, oh, you dress bad, you dress too feminine, you dress too cute. So have you never thought about all these comments from other people might be imaginary?

P: Yeah, I'm almost sure that they are imaginary, because I for myself don't care about what other people wear. But still, I don't know, maybe it's like anxiety or something, because I keep imagining what other people might think about me wearing this or that.

I: Yeah, but at the same time, why would you think if you wear stronger clothes they wouldn't criticise but feminine clothes they would?

P: Because I feel like feminine clothes don't look good on me. And they would think that I look stupid.

I: Stupid in what way? Like stupid is because it's too feminine? Or stupid because you can't handle the feminine clothes?

P: Because I can't handle I guess. I'm not moving feminine, I'm not... I even have a female friend who like moving feminine and like, your steps are too wide, you have quick abrupt gestures...

I: What?

P: You know like rough gestures?

I: Rough gestures?

P: Not like nice and feminine...

I: Oh, like your postures are very manly?

P: Yeah, so that's why I think that this type of clothes doesn't suit me, and I don't suit it.

I: Fair enough, poor Taylor Swift, and that one?

P: It's too... not faceless...

I: Faceless?

P: No, the Russian word is faceless, that's why I'm trying to think of how to translate it. Too dull for me?

I: Too dull?

P: Yeah, dull, boring, not interesting at all. I just look at the dress and it has no personality or anything.

I: What? Why? It has got lots of patterns.

P: I don't know.

I: It [has] its style. What style do you think that is?

P: Boho something?

I: Boho?

P: Yeah.

I: Okay. Do you normally don't like boho, bohemian kind of stuff?

P: Yeah, not really. I feel like boho is tons of, a lot of boring stuff combined together in tons of layers.

I: Okay, why do you think it's boring comparing with probably that one? Is it because it's less contrast. Is it because it's too gentle?

P: Yeah. Less contrast, extremely gentle and at the same time it's really plain, really plain silhouette.

I: Okay, is it fair to say that you don't like hippy kind of style as well?

P: Yeah, don't like it.

I: Hippy and boho, they are probably similar to each other anyway. Is it right to say that you prefer a kind of powerful clothing style, like with more contrast more personality stuff?

P: Yeah.

I: Is that the reason why you like this but not that?

P: Yeah.

I: Not even to the beach?

P: No.

I: What would you wear around beach?

P: Swimsuits?

I: Fair enough. Yeah, that one? That's a lot of contrast.

P: Yeah, that I would say, I don't know... totally I don't like it.

I: Why?

P: These little stupid animal elements, it looks extremely weird and childish.

I: Childish?

P: Yeah.

I: Okay.

P: The whole colour pattern is totally not mine. I don't like it, I don't like purple, I don't like the combination of purple and green, and hat. Literally everything. I will never wear something like this. It's so... I mean, you would think that this thing has some personality right, but I guess it's not the personality that I'm going for.

I: What sort of personality do you think this one is?

P: It's really childish and... hmm...

I: It's fine, if it's childish.

P: Yeah, it's childish.

I: Just childish then. That one? I'm a little bit surprised about that one.

P: Yeah, it's kind of office style, but it lacks personality for me, I don't like this shirt, I don't like this skirt. It's too plain.

I: Too plain?

P: Yeah.

I: So even for office lady wear, you would prefer a little bit of personality to it.

P: Yeah.

I: Like if you were her, what would you wear?

P: I would... maybe... I don't know, sleeves? Something with more interesting sleeves? I would wear a necklace, and I would wear a bigger belt or something.

I: Just to have a little bit of touch of yourself?

P: Yeah.

I: Just realised how weird this sentence sound. Yeah, that one.

P: Oh yeah, that's everything that I don't like. It's extremely revealing, sexy and feminine, and the colours.

I: You don't like black?

P: I like black, but I don't know... Oh, and the lashes.

I: Yeah?

P: I just don't like it. Everything about this is terrifying for me.

I: Not even for a Halloween party costume?

P: No, never!

I: Okay, fair enough. And why are they in the middle?

P: Because I'm not sure. This thing, I think it's kind [...] or something, I don't know, smart casual. I feel like I can wear it, I don't particularly like this, but I would wear this.

I: Have you got anything like this?

P: Yeah, I've got something like this.

I: You've got her tracksuit?

P: I've got a shirt like this, and the tracksuit. I wouldn't wear them together, but ...

I: Okay. Why wouldn't you wear them together? Do you think it's bit too...?

P: I feel like they don't really combine, and you know, Russian chavs wear this clothing.

I: Yeah, I know, same here.

P: So I wouldn't wear it to just go out or something.

I: Will you wear it if you're going to gym or exercising?

P: Yeah, sure.

I: You would?

P: Yeah. I literally wear those kinds of stuff for climbing.

I: For climbing? But nothing like normal daily uses.

P: No. No.

I: Cool, and the last one. You're still looking at it, you can't decide?

P: Yeah. It's extremely feminine, as you can see. But the thing is, I have almost this kind of dress.

I: You do?

P: Yeah. Not this silhouette, but colours, and basically... as I said, sometimes I'm trying to wear something like this.

I: Even though you don't like it?

P: Yeah.

I: Why?

P: Because I feel like I have to be feminine sometimes. I just want to try it and see how it works. And it doesn't.

I: Why do you feel like you have to be feminine, sometimes?

P: I don't know, because I'm a girl?

I: I know, is it...

P: I think it's also part of... I don't know about China, but Russian culture is a little bit paternalistic, even now. More paternalistic than British.

I: Yep.

P: And yeah, a lot of people, when I was growing up, a lot of people was like saying that I'm not feminine enough, that I should wear more dresses and stuff. And my friend, one of my best friends, is really all about those kind of stuff. And she's judging me for picking up climbing and archery, and not dancing and stuff.

I: What's wrong with that?

P: I don't know, she thinks it's not feminine enough, that I should be like learning how to dance and not to climb.

I: Do they have a set of beliefs like women should do this instead of that?

P: Yeah.

I: Are you kind of against that feeling or are you kind of feeling a bit vulnerable towards that culture?

P: I'm against this kind of stuff, but I feel like I will be more successful if I would be more feminine.

I: Successful in what way?

P: Like people would like me more.

I: So you kind of want other people to accept you?

P: Yeah.

I: And even though you don't like this kind of ideology or values?

P: Yeah.

I: It's a hard choice isn't it?

P: Yeah, of course it's hard. That's why I really like living here, because here I finally feel like people don't care if I'm feminine or not.

I: Yeah, well, climbing is part of the... everyone can do it.

P: Yeah. Just in Russia you have to live with more pressure of this sort of thing.

I: So is it right to say that this is the style you don't like but then you find you have to conform to the culture?

P: Yeah. Yeah.

I: Talking about cultures, I know you have lived in 3 different cultures now, more or less. Do you notice any dressing style differences when you are living in different countries?

P: Well, China is, definitely, at the same time it's extremely feminine, for females. It's really funny because you would go to the market, and you would see piles of clothes, and you would always know that this black and grey piles are for men, and this PINKY everything PINKISH and PINK and RED and they look PINK again, and these are for girls.

I: I feel sorry for you.

P: And even one day, I was trying to buy a home suit for myself, just to wear it in my flat. I didn't know about this selection at [the time], and I tried buying the black and greyish costume with stars and stuff, I really liked it. And I was like yeah how much is this one. And she's like are you buying it for you boyfriend? I was like no, I'm buying it for myself, and she laughed and she said it's for guys, here's yours. And she took me to this PINKISH, like [...] of suits, and

everything was PINK, and I was like no, why can't I buy this one and she was like I don't have your size, buy from this. So yeah, Chinese...

I: Is it like even worse than Russia, you think?

P: Yeah, definitely worse than Russia. I mean I'm talking about Jilin, I've never bought clothing in any other towns, I think.

I: It makes sense, because I was gonna say that I grow up in Shanghai, and...

P: Yeah, I think the big towns obviously would be more...

I: Slightly more...

P :But Jilin was extremely traditional in this way, but at the same time, positive stuff, I saw a lot of middle aged and even older women wearing bright and interesting stuff. Maybe extremely feminine, I don't care, they looked so nice and bright and... In Russia, people would frown upon such ideas, they'll be like if you are middle age, you should wear really serious and greyish stuff, but in China...

I: We still have that I think. Like if you are wearing something too outstanding, you'll be frowned upon if you are over 40 years old.

P: But still there were a lot of such ideas, comparing to Russia, I was really impressed by this. In Russia you can buy a lot of normal clothes for females, not really feminine stuff, but still in daily life you would feel I think some pressure at least, to be more feminine.

I: Yeah. Do you notice you change a little bit like the way you dress in 3 different places?

P: Yeah, I change my style a lot in China, because I was living with this, my best friend. She's Russian, and she influenced me a lot, and I think I started wearing better clothes then. I think I went for smart casual then.

I: Is she quite smart casual?

P: Yeah, she is.

I: And Britain, in Bristol?

P: I think I got a little bit more relaxed here, because I can see a lot of girls literally wearing just jeans and hoodies, and just making bands over their heads, and not wearing make-up. That makes me feel really good about myself, I feel more relaxed, I feel I can be like that. I can wear whatever and go outside and not feel bad about this.

I: So you would wear something really casual in Britain, in Bristol?

P: Yeah.

I: And something probably more feminine and smart casual in China, in Jilin?

P: Yeah I think so.

I: What about Russia?

P: Smart casual for Russia as well.

I: Is it quite feminine as well?

P: Yeah, mostly.

I: Is it because of other people?

P: Yeah.

I: Cool, where are you from in Russia again?

P: I live near Moscow, not Moscow, but...

I: Near Moscow?

P: Yeah, I was studying in Moscow and working in Moscow, so you can say Moscow.

I: Right, okay. It's fine, we've covered this. Have you, when you grow up, do you always have the similar kind of style or have you changed? Have you experienced any change in your styles?

P: When I was little... I mean, you are talking about when I was actually able to choose my clothes right, because when I was like 3 or 4 years old, my mum...

I: No, I probably wouldn't go that far. Let's say about 10 years old, did you say your mum bought you clothes?

P: Yeah, but still I had a voice in this.

I: Okay, what kind of clothes did you wear when you were about 10?

P: Really... I hated dresses and skirts and everything like that, I always wore pants and some kind of T-shirts.

I: So [was] it quite a tomboy kind of style?

P: Yeah.

I: Did you cut your hair and stuff?

P: No I had really long hair, like up to when I was 16, maybe 15, I had my hair up till my knees.

I: Wow, it's really hard to maintain.

P: Yeah. It was really hard to maintain, I was really happy to cut [it], but still I didn't cut it really short, just to my shoulder and stuff.

I: So yeah, okay, around 10 years old you were having a kind of tomboy kind of style.

P: And same until I went to university I think.

I: Okay, like undergraduate university?

P: Yeah, I was 16 or 17 I think. And there, I tried being more feminine, because, well, all those girls around me.

I: What kind of girls?

P: Well, you know, pretty girls, wearing feminine stuff, then I was like yeah, I want to really like that too, so I tried wearing...

I: Was it because of that time that you discovered like girlish people get more in life, and then you started to feel like oh, maybe I should do this as well?

P: Yeah, I think so yeah.

I: Right, so you started getting a little bit feminine even though you don't feel comfortable about it?

P: Yeah, but when I think about what I wear at that time I feel terrible, like how could you choose this? It's terrible terrible tasteless over-feminine shirts.

I: So at that period, you bought a lot of things you regretted basically, because you want to conform into that... what kind of things?

P: I don't know, over-feminine tops with lashes and ...

I: Like that one? Like the pink and white one?

P: Yeah, maybe. Obviously not exactly like this, but on the same line.

I: And you really don't like it?

P: Yeah.

I: Okay. Do you still have any clothes like this?

P: Maybe at home but I don't wear them.

I: You don't wear it then?

P: No.

I: Not even when you're home?

P: No.

I: So what would you do then if you said you want to conform to the Russian culture of being...

P: Right now?

I: What would you wear instead?

P: I have plain dresses, which I like actually.

I: Like more classy style of female?

P: More what?

I: Like classy, hmm, elegant, like that kind of...

P: Yep.

I: Oh, right I see. Okay, so that was the undergraduate time, when did you start changing like, reflect on this and changed then?

P: It was definitely China, because like I said I was living with my friend, and I liked her style, and she was really eager to change my style a little bit. So we went shopping and I changed my style a lot after that. And even my parents said I started looking, like they really liked the changes.

I: Okay, so it's a bit casual smart afterwards.

P: Yeah.

I: When do you start like[ing] the punk and rock style?

P: Oh, I forgot about this. When I was a teenager like 13, I think, I totally forgot about this, I was a little bit emo goth stuff. I was wearing all black, and kind of punkish clothes and I would you know, paint my make up line, below my eye, oh I looked so funny but I felt so good.

I: Why?

P: I don't know, it was so comfortable, so I think it's still the style I really like, you know, punkish...

I: Comfortable?

P: Yeah, comfortable and at the same time, it makes a statement. And I wore skirts, they were kind of long, but they have chains and

stuff, and they have plaids, and they have chains, and I wore like huge boots. Oh I love all these.

I: Why did you love it? Do you feel like it's most you?

P: Yeah.

I: Do you still like it?

P: Yeah.

I: But you don't wear it that often I guess?

P: [No], I don't. I feel like I should look more normal.

I: You should?

P: Yeah.

I: Is it another thing about the culture conformity stuff, like you feel like because you are 20 something, you shouldn't dress so differently from others?

P: I feel like if I want to... the thing is, I like that type of clothes but at the same time I want to be mature and meet mature people and stuff like that, clothes like this make a statement, make a statement that I might attract people that won't be that good for me.

I: All right, I see what you mean now. You don't want to give other people the wrong idea?

P: Yes.

I: Even though you really like those kinds of things?

P: Yeah, right.

I: So I guess you don't wear them any more?

P: No. Maybe just rarely.

I: Rarely? Like going to a concert or a gig?

P: Yeah, stuff like that.

I: So when you are in China you go for casual smart because of your friend. And anything else changed afterwards?

P: When I started working after graduating, I started liking, as I said, office style, like white shirts and some kind of more official looking trousers. But like I said, I like them to have some personality and I would usually add some accessories. I feel confident and nice in office clothes too.

I: Is that the... You know we talked about the wrong idea from the punky [clothing] and this is the right idea isn't it?

P: Yeah.

I: Do you like these clothes?

P: Yeah, I like them. I actually like them. I even wear them when I'm not working, sometimes.

I: And after the work phase is your master degree isn't it?

P: What?

I: After work, the phase of work, you [came] to do master here isn't it?

P: Yeah.

I: Do you notice anything else changed in your style of clothing?

P: I feel like I'm trying to combine casual and office, what I am wearing now.

I: Casual smart?

P: Yeah.

I: Is that a different kind of casual smart, from your university in China?

P: Yeah, I think so.

I: How is it different?

P: It's really hard to put my finger on it. I just feel like it's different, but when I think about it...

I: What would you normally wear in China, that counts as casual smart?

P: Like jeans and shirts. I feel like I'm going for more interesting pants here, for some reasons, like different note on the jeans, like different clothes, different plaids. I don't know, maybe I try to imitate this stereotypically British style.

I: What's a stereotypical British style?

P: I would say that in Russia we think it's this one. This is considered to be a stereotypical British style in Russia, for some reasons.

I: Maybe in London. Okay, so you want to go for that style because you are in Bristol and that's a very British look.

P: Yeah.

I: That kind of casual smart, but well, when you were in China that time, what kind of style was it, is there any picture that's similar?

P: Seems like this is the closest.

I: The closest?

P: Yeah.

I: It's more casual.

P: Yeah.

I: Hmm, but you said you wouldn't wear a tracksuit.

P: Yeah, I would choose jeans or something normal.

I: So it's more casual than casual smart.

P: Yep.

I: And in Britain it's more of a preppy look. Have you bought a lot of things that you regretted before?

P: Many things.

I: Many things? What are normally the occasion that you bought something and you regret, what kind of clothes do you love buying and regret.

P: Dresses, because I always feel like I should have more dresses.

I: You feel like you want to have more dresses?

P: Yeah.

I: But then why did you regret it in the end?

P: Because, I don't know, after some time I stopped liking them, I feel like they don't really suit me and... I have a single dress that I really like and I will like it forever. It's really plain and it's a dark [dress], like this long sleeves and the skirt goes to my knees. It's really plain but it looks really awesome. But when I try to buy dresses that are more colourful, I literally wear them several times and then I feel like no, not my type of thing.

I: Okay. So remember that favourite dress of yours, do you like it?

P: Yeah, I really like it.

I: I thought you don't like dresses.

P: Yeah, but I think it's really office style, smart casual style, it's really plain, so you can add whatever you want to it. I can add jackets and accessories, belts, whatever, everything goes with it. I can even make a little bit punky with it, because it's so plain. I can wear you know, heavy boots, and heavier accessories.

I: So it almost feel like you...

P: It doesn't feel like a dress. It doesn't feel like it's a lady piece of clothes, it feels like something basic, which I can do whatever I want to it.

I: It's almost like a piece of paper you can paint over it isn't it?

P: Yeah.

I: Okay, that's fair enough. Do you use social media?

P: Yeah I do.

I: Do you use Facebook, Instagram...

P: I use Facebook but I only started using it properly in Britain, because I never needed it before, I had an account but I never needed it, because in Russia everybody uses our Facebook.

I: Okay. Anything else?

P: So Facebook, Russian Facebook, I don't use Instagram, just not interested. I used to have a Twitter account but I deleted it, because it was boring for me. And I have an account in Russia on... you know like journal?

I: Like a blog?

P: Yeah. I have a blog on Russian website.

I: Right, I don't think I can understand it yet. Cool, so when you are on Facebook or Russian Facebook or any social media, do you post pictures on then?

P: You mean my pictures?

I: It doesn't have to be yours, just any pictures.

P: Yeah.

I: What kind of pictures do you normally post?

P: There are some photos that I make and I like, or show people where I was or something. Or some funny pictures, or some beautiful pictures of animals.

I: You like animals?

P: Yeah, especially watching animals and stuff. I think these kinds of stuff.

I: Okay. Do you have pictures of yourself on it?

P: Yeah, I do. That's a funny question, because I only started having pictures of myself on social network after China. I think I started feeling so much confident after this.

I: After...?

P: After China.

I: After China? What happened?

P: I don't know. I just felt more confident, independent, because I lived alone for a year I think. I changed a lot of my styles as I said. So I felt confident enough to use my pictures and avatars and personal pictures of me and stuff.

I: How are those pictures taken? Are they taken by other people, or do you take them yourself? Or a mixture of both?

P: I prefer pictures taken by other people.

I: Okay. Do you manage your pictures online? For example, if I go to a party, someone takes a picture, if I look ridiculous, which I always think I look ridiculous in pictures, I always have to either untag me from the post, or hide from the wall, do you do these things as well?

P: I don't but I would like to.

I: You do like to?

P: I would like to do this but I feel like it would look funny and really just weird, that I'm not confident enough. I won't tell anything, but I don't like this.

I: You don't like this, okay. Do you untag yourself though?

P: No.

I: They are still there on the Facebook then?

P: Yeah. Not on Facebook but on Russian Facebook. There are some pictures I really don't like but I didn't untag them because I thought it would look weird.

I: Right, okay, that's fine, Yeah, that probably covers most of the things for this interview.

AV30 – 2

I: Thank you for coming to my second interview, unfortunately my other recorder broke so I'll just use that one, if there is anything. Today's interview's going to be two parts, the first one is going to talk about the recent consumption, basically the things you bought since the last time you met me, which was just before Christmas wasn't it?

P: Yeah.

I: And the second part is a lot about the question I had during the first interview, that I didn't have the time to ask you, so I'll ask them now.

P: Cool.

I: Right, shall we start with the Christmas shopping or Black Friday shopping. Black Friday is a bit too long ago I guess, do you remember if you bought anything during the Black Friday period?

P: Not as far as clothes is concerned. I only bought like shampoo and conditioners, because I like the one that was on sale, which was natural and stuff.

I: Where did you get them?

P: I herb dot com. Yeah, I think that's the only thing I got.

I: Was it on sales on anything?

P: Yeah, it was on sales. They are quite pricey if not on sales.

I: Oh, okay. So around that period of time, I know it's a long time ago, you felt like it's the sales season, so you went on all the website to have a look, or is it because...

P: Yeah, I knew it was black Friday, so I decided to check if they had sales on anything.

I: Was it good?

P: Yeah, I really like the conditioner.

I: Cool. And you didn't buy anything else, knowing that everything, most of the things would be on sales then?

P: Yeah, because... I don't know. Just didn't.

I: That's fair enough. Do you feel anything about black Friday? I don't want to lead you to anything, but a lot of people told me that they felt a little bit stressed because knowing that's the first thing going to be on sale, they went to have a look, even though there weren't many good things on sale, and the sales were not even that much. They felt like a little bit of stressed, other people told me it's because it's exam period that time, so they didn't actually look for it, so they waited until the Christmas period to see if there's anything going on. So do you feel anything at all, or is it just a normal day for you, that time?

P: It's more or less a normal day, but sometimes... I've got a friend who shares this idea, I think I share it too, that you know black Friday is a special day designed to take our money, and the sales was on for a purpose to make us spend more money. So sometimes I feel like I'm obliged to ignore those days, as you know, an anti-consumption thing. So I didn't buy clothes or anything else. But when I remembered about this website I was like okay, yes it is something you know, encourage us to buy stuff, but if there are some discounts on this website, or shampoo or some stuff, because at the moment I was wanting to buy normal shampoo for years, and yes, I decided to check.

I: And you got something?

P: Yeah.

I: And you do have that anti-consumption thing?

P: Yeah.

I: Do you have that anti-consumptive movement throughout the year? Like for valentines' day, for example, for...

P: Yeah, I think so yeah. Well, at the same time, I know that online shopping is definitely making me feel better, because sometimes when I really down, I would just go to the website and check if they have something I like.

I: Okay, so which means you do have the ideology of being anti-consumptive, and not following for the marketing, but at the same time, the shopping therapy really helps you, for your mood.

P: Yeah. I know. I know it sounds weird but it kind of is.

I: No, it's not weird, I guess we all have a little bit of this, but do you feel like it's much of a struggle for you?

P: I think it's becoming more of a struggle with years, because I know that at the moment of shopping, and I will get these new things, I feel really good about it; but after some time, I won't appreciate them that much, and I'll be like why? I mean these are good things, but do I really need them? Probably not.

I: So is it right to say that you always have the idea of being anti-consumptive, but most of the time you still fall into the shop therapy kind of thing? And you regret afterwards and feel like oh maybe I should be more anti-consumptive?

P: Yep

I: It's not the other way round, it's not like it's very rare for anti-consumptive thoughts to win? Is that right?

P: Yeah. I think so.

I: Okay, has your anti-consumptive idea win once?

P: Yeah, sometimes I go through some shops, for example, when I was at the north with my boyfriend, we went to neighbour city to just wander around, we went through different shops and I think the anti-consumptive thing was definitely winning, because I only bought like a few presents for my friends, which is not even for me, so it doesn't count. [...] So yeah, I was proud of myself.

I: So when you were in the shops, in the neighbour city with your boyfriend, what kind of ideas were striking you at the background?

P: I usually just try to think, when I see something nice, sometimes things look so nice, and I just think, will I actually be using it? And often the answer is no.

I: And do you think it's because of your anti-consumptive...?

P: I think it is, or otherwise I wouldn't even care. I would think it's a nice thing and buy it, but sometimes I'm like, it's just design that's so nice for me to buy it, it's not actually useful, I won't use it for anything, it's just a pure useless thing.

I: Have you thought about it could be something else, instead of anti-consumptive behaviours? For example, when you try to save money, so you have that mental debate of do I really need it, do I really want it? Or is it because...

P: No I think it might be another idea, I always try to... I always feel like I'm not self-confident enough, and I feel like I should find this confidence in myself, not in things and stuff. So sometimes I think like you don't have to get new clothes, you don't have to get new things, you're fine as you are. So these moments I'm like okay, I'm not buying this I'm great already.

I: Okay, so this is the kind of mental talk you had in your mind, when you are deciding whether to spend money or not, right? So when

you are talking about anti-consumption, what are the main causes of that anti-consumptive behaviour? Why do you want to be anti-consumptive?

P: Because I generally like this idea of free lifestyle, and you don't depend on things. You have one little suitcase. You know this ...

I: Voluntary simplicity? To have a simple life?

P: Yeah. I like the idea of it.

I: The idea of having a simple life?

P: Yeah, I'm not sure if I can actually follow it, but the idea seems amazing to me. And when I read about people like this, for example, a little suitcase with all the stuff they've got, they travel around and they don't have to think about going sell stuff with them, and they are totally fine with having one pair of jeans, and one shirt or one jumper, I think this is how a person should be, well, in my opinion...

I: Instead of owning too many things?

P: Yeah, I think this gives you time for more important stuff, I don't know, traveling, making the world better and stuff, not caring with all the stuff. I don't know, it's just an idea of a person who is simple, and not with a lot of stuff, and it's really attractive to me.

I: So you think the idea of having less things is cool?

P: Yeah.

I: Okay. That is the main drive for your anti-consumptive behaviour?

P: Yeah. I think so.

I: Is there anything else?

P: Might be a little bit of... I don't know if it's called political motives, the whole idea of companies just trying to make money out of us, and we should return to high inspirations and stuff, like we had in Soviet Union, yay.

I: So it's anti-marketing movement?

P: Yeah.

I: And it hasn't been as successful as the shopping therapy I guess?

P: What?

I: Coz you have the idea of being anti-consumptive, and you have the idea of shopping makes you feel good, but you said the latter, the shopping therapy, actually wins most of the time, instead of your simple life idea or the anti-marketing movement, isn't it?

P: Yeah.

I: Have you got any plan for the valentine's day? Are you going to do anything, with your partner?

P: No I don't think so. The valentines' day is a total, I'm trying to find a proper word, a totally made up holiday.

I: Yeah, I believe so.

P: I never ever celebrated it and I'm never going to. I don't think my boyfriend is going to. I think my boyfriend is closer than me to this anti-consumption thing.

I: Oh, is he?

P: Yeah, because he has very few clothes, he's very you know, simple in his lifestyle. Yeah, that's what I like about him too. So yeah, I don't think we are celebrate it or buying anything.

I: What about Christmas? Have you bought anything for Christmas?

P: You mean as far as presents are concerned?

I: Yep.

P: Yeah, sure, I bought a lot of presents for a lot of people.

I: Okay, can I just write them down, I guess you bought lots of things for your families?

P: I bought stuff for my boyfriend, and I bought some presents for his family too together. Do you need a list of them?

I: Not necessarily, but I just like the type of people you have bought the presents for.

P: Yeah okay, for his family obviously. I mean I think it was a surprise when I said I wanted to participate, but it's traditional in Russia if you are meeting your...

I: Other half? Family?

P: Yeah. You are supposed to bring something, I'll just feel rude if I didn't. And I bought stuff for my friends...

I: Is that it? Have you bought anything for your family, or is it because they are in Russia so you didn't?

P: Yeah, no no no. They are in Russia, and we don't really celebrate Christmas obviously, so...

I: When you talk about traditions right, you said it's traditional for you, for a Russian to buy presents when you meet the partner's family for the first time right? What do you feel about those traditions?

P: [...] I think, it's an expression of friendliness, for example, another tradition is when you first go to somebody's home, we usually tend to buy some food, or to bring something with us. I think it's a nice tradition. It's funny because the apartment I live in, it is really important for me to share food with everybody at least once. Of course I feel like it's an expression of my friendliness and this means something for my connection with it. So I made everyone to eat something I bought. It was funny.

I: So you feel nothing like the idea you talked about before about the anti-marketing thingy?

P: NO, definitely not. That's a nice tradition.

I: That's a nice tradition, okay. What about Christmas though? Christmas shopping, do you feel like Christmas shopping is a marketing created event, or do you feel like it's a nice tradition?

P: It's both. I mean nowadays it's becoming so much bigger, because of marketing. And basically you are obliged to buy presents for people around you, or otherwise it might feel weird. But I think, I don't know, Christmas is such a nice holiday, I don't mind making it nicer buying stuff for my friends and relatives. Did I understand the question correctly?

I: Yeah, yeah that's fine, so you think it's a bit of both, tradition and anti-marketing movement and both that...

P: It's not a hollow consumption, you make your friends and relatives feel better, so I think it's still the right thing to do.

I: Is it fair to say that your anti-marketing idea is only towards yourself, it's not towards other people?

P: Yeah.

I: So when you are buying for other people...

P: Yeah, it doesn't count.

I: It doesn't count, even it's against your simple life ideology?

P: Yeah.

I: Right, okay. Can I start by asking about your friends, what have you bought for them?

P: Sure, let me remember...

I: You don't have to tell me names, it's fine.

P: Oh dear, ah, I bought some lip balms for girls, and I definitely bought postcards for everyone, and I decorated them individually inside.

I: Postcards?

P: Yeah, Christmas cards I mean and I decorated them. What else? I bought headphones for one girl because she has her birthday literally the same day as Christmas, like on the 21<sup>st</sup>. So I needed to buy a bigger present.

I: You bought headphone for her because...

P: Because it's like she has two holidays to celebrate at the same time, and I felt like a small Christmas present wouldn't be right.

I: Do you know that she likes headphones, or she wants headphones, or is it just you ...

P: No, we discussed it months ago, and she said it would be nice to have Bluetooth headphones.

I: Right, so you know that she wants it?

P: Yeah. And I bought like anime pack, anime DVD...

I: Animal DVD?

P: Anime DVD and a dragon toy for another friend, because dragons and anime DVD was on his wish list. I bought mugs to some people...

I: You bought what?

P: Mugs. Yeah, I'm crazy about mugs, I never have enough of them, so I assume other people love mugs too.

I: Fair enough.

P: Yeah, so I got two mugs, shirt, two more for my girlfriends, yeah.

I: Okay, lip balms, why did you buy lip balms for girls?

P: Christmas market.

I: No, why did you buy them?

P: Why did I buy them? Because lip balm is something most people use, not lipsticks, not with colour, just general little things to make your lips feel better, without colouring or ...

I: Yeah yeah I know what lip balm is.

P: No no I was trying to make sure that I don't buy stuff that will, you know, it's make up or anything, totally neutral thing, and I know it's useful for everyone and...

I: Do you think lip balm is a very feminine thing?

P: I don't think so. I think men can totally use it.

I: Okay, so why didn't you buy lip balms for guys?

P: Because I know that, for example, my boyfriend wouldn't appreciate it. He might use it, but he would think I just decided to make fun of it a little bit.

I: So you think there's a social stigma around...

P: Yeah, I think so yeah. I mean I totally wouldn't mind if the guys I know use lip balms, but I know that I shouldn't just get them lip balms without asking them.

I: Okay, fair enough, that's cool. So that's your friends, have you bought... What did you get for your boyfriend's family and himself, I mean, you don't have to tell me all the details about them, but mainly what kind of stuff...

P: My boyfriend has got a park like not extremely expensive for big stuff, but I think nice stuff, and all of it for personal related to him, so I know, like Mark is a giraffe, he's tall, and Mark always changes, it's so cool, it's black, but when you put hot water into it, it shows you the picture of the Lord of Rings. Because it's a hot water thing, so he really likes it.

I: So it's like personal...

P: Yeah, all of them are personal. And then for his mum, I got a book, and candle. For his older sister and her boyfriend, we got alcohol, because...

I: You can't go wrong with alcohol...

P: Yes, but because he doesn't really know what to get him, so he says he buys him alcohol each year, so yeah let's go with alcohol then.

I: Fair enough.

P: And to his little sister, we got, it was my idea, a little hand microscope.

I: Okay.

P: It's amazing, everyone loves it. They were totally freaking out about it. Everybody in the family played with it, so we think it's a really big success, I'm really proud of myself.

I: Is she quite sciency?

P: She's not extremely sciency, but she loves animals and she wants to be vet, and she's quite determined. And you could see she loved this, because she played with it all the time. Yeah, so proud of myself.

I: Cool, so that's the Christmas presents. Have you bought anything for yourself, since the last time I spoke to you, which was about a month-ish?

P: Yeah, I bought this black dress, showed you a photo.

I: Oh yeah. Okay, yeah the black dress.

P: And yesterday I bought two jumpers, which should come tomorrow.

I: Two jumpers?

P: Yeah, two jumpers which are more or less practical to buy because I realise that...

I: It's cold?

P: Yeah, it's really cold. I didn't expect it to be that cold here, and [it's] really freezing, so I feel like I need more jumpers, because the one I got is definitely not warm enough.

I: Okay, so only one black dress and two jumpers for a month? Any accessories? Make-up? Perfume? These kinds of things?

P: Yeah, I bought make-up stuff.

I: From?

P: From Superdrug. And I got mascaras, and an eye pencil...

I: Eye-liner?

P: Eye-liner, well, eye pencil. Eye-liner and eye pencil are different things aren't they?

I: Okay, eye pencil, mascara...

P: Yeah, several mascaras...

I: Several?

P: Because I have to try which of them are better.

I: Okay, you don't strike me as a type of person who does make-up quite often though.

P: Seriously? Because I always wear make-up.

I: Oh, I can't see you.

P: Seriously?

I: Oh, okay, I can only see the mascara.

P: Wow. I guess I'm going for the natural make-up.

I: Okay, so what have you done today then?

P: I'm doing the cream that takes black circle...

I: Concealer?

P: Concealer! Concealer and a little bit of eye shadows, natural ones. Then eye pencil.

I: Today?

P: Yeah. Eye pencil and mascara.

I: Mascara yeah I can see that. Do you often do make-up then?

P: Yeah.

I: Okay. Sorry it might be your glasses that's blocking most of the make-up off, I can't see much.

P: No, it's actually nice that you can't tell that I'm wearing make-up, because you can see the difference between non-make-up face and make-up face. I like that my make-up face is not completely different.

I: So why do you do make-up then?

P: Because it enhances... I don't know! It makes it different just not totally different!

I: Okay, okay, that's fine, so I guess you do spend money on make-up things? And you love trying different mascaras?

P: Not that I love it, but there is a particular mascara that like.

I: Which one?

P: Doesn't make your lashes extremely long.

I: So it's clean definition?

P: Yeah, like this one.

I: Which one is it?

P: The thing is I used a particular one, it's a Russian brand. And I brought it with me, and just recently, I finished it. That's why I bought two mascaras here to check if they are nice. One from Rimmel I think, and one from Max Factor.

I: Is any one of them good?

P: I'm using the Rimmel one now and I like it.

I: Okay. It's fair enough. That's make-up from Superdrug? Anything else you can remember?

P: I also got like this type of red clay for my face.

I: Okay, is it to moisturise your face?

P: Yeah, for sensitive skin. I haven't used it yet, so I don't know if it's good.

I: Okay. Any scarf, hat, gloves, ring, jewellery?

P: Yeah I got gloves, but really it wasn't even a determined shopping for gloves. It was just when I was up north, I realised my hands were extremely cold. I literally bought whatever gloves in the nearest store.

I: Cool. Where did you get them?

P: It's a local shop but they are like Poundland, everything was a pound.

I: Cool. Does it work?

P: Yeah. They have this... I never have them before, they have this parts on thumbs, and pointing fingers to use it from.

I: Oh okay, I see what you mean. So it's covered all the way here, and you've got fingers?

P: No...

I: Oh you've got it. I've never seen them, they look cool.

P: They look so cool, it's like they are from cyberpunk or something.

I: Yeah, you're still using them I guess.

P: Yeah.

I: Cool, let's talk about the black dress. Where did you get [it]?

P: ASOS.

I: Okay, do you like [it]?

P: Yeah, I really like it. The moment when I saw it, it's definitely... I don't even know when I'll wear it, maybe on my graduation or something, because I really don't go out to places where it'll be suitable to wear it.

I: To wear it in daily life?

P: No, it's definitely not a daily one. It's really a fancy one. But I love it so much and when it came, it fitted perfectly.

I: Okay, it's nice.

P: Yeah, I like it very much.

I: You did mention about the complicated feelings for dresses, [didn't] you?

P: Yeah.

I: I'll ask about that later. What about the two jumpers, where did you get them?

P: ASOS too. I think it's my favourite shop now.

I: You do like online shopping you said.

P: Yeah.

I: The two jumpers are mainly a result of the cold weather I guess? It makes you conscious about what to order.

P: Yeah, but also they were pretty, obviously. And I was planning to buy just one, but then I saw the second...

I: What do they look like?

P: One of them is like pink, but nice shade of pink, and it has tiger on it, and a flower, and was drawn in a Chinese way or something, Chinese style.

I: Long sleeves, really thick one, knitted ones is it?

P: What do you mean, do you mean the picture of tiger and flower. They both are long sleeved. I don't think they are extremely thick, but they look warm at least.

I: Cool.

P: Yeah, one of them is pink with tiger and flower, the other one is completely black with a few tiny childish style pictures. So there is a rock here and there are stars, and I think there is a dinosaur or something, like scattered.

I: Okay, so they are kind of completely the same style but different patterns, is that right?

P: What do you mean by...?

I: Are they kind of the same to each other, apart from the patterns?

P: Yeah I think they are more or less similar, but not that they are from the same line or something.

I: Okay, are they knitted?

P: The black one is knitted, the pink one is made of some artificial cloth I don't remember the name.

I: Artificial material, okay. Cool, that's the two things you ordered?

P: Yeah.

I: That's very interesting, especially the pink flower and tiger thing. I'm not going to ask you about the make-up and Superdrug thingy, or red clay or gloves, I didn't know that you use make-up, my bad. Cool, in your wardrobe you took 3 pictures did you?

P: Yeah.

I: And one of them is the black dress you found really interesting and really like it. What are the other two?

P: There is a skirt, and there is, I don't know how to describe this, a really long sleeveless white shirt thingy?

I: Can I have a look again, I can't remember what they are now.

P: Yeah, I don't know how to describe it.

I: Oh, it's a sleeveless top, sleeveless T-shirt with Mickey Mouse. Okay, and the other one is the skirt, don't know how to describe that one.

P: I don't know, the skirt. Probably like platted thing, I don't know, when I see this kind of texture.

I: I'm sure there's a word for it, but I don't know. Shall we start with the T-shirt.

P: Okay.

I: Did you say you regret buying it and you don't wear it at all?

P: I don't know why I liked it, I just like how it looks. But I have no idea how I'm supposed to wear this thing. I don't know. I never ever wear it because I don't know how to wear it, how to combine it with, it's not extremely comfortable.

I: Where did you get it?

P: I got it when I was in China, so literally 3 or 4 years ago.

I: In China, do you know if it...

P: I think it was either Zara or H&M, I don't remember.

I: Oh, okay. H&M or Zara. Do you have it in your wardrobe?

P: ?

I: You still have it in your wardrobe?

P: Yeah, and I even took it with me for some reasons.

I: Exactly. You said you only took the clothes you liked?

P: Yeah.

I: Which means you do like that T-shirt, but you don't know how to wear it, is that right?

P: Yeah, I think it looks really cool.

I: So yeah, tell me why you like it to begin with, why do you think it's cool?

P: I don't know, it has this picture of Mickey Mouse, but it has this black silhouette, so it's a little bit ironic, I think.

I: Okay, do you like Mickey Mouse?

P: No.

I: Okay, what's good about that pattern then?

P: I don't know, it's a little bit playful, and ironic at the same time, because it's clearly meant for an adult. And it's a very large piece of clothing I think...

I: Okay, you did tell me before that you like T-shirts with ironic patterns. Does that fall into one of the categories?

P: Yes, as far as the ironic thing is concerned. The form, the figure, the shape of it is something I never wear. It's too long, I mean it's my size, so it's supposed to fit me, but it's generally too long, comparing to other clothes I generally wear. And it's a bit too, how is it called? Free?

I: Free? Flowy?

P: Yeah, too flowy.

I: Okay, do you have any other sleeveless T-shirts?

P: Yeah, I have one. And the funny thing is I didn't even buy it. It was from my friends in China, and it didn't fit her.

I: So she gave it to you?

P: Yeah, why not.

I: Did you like that?

P: Yeah, now it's one of my favourite things. It's really short, and it fits, different from this one.

I: So you don't have anything against sleeveless T-shirts. It's the pattern that makes you feel very cool, relaxed and stuff, but the only thing you don't is because of the style and how it fit you, well how it doesn't fit you. But still, you like it, that's why you brought it here?

P: I still hope to wear it at some time.

I: Do you try it on every now and then, just to see how...?

P: Yeah, occasionally I try how it looks, but no idea how I'm supposed to wear this thing.

I: Okay, that's very complicated. What about the skirt, do you like that skirt?

P: Yeah, I like the colours. I like it but again it's different from what I usually wear. For example, if I wear a skirt, they are usually more office-like, yeah, professional like. They are dark colours, they are black, they are like to my knees or something. And this one is a midi-skirt, and it's kind of bright, I like the colours, and I like the length more or less, although I don't usually wear this length, but I thought in this climate it might be wise, to wear this type of thing. But again, I don't think I wear it even once since I bought it.

I: You did tell me last time, you had complicated feelings for skirts. You definitely don't wear skirts, because you feel vulnerable in it. What are you vulnerable against, do you feel like? Why would you feel vulnerable when you're in skirts?

P: In mini-skirts you mean?

I: Yeah.

P: Because I don't feel like I've got the freedom of movement, and I should always care about how I sit, for obvious reasons.

I: Is that right to say that you are uncomfortable, instead of vulnerable, in mini-skirts?

P: Well, I'm uncomfortable but it seems at the same time, I'm vulnerable because my legs are exposed and I don't know...

I: What are you vulnerable against? What do you feel like you're vulnerable to?

P: I don't know, I feel like people are looking at my legs, judging them or something, I don't know.

I: So wearing mini-skirts you feel vulnerable towards a certain group of people, or specifically a culture, or what are you feeling vulnerable to? Or judgmental people?

P: Partly because I think some people maybe judgemental, like they would think that I would try to bring attention to myself, by wearing this kind of skirts.

I: Coz vulnerable is quite an interesting word, but I don't feel like we discussed it quite well, in what you're feeling. Coz I can understand why you are feeling uncomfortable, because you care too much about exposing underwear, and fear that other people might judge you. Is that fear related to your vulnerability?

P: Yeah, maybe. Sorry, it's just they are so deep questions. They demand a big amount of self-reflection.

I: It's fine it's fine. If you really can't figure out, we can move on to the next question.

P: Yeah, can I think about it for some time?

I: Yeah, cool. So that was the midi-skirt? Do you like skirts? You said you don't really like skirts unless they are for office wear. So why did you buy this kind of midi-skirt to begin with?

P: I like the colours, I thought that might add something new to my styles, if I manage to combine it with other stuff. But whenever I want to go somewhere, and I'm thinking maybe I should wear it today, I was like no, I will have to spend time combining other stuff, and thinking what to wear it with, I might as well just go with stuff I usually wear.

I: Cool. So when you are buying this midi-skirt, apart from the colour that you actually like, you said you were thinking of trying new styles. Why would you... I know a couple of styles we talked about last time were like punk and rock style because of the music you listen to. You like office professional look because you want to be that kind of person, being strong and confident and stuff. But at the same time, you would still want to go for new style, why do you have that strife, to have new styles? And what exactly that new style you are thinking about?

P: Well, maybe the style I usually wear is a bit closed and stuff. I think if I wear... I might try wearing skirts, and something more cheerful.

I: Oh you think your normal style is a bit boring, and you want to try something different, or more cheerful, and happy, is that what you are on about?

P: Yeah.

I: And it's not been very successful I guess?

P: Oh yeah, because I think more closed and serious style maybe my type of thing.

I: Your type of thing?

P: Yeah.

I: So every time you go shopping, do you still have that kind of feeling that maybe I should try something different, coz everything

in my wardrobe is that colour, and that style, but at the same time, it's because it's not your style, it's not something you want, so you would end up with things like the midi-skirts?

P: Yeah, possibly. Sometimes I try to go for something new, but it doesn't fit, and eventually I never wear it.

I: Cool, so that feeling of having new style is kind of... is that important to you? Or does it come up quite often?

P: It comes out sometimes, because sometimes I'm kind of stuck in how I look, that I might try something new.

I: Why would you feel like you're stuck in the styles you have?

P: The thing is, I feel like I'm constantly not-changing and developing, and my youth is changing and stuff, and I feel like maybe I should somehow change my clothing style...

I: Why is it related?

P: Just to express myself and show people I'm a bit different maybe.

I: Do you think it's important to let people notice your difference? Or do you have that kind of motivation to show people that you have become something different?

P: Yeah, I think I do. And generally, I'm not sure if I'm really a verbally person?

I: Verbally?

P: Verbally? Very good with words? I don't know, talkative? Very talkative.

I: Oh, talkative.

P: I might as well try to express myself through non-verbal style.

I: So clothing is part of your choice to let other people know what you are? Or do you use clothing to let other people know what you want to be?

P: Well, you know...

I: Coz I think I had this strong feeling from the last interview, you have that kind of person you want to be which is confident and strong and relaxed basically, so that's why you love office professional kind of look, to show people what you want to be. But at the same time, you have that comfy and that rock and punk style which are the styles you like, [but] not what you want to be seen by the other people any more because you're afraid of attracting the wrong interests. So when you're dressing to see other people, I can't remember what I'm trying to ask now... That's such a long build up for something I can't remember.

P: I was really intrigued by this and you really disappointed me.

I: Let me organise the thoughts a little bit, what did I ask you about? Do you feel like, you need to show people what you really are, or do you need to show people what you want to become?

P: So this is really a struggle between thing, because you know there is a thing fake it 'til you make it? Maybe I'm trying to dress a little bit more relaxed and confident and stuff. For example my friend often tells me that I should wear more casual clothes, because often when I'm trying to look casual, I still am closer to office looks.

I: There's nothing wrong with it.

P: Yeah, I know, but she thinks that I should wear more casual stuff, but I feel more confident and [43'06] in office style, but again I think that you should find strength in yourself, you shouldn't rely on your clothes and stuff, should be confident in anything. And sometimes I try wearing more casual clothes, but I just don't feel that confident in them.

I: Okay, so you don't wear casual stuff normally? I know you like having that mental debate about a lot of things, I noticed. Let me draw a picture of yourself right, if this is you right, you've got that

kind of image of what you want to become, which is the strong, confident and relaxed type. So in order to achieve that, you use your clothing as a kind of professional style. There is another you basically, which is more punk, I'm not saying that this is definitely you, I'm just saying that this is the kind of dress you would like as well, punk and rock one, but you have that feeling that, you are scared that you might get the wrong attention, and don't want to be grouped with the certain [type] of people. So sometimes you would wear it, but not to an extent that you would give that vibe. So that's why you would leather shoes or leather something, not to a full length, but giving some ideas of that rock and punk feeling. So basically, these are the two main things you have, but at the same time you want something new and different, which is the idea of it. Is that right?

P: Yeah.

I: And what do you do to embed that new kind of thingy, apart from the midi-skirt? Coz I have a strong feeling that the new and different is basically what is opposite to your... that is, which is the office style. So instead of having the normal office style of black and white, and really smart casual kind of clothing, you would deliberately try to get something really casual, and brighter colours instead of black and white. This kind of new idea is basically what's opposite to that one, if that's correct, is that right?

P: Yeah, I think so yeah.

I: But like those midi-skirts and stuff, because this is not what you are comfortable with, and just because this is just the opposite to the other idea, which makes you feel like oh this is not me, I don't want to dress in that, that's why even though you keep buying this, you won't wear it, is that right?

P: Yeah, I think so.

I: Then from the last interview, there is another one, which is the dress one, coz you said you have a thing for dress, which you don't like it that much, but at the same time you want to feel... because people has been, well the culture has been pushing you into becoming more feminine, because you're a lady, you have to act in this way even though you don't like this culture completely, you would want to conform with it, just to either boost your career choice, or your personality choice, or friends and network and stuff, so that's why you sometimes would go for dresses, is that right?

P: Yeah, but still the dresses I have right now are really officey.

I: Officey? So it's connected.

P: And they are really casual, not casual, but everyday, so I can totally wear them to classes or something.

I: But still it's a touch of the feminine instead of the normal middle...

P: Yeah, for me it's really feminine stuff.

I: Is that right?

P: Yeah. Okay, that's why this new dress I bought is a bit weird for me because it's definitely not an everyday type of thing. So I have no idea when I'm wearing it. I just think I look so good in this.

I: So you do like dress yourself, don't you?

P: Yeah sometimes, I like how it look and it's not usual for me, it's not extremely comfortable for me to wear them, but I know that I suit them.

I: So this is not like what I said about you feel like you have to conform with your society, it's more like you actually do like the dress, and be a lady-like?

P: I like being lady-like but in situations which are appropriate for it. For example, if I wear dresses to my classes or something, I would

still feel like I'm showing off or something, that I'm looking too... not festive, but everyone in my class...

I: You feel like you're over-dressed?

P: Yeah.

I: I think I notice a little bit about your lady-image as well. It's not like you're directly against it, it's more like you feel like you can't handle it well, because some friends you had commented on your gestures being too manly, you feel like your figure is not very feminine, therefore you couldn't handle it, or otherwise people would laugh at you behind your back. Is that what your complicated feeling for dresses are?

P: Yeah. And at the same time, I always feel a little bit over-dressed when I'm wearing dresses. It's funny coz I even remember one conversation with my friend, that friend who influenced my style a lot. She bought a dress, and I thought it was really festive. It was really for special occasions and I asked her when she's going to wear it, what was her intention of wearing it. She's like I would wear it for classes, it's for everyday. It was way too festive. But she's like no, it's a normal dress. So for me, dresses are always...

I: Saved for special occasions?

P: Yep.

I: Okay, that's fair enough. I think I've already touched some of the questions, I'll just... Did you say you like classical music?

P: Yes, I do.

I: Okay, that's fine. We talked about you've got 4, probably 3.5, different styles. Do you differentiate them for different occasions? Like when do you normally wear punk and rock styles? When do you normally go for professional look? When do you go for dresses for special occasions, like really formal occasions I guess? And when do you try a new style which you probably don't try as often?

P: I like this my normal offices' style, I usually choose it for going to classes. Sometimes even for going to new places for me. For example, I don't know, it's a stupid example, but when I dyed my hair recently, I was wearing the officey kind of style, because I feel confident in it and there were people to meet, my hairdresser and stuff. And I wanted to wear something that makes me confident, so it was a totally office look.

I: What about punk and rock thingy?

P: If I go out with friends I guess, not when... I don't like clubs or anything... so if I go to...

I: Food? Meal? Shopping?

P: Yeah maybe. The thing is it is still office style for most part of the time. I'm just trying to remember when I'm even wearing them.

I: Has it been a long time I guess?

P: Yeah, I think so, it was a long time ago.

I: Do you still wear an element of it instead of the full...

P: Yeah, I kind of liked the punkish style in high school. But I haven't been wearing a full outfit in this style since high school I think.

I: Cool. But you still buy those elements of stuff like leather shoes boots isn't it?

P: Yeah.

I: What else do you have?

P: I have leather shoes, I have leather jacket, which I really like. I can't remember...

I: Do you have studs and stuff?

P: What?

I: Studs?

P: Studs?

I: Like a metal thing that pointed out a little bit.

P: I have a full jacket with this studs. It's amazing.

I: Cool, it's nice to know. So that's the different situations where you wear them. When do you feel like you're most comfortable, to wear whatever you want? Coz I have a strong feeling that you always have to wear something to boost your confidence, when you're like in university, at work, even going out with friends? When do you feel like you're most free to wear whatever you want?

P: At home?

I: Do you wear pyjamas at home? Do you wear...?

P: I could wear pyjamas, or... right now I'm wearing leggings, usually leg leggings, and a T-shirt with Death Star which my friend got me, and socks with foxes. Yeah, at home I usually wear comfortable clothes.

I: Is it because you don't need to see anyone, or is it because you feel like you're home?

P: It's because that people live in my home they won't judge me or anything.

I: Why do you think people around you outside of your house judge you?

P: Coz I don't know them that well. I've been living with those people for more than half a year and I feel really comfortable with them.

I: So it's a matter of comfortable isn't it? So if you're really comfortable with a friend, you care less what you wear.

P: Yeah.

I: I was gonna ask you that thing about your black jumper, no, sorry, pink jumper, coz I remember something you said something about

you really don't like flowers on your clothing, because it's really feminine and childish, and pink.

P: Yeah, but in this case they are very stylist? Sometimes I try to incorporate Russian words in English, but it doesn't work. They are not those photos of flower, or realistic pictures of flower, those are types of flowers that look like they are from Japanese or Chinese painting. So they look...

I: So they are not like the traditional young girl kind of flower?

P: Yeah.

I: But it's more of a painted flower?

P: They are smart flowers.

I: So when you've got that jumper, could you send a picture of it if you don't mind?

P: Do you want to see a picture?

I: When you've got it, can you send me a picture of it?

P: Yeah. I can literally find it now, 'coz I've got a link.

I: Cool, if that's okay. Thank you. And pink, why pink?

P: It's a nice shade of pink, and I know that I suit pink. I feel like you're really regretting interviewing me, don't you?

I: No, you're a very interesting participant. I feel like you're really regretting participating, coz a lot of the questions I asked are not...

P: No I like contemplating my choices. Oh, there we go. Oh there are even more flowers than I remembered.

I: Tigers are on the flowers as well.

P: Yep.

I: So how is this flower not feminine?

P: Look at them, they are like [...] and stuff.

I: What?

P: Like this, Japanese style of drawing.

I: Using calligraphy you mean?

P: Wait a sec, I'm just going to find the word.

I: I might not know that word I'm sorry.

P: You will definitely know this word. When I'm talking to you, I'm always sure you know what I meant. Engraving, that's what it's called, like it's engraved.

I: Engraving. So if it's engraving style it's fine, but if it's anything else... Weak flowers are not okay, but strong flowers are okay?

P: Yep. You can see this flower is part of the picture.

I: It's much bigger than the tiger.

P: Yep but they fit with the tiger, they are the same style with the tiger, you can tell that they are not flowers for being flowers, they are part of the tiger, if that makes sense.

I: Yeah sure.

P: And tiger is definitely not overly anything. Tiger is a tiger.

I: Tiger is a tiger. And why pink? I thought you don't like a kind of girlish type of colour.

P: Yeah, because I really like the picture.

I: You really like the tiger and flowers, strong flowers sorry.

P: Yeah, smart flowers.

I: Smart flowers.

P: I don't know, pink actually looks not bad on me. I don't like it generally but I know it suits me, and the tiger thing. I saw that, I mean the model is wearing the black skirt which I definitely have. And that I won't need to think of what to combine it with.

I: Okay, so that's that. So last question. I'm gonna talk more about your Russian culture. You talked about how Russian is a very paternal kind of country, with a lot of emphasis on how women should dress or wear, but that kind of culture could result in two different ways of approaching it. Some people really hate it, and would become more rebellious against it, and therefore they become tomboys and they wear all the leather stuff just to show that you are against that paternal culture; some people do it the other way round, some people feel that I should use it to my advantage, so therefore they conform with it, they dress as lady as possible to become part of the culture. What is it to you then? Do you feel like you're more rebellious or do you feel like you're more conformed? Or do you feel like it's a constant struggle between these two, you don't really know what to do?

P: The thing is I really support feminists' views, so I can't possibly approve this kind of culture. But the same thing I often notice myself using it to my advantage because you know I'm small, and I have long hair, and I know it's really easy for me to be feminine enough for my country and to get some advantages. I don't know, I know it sounds really bad, but my male colleagues will treat me nice, if I look good. And I might feel comfortable with them being very helpful and stuff, so for example my first job, I totally did it.

I: Okay.

P: So yeah, that's how my feelings are.

I: So is it right to say, normally when you're comfortable, when you're not in your working environment, when you're not in university for example, you would probably go for the rebellious one, because ideally you're against that paternal culture; but when you're at work, you feel like you should take advantage over certain cultures, certain values basically, so that's why you would wear

something that's quite feminine, though you're against that culture. But are you against the feminine dress yourself?

P: I'm not against feminine dresses, but I'm against, I'm opposing this stereotype of women.

I: Okay, so do you feel like Russia has got such a culture, it makes you have to avoid dressing like a woman sometimes even though you like it? Just to show that you're against that culture?

P: Yeah, sometimes I did it in my second job, because I worked at a more or less female-centred office. We had literally only 1 or 2 male colleagues. And all these females they were kind of feminine. They were really stereotypical feminine.

I: What do you mean?

P: They were judging girls who weren't wearing make-up, they were judging girls who were dressing feminine or something, or trying to enhance their appearances somehow. Sometimes I would just wear jeans and hoodies, not wearing make-up just to annoy them.

I: So your choice of clothing actually shows... well like you said, you're not a very vocal person, so you would use clothing to show attitudes towards the dominant culture. And whenever you've been questioned in that way, for example, by the female colleagues you had, you would deliberately use the opposite things even though you like or hate it regardless, you would use them to show your attitudes.

P: Yeah.

I: Okay. But what if it's the opposite, where for example, it's a very feminist-dominant places, where everyone's like you should dress like a man, because we are strong, we are confident blah blah blah. Would you deliberately wear something like dress-like feminine-like just to show them stop talking bullshit?

P: No, no, because I share this view.

I: So if those female colleagues of yours do not impulse that feelings to you...

P: Yeah, I wouldn't care that much.

I: You would hypothetically wear what you want, which is basically the office-like things?

P: Yeah.

I: With a little bit of element of rock and punk?

P: Yeah.

I: Cool. That's all I need from you. Thank you.

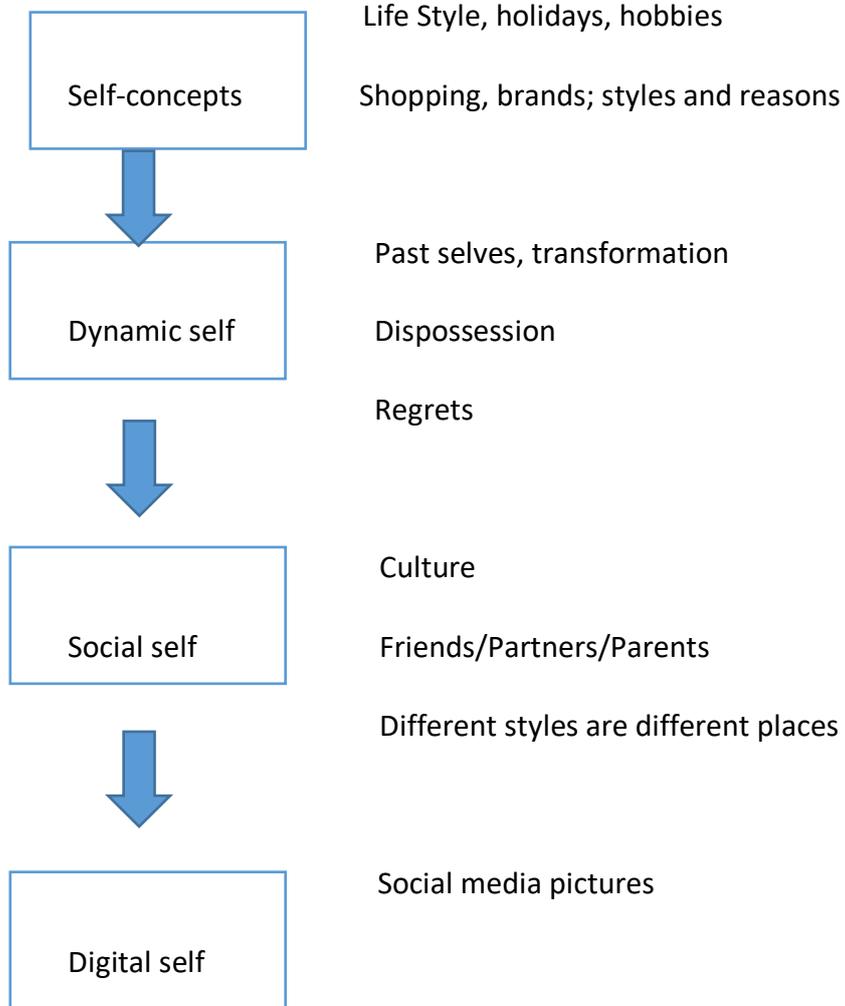
P: You're welcome.

[4:48:04]

[Appendix VI Moderator guide](#)

## Moderator Guide

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## Appendix VII Screenshots of NVivo 12 nodes

The screenshot displays the NVivo 12 interface with a list of nodes. The 'Nodes' pane on the left shows a tree view with categories like Quick Access, Data, Codes, Relationships, Cases, and Notes. The main window shows a table of nodes with the following columns: Name, Files, References, Created On, Created By, Modified On, and Modified By. The table contains 65 items, with the 'Notes' category expanded to show various nodes such as 'Smart casual', 'Personality', 'RQ1', 'RQ2', 'Age restriction', 'Avoid identical items', 'Bad experiences', 'Culture', 'Gender restriction', 'Incompatible', 'Negative reference group', 'Rebellion', 'RQ3', 'Already paid', 'Appeal to alternative values', 'Blend in', 'Boredom', 'Branding (and positioning)', 'Brandlessness', 'Buying for the future', 'Changed opinions', 'Collection', 'Compensation', 'Confidence', 'Denial of action', 'Denial of importance', 'Denial of the original form', 'Discount', 'Ideal self', 'Impulsive shopping', 'Last one', 'Making fun of stereotypes', and 'Match with other pieces'.

Name	Files	References	Created On	Created By	Modified On	Modified By
Smart casual		0	0 31/08/2017 16:26	YD	31/08/2017 16:26	YD
Personality		1	2 23/08/2017 20:09	YD	23/08/2017 20:10	YD
RQ1		2	3 20/08/2017 12:33	YD	23/08/2017 12:15	YD
RQ2		17	34 22/08/2017 12:34	YD	22/08/2017 12:34	YD
Age restriction		5	7 22/08/2017 12:48	YD	31/08/2017 17:23	YD
Avoid identical items		1	1 04/09/2017 18:56	YD	04/09/2017 18:56	YD
Bad experiences		1	1 31/08/2017 17:50	YD	31/08/2017 17:50	YD
Culture		1	1 29/08/2017 15:56	YD	29/08/2017 15:56	YD
Gender restriction		1	1 01/09/2017 14:43	YD	06/09/2017 18:30	YD
Incompatible		1	1 29/08/2017 17:24	YD	29/08/2017 17:24	YD
Negative reference group		12	17 22/08/2017 15:59	YD	04/10/2017 16:10	YD
Rebellion		4	5 22/08/2017 14:34	YD	31/08/2017 19:25	YD
RQ3		41	245 22/08/2017 12:34	YD	22/08/2017 12:34	YD
Already paid		5	6 25/08/2017 14:32	YD	01/09/2017 15:40	YD
Appeal to alternative values		11	16 22/08/2017 15:26	YD	27/09/2017 16:17	YD
Blend in		16	28 22/08/2017 16:21	YD	04/10/2017 17:34	YD
Boredom		2	4 29/08/2017 18:49	YD	29/08/2017 19:57	YD
Branding (and positioning)		1	2 25/08/2017 14:20	YD	25/08/2017 14:20	YD
Brandlessness		1	1 01/09/2017 16:11	YD	01/09/2017 16:11	YD
Buying for the future		6	8 22/08/2017 16:06	YD	02/10/2017 17:16	YD
Changed opinions		2	4 25/08/2017 14:39	YD	25/08/2017 16:34	YD
Collection		3	3 25/08/2017 14:44	YD	25/08/2017 18:49	YD
Compensation		4	6 22/08/2017 12:54	YD	01/09/2017 14:51	YD
Confidence		1	2 04/09/2017 12:24	YD	04/09/2017 12:24	YD
Denial of action		6	6 22/08/2017 15:28	YD	04/10/2017 16:12	YD
Denial of importance		8	9 22/08/2017 15:39	YD	27/09/2017 16:17	YD
Denial of the original form		11	15 22/08/2017 21:23	YD	04/10/2017 17:43	YD
Discount		8	16 22/08/2017 15:59	YD	31/08/2017 17:16	YD
Ideal self		6	8 22/08/2017 15:48	YD	11/09/2017 18:18	YD
Impulsive shopping		3	5 25/08/2017 15:06	YD	25/08/2017 17:33	YD
Last one		1	1 31/08/2017 15:35	YD	31/08/2017 15:35	YD
Making fun of stereotypes		1	1 01/09/2017 23:15	YD	01/09/2017 23:15	YD
Match with other pieces		5	5 22/08/2017 12:57	YD	02/10/2017 17:51	YD

Appendix VIII Sample characteristics

Code	Details	Consumer characterisation	Likes	Dislikes
VT01	ASA/UN D	<p>VT01 is certain between the style she likes and styles she wears;</p> <p>VT01 thinks punk and rock style reflect her personality of being strong, and also wants others to think of her like that;</p> <p>VT01 has a combination of different styles to meet different needs but struggles to wear what she really likes;</p> <p>VT01 also wears garments she assumes others would like to see on her;</p> <p>VT01 is susceptible to fashion and has specific sentiments for Burberry that she would buy everything there.</p>	<p>Theatrical and luxurious European palace style (e.g. Punk, sexy &amp; sweet; theatrical and dreamlike)</p>	<p>Fast fashion; revealing; dazzling and colourful</p>

DH02	EUR/UN D	DH02 has not experimented different styles yet, and only dresses in casual styles at Uni. DH02 avoids shopping at expensive brands but occasionally buys from ASOS with tags on.	Casual; sophisticated and confident	Crop top and bra-let; revealing; girlish; punk; goth; hippy
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HN04	ASA/UN D	HN04 tends to dress to impress her friends. She usually dresses in normcore or smart casual styles, but occasional she would put on hipster clothing to show a different side of her. To her, hipster style represents cool and freedom.	Plain boho; normcore; casual smart	Hipster
DT05	ASA/UN D	DT05 does not have a fixed style she likes, as long as the clothes do not make her look fat. Due to the lack of body confidence, DT05 only chooses clothes based on patterns rather than styles, and has a fear of overdressing.	Comfy; animal patterns; preppy;	Sexy; revealing; lolita; rock; punk

JM06	ASA/UN D	<p>JM06 follows fashion and has an eye for unique items;</p> <p>JM06 puts on different styles for different holidays to match with scenes;</p> <p>JM06's choice of style is determined by her age; JM06 prefers low-key garments and doesn't want to stand out.</p>	<p>Unique;</p> <p>high-waist;</p> <p>basic</p>	<p>Wild; California style; flashy;</p> <p>too mature;</p> <p>revealing;</p> <p>hipster/hiphop;</p> <p>messy</p>
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		<p>However, she does like pretty dresses in Bohemian style even though she never wears them.</p>		
QY07	ASA/Pos t	<p>QY07 does not choose clothes based on brands, but styles. She prefers to shop for light luxury brands that are between high street brands and luxury brands because she thinks they are worth the money. QY07 is easily influenced by sales and will not buy things if they are not on sales.</p>	<p>Light</p> <p>luxury;</p> <p>casual;</p> <p>normcore;</p> <p>elegant</p>	<p>Childish;</p> <p>revealing;</p> <p>foppish;</p> <p>girlish;</p> <p>really mature</p>

KK09	EUR/UN D	KK09 has three specific styles she likes, hard rock, vintage and elegant. She has clear ideas of where to get clothes for each style. KK09 does not like girlish style or colour because of the sweet girl stereotype.	Vintage; hard rock; classic & elegant; preppy; sunny & cheerful	Girlish; stupid & sweet
AG10	EUR/UN D	AG10 likes comfy clothing and prefers casual baggy style in uni. AG10 does not the stereotypical hipster clothing because she thinks they are not truthful to themselves.	Baggy & comfy; smart casual	Masculine; tomboy; gothic; revealing; dark punk; hippy; hipster

		Also, she is not a fan of dark themed clothing.		
CT11	ASA/UN D	CT11 has anxiety and confidence issues so she does not dress to stand out. However, her interest in larping provides another perspective into what she really likes and dislikes when it is to do with clothing.	Block colours; lady-like	Flashy; girlish or princess; loud; printed patterns; revealing

YA16	EUR/UN D	YA16 does not like 'older generation' shops like M&S or Dorothy Perkins; YA16 likes sexy garments but not too revealing as she feels uncomfortable; YA16 often wears plain and basic garments because she does not want to stand out. However, she does like unique garments because she does not want to look the same as every other girl.	Unique; feminine;	Hippie; revealing; punk; boyish
JN14	ASA/UN D	JN14 is quite open to try different styles so she does not really have any brand that she dislikes.	Simple & basic; tomboy; punk	Lolita; mori girl; revealing; goth

		JN14 has a phase of being a tomboy when she was younger. However, after that phase has ended, JN14 used feminine garments she disliked to compensate the phase of tomboy until she finally accepts that she only loves comfortable clothing.		
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MZ13	EUR/UN D	MZ13 is one of the few students that dresses up for Uni, which means, she does not like casual style at all. She has clear ideas of what to wear for different occasions.	Smart; smart casual	Crop top; baggy; revealing; hippy; red
OM17	EUR/UN D	OM17 claims to be open to all styles but she is quite certain in the styles she does not like too. She has complication over silver jewellery and dislikes smart clothing.	Trendy; biker chic; hippy; vintage	Sophisticate d; old- fashioned
RN18	EUR/Pos t	RN18 generally dislikes styles that are too casual, because she thinks you need to put more effort into your style. However, being a master student with several years of working experiences, she	Casual smart; classic; unique; powerful	Hoodies; revealing; crop tops; foppish; kitten heels; flip flops; trendy items; goth

		is constantly shifting between the Uni student identity and a professional smart identity, in which she sets differentiates them by separating Monday power women style and Thursday casual style.		
JO20	ASA/UN D	JO20 prefers hipster styles, even though her definition for hipster is broad enough to include every style she likes. She is more into the image portrayed by hipsters (carefree) instead of the clothes themselves.	Preppy; lady; feminine; sophisticated	Rock; goth
NC22	ASA/UN D	NC22 has confidence issue where she could not trust herself in buying clothes. She has to bring a friend with her every time she goes shopping, and would mostly agree with anything her friends suggest. NC22 also does not prefer specific styles as long as they would make her look thinner.	Floral prints; lady	n/a

ER23	EUR/UN D	ER23 really likes retro and vintage styles and often shops at brands	Retro; vintage; unique;	Chavvy; punk; rock; dark
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		that portray such identities (Loot and Urban Outfitters). On the other hand, she really dislikes chavvy identities that her brother likes, but somehow still buys from these chavvy brands.	crop tops; hippy (summer)	
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BJ24	EUR/Pos t	<p>BJ24 loves experimenting new styles, and is not afraid of wearing anything different. BJ24 has four styles to fit into her four phases within a day: professional working style; bolder after work style; wilder pub style and extravagant night out style. Being a goth at her teen, she regretted wearing eccentric clothing now, though she still likes it deep inside. On top of that, she also collects hats of different styles. Comparing with her usual four styles of clothing, she owns more than 50 different styles of hats, and could not explain why she enjoys buying hats as much.</p>	<p>Unique; timeless; classic; hippy; punk</p>	<p>Crop tops; sequin; dungarees or jumpsuits</p>
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CC25	ASA/UN D	CC25 has not got a fixed style she likes but she would like to dress like people in Gossip Girls or Kate Middleton. She wants to dress in elegant and feminine style but lacks the confidence to pull it off.	Simple; elegant; preppy; feminine; classy	Tomboy; childish; goth/punk; complicated
VS26	ASA/UN D	VS26 likes wearing simple styles and only wears skirts or dresses for occasions; VS26 prefers comfortable and practical clothing to stylish ones; VS26's usual style is comfortable and casual, but she does have a list of styles she wears at different occasions. On top of that, depending on the group of friends she is with, VS26 would put on different styles of garments to make them happy; VS26 really likes cute styles, however, she thinks cute styles are not good for her age. Therefore, she buys cute	Smart casual; tidy and clean; cute; sweet punk	Lolita;

		accessories like bags or pencil cases instead.		
BM27	EUR/UN D	BM27 shops at different brands for different needs and mixes styles among them. She dislikes preppy style because of her past experiences with her coursemates at boarding school and does not want to be associated with that stereotype.	Elegant; sophisticated; casual; punk	Goth; preppy; cute & innocent
KC28	ASA/Pos t	KC28 uses styles for different means, in a way that she cares about what images clothes present to other people. Like QY07, KC28 also prefers light luxury brands in general, so does not have any specific brands she hates or loves.	Punk; comfy & casual;	

AV30	EUR/Pos t	AV30 dislikes feminine and girlish styles because she wants to be taken seriously from her friends and colleagues. However, over the Christmas period she has bought herself a pink floral jumper which to her, is not a floral jumper, but a	Office professional style and light punk and rock styles	Feminine or girlish
		strong and powerful floral jumper because the flower is embroiled; AV30 dislikes feminine dresses and skirts because she believes herself to be a powerful feminist. However, she also admits she takes advantages of the feminine identity at work because colleagues treat her better if she dresses in feminine styles.		

LC29	ASA/Pos t	LC29 likes to follow the fashion, and loves experimenting different styles. She believes clothes are to be worn to make you look pretty, so she's less bothered with styles	Boho; lady; reserved; fashionabl e; classic	Sexy; punk; rock; tomboy; hipsters
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