

Negotiating stigmas: Contributions from the narrative approach

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Objective of the study

The broad aim of this research is to understand how consumers construct their identity through biographical consumption narratives. Accordingly, I will explore how people tell stories of consumption and how those stories reflect on their past/current/future life meanings. In particular, I aim to understand how consumers use consumption as a resource to create continuity in their life-stories in the face of stigmatization. Existing consumer research on this topic has studied how individuals manage their stigmatization experiences through practices of self-empowerment and well-being, building a broad taxonomy of remedial responses using content-analysis. In addition, the secondary aim of this study is to explore the role and importance of consumption in identity creation. As this research is interpretive by nature its objective is to gain a better understanding of the phenomenon in question rather than produce generalizations.

Research method

In order to shed light on this complex phenomenon, I gathered data utilizing life-story-interviews. I analyzed this data through employing the method of narrative analysis which involves configuring the shattered data elements into a coherent story that unites and gives meaning to the data as contributors to a goal or a purpose.

Findings

A narrative approach enabled me to gain an in-depth holistic understanding of the biographical meanings in the interviews. Indeed, this research hopes to extend our knowledge on the consumer coping responses to stigmatization through its in-depth analysis of biographical narrative. This more holistic approach has allowed the grasping of stigmatization in the context of biographical narrative, and thus, produced a novel interpretation of these coping practices. This research proposes a model of compensatory consumption whereby identity lies in the life-story and the author aims to construct a complete and coherent narrative through compensatory consumption. In a narrative context, stigma is reflected as a lack of meaning, and compensation is, then, a process through which individuals negotiate this lack of meaning by using consumption as a resource for a variety of remedying strategies. This proposed model enables me to demonstrate how the application of such remedies can be examined in an in-depth manner through a focus the modalities of *agency* and *communion*. As higher order concepts, these two notions help to understand how an individual is able to create broader coherence in the face of stigmatization. Finally, the thesis also explores the relation of identity construction and consumption. It is concluded that consumption is not used to construct identity per se, but rather reflects identity through its role in the individual's broader sense-making – namely via the told life-story. Nevertheless, consumption has a significant role in the process of 'selfing' as a resource.

Keywords

Narrative, identity, stigmatization, narrative analysis, consumption, consumers, consumer research, life-story interview

Tutkimuksen tavoitteet

Tämän tutkielman tavoitteena on ymmärtää, kuinka kuluttajat rakentavat identiteettiään elämäkerrallisessa narratiivissa. Toisin sanoen, tutkin kuinka kuluttajat kertovat tarinoita kulutuskokemuksistaan ja miten nämä tarinat heijastavat heidän menneitä, nykyisiä ja tulevia tavoitteitaan ja merkityksiään. Erityisesti tutkielmassa pyritään ymmärtämään, kuinka kuluttajat hyödyntävät kulutukseen liittämääns merkityksiä luodakseen jatkuvuutta elämäntarinaansa stigmatisaation yhteydessä. Aikaisempi kuluttajatutkimus aiheesta on perustunut sisältöanalyysiin, eikä näin ollen ole mahdollistanut yhtä syvällistä ymmärrystä. Tämä tutkielma pyrkii laajentamaan tätä ymmärrystä hyödyntäen elämäkerrallisuuden mahdollistamaa, kokonaisvaltaista lähestymistapaa. Tämän lisäksi tarkoituksena on myös ymmärtää kuluttamisen roolia tässä identiteetin luomisprosessissa. Koska tutkimus on luonteeltaan tulkinnallista, sen tarkoituksena on saavuttaa laajempi ja syvempi ymmärrys kyseisestä ilmiöstä, ei niinkään tuottaa yleistyksiä.

Tutkimusmenetelmä

Tutkielman aineisto on kerätty hyödyntäen elämäntarinahaastatteluja, mikä mahdollistaa kompleksisen ilmiön syvällisen tarkastelun. Lopullinen ymmärrys aineistosta on saavutettu narratiivi analyysin kautta. Tämä metodi perustuu Ricoeurin 'juonellistamiseen', missä irralliset tarinat ja tapahtumat koostetaan yhteneväksi kokonaisuudeksi, jonka erilliset palaset saavat merkityksensä kokonaisuuden osana.

Löydökset

Tutkielmassa hyödynnetty menetelmä mahdollisti syvällisen, kokonaisvaltaisen ymmärryksen haastattelujen sisältämistä elämäkerrallisista merkityksistä. Tämän johdosta tutkimus on laajentanut ymmärrystä kuluttajien tavoista pärjätä stigmatisaation kanssa elämäkerrallisen tarinankerronnan avulla. Tässä tutkielmassa esitetään malli kompensoivasta kuluttamisesta, missä yksilön identiteetti rakentuu elämäkerrallisessa tarinankerronnassa, missä kertoja pyrkii muodostamaan yhtenevän narratiivi-identiteetin hyödyntäen kulutukseen liittämääns merkityksiä. Tämän mallin avulla esitetään, kuinka pärjäämiseen käytetyt strategiat hyödyntävät kuluttamista resurssina elämäntarinassa heijastuneen merkityksettömyyden kompensoimisessa. Esitetty malli mahdollistaa näiden remedifikaatio strategioiden syvällisen tutkimisen keskittyen toimijuuden ja yhteisöllisyyden korkeamman luokan teemoihin. Nämä teemat auttavat meitä ymmärtämään kuinka yksilö pystyy luomaan laajempaa yhteneväisyyttä elämäntarinaansa huolimatta stigmatisaatiosta. Lopuksi, esitetään, että kuluttaminen ole suoranaisesti keino rakentaa identiteettiä, vaan ennemmin siitä kerrotut tarinat heijastavat kuluttajan rakentamaa identiteettiä, joten kuluttamisella on tärkeä rooli identiteetin rakentamisessa resurssina.

Avainsanat

Narratiivi-identiteetti, stigmatisaatio, narratiivi analyysi, kulutus, kuluttaja, kulutustutkimus, elämäntarina haastattelu

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1. Introduction

1.1 Introduction

In the face of undesired events in everyday life that individuals have no control over, powerlessness and frustration are common feelings. Such feelings are also commonly associated with stigmatization (Goffman, 1963), a phenomenon that devalues an individual as a result of some physical or psychological attribute in a given context. This contamination of an individual can have profound effects on his or her perception of life's meaningfulness, and can lead to negative outcomes such as resignation and maladaptation.

Existing consumer research on this topic has studied how individual's manage their stigmatization experiences through practices of self-empowerment and well-being (Henry and Caldwell, 2006), building a broad taxonomy of remedial responses using content-analysis (Glaser and Strauss, 1967).

To further build on this work, this thesis seeks to understand the remedying of stigmas through biographical narration. Based on the broad agenda of CCT (Arnould & Thompson, 2005), this narrative inquiry seeks to understand the co-constructing dynamic between individual sense-making and the broader landscape of meanings within which this individual lives in. To this end, this thesis aims to understand *how* individuals negotiate their perceived stigmas through the telling of their life-stories, and through the configuring of culturally conditioned and reproduced meanings of past, present and future.

Through an extended and in-depth analysis of one individual's life-narrative, this research delivers a narrative conceptualization of stigma response, identifying and grouping a number of stigma resolving strategies under the guiding higher-order themes of *Agency* and *Communion* (McAdams, 1993).

These findings are significant to current stigmatization literature not only due to the relatively new method of narrative, but also due to the holistic, biographical analysis involved in (re)constructing these insights. Stigmatization is often a matter of complex and deep-seated conflicts in an individual's life, and to adequately understand how such tensions are negotiated and re-integrated into one's life-trajectory, an intimate analysis of such a life is paramount.

1.2 Research gap

In their article "Self-empowerment and consumption", Henry and Caldwell (2006) have studied stigmatization (Goffman, 1963) from a consumer research point of view. In this work, they explore

a variety of consumption-related coping responses to stigma through content analysis (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). While their study on the Australian heavy metal music scene offers a rich taxonomy of consumer remedies for stigma, their approach fails to recognize the holistic aspect of this phenomenon, and the biographic dimensions of consumers' accounts remain untouched. The current research will observe this phenomenon through a novel approach utilizing narrative theory that enables a more holistic, in-depth understanding of how an individual can negotiate stigma through life-story telling.

1.3 Research objectives and research questions

1.3.1 Research objectives

The broad aim of my research is to understand how consumers construct their identity through biographical consumption narratives. These narrative acts are directed towards chosen (strategically) temporal domains of the life-story-as-text – but are always told through a present perspective (Järvinen, 2004). This perspective entails *trying* to integrate salient past, present, and future meanings into a relatively coherent whole.

Accordingly, I will explore how people tell stories of consumption and how those stories reflect on their past/current/future life meanings. Thus, emphasis is on identifying strategies and techniques individuals use in their storytelling to construct a coherent identity. In particular, I aim to understand how consumers use consumption as a resource to create continuity in their life-stories. As my research is interpretive by nature its objective is to gain a better understanding of the phenomenon in question rather than produce generalizations.

In addition, the secondary aim of the study is to explore the role and importance of consumption in identity creation. In their article “Identity, consumption, and narratives of socialization”, Shankar et al. (2009) present an argument that contradicts with the common view in consumer research, as they state that, actually, the role of consumption has been overly emphasized in identity construction and it should rather be seen as a context in which this process of identity construction is reflected in.

Furthermore, although the context of my research is music, this thesis aims to shed light on the identity projects of consumers, as “consumer culture theorists do not study consumption contexts, they study *in* consumption contexts to generate new constructs and theoretical insights and to extend theoretical formulations” (Arnould & Thompson, 2005: 869). This said, in my research I will concentrate on active and conscious consumption of music rather than accidental hearing of it in different spaces.

1.3.2 Research questions

As my specific aim in this research is to understand how an individual constructs a coherent and satisfactory, temporally structured identity through storytelling my research questions are as follows:

- What kind of storytelling strategies do consumers deploy when integrating past, present, and future meanings in and through the present perspective as they construct a viable narrative identity?
 - How are the themes of agency and communion demonstrated in these consumer narratives?
 - What is the role of consumption in this process?

1.4 Definitions of key concepts

Identity is defined through McAdams's (1996) framework where self-as-subject "I" is engaged in the process of 'selfing' where the self-as-object "Me" integrates the temporal dimensions of past, present, and future through story-telling.

Consumption is an act of self-actualization, where goods are not acquired only for their use value. The postmodern view sees consumption as part of the process where value is not only "consumed" but it is also produced through the act of consumption itself.

Narratives are stories that are follow the logic of 'narrative configuration' and are told by individuals. In current research identity is understood as one's biographical narrative (McAdams, 1996) that is a product of 'selfing'.

Narrative configuration In my work I use the term 'narrative configuration' (Polkinghorne, 1988) to refer to the process of configuring time and events to a comprehensible, satisfactory whole whereas 'emplotment' (Ricoeur 1984) refers to the same logic, but from the analytical perspective of the researcher (Polkinghorne, 1995).

Stigma is "an attribute that is deeply discrediting" as it reduces its bearer "from a whole and usual person to a tainted discounted one" (Goffman, 1963: 3).

1.5 Previous research

In this section I will first discuss briefly the previous research concerning popular music consumption. Then, I will review the key articles that have influenced my study on this particular research topic of negotiating stigmatization through consumption narratives.

Considering the importance of popular music in the everyday life of consumer, it has received quite a little attention from marketing researchers (Holbrook, 1986; Holbrook & Schindler, 1989; Lacher & Mizerski, 1994; Shankar, 2000; Shankar et al. 2009), though it has been studied from a variety of theoretical perspectives (see Shankar 2000 for a review). The areas of interest of these studies range from the music industry's influence on people, to what does music do to people and finally, what do people do with music (Shankar, 2000). What is common for these different points of view is the shift in consumer's role from passive receiver to an active co-producer of content and meaning that is comparable to the postmodern theories of consumption that grant consumers an active role in meaning creation (Firat & Venkatesh 1995, Firat & Dholakia 2006).

A great inspiration for this thesis was Shankar et al.'s (2009) study on people's record collection as a reflection of their identity projects. In this study consumers were interviewed about their record collections with the purpose of exploring the linkages of these records with life-narratives of consumers in order to study the relationship between consumption and identity. Shankar et al. (2009) elaborated on the idea that identity construction is reflected in consumption, and argued that record collections could act as an archive of this ever-changing project of self. In similar vein Avi Shankar (2000) concluded that music can be an important way to adapt and make sense of one's own existence.

Another influential article, the one I strive to extend with this study, is Henry and Caldwell's (2006) study on the consumer empowerment in the face of stigmatization. Based on a review of the sociological, psychological, and consumer behavior literature as well as on a content analysis of the ethnography on heavy metal music enclave they discuss the various consumption-related remedies to stigma. In this article, Henry and Caldwell (2006) propose taxonomy of consumer remedies to stigma. This categorization consists of ten remedies: resignation, confrontation, enclave withdrawal, escapism, mainstream engagement, concealment, hedonism, spiritualism, nostalgia, and creative production. These responses vary in respect to their emphasis on engagement and disengagement and they may lead to either negative or positive adaptive outcomes in terms of self-empowerment and wellbeing.

1.6 The subject of the research – self-reflexivity

As my research is interpretative by nature and aligns with assumptions of philosophical hermeneutics, the role of researcher is to act as a measuring stick. In the process of inquiry the pre-understanding of the researcher will merge with the understanding of the research object in a fusion of horizons. Accordingly, what I have previously experienced and learned influences my analysis and findings, and I am inclined to enclose some information of myself and my life-experiences. According to Gadamer (1989), self-reflexivity such as this stems from the idea that for any meaningful understanding of research data to occur, the interpreter assimilates one's own fore-meanings and prejudices into the interpretive process. Thus, "reflexivity is the process in which one reflects critically on the self as researcher... It is a conscious experiment of the self as both inquirer and respondent, as teacher and learner, as the one coming to know the self within the process of research itself. "(Lincoln & Guba, 2000: 183). In other words, then, a practice of self-reflexivity offers a chance to learn about, as well as challenge, the origins of one's biases and prejudices. As such it is about making choices what should be included in the final research production.

Firstly, this research is part of my master's degree in Economics and Business Administration. It is a pinnacle of my studying life, and should therefore demonstrate my ability for analytical thinking as well as for acquiring information on a certain topic. In addition, I have a need to demonstrate that I am able to carry out a demanding research project in order to be accepted to continue my studies in the doctoral program.

Secondly, the current context of study reflects to a large degree my own interest. I have always been quite interested in listening and collecting music, although my abilities to actually create any music are quite thin. My liking to music can be credited to my mother who has been an avid listener of music. During my childhood years we have always had music playing at home, and not only children's songs, but also more credible works such as those of Beatles, Cat Stevens, Rolling Stones, the Doors, and so on. This is probably this is why buying and listening to music has grown part of my set of practices as well. During different periods of life my musical interest has been directed towards different genres and artists, but I have always been keen on finding new music as well as exploring the classics. I have not devoted myself to any certain style, but good music has always been my thing and I have found it important to keep myself updated of the new and vivid music styles. I think that my vast, although not necessarily deep, knowledge of different music genres will both enable and constrain the extracting and interpreting of the stories of my informants.

1.7 Structure of the study

In this first chapter, I have presented the objective and research questions of this research in order to locate this inquiry within the field of existing research, as well as to justify my approach. In addition, I have reviewed the key articles that act as a starting point for this thesis, and following the hermeneutic approach described the researcher, me.

In the second chapter, my agenda is to justify my research and locate it within the framework of consumer culture theory (Arnould & Thompson, 2005), and describe briefly the essence of this theory. Here, I will concentrate on clarifying the concepts of consumption and identity in the context of this research, and elaborate on how consumption is used in identity construction and compensatory consumption.

In the third chapter, I review narrative theory and describe its main elements, including narrative configuration (Polkinghorne, 1988) which will establish a link between story-telling and identity (McAdams, 1996). In this context I will also introduce the concepts of time and causality.

Then, in the fourth chapter, I will discuss biographical narratives, in particular the relation between actual human life and life-stories. In this chapter I will describe the biographical concepts that are used in my analysis. Finally I will discuss stigmatization (Goffman, 1963) as well as a variety of coping responses to stigmas and propose higher order themes of agency and communion (McAdams, 1993) to guide my analysis.

In the brief fifth chapter, the conceptual dynamics that will guide my analysis are reviewed.

In the sixth chapter, the methodological principles of narrative paradigm (Shankar et al., 2001) are addressed. In this chapter, I will discuss philosophical hermeneutics as well as my ontological and epistemological position. Then, I will describe my methods of life-story interview and narrative analysis. Finally, I will describe the actual process of data collection and analysis as well as describe the problems encountered in the course of the research.

Following this, in the seventh chapter, I will represent the findings and analysis thematically. First, I will set the scene through describing the unresolved tensions and then, I will describe the various coping responses that were encountered in Pete's narrative.

In the eighth chapter, the findings of this research are discussed. I will propose a narrative model of compensatory consumption to understand this process of negotiating stigmatization in a

biographical narrative. Then, I will discuss the narrative strategies found in Pete's narrative. Finally, I will elaborate on the relation of consumption and identity.

In the last chapter, I will conclude my discussion on the findings of this research and present my contribution as well as offer suggestions for further research.

2. Cultural view on consumption

In this chapter, I will situate the current research within the Consumer Culture Theory (Arnould & Thompson, 2005) and provide a brief description of its key characteristics as well as its implications to current research. After this, I will discuss the relationship between consumption and identity under contemporary cultural conditions.

2.1 Overview of CCT

Consumer Culture theory (CCT) (Arnould & Thompson, 2005) studies the practices of consumption and possession, as well as their hedonic, aesthetic, and ritualistic dimensions. This said, CCT is not actually a theory, rather, it is a conceptualization of certain research traditions that have emerged in the last 20 years to address the dynamic relationships between consumer actions, the marketplace, and cultural meanings. Rather than to offer conclusions or theorizations, the aim of CCT is to ‘link individual level meanings to different levels of cultural processes and structure and then to situate these relationships within historical and marketplace contexts’ (Arnould & Thompson, 2005: 875). Accordingly, CCT enables the studying of product and brand meanings as well as product symbolism.

Consumer culture theorists study *how* consumers consume in the context of everyday life. This is done by utilizing various research methods. The theories under the umbrella of CCT are linked together by their common aim to understand cultural complexities, as these theories have abandoned the modernist view of culture as ‘a fairly homogenous system of collectively shared meanings, ways of life, and unifying values shared by members of society’ (Arnould & Thompson, 2005: 869). These theories ‘explore the heterogeneous distribution of meanings and the multiplicity of overlapping cultural groupings that exist within the broader socio-historic frame of globalization and market capitalism’ (Arnould & Thompson, 2005: 869). Therefore, in consumer culture the market place mediates the relation between lived culture and social resources as well as that of meaningful ways of life and the symbolic and material resources that make it possible. This market place culture is dependent on consumers’ ability to exercise their free will in everyday consumption choices, although the choices are made between ready-made goods and encouraged by desire-inducing marketing symbols (Holt, 2002).

CCT conceptualizes culture as the very fabric of experience, meaning, and action (Arnould & Thompson, 2005). Bourdieu (1990) compares consumer culture – and the market place ideology it advocates - to a game where individuals improvise within the constraints of rules. As the

consumers' actions are constrained by these common rules, they have an influence to consumers' perception of acceptable actions, feelings, and thoughts, hence making certain patterns of behavior and thought more probable than others (Holt, 1997; Kozinets, 2002; Thompson & Hirschman, 1995). This reflects the dynamic ontology of narratives as well; culture provides the structure for consumer behaviors and storytelling, still leaving him or her with some agency to act within a given cultural frame (Arnould & Thompson, 2005).

2.2 Consumption and CCT

Using multiple, novel research methods, CCT explores the socio-cultural dynamics that drive the consumption cycle. According to Arnould and Thompson (2005), this research tradition seeks to investigate the contextual, symbolic, and experiential aspects of consumption that are evident in the different stages of consumption cycle. This cycle consists of acquisition, consumption and possession, and disposition processes (Holbrook, 1995). Thus, consumption is not seen as a mere act of buying but as a project that should be studied from beginning to an end.

No longer do consumers base their decisions solely on the materialistic benefits, but also on symbolic meanings through which consumers can maintain and construct their identities (Elliott 1999: 112). As Firat and Venkatesh (2005) argue, the symbolic and functional properties of goods are inseparable, so no distinction between real and simulation, or material and imaginary should be made. In this vein, CCT has studied the hedonic, aesthetic, and ritualistic dimensions of consumption and possession practices. However, this range of focus areas has also incorporated the role of disposition (by will, by accident, or by misfortune) of consumer products in consumers' identity practices. Indeed, possessions can be perceived as both signifiers and containers of identity, while also material carriers of self (discardable or otherwise), all of which represent important role as resources in constructing coherence to one' life. In this light, consumption is not the end, but it is a social act, in which meaning is created and produced. (Firat & Venkatesh, 1995). Accordingly, the narrative approach is supported since it allows me to observe this process comprehensively.

In their manifesto, Arnould and Thompson (2005) state that CCT emphasizes the productive aspect of consumption, in particular 'how consumers actively rework and transform symbolic meanings encoded in advertisements, brands, retail settings, or material goods to manifest their particular personal and social circumstances and further their identity and lifestyle goals' (p.871). In my research, I specifically explore the process of how consumers make sense of their lives in narrative form through describing their consumption practices and demonstrating the meanings that are attached to them. Despite this, I oppose taking by face-value the degree of importance CCT

theorists place on the role of consumption meanings in the process of identity construction. Instead I would advocate Shankar et al.'s (2009) view that consumption choices among these symbolic products reflect more accurately the dynamically constructed narrative identity of consumer.

The current research contributes to the CCT stream of “Consumer Identity Projects”. This aspect deals with consumers as identity seekers and makers, using market-generated cultural meanings and symbols to assemble a coherent, yet fragmented sense of self. This type of approach is also present for example, in the work Schau and Gilly (2003) who view the ‘identity project’ as a goal driven endeavor, where consumers strive towards a coherent self using pre-produced symbols and meaning in their Web-based self-representation practices.

Much to the concern of this research, Arnould and Thompson (2005) also suggest that temporality in consumption experiences should be studied in more detail - in particular *how consumers understand* temporality. Since temporality is an inherent structure of narratives, studying consumer stories facilitates such a study quite appropriately.

2.3 Contemporary views of self

In his influential article “Personality, Modernity, and the storied self” (1996) McAdams reviews the qualities of the modern self. According to him, identity is no longer seen as a passive, fixed and stable entity that is solely crafted by external forces. Rather, in modernity, self is seen as a “product or project that is fashioned or sculpted, not unlike a work of art or a technological artifact” (Giddens, 1991, cited McAdams, 1996: 297). This process of forging an identity is an interactive process in which individuals draw from social influences, and in turn, further mold and contribute to these social structures (Giddens, 1991). This aligns with the narrative paradigm (Shankar et al., 2001) where narratives are seen as dynamic constructs of individual and social agency. Moreover, temporality has an important role within this dynamic, as the ever-evolving identity of an individual develops over time seeking temporal coherence through self-actualization and projects (Giddens, 1991). Temporal coherence refers to the narrative function of integrating separate life-events and meanings into a cohesive plot line (Polkinghorne, 1988).

The postmodernist view on identity challenges this modernistic unity and purpose in life (i.e. Gergen, 1992). Here, identity is seen as fragmented into locations of intersecting voices in narrative space-time (Firat & Venkatesh 1995; Sampson 1989). Despite this fragmentation, consumer researchers have found few examples of consumers abandoning the desire for a coherent identity narrative (see Ahuvia, 2005 for review). Quite the opposite, existing research has explored the ways people use consumption to configure a coherent identity within the context of fragmented society.

Accordingly then, it is not the self that is endlessly fragmented but the cultural setting it draws from (Ahuvia 2005).

By and large, despite the popularity of the postmodernist view of fragmented self, it has become commonplace to view consumer's sense of identity as structured in terms of narrative (e.g. Ahuvia; 2005; Escalas & Bettman, 2000; Giddens 1991, McAdams 1996, Thompson 1996, 1997, Holt & Thompson, 2004). Indeed, then, while postmodernism should be treated as an exaggeration, it is, nevertheless, accurate in its depiction of identity construction being difficult. Indeed, my research shares this view, especially in regards of creating temporal coherence to the self-defining life-story (McAdams, 1996).

2.3.1 Consumption and Identity

The self is conceptualized under the conditions of postmodernity not as a given product of a social system nor as a fixed entity which the individual can simply adopt, but as something the person actively creates, partially through the acts of consumption (Giddens, 1991). Through consumption one exercises free will to form images of who and what one wants to be. Paradoxically this 'free will' is directed by values that are partly social constructs (Thompson, 1996). In this chapter, then, I will review a variety of ways the self is viewed to be related with consumption.

One way to view identity is to understand it through "having, doing, and being" (Sartre, 1962), so as to understand it as a sum of our possessions and practices as they are embedded within existential frame of meanings. In his epic paper "Possessions and the Extended Self", Belk (1988) discussed how people use consumption to construct their identities. Grounding his argument on James's (1890) much-cited dichotomy of "I" and "Me", he proposes a concept of "extended self". In so doing, he argues that consumption is a way to produce a desired self through adopting the images and style *implied* by one's possessions. Thus, consumers often opt for brands and products that communicate a certain identity. This enables consumers to self-represent and make their identities tangible (Schau & Gilly, 2003) - indeed "We are what we have", maintains Belk (1988: 160).

This link between consumer's identity and consumption has been established in, for example, studies of strong emotional attachments to objects (Ahuvia, 2005; Sherry & McGrath, 1989; Richins, 1997; Schultz, Kleine & Kernan, 1989). For instance, in his study of loved objects, Ahuvia (2005) suggests that "love" can be associated to a broad variety of activities, and not only to material objects. This argument about the holistic nature of consumption justifies my approach that understands music consumption as a broader concept than buying records; rather it also involves

time consuming activities, social ties, and displaying symbols. The consumer is, then, an interpreter who turns goods into social and cultural values. While the consumer is not the author of what is consumed, she or he does dictate *how* it is consumed (Strathern, 1992). This conjecture implies that I should not concentrate on consumption objects *per se* but on the ways individuals consume as well as how they are narrate about them.

Goffman (1959) theorizes that self-presentation is the intentional and tangible component of identity, as social actors engage in internal dialogue in order to project a certain kind of impression. According to him, this set of behaviors is called impression management (Schau & Gilly, 2003). The social actions in this process are rooted in consumption with individuals displaying signs, symbols, brands, and practices in order to communicate certain impression (Williams and Bendelow, 1998). Goffman (1959) argues that this self-representation is context-dependent, highlighting the significance of certain audience and setting. In like vein, narrative analysis is an excellent way to examine what Arnould and Price (2000) coin *authenticating acts*, narrative instances through which one can reveal true self by part-taking in consumption activities.

As I have previously stated, people attach meanings to their possessions (Ahuvia, 2005; Belk, 1988). Building on Levy (1959) and Mick (1986), Lury (1996, p.1) states that “One of the most important ways in which people relate to each other socially is through the mediation of things”. Objects are a way to communicate one’s relationship to materiality as well as their standing within the social world (Ames, 1984 cited in Schau & Gilly, 2003). As Dittmar and Pepper (1992) explain it, consumers acquire and display possessions as tangible symbols of identity. This is aligned with Belk’s (1988: 147) statement that the relationship between person and object is “never a two-way (person-thing), but always a three-way (person-thing-person)” – therefore by studying people’s possession portfolios we can gain we can gain access to an individual’s intangible self, which is most often positive, but can also be oppositional or directly oppositional (Schau & Gilly, 2003). Moreover, Belk (1988) suggests that self cannot be defined uniformly because it is an assessment that changes and evolves over time. Thus, narrative temporality serves to link the ever-changing self with its primary resource that is consumption meanings (Shankar et al., 2001). Indeed, Ahuvia (2005) suggests that a narrative approach has the capacity to capture the temporal continuity of identity construction.

As current research views identity as life-story, possessions could be seen as a horizontal extension to this model. One assembles self through acquiring objects, or at least sees this extension as reflection of the self that is constructed in story-telling. This research will look into the ways as to

how these consumption meanings are integrated into biographical narrative. Thus, it is not the actual objects that become part of the extended self but the ways they are narrated about. In this sense, life-story telling represents the core self, and the extended self, then reflects how external objects are embedded in the life story. Thus, my research builds on both Ahuvia's (2005) and Belk's (1988) works by integrating these two frameworks. In summary, then, since story-telling is a primary way of self-presentation, while also contextualizing consumption practices, the examination of narrative serves as an efficient way to understand these aforementioned relationships.

2.3.2 Compensatory consumption

“Compensatory consumption is engaged in whenever an individual feels a need, lack or desire which they cannot satisfy with a primary fulfillment so they seek and use an alternative means of fulfillment in its place” (Gronmo, 1988: 68)

Compensatory consumption is a complex area of consumer behavior spanning a vast range of types of compensation and behavior manifestations (Woodruffe, 1997). Gronmo's (1988) definition of compensatory consumption behavior stems from the notion that while many consumer behavior models are based on an underlying utilitarian correspondence between action and needs, an opposite approach could be equally valid. He argues that parts of consumer behavior are characterized by a systematic *lack* of correspondence between action and needs. Thus “compensatory consumer behavior’ means that consumption is heavily emphasized as a reaction to, and as an attempt to make up for, a general lack of esteem or self-actualization” (Gronmo, 1988:68)

This notion of compensation is reflected, for example, in Baumeister's (1991) theory of needs for meaning in life. He maintains that people failing to satisfy their needs for meanings will show some frustration, malaise, discontent, or instability. In turn, when people experience loss of meanings they turn to their remaining sources of meaning, emphasizing these when trying to cope with the loss. Indeed, it could be argued that in consumer society, consumption is one of the primary meaning-bases people draw from, and that the process of constructing a ‘meaningful life’, or, in other words, an integrated self-narrative, will, inadvertently, imply compensatory consumption practices, and stories thereof.

3. Narratives

Traditionally, marketing research has seen and observed stories as a report of factual events (Hopkinson & Hogarth-Scott, 2001). This view fails to recognize the finer nuances that can be observed in the stories. As they are accounts of events told and remembered by the human mind, they are not always fully aligned with the actuality. These inconsistencies, in turn, can reveal a whole lot of the protagonist and his identity. The current research applies the narrative paradigm as a lens to interpret these consumer narratives (Shankar et al., 2001). This implies that stories are observed as ontologically constitutive accounts of consumer constructed meanings and reality. Moreover, biographical narrative may even be perceived as constituting the identity of the individual (McAdams, 1996) as will be described later.

Shankar et al. (2001) suggest studying narratives as a way to understand consumption. In a consumption context we may expect consumers to weave coherent meanings of their consumption behaviors (compensatory and functional) through the utilization of narrative forms. These 'consumption stories' may function to locate the individual's behavior in its original context (Woodruffe-Burton & Elliott, 2005: 462). "The structure of narratives allows stories to be used in this capacity: emotion is understood in the context of an initial event affecting an actor, unusual events are explained through canonical storylines, and self-goals are situated in relation to actors and outcomes. Hence, by examining consumer narratives, we can gain insight into how consumers understand their consumption patterns and how consumption plays a role in self-creation (Escalas & Bettman, 2000: 245)." In like vein, Elliott and Wattanasuwan (1998) have found many examples of acts of consumption that use symbolic resources to construct a narrative identity. According to them, these meaning-laden resources help individuals locate themselves and their behavior in a logical sequence of meaningful action.

More effectively than through a structured or semi-structured interview format, the subject can, through biographical narration, convey the deeper and holistic meanings of a consumption experience. In general, narrative analysis enables consumer researchers to gain richer ways to understand consumers' consumption behaviors as part of their integrated life-story (Shankar et al., 2001).

In the following sections I will discuss narrative theory. This will entail defining its main concepts, the structure of narrative, and its role in the construction of identity.

3.1 Narratives in sense-making

Storytelling is an inherent feature of human beings, as stories are a fundamental part of all known cultures. Jerome Bruner (1986) even goes as far as suggesting that we are genetically built to understand the narrative form. Consequentially, we develop an ability to socially and culturally understand stories (Polkinghorne, 1988). Story-form is a natural way for individuals to organize information, and they use narratives to express themselves and their views to others; many scholars have even suggested that the human mind is primarily an instrument for storytelling (McAdams, 1993).

Bruner (1986) distinguishes between narrative and paradigmatic modes of thought. The paradigmatic mode of thought is strictly based on empirical knowledge and thus cannot express person's desires, objectives, and social behavior. Conversely, these *can* be communicated through narrative mode. Based on these modes of thought, narrative inquiries can be classified into *analysis of narratives* and *narrative analysis*. According to Polkinghorne (1995), *analysis of narratives* concerns stories as data, creating paradigmatic knowledge in the form of categories and typologies, in a similar manner as content analysis (Glaser & Strauss 1967). On the contrary, *narrative analysis* analyzes actions, events, and happenings through utilizing 'narrative configuration' or 'emplotment' (Ricoeur, 1984) as an analytic tool to produce stories (e.g. biographies, histories, and case studies). In my work I will use the latter in order to understand the interrelatedness of actions, events and happenings and their link to the identity projects and meanings.

Narrative is a tool for people to explain their life and organize the mismatching and contradicting meanings and events therein into a coherent and meaningful whole (Baumeister, 1991). Life-story telling is about constructing meanings of life through 'narrative configuration' (Polkinghorne, 1995). This active process will be described in the next section.

3.2 Narrative configuration

Human experience does not automatically take a story-form, but it consists of unrelated day-to-day chores and simultaneous multiple projects (Carr, 1986). This said, we as humans have a tendency to organize or 'configure' our experiences and memories of human happenings into a coherent and continuous tale of self (Bruner, 1991). 'Narrative configuration' refers to the process in which these separate life-events are arranged together into a temporally organized whole, thus directing them towards a conclusion, or a valued end-point (Polkinghorne, 1991: 147). The existence of a resulting plot or a unified storyline implies that life makes sense and forms a cohesive whole. When happenings are 'narratively configured', they take on narrative meaning. That is, they are

understood from the “perspective of their contribution and influence on a specified outcome” (Polkinghorne, 1995: 5). In sum, narrative configuration is the means to bring coherence and integration among fragmented life-meanings and events. Thus, in my work I use the term narrative configuration (Polkinghorne, 1988) in order to refer to individuals’ process of configuring time and events into a comprehensible, satisfactory whole. Emplotment (Ricoeur, 1984), in turn, reflects how this configuration process is conceived and interpreted by the faculties of a researcher (Polkinghorne, 1995).

‘Narrative configuration’ follows abductive reasoning that is also present in Bruner’s (1986) narrative mode of thought. This reasoning is based on the idea that to form a holistic understanding of a given, partially comprehended phenomena, one is inclined to ‘fill in the blanks’ (Polkinghorne, 1988). In a story-telling context, this ‘filling in the blanks’ occurs through the configuring of the temporal parts of the story together to follow a continuous storyline: the plot - and by ‘grasping’ them together and directing them towards an ‘acceptable’ ending (Ricoeur, 1981), or what McAdams (1993) coins ‘denouement’. In other words, rather than following a deductive or predictive logic (Ricoeur, 1981), ‘narrative configuration’ proscribes that the ending of the plot needs to be sufficiently acceptable so as to enable the convincing and plausible linking of events that has lead to it.

What comes out of narrative configuration is a thematically organized or ‘plotted’ text (Polkinghorne, 1995). ‘Plot’ is, then, the advancing force of narrative, as it integrates separate events as contributing to the valued end point. Consistently, narratives are socially negotiated constructs that organize people’s thoughts and actions in temporal sequences, explaining how particular orderings of actors and actions lead to particular social arrangements (Ricoeur, 1984). It is a kind of ‘discourse composition’ that integrates separate events, happenings, and actions into ‘a thematically unified, goal-directed process’ (Polkinghorne, 1995: 5).

It should also be noted that the plotting or configuring of stories always occurs from the ‘perspective of the present’ (Järvinen, 2004). In other words, all the events that are configured to advance the plot towards the present situation gain their meaning from this very present situation. Narrative configuring, therefore, reflects an oscillating motion with the events unraveling from present towards the experienced past and the anticipated future. Indeed, Ricoeur’s theory of ‘emplotment’ conceives of the present as a temporary end-point on the indefinite succession of events, a point-of-view from which the story can be seen as a whole.

3.2.1 “Selfing”

McAdams’s (1996) integrative framework of personality builds on James’s conceptualization of personality as a dual structure of “I” and “Me”. In this conceptualization the “I” can be seen as an active process of ‘selfing’, or narrating, to create a coherent self whereas the “Me” is understood as the product of ‘selfing’, the narrated self.

“I” and “Me”

James’s (1890) distinction between “I” and “Me” has been cited endlessly in consumer research (Belk 1988, McAdams 1996). I follow McAdams’s (1996) conceptualization, in which “I” is an active agent that constantly engages in the act of constructing “Me”. To clarify this, McAdams suggests, that we should “identify the I as a process and the Me as a product (McAdams 1993)”. Consequentially, “I” is rather something one does, so ‘to self’ signifies “to make self out of experience, to apprehend one’s actions, thoughts, feelings and so on as ‘mine’” (McAdams 1996, p.303) This is actually not far from Belk’s (1988) interpretation where “I” extends itself through acquiring objects that are assimilated into the coherent, extended self.

The “Me” is, then, the product of the process of ‘selfing’. It can be referred to as *the* self-concept (Baumeister, 1991) and it consists of the various self-attributions that are formulated through ‘selfing’. “Me” can then be grasped on multiple manifestations and levels, incorporating the material, social and spiritual realms of that which is *mine* (James, 1890). Thus one’s material belongings as well as personal concerns and life-stories become part of the self-as-object “Me” (McAdams, 1996).

Life-story as identity

Narratives can be seen as the fundamentally unifying aspect of identity (McAdams, 1996). According to McAdams (1996), life-stories are the actual products of “selfing” that are cobbled from the different levels of identity as well as from integrated life-events. In similar vein, Thompson (1995) views the self as a symbolic project, which the individual must actively construct out of the available symbolic materials, materials which the individual weaves into a coherent account of who he or she is – a narrative of self-identity.

In other words, the life-story links together, through the act of ‘selfing’, various dispersed ‘Me’s’ into a coherent and continuous story of self. As Ahuvia (2005: 172) writes in his article of consumption and narrative; “in addition to seeing one’s identity as a list of attributes, these attributes are linked in memory to key episodes in life, which in turn are strung together to form a

story... [t]his story line allows people to make sense of who they are and provides a connected identity from past to present, and into imagined possible futures”.

Furthermore, Fischer (1985) suggests that we are actually *homo narrans*; we learn about ourselves and our culture through listening and telling stories. Thus, narrative is an important way to make sense of the world surrounding us and our relations to and within this world. Indeed, as Gergen and Gergen (1988) maintain, stories are an essential way to make sense of our position within the social world. In addition, Escalas and Bettman state: “People use narratives to create a sense of self. Self stories link the events in one’s life to build a coherent self-concept, motivated by one’s higher-order identity, value, and role goals.” (p. 244) Then, reconstructing the life events into a story-form is identity work that helps person to discover one’s identity and understand the true meaning of life events and emotional experiences (Polkinghorne, 1991).

3.3 Narrative time and causality

Narrative mode of thinking seeks to form stories that are coherent, temporally structured accounts of person’s experiences in given context (Baumeister & Newman, 1994). In narrative mode of thought, we seek to explain events in terms of human actors striving to do things over time (McAdams, 1993). The narrative mode presents events through active, target-oriented actors setting them into a temporal context (McAdams, 1993). The temporal nature of narrative makes it possible to understand why events take place as well as what motivates people (Escalas & Bettman, 2000). Thus, it is through this concept of temporality that enables narrative to display causal relations between events. This is to say, the temporality of narrative makes it possible to draw conclusions of the causality of events (Escalas & Bettman, 2000), which, in turn, refers to the consequentiality of narrative sequencing (Young, 1987). Ricoeur (1984) maintains, that temporality is a key feature of narrative as “time becomes human time to the extent it is organized after the manner of narrative; narrative in turn is meaningful to the extent it portrays the features of temporal existence (Ricoeur, 1984).

As such, temporality can be seen as the most central characteristic of a person’s existence (Polkinghorne, 1991). Through narration, a person can understand the temporal context of events, and by organizing these events into the temporal sequence, she or he can gain a holistic understanding of the causes and effects of one’s actions. In addition, Cottle (1976) even suggests that our individual identity is partly based on the emphasis he or she places the temporal dimensions of past, present, or future. This temporal orientation refers to the way in which individual constructs

his or her life-story, as it is related to how an individual places the most important events in his or her narrative.

3.4 Narrative identity and purposeful storytelling

In this section I will briefly discuss the concept of possible self (Markus & Nurius, 1987) and their relation to provisional selves (Ibarra, 1999) and their relation to biographical narrative.

As stated numerous in the earlier sections, biographical story-telling is a way for an individual to create coherence between the temporal domains of past, present, and future. Accordingly, they are able to construct a cohesive self that integrates what they used to be, what they are, and what they anticipate of becoming. In this vein, while people tell stories of self, the future is present through reflecting on the anticipated, hoped for and feared future-states. In the context of identity, these states could be referred to as ‘possible selves’ which are “individuals’ ideas of what they might become, what they would like to become, and what they are afraid of becoming” (Markus & Nurius, 1986). In other words, then, ‘possible self’ is a concept concerning change in identity as images of what end states are desirable or undesirable for the protagonist. Thus, they serve as incentives for further behavior as well as evaluative and interpretive context for the current view of self.

In their story-telling, individuals can ‘test’ these possible selves so as to “fit them on”. As practical trials of possibilities which can only be clarified with experience, the concept of provisional selves builds on, but differs from the notion of possible selves (Ibarra, 1999), as they concern how possible selves are created, tested, discarded, and revised in the course of life-story. Provisional selves serve as experimentations of possible but not yet fully elaborated identities (Ibarra, 1999). New identities enacted in narrative are often provisional, even makeshift, until they have been integrated into the frame of narrative. In sum, then, narrative serves as a context in which an individual is able to project future identities as well as to experiment with these ‘possible selves’ and by constructing these as a part of narrative they become a part of “me”.

4. Study of lives

Previously, I have discussed how story-telling is an ontologically constructive act. This, however, is not to say that story-telling produces fictitious stories without a relation to our lives. In fact, our lives and our stories have an inherent relation, which is clear when considering the hermeneutic perspective that is fundamental to the interpretation of narratives (Fischer, 1985; Denzin, 1989; Polkinghorne, 1988). In other words, the meanings of our lives cannot be determined outside of the stories we tell of them, and in turn, the meanings of our life-stories cannot be resolved without any reference to the lives we live (Widdershoven, 1993).

As Widdershoven (1993:2) states: “The implicit meaning of life is made explicit in stories”. Consequently, narratives are less about facts and more about meanings that are conveyed through them (McAdams 1993: 28). Through ‘narrative configuration’ (Polkinghorne, 1995) events are made meaningful. Stories are told to configure a myriad of events and meanings into a coherent whole, and through stories people “create themselves” (Josselson, 2004).

Having said the above, “story” is a linguistic form in which lived experience of humans can be expressed as situated action (Ricoeur,1991). Stories follow the same inherent structure that is characteristic to our lives. Narrative mode of thinking forms stories that are coherent, temporally structured accounts of person’s experiences in given context (Baumeister & Newman, 1994). Narrative mode is thus about ‘human actors striving to do things over time’ (McAdams, 1993).

In this chapter I will describe the concepts that will aid the analysis of my informants’ narratives. Firstly I will discuss narrative directionality and the related concepts of redemption and contamination (McAdams & Bowman, 2001), which are ways to gain interpretive control over the direction of the plot. Secondly I will describe the four needs for meaning (Baumeister, 1991) which are unifying themes of ‘configured’ life-events. Thirdly, I will address the infliction of stigmas on individuals’ life; how do they come about, and what kind of consequences they have. Finally, the variety of responses to stigmatization are elaborated upon as I will review the psychological and sociological theorization of responses to stigma, and in relation to them, I will present McAdams’s (1993) concepts of agency and communion that will guide my analysis of the data.

4.1 Narrative directionality

Subject of my study is the consumer as a reflexive author of his or her biography that strives to construct a coherent self. This does not solely happen through having of possessions, but rather through narrating about the beings and doings involved with consumption (Sartre, 1962). Narratives

are then means that are used to make sense of self, thus the ways that one narrates about consumption are significant to the process of “selfing” (McAdams, 1996).

As I have described earlier, identity is understood as a life-story. Thus, it is, in a way, a product of imagination. Despite this imaginary dimension, there is a link between ‘what actually happens in one’s life’ and ‘how one chooses to remember it’. Identity, then, is not only based on imagination but also reflects the personal choices one makes in telling the story, i.e. what to narrate, and even more importantly, how to narrate it.

One of the key features of narrative is its capability to bring about directionality among separate events. Gergen & Gergen (1988) describe directionality as narrative’s sense of movement or direction through time. Here, narrative must have an established valued end-point towards which protagonist strives over time. Consequently the narrator must then ‘*select and arrange preceding events in such way that the goal state is rendered more or less probable*’ (Gergen & Gergen 1988: 175. Following this, the events unrelated to the goal state detracts or dissolves the sense of narrative. Thus, directionality brings about coherence in the narrative, since the events are evaluated according as to how they develop in and through the story-line.

Gergen and Gergen (1988) maintain that for a narrative to appear successful, its events need to be arranged as they pertain to the achievement the end state. When considering this as a criterion, there are three rudimentary prototypical narrative forms; progressive, regressive, and stability narrative (Gergen & Gergen, 1988). The stability narrative links the events in a manner that the protagonist remains unchanged with respect to the valued end point, whereas the other two characterize either incremental or decremental movement along the evaluative dimension.

Related to this concept of directionality are McAdams and Bowman’s (2001) redemption and contamination sequences that are ‘narrative strategies’ for making sense of perceived transitions in life as they help in fitting discontinuous events into life-stories. As life-story is a version of actual events as interpreted or perceived by the protagonist these strategies are a way to construct reality.

According to McAdams and Bowman (2001) redemption and contamination sequences are forms of narrative movement, or more accurately, ways in which the protagonist can maintain interpretive control over events in narrative. Redemption sequence describes progressive narrative movement, in which emotionally negative or bad scene eventually has a positive impact later on in one’s life. An individual may, then, redeem unfortunate events in the course of narration by accounting changes in self, relationships, or philosophy of life on them. Reversely, contamination sequence

(McAdams & Bowman, 2001) describes a positive event leading to bad outcomes. One can view high points, low points, or turning points through these narrative lenses, which stem from narrator's views on life. In case these sequences occur frequently they might become a defining feature of the life-story.

4.2 Four needs for meaning

By definition, a meaning is a shared mental representation of possible linkages among things events. Thus, meaning is a *relational* (Baumeister, 1991; Wittgenstein, 1963). Life as a whole does not automatically have a single, clear meaning, rather, it needs to be actively constructed by the individual (Baumeister 1991) - "meaning has to be imposed, it is not built in" (Baumeister, 1991: 4). In narrative, these meanings can be dynamically constructed (Shankar et al., 2001) as a result of the interplay between individual and social narratives.

The meaning of life is the same kind of meaning as the meaning of a sentence in several important respects: having the parts fit together into a coherent pattern; being capable of being understood by others; having meaning fit into a broader context, and invoking implicit assumptions shared by other members of the culture (Baumeister, 1991).

In his opus magna, Baumeister (1991) recognizes four essential needs for which meanings of life should respond to in order for life to appear meaningful.

Purpose: The first need implies that people wish to interpret events as being purposive. The purposive connection links temporally separated events together so that they are all headed towards a certain outcome (Baumeister & Wilson, 1996). Hence, purpose creates coherence into narrative through causality by presenting events as steps leading towards certain outcome. There are two types of purposes, goals and fulfillment. Goals refer to desirable objective circumstances, whereas fulfillment refers to more subjective end-states. Events can be interpreted to have purpose if they either lead to goals (e.g. graduation, wealth), or fulfillment (e.g. happiness).

Value (Justification): These two concepts describe the person's need for a set of values or beliefs for evaluating what is right or wrong. These are essential to make moral choices as well as to justify one's actions (Baumeister, 1991, Baumeister & Wilson, 1996).

Efficacy: This reflects the person's need for control of self and ability to make a difference. This involves the belief that one has control over external events that affect certain outcomes (Baumeister, 1991; Baumeister & Wilson, 1996).

Self-worth: This concept reflects the need for positive affirmation of the self. In practice, as Baumeister (1991) states “this usually involves finding some means of regarding oneself as superior to others, whether this is based on membership in an elite group or on individual attributes and accomplishments” (p. 44).

An additional need conceptualized by Baumeister and Leary (1995) is the need for *Belonging*: to form and maintain strong and stable interpersonal relationships. This need is for frequent, non-aversive interactions within an ongoing relational bond. Consistent with the belongingness, people form social attachments readily under most conditions and resist the dissolution of existing bonds. Lack of attachments is linked to a variety of ill effects on health, adjustment, and well-being.

Baumeister’s (1991) framework of four needs for meaning can be used to extend McAdams’s (1996) narrative understanding of identity (Baumeister & Wilson, 1996). These four needs are dimensions that people use to interpret their lives; they constitute the different aspects of their existence that make them crave for meaning. As described earlier, McAdams (1996, 1993) argues that people use stories to make sense of their life and to bring about coherence to the separate life-events. According to him, to understand one’s identity, one must integrate one’s disparate roles, incorporate one’s values and skills, and organize the past, present, and future into a meaningful pattern (Baumeister & Wilson, 1996). This can be accomplished through composing a cohesive life-story.

As stated previously, this study is about understanding how people, in their efforts to resolve their stigmas, construct their present sense of self through biographical story-telling. To do this, I have observed how people engage in identity work through telling stories of their music consumption as well as how these stories are used to compensate for their lack of meanings in life (Baumeister, 1991).

4.3 Stigmatization

This research aims to extend the understanding of stigmatization through the deployment of narrative theory. Here, I will discuss stigma, its source, and consequences.

Stigma in social identity literature is theorized as “an attribute that is deeply discrediting” therefore reducing its possessor’s status “from a whole and usual person to a tainted discounted one” (Goffman 1963:3). Possession of stigma implies that an aspect of social identity is devalued in a certain context (Crocker, Major & Steele, 1998). Prejudice towards an attribute can lead to decreased possibilities of an individual. Stigma can be particularly stressful because although it is

defined by being devalued in a certain context, this context can be very pervasive for the individual. Some stigmatized attributes can actually be so powerful in the reactions that they inflict, so that they achieve a 'master status', thus becoming the core, identifying aspects of the person who possesses them (Goffman 1963).

Numerous theoretical perspectives suggest that stigmatized people may suffer psychological consequences such as ego defenses, low self-esteem, external locus of control, and depression (Allport, 1954; Crocker & Major, 1989). The examples include poor self-worth and a profound lack of self-efficacy (Henry & Caldwell, 2006). Furthermore, I propose that stigmas can be reflected on biographical narrative as a temporary or even permanent cause for the lack of meaning in life, although stigmatization can be context dependent and thus not necessarily permanent (Henry & Caldwell, 2006).

Stigmatized people are often found to function as well as other people, despite the fact that they are disadvantaged in a variety of ways (Miller & Kaiser, 2001). In coping literature, it is suggested that stigma is only detrimental to individual's wellbeing if it exceeds his or her resources for coping (Miller & Kaiser, 2001, Henry & Caldwell, 2006). Thus, if stigma can be coped with through the acts of consumption it will not cause such a great amount of consequences as it otherwise would. As I will show in the empirical part of my research, an individual facing stigma is able to, through narrative coping strategies, reconstruct the meanings underlying the stigma in such a way that leads to a positive integration of the life-narrative.

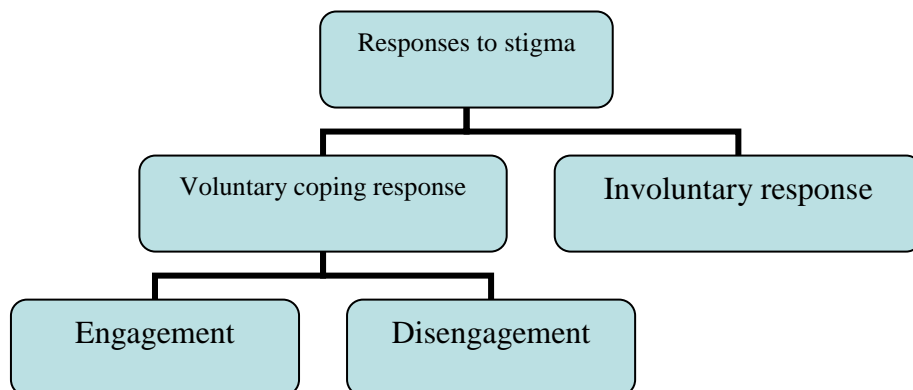
Baumeister's (1991) theory maintains that people failing to satisfy their needs for meaning will show some frustration, malaise, discontent, or instability. In a similar vein as stigmas can be coped within the narrative form in order to return meaning of life into its textual representation.

4.4 Agentic and communal responses to stigma

By definition, stigma as such, has negative physical and psychological effects on individual, in narrative context this could be accounted for as lack of meaning (Baumeister, 1991). This said, stigmatized people are still able to function and create cohesive life-stories in a same manner as 'normal', non-stigmatized people. This all comes down to different strategies of coping as individuals exhibit various responses to stigma-inflicted inner states. Miller and Kaiser (2001) discuss the different responses to stigmatization that individuals might engage with. These dynamic, multifaceted, and interdependent responses can be employed simultaneously or independently. These adaptive reserves of meaning can include psychological, social, behavioral, economic, or

educational resources (Miller & Kaiser, 2001). In short, then, the outcome of stigma depends on the ways in which an individual is able to cope with it.

Consensus about which dimensions are fundamental to conceptualize responses to stigma has not yet emerged (Zeidner & Endner, 1996). In this thesis, and through a narrative framework, I will reinterpret Compas et al.'s (2001) model of the fundamental dimensions of responses to stigma.



Miller and Kaiser (2001) suggest that the most fundamental divide between these responses would be between voluntary and involuntary, since only voluntary responses account as coping. This follows from the definition of coping as conscious, volitional efforts to *regulate* emotion, thought, behavior, physiology, and the environment in response to stressful events or circumstances (Compas et al., 2001). Accordingly, then, because of the emphasis laid on the agentic nature of consumption this thesis will only concentrate on voluntary coping (as seen through a narrative perspective, however). These responses, in turn, are divided into two categories, engagement and disengagement coping.

Engagement and disengagement strategies could also be labeled as either fight or flight, or as approach or avoidance. The fundamental difference, then, between the two concepts is that in the first, one seeks control over events, whereas in the second one seeks detachment.

The current research aims to accomplish a novel understanding of coping responses as applied to a narrative context. In doing so, I will employ the concepts of *agency* and *communion* (McAdams 1993: 71). These motivational tendencies are the “fundamental modalities in the existence of living forms” and they can be used in order to understand the basic motivational themes associated with

the coping responses. In this sense these two concepts are, to a large degree in line with the notions of engagement and disengagement.

Bakan (1966) defines agency as “individual’s striving to separate from others, to master the environment, to assert, protect, and expand self.” Thus, the objective is to become a powerful and autonomous agent through having an impact on one’s environment and developing oneself, which also correlates with Baumeister’s (1991) need for efficacy as a fundamental feature of biographical narrative. In addition, this agentic need encourages acting to consolidate one’s individuality as separating from the surrounding environment through mastery and manipulation. In opposite, then, *communion* refers to “the individual’s striving to lose his or her individuality by merging with others, participating into something that is larger than self” (McAdams 1993: 71). This can be characterized as human longing for close and warm relationships as well as desire for love and intimacy. In different times, people demonstrate tendencies towards different motivational aspects, and one’s behavior is a combination of these.

As such, achieving control over events and oneself seems to stem from agentic motives thus reflecting ‘engagement’. Whereas distracting oneself of the current situation or losing oneself to something larger than oneself (*communion*) follows the logic of ‘disengagement’. Despite of this distinction between different types of responses, matters are not always straight-forward as there might exist responses that feature both kind of characteristics, which might cause tension for individual.

5. Conceptual dynamics - compensatory consumption in 'life-story as identity'

In this chapter my aim is to summarize the previous chapters, and therefore to clarify the conceptual dynamics that direct my analysis of the data.

LIFESTORY IS IDENTITY - In McAdams's (1996) view, identity is constructed in our life-story. Self-as-object 'Me' is understood as a product of the act of 'selfing', the self-as-subject. Identity is a construct that consists of separate life-events that are integrated through the act of narrative 'configuration' (Polkinghorne, 1988) which uses life events and happenings as resources for identity construction. As identity is a biographical construct it is useful to observe how an important aspect of life-story, its temporal dimension connects with identity and life-story.

INTEGRATION OF IDENTITY - Identity is then a structure consisting of the three temporal dimensions, past, present and future. One fundamental striving for human being is to achieve cohesiveness in life. Meaning of life is something that integrates together these different dimensions. Baumeister's (1991) four needs for meaning are ways in which people do seem to require their life to make sense. These meanings connect separate events in a way that *meaningful* life story connects separate events and establishes causal relations between them. Therefore, life events need to be 'configured' accordingly into a coherent whole that is unified by certain higher-order life-meanings (Baumeister, 1991). The resulting storyline, the plot (McAdams, 1996; Ricoeur, 1981; Polkinghorne, 1988) is a unifying force in a story. The story is told so that events follow this plot and thus make sense. Identity is then a time-line like construct that evolves and develops over time, and makes it possible to follow this process of identification. One needs to integrate all the three dimensions past, present, and future so as to 'configure' a satisfactory, and meaningful story. If one perceives a dimension lacking meaning this can be compensated through narrative strategies that involve utilizing meanings from external sources like consumption. The current research aims to demonstrate how one has certain strivings, or rather meanings that one strives for and through them attempts to unify the story regarding the temporality as well. Meaning directs the story-telling and creation of causality. In my analysis I will show how the lack of meaning can be inflicted on individual's life-story as a result of prolonged stigmatization (Goffman, 1963), and how this can be then compensated through the employment of a variety of coping strategies (Miller & Kaiser, 2001). These are reflected on the telling of the story as one utilizes agentic and communal (McAdams, 1988, 1996) themes in order to bring about continuity in one's biographical narrative.

PERSPECTIVE OF THE PRESENT – A life-story is told from the perspective of the present. My informants tell stories to achieve a satisfying, coherent identity. As they configure their life through the lens of their present, there are times and events as well as meanings that are not consistent with their present.

NARRATIVE DIRECTIONALITY –Narrative directionality refers to narrative's ability to demonstrate the advancement of a story towards a valued end point (Gergen & Gergen, 1988). Therefore, narrative demonstrates events so that '*the goal state is rendered more or less probable*' (Gergen & Gergen 1988: 175). Using the concepts of narrative directionality I will explain how my subjects construct coherent stories that integrate past, present, and future in ways that respond to their perception of the direction in the narrative. Redemption and contamination (McAdams & Bowman, 2001) are narrative strategies that are used to fit events in the overall directional 'pattern'. The current research strives to understand the role of consumption in creating this directionality as well as in the different kinds of situations additional consumption resources are used to enhance directionality.

6. Methodology

Narrative paradigm

A paradigm may be defined as “a group of researchers sharing common assumptions about the nature of reality, utilizing common methodologies, and dealing with similar problems” (Kuhn 1970 cited in Thompson et al., 1989). This research falls within the narrative paradigm that builds on the ontologically constituting status of the stories we tell and their hermeneutic interpretation (Shankar et al., 2001). In this chapter, I will describe the methodological assumptions of this research, the actual methods applied, and the problems encountered in this process.

6.1 Philosophy of narratives

6.1.1 Axiology

In the fairytale “Alice in Wonderland”, Alice asks the Cheshire Cat, “Would you tell me, please, which way I ought to go from here?”. The sage cat replies, “That depends a good deal on where you want to get to.” This dialogue illustrates the fundamental principle of ends and means: without a clear objective, it is impossible to decide how to accomplish it. In this vein, axiology refers to the fundamental goals one strives to accomplish through conducting the research, as well as what counts as fulfilling these certain goals (Hudson & Ozanne, 1988).

As my research falls into the category of interpretative research, the primary goal of my study is to understand, not explain, the meanings consumers attach on their acts of consumption through biographical narrating. What does this understanding imply then? According to Hudson & Ozanne (1988), in the interpretative tradition, understanding is seen more as a process than as an actual end result. This is mostly due to the fact that interpretation of a phenomenon is seen as a moment in the continuum of understanding that is referred to as the hermeneutic circle (Hudson & Ozanne, 1988). Denzin (1989) summarizes this quality of interpretation as follows: “One never achieves *the* understanding; one achieves *an* understanding”. For my research then, this implies that my current interpretation is only *my* interpretation of the meanings at the *present time* in a similar way as the narratives are truths of the *time of the telling*.

6.1.2. Philosophical hermeneutics

As is suggested here, the interpretive approach to narratives of consumption is based on philosophical hermeneutics (Gadamer, 1989): “Following the footsteps of Gadamer, Ricoeur suggested that all behavior, and by extrapolation our consumer behavior too, could be interpreted as

text and therefore could be subjected to a hermeneutic analysis” (Shankar et al., 2001: 441). In the following section, I will briefly describe the concepts of philosophical hermeneutics relevant to this study, and then elaborate on their implications to the study of life-stories.

Hermeneutics is a theory of the interpretation of meaning (Bleicher, 1980). It is not a methodological procedure like phenomenology, since no clear guidelines for hermeneutics exists (Arnold & Fischer 1994). Hermeneutics has its origins in the interpretation of the Bible with an underlying assumption that there is meaning hidden in the text, waiting to be ‘uncovered’ (Schwandt, 1998). This view differs from philosophical hermeneutics insofar as it harbors a ‘realist pretension’ (Schwandt 1998: 227). Rather than assuming that texts hold within some essential truth awaiting to be uncovered, philosophical hermeneutics, is based on abductive, constructivist sense-making: the meaning of the text is arrived at through an understanding of its whole, which, in turn, is predicated on the interpretive faculties of the researcher.

Philosophical hermeneutics is relevant to consumer research in three ways. Firstly, it is needed to shed light on the nature of understanding itself. Secondly, it helps in refining our comprehension of the interpretive methods used in consumer research. Finally, through its basic concepts, such as pre-understanding, the hermeneutic circle, the fusion of horizons, self-understanding, and the ideal of dialogic community, it offers important implications as to the critical understanding of the consumer (Arnould & Fischer 1994: 55). In the following sections, I will briefly review these concepts as well as elaborate on the ontological and epistemological claims that they imply.

Nature of understanding

Hermeneutic philosophy is concerned with the interpretation of understanding (Gadamer, 1989), more precisely what counts as understanding and how we can achieve an understanding of experiences and phenomena. Concerning this, the concept of hermeneutic circle implies that a complete, final understanding cannot be achieved. There is no one truth, but only a current understanding. This philosophy holds that linguistic understanding has an ontological status (Shankar et al. 2001, Arnold & Fischer 1994, Gadamer 1989): narratives are fundamental descriptions of our being-in-the-world and lived experience.

Pre-Understanding

Following Heidegger’s concept of “being-in-the-world”, pre-understanding is consequential of the fact that before any interpretation takes place, the subject and object of interpretation already exists (Arnold & Fischer, 1994). This “prejudice” (Gadamer, 1989) should not be seen as constraining but as an enabling “window to the world”, a base for reflexive understanding (Arnold & Fischer, 1994).

The consequence of this is that all knowledge is contextual, and interpretation is both enabled and constrained by the subject's pre-understanding of the object and one's own historical background.

Pre-understanding results from two circumstances, one's background as a person and one's background as researcher (Arnold & Fischer, 1994). Our familiarity with the phenomenon under study helps us make sense of the complex factors influencing such experience. In turn, our knowledge of theories and research findings that likewise influence our inquiry and our understanding of this same experience. Whereas some research traditions view pre-understanding as both complicating and hindering the process of interpretation, according to philosophical hermeneutics, researcher-prejudice is both inevitable and necessary (Arnold & Fischer, 1994). Indeed, philosophical hermeneutics emphasizes the subject's being-in-the-world as a starting point for interpretation.

Fusion of horizons and the hermeneutic circle

The term 'hermeneutic circle' represents the idea that the meaning of the whole text is determined from a individual elements of a text, while at the same time, an individual element is understood by referring to the whole of which it is a part of (Arnold & Fischer, 1994). This concept reflects the process of 'emplotment' which defines 'narrative configuration' as a continuous iteration (Ricoeur, 1984; Polkinghorne, 1995).

Unveiled through the analysis and progressive iterations of the hermeneutic circle, the pre-understanding of the interpreter reflects the fusion of horizons between the subject and the text (Arnold & Fisher, 1994). In this process, pre-understanding is adjusted as long as it is aligned with the meaning of the text and so it becomes an understanding (Arnold & Fischer, 1994).

6.1.3 Ontology

Ontology refers to the assumptions of the nature of reality and social beings (Burrell and Morgan 1979). My ontological stance is mostly influenced by Shankar et al. (2001) who have developed and applied a narrative paradigm to analyze consumer narratives. This implies that narratives are ontologically fundamental – they construct realities. As is described in the following: "Like myths, "narratives" are not true to external reality, but are distinctive in that they are the means through which tellers impose order upon what they see, thereby constructing reality and creating their understanding of events" (Hopkinson & Hogarth-Scott, 2001: 28)

Furthermore Shankar et al. (2001) suggest a dynamic ontological position. This dynamicity refers to two aspects of narratives; agency and temporality. Firstly, agency can be seen as ‘the extent to which our individual narrative is written for us as opposed to the extent to which we write our own narrative’ (Shankar et al. 2001: 439). Secondly, Heidegger (1962) suggests that temporality is an essential condition for our existence, thus it is also manifested in narrative through the dimension of past, present, and future.

In short, this ontological position sees ‘reality’ as dynamically constructed as a product of our own choices but mediated and modified by the social and cultural world within which the individual resides and is contextualized by the temporal setting. Reality, then, is something that depends on perception (Hudson & Ozanne, 1988). Accordingly, multiple, if not even endless, ‘realities’ exists.

6.1.4 Epistemology

Epistemology refers to the questions: what is knowledge, what can we know, and how can we obtain knowledge, or as Lincoln and Guba (1985: 37) express it: “the relationship between the knower and what can be known”. Within a narrative paradigm, epistemology follows directly from our ontological view. The distinction between epistemology and ontology becomes obsolete, what we can know is the same as how can we know it (Guba & Lincoln, 1998).

According to this approach, any understanding will be subjective (Shankar et al., 2001). Any given interpretation will be a co-production between the researcher and his or her research subject(s). Thus, in narrative inquiry, life-story as well as the understanding of it, is a mutually dependent evolution orchestrated by both interviewer and interviewee. What is more, interpretivist research is emergent by nature (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), as well as idiographic, time- and context-dependent (Hudson & Ozanne, 1988). This follows in the vein of the hermeneutic argument that we can only achieve an understanding, never the final understanding.

Shankar et al. (2001) discuss about the dynamic agency, from which follows that narrative is not a subjective act: language, on which narrative is based, is determined socially through discourse. This suggests that narratives are also partly socially constructed.

6.2 Method

Method refers to ‘the way in which one attempts to investigate and obtain knowledge of the social world’ (Burrell and Morgan 1979: 2). In the current research, the way I choose to acquire this knowledge follows from the prior stated ontological and epistemological position.

6.2.1 Data collection: Life story interview

In this research data has been collected using the life-story interview method (Atkinson, 1998). This method encourages the interviewee to narrate his or her entire life-story or a story of certain significant time-period. The role of the interviewer is to facilitate this process through posing discreet, carefully chosen questions and responses in order to maintain the advancement of the story. Therefore, life story is a co-creation (Atkinson, 1998). The collaborative nature of this interview method follows in the vein of philosophical hermeneutics since knowledge is a product of subjective understanding of interviewee's experiences as well as the inter-subjectively constructed meanings between the subject and object of the interview (Heron, 1996): "The investigator and the object of investigation are assumed to be interactively linked so that findings are *literally created* as the investigation proceeds" (Guba & Lincoln 1998: 207). The advantage of this method lies in its freedom as it allows the individual to elaborate on one's life-course richly and deeply rather than constrain this process of story-telling (Atkinson, 1998).

6.2.2 Analysis of the data: Narrative analysis

Narrative analysis is based on the principles of 'emplotment' as defined by Ricoeur (1984). In this chapter, I will elaborate on this practical part-whole process of interpretation (see Thompson, 1997). The challenge the researcher must confront when doing narrative analysis is to try and construct a display of complex and interwoven human experience as it unfolds through time and as it stands out at any present moment through recollection and imagination (Polkinghorne, 1995). This is essentially what 'emplotment' (Ricoeur, 1984) refers to.

In this type of analysis, the researcher's task is to configure the data elements into a story that unites and gives meaning to the data as contributors to a goal or a purpose. This analytic task requires the researcher to develop or discover a plot that displays the linkage among the data elements as parts of an unfolding temporal development culminating in the denouement (Polkinghorne, 1988; McAdams, 1993).

For the researcher to be able to re-create a coherent story, Polkinghorne (1995) proposes several analytic steps starting from deciding the story's end, or denouement. Here, specifying the outcome allows the researcher to choose the significant events that were necessary to produce that specific conclusion. The step after identifying the outcome of a story, is to arrange the events chronologically in order to configure the story in such a way that this specific conclusion is arrived to. During this process the researcher looks into causes and influences establishing sufficient causal links so as to maintain this general plot structure. Often these plot lines are not one-to-one, but more

complicated combinations and accumulations of events, involving recursive movement from the data to the emerging story. If the major events of data do not fit the plot, then the plot needs to be adjusted. As such, the development of the plot follows the same principles of understanding that are prescribed by the hermeneutic circle (Polkinghorne, 1995). The final story must fit the data while at the same time bringing an order and meaningfulness that is not apparent in the data themselves (Polkinghorne, 1995).

The final step is the writing-up of the story. The storied product is a temporal gestalt in which the meaning of each part is given through reciprocal relationships with the plotted whole and other parts (Polkinghorne, 1995). The prior described plot outline is essential for writing the story – the outline is an intellectual construction or temporally patterned whole that the researcher develops from working with the sequentially ordered data. Configuring the plot is again a process, where it is fitted to the main events, making sure there are no gaps in the data. The final outcome of this process “allows for the incorporation of the notions of human purpose and choice as well as chance happenings, dispositions, and environmental presses. The result of a narrative analysis is an explanation that is retrospective, having linked past events together to account for how a final outcome might have come about. In this analysis, the researcher attends to the temporal and unfolding dimension of human experience by organizing the events of the data along a before-after continuum.”(Polkinghorne 1995: 16)

6.2.3 Hermeneutics of faith

Ricoeur distinguishes between two forms of hermeneutics, a hermeneutics of faith and a hermeneutics of suspicion (cited in Josselson, 2004). Hermeneutics of faith aims to restore meaning to a text, whereas hermeneutics of suspicion tries to unveil meanings that are disguised. In the current research I will be utilizing hermeneutics of faith, which implies that my interpretation concerns the various messages inherent in the narrative texts, and the restoration of the meanings among the messages addressed to the interpreter. The objective of this approach is therefore, to seek insight or re-present the *subjective world of the participants* as well as the social and historical world they *feel* themselves to be living in (Josselson, 2004). Accordingly, that is to understand the Other as one understands oneself.

My view, aligned with the hermeneutics of faith (Josselson, 2004), implies that I believe what my informants are telling me, or at least trying to, in terms of their subjective experience and meaning-making. Through this approach, I am then granting my research subjects agency to configure their

stories. Thus, as a researcher, I am trying to unearth the meanings inherent in the obtained narratives, while staying faithful to the intentions of the narrator (Tappan, 1997).

Conclusively this approach enables me to investigate the tacit knowledge, as well as underlying assumptions of my informants, insofar as I stay within the frame provided by the original narrator.

6.3 Research process

In this chapter, I will review the research process steps, and address the pragmatic matters involved in the research. The rudimentary steps of my study are: Acquiring pre-understanding through the thorough literature review, collecting the data using life-story interviewing, interpreting the data using narrative analysis, and representing this data through identified themes.

6.3.1 Sample

Because my aim has been to accomplish an understanding of a particular consumer behavior, purposive sampling (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) is required. In order to gather useful data of music consumption, I selected interviewees that I knew would be adequately immersed in this type of activity so as to be proficient with stories of relevant experiences.

I interviewed a 'convenience sample' (Shankar et al., 2009) of six people, of which I used a single interview for final analysis. McAdams and Bowman (2001) suggest that in this kind of research there is no right amount of interviews to be conducted. In their work, for example, the object of analysis was the single life-story of a police chief during the fifties in an African-American community. Indeed, Erben (1998) maintains that the number of interviews required will be determined by the aims of the research. The objective of this current inquiry is to understand the resolving of stigma through story-telling as it occurs in and through the meanings of individuals' biographical whole. In other words, the analytic requirements of this type of research, its depth and intensity, is satisfied by a single case.

Denzin (1989) suggests that knowing one's research subject closely is advantageous while conducting interpretative biographical research, as it is the in-depth knowledge of this person's salient past, present, and future meanings that serves as building blocks towards understanding. Also, the notion of pre-understanding in philosophical hermeneutics (Gadamer 1989, Arnold & Fischer 1994) supports this view, as the researcher acts as an instrument of research, and the text is a fusion of horizon's of subject and object (Gadamer, 1989). So, my connection to the subjects of this research should be seen as an advantage, enabling a hermeneutic understanding far more intense than one with total strangers.

6.3.2 Conducting the interviews

The interviews lasted from 90 minutes to as long as 150 minutes. The interviews were conducted either in the homes of informants (6), or at some other meaningful and peaceful site. In each interview, I sought to encourage the informant to narrate about biographical moments as well as their consumption habits. I also strove to extract discussions of taste and preferences in order to encourage discussion of music as well as related topics.

I assured the informants that the interview data would be dealt with confidentially and encouraged them to be open in their telling. The subjects narrated freely about their significant experiences and also used available resources in enriching as well as facilitating remembering their accounts by using their records and other possessions as exhibits.

6.3.3 Actual steps in analyzing the data

In analyzing the data, I employed the method of narrative analysis (Ricoeur, 1984; Polkinghorne, 1988). To accomplish a *“fusion of horizons between the text and the researcher”* (Gadamer, 1989), I read the transcribed texts carefully over and over again adjusting my initial understanding after every reading, as abiding to the ‘part-whole’-process (Thompson, 1997). The final understanding, adjusting, and re-interpretation occurred through the arduous process of writing.

6.3.4 Problems

Researching people’s life stories is relatively difficult. In order to obtain rich data, I needed to establish trust with my interviewees. To tackle this problem, I chose to interview people that I knew relatively well, and felt that they could trust me as well as feel comfortable about discussing their lives with me. Another problem that emerged was the participants’ hesitation to describe their lives in proper detail, as they often chose to concentrate on their music consumption experiences.

This may have been due to the fact that my informants found it difficult to reflect on their experiences in such a way that would satisfy requirements stated in qualitative research – and often taken for granted aspect of this type of endeavor. Simply put, it appears that reflexivity about one’s own life is harder than expected.

7. Findings and analysis

In this section, I will present my findings and analysis concerning the empirical data I collected. For the sake of clarity I represent my findings through Pete's narrative, although similar conclusions could also be drawn concerning the other five biographical accounts I collected.

In this section, I will first set the scene by describing the various unresolved tensions caused by stigma that are found in Pete's life-story. These unresolved tensions between the higher order life themes of agency and communion depict challenges and problems in Pete's life story, which he, then, remedies and resolves through his story telling. My analysis of Pete's biographical narrative follows the logic that is described in the previous section of 'conceptual dynamics'. Here, identity is viewed as a sum of past, present, and future meanings – all of which are drawn upon to cast a satisfactory identity. In this first part I will thus concentrate mostly on discussing the significant events and aspects in Pete's life-story that appear as the source for stigmatization and thus bring about the lack of meaning into his biographical account. In the second part of this analysis, I will discuss the ways Pete attempts to cope with the incoherence and dissatisfaction, which are inflicted on the life-story by the stigmas. In doing so, I will draw upon his narrative, and introduce a number of different coping strategies, thus also reflecting on and re-interpreting the classification of remedies proposed by Henry and Caldwell (2006) and Miller and Kaiser (2001).

7.1 Pete's life story

Pete is a friend of mine, who is indeed enthusiastic about music, to put it mildly. He has never been so much into making music, but has been spending his pocket money on records and other music-related paraphernalia for longer than is necessary. He would characterize himself as a record-nerd, and people who know him would have no hesitation in agreeing with this. He perceives music as a salient sign of his identity, and as he maintains, that every time he goes into someone's house, "the first thing to do is to raid one's record collection, since that tells you how one is". He has stacks of records at his house, although he does not listen to all of them that often, but they are still special to him, which makes them indispensable. And if you have a question on some obscure musical matter, he probably has an answer, or at least he will be ready to state his opinion on the matter.

Pete's life-story demonstrates a number of stigmas resulting from a variety of factors in his social environment (Goffman, 1963). This stigmatization, then, causes unresolved tensions in Pete's life-narrative. The stigmatization described here produces undesirable separation, and prompts agentic behavior such as withdrawal while highlighting his personal identity as something very different

from others which could be referred to as agentic themes. On the other hand, Pete's life-story also demonstrates communion as a significant theme, which, in turn, leads to a tension between these two modalities. Throughout his story, Pete strives to resolve these tensions which are associated with lacking meanings (Baumeister, 1991) to achieve a balanced and satisfactory 'self'. He does so by deploying a number narrative strategies thus creating coherence to his life-story. Within Pete's narrative, we can observe periods that actualize such coping responses through both agency and communion (McAdams, 1993).

Loneliness and desire to belong

Not fitting in' and feeling alone as a result is reflected as a lack of meaning (Baumeister, 1991) in Pete's biographical narrative. This involuntary separation from his peers could be due to his inherent feature of shyness or the avoidance of others, causing tension in the interplay of the two modalities of agency and communion (McAdams, 1993).

Pete was born to a family with conservative values with his only sister being 14 years older than him. Not having any siblings to play with combined with his conservative upbringing led Pete to spend time mostly by himself or in the company of older relatives. As a teenager Pete felt that his conservative upbringing distinguished him from the rest, although he was neither able to identify with his parents who had quite different values than him. This exaggerated the feeling of no one understanding him as well as him being alone in the world, which is a rather common feeling during this particular age. Although he refers to these times as difficult due to his parents' differing worldview, he jokes about how it could also be down to the difficulties associated with being a teenager and growing up.

Despite his later expression of self-confidence and change over time, these past experiences have left their mark on Pete and his life-story, as one of the major characteristics, or influences in his story, seems to be the feeling of loneliness and being different, as he describes:

“Well, for a long time. Even since my first memories, I have had this feeling of being foreign, the experience of being left outside. The fancy expression could be ‘weltangst’, the tragedy of a modern human being.”

When listening to Pete's biographical narrative, this theme of 'being the odd one out' characterizes his feelings of his life. References to this are abundant in his biographical story-telling as he portrays it as a major characteristic of his personality as well as his biggest flaw. This can be

viewed as Pete's major obstacle, as a large part of his life-story-telling either reflects or strives to compensate for this. In the following, he again portrays his child-self as a lonely dreamer:

“ Well, I spent quite a lot of time by myself, and my mom and dad told me that I was mostly alone, in my own imaginary world, they even went into the extent of trying to find me friends ”

Young Pete spent a lot of time alone, even to the extent that it worried his parents. In his narrative he portrays his child-self as a lonely boy who enjoys spending time by his own rather than being left out. His account that his parents made an effort to find company for him suggests that rather than being a victim of unfortunate circumstances, he actually perceives himself as the lonely wolf-kind of a character for whom demonstrating this kind of independence is only natural. This could then be interpreted as an illustration of his individualist tendencies. Pete discusses the reasons why this particular strategy of withdrawal has been convenient to suit his need for coping:

(P): As I was younger, I used to be tense over some social encounters. I didn't show it to others, 'cos, well, I was smart enough to play them so that didn't show of me. But in a way, it was an unpleasant, awkward feeling that I can't be myself here. Like I sort of enjoy this company, it's okay, and these people are sort of okay, but I had a feeling that I am not at home in this situation, I don't belong here.

Even presently he describes himself as being rather shy despite of the loud impression he gives out. This, he admits, is a defense mechanism, through which he has been trying to identify with others, yet distinguishing him from the masses. The agentic nature of this tactic lies in its ability to separate Pete from the rest – as it is a way to stand out, not blending into the background – whereas it also has communal influences since it is a way to fit in and demonstrating extrovertism. By being loud and opinionated, he conceals his stress over social situations, although, by acting in such an unnatural way, he feels that he is losing his true self. This apprehension in social situations is, then, a fundamental problem for him, partially enforced by his environment, but also supported by his choice of coping strategies that support this separation. Thus, it is more convenient for Pete to simply keep to himself, and demonstrate his individuality, than try to be something that he is not. Although this agentic strategy of withdrawal might seem successful, it might also be maladaptive through its objective of separation from others. Indeed, these strategies of withdrawal may do little to improve situation that is the feeling of alienation from the world.

Despite of Pete taking pride in standing out from the rest, he also demonstrates his desire to belong (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). In his narrative, then, he strives to balance out these opposing modalities. In order to do this he has also found opposite ways to cope through efforts to find places, or social spaces that enable him to feel at ‘home’:

(P): Well, culture, and the fact that I have living culture around me, those are important things. And communital sense that has also become important, that there are times and places where I can feel that I can be what I am.

As he explains here, the music community he now seeks to belong to is a place and time where he can feel ‘at home’ – to be part of some bigger whole. This, in turn, seems to suit Pete’s needs since it seems to satisfy his desire to be himself while simultaneously being part of something larger than himself. This theme of becoming a member of an enclave can be interpreted as *communion* (McAdams, 1993). Accordingly, this is a prominent reason why music has become so important for Pete because it responds to his need for self-worth (Baumeister, 1991): it allows him to participate, while also giving him the freedom not to assume any prescribed roles. As a coping strategy, communion enforces infusion into the company of other people, which can improve Pete’s standing in society as it relieves the stigma resulting to not-belonging. This causes tension in the narrative since this objective is contradictory with Pete’s striving to ‘be himself’, to be the master of the situation at hand, as well as to be himself. In turn, this tension may be solved, for example, through the choice of communities to be part of in which he can participate as ‘himself’. In short, then, he strives to employ coping strategies that accommodate both of these themes thereby solving the higher-order tensions that are reflected in his narrative.

High-expectations

Pete describes his parents, especially his father as being “overly demanding”. This is a major trauma for him, as he keeps enforcing this image throughout the story. He illustrates this with an example from his childhood; when he started school his father had already taught him two years of mathematics in advance, because “he did not trust the teaching at school to be good enough”. This led Pete to setting similar expectations on himself, and he “cried if he got less than full score on the test”. These high expectations or socialized standards, set on Pete influenced his own perception of self, or as he explains it himself “not to realize his own limitations”. This led him never being able to live up to his unreachable goals. As he admits here, he has suffered from poor self-esteem inflicted on him by his limited social sphere and the high expectations set on him. Although he

blames himself for this poor self-esteem, it is evident that this self-image present in his narrative-telling is clearly a product of socialization (McNeil, 1987).

(P): I guess I was like eight or nine. When I was in school it was a huge tragedy for me that I was not admitted to [an “elite” elementary school] to attend the third grade. All my cousins went there. That also caused me to feel inferior. And I was bitter for that for a long time.

This lack of self-worth reflects the stigma that is caused by him not being able to live up to the high-expectations set on him by his family. As he fails to meet his father’s expectations, he assumes a stigma of inferiority that casts a shadow on his life, and is reflected in his biographical narrative as a lack of self-worth, which is a fundamental need for meaning in human life (Baumeister, 1991). Moreover, this excerpt also reflects the overall tone that Pete uses while discussing many of his childhood memories. All the incidents he mentions enforce this feeling of rejection and inadequacy that is characteristic in his story. Later on he actually manages to attend that particular school during his high-school years, although this does not suffice to relieve this sense of inadequacy. Later on in this analysis I will demonstrate, how this feeling is compensated through various strategies under the broad themes of *agency* and *communion* (McAdams, 1993).

Resignation

Pete has been leading quite a unhealthy life for the past years, as he admits. This negligence of health could be due to his depression that causes one to lose interest in such issues. Another, explanation could be the rigid circumstances he perceives to have found himself in and has no way of changing. As he has felt unattractive and incapable due to his low sense of self-worth, he demonstrates a sense of resignation regarding control over his life. This again reflects how he seeks something larger than himself, that he has low sense of efficacy in improving the circumstances. By admitting this, he has given himself permission to immerse himself into a variety of harmful and hedonistic consumption activities in order to medicate his feelings of powerlessness, depression, and insufficiency. This way negotiating things has proved itself maladaptive due to its nature as it seems to be a self-fulfilling prophecy; inactivity in the face of a problem rarely leads to any improvement.

In finding a social space where he can feel at ‘home’ in his life, Pete has changed the overall direction of his life. As he has recently found ways to engage in other remedies he has been able to let go of the bad habits of the past such as drinking, smoking pot, and unhealthy eating. As of present he has abandoned these harmful activities and instead found joy in exercise and healthy eating.

(P) And now I am doing my best to be active in the field of sports. Since I have been suffering of insomnia for the last 25 years, doing sports makes me feel better. So pretty much I do all this to improve my own health since it has been in the decline for the last 25 years. I was thinking that I can drink, smoke, and eat pizza for another quarter of a century and sharpen up when I am fifty. [...] I have to do something about it, otherwise I'll be a human wreck at thirty. It's some weird health awakening.

This turn for better has occurred as a response to his change of perception of himself as he now feels he has gained control over his environment and his self. As he has now found other ways to negotiate and, thus relieve, his stigmas he has been able to let go of the old habits.

Summary

In summary, Pete's story is tale of survival; his identity is constructed around the effort to overcome the tensions of loneliness, high-expectations due to socialization, and resignation due to a lack of control over his environment. His tale reflects that he is heading up towards a better future, however. He narrates his past, present, and future in a manner that shows this progressive plot line (Gergen & Gergen, 1988), demonstrating his striving to "become a better person". Consistent with this interpretation, he frequently narrates the past periods of his life as redemption sequences where unpleasant memories of the past have an important role of bringing about positive influences to the present and future (McAdams & Bowman, 2001) – as this subsequent excerpt maintains:

(E): So, are you content with your choice of university?

(P) In the end, yes. It is an important phase in my life, had I not been there I might be a different person that I now am. And, well, I would not want to be. Even though I have experienced some things that I could do without, I have experienced them, and no need to be bitter for them or anything.

7.2 Narrative coping strategies

In the following I will present a number of narrative coping strategies through which Pete resolves the prior described tensions found in his life-story.

Expansion of self – Pete as chameleon

The strategy of identity expansion is based on the idea that music styles, and the sub-cultures associated with them, implicate different kind of identities. Pete indicates that music has an

instrumental role in his effort to belong. Due to Pete's inclination towards a variety of musical tastes, he is, like a chameleon, able to construct a variety identity positions which to inhabit.

In this strategy, Pete has the power to choose who he wants to be. He uses music as a resource for this self-expansion, as different music styles reflect different identities for him. The dynamics of this chameleon strategy reflects the one of the modalities McAdams (1993) characterizes as fundamental to human life, that is, *agency*. In order to cope with the various tensions found in his life-story Pete enacts agency through his bricoleur-like configuration of musical selves. In other words, expansion of self through assuming different identities associated with certain music styles is a central agentic theme in Pete's story.

Although Pete states that he has been into several music scenes very passionately, it is also evident in his narrative that music has another function, a function of unification and attachment. Listening to a certain style of music is a way to identify with his choice of sub-culture, as he narrates:

(P) Well, it is sort of way to belong to a certain group. I actually think that it would be possible to find interesting music in almost any genre, except maybe trance.

However, as there are endless consumption possibilities to choose from and plenty of 'good' music out there, it is not only the quality of music that affects the choice of style. As Pete explicitly admits, music is a way to belong to a certain social sphere. This belonging, then, is a way to expand his identity. Throughout his life-story, it is evident that Pete's identity project has been reflected in his taste of music, as it enables him to withdraw to a company of like-minded people. In doing this, he has control over what kind of groups to identify with.

(P): Well, and that I have learned to see what my positive traits are. I have been a chameleon in a way, and now I can see also the good side of it, like I have learned to get along with a variety of different kind of people. And I don't know how social intelligence develops, but I believe that this has had an influence that I have developed social skills along that, in a way that I have been dealing with different kinds of people. I have always tried to identify with some groups but that group changed so often during my teenage years. I tried to be a live-role-playing-heavy-metal-enthusiast as well as precocious-suit-wearing-teenager and then spent years listening to rap. As a teenager, during the age of 15 to 20 I almost listened solely to rap.

In the preceding quote, Pete summarizes his past life and its relation to music. In this excerpt is illustrated how the groups he has sought to belong to by changing his appearance and listening to

certain kind of music has been reflective of his identity project. He has demonstrated his identity through different groups according to what is convenient at the time, thus maintaining his agency in choosing these particular sub-cultures. Nevertheless, he has not found a 'home' through these continuing efforts of belonging. He describes himself as a chameleon that is characterized to change color according to his background. This metaphor is quite relevant as he has been trying to fit in to various groups through changing his appearance and taste in music as a chameleon does. Thus, music has had a permanent role in his life as a tool to help him in his attempt to find his slot in the world. This constantly evolving, liquid identity has been a survival mechanism for him, although it has also enhanced the feeling of 'not-belonging'.

Although it might seem the objective of this coping strategy to lose oneself in music and to fit in and become part of something – it is not exactly so. In fact, as he concludes, the community he wants to be a part should be the kind that allows him to fulfill his agentic strivings of 'being himself', 'being respected for what he is', and thus enforcing his own worldviews. Therefore, this community should not be a totalitarian one that defines one's identity in full, but a music community that emphasizes the unity concerning that aspect of his life while still respecting the differing views of its participants. In addition, the marginality of this community is also of value. As a part of a peripheral, emerging sub-culture, Pete can still feel rather special, differentiated from the mainstream, as "none of his old friends are into this kind of music". Indeed, he seems to be very fond of the music itself, but secondary activities play an important role in the equation, too. Through his narrative 'selfing' (McAdams 1996) efforts he also reflects considerations as to what kind of self-image he wants to project through his leisurely interests.

Journeying – Pete as traveller

Journeying is a strategy that follows from Pete's chameleon-like ability to change his preference and appearance as he deems appropriate. In his life-story-telling, he narrates about engaging with various groups, which, in turn, suggests trying on of 'possible selves' (Markus & Nurius 1987) in his quest to find an ideal identity. This ongoing fitting of roles, then, represents a journey through which Pete seeks to integrate his identity-as-life-story.

This provisional testing of identities (Ibarra, 1999) is an example of Pete's conscious efforts to overcome the various tensions found in his life-narrative. Instead of just giving up one's agency and surrendering to anything that might come, he is determined to try on different ways of being. As Pete journeys through his life, testing a variety of identities this exploration, then, becomes a part of him. In other words, instead of contending that his 'identity play' demonstrates a desire to merge

with the Other (Hall 1997) this could actually be understood as reflecting his need to expand himself through agentic behavior.

As already established, Pete has a history of using the meanings associated with music in order to explain his identity. This attempt to identify with certain groups could also be interpreted as what McAdams (1993) labels as *communion*, a striving to lose individuality by merging with others, participating in something that is larger than himself. He tries to lose his problematic self through becoming a part of some bigger. Although, in doing this, he simultaneously tries to maintain his sense of agency, the sense of separation from others, and being an autonomous individual. This said, Pete's narrative demonstrates how the coupling of certain music styles reflects the successful coupling of both agency and communion (McAdams, 1993) in his identity work:

My music taste has correlated with my identity, for example as a teenager I tried to build my identity through listening to heavy metal. I guess I had to be this grim dude. But in the end it did not quite work for me.

Pete describes trying on the identity of a 'heavy-metal-listening grim dude', but realized that it is not 'his thing', as it fails to fill his needs to find something more suitable instead. In other words, since he feels that heavy metal is not 'his', that is, part of his 'extended self' (Belk, 1988), he then demarcates from it in order to maintain a coherent life-story (Ahuvia, 2005). Instead of this role, Pete continues his journey of identity and shifts to listening jazz, which gradually, then, leads him towards the choice of rap music. The way that this is portrayed reflects his sophisticated image of self:

(P): It is sort of peculiar, that I ended up listening to rap through jazz-music. Like my father had listened to jazz and he had jazz-classics like Miles Davis, Dizzy Gillespie, John Coltrane, Thelonius Monk, Herbie Hancock, and such jazz classics among others. So I started listening to them after listening to rock and heavy metal as a younger like 13-14 years old. Then I realized that lot of jazz samples are used in rap, like they have the same vibe and through that realization I started being into rap.

Listening to jazz is generally seen as conservative, and as a sign of sophistication. By and large, everybody likes jazz, and as Pete remarks, one is not allowed to dislike jazz if one wants to appear knowledgeable. Also, as he says, listening to jazz, that is 'adult music', reflects Pete's identity-crisis, he wants to be like the grown-ups he hangs out with. As a teenager he even goes as far as

wearing a suit and tie to appear neater. Mentioning his enthusiasm for jazz music, and justifying his interest in rap through its likeness to jazz, he maintains his identity as a person with suave qualities. As he states, this shift towards a more popular style of music was also socially convenient for him:

(P): Then as I was fifteen I started to integrate myself into normal youth. Many of my friends listened to rap, and that sparked the interest in me as well. [...] Yeah, well, I started identifying myself through rap. And what comes to appearances, I wore Carhartt hoodies, like everyone else in those times.

Listening to rap suits Pete well, musically it included some elements such as jazz, and socially, it helped him in becoming part of mainstream youth. As a connoisseur of some sort, he was able to distinguish himself from the masses and allowed him to feel special among other affiliates as well. As Pete immersed himself into the rap scene he signalled his identity with conviction.

Currently, Pete has been involved with certain London-based club music scene that has gained a small, but tight, fan community in Finland. It has only been through this introduction to this certain style of music and community around it that Pete has finally found a 'home', realizing also who he would like to be in this stage of his life. Through his storytelling, then, Pete creates a coherent life-narrative and integrates that he is today with who he has been. As Pete and his friends have stipulated rap is one of the 'normal' ways to be socialized into this particular music strand of music:

(P) But what is remarkable is what we discussed with the dub step gang, like through what kind of music one has ended up into dub step. So we have formulated this divide of rap kids, techno kids, and jungle kids. I was a rap kid, myself. And then some were all of the above.

As he narrates, he is not the only one who has been lured into liking dub step through rap, thus he can feel 'normal' and part of the group. Also, through this emphasis he makes a statement that integrates his past into his present so his music taste then forms a coherent whole.

On this journey Pete's objective has been to find something that is 'him', to extend himself through his choice of music style (Belk, 1988). He has been fitting a variety of identities associated with heavy metal, jazz, rap, and finally dub step. His retrospective attitude towards these identities vary, as he still considers some of them a part of himself while trying to demarcate from others. Accordingly, as Pete describes his biographical wandering through different music scenes it can be interpreted as an act of 'trying on' different identities. This future-oriented strategy follows a logic to that described by Markus and Nurius's (1986) concept of possible self and Ibarra's (1999) notion

of provisional self. In engaging with a variety of musical styles and the identities associated with them, Pete has been experimenting with what he could be, both pragmatically and emotionally. In this light, it is then not solely a question of him fitting and thus merging into a community, but a question of whether the community ‘suits’ him. This said, Pete’s journey to find this community becomes an important part of his narrative, in two main ways. Firstly, without his experience of being lost and the ‘journeying’ that was required, one could not appreciate the destination finally reached so much. Secondly, as Pete has had a chance to trial out different selves, he has had the opportunity to make well informed. Finding a place he can call home might seem like a simple dream, but it has taken most of Pete’s life to attain this goal.

Finding comfort in community

Despite expressions of individuality, Pete finds comfort in giving up his agency and losing his problematic self through being part of something bigger. This surge towards communality becomes a prominent aspect in his story, as he describes his major turning point – as the finding of the music community he has for so long searched for. This is evident in the following excerpt in which Pete discusses the overall atmosphere in his life and accounts for the brighter circumstances that have been brought about explicitly to through the music he listens to.

(P): Now I feel so positive about everything, I don’t need to angst so much. Y’know, I was so full of angst until I turned 25. Recently so many good things have happened to me, I have learned to be with myself so much better. As a matter of fact, I don’t know if it was a year ago, I just grew up. I was not the eternal miserable teenager as I thought I would be.

[...]

(P): Well, actually music has quite significant role in that. When dub step taught me to ‘feel’ the music with my heart. I let go of all that... Well, I have listened to music with heart before, I remember attending rap clubs as I was younger. Like dub step did the same thing for me that I thought was gone for good. Let’s say the same feeling I had while attending rap clubs as I was younger, collective optimism, the feeling of community.

Quite remarkably, Pete narrates this major change in his attitude, to be associated with his recently found enthusiasm towards a certain marginal music style. In his narrative, he implies that this turn for better is actually mostly due to him finding dub step and the community around it. In his life-account, music appears as the ultimate remedy to his identity crisis. This is a major turning point (McAdams, 1993) in Pete’s life, and as he explains further: “music came into my life ‘at the right’ moment, I guess I was ready for it, that’s why I fell in love so hard.” Pete credits the finding of

himself to the finding of this particular music community. In joining this sub-culture, he has been able to fulfill his goals of *communion*. The collective optimism he describes here could be theorized as ‘*communitas*’ – transcendent group camaraderie (Turner 1969, Turner & Turner 1978). This bond transcends typical social norms and convention, and moreover, it exudes a sense of camaraderie that occurs when individuals from various walks of life share a common bond of experience that all participants consider special (Belk et al., 1989, cited in Celsi et al., 1993). A key aspect of ‘*communitas*’ in the context of sub-culture, then, is the recognition that everyday statuses and social roles are not relevant (Turner, 1969), which in turn causes stigmas to lose their meanings as well.

The love Pete associates with music is something that emerges from the collective sense of community. In his narrative, Pete makes sense of his longing for community, using music as a metaphor, and as much as he loves the music itself, he loves the people in the community, too, which in itself an inseparable part of the whole concept. Pete does not talk about music only as an object of consumption, but something to be loved. He talks about his love to music as something he had lost, and which had caused him to feel a kind of grief. Love is a common emotion associated with consumption (Richins, 1997), but in this context it could be even more. It is peculiar how Pete refers to some music as ‘lovable’, almost as if he were referring to a person, especially when, in stark contrast to American society, for instance, this sort of usage of the word ‘love’ in Finnish language and culture is almost unheard of. As such, to describe something as so deeply loved, is a prime example of consumption meanings becoming of an important aspects of one’s extended self (Belk 1988).

Bonding

This strategy refers to the actual ‘doings’ that bring the members of community even closer together. By engaging in these acts, Pete enforces *communion* (McAdams, 1993) in his everyday life, as these doings constitute an essential part of his narrative.

Finding his own place in the community and pursuing his passion in making music enables Pete to fulfill the needs for self-worth and efficacy (Baumeister, 1991). This special kind of community also has an important role in this negotiation of lack of meanings. Most of Pete’s affiliates have experienced same things as he has, which contributes positively to his feeling of partness. Through the same kinds of consumption interests these community member find each other and are able to cope with their feelings of outcast-ness together.

(P) There is such a homely atmosphere in all the clubs. Everybody is a bit weird [special] in their own way, and have had quite similar experiences and digs the same grim sounds. All the people who have ended up diggin' dub step are similar kinds of quirky people, or something. Odd, in a good sense, lots of very likable people. I've met so many exciting people through dub step.

The tight community of true fans enables one to feel welcomed and loved as oneself, although this congregation might seem almost hostile from the outside, as its marginal nature is its essential characteristic. By participating actively in these group activities, and narrating about them, Pete establishes himself as an active member of the sub-culture. While the members are allowed to exhibit their own distinct features in some domains, there are some areas everyone should agree on and take part in. For instance, the members of the scene share a strong sense of sociality, keeping in touch through online discussion boards in between concerts and other social encounters:

(P): So my other hobbies, I 'nerd' around online too much, on music-related online discussion boards. And discuss other aspects of my life as well [laughing]. My last post to [a discussion board he is active within] is about if I will have the courage to ask a girl out.

[...]

(E) So this of hobby of yours, online discussion boards. Interesting.

(P) Well, I have met so many friends and acquaintances. On the other hand even to the extent that I know too many people, y'know, that might become a problem as well. I just don't have enough time to stay in touch with everyone.

Pete spends considerable times in posting on and reading the discussion boards, and has even formed personal relationships through these mediums. They play an important role in his 'fan identity', through them cultural capital is shared and communal bonds among the enclave are maintained. In addition, discussing music, and finding shared interests 'in real life' is an important part of these bonding practices:

(P): As I was younger rap was a way to belong, and there was some interesting hiphop available. There was 'backpacker'-hiphop and the pleasant authentic atmosphere. Well, it was belonging. The thing was to listen to as authentic music as possible, that would be as underground as can be. And afterwards, when that was over, people started listening to nineties rap classics, although they were not that UG, and we were again bonding like: 'cool, man, you like nineties rap as well.'

Choice of music can be seen as reflecting one's interests, so this kind of bonding is a common practice among music enthusiasts. Interaction like this tightens the tie between the cohorts of this sub-culture. The communal activities, such as these, as well as the online discussions, concerts, and clubs Pete participates in, enhance the attachment he feels between himself and other affiliates. By being part of this community, Pete can gain a sense of self-worth by belonging into a semi-closed society, thus matching the theme of *communion* (McAdams, 1993). As a by-product of this experience, he can simultaneously resolve the tensions caused by differentiating himself from the mainstream, an agentic theme that will be discussed in the next section.

Authenticity

First and foremost, Pete wants to be his true self, an individual who does not conform to any stereotypes. This striving towards 'authenticity', as achieving his 'essential' sense of self, is an important theme for Pete, as he yearns for control over control over his identity. Although he discusses dub step in great lengths throughout his interview, he insists that he should not be defined through a given music style. Indeed, he frequently asserts that he does not want to conform to any molds:

(E) What do you mean by multiple roles?

(P) That I don't want to be defined through any pre-determined molds, you now like goth, heavy metallor, hipopper, or anything. Well, I've never had that kind of a phase that I was any of that. Well, I don't define myself as dub stepper either. I just happen to like it because that is the music that is vivid at the moment. I that oughta be digged, like I can also listen to nineties rap classics, or rock classics, or jazz and punk classics, but at the moment dub step mostly applies for me. I'm not saying that's the only genre, that is vivid, but definitely one of them.

This avoidance of pre-determined roles relates to his need for self-efficacy (Baumeister, 1991). He is finally feels in control of his identity work, his values, and socio-cultural environment, thus being hesitant to adapt to conform to a prescribed narrative. Pete listens to music, not because someone has instructed him to do so, but because e deems it as "good and vivid", these concepts instantiating for him what is truly 'authentic'. In fact, the more weird and obscure the music is, the better. Indeed, it seems that he has found a niche where he feels comfortable; he cannot be like everybody, so he is not even going to trying to. This nonchalant attitude reflects the club culture of dub step that "has no rules, since the music has no standards, there is no standard way to feel the music either. You can dance however you want, or just nod your head on the dance floor, there is no such norms

existing”. Accordingly, dub step allows Pete this freedom as the informal rules of this realm encourages everyone to be exactly who they want to be:

(P): The most I like the fact that you can feel the music in your own way, by yourself, and have everyone else around you. Like you are alone together

.

[...]

(P): I think it is the dark tone of the music, it pretty much reflected, how should I put it, the feeling of outside-ness in my life. That is probably what hit me. As I was walking alone on dark street and listening to the music from head phones or attending clubs. Somehow the music helped me in finding good vibes from the feeling of outside-ness, suddenly it felt beautiful. I guess that is what made me love that music. Somehow I often thought about my outcast-ness at the clubs but simultaneously had a chance to meet awfully nice folk, that were very amicable towards everybody. Well, I've been through mental illness and many others within that scene have as well. It is interesting how many have found that music through their own problems and started feeling it and got something out of it. I'm not saying that dub step would be the sole content of my life but it is interesting what kind of people I have met in those circles.

Like many others in the scene, Pete has been through rough times. Music has helped him make sense of his self, and of his feelings of loneliness, an experience that, together, amounts to something higher, something he describes as “beautiful”. In his narrative, Pete attributes the change in his perception of life mostly to music, which enables him to make sense of this life in a new light.

This manner of narrating could be accounted as a ‘redemption sequence’ (McAdams & Bowman, 2001) in which music plays an integrative role; through the role of music Pete’s life gains more meaning. The way he discusses his liking in music reflects the fact that among this particular sub-culture he can maintain his originality, his authentic self, yet still belonging to this idiosyncratic group. The way Pete narrates this turning-point, shows how he has gained a new lens to observe his life through. Resonant with Shankar et al.’s (2009) emphasis on the peripheral nature of consumption, music for Pete merely reflects his identity, rather than directly constituting it.

'Blending in'

As hard as Pete is trying to differentiate from the mainstream and maintain his individuality as a member of a community, he also finds comfort in being able to function normally, accommodating the demands set by his family. The integration of these standards, play an especially important role in the telling of his life narrative. This coping strategy is about gaining acceptance from the people perceived as non-stigmatized by story-telling individual. This gaining of acceptance is a way of challenging the label of stigma (Henry & Caldwell, 2006). Indeed, Pete's aspiration to be 'normal' and to blend in with the rest reflects the theme of communion (McAdams 1993). In adopting the socialized values and objectives imposed on him into his narrative, Pete aims to be accepted on his own terms, thus de-emphasizing some other mainstream domains of meaning he might not find feasible to accomplish.

Pete describes his family being rather sophisticated and he credits his reading hobbies to his sister who works in the publishing industry, as well as to his parents' vast library. In his past, present and future doings and aspirations, Pete has been striving to live up to the expectations imposed on him by society, and particularly his own family, when asked about the importance of sophistication and education, he describes the importance of a university degree:

(P): To gain a certain level of sophistication, and as a matter of fact acquiring an academic degree. Even to the extent that if I fail to complete my studies at the university, it would be socially difficult for me.

(E) You mean that your family would disapprove?

(P) Particularly that, but otherwise as well. Y'know, if I would have not graduated in few years, I wouldn't have a degree, that would feel difficult in a social sense.

(E) What do you mean by that, socially difficult? Where does that difficulty stem from?

(P) I just have always considered having a university degree as something one oughta have, as given. That is probably something I have learned from home. Let's say that my sister and her husband are doctors of philosophy, two out three of my father's sisters are doctors. And well, my father's a licentiate.

This problematic that Pete describes is a double-edged sword. On the one hand, it stems from his family's high standards regarding education, hence inflicting a sense of lack of self-worth, or to put it in another way one of the significant sources of stigma found in his account. On the other hand, this has sparked an interest in Pete to educate himself, which in turn, can be interpreted as a positive outcome of the stigmatization. These expectations set by his family have always pushed him to his

limits, and quite ironically, now that he has ended up in a respected university he has had difficulties to find his own interests in this place. Thus, through this narrative strategy, Pete seeks to integrate his own interests with broader social expectations – a tension-laden affair to say the least. Accordingly, instead of just doing what he is told, he has strove to find his own path. A good example of this, is to gain a degree of a prestigious university, and in doing so to acquire a certain level of sophistication. In studying this degree, he does not want to be like anybody else, but rather to take degree courses that enable him to realize his own, peculiar interests.

In this vein, throughout the interview Pete keeps mentioning how much he knows and takes a pride in his vast knowledge in multiple fields. Pete identifies himself as an armchair philosopher, as he has been reading quite a lot of philosophy. He discloses that he wants to read about topics that would make him more knowledgeable and better person as well as to lubricate his thinking. Pete's desire to do so is greatly influenced by his father whom Pete regards as a highly contradictory character, in a way he greatly appreciates the upbringing he has received from his father, but at the same time also attributes to him many of the difficulties and mental problems in his life. Pete has been engaging in this attempt to gain acceptance from others throughout his past and still does so in his present and future aspirations. His narrative is full of references to his striving to be accepted in a variety of ways. This attempt is a source of tension since it contradicts in a major way with his general effort is a tension-laden one since it reflects contradictions between his aim for self-authenticity and acting accordingly, as these two rarely seem to fit together in his case.

Differentiation

Pete's effort to 'blend in' causes tension between the contradicting themes of agency and communion (McAdams, 1993). He seeks to resolve this by differentiating himself from the mainstream. This can be characterized as another agentic coping response that might be associated with Pete's telling of his habits and music taste. The symbols and music found in the rap as well as heavy metal culture reflect aggression towards society as well as separation from the masses (Henry & Caldwell, 2006).

Another aspect of this coping strategy is his strong dislike towards the members of the mainstream:

(P): Quite surprisingly the uni has taught me quite a lot of human beings. Coming from a stereotypical, sophisticated upper class family and having attended elite schools, I have to admit that I could not believe how dumb-ass folks attend university.

(E): Well.

(P): I was in a shock for the first few years there. Well, not exactly in a shock but at least a bit surprised. But it has been good to meet people that are different from myself and learn to understand them. That might be one of the biggest lesson from the university.

Differentiation is also evident in one's views of the mainstream as mindless cretins, something that he believes he is not. The same kind of influence can be observed in his telling of his music consumption, as he strives to achieve a connoisseur status within a certain genre, and representing it as something very different from the mainstream. Accordingly, he demarcates his own subculture from the mainstream, especially from the specific music tastes:

(P) Yeah, if you check out a mainstream night club and see to what kind of music people are dancing to. [babbling] The music [referring to dub step] is so lovely and the people are wonderful, they are still so genuine in the scene. Although it is becoming mainstream on full steam.

Referring to the music 'the Others' listen to, he shows clearly what his music of choice definitely is not. By doing this he portrays it as a choice of special people that have a mind of their own. What is also remarkable in this narrative is the anticipation of dub step becoming mainstream. This would be problematic, since it would do away with its main lure, its exclusivity. On the other hand if the breakthrough would happen Pete could emphasize him being one of the first ones to recognize the trend, which would be an excellent source of status, and hence self-worth.

The peculiar interests of Pete are not limited to digging obscure music scene of dub step. Despite his sophisticated mind and taste, he is rather passionate about B-movies, like zombie- and Steven Seagal-action films as well as some rather kitschy music scenes. Although, how he narrates about them is maybe the key to understand this peculiarity. He does not like just any kind of B-films, and his plans of shooting a movie are directed towards a specific genre, 'post-apocalyptic zombie-movie'. This is similar to what Ahuvia's (2005) study on loved consumption objects, in which subjects narrated about their quirky objects of interest distinguished these surprising tastes from those of one's with lower level of sophistication. Pete's narrating holds to this same theorizing, indicating that Pete seems to consider himself some sort of connoisseur and wants to enforce this impression through his storytelling, and especially considering that his movie shelf was stacked with both B-movies as well as renowned art house film classics. In his narrative Pete establishes his own way of sophistication, enforcing the image he strives for in his own terms.

Escaping reality

Sometimes one has no chance of controlling the situation, or oneself. On these occasions, the literature suggests (Henry & Caldwell, 2006, Hirschman, 1992; Miller & Kaiser, 2001) that a stigmatized individual might use consumption as a device for escape from the unfortunate circumstances in the face of which one is rather powerless. This approach reflects the theme of communion (McAdams, 1993) as instead of striving for control over self or the situation, one chooses to escape and forget the matters one has no control over.

As pointed out earlier, Pete has gone through times in his life when he has been unable to confront the situation and take control so, the most feasible way to find comfort has been through immersing himself fully with music. As he admits himself: “But the music thing, I feel as if that it was some sort of escapism for me as a teenager. If nothing else appeared interesting, at least rap was cool. And drinking beer and smoking pot.” Here, Pete compares music to alcohol and cannabis, as music has been an effective tool for him to alter his state of mind, and furthermore to disengage from undesirable situation. From this standpoint, he sees music as a highly positive aspect in his life, as it has enabled him to withdraw to an imaginary world where he could feel safe when necessary. When asked if he could recollect any negative memories considering music, he portrays music as an ultimate remedy and points out that it simply cannot hold any downbeat recollections because of its nature as such a miracle-worker:

(P) No, I don't really have any negative memories of music. Even though there have been worse times, music has always been one of the good things in life, almost always. It was sort of an asylum for me. Y'know, you put on the headset and play your favorite rap song, you can be somewhere else for a moment, to feel it. It's still the same for me. It was so that music and literature were sort of resorts for me, especially as a teenager.

Through music one can simply travel far with a mere push of a button. Pete constructs music as a fundamental aspect of his life that has saved him over and over again, as it is perceived as something that he can rely on endlessly. This act of escapism brings about integration, as the music that is part of his life might change but the practice remains. For Pete, it is a comforting thing to know, that there is something permanent in life. As was in the past, and will be in the future, Pete continues to have a reliable aspect in his life. Hence, there is continuity in the way Pete uses music to relieve his everyday worries. In addition to listening to music, Pete has also found some other ways in which to relieve his grim feelings:

(P): It kicks ass. Telemark-skiing is the best ever. It requires such deep concentration that it totally takes you out of this world. And the fact that you can do it in such 'out-of-this-world' places.

His enthusiasm for 'doing' is another form of escapism. Both doing telemark-skiing and spinning records require such concentration that everything else loses its meaning. Earlier, Pete has gone through some hard times in his life, so the significance of this everyday coping should not be underestimated. This view on doing is also demonstrated in the following excerpt where Pete mentions that this escapism makes him feel more at ease in everyday life as well – it's like a minibreak from mundane worries. This 'feeling good' contributes to Pete's sense of self-efficacy, increasing his psychological well-being through activities that give him more control over his life's outcome.

(P): But it is in a way very important for me, I have always wanted to learn to play records, it would be quite nice. The fact that you have to concentrate on this 'doing' so intensely. Most of my hobbies require such concentration, it sort of allows you to 'get away' or 'let go'

(E): Escaping reality?

(P): In a way, yes. But afterwards reality feels rather good again, when you have been playing records for a while.

Like listening to music and telemark skiing, doing DJing enables Pete to “forget every day worries when playing”. Later Pete states that he greatly enjoys this act of practicing. This sense of feeling good can be contributed to the better cognitive state that is acquired through performing this compensatory activity just as is the case with other compensatory consumption activities (Woodruffe-Burton & Elliott, 2005; Thompson & Holt, 2004).

Nostalgia

Expression of nostalgia is a way to manipulate the tone of telling as it, for example, enables Pete to embed warm feelings to the stories of his otherwise grim youth. Nostalgia can be characterized as a bittersweet feeling that one feels towards a past experience, or the 'golden times' that once were. In like vein, as Pete can seek for comfort through music so as to direct his attention away from matters he cannot change, he can also find security in the memories of his past, thus turning his glance towards 'the times when everything was better'. This nostalgic remembering of events appears in Pete's narrative in quite a few occasions. Despite Pete constructing his youth as a difficult time of soul-seeking and depression, he also uses a warm tone when remembering and relating to these memories of the past. For example, he discusses the feelings that were brought back through

listening to dub step: “Hearing dub step brought back the euphoric feeling I used to get from rap, that I thought was lost forever”. In this narrative music captures a feeling of nostalgia. He also relates nostalgic memories with the people he used to listen the music with, a sort of camaraderie he misses from his youth.

(P) Well, Mixtapes by The Nons brings about good memories. At first I didn't even know whose song it is, but it was always played in Supersessiot [a radio program]. When we were chilling with friends, we always listened to tapes of that radio show. [...] As said it always played there as well as at all the parties, so that has left a nostalgic feeling.

This warm remembering is a way for Pete to enact temporary escape; to direct the attention away from his more unpleasant memories. While most of his narrative telling enforces quite a different perception of his youth, embedding the nostalgic moments into the narrative is a way of coping. As Pete has described music being a place to hide from the cruel world, it can serve a similar purpose in his story-telling. Through constructing the happy moments into his youth, it makes it more bearable for him. Thus, through a nostalgic tone, his past is made better and he feels more comfortable discussing it as the symbolic meanings of music compensate for the stigmatization in the other fields of his life.

Demarcation

Compared with of my other informants, Pete is surprisingly open about many difficult events in his past, although he is reluctant to discuss them in their entirety. While he is asked to narrate about his music experiences, he mostly concentrates on the present time period, just briefly referring to some past events and likings. There are a few things in his past that are significant enough to illustrate his present mindset, but otherwise it has been difficult to persuade Pete to narrate coherently about these experiences. The events he omits or speaks only shortly about are mostly the ones that are ‘not him’ anymore (Belk, 1988).

Through this self-demarcation, Pete attempts to hide certain ‘embarrassing’ aspects of his past, such as his affiliation with live role-playing and heavy metal, an act of demarcation he enacts through the present perspective (Järvinen, 2004).

(E) So what appealed to you in heavy metal? Was it a way to belong?

(P) It was a phase; I was trying to find an identity. This was around junior high when I was into role playing, which was part of the scene. And then again it was socially difficult. Well, you know, it is a bit stupid to play around with fake sword in the forest.

Accordingly, Pete demarcates from his past behavior, ridiculing it by pointing out how he is not into that anymore and cannot understand the activity of live-role playing. Earlier on, he has ‘confidentially’ confessed that he used to be into that, suggesting that I should not tell anyone since it is, after all, a bit embarrassing.

This could be a way to bring coherence in the narrative through the act of ‘narrative configuration’ (Polkinghorne, 1995), since the metal music cannot be linked with his main-story that flows smoothly from precocious jazz listener to a rebellious rap enthusiast concluding to a dub step devotee. Neither is this kind of music ‘cool’, and as such, it is a way to demarcate (Ahuvia, 2005) himself from this gang, and enforce his identity as a musically aware and sophisticated individual. Indeed, this individualism abides to the theme of agency, while Pete separates himself from the stigmatized group and demonstrates his control over his narrative self.

Collecting cultural capital

The way Pete discusses his record collection signals its importance to his identity as member of the sub-culture. By nature, this collecting is an agentic practice as it involves doing, and furthermore through this activity he can demonstrate his distinction from others. In addition to this, it also deals with the theme of communion, as the practice of collecting records abides to the communal rules and structures.

The names of artists as well as the distinct names of music styles that are recognizable to only select group of connoisseurs can be considered as sub-cultural capital (Thornton, 1995). This concept is an important part of the sub-culture, since to Pete’s peers this jargon is a signal of him being ‘in the know’. This ‘snobbery’ is an important way to build the feeling of community and exclusiveness, as Frith (1996: 111) points out how social groups “get to know themselves as groups (as a particular organization of individual and social interests, of sameness and difference) through *cultural activity*.”

This process of identification separates the members of the sub-culture from the mainstream, although no one is excluded by any unfair standards; by displaying enough enthusiasm and interest anyone can be a member. This aspect most likely applies to Pete since it enables him to be a respected member of community through his own efforts, while still allowing him to stay true to

himself, as status is not based on the external appearance or other randomly inherent fact, but is totally of his own making.

(E): So, you feel it is important to be yourself?

(P): Yeah, definitely. And also what philosophers call 'rooting'. The fact, that you can be part of a group but simultaneously feel that you can be yourself. So you spend time with people with whom you don't have to feel tense over irrelevant stuff. Well, that's important for me.

As Pete strives to be himself, it is important for him to hang out with people that respect him as he is. In this context the relevant features are his skills as a DJ as well as his knowledge, which he strives for developing to a higher level, on his own terms. While in the past he might have felt that he has to strive endlessly to be better and smarter without ever achieving his father's appraisal or acceptance, nor to his own satisfaction, he does not have to do so in the present. He has the efficacy not only to master his current circumstances but also his future self, he has his future in his own hands.

Record hunting and collecting rarities is a playground for the cultural capitalists; to snatch the golden nuggets one has to be 'in the know' and 'street-wise'. Through expanding one's record collection with fine objects one gains respect among peers, albeit, this so-called sub-cultural capital is only recognized by this small circle of connoisseurs. This is obvious in Pete's account of his record collecting hobby that can be seen as an expression of aspiring to become a prominent member of the sub-culture. His way of narrating about the characters, scene, and artifacts signals his status as a connoisseur. Through establishing his level of knowledge, he demonstrates his position within the exclusive sub-culture. By doing this, he can find meaning in his life. Through demonstrating his extraordinary knowledge of this rarely known phenomenon he can assume knowing more than others, and in doing so, assume a sense of superiority, thus evincing the negotiation of lack of self-worth (Baumeister, 1991). All his activities within the sub-culture can be understood as acts of compensation, and narrating of purposiveness to his life. In his narrative, Pete also differentiates his own subculture from mainstream culture, especially in regards of taste in music.

(P): There, Timo Lassy's and Jose James' sevens [seven inch records], both small editions, very rare. That always catches my attention at the record store when something is 'limited edition'

(E) So you have to have it?

(P) Almost, even though I would not mind the music so much, it still makes you want it. It is part of the record-collecting-nerdy-practice. I don't recommend it to anyone.

Here, Pete narrates about his record collecting practices, so as to integrate them into his life-story. Furthermore, although he refers to it sarcastically as being nerdy, he takes pride in this 'nerdiness'. Somehow for Pete, as for the others who are into the same activities, acquiring the respect of other people that are also able to appreciate this exquisite connoisseurship and record collecting, is one of the most important sources of self-worth Pete can imagine. The enthusiasm of limited edition publications signals, that the record collection is an asset to signify one's devotion and uniqueness. In order to buy certain rare publications one has to be in the right place at right time, or alternatively willing to spend significant amounts of money. Engagement in these practices displays Pete's devotion to the sub-culture. Acquiring these gems into his record collection makes it more exquisite and therefore signifies his enthusiasm. Having these rarities in his record collection is a visible sign of one's cultural capital as well as awareness. Through the act of narrating Pete appropriates the meanings contained in his record collection as a part of his narrative. Thus, one acquires meaningful objects that reflect one's identity aspirations as well as past and present perceptions, but in order for them to become part of one's identity, these meanings need to be integrated into one's life-narrative in a continuous manner.

Creative production

Stigmatized individuals seek out social spaces in which they can establish their own societal norms (Henry & Caldwell, 2006). This is possible in this certain sub-culture as it has basically no rigid rules or standards as it still is in the process of making. Creative producers within a sub-culture have a chance of deriving status within this social space, something that would be impossible to achieve if working within the mainstream. In defining the participants of sub-culture members as consumers and producers of content Firat and Venkatesh (1995) argue that "the individual is freed from seeking or conforming to one sense of experience of being, the disenchantment from having to find some consistent reason in every act...is transcended, and the liberty to live each moment to its fullest...is regained (p.253)". Following from this, then, individuals engaging in the acts of creative production are, in fact, active re-creators of themselves.

Creative production (Henry & Caldwell, 2006) within a certain sub-culture abides to the rules and qualifications for appropriate participation, but, this said, the rules are not a major constrain to one's creativity since they are rather flexible. The coping strategy of creative production involves Pete's attempts to produce his own music following the codes that are already existing in the subculture.

He has a project with his fellow music enthusiast to produce their own tracks, and he also strives to become a decent DJ.

Through his interest in this certain club music, Pete has found enthusiasm for spinning records and making his own music. This do-it-yourself-aspect of this music scene makes him feel able, that he has efficacy over his own success. As this scene is young, the standards are not high yet, and making electronic music only requires simple equipment. For once, he, then, has not set the standards too high himself:

(P) And the fact that I will never be the best in DJing, but if I had never done it, I would regret never trying.

Through this ‘doing’ Pete accomplishes a feeling of agency, in this field of life he has the power to either success or stay mediocre, but it is all up to him. With this statement, he also demonstrates his ‘regret nothing’ attitude, which he applied to his experiences at the university as well. This implies that, as such, ‘doing’ is important, even though it would not lead anywhere. Here, the act of ‘engagement’ is important as he can feel that it establishes him as a powerful agent through having an impact on his surroundings. As he portrays it, the act of playing is valuable as such, since he actively strives to learn more and be better. Moreover, he gets satisfaction out of this improvement, as he feels that he can make a difference.

In a novel sub-culture, there exists no pre-defined set of rules or norms. The members of the dub step scene therefore have a possibility to create the qualifications to respond to their own desires. When asked if being respected among the cognoscenti of the subculture for his DJing skills contributes to this satisfaction, he does not answer directly:

(E) Do you have objectives for your DJing?

(P) Well, it's cool to learn new stuff. Like if you manage to mix tracks together smoothly in a way that it sounds good then that feels good, it is very satisfactory.

(E) Like it is important for yourself, not necessarily socially important

(P) No, but other DJ's appreciate you paying attention to that.

(E) So it is important for you to be appreciated by fellow DJ's?

(P) Yeah, and since the circles are so small, almost all the DJ's are my friends, or at least acquaintances. But anyways I love dub step mostly because of the wonderful people I get to meet in the parties

His answer, though, reflects the importance of the community for his love of certain music. The people and the community are part of the music through which he is able to gain a sense of self-worth (Baumeister, 1991). By being a good DJ and a connoisseur of this music style, he can feel himself as a respected member of the community, and maybe seen as a streetwise character by the people outside the scene. In his everyday life, Pete talks endlessly about the different music genres and takes pride in knowing all the emergent new streams and sub-genres of this music style. Although he emphasizes the fact that he is in this scene solely for the love of music, his style of speaking about it signals something else.

8. Discussion

In the following sections I will further elaborate on my findings through discussing stigmatization, coping, and role of agency and communion in life-stories. I will start by presenting my model of compensatory consumption. Then, I will discuss the present-orientation, integration, and directionality in Pete's narrative, more precisely, the ways in which he uses these narrative concepts in his story-telling and consumption to negotiate for lack of meanings. This will lead to a description of the various narrative strategies encountered in his life-story through which I will demonstrate through the higher order life themes of *agency* and *communion*. I will conclude this discussion by addressing the ways tensions between these life themes are resolved. Finally, I will present my conclusions on relations of consumption and identity in the context of biographical narrative.

Stigmas can have both positive and negative outcomes. As Goffman (1963) points out, stigmatization does not necessarily lead to only negative outcomes, since an individual "may also see the trials he has suffered as a blessing in disguise, especially because of what is felt that suffering can teach one about life and people (Goffman, 1963: 11)" Accordingly, this might prompt an individual to gain a different view on life, and as a result, strive to accomplish great things in life. The issue at hand is, then, how individual responds to the stigmatization; and as a result, does it lead to lowered self-esteem and destructive behaviors or is it a catalyst for positive life-style change (Henry & Caldwell, 2006). Although I analyze only one case in this thesis, it has been clear that all my informants have been able to cope with stigmatization in varying degrees through their reasoning of self, and have been able to change their life for better.

Next, I would like to propose a narrative model of coping whereby identity lies in the life-story and the author aims to construct a complete and coherent narrative through compensatory consumption. In a narrative context stigma is reflected as a lack of meaning, and compensation is, then, a process through which individuals negotiate this lack of meaning by using consumption as a resource for a variety of remedying strategies. This proposed model enables me to demonstrate how the application of such remedies can be examined in an in-depth manner through a focus the modalities of *agency* and *communion*. As higher order concepts, these two notions help to understand how an individual is able to create broader coherence in the face of stigmatization.

Since a *meaningful* life-story connects separate events and establishes causal relations between them, the four needs of meaning that are required for one's life to make sense are essential in bringing about coherence (Baumeister, 1991) When these needs are not met, it is proposed that

discontinuity appears in the life-story. In the preceding analysis, certain meanings were evident throughout the story thus creating association and distinction through symbolic meaning. In narrative these meanings can be used as a lens to observe how the narrator makes sense of his environment and separate life-events, and in so doing brings about integration.

Accordingly, one can use consumption as a resource in telling of story, so as to negotiate for the lacking meanings, to construct one's life so it 'makes sense'. Based on Gronmo's (1988) conceptualization, Woodruffe (1997) defines compensatory consumption as an attempt to make up for a lack of esteem or self-actualization. In the current study I have represented how these acts can be extended into story-telling and consequently enables the utilization of the temporal dimension in this process of consumption.

8.1 Narrative configuration and consumption in Pete's narrative

The perspective of the present is clearly visible in Pete's recollection of events; past events are reviewed through their influence on the present. Even more importantly scenes of redemption (McAdams & Bowman, 2001) seem to be quite common, while discussing the past. These negatively perceived past episodes can either redeem or contaminate (McAdams & Bowman, 2001) according to how the past episodes are narrated about. In multiple cases, Pete remembers negative events that he then redeems by telling what he has learned from it, how it has improved his present situation, or that it was something that made him what he is. By observing and interpreting the manner in which one 'configures' the life story we can draw conclusions on the direction of the plot, and the perception of one's life. The resulting plot aligns with one's view of identity and is a result of imposing a variety of strategies that produce coherence and directionality that are essential for a satisfactory narrative (Gergen & Gergen, 1988). Narrative directionality reflects Pete's desired identity as he constructs his life mostly in a way that demonstrates progressive directionality (Gergen & Gergen, 1988) where plot demonstrates a movement towards achieving his goals, the valued end-point. In doing this he uses consumption as a resource as the meanings he associates with music provide good material in explaining his life events, i.e. through his love of dub step he has been able to resolve the lack of meaning that has been evident in his past, and which has been determining his direction of life earlier. As described in the previous chapter, Pete uses the meanings in consumption to negotiate for the lacking meanings, thus accounting a great deal of improvement on his consumption of certain music style.

At a low point of his life, Pete was tainted by his stigma, as he had resigned his control over his life and his circumstances. Despite of this, he has been able to overcome these stigmas by engaging in

various coping strategies which has enabled a positive change of life-style. The major factor in this turning-point is him assuming the role of a powerful agent in his life, and making the change happen. Despite Pete demonstrating these individualist tendencies, his striving towards communal themes is also evident. Contradictions that appear in his life-story as a result of these opposing themes bring about lack of meaning and thus discontinuity occurs. To cope in the face of these problematic occurrences, he deploys a variety of narrative strategies that enable him to negotiate this discontinuity by using the consumption meanings of past, present, and future as a resource. These help him to smoothe out the story to construct an integrated whole. Through narrating about these consumption meanings they became a part of his identity. Nevertheless, it is not the meaning of consumption, but the meaning one narrates into it that become part of his narrative self.

The emphasis Pete lays on certain 'doings' in his life-story could be a way for him to construct agency, and in so doing, compensate for the lack of efficacy (Baumeister, 1991) which is reflected in his narrative. Especially, as he was younger, a number of expectations set on him hindered his control over his life. In the present, as he narrates, his success or failure is in his own hands, as he can finally make up his own goals and reach them through his own efforts.

The attempt to fit in to a community has been an important theme for Pete throughout his life. As he narrates, it has been a salient objective for him in the past, and in the present he emphasizes the importance of his belonging to this enclave of dub step enthusiasts. He also narrates passionately about his doings involved with this community which are aimed towards him becoming a prominent member of this community in the future. These projected, desired states, theorized as 'possible selves' (Markus & Nurius, 1986), act as drivers for his attempts as well as they enable him to construct a wholesome, meaningful narrative. Therefore, as Pete has gone through some hard times, which he does not want to bother himself with, he concentrates on the good things in the present and his constantly-improving future self, including a healthy body, integration to a community, and a university degree, as a way for coping.

Also, Pete constructs himself in the present as rather different from his old, lonely self: "I know too many interesting people; I don't even have time for all of them anymore, which is unfortunate." Accordingly by juxtaposing these rather contrasting view of self to that, who he has been before, Pete seems to demarcate this old sense of identity from his current being in the similar way as he portrayed his 'heavy metal' identity. Despite of describing himself as shy by nature, he is actually known for his out-going-ness and opinionated-ness. This manipulation of self can be interpreted as

an agentic strategy, and in so doing, he directs his efforts to the present circumstances through constructing them conveniently and manipulating his self-image accordingly.

8.2 Agency and communion in Pete's narrative

Agentic coping responses arise from individual's need for self-actualization and control over self and environment, whereas communion reflects the themes of belonging and intimacy. As both of these themes are present in Pete's life, they cause tension that has to be balanced out.

In the following I will briefly describe the major coping strategies that were recognized in the preceding chapter, and discuss the implications of agency and communion further.

8.2.1 Agentic ways of coping

'Expansion of self' is a highly agentic strategy by nature since its objective is to enhance Pete's identity by using cultural meanings and socialized narratives as resource. Through self-expansion he demonstrates the control over self as a powerful agent. This aligns with McAdams's (1996) concept of 'selfing' that involves the individual actively constructing his or her identity through the act of biographical telling. In the similar manner as one constructs the "extended self" (Belk, 1988) through acquiring possessions, these props act as resources for story-telling, hence become part of one's identity.

The strategy of *'journeying'* builds on the idea of identity expansion as it follows from Pete's ability to change his preference to assume certain identity. In his life-story-telling he narrates about engaging in provisional testing of identities (Ibarra, 1999) with various groups which carry implications to 'possible selves' for him (Markus & Nurius, 1987) Thus, it is an example of the conscious efforts one makes to overcome the lack of meaning. Instead of labelling this 'identity play' as 'disengagement' coping that follows the logic of communion, it reflects his nature as a powerful agent. On this journey Pete's objective has been to find something that is 'him', through which to extend himself (Belk, 1988).

'Authenticity' reflects Pete's desire to be his true self, an individual that does not conform to any stereotypes. This 'authenticity' is an important theme for Pete as he wants to be a powerful agent that has control over his identity. This said, he wants to be himself as he refuses to adopt a pre-determined role of certain music genre. The way he discusses his liking in music reflects the fact that among this particular sub-culture he can maintain his originality, his true self, yet still belonging to this group. This authenticity, then, is an extension to the theme of agency as it emphasizes the importance of self actualization and differentiation.

'Differentiation' is a resolution to the contradicting themes of agency and communion (McAdams, 1993), arising from his attempt to 'blend in'. This can be characterized as another agentic coping response that might be associated with Pete's narrative. It involves two kinds of actions that either confront unpleasant circumstances, or separates Pete from the masses (Henry & Caldwell, 2006). In so doing, he also utilizes his view of self as sophisticated individual as a resource for differentiation. Accordingly, he also demarcates his own subculture from the mainstream, especially from the specific music tastes. Way of narrating also plays a role in how things are perceived in the context of narrative. This is similar to Shankar's (2000) description of himself accepting the fact that he is different from the rest and then reflecting this theme through his marginal taste in music.

'Demarcation' strategy illustrates Pete's manner of telling some of the past likings that are 'not him' anymore (Belk, 1988). It highlights his agency in creating his own story as well as separating him from mainstream. In this strategy he demarcates (Ahuvia, 2005) from these events that cause discontinuation in his coherent music taste. This is a way to create integration as these events are not cohesive with the 'big picture'.

'Collecting cultural capital' is important for Pete, as is evident from the way he discusses his record collection as an important asset regarding his status in a sub-culture. These possessions are integrated into his biographical narrative as they are described as a reflection of his identity. By nature, this collecting is an agentic practice as it involves doing, and furthermore through this activity he can demonstrate his distinction from others. Despite of this, it also deals with the theme of communion, since it abides to the communal rules and structures.

'Creative production' is a resource from which status is derived within a subculture. In the relatively novel sub-culture with inexistent or at least highly flexible standards, Pete has had a chance to produce his own cultural content, and simultaneously have an impact on the rules and norms of the social space. Thus, through engaging in the acts of creative production, Pete has had a chance to re-create himself. Through this 'doing' Pete accomplishes a feeling of agency since he is the author of his own destiny. By being a good DJ and a connoisseur of the certain music style, he can feel like a respected member of the community, and maybe seen as a streetwise character by the people outside the scene.

8.2.2 Communion in coping

Despite Pete's determination in being his 'true self', *'finding comfort in community'* is an important theme since Pete seeks reconciliation in being part of something bigger, as he can give up his agency and lose his problematic self. The transcendent group camaraderie (Turner, 1969; Turner

and Turner, 1978) he describes is a major source of positive feelings for him as he can let go of the problematic aspects of self and immerse himself in the community.

'Bonding' refers to the actual 'doings' that bring the members of community together. By engaging in these acts, such as online discussions, concerts, and clubs, Pete enforces the theme of *communion* (McAdams, 1993) in his everyday life. Many members of this community have shared the same experiences in their youth as Pete, which is an important factor in bonding. By narrating about his participation in these group activities, Pete establishes himself as a part of this community and enforces these communal bonds in his narrative. As a by-product, he can simultaneously resolve the tension caused his agentic strivings by differentiating himself and his sub-culture from the mainstream.

'Blending in' is an opposite strategy from 'differentiation' as its objective is to help Pete to 'fit in' with the mainstream and adjust to the expectations set on him. This strategy of coping focuses on gaining acceptance from the non-stigmatized people in order to challenge the label of stigma (Henry & Caldwell, 2006). This aspiration to be 'normal', to blend in with the rest, reflects the theme of communion (McAdams, 1993). In adopting the socialized values and objectives into his narrative, Pete aims to be accepted in his own terms, de-emphasizing some other domains that he might not find feasible to accomplish in the standards of majority, or at least what he considers as majority. This attempt is a source of tension since it contradicts in a major way with his objective of being his 'true self' with him acting accordingly as these two rarely seem to fit together. This said, as this strategy's aim is to lose oneself and to follow a path created by someone else, Pete strives hard to modify it according to his own interests so he could maintain at least some of his agency.

'Escaping reality' is a coping strategy that might occur when one has no chance of controlling the situation, or oneself. On such occasions, Pete uses music consumption to escape. This approach represents the theme of communion since instead of confronting the situation at hand, one chooses to 'flight' and forget the matters one has no control over. This feeling good achieved through temporary escape contributes to a sense of efficacy, manipulating one's psychological well-being through this activity Pete gets more control over his life's outcome.

'Nostalgia' can be characterized as a bittersweet feeling that one feels towards a past experience, or the 'golden times' that used to be. Furthermore, the expression of nostalgia is a way to manipulate the tone of telling as, for example, it enables one to embed warm feelings to an otherwise negatively perceived past. In like vein, as Pete can seek for comfort in listening to music in order to direct his attention away from the matters he cannot change, he can also find security in the memories of past,

thus turning his glance towards the times when everything was better. In narration, music enables this feeling of nostalgia. This warm remembering is a way to direct attention away from the more unpleasant memories, a temporary escape.

8.2.3 Summary of agency and communion in coping

These strategies characterize Pete's narrative as it describes the ways in which he attempts to gain a balance between the contradicting modalities to achieve an integrated biographical identity. While some of his coping involves strategies distinguishing himself from the Others and finding his 'true self', some of them have a higher level objective of 'losing himself' and belonging. In sum, then, Pete tries to combine these two differing objectives through utilizing a variety of consumption meanings as his unresolved tensions are remedied by using an appropriate mix of these strategies

In narrative, an individual constructs a coherent identity through engaging in various acts of integration. Different levels on remedying as depict various nuances in Pete's narrative. These narrative strategies operate on the different levels of narration, as they concern the direct construction of identity, narration, and actual 'doings' and 'havings'. Thus, everyday doings as well as strivings to reach certain higher level goals are all coming together in a narrative. The utilization of these different types of remedies enables the formation of a coherent identity despite the contradicting higher order themes. Indeed, through deploying these remedies with different higher-order themes Pete can negotiate himself a cohesive identity.

8.3 Relation of consumption and identity

One of my objectives for this research was to critically explore the relation between consumption and identity. A common view among consumer researchers is that in consumption individuals are empowered to make up who they want to be, or construct their identities (Firat & Venkatesh, 1995). For example, Belk (1988) has proposed that we are what we own as our possessions, something that can be described as "mine" act as trajectories for our identity. This can be observed as people actively construct, maintain, and communicate their identity by using the symbolic meanings of brands, leisure, and lifestyle pursuits (Elliott & Wattanasuwan, 1998). Following Warde (2005) Shankar et al. (2009) propose the view of seeing consumption as a moment in every practice, means to an end. In this view consumption is reflected in our dynamically-constructed narratives, or can be used to facilitate social relations (Cova, 1997). The current data seems to support their view, as my informants clearly indicated many different ways in which consumption indeed was part of many social practices and coping strategies.

Within the proposed narrative paradigm, identity is seen as a dynamically constructed interplay between individual and socialized narratives (Shankar et al 2001). Consumption can be also used as a resource in individual's narrative, but in this case it is mostly the way in which one consumes and discusses this consumption that can be accounted as compensation – not the actual act of consumption. As my informants discuss their past consumption they attach certain meanings to their activities, and integrate these into their narrative self. Through this story-telling they can negotiate the lacking meanings into their narrative, thus become whole again.

This is evident in Pete's narrative where music plays a significant role as he invests significant amount of his income and time in making music, buying music, and listening to music. For example Pete can ascribe meanings of redemption (McAdams & Bowman, 2001), i.e. seeing past events in new light, to his new liking of certain music style when this could actually be credited to an overall life change. Actually, music is something that keeps the story together. In order to view Pete's life as a continuum one should see the coherence through music. The way Pete 'configures' his life-story coherently through making links in his music taste that flows fluently demonstrates how music consumption, indeed, reflects his identity projects and acts as a resource for story-telling.

As Pete tells stories of becoming a connoisseur in a specific field and attaining a status through his vast record collection he integrates these outcomes into his narrative self. Stigma is reflected in narrative as lacking meaning. This lack, be it in past, present, or future, can be compensated through narrative coping strategies that utilize consumption meanings as a resource. Here, then, identity is something that is constructed and then *reflected* on the patterns of consumption, not vice a versa.

9. Conclusions

9.1 Theoretical implications

As stated in the first chapter, the objective of this thesis was to extend the existing framework of consumer coping responses to stigmatization through the use of narrative method. More precisely, current research explored how an individual uses consumption meanings as a resource to negotiate the lack of meaning in his or her biographical identity. The narrative approach was chosen as appropriate due to its ability to produce a holistic understanding of its subject. This research has, indeed, extended our knowledge on the stigmatization through its in-depth analysis of biographical narrative. Therefore, this more holistic approach has allowed the grasping of stigmatization in the context of biographical narrative, and thus, produced a novel interpretation of these coping practices through the concepts of agency and communion. In sum, then, this research managed to expand our current understanding of the phenomenon.

In addition the thesis is also building on Shankar et al.'s (2009) work concerning the relation of narrative identity and consumption. In this article, it was proposed that consumption is not used to construct identity, but it merely reflects the identity of a consumer. I would agree with this view and suggest that nevertheless, consumption has a significant role in the process of 'selfing' as a resource.

9.2 Suggestions for further research

This research has contributed to the existing research through producing a novel understanding on the phenomenon of coping. Nevertheless, as my research sample has been quite narrow, more comprehensive understanding could be accomplished through increasing the sample size. Although, it should be noted, that interpretivist inquiry does not aim to produce results that can be generalized, so, as such, this could be rather done to broaden our understanding.

As this research also discussed the role of consumption in the process of identity construction, it could be studied further. A relevant research topic could be to observe how individuals utilize available brand meanings in their story-telling.

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