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Consumer Decision Making From a Social Perspective

- A Study of the Outdoor Space

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Abstract

- Title:** Consumer Decision Making from a Social Perspective - A study of the Outdoor Space
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- Course:** BUSM08 Master Degree Project (15 ECTS)
- Keywords:** Consumer Behaviour, the Outdoor Space, Decision Making, Consumer Culture Theory, Publicly Displayed Items
- Purpose:** The purpose of the thesis is to investigate how social and cultural factors influence the decision making behaviour regarding publicly displayed items, using the outdoor space as an example. We want to provide a more dynamic view on decision making concerning publicly displayed products, taking the personalities of the consumers into consideration.
- Methodology:** The methodology employed is an iterative, constructionist approach with a qualitative research design. In order to provide more objective and valid results, triangulation is utilized for the data collection which includes qualitative interviews, observations, and secondary data provided by IKEA.
- Theoretical perspectives:** In contrast to the, according to us, rather static approach to decision making employed within consumer behaviour research; we introduce a more modern perspective. Our theoretical framework hence consists of theories from both the consumer behaviour area and the Consumer Culture Theory field. The theories selected concern aspects related to the social environment, status, and the identity.
- Empirical Data:** The empirical data was collected through qualitative, in-depth interviews and observations in the respondents' homes.
- Conclusions:** The investigated social aspects; the social environment, status, and the identity, seem to influence the decision making behaviour concerning items located on the outdoor space to a quite large extent. Moreover, consumers appear to be affected by these influences to different extents as they move between different stages in life. Different types of decision making strategies regarding publicly displayed goods are furthermore identified and summarized in a table.

Preface

We would like to take this opportunity to thank everyone who has participated in, and contributed to, our thesis.

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1. Introduction

In this chapter, we introduce the research area consumer decision making and present what we consider to be a problem within the area. Moreover, we present the purpose and research questions of the thesis as well as describe what our contribution will be and the limitations of the study. We conclude with an illustration of the outline of the thesis to simplify the reading process.

“[...] the only reason we want to have something is to enlarge our sense of self and the only way we can know who we are is by observing what we have.”

- Sartre (1943) in Belk (1988: 146)

Sartre's statement depicts the relationship between individuals and their possessions as a quite intricate matter as he suggests that one's possessions greatly reflect the self and that the reason for desiring possessions merely is based on a wish to improve this self. Accordingly, we view a related aspect to consumption - consumer decision making - as a complex research area since there are many factors that may play in and affect how and why decisions are made. Nevertheless, the area has been investigated in a rather static manner, leaving out important cultural factors. This thesis considers a number of social and cultural aspects that may influence decision making when it comes to a very visible area; the outdoor space. The outdoor space offers a good example for publicly displayed items and it is likely that not all factors influencing the decisions regarding what to place there are rational. We approach the term 'consumer decision making' with a somewhat extended approach as we consider the choice to place, and display, goods on the outdoor space to be a decision as well. It is thus, according to us, not only the decision to purchase something that is of interest to investigate. We will describe this definition more thoroughly in section 1.2.

1.1. Current Research on Consumer Decision Making

Since earlier times, a lot of progress has taken place within the field of consumption and consequently how consumers approach the area decision making. Campbell (1983) argues that in traditional societies, consumers were only aware of a rather restricted number of products while in our modern society, there is an unlimited amount of items to be consumed which moreover are facing a quick and continuous development. Nowadays, we do not desire very specific things; we rather want to want and desire to desire. This implies a rather irrational approach to decision making when it comes to consumption, but many models

concerning consumers' decision making behaviour are, however, very linear, assuming that these are rational and follow logical steps when making decisions about what to consume.

When exploring consumer behaviour research concerning decision making, our interest was particularly directed towards 'The buyer decision process'; a classic model developed by marketing scholars (Armstrong and Kotler, 2005). The buyer decision process consists of five stages: need recognition; information search; evaluation of alternatives; purchase decision; and post-purchase behaviour. Armstrong and Kotler (2005) suggest that the model illustrates all the steps a consumer faces in difficult and complex buying situations. The first stage, need recognition, concerns the moment when a consumer becomes aware of a problem or need, triggered by internal or external stimuli. When the need has been recognized, the consumer starts searching for information from different sources such as personal, commercial, public and experiential sources. The gathered information is then used to choose between different products and brands in the next step of the decision process; evaluation of the different alternatives. After this, the purchase decision and actual purchase takes place. This stage can be affected by the attitudes of others, such as preferences of the consumer's family, or by unexpected events not predicted by the consumer such as loss of income or competitors lowering their prices. In order for the consumer to be willing to return to the brand or store, the initial need has to be satisfied, which relates to the last stage; post-purchase behaviour. Whether the consumer is satisfied or not depends on how the perceived performance of the product matches the customer's expectations of functionality (Armstrong and Kotler, 2005).

We argue, however, that the buyer decision process model is too static and does not, to any larger extent, reflect the social or cultural aspects that may influence decisions about what to consume. Moreover, even though it is called the buyer decision *process*, we consider it to lack an element of process as it rather is very linear, assuming that consumers go through different steps in a pre-determined manner. Instead, we suggest that these stages can be mixed and that decision making is a cultural and collective process, constantly being influenced and altered by social factors. The buyer decision process model is thus, according to us, too individualistic and too focused on functional aspects.

The model has previously been criticized for the underlying assumption that consumers are rational; nevertheless, it has been widely used for studying consumers' decision making behaviour within various areas. Keaveney, Huber and Herrmann (2007) investigated for instance how the following stages of the buyer decision process influence buyer regret; information search, alternative evaluation and post-purchase evaluation of product as well as service attributes. The studied area was luxury automobiles. Similarly, Chao and Gupta (1995) used steps from the model of the buyer decision process when examining country-of-origin effects on consumers' purchase decisions regarding new cars. Karjaluoto *et al* (2005) furthermore discusses the model when studying the consumer buying decision process and the factors that determine consumer choices between different mobile phone brands. Cars and mobile phones are areas where the decision making can be assumed to involve, for instance status seeking tendencies, and could thus be of interest to examine from this perspective.

The model on the buyer decision process has also been used in studies of online consumer behaviour. Comegys and Brennan (2003) examined for instance the online purchase decision making behaviour of undergraduate college-aged students from the USA and Ireland by using the buyer decision process model. Some years later, Comegys, Hannula and Väisänen (2006) followed up with a study on whether online shoppers from the USA and Finland approach the consumer buying decision process differently, and whether this behaviour has changed over time. They claim that the five-stage buying decision process model is a widely used tool for marketers to gain a better understanding about their customers and their behaviour according to Kotler and Keller (2006). Moreover, a similar model has been employed within business to business buying decisions (e.g. Quigley, Bingham and Patterson, 1994).

Apart from the buyer decision process, consumer behaviour researchers have studied various consumer decision making styles, termed CDMS. In 1986, Sproles and Kendall wrote an often referred to article where they conceptualised eight basic characteristics of consumers' decision making styles and introduced a model to measure these decision making styles empirically. The eight characteristics were the following: perfectionism or high quality consciousness; brand consciousness; novelty-fashion consciousness; recreational, hedonistic shopping consciousness; price and 'value for money' shopping consciousness; impulsiveness; confusion from too many choices; and habitual, brand-loyal orientation toward consumption. These characteristics were argued to be the most frequently discussed in consumer behaviour research.

Bauer, Sauer, and Becker (2006) further explain how several studies have investigated consumer decision making styles within consumer behaviour research. They claim that the research designs suggested in these studies mainly are replications of the study conducted by Sproles and Kendall (1986), and present an updated version of the model as well as test it in relation to different product categories and levels of product involvement. Their model is dependent on the investigated product and the consumer's purchase experience and includes seven factors: perfectionism; brand consciousness; price/value consciousness; brand/store loyalty; spontaneity; innovativeness; and variety-seeking. Neither the model by Sproles and Kendall (1986) nor the one by Bauer, Sauer, and Becker (2006) does, however, include any social or cultural aspects that may influence the decision making behaviour. Moreover, just as with the model on the buyer decision process, these models focuses merely on buying decisions and neglects the fact that important consumption decisions also may take place after the purchase in terms of what to do with the purchased object.

An area that has been widely investigated within consumer behaviour research is furthermore how the decision making within the household is affected by family members. Davis (1976) describes how the family has been depicted as an important influencer for purchase decisions regarding all sorts of products within consumer behaviour literature. He argues that many decisions rather are made by the family as a group while there has been little research conducted about group decision making as this research has been too individualistic. The areas discussed by Davis (1976) are how family members are involved in economic decisions such as spending- and saving decisions, what the process of the decision making looks like

within families, and whether decision outcomes are affected by differences in family role structure and decision strategies. Foxman, Tansuhaj, and Ekstrom (1989) similarly studied how adolescents influence the family decision making using a socialization perspective. The socialization factors investigated were the family communication patterns and family structure; the child's individual characteristics and resources such as income, confidence and employment; and the type of products related to the decision making. Moreover, Thomson, Laing, and McKee (2007) investigated the role that children play within family purchase decisions of high-involvement products, and found that the children in all of the studied families were found to directly influence the decisions about the discussed purchases.

These studies about family decision making all take in influencing factors related to others in terms of family members, and family decision making in general seems to be a widely examined area. We argue, however, that the decision making about what to consume, and how to consume it, may be influenced also by other actors in the social environment, outside the family, and hence be affected by other social contexts than the family. These actors could be neighbours, friends, and different groupings.

1.2. A Cultural Perspective on Decision Making

In contrast to the rather rational and functionalistic view on decision making within the consumer behaviour literature described above, the area of Consumer Culture Theory (CCT) includes a more dynamic perspective on consumption in general. CCT comprises consumer research that attends to the sociocultural, experiential, symbolic, and ideological aspects of consumption rather than merely behaviour. It refers to a group of theoretical perspectives dealing with the relationships between consumer actions, the marketplace, and cultural meanings. Within CCT, culture is furthermore not viewed as a narrow system of collectively shared meanings, ways of life and values among members of society. Rather it explores a more diverse connection of meanings within a variety of overlapping cultural groupings and thus takes on a broader perspective of culture. Moreover, CCT research emphasizes how consumers actively modify and interpret symbolic meanings set in for instance brands and products, and is concerned with the cultural meanings, sociohistoric influences, and social dynamics that shape consumer experiences and identities (Arnould and Thompson, 2005).

In correspondence with the CCT-field, Douglas and Isherwood (1978: 7) suggest that the very idea of consumption should be seen as a social process and, contrary to the creators of the buyer decision process model, state that the idea of the rational individual is "*an impossible abstraction from social life*". Corrigan (1997) further argues that when purchasing a product, the fulfilling of concrete needs could be seen as a by-product since the consumption of goods communicates social meanings. This is closely in line with Baudrillard's (1988) theory of contrasting use-value with signifying-value; objects do not only have functional purposes but also signify certain things. Consumers do not mainly consume to accomplish specific concrete ends, but to achieve social ends. Goods hence constitute a cultural system of meanings (Corrigan, 1997). Witt (2010) similarly discusses the

importance of consumption for expressing messages and suggest that the motivation for consuming symbolic products is to gain status recognition, to express belonging to or distance from certain groups, or to fulfil one's self-image. Douglas and Isherwood (1978) equally state that the most important function of consumption is to clarify and classify things rather than to fulfil needs in a functional way, and describe how a major function of goods is to show the social categories in a culture. All material possessions thus hold social meanings. Goods are furthermore described as being able to create and maintain social relationships as well as to say something about a person or family.

When considering the social and cultural aspects that may affect consumption, and hence also consumer decision making, discussed within Consumer Culture Theory, it can be noted that these are largely missing in the buyer decision process model just as in much of the consumer behaviour research regarding decision making. A major motivator for the decision to consume something is within CCT argued to be the communication of social meanings rather than the fulfilling of functional needs. We have thus found the existing research on decision making within consumer behaviour literature to be too narrow and static as it lacks the inclusion of social and cultural aspects. For instance, none of the studies concerning the buyer decision process described above (e.g. Keaveney *et al*, 2007; Chao and Gupta, 1995; Comegys and Brennan, 2003) relates the decision process to social and cultural aspects to any larger extent. Neither do the models developed by Sproles and Kendall (1986) and Bauer, Sauer, and Becker (2006). From studying the CCT literature, we found the social environment, status, and identity aspects to be of most interest for us to examine in this particular study. This will be discussed further in section 1.4.

As mentioned in the beginning of this chapter, we include a broader view on consumer decision making in this study. Our definition of the term entails not only the decision to purchase an item, but also the decision about how to consume this item in terms of where to place it and how to display it. Moreover, as this thesis focuses on the outdoor space, some items consumed there may be old purchases, inherited, or gifts. To place these items on the outdoor space is also an active decision and is hence just as interesting to examine as any buying decision. This aspect of decision making is, however, something that previous research on consumer decision making within consumer behaviour has neglected to examine. In order to get a comprehensive picture of decision making when it comes to publicly displayed items, such as those located on the outdoor space, we combine the more rational theories from the consumer behaviour area and the rather intangible aspects from the CCT-field in our study. The reason for this is that we consider both research fields to offer valuable insights and it is thus, according to us, advantageous to combine the two perspectives.

1.3. Purpose and Research Questions

Following the reasoning above, the purpose of this thesis is to investigate how social and cultural factors may affect the consumer decision making regarding publicly displayed items, using the outdoor space as an example. We seek to explore how consumers reason around

their decisions in this area, and what role for instance status and other social aspects play in their reasoning. Our aim is to increase the understanding of consumers' thoughts about their choices of items for, and hence the appearance of, their outdoor spaces. Accordingly, we want to provide a more dynamic view on this type of decision making, taking the personalities of the consumers into consideration.

Our research questions are:

- How do social and cultural aspects influence the decision making behaviour regarding items that are displayed publicly, such as those located on the outdoor space?
- What types of decision making strategies can be identified when it comes to the choice of what items to place on the outdoor space?
- What are the intended meanings of possessions located on the outdoor space?

1.4. Studying the Outdoor Space

When considering all the magazines, television programmes, and websites that are dedicated to home decoration, and during spring also to the outdoor space, it seems likely that many consumers put a lot of effort on its appearance. It is furthermore a place where a lot of time is spent. The home in general, and correspondingly the outdoor space as we consider these to be closely connected, can accordingly be seen as complex sites for making decisions about what to, and what not to, consume.

The historical development of the notion of the home brings further confirmation to this proposition, as the home and the furniture within it always have carried certain meanings. The home seems, for instance, to be a major tool to create and express the self and one's personality, and another function of the home has been explained to be the communication of status messages. These aspects which are likely to influence the decision making behaviour regarding the outdoor space are not rational but interesting to examine nevertheless. Corrigan (1997) describes how there in earlier societies was little distinction between the home and work since much production took place at home. When industrialization occurred, however, these spaces became two separate entities. The workplace became the place for public productive life, and the home the place for private consumption and hence a sanctuary, especially for those who had jobs with little opportunity for self-expression. The home thus became a central part in the creation of one's self. Corrigan (1997) further explains how families still today use the consumption of goods to construct itself as a family, even though most goods nowadays are purchased rather than inherited. When considering these factors, it becomes clear that decisions about what items to locate in the home, and perhaps the outdoor space, is a matter not to be taken lightly.

Another historical development was the arrival of fashion, which enabled people to start consuming in ways to indicate status. In earlier societies, old money was held highly as

described by McCracken (1988) in Corrigan (1997), and objects such as furniture and buildings thus served as visual proof of status by showing marks of age. When fashion appeared, however, signs of newness rather than of age became important. Old wealth could thus now no longer be told apart from new and lower classes could consequently more easily imitate upper classes. Clarke (2001) further explains how historically, the construction of the household as an expressive form has been connected with the development of the new middle-class. The bourgeoisie spent a lot of money on socially strategic products such as furniture and home decorations, even if the family lacked proper funding. By the nineteenth century, the furnishing and decoration of the bourgeoisie homes in Europe and the USA had become an important communicative practice, and a lot of effort was given to decorating the homes. Packard (1959) similarly argues that during the late 1950s, the home even started to replace the car as the most favoured status symbol in America, and could be used to convey the impression of high status or to show that the owner was successful. These illustrations portray the communication of status messages as an important factor influencing the decision making concerning the appearance of the home which is closely connected with our research area; the outdoor space.

With the term ‘outdoor space’ we include balconies and terraces, and the interest in goods related to this area has increased over the years. Consumers are nowadays not only spending more on outdoor furniture and appliances, but also building more sophisticated outdoor spaces (All Business, 2007). As the outdoor space is displayed publicly towards neighbours and people passing by and thus can be seen as a display window of the home, we consider it to be an interesting area to investigate. Belk (1988) similarly explains how it has been suggested that while the interior decor of the house represents the actual self, the exterior appearance of the house signifies something similar to social self since this is what others see. These views of the interior and exterior of the home can be related to the analogy of the body, and Turner (1992) in Corrigan (1997) correspondingly distinguishes between the internal and the external body. The external body in this sense refers to the representations of the body in social areas and needs to consume various products in order to fit into society. Featherstone (1982) in Corrigan (1997) similarly argues that the external body’s attractive appearance is a crucial matter and becomes a clear evidence of the care or lack of care; whether the body has been maintained properly can directly be judged. If the body is improperly styled, it is a sign of laziness and moral negligence while good maintenance signifies a worthy person.

We consider the comparison with the body to be a further confirmation of the outdoor space as an interesting research area. As with the external body, the outdoor space can quickly be judged and perhaps act as an indicator of the owner’s personality and status as well as of what the interior of the house looks like. It is thus a good example of a very visible area of consumption which may influence the decision making concerning what to place there. Due to the visibility of the outdoor space towards the environment, we suggest that there are great opportunities to, for instance, consume in manners to indicate status or to fit in with the neighbourhood. Packard (1959) correspondingly explains how expensive products visible to outsiders passing the home have been appreciated status symbols among status seekers.

Following the reasoning above and the discussion about the historical development of consumption within the home, the cultural and social factors that we have decided to focus on are how the decision making concerning items located on the outdoor space is influenced by one's social environment, status aspects, and by one's identity.

1.5. Our Contribution

How consumption in general is affected by factors concerning self expression is not a new concept within Consumer Culture Theory; a lot of research about the relationship between possessions and the self was carried out in the 1980's (e.g. Belk, 1988; Wallendorf and Arnould, 1988). Since then, nevertheless, few studies have been conducted within the area, although some researchers have explored the field of status consumption (e.g. O' Cass and McEwen, 2004; Amaldoss and Jain, 2005; Clark *et al.*, 2007) and social consumption (e.g. Fitzmaurice and Comegy, 2006; Witt, 2010). None of them have, however, dealt with goods related to the outdoor space, although Ulver-Sneistrup (2008) explored status consumption and its relation to the home in general as she claimed that this connection had never been investigated earlier. Neither have these researchers investigated the influences of these concepts on decision making specifically. We are interested in the outdoor space in particular, and found a gap in the existing literature about how decision making concerning the consumption of outdoor items is affected by cultural and social factors. As the outdoor space is a visible area where consumption decisions easily can be seen, outdoor goods offer an interesting example of publicly displayed items.

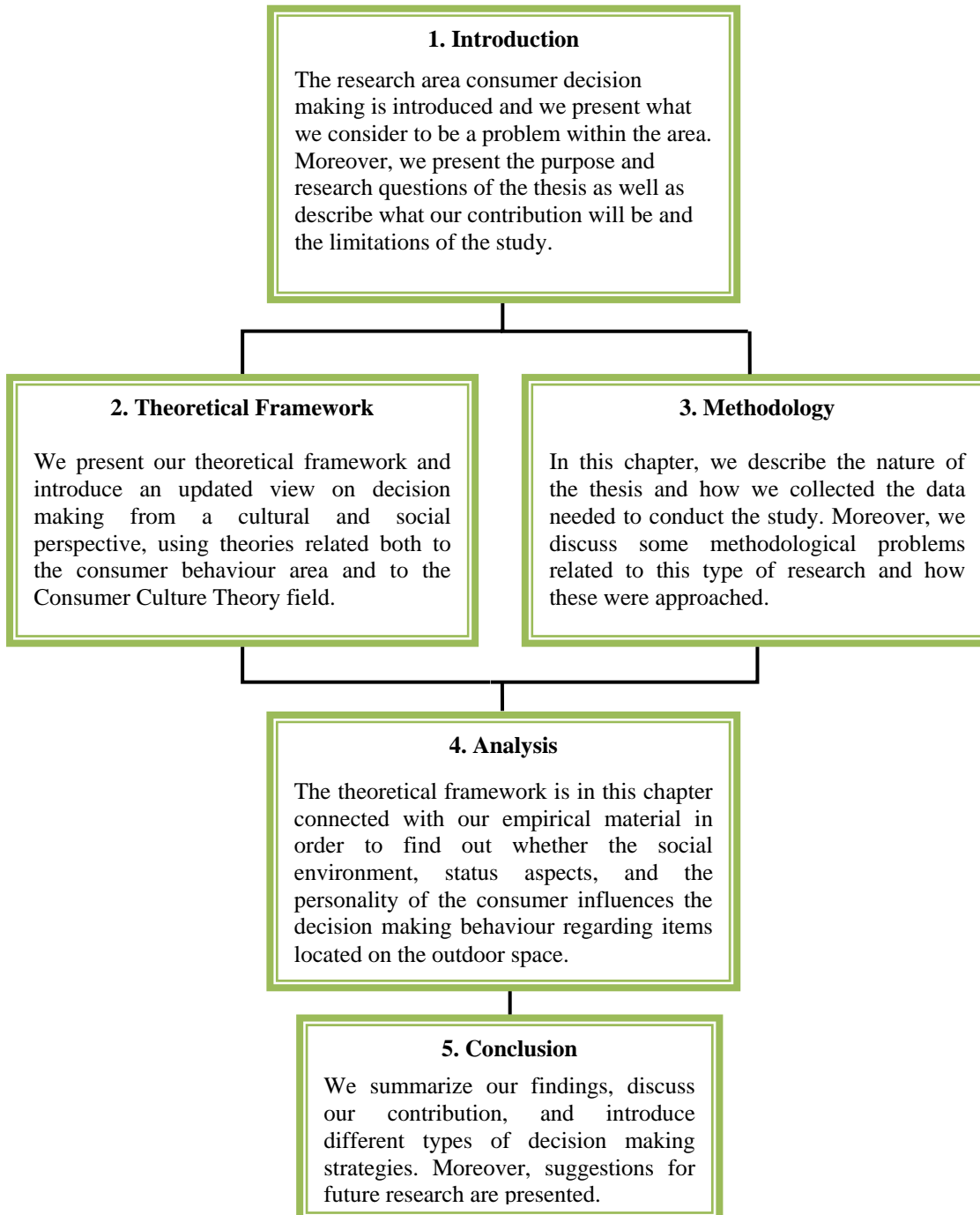
Our contribution to the consumer behaviour research area will hence be a study of how underlying social and cultural factors may affect the decision making behaviour regarding items related to the outdoor space, focusing on one's social environment, status and identity aspects. We are moreover extending consumer decision making to not only include buying decisions but also decisions taking place after the purchase. As we consider the current research about decision making to be too narrow and individualistic, we are using theories from both the consumer behaviour area and the Consumer Culture Theory-field to study the phenomenon as previously mentioned. We thus, additionally, aim to contribute to Consumer Culture Theory since the outdoor space has not been investigated in this purpose before from what we have found. Moreover, Dwyer (2009) argues that many theories about social consumption are in need of an update and Saren (2007) criticizes the theories on how individuals for instance use goods to create their identities, show who they are, and to signal their desired social status to be too one-dimensional. He argues that it is important not to forget the different roles a person plays in life, and that the role as a consumer furthermore constantly is in process, changing through the different stages in life and is affected by outside influences and contexts. We are therefore aiming to provide an updated and more inclusive view on social aspects of consumer decision making, taking the multiple identities and personalities of the consumers into consideration.

Our study will be of great interest for companies that sell or market products related to the outdoor living area and also other publicly displayed items. As consumers nowadays have many alternatives to choose between, it is vital to know the underlying cultural and social factors that may affect their decision making behaviour. This is furthermore something that for instance Eastman, Goldsmith and Reinecke Flynn (1999) have acknowledged, and claim that marketers of many brands of visibly consumed products should recognize the possibility that they are selling ‘status symbols’.

1.6. Limitations and Exclusions

We have chosen to focus on some social and cultural factors that may influence consumers’ decisions regarding the choices of what to place on the outdoor space, including the social environment, status, and the identity and personality of the consumer. Thus, we do not consider how more tangible issues, such as price and quality, affect the choice of outdoor furniture to any larger extent. Due to time- and space limitations of the study, neither do we investigate other cultural factors such as ethnicity and religion which also may influence consumer decision making. Moreover, we concentrate on how consumers’ reason around their decisions connected to the appearance of their outdoor spaces and products in general, regarding for instance style and design. We hence exclude how in-store factors influence the decision making behaviour. Neither do we put any larger focus on what brands the participants in our study prefer and how these affect the choice of items for their outdoor spaces, even though this aspect is considered to some extent.

1.7. Outline of the Thesis



2. Theoretical Framework

In this chapter, we present a theoretical framework that we later will implement when analysing our empirical material. We want to introduce an updated view on decision making from a cultural and social perspective, using theories related both to the consumer behaviour area and to the field of Consumer Culture Theory as described in chapter 1.

“Knowingly or unknowingly, intentionally or unintentionally, we regard our possessions as parts of ourselves”

- Belk (1988: 139)

Just as Belk, we take an interest in how consumers relate to their possessions, and suggest that consumer decision making involves several aspects. In this thesis, we have chosen to focus on theories regarding *some* factors that may influence the decision making behaviour concerning publicly displayed products such as those located on the outdoor space. Since we see consumer decision making as an important preceding stage to consumption, we are interested in understanding decision making through studying theories on consumption. Following the reasoning from chapter 1, the home has historically been a place for conveying certain meanings and a major function of goods in general has been explained to be the communication of messages. The home has, for instance been described as a central part in the creation of one’s self (Corrigan, 1997), as a status symbol (Packard, 1959) and as connected to the development of the middle class (Clarke, 2001). The home is closely attached with our area of study; the outdoor space. The social and cultural aspects that we, from studying the literature, have found to be most relevant to examine when it comes to decisions concerning items located on the outdoor space are, correspondingly, influences related to one’s social environment, status, and one’s personality and identity. However, it is important to be aware of the fact that there might be yet additional factors that could have an impact on this type of decision making behaviour.

2.1. Social Influences on Consumption

According to the literature, goods can be used to fit in with certain groups and we thus consider the social environment to be an interesting aspect to study when it comes to influences on consumers’ decision making behaviour. Fitzmaurice and Comegy (2006) describe how social consumption as a concept includes a broad view of the social visibility and communicative impact of goods as it takes social influences and conformity into account.

Moreover, even though Armstrong and Kotler (2005) strongly advocate the static model of the buyer decision process, they have also constructed a model that considers various factors influencing the buying behaviour including social and cultural factors.

2.1.1. Possessions as Symbols

As discussed in chapter 1, the consumption of goods communicates social meanings (e.g. Corrigan, 1997). Packard (1959) correspondingly stresses the importance of “taking on the coloration” of the group one aspires to belong to. When a person moves into a new neighbourhood for instance, he or she is rapidly and critically evaluated by the neighbours before being accepted or rejected into the group. If he or she does not abandon old status symbols, values, friends or behaviour patterns, the chances to join the new group is reduced. Witt (2010) similarly explains how the capacity of goods to act as symbols is not natural; this has to be agreed upon by the members of the relevant group or society. Goods that are seen as appreciated symbols in some contexts can thus be useless or even negative in others. Advertising campaigns can, moreover, directly influence consumer behaviour and affect the notion of perceived symbols.

The home is, according to Garvey (2001), commonly pictured as a key place for communicating an image of oneself towards others through the purchase and consumption of goods. She further claims that interior design decisions are often made in line with, or through the rejection of, design cues that are seen as fashionable by one’s social environment and illustrated in advertisements, and sometimes takes the role of an aspiration. Clarke (2001) further describes a forum for inspiration that has appeared in Western Europe and the USA from the 1990’s and onwards; the home-improvement media, including magazines and television programmes. Just as Garvey (2001), she explains how these have transformed the home into a place of aspirations as they emphasize a fantasy element of decorating the home and garden, which further are implied to need frequent “makeovers” in order to be in line with fashion. The inspiration for home interior designs is moreover claimed to derive from media rather than from the neighbours and simple imitations of these.

Following this reasoning, decision making regarding the choice of publicly displayed goods involves an element of risk. Correspondingly, Solomon, Bamossy, Askagaard, and Hogg (2006) explain how there is a belief among consumers that major purchase decisions involving greater amounts of information search comes with a certain amount of perceived risk. The perceived risk of negative consequences is divided into five different kinds, of which social risk is one. Solomon *et al* (2006) point out that purchases that often are affected by social risk generally are visible or symbolic items, such as objects for the home and the outdoor space. One’s social risk capital consists mainly of self-confidence and self esteem, and consumers with a lower level of such risk capital are thus more likely to be negatively affected by the perceived risks related to the item to be decided upon. Solomon *et al* (2006) further explain how a perceived social risk also can appear when a consumer’s product choice easily can be observed by others as there is a risk of embarrassing oneself if choosing the

wrong item. The perceived social risk as well as how goods can be seen as symbols are factors that may influence the decision making when it comes to publicly displayed items such as those located on the outdoor space.

2.1.2. Cultural Factors

Armstrong and Kotler (2005) explain that culture is not something one learns as a child; rather the parents' basic values, wants, perceptions and behaviour are copied. Culture exists everywhere in society and is explained to have the possibility to strongly influence consumers' decisions about what to purchase. Members of social classes, in terms of a combination of income, occupation, wealth, and education for instance, are accordingly explained to share the same behaviour, interests and values. The members of a certain social class furthermore tend to have resembling buying behaviour in many areas (Armstrong and Kotler, 2005). Bordieu (1979) in Corrigan (1997) similarly argues for another type of capital than economic capital - cultural capital - which results from the time one has been studying and from how elite the university is considered to be. The higher cultural capital one possesses, the more educated he or she gets in how to consume the right things. Arnould and Thompson (2005) correspondingly illustrate how institutional and social structures, such as class, community, ethnicity and gender as well as mobility goals and level of cultural capital continuously influence consumption decisions and behaviours, and portray consumers as enactors of social roles and positions.

McCracken (1986) similarly studied the relationship between culture and consumption and describes how cultural meanings can be found, and move between, three different places; between the world and the good and from the good to the individual. Culture is explained to divide the world into different categories where the most important ones are different classes, status, occupation and age. Goods have the ability to express a cultural category and make it more visible for others. As individuals are what they claim to be, marketers sometimes manage to create new market segments by creating new categories of persons, such as "yuppies" and "teenagers" (McCracken, 1986). In this sense culture, in terms of social class and cultural capital, has the possibility to influence consumers' decisions about what to purchase or consume.

Armstrong and Kotler (2005) in a similar manner discuss a typology termed VALS, where VALS stands for Values and Lifestyle. The model divides consumers into two dimensions, focusing primarily on motivation and level of resources. The main motivators when it comes to consumer behaviour are explained to be to express the self, to signal achievement towards peers, and to indicate main beliefs, knowledge and ideals. The second dimension, resources, categorizes consumers into groups with high or low levels of resources such as level of education, income, self-confidence, and health. People with low levels of resources are described to rather struggle to meet their basic needs than to fulfil their desires and are thus not driven by motivations to any larger extent (Armstrong and Kotler, 2005). Following this

reasoning, decisions about purchases and consumption are influenced by level of resources and type of motivation.

2.1.3. Social Factors

The social factors that by Armstrong and Kotler (2005) are explained to influence consumer behaviour are related to one's status and social role within smaller groups and the family. Individuals are often part of many different groups, such as clubs and organizations, where they hold different positions in terms of status and role. Several different types of social groups are presented by Armstrong and Kotler (2005) such as aspirational groups, membership groups, and reference groups. A reference group is explained to have the ability to form consumers' behaviours and attitudes, and to work as a source of inspiration and influence for non-members. Moreover, a group has the power to affect consumers' attitudes and decisions regarding choices of products and brands. This influence increases when the products are of such nature that they are visible to others according to Armstrong and Kotler (2005). Ledgerwood, Liviatan, and Carnevale (2005) further state that people relate to these group identities in the same way as they relate to the personal identity, meaning that group members strive to hold on to the qualities the group possesses. Members of a group may thus desire to communicate the group identity through symbols that are recognized socially in a similar way as to how individuals use symbols to communicate their own identities. Ledgerwood *et al* (2005) further emphasize how group identity can be a major source of an individual's self-esteem and furthermore act as a personal goal. This implies that consumers' decisions about purchases and consumption, especially for publicly displayed goods, are likely to often be influenced by group aspects.

Fitzmaurice and Comegy (2006) further argue that the tendency to consume in a social manner is closely related to materialism, as materialists are described to be very receptive to the social suitability and communicative ability of products and brands. The decision to purchase goods is thus based, among other things, on the ability to symbolize membership, or desired membership, in social groups and is hence closely related to the concept of status consumption which will be discussed more thoroughly in section 2.2. This type of consumers tends to be more informed about social meanings in products and brands depending on their level of social consumption motivation. Materialistic consumers have furthermore been found to judge people by their possessions and to view the purchase of goods as a central life goal, and also to view themselves as social influencers in the marketplace who spend more time and money on shopping than others. If these suggestions are correct, it is likely that the decisions to purchase certain items are influenced by their social suitability and communicative abilities.

2.2. Status Related Influences on Consumption

Demonstrating status has been described as a major function of goods and status consumption is often closely related to the aspects of social consumption presented above. Eastman,

Goldsmith and Reinecke Flynn (1999), for instance, explain that the desire for status motivates much of consumers' behaviour and the purchase, display and consumption of goods and services are frequently described as a means of gaining social status. O'Cass and McEwen (2004) similarly portray conspicuous consumption as an important dimension in social status in terms of the communication of messages originating from the desire to fit in, enhance the ego, or to display wealth. Following this reasoning, we consider status influences on decisions about what to purchase and to consume to be interesting to examine when it comes to publicly displayed goods such as those located on the outdoor space.

2.2.1. The Evolution of Status Consumption

Eastman *et al* (1999) explain how researchers often relate the desire for social status to hierarchical social structures originating from the level of income and type of profession, expressed as 'social class'. Already in 1904, Simmel established his 'trickle-down theory' concerning how lower social classes imitate the upper classes. Fashion thus 'trickles down' the social hierarchy (Corrigan, 1997). Imitation of higher social classes has also been stressed by Veblen, who has been described as the founding father of the field of 'person-object' relations (McCracken, 1986). Veblen (1899) in Corrigan (1997) argues that wealth is the basis of social prestige and status, and that there are two main ways in which people can demonstrate their high status level: conspicuous leisure and conspicuous consumption. While conspicuous leisure involves demonstrating that one does not have to work, conspicuous consumption is more common in the modern society where most people have to work for a living. The upper classes consequently spend money on goods in order to indicate their wealth to other members of the society, while the lower classes are explained to consume only for imitational purposes. According to Veblen, individuals imitate the consumption patterns of others who are situated higher in the hierarchy as they are the ones who set the standards (Corrigan, 1997; Trigg, 2001). Conspicuous consumption is, as argued by Veblen, the most important factor in determining consumer behaviour, not only for the wealthy but for all social classes, and the search for status through consumption never ends due to the ease in imitation (Trigg, 2001). These aspects of consumption are, correspondingly, interesting to examine from a decision making perspective.

Eastman *et al* (1999) claim, however, that even though these hierarchical structures are significant for establishing one's social status and the group that one makes comparisons with as well as related status symbols, there is another, more modern, perspective on consumers' motivations and desire for status. They argue that consumers' decisions to purchase and consume goods due to the provision of status are not only related to income or social class level, anyone can have these tendencies. Viewing status consumption as a practice employed only by the wealthy and by those belonging to higher social classes is therefore argued to be incorrect, and consumers are suggested to vary in their status consumption tendencies independently of social class level. Packard (1959) has a similar view on status consumption and argues that most people surround themselves, intentionally or unintentionally, with status symbols that they hope will influence others' judgements and to help establish some distance

from those considered to be further down in the status hierarchy. Ulver-Sneistrup (2008: 1) furthermore explains how status consumption no longer is “*just an orgy in ostentatious extravaganza as argued by Veblen’s conspicuous leisure class, but is perhaps more often cleverly camouflaged by complex style expressions, language and practices*”. Following this reasoning, a more modern view on status consumption should be taken into consideration.

2.2.2. Contrasting Status- and Conspicuous Consumption

Status consumption and conspicuous consumption are often discussed intertwiningly. Eastman *et al* (1999: 42), for instance, define status consumption as:

“[...] the motivational process by which individuals strive to improve their social standing through the conspicuous consumption of consumer products that confer and symbolize status both for the individual and surrounding significant others”.

They propose that status consumption entails an interest in consuming for status purposes, which involves a desire for status and conspicuous consumption of status imbedded products. This implies a rather connected view on status- and conspicuous consumption but the authors do, however, distinguish between the two concepts. While conspicuous consumption is described to involve the purchase of expensive products in order to boost one’s ego, a desire for status is explained to involve purchasing something that symbolizes status to both the individual and towards others. Consumption of status products may thus help people to obtain both self-confidence and social approval. A rather linear view on status consumption is furthermore presented; it is implied that the more a consumer seeks status, the more he or she will consume products that increase his or her status (Eastman *et al*, 1999).

O’Cass and McEwen (2004) draw an even wider distinction between the two concepts when arguing that status consumption, in terms of purchasing and consuming status possessions, does not have to be conspicuous. While status consumption concerns the tendency to desire status, and purchase and consume products that provide status to the individual and to improve the ego, conspicuous consumption concerns enhancing one’s image through the explicit consumption of goods in order to *communicate* status to others. O’Cass and McEwen (2004) stresses that not all status consumers desire to conspicuously show off their goods in order to improve their social standing, but rather use status-imbedded products to fit into different situations and to feel good about themselves. Different conspicuous consumption tendencies thus involve different consumer behaviours and motives. Status consumption does, however, affect the likelihood of conspicuous consumption, and the desire to identify with or to enhance one’s image towards others is closely related to both status consumption and conspicuous consumption.

Men are furthermore by O’Cass and McEwen (2004) described to be more likely to consume conspicuously than women. Correspondingly, Corrigan (1997) presents a study concerning the meanings of furniture, conducted by Csikszentmihayli and Rochberg-Halton (1981),

which found that for men, personal accomplishments tended to be the primary meanings of furniture while for women, memories of times past were the key associations. O’Cass and McEwen (2004) stresses, however, that they have not found any gender differences in the status consumption tendencies. The influences of both status and conspicuous consumption tendencies are in our opinion interesting to examine when it comes to decision making regarding what items to display in the outdoor area.

2.2.3. Status Seekers versus Non-Status Seekers

Consumers are by Eastman *et al* (1999) described to vary in the extent to which they try to obtain prestige through the consumption of status products. Clark, Zboja and Goldsmith (2007) have a similar view, and contrasts status consumption with role-relaxed consumption, based on the degree to which consumption is an individual or a social process for the consumer. They explain that status-seeking consumers have been found to tend to conform to group norms, even though they still maintain a certain need for individuality. Status-seekers have also been found to be more vulnerable to influences from the social environment. The motivation for status consumers lies in improving their social standing in their reference groups through purchasing prestige products that indicate status to themselves as well as to other members of their desired social group. Role-relaxed consumers on the contrary are usually unlikely to adapt to group standards or to be influenced by others, and pay little attention to social comparisons (Clark *et al*, 2007). Similar findings have been made by O’Cass and McEwen (2004), who claim that status-conscious consumers have shown to be more socially aware and interested in social relationships. Moreover, they suggest that status consumers commonly define themselves and others in terms of their possessions, serving as key symbols for personalities and interests. A common tool to enhance one’s status through the home, described by Packard (1959), is to add casual but obviously expensive “touches” to the interior.

Amaldoss and Jain (2005) correspondingly explain how consumers’ purchase decisions vary depending on their desire for exclusivity or conformity but have, however, an opposite view on the two concepts. They divided consumers into two groups; snobs and followers, and studied how the demand is affected by price and mixture changes among these clusters. The results showed that if the market would consist of either only “snobs” or only “followers”, the demand would not increase if the price was raised. In a market including both snobs and followers, however, the snobs would make more purchases as the price increases. This indicates that certain consumers will purchase conspicuous products to a larger extent if the price increases, independently of quality differences. Those striving for individuality are, however, the status consumers and not the non-status seekers.

Ulver-Sneistrup (2008) correspondingly describes how Swedes and Americans tend to emphasize individuality through breaking with the mass market and with the influences of media as these remove the perceived authenticity. In this sense, authenticity and turning away from the mass market indicates status. In her study of consumption within the home, the

participants were simplistic and disgusted by lavish and “vulgar” styles. Simplicity is consequently described as corresponding with status. Status was moreover established through the judgements of others’ tastes, and the expressions of disliking or fondness are thus explained to be camouflaged status claims. Ulver-Sneistrup (2008) further explains how the movement between status positions affect the way consumers consume home aesthetics and their view on individuality and conformity. When moving upwards in the status hierarchy, the home is described to work as a “rehearsal stage” and the design of the home thus follows guidelines decided by high status authorities, such as certain brands and media. In this sense, keeping up to date with fashion in home furnishings seems to be more important to status climbers than to those who are more confident in their status rankings, who in turn emphasize authenticity and individuality.

We find these aspects of individuality, authenticity and simplicity to be interesting to investigate in terms of whether they characterize furnishing decisions made by status consumers.

2.3. Identity Influences on Consumption

Possessions have by several researchers been described to reflect one’s personality. Hecht (2001: 123) states, for instance, that the furniture and decorations within a house:

“[...] are more than mere ‘things’; they are a collection of appropriated materials, invested with meaning and memory, a material testament of who we are, where we have been, and perhaps where we are heading”.

Moreover, Prentice (1987) demonstrates a clear correspondence between the choice of possessions and individuals’ attitudes and values. She stresses the fact that individuals not only use, look at and think about their possessions but also behave with them which indicates the importance of carefully selected items in our everyday life; possessions that reflects our selves and personalities. Below, we introduce theories regarding factors that may influence individuals’ perceptions of their personal identities, and also how these identity aspects may influence decisions about what to acquire or to consume.

2.3.1. Components of the Self

Solomon *et al* (2006) describe the self-concept as a very complex construct and emphasize how consumers look upon and relate to themselves in very diverse ways. Some individuals’ self-assessments are, however, more realistic than others. While the actual self refers to the realistic judgement of oneself and who a person is, the ideal self demonstrates what an individual desires to be. According to Solomon *et al* (2006), the gap between the ideal and actual self varies from person to person. McCracken (1988) in Corrigan (1997) explains how individuals can construct a “bridge” between the actual and ideal self by obtaining an item

associated with the desired self or lifestyle. The acquisition of objects and possessions consequently becomes a way of compensating for what is missing in the real world, and the desired lifestyle can thus become part of the actual lifestyle through this one object.

Solomon *et al* (2006) further describe how persons who experience a large disparity between their actual and ideal selves are likely to be targets for greater fantasy or daydream ideas of how objects will contribute to their selves. The fantasy about a certain object thus bridges the gap between the ideal and actual self. Functional products are moreover explained to be more related to the actual self while highly expressive social products to a greater extent are related to an image of the ideal self. Wicklund and Gollwitzer (1982) in Solomon *et al* (2006) discuss a similar theory; the symbolic self-completion theory. They explain how persons with an incomplete self-definition often decide to acquire and display items symbolizing their desired identity and thus hoping to complete it. This is an interesting aspect concerning how people wish to express themselves through their possessions. Clarke (2001) further made an interesting finding related to the home, as she discovered that even those with sufficient economic and cultural capital for accomplishing their 'ideal' homes may be affected by a gap between the ideal and the real. Moreover, for the middle-class, the ideal home does not only concern a certain style, design or social aspirations, but is also related to an idea of living quality and sociability.

Arnould and Thompson (2005) in a similar manner describe how consumers have been explained to use marketed products in order to create senses of self and further stress that the marketplace has become a source of symbolic and representative resources where people can seek and create descriptions of their identities. Likewise, researchers within Consumer Culture Theory argue that the market produces certain types of consumer positions that consumers can select between, and the consumers are thus following cultural scripts created by the market (Arnould and Thompson, 2005).

According to these theories on how individuals strive to achieve their ideal lifestyles, consumer decision making seems to greatly be influenced by desires. The decisions about what to acquire are thus based on what items that will take a person closer to an ideal way of life and to provide the best description of his or her identity.

2.3.2. The Identification with Possessions

According to Belk (1988), the identification with possessions has shown to begin rather early in life as children learn to differentiate themselves from the environment and others who might envy their possessions. This continues through the whole life as people try to express themselves through their possessions. In his famous article *Possessions and the Extended Self*, Belk (1988) discusses the relationship between possessions and the sense of self and stresses that understanding the notion of possessions as an extended self can improve the understanding of consumer behaviour. He further argues that our possessions are key contributors to, and reflections of, our identities. Beaglehole (1932) in Solomon *et al* (2006)

similarly explains how some objects in our lives are especially important in defining our identities and social roles. As consumers, we consider these objects as almost being incorporated into our identity, thus comprising our extended self. Belk (1988) further accounts for four different levels of extended self ranging from personal objects on an individual level to public objects and places in larger social environments on a group level. In between these two extremes, there are objects on a family level and a community level.

If an object can be seen as an extension of the self, it seems reasonable to assume that some degree of resemblance between a person and his or her possessions can be noticed. According to Solomon *et al* (2006), there are often matching attributes between consumers' self images and their choices of goods to consume; consumers thus reveal a clear consistency between their own values and the products they decide to acquire. Grubb and Hupp (1986) similarly present an idea of correspondence between products, product usage and self image. As an example, they describe how the self image of car owners usually is equivalent with the characteristics of the car. Clothing, housing and automobiles are moreover all examples of items that have the ability to become a "second skin" according to Solomon and Jager in Belk (1988). Prentice (1987) furthermore found that while individuals with mainly self-expressive possessions are more likely to be drawn to symbolic appeals and values, people with primarily functional possessions favoured appeals and values of a more functional kind. Self-expressive and functional characteristics of possessions in this sense clearly correspond with the attitudes and values of individuals.

The home is by Corrigan (1997) described as a site where many external values show through, for instance, the design of furniture. In a study of Australian houseware magazines from 1996, he correspondingly found that these appear to stress how the home is an expression of one's self. Belk (1988) equally stresses how displayed objects such as household furnishings might become a part of ourselves due to the fact that we give them our care and attention and as they share memories and experiences with us. Tian and Belk (2005) further describe how revealing the extended self is connected with vulnerability, which in turn is related to family. Likewise, Belk (1988) states that the home is the main consumption object that a family uses to define its family-self, and implies that the house is a symbolic body for the family. While clothing can be used to change the perception of the individual's body, furniture and decorations can change the appearance of the family's body.

Woodward (2001) correspondingly emphasizes how the home, through its objects, has been described to play an important role in maintaining self-identity, self-esteem, and family relations. Some spaces in the home are furthermore explained to function like passages between the home and the outside world and the expression of identity thus becomes vital in such transitional settings. An example of such a transitional space is the living room since it often is the setting that visitors experience (Woodward, 2001). How possessions such as those located in the home can be seen to represent a person's self and identity is according to us an interesting aspect to consider when studying influences on decision making regarding what items to place on the outdoor space.

2.3.3. Public and Private Self-Consciousness

According to Solomon *et al* (2006), individuals often build an image of themselves based on other persons' perspectives by taking in and interpreting signals and impressions from others. This process is known as "the looking glass self", and depending on whose view that is taken into consideration, the looking glass image varies. In this sense, interaction with other people plays an important role in forming the self. Individuals thus adapt their behaviour to the perceived expectations of others in something that can be identified as a self-fulfilling prophecy. Clarke (2001) similarly found how individuals often are very concerned with how their homes should look as persons tend to judge their homes after their ideals. The ideal home becomes an internalized image of what other persons might think of one and this influences the creation of the actual home. The home thus envisions the image the owner has of him- or herself in the eyes of others and becomes something to live up and give time to, to show off and to work on.

The extent to which individuals are aware of the image of themselves that is communicated to others differs significantly. A greater concern about appearance and public image further causes deeper concerns about what items that are purchased and displayed as well as their social appropriateness (Solomon *et al*, 2006). Two examples of measures to determine this tendency are public self-consciousness and self-monitoring in terms of how an individual evaluates him- or herself. In Solomon *et al* (2006), Holbrook, Solomon and Bell (1990) state that individuals situated high on the self-monitor scale are more influenced by estimates of what others would say about products they acquire and consume when choosing products. The impressions that possessions make on others is a crucial matter for high self-monitors. The influences of these premises consequently become vital to reflect on when considering decision making related to the outdoor space.

There are several different arguments of whether the private self-consciousness and the public self-consciousness show different motivational and behavioural outcomes. Fenigsten (1987), for instance, questions the validity of the distinction between the private and public self-consciousness, and whether the private self really can be truly private. He further stresses that several aspects of the self are involved in both the private self and the public, social self. Nevertheless, Fenigsten (1987) points out how individuals differ in their desire to display their selves in a similar manner as Solomon *et al* (2006) and Holbrook, Solomon and Bell (1990). Fenigsten (1987) states that while persons with a self-aware nature tend to be more focused on the private facets of the self, other individuals may be more concerned with the public self, including characteristics such as recognition or appreciation from others.

Following the reasoning above, individuals' ideas about their personalities as well as their thoughts about others' perceptions of their identities seem to have the ability to influence their decision making behaviour. The extent of this influence depends, however, on a persons concern about others' opinions.

3. Methodology

In this chapter, we describe the nature of the thesis and how we collected and interpreted the data needed to conduct the study. Moreover, we discuss some methodological problems related to this type of research and how these were approached.

3.1. The Nature of the Study

It was important for us to early in our work with the thesis discuss what kind of study we wanted to conduct. As we wanted to include a more dynamic view on decision making regarding the outdoor space, we all agreed on conducting a qualitative study, centring on consumers' reflections regarding goods related to the outdoor space. This choice was later used to guide our decisions on how to collect the data needed.

3.1.1. Ontology and Epistemology

Even though pre-determined assumptions are difficult to avoid, our initial ambition was not to have any concrete hypotheses about consumers' decision making behaviour regarding outdoor living products. The results of our study thus depend entirely on the participants' experiences and feelings around the subject. Following this reasoning, our ontological view can be explained to be social constructionist as it views reality as being socially constructed and determined by people, rather than by objective and external factors (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe and Jackson, 2008).

The aim in constructionist research is to increase the general understanding of a situation, and it is furthermore a suitable research design when investigating underlying meanings, as argued by Easterby-Smith *et al* (2008). Another strength of social constructionist research is explained to be that it is flexible and good for generating theory. This corresponds well with our study as we examine the underlying social and cultural factors which may influence consumers' decision making behaviour regarding items located on the outdoor space, and since our aim is to increase the understanding of the area. Moreover, constructionism focuses on how people interpret the world and on how they are thinking and feeling (Easterby-Smith *et al*, 2008). Correspondingly, our epistemological orientation is interpretivism which stresses the understanding of something through an examination of the interpretations of the studied participants (Bryman and Bell, 2007). As explained above, the results of the study depend on

the participants' reasoning around the outdoor space when it comes to cultural and social aspects of decision making.

3.1.2. A Qualitative Study

Following the reasoning above, the thesis is qualitative in its nature. What characterizes qualitative studies, according to Bryman and Bell (2007), is the emphasis on words rather than numbers in the collection and analysis of data. This is also something that illustrates our study, as numbers are not of interest when investigating social and cultural aspects related to decision making. Moreover, just as us, qualitative researchers are interested in viewing the examined topic from the perspective of the people being studied. A detailed description of the investigated settings is thus important in qualitative studies because of their significance for the participants, and as it is important to get to know the context within which people's activities takes place (Bryman and Bell, 2007). Understanding the context of the participants was very important to us, as the purpose of the study is to understand consumers' decision making behaviour when it comes to the outdoor space. We thus needed to study the participants' personalities, styles, and the environments they live in. The empirical material was therefore collected in the participants' homes, which will be described in detail below.

An inductive approach, starting out with empirical investigations leading to the development of theory is usually emphasised in qualitative research according to Bryman and Bell (2007). We selected, however, an iterative approach as we considered it to suit our study better. In iterative studies, theorizing, empirical data collection and interpretation take place iteratively and are thus mixed. Nevertheless, the thesis has an inductive aspect as the results emphasize the generation of, rather than testing of, theory (Bryman and Bell, 2007).

3.2. Data Collection

We were aware of the fact that our own subjective thoughts about consumers' decision making behaviour concerning outdoor items might become a problem during the data collection. As recommended by Johnson and Jehn (2009), we thus employed triangulation in order to provide more objective and valid results. In triangulation, more than one method to collect data is utilized in the study. This is beneficial when a study is conducted within a limited amount of time, as using mixed methods can help establishing a more complete and valid picture. The triangulation thus helps to confirm existing findings (Johnson and Jehn, 2009). Hence, we decided to collect the empirical material through both qualitative interviews and observations, and have also used secondary data provided by IKEA. A factor that both made it easier and more difficult for us during the data collection was the season, since the study was conducted in April; easier as the topic was very relevant and more difficult as most of the participants had not yet furnished their outdoor spaces.

3.2.1. Participants

Constructionist research entails gathering rich data from a small number of cases chosen for specific reasons rather than from many cases selected randomly, as argued by Easterby-Smith *et al* (2008) and Kvale (2007). For this subject, we found consumers situated in more urban areas to be most interesting to study as their outdoor spaces are visible to a greater extent than those located in rural areas. This is an important aspect when investigating social and cultural influences to decision making. All of the participants in the study have an outdoor space, in which we include terraces, gardens and balconies. We have selected consumers living in Malmö, Lund and Stockholm as we are familiar with these cities. This follows the recommendation of Bryman and Bell (2007) about how the researcher should be familiar with the setting in which the study takes place in order to understand what the interviewee is saying in his or her own terms. McCracken (1988) argues, however, that conducting a study within a well-known cultural environment can cause “cultural blindness” and a lack of critical distance to the studied subject. Since one of us is not familiar with Malmö, and two of us not very familiar with Stockholm, we still claim that a certain distance was achieved.

Moreover, we limited the study to consumers within the age group 20-40 as we considered this to be an interesting cluster to study on the subject of social and cultural aspects influencing decision making. Ten participants were included in the study since we found this number to be sufficient in order to obtain well-founded results and not too large for us to analyse more thoroughly as discussed by Kvale (2007). The sampling was strategic in the sense that we selected participants that we believed would take an interest in decorating, and talking about their decisions regarding, their outdoor spaces. We also employed a method termed snowball sampling, as we let the respondents recommend other persons that they thought would be of interest for our study (Bryman and Bell, 2007). We are conscious of the fact that our findings only can be generalized to this specific population, as described by Bryman and Bell (2007), but still consider a strategic approach to sampling to best suited for this particular study. Moreover, an aspect that needs to be considered is that all of the respondents are well-educated and can be seen as belonging to the upper middle-class. A detailed description of the participants can be found in Appendix 1.

3.2.2. Qualitative Interviews

The interviews conducted were qualitative, correspondingly with the nature of the study. Bryman and Bell (2007) describe how qualitative researchers often prefer a loosely structured and flexible approach to the collection of data, and thus less structured approaches to interviewing. We found a semi-structured approach to be most appropriate for our study as we considered it to be most probable to provide us with the information we need, while still having the advantage of being flexible. Along with the guidelines provided by Bryman and Bell (2007), we prepared a list of questions on the topics that we wanted to cover, while still making sure that the interviewees would feel free in how to reply as we wanted to get to

know the respondents. Moreover, the intention was not for the list of questions to be followed meticulously and many attendant questions were asked. However, all the questions were, as recommended, posed in similar ways in order to make the pre-requisites for our interpretations as equal as possible for all of the participants, even though they were not asked in the same order. We were careful not to ask very specific or leading questions, and thus asked about the social and cultural aspects of decision making in rather implicit ways. The reason for this was that we wanted to understand the consumers in their own terms, and not let our own assumptions affect their answers. The interview questions can be found in Appendix 3.

The interviews were conducted in the participants' homes. In this way, we got direct experience of what their outdoor spaces looked like, and we also believe that it made it easier for the respondents to talk about the subject as it became more tangible. All three of us were present during the interviews in order to capture everyone's perspectives and interpretations of what was being said. Miller (2001) states that as the home is such a private sphere, investigations of people's relationship to the home needs to take place within this sphere in order to understand the respondents correctly, even though it might be perceived as intrusive. We did not, however, get the feeling that the respondents perceived our visits as disturbing, rather they seemed to enjoy helping us with our study.

Easterby-Smith *et al* (2008) further explain how interviewees sometimes try to satisfy the interviewer by answering in ways that he or she believes that the interviewer wants them to answer, or give fake answers. With all of us being present, we believe that we were able to capture these tendencies. Moreover, we did not inform the respondents about the purpose of the thesis until after the interviews as we did not want it to influence their answers. The interviews were tape recorded as recommended by Bryman and Bell (2007), who state that it is important for a detailed analysis and to ensure that the interviewees' answers are captured in their own terms. Tape recording the interviews furthermore aided the listening process since we were not distracted by taking notes, and gave us the opportunity to transcribe them, as discussed by Easterby-Smith *et al* (2008).

The question of how one, as a researcher, gets people to talk about the taken for granted, showed to be a relevant matter for us as most of the participants in our survey had not reflected on their decision making behaviour regarding their outdoor spaces to any larger extent. According to Harper (2002), this is an issue that photo elicitation as an interview technique, involving the integration of photographs into the interview, can discard. To facilitate for the respondents to talk about the taken for granted, we therefore showed them photographs of different outdoor spaces of various characters (e.g. cosy, exclusive, functional, personal). This method also improved the communication between us as researchers and the respondents and thus gave more depth to our word-based interview as discussed by Harper (2002).

Our intention was to select pictures representing different styles and designs in order for the respondents to reflect on what they found best corresponded with their own personal styles.

The interviewees got the opportunity to comment on the different types of outdoor spaces and explain which one that was most, and least, preferred. Six photographs of gardens and terraces as well as six photographs of balconies were chosen and can be found in Appendix 4. These were all printed in colour and selected from the Google picture database by using search words such as: garden, outdoor space, balcony, cosy garden, luxurious balcony, and cosy balcony. Using photographs in interviews is by Easterby-Smith *et al* (2008) further explained to be a good method when the investigated subject can be seen as problematic and difficult to grasp; images enables complex matters to be better understood. Bryman and Bell (2007) further suggests that photographs can help overcoming interviewees' discomfort in being interviewed and encourage them to discuss issues in more detail. The pictures that we showed turned out to be a positive feature as the participants opened up more and gave us better insights in what they liked and disliked.

As many of the participants not yet had furnished their outdoor spaces due to the season, we also asked them about other things than their own outdoor spaces, such as others' outdoor spaces and desired or undesired outdoor items. Campbell (1995) proposes a further problem, specifically related to status consumption; he suggests that most consumers would probably not admit that their decisions to purchase and consume goods are influenced by status purposes. This is a problem that became very relevant to us, as the influence of social and cultural factors on decision making are sensitive subjects to discuss. We cannot tell for sure that the respondents were dishonest when leaving out status, for instance, as influencing their decisions regarding the selection of outdoor furniture, but certainly got the feeling that this was something that the participants were reluctant to discuss.

3.2.3. Observations

The observations were conducted in connection to the interviews, as these took place in the participants' homes. The intention for the observations was to provide confirmation of our interpretations of the answers provided in the interviews, and to make it easier for us to understand what the participants were saying. Kvale (2007) correspondingly states that if a study seeks to explain people's behaviour and their interaction with their environment, observations usually provide more valid knowledge than simply to ask the participants of a study about their behaviour. We chose to take the roles of observers as participants, as described by Bryman and Bell (2007), meaning that our main roles were interviewers. This approach was suitable for us as our study of outdoor spaces did not include any form of activity to engage in. Besides observing the outdoor spaces belonging to the participants, we also observed those in the nearby area in order to examine whether these showed any similarities. Moreover, we also compared whether the outdoor spaces matched the interior settings of the homes in order to investigate whether there seemed to be a difference in their decision making behaviours when it comes to indoor furniture. In this way, we also got a deeper understanding of the participants' approaches to decision making regarding publicly displayed items.

In relation to the observations, we took several photographs of the outdoor spaces and the participants' interior settings of their homes as well as of the neighbours' outdoor spaces with the purpose of using these when analysing the empirical material. Bryman and Bell (2007) similarly suggest that photographs can be used to observe and record reality, and should be used as a complement to interviews for instance. These images were very helpful for us during the analysis as it is easy to forget important details. Some of these photographs can be found in Appendix 2 in order to give the reader a better insight in what the participants' homes and outdoor spaces looked like.

3.2.4. Secondary Data

We have had the benefit of taking part of a survey conducted by the Swedish furniture giant IKEA in the end of 2009 and the beginning of 2010 on 22 616 persons from ten countries. The purpose was for IKEA to explore their core consumers' habits regarding their outdoor spaces. Apart from providing us with inspiring information, the results of the study that concerns the Swedish customers will be referred to in chapter 4. IKEA was moreover the initiators of the area of the thesis. They are not currently selling outdoor furniture to any larger extent, but are planning to initiate a larger outdoor living section within a few years. Thus, IKEA is the primary target group for the thesis, but the results will also be of interest for other companies selling and marketing outdoor furniture and accessories related to the area.

3.3. Methodological Problems

Bryman and Bell (2007) describe how constructive researchers always present a specific version of reality, rather than one that can be regarded as definitive. Qualitative research has moreover been criticized to be too subjective and difficult to replicate, and there are also problems of generalization. Even though our study probably will be difficult to replicate, we strive to ensure validity and reliability in our results through the methods described below.

3.3.1. Validity

Validity concerns the issue of whether the observations match the developed theory and whether the results of the study can be generalized to other settings, and is by Bryman and Bell (2007) argued to be hard to reach with qualitative research methods. Moisander, Valtonen and Hirsto (2009) have a similar view on consumer research with an interpretivist approach, using open-ended and in-depth qualitative interviews. They claim that it may be a useful research design for studying consumer experience from a rather individualistic perspective, but do not ensure any valid deeper understandings. We are aware of the fact that our results are based entirely on the participants' views on decision making regarding the appearance of their outdoor spaces, and may not represent the entire Swedish population. As

discussed by Easterby-Smith *et al* (2008), however, the aim of qualitative research is not to present an objective and true view of something, but rather to capture the participants' subjective understandings of a topic. In order to achieve higher validity in constructionist research then, Easterby-Smith *et al* (2008) suggest that the results should be reached through transparent methods. Cho and Trent (2006) similarly propose a process-oriented view of validity, and argue that the research process should be clear and easy to follow by the reader. We have therefore been careful to openly describe how the participants in our study were selected and how the data was collected and interpreted.

Cho and Trent (2006) further explain that in qualitative research, and especially in personal essays, the researchers' subjectivity is central which requires continuous self-assessment. Easterby-Smith *et al* (2008) similarly suggest that when collecting data, researchers need to think about their roles and the way they affect the research process. As the aim of in-depth interviews is to uncover the meanings and interpretations that people attach to certain topics, they thus involve some degree of subjectivity. Hence, interviewers risk imposing their own reference frames on the interviewees, both during interviewing and during the interpretation of the answers, as argued by Easterby-Smith *et al* (2008). Schwartz and Schwartz (1955) similarly describe how bias can cause distortion and misinterpretation in observations, and must be explored in order to increase the validity. Therefore, questions such as whether the researchers' unconscious motivation affects the way events are interpreted, and whether they see what they want to see in the data have to be reflected upon. Moreover, the observers might influence the activities and settings examined simply by being there (Schwartz and Schwartz, 1955).

Being reflective about our own views and assumptions was important to us during the interviews and observations in order to avoid bias. Since we employed an iterative approach to theorizing, empirical data collection and interpretation, and thus studied existing theories and literature within the area in parallel with conducting the interviews, we realized that this might colour our interpretations. As we were aware of this, we do, however, believe that we were able to assess ourselves and not get carried away by our initial assumptions. Nevertheless, being reflexive and aware of how various aspects of our identities affected the research process was of great importance throughout the study. Moreover, it seems reasonable to assume that the participants might have cleaned up their homes and outdoor spaces before our visits but we do not consider it to significantly affect the results of our study. Interpreting the participants correctly was, however, of great importance to us, and we thus gave them the opportunity to examine and comment on our impressions from the interviews. This is termed respondent validation, and is recommended by Bryman and Bell (2007).

3.3.2. Reliability

External reliability concerns the degree to which a study can be replicated, and is a difficult criterion to meet in qualitative research since it is impossible to 'freeze' a social setting and

the circumstances of an initial study to make it replicable, as explained by Bryman and Bell (2007). Correspondingly, our purpose was not for the study to be easy to copy. An important aspect to consider is that some of the concepts discussed in this thesis might have different meanings in different countries. As shown by Wallendorf and Arnould (1988), the concept of status, for instance, differs between cultures. In their study, conducted in the USA and Niger with the purpose to explore the meanings of favourite objects, they found that while the concept of status in the USA was measured through what one has, the expression of wealth was in Niger affected by cultural traditions. This is something to keep in mind as the theories presented in our study focuses on Western traditions.

Internal reliability in turn, is of interest when several researchers are involved in a study and concerns whether or not these agree on what is seen and heard, and whether there is consistency in their decisions and interpretations (Bryman and Bell, 2007). As all three of us were present during the interviews and observations, we were all exposed to the same information which was something we considered to be important in order to get a broad and integrated perspective. The data and impressions collected as well as the transcribed interviews were then discussed together in order to eliminate possible misinterpretations.

3.3.3. Interpreting the Empirical Material

As previously mentioned, consumers are generally unwilling to admit that their decisions to purchase and consume goods are influenced by status aspects (Campbell, 1995). Another problem that we discussed previously was the season as many of the interviewees had not yet spent time to decorate and furnish their balconies, terraces and gardens. This was something that we had to take into consideration and thus collected several different forms of data for the interviewed participants in order to gather a comprehensive and accurate picture of each individual as recommended by Bryman and Bell (2007). Through recording the interviews, taking photographs of the participants' homes as well as making observations of how the participants behaved and interacted in their homes, we believe that we were able to obtain a truthful understanding of each individual. Moreover, through investigating and documenting both the interior setting as well as the outdoor space of their homes, we were also able to provide a more thorough picture of the participants' personal preferences when it comes to decisions regarding furniture and decorations in their outdoor spaces. Accordingly, we could in this way take in and understand the personality of each participant and thus illustrate the full context of each interview session to the reader. The recordings of the interviews as well as photographic documentation have allowed us to distinguish valuable nuances in the statements made by the participants. This kind of data has been crucial for understanding underlying social and cultural aspects regarding decision making concerning items located on the outdoor space.

Kvale and Brinkman (2009) further present a problem connected to the interpretation of conversational analysis. They claim that several issues regarding reliability and validity are raised due to possible misinterpretations and different meanings of transferring the spoken

word into written form. By making sure that all of us attended the interviews conducted, always taking double recordings as a back-up, and by transcribing each interview within the time limit of maximum two days, we believe that we managed to handle the implications of interview transcriptions. Kvale and Brinkman (2009) furthermore stress the positive analytical consequences that follow with transcriptions, as the analysis of the meaning of what was said during the interview session in this way is worked through very thoroughly.

An implication related to the interpretations of the interviews and observations that we have needed to take into account, however, is connected with the fact that some of the participants live together with a partner. Due to this, it is likely that they have not made the decisions about the interior of their homes as well as their outdoor spaces by themselves, and it may thus be difficult to interpret and analyse their individual decision making behaviour. As we were aware of this, however, we were careful to ask about whom in the household who usually make the most decisions about the appearance of the home as well as of the outdoor space and also about specific furniture choices.

3.3.4. Ethical Issues and Responsibilities

Kvale and Brinkman (2009) stress how ethical considerations are important when conducting qualitative research interviews and underline the fact that the nature of the study and context of the interviews greatly affect the ethical principles to consider. Informed consent, in terms of informing the interviewee about the purpose of the study as well as the procedures of the study and interview is for instance a central matter. When conducting our interviews, we were careful to inform the participants about what area the questions were to involve, but left out the cultural and social aspects until after the interviews as we did not want this knowledge to influence their answers as previously mentioned. Moreover, we asked the interviewees for their consent regarding us recording the interviews as well as taking photographs of both the interior setting in their homes and their outdoor spaces. According to Kvale and Brinkman (2009), this is a fundamental element when conducting qualitative research interviews. In order for the participants to realise when the real interview started as opposed to the non-recorded informal interview, we were furthermore very clear about when we started the recording.

The interviewer being attuned and responsive about what the respondent is doing, saying or even not saying, is further stressed by Bryman and Bell (2007) as an important part of the ethical responsibilities of the interviewer. This is something we have taken into great consideration when conducting our interviews. Also signs in the body language might reveal if the participant is feeling uneasy with any parts of the interview and documentation (Bryman and Bell, 2007). We did not, however, get the impression that the respondents were uncomfortable during the interviews. Another issue discussed by Kvale and Brinkman (2009) is confidentiality. Prior to each interview, information regarding the confidentiality of the material collected was given in detail to all the interviewees. As our study conceals all personal data such as full name, address and so forth, and as no other revealing information

that can be linked to any specific individual is revealed through the interview information, the anonymity level is kept very high. The matter of who will have access to the interviews is yet another issue regarding the confidentiality discussed by Kvale and Brinkman (2009). As we informed the participants about how no personal information would be revealed through the interviews, all respondents were fine with how the information of the study later on would be presented.

Kvale and Brinkman (2009) further emphasize the role of the researcher as an important component when it comes to research interviews. Knowledge of ethical guidelines is a requirement when weighting scientific and ethical concerns in a study. This often corresponds with the scientific quality of the outcome of the interviews. In order to maintain a high level of scientific quality, we let each participant read through and validate the information from the interview, as previously mentioned.

4. Analysis

In this chapter, we connect the theories described in chapter 2 with the empirical material, gathered through interviews and observations, in order to reveal how the social environment,, status aspects, and the personality of the consumer influences the decision making behaviour regarding publicly displayed goods such as those on the outdoor space.

4.1. How the Social Environment Influences Decision Making

IKEA's study of how people relate to their outdoor spaces showed that relaxing and dining are the outstandingly most common activities in the outdoor space in the participating Germanic countries such as Sweden. Storing things in the outdoor space was not as common in Northern Europe as in other countries, and the Swedish participants often mentioned socializing, having dinners, barbeques or parties among the activities taking place in their outdoor spaces. When considering the activities taking place in the outdoor space, it consequently seems to be an area where a lot of socializing takes place and hence as a space where guests are commonly invited. This is an interesting aspect as these guests, constituting parts of one's social environment, thus may affect the decision making concerning what people chose to place on their outdoor spaces. Fitzmaurice and Comegy (2006), for instance, describe how the social visibility of certain types of goods may have an impact on the decision making regarding these items.

4.1.1. Fitting In with the Social Environment

As discussed in section 2.1.2, McCracken (1986) illustrates how a relationship between culture and consumption exists, and how culture consequently divides the world into different classes, which in turn affects the decision making within these classes and among the different levels of cultural capital. Even though all of the participants in our study have moved out from their parents' houses a long time ago and are considered as adults, making their own decisions regarding choice of furniture and decorations for instance, they may still be affected by their parents' opinions and social class as they might want to fit in with this group. When analyzing how the social environment as well as cultural factors influences our participants in their decision making, it is vital to note that all of them have studied at university for a rather long time and can be seen as well-educated academicals, belonging to an upper middle class. According to Bourdieu (1979) in Corrigan (1997), our participants

consequently have a rather high cultural capital which may show in the way they make decisions about what to consume as they want to fit in with this group and show that they know what is trendy.

When moving into a new area, Packard (1959) states that it is important to be accepted by the neighbours and according to Solomon *et al* (2006), a perceived social risk exists when it comes to publicly displayed products. Items located on the outdoor space are often highly visible which we could notice, for instance, in the area where Kalle lives.

In Västra Hamnen in Malmö, the balconies and apartments are very closely located and it is thus easy to see how the neighbours have decided to decorate their balconies. A strikingly large number of Kalles' neighbours had covered their balcony rails with a bast fence, probably in order to decrease the insight. This is something that we did not notice in any other areas that we visited.

(Observation, Kalle's neighbourhood)

Kalle expressed that he could consider a bast fence in order to decrease the insight but nevertheless emphasized how he considers his neighbours' opinions of his balcony to be less important than those of his friends. Kalle was not the only participant who stated that the opinions of friends are more important than those of the neighbours. An interesting aspect related to this was, on the other hand, that Maja, Frida and Hanna all explained that there are mostly old, retired people in their neighbourhoods. This might affect the lack of importance they place on the opinions of their neighbours. Maja further appeared to place more importance on fitting in with her own age group than with the neighbours, which showed when we asked her about what she thinks people will say about their outdoor space:

M: Ehm, I guess they will believe that, or maybe see that, there are young people living there. It is often possible to see whether there are young or old people living there [in a house].

Maja's emphasis on a youthful appearance furthermore reflected on her preferred style:

M: If I could choose anything I wanted without considering the price I would like to have Grythyttan¹. They are nice-looking, stylish, simple and classic. There is a lot of outdoor furniture that is big and bulky and I do not find it very trendy or modern... But Grythyttan is both trendy and modern.

I: Is the appearance of the outdoor space important to you?

M: Yes, I think so, when purchasing outdoor furniture it is often the design that matters. A combination of functionality and design...It has to be both, only functionality does not work, it has to look good as well. It is just as important.

¹ Grythyttan is an old family business founded in 1895 that started making horse shoes in Grythyttan, Sweden. In the 1940's and 1950's, their steel furniture started to rise in popularity and became a synonym for quality and tradition. Their vision is to achieve the classic without losing the present (Grythyttan.net).

Maja belongs to a group of young couples who recently have become parents and both she and her husband have got rather high levels of income. Armstrong and Kotler (2005) state that members of a social class with similar levels of education and income tend to develop similar behaviours and interests and may therefore develop a special way of making decisions. Maja's group of friends might correspondingly influence her decision making behaviour, even though we did not find any concrete evidence for this suggestion.

Solomon *et al* (2006) further explain how individuals with a low self esteem tend to be more affected by the perceived social risk of products. Among the participants in our study, Malin seemed to have a high self esteem and it became clear that she bases her decisions regarding what to place in her home and on her balconies on what she finds to be nice-looking to a greater extent than on what others might think. She was very determined about what she liked and disliked, and did not seem to consider any social risks in terms of what the neighbours would think about her new purchases. Emelie who is 25 years old and lives with her boyfriend in a newly built apartment in Stockholm showed to be very aware of the appearance of her home and her balcony in terms of the furniture and decorations. An interesting finding was, however, that in their garden at their summer house on an island outside Stockholm, she did not consider the appearance to be as important as in the city.

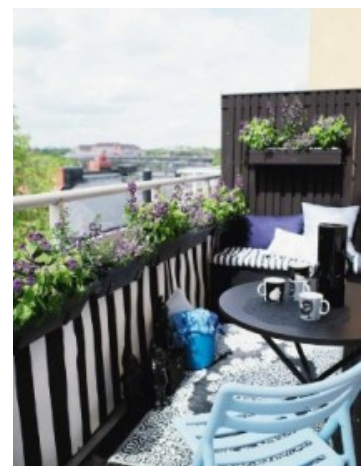
E: It is not that important in the summer house where one can have another style and such.

I: Why does it not need to be as nice there?

E: Because you can release all demands and you do not see everything all the time but you have to put more effort on finding things with good quality that holds year after year.

This indicates that Emelie considers it less important to keep up a nice-looking appearance on the countryside as the social environment there is less demanding. Whether decisions regarding what goods to consume for some consumers are based on their social suitability and communicative ability as discussed by Fitzmaurice and Comegy (2006) is, however, a question that proved to be too sensitive and difficult to examine in our study.

Witt (2010) explains how goods can be used as symbols and thus create positive or negative feelings towards different groups. This is something that became very clear throughout our study. Malin associated for instance plastic flowers with an older generation, such as her grandmother's, and would thus never consider having plastic flowers in her home or on her balconies. Moreover, she had very strong feelings towards garden gnomes and strongly disliked these. When looking at the balcony pictures, she first considered picture number two to be nice-looking but when she noticed a black garden gnome on it, she immediately changed her mind and would never consider that balcony. Daniel similarly disliked old, heavy



(Balcony picture number 2)

furniture as he considers it to be old fashioned and would thus never decide to purchase that.

Goods can further be used as status symbols, which will be discussed more thoroughly in section 4.2.

4.1.2. Style Depends on the Social Stage in Life

During the study, we found that decision making related to style seems to be somewhat situational, depending on one's social stage in life. Armstrong and Kotler (2005) correspondingly discuss the VALS typology, values and lifestyle, including two dimensions; level of resources and motivation. This typology can be applied on our respondents as all of them have been students with low levels of economic resources and, due to this, low motivation to signal achievement for instance. Caroline is currently a student and lives in an apartment in Lund, including a glazed-in balcony that is not fully decorated. She explained how she only had it furnished first one or two years after she moved in, but has lived in the same apartment during all of her years of studying. Caroline knows that she is going to move quite soon and she is therefore not that interested in or motivated to put any effort into decorating the balcony now. She has however, a rather personal style, characterized by bright colours, although she states that she will change the interior design in her next apartment. A good example of Caroline's attitude showed when we asked her what type of style she has:

C: There are so many things that I would like to change now that I have lived here for a while, but unfortunately I do not have the money. Like these shelves, I would like to take them down but that would mean that I had to fill a lot of drill holes and such things that make it... I can just as well wait because I will not live here for that long anyway.

This attitude was something that characterized several of our respondents as many of them discussed how they did not put any effort on apartments that were considered as temporary. Malin, for instance, told us how she and her boyfriend had a rather large balcony in their previous apartment when they were students. They did not, however, "put any love" on it as they were students and were soon going to move. The plastic chairs and a small table did consequently not follow them to their new apartment. Malin has moved from having low to high levels of resources and she is now more motivated to create an attractive balcony. It is interesting to note that Malin explained how she strongly dislikes plastic chairs, but still could consider having them in her temporary student apartment. As most students have rather low levels of resources, we consider it to be likely that they do not care much about what others think as it is a stage in life where other things are more important. The decision making strategy is thus more dependent on other factors, such as meeting basic needs, than appearance as the social environment might be more tolerant.

Frida is another participant whose style seemed to depend on her living situation. She is a working mother who lives in a terrace-house in Lund together with her husband and two

children. Her living situation is very different from Caroline's as she has got higher levels of resources and thus is more motivated to meet her desires. However, as Frida has taken a big step in life and started a family, her decisions regarding both the interior design and the outdoor space need to be based on functional aspects since the furniture have to be adapted to her children.

When entering Frida's house we immediately noticed that the children are a central part of the family; toys are present everywhere in the house and the furniture is well adapted to the children. The living-room table works as a free space for the children's books and their toy cars are placed under the stairs. The kitchen seems to be the core part of the house as it became natural to conduct the interview there. The table cloth on the kitchen table is made of plastic and perfect both for playing with messy things on and easy to clean from food leavings. Also the outdoor space is filled with toys and functional, plastic furniture (see Appendix 2).

(Observation, Frida's house and terrace)

When discussing the pictures of the terraces, Frida clarified what style she might want when the children have grown up. She considered terrace picture number three to be "the coolest" but was realistic and implied that they do not have the energy or strength right now, but maybe could consider it in ten years when the children are older. In Frida's current life stage, it seemed as if the persons in her social environment that influenced her decision making the most were her children.



(Terrace picture number 3)

An example of Frida's attitude towards her current decision making strategy was illustrated when we asked what was most important to her when it comes to furniture:

F: It has to be functional, so when we purchase new furniture now we definitely want to be able to sit down and have dinner by the table outside. It is really nice with a nice couch area with cushions and such, but we want to be able to sit down and have dinner properly. It is probably mostly for the family aspect that we reason in that way. [...] The kids could not sit down and eat if we had a coffee table and arm chairs, they need proper chairs.

A finding when it comes to the living situation was that it appeared as if all of the participants are thinking about the next stage in their lives. When being students, they have no interest in wasting neither money nor time on the outdoor space, such as Caroline and Malin, but when they start working, they want to create something nicer and more comfortable. Maja is an example of this as she is very motivated to create a nice-looking outdoor space now that she has the resources. Frida is furthermore in a stage in life where she is thinking about how she and her husband could decorate and use the outdoor space after the children have grown up. A pattern that we have identified is that up to a certain stage, the older a person gets, the more economic resources he or she gets and consequently becomes more motivated to decorate the

outdoor living area. The decision making behaviour concerning the outdoor space is hence influenced by what social stage in life a person is.

4.1.3. Social Environmental Sources of Inspiration

Where our participants got their inspiration from was an aspect that we found to be very interesting to study when it comes to social influences on their decision making behaviour. Clarke (2001) implies, however, that for interior design decisions, the inspiration rather derives from media than from the imitation of neighbours. This corresponded rather well with what the participants in our study told us when we asked them about where they got their inspiration from. Some of them read magazines about interior design, like *Frida* and *Malin*, and Alan also expressed how he got inspiration from television programmes. Other sources of inspiration were different stores, outdoor café areas, and advertisements in leaflets. Nevertheless, Malin, Maja and Emelie all implied that they tend to look at their neighbours' outdoor spaces and sometimes get inspired of these. Moreover, as previously mentioned, in Kalle's neighbourhood many had bast fences on their balcony rails and this was also something that he could consider. Emelie told us about how she gets inspired:

E: I think I get inspiration rather unconsciously, from IKEA maybe.

I: Do you get any inspiration from your neighbours?

E: Yes, but probably without me thinking about it. It is very likely that I get inspired through looking at how other people have it on their balconies.

The neighbours thus seemed to be a rather unconscious source of inspiration and Maja was the only one who explicitly stated that she looks at others outdoor spaces for this purpose:

M: Every garden one passes, it gets like...one sees what one would like to have and not like to have.

On the other hand, both Caroline and Alan willingly admitted how they get inspiration from their mothers, as Caroline's mother is an architect and Alan's mother is very interested in interior design. Alan's aunt is furthermore the owner of an interior design store. Clarke's (2001) theory on how people mainly get inspiration from media thus seems to be somewhat applicable, even though the family and neighbours are likely to be a major source of inspiration too, knowingly or unknowingly.

Armstrong and Kotler (2005) further explain how reference groups often influence the decision making when it comes to consumption. This is something that is rather hard to investigate within a limited amount of time, as we would have needed to get to know the participants better in order to find out which their reference groups are. Nevertheless, as previously mentioned, it seemed as if friends and family as well as the participants' age groups functioned as the major reference groups. Both Kalle and Emelie indicated that the opinions of their friends were a lot more important than those of their neighbours. Hanna also

stated that as her friends often compliment her balcony for being cosy, she becomes more motivated to decorate it again the next year. Caroline and Alan furthermore seemed to be influenced by their mothers as they put a lot of trust and respect in their knowledge within the interior design area. Especially Caroline's decisions about the furniture on her balcony were largely influenced by her mother. Maja was moreover, as previously discussed, very concerned with having a trendy and modern outdoor space as she claimed that it is easy to estimate a person's age by looking at his or her outdoor space.

Ledgerwood *et al* (2005) further indicate how these groups can create shared identities which individuals strive to live up to. They consequently base their decisions regarding what goods to consume on their ability to communicate this group identity. Since we do not know what groups the participants in our study belong to, we can neither confirm nor dismiss this suggestion. However, all of them are well-educated, have quite prosperous lifestyles and most of them have jobs characterized by a rather high social status. It is thus reasonable to assume that their groups of friends share similar qualities and their decision making may consequently be influenced by attempts to live up to this group identity. This leads us to another aspect that we have investigated in terms of its influence on decision making regarding publicly displayed goods; status.

4.2. How Status Influences Decision Making

As we have discussed previously, status is a rather complex area of study as it is a subject that many are reluctant to talk about. We have therefore been forced to take several aspects into consideration when analysing possible status consumption tendencies. These factors include the following; what was said in the interviews, subtle hints, the appearances of the outdoor spaces as well as the interior of the homes, and the participants' personalities. When discussing status, we do not view the concept merely in terms of the imitation of higher social classes as argued by Veblen (1975 [1899]) and Simmel (1957 [1904]) in Corrigan (1997). Following the reasoning by for instance Eastman *et al* (1999), Packard (1959), and Ulver-Sneistrup (2008), we take on a more modern perspective of status consumption. We correspondingly claim that anyone can have the tendencies to base consumption decisions on the item's provision of status, not only for the purpose to show off wealth or to climb the social ladder, but perhaps for the mere reason to feel good about oneself.

4.2.1. The Status Conscious Decision Maker

During the study, we found that some of the participants, particularly Malin, Daniel, and Kalle, were very style conscious and aware of what they liked and disliked. As we see it, having an exclusive and fashionable home may be closely connected to status consumption, although not necessarily to conspicuous consumption. As explained in section 2.2.2., Eastman *et al* (1999) describe how status consumption involves an interest in consuming for status purposes. A distinction between status- and conspicuous consumption was, however,

drawn. While a desire for status entails buying something that symbolizes status to *both* the individual and towards others, conspicuous consumption involves buying expensive products in order to boost one's image. As explained in the same section, O'Cass and McEwen (2004) similarly argues that status consumption, in comparison to conspicuous consumption, involves the tendency to desire status, and to purchase and consume products that provide status to the *individual* rather than towards others. Some status consumers thus use status-embedded products to fit into different situations and to feel good about themselves rather than to send messages to others.

As we see it, Malin's decisions about what to consume are likely to be influenced by status factors. When entering Malin's home, we immediately got the feeling that she had put a lot of effort on its appearance. She and her boyfriend lives in a better part of central Malmö, characterized by old, beautiful houses and this exclusive style continues inside the apartment.

The home is furnished with expensive and fashionable furniture such as paintings by Liselotte Watkins and armchairs designed by Arne Norell as well as cushions and a bed spread by AnnaO. It is easy to see that none of the items have been placed there randomly (see Appendix 2). When we arrived, Malin offered us coffee from her newly bought coffee machine from an expensive brand and the apartment was very clean and tidy. Besides a large, elegantly decorated living room, the apartment includes a spacious bedroom, a medium sized kitchen with a modern and trendy interior as well as a study room. Malin has two rather small balconies, one on each side of the house. Due to the season and the unusually cold spring, in addition to the fact that they quite recently moved in, these have not been fully decorated yet but Malin and her boyfriend has started furnishing them a little. On one of the balconies, there are two café chairs and on the other one, there are two benches that fit exactly as well as some plants and small lanterns. The second balcony has also been decorated with a wooden floor.

(Observation, Malin's apartment)

Malin explained that she is the one who decides the most about the interior design issues and stated that she finds both the interior decoration of the home and the balconies to be important. She further explained that she puts a lot of effort into decorating her home and has an interest for home decoration. She thus spends a lot of time on it and plan a lot before making a decision about a purchase. This became very evident when Malin described how the two benches were chosen:

M: At first, we were actually going to build them ourselves and Mattias [Malin's boyfriend] had even looked at this Norden-bench at IKEA to see if he could saw it so that we could have it outside. But then we realised that it would not end well if we started to fix with that ourselves so we went to Össjö, just outside Ängelholm, where an old little lady sells some outdoor furniture and there we found two benches that fit exactly! So after that, we went back to the timber-yard and said that we did not want the planks. He had helped us a lot for half an hour...

This description confirms Malin's previous claim that she spends a lot of time on home decoration. Moreover, her consciousness regarding style and the importance she places on how the balcony should look indicates how her decision making strategy is influenced by status aspects. As previously described, Packard (1959) mentions how a common tool to enhance one's status through the home is to add casual but obviously expensive "touches" to the interior. This is something that we immediately identified on several places in Malin's apartment:

When entering the living room, the first thing we noticed was some lighted candles situated on the fireplace. Lighted candles were further placed on the large coffee-table on which a small bowl with dark chocolate also was decoratively placed. In a corner of the room, a basket with interior design magazines was placed seemingly casually.

(Observation, Malin's apartment)

When inviting friends to the apartment, Malin explained that she puts some extra weight on the balconies since they are frequently used by the smokers. Fixing the balconies a little extra on these occasions is something that Malin considers to be "*fun and not that effortful to spend time on*". Even though Malin seemed to be a typical status consumer, she did not show any explicit conspicuous tendencies as she was rather modest when talking about her apartment and the interior. When asking her what type of balcony she would like, she used the word "warm", and she also stated that she wants the balconies to look good for her own sake and not for others. We certainly got the feeling that this was the case, even though she also wants the balconies and the rest of her home to look good towards others as well. In this sense, the reasons for Malin's decisions to purchase expensive and fashionable furniture are based more on a need to feel good about herself and not on a wish to impress others. It is thus likely that she to a larger extent bases her interior decisions on what symbolises status both to her and towards others, as discussed by Eastman *et al* (1999).

Similarly to Malin, we consider Daniel's decisions about what to place on his balcony to be influenced by status factors, consciously or unconsciously. Daniel lives alone on Möllevången in Malmö and just as in Malin's home; we could tell that nothing had been placed there accidentally since everything looked very much thought through.

The apartment includes one bedroom and a spacious living room with an eye-catching, large glass table as well as a smaller kitchen. The interior design is rather masculine with dark, sturdy, furniture and there are many personal touches, especially paintings and accessories from different travels (see Appendix 2). Daniel has a large balcony with an amazing view as the apartment is located on the top floor of the building. The large balcony is currently empty, besides a couple of chairs, as Daniel recently moved to this apartment.

(Observation, Daniel's apartment)

Despite the current lack of furniture, Daniel has many ideas about what the balcony will look like:

D: I am going to fix it so that it will be possible to spend more time there by putting out duckboard, such squares can look pretty good so that you do not see the concrete. And then I will throw out those plastic chairs and buy such chairs with metal and wood and also a table.

I: Why is the duckboard important?

D: It looks good.

I: What is most important; that it looks good or the functionality?

D: That it looks good.

I: Can you tell us a little more about the furniture you want to buy?

D: Quite small [chairs], maybe with steel legs and the rest in wood. And a matching table; rather small, maybe only 60 x 60 centimetres.

This discussion indicates that Daniel has very tangible ideas about what he wants to place on his balcony and that the most important factor is the appearance. Daniel further stated that it is important that his furniture matches his taste, and that he does not make any difference on outdoor- and indoor furniture in this sense. Daniel's emphasis on appearance became even more obvious when we asked him about where he gets his inspiration from:

D: Oh, I do not know. I look around and go after what I find to be nice-looking. I do not base my decisions on price but rather on what I find to be nice-looking. I like rather sleek-looking things and not things with a lot of details [krusiduller]. [...] I am not a gadget person [prylmänniska], I am quite minimalistic.

Status can, as discussed by Ulver-Sneistrup (2008), be established through the judgements of others' tastes and the expressions of disliking or fondness are in this sense camouflaged status claims. Apart from being very certain about what he likes, Daniel was equally sure of what he dislikes:

I: Can you tell us about something that you think looks good? Your style?

D: I can tell you what I do not like; plastic. Such plastic furniture that only stand there. It is so cheap and simple and no nice design.

I: That it is cheap or that it looks cheap?

D: The combination. And I do not like such white metal chairs that are heavy and white and the feet go out and they are heavy, you know? I cannot withstand that, that style, old-fashioned style.

I: Is there something that you definitely could not have on your balcony?

D: Yes, a fake green carpet that looks like grass. I cannot withstand that either.

Daniel's confidence in his style was demonstrated also when discussing the pictures of the balcony. He described, for instance, the anchor on the third balcony picture as "meagrely" [torftigt] and the first balcony picture to be full of "rubbish". He liked the previously discussed third terrace picture a lot, except for the tent which he considered to ruin everything.



(Balcony picture number 3)



(Balcony picture number 1)

An interesting statement made by Daniel was that he would like to be able to barbeque on his balcony but would never consider having a barbeque on it as he thinks that it looks too ugly. We consider this discussion to be a further proof of Daniel as a status consumer and he seems to base his decisions about what to place on the balcony on design aspects. Just as in Malin's case, however, we got the impression that even though Daniel is very concerned with the appearance of his apartment and balcony, it is mostly for his own sake and not specifically to make an impression on others.

4.2.2. The Conspicuous Decision Maker

Following the reasoning in the previous section, conspicuous consumption concerns enhancing one's image through the explicit consumption of goods in order to *communicate* status to others more than status consumption does (O'Cass and McEwen, 2004). Veblen similarly describes conspicuous consumption as spending money on goods in order to indicate wealth to other members of the society (Corrigan, 1997). Kalle too seemed to be very conscious about the appearance of his home but in comparison with Daniel and Malin, he seemed to lack the great confidence in, and awareness of, his style that they showed us. Kalle lives alone in a seemingly expensive, newly built two-room apartment in Västra Hamnen in Malmö. When entering Kalle's home, we were rather confused by the mixed messages the interior sent us.

The apartment is very masculine in terms of the interior design and furnishing; the first thing we saw when entering was for instance a work-out set. The walls are furthermore decorated with various pictures, such as from movies, as well as with paintings where the most dominating one was a very large, street art painting of a man with a gun (see Appendix 2). On the other hand, there are other details, such as purple curtains and table mats, which indicate a certain degree of femininity and sensitivity. Moreover, Kalle's furniture seems to be rather exclusive and purchased from expensive designer stores considering the material and design. The apartment moreover includes a very large balcony which, however, was empty at our visit.

(*Observation Kalle's apartment*)

The reason for Kalle's empty balcony is the fact that he quite recently moved in but he stated that he was just about to start fixing it. When asking Kalle to describe his plans for the balcony, he explained that since the balcony is very large, he wants both some sun chairs and table and chairs in order to be able to invite friends over for dinners. Kalle stated that the appearance of the balcony is important and moreover thinks that it is important what other people think: *"One cares about what other people think, of course, not primarily neighbours though but rather friends that are invited over, to a greater extent at least"*. Yet he claimed that it is more important what he thinks than what other thinks. On one occasion, Kalle pointed out that nothing was from IKEA and he seemed to be quite picky when it comes to brands. When we asked Kalle about where he is going to purchase his outdoor furniture, he immediately answered Grythyttan. He did not, however, seem to be really sure about why but said that they have their "classics":

K: Well, they have a classic chair above all and a table that matches which are...well, kind of old, classic outdoor furniture... So it would be for that reason then. But as I said, they do not have like one hundred models but rather two or three types to choose between.

In this sense, it seems as if Kalle's decision about where to purchase his outdoor furniture rather is based on the brand than on specific features. Kalle furthermore explained that he considers the same things to be important when purchasing items for the balcony as when purchasing things to the inside setting of his apartment: *"It should look good but still not be... Well it is more important that it looks good than that it is functional"*. Moreover, Kalle likes sturdy furniture, but more because he thinks they look good than for the functional aspect of it. Following this reasoning, the decision about what to place on the balcony seems to be based primarily on the appearance of the items than on functionality, which strongly indicates an influence from status aspects on his decision making behaviour.

When discussing the pictures of the balconies, Kalle seemed quite uncertain on what he likes and dislikes. The only picture that he disliked was the first balcony picture, mostly because of the rug. He said that it seems as if all the other balconies have been decorated with some effort and could not say that he disliked any of them. Also when discussing the pictures of the gardens, Kalle could not really say that he strongly disliked any of them, and claimed that they all looked nice. Further indications of Kalle's uncertainty and inconsistency showed in the following discussion:

K: This picture feels a little too much as an outdoor space or lounge belonging to a restaurant [balcony picture number 3, discussed in section 4.2.1.]. It is ok but it feels as if a lot of people have it. Definitely not ugly but still...

I: Do you mean that you become more hesitant towards it rather than keener towards it if everyone has that kind of furniture?

K: Yes, exactly. But the fact that everyone has it can probably also make that I think it looks ok I guess.

The discussion above and Kalle's inclination to purchase his furniture from well-reputed brands are aspects that we interpret as a tendency to base decisions on status factors. As discussed by Ulver-Sneistrup (2008), when moving upwards in the status hierarchy, the design of the home follows guidelines decided by high status authorities, such as certain brands and media. In this sense, keeping up to date with fashion in home furnishings seems to be more important to status climbers than to those who are more confident in their status rankings, who in turn emphasize authenticity and individuality. Daniel, in comparison, did not find brands to be of such great importance and claimed that even the cheap store Rusta is ok as long as it is his specific style. We consider Kalle to show conspicuous tendencies, even though he claimed that he finds the appearance to be important most for his own sake. The reason for this interpretation is his uncertainty about his likes and dislikes, and uncertainty regarding why he actually wanted to purchase his outdoor furniture from Grythyttan. In contrast to Malin and Daniel who were very sure about what they liked and disliked, Kalle did not seem to base his furnishing decisions on his particular style to the same extent but rather on what is considered to be "classics" in general for instance.

4.2.3. Individuality and Simplicity as Status Indicators

The degree to which a consumer bases his or her decisions on achieving individuality or conforming to others is something that is discussed in terms of distinguishing status consumers from non-status seekers by both Amaldoss and Jain (2005), Clark *et al* (2007), O'Cass and McEwen (2004), and Ulver-Sneistrup (2008). These researchers seem, however, to have rather different views on the concept. While Clark *et al* (2007) and O'Cass and McEwen (2004) indicate that status-seekers tend to conform to group norms and are vulnerable to social influences, Amaldoss and Jain (2005) and Ulver-Sneistrup (2008) claim that the status consumers are those who desire exclusivity and individuality and who turn away from the mass market. Garvey (2001) further claims that interior design decisions often are made in line with, or through the rejection of, design cues that are seen as fashionable by one's social environment and illustrated in advertisements.

From our study, we cannot draw any conclusions in order to support any of these viewpoints. As previously mentioned, Kalle stated, however, that he does not have any furniture from IKEA. He further claimed that he gets hesitant towards "lounge furniture" since he thinks everyone has it but still, the fact that many people have it can affect the fact that he thinks that they look ok. This confirms both propositions in a way. Daniel furthermore strongly emphasized how all his furniture has to correspond with his style. In our opinion, there is no typical status consumer in the sense that they either stress individuality or the copying of influential others. Neither did we find evidence for O'Cass and McEwen's (2004) proposition that status-conscious consumers are more interested in social relationships as this was something that all the participants in our study tended to be, irrespective of status awareness.

In a similar manner, we cannot say that the non-status consumers are either individualists or copycats when it comes to decision making concerning what to place on the outdoor space as

we found evidence for both. What characterized the non-status consumers was instead a rather negligent attitude towards their respective styles in terms of status aspects. Kristina for instance based her decisions regarding what to place in her home and at the outdoor space more on sentimental values than on what these items represented in terms of status. This follows the theory by Clark *et al* (2007) about how role-relaxed consumers usually are unlikely to adapt to group standards or to be influenced by others, and pay little attention to social comparisons. Kristina's attitude towards decision making will be discussed more thoroughly in section 4.3. Some of the respondents, such as Frida, Hanna and Alan, furthermore emphasized functionality rather than appearance in contrast to the style conscious status consumers described above, and thus seemed to care little about status aspects when making decisions about their outdoor spaces.

Apart from individuality, Ulver-Sneistrup (2008) discusses how the participants in her study advocated simplicity in contrast to vulgarity. In this sense, simplicity is described as corresponding with status. An interesting finding was that almost all of the participants in our study mentioned the word "sleek looking" [stilrent] when describing their styles and what they wanted their homes as well as their outdoor spaces to look like. This is something that Kalle, Maja, Emelie, Daniel and Kalle all mentioned. Daniel said that he is quite minimalistic and Kalle even used the word "sterile". Moreover, Alan said that he likes it simple and almost got offended when we complimented his balcony for being homely [pysslig]:

I: What is your style?

A: I do not know if I have a specific style. I like wood and a simple style. You said that that my balcony is homely but I do not think that it is homely. Just some flowers, it is not more than that.

Colours in general are furthermore something that several participants were negative against, such as Kalle, and Alan explained that he prefers earth colours. When discussing the photos, however, and asking about which outdoor space they would prefer, it turned out that the sleek looking outdoor spaces often were dismissed in preference for the more cosy ones and the participants outdoor spaces were in reality not sleek looking at all. We thus interpret the word 'sleek looking' to be something that sounds good to say in terms of preferred style as a way to indicate status, but may not be lived up to in reality when it comes to decision making.

4.2.4. Hidden Status Claims

As we have discussed earlier, status is not something that the participants were willing to admit that they looked for when making decisions about their outdoor spaces. We did, however, find some hints which we considered to be concealed status claims. We did not find any gender differences in the status and conspicuous consumption behaviour though, as discussed by Csikszentmihayli and Rochberg-Halton (1981) in Corrigan (1997) and O'Cass and McEwen (2004). One theme in which we noticed some conspicuous tendencies was when discussing prices. Amaldoss and Jain (2005) discuss how status consumers, or snobs as

they term the group, have a preference for expensive items, irrespectively of quality aspects. Many of the respondents correspondingly mentioned that they did not want their outdoor furniture to look “cheap”. Especially plastic chairs were something that many respondents found repelling. This is something that Malin, for instance, mentioned and Frida, Hanna and Daniel were all very firm when telling us that they dislike this kind of furniture. Caroline stated that she does not like plastic outdoor furniture and that she does not want her furniture to look cheap and even Alan who otherwise claimed to emphasize functionality similarly explained that he does not like plastic chairs for this reason. He did, however, get a little embarrassed about this statement:

I: Can you tell us about something that you think looks ugly and that you would never consider to place on your balcony?

A: I hope that you do not have it now, but plastic chairs. I do not like that.

I: Why not?

A: I will probably sound like a snob now, but I think that it looks cheap and one would only sweat.

I: You do not want it to look cheap?

A: No, it should look a little nicer.

The aversion towards cheap looking furniture could, according to us, be related to conspicuous tendencies which might influence these consumers in their decision making.

Another aspect of status consumption is, as previously discussed, to define what is not liked. When asking the participants about what they do not like on outdoor spaces, we got rather varied answers apart from the plastic chairs discussed above. The pictures of the outdoor spaces were very helpful in this matter. Malin could, as previously mentioned, for instance never have a garden gnome or plastic flowers on her balcony and Caroline disliked “*unstable chairs with thin legs and old, rotten, wooden planks*”, while Kalle disliked colours. Emelie further disliked messy balconies and it bothered her when people use it as a storage space. She also stated that the anchor on the third balcony picture looked “trashy”. Hanna similarly disliked when people have not furnished and fixed their balconies, and Daniel had very strong opinions regarding what he dislikes as previously described. An interesting aspect when discussing these dislikes was that the respondents really wanted to establish some distance from these interior design choices and almost looked down on them. In this sense, establishing distance from interior design choices that are considered as “trashy” or “old-fashioned” might be a way of indicating status.

Some of the participants confirmed that others opinions about the appearance of the outdoor space are important, but then immediately added that their own opinions of course are what is most important (e.g. Maja and Kalle). Both Emelie and Kalle considered their friends’ opinions to be important but not what their neighbours think about their outdoor spaces. In contrast Kristina, who we consider to be a non-status consumer, did not care about what others think and preferred “unobtrusive” furniture. As the participants were so unwilling to admit that they cared about others opinions, we decided to use a more subtle method. We

thus asked those who had a partner how they would feel when having friends over if this partner had decorated the outdoor space or the home with something that they strongly disliked. When asking Emelie how she would feel when having friends over if her boyfriend Anders had put the previously mentioned anchor on their balcony, she immediately admitted that she would definitely say that she had not chosen it and would probably not let him place it there at all in the first place. When discussing how Hanna feels when her boyfriend Micke brings home an item that she dislikes, we asked her whether she feels uncomfortable for her own sake or towards others visiting their home:

H: Well, it is probably mostly because I would have been bothered about it myself, or like 'I hope no one else sees it'. It is probably a combination.

I: That you cannot stand for it really, when inviting friends over?

H: Yes, it might feel as if 'that is not nice but it is not mine'. You have to explain, haha. Micke had a really ugly, kind of over dimensioned, candle holder with a huge iron foot and a stick that went straight up and then a tiny candle on top of it. He brought it, it stood next to the TV like a monument but it went, it is gone now.

These 'hidden status claims' imply, according to us, some conspicuous tendencies in the participants' decision making behaviour regarding what to place on their outdoor spaces, even among those who claim to emphasize other things than the appearance.

4.3. How the Identity Influences Decision Making

Personal preferences are, as have been discussed throughout the thesis, a very complex concept as they are a result of influences from several different elements in one's life. Individual ideas of who we are, what values and attitudes we stand for and what messages we communicate to others in our environment are all shaped by interactions and received messages of how we are perceived by people around us, as discussed by Solomon *et al* (2006). The individual viewpoint of what is regarded as aesthetically desirable is thus shaped by both one's own picture of him- or herself and by others perceptions. The understanding of who one is, and of who one appear to be, is to a large extent reflected in the decisions of what goods that are acquired, used, and displayed according to Holbrook, Solomon and Bell (1990) in Solomon *et al* 2006. Following this reasoning, how one's identity influences the decision making concerning the outdoor space became an interesting aspect during our study.

4.3.1. Expressing a Personal Style and Sentimental Values

As discussed in section 2.3., both Grubb and Hupp (1986) and Solomon *et al* (2006) express how consumers reveal a consistency between their own values and the products they acquire. For some of the participants in our study, it was correspondingly very apparent that their own personal values have been a critical influence in their decision making of what items to purchase or display in their homes. All the interior design choices and items in Malin's home

reflected for instance as previously mentioned a very unique, classy and carefully selected feeling which corresponds well with her values. Malin is a young working woman with a very personal style that can be noticed when entering her home. We all agreed that Malin seemed to be a warm person with a high self esteem who is very aware of her style.

People try in many ways to express themselves through their possessions according to Belk (1988). He argues that possessions are key contributors to, and reflections of, the personal identity. Due to her own personal style, Hanna correspondingly admitted that she “*fall(s) for the same kind of things over and over again*” when deciding on what goods and furniture to purchase. This is definitely a striking fact when looking around in Hanna and her boyfriend’s apartment:

The interior setting, choices of colours, furniture, and decorations as well as the organization of belongings creates an inviting and homely atmosphere and a clear touch of a light, romantic style permeates the three room apartment. The same feeling unquestionably extends to their outdoor space; a fairly small but cosy balcony. The furniture on the balcony consists of two dark wooden armchairs with seat cushions, two additional chairs as well as a small matching table, and one little stool; semi-wrapped in a softly coloured floral textile. The floor of concrete is covered with a green, soft self-adhesive carpet and on the wall bordering to the neighbour’s balcony, Hanna has put up a large piece of textile with a pattern and mix of colours that matches the style of the balcony very well (see Appendix 2).

(Observation, Hanna’s apartment)

When Hanna described what style she prefers, she explained that she wants to create a “*cosy atmosphere*” and a bit of a “*romantic style*” with flowers and inviting lanterns. We found that this statement was very well reflected in the cosy and homely interior as well as in the outdoor style. Hanna focuses a lot on creating a *feeling* in the outdoor space, using floral textiles, heart-shaped flower pots, and lots of lanterns and plants. Since Hanna has got a good sense for design and style and moreover is both creative and handy, we got the feeling that she is the one who primarily is in charge of the decoration of their outdoor space and this is also something that she admitted herself. Even though she might not always be the particular buyer of the goods in her boyfriend’s home, she is highly involved when deciding what objects to place there and on their balcony:

I: How did you reason when furnishing and decorating your present balcony? You said that there was no balcony in your previous apartment; did you purchase all these items when moving into this place?

H: My boyfriend brought the two chairs with armrests and the table from his previous apartment, so we had that stuff from before. And then we bought two additional chairs in order for four people to be able to sit there. And, well, I found this green, self-adhesive carpet to be pretty nice. If it had not been there already, I would definitely have bought it myself; I think it is very nice to get rid of that concrete floor. And then, this piece of textile on one of the gables; I put it up as it looked a bit shabby before...

Having and maintaining a personal style within the home is moreover something that we especially found Kristina to be enthusiastic about. Kristina lives together with her husband and two young children in a fairly old and small house which, in combination with the large, open, and somewhat playful garden, invokes a very personal feeling. Kristina particularly emphasized how she finds the inclusion of personal attachments to be important in a home. This was very noticeable when looking around in her home. When it comes to decision making regarding the decorations and furnishings of the house and the outdoor space, Kristina stressed that she does not want her home to look neither luxurious nor flashy, and also emphasized that it *”should not look as if the entire home comes from the same store”*.

The furniture and other items, both inside and outside Kristina’s house, are rather diverse and put together in a very personal way. The interior setting created, however, a very messy impression. Due to its limited size, the house is rather packed with things, toys, tools and decorations (see Appendix 2). Nevertheless, a very personal feeling was immediately invoked when entering Kristina’s home. Multi-coloured and striped textiles are mixed with old furniture containing lots of sentimental values and newly bought items as well as with pictures painted by the children covering the fridge and the bedroom walls. This created a very personal atmosphere in the house.

(Observation, Kristina’s home)

Following this observation, Woodward’s (2001) theory regarding how the home through its objects plays an important role in maintaining the self-identity and family relations is very relevant when analysing what goods Kristina and her husband have decided to include in their home. They seem to want to create a personal and pleasant home-atmosphere in order to construct and maintain their identity as a family. Woodward (2001) further stresses how some spaces in the home function like passages between the home and the outside world and how the expression of identity thus becomes vital in such transitional settings. A good illustration of this is the centre of attention in Kristina’s home; the very personally decorated and furnished kitchen. The way Kristina’s home, through its goods, plays an important role in maintaining the self-identity is further supported by the fact that several pieces of furniture in her home have a historical bound to the family and thus entail a lot of sentimental values.

When it comes to decisions concerning what items to place in the outdoor space, we found that Kristina is very fond of items with strong sentimental values. For instance, the old wooden sofa that Kristina and her husband had kept on their balcony in their previous apartment originates from her childhood and she used to sleep in it as a little girl. The way in which Kristina considers many of the goods in her home to have deeper values demonstrates how they function as extensions of her ‘self’. This shows that Kristina puts a greater emphasis on the functional and the personal values of an item than on the aesthetic values. In many ways, Kristina’s home holds numerous examples of what Belk (1988) describes as extensions of the self; both on a personal level and on a family level. Kristina further explained that, from her point of view, sentimental values can compensate for an unpleasant look of an item; she can stand having a less aesthetic object in her home if it entails sentimental values:

K: Our hammock was for instance hand made by one of the fishermen where I come from, Åhus. That is a little fun. In that case it is not... If such a value exists, then I can stand the fact that it might not be that nice looking; then there are other values. It might not always be the main priority [as compared to an appealing look] but it gives it a more redeeming feature.

Kristina showed no greater concern about the public image and the social appropriateness of the items she had decided to display in her home and on her outdoor space. Holbrook, Solomon and Bell (1990) in Solomon *et al* (2006), describe how people with high public-self consciousness are more concerned about their appearance than those with a low public-self consciousness; a measurement that is closely linked with self-monitoring. While high self-monitors are more concerned about the way they present themselves in social situations and thus what others might think of their product choices, low self-monitors are less concerned about the impressions their product choices have on others. Accordingly, Kristina's public self-consciousness and self-monitoring is very low. This is supported by the fact that Kristina showed no considerable concerns about the decisions on what goods that are purchased and displayed in their home and what impressions these make on others. Kristina did, however, in many ways appear to be very sure of her own personal style. When considering the photos of terraces and balconies that she found especially attractive, there was a clear correspondence between these and the style of her home. Interesting to note is that the terrace pictures that Kristina chose as her favourites were the only two that no other participant pointed out. Kristina explicated her choices by saying:

K: Well... they feel rather simple, and I mostly like the garden picture number two as it displays a rather mixed kind of things. And as for garden picture number five... well, I do like wooden furniture...



(Terrace picture number 2)



(Terrace picture number 5)

Some of the participants in our study showed, however, very little concern about having goods that include sentimental values in their homes and this did not influence their decision making behaviour. Alan is a good example of this. He is originally from Ireland and moved to Lund only three years ago. Even though one might think that he would be extra concerned

about displaying goods with sentimental values reminding him of his Irish origin and his family in his home country, he has very few items with such characteristics in his home:

I: How did it feel when you moved here, as you did not have any goods with you from your home in Ireland? Did it feel sad or difficult not to bring any personal things?

A: I did bring some personal things – photos and such- but not much more than that.

I: Is there something you especially miss from home? Any furniture or such?

A: Not furniture, but a bath tub. But not furniture.

Alan seemed to be much more concerned with the functional aspects than with the sentimental values when deciding what goods to display in his home and on his balcony. This demonstrates what Belk (1988) would describe as a low level of identification with possessions.

An interesting finding was that the family households' decisions on what items to display and about how to decorate the interior settings of their homes as well as outdoor spaces seemed to be based on sentimental values to a much larger extent than for the single households. Tian and Belk (2005) similarly describe how research has shown how revealing the extended self is connected with vulnerability, which in turn is related to family. This finding corresponds well with Belk's (1988) description of the home as the most important place for families to define their family-self. While the single households we visited were keener on showing a fashionable, trendy, and sleek looking style, the families put much greater weight on maintaining a functional, family-friendly home filled with items containing sentimental values. This is further supported by Woodward's before mentioned theories (2001) where the home is described as playing an important role in maintaining family relations.

4.3.2. The Outdoor Space as Revealing Personality

Many of the participants in our study expressed how they to a large extent consider the style of the outdoor space to reflect the owner's personality. Especially Maja, who lives in a terraced house together with her husband and little son, emphasized how one's choice of furniture can disclose a great deal of facts about oneself. As previously discussed, she particularly stressed how she often can tell a person's age by looking at his or her outdoor furniture. However, Maja also states that the outdoor space reveals other things:

I: You said that you usually look at others outdoor spaces; do you think that they say something about the persons who live there?

M: Yes, I absolutely think that it does. It says quite a lot when passing some gardens where everything is perfect, and it kind of says something about how that person is. Maybe that he or she has got a lot of time to put on the garden. I think furniture says quite a lot about how a person is, but then there are others who do

not care at all and that does not say a lot...or maybe it says that that person does not care about the appearance or so...

Maja whose home is characterized by a rather plain but still individual style, pointed out that she finds it important to have an individual touch of the interior setting in the home. Even though Maja and her husband very recently moved to their present home, her and her family's personal style is very well reflected in the choice of the goods in their home. Hanna, Frida, Emelie and Malin all further supported the belief that the style of the decorations and furniture in the outdoor space expresses and reveals many truths about the individuals who lives there. Emelie, for instance, mentioned how a person's outdoor space can say something about his or her social status. Kalle who agreed in this belief also added that the decisions of what goods to place in the outdoor area often can tell the observer something about the organization of the interior home:

K: In old houses one can see that there are, like, 17 strollers and 10.000 plastic bags and so forth... and that some people use the balcony a bit like a storage space, so I think that says a bit about them.

These findings support Hecht's (2001) description of how possessions reflect one's personality. Also Prentice (1987), demonstrates a clear correspondence between the choice of possessions and individuals' attitudes and values. Emelie not only reflected upon the poor organization and style of other people's outdoor spaces, but also admitted that this can bother her. Since Emelie is a very organized, structured and tidy kind of person, other people's messy and unorganized outdoor spaces conflicts with her own personal attitudes and values, even when it does not concern her own outdoor space:

E: I think that it is ugly when people use their balconies as storages, that is ugly, when there are a lot of things on the balcony that does not belong there.

I: Why do you think that it is ugly?

E: Because it bothers me. I do not like disorder and it does not matter if it is the neighbours that have a disorder [on their balconies], it bothers me anyway.

Moreover, Prentice (1987) claims that while individuals with mainly self-expressive possessions are more likely to be drawn to symbolic values, those with mainly functional possessions favour functional values. Following previous discussions, Kalle, for instance, seemed to value symbolic items and his home is characterized by self-expressive attributes. Other participants, on the other hand, seemed to value functionality and thus had more functional items in their homes. These participants were mainly those who had children.

Some of the participants appeared to be a little anxious about revealing their personalities and selves through their choice of style and decorations on their outdoor spaces. When discussing the balcony pictures, Emelie stressed that she would rather have a balcony that looks luxurious than personal. A great awareness of the public exposure of the outdoor space was noted through all of the interviews. To a certain extent, it appeared as if showing a sleek

looking outdoor space is a safe alternative to revealing one's personality by displaying very personal goods. Emelie, for instance, finds it crucial that the decision to place personal details in the outdoor space has a clear underlying thought:

I: What is it that you dislike with trifles [plotter]?

E: Well, it should not look too messy. It is ok to have personal things and such, but it should not be too much. There has to be a thought behind it [decorations], so that it creates a feeling of consistency and that the things have not just been placed there. There has to be a thought behind everything!

Following the discussion above, how the outdoor space reveals one's personality seems to influence some of the participants' decision making behaviour as they either appear to be careful about displaying, or want to display, very personal things.

4.3.3. The Gap between the Actual- and Ideal Outdoor Space

An interesting result from the interviews was, as previously discussed, that many of the participants claimed that they prefer sleek looking settings, even though their own homes and outdoor spaces did not reflect this statement. For instance, when showing our participants the pictures of different outdoor spaces and letting them select the photographs that best represented their personal styles, we found that especially Kalle and Alan pointed out outdoor settings with a style that neither reflected the style of their homes, nor the style preferences they claimed to have. Just like Solomon *et al* (2006) stress how the gap between the actual and ideal self depends on individual self-assessments in terms of how well a person is aware of his or her personality and self, we found this to be the case among several of the interviewees. For Alan, Kalle, and Emelie, there appeared to be a noticeable discrepancy between what kind of style they declared to like as compared to what was expressed in their homes.

As previously discussed, Alan's entire home, and especially the outdoor space, radiated a homely feeling due to all the small decorations and pottering going on there, such as flower seeding. Still, Alan claimed that he likes it plain and simple. This information indicates a gap between his actual and ideal self; a shortcoming in understanding the own actual self. Also Kalle showed these tendencies as he seemed to have difficulties in determining what style he really can refer to as 'his'. When observing the pictures of different outdoor spaces, he seemed to have a comparatively hard time to decide what elements in the pictures he liked and disliked. He furthermore claimed to be negative to colours while his home included both colourful paintings and textiles, such as purple curtains and table mats. Moreover, Emelie first claimed that she wants a sleek looking outdoor setting but when selecting between the pictures of outdoor spaces, she dismissed the sleek looking ones in preference for the cosier alternatives.

On the contrary, Malin showed to be very certain on her personal style and on what attributes she liked in the displayed pictures. Just like Daniel's before mentioned certainty of what goods and styles that he would not decide to decorate his outdoor space with, Malin demonstrated a very small gap between the ideal and actual self. The clear correspondence between Daniel's decisions regarding what furniture and goods to place in his home and his choices of ideal styles while studying the pictures of the outdoor spaces verified a profound awareness of his actual self. Moreover, just like Daniel, Kristina demonstrated a very insightful understanding of her own personal style, preferences and favourite kinds of decorative attributes.

Like McCracken (1988) in Corrigan (1997) describes how a "bridge" can be constructed between the actual and ideal self, we furthermore found tendencies among some of the participants to desire home decorations that symbolise a certain style in order to get closer to this particular lifestyle. Similarly, the symbolic self-completion theory described by Wicklund and Gollwitzer (1982) in Solomon *et al* (2006), explain how people with an incomplete self-definition tend to acquire and display items symbolizing their desired identity with an aspiration of completing this particular lifestyle and identity. In Kalle's case, we found an inclination to use well-reputed brands as a way to construct a bridge to a certain desired sense of self. Not only did Kalle carefully point out that he does not own any IKEA items, but as a response to what items and furniture he is planning to place on his balcony, he also particularly talked about a rather classy brand; Grythyttan. However, the grounds for Kalle's fascination of Grythyttan, as earlier discussed, turned out to be based on what others have told him about it being a stylish and classy brand for outdoor furniture. This statement gave us a feeling of an attempt to bridge the gap between his actual and ideal self. Arnould and Thompson (2005) further describe the use of marketed products as a way to seek and create descriptions of one's identity. We have not, however, been able to draw any further conclusions in order to confirm this hypothesis. Nevertheless, it is likely that several of the participants in our study might have based their decisions to purchase and display branded objects and goods in their homes on a desire to approach a sought after lifestyle.

As illustrated above, the decision making of what goods to place in the outdoor space seems to be influenced by identity matters to a great extent. Many decisions regarding the interior and exterior setting seem to be steered by beliefs about the self, others opinions about who we are and about who we wish to be. Even though this type of decision making is a complex phenomenon to analyse, our study have found several interesting linkages between the identity, style decisions and concerns about appearance and public image.

4.4. Summary of the Analysis

In section 1.4., we compared the outdoor space with the appearance of the body as it quickly can be judged in terms of whether or not it has been properly maintained and styled. This is something that we found great evidence for as several of the participants mentioned how it is easy to judge a person's age, and to some degree even personality and social status, through

looking at his or her outdoor space. Moreover, we found that the interior setting of the home to a great extent reflects on the outdoor space which can be seen as an extension of the home. Caroline described it like this:

C: If one has an apartment or a house where the interior setting is kind of...nice things or a little flashy and such...if one has a style inside, one wants it to reflect on the outdoor space as well and not have like old, mouldy, wooden furniture. It feels as if it pulls down the general impression.

A finding that we made concerning influences of the social environment was that it seemed as if the participants in our study considered the opinions of their friends to be more important than those of the neighbours and thus seemed to be more affected by these when it comes to decision making. They further claimed to consider it to be more important to fit in with their own age groups than with the neighbours. The participants often got a lot of inspiration from their reference groups, such as family and friends, apart from media. Those who used their families as reference groups for their decision making behaviour moreover appeared as having a lot of respect for their opinions. Another finding was that decisions regarding furniture and decorations are closely connected to one's situation in life.

We found that several participants seemed to be influenced by status aspects when it comes to decision making regarding their choices of furniture and decorations for both the inside setting of their home and their outdoor spaces as they, for instance, tended to emphasize the design before the functionality. Since status is a factor that is very difficult to investigate, however, our conclusions are based rather on our experiences of the participants than from what was being said specifically. Nevertheless, we did identify several hidden status claims during the interviews.

Another interesting finding was that the participants' possessions seemed to reflect their personalities to a large extent. Some participants further stressed how personal attachments are important in a home which furthermore, through its objects, seemed to play an important role in maintaining the self-identity and family relations. It appeared, however, as if sentimental values imbedded in goods are more important to family households than for those living alone and this was thus more likely to influence their decision making behaviour. In terms of a comparison between the actual self and the ideal self, we discovered that some of the participants appeared to desire furniture and decorations symbolising a specific, desired type of lifestyle which correspondingly influenced their decision making behaviour. The gap between the actual and ideal type of outdoor space moreover seemed to be quite large for some participants, especially those who claimed to prefer a sleek looking setting which did not reflect their own homes. Following this reasoning, the social environment, status, and the identity all seem to be aspects that influence consumers' decisions concerning what to display publicly such as on the outdoor space.

5. Conclusion

In this chapter, we summarize our findings and answer our research questions as well as discuss our contribution. A table is presented in order to better illustrate the different decision making strategies that we have identified. Moreover, we suggest some related topics that could be of interest to investigate further.

Following the discussion in section 4.4., we have identified several ways in which the investigated social and cultural aspects – the social environment, status, and the identity – influence the decision making behaviour regarding items that are displayed publicly, in this case possessions located on the outdoor space. The extent to which these aspects influences decision making varies, however, between different types of consumers. From these findings, we have identified a number of decision making strategies that are summarized in the table below:

Social Factors Influencing Decision Making	Categories	Decision Making Strategies
Stage in Life	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Student • Working • Parent 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cost efficient • Cost insensitive • Functional
Type of Outdoor Space	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Balcony • Terrace/Garden • At the Summer House 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Space efficient • Sustainability • Freedom
Status Seeking Tendencies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Non-Status Seeker • Individual Status Seeker • Conspicuous Status Seeker 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Personal preferences • Ego boosting • Showing off
Level of Receptiveness to the Social Environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High • Low 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fitting in • Negligence
Level of Self Awareness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High • Low 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Personal • Inconsistent
Sensitivity to Sentimental Values	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High • Low 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Relational • Anything goes

A major factor influencing our participants' decision making strategies turned out to be what stage in life a person is. When being a student, one's decision making strategy seems to be based on cost efficiency to a great extent, independently of factors such as style consciousness and status seeking tendencies for instance, while a working person's strategy is less dependent on prices. Even though some individuals were very aware of the appearance of their homes and outdoor spaces, they admitted that they had not put any effort on the interior and exterior design when being students or when the home had been considered as temporary (e.g. Malin). In this life stage, status aspects for instance are less influential as the social environment is more tolerant. Moreover, when being a parent, the decision making strategy is characterized by functional aspects related to the children's needs and influences (e.g. Frida).

Naturally, the type of outdoor space influences the decision making strategy a great deal as well; a balcony with a rather limited space requires space efficient items while a larger terrace belonging to a house indicates a more sustainable form of accommodation and consequently creates a need for more sustainable outdoor items (e.g. Maja). An interesting finding related to type of outdoor space was moreover that the decision making strategy regarding outdoor items for the summer house seemed to be a lot more relaxed, focusing on freedom and a feeling of a release from the daily demands. Emelie who normally appeared to be quite concerned with her social environment and status aspects claimed to care a lot less about these aspects in her summer house. This may be related to how a more tolerant attitude towards appearance exists there, just as for student accommodations.

Status seeking tendencies further showed to affect our participants' decision making strategies to different extents. For the non-status seeker (e.g. Kristina), the decision making strategy was characterized by a rather negligent attitude towards other people's opinions and status issues. The status seeker who searches for status for an individual purpose turned out, on the other hand, to employ a decision making strategy focusing on boosting his or her ego rather than merely indicating status towards others (e.g. Malin and Daniel). The design is for this type of consumer very important, and they tend to select expensive items for their homes, including their outdoor spaces, in order to feel good about themselves as well as to make it attractive to others. The conspicuous consumer's decision making strategy is moreover based more on showing off, and we found a lack of certainty on what specific style that is preferred (e.g. Kalle). The conspicuous consumer consequently bases the decisions on what to place on the outdoor space on what others find fashionable as well as on what brands that are regarded as trendy. Quite closely related to status is one's receptiveness towards the social environment. A high level of receptiveness corresponded with a greater desire to fit in with the social environment; among our participants primarily with one's own age group and friends (e.g. Maja). A high level of receptiveness furthermore indicated a greater likeliness to be inspired by persons in the social environment (e.g. Caroline). On the contrary, a low level of receptiveness did, just as with the non-status seeking tendencies, indicate a rather negligent attitude towards others opinions (e.g. Kristina). This also reflected on the related decision making strategies.

When it comes to personality and identity aspects, a high level of self awareness and a good knowledge about one's own, personal style appear to correspond with a decision making style related to very personal, often consistent preferences matching this personal style (e.g. Malin and Kristina). A lower level of self awareness was on the other hand characterized by rather inconsistent decision making strategies and an uncertainty about own preferences (e.g. Kalle). A final theme that we identified was the degree of sensitivity to sentimental values imbedded in the goods located on the outdoor space which varied to a great extent among our participants. For those with a high sensitivity towards this type of values, the decision making strategy was greatly influenced by relational and sentimental aspects. Sentimental values were on one occasion even explained to have the ability to compensate for a distasteful look of an item (Kristina). For those with lower levels of sensitivity towards sentimental values on the other hand (e.g. Alan), other aspects were more important.

The decision making strategies and categories of consumers presented here are rather stereotypical and could be considered as quite static, just like the models on decision making presented within consumer behaviour research that we previously criticized. However, we suggest that consumers can hold several of these attributes and thus employ several of the decision making strategies described. Hence, we do not want to take our reasoning as far as Arnould and Thompson (2005) who portray consumers as enactors of social roles and positions through their decisions on goods to consume. The illustrated characteristics of the strategies are, according to us, often more or less mixed. An example of this is Malin who is a young, working person with two small balconies. We consider her to be an individual status seeker with a high level of self awareness. Malin's decision making strategy for her balconies is consequently quite cost insensitive, focusing on space efficiency. Her strategy furthermore contains an amount of ego boosting, but the selected items matches her personal style very well.

As the presented decision making strategies are based on our interviews with, and observations of, the participants' of our study, we cannot guarantee that they are generalizable to a larger population. A study including other participants may hence discover additional or quite different decision making strategies. Nevertheless, we have created a framework covering several important social and cultural aspects related to decision making, not yet examined in current consumer behaviour research. Moreover, we argue that current research within the area lacks the inclusion of nuances on different types of decision making as it mostly is the buying decisions that are considered. With our extended definition of the term, we suggest that we have contributed with a broader view on decision making as it also may entail decisions regarding previously made purchases or gifts. We have furthermore focused on one specific area; publicly displayed items located on the outdoor space, since we consider it to be likely that decision making strategies differ between different types of goods. This is something that previous studies on decision making within the consumer behaviour area have neglected to a large extent. By combining perspectives from both the consumer behaviour area and the CCT field, we argue that we have been able to conduct a very comprehensive study, taking both rather rational arguments such as the lifecycle, and more intangible aspects such as status into account.

Decision making is, however, a very intricate area of study and quite difficult to capture using regular interviews which we have discussed throughout the thesis. In order to provide as valid results as possible and to capture the nuances related to the examined social and cultural aspects – the social environment, status, and the identity – we thus employed a number of methods. Besides utilizing a photo elicitation technique and asking about these aspects in very implicit manners, we chose to make thorough observations of both the interior settings and the outdoor spaces belonging to the participants as well as of how they interacted. Moreover, we took several photographs of these settings in order to improve the foundation for a deeper analysis and to provide the reader a better understanding of what we are saying. We suggest that this is a better method to study consumer decision making as it enables this complex area to be better understood and provides a much more comprehensive picture. Taking the personalities of our participants into consideration was moreover important throughout our study as we wanted to understand their behaviour. To be able to capture cultural and social aspects related to decision making, we consequently argue that quantitative studies are of no use for this purpose.

So what about the intended meanings of possessions located in the outdoor space? Contrary to the rather static and rational approaches to consumer decision making that has been emphasized in much of consumer behaviour research, we suggest that the intended meanings of publicly displayed possessions are multiple. Rather than merely serving functional purposes, we have found that the meanings of publicly displayed goods such as those located on the outdoor space may imbed social meanings and communicate status messages. Moreover, we have found the outdoor space to reflect one's personality and identity to a rather high extent and to serve as a place for sentimental values. These aspects have all showed to reflect on the participating consumers' decision making behaviour as the outdoor spaces thus become something to live up to and to work on.

5.1. Future Research

We suggest that future research could investigate other social and cultural aspects than the social environment, status, and the identity, that may influence consumer decision making regarding publicly displayed products. It could thus be of interest to make a similar study, focusing more on the cultural, national and ethnic influences when it comes to decision making regarding items located on the outdoor space. Researchers could moreover explore how profoundly this type of decision making differs between different countries and cultures, and to what extent they are merging on a global scale. As discussed in section 3.3.2., Wallendorf and Arnould (1988) have, for instance, shown that the concept of status differs between cultures.

In order to find out more about consumers' decision making strategies closer to the purchase; studying how in-store-promotion influences the consumer while shopping might result in interesting findings. In this way, it would be possible to find out whether consumers'

approaches to decision making changes depending on in-store layouts and promotions. In order to convey such a study, however, we recommend more comprehensive research during a longer period of time consisting of both observations of consumers' in-store-behaviour as well as in-depth interviews.

Moreover, future researchers could examine whether there are any gender differences when it comes to social and cultural aspects influencing the decision making regarding publicly displayed goods such as in the home and on the outdoor space. In such a study, it might further be interesting to explore whether, and how, these decision making aspects have evolved during the years and what changes in the decision making behaviour the future may bring when it comes to gender differences. Finally, another study within the same area could focus more on what role different brands play in the decision making behaviour when it comes to publicly displayed goods.

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Balcony Pictures Shown During the Interviews

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6.4. Verbal Sources

Interviews

Alan, Lund (2010-04-27)

Caroline, Lund (2010-04-22)

Daniel, Malmö (2010-04-21)

Emelie, Stockholm (2010-04-23)

Frida, Lund (2010-04-20)

Hanna, Malmö (2010-04-19)

Kalle, Malmö (2010-04-19)

Kristina, Lund (2010-04-27)

Maja, Lund (2010-04-22)

Malin, Malmö (2010-04-20)

Appendix 1

Participants

Name	Age	Occupation	Education	City	Type of outdoor space
Alan	29	Business Controller	Business Administration and Economics	Lund	Glazed-in balcony
Caroline	23	Postgraduate Student	Technology Management	Lund	Glazed-in balcony
Daniel	27	Doctoral Student	Hospital Physicist programme	Möllevången, Malmö	Large balcony
Emelie	25	Nurse	Nursing programme	Kungsholmen, Stockholm	Medium-sized balcony
Frida	33	Doctor	Medicine	Lund	Terrace and garden
Hanna	26	Jurist	Law	Central Malmö	Small balcony
Kalle	27	Unemployed	Information and Communication Engineering	Västra Hamnen, Malmö	Large balcony
Kristina	35	Librarian	Education in Librarianship	Lund	Garden
Maja	31	Maternity leave/ Media Agency	Media and Communication	Lund	Glazed-in balcony and garden
Malin	26	Occupational Therapist	Medical Science in Occupational Therapy	Rörsjöstad, Malmö	Two small balconies

Appendix 2

Pictures of the Participants' Homes and Outdoor Spaces

Alan



Caroline



Daniel



Emelie



Frida



Hanna



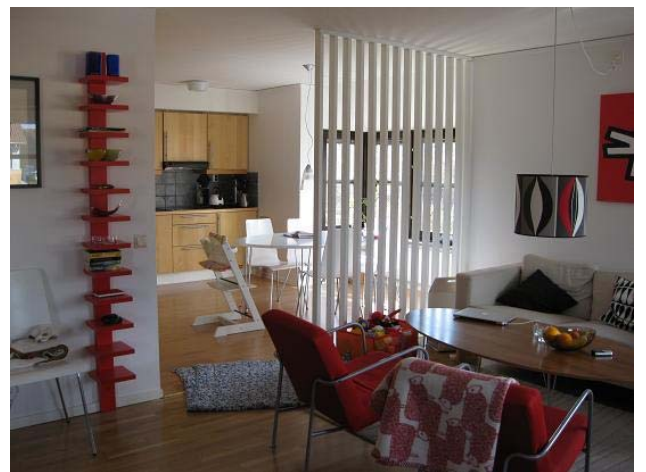
Kalle



Kristina



Maja



Malin



Appendix 3

Interview Questions

How did you think when you purchased/selected the items for your outdoor space?

Do you have any favourite item on the outdoor space? Why/why not?

Where do you purchase items for your outdoor space? Why

Do you think differently when purchasing/selecting outdoor furniture as compared with indoor furniture? In terms of price for instance.

Where do you get inspiration from?

Do you discuss the outdoor space with others (in terms of decoration)?

Is the appearance of the outdoor space important to you?

Are other people's opinions about your outdoor space important to you?

Do you often invite friends over? Do you usually spend time on the outdoor space on those occasions?

What do you think about your neighbours' outdoor spaces? Do you think their outdoor spaces says something about them, for instance about their personalities?

Do your neighbours affect your decisions regarding what items to place on your outdoor space? How?

Can you tell us about something that you think looks good on an outdoor space? Why?

If you got the opportunity to decorate your outdoor space without thinking about the cost, what would it look like?

Can you tell us about something that you think looks bad on an outdoor space? Why?

About the pictures:

Which outdoor space do you prefer? Why

Which outdoor space do you like the least? Why?

Appendix 4

Pictures Shown During the Interviews

Balconies

1.



2.



3.



4.



5.



6.



Terraces and Gardens

1.



2.



3.



4.



5.



6.

