Shame on you!

-A study of how individuals handle the feeling of shame-

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How do individuals handle the feeling of shame in association with cultural consumption?

Abstract

Title: Shame on You!
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Seminar date: 03-06-2008

Course: BUS 808. International Marketing and Brand Management, Master thesis in Business Administration, 15 ECTS

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Keywords: Shame, Accounts, Cultural consumption, Social status, Cultural capital

Thesis purpose: The aim is to acquire an understanding for how individuals handle the feeling of shame in connection with cultural consumption.

Methodology: The study uses an abductive approach with a qualitative design based on accounts as a tool to capture the feeling of shame.

Theoretical Perspective: The thesis is based upon theories of how to detect shame, the use of accounts and high and low cultural capital in connection with social status.

Empirical Foundation: Empirical data was gathered from five respondents through in-depth interviews based upon our own contribution to the methodology, the Backstabber interview technique.

Conclusion: The Backstabber interview technique successfully triggered feelings of shame in connection to cultural consumption. We found that our respondents tended to use different forms of accounts to handle the feeling of shame. We categorized them into five accounts with relating sub-accounts. Our results indicated that individuals can gain status through skilfully use accounts.
How do individuals handle the feeling of shame in association with cultural consumption?

Acknowledgement

First and foremost we would like to thank our supervisors Cecilia Cassinger and Peter Svensson who have made this whole project a lot easier by their support in the form of both encouragements and constructive critiques. Further on they have been very engaged in the data collection process and recommended relevant sources thus guided us towards the right direction.

Moreover we would like to thank all of our respondents whose’ answers this research is based upon. They offered to us their time without any requirements of contribution thus made this thesis possible to implement.

Least but not last we would like to express our gratitude towards all of our lecturers who have enlightened us during the past year of studies within International Marketing and Brand Management.

2007 June, Lund

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How do individuals handle the feeling of shame in association with cultural consumption?

Table of contents

1 INTRODUCTION 6

1.1 SHAME IN DIFFERENT CULTURES 6
1.2 THE FEELING OF SHAME 6
1.2.1 EMOTIONS IN ASSOCIATION WITH CONSUMPTION 8
1.2.2 THE RELEVANCE OF CULTURAL CONSUMPTION 9
1.2.3 CONSUMPTION A PROTECTION AGAINST SHAME 11
1.2.4 CULTURAL CONSUMPTION GENERATES SHAME 13
1.3 WHAT WE AIM TO ACCOMPLISH 15

2 WHAT IS SHAME? 17

2.1 FRAMEWORK OF IDENTIFYING SHAME 17
2.2 DETECTING SHAME 18
2.2.1 SHAME IN VERBAL CUES 18
2.2.2 SHAME IN PARALINGUISTIC GESTURES 19
2.2.3 CUES OF VISUAL GESTURES 20
2.3 POST-MODERN SOCIETY’S NOTION OF SOCIAL NOBILITY 20
2.3.1 THE CATEGORIZATION OF HCC AND LCC 21
2.4 STATUS PHENOMENON 22

3 HOW TO CAPTURE SHAME 26

3.1 WHERE DOES SHAME OCCUR? 26
3.2 ACCOUNTS 27
3.2.1 EXCUSES 29
3.2.2 JUSTIFICATION 30
3.2.3 DEVELOPMENT OF ACCOUNTS 31
3.3 THE APPROACH TO SHAME 31
3.4 DATA COLLECTION 33
3.4.1 QUALITATIVE INTERVIEWS 33
3.4.2 THE BACKSTABBER INTERVIEW TECHNIQUE 34
3.4.3 WHO FEELS SHAME? 35
How do individuals handle the feeling of shame in association with cultural consumption?

4 THE HANDLING OF SHAME

4.1 ACCOUNTS
4.1.1 THE RESIGNATION OF THE SELF AS A SUBJECT ACCOUNT
4.1.1.1 The Good Samaritan account
4.1.1.2 The profession account
4.1.1.4 The availability account
4.1.2 THE INDIVIDUALISATION WITHIN THE COLLECTIVISM ACCOUNT
4.1.2.1 The tall poppy syndrome account
4.1.2.2 The common Swede account
4.1.3 THE AUTHORITY ACCOUNT
4.1.3.1 The joke account
4.1.3.2 The bewilderment account
4.1.4 THE TENSE ACCOUNT
4.1.4.1 The previous interest account
4.1.4.2 The up-coming interest account
4.1.5 THE STEREOTYPICAL ACCOUNT

5 CONCLUSION

5.1 HANDLING OF SHAME THROUGH ACCOUNTS
5.2 THE SKILFUL ACCOUNT USER
5.3 OPTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH
5.4 PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS
5.5 REFLECTIONS - STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES

REFERENCES

APPENDIX I: PRESENTATION OF THE RESPONDENTS
APPENDIX II: INTERVIEW GUIDE
1 Introduction

The purpose of this section is to present the feeling of shame and precedent researches on the subject. Moreover it explains how shame is related to cultural consumption in order to get an in-depth understanding for the research question presented in the end of the first chapter.

1.1 Shame in different Cultures

Shame is often referred to as a master emotion which influences individuals’ behaviour. (Retzinger 1995, Scheff 1995) As emotions most of the time is embedded in the contextual situation they can sometimes be difficult to detect. Shame has different distinctions within different societies in the world. The western societies have a very narrow explanation of shame in comparison with the traditional cultures such as the Asian countries that on the other hand have a broader interpretation of the expression of shame which can relate to a varied spectrum of feelings. (Retzinger 1995) The language of Mandarin Chinese has a much larger vocabulary and thus a much larger shame lexicon than the English language. Maori uses the concept of whakamaa which is used in everyday conversation. It stands for several emotion words such as; shyness, depression, uncertainty, embarrassment, incapability, fear, inadequacy, hurt etc. (Scheff 1995) However distinctions can be found in the western societies as well. In the English vocabulary shame is referred to as a crisis emotion which is to be avoided at all times. It is a feeling of emotional pain and social disgrace. The French language has a bit broader use of the word shame than the English. They use two words: la honte which is shame in the sense of crisis and la pudeur which is not to be used in a negative sense when it corresponds to modesty and shyness.

1.2 The feeling of shame

Shame and guilt are two emotions that often get mixed up hence it is important to distinguish them. The feeling of shame goes beyond for instance the feeling of guilt; it is more a defective objectionable self (Lutwak et al, 1997). Schmader & Lickel (2006) means that people feel ashamed for who they are, since it is closely related to the self, and guilty for what they do.
How do individuals handle the feeling of shame in association with cultural consumption?

Solomon et al (2006) describe the self as the person’s identity including realistic appraisal of the qualities we have or lack. Further Schmader & Lickel (2006) claim another difference between shame and guilt since shame creates avoidance behaviour while guilt creates approach behaviour. Hence shame makes people distance them from the inappropriate behaviour and guilt makes people approach the unacceptable behaviour in order to make up for it. Those feelings are different but might often accompany each other: “if I feel ashamed of whom I am, I probably also feel guilty for what I do” (Schmader & Lickel p. 54, 2006). Further on they mean that people feel shame for reasons of identity and guilty for the controllable behaviour. The sociologist and political researcher Giddens (1994) state that guilt has been widely explored, but shame, as he considers a more important feeling to respect to the self, has been less extensively discussed which gives us a further reason to study shame.

The sociologist Scheff (1995) claims that several authors believe there has been a decreased level of shame in the modern society, but Scheff (1995) himself argues that the level of shame actually has increased. The reason for why shame is not as evident as before is that shame in today’s society is more undercover than before. Scheff (1995) means that shame itself is shameful hence the emotion is avoided or ignored. Elias’s findings support Scheff’s view of shame, the results from his study showed that the overall amount of shame has grown in Europe but it is hardly noticed due to that it has gone underground (Scheff 1995). This has been the outcome since the feeling of shame is so avoided and disgusted that even the carrier of shame is not aware of it.

Traditional researcher have according to Giddens (1994) primarily focused on the ‘visible’ part of the self, the body, when studying shame. He uses Freud as an example of this hence he linked feelings of shame to fears of bodily exposure. Shame is much more than a feeling solely connected to nakedness, it is an emotion revealing the ‘invisible’ parts of the self. According to Scheff (1995) the studies of Lansky, Lewis, Retzinger and others suggest that most shame is outside individuals’ awareness. The self is continuous dependent of the proximity of place, of earlier experiences and of others in their social sphere. Tomkins describes shame as “a sickness of the self” (Probyn p. 329, 2004). Hence shame is perhaps the most intimate feeling which according to the cultural researcher Probyn (2004) makes our selves intimate to our selves.
The ideal self is what Solomon et al (2006) describes as a person’s concept of how he or she desire to be. According to Giddens (1994) the ideal self is a key part of self identity and it tends to continuously be a dissonance between the self and the ideal self. The French philosopher and existentialist Sartre postulated that the sole reason of why we want to consume is due to the wish of enlarging the self towards the ideal self. One way to understand who we are is to observe oneself in terms of what we consume. (Belk 1988) Riezler, a German philosopher and diplomat (1943), describes the human as the builder of the self, but the human has a limited ability to build which means the self never becomes quite the ideal self. The “builder” is the creator of the self and it continuously strives to build the self towards the “complete building”, which is the desired ideal self. In the process where the individual builds up the self Riezler (1943) argues that the feeling of shame can arise since all humans’ has a limited capability hence the ideal self can never become complete. The ambition to reach the ideal self therefore becomes an endless process. The feeling of shame works as a cover for vulnerable parts in the gap between the self and the ideal self which protects the human against themselves and others.

Probyn (2004) finds shame as a particular interesting emotion because it shows the self in its essential vulnerability since it reveals the gap between the self and the ideal self. Holbrook, who studied consumption manners (1999), means that the extent of the gap influences the urgency to reduce it. In order to fill the gap people attempts to consume the correct artefacts as an attempt to reach the ideal self (Holbrook 1999). According to the consumer researchers Arnould & Thompson (2005), several studies show how the market creates different positions and how consumers form identities through consumption in order to reach these market-made desired positions.

1.2.1 Emotions in association with consumption

Consumption reflects the self and becomes a measurement to reach the ideal self (Holbrook 1999). This makes consumption personal and emotional, which can generate feelings of shame as the person consumes products that are not in line with the ideal self. Shame is a feeling connected to consumption which reveals how people make sense of their world, how
How do individuals handle the feeling of shame in association with cultural consumption?

they look upon events around them and how they locate themselves in response to others which according to the two consumption scientists Lunt & Livingstone (1992) are important factors in order to understand a person’s identity and behaviour. They (1992) postulate the importance of understanding the nature of the personal identity in turn to understand the consumption society.

Feelings in association with consumption are relevant thus Holbrook (1999) claims they create a total consumption experience. Further he means that during the 1980 the experiential approach to consumer research was born and individuals’ emotions were put in focus in order to understand consumer behaviour. Arnould & Thompson (2005) argue that experiential consumption encourages collective identification which is based on shared values, status systems and social practises. Further on Hume (2008) means that consumers evaluate their consumption experience partly based upon the subjective attributes such as emotions. The art researcher Hume (2008) claims that there is a lack of research within the field of emotions when it comes to consumption.

Several other researchers have appointed the importance of feelings arising in connection with the consumption moment (Holbrook 1999, Scheff 1995, Bourgeon-Renault 2006, Holbrook & Hirschman 1982, Chan & Goldthorpe 2006) which gives us reason to believe the feeling of shame in association with consumption was relevant to study. Hume’s (2008) studies shows that service quality and emotions influence the perceived value of products which in turn has an affect on repurchase behaviour through satisfaction. Holbrook & Hirschman (1982) mean that it is essential to understand the consumers’ experience in order to understand consumer behaviour since many products project cues which have to be heard, seen and felt in order to be appreciated. Based upon those statements we consider cultural consumption to be an important subject to investigate since it is a trigger of emotions.

1.2.2 The relevance of cultural consumption

Bourgeon-Renault et al (2006) found that the experience of the cultural consumption is important for the values ascribed to the cultural object, in their case museums and monuments. Further on they have established two dimensions of the museums’ visitors’
experience; individual and collective. The individual dimensions are characterized by symbolism and hedonism, the visit’s ability to generate feelings of pleasure and amusement as well as aestheticism. The collective dimensions are the social exchange, festivity and search for a shared experience. Bourgeon-Renault et al (2006) claim that consumption is dependent on the circumstances in the context, which is characterized by the contradiction between individualism and the collectivistic desire to strengthen social bonds within communities or groups. According to Bourgeon-Renault’s et al (2006) study feelings in association with cultural consumption are essential to understand.

Further the marketing researcher Addis (2005) describes the consumer experience as the interaction between a subject which is the consumer and the object which can be a product, service etc. Holbrook & Hirschman (1982) mean that the experiential perspective of consumption aims to understand the symbolic meanings rather than the tangible benefits of services and products. In this way cultural products can help symbolize one’s identity, which in turn can generate feelings of shame. Bourgeon-Renault et al (2006) claim that cultural products are subjective symbols hence cultural consumption is not only a straight-forward monetary transaction. They argue that cultural consumption has more of a relational character depending on the aesthetic and affective exchange between providers and consumers. Further on they say that symbols and shared values are important elements of the cultural consumption. Bourgeon-Renault et al (2006) argue that subjective symbols such as cultural products can not be understood through only the cognitive perspective because it does not concern phenomenon such as pleasure, aesthetic experience and emotional reactions. Hence they emphasize the importance of the experience, especially in the field of culture, as an explanatory variable to understand consumer behaviour.

Since the consumption of culture is close related to emotions and what one consumes in its turn is a reflection of what one desires to be, we consider cultural consumption to be a relevant trigger to capture the feeling of shame.
1.2.3 Consumption a protection against shame

As mentioned above feelings are especially important when it comes to cultural consumption and shame is an emotion that can be avoided or even approached through cultural consumption. Arnould & Thompson mean consumers to be identity seekers with a goal driven approach and use symbolic products for self-representation. Arnould & Thompson (2005) mean that consumers actively transform symbolic meanings in objects to mark their personal and social value, their identity and lifestyle goals. In this way people can form desired identities through their cultural consumption. From a cultural consumption perspective the market place works as a provider of resources that individuals can consume to construct individual and collective identities. As several social status and cultural researchers claim (Bourdieu 1984, Holt 1998) the consumption of culture is closely related to the image of social status whereas shame is most likely to be closely related to consumption of cultural artefacts. Hence Hume (2008) believes it to be essential to understand emotions in cultural consumer research.

Scheff (1995) claims that earlier researcher within the field also have argued that shame has the role of the “master emotion” in all societies since it seems to control our behaviour. This means that shame also has an impact on our consumption behaviour. According to Scheff (1995) there is a long tradition within the literature and science that reclaims the recognition of shame in both us and others is what makes us understand shame since it influences our bodies, our concepts and ideas. Scheff (1995) means that shame can work as a moral direction for our behaviour. Hence people consume “the correct” products to protect themselves from feelings of shame. Further Holbrook (2006) claims that consumption becomes a way to achieve social conformity by fitting in and avoid feelings of unpleasantness, such as shame.

Scheff (1988) found that nonconformity to exterior norms generates feelings of shame. Further on his results indicate a difference between people with high and low self-esteem and how they experience shame. The individuals with a high self-esteem were more likely to act on their judgement despite their feelings of shame. Those with a lower self-esteem acted contrary to their own judgement with the aim of avoiding further feelings of shame. (Scheff 1988)
People do not only feel shame for themselves, but also as Lickel’s et al (2005) study shows, people feel ashamed for mistakes of members of the group to which they belong since it is relevant to one’s social identity that the in-group members share. In order to avoid shame all in-group members need to consume in an appropriate manner. Further on Lickel et al found that individuals are keen on creating a good reputation for themselves within the group since the other’s interpretation of the person is the key to their social identity of the self. The social group influence the person’s will and have a greater effect the more associated the person is with the group. (Lickel et al, 2005) Bourdieu claims that cultural capital protects the respect of the surroundings through the consumption of artefacts that are ideationally difficult thus can only be consumed by a minority who has the ability to do so (Holt 1998). This means consumption can reflect the individuals’ status in society. Holt has upon Bourdieu’s findings made a distinction of the so called LCCs (low-cultural capital) and HCCs (high-cultural capital) which he defines as follows:

“The tastes of LCCs are organized to appreciate that which is functional or practical – the taste of necessity.”

“In contrast HCCs are acculturated in a social milieu in which they seldom encounter material difficulties and in which their education emphasizes abstracted discussion of ideas and pleasures removed from the material world. For HCCs, the material value of cultural objects is taken for granted: instead taste becomes a realm of self-expression, a means of constructing subjectivity.”

(Holt p. 7-8, 1998)

Hence taste is especially important for HCCs since it is a way for them to express their identity. Taste is expressed by consumption therefore it is essential for the HCCs to consume the appropriate cultural objects in order to fit the social group and protect themselves from feelings of shame. Status is according to Holt (1998) generated from the individuals’ taste and the taste signals social group belonging. He further means that how you consume the chosen goods is crucial and what you consume is of decreasing matter. Consumption is crucial in order to attain social status and avoid feelings of shame. According to Scheff (1995) shame is
How do individuals handle the feeling of shame in association with cultural consumption?

like a crisis emotion characterized by both emotional pain and social disgrace. Shame is connected to fear and Scheff (1995) emphasize the social fear to be what people refer to and the feeling is closely related to social components. This means that the feeling of shame reflects much more than a simple emotion; it rather reflects a social status game where people consume in order to avoid and protect themselves from feelings of shame. The external response of consumption is important to avoid the feeling of shame (Schmader & Lickel, 2006). The external social feedback can be considered as a grade of whether the consumption choice was correct or not. If the external response is negative the feeling of shame can occur and the person feels afraid to be rejected by others. (Schmader & Lickel, 2006) A reason why it is of interest to concentrate on cultural consumption is that HCCs careers can be considered as of symbolic value where the importance lies within the symbolic value. It is rather important to understand and respond to new situations than follow instructions. Amongst HCCs there is a value in being able to manipulate and synthesize information. (Holt 2007)

1.2.4 Cultural consumption generates shame

As previously touched upon, Holt (1998) suggests that cultural consumption is an indicator of one’s social belonging. Hence cultural consumption reveals the self. He further claims that cultural capital exists in three forms where one of those is the culture capital objectified in cultural objects. (Holt 1998) He suggests that the cultural capital is embedded in the social environment of the cultural elites in families where education at institutions are required and interaction with peers from comparable families. Based upon above discussed we find it especially interesting to investigate the shame in relation to cultural consumption.

It is essential to consume “right” to attain social status. Holbrook (1999) touches upon the fact that some products should be avoided in order for individuals to reach the ideal social group. However different social groups seem to have different avoidance products. As well as the social status is generated from consuming certain objects, paradoxically social status can also be induced through avoidance of certain products (Holbrook 1999). Solomon et al. argues that some people are judged just as much of what they do consume as on what they do not consume. These objects which could be considered as avoidance products are generally those which appeal to the big mass like for instance commercial popular music thus are considered...
How do individuals handle the feeling of shame in association with cultural consumption?

as low culture. (Holbrook 1999) Distance taking and avoidance behaviour are according to Schmader & Lickel (2006) often generated by feelings of shame. They found several earlier studies claiming that emotions of shame cause an avoidance behaviour functioning as a shield to protect against others negative evaluations. Schmader & Lickel (2006) claim that present emotion theories suggest that individuals experience shame when they consider their behaviour as revealing an inappropriate flaw in their character, in respect to the self. Cultural consumption is correlated to an individual’s social group belonging (Holt 1998) and when people consume culture which is not in line with the social group which they wish to belong, we believe a dissonance to appear which generates the feeling of shame. We made the figure below to illustrate the reasoning;

Figure 1

Figure 1 shows how the dissonance is created when individuals consume inappropriate cultural products or activities which are not accepted in the social context where they belong. This dissonance in its turn generates feelings of shame. Cultural products are interesting to study since Holt (1998) claims it shows social belonging. The two consumer researchers Holbrook & Hirschman (1982) further claim that the symbolism plays an important role especially when it comes to cultural goods and activities. Hence they suggest it to be a relevant area for further research. Consumption functions as a tool to help detect the identity of individuals, there are symbolic meanings in the use of certain goods, a good example of
How do individuals handle the feeling of shame in association with cultural consumption?

that is the symbolism in consuming certain brands, it functions as a social interpretation. (Warde 1997) Further on several researchers within the field of consumer culture theory have explored how consumers continuously transform symbolic meanings in brands, advertisement, retail settings, or material goods to express their identity. (Arnould & Thompson 2005) In the same way can culture with its strong symbolic intrinsic value work as a way to manifest social belonging and avoid feelings of shame, however this is a field not yet not been explored.

Feelings associated with cultural consumption is especially important as cultural consumption is related to an individual’s social group belonging. (Holt 1998) The sociologists Scott & Lyman (1968) have studied how criminals handle shameful situations through accounts in which they verbally excuse and justify the criminal untoward actions. We believe these accounts could be useful in other than criminal contexts. Holbrook, who studied consumption manners (1999), means that people try to consume the correct artefacts in order to reach the ideal self. When individuals consume the wrong cultural products it reflects their incomplete self since does not correlate with the social group and this generates feelings of shame. We believe the unacceptable consumption could be viewed as an act of “crime”, where the individual handle the shame through defending the inappropriate consumption choice in the same way a criminal defend their crimes. As far as we know no previous studies consider how individuals’ actually cope with the feeling of shame within the field of cultural consumption theory.

How do individuals handle the feeling of shame in association with cultural consumption?1

1.3 What we aim to accomplish

The aim with our study is to understand how consumers deal with the feeling of shame in connection to cultural consumption. Some scientists describe shame as a “master feeling” of the being which influence our behaviour. (Retzinger 1995, Scheff 1995) Hence we want to lift this important feeling to the surface in order to examine it closer and understand the feeling of

1 Cultural consumption: Theatre performances, movies, TV-shows, literature, opera performances, music and concerts.
How do individuals handle the feeling of shame in association with cultural consumption?

shame and how consumers handle it in association with cultural consumption. The feeling of shame is closely related to the self and might reflect the status system and social belonging. This does according to Holt (1998) have an impact on consumption behaviour. We chose to focus on cultural consumption since it is closely related to the social status phenomenon (Holt 1998) hence it is most likely to trigger the feeling of shame thus also the handling of it. In today’s society shame is somewhat undercover hence difficult to capture (Scheff 1995). Therefore our purpose is to develop an interview technique especially constructed to trigger the feeling of shame thus capture the handling of it, we have chosen to name it the backstabber interview technique. We hope this interview technique will contribute to the field of methodology theory used to examine shame and other unpleasant feelings.

The handling of shame has earlier been studied with the help of accounts, but as far as we know primarily in contexts of criminal character (Scott & Lyman 1968). Our purpose is moreover to prolong present theories of accounts and modify them to better suite the research field of cultural consumption theory. We hope our results contribute to the field of consumer culture theory since they will augment the sociological understanding for how consumers deal with the feelings of shame in association with cultural consumption.
2 What is shame?

This chapter presents previous studies and theoretical findings concerning the feeling of shame. It facilitates our understanding for shame and how to detect it. Further we explain why shame occurs in connection to cultural consumption.

2.1 Framework of identifying shame

Shame is related to the actions of covering and uncovering feelings with the help of speech and silence, community and alienation (Schneider 1977). Shame is referred to as a master feeling that does a part of one’s identity and the self. It is associated with social relationships as well as social change. It should not only be identified as a negative emotion rather it is a natural feeling which occurs on a daily basis. (Retzinger 1995) Schneider (1977) takes it as far as explaining the feeling as something positive which reflects features of humanity. Shame is an indication on that we are social beings who dedicate ourselves in community with others and mutual social relations. (Retzinger 1995) Shame can moreover be when one feels shame on the account of another person within the same in-group. Schmader et al. refers to this kind of shame as in-group shame. (Schmader et al. 2005) They further distinct shame and guilt as two separate feelings which require different ways of justify it. They postulate that people tend to have the desire to apologize and ask for forgiveness for their wrongdoings however shame is rather something one wants to hide from and distance oneself from. Further they explain that shame consists of a self awareness and there is a fear going on of being rejected from others. (Schmader et al. 2005) We will conduct this article with a focus upon the handling of shame.

Gottschalk et al have detected some cues of both verbal and nonverbal characteristics which are frequently used when discussion shame and shame contexts. These words are often of the same characteristics and it is in situations when talking about the self in relation to the other that shame seems apparent. There are a great number of words which can reflect the emotion of shame, especially when thinking of how others view you and how you are considered in a social context. (Retzinger 1995)
Shame can often occur when an individual feel inferior to the ideal self, the fantasy one wants to reach. Lewis puts it as follows: “shame is elicited when one experiences failure relative to a standard (one’s own or other peoples’), feels responsible for the failure, and believes that the failure reflects damaged self”. (Crozier p. 26, 2001) There is a discrepancy of how one actually is and how one actually wishes to be, the self and other are either alienated or are threatened to be so. (Retzinger 1995) The influence of the in-group is larger the greater associations one has to the group. The opinions of common social identity are the key to the self identification whereas the individual care for keeping a good reputation of oneself within the group. (Schmader et al. 2005)

2.2 Detecting shame

In order to be able to study shame we needed methods to help us detect when individuals felt shame. There are several ways to detect the emotion of shame and some of the most common ways are defence against the state which is denial of any form or hiding behaviour. Typical hiding behaviour could be regression, anger, violence and negation of others. (Retzinger 1995) Below we will categorize the shame behaviour in a logical manner.

2.2.1 Shame in verbal cues

Verbal cues can be words which both directly and indirectly indicate a reference to shame. It can be negative indications of one’s appearance in comparison to another person or an obsessive behaviour about how one should have acted else wise. Retzinger (1995) splits up the verbal cues of shame in six different categories which are as follows:

1. Direct indication – embarrassed, humiliated, ashamed etc.
2. Abandonment, separation and isolation – postulations of not feeling as one in the group or being separated from significant others. Words of this categorization could for instance be: alienated, alone, deserted, detached, divorced, dumped etc.
3. Ridicule – Statements of being hurt or endangered by another person. It could for instance be put down or made to look like a fool. Examples: dejected, absurd, defeated, foolish, funny, idiotic, hurt, freak etc.
How do individuals handle the feeling of shame in association with cultural consumption?

4. Inadequate – Is when someone feels to be considered to be in a state they can not measure up to others expectations and ideal image. Examples: failure, inept, helpless, inferior, insecure, unsure, useless etc.

5. Discomfort – This is in situations aligned with social settings. Social-emotional discomfiture which could be: jumpy, antsy, hyperactive, tense, restless, nervous and so on.

6. Confused/Indifferent – Postulations which indicate messed up judgment or absence of muddle in an arousing context. This could for instance be spaced, blank, stunned, aloof, hollow etc.

2.2.2 Shame in paralinguistic gestures

Shame can be detected in other symbolic signals than verbal ones. Shame also contains for instance hiding and avoidance behaviour which we had to be aware of in order to detect the feeling of shame. Retzinger (1995) refers to Laboy et al. and Pittenger et al. who have identified cues of such paralanguage in his study. They categorize them as follows:

1. Overdone soft – decrease in tone volume when the peak of the shameful topic is to be reached. This typically occurs when talking about sex or other taboo filled subjects.

2. Hesitation – Pausing when getting to the sensitive area.

3. Self Interruption – Interruption of one self in the middle of a story to change subject.

4. Pause. Before code words or sensitive taboo topics people tend to make long pauses of silence.

5. Rapid Speech – One hides what is being said by talking just so fast that one almost swallows or excludes the most sensitive words.

6. Laughed words – Laughter is often used when one is aware and open about the embarrassment. It can also be a way to mask the sense of anger or shame by using tense laughter.
2.2.3 Cues of visual gestures

The visual gestures can help us detect shame through observation. Many of the visual gestures are made outside our consciousness and are therefore valid indicators of the emotional state. The blush could be considered the most facile way to detect shame since one cannot control the blushing and the cheek is almost always uncovered (Tomkins 1963, Schneider 1977). Further typical gestures to reflect the emotion of shame could be biting the lip, false smiling, cover the face with the hand which Retzinger (1995) claims to be a safe indicator of ‘I feel like a fool’. Other very common indicators of shame are blushing, wrinkled forehead, fidgeting etc. (Retzinger 1995)

Tomkins explains that shame reduces the spontaneous feelings of joy. Once the sense of shame is triggered the potential smile and arousing emotion will fade. An illustration could be if one is trying to commune with another individual with or instance a smile or a hello but then suddenly realizes that the other person was a stranger, one would most likely react by lowering the head or look in another direction as an indication of humiliation and shame. (Tomkins 1963)

2.3 Post-modern society’s notion of social nobility

We have chosen to partly base our thesis upon the theory of HCC (High Cultural Capital) and LCC (Low Cultural Capital) constructed by Holt (1998) as mentioned previously on the basis that the conception of shame is closely related to the consumption of culture. We mean that culture is an extra attribute which is not required to an individual as a basic need in order to physically survive. The cultural products rather exist to help boost the value of a person’s everyday life; hence the choices of consumed cultural products are not forced upon the individual. The cultural consumption is in these terms not only products of function, but also products of taste and enjoyment. The taste of the individual in its turn is often an outcome of social upbringing and background in terms of parental education and nobility. We claim that every level of the social society is living in accordance with a framework of implicit rules in order to fit the group. If the individual does not consume regular cultural artefacts which correspond to their framework they feel somewhat ashamed (Chan & Goldthorpe 2006).
How do individuals handle the feeling of shame in association with cultural consumption?

Holt is in agreement with both Bourdieu & Warner of that status is reproduced and expressed in everyday social interactions by tacit evaluations. Bourdieu further claims that status notions of a person are expressed through the tastes of the individual. He also argues that cultural capital becomes evident in consumption of objects and is mirrored in these objects. (Holt 1998) This is the reason why we have concentrated our thesis around the examination of cultural products such as music, theatre, opera, literature etc. However Holt has chosen to modify Bourdieu’s theory since he considers the post-modern cultures to have new preferences of what generates social status. As previous mentioned it is in today’s social society of importance to consider cultural categories and genres rather than the objectified form of cultural capital. Thus we believe that the social frameworks of consumption rules are not vertically constructed but rather horizontally constructed. The cultural hierarchies’ boundaries have blurred in today’s capitalist societies and it is more complicated to define the class levels. (Holt 1998) We have the idea that in today’s society status is not a product of financial liquids and with that the ability to consume expensive goods. As touched upon in previous sections status is nowadays more a product of the taste of the object and so is the practice of the consumed good an essential matter in the evaluation of status and construction of shame. By that we mean that how you consume the chosen goods is crucial and what you consume is of decreasing matter. (Holt 1998)

2.3.1 The Categorization of HCC and LCC

From above considerations Holt (1998) has made a categorization of the population into two groups LCCs and HCCs. The LCCs tend to have been living in the same local area all their lives thus tend to often refer to certain local particularities; while the HCCs often have lived not only across the country, but also at different places around the world, hence have different preferences than the LCCs. In order to be able to divide people in the different categories Holt has taken three dimensions in consideration: formal education, family upbringing and occupational culture. Since our respondents’ parents was raised at a time where the father’s education was of the deepest importance in contrast to the significance of the mother’s, the father’s background in terms of education and occupation is of larger interest than the mother’s.
How do individuals handle the feeling of shame in association with cultural consumption?

The HCCs are most frequently occupied in technical, professional or managerial jobs; they have no less than bachelor’s degrees and their parents have in general college educations at the lowest. LCCs however have occupations of manual labour characteristics or service/clerical work; some are even unemployed. The LCCs on the other hand have attained no more than a high school education. The fathers of the LCCs have at the highest high school education and most frequently less. (Holt1998). Eijck (1999) does a similar distinction where he refers to the LCCs as the ones consuming popular culture2 and he claims that their parental background is not as obvious as the in this case HCCs.

As mentioned in the Background discussion the LCCs and HCCs have different opinions and perceptions of what the use and outcome of a product should be. While the LCCs value the functional or practical features of a good, the HCCs on the other hand take the functional attributes for granted and appreciate the materialistic value of cultural products and consider the taste as a sphere of self-manifestations and a tool of subjectivity construction. This is why we have chosen respondents which we assume is most likely to be HCCs hence they will also be rewarding victims regarding when it comes to feel shame.

2.4 Status Phenomenon

The consumer culture researchers Arnould et al (2005) are in line with previous researchers in the assumption that consumption is a way to experience realities linked to fantasies, desires, aesthetics and identity play; the human being wishes to attain social status. The search for status tends to be an on-going process. It seems to be an attempt to diminish unpleasant feelings. (Scheff 1995) Some researchers even go as far as consider the status seeking as a biological strive; it is a basic need for us human beings like with the physiological need of food, air and water. (Holbrook 1999)

Social groups tend to cluster in different positions created by the market. These groups can for instance be based upon how they prefer to spend their leisure time and disposable income, whereas lifestyle marketing has its roots in stratification and “style of life”. The reason why people feel the need and desire for some specific objects are based on the fact that these

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2 The music, films, books and other types of entertainment consumed by the mass market (Solomon et al 2006)
How do individuals handle the feeling of shame in association with cultural consumption?

objects will provide the individual a feeling of belonging to a social group. Hence the reactions of others play a significant role in the game of gaining status and lifestyle. If one’s action does not generate some kind of acknowledgement with one’s ideal social group that specific action seems meaningless in the game of gaining social recognition. Thus the external feedback is of importance to get recognition of the gained status. (Holbrook 1999) Holbrook further argues that some products are exclusively used for extrinsic reasons in order to reach our social goals. Extrinsic reasons are opposite to the intrinsic reasons which are not crucial to accomplish a certain action but adds extra value to it (Holbrook 1999).

One rather strange observation made by Holt (1998) is that the exact same product can be considered as a high status object in certain coherences but quite the opposite in another. This is in line with previous chapter who said it is nowadays important how you choose to consume and not what you consume. (Holt 1998) We believe what to be crucial within this determination of the categorization of a high status product or low status product is whether the individual is consuming in accordance to her/his social in-group. If s/he is, it will probably bring status to her/him but if not the outcome will be quite the opposite and the individual will sense shame.

Then, who decides what the ideal self is suppose to look like? As mentioned before the market creates the different positions in society and the social groups might create the ideals specific for the group at issue, which of course are influenced by the market. Holbrook (1999) suggests that all people of today’s society are more or less always striving to belong to an ideal social group to gain desired social status. English et al argues that it is important to distinct between the status-seeker and the one who already belongs to the specific status group. The so called “in-group” members seem to be able to identify finer nuances of consumption while the out-groupers tend to cluster all the in-groupers as rather similar individuals. Whereas there can be different status levels within the in-group as well. (Holbrook 1999) Holbrook (1999) further argues that people try to reach their ideal social group by consuming different products which symbolize the desired group’s values. According to Riezler (1943) this means that the self has to fit the ideal social group in order to avoid the feeling of shame.
As mentioned in previous section people in present time tend to identify themselves to image and lifestyle groups on a horizontal level rather that on a vertical level (Chan & Goldthorpe 2006). This can be due to the increasing amount of people in today’s world who gets the opportunity to attain a high education hence they search for a broader knowledge base where they can found their preferences upon and also evaluate within which social group one wishes to belong.

Paradoxically Bauman claims that people are able to construct their own lifestyles independently of their social locations. They do this through their consumption patterns and taste exposures, thus he claims that the world is becoming more and more individualistic. He further suggests that lifestyle becomes a “life project”. However this does not go hand in hand of why omnivores clearly tend to express their discrimination and irony while consuming mass or popular culture. They do so to make the interlocutor aware of their awareness of that the culture at issue could be considered as low culture by society. (Chan & Goldthorpe 2006) We mean that if the individualisation is growing one should not care about external opinions and thereby leave the irony out. This behaviour mirrors the individuals’ consciousness about belonging to a certain group which do not approve of the mass culture or popular culture. This induces that the rules and norms of the social group still have a great influence on people even if the society tends to become more individualistic. Since the irony and discrimination seems to be a mode for omnivores to oppose to consumption which is not accepted within the social group to which they belong in it is a way to handle the wrongdoing and justify for the shame felt in connection with the action.

Holbrook (2006) claims that the social status concerns the mode in which people consume in order to gain recognition from others. Arnould et al (2005) mean that many researchers show upon individuals who gain in-group social status by the exposure of cultural capital.

As mentioned above Holt (1998) made an observation that HCCs to some extent consume the same products as LCCs, but without damaging their social status. This corresponds to the conjecture of omnivores as the upper middle-class consuming a broad spectrum of products covering all from common popular culture, often considered as low culture; to complex culture considered as high culture. (Chan & Goldthorpe 2006)
How do individuals handle the feeling of shame in association with cultural consumption?

We claim that shame occurs in the game of social group belonging and is especially strong in connection with cultural consumption since there is a clear distinction made by previous theorists of what is considered as low culture and high culture (Holt 1998, Eijck 1999 Alderson et al 2007, Coulangeon & Lemel 2007).
3 How to capture shame

This section describes the research process and the tools we used to precede our research. Moreover it describes the nature of our research problem and the standpoints taken to approach the issue. Further on we argue for the methods chosen in order to capture the feeling of shame. Finally we present how we conducted the data collection and we justify for the choice of our selection of respondents and describe our interview technique.

3.1 Where does shame occur?

In order to study shame we needed to understand the reality in where the feeling occurs. From a positivistic perspective the reality is objective and it exists independent of the observer, and the scientists’ job is to identify the pre-existing reality (Easterby-Smith 2004). In this study the handling of shame is the issue, which is a phenomenon created by human beings. Therefore the reality is determined by humans rather than by objectives and external factors which made it difficult, if even possible, to measure the handling of shame in numbers. Individuals were in focus for this study and as Easterby-Smith (2004) points out social constructionists emphasize the importance of creating an understanding when it comes to studying human beings rather than gather measurable facts. To understand how individuals experienced and handled the feeling of shame we aimed to gather information based on conversations with suitable respondents. As mentioned before shame occurred when there was a discrepancy of how one actually is and how one desires to be, when there was a gap between the self and the ideal self. (Retzinger 1995) When this gap occurs Retzinger (1995) claims that people feel inadequate, discomforted and confused; hence we needed to construct those situations through conversations in order to elicit feelings of shame and be able to reach our aim.

According to Scheff (1995) the studies of Lansky, Lewis and Retzinger most of the experiences of shame occur outside individuals’ awareness. This made the empirical material needed for our study a bit more complicated to gather. We could not ask respondents about earlier shameful consumption experiences since they probably would not even be aware of them. In addition, shame is a sensitive topic and even if the respondents were aware of how they handled their shameful experiences they might not wanted to share them with us.
How do individuals handle the feeling of shame in association with cultural consumption?

Therefore our mission was to make them experience shame during the conversation in order to observe how they actually handled it. People have sometimes been observed as nothing more than abstract physical objects but Easterby-Smith (2004) claim it is important to pay attention to the complexity of human beings. Emotions were expressed in both body language and words, hence these cues were important for us to understand in order to detect when shame occurred and how the respondents handled it. According to Easterby-Smith (2004) the labels and names which individuals attach experiences to are essential in order to understand behaviours. We first and foremost used verbal cues to identify shame. Moreover visual and paralinguistic cues were taken in consideration as well as the language, the respondents’ vocabulary and the names people associate with particular cultural consumption in order to capture the shame.

3.2 Accounts

The verbal communication is as mentioned above highly relevant for our study. We had cues to detect shame but needed directions to be able to understand and analyse the conversations. Scott & Lyman (1968) have studied accounts which they describe as the “statements made to explain untoward behaviour and bridge the gap between actions and expectations” (Scott & Lyman p.46, 1968). Further on they mean that accounts are a crucial element in the social order since they work as a covering device to keep a natural state which prevents conflicts from arising. They are typically used in situations where individuals sense that their behaviour has cast doubt on the image which they aim to represent. In situations like this a dissonance can occur which the individual tries to make up for with the help of justification and excuses for the self in order to save his or her face. (Scott & Lyman 1968) The dissonance generates feelings of shame (Retzinger 1995) thus we believe that accounts were an effective way to capture shame. Scott & Lyman (1968) mean that different accounts suite different contexts, depending on the group and expectations. Hence the “normal” person will change the account to make it appropriate for a particular context. Further on they mean that different accounts are used in conversations with for instance the wife or the boss. The roles and identities of the situation affect the accounts so that they fit the role of the speaker and the outcome of the interaction will often depend on the pre-established identities. Scott & Lyman (p. 59, 1968) claims that “every account is a manifestation of the underlying negotiation of identities”. The
How do individuals handle the feeling of shame in association with cultural consumption?

different identities in the conversation will have an affect on the linguistic style used and Scott & Lyman (1968) distinguish between five linguistic styles; intimate\(^3\), causal\(^4\), consultative\(^5\), formal\(^6\) and frozen\(^7\). These represent the manner in which accounts are given and also indicate the social group in which they are appropriate to use. The differences between the five styles are not completely clear and often shade into one another in real life. In our situation we believed there was a mix of causal and formal linguistic styles. It was causal since both we and the respondent were academics at Lund University, which put us in a similar social group. However the respondents had a higher education than us which gave the object somewhat a higher status and this difference created a more formal linguistic style. One can say that we belong to the same in-group but we were able to distinguish the nuances within our group thus place the respondents at a higher level than us within the group. The interview took place under planned circumstances which also lead to a formal situation, where the respondent was the speaker and we were the audience. We believe the roles we got had an affect on the accounts used by the respondents and they might have been different in another situation.

Scott & Lyman (1968) divide accounts into excuses and justification. They mean one or both are usually invoked when a person is accused of having done something unacceptable or improper. Our mission was to accuse the respondent for having consumed improper cultural products to trigger feelings of shame. In this way we could study how the respondents used accounts to handle their shame. According to Scott & Lyman (1968) excuses are accounts in which the person admits that the act is inappropriate but denies responsibility of the act. Further they claim that justification is used when the person take responsibility for the act, but denies the inappropriate features associated with it. Scott & Lyman’s (1968) study mainly focused on criminal acts, but we found many of the accounts to be applicable on cultural consumption as well.

\(^3\) People who share an intimate, deep relationship (Scott & Lyman 1968)
\(^4\) Accounts among in-group members (Scott & Lyman 1968)
\(^5\) The knowledge is unknown or problematic to understand for others (Scott & Lyman 1968)
\(^6\) Often when the actor has an audience greater than six people (Scott & Lyman 1968)
\(^7\) Extreme form of formal style when there is an irremovable social or material barrier between people (Scott & Lyman 1968)
3.2.1 Excuses

Scott & Lyman (1968) divide excuses into different categories that appeal to; accidents, defeasibility, biological drives and scapegoating.

Excuses can blame an accident as the cause for certain behaviours. According to Scott & Lyman (1968) people generally tend to blame hazards in the environment, the human incapacity to control all motor responses and the understandable inefficiency of the body. The excuse of accident is acceptable because it is unpredictable and happens to everybody sometimes. In our case this could be a person who blames that they accidentally purchased the wrong tickets for a movie, or accidentally turned on the TV in the middle of a bad TV-show etc. In this way they blame the accident to legitimize their unacceptable cultural consumption. Even though accidents struck everybody, some accidents are more likely to happen than others. Also, the probability that the same person will experience the same accident over and over again is not very likely. When the excuses rooted in an accident are used frequently people can in according Scott & Lyman (1968) begin to distrust the excuses.

A different form of excuse is defeasibility where the person blames the inappropriate act on the lack of knowledge and will. (Scott & Lyman 1968) Individuals can then excuse themselves through saying that they were forced to certain consumption and that the will was not completely free. Another way to defence an act is to blame lack information as the source for a particular behaviour. (Scott & Lyman 1968) For instance this could be misinformation or misrepresentation of facts given by others. It could also be a person who blames work as the force of consuming a cultural activity.

Another form of excuse invokes biological drives, which means that people can excuse their acts through blaming physical and biological factors that affect the behaviour beyond the will of the actor (Scott & Lyman 1968). For our study a person could excuse their cultural consumption by blaming a biological factor.

Scott’s & Lyman’s (1968) last type of excuse is scapegoating. They mean that people excuse their questioned behaviour by claiming it was a response to the attitudes or acts of another person. This is a way for individual to decline the responsibility for their actions and shift the
burden of the act to another. In our case the person could blame another individual for their cultural choices.

3.2.2 Justification

Scott & Lyman (1968) describes justification as the “techniques of neutralization”. Further they mean justification to be a socially approved vocabulary used to neutralize behaviour or its consequences which are called into question. The person is justifying an act through emphasizing positive value of it to the contrary. Scott & Lyman (1968) describes different types of neutralization techniques and we used two of them which we believed were applicable on our field of cultural consumption.

The first justification is what Scott & Lyman (1968) call condemnation of the condemners. People justify their untoward behaviour through comparing it with others’ acts and conclude that others commit much worse acts. A respondent might admit they watch Let’s dance, but claim they would never watch Big Brother like everybody else does. The second justification method is according to Scott & Lyman (1968) appeal to loyalties. They claim individuals to justify their unacceptable behaviour as something tolerable since it served the interest of another to whom the person owes affection. For instance an individual might have seen a silly movie only to make the partner happy.

In addition to these justification techniques there are according to Scott & Lyman (1968) two other types of justification called sad tales and self-fulfilment. Some individuals use their sad past as an explanation for their present inappropriate behaviour. A person might blame the fact that they were not allowed to watch TV as a child, therefore watch everything they come across today. Others justify their questioned behaviour through describing them as acts of self-fulfilment. In our study people might justify their unacceptable cultural consumption by saying the consumption has a higher aim to develop the self or claim that they used to consume high culture in their youth.
3.2.3 Development of accounts

Scott & Lyman’s (1968) accounts are useful for our study. They will help us capture shame and understand how individuals use accounts to handle their shame. As mentioned before, accounts have mainly been used in association with crimes, never before with cultural consumption. We will base our study around Scott & Lyman’s accounts but we will be open and both modify currently existing accounts and add new accounts that we find in our empirical study which better fit our study. Individuals’ cultural consumption is closely related to status and identity; hence we believe that this can be a reason for why the present account theories might not be complex enough to understand the handling of shame in association to cultural consumption.

3.3 The approach to shame

The accounts were used to capture the feeling of shame and hereby we will describe how we chose to approach our research issue. As we already established a lack of research within the field of how individuals handle the feeling of shame in association with cultural consumption it was difficult to test a hypothesis based upon earlier theories, which according to Bryman & Bell (2007) is the method in a deductive study. Alvesson (1994) claims that a deductive study can not provide the researcher with a deeper understanding and the aim with our study was to understand how people dealt with the feeling of shame, hence we believed that a deductive approach was not suitable. Earlier research has given us an understanding for what shame is and why it occurs. However, we had no clear information about how people actually handled the feeling of shame in association with cultural consumption which in theory meant it was possible for us to enter the sphere of shame with an open mind without any pre-understanding. This is what Bryman & Bell (2007) call an inductive study, where the study itself generates new theories. However we believed it was difficult, if even possible, to approach our research problem with a fully open mind. We had pre-assumptions of how people handled shame built upon our own experiences, observations of reality and Scott & Lyman’s (1968) dissertation on accounts. Therefore we found that an inductive approach was not appropriate.
To answer our research question we considered theories about shame and accounts to be useful in order to capture the feeling of shame. Even though the theories were used to a certain extent, we tried to keep the gathering of empirics as inductive as possible to keep a relatively open mind and understand how individuals handled shame. This kind of research design is what Alvesson (1994) calls abduction. He describes it as a combination of induction and deduction. The starting point for the study took an inductive approach, which further on was complemented and analysed with the help of relevant theories. We believed an abductive approach was a suitable method to gather information which helped us answer our research question. Alvesson (1994) points out the appropriateness of an abductive method when the intention is to create an understanding for a particular area, which is in line with the aim of this thesis.

We found it difficult to obtain fully objective empirical material since individuals are easily influenced by the context in which they act. Individuals feel ashamed for different reasons which are ever changing depending both on the person and the dynamic milieu. All social situations are unique. The methodologists Bryman & Bell (2007) mean reality is a continuous state of construction and reconstruction where reality is ever changing and influenced by social actors, which is in line with our assumptions about the reality. In this study we were the social actors who triggered feelings of shame and interpreted the answers in ways that probably influenced the results of this study. Heisberger (Easterby-Smith 2004) strengthens this opinion by pointing out that it is impossible to obtain fully objective information due to that the experimentation itself will have an impact on the subject studied. We believed it was important to be aware our own influence on the study in order to keep a humble approach to our results.
3.4 Data Collection

3.4.1 Qualitative interviews

Our aim was as mentioned before to understand how people handled shame and since humans are the creators of this phenomenon we needed to understand them in order to fulfil the aim with this study. Every person is unique and to be able to understand the complex human beings we found a qualitative method based on conversations to be appropriate. We chose not to use a quantitative method since it was problematic to measure with numbers how people handle shame. In addition Easterby-Smith (2004) claim a mix of quantitative and qualitative methods may lead to confusion and contradictions. To be able to answer our research question quality seemed more important than quantity. We found five respondents to be a suitable sample for our study since the aim was to understand the individual in our specific context rather than attain results which could be generalized across other social settings. It was more important to achieve a validity which according to Bryman & Bell (2007) refers to whether the researchers really were studying what they ought to study.

Interviews with suitable respondents were an appropriate qualitative method to understand how individuals dealt with shame and Burger (Easterby-Smith 2004) emphasize interviews’ ability to probe deeply and open up new dimensions of problems. Our study required fairly long and extensive interviews in order to successfully trigger the feeling of shame. Hence ‘in-depth-interviews’ were carried out and Easterby-Smith (2004) emphasize this method as an effective way to create an understanding for a certain behaviour. The study demanded an understanding for the respondents and Jones (Easterby-Smith 2004) points out interviews actually can illustrate how individuals perceive the reality based on their personal framework of values and believes. This was of interest for our study since values and believes can reflect the identity which is closely related to shame, hence help us to understand how they handled it. Shame is a rather sensitive topic therefore all participants remained anonymous in this study which hopefully resulted in more trustworthy answers where the respondents dared to admit shameful cultural consumption. To assure that the respondents experienced shame
during the interviews we developed our own interview technique which we hope increased the validity of our study.

### 3.4.2 The Backstabber interview technique

We needed to trigger the feeling of shame which is why we developed the Backstabber interview technique which is somewhat different from most regular interview methods. The respondents thought they were attending the interview since we studied how intellectual people consume culture, which was not the whole truth. First the respondents were required to tell us how they grew up and what kind of culture which was consumed in their home while growing up. Further we approached six cultural categories which helped us trigger the feeling of shame. Within each cultural category we let the respondent talk about their interest for the category. The interviews were similar to a role play where the respondents unconsciously took the role as the intellectuals since we encouraged them to do so and played swayed in order to later be able to backstab them. Several of the questions asked were not directly relevant for our research issue, more a way to hide the fact that we actually were studying shame. Further we tried to find the respondents weak spots, which was the culture the person consumed but felt ashamed for. When we detected a weak spot we backstabbed the respondent and questioned their consumption. We indicated our disapproval of the cultural artefact consumed and emphasized the incongruence with the person’s intellectual identity. In this way we high lighted the gap between the respondent’s actual self and ideal self which Retzinger (1995) claims generate feelings of shame. When backstabbing the respondent the roles changed, we took the superior position and the respondent the weaker position. This created an uncomfortable and confusing situation which promoted feelings of shame (Retzinger 1995). The respondent was in this way forced to defend the shameful consumption and justify their choice which led to the use of different accounts. After the backstabbing we moved on to the next cultural category and tried to return to our previous roles. We let the respondent take on their intellectual role again while we waited for the next opportunity to backstab.

We formed the base for our interview questions upon on the relevant theories of how to detect shame and accounts. The questions worked as guidance where further questions were added
and others taken away along the interviews. (Our interview guide is found in Appendix II). Bryman & Bell (2007) call this a semi-structured interview and claims it to be a very flexible technique which allows the interviewer to pursue topics of particular interest. The semi-structured method was suitable for our study since it gave us the possibility to ask additional questions when we found weak spots and steer the interview into, for our thesis, relevant directions. Moreover we tape-recorded the interviews which facilitated the ability to pose relevant spontaneous questions and observe the body language since we were not dedicated to make notes. Most interviews took 1-1,5 hours except from one interview which only lasted for 30 minutes. We finished all interviews by revealing the real aim with our study so that the respondent understood why the interview might have been uncomfortable. We have not found any similar interview methods in the academia hence the backstabber interview style could be seen as a contribution to the methodological research field.

3.4.3 Who feels shame?

Obviously everybody feel shame sometime, but we wanted to find people who more often experienced shame in association with cultural consumption. For our study it was more suitable to choose objects which could give relevant input rather than representative input for the research purpose at issue. In order to be certain to detect shame, we chose five participants which most definitely were highly cultivated, concerned with what cultural artefacts they consumed and with a high education. The participants chosen were most likely to belong to the category of HCCs. We assumed that highly intellectual persons felt a higher pressure to consume the correct cultural artefacts in order to keep up their cultivated identity. Thus we have, with the help from our supervisors, monitored suitable PhDs and PhD students for our interviews. The respondents chosen in this study was due to their field of specialization likely to consume cultural products.
4 The handling of shame

In this section we will present the essential empirical material found through our conducted interviews and at the same time analyse the quotations and detect the accounts used. We base the analyses upon the presented theories and further analyse the material in a suitable manner for the nature of research problem at issue.

4.1 Accounts

During our backstabber interviews the respondents used different ways to handle the feeling of shame. With the help from previous chapters we could easier detect the shame behind the respondents’ efforts to hide it and observe how they handled it. Especially Scott & Lyman’s (1968) theories about accounts were useful in order to uncover the accounts, but they were not sufficient enough to analyse all our gathered empirics. Hence we structured the following chapter after the accounts we found most prominent; the resignation of the self as a subject account, the individualisation within collectivism, the authority account, the joke account and the stereotypical account. These were the main accounts and within these several what we like to refer to as sub-accounts were found.

4.1.1 The resignation of the self as a subject account

We identified what we have titled the Resignation of the self as a subject account as a frequent excuse to justify one’s cultural consumption choices. This could for instance be a respondent who claims the choice of certain cultural products was due to the lack of alternatives. Moreover it could also be another individual who “forced” the respondent to consume a certain cultural product. Further the resignation of the self as a subject account could also be of the character that one blames ones physical or psychological state of mind. One good example of this could be illustrated in the following quotation:

Respondent 4: “Some years ago I had a lodger and he was completely obsessed with Idol and at some point it was more or less inevitable to watch it. I was sucked in to it in a way.”
How do individuals handle the feeling of shame in association with cultural consumption?

Here he clearly indicated to us that he had no choice but to consume the Swedish version of the reality show Idols. He resigns himself as a subject who has the ability to make choices. Below we will specify the sub-accounts within the resignation of the self as a subject account.

4.1.1.1 The Good Samaritan account

We have identified this form of excuse as a sub-account to the resignation of the self as a subject account. The Good Samaritan account was when the respondents explained they consumed something with the only pleasure of pleasing someone else. It can be making a friend, a wife or a husband happy through consumption.

We wanted to know about Respondent 1’s interest for music and if he frequently was attended concerts.

Respondent 1: “I have been to ridiculously many concerts ...It is one real reason for that and it is that a close colleague and friend of mine who thinks it is very fun and sees it as a way to get away from the family and keep the feeling of being young and adventurous”.

The majority of these concerts were with hip artists which we believe are generally attracting a younger audience. We did detect shame in his way of talking about the concert and was continuously excusing his behaviour by blaming the friend. The respondent’s friend saw concerts as a way of getting “permission” from the family life and our respondent justified his own behaviour by blaming the friend. What was further interesting about this quotation was that the respondent both accounted for his behaviour by blaming his friend but further he also accounted for the friend’s behaviour by blaming the friend’s urge to get a break from the family life. This reflects that he was somewhat ashamed of the in-group’s behaviour since he and his friend was members of the same group thus partly shared identity. (Lickel et al 2005) This form of justification resemble the account which Scott and Lyman (1968) would call appeal to loyalties. Our respondent was aware of that it might not be considered as appropriate for him to attend these “cool and trendy” concerts but meant it was acceptable since he did it for his friend.
How do individuals handle the feeling of shame in association with cultural consumption?

Further when we talked about theatre Respondent 1 claimed it was “a dead form of culture” and he rather preferred opera. Theatre would probably by most of us be considered as a form of culture which attracts HCCs, but in Respondents 1’s case there might be reason to believe he connected theatre to LCCs; hence the reason why he had a patronizing tone while touching upon the subject. He grew up in a working-class home and he was the first to attain an academic degree. During his upbringing his family enjoyed theatre and this might indicate that he has a notion of that he categorizes theatre as a lower middle class amusement. Hence it does not correspond to his present position on the ladder of the social status. Despite his negative attitude towards theatre we found that he recently attended a theatrical performance as illustrated in below quotation:

Interviewer: “How come you went to see a theatrical production then?”

Respondent 1: “…two reasons, partly due to a recommendation from a colleague and partly because my wife wanted us to do something together”

We think that maybe Respondent 1 felt ashamed admitting he actually attended a theatre recently, just after stating it was “a dead form of culture”, he contradicted himself. He used the Good Samaritan account and said he did it since his wife wanted them to do something together. The object’s excuse was what Scott & Lyman (1968) would call defeasibility, since the respondent blamed the visit on the “force” of someone else, in this case a recommendation and his wife. This is a way for him to legitimize the inappropriate cultural consumption.

Since reality-shows often are considered to be low intellectual products we were curious to know if Respondent 1, who we considered a very intellectual person, had ever watched such a series:

Respondent 1: “I made an attempt to follow Robinson [Survivors] to get an idea of what everybody else is watching it could be important...is it me who have missed something? I thought it was exactly as bad or meaningless as I thought it would be.”
How do individuals handle the feeling of shame in association with cultural consumption?

Respondent 1 wanted to watch Robinson since everybody else did it. This kind of justification could be described as a form of condemnation of the condemners (Scott & Lyman 1968) since he unwillingly watched Robinson but is still not as bad as all the others who happily enjoy watching it. By doing this he automatically distinguished himself from the other spectators.

The respondent continued the discussion concerning the reality show Robinson [Survivors] And accounting for the reason of why he continued to follow the show:

Interviewer: “But how many episodes did you watch then?”

Respondent 1: “I was forced to continue watching it since my wife was stuck.”

It seemed he did not want to circumvent for his true opinion and that he watched several episodes of the show Robinson for his own will which he in the earlier reasoning had titled as a “crap” TV-show. To excuse his shame he handled the shame through blaming his wife for the, according to him, inappropriate behaviour. He positioned himself as the good Samaritan since he watched it for his wife sake. The form of excuse used in this quotation could also be interpreted as what Scott & Lyman (1968) call defeasibility as the respondent claimed he did not watch it by free will he was “forced” by his wife who enjoyed Robinson.

4.1.1.2 The profession account
The next sub-account utters itself when someone excused the lack of certain cultural consumption by blaming their profession. Most often this gave its expression through blaming the access of spare time due to the time consuming work. Further on the respondents excused redundant consumption of some low cultural products, like for instance reality shows, on that it provides one with a relaxation mode since it does not require as much brain activity like for instance a difficult independent movie or a documentary. The respondents tended to blame this need of watching those kinds of shows since their professions on the other hand demanded a lot of brain activity and difficult thinking.
How do individuals handle the feeling of shame in association with cultural consumption?

We tried to trigger the accounting behaviour of the Respondent 3 by leading the conversation into TV-shows and she accounted like follows:

Interviewer: “Do you have a favourite TV-show?”

Respondent 3: “Later years when I’ve been a PhD with a very hard and demanding job situation I’ve been quiet tired out. Hence I’ve followed reality shows with joy, like Robinson and Idol which I understand I should be ashamed of and I’ve got to defend it…”

We further tried to backstab her with the following question:

Interviewer: “Is Idol really your favourite show!?” [doubting and surprised tone]

Respondent 3: “Ehh no no, I can I can’t say that, I can’t say it is my favourite show. I don’t even think it is particularly good. It’s it’s maybe…it’s the element of competition that entices me. It is unserious, too lengthy and too much commercials…Actually, I don’t think it’s good.”

At first the respondent spontaneously admitted her two favourite shows were Robinson and Idol. She was fully aware this was not appropriate TV for an intellectual person like herself and she excused her behaviour by blaming her demanding work. When we asked her once again about Idol but with a doubting voice we could tell from her stuttering she got a bit insecure. She started to talk about the negative features of Idol to distance herself from it thus get closer to the ideal self. We went on with a blaming tone:

Interviewer: “Why do you watch it [Idol] then?”

Respondent 3: [Deep sigh] “It is the fact that you watch it week after week, to watch a single episode would be meaningless. Because you follow the show you get engaged and continue watching. The things I really want to watch are movies, but it’s not very often there are movies that appeal to me on TV at suitable times.”

Interviewer: “When do you watch reality shows?”
How do individuals handle the feeling of shame in association with cultural consumption?

Respondent 3: “It’s for relaxation, oh yeah, for relaxation. You are tired, want to clear the brain and are too tired to make an effort. It’s much because I think a lot in my work is about complicated theories and so on, then I like to be fed with something which is easy to take in that doesn’t demand any effort.”

Once again she used the profession account to defend her inappropriate consumption of TV-shows. She blamed the demanding and tiring work as the source for why she needed reality shows for relaxation.

Respondent 4 had earlier in the interview expressed his passion for Spanish independent movies whereas he tried to account as follows when we provoked and backstabbed him in his choice to be a frequent consumer of reality shows.

Interviewer: “You have consumed a rather lot of reality shows. It is not easy to find a direct link to the kind of movies you like…”

Respondent 4: “[Interrupts]...noo absolutely not. No but at the same time I believe, I believe it to be a point,... or partly there is a point with... if you then are a sociologist you have to understand how people think, how peoples’ everyday life is working and how do peoples’ everyday life looks like? Yes, peoples’ everyday life is “Andra Avenyn” [Swedish soap opera] it is like Idol it is…what does people talk about? It is the Eurovision Song Contest, Dr Phil it is what Oprah Winfrey says and so on it is what people relates to and I think it is quite funny because at the same time it also tells us...it can also contribute with...I mean I think it is rather exiting to watch these kinds of programs both as a private person and as... like like a scientist. I mean to take the temperature. What is it that is about to happen? What do you talk about? And so on.”

He started to answerer our question before it was even fully posed and he handled what to be an uncomfortable situation with grace. The above quotation can be considered as a combination of the two accounts; the profession and the authority account. On one hand Respondent 4 blamed his profession and the fact that he is sociologist. It was a part of his job
How do individuals handle the feeling of shame in association with cultural consumption?

to know in what direction society tends to move. By putting it this way he protected himself from us thinking he actually consumed reality shows for joy. Respondent 4 emphasized he rather had to watch reality shows due to his profession. Moreover one can also draw a parallel to the account of Authority since he tended to position himself different than the norm or the general Swede. We believe he indicated the mass watched reality shows for entertainment, while he rather watched it for education. He distanced himself from the big mass and emphasized his position as academically educated when saying: “...if you then are a sociologist you got to understand how people think, how peoples’ everyday life is working and how do peoples’ everyday life look like? Yes, peoples’ everyday life is “Andra Avenyn” [Swedish soap opera] it is like Idol it is...what does people talk about?...” By using the word “people” he once again indicated that he is not a part of that group and by telling from the tone in his voice he indicated himself as belonging to another group than the one of the mass. He pointed out that he did not watch Andra Avenyn, he rather observed it. In this way he managed to handle his shame and even benefit from the situation by promoting his intellectual aim with watching the shows.

Respondent 5 who also is a sociologist used his profession to justify his actions:

Interviewer: “Have you ever watched any Reality show like for instance Big Brother or Robinson?”

Respondent 5: “Never Big Brother, but I have watched Robinson, but never Big Brother.”

Interviewer: “Have you been a frequent consumer or only accidentally watched it?”

Respondent 5: “Robinson, I mean, I was probably watching, not like I was watching every sequel but I was probably watching rather frequently I have to say. But I got tired of it. There are definitely seasons which I completely missed out on.”

This was a golden opportunity for us to backstab the object:
How do individuals handle the feeling of shame in association with cultural consumption?

Interviewer: “But what was it that made you continue watch the show, I mean after all you watched several episodes?”

Respondent 5: “Yeah but I mean, it was an interesting idea the thing with the social game how one handles the situations you can’t deny that but.”

He repeated himself with twice mentioning he did not watch Big Brother, this could be a way to take distance from Big Brother. He used the profession account and indicated he watched Robinson as a sociologist since the social game was interesting rather than pure entertainment.

Respondent 4 explained his interest for the Simpson’s Show and we wondered why he was such a loyal consumer of the Simpson’s Show. This is a brilliant example of how the Profession account was used to handle the shame and the awkwardness:

Respondent 4: “When you read lots of intellectual stuff you get kind of over-loaded and therefore I watch Simpson’s and stuff on You Tube.”

He explained the fact that he watched The Simpson’s Show by blaming his demanding job. He went on with the same accounting tool when we discussed the area of movies:

Interviewer: “Do you watch movies at home?”

Respondent 4: “I decided to join Love Films... [Independent movie association]” “but it ended with me having loads of unseen movies at home. But it’s also about me not having enough time. If the movie appears to be challenging it demands that you have the energy and time to watch it. Have you written since 8 in the morning till 10 in the evening and eaten some disgusting microwave made food, are you then going to sit down and watch a damned difficult Fellini movie? I don’t do it.”

The respondent tried to indicate to us that he had the yearning to consume difficult independent movies, hence often referred to as high culture (Holt 1998) but was incapable to
How do individuals handle the feeling of shame in association with cultural consumption?

do so due to his lack of time. The lack of time was further blamed on the time consuming work and the workload it brings to study for a doctor's degree, hence he used the profession account.

Following quotation can appear rather confusing since Respondent 4 tended to touch upon several of our identified accounts, not only the profession account. However we found it crucial to expose this since the respondent tends to loose his credibility in accounting his behaviour by repeatedly changing accounts.

Interviewer: “Why haven’t you been to the theatre in such a long while?”

On our provocative question he answered:

Respondent 4: “I’ve been writing my dissertation the last couple of years, it’s like that, it takes time. But it’s interesting because I’ve an ambition to attend more theatres.”

Interviewer: “Why?”

Respondent 4: “Because I should do it, I probably should do it. I normally order the program for the autumn, but in the end I never go there.”

We tried to provoke him and put the answer in his mouth with a slight judging tone:

Interviewer: “Maybe you actually don’t feel like going to the theatre?”

Respondent 4: ”There is always an ambition in some way, ehm ehm...you want to get a new job, a new apartment. That is what in a way drives us. But then I guess I’ve to say when it comes to ehm ehm my commitment I might not be that interested after all. Or at least not the culture here, I mean what does Malmoe got to offer?”

We did not accept this to be a good excuse enough and further tried to trigger some accounting:
How do individuals handle the feeling of shame in association with cultural consumption?

Interviewer: “Copenhagen then?”

Respondent 4: “I know, I know. That’s the thing with Copenhagen, “Malmoe it’s so much fun because it’s so close to Copenhagen.” [ironic voice] “Yeah sure it is, but I’m terribly lazy too.”

We found this answer very interesting due to his variation of accounts. Respondent 4 was continuously through our interview justifying his behaviour through saying that he had the ambition to consume more culture. Respondent 4 used several excuses for his behaviour; he had the will and desire to go to the theatre however he was forced not to by different reasons. This kind of excuse is closest to what Scott & Lyman (1968) call defeasibility in criminal contexts. Firstly he blamed his time consuming job by using the profession account. The object experienced that he should attend more theatrical performances, but could not specify why he felt this way. Maybe this was a product from the pressure from the surrounding context, where he felt obliged to consume culture in order to maintain the intellectual identity. Secondly he blamed his slightly low level of commitment and admitted he was not actively searching for theatrical performances. Thirdly he blamed the very limited number of supplied interesting theatrical performance in the Malmoe area. Fourthly and last he blamed his personal feature of laziness as the reason for why he hasn’t attended a theatre performance in years. By using several of accounts we felt that the respondent lost trustworthiness, particularly since some accounts contradict one another. For instance, how could he know there was a lack of high quality theatrical productions he has not put in any efforts in searching for them?

The need to relax has been a common excuse for our respondents in order to make up for what they watch on TV. Relaxation seemed to be close connected to their demanding jobs where TV becomes an act of recovering and resting the body.

Interviewer: “Do you have any favourite TV-shows?”
How do individuals handle the feeling of shame in association with cultural consumption?

Respondent 5: “I watch a couple of series. I watch a series called The Wire which was showed last night. Then I also watch the Danish detective series which is showed on Thursdays which never seems to end. What’s the name of it? Brottet. [the Crime]”

Interviewer: “Why is it that those TV-shows appeal to you?”

Respondent: “No but I mean, they are well produced and they are good. Otherwise it is more of a way to relax. There are no heavy reasons why. “

He admitted he liked watching them but excused his behaviour in line with the others by blaming the need of relaxation. In this section we did not even have to provoke or backstab by patronize the TV-shows in order to set off the accounting behaviour.

4.1.1.4 The availability account

The availability account was the forth sub-account to the resignation of the self as a subject account. With the help of this account the respondents tended to excused their absence of the consumption of a cultural activity due to the fact that there was no other alternatives, there simply was no option to visit a cultural site since there did not exist any nearby. A good example of the availability account is found in below quotations where Respondent 3 explained why she has not been to the cinema in such a long time:

Interviewer: “Why haven’t you been to a cinema in such a long time?”

Respondent 3: “Convenience and laziness. It’s not that many movies that appeal to me. I believe most movies are intended to young teenage boys.”

We showed our lack of support of the explanation by the following:

Interviewer: “But Kino shows more independent movies.”

Respondent 3: ”But I don’t live in Lund I live in Helsingborg. [...]”
How do individuals handle the feeling of shame in association with cultural consumption?

She further told us that cinema after cinema was closing down in Helsingborg which made it even harder to find interesting movies. We did not want to give in and surprised the respondent by having some knowledge about the Helsingborg cinema scene and questioned the respondent’s choice further:

Interviewer: “But there you can find Röda Kvarn.”

Respondent 3: “As a matter of fact I haven’t been there.”

At first Respondent 3 explained her absence in the cinema for a while through excusing the behaviour by blaming personal features. She used the availability account by further complaining on the range of movies offered nowadays, which made it hard for her to find interesting movies. When we brought up Kino to indicate there are independent movies available, the respondent blamed the fact that she did not live in Lund. When we then suggested Röda Kvarn in Helsingborg as an alternative to the regular cinemas showing independent movies similar to the ones in Kino, she could not come up with any more excuses and gave in to that she have never been there. This was a good example of how the respondents used several accounts in order handle the shame and avoids telling the “truth”.

Another fine example is when Respondent 4 tried to account for his consumption of Ben Stiller movies:

Interviewer: “Have you seen any less good movies lately?”

Respondent 4: “Everything Ben Stiller has ever made is actually bad.”

Interviewer: “How come you watched all these Ben Stiller movies then?”

Respondent 4: “It’s most often on flights, where you get it kind of served.”

The respondent did not want to acknowledge that he had anything to do with the choice of consumed movie as he blamed it on long distant flights. Ben Stiller movies are typically categories of motion pictures which could be considered as popular culture consumed by the
big mass. Theses do usually not require to be analyzed in order to be understood; thus could be a movie often consumed by LCCs since they most often consume products due to the functionality of the product (Holt 1998). One of the main functions of a Ben Stiller movie is providing the crowd with a good laugh whereas these kinds of movies can appeal to LCCs. This could be the reason why our respondent wishes to distance himself from the natural crowd of these movies, yet since he got no choice but to watch them during the long distance flight he is all of a sudden justified to consume the movies at issue.

Respondent 2 admitted she enjoyed watching Top Model, all though she said she was aware it might not be a political or culturally correct program to watch. We tried to activate the accounting by asking why she started to watch it in the first place.

Respondent 2: “I think I was home and ill or something.”

She blamed the illness as the reason for why she first saw it and wanted to watch something which did not require a big effort thus Top Model was a good candidate to such a program. In this way she indicated nothing else was on TV during the day she was ill and Top Model was the only TV-show available for her. This was an example of how she handled her inappropriate behaviour by making an excuse which also by Scott and Lyman (1968) could be defined as blaming an accident as the cause of certain behaviour. She was home and ill, turned on the TV and there it was, Top Model.

4.1.2 The individualisation within the collectivism account

To blame the others for ones behaviour was a simple account used to get away with unacceptable consumption. However the blaming uttered itself in different approaches. It could be as explained in previous sections as an attempt to do a good deed. However it could like in this section be due to the wish to stay within a group while still having a desire to be individualistic. We found two sub-accounts to this account called the tall poppy syndrome account and the common Swede account. Our respondents tended to avoided cultural products that were aimed for the large mass since those could threaten the respondents’
individualisation within the collectivism. We tried to find cultural activities of such character which appealed to the respondents in order to set off the accounting:

Interviewer: “Which is the best movies you seen?”

Respondent 4: "I like Almodovar’s earlier movies the later ones are so commercial and boring.”

The respondent distanced himself from commercialisation and he almost seemed fear being too collectivistic Commercial cultural products appear to be too broad and directed to the large mass of people hence not in line with the respondent’s intellectual identity. By stating that he only appreciated the earlier work of Almodovar he distanced himself from the latter which has got more attention on an international level thus could be considered as low culture most often consumed by the LCCs.

4.1.2.1 The tall poppy syndrome account

The tall poppy syndrome account was a way to handle the shame through carefully chose the appropriate humble words in order to avoid a patronizing behaviour. This account was a way for the person to stay within the collectivistic group hence not talking anyone or anything down, but still keep an individualistic profile. One of the respondents handled the shame through silence or the unwillingness to specify certain actions, she left things unsaid. On the easiest of questions her only answer was a long pause of ostensible thinking but finally said “I don’t really know”. For instance she explained that she did not appreciate the latest work by the Chemical Brothers since it is too much radio alike. We tried to find out if the pausing and the thrifty sentence was due to her personality or actually a way to cover a shameful behaviour and continued:

Interviewer: “What is it that you do not like about their [The Chemical Brothers] music nowadays?”
How do individuals handle the feeling of shame in association with cultural consumption?

Respondent 2: “It’s difficult to tell. Just not as good as before [laughter]. I can’t really spot it. [Long pause] The latter work has taken a new direction towards the radio. It sounds like everything else.”

Respondent 2 did not speak straight out she did not like it and laughed to make the situation less dramatic. She seemed to choose her words carefully and did not want to patronize the cultural product at issue or for that sake maybe even demean the people consuming in this case the latest work of the Chemical Brothers. This can be a sign of the typical Scandinavian “tall poppy syndrome” where no one is to consider they as better than another. With the help of the tall poppy syndrome account she managed to distance herself from the music in a very timid and humble way. We may think that she did not want to be associated with the popular music that the Chemical Brothers can be considered as from the point where it became too commercialised and available for the big mass. As paralinguistic sign explained by Retzinger (1995) in chapter 2 we found her to consider her own silence as somewhat awkward since she at several points mentioned how difficult our questions were. In this certain quotation she handles it by laughing in an excusing manner.

4.1.2.2 The common Swede account

The individualisation within the collectivism account was often used when the respondents positioned themselves as different and intellectual from those of the common Swede at some point. The respondents seemed to define the common Swede as individuals consuming popular culture8 similar to LCCs which most of our respondents did not want to be associated with. Despite this notion the respondents did consume culture which typically could be considered as artefacts consumed by the common Swede. Some respondents justified this consumption by claiming that they were more or less obliged to consume it in order to be a part of the conversations among colleagues. This can also be an indication to the observer that the objects felt ashamed of their in-group behaviour since they belonged to it but was aware of that it was considered as low cultural.

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8 The music, films, books and other types of entertainment consumed by the mass market (Solomon et al 2006)
How do individuals handle the feeling of shame in association with cultural consumption?

As pointed out previous the cultural category of reality shows would probably be considered as something often consumed by LCCs and does probably not generate authority in society; whereas we wanted to emphasize this cultural category to our intellectuals. Robinson was a very popular reality show in Sweden which we considered as TV-show typically consumed by the common Swede; hence we questioned why Respondent 1 chose to watch it.

Respondent 1: “I made an attempt to follow Robinson to get an idea of what everybody else is watching it could be important...is it me who missed out? I considered it to be exactly as bad or meaningless as I thought it would be.”

Respondent 1 wanted to watch Robinson since everybody else did it. This sort of justification could be described as a form of condemnation of the condemners (Scott and Lyman 1968) where he unwillingly watched Robinson but still he should not be categorized as within those of LCC since they enjoyed watching it in contradiction to him who only watched to be in correlation with in-group members. Since we could sense somewhat attempt to distinguish him from those who actually do consume reality-shows we wanted to stick to the subject in order to provoke him and set off the accounting behaviour and continued on the questions asking why he consumed Robinson:

Respondent 1: “ehh to challenge my own prejudices, I guess you can say that...”

Respondent 1 justified his inappropriate behaviour by giving it a meaningful aim; to overcome his own prejudices. This could be interpreted as a justification of self-fulfilment (Scott & Lyman 1968) where the respondent justified the behaviour through claiming it could decrease his prejudices and in turn increase the understanding for why everybody else watched it thus make him a better person. If he would have accomplished the attempt to get rid of his prejudices he would have positioned him more like the common Swede or those categorized as LCCs since he said “everybody else is watching it [Robinson]”. However this was the group he seemed to distinguish himself from. His prejudice was the subject which distanced him from the LCCs hence provided him with higher status. The question is if he really was open and sincerely willing to get rid of his prejudices since it would have resulted in him increasing the gap between self and self ideal self (Retzinger 1995) . Hence we believe
How do individuals handle the feeling of shame in association with cultural consumption?

the accounting in this case to be a conscious or unconscious attempt to justify why he watched Robinson in the first place. Maybe he even watched Robinson to get his prejudices confirmed hence authorized to distance himself from all the others.

We further tried to trigger Respondent 1 into an accounting behaviour by posing questions about low cultural activities and in this case it concerned the Eurovision Song Contest.

Interviewer: “Have you seen the Eurovision Song Contest?”

Respondent 1: “Yeah...ehh what was it...three episodes?”

Interviewer: “Why?” [provocative tone]

Respondent 1: “It is sociological, since everybody else does it.”

He made it clear that he resigned him from actually enjoying the cultural activity but still he repeatedly consumed it due to his in-group members’ behaviour. The group he wishes to be associated with does so, but still he is aware of that the consensus classifies it is low culture.

At another point Respondent 2 explained that she had a record at home of the famous Swedish pianist Robert Wells. He is a popular musician amongst the common Swedish inhabitants. He does not only play the piano, but has created a whole institution around the phenomenon of Robert Wells by gathering many famous Swedish artists with a similar crowd and go on tour every year under the name “Rhapsody in Rock”. She explained that she got the record of Robert Wells as a Christmas present from her brother and she was extremely ashamed of this record and tried to hide it for many years. When we asked why she was ashamed of it she was reluctant to answer and just said “I don’t know”. We claim that she has to have an idea of why she felt this way about the album but was too indoctrinated in the Scandinavian culture in order to develop the answer. Her inner thoughts could be the same as of those of respondent 4 above that she does not want to be connected to the common Swede, the jovial Swede which consumes popular culture. We explain it as of that she wishes to distance herself from this
How do individuals handle the feeling of shame in association with cultural consumption?

entertainment hence are being individualistic within the large community of the Swede but by doing this she becomes more collective within her own sub-group belonging.

Even if respondent 2 was very timid in stating her dislikes we managed to detect some individualisation within the collectivism accounting when we further asked her about the Robert Wells record:

Interviewer: “Why is it that you don’t want to have that record [Robert Wells] visible on the shelf?”

Respondent 2: “I don’t know actually. No, but I think it’s the whole...I mean he is talented in a way, it is not the issue. I think it’s the whole thing this with Rhapsody in Rock it’s not that. Oh it’s very difficult questions.”

At one point in the interview she actually said straight out that she had the notion of generally dislike all popular culture. However it does not have to mean that one should be classified as an LCC just because one consumes a cultural attribute which would be considered as a low cultural artefact. Holt has identified that both HCCs and LCCs enjoy rap music however they do so for different reasons. (Holt 1998) It could be the same in the case of Robert Wells. The common Swede tends to feel fellowship by consuming Robert Wells and his institution of Rhapsody in Rock. What is crucial in order to determine whether an individual’s action should be considered as manners of high status or not is the notion of collectively of the individual. Is the person consuming an object because of its individual group belonging or just due to lack of knowledge? The HCCs liked the beat in the rap music and that explained that they felt it to be very culturally unique and to have many emotional statements in the lyrics. However they rejected the violence in the rap music played on the radio. The LCCs however could not at all understand rap music but had no further explanation of why. (Holt 1998) The respondent in this case are maybe aware of that it is most often LCCs that consume music like the one of Robert Wells and therefore should not consume that sort of cultural artefacts. On the other hand she could not further explain her rejection of the music which could be an indicator of her having one foot in the LCC category but the other in the HCC category, with the desire to have both feet in the HCC category. This can be considered as a gap between the self and the ideal self. However we claim that someone we consider a HCC does not have to
How do individuals handle the feeling of shame in association with cultural consumption?

be a HCC in all of the aspect of appointed by Holt (1998) in this thesis; whereas the accounting in some cases are unnecessary.

Moreover Respondent 2 at one point tried to account for watching Idol and the Eurovision Song Contest. She justified it by claiming that if one wishes to be included in the conversation at work during lunch time you have to see these programs. At the same time she laughed in a shy way and put her hand in front of her mouth which indicated she felt shame. As mentioned previously a rather strange observation made by Holt (1998) is that HCCs to some extent consume the same products as LCCs but still they are acknowledged by society as HCCs. This can be explained with the speculations of omnivores consuming a very broad sphere of products covering everything from mass low culture to complex high culture (Chan & Goldthorpe 2006).

Respondent 2 answers above was also a good example of both what Retzinger (1995) calls cues of visual gestures and paralinguistic gestures. The respondent seemed to feel ashamed for watching Idol and Eurovision Song Contest. She accounted by a visual gesture and covered the mouth up with the hand while giggling away the emotion of shame. This can be correlated to the Holt’s (1998) discussion of that HCCs are more likely to explain their likes and dislikes and since she was not able to do so she automatically positions herself amongst the LCCs. Moreover she earlier indicated she felt ashamed by the fact that she had the choice of not enjoying popular music. For this specific respondent it appeared she was ashamed either way. She was ashamed of not remaining within her social group at work if she does not consume certain popular culture on the other hand she was also ashamed to confess that she actually did enjoy some popular culture. It does correspond to the discussion in the problem discussion based on the sociologist Scheff (1998) where individuals can feel ashamed of their in-group members towards other out-group individuals whereas they have to account to the out-group members for the choices of the other in-groupers’ choices of cultural activities.

However, further in the interview Respondent 2 explained she could listen to the radio sometimes but did not really enjoy it since the road to a “good” song was too long and the burden was bigger than what the pleasure brought. Yet, she gave the impression of having a very broad scope of musical interest in the sense of genres. The respondent in this case could
be called an omnivore who is referred to as the upper middle class of society (Chan & Goldthorpe 2006). The omnivores are generally highly educated and consume different categories of cultural. However they express their discrimination and irony in connection with consuming mass or popular culture and further try to explain why they chose to consume popular culture. (Chan & Goldthorpe 2006)

The issue of both wanting to be individualistic and collectivistic at the same time seemed to be a sensitive paradox. Swedish soap operas were something we believed might be considered as something collectivistic which was typical for the common Swede to watch. We managed to trigger some accounting with respondent 3:

Interviewer: “Have you ever watched a Swedish series like Rederiet, Tre Kronor etc [Swedish soap operas]?”

Respondent 3: “[Laughter] Hahaha [Holds the hand in front of her mouth] Yeah actually I have.” It’s like Idol you watch it since it’s returning, you’ve got to follow it, but it is quiet bad. It’s poor made, often with poor actors and unlikely plots.”

Above quotation is further a good example of what Retzinger (1995) has identified as cues of visual gestures of shame. He claims that the covering up the mouth is the same as saying “I feel like a fool”. That gesture in combination with the word “actually” seems like a clear indicator of shame since the cultural products consumed is not in line with our pre-perception of her group belonging.

Another example of the attempt to stay individualistic within the collectivism in combination with paralinguistic cues in the form of laughter (Retzinger 1995) is reflected in bellow’s quotation:

Interviewer: “Have you ever read a book written by Liza Marklund [Swedish popular detective story writer]?”

Respondent 4: “NO!”
How do individuals handle the feeling of shame in association with cultural consumption?

Interviewer: “Why?”

Respondent 4: “[laughter] I knew this was about to come! I knew it! I was thinking about this and was thinking if they don’t mention Liza Marklund they are completely stupid! Eh ehh no I haven’t [laughter] ok…NO! It has been a very typical example of a positioning of myself. I think it is too common.”

We tried to activate the accounts by the following question posed in a surprising tone:

Interviewer: “What is wrong about being common?”

Respondent 4: “No, nothing is wrong with that, but eh, but eh... I just don’t want to be associated with it [laughter]. No, I don’t know. Further on I’m not very fond of reading detective novels. But I mean Liza Marklund, I just can’t go there.”

Interviewer: “But what is it that makes you say that?”

Respondent 4: “Yeah, but it’s this like “book-club trashy”. Here we are again touching the positioning that I talked about earlier. It is just impossible, it just is.”

Meanwhile he refused to consume popular culture in written form he gladly told us how he enjoyed consuming popular typical Swedish entertainment programs such as the Eurovision Song Contest together with his friends. So we posed the following question in a very encouraging and understanding tone.

Interviewer: “Do you watch the Eurovision Song Contest?”

Respondent 4: “YEAH!”

However the follow-up question the tone was change into a slight judgemental tone whereas we tried to backstab the respondent.
How do individuals handle the feeling of shame in association with cultural consumption?

Interviewer: “Why?”

Respondent 4: “I am completely obsessed with it. No but god I have watched all the part contests. We have large dinner parties before every contest. [...] It is important [laughter], for the society, for the world. Imagine if Göran Persson [former prime minister of Sweden] was about to say “It is important to watch the Eurovision song contest. That is kind of what I mean.”

How come he consumed popular TV-shows but was incapable of reading popular culture in written format? Watching a popular TV-show could be done in solidarity with friends, thus the people in the same social group. Then individuals could sit and laugh about the program and make fun of the people attending together in a social context. Comparing it to reading a book which was not a social activity rather something people did on their own. We believe the social context was a decisive factor to distinguish what was acceptable and what was not. You can not laugh away the LCC characteristics of a book with someone else and ridicule the cultural artefact. In this way we believe individuals could induce they did not “really” enjoy the cultural artefact which was consumed but rather enjoy the social institution around it. On one hand individuals wanted to be a part of the group but on the other hand they did not want to be associated with the big mass, the common Swede. You could say there was a contradiction going on of what is considered to generate high social status.

Previous researchers have pointed out the importance of today’s individualisation and how people more and more seek to stand out from the crowd.(Chan & Goldthorpe 2006) However, the respondent’s behaviour indicated a wish to somehow belong within a community. If the individualisation is growing one would not care about external notions which seemed to be the case in our study. The whole phenomenon of accounting is due to the social game and the wish to belong. This behaviour mirrors the individuals’ consciousness about belonging to a certain group which does not approve of the mass or popular culture. This means that the rules and norms of the social in-group still has a great influence over people even if the society tends to become more individualistic. In accordance with earlier discussion concerning omnivores’ use of irony to distance themselves from inappropriate acts (Chan & Goldthorpe
How do individuals handle the feeling of shame in association with cultural consumption?

2006), we found a slight ironic tone in the quotations above. It seemed to be a popular way for omnivores to oppose to their consumption which was not accepted within the social group they belonged. The discrimination is to further justify for the choices and make the interlocutor aware of one’s awareness of the inappropriate character of the cultural artefact consumed. (Chan & Goldthorpe 2006)

As mentioned before Swedish soap operas were something we believed might be considered as something which belonged to the category of the common Swede. Hence we suspected it might trigger feelings of shame and we were eager to find out what Respondent 4 had to say about this kind of cultural consumption.

Interviewer: “Have you ever been a frequent consumer of a Swedish soap opera?”

Respondent 4: “Just when I started studying we lived in a small collective...but that is a while ago...then we watched Vita Lögner and Skilda Världar [Swedish soap operas]. Then it was more like everyone who lived there did it. [...] they were the ones who stained me. Eehh, but that was rather long ago.”

He excused his behaviour by blaming the people he lived with. This could be seen as scapegoating (Scott & Lyman 1968) where the respondent shifted the burden of the inappropriate consumption to the others who lived in the collective. In this way he was more or less “forced” to watch the soap operas due to the desire to stay within the group. However now afterwards when the urge to belong to this group was gone he had no problem smear the behaviour of the past in-group members. By doing this he showed us his disgrace for those poorly made productions thus justified his past consumption of it.

4.1.3 The authority account

This account was used as of positioning oneself as an authority by for instance using unnecessary advanced language or giving long and complex answer on simple questions. A further way to position oneself as an authority was to partake a certain body language. The authority account seemed to be popular especially amongst the men.
How do individuals handle the feeling of shame in association with cultural consumption?

Respondent 1 had previously in the interview expressed his appreciation of opera. Since we assumed most people do not attend opera performances very often we tried to activate the accounting process by asking when the last time he went to an opera was. (To keep the respondent anonymous we referred to Swedish towns and years as X)

Respondent 1: “I am actually attending one in a couple of days. But it has actually been a while since I went to an opera I think it was 10 years ago. This is due to that I went to several operas when I lived in X … I moved here 19XX but I have not found anything that I would like to see around here [Scania]. I have not searched actively, the problem is that I have chosen my career and I do not have any damn time.”

The respondent managed the situation by using several accounts after each other. At first the object blamed the poor opera scene in Malmoe. This could be an authorial account since he appeared as the “expert” who had made the active choice not to attend any operas due to the poor opera scene. This put the respondent in authorial position since the hidden meaning was he only attended operas of a certain quality. In this way Respondent 1 managed to turn the slightly shameful situation to his behalf and even benefit from it. However, even though we were aware of the Malmoe Opera House has done several classical productions and further Copenhagen also has quite a lot to offer, he maintained his authority and credibility. Further, in his next sentence, the respondent admitted he has not been actively searching for opera performances thus changed the characteristics of the accounting. How can the respondent possibly know there have not been any opera performances of quality if he has not been searching? This account contradicts his earlier account. Finally he excused his behaviour by changing account again and blamed his time consuming work which was more in line with the profession account manifested above.

Respondent 4 also used the authority account when he tried to turn the cultural consuming activity into something of status which is mirrored in the following quotation:

Interviewer: “What TV-shows do you like?”
How do individuals handle the feeling of shame in association with cultural consumption?

Respondent 4: “I watch House, it’s similar to CSI. You already know from the start he is going to solve the case. You know his boring character will be presented as harsh as possible, but in some way it’s fun.”

Interviewer: “What makes it so much fun then?”

Respondent 4: “I don’t know. You have to put it in relation to other stuff, what do we got? Idol, so you think you can dance, stuff like that. I mean, generally everything on TV is pretty crappy [...] In fact, I don’t have that much of an idea what’s on TV.”

The respondent watched House and CSI but it seemed difficult for him to explain why he liked it, almost like he did not want to admit it. He indicated he was clever enough to figure out how the episodes would end yet still he watched it. This could be seen as an authority account where the respondent emphasized his intellectual capacity. The respondent justified his choice of TV-shows by saying there were so much worse TV programs. In this case Respondent 4 used the justification technique mentioned previously in this thesis called condemnation of the condemners (Scott & Lyman 1968). The object upheld himself in another position than most other people who watch low culture TV-shows. Further he indicated he should not be placed in the same category as of those who actually do choose to consume them since he picked out the best available which put him in an authority position. This could also be seen as an excuse of the type defeasibility (Scott & Lyman 1968), because the object was “forced” to watch low culture TV-shows due to the lacking supply of TV programs thus left him no other choice. In the last sentence he admitted he did not have a clue about what was actually on TV. How can he possibly blame the range of TV-shows offered when he did not know what it consisted of? This was contradictory with his justification and excuse given.

Further we wanted to find out what he thought about going to the cinema and what kind of movies he most likely consumed hence loophole to trigger some shame thus accounts behaviour.
How do individuals handle the feeling of shame in association with cultural consumption?

Respondent 4: “Then I consume trash-culture [humoristic tone], Hollywood-trash eeehmm unfortunately the movie market in Malmoe has become crap, SF has taken over everything.”

We posed an opposing question in order to state our disapproval to the excuse given above.

Interviewer: “But you have Kino here in Lund?!”

Respondent 4: “I know, I know...but then it’s also this, that for me is Lund ehm...I hardly do anything in Lund, I never go out for dinner, I never go to the cinema. I never do anything in Lund except from working. After X years here I’m pretty tired of Lund and it’s important to make some kind of distinction, I’m only here when I work.”

Respondent 4 indicated he was more or less “forced” to consume Hollywood movies which could be typical examples of what is considered to be popular culture. We believe consumption of popular culture was not in line with his intellectual identity hence a gap between self and ideal self appeared which created the feeling of shame. He used several accounts in order to reduce the gap and protect himself from the shameful feelings. The object might have used the word “trash” to distance him from these kinds of movies. He further used the availability account as he did not like Hollywood movies but had to see them since they were the only movies available. He used the authority account by indicating the movies offered in Malmoe did not have high quality enough for him which put him in an authorised position. When we suggested Kino in Lund which offered independent movies Respondent 4 appeared to indicate feelings of shame since he had not been there. This notion triggered further accounts and he once again excused his behaviour. He meant he could not go to the cinema in Lund since he had to make a distinction between work and private life. We believed this was a rather poor excuse since we assumed someone who genuinely wanted to consume intellectual movies should not see it as an obstacle to visit a cinema in the same town as the work place. He seemed to use accounts to hide that he went to the cinema to consume popular culture, which he tended to position as something not completely legitimate.
How do individuals handle the feeling of shame in association with cultural consumption?

4.1.3.1 The joke account

With the help of the joke account the respondents made fun of themselves or of the culture consumed. To handle their shame associated with the inappropriate consumption behaviour they used humour to distance them from the inappropriate consumption. In this way the respondents indicated that they were very well aware of that the specific cultural artefact consumed was not in incongruence with their intellectual profile.

Respondent 4 told us about several of his favourite movies which were not very well known independent movies, not made for the huge mass. When we found out he had seen Titanic we deliberately sounded very surprised and slightly accusing in order to set the accounting free and follow our backstabbing technique.

Interviewer: “What did you think about the movie Titanic?”

Respondent 4: “I thought Leonardo DiCaprio was so damn handsome! Ehmm ehm didn’t think it [The Titanic] was particular good.”

Interviewer: “How come you went to the movies to see Titanic it’s pretty different from the other movies you like?”

Respondent 4: [Laughter] “It was because Leonardo was there! I sound like a teenage girl, but what should I do? [Laughter] “The movie got so much attention and everybody was talking about it. […] Leo was also up coming at the time. This is so much fun; people are going to think you’re interviewing pony girls down in the stable!”

The respondent was joking about the fact he had seen Titanic. He giggled a lot and in line with Retzinger’s statements (1995) laughter is often used when one is aware and open about the embarrassment. This indicated that Respondent 4 knew it was not fully legitimate for an intellectual person like himself to watch Titanic. His jokes showed on a self-awareness which somehow legitimised and distanced him from the fact he saw Titanic. He knew he did not sound like the intellectual person he is but rather like a “teenage girl”. In this way he used the joke account to emphasize and enlarge the gap between his self and his ideal self, instead of
hiding or diminishes the gap like most other respondents did. Through using the joke account he somehow managed to handle his shame and somehow get away with it.

Talking about TV-shows with Respondent 4 he explained how brilliant of a show The Simpson’s was thus a TV-show that he enjoyed to watch. However we would not refer to The Simpson’s as a low cultural category of cultural since they most often make farces upon political and environmental issues. We wanted to find out what other TV-shows Respondent 4 enjoyed to watch to find a loophole of shame.

Interviewer: “What other TV-shows do you follow?”

Respondent 4: “It was me and some friends who made some jokes about Ernst... poor little Ernst Kirschteiger [ironic voice], some time ago and therefore I just had to watch the show ”Sommartorpet” [Swedish decorating TV-show], cause, I mean we have made so many jokes about him. Moreover I have also renovated my apartment [...] Other than that I don’t watch that much yeah I watch the News.”

We believe Sommartorpet with Ernst Kirschteiger is a typical TV-show loved by the common Swede. We found that Respondent 4 did not want to identify himself with the typical Swedish person hence watching Sommartorpet was not in line with his ideal self. Therefore he had to excuse his behaviour by making a joke as the reason for watching Sommartorpet. He had also recently renovated his apartment which gave him an additional reason to watch the program. Throughout the answer he had an ironic tone as to show he watched it with a sense of humour. With the joke account he managed to hide his shame and distance himself from Sommartorpet and its regular spectators.

Further we lead the discussion into reality shows:

Interviewer: “Have you ever seen a reality show?”
How do individuals handle the feeling of shame in association with cultural consumption?

Respondent 4: “Ehh, yes I have probably seen all of them, or all of them I don’t know, Idol and I have seen Big Brother, but I haven’t been that engaged in it and of course Top Model and Top Model Sweden and Top Model USA and eh America’s Got Talent you know […]”

We continued in an understanding tone and expressed it like we had something in common with each other:

Interviewer: “You mean the one with Mitch Buchannon [Baywatch Star]!? ”

Respondent 4: “Yes exactly, I mean you just can't miss it...[ironic voice]”

The respondent made jokes about what he watched with the attempt to distance him from the low culture thus consciously or unconsciously put him in an authorised position. He admitted he consumed reality shows but his jokes emphasized his manner of consuming them, he watched it with a sense of humour, which distanced him from the original crowd of the reality shows.

4.1.3.2 The bewilderment account

The respondents used the bewilder account to justify an untoward cultural consumption and put them in an authorised position. With the help of this account the objects handled the shame by using unnecessarily long sentences, advanced vocabulary and complex words which was confusing. Sometimes the respondents even posed their own questions along the way of the answer so that the interlocutor, or in this case interviewer, almost forgot the original question.

Respondent 1 earlier gave us a contradicting answer about listen to opera live and listen to it on the stereo. We wanted to sort out what he meant by this and get an explanation thus try to trigger feelings of shame.
How do individuals handle the feeling of shame in association with cultural consumption?

Interviewer: “Apparently you now say that you can listen and enjoy an opera on a record, which is not in line with what you earlier said that you don’t get the same out of it [opera] on a stereo.”

The answer was long, fumbling and he augmented his voice and ended up with an unfinished sentence followed by a new one in order to neutralize his mistake:

Respondent 1: “…yeah but no, I mean I think that it relates to the exact same way as... that is to say eehh... as actually, I mean the problem is that...that is actually a really good question. I think that it is a qualitatively different experience to see it [opera] in a new production actually and get it on a record, kind of the same thing as on a live...I mean to see an artist live and listen to it on a record.”

This could be a way for the objects to consciously mislead the listener, or in this case interviewer, and make them forget what the originally posed question was hence neutralize the awkward situation. The answer was confusing and the respondent made it sound more complicated than it actually was. This naturally put the respondent in authorised position where it seemed hard to ask further follow-up questions since the answer was unclear and the original posed question almost forgotten in the large amount of incoherent words.

However, Respondent 1 contradicted himself, first the object claimed that theatre was a dead form of entertainment and claimed that theatre even expressed itself better on television. Further, he postulated that opera, which for many could be considered as a similar form of entertainment as theatre, was worth watching live and could not be enjoyed in the same way through technical devices. However Respondent 1 had a hard time explaining how this could be the case. Further into the interview when the conversation led into music the object explained that he often sat down and actively enjoyed opera on a record. We consider this as a slight contradiction to previous opinion.

The respondent interrupted himself which according to Retzinger (1995) is a paralinguistic sign of shame. The question posed seemed to surprise the respondent and he could not straight away give an answer. He covered this up by starting the sentence by saying something and
How do individuals handle the feeling of shame in association with cultural consumption?

then however regretted his answer, interrupted himself and continued on a new explanation. Is this due to that he wishes to give the impression of being an authority who at any point is supposed to respond with a quick answer? Maybe he wishes to at any point live up to the idea of the ideal self. Then, who decides what the ideal self is suppose to look like? The market creates the different positions in society and the social groups might create the ideals specific for the group, of course influenced by the market. Holbrook (1999) suggests that all people of today’s society are more or less always striving to belong to an ideal social group to gain desired social status. English et al argues that it is important to distinct between the status-seeker and the one who already belongs to the specific status group. The in-group members however seem to be capable of identifying finer nuances of consumption thus position themselves at different levels within their in-group, while the out-groupers tend to cluster all the in-groupers as rather similar individuals. (Holbrook 1999) Holbrook (1999) further on argues that people try to reach their ideal social group through consuming different products that symbolize the desired group’s values. According to Riezler (1943) this means that the self has to fit the ideal social group where the person wants to belong in order to avoid the feeling of shame.

4.1.4 The tense account

This account was used in order to justify the present lack of cultural consumption by emphasizing the earlier use of a certain cultural activity or the up-coming interest for a specific cultural artefact which were the two sub-accounts This resembled Scott & Lyman (1968) account of justification an inappropriate act through blaming the sad past. In our case the past does not have to be sad, but the tense account is common to the sad tail account in the sense that the past influence the present behaviour. To handle the feeling of shame the respondents for instance explained they have listened to a lot of music in their youth or that they were planning to consume more music in the future. The tense account also includes how the past might have influenced the respondents’ present and future cultural choices.
How do individuals handle the feeling of shame in association with cultural consumption?

4.1.4.1 The previous interest account

This account was a sub-account to the tense account where the respondents justified their present lack of interest for a certain cultural category by emphasizing their previous interest. Respondent 1 explained that he always has loved music and even used strong words to describe his interest like for instance “fan of music”. He emphasized his previous consumption of music; however we could detect a sense of shame when he admitted that his interest had decreased around the age of 25. He meant that abandoning the music was a mistake and further tried to excuse his choice by saying that it is much easier to nowadays stay tuned in the music world.

We wanted to find out more about Respondent 3’s music interest and asked when she last attended a concert. She ended up answering another question than the one posed and in a similar way as the previous she started to talk about her previous interest for music in order to excuse her apparent lack of music consumption.

Interviewer: “When was the last time you went to a concert?”

Respondent 3: “I mean music is something that I have lost. I was a very very enthusiastic music listener and buyer in my youth, especially when I moved away from my parents and started to earn my own money so that I could buy records. I knew everything about artists who came to play and band members and then I just lost it.”

Instead of answering our question she focused on her past and ignored her present interest for music which was what the question actually concerned. The respondent constantly returned to the fact that she was an enthusiastic fan of music in her youth thus using the past consumption as an excuse. Even though one can not neglect that she admitted her to have lost the interest for music. She used the tense account to emphasize her earlier interest for music as a way to justify for the lack of music in her present life since it was rather evident during the interview that music was not a big part of her life nowadays. Therefore it seemed important for her to make sure of that we truly understood her previous passion for music.
4.1.4.2 The up-coming interest account

The tense account can also emphasize the ambition and up-coming interest to consume culture as an excuse for the present lack of cultural consumption. The respondents used the up-coming interest account to defend the fact they have not consumed a certain kind of culture on a long while. As mentioned earlier Respondent 1 was interested in opera and we analysed the same quotation as the following under the authority account. However this quote can also be considered as a tense account. In this case the respondent emphasized his up-coming engagement and not only his previous interest as Respondent 3 did.

Interviewer: “When was the last time you attended an opera?”

Respondent 1: “I am actually attending one on the sixth of May. But it has actually been a while since I went to an opera I think it was 10 years ago. This is due to that I went to several operas when I lived in X ... I moved here in 19XX but I have not found anything that I would like to see around here. I have not searched actively, the problem is that I have chosen my career and I do not have any damn time.”

Instead of answering our posed question Respondent 1 used the up-coming interest account and highlighted his soon forthcoming opera visit. He did also use the previous interest account by stressing his previous commitment to the opera through emphasizing he went to lots of operas several years ago. We believed he felt a bit ashamed due to the fact he has not been to an opera performance in over 10 years. He might have used the tense account to handle his shame and reduce the gap between the self and the ideal self through prompting his previous and up-coming interest.

He was eager to emphasize his interest for opera since we believe this was a status symbol that he wanted to be associated with. As we mentioned under the good Samaritan account Respondent 1 found opera much more interesting than theatre and this could be due to his progress in the class society. He grew up in a working class home and was the first one in the family to attain an academic degree. His family especially his mother enjoyed theatre which can be an indication for why he might associates theatre as a LCC enjoyment hence does not suite his present position on the ladder of the social status. His ex-partner was the one to
introduce him to opera and she however was raised in an upper middle-class family. According to Holbrook (2006) the social value concerns the manner in which people consume to gain recognition and status from others. Arnould & Thompson (2005) mean that many studies show that individuals gain “in-group” social status through the display of cultural capital which above reflects well. This demonstration can be particular forms of skills and knowledge which are valued in the group. In Respondent 1’s present social status group we can assume that it is highly valued to be well-read which is why he is not keen on being associated with theatre since he assumingly considers it to correspond to the lower middle class. Instead he used both the previous and up-coming tense account to stress his interest for opera thus his belonging to HCC.

We tried to find out if there was any shame to be found in his apparent class-trip through society:

**Interviewer:** “Do you think your “class journey” could have affected your interest for opera?”

**Respondent 1:** “yeah…it is about learning…uhh or developing a certain type of taste so that you can appreciate this [opera]…”

This was an indication of that different social classes might value different cultural artefacts. Respondent 1 did not grow up with opera, but he learnt to like it since as we believe it was an important part of the new social class he came to belong. His class journey has most likely influenced his cultural liking and in turn also which cultural consumption generates feelings of shame.

**4.1.5 The stereotypical account**

The respondents used the stereotypical account like for instance the stereotypical gender roles as an excuse for certain cultural consumption. This account resemble Scott & Lyman’s (1968) biological drive account, but instead of blaming biological factors the respondent rather blamed socially constructed stereotypes.
How do individuals handle the feeling of shame in association with cultural consumption?

Respondent 3 was a woman who had earlier stated her liking of realistic drama movies while her partner enjoyed violent adventurous action movies. The reason for the difference in taste the object described like this:

Respondent 3: “I think it depends on the gender roles, you have learnt what to like. Women learn to like relations and so on…”

Respondent 3 further explained gender roles are socially formed and that they appear in a very early age. The object does not see it as something biological, but a fact which affects everybody. In this way the object legitimates the fact that she likes movies involving drama and relations due to the stereotypical role she has as a women.

Respondent 4 also used a stereotypical account when he described the reason of why his cultural consumption patterns changed during his teenage years.

Interviewer: “Why did you start to consume more culture during your adolescence?”

Respondent 4: “Position strategy...if you are a part of a group where everybody is trying to show themselves as smarter than the others it kind of becomes a power struggle [...] A way to position myself to the other damned farmers [with a smile].”

He grew up in a small village and did not want to become the stereotypical person who stayed in the native village, those who he playfully called “farmers”. Respondent 1 was openly telling us how consuming culture became a way to gain in-group status and distinguish from the “farmers” with who was raised amongst. He indicated the “farmers” were not very intellectual hence we believe could they could be categorized as LCC’s with a low cultural capital. In this way he used the stereotypical account in order to blame the LCC stereotype as a reason for his changed consumption pattern. He positioned himself to distance him from the stereotypical small town people. He moreover used the expression “cultural cred” to describe the value of consuming the correct culture in order to fit in as an HCC.
How do individuals handle the feeling of shame in association with cultural consumption?

4.2 Summary of the accounts

Below we have summarized all of our found accounts:

- The resignation of the self as a subject account – is when someone resigns their ability to make an active choice.
  - The Good Samaritan account – is when someone justifies an action by claiming s/he did it to make someone else content.
  - The profession account – is when the individual explains one’s actions due to their profession.
  - The availability account – Is when someone blames the lack of cultural consumption on the availability opportunities.

- Individualisation within the collectivism account – Is when someone on the one hand wishes to be individualistic, but on the other hand s/he does not want to distinguish oneself too much since s/he still wishes to be accepted and fit in to the in-group.
  - The tall poppy syndrome account – is a way of accounting by carefully chose appropriate humble words in order to avoid a patronizing behaviour.
  - The common Swede account – people in our respondent group tend to feel shame when they consume common popular culture. However they justify this by saying that they were more or less obliged to consume it in order to be a part of the conversations among colleagues.

- The authority account – is used as of positioning oneself as an authority in order to gain status and generate respect from the interlocutors.
  - The joke account – the respondents make fun of themselves, they use humour to distance them from the inappropriate consumption.
  - The bewilderment account – the objects handle the shame by using unnecessarily long sentences, advanced vocabulary and complex words which can appear confusing.

- The tense account – is used in order to justify the present lack of cultural consumption by emphasizing the use of some cultural artefacts in another time.
How do individuals handle the feeling of shame in association with cultural consumption?

- The previous interest account – the respondents justify their present lack of interest for a certain cultural category by emphasizing their previous interest.
- The up-coming interest account – is when one excuses the lack of cultural consumption by emphasizing the ambition and intention to have an interest of a cultural activity or product in the future.

- The stereotypical account – is when one blames their wrongdoings by blaming the socially constructed stereotypes. This could for instance be blaming the gender roles or the class roles donated to them from the market.


5 Conclusion

This section presents our findings considering how individuals handle the feelings shame in association with cultural consumption. The shame is handled through the accounts found in our empirical material which are illustrated in Figure 2 below. Further we discuss how accounts could be a way for individuals to gain status and be categorized as HCC. Moreover we suggest interesting topics for future research and some practical implications. Finally we reflect upon our study and emphasize the strengths and weaknesses with our thesis.

5.1 Handling of shame through accounts

We maintain in accordance with for instance Holbrook (2006) that every individual of the society have a social in-group to which they belong. This social in-group has certain preferences or a specific framework of what is legitimate for the member to consume in order to either stay within the group or to increase its status within the group. If the member of a social group consumes a cultural product which does not correlate with the in-group framework one can say that there occurs a dissonance between the social belonging and the cultural consumption. The dissonance seemed to develop an emotion of shame. Since shame itself is shameful the emotion is according to Scheff (1995) avoided, hence individuals who feel shame do everything in their power to diminish the emotion of shame. Our respondents tried to reduce the feeling of shame through the help of different accounts. The above reasoning is illustrated in Figure 2 on next page.
How do individuals handle the feeling of shame in association with cultural consumption?

**Figure 2**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ACCOUNTS</th>
<th>The resignation of the self as a subject</th>
<th>The individualisation within the collectivism</th>
<th>The authority</th>
<th>The tense</th>
<th>The stereotypical</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SUB-ACCOUNTS</td>
<td>The good Samaritan</td>
<td>The tall poppy syndrome</td>
<td>The joke</td>
<td>The previous</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>The profession</td>
<td>The common Swede</td>
<td>The bewilderment</td>
<td>The up-coming</td>
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<td>The availability</td>
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We have identified accounts to be a product of the emotion of shame and further we established the accounts illustrated in Figure 2 used to handle the feeling of shame. The previous constructed theory of accounts made by Scott & Lyman (1968) has helped us toward a greater understanding of the significance of the subject at issue hence assisted us to prolong their existing accounts towards accounts which better fit a cultural context. We consider our findings to provide the field of consumer culture theory with a modified theoretical foundation concerning the handling of shame. We have however constructed our own accounts which we consider to be more suitable to our context at issue.
One way for the respondents to handle the shame was to reduce the gap between the self and ideal self with the help of accounts. They blamed others, time, availability, work etc in order to justify for their cultural choices thus to make up for their shameful behaviour. But we also found the opposite, where the respondents through the joke account enlarged the gap between the self and the ideal self instead of hide it. In this way the respondents emphasized the gap and even exaggerated it which showed upon humour and thus a great distance to the self. This also seemed be a method to handle the feeling of shame.

The respondents used several accounts instead of only a single one. We found several contradictory answers in our empirical material. The respondents could for instance first blame the bad range of TV-shows offered and in the next sentence claim that they did not have a clue what was on TV nowadays. Contradictory answers could strengthen the notion that the accounts are made up excuses and justifications in order to protect the individual from shame. Those contradictory answers resulted in them loosing their credibility and they gave one away in feeling shame instead of hiding it.

5.2 The skilful account user

The backstabber interview technique was successful in order to make the respondents feel shame thus set off the accounting. We hope the backstabber interview technique to be useful for other researchers within the field of the handling of shame and other sensitive emotions.

The whole phenomenon of accounting seems to be due to the social game and the individuals’ wish to belong to a desired social group. We believe the accounting is a product of the market’s constructed perception of how some products should be consumed in a certain way. The capability of accounting could be an extension or a fourth dimension of Holt’s (1998) categorization of HCCs and LCCs. The skilful account users seem to gain social status by their clever way of talking and justifying choices. In this way the skilful account user manage to handle shameful consumption situations through verbally convincing arguments which in turn gives the individual social status. We are of the opinion that Holt’s theory, touched upon

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9 Holt’s (1998) dimensions are: formal education, family upbringing and occupational culture
in this thesis, could be updated or modified. Therefore we somewhat argue that the ability to account could be added or even replace Holt’s dimension of family upbringing (Holt 1998) as a way to categorize individuals as HCCs. We have interviewed what most of the citizens in Sweden probably would define as HCCs since they are highly educated. Yet some of our respondents did not come from families where the parents had a college education or higher, hence Holt would not consider all our respondents as HCCs. We believe time has changed whereas family nobility might no longer be considered as a criterion in order to be classified as a HCC.

Previous researchers have indicated that people tend to increasingly move in the direction with the desire to be individualistic. (Chan & Goldthorpe 2006) Yet we find this statement somewhat ambiguous after the implementation of our thesis. We feel that the statement needs a more detailed and extended explanation. Yes, we are in accordance in that people wishes to be rare and different but only if the rarity is shared with a group of other people. As in above previous discussions all individuals have the urge to belong to a social sub-group or what we also have referred to as the in-group. However the people we have interviewed tend to have the wish to distance them from what we have called the common Swede and what those culturally consume. One can summarize it that people in our study tend to be collectivistic within their individualistic sub-group. We have managed to detect this desire since almost every time the context has touched upon the consumption of popular culture the respondents tend to fire away different accounts. Sometimes it even seems like the respondents wish to belong to several sub-groups at the same time like for instance one professional sub-group and one family oriented sub-group.

5.3 Options for future research

The field of the handling of shame is yet fairly unexplored which open up for several opportunities for future research. It would be interesting carry out a similar study like our but made on a larger sample to examine the possibility to receive a greater support for the accounts we found.

According to Schneider (1977) does what considered as shameful vary from one culture to another and age to age etc. Our study only included PhDs and PhD students in Lund since we
believed cultural consumption would be especially important among intellectual people. It is possible that culture might not be the best way to trigger shame in less intellectual groups which is important to remember for future research in order to successfully trigger the feeling of shame within a specific group.

As mentioned before, this study only included HCCs which we believed had an impact on the result. It would be interesting to carry out a similar study on both HCCs and LCCs to understand if there is a difference between how they handle shame. Could the handling of shame be connected to the cultural capital one possesses? Could higher status be attained through the skilful use of accounts?

5.4 Practical implications

This research will help corporations to easier label and segment customers with the guidelines of accounting; thus easier spot the correct target group. The thesis is of importance since especially cultural consumption seems to be closely correlated to the master feeling of shame. Our research can help omnipotent corporations to better understand intellectuals’ and omnivores’ emotions in connection to some cultural consumption and adapt the marketing efforts towards a more sophisticated appearance. Further it will help the corporations to facilitate the seduction of the desired target group.

5.5 Reflections - Strengths and weaknesses

We believe The Backstabber interview technique was an important element for our study as it made our respondents feel shame. It can also be a useful method for future research within the field. However there can be some weaknesses with the “backstabber” interview technique since some of the accounts used can be true reasons for why particular cultural artefacts were consumed or not consumed. The distinction between true excuses and accounts were not crystal clear, which can have affected our result. Since we observed all kinds of potential cues of shame we could have misinterpreted some answers or physical behaviour.
How do individuals handle the feeling of shame in association with cultural consumption?

The empirics and analysis was structured with suitable headings for the accounts we found. In many cases the respondents used several accounts to answer the same question which made it hard for us to make clear distinctions below each heading. Hence there is more than one account under some headings and the same quotations used several times but with different interpretations of accounts. This can be confusing for the reader, but in the same time it shows how the respondents combine different accounts to handle their shame which reflects the complexity of the reality as we found important for this thesis.

This study only includes shame in connection with cultural consumption. Since all of our respondents have high educations, PhD students at the lowest, one can assume that they possesses a high cultural capital and are aware of “good” and “bad” culture. Thus they are keen on maintaining their authority. Hence shame is most likely to appear when revealing the consumption of so called “bad” culture; thus also the handling of minimising their choice of culture which is our subject of interest. We have chosen these objects in order to more easily trigger the emotion of shame. Hence the big mass of citizens is not included thus not represented in our research. It might happen that they would handle shame with other kinds of accounts. For example was the profession account very evident maybe because the thesis only included hard working PhDs and PhDs student in our study.

We would further like to emphasize that even if our intentions were to interview HCCs in accordance to Holt’s (1998) framework we found that several of our respondents did not fulfil all of the criterions set up by Holt, especially when it came to family upbringing. However this twist instead helped us to construct some modifications of Holt’s (1998) previous theory.
How do individuals handle the feeling of shame in association with cultural consumption?

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How do individuals handle the feeling of shame in association with cultural consumption?

Appendix I: Presentation of the Respondents

Respondent 1: Business Economics Lund University

Respondent 2: Political Science, Lund University

Respondent 3: Political Science, Lund University

Respondent 4: Sociology, Lund University

Respondent 5: Sociology, Lund University
How do individuals handle the feeling of shame in association with cultural consumption?

Appendix II: Interview Guide

The interview is nothing but a guideline in order for us keep track and stick to a somewhat similar pattern throughout all of our interviews. The intention is not to use as a strict framework. There should be space for the interviewer to pose spontaneous follow-up question if it suite the answers.

**Theater**

When was the last time you went to the theatre?

What production did you see?

How come it was such a long time ago?

What made you choose that production?

What did you get in exchange from the visit?

**Cinema**

Do you like going to the cinema?

Why?

When was the last time you went to the cinema?

What movie did you see?

What made you choose that movie?
How do individuals handle the feeling of shame in association with cultural consumption?

Have you ever seen a film at the cinema which you did not enjoy?

What made you go and see it in the first place?

Which is the best movie you have ever seen?

Why is it that exactly this movie appeal to you?

Have you seen Titanic?

What did you think of it?

Do you really think that it is in line with you previous answers regarding your movie selection?

**Opera**

What is your opinion of Opera?

When was the last time you went to an opera?

How many times in total have you been to an opera?

Why so few?

What is it that you appreciate about opera?

Do you have any favourite production?
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Literature

Have you ever read a book by Liza Marklund?

Why/ (not)?

What do you prefer to read?

Why?

Approximately how many books do you consume each year?

Oh?! Why not more than that?

Which one of your books don’t you want to have visible on the shelf?

Why is that?

TV-shows

Which is your favourite show/shows?

Why?

Have you ever seen a reality show? (Big Brother, Paradise Hotel, Idol etc)

When was the last time you saw a reality show?

How come you watched it?

How many episodes did you watch of it [reality show]?
How do individuals handle the feeling of shame in association with cultural consumption?

Did you enjoy it?

If you thought it was no good, why did you then continue watching?

**Concert/Music**

When was the last time you went to a concert?

What kind of concert was it?

Have you been to any other concerts this spring?

What genres of music appeals to you?

What artists do you like?

Have you ever been to a big arena concert?

If yes: Isn’t that artist a bit too commercial to be in line with what you said earlier?

If no: Isn’t that rather strange since you claim yourself to be very interested in music?

How do you consume music at home? Are you an active listener or do you only listen to music while doing something else as background entertainment?

If most often as background: Oh! That’s strange since you position yourself as a true music lover?!