DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Consumer identity
The case of home confined consumers

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Abstract

This thesis focuses on the lived consumption experiences that home confined consumers employ to retain an identity in absence of direct marketplace interaction. Home confined consumers account for a significant percentage of the population that are termed disabled. This group of consumers are relatively fast growing and the diversity of disability is one that is expanding in keeping with such growth. Disability itself has not featured highly on the marketing and consumer behaviour research agenda, the case of home confinement has not been addressed. This research aims to contribute to understanding and personal knowing about this population ‘in extremis’.

The research adopted an interpretivist approach and drew on a radical constructivist epistemology to capture the lived experience and personal knowing of home confinement. This methodology has not been employed within the consumer research discipline. Radical constructivism acknowledges a more personal way of knowing that is reflective of subjectively constructed consumption experiences and an internal reality that may not match an external reality. Three individual cases of home confinement were explored over a two-year period by means of ongoing ‘conversational’ style interviews.

This thesis argues that home confined consumers are actively involved in the identity construction process. The findings illustrate the diversity of the home confined experience, and the overriding need to establish an identity that is both in keeping with the personal reality of the lived experience, but, one that will equally establish an identity as stemming from an abelist perspective. The study accommodates the Consumer Response Model introduced recently into disability studies, which aims to capture the lived experience and is in keeping with the agenda of Consumer Culture Theory. This study also acknowledges the implications of the Transformatory Consumer Research agenda in relation to consumer wellbeing.

Periods of sustained, and or, irreversible liminality and uncertainty can be instrumental to the erosion of an identity life cycle. The creative and transformative
consumption experiences of the home confined consumers in this study provide a different understanding of consumption behaviour and identity. The concept of a marketplace takes new forms (internal marketplace) when considered from another positioning and a personal reality is the major determinant, not the social reality, for constructive consumption behaviour. Far from being the powerless, weak, and feeble consumers generally depicted in literature, the home confined consumers in this study overcome many barriers to consumption to remain active, powerful, independent agents of change, 'within' an abelis society. In conclusion, the study highlights survival consumption behaviour, in both physical and emotional terms, as the ability to capture not only abelism but also a non-institutionalized freedom.
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Chapter One: Introduction

1.1 Introduction

This chapter provides the foundation for the thesis by introducing the field of study. It discusses the background to the research, the research aim and objectives and the rationale driving the research. It briefly describes the research methodology employed and outlines the structure of the thesis along with the indicative content of each chapter.

1.2 Background to the Research

This thesis falls within the consumer research discipline in the domain of what Arnould and Thompson (2005) refer to as Consumer Culture Theory (CCT). Consumer culture is said to denote "a social arrangement in which the relations between lived culture and social resources, and between meaningful ways of life and the symbolic and material resources on which they depend, are mediated through markets" (Arnould and Thompson, 2005: 869). In other words, this stream of research addresses the dynamic relationships between consumer actions, the marketplace and cultural meanings, and demonstrates the impact of marketplace structures and ideologies on shaping sociocultural consumption practices (Arnould and Thompson, 2005).

The thesis explores consumer identity in relation to special possession consumption and does so within the context of consumers confined to their homes due to disability and long-term illness. Home confined consumers are individuals whose context of diminished physicality, coupled with few or limited opportunities for marketplace socialization, render them as disadvantaged and vulnerable. A key question addressed by this research is: What happens to consumer identity in the absence of marketplace socialization?

Postmodern theory acknowledges the central role of consumption in the construction of the social world in general and individual identities in particular. Consumption has increasingly been viewed as a normal and expected custom of today's society. Indeed, it is argued that we live in a consumer society where the ability to consume
appears to be everything (Miles, 2001). Thus, mainstream consumer society is "directed largely by the accumulation and consumption of material goods" (O'Shaughnessy and O'Shaughnessy, 2002: 525). Consumption is even deemed to be a sign of good citizenship in response to a crisis situation. For example, after World War II, consumption was viewed as a civic responsibility to improve the living standards of all Americans (Cohen, 2004). Similarly, after the terrorist attacks on the 11th September 2001, people were encouraged to increase consumption (Hill, 2002b). It has thus become a societal expectation that consumers should respond to the temptations of the marketplace. As Bauman (1998: 37) suggested "a 'normal life' is the life of consumers, preoccupied with making their choices among the panoply of publicly displayed opportunities for pleasurable sensations and lively experiences."

Home confined consumers are individuals who lack the resources, in terms of physicality and ability, to participate in the normal customs of their society. Within consumer culture it is also argued that people look to the marketplace in their pursuit of happiness (Ger, 1997; Ahuvia and Friedman, 1998).

This increased emphasis on consumption makes doing everyday life for the home confined consumer that more difficult. This is because consumer society can be as significant to those who do not have access to resources, as to those who do (Miles, 2001). Firat (1992) suggests that consumers consume signs to recreate individual identities of the moment and Douglas (1997: 30) argues that the shopping process is integral to defining one's identity, not simply 'what one is, but what one is not.' Against this backdrop of the centrality of consumption in people's lives, people with disabilities need to interact and experience the consumer lifestyle as part of achieving full societal inclusivity. Conroy and Feinstein (1988) argue that a critical component to insuring independence for this particular population is their ability to perform autonomous consumer related activities. However, the challenges they face as consumers restrict many aspects of 'typical' consumer behaviour (Kaufman, 1995).

Physicality is a highly valued commodity in Western society, and those who fail to meet the socially imposed standard are viewed as a class apart (Chouinard, 1997).
Power and social control are reflected in environmental design; keeping disruptive elements in their place (Moss and Dyck, 1997). Restrictive environments control access to social spaces, determining in a very real sense who does and who does not belong. Similarly, equating disability with illness has had a significant impact on modern thinking. Western society views illness as a private problem to be resolved outside of the public domain (Rioux, 1985). Marketing has a role to play in consumer marginalisation and Bowring (2000) argued that the manufacturing of exclusion and shame is one of the chief tools of commercial advertising. Additionally, Szmigin (2003) noted that marketing has been criticised for being responsible for the increase in social comparison, competitive consumption and the need to keep up with the latest and the best consumer goods.

1.3 Main Argument of the Thesis

The main argument of this thesis is that home confined consumers employ a range of innovative and creative consumption experiences that provide evidence of their abelism and visibility. Furthermore, they can (re)construct an identity through special possession consumption, and in absence of direct marketplace socialization. Consumer agency is defined as a person’s capacity for action in their interests (Peñaloza, 2004). Consumption represents a key arena of social life in which the tensions of structure and agency are played out on an everyday basis (Miles, 2001). Rather than being constrained by structure, it has been suggested that consumers are beginning to take over the marketplace (Szmigin, 2003). A number of studies have demonstrated that consumers assert their agency by altering, reworking or subverting marketers’ meanings to create their own idiosyncratic or socially constructed alternatives (Mick and Buhl, 1992; Thompson and Haytko, 1997; Muniz and O’Guinn, 2001; Holt, 2002; Kozinets, 2002; Kozinets et al., 2004). This thesis extends this research stream by considering the empowerment and abelism, derived from special possession consumption, of a disadvantaged consumer population.

The contribution of this research is seen in two main areas. First, it adds to knowledge and understanding of home confined consumers, especially in relation to identity construction and consumption behaviours involved in managing the transition from abelism to non-abelism. Secondly, it adds to knowledge and
understanding of identity and special possession consumption, and, in particular, the ways that possessions play a significant role in the realisation of a self-identity.

1.4 Aims and Research Objectives

The overall aim of the research reported here was to gain a deeper understanding of identity (re)construction within the context of consumers who were previously active in the marketplace but are now confined to their homes due to long term illness and disability.

The key topics addressed by the research are as follows:

- How do home confined consumers maintain an identity in absence of direct marketplace interaction? What consumption behaviour is employed and how might this be classified?
- What consumption experiences are important to home confined consumers? What special possessions enable these consumers to display a visibility and abelism reflective of societal consumption behaviour?
- What are the implications of special possession consumption in relation to the ability to realise self-empowerment, self-worth and a self-identity? What are the implications for consumer researchers to conceptualise empowerment, wellbeing and consumer disadvantage?

1.5 Rationale for the Research

Consumer Culture Theory (CCT) explores how consumers consume actively to further their identity and lifestyle goals (Arnould and Thompson, 2005). The marketplace provides consumers with multiple resources from which to construct individual and collective identities (Murray, 2002; Schau and Gilly, 2003). One of the aims of CCT is to expand knowledge on disadvantaged and vulnerable consumers (Arnould and Thompson, 2005). More recently, Transformative Consumer Research (TCR), that is, research that has the potential to make a positive difference to the lives of consumers (Association for Consumer Research, 2006), is likely to be accompanied by increased interest in vulnerable and disadvantaged consumer groups. Both CCT and TCR focus on the consumer’s perspective. This research fits with the aims of CCT and TCR.
There is a need for consumer researchers to question some of the widespread beliefs about disabled consumers. Research has shown that people with disabilities are perceived as damaged, feeble, passive and dependent, unable to pursue activities at the level of their fully functioning peers (Murphy, 1990; Phillips, 1990). Disabled people are perceived as ineffective workers unable to contribute meaningfully to mainstream society (Hanson, 2002). Peripheral access is granted according to able-bodied parameters, thereby satisfying the concept of universality without comprising or disrupting the day-to-day activities of non-disabled citizens (Chouinard and Grant, 1997). Disabled persons have not been allowed to be actively involved in the process; rather they have been acted upon. As a result, disabled people must labour under the assumptions imposed upon them by their non-disabled counterparts. Socialization with one’s non-disabled peers is severely restricted and regulated. More importantly perhaps, non-disabled people retain the perception of disability as an anomaly as opposed to a reflection of the diversity of humanity. Society has yet to develop a comfort level associated with impairment, pain or fatigue that venture much beyond avoidance (Wendell, 1996). Myths, fear and apprehension remain intact due to lack of exposure to, or knowledge of, disability. The absence of everyday encounters between the able-bodied mainstream and the disabled ‘outsiders’ perpetuates ignorance and fear (Barnes, 1991). Additionally, the equation of consumption with happiness (Ger, 1997; Ahuvia and Friedman, 1998) implies that home confined consumers’ lead miserable lives. The limited research on these assumptions suggests that they need to be more vigorously investigated, and even challenged. An important aim is to provide such consumers with a voice and raise their visibility. Reinharz (1992) cited demystification as one of a number of transformative research strategies where the aim is to investigate and challenge common myths and stereotypes that persist about such groups.

People with disabilities face difficulties in participating fully in the consumer society and this is a growing group. Estimates of the numbers of disabled people in society vary considerably, reflecting the wide variation in the ways that disability or ability is defined (Rummel et al., 1996). Currently, it is estimated that there are 49.7 million people with chronic disabilities in the USA (Waldrop and Stern, 2003) and 10 million adults in the UK (DWP, 2004) and 6.9 million of working age (LFS, 2005). The International Labour Organisation (ILO) estimates there are 610 million
disabled worldwide and 39 million disabled in Europe. Almost certainly the numbers will grow as the general population ages (Burnett and Pallab, 1996). Despite the extent of disability, there is only a very small stream of research that focuses on the disabled consumer and the adoption of consumer roles by disabled persons. Research by Burnett and Pallab (1996), Baker and Kaufman-Scarborough (2001), Vezina et al. (1995), Kaufman-Scarborough (1999) and Baker and Redmond (2001) focused on disabled consumers who consume in the 'normal' interactive environment of the able-bodied individual. To illustrate such studies, Rummel et al. (1996) examined how developmentally disabled people make consumption choices. Some consumer researchers addressed specific disabilities, such as visual impairment (Gould, 1999), HIV/AIDS (Gould, 1990; Pavia, 1993), and high blood pressure (Pathak et al., 1993). The bulk of the work is also North American in origin. Similarly, in market research, there is little commercially generated marketing knowledge about disabled consumers, or, indeed, other marginalised and disadvantaged groups. This results in such consumers being overlooked, and even shunned, as potential customers (Alwitt and Donley, 1996); the invisibility of the home confined consumer further exacerbates such lack of knowledge and is, therefore, the main concern of this research.

1.6 Research Methodology

In line with other CCT research (Arnould and Thompson, 2005) a qualitative research approach was deemed central to meeting the aims of the study. As such, the research follows the philosophies of interpretivism. This perspective advocates multiple realities due to the existence of differing individual perceptions (Hudson and Ozanne, 1988). The epistemological stance of radical constructivism holds that people are actively involved in the creation of their own phenomenal worlds (Burr, 1985; Raskin, 2002), with a subjective experiential reality (Von Glasersfeld, 1995). A phenomenon must, therefore, be studied from the perspective of the consumer involved and the emphasis is placed on reaching the level of lived experience (Thompson et al., 1989).

The research design reflected the need to understand the everyday lives of respondents and the main data collection method was in-depth interviews. These
interviews were more conversational in style and the lead was taken from the respondent. The more personal way of knowing (Von Glasersfeld, 1995), mirroring the radical constructivist approach, was adopted, as it was believed this design would lead to the discovery of more insightful findings. Three individual cases were explored in this study (one case represented two sisters) over a period of two years. On-going interviews or ‘conversations’ were carried out in respondents’ homes on a weekly or fortnightly basis, but in one case, everyday ‘conversations’ were conducted by e-mail or telephone, or both.

The interpretive framework chosen for the research was hermeneutics. This iterative analysis and interpretation process leads to the development of a holistic understanding as initial understandings are modified as new information emerges (Thompson et al., 1989; Arnould and Fischer, 1994). Pre-understanding is an important tenet of hermeneutic philosophy (Gummesson, 1991; Arnould and Fischer, 1994). Consequently, in line with previous CCT research, this study draws from an interdisciplinary body of theory to advance the theoretical conversation. Figure 1.1 provides an overview of the research problem and design. A more detailed discussion of the research methodology is provided in chapter four.

Figure 1.1 Research Design
1.7 Overview of the Chapters

The literature review is presented as two separate chapters (chapters two and three), which critically examine the extant literature on consumption and identity, possessions and extended self, nostalgia, ritual and ritualised behaviour. Chapter four discusses the research methodology adopted for the study. Chapter five presents brief ‘life histories’ of the three individual cases and discusses the findings on special possession consumption behaviour and the implications for identity. Chapter six focuses on self-care practices associated with the body, body rituals and ritualised behaviour. Chapter seven discusses the importance of personal communities in the realisation of autopoiesis for the home confined consumer and for achieving wellbeing. Chapter eight concludes the thesis by identifying the main contributions of the research and potential areas for future research attention. The content of each chapter will now be described in more detail.

Chapter two addresses the relationship between consumption and identity and how this impacts on the ability to construct a self-identity in relation to others in terms of identity networks. Implications of non-abelism on the ability to construct an identity are considered and how consumption experiences may alleviate difficulties in the realization of an identity. The home confined consumer context is discussed in relation to concepts of consumer disadvantage and vulnerability.

Chapter three reviews the literature on possessions and nostalgia within consumer research, and other related disciplines. This chapter focuses on possessions, specifically special possessions, and their associated attachments as being integral to the realisation of an identity. To support this thinking, literature reviews on the concepts of nostalgia and ritual are provided to contextualise the importance of both these concepts in the consumption and identity process. These concepts provide a basis from which to explore the consumption experiences of those confined to the home.

Chapter four focuses on the research methodology. It begins by setting the research in the context of consumer research and goes on to discuss the philosophical assumptions of interpretivism, which underpin much of Consumer Culture Theory.
Chapter One: Introduction

(Arnould and Thompson, 2005). This research subscribes to the ideas of radical constructivism, and, since this is not widely employed in consumer research, there is a detailed discussion of what it is and why it was employed for this research. The research strategy involved case studies of home confined consumers and the rationale for this strategy, along with details of research design, are also discussed.

There are three findings chapters as follows:

**Chapter five** begins with a brief life history of each of the three case studies. However, this chapter focuses on consumers’ ability to realise identity through special possession consumption. This study has shown that identity (re)construction amongst home confined consumers is an active, complex and nuanced process whereby earlier lives as well as current situations are interconnected through possessions. A number of valued possessions, both functional and expressive, serve to sustain and bolster a person’s sense of competence and wellbeing. These possessions that give credence to the ‘invisible’ home confined consumer are symbolic of their existence, but an existence not just marked by their physical presence, but by the ability or abelism inherent in the consumption of such possessions. Finally, it argues that assumptions made about home confined consumers may have little grounding in reality.

**Chapter six** discusses special possession consumption in relation to bodies and rituals, and the importance of such to the home confined consumer in terms of demonstrating ability, creativity, control, and power in doing everyday life. Postmodern culture can best be compared to chaos and it is not surprising therefore that the individual who is living under the pressures of everyday life and in value-uncertainty turns to the concern of his or her body. The ability of the home-confined consumer to delay the process of disease and decay and by extension, invisibility, firmly lies in their domain. This challenges stereotypes of disability as one displaying only passivity and powerlessness. These concerns of the body to achieve a visible ‘abelism’ are not purely aesthetic concerns but emanate from a real desire to harness physicality and a sufficient level of self-power to enable an ongoing identity. The discipline, rituals and regimes of care are discussed in terms of commonality to the three cases in this research.
Chapter seven focuses on personal communities. Current social and economic issues concerning the care of the elderly, disabled and chronically ill suggest that communities of care and care support structures may be an important area for future consumer research. Findings suggest that personal communities can help empower the home confined individual, especially in periods of uncertainty and vulnerability, by providing a supporting framework for ongoing construction of self and of identity. Home confined consumers can benefit from the construction of a personal community in terms of wellbeing, welfare and feelings of empowerment. Of course an underlying but extremely important concern for home confined consumers is their ability to stem the transition from independent living to 'institutionalised' living, and, as a result the need to construct, manage, and maintain a personal community is undoubtedly one of major concern.

Chapter eight concludes the thesis by discussing the contributions to emerge from the research. There are contributions to the consumer research literature on identity and special possessions as well as contributions to consumption in the context of home confined consumers. The latter focuses on identity, special possession consumption behaviour, empowerment and wellbeing. The limitations of the study are identified as well as suggestions for future research inquiry.

This chapter has introduced the research undertaken for this thesis; the following chapter begins by providing a context for this study.
2.1 Introduction

Most individuals learn the meanings of consumption through the socialization process, via families, friends, and especially through interactions in the commercial marketplace (Firat, 1992). Indeed Douglas (1997: 30) argues "the shopping process is integral to defining one's identity, not simply 'what one is, but what one is not.'" The importance of such interactions is well established in the consumer research literature and a stream of research has focused on interactions in cathedrals of consumption and festival marketplaces (shopping malls, and so on) (Firat and Dholakia, 1998; Maclaran and Brown, 2005; Maclaran and Brown, 2000; Maclaran and Stephens, 1998; Miller, 1997, 2001). This brings into question consumers who have very limited or no direct access and exposure to the commercial marketplace and, hence, limited personal experience, which, in turn affects their ability to utilise product cues and consume symbolically (Belk, 1988; Firat and Venkatesh, 1995; Solomon, 1983).

No studies were found that examined the consumption situation of homebound individuals. Of course some interaction with the marketplace is possible even for homebound consumers via remote shopping that includes the use of the internet, television shopping channels, catalogues, and so on (Burton, 2002). However, even remote shopping is an area where research is very limited, and where it does exist, it focuses on consumers who are able (bodied) to make choices between direct and remote marketplace interaction (Morley, 1992; Fine and Leopold, 1993; Claxton, 1995; Stern, 1997; Bush, 2001; Park and Kim, 2003; Aggarwal and Vaidyanathan, 2003; Hoffman, 2004). In a study by Taylor (2000) adults with disabilities were found to spend more time on-line than their able bodied counterparts. Nevertheless, it is widely assumed that homebound consumers are no more likely to engage in remote shopping than the general population (Burnett and Pallab, 1996). Whilst recognising the importance of consumption and consumer choices in the lives of people with disabilities, there are relatively few consumer research studies on their
interactions with the commercial marketplace. Indeed, to date there has been only limited research that examines the adoption of consumer roles by disabled persons.

In this chapter the literature on consumer identity is reviewed and the importance of consumption to identity construction is discussed. The implications of changes to consumer context on the ability to realise identity is addressed. The role of marketplace interaction or socialization in the identity project is emphasized. A brief review of the disability literature and consumer research studies of disabled consumers follows. Finally the concepts of consumer vulnerability and consumer culture are examined.

### 2.2 Identities and Consumption

A considerable body of scholarship in consumer research (Amould and Wilk, 1984; Belk, 1988, 1990, and 1992; McCracken, 1986, 1988; Mehta and Belk, 1991), sociology (Corrigan, 1997; Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton, 1981; Goffman, 1959) and anthropology (Douglas and Isherwood, 1979; Sahlins, 1976) have addressed the relationship between identity and consumption. "The relationship implicit...is that identity translates into consumption, and that consumption is capable of revealing identity" (Schau, 2000: 50).

People consume as a result of imagined relationships between objects, between objects and humans, and between humans individually and collectively. As Bocock (1993: 68) states, "People try to become the being they desire to be by consuming the items they imagine will help create and sustain their ideas of themselves, their image, their identity." Consumption is central to the construction of the social world (Elliott, 1997) and integral to the expression of individual and collective identities (Belk, 1988; Bocock, 1993). Consumers deliberately acquire things and engage in consumption practices to achieve a pre-conceived notion of their essential selves. Consumption is a dynamic process and a creative endeavour that ordinary people engage in daily. People engage in consumption behaviour in part to construct their self-concept and to create their personal identities (Belk, 1988; Richins, 1994). Recent research indicates that consumers construct their self-identity and present
themselves to others through their “self-image associations” (Escalas and Bettman, 2005: 378).

The individual in postmodern society is threatened by a number of “dilemmas of the self” (Giddens, 1991: 201) including fragmentation, powerlessness, uncertainty, and a struggle against commodification. These dilemmas are driven by the “looming threat of personal meaninglessness” (Giddens, 1991: 202) as the individual endeavours to construct and maintain an identity that will remain stable in a rapidly changing environment. Through the ever-growing plurality of consumer choice, the individual is offered resources that may be used creatively to achieve, “an ego-ideal which commands the respect of others and inspires self-love” (Gabriel and Lang, 1995: 98).

Central to postmodernism is the recognition that the consumer does not make consumption choices solely from products’ utilities but also from their symbolic meanings (Belk, 1988; Bourdieu, 1994; Dittmar, 1992; Douglas, 1982; Gabriel and Lang, 1995; Giddens, 1991; Goffman, 1959; McCracken, 1988). The functions of the symbolic meanings of products operate in two directions, outward in constructing the social world; Social-Symbolism, and inward towards constructing self-identity; Self-Symbolism (Elliott, 1997). As consumption plays a central role in supplying meanings and values for the creation and maintenance of the consumer’s personal and social world, so advertising is recognized as one of the major sources of these symbolic meanings. These cultural meanings are transferred to brands and it is brands that are often used as symbolic resources for the construction and maintenance of identity (McCracken, 1987; Mick and Buhl, 1992).

The self is conceptualized in postmodernity not as a given product of a social system nor as a fixed entity that the individual can simply adopt, but as something the person actively creates, partially through consumption (Dittmar, 1992; Gabriel and Lang, 1995; Giddens, 1993; Glover, 1988; Solomon, 1986; Tyler, 1978). Thompson and Troester (2002: 145) suggest that in the age of postmodernity, postmodern motivations and goals, “are uniquely constructed, consumer micro-cultural contexts and exhibit distinct symbolic connections to specific consumption practices.” Thompson and Hirsch (1995: 210) describe the self as a symbolic project, which the
individual must actively construct out of the available symbolic materials, materials
that "the individual weaves into a coherent account of who he or she is, a narrative
of self-identity." We live in a symbol-rich environment and the meaning attached to
any situation or object is determined by the interpretation of these symbols. Through
the socialization process the consumer learns not only to agree on shared meanings
of some symbols but also to develop individual symbolic interpretations of his or her
own. The consumer uses these symbolic meanings to construct, maintain and express
each of his or her multiple identities.

The development of individual self-identity is inseparable from the parallel
development of collective social identity, and this problematic relationship has been
described as the internal-external dialectic of identification by Jenkins (1996), who
maintains that self-identity, must be validated through social interaction and that the
self is embedded in social practices. Dittmar (1992) comments that "material
possessions have a profound symbolic significance for their owners, as well as for
other people and the symbolic meanings of our belongings are an integral feature of
expressing our own identity and perceiving the identity of others." Although
McCracken (1988) suggests that ritual is the prime means for the transfer of
symbolic meaning from goods to the person, the complex social practices of
consumer culture extend far beyond the concept of the ritualistic, and entail a
reciprocal, dialectical relationship between the individual and his or her cultural
milieu. All voluntary consumption carries, either consciously or unconsciously,
symbolic meanings if the consumer has choices to consume, he or she will consume
things that hold particular symbolic meanings.

Literature suggests that the consumer is what she or he has, since her or his
possessions are viewed as major parts of his or her extended self (Belk, 1988).
Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton (1981) suggest that the consumer invests
"psychic energy" such as effort, time, and attention in an object. This energy and its
products are regarded as a part of self because they have grown or emerged from the
self. The symbolic meanings of the consumer's possessions may portray essences of
his or her individuality, or reflect his or her desirable connections with others (Kleine
et al., 1995) and symbolic consumption helps the consumer to categorize her or
himself in society, to ease periods of transition and to achieve a sense of continuity and preparation for death (Belk, 1988).

Although the consumer learns and develops consumption symbols through socialization processes and exposure to mass media (e.g., advertising), it does not mean that everybody who possesses the same product bought it for the same symbolic meaning. The symbolic resources available to the individual for the construction of the self can be distinguished as being either lived experiences or mediated experiences (Thompson et al., 1990). Lived experience refers to the practical activities and face-to-face encounters in our everyday lives. Mediated experience is an outcome of a mass-communication culture and the consumption of media products, and involves the ability to experience events that are spatially and temporally distant from the practical context of daily life. The individual can draw selectively on mediated experience and interlace it with lived experience to construct the self.

The life history and social situation of individuals will lead to different valorisations of forms of experience, varying between those at one end of the continuum who value only lived experience and have little contact with mediated forms, and others at the opposite end of the continuum for whom mediated experience has become central to the project of the self. However, central to postmodern consumer culture is a growing range of opportunities for the use of mediated experiences in the project of the self, countless narratives of self-formation, countless visions of the world such that we may be encountering “symbolic overload” (Thompson and Hirsch, 1995: 216).

One of the prime features of the postmodern experience is fragmentation, where the inherited self-identity of history is no longer a stable secure fact but requires active construction, “A self-identity has to be created and more or less continually reordered against the backdrop of shifting experiences of day-to-day life and the fragmenting tendencies of modern institutions” (Giddens, 1991: 198). This construction is achieved partly through developing coherent narratives of the self. In postmodern consumer culture, individuals are engaged in a constant task of negotiating meanings from lived and mediated experiences as they endeavour to
construct and maintain their identity. As part of the resources for this task individuals utilize the symbolic meanings of consumer goods, to gain an understanding of the dynamics of the process of identity construction. This understanding will play an important role in the symbolic project of the self (Elliott and Wattanasuwan, 1998).

2.3 Identities in Transition

Identities and relationships are always work-in-progress and the role of consumption activities and experiences has been acknowledged in the construction of such a life project. Transitions have been described as a limbo between a past state and a coming one, "a period of personal ambiguity, of non-status, and of unanchored identity" (Schouten, 1991: 49) and represent valuable sites for exploring the relationship between consumption and identity creation (Hogg et al., 2003). Home confined consumers moving from an abelist to a non-abelist perspective, are uncertain of their ability to manage consumption activities and are deemed liminal at this point in time (Turner, 1969). Indeed, Murphy et al. (1988: 237) observed that disability creates liminality, since the disabled are neither well, nor sick, "declassified but are not yet reclassified; they have died in their old status and are not reborn in a new one." Adelman (1992) supports this sentiment; she argues social liminality is often experienced by persons whose personal identity is threatened as a consequence of the stigma of disease (disability) and loss of social ties (invisibility of home confinement). Transitions in personal circumstances, emotional and or physical, can be the catalyst for bringing about a liminal state in which the self-identity struggles to attain a new strong sense of self. As a consequence of continual evolvement, and certainly in times of crisis, the taken-for-granted aspects of life may be reassessed and constructed in a more meaningful way. Research among consumers in crisis or in situations of 'extremis' may enhance our understanding of the role of consumption in our society and how in particular these consumption experiences may exacerbate or improve the situation of those in distress. Indeed Schouten (1991: 50) believes that, "Major role transitions are crucial times in determining the direction and quality of consumers' lives, but little is yet known about the consumption behaviours of liminal people or the importance of consumer behaviours to human growth and change."
Those vulnerable in society and alienated by their exclusion from consumption culture may feel further isolated in terms of their consumption behaviour as individuals. Wicklund and Gollwitzer (1982) suggest that as a temporary measure vulnerable consumers attempt to restore their damaged self-identity through symbolic consumption (Elliott, 1999). Consumption plays a central role in the construction and maintenance of self-identity, where the development of the self is translated into the pursuit of desired possessions (Giddens, 1991). When faced with threats to self-esteem and sense of identity, individuals are motivated to preserve continuity of meaning through the consumption of past experiences. The process of maintaining continuity is crucial to the successful adaptation to change and loss, indeed the ability “to control deviation from expected behaviour, to isolate innovation and sustain the segregation of different aspects of life are all means to defend our ability to make sense of life” (Marris, 1974: 11).

Consumers with uncertain futures engage in a delicate dance between optimism and pessimism as they go about their day-to-day lives. Consumers use consumption decisions to help them through their crises, “often appearing to use control over their consumption as a surrogate for their loss of control in other dimensions of their lives,” (Pavia and Mason, 2004: 452). Control, often in the form of consumption, emerges as a defence to buffer the fear of mortality. Consumption experiences that offer the vulnerable individual a capability or competency to realise control in times of uncertainty and liminality, in terms of pleasurable or nostalgic escapism, should actively be pursued. Consumption of possessions and experiences is a critical component of managing life-threatening situations, for those considered as experiencing liminality due to sustained uncertainty. Consumption activities provide signals about the individual’s mindset to both those experiencing uncertainty and those who constitute the world around them. These activities will eventually play an important role in leading individuals through the crisis and into resolution (Baumann, 1996). As Pavia and Mason (2004: 453) suggest, “Consumption offers an arena in which control can be exercised, a means for enjoying short-term sensual pleasure and immediate experiences, a voice through which the individual can express and understand her views about the future, and a mechanism to envision herself anchored in the future surrounded by others and linked by joint consumption.”
Woodruffe-Burton and Elliott (2005: 461) have suggested that in order to make sense of our lives and ourselves, we require a narrative identity. This form of "compensatory consumption behaviour" provides an opportunity for the construction of self in consumption. Narrative research generates knowledge about the social or individual construction of reality through story telling (Hopkinson and Hogarth-Scott, 2001). Hurdley (2006: 717) suggests, "Narratives as social performances demonstrates the extent to which apparently 'private' experiences of the self are manifested by means of display objects and domestic artefacts. Narratives and objects inhabit the intersection of the personal and the social." Home confined consumers may be afforded the opportunity to construct an identity through the narratives of special possession consumption.

Research in consumer behaviour has demonstrated that individuals create, transform and maintain self-identity through the consumption of goods and services (Belk, 1989; Celsi et al., 1993; Hill and Stamey, 1990; Hogg and Mitchell, 1997; Schouten and McAlexander, 1995). Goods and services are recognised to embody signs and symbols that communicate meaning to other individuals and groups. It is emphasised in the literature that in defining identity there is interdependence between the individual and society (McCracken, 1986, 1990). This interdependence between self and society is acknowledged and summed up by Berger (1966: 109) "one identifies oneself, as one is identified by others, by being located in a common world."

2.4 Importance of Others to Self

Our location within a common world relates to the notion that we live in communities. Community has been largely overlooked in studies of consumption behaviour (Cova, 1997; Muinz and O'Guinn, 2001; McGrath et al., 1993). The idea of communal consumption, however, is not new. Within specific communities or cultures, certain products or brands become ideologies of consumption (Hebidge, 1979; Schouten and McAlexander, 1995). This type of conformity facilitates the adoption of collective norms and values; identity provides the means by which individuals create and survive social change (Berger, 1966; Hogg and Mitchell, 1997; McCracken, 1990).
The self is composed of multiple identities with associated loyalty to relationships of ethnic community, religion, locality, and nation or supra-nation (Smith, 1991). With some products, we develop a relationship such that they come to be important parts of our identity. Others cannot be so readily accommodated, these, if they are to be absorbed, require an exploration of identity, “The quest for outer difference becomes a quest for inner meaning” (Gabriel and Lang, 1995: 78). Consumption has become an opportunity to display one’s identity. For Belk (1988) certain objects are as vital to our identity as physical extensions of our bodies. These also act as filters to organize and interpret our social existence. As a communicator, the consumer uses products as bridges to relate to other people. As identity-seeker, the consumer searches for a real self in consumed objects (Gabriel and Lang, 1995).

Participation in constructing identity, knowledge, and meaning should be a matter of ensuring the survival of the communicating community (Deetz, 1992). Identity, as a sense of self, requires a sense of other (Cohen, 1994; Maturana, 1980). Identity is therefore a cultural performance; identity is expressed through and within culture, by means of consumption. This performance, or discourse, is expressed through constructed meanings, evoking emotional responses from the community (Smith, 1991). These are not, however, shared symbols that the entire population understands in an identical way, rather there is a need to define such symbols.

In marketing, research suggests that one’s identity is challenged during transitions (Noble and Walker, 1997) and transitions lead to disruptions in consumption (Andreasen, 1984; Fellerman and Debevec, 1993). Disruptions in consumption can be the result of both the traditional family life cycle trajectory (marriage, birth of a child, empty nest) and less recognized transitions (sudden loss of a job, relocation, serious illness). In addition to experiencing transitions and managing everyday interactions, ‘families’, act as a locus for social reproduction. Consumer researchers focus on various topics within this domain including intergenerational influence as a source of brand equity (Moore et al., 2002) inalienable wealth (Curasi et al., 2004) and rituals (Belk et al., 1989; McCracken, 1986; Rook, 1985; Wallendorf and Arnould, 1991). Family identity offers valuable explanations for why intergenerational influences occur in some families but not in others. Family identity
also has implications for the extent to which services and places are constructed into a family’s identity and transferred across generations (Price and Epp, 2005).

Consumer choice, consumer experiences, consumer products and material objects generally are said to express and create (Schau and Muniz, 2002), emancipate (Kozinets, 2002), and transform (Ruth, 2003) the consumer self, albeit under varying conditions and, moreover, communicate self-concept and status to others (Arnould and Price, 2001; Belk, 1988; Borgerson and Schroeder, 2005; Richins, 1994). Work in consumer culture has become increasingly focused on the contribution of objects to identity construction and to questions of agency (Schroeder and Borgerson, 2004; Miller, 2002). Consumers actively draw upon interaction to construct and maintain identities in the face of postmodern meaninglessness. Consumption itself plays a central role in supplying meanings and values for the creation and maintenance of the consumer’s personal and social world through apparently narrative efforts (Borgerson, 2005).

We cultivate and preserve our identities via symbolic use of possessions (Belk, 1988; Solomon, 1983). People use consumption to acquire or maintain an aspect of self-concept, and, in other cases it can facilitate changes in identity either of a temporary or permanent nature (Kleine et al., 1995; McAlexander, 1991; Young, 1991). The construction of identity continually evolves over time (Kegan, 1982), going through stages of acquisition, maintenance, latency or disposition and possible reconstruction, in other words an identity project life cycle (Kleine III and Kleine, 2000).

2.5 The Centrality of Identity Issues in Consumption

“That we are what we have... is perhaps the most basic and powerful fact of consumer behaviour” (Belk, 1988: 139). The issue of identity, central to possession consumption as a part of self, are important and lasting contributions of Belk’s (1988) article. Ahuvia’s study (2005: 179) states that love objects serve as “indexical mementos of key events or relationships in the life narrative, help resolve identity conflicts, and tend to be tightly embedded in a rich symbolic network of associations.”
Throughout their lives, people strive to resolve identity conflicts, although the ongoing nature of life renders each tentative and imperfect, but work on identity narratives suggests that people generally strive to resolve these tensions (Burroughs and Rindfleisch, 2002; McAdams, 1993; Mick and Fournier, 1998; Murray, 2002). The notion of products as providing consumers with solutions to identity conflicts provides an important addition to the established focus on consumption as a means of distinguishing or marking out social groups. It is not surprising that loved objects and activities play a special role in consumers’ understandings of who they are as people (Wong and Ahuvia, 1998; Ahuvia, 2005). This confirms the fundamentally social nature of consumption and reiterates the importance of the trilateral person-thing-person framing of consumer behaviour. Belk (1988: 159) draws attention to the fact that the “possessions incorporated in extended self serve valuable functions to healthy personalities” because “possessions can make a positive contribution to our identities.” This is particularly relevant to consumer wellbeing, since research has suggested that conflicts and tensions within the identity narrative are experienced as psychologically problematic (Burroughs and Rindfleisch, 2002; Murray, 2002). Ahuvia (2005) suggests that further research looking at issues related to consumption, identity, and consumer welfare is needed.

Ahuvia’s (2005) study shows how consumers use the things they love to construct a sense of self when facing conflicts. Contemporary consumption also shows that the feeling of identity invested in material objects can be extraordinarily high (Ames, 1984). McCarthy (1984) contends that identity can be expressed more in the extended self than in the unextended self. Consumption has the ability to tie together a life project, and socio-historical consumption behaviour provides a continuity of that identity through present and future orientations. This understanding implies a socialization process and a physicality that is indicative of an abelist perspective.

### 2.6 Abelism and Disability

Society is designed for able-bodied persons, following a perspective called ‘ableism’, perpetuated through what Imrie (1999: 25) calls “discriminatory architectural design.” Physicality is a highly valued commodity in Western society, and those who fail to meet the socially imposed standard are viewed as a class apart
(Chouinard, 1997). Power and social control are reflected in environmental design, keeping disruptive elements in their place (Moss and Dyck, 1997). Restrictive environments control access to social spaces, determining in a very real sense who does and who does not belong. Similarly, equating disability with illness has had a significant impact on modern thinking. Western society views illness as a private problem to be resolved outside of the public domain (Rioux, 1985).

Research has shown that people with disabilities are perceived as damaged, feeble, passive and dependent, unable to pursue activities at the level of their fully functioning peers (Murphy, 1990; Phillips, 1990). Disabled people are perceived as ineffective workers unable to contribute meaningfully to mainstream society (Hanson, 2002). Peripheral access is granted according to able-bodied parameters, thereby satisfying the concept of universality without compromising or disrupting the day-to-day activities of non-disabled citizens (Chouinard and Grant, 1997). Disabled persons are not permitted to be actively involved in the process; rather they are acted upon. Socialization with one’s non-disabled peers is severely restricted and regulated, Morris (1991: 37) suggests, “Most of the people we have dealings with, including our most intimate relationships are not like us.... Our ideas about disability and about ourselves are generally formed by those who are not disabled.”

More importantly perhaps, non-disabled people retain the perception of disability as an anomaly, as opposed to a reflection of the diversity of humanity. Society has yet to develop a comfort level associated with impairment, pain or fatigue that venture much beyond avoidance (Wendell, 1996). Myths, fear and apprehension remain intact due to lack of exposure to, or knowledge of, disability. The absence of everyday encounters between the able-bodied mainstream and its disabled ‘outsiders’ merely perpetuates the ignorance of the former and their fears (Barnes, 1991).

Consumer researchers, as well as commercial marketers, have been slow to focus on the difficulties faced by consumers with disabilities. Baker and Kaufman-Scarborough (2001) argue that legislation has been the catalyst for efforts to making society more inclusive for people with disabilities. For example, the Americans with Disabilities Act (1990) (ADA), as well as the Disability Discrimination Act (UK)
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(1995, 2005), are the driving forces behind initiatives and thinking in respect of disabled buyers. In particular, such legislation has spearheaded the ‘architectural’ access concerns of businesses. Some businesses are beginning to realise new market opportunities amongst people with disabilities (Mueller, 1990). Waldrop and Stern (2003) state that 19.3% of the USA population (49.7 million) has a disability of some kind, making people with disabilities the single largest minority group in the US. Of this 49.7 million disabled, 18.2 million (16 and over) are registered with a condition that makes it difficult to go outside the home. In the UK, the government’s Manpower Report (2003) estimated that disabled consumer spending power amounted to £45-50 billions. This spending power is representative of the 6.9 million disabled population in the UK (see Table 2.1 below) and this figure, as in the US, reflects 19% of the total population (29.7 million).

Table 2.1 Disabled Population Figures (UK and USA, 2005/2003)

| Country | Total Population (m) | Disabled Population (m)-(%)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>UK</td>
<td>29,710,306</td>
<td>6,941,935 (19)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>USA</td>
<td>257,200,000</td>
<td>49,700,000 (19.3)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sources: Labour Force Survey, 2005 (UK) and Disability Status, 2003 (USA)

Whilst disabled consumers remain marginalized in the consumer marketplace, at least consumer researchers and legislators have shown some interest in their needs. By contrast, individuals who are homebound due to disability, long-term illness and ageing, are invisible consumers.

2.7 The Disabled Consumer and Identity

Consumption and possessions as extensions of the self (Belk, 1988) play a central role in defining and communicating identity. The narratives of self-identity constantly change but remain firmly embedded in the social processes that are ultimately contextually specific. As Weeks (1990: 88) states, “Identity is about belonging, about what you have in common with some other people and what differentiates you from others. At its most basic, it gives you a sense of personal location, the stable core to your individuality.” The assumption that identity construction through contemporary mass consumption is both a right and a freedom
underpins these understandings but makes no allowances for the implications of consumption with non-able bodied consumers (Dittmar, 1992; Gabriel and Lang, 1995; Hogg and Mitchell, 1997; Hogg and Wilson, 2004; Richins, 1999). Chouinard (1997: 380) supports such understanding, “Abelism entails a way of being that takes mobility, thinking, speech, and the senses for granted, and which includes largely ‘unconscious’ aversion to people and bodies that remind us that the able-bodied norm is an ideal.”

Disability as a field of enquiry is a relatively recent adoption, arising from the demands of disabled or those consumers of the non-abelist perspective (ADA, 1990) for full citizenship rights. Dart (1993) feels legislation would not have been necessary if people with disabilities had been consistently treated as equals and empowered to make free choices. As Paterson and Hughes (1999) point out, the structural and practical aspects of disability were focused upon, to the detriment of the disabling experience excluding those consumers’ from everyday life. The cultural and social aspects of consumption were neglected and, as Barnes et al. (1999) note, research in the main was concentrated on forms of exclusion, such as education, labour market, housing and transport.

Consumer Direction Disability advocates argue that throughout the long-term care system in all types of settings, persons with disabilities have insufficient opportunities to shape and direct their own supportive services (Benjamin et al., 2000; Baker and Redmond, 2001). Benjamin (2001) states that Consumer Direction is based on the premise that persons with disabilities should be empowered to live as independently as possible and that physical (and even cognitive) limitations should not be barriers to expressing preferences and making decisions about how they conduct their lives.

Much extant research on disability has focused on such topics as transfer learning (Bachor, 1988) and adaption to independent living (Dattilo and Peters, 1991), though few have examined these topics in commercial marketplace settings (Ferguson and McDonnell, 1991; Westling et al., 1990). Exceptionally, research by Kaufman-Scarborough (1998, 1999), Baker and Redmond (2001), and Baker et al., (2001) focused on the developmentally disabled who were consuming in the normal
interactive environment of the able bodied individual. Burnett and Baker (2001) considered the problems experienced by disabled travellers in accessing infrastructure, and Klerk and Ampousah (2002) considered problems when purchasing clothing, in terms of changing room facilities (spatial concerns). Other contributions to the disability arena have been made by Mason and Pavia (2006) who investigated family consumer behaviour when at least one child in the household has health challenges and focused on the adaptation by the family to retain marketplace interaction. Consumer behaviour research has recognised the demands that ordinary family life presents (Carrigan and Szmigin, 2004); others have addressed the adjustments to consumption behaviour that disruption (illness, death) can bring (Baker, 2006; Gentry et al., 1995; Kates, 2001; Pavia and Mason, 2004). Kaufman-Scarborough and Childers (2006) explore website accessibility and examine the motivations, challenges, and experiences of persons with visual impairments as they move from the structural environment to the electronic marketspace.

Hogg and Wilson (2004) highlighted the issue of identity in relation to the disabled consumer and current research by Downey and Catterall (2004, 2005b, 2005c, 2006, 2007a, 2007b, 2007c, 2007d) has stimulated interest in the identity debate of disabled consumers, especially those confined to the home. Studies by Downey and Catterall, in contrast to other disability studies, are concerned with changes in consumption behaviour and the ability to realize an identity in absence of a socialization process. This shift in perspective from the purely ‘architectural’ consumption concerns of disability to understanding the consumers lived experience from a non-abelist positioning, is a shift in focus from other disability consumer research studies. This consideration of the micro-level of existence and consumption experiences serves to extend knowledge of the consumer’s lived experience as advocated by Consumer Culture Theory (CCT) (Arnould and Thompson, 2005).

2.8 Conceptual Frameworks

Disability studies and policy development have been characterized as proceeding from one of two theoretical approaches: the medical model and the social model (Humphrey, 2000; Oliver, 1990; Paar and Butler, 1999). Each approach focuses on changing something so that people with disabilities can become integrated into society. The medical model seeks to rehabilitate the individual, whereas the social
model seeks to redress the problems in the structural environment. A third framework, representing consumer marketplace response (Kaufman-Scarborough and Baker, 2005) conceptualizes consumer perceptions of independence and dependence, and how they choose their marketplace responses.

2.8.1 The Medical Model

The medical model considers a person's disability as the cause of his or her limitations. Sometimes called the 'disease' model, the focus is on the illnesses, congenital defects, acquired injuries, or other conditions that limit individuals' activities, defining them as different from non-disabled people. The standards of disability, however, are often defined by societies themselves and may differ considerably from country to country (Ingstad and Whyte, 1995). In essence, the disability itself is thought to prevent the person from participating in everyday life (Johnston, 1996; Llewellyn and Hogan, 2000; Oliver, 1990).

The model assumes that people with disabilities must be 'fixed' or learn to adapt to become part of mainstream society. The focus is on returning or restoring the individual to normalcy by way of medical treatment or use of various assistive aids. If solutions are not found, the individual may be isolated from society and the disability itself prevents an individual from enjoying full participation in a society full of able-bodied persons (Chouinard, 1997). This type of approach has been criticized for framing consumers as "disempowered victims" with "resource deficits" and failing to recognize the "resource assets" that consumers bring to consumption situations (Lee et al., 1999: 230).

2.8.2 The Social Model

Rather than blaming people for their personal characteristics, the social model considers society and its structure as the focal point for analysis (Oliver, 1990). This perspective argues that society places various social restrictions on those with physical as well as mental and invisible handicaps, such as epilepsy and attention-deficit disorder. Within this perspective, consumers with disabilities are eligible (and able) to participate fully as active members of society. However, environmental factors (infrastructure, building design, amenities) create disabling situations for consumers.
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Societies are disabled when they construct buildings, design transportation systems, and arrange workplaces that are designed for 'able-bodied' persons only. In essence, 'ableist' design creates barriers that limit access to many parts of a society (Oliver, 1990). For example, educational programs in architecture, transportation and urban planning continue to adhere to traditions that were based on access for non-disabled persons only (Imrie, 1999, 2000; Paar and Butler, 1999). In many cases, such systems are adapted only after people with disabilities request the ability to participate and use specific facilities (Kaufman-Scarborough, 2001). The problem becomes a "collective responsibility of the society as a whole" to redress the balance and provide access via changes in society (Llewellyn and Hogan, 2000: 159).

The basic assumption of the social model is that the environment is flexible and can be changed, reconstructed, or adapted to fit the needs of individuals. People who subscribe to this model believe policymakers have the responsibility to examine the social environment to identify and eliminate barriers that create a 'disabling environment.'

Both the medical and the social models come from literatures in sociology, disabilities studies and environmental planning. Some researchers have argued that these models are incomplete and should instead incorporate the interaction of the person, his or her body, and the environmental space he or she encounters (Freund, 2001; Humphrey, 2000; Llewellyn and Hogan, 2000). Even though the models are incomplete individually, each approach can inform us about particular parts of the experiences of people with disabilities (Kaufman-Scarborough, 2001; Llewellyn and Hogan, 2000).

2.8.3 The Consumer Marketplace Response Model

The consumer marketplace response model, offered by Baker et al. (2001) from their analysis of the experiences of consumers with visual impairments, suggests that both the characteristics of the environment and the characteristics of the person should be taken into account. This model focuses on the dependency and independence in the marketplace as responses by the consumer to factors in the environment, their perceived adaptation skills, and the perceived costs of asking for and receiving assistance, when needed. Kaufman-Scarborough and Baker (2005) extended the
model to include consumers with any type of disability and specify how aspects of both the medical and social models are inherent in this marketplace response model. This model takes into account a person’s perceptions of an environment as enabling or disabling, individuals with disabilities formulate responses to their disabilities in terms of perceived access or barriers to inclusiveness.

There has been little attempt to consider the experience of disablement from consumers’ perspectives and how this impacts on the self-concept or self-identity. Edgar and Sedgwick (1999) recognise that identity is not merely constructed but depends upon some other. "One identifies oneself and one is identified by others, by being located in a common world." As Ellis (2000: 21) notes, modern society is averse to "risky bodies" and anxieties about the corporeality of the body revolve around concerns to preserve independent bodies, of "health, fitness, and youth." For a range of authors, such as Dyck (1999), Moss (1999), and Paar (1999), disability is inscribed by biomedical discourses of the body. Such discourses seek to propagate a conception of disability as abnormal, deviant and reducible to the physical and mental impairment or the functional limitations of the body.

Thus, a focus on disabled people draws attention to the body and the diverse ways in which it is entwined with socio-spatial practices. As Sennett (1992: 373) suggests, "urban spaces take form largely from the ways people experience their own bodies." In particular, there are senses in which the boundedness of the body is connected to what Bourdieu (1977, 1992) refers to as the ‘habitus’, or what Jenkins (1992: 74) suggests is, “habit or typical conditions or appearance, particularly of the body.” Marks (1999: 129) suggests “the body adopts a particular habitual way of relating to the environment,” the body becomes ‘marked out’ socially by symbolic markers, which, in turn, influence life opportunities, social standing, and inclusiveness. The habitus, then, seeks to focus on the corporeal, embodied experiences of everyday life and to understand the social inequalities inherent in such interactions (Edwards and Imrie, 2003).

Seeking to break the boundaries and barriers of disability is seen, by some, as dependent upon the empowerment of disabled people, or what Cruikshank (1999: 1) refers to as, “making individuals politically active and capable of self government.”
These debates conceive of disabling, barri ered and bounded spaces as increasingly part of a discourse about social exclusion, or what Room (1995: 105) suggests is, "inadequate social participation, lack of social integration and lack of power." For many (Cruikshank, 1999; Imrie, 2001), empowerment is reliant on often-elusive networks of social contacts, or trying to find shelter in a world that refuses to accommodate irregularities. As Cruikshank (1999: 20) noted in her study, "Being 'just another number', 'dependent' or 'in need of help' is not the antithesis of being an active citizen. Rather, it is to be in a tangled field of power and knowledge that both enables and constrains the possibilities of citizenship." Home confined consumers lives are likely to be influenced by the intersection between (their) bodies and the broader socio-institutional attitudes and practices of everyday life.

2.9 Consumer Vulnerability

Consumer vulnerability as a concept provides a focus on the social consequences of consumption, even though there is no clear definition as to what exactly it refers. This lack of clarity has therefore determined that consumer vulnerability is experienced as an individual, or as a consequence of a particular group affiliation. To this extent there will be "some categories of people because of membership in a defined class" that "are always vulnerable" (Baker et al., 2005: 128).

Many consumer behaviour and marketing researchers have turned their attention to those groups deemed vulnerable by association. Hill and Stamey (1990) considered the plight of the homeless consumers in meeting their daily needs and Kaufman-Scarborough and Baker (2005) considered if consumer interests were best served by the Americans with Disabilities Act (1990).

Morgan et al. (1995) suggest a situational context in relation to defining consumer vulnerability and highlight the interaction of a person and their personal characteristics with a particular consumption situation. Ringold's (1995: 584) definition of vulnerable consumers suggested that these are individuals who have "diminished capacity to understand the role of advertising, product effects, or both." Hill (2001) and Peñaloza (1995) have considered vulnerability from both an external and an internal positioning. These considerations together take on board the negative
marketplace factors of stigmatization, subordination and segregation, which so often lead to internal or self-fragmentation and loss of self-identity. There is no doubt that certain internal factors can intensify the experience of vulnerability, indeed “how an individual frames an experience affects whether and/or to what extent vulnerability is experienced” (Baker et al., 2005: 130).

Psychosocial characteristics such as self-concept (Pavia and Mason, 2004; Stephens, Hill and Hanson, 1994), perceived health (Luce and Kahn, 1999) and social isolation (Hill, 1991; McGhee 1983; Moschis, 1992) are all linked to vulnerability, and to the lived experience. Although these internal factors have an important role to play they are not in isolation from external conditions that disfavour the consumer in exchange relationships. Most explorations of consumer vulnerability consider the lack of personal control as a major concern of the experience of consumer vulnerability. When consumers are disempowered in terms of inability to exert control over their behaviour and emotions, then this is considered part of experiencing vulnerability (Csikszentmihalyi, 1978).

It is not surprising that the element of control plays a central part in the make up of consumer vulnerability when one takes into account the meaning that consumption can bring to a consumer’s life (Belk, 1988). This meaning is contextually tied to the ability of the individual situation to exhibit and exert control (Miller, 1987). Hill and Stephens (1997: 34) noted that “feelings of loss of control over their consumer lives may dominate the existence of the poor” and, in the current research, the added dimensions of physicality and context can further contribute to loss of control. Vulnerability is equally at home with those consumers whose disabilities render them powerless to interact directly in the marketplace, and as such, their socialization process is restrained or extremely limited. People with disabilities who have imposed assistance from the marketplace are not always in the position to obtain the independence they desire, and their inability to control their environment, inevitably defines the vulnerability experienced (Baker et al., 2001).

Consumers who experience vulnerability, in whatever guise it takes, try to engage in activities that will secure personal control. These cognitive, emotional and behavioural coping strategies (Heckhausen and Schultz, 1995) can help assist in acts
of consumer agency (Peñaloza and Price, 1993). Baker et al. (2005: 132) suggest that strategies “for coping may include disattaching, distancing, fantasy, and other general attempts to regulate emotions.” Although issues of stigmatization and marginalization can be overwhelming there are forms of coping that attempt to overcome such marketplace labelling. Indeed Penaloza (1995) found that immigrant consumers can resist stigmatization by refusing to buy and use particular products. The lesbian and gay community have resisted marginalization by freely expressing their identities through ritual acts of consumption (Kates and Belk, 2001). These types of behaviour are extremely important for the vulnerable consumer in eradicating self-negativity and reaffirming visibility and place in society (Baker et al., 2005).

Experiences of vulnerability can affect present perceptions of self and this can constrain one’s future willingness to negotiate an ongoing self-identity or self-concept. The obvious control and competencies displayed by those consumers deemed vulnerable in doing everyday life dictates why experiences of vulnerability are contextually bound (Moschis, 1992). Studies by Pavia and Mason (2004) and Hill (2001) suggest uncertainty can disrupt future self-concepts and “bring a sharp focus on the present and a focus on figuring out how to manage the present to maintain the self” (Baker et al., 2005: 134). Consumption can empower the self (Ger, 1997) and present the means to becoming someone again (Pavia and Mason, 2004).

Consumer vulnerability is not the same thing as stigmatization, where specific characteristics are a sign of disease or decay (disabled consumers). Baker et al. (2005: 134) offer a definition of consumer vulnerability and one that will have bearing on the current research, “Consumer vulnerability is a state of powerlessness that arises from an imbalance in marketplace interactions or from the consumption of marketing messages and products. It occurs when control is not in an individual’s hands, creating a dependence on external factors (e.g., marketers) to create fairness in the marketplace.” Vulnerability is also a dynamic concept and it is likely that a person’s vulnerability will change during the course of his or her life.
2.10 Consumer Culture and Identity

As Featherstone (1998: 84) suggests, “To use the term ‘consumer culture’ is to emphasize that the world of goods and their principles of structuration are central to the understanding of contemporary society.” Bauman (1998) argues that the decline of ‘jobs for life’ and the constant transition between jobs and roles have paved the way for a new method to express ourselves in terms of self-identity and in how others perceive us. In place of a permanent ‘jobs for life’ sense of identity, based on production, Featherstone (1998), Bauman (1998), Firat and Dholakia (1998), and Lury (1996) argue that people today experience ‘fluid’ identities based on patterns of consumption. Consumer culture pervades all levels of society, most importantly, “at the level of meaningful psychological experiences. It affects the construction of identities, the formation of relationships, and the framing of events” (Lury, 1996: 233). The centrality of consumption to contemporary identity formation leads Bauman (1998: 26) to state, “The roads to self-identity, to a place in society, to life lived in a form that is recognizable as that of meaningful living; all require daily visits to the marketplace.”

These statements reflect the importance of having access to the marketplace for ongoing identity construction, and it is against this backdrop that the home confined consumer must consume. In many instances those deemed disadvantaged, are, as Bauman (1998: 28) suggests, “socially defined and self-defined, first and foremost as blemished, defective, faulty and deficient-in other words inadequate-consumers.”

Firat and Dholakia (1998) argue that the status of the person in society has been changed from that of citizen to that of consumer. As identity and interaction becomes more and more mediated, vulnerable consumers are less and less able to have their voices heard. Bauman (1998) argues that it is no coincidence that this disempowerment accompanying the growth of a consumer society can lead to the exclusion of certain vulnerable groups as an inevitable part of social life. If we are what we consume, (Belk, 1988), if our purchases convey complex meanings and signals, then not being able to engage in the market in the full sense, affects the ability of disadvantaged groups of consumers to interact in meaningful social life.
2.11 Discussion

Participation is a key element to inclusivity and to combating exclusion. The hegemony of the market in contemporary socio-cultural life means that those who are excluded have less control over their life choices, their ability to express and form identities, and the influence they can have on society. A consumer is without an identity if he or she cannot secure visibility and physicality through participation in the marketplace. The context of the home confined consumer places multiple barriers to immersion in the marketplace, and these individuals have many challenges to overcome to achieve inclusivity and to retain their self-identity.

The importance of consumption and, in particular, special possession consumption is heavily addressed within the identity literature. Investment in material objects and special consumption experiences can provide the impetus to not only drive forward the identity project, but also, to realise the opportunities to extend the self and enhance feelings of self-worth, self-concept and self-wellbeing. In the words of Kaufman-Scarborough and Baker (2005: 26), “If a disability prevents a person from interacting in the marketplace, this may pale in comparison to a disability preventing him or her from participating in a variety of interpersonal and self-development activities and other aspects of life.”

Chapter three reviews the consumer research literature on possessions generally and special possessions in particular. Two other concepts, nostalgia and ritual will also be addressed in conjunction with the literature on possessions.
Chapter Three: Literature Review: Consumption Concepts of Identity

“There goes my only possessions, there goes my everything,” (Humperdinck, 1977)

3.1 Introduction

This chapter addresses three consumption concepts that impact upon, and are important to, the realisation of an identity project. Specifically, the concepts of possessions, nostalgia, and rituals are reviewed with respect to the interdependent roles they play in identity construction. First, possessions will be discussed in relation to identity before addressing special possessions and possession attachment. Secondly, the nostalgia literature is discussed and its implications for possession attachment. Third, the literature on ritual is reviewed. Finally, the relationships between the concepts are discussed.

3.2 Possessions

Sartre (1943) considered that possessions are all important to knowing who we are; the wanting of a possession serves to enlarge our sense of self, whereas the object on becoming a possession merges self with non-self. Fromm (1976: 76) suggests that this view promotes, “a having mode of existence that views things, experience, time, and life itself as possessions to be acquired and retained.” The difficulty of this having mode of existence is the realization that one’s identity is at risk through the losing of one’s possessions. Both Sartre and Fromm acknowledge that the having of possessions functions to create and maintain a sense of self-definition.

The functions that possessions fulfil in peoples’ lives are not constant over the life span. Belk (1988) suggests that person-object relationships are ever evolving, and the many changes experienced over one’s life course is deemed as moving from being at one with the environment, to having objects that aid in the transition to a world where the self is distinct from the environment. The context of this study mirrors such a transition, the home confined consumers are essentially in a world that is detached in terms of space, the public space giving way to the more private
space. It is the consumption of possessions that may aid such a transition into this private space that are the concerns of this study.

Furby (1978) suggests that a stronger sense of self is accomplished by learning to actively control objects in our environment, rather than feeling controlled by them. Freedom or power to control possessions, not only in terms of objects but also in relation to people, places and experiences, may provide a framework within which the home confined consumer can project the self. Memories of people, places and experiences are forms of possession consumption that need to be considered in respect of identity maintenance (McCracken, 1987). If an involuntary loss of possessions causes a diminished sense of self, one of the primary reactions following such loss should be an attempt at self-restoration. Niederland (1967) believes this loss is the catalyst for a period of creativity to extend the self in new ways and make up for the diminished sense of self.

### 3.3 Socio-Historical Aspects of Possessions

The dialectic tension between stability (maintaining a facet of identity) and change (discarding a facet of identity) is another motivator for the development of self. Possessions create a tangible residue of the past, present, and possibly an anticipated future identity (Belk, 1988; Rochberg-Halton, 1984; McCracken, 1988; Wallendorf and Belk, 1987). Special possessions could therefore facilitate self-continuity by connecting a person with a desirable past self (memories), a present self (me now), or a future self (who I am becoming), (Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton, 1981; McCracken, 1988; Price et al., 2000).

Integral to a sense of who we are, is a sense of our past and possessions are a means of storing memories and feelings that attach us to a sense of past. The most frequently given explanation for valuing objects is the memories they call forth of other people, occasions, and relationships (Belk, 1995, 1990, 1988; Belk et al., 1989; Csikzentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton, 1981). The desire to know one’s individual past can explain the retention of personal memorabilia; whereas the desire to identify with an era, place or person can be the result of desirable traits or values that the possession in question conjures up (Belk, 1991a; Davis, 1977; Geist, 1978).
Possessions function to create and to maintain a sense of self-definition and that having, doing, and being are integrally related. The actions expressed in relation to possession function are essentially those of an identity that has power to control the decision-making, and by extension, the ability, to exhibit competencies consistent with direct marketplace socialization.

### 3.4 Consumption, Possessions and Identity

The most basic and powerful fact of consumer behaviour is as Tuan (1980: 472) suggests, "Our fragile sense of self needs support, and this we get by having and possessing things because to a large degree, we are what we have and possess." The premise that we regard our possessions as parts of ourselves is not new; James (1890) declared that we are the sum of our possessions. This relationship between possessions and self contributes to the understanding of human beings and by extension, identity (Belk, 1987). The present view of the extended self is not limited to external objects and personal objects, but also includes persons, places and group possessions as well as such possessions as body parts and vital organs. Extended self implies self-plus possessions and this is acknowledged by Rochberg-Halton (1984: 335) "Valued material possessions.... act as signs of the self that are essential in their own right for its continued cultivation, and hence the world of meaning that we create for ourselves and that creates our selves, extends literally into the objective surroundings."

Interestingly, control has been suggested to be the critical determinant of feelings of possession (Furby, 1978; Tuan, 1984). The more we believe we possess, or, are possessed by an object, the more a part of self it becomes. McCarthy (1984) concludes that such objects act as reminders and confirmers of our identities, and that our identities may reside in objects more than they do in individuals. The life cycle of the consumer tends to suggest a tendency to cite as 'special' those possessions that symbolize other people (McCracken, 1989; Olson, 1985). This further suggests that possessions are regarded not only as a part of self but also as instrumental to the development of self. Special possessions play an important role in easing life transitions and are instrumental to self-maintenance (McCracken, 1987).
To understand consumer buyer behaviour it is necessary to gain an understanding of this process as it is embedded in daily life (mundane consumption). Mundane refers to those activities that constitute the bulk of daily life. Mundane consumption is self-relevant (unique or special), what we consume in order to perform even ordinary human activities, both contributes to, and reflects, our sense of identity. Mundane consumption occurs within an activity stream as Ewen (1988: 108) suggests: "life is caught between the polarities of having and doing," the combination of activity stream and product cluster forms a consumption system (Boyd and Levy, 1963).

The self (James, 1890) affords a particularly powerful lens through which ordinary consumption behaviour can be viewed, in as much as many of our daily life-tasks constitute self-enterprises. The development of personal and social-identity is highly integrated into consumption activities and patterns of behaviour. Indeed Belk (1988) has argued that possessions afford a person a sense of both who, and what, he or she is. In the context of Sartre's (1943) distinctions, we see the product clusters that people use (having) as facilitating their daily activity patterns. Indeed the clusters of possessions that constitute the social world of the individual have profound implications for their sense of wellbeing and their future extensions of self and self-identity.

Possessions offer a medium of interaction through which parts of self are assembled, created and extended. The importance of this form of interaction helps to narrate a person's life story, past, present and future, where the socio-historic aspects are brought into play as an extremely informative and necessary guide from which to extend the self. It is generally agreed that individuals use attachments to define and maintain their identities (Belk, 1988; Schultz et al., 1989; Wallendorf and Arnould, 1988). Identity is reflected in one's life narrative, capturing various roles including past, present and anticipated future selves. Consumption has to be recognised as an integral part of the social need to relate to other people and to have mediating materials for relating to them. The mediating materials, possessions, and more importantly, special possessions, provide linkages for interaction and social exchange, essential in the definition and maintenance of one's identity.
Possessions fulfil different functions at various points in our lives (Belk, 1988). Mehta and Belk (1991) observed that during geographic movement away from the people, places and things of previous homes, an increased burden is placed on individual possessions for anchoring identity. Place attachment contributes to self-definition, self-continuity, self-stability (Low and Altman, 1992), and communal aspects of identity (Brown and Perkins, 1992) for both children and adults (Cooper-Marcus, 1992). Places serve as psychic anchors (Cooper-Marcus, 1992) telling personal stories of individuals, families, or other groups. Familiar possessions brought from home might be depended upon to prevent total identity alienation in an unfamiliar environment. Noble and Walker (1997) suggested when social or support networks are lost, possessions may be used to fill the void. Favourite possessions become symbols of past relationships and serve to solidify and represent both one's connections to and differences from others (Maldonado and Tansuhaj, 1999). Mehta and Belk (1991) and Noble and Walker (1997) showed that possessions can also be used to ease the way into new roles and their associated identities, facilitating the psychological transformation to a new state.

3.5 Possession Attachment

Possession attachments are not just memorabilia that permit nostalgic reflection, "emotionally significant possessions appear to reflect and influence the individual's growth, in a dynamic process" (Myers, 1985: 4). Possession attachment research is orientated towards understanding the effects of bonding with possessions in relation to consumer wellbeing. Goods have the property of indexicality, as they provide tangible or palpable proof of life events (Grayson and Shulman, 2000). "Retaining a possession that is incontrovertibly and physically linked to a memorable past event helps to verify for (a person) that the event has occurred," (Grayson and Shulman, 2000: 8). Possession attachments help people cope with and adjust to change. The sacred meaning of special possessions flows from their role in various kinds of personal journeys (Belk, 1997). Some consumers keep or dispose of attachment possessions to aid life transitions, such as divorcing (McAlexander, 1991), losing a loved one (Gentry et al., 1995), or anticipating one's death (Gentry et al., 1995; Pavia, 1993; Price et al., 2000). Experiences are singularized through participation or observation and become irreplaceable. Those consumption experiences believed
to be important to the realization of self-definition, self-expression, or self-identity exacerbate the need for preservation consumption experiences. Possession attachment offers the means to secure an ongoing identity through many transitions.

Material possession attachment defines the relationship between a specific person and a specific object of possession (Cooper-Marcus, 1992; Low and Altman, 1992) and, in so doing, reflects the extent of "me-ness" associated with that possession (Kleine et al., 1995: 327). Possession attachments often designate "who I am connected with" or "how we are connected", an understanding of one's self as necessary to self-development (Kleine et al., 1995: 329). Gentry et al. (1995) describe how people at different life stages have different types of attachments, particularly when faced with death. It would seem understandable that possessions regarded as being strongly attached to oneself could offer deep insight into identity building capabilities central to the maintenance and extension of the self (Ball and Tasaki, 1992; Belk, 1988).

Although self-definitional value is explained in different ways, each explanation reflects either the autonomy or affiliation seeking motives driving self-development (Kleine et al., 1995). People are motivated to establish and maintain a personal and unique identity (autonomy seeking); at the same time they are motivated to maintain interpersonal connection that also defines the self (affiliation seeking). Using possession meanings to negotiate the dialectic tension between self-continuity and self-change underpins such attachment. Possessions also help us project ourselves into the future, even beyond death (McCracken, 1988; Price et al., 2000). We also cling to goods that capture unrealized ideal selves by using the goods for leverage toward imagined future conditions (McCracken 1988). Schultz et al. (1989) suggest that possessions reflect autonomy seeking when they evidence individual accomplishments, distinctiveness, uniqueness, independence, self-control or other aspects of individual integrity. Affiliation seeking, by direct contrast, is apparent when possessions reflect connections with others, with one's heritage or tradition, to occasions spent with important others, or reflect being in touch and cared for by others (Belk, 1988; Kleine, and Allen, 1995; Schultz et al., 1989; Sivadas and Venkatesh, 1995; Watson, 1992). At certain times in our lives autonomy or
affiliation seeking tasks dominate the identity life cycle structure, but it is only in maturity that both of these tasks are engaged in the identity project (Altman, 1976; Kegan, 1982).

In relation to possessions, visible consumption patterns influence our impressions of an unknown person (Belk et al., 1982) and the personality traits we attribute to them (Holman, 1980). In the context of Sartre’s (1943) distinctions, we see the product clusters that people use (having) as facilitating their daily activity patterns. Indeed the clusters of possessions that constitute the social world of the individual have profound implications for their sense of wellbeing and their future extensions of self and self-identity. Belk (1988) has proposed that possessions not only define who and what we are, but that they also afford a link with the past and provide a marker for the future. Material possessions remind us of experiences, accomplishments and other people in our lives, indeed, “the accumulation of possessions provides a sense of past and tells us who we are, where we have come from, and perhaps where we are going” (Belk, 1988: 160).

Possessions, as discussed, have the ability to support a self and a self-identity through the many stages of its life cycle. Possessions offer a means to address the multiple challenges and transition that differing contexts and situations demand.

3.5.1 Attachment to Special Possessions

The suggestion of a socio-historical link between person and possession is one of the strongest themes in the special possession literature. Although we use language such as “who I am” and “who I am not,” or what is “me” and “not me,” to discuss attachments, attachment is really a matter of degree. Attachment to a possession can be relatively strong or weak. Generally, strong attachment possessions include those regarded as most difficult to part with and most cherished, ‘attached to’, or ‘irreplaceable.’ Strong attachments are more central to the proximal self (Belk, 1988) whereas weak attachments do not reflect the self as much or at all (Kleine et al., 1995). The strength of attachment may be indicated by behavioural tendencies such as unwillingness to sell possessions for market value or to discard objects after their functional use is gone (Belk, 1991b).
3.5.2 What is Attachment?

Attachment is a multi-faceted, relatively complex concept. Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton (1981) point out, that special possession objects (including possession attachments) vary in their symbolic purposes and identify various motivations for attachments, suggesting multi-faceted person-possession ties. Working with social psychologists', distinction between the public (interpersonal) and private (intra-personal) sides of the self (Greenwald and Breckler, 1985), Ball and Tasaki (1992) assert that possessions most useful for cognitively rehearsing elements of self-concept will be those with which one has formed special attachments. Kleine et al. (1995) and Schultz et al. (1989) define attachment to have facets of affiliation, autonomy, and past, present, and future temporal orientations. Each self is associated with different kinds of possession attachments that reflect particular self-developmental tasks.

3.5.3 Changes in Attachment

The meanings associated with a possession and the intensity of attachment to it does not remain static, but changes as the self evolves and the autobiographical function of the object changes (Myers, 1985). Myers (1985: 6) observed in her study of adults' retrospection of childhood attachments, “emotionally significant possessions are a sign of and participant in a person’s growth and change.” Kamptner's (1989, 1991) studies of life stage meanings of possessions shows systematic shifts in self with accompanying changes in attachment meanings. Attachment being dynamic does not preclude particular possessions, such as heirlooms, from assuming relatively static meaning. Heirlooms, for example, symbolize deep meanings of family and self-continuity that are passed from one generation to the next (Curasi, 1999; McCracken, 1988; Price et al., 2000). An unusual case of heirloom meaning is McCracken’s (1988: 44) informant “Lois Roget,” the self-appointed keeper of a home filled with generations’ worth of family possessions. This “curatorial consumption” pattern, “gives her important comforts, continuities, and securities that are generally now absent from the modern world. But it also works to constrain and coerce her existence in ways that most of us would find intolerable.” McCracken suggests that in contrast to Mrs. Roget’s situation, modern conditions
usually lead people to mould and shape the meanings of household possessions to fit our identities.

Attachment itself and the meanings of attachment possessions, tend to be dynamic in order to manage the conflict between desiring self-continuity and needing self-change (Kleine et al., 1995). Possessions are potent facilitators of late-life adaptation (Kamptner, 1989; Rubenstein, 1987, 1989; Sherman and Newman, 1977-78) and attachment possessions serve as “lighting rods for memories” and “restate to oneself the core aspects of one’s identity and life accomplishments” (Rubenstein and Parmalee, 1992: 154). Similarly, in a study of elderly people, Kamptner (1989: 182) found that, “Personal possessions appear to play a salient and meaningful role in many of the developmental tasks and challenges that old age may bring. One’s belongings may enhance mastery and control in the face of losses; they may act as mood modulators; they may assist individuals in maintaining and preserving their identities in the face of events that erode their sense of self; they may trigger and enhance the life review process; and they may represent ties or bonds with others at a time of life when social losses tend to be greater.” Possessions not only help elderly people adapt to new living environments, they also influence others' perceptions of elderly. Millard and Smith (1981) measured medical school students' perceptions of photographs showing elderly hospital patients either surrounded by possessions or devoid of possessions. Results suggested that elderly patients surrounded by personal belongings were perceived more positively and evaluated as feeling better, more effective, less dependent, and more socially capable.

Divestment rituals transfer possessions and their meanings from one generation to the next (Curasi, 1999; McCracken, 1988; Price et al., 2000). Pavia's (1993) study of HIV-infected informants showed that as the illness progressed, loss of possessions became associated with a loss of control, and this made the loss of jobs, homes, health, and relationships a more overriding concern. Echoing Furby's (1978) belief that bonding with possessions stems from the perceived control we have over them, Pavia found the worst part of possession loss was the decreasing ability to have or keep possessions, and consequent inability to maintain one's former self relationships (Stevenson and Kates, 1999).
There are economic and psychic costs associated with having and using material possession attachments. Attachment represents commitment of one's resources and self that could be invested in other things (Belk, 1988, 1992; Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton, 1981). Relying heavily upon material goods for self-construction may restrict the range of meanings from which the self can be built. Self-cultivation becomes limited to the domain of the marketplace, "removing the 'infinitely rich lived world' from experience and replacing it with a poverty of meanings within prevailing material activity dictated by the opaque contingencies of the market," (Kilbourne, 1991: 454). That is, a person's pool of experiences is reduced by the objects into which one extends one's self.

3.5.3.1 Place Attachment and Possession Attachment

According to Brown and Perkins (1992), place attachments serve two basic functions: identity-definition and self-continuity. Place attachment contributes to self-definition, self-continuity, self-stability (Low and Altman, 1992), and communal aspects of identity (Brown and Perkins, 1992) for both children and adults (Cooper-Marcus, 1992). Places serve as psychic anchors (Cooper-Marcus, 1992) telling personal stories of individuals, families, or other groups. Just as possessions are used for defining self-boundaries, places with identification value also define "me" (Korpella, 1989). Healthy self-development in children is affected by having place attachments through which children learn self-regulation (Spencer and Woolley, 2000). Places are settings for experiences defining a person's likes, preferences, and autobiography. Places also permit self-transcendence via sacred space. Place attachment to the home is stronger when a person is able to regulate his or her privacy in the setting, allowing feelings of control and enhanced family functioning (Harris et al., 1996). Place attachment has a social, affiliative component, similar to possession attachment.

Dislocation disrupts self-continuity (Fried, 1963, 2000) and fragments spatial and group identity. Although one's sense of place attachment becomes disrupted by relocations at different points in the life span, people naturally establish roots to new locations and establish new place bonds (Kamptner, 1989; McCracken, 1988;
Millard and Smith, 1981; Price et al., 2000; Sherman and Newman, 1977-78; Wapner et al., 1990). Such studies about place adaptation involving possessions demonstrate the inextricable link between place and possession attachment.

The adaptive function of possessions is highlighted in Rubenstein’s (1987, 1989) and Rubenstein and Parmalee (1992) studies of nursing home and adult care facility residents and how they adapted to impersonal institutional environments. Rubenstein’s (1987, 1989) studies with older adults provide some of the best illustrations of possession-place attachment. His work shows the home is not only a “central staging ground for being and doing by older adults, it also acts as a repository for cherished personal possessions” (1992: 153) he adds that “at first glance, the relationship between place attachment and highly valued belongings may be obscure, but in our view it is of vital significance.” Rubenstein views possession rituals as part of personalizing the home, connecting people to places. He suggests as older adults’ spatial functioning decreases, the role of cherished possessions as identity markers and connectors to home may increase.

Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton’s (1981) study of the meaning of household possessions also examines inseparable place and possession meanings. Disruptions of person-place bonds often involve possessions tied with the place, burglary, natural disasters, voluntary relocation, or family changes (e.g., death, illness, accident) all involve violation of the extended self via both place and possessions (Brown and Perkins, 1992; Dittmar, 1992). Place disruption parallels possession dispossession and its process of emotionally distancing one’s self from possessions (Sayre, 1994; Roster, 2001; Young and Wallendorf, 1989). Joy and Dholakia’s (1991) study of home and possessions of Indian immigrants reflects coping with place disruption. Possessions were used to mark transience and to help children socialize into Indian culture. Examining both place and possessions helped reveal how possessions were used to manage place disruption and individual and family self-definitions. Place and possession attachment converge in Vinsel et al.’s, (1981) study about university residence hall rooms and how students’ possession displays were intertwined with adaptation to a new place. Moreover, souvenirs and other possessions signify bonds to places, thus compounding place and material possession attachments (Baker et al., 2004).
3.6 Nostalgia

Nostalgia is an important consideration in the special possession consumption experience and a review of current literature in this area and its implications for possession attachment follows.

3.6.1 Past Sense

The concept of nostalgia has received increasing attention in consumer research over the last decade (Holbrook and Schindler, 2003; Holbrook and Schindler, 1996; Holbrook, 1993; Hirsch, 1992; Havlena and Holak, 1991; Holbrook and Schindler, 1991; Belk, 1988). Objects of the past are often intentionally acquired and retained in order to remember pleasant times of one’s past. Hirsch (1992) points out that idealised past times become displaced onto sounds, smells, and tastes associated with positive experiences. However, nostalgia is a complex reaction that has been conceptualised on a number of different levels, as a form of pathology within the literature on clinical psychology and depression (Kaplan, 1987; Hertz, 1992), and as a result of social decline and the demise of community (Chase and Shaw, 1989; Hirsch, 1992; Turner, 1987). Havlena and Holak (1991) encouraged consumer researchers to study nostalgia in earnest, and this has resulted in nostalgia being addressed as sociological phenomena rather than from a medical perspective.

In the consumer behaviour literature, nostalgia is conceptualised as part of preference in the consumption of goods and experiences (Holbrook, 1993). Nostalgia requires a stimulus, or the presence of artefacts, images, or narratives, which have a positive association with a particular period. According to Davis (1979: 4) “not only does the word nostalgia appear to have been fully “demilitarized” and “demedicalized” but is now more likely to be classed with familiar emotions such as love, jealousy and fear.” Nostalgia has been defined as a longing or yearning for the past, or yesterday (Davis, 1979). Belk’s (1990: 670) definition of nostalgia supports such emotional attachment, “a wistful mood that may be prompted by an object, a scene, a smell, or a strain of music.” The nostalgic experience is one of a personally experienced past, where memories although constrained by actual events, are constructed to form a positive memory.
We no longer need to have lived a past in order to feel nostalgic for it (Chase and Shaw, 1989). Baker and Kennedy (1994: 170) draw a distinction between “real” nostalgia for some remembered pastime, and “simulated” nostalgia, a form of vicarious nostalgia evoked from stories, images, and possessions (Belk, 1988; Goulding, 1999, 2002; Stern, 1992). The definition of nostalgia by Holbrook and Schindler (1991: 330) supports Chase and Shaw’s (1989) findings, but they go further and suggest that nostalgia is, “a preference (general liking, positive attitude, or favourable effect) toward objects (people, places, or things) that were more common (popular, fashionable, or widely circulated) when one was younger (in early adulthood, in adolescence, in childhood, or even before birth).” Holbrook and Schindler (1994) found that nostalgia is not the domain of the aged rather it is the positive attitude expressed towards earlier times that is significant (Goulding, 1999).

Some researchers (Havlena and Holak, 1991; Jones, 1980; Summers et al., 2001) argue that nostalgia tells us more about the conditions of the present than the past, and more about the societal situation than the age-related vulnerability of the individual. Jones (1980: 282) states that, “... (nostalgia)...is a functional emotion, which by shoring up a sagging sense of identity can help either a person or a generation cope with difficult times (284)... Nostalgia thrives on dislocations in the life cycle, whether in the life of an individual or the life of a generation. Since nostalgia attempts to bridge gaps in our lives, between old selves and new selves, it follows that it is most likely to break out at times when disruptions are the sharpest.” Indeed, those with positive attitudes toward the past have been found to be more open to emotional consumption experiences and more sensitive to interpersonal feelings (Holbrook and Schindler, 1996). In a study by Holak and Havlena (1998: 218) of nostalgic experiences the complexity of mixed emotions (warmth, joy, affection) were linked with associated negative emotions (sadness, desire) to determine the nostalgic intensity of such consumption experiences and afforded a definition of nostalgia as, “a positively valanced complex feeling, emotion, or mood produced by reflection on things (objects, persons, experiences, ideas) associated with the past.”

Goulding’s (2002) study identified that vicarious nostalgia (outside of one’s consumption experience) is a constant feature of all consumption experiences. She
looked at the underlying themes of age and nostalgic consumption, nostalgic socialization, disillusionment with the present, nostalgia as a social emotion, and enduring nostalgia in keeping with such a focus. This study highlights the many forms of nostalgia in play and of the interconnectedness of these other nostalgic considerations. This concept of vicarious nostalgia has been considered in previous studies under different headings. Havlena and Holak (1996) identified ‘virtual’ nostalgia, Baker and Kennedy (1994: 171) considered the concept of ‘simulated’ nostalgia as a, “yearning for the indirectly experienced past and may be remembered through the eyes and stories of a loved one.” Stern (1992) had also discussed such an historical nostalgia in which there was not a direct experience with the past being described. Steenhuisen (1990) and Goulding (1999) alluded to this understanding by suggesting that it was not always the obvious group of consumers who gain most from the nostalgic trip.

Nostalgia is about contrasts, contrasts made with the events, moods, and emotions of the present situation. The contrast is subjectively constructed during the nostalgia experience (Davis, 1979). Davis (1979) suggests that nostalgia creates a sharp contrast to an otherwise bleak current situation, by constructing the past as a much better, calmer, safer time. Essentially, nostalgia is a positive orientation to the past (Davis, 1979; Holbrook and Schindler, 1991, 1994), which reflects a negative appraisal of self in the present (Davis, 1979; Kamptner, 1989). Like no other sentiment, nostalgia has the ability to filter out the unpleasant and in doing so reassures the present self, that it is deserving, qualified, and fully capable of handling the uncertainties that may lie ahead (Davis, 1979).

3.7 Nostalgia, Possessions and Identity

Nostalgia is a learned emotion (Goulding, 2002), usually instigated by feelings of frustration in the present. The development of these preferences are largely based on the individual being socialised into nostalgia, and are further strengthened through extended exposure to positive images such as film, music and photographs. This type of exposure can lead to an idealised perception of time. People use the past to construct, maintain and reconstruct their identities. The nostalgic experience provides reassurance of past happiness and accomplishment, which provides comfort
and feelings of self-worth. While current circumstances may pose a threat to identity, nostalgia is the, "search for continuity of identity" (Davis, 1977: 420). Belk et al. (1988) suggest that nostalgia is an emotional, rather than a cognitive, memory process. The sacred past is recoverable through rituals or events, places, objects or experiences (Belk et al., 1989). When sacred possessions evoke sacred nostalgic memories, these objects provide stimuli that can initiate a wealth of memories that are interwoven with emotional associations, moods, and thoughts (Belk, 1988).

Although possessions may evoke the past, it is only when they are interpreted that they have meaning. According to Belk (1988) people selectively interpret the past, just as they selectively decide which possessions to save. Items and experiences become sacred in meaning because they are constructed as such through the past. According to Belk (1990), being surrounded by special or sacred possessions constantly reminds us of who we are. Possessions, therefore, can have a stabilizing effect in terms of self-worth and act as a supporting framework when confronting an uncertain future. Milligan (2003: 381) comments that, "Nostalgia as a means of creating identity continuity in the face of discontinuity shows the generation-delineating abilities of nostalgia."

Communal ties and bonds with personal community members are strengthened as a result of nostalgic possession consumption, especially in relation to shared experiences (Milligan, 2003). Belk (1991) argues that our most treasured possessions are those that represent linkages to other people. Much of our 'self' is tied to the memories of the times, places, events, and people involved in, or associated with, these experiences. Geist (1978) suggests that we seek in the past that which is missing in the present, and, as a consequence, part of one's individual identity is derived from the recollection of these shared experiences, often cued by the possessions themselves. The major reason we seek possessions that evoke a sense of past is that these objects provide a sense of security (Belk, 1991). When we are experiencing turmoil and chaos, we turn to something familiar and secure (Davis, 1977). Hewer's (2003) study of garden consumption develops this sense of safety and security in the past and this is echoed in other studies of heritage (Goulding, 2000) and advertising and retro products (Brown, 1999). Objects that recall the past are instrumental to knowing who we are (Belk, 1991). As Jameson (1989: 116)
suggests, nostalgic experience means a, "return to that older period and to live its strange aesthetic artefacts through once again."

Other studies have looked at the relationship between nostalgia and materialism (Rindfleisch et al., 2000) and nostalgia and cooking (Baker et al., 2005). Humphreys and Brown (2002: 142) considered the importance of nostalgia in acts of collective self-authorship. The study suggested that nostalgia is, "key to the understanding of the dynamics of individual and organizational identity-construction in several ways: it can be a means of maintaining a collective sense of socio-historic continuity, a source of resistance to hegemonic influence and a defence against anxiety."

3.8 Ritual

Another important concept underpinning consumption behaviour is the construct of ritual. Consumer researchers have argued that the ritual construct affords great potential for conceptualizing and interpreting many aspects of consumption phenomena (Belk, 1979; McCracken, 1986, 1988; Rook and Levy, 1983; Sherry, 1983). Rook’s (1984, 1985) contribution to the understanding of ritual as a conceptual framework offers rich insights into the real, experiential lives of consumers, and the types of symbolic meanings that they invest in the use of consumer products. Rook (1985: 252) has defined the term ritual to encapsulate the shared, "structural and content elements" of "both everyday and extraordinary human experience." Tetreault and Kleine 111 (1990: 31) define ritual as, "a type of expressive, symbolic activity, constructed of multiple behaviours that occur in a fixed, episodic sequence."

Rook (1985: 252) explicitly aggregates the constructs "ritual" and "ritualized behaviour", where, "both everyday ritualized behaviour and larger public rituals" are "energized" by the nature of the conflicts between internal and social forces. Tetreault and Kleine 111 (1990) make a distinction between ritual and ritualized behaviours in the fact that ritual "instantaneously" accomplishes its purported objectives of status transition and social maintenance (La Fontaine, 1985; Turner, 1985). As such ritual is most closely linked to the maintenance of, and or, changes within systems of society, knowledge and nature (Vizedom, 1976; Durkheim, 1974).
This allows changes to occur and these changes permit the transition (of an individual) to a new status (within the social system).

By contrast, ritualized behaviours are more likely to be associated with the maintenance, and or, change in one’s self-perception (Solomon, 1983). Ritualized behaviour requires only a private enactment, whose sequence of events and artefacts employed, may be guided by individual tradition (Rook, 1985), as well as social norms. The mundane repetition of ritualized behaviour occurs in self-time (Warner, 1959).

Ritual’s meanings are conveyed through the use of symbolic or metaphorical artefacts (objects, language, actors and behaviours) that are orchestrated into a structured, dramatic episode, often repeated over time. It is socially standardized and requires the organized co-operation of individuals to fulfil all the necessary roles (La Fontaine, 1985). The socially standardized rules for ritual performance consist of both explicit and implicit requirements. Implicit rules as part of a “hidden culture” (Garfinkel, 1963; Hall, 1977) exert an extremely powerful influence on behaviour.

The power of ritual as an analytical category is two-fold for consumer research; Kertzer (1988: 10) observes, “The power of ritual stems not just from its social matrix but also its psychological underpinnings. Indeed these two dimensions are inextricably linked. Participation in ritual involves physiological stimuli, the arousal of emotions; ritual works through the senses to structure our sense of reality and our understanding of the world around us.” Ritual, like nostalgia is a learned emotion that straddles the socio-historical life cycle of the consumer. The maintenance of an identity is dependent on a past to support its present and future orientations and to sustain the self through many transitions.

3.8.1 Defining Ritual

Consumer research examines both the objects and the actions that constitute consumption. There has been increasing recognition of the importance of ritual and ritual behaviour in shaping contemporary consumption (Belk et al., 1989; Holt, 1992; Rook, 1985; Wallendorf, 2001). Rook (1985) blamed the prior neglect in
consumer research on the popular notion that rituals were associated with religious observation or primitive conduct. Currently, the concept of ritual is extended to include many symbolic actions performed at both the communal and individual level. It is acknowledged that ritual has a role to play in contemporary, secular, social and private activity.

The term ritual has been used to explain such diverse practices as weddings, birthdays, rites of passage, and human sacrifices: activities, which at first appear to have very little in common. For some ritual is regarded only in terms of the sacred (Durkheim, [1912] 1965), others see it as a secular association (Hermanowicz and Morgan, 1999; Sell et al., 2000). Some consider its function to maintain the status quo (Rappaport, 1971); others feel its purpose is to subvert the status quo (Gluckman, [1956] 1965; Turner, 1969). The contrasting definitions of the form and function of ritual only serve to support its being variously described as a given and formalised activity or, one that is constructed and changing with context (Hermanowicz and Morgan, 1999; Rook, 1984, 1985; Tetreault and Kleine 111, 1990). However, most attempts at definition share a recognition that rituals consist of behaviours that are in some way prescribed. Generally speaking, this behaviour is largely symbolic and enacted with the intention of achieving some profound purpose (Holt, 1992; Rook, 1985).

Rituals and their meanings are learned through a socialization process of observing and then mirroring (McGrath, 2004). Ritual consumer behaviour is unconventional in that it is not self-serving by nature, but is executed with the help of others. Particular events (Christmas dinner) reflect more than personal preferences; it references an archetypal model, a perception of a ‘real’ Christmas that is universally shared. In order to achieve this, individual tastes and particularities are de-emphasized (Wallendorf and Arnould, 1991). Rituals should not be confused with habits and customs, a handshake for instance, or a morning cup of tea. Ritual is separated from habit in its ability for communicative action. Habits are repeated actions without any intended significance; rituals are performed with the aim of symbolically expressing meanings. It would undermine the significance of a ritual to describe it as purely habitual (Rook, 1985; Tetreault and Kleine 111, 1990).
Table 3.1 Everyday and Ritual Consumer Behaviours

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Everyday Consumer Behaviours</th>
<th>Ritual Consumer Behaviours</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Referencing innovation and change as ideal</td>
<td>References ‘unchanging’ tradition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concerned with savings and thrift</td>
<td>Concerned with giving and receiving</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Modal exchange is a transaction</td>
<td>Modal exchange is relational</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No supposed relationship</td>
<td>Supposes a circle of relationships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One-way communication</td>
<td>Two-way communication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Impersonal and self-interested</td>
<td>Personal and self-interested</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Idealises a state of satisfaction</td>
<td>Idealises ongoing movement</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Adapted from Arnould, Price and Curasi (1999: 6)

3.8.2 The Elements of Ritual

Rook (1985) outlined four tangible components of ritual: ritual artefacts, a ritual script, ritual performance role(s), and a ritual audience. Ritual artefacts describe those products employed in their symbolic capacity to perform the ritual. These might include sacred objects or icons, or secular objects such as gifts, food and drinks. Ritual may be approached as a drama, with a beginning, middle and an end. The ritual script dictates the prescribed consumption behaviours and their sequence throughout a ritual performance. The script may be formal and unalterable, as with a religious rite of passage, or it may be more casual, as with a family gathering (Kertzer, 1988; Sell et al., 2000). Well-established routines are comforting by their very nature and also assure participants that their actions are being performed correctly. The sum total of each participant’s expected behaviours and responsibilities is known as the ritual performance role. The ritual audience may consist of only performers or a mass of non-participating spectators. It may happen that the audience is not present at the time of performance but the ritual is enacted with the intention of recounting the events through storytelling and suchlike (Gainer, 1995).

3.8.3 The Function of Ritual

Rituals are not mere leisure pursuits conducted for their own sake; rather they come about out of necessity (Driver, 1991). In periods of transition and uncertainty that can lead to the experiencing of a diminished sense of self, rituals may provide a stabilizing effect when consumption behaviour has been radically altered. Many
forms of human interaction are symbolically charged, rituals are distinctive in that they perform a profound function, which goes beyond the strict semiotics of the symbols used. Ritual "is not in service of the symbols, but the other way around. Rituals employ symbols so as to invoke, to address, to affect, even to manipulate, one or other unseen power" (Driver, 1991: 97). Ritual manipulates objects and symbols to achieve its desired effects; however, the exact nature of these effects is a source of consternation amongst theorists (Hermanowicz and Morgan, 1999; Rappaport, 1971; Rook, 1984, 1985; Roth, 1995; Sell et al., 2000; Tetreault and Kleine111, 1990; Wallendorf and Arnould, 1991).

Anthropologist Victor Turner proposed that there are two basic ontological forms, which manifest themselves in the performance of ritual: structure and anti-structure, "It is as though there are two major models for human interrelatedness, juxtaposed and alternating. The first is of society as a structured, differentiated and often-hierarchical system.... The second is of society as an unstructured or rudimentarily structured and relatively undifferentiated communitas, community or even communion of equal individuals who submit together to the general authority of the ritual elders" (Turner, 1969: 96). It is possible to distinguish two models of ritual, which differ in their form and function and shall be known as the classic and the liminal models of ritual.

3.8.4 The Classic Model of Ritual - Order

The classic model of ritual (Cheal, 1989) serves to communicate and maintain a social and moral order. Rituals in this sense are conducted with the intention of securing oneself within a larger cultural system, which Turner labelled "structure" (1985: 159). The symbolic meaning of goods can be seen to categorise culture, however goods do not function as a simple register of cultural meanings. It is only through their use, especially ritual use, that objects' meanings are activated (Arnould, 2001). This process is sometimes referred to as the reification of cultural meanings, that is, the conversion of abstract concepts into physical objects.

In keeping with the classic model, McCracken's (1986: 78) definition of ritual emphasizes its capacity to order, "Ritual is a link of social action devoted to the
manipulation of cultural meaning for the purposes of collective and individual communication and categorization. Ritual is an opportunity to affirm, evoke, assign, or revise the conventional symbols and meanings of the cultural order." Order in this sense describes a sense of organisation, form or regularity without which reality would appear chaotic. However, this is not just a means of conceptualisation, order is always connected with definite practices, that is, it directs action (Arnould, 2001; Durkheim, 1912/1965). Rituals acknowledge such an order through the manipulation of symbols and meanings (Holt, 1992). Arnould et al. (1999) describe how customs surrounding the passing on of cherished possessions develop as an outcome of individuals’ longing for social order. Initiating or continuing an inheritance ritual enables the participant to situate his or herself within an imagined familial continuity. It is only through the act of passing on the good that one fits into the figurative order. A distinction must be made between social order that is provided by ritual, and ordered behaviour that is dictated by the ritual script (La Fontaine, 1985; Rook, 1985; Tetreault and Kleine 111, 1990). A script is operational for the duration of a ritual; social order acts as a precedent for behaviour throughout life (Houston, 1999).

The classic model of ritual focuses on the process through which ritual regulates the activities of a society, however, that is not to say that these processes are visible to society. Order, as a customary or prescribed system of proceedings, is so pervasive that its presence goes largely unseen. We are not always conscious of the shared meanings, which have been encoded ritually into the pattern of culture (Driver, 1991). Rituals exemplify ‘truths’ about the world in which we live and persuade us that this is the way things inevitably are and should be (Arnould et al., 1997). Rituals of reification can be invaluable to those in positions of authority or those experiencing vulnerability as a consequence of change (Cheal, 1989). Social order comes about as a product of ritual but this is not an end in itself. It is a prerequisite of the subsequent social gift of ritual, community (Driver, 1991).
3.8.5 Community

Rituals build solidarity among those who share in their performance is a common sense assumption. A group can achieve solidarity because they look for it together. Rituals express shared understanding, which can strengthen the collective consciousness of a group. Solidarity can also be achieved through the subsequent shared emotional experience or mental state. The ritual script acts as a mnemonic device, which triggers a sequence of emotional responses and determines their appropriateness and intensity (Driver, 1991; Rook, 1985). A recurring theme in many accounts of ritual is a sense of belonging or oneness with others.

3.8.6 Transformation

According to Driver (1991), order and community are only two of ritual's three gifts. The third, transformation, is often the most significant and observable outcome. A wedding unites two people as a couple; initiation makes a man of a boy; and a signature makes the unofficial, official (Douglas and Isherwood, 1996). Ritual is a means of symbolically enacting change. The transformations that occur in the classic ritual are not threatening to the social order; they are merely adjustments to one's position within that order. A rite of passage may grant an individual a new status in society, however the rite still instructs about society and the role of the individual in it (Hermanowicz and Morgan, 1999). Transformation in the classic ritual affects only the subject and not the shared worldview.

Order, community and transformation must not be regarded as a simple checklist of ritual effects; order is necessary to achieve community, and in turn shared emotions can be channelled to affect transformation. The gifts of ritual combine as a dynamic entity (Driver, 1991). It must be noted that not all rituals are enacted with the intention of effecting a transformation. Some rituals are satisfactorily concluded without any significant metamorphosis. The reification of social order is always the overriding function of the classic model, though circumstances might arise that necessitate the performance of a transformative ritual to reaffirm this order. Order, community and transformation are essential components in the realization of an identity that is undergoing transitions and uncertainty. The often regimented and disciplined attendance to such ritual consumption is indicative of the situation.
brought about by changes in consumption behaviour (Knottnerus, 1997). "The taken-for-granted actions routinely performed in the wider social environment that acquire significance for the actor and then become part of the individual’s script for his or her immediate world," (Sell et al., 2000: 457).

3.8.7 The Liminal Model of Ritual

The classic model describes rituals, which serve to communicate and reify values that are considered important, in so doing; they reproduce a model of reality. Turner (1969) considered this view as overly circumscribed as it reduced ritual to a means of social control. Instead of preserving the status quo, rituals can also serve to bring about changes to the social order. In this way rituals reproduce a model for reality (Geertz, 1973). The liminal model asserts that rituals "can be agents of change forging new boundaries, rather than conservative gatekeepers of social continuity" (Ustuner et al., 2000: 209). Geertz (1973) suggests that individuals simultaneously hold two views of the world, the world as it is and the world as it ought to be. Our sense of the everyday (worldview) is coloured by the sense of an ideal (ethos), which in turn is shaped by the everyday. The liminal model of ritual operates in the 'subjunctive' mood (Turner, 1969) a world 'as if' and as it 'should be'. In contrast with the classic model, liminal rituals purposefully strive to be unlike the typical.

3.8.8 Liminality

Tetreault and Kleine 111 (1990: 34) suggest liminality describes a peculiar, "bracketed social time and/or place" that is set apart from the mundane. This is not to say that liminal time and space is peculiar by nature, just that it is significant to those who experience it. Liminality brings with it not only a loss of identity for the subject but a temporary absence of time and place, a state of being, "Liminal entities are neither here nor there; they are betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention, and ceremonial" (Turner, 1969: 95). Liminality provides an environment conducive to the experience of collective transcendental experience. Within liminal time and space, society’s normal codes of behaviour no longer apply. Alexander (1989: 1058) suggests, "that ritual transition puts participants betwixt and between cultural determinations, giving ritual an indeterminate dimension". Established social order is replaced with a new set of

3.9 Communitas

Communitas is closely associated to liminality, which describes a society during a liminal period, "unstructured or rudimentarily structured [with] a relatively undifferentiated comitatus, community, or even communion of equal individuals who submit together to the general authority of the ritual elders" (Turner, 1969: 96). Turner introduced the term communitas to describe the special connection that emerges from rituals anti-structure. Whereas communities describe an area of common living, communitas is “an essential and generic human bond, without which there could be no society” (Turner, 1969: 97). Communitas exists independent of normal social roles and structures whereby ritual performers are immersed in a temporary state of status equality. Self-interest is momentarily forgotten and instead a group attempts to achieve an experience of shared euphoria (Driver, 1991).

Communitas is not simply another form of camaraderie, it is “a transformative experience that goes to the root of each person’s being and finds in that root something profoundly communal and shared” (Turner, 1969: 138). Liminal rituals involve a whole society, not just a community within it, communitas has no boundaries and it welcomes all humanity. In upsetting the established order, liminality suggests an emancipatory nirvana (Kozinets, 2002). In reality, despite its ideals, liminality cannot claim to be completely independent of social structure. Often a degree of organisation and control is necessary to effectively perform a ritual; therefore, rituals will come to develop some arbitrary order. Liminal order, however, is comparatively playful and imaginative; therefore it exists, “as if outside the structures of society” (Driver, 1991: 159).

Community is formed through bonding, which attempts to reinforce exclusive identity and homogenous groups. Communitas, on the other hand, is an outcome of bridging practices that strengthen weak ties (Milligan, 2003; Turner, 1969). The notion of communitas is enhanced by Turner’s concept of anti-structure. Turner
clarifies the ideas of liminal, communitas and anti-structure, "I have used the term "anti-structure," to describe both liminality and what I have called "communitas." I meant by it not a structural reversal... but the liberation of human capacities of cognition, affect, volition, creativity, etc., from the normative constraints incumbent upon occupying a sequence of social statuses," (1982: 44). Community is "a kind of sociological superglue" while communitas is "a sociological lubricant," (Putnam, 2000: 23). Putnam qualifies this distinction by noting that not all forms of social capital can be labelled as either one or the other. Certain groups embody both bridging and bonding ideologies such as Internet chat rooms.

There are many parallels with the concept of communitas and the literature on 'communities of consumption', or social groups facilitated by shared consumption interests (Cova, 1997; Cova and Cova, 2001; Muniz and O'Guinn, 2001; Schouten and McAlexander, 1995; Thompson and Holt, 1996). Both constructs can be seen to be free from traditional social structures and classifications, and heterogeneous in their make up. These constructs are realised through a passion or sentiment rather than any differentiating characteristic. What binds members of these social arrangements is not a formal code but seemingly weak links, such as a shared emotional connection, sense of style, moral beliefs or consumption practices (Cova, 1997).

3.10 Liminal Transformation

Liminal transformation is not found within established social order but in anti-structure. This transformation of social structure to achieve phases of liminality is important because, in representing those structures as "sensorily perceptible", ritual also renders them "accessible to the purposive action of society," (Turner, 1966: 1969: 25). Identity is malleable in liminal space (Roth, 1995). An individual may adopt a persona of their choosing which is in no way indicative of his or her real world character or state. Liminal transformation is a 'magical' experience (Rook, 1985; Driver, 1991) but transformations last only as long as the ritual performance itself. Liminality allows participants to remodel their identity but, unlike a rite of passage, one must eventually revert to the original state of being.
Table 3.2 The Function of Ritual: Two Perspectives

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Classic Model</th>
<th>Liminal Model</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Order</td>
<td>Anti-Structure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community</td>
<td>Communitas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ordered/Transformation</td>
<td>Liminal Transformation</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Author's Own

Table 3.2 summarises the classic and the liminal models of ritual. These are not alternative perspectives on the same phenomena, but two separate types of ritual that are functionally opposed. Both models attempt to bring about shared experience and affect change, the contrasting starting points of order and anti-structure stipulate that these manifest themselves in different ways.

3.11 The Sacred and the Profane

The present discussion of ritual has not examined the position of religious belief in ritual. The term was first used in cultural anthropology to describe behaviours that alluded to the sacred and the supernatural (Holt, 1992). Durkheim defined ritual in terms of sacred objects, "is the totality of practices concerned with sacred things, even if there are rites without gods, the objects to which they refer are always by definition of a religious nature" ([1899] 1975: 88).

Belk et al. (1989) note that, in contemporary society, the distinction between the sacred and the profane is no longer equivalent to the distinction between the religious and the secular. Recent years have seen gradual secularisation of society as typified by the increasingly non-religious celebration of Christmas and the separation of civil law from religious morality. A concurrent trend has seen the sacralisation of the secular whereby the essence of religion is sought in what was previously regarded as profane (Rappaport, 1971; Sell et al., 2000). As Hermanowicz and Morgan (1999: 203) suggest, "Ritualizing customary practice offers yet another opportunity to emphasize values, to announce, define, and reaffirm commitment to sacred aspects of customary practices." The idolization of consumer goods is perhaps the most obvious case, but we can also regard nationalistic celebration, a
devout belief in the ‘truth’ of science, and the veneration of art and artists as symptoms of this phenomenon.

### 3.12 Rituals in Modernity and Postmodernity

Modernity, the cultural condition of the Western world since the Age of Enlightenment, is inhospitable to faith in the sacred. This period in history has been marked by the pursuit of progress through the rational organisation of everyday social life. The modernist project brought with it the dominance of reason over superstition and irrationality, the gradual secularization of thought and conduct, a unity of purpose in art, architecture and science, and the emergence of a monetary exchange economy (Brown, 1995; Venkatesh, 1992).

The individual in modernity is presented as being centred, self-conscious, and committed to a particular life objective. Subsequently, a prevalent concept that has emerged in marketing is that of the consistent and unified self (Belk, 1988; Goffman, 1971). It is presumed that modem man exists from social ties, seeking rather to differentiate or individuate oneself from the masses, rather than share in the communal disorder of the pre-modern age (Cova, 1997). With increasing individualism, religion came to be regarded as something apart from economic, political, recreational, and domestic life. It came to be part of one’s private life with detrimental implications for the social expression of religious dogma (Cheal, 1989; Holt, 1992).

The rituals of African and South American tribal societies, as described by Western anthropologists (Turner, 1957, 1967) appear characteristic of uncivilized peoples. The unbridled hedonism provoked by liminality is not in keeping with the spirit of the age. It is unsurprising then that liminal rituals vanished in modern societies and only those, which were more explicitly functional, survived. Christmas and Thanksgiving celebrate abundance through consumption (Wallendorf and Arnould, 1991). Calendrical rituals such as New Year’s Eve emphasise progress rather than stability. In contrast to ancient rituals, which welcomed all society, modern rituals involve only a closed group of participants, typically one’s immediate family.
Certain theorists have proposed that we are currently living in a postmodern society characterised by a chaotic mix of diverse lifestyles and identities (Brown, 1995; Featherstone, 1991; Firat and Venkatesh, 1995; Venkatesh, 1992). Where modernism is grounded in notions of advancement, achievement, innovation and improvement, for the postmodernists, it is impossible to impose rational order on the chaos and complexity of reality. Postmodernists celebrate diversity and ambiguity and are comfortable in the absence of certainty and definitive explanations. Postmodern society has witnessed a revival in the performance of rituals; these rituals, however, are characterised by the aestheticisation of everyday life (Featherstone, 1991) and the pursuit of irrational desires and whims (Bauman, 2001). Participants in postmodern rituals indulge in the spectacle of ritual experiences with little regard for their ultimate meanings. In this way ritual consumption experiences lack the courage of commitment and mood, rather than being intensive and serious, they are impulsive, playful, and hedonic (Ustuner et al., 2000). Postmodern rituals exist in the liminal form, consensus is not a necessity within anti-structure; rather it celebrates diversity and disorder, reflecting the ‘anything goes’ mentality so characteristic of the postmodern condition. In as much as the ritual script permits, choice replaces rules.

The increasing significance of rituals that are not based on spiritual beliefs (Kozinets, 2002; Rook, 2004; Ustuner et al., 2000) has led to consumers experiencing the sacred in what would otherwise be considered profane (secular) (Cova, 1999). Holt (1992) proposes that in postmodernity, ritual artefacts are not separated from profane existence; they are merely treated as sacred in order to achieve extraordinary experience. The sacred has been redefined to describe aesthetic, transient, experiences rather than entities (Arnould and Price, 2003), reflecting the age of multiple realities and identities. It is in this transience that the postmodern ritual differs from its pre-modern counterpart, the latter acknowledging the past and the former being firmly situated in the present.
3.13 Discussion

Place attachment can be defined as the emotional bond formed between physical site and individual through interaction processes (Milligan, 1998). Place and possession attachment serve similar basic functions: identity-definition (autonomous selves and affiliated selves), and self-continuity and or change (self-adaptation to new places or contexts). Place attachment can influence wellbeing and self-development, whereas disruption and dislocation can lead to a diminished sense of self. The context of home confinement may highlight other forms of attachment that could remain hidden when consumption is only explored from an abelisit perspective.

The fluid nature of ritual permits individualism and the associated changes in consumption behaviour. The act of the ritual is not a given, rather it adapts to a particular cultural context. Exploring these changes in behaviour and gaining an understanding of what remains relevant in the midst of uncertainty and chaos, will afford valuable insight into the dynamic relationship between ritual practices, special possession consumption, and vulnerable consumers. The boundary between premodem and postmodern forms of ritual may not be so real, the home confined consumer addresses ritual consumption both as a communal concern to strengthen personal community ties, but also, to make visible an identity and individualism in the face of changing contexts of consumption. The need to secure elements of both past and present consumption lives may be tenable for the home confined consumer, through the innovative, subjective, creation of rituals. The classic and the liminal models of ritual together may provide a means for vulnerable consumers to construct an identity, which fits with the experiential reality of their current lives.

Figure 3.1 (overleaf) shows the three literatures discussed in this chapter in relation to identity construction and realisation. These three concepts, special possessions, nostalgia and ritual are of particular interest in affording the home confined consumer an ability to realise an identity in times of disruption and transition. The underlying abilities associated with ritual and nostalgia (socio-historic, emotional), compliment the physiological ties of ‘being and ‘doing’ inherent in ownership of an identity. The ability for home confined consumers to realise an identity through the
interdependent concepts of special possessions, nostalgia and rituals are afforded by such consumption activities and capabilities.

Figure 3.1 Interdependent Concepts of Identity

The often-subjective meanings attached to consumption experiences mean that there is a need for a methodological approach that recognises the consumer’s personal lived experience and the potential vulnerability of those explored. In the following chapter the methodology employed in this research is discussed.
4.1 Introduction

The methodology employed in the research is discussed in this chapter. A methodology that was sensitive to the research agenda of discovery, as well as the research context, was required. What follows in this chapter is a discussion of the methodological choices and the rationale for case study research grounded in the interpretive paradigm. This chapter begins with an overview of the evolution of consumer research and, importantly, introduces Consumer Culture Theory and Transformative Consumer Research. This is followed by a discussion of the philosophy underpinning the research that includes the rationale for employing radical constructivism. The discussion goes on to address the research strategy involving the use of case studies. The rationale underpinning case study selection, data collection methods, data analysis and interpretation strategy are discussed. The chapter ends with a review of issues of researcher vulnerability that emerged during the research and the limitations of the study.

4.2 Evolution of Consumer Research

There have been many changes in consumer research over the 20th century. Belk (1995) traces its development and transformation from its origins in economics in the early twentieth century through to the view of consumer as information processor and decision maker that is currently employed. During the 1980’s a new more interpretive form of consumer research emerged that embraced the “study of consummation in all its many aspects” (Holbrook, 1987: 128). First the ‘new consumer behaviour’ (Belk, 1995: 60) moved the focus of researchers’ attention from pre-purchase and purchase decision-making processes to the experiences that surround acts of consumption, whether before, during, or after the actual purchase. Secondly, by conceptualising consumers as socially connected beings rather than as potential purchasers of a product or service (Faber and O’Guinn, 1988), the meanings that consumers create through consumption activities, how they behave in their everyday lives, and the subjective, emotional aspects of consumption were emphasised (Holbrook and Hirschman, 1982; Hirschman and Holbrook, 1982; Hirschman, 1985).
Essentially this new consumer behaviour attempted “to understand how consumption relates to the rest of human existence” (Belk, 1995: 62). These new consumer researchers advocated, “intellectual diversity and topical heterogeneity” (Hirschman, 1986: 435) and the recognition that consumers are not merely information processors but, “socially connected human beings in multiple interacting cultures,” (Belk, 1995: 62). Thirdly, new methodologies for researching consumers were deployed. Previously consumer researchers relied heavily on measurement scales, surveys and experiments. Now they began to employ more qualitative methods. Table 4.1 highlights the main differences between the “old” and “new” consumer behaviour perspectives.

Table 4.1 Old Versus New Perspectives in Consumer Behaviour Research

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Old Perspective</th>
<th>New Perspective</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Positivist</td>
<td>Non-positivist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experiments/Surveys</td>
<td>Ethnographies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quantitative</td>
<td>Qualitative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A priori theory</td>
<td>Emergent Theory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economic / Psychological</td>
<td>Sociological/Anthropological</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Micro/Managerial</td>
<td>Macro/Cultural</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focus on buying</td>
<td>Focus on consuming</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emphasis on cognitions</td>
<td>Emphasis on emotions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American</td>
<td>Multicultural</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Thus, the ‘new consumer behaviour’ changed what was studied and how it was studied. Dimensions of consumer behaviour previously ignored became major foci for investigation, such as consumption symbolism, property and possessions, festivals and rituals, gifts and gift giving, and consumption and the self. These studies marked a paradigm shift from positivistic research approaches to interpretivist approaches (Sherry, 1991) using ethnographic-based methods such as participant observation and in-depth interviewing to collect qualitative rather than quantitative data. Interpretivist approaches encouraged an emergent approach to theory building by grounding theory in the data.
Interpretive consumer research has expanded considerably both in terms of numbers of interested researchers and research topics over the past two decades. However, it remains the case that it represents only a very small proportion of all consumer research. Perusal of any of the conference proceedings of the Association for Consumer Research reveals that ‘positivist’ and quantitative research still dominates the field (www.acrwebsite.org).

4.2.1 Consumer Culture Theory

Some two decades after the emergence of interpretive consumer research, Arnould and Thompson (2005) provided a framework and an agenda for interpretive consumer research under the rubric of Consumer Culture Theory (CCT). Consumption and possession practices have been the most widely studied phenomena identified within the CCT tradition (Belk et al. 2003; Grayson and Shulman, 2000; Joy and Sherry, 2003; Rook, 1985). CCT explores how consumers actively rework and transform consumption experiences to further their identity and lifestyle goals (Holt, 2002; Kozinets, 2002; Mick and Buhl, 1992). Four research streams were identified within CCT, namely, 1) consumer identity projects; 2) marketplace cultures; 3) the socio-historic patterning of consumption; and, 4) consumption as a practice of ideological reproduction and resistance.

4.2.2 Transformative Consumer Research

More recently, in 2006, during his Presidential address at the annual conference of the Association of Consumer Research, David Glen Mick called for research in the interest of consumers, which would improve their quality of life. Thus, the mission of Transformative Consumer Research (TCR) is to make a beneficial difference in the lives of consumers, both present and future generations, through the conduct of consumer research. Substantive topics that have been given the highest priority over the next three to five years include vulnerable consumer groups, such as, homeless individuals, young children, elderly, ill and handicapped individuals. Although many of the advocates of TCR are also interpretive researchers, it is also recognised that research in the consumer interest may emerge from the ‘positivist’ research traditions. The first conference of TCR, “Transformative Consumer Research: Inspiring Scholarship for Collective and Personal Well-Being,” was held in July
2007 and provided a forum to present some of the emerging findings from current TCR research endeavours, including findings from this research study (Downey and Catterall, 2007d).

This research study is located within interpretive consumer research and Arnould and Thompson's (2005) Consumer Culture Theory framework. It can also be located within Transformative Consumer Research since one of the main aims of the research is to address assumptions about a vulnerable consumer group that is currently under-researched namely, consumers confined to the home through disability or long term illness. In the discussion that follows the research philosophy that underpins the research is discussed.

4.3 Research Philosophy

The positivist and interpretive approaches in consumer research differ in relation to their ontological assumptions about the nature of reality and social beings. Positivism holds that a single, unchanging and objective reality exists. The fragmental nature of this reality makes it possible to obtain precise and accurate observations of the world (Hunt, 1991; Lutz, 1989; Murray and Ozanne, 1991; Seale, 2004; Spiggle, 1994). Interpretivists, by contrast, reject the idea of a single reality and believe that reality is mentally perceived, allowing for the concept of multiple realities to exist due to multifaceted individual perceptions. From this perspective, society is constructed from interpretive processes with meanings derived from the context. Thus, society is presented as a changing entity that is constructed by people themselves, rather than a fixed and unchanging entity that is external to the person (Brewer, 2000: 34).

Table 4.2 highlights how positivist and interpretivist approaches differ in their axiological assumptions. The fundamental goal of positivism is explanation. Prediction is attempted through the generation of universal laws of association between variables. In contrast, the central goal for interpretivists is in the understanding of behaviour. Verstehen is the term often used to refer to interpretive understanding, a concept that originated with Weber who considered that it was important to understand the subjective meanings of behaviour (Trigg, 2001: 48).
Verstehen places emphasis on the idea of empathic identification as the researcher tries to know and understand others (Patton, 2002: 52).

### Table 4.2: A Summary of Positivist and Interpretivist Approaches

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assumptions</th>
<th>Positivist</th>
<th>Interpretive</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ontological</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nature of Reality</td>
<td>Objective, tangible</td>
<td>Socially constructed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>Multiple</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Fragmentable</td>
<td>Holistic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Divisible</td>
<td>Contextual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nature of Social Beings</td>
<td>Deterministic</td>
<td>Voluntaristic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Reactive</td>
<td>Proactive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Axiological</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overriding goal</td>
<td>“Explanation” via subsumption under Verstehen</td>
<td>“Understanding” based on Verstehen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Epistemological</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge generated</td>
<td>Nomothetic</td>
<td>Idiographic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Time-free</td>
<td>Time-bound</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Context-independent</td>
<td>Context-dependent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>View of causality</td>
<td>Real causes exist</td>
<td>Multiple, simultaneous shaping</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Relationship</td>
<td>Dualism, separation</td>
<td>Interactive, Cooperative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Privileged point of observation</td>
<td>No privileged point of observation</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Hudson and Ozanne (1988: 509)
Much of the philosophical debate surrounding positivism and interpretivism occurs at an epistemological level. Spiggle (1994: 492) suggests that the "debate centres on the question of how can we know and represent what we know about reality." The epistemological stance of the positivist excludes anything that "cannot be subsumed under scientific law," (Trigg, 2001: 3). Positivists attempt to identify linkages between cause and behaviour and aim to find nomothetic statements or "general, abstract laws that ideally can be applied to an infinitely large number of phenomena, people, settings and times" (Hudson and Ozanne, 1988: 511).

By contrast, the context is important for interpretivists and it is in the particular rather than the general where their main interest lies. "Living through the 'highs' and 'lows' of informants lives allow the researcher to know the phenomenon under investigation in a way that few other methodologies permit," (Hill, 1993: 260). Interpretivism adheres to a holistic view of reality that implies that causal linkages cannot be identified. Therefore, interpretivists seek idiographic knowledge and thick description as these provide more thorough accounts of the phenomenon being studied (Brewer, 2000: 39). As Denzin (1989: 83) suggests, thick description involves capturing the voices of "lived experience".

The relationship between researcher and research subjects differs between interpretivism and positivism. Positivists take on an observer's role and take no part in the research field so as not to influence the research subjects. Interpretivists interact with people and immerse themselves in the research environment to enable them to see the phenomena from the perspective of the consumers involved. In this case, knowledge of the social world is obtained from "intimate familiarity with it," (Brewer, 2000: 4).

This research subscribes to the philosophical position of interpretivism. Holbrook and O'Shaughnessy (1988) argue that consumer research is a social rather than a natural science and, therefore, should follow the interpretive perspective. By contrast, positivism, with its emphasis on observed reality can cause reification, resulting in "a process that treats essential human characteristics as if they were non-human things" (Trigg, 2001: 47).
4.3.1 Identifying the Appropriate Research Paradigm for the Study

It should be noted that the debate between the proponents of the different paradigms has shifted increasingly away from outright confrontation, where the champions of each have attempted to undermine the position of the other, towards a more useful dialogue about the appropriateness of the different positions to a particular type of study (Davies and Fitchett, 2005; Haslam and McGarty, 2001; Remenyi, 2002).

An interpretivist approach is much more appropriate where the study is exploratory, the context is of critical importance and the theory base is limited (Blakie, 1993; Gill and Johnson, 1991; Gill, 1995). In such circumstances the challenge to the researcher is to minimise the distance between themselves and the research participants, by whatever ethical means possible, and to build up a picture based on their contributions of what is happening in their world as they view it. Little has been written on the home confined consumer and this is a study of discovery (Gill and Johnson, 1991; Schein, 1987; Strauss and Corbin, 1990).

Interpretivism, as a generic term includes research that can be based on very different underpinning assumptions, including critical theory, realism, and constructivism (Yin, 2003; Perry, 1998).

Critical theorists argue that power is an ubiquitous feature of social relations and some researchers consider that no interpretive study is complete without a focus on the wider structures of power relations, such as class, gender and economics in relation to everyday social interaction (Hackley, 2003). Researchers working within the critical theory tradition aim at critiquing and transforming social, political, cultural, economic, ethnic and gender values. The research enquiries will often involve long-term ethnographic and historical studies. Assumptions are subjective and knowledge is grounded in social and historical routines and is value-dependent, not value-free (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). Hackley (2003) argues that interpretive studies that are truly critical in this wide ranging sense may be beyond the scope of most student researchers.

Realism shares with positivism the aim of science to explain social phenomena. However, realist researchers aim to discover and identify the existence of underlying, structural, causal mechanisms (competition, ideology) that inform how
people think and act, and also enable or inhabit the realisation of their intentions (Easton, 2002). Realism argues that the knowledge people have will affect their intentions and actions, and in this sense the social world is not independent of their knowledge. Realists assume that there is a real world to discover, even if it is only imperfectly and probabilistically apprehensible (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). The goal of realism is to discover observable and non-observable structures and mechanisms independent of the events they generate. It involves searching for an understanding of a common reality of an economic system in which people operate independently and makes few allowances for multiple 'constructed' realities. The exploratory nature of this study to discover the lived reality of home confined consumers is not likely to be addressed by the ontology of realism.

Constructivists tend to adopt a relativist ontology and are often found in research in psychology and organisational change (Perry et al., 1999). Constructivism suggests an individuality regarding the construction of meaning and the perspective is based on the assumption that truth is a construction that refers to a particular belief system, held in a particular context. Realities appear as multiple realities, which are socially and experientially based, and are intangible mental constructions of individual persons.

Within consumer research the interaction between consumers and society is important. People have cultural understandings consisting of socially established structures of meaning (Geertz, 1973), and act with an understanding of their actions within their social context (Trigg, 2001). Consumer experiences occur in a contextual setting so the consumer should not be seen as entirely independent from the context. Guba and Lincoln (Patton, 2002) summarise constructivism as ontologically relativist, epistemologically subjectivist and methodologically hermeneutic and dialectic. Relativism suggests that "all tenable statements about existence depend on a worldview, and no worldview is uniquely determined by empirical or sense data about the world" (Patton, 2002: 97), while subjectivism holds that individuals create their own knowledge. Like critical theory, constructivism, makes enquires about the ideologies and values that lie behind a finding (Lincoln and Guba, 1985).
One of the purposes of this research is to understand the lived experience of home confined consumers within their own social context, as distinct to that of a consumption society. This is consistent with Thompson et al. (1989: 136) who discuss the importance of putting consumer experience back into consumer research. They suggest that experience should be understood from the perspective of "person-in-the-world", thus consumer experience should be described as it is lived.

4.4 The Appropriateness of an Interpretivist, Constructivist, Approach

In light of the above discussion it is increasingly apparent that the appropriate research approach for this research is conducted under the auspices of the interpretivist paradigm referred to as constructivism. The holistic perspective of the research and the particular context, the home confined consumer, is of crucial importance here. Constructivist psychologies theorise about and investigate how human beings create meaningful systems for understanding their world experiences. Three key constructivist psychologies are Personal Constructivist Psychology, Social Constructionism and Radical Constructivism, and these have expanded in influence over the past fifty years (Neimeyer and Raskin, 2001). All constructivist psychologies share the belief that none of the many ways of understanding that people have developed provide a purely objective view of the world. Human beings have the ability to create understandings that help them navigate life, regardless of whether these match an external reality.

4.4.1 Personal Constructivist Psychology (PCP)

In personal constructivist psychology (PCP) the self is commonly viewed as constructed, not discovered (Burr et al., 1997). PCP provides a suitable framework for addressing the indeterminacy in the pursuit of personal knowledge (Kelly, 1979). Kelly believes that an inherently orderly universe actually exists, and humans behave so as to come to know it. They come to know it through a personally meaningful process based on perceiving recurrent themes among the particular events of their lives. PCP also emphasizes the deep personal involvement of the individual in the process of knowing and the necessity of personal commitment to the elaboration of our understanding. From Kelly’s (1979) viewpoint, each individual attempts to make meaning from experience by noting both comparison and contrast in recurrent
patterns. PCP rests on a philosophical assumption called ‘constructive alternativism’; the belief that current human knowledge “consists of ‘jigsaw puzzle’ fragments of ultimate truth and we elaborate it by accumulating more fragments until we know everything,” (Kelly, 1979: 66).

The notion of reflexivity plays a key role in Kelly’s position. PCP is basically a humanistic theory; it points to free choice and the creation of personal meaning. It views people as more or less locked within their own personal meaning systems. Kelly’s PCP is seen as related to, but less extreme than, radical constructivism. PCP means the adequation to an external world of things existing in themselves and, as such, this distinguishing feature of PCP from radical constructivism renders it unsuitable for the context of this study. PCP attains to the construction of a real world; radical constructivism suggests that external reality constrains people’s constructions of it.

4.4.2 Social Constructionism

The social constructionist has an aversion to the notion of an isolated knower (Gergen, 1995b). In social constructionism all knowledge is considered local and fleeting, it is negotiated between people within a given context and time frame and people are not considered to have any sort of stable and essential personality (Burr, 1995, Gergen, 1991, 1994). As Burr (1995: 4) puts it, “there is no objective evidence that you can appeal to which would demonstrate the existence of your personality.” Social constructionists often deconstruct the very idea of a coherent selfhood (Sampson, 1989).

The ways in which someone is identified, talked about, and treated all contribute to creating a particular identity for the individual. A person is likely to be identified in a variety of specific contexts and may actually come to live out different identities in each of those settings (Gergen, 1991). Human identity is fluid and constituted within the parameters set forward by social surroundings (Gergen, 1991, 1994). In the post-modern psychological world people mix and match realities and identities in an increasingly complex array of circumstances. The confusion this produces helps explain why many people criticize social constructionism for encouraging anything goes relativism (Gillett, 1998; Held, 1995; Parker, 1999).
Reality in social constructionism is usually viewed as dependent on how groups of people collectively elaborate their ideas. Social constructionism shifts the emphasis from decontextualised selves to socially constructed identities, but all varieties of constructivism challenge researchers to refocus their attentions on the critical importance of the human meaning making process.

The epistemological stance of social constructionism, while following the belief that meaning and knowledge is subjectively constructed, emphasises that the social world must be understood from within rather than explained from outside (Hollis, 1994), and focuses not on the meaning-making activity of the individual mind but on the collective generation of meaning as shaped by conventions of language and other social processes (Schwandt, 1994). A mutualist theory of meaning is relevant to social constructionism as “mutualism holds that meaning is a social construction as opposed to a purely private cognitive construction” (Hackley, 2003: 125).

Social constructionism highlights the role of culture and shared meanings (Crotty, 1998). The view that “all knowledge, and therefore all meaningful reality as such, is contingent upon human practices being constructed in and out of interaction between human beings and their world, and developed and transmitted within an essentially social context” (Crotty, 1998: 42). This understanding of social constructionism holds the key as to its applicability in this research study. The context of the home confined consumer plays a key role in this study; the individualistic, as opposed to the social context, is the understanding to be captured. The personal knowing, rather than the social knowledge of the home confined experiential reality dictates the employment of a more suitable constructivist psychology. Social constructionism does not fit with the idea of a personal way of knowing, which is a central concern in the current research.

4.4.3 Radical Constructivism

Radical constructivism challenges the objectivist worldview in which most people have grown up and that grounds their daily living. Less radical variants of constructivism, such as critical constructivism (Mahoney, 1988), permit objectivists a certain amount of elbowroom, but radical constructivism does not. Radical constructivism sees language as a particular form of action and not a substitute for it.
Chapter Four: Research Methodology

One must appreciate that language, as constructivists define it, encompasses the use of symbols as well as words and includes both verbal and nonverbal modes of expression. Language is where people live (Packer, 1985); it allows people to have names, to 'know' who they are. In life, there are too many interest groups to please and too many competing preferences to enact for people's behaviour to be consistent from moment to moment, or from one setting to another. Humans' sense of continuity is preserved because we construct and manage to believe in a relatively smooth narrative of events. To the radical constructivist, discontinuities in action are to be expected at every level of social living, from the individual to the communal.

Radical constructivism is an approach to understanding how the world that people think they know comes into existence. Radical constructivism is a mode of analysis; constructivists respect the labels that society has assigned to various phenomena. Radical constructivists also understand something that objectivists miss, that social conditions, no matter how harsh and unyielding, do not automatically and inevitably produce a single invariant set of experiences in all who are exposed to them. Everyone's positioning is a little different, and each person couples with elements of the social and natural environment in unique ways (Efran and Fauber, 1995). People living in essentially the same situation will have very different experiences of themselves and of the world. For the objectivist, who becomes overly wedded to the basic facts of life, risks overlooking the important subtleties of individual experiences.

Constructivists understand that no group has a monopoly on personal satisfaction. The home confined context does not automatically render such consumers distinct from the ability to consume personal satisfaction even though their life experiences and goals may differ from perceived norms. It would be patronizing to assume that the only 'service' meaningful to a disabled individual is the 'architectural' manipulation of social space; personal satisfaction is more than instigating the 'widening of the aisle'. Life is a continuous drift in which all forms and diversity count and no one mode of analysis is truly capable of capturing the complete picture.

In point of fact, radical constructivism neither authorizes nor requires the abandonment of the conventional distinctions between accurate reporting and deliberate fabrication (Efran and Fauber, 1995). Recall that language is a socially
embedded activity, and cultures, for good and sufficient reasons, have established categories of discourse and guidelines for linguistic performances. Constructivism is not an argument for or against particular methods or strategies. It provides a framework in which to note that people are truly responsible for answering their own questions and that a meaningful existence cannot be obtained any other way. The notion of knowledge as invention (Von Glasersfeld, 1984) contrasts with the objectivist belief in discovering an already existing truth. The problem of a constructivist position has to do with the question of how people assign validity to their knowledge. Mahoney (1988) borrowed the term radical from Von Glasersfeld (1984); ironically there has not been a statement by Von Glasersfeld denying the existence of reality. Radical constructivism, thus, is radical because it breaks with convention and develops a theory of knowing in which knowledge does not reflect an 'objective' ontological reality, but exclusively an ordering and organisation of a world constituted by experience. The radical constructivist has relinquished "metaphysical realism" once and for all (Von Glasersfeld, 1984: 24). From a constructivist view, experience plays a crucial and exclusive role in the generation of knowledge.

As Table 4.3 (overleaf) shows, Von Glasersfeld does not assume that accommodations necessarily lead to increasingly accurate portrayals or representations of reality, which PCP and social constructionism favour. "Constructivism is distinguished by its focus on how the individual cognitively engages in the construction of knowledge from social constructionism, which claims that knowledge and meaning are historically and culturally constructed through social processes and action" (Young and Collin, 2004: 374). The key concerns of this study are best served using a radical constructivist approach, where personal knowing and experiential reality are subjectively created to establish a fit in the context of home confinement. The truly lived experience is captured in this constructivist approach and will be discussed in relation to this study.
### Table 4.3 Key Points of the Three Constructivist Psychologies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Personal Constructivist Psychology</th>
<th>Social Constructionism</th>
<th>Radical Constructivism</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Individual cognitively engages in the construction of knowledge</td>
<td>Knowledge and meaning are historically and culturally constructed through social processes and action</td>
<td>Individual cognitively engages in the construction of knowing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Orderly universe actually exists</td>
<td>All knowledge is considered local and fleeting, negotiated between people in a given context and time frame</td>
<td>Private, self-constructed worlds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Human knowledge consists of ‘jigsaw puzzle’ fragments of ultimate truth and by accumulating more fragments we can know everything (Kelly, 1979: 66) (Constructive Alternativism)</td>
<td>Reality viewed as dependent on how groups of people collectivity elaborate their ideas. Infinite variety of socially constructed realities. Gergen (1991) uses the term ‘saturated self’ to describe multiple socially constructed selves.</td>
<td>Emphasizes the ability of human beings to use the understandings they create to help them navigate life regardless of whether it matches an external reality or not.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self is constructed, not discovered Free choice and creation of personal meaning. Humanistic, existential and other phenomenological leanings, (Butt, 1998a).</td>
<td>Emphasizes the, “primacy of relational, conventional, social practices as the source of individual psychic life,” (Stam, 1998: 199).</td>
<td>“Constructivism, thus, does not say there is no other world and no people, it merely holds that insofar as we know them, both the world and the others are models that we ourselves construct.” (Von Glasersfeld, 1995a: 137)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The term ‘constructionism’ “signals the rejection of individualist and rationalist accounts,” (Raskin, 2002: 18).</td>
<td>Constructions need to aid adaptation to a world that is not directly knowable.</td>
<td>“adaptation does not mean adequation to an external world of things existing-in-themselves, but rather improving the organism’s equilibrium, i.e., its fit, relative to experienced constraints,” (Von Glasersfeld, 1995a: 63)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4.5 Rationale for a Radical Constructivist Approach

The radical constructivist theories of Von Glasersfeld (1995), Maturana (1988) and Varela (1984) provide a rationale for the approach adopted in this research. Radical constructivism emphasizes the ability of human beings to use the understandings they create to help them navigate life, regardless of whether or not such understandings match an external reality. Von Glasersfeld (1995) asserts that human perception is adaptive; it evolved to help people survive. For radical constructivists, “adaptation does not mean adequation to an external world of things existing-in-themselves, but rather improving the organism’s equilibrium, i.e., its fit, relative to experienced constraints” (Von Glasersfeld, 1995: 37).

While people accommodate within the framework of social interaction, they ultimately remain cognitively isolated. There is no doubt that these subjective meanings get modified, honed, and adapted throughout their use in the course of social interactions. But this adaption does not and cannot change the fact that the material an individual’s meanings are composed of can be taken only from that individual’s own subjective experiences (Von Glasersfeld, 1995).

As people are locked inside their own subjective experiences, radical constructivists are interested in the ways that human beings establish and maintain communities. Maturana (1988) maintains that “problems do not exist apart from the observers who language them, that is, all speakers use private languages. Although specific words may be familiar, personal histories influence users to create unique meanings” (Loria, 1995: 156). Such statements brand Maturana as even more radical than some of the others who subscribe to radical constructivism (Efran and Fauber, 1995; Kenny and Gardner, 1988).

Central to Maturana’s work is the concept of autopoiesis, the notion that organisms are self-creating and self-sustaining systems. Maturana (1988) calls this position structure determinism and features of the external (or internal) environment enter into the equation by triggering changes in a living being’s structural dynamics. The environment never directly instructs the system about how to behave. Central to autopoiesis is the concept of structural coupling, at the social level individuals’ couple to form communities that in turn enhance their own survival. These are
referred to as third order couplings (Maturana and Varela, 1992). The social phenomena we associate with such couplings often develop within a linguistic domain. Maturana’s work is of interest within constructivist psychology because it provides a framework for examining how human beings come to interact within social domains using language, creating and sustaining particular forms of knowing in explanatory domains. From Maturana’s perspective, “we are continuously immersed in a network of interactions, the results of which depend on history” (Maturana and Varela, 1992: 242).

4.5.1 Epistemological or Hermeneutic Constructivism

Von Glasersfeld and Maturana both see human beings as closed systems that cannot directly access external reality. This is in keeping with epistemological constructivism. However, both theorists emphasize the role of language in sustaining social realities, implying a more hermeneutic constructivist approach. Maturana and Varela (1992) propose that people must distinguish two kinds of explanation, the first being useful in studying the internal dynamics of a system; where the external world is irrelevant in causing changes in the system. The second is where people function as observers in studying other living beings; in these explanations people posit ways in which environmental and organismic changes are interrelated. For Maturana the truths one discovers vary in accordance with the positioning of the observer, which is always a matter of preference.

Maturana emphasizes the role of third-order couplings, which produce social unities. From this perspective, social systems are not merely collections of isolated individuals brushing up against one another; they are emergent forms of organization created through third-order couplings. They sustain themselves because they foster the autopoiesis of their members. In this sense, reality is not something external. Maturana refuses to talk about a reality independent of the observer and so his theory seems best classified as hermeneutic constructivism. Maturana’s notion of ‘bringing forth’ or capturing lived experiences of the world as we make distinctions typifies the hermeneutic posture.
4. 6 Question of Objectivity

Constructivist objectivity should be called by another name because it does point to a world of things in itself. Von Glasersfeld (1986) used the term intersubjective for this highest, most reliable form of experiential reality. This level arises through the corroboration of other thinking and knowing subjects. The introduction of ‘others’ might seem to be in flat contradiction of the constructivist principle that all knowledge is subjective. Although the others are the individual subject’s construction, they can nevertheless provide corroboration of that subject’s experiential reality. The model of how we construct others is, in fact, an extension of a suggestion made by Kant, “It is clear: If one conceives of another thinking subject, one necessarily imputes to that other the properties and capabilities by which one characterises oneself as subject” (Kant, 1781: 223).

One’s experiential field has been populated with models of others who move, perceive, think, feel and even philosophise, in keeping with the rules one has oneself abstracted from experience. It helps to create that intersubjective level in which one is led to believe that concepts, goals, and, ultimately, feelings and emotions are shared by others and, therefore, more real than anything one experiences only by oneself. In the constructivist view, the self we conceive, as well as its body, are necessarily the product of that active agent, the “I” that is not part of the world. If we assume that the knowledge that constitutes our experiential reality is constructed piece by piece on the basis of experience, then we must also assume that the knowledge we have of our self must be constructed in a similar way. Just as we construct a model of a world, externalize it and then treat it as though its existence were independent of our doing, so we construct a model of the entity that we call self and externalize it so that it ends up as “a thing among other things” (Piaget, 1937: 82).

The self as a locus of experience appears to be an active agent rather than a passive entity. This active self can decide to experience or not to experience. The focus on a conceptual core is where the basic self is established; consideration will be given to self as locus of experience and self as perceptual entity. With the construction of permanent objects (possessions), the cognitive subject crystallizes some of the repeatable items it has constructed and treats them as external and independent. It is
only with time and much experience “that the individual eventually identifies at least some properties of a relatively stable nature associated with oneself” (Secord and Peevers, 1974: 121). One is not free to construct others in any way we would like. This dependence on viability in our construction of other individuals has a consequence that leads into the direction of ethics, a realm that is no less appropriate for constructivism than for other theories of knowledge. The fact that the individual needs the corroboration of others to establish the ‘intersubjective’ viability of ways of thinking and acting entails a concern for others as autonomous constructors. From the constructivist perspective the concern for others can be grounded in the individual subject’s need for other people in order to establish an intersubjective viability of ways of thinking and acting. Others have to be considered because they are irreplaceable in the construction of a more solid experiential reality.

4.7 Linking Constructivism to Consumer Research

As Sexton (1997) suggests, the process of understanding and knowledge are social, inductive, hermeneutical and qualitative, Maturana (1988) supports that the ‘bringing forth’ of the world typifies the hermeneutic posture. The role of language and conversations in sustaining social realities implies a hermeneutic constructivist approach. Radical constructivism is no less wanting in its ‘bringing forth’ the adaptation of the consumer’s fit with his or her experienced constraints.

Figure 4.1, overleaf, highlights the similarities of both these constructivist psychologies (radical constructivism and social constructionism) in addressing consumers’ lived experiences. The difference in both approaches stems from accepting that another, more personal way of knowing exists, the case for adoption of a hermeneutic analytical approach holds as firmly for the radical constructivist as it does for the social constructionist.
Figure 4.1 Linking Constructivism to Work in Consumer Research

Interpretivist Approaches

Radical Constructivism

Personal knowing, lived experiences outside of a social context (Von Glasersfeld, 1995; Maturana, 1988; Varela, 1984).

Intersubjective

Von Glasersfeld (1986), most reliable form of experiential reality, with corroboration of others. Opportunity to narrate consumers lived experiences without a need to mirror an objective, ontological reality.

Social Constructionism

Understanding of lived experiences in a societal context (Crotty, 1998; Trigg, 2001; Stam, 1998).

Subjective Personal Introspection

Opportunity to narrate consumers lived experiences through capturing the voices, developed and transmitted within an essentially social context (Crotty, 1998). Experience should be of “person-in-the-world” (Thompson et al., 1989).

Source: Author’s Own
4.8 Limitations of Radical Constructivism

The most frequent objection to radical constructivism is that constructivism denies reality. It only denies that we can rationally know a reality beyond our experience. Von Glasersfeld (2001: 41) states, “Constructivism has no quarrel with the mystics who express their intuitions about a transcendent world in poetic metaphors, which of their nature are not translatable into scientific language.” Most critics seem to be unwilling to accept the explicit statement that constructivism is a theory of knowing, not of being. A model of the construction of knowledge that is designed without making ontological claims about what is known seems difficult to accept. The importance of the individual perspective, instead of a societal one, does not always invoke an interest in or a need to explore certain phenomena if generalisability is limited. In relation to this epistemological approach, the perspective of the consumer is always to the fore in the managing of situations and the ‘bringing forth’ of consumption experiences. It takes time and effort for the researcher to immerse him or herself in the world of the consumer in order to elicit these consumption experiences and this may not always be a feasible scenario.

Radical constructivism addresses the micro rather than the macro level of knowing, and, as such, can be found wanting in terms of constructing validity in an external environment. The marketplace consists of individuals with unique experienced realities and individual consumption experiences, and unless a holistic perspective of consumer consumption behaviour is captured, a fit between the knowing and the doing cannot be understood. CCT advocates ‘capturing’ consumers’ lived experiences and it is these individual faces of the marketplace that should be made visible.

Radical constructivism has mainly been deployed within the educational arena, specifically in the field of mathematics (Cobb, 1990; Cobb et al., 1991; Tobin, 1993). This approach enables students to become the owners of the problem and to interiorize it, resulting in individualistic approaches to establishing a solution. This method allows the evolution of an approach that best fits with the individual concerned and the recognition that multiple bases for problem solving exist. The home confined consumers have to solve their ‘problems’ in their own individual
ways, and the multiple realities created could only be identified from exploring their personal ways of knowing through the employment of a radical constructivist approach. Radical constructivism itself must not be interpreted as a picture or description of any absolute reality but as a possible model of knowing that cognitive organisms are capable of constructing on the basis of their own experiences of a more or less reliable world.

### 4.9 Underlying Assumptions of this Research

A fundamental assumption underlying this research is that individuals make choices, that they construct their own realities and that their actions are purposeful and meaningful rather than externally determined. External factors are recognised as key influencers on an individual’s choices but these external factors are not seen as the sole determinants of an individual’s view of the world or the decisions they make. This is a fundamental position because it is reasonable to view people as being able to make purposeful and meaningful decisions on their own, without reference to external influences. The individuals participating in this study are believed to place constructions on their experiences, which constitute reality to them. The challenge to the researcher is to seek insights into, and understanding of, the details of their experiences as individuals, to interpret them and to reconstruct a view of their reality that is sophisticated and informed. The primary instrument for both the collection and, crucially, the interpretation of the data is the researcher. The case study as a research strategy was the preferred choice for this study.

### 4.10 Research Strategy

A case study is an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident (Yin, 2003), which is the case with home confined consumers. The case study is also a useful approach to adopt in the early stages of theory development where little is known about the phenomenon under investigation. Theory building and testing is afforded by the case study approach by making comparisons, looking for similarities and differences within the collected data. This means that elements of the theory are being confirmed or disconfirmed rather than being tested for generalisability to a population (Stoecker, 1991). As the researcher is interested in theory building, the role of describing, classifying and comparing the
complexities of the consumption behaviour of the home confined consumer is central to this research.

A second reason for using case studies is the need for intensive examination of a phenomenon to gain understanding. The depth and detail of qualitative data can only be obtained by getting physically and psychologically closer to the phenomenon. It is the very subjective nature of this research that calls for such a method to be utilized to enable a full picture to be developed, and possible rethinking of the phenomenon being studied (Stake, 1995). Gummesson (1991) argues that an important advantage with the case study approach is the opportunity to obtain a holistic view of a specific phenomenon.

4.10.1 Criticisms of the Case Study

Yin (2003) and Gummesson (1991) have identified a number of potential problems with case study research. Many researchers view this method as a less desirable form of inquiry (Yin, 2003). The greatest concern is over the lack of rigor often found when a researcher has not followed a systematic approach, or has allowed equivocal evidence or biased views to influence the direction of the findings and conclusions (Yin, 2003). Gummesson (1991) argues that case studies provide little basis for scientific generalisation. This causes problems especially in research that involves a single case as it poses the question, how can you generalise from a single case? Case studies, like experiments are generalisable to theoretical propositions and not to populations or universes (Yin, 2003). Case studies can take too long to complete and result in vast amounts of textual data to analyse (Yin, 2003).

Although the literature on case studies highlights the unique case, or the revelatory case, as a raison d'être for its utilization (Yin, 2003), it tends to address concerns within a managerial domain. The individual cases explored in this study are more in keeping with 'one-off' clinical cases found within clinical psychology and of interest for their individual context rather than their collective generalizations about particular populations. Similarly, clinicians recognise the role of individual case studies in discovery and theory generation.
4.10.2 Individual Case Studies in Clinical Settings

Charlton and Walston (1998) identify the benefits of case studies involving individual patients as having huge potential to stimulate new learning; they are set up for discovery and instrumental in the detection of new ideas. The greatest challenge is that the case should convince on its own, “one only recognizes what one knows” (Vandenbroucke, 1999: 162). Eysenck (1976: 9), who originally regarded the case study as nothing more than a method of producing anecdotes, later realized that “sometimes we simply have to keep our eyes open and look carefully at individual cases, not in the hope of proving anything, but rather in the hope of learning something.”

For researchers, the closeness of the case study to real-life situations and wealth of details are important, “One can often generalize on the basis of a single case, and the case study may be central to scientific development via generalization as supplement or alternative to other methods. But formal generalization is overvalued as a source of scientific development, whereas “the force of example” is underestimated” (Flyvbjerg, 2006: 228). The extreme case can be well suited for getting a point across in an especially dramatic way, which often occurs for well-known case studies such as Freud’s (2003) “Wolf-Man” and Foucault’s (1979) “Panopticon.”

4.10.3 Cases in Consumer Research Studies

Examples of case studies in consumer research include Holt’s (2002) study that used micro level data, people’s stories about their consumption, to investigate macro level constructs. Holt used an Extended Case Method (ECM) to gain an interpretive perspective. ECM seeks to develop conceptual frameworks with explanatory power. As a discovery-orientated approach, the goal of ECM is to “construct fruitful extensions of theory rather than to subject alternatives to a test,” (Holt, 2002: 73). An extended case method examines people’s everyday consumption practices from collecting individual consumer’s consumption stories, the micro level, and then going on to investigate macro level constructs. As a ‘craft’ mode of science, ECM “embraces, connection, proximity, and dialogue as compared with positive models of science whose hallmarks are separation, distance, and detachment,” (Burawoy,
Holt (2002) sought numerous consumption stories via loosely structured conversations with five informants.

Fournier’s (1998) study on consumer-brand relationships is one of the most cited in the consumer research literature. It involved three female cases in different life situations. The size restriction on the informant pool allowed depth concerning individual life worlds, necessary for thick description (Erlandson et al., 1993; Mick and Buhl, 1992). The modified life-history case studies approach (Denzin, 1978) in Fournier’s research is employed in this current research on home confined consumers, both are involved in discovery-orientated projects and employ phenomenological interviewing techniques.

4.11 Research Design

In the discussion that follows the design of the research is discussed. Access to and selection of cases is considered first. Given the nature of the respondents and the research context, the ethical issues are addressed. This is followed by a discussion on the interviews with the case subjects and on data analysis and interpretation.

4.11.1 Access to and Selection of Cases

The key sampling issues were the criteria used to select case respondents, access to respondents and the number of case studies undertaken. There is no prior consumer research to indicate how one might define a home confined consumer. The following criteria were selected for this research.

1. Respondents have no direct interaction in the marketplace, either in person or by remote shopping (Burton, 2002).
2. The years of confinement in the home are greater than three years. Brownlie and Horne’s (1999) study of prison inmates suggests that no aspects of self-extension are exhibited before three years.
3. Home confinement is a result of illness or physical disability, but not solely as a consequence of age.
4. Respondents are living in a home setting rather than an institutionalized environment. This allows for freedom and power of possession consumption to be demonstrated and observed.
5. Respondents are living independently in the sense that they are not living with family, friends or full time carers.

Given these criteria, the key issue in this research was access to suitable respondents, and having gained access, that respondents would be willing and able to provide consent for the study.

Home confined consumers can be embarrassed about their situation and find it extremely difficult to let strangers into their home. Gaining access to and being accepted into such households is a time consuming process and not something that would automatically occur. This research study was dependent on access and consent being given by the home confined consumer and not through a third party. It was only made possible through prior knowledge and friendship of the three cases involved in this research. Access and consent are not the only hurdles to overcome; the issue of trust plays heavily in the relationship between researchers and researched.

Those consumers who are home confined are understandably vulnerable and it is a situation that requires a sensitive approach, so that vulnerability is not exacerbated. Despite this challenge, the literature in disability studies illustrates the importance of such case studies for giving voice to the disabled. McCarthy (2001) argued that a decision not to research individuals because they are vulnerable could actually increase their vulnerability because people will remain in ignorance about their circumstances and treatment. Furthermore, exclusion from research “may also denude the knowledge base of marginalized groups concerning their health, education, welfare and quality of life” (Owens, 2007: 307).

Susinos (2007) studied social exclusion with young people who were from underprivileged socio-economic, ethnic/cultural and disabled groups. She argued that the worlds of those who are socially excluded are not often the subject of research. The narrative inquiry or life story research can give informants a central and valued role in the research relationship that helps to counter their exclusion from society. Roets et al. (2007: 270) suggest, “listening to long silenced voices, documenting their stories and making sense of them was a huge ethical challenge.”
Giving voice to the disabled through research is a key issue in disability studies and it is recognised that the individual case is one way of achieving this. Thus, the single case is gaining support within disability studies. The single case or case history is one way to secure the appropriate freedom through the vocalizing of the silent voice and the disclosure of the silent experiences essential to capturing the truly lived experience, and not one that has to fit society. “Liberation from disability is about having choices, not about living life in conformity to some pre-defined notion of normality,” (Burchardt, 2004: 742).

In disability studies the single case method can transform individual issues into societal or structural issues, developed initially from consideration of the individual story (Walmsley and Johnson, 2003). In Park’s (1967) study, ‘The Siege’, the author walks the reader through her daughter Jessy’s first eight years as an autistic child. This publication has been credited as a watershed event in the history of autism, quite a claim for a personal narrative. Joan Martin Hundley’s (1971) study, ‘The Small Outsider’ performed a similar role in Australia. Hundley details her engagement with the medical model of autism, stigma and the spoiled social identity. Similarly, Dossa (2006) tracks Fahimeh’s transition from Iran to Canada in a single case study aimed at identifying how women resist and rework stigmatized labels of disability and race from their social locations at the margins. As Dossa (2006: 357) discloses, “I chose to focus on one woman for two reasons, one, to facilitate a closer reading of a narrative and two, to recognize the collective endeavour captured in one voice. When marginalized people speak, they identify structured factors that shape their collective experiences.”

Entering their homes as a ‘researcher’ who was also a friend was an issue in this research. As in every research study involving human subjects, the respondents have to be fully informed of all the aspects of the study so that they can give informed consent. All of the respondents were willing to participate in the research study. However, conditions were placed on participation. The overriding concern of the respondents centred on the study being handled discretely as part of an ongoing and already established relationship. In other words, having given consent, the informants did not wish to be subjected to formal or direct questioning. Spradley (1979) and Harkness and Warren (1993) have discussed the problems that can arise
when interviewing friends and acquaintances. Harkness and Warren's discussion of these problems has particular resonance for this study, "Rather than becoming more comfortable, interview participants who are friends from the beginning may become uncomfortable as the interview unfolds. The formalised, tape-recorded, question and answer format, perceived as appropriate for stranger, is considered intrusive amongst friends" (p.332).

Of course, it was never intended that case interviews would be of the formal question and answer format described by Harkness and Warren (1993). Yet there were occasions when asking questions and probing for more information arose naturally in conversations with respondents. For example, questions about favourite possessions or asking for more detail when respondents are recollecting consumption experiences were perfectly acceptable and, indeed, welcomed. There were other occasions when it was clear that the respondents wanted to ensure that the researcher had recognised a story or experience that they considered to be important. Some recollections were repeated many times over the data collection period. Barbara and Gloria's ritual of questioning visitors before they gained access to their home was explained to me on numerous occasions, even though I knew this script by heart. On occasions Jay would relate a story or experience for me more than once in the same session, either to ensure that I had made a mental note of it or, when he thought I had perhaps not recognised its significance to him. Additionally, as I began my research, Jay began work on his life history project, which paralleled my two-year period of data collection. At the end of the research I was given, as a Christmas gift, a bound copy of Jay's life history and it has become my special possession. Issues that were too sensitive to raise or address by both parties were discussed in the life history.

As the study of home confined consumers entailed intensive fieldwork over a long period, the number of cases selected was relatively small. Initially two cases of home confinement seemed appropriate providing contrasting 'lived experiences' to explore. A third case, David was added some six months after the data collection process had started. It was considered at the time that this third case exhibited many differences from the other two and would add to the overall study in terms of exploring different circumstances and experiences of confinement.
4.12 Data Collection Methods

The approach to interviewing used in this research was closest to in-depth qualitative interviewing; this style of interviewing seeks a deep, information rich, understanding from the respondent. Conversation rather than interview would be a better way of describing the data collection method. Although a consistent line of enquiry is sought the actual stream of conversations are likely to be fluid rather than rigid (Rubin and Rubin, 1995). Johnson (2000: 106) suggests that "deep" means attempting to achieve the same level of deep understanding and knowledge as the respondent. The researcher must uncover what is usually hidden from view and achieve more reflexive understandings about the nature of the experience. As Johnson (2000: 106) points out "deep understandings allow us to grasp and articulate the multiple views of, and perspectives on, and meanings of some activity, event, place, or cultural object."

This is consistent with the interpretive ontological viewpoint that there is more than one reality. This style of interviewing is flexible, yet controlled (Burgess, 1982: 107). A flexible approach allows 'conversations' to be adapted to suit each individual respondent whose personal set of circumstances require that conversations need possible tailoring. The ease of redesign encourages the researcher to truly hear the meaning of what the interviewees say without "discarding pieces that do not fit with the initial conception of the research problem," (Rubin and Rubin, 1995: 45). Given the active role the interviewee plays in shaping this style of interview, Rubin and Rubin (1995: 11-12) suggest the term "conversational partner" for respondents. They state, "If the partners can direct the conversation to matters that interest them and that they think are important, interviews gain depth and reality. If you impose on them what you think is important, you miss important insights about the subject you are investigating and you may substitute your ill-informed view of the field for their experienced and knowledgeable one." In other words, giving interviewees (or conversational partners) the freedom to talk about the areas they feel are important produces more valuable and interesting data. There are two advantages of this; firstly, responses are provided in respondents' own language and secondly, unexpected digressions often turn out to be very productive (Johnson, 2000).
Rubin and Rubin (1995: 27) suggest that “data collection has the task of creating a conversational setting in which the information provided is faithful to the frame of reference of the respondent.” In this case the researcher’s theory and the subject’s ideas are supposed to emerge in mutual understanding. Any theory generated should be true to the subjective opinions of respondents. The avoidance of a rigid structure indicates awareness that individuals have “unique way(s) of defining the world” (Denzin, 1970: 83). Thus, this style of interviewing is consistent with the radical constructivist perspective. A list of topics and conversational themes is provided in Table 4.4 (overleaf).

In order to capture experiences with objects or possessions, informants were asked to ‘talk about’ or have a ‘conversation’ about a self-selected product or object that they have or feel special affection for (Holbrook and Schindler, 2003). Looking inward, the nostalgic experiencing of relived memories is brought forth by this type of approach. These introspective vignettes drew on the method of subjective personal introspection (SPI) (Holbrook, 1995; Gould, 1991; Holbrook, 1986; Holbrook, 1987; Holbrook, 1988) to illicit the diversity of the lived experience that Thompson et al. (1989, 1990) advocate.

In addition to the conversations/interviews and the introspective vignettes, the researcher participated in consumer and consumption activities. These included shopping for the respondents, giving advice when asked, attending to various household tasks when needed. Of course, this was not ‘new’ activity but a continuation of activities performed for respondents before the research commenced.

Given the importance of understanding the world from the subjective viewpoint of the respondents, tape-recording interviews was initially considered (where appropriate and fitting), as it offers the advantage of preserving the words of the participants while allowing researchers to maintain original data (Seidman, 1998: 97). However, an initial attempt at recording interviews was abandoned very quickly. As discussed above, respondents wanted the study to be undertaken discreetly and without the formality that can be associated with some types of interview. Given the added benefits of “thick description” that transcriptions from recordings will allow, in the form of extracts of natural language, it would be
understandable to want to utilize such a method. The rationale for transcription is that relying merely on memory and notes is difficult (Brewer, 2000: 87).

Table 4.4 Topics and Conversational Themes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Valued possessions (nostalgic consumption)</th>
<th>Conversations about personal objects or consumption experiences to ‘gather’ the lived experience.</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.Missed possessions-consumption areas that have had to be left behind (dispossession).</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. Describing the setting and context of the “social world” of the respondent in terms of possessions.</td>
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<td>3. Favourite photographs, smells, music and the memories evoked as a consequence of this.</td>
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<tr>
<th>Collections (showing the extension of the self-identity and multiple identities)</th>
<th>Evidence of collection(s), how it, or they, were initiated.</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Catalyst for starting collection(s), self-gifts, wish lists, gifts from loved ones/friends.</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. Feelings evoked by collection(s), positive or negative connotations associated with it.</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. Situation of collection(s), in terms of display and position within “social world” of respondent (power and freedom in presentation of it).</td>
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<th>New possessions (extension of self)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. What new categories of possessions have they consumed since being confined?</td>
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<td>2. New interests, how they spend their time.</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. New others in their social world, positive and negative aspects of this.</td>
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<tr>
<td>4. Wish lists, self gifts.</td>
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<td>5. Evidence of creativity, how (if applicable) are they extending the self (life-histories, diaries, journals).</td>
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<tr>
<td>6. Influence of others in relation to new areas of consumption (personal communities).</td>
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<td>7. Adoption of vicarious nostalgic consumption as a consequence of new linkages.</td>
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<th>How they consume</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Daily consumption, how it is achieved with regards selection of individuals for tasks.</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. Changes in consumption behaviour as a result of this.</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. Personal consumption, the ability or non-ability to experience individualistic needs.</td>
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<tr>
<td>4. Emotional wellbeing associated with confinement to home, expressed in movement, language, interest in the consumption of possessions.</td>
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<th>Social networks</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Family and friends, the existence and importance of these.</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. Diminished or expanded circle of contacts, feelings with regard this development.</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. Linkages to the marketplace.</td>
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</table>
The data collection process was ongoing in nature over a two-year period and the opportunity for multiple conversations and multiple immersions in the home confined context, more than made up for an inability to record conversations. To illustrate, respondents were usually visited weekly or fortnightly but in one case, everyday 'conversations' were conducted by e-mail or telephone, or both over the research period. It was not unusual then for respondents to tell the same consumption stories or recall consumption experiences on many occasions over the period. This returning to consumption stories and experiences in a manner that was natural and unforced between friends allowed the capture of 'thick description' without having to resort to tape recordings.

Although the conversations were not recorded they were however written down and kept in a living diary after returning from respondents homes. The conversations were dated and similar conversations, in terms of special possession consumption, were kept together to support capturing the lived experience. Consumption experiences, unique to each respondent were kept separate from those consumption texts that had commonalities running through them. This living diary provided an additional source of reference, it allowed for self-reflection at the consumption point in time and these thoughts and understandings played an important part in coming to know the home confined context. Over the two year period of multiple immersions in the experiential reality of the home confined consumers it was not unusual for conversations in terms of its subjective and ritualistic content to be played out over and over again. Given the high level of uncertainty and anxiety that marks out home confined consumers’ everyday experiential reality, it was understandable that their conversations would naturally turn to issues considered of special importance, time and time again.

The living diary of the respondents’ conversations reflected the ongoing narrative consumption texts that were collected at multiple points in time. These continuous intersubjective reflections of home confinement helped to support multiple triangulation of the phenomenon. The credibility and integrity of the findings of this naturalistic consumer research study are enhanced by the ability to go back and forth between the field and the context of study on a continuous basis. Additional methods of participant observation and the accompanying opportunities for introspective
vignette collection within the home confined setting contributed to the dependability and confirmability of the consumption narratives of home confinement than would ever have been realisable through one-off in-depth interviewing techniques. The life history of Jay also provided a point of reference from which to gain an additional source of integrity in relation to capturing a rich understanding of the home confined narrative or conversation texts. Capturing various sources and forms of information relating to the same social phenomena is instrumental in realising a deeper understanding of the home confined context.

Confidentiality was maintained in the thesis and any other publications. Respondents’ names, addresses or other details of their specific location were not disclosed. Personal community members of the three case studies were also given anonymity. Following the tradition within consumer research, brief extracts from the ‘conversations’ were used in the thesis and any resulting publications to illustrate, support, or illuminate concepts and theory. In these cases pseudonyms were used, as is usual practice in consumer research journals.

4.13 Data Analysis and Interpretation

Within consumer research there are a number of frameworks that are commonly used for analysis and interpretation, namely discourse analysis (Elliott, 1996) grounded theory (Goulding, 1999, 2002) and hermeneutics (Thompson et al., 1994; Arnould and Fischer, 1994). With respect to grounded theory, the emphasis is placed on emerging data (Goulding, 2002). An important aspect of grounded theory is that the researcher does not begin the project with a preconceived theory in mind (Strauss and Corbin, 1998: 12). In grounded theory these preconceived conceptions are thought to bias the investigation. Given the socio-historic nature of the relationships between the researcher and the researched in this study, grounded theory was not a suitable option to employ.

Discourse analysis has been used in relation to consumer research (Elliott et al., 1995). Its focus, however, has been on the achievement of variability where the researcher may actively intervene in the interview process or facilitate disagreements, in focus groups for example (Elliott, 1996). The assumptions of discourse analysis are that “language is a medium oriented towards action and
function, and that people use language intentionally to construct accounts or versions of the social world, this active process of construction being demonstrated in language variation” (Elliott, 1996: 65). Given the subjective nature of the research it would not be deemed a suitable approach for such interaction to override the experiential reality of the informants.

The method employed in this study was hermeneutics. Hermeneutics is an iterative process “in which a ‘part’ of the qualitative data (or text) is interpreted and reinterpreted in relation to the developing sense of the ‘whole’” (Thompson et al., 1994: 433). These iterations allow a holistic understanding to develop over time as initial understandings are modified as more information becomes available. The hermeneutic circle, sometimes called the iterative spiral of understanding (see Figure 4.2 below), describes the “back and forth, specific-general-specific movement of interpretation” (Arnould and Fischer, 1994: 57).

**Figure 4.2 The Hermeneutic Spiral**

Gummesson (2000) acknowledges how the different levels of pre-understanding can evolve into levels of understanding through the hermeneutic process. An important tenet of hermeneutic philosophy is pre-understanding, hermeneutics recognises that prior to interpretation, we and the object of our interpretation exist (Arnould and Fischer, 1994). In the hermeneutic tradition, preconceptions provide a necessary
frame of reference from which more informed understandings of a given phenomenon can be developed (Thompson et al., 1994). Pre-understanding, therefore, enables rather than constrains the interpreter, as without prejudices it would be difficult to find meaning in the words or action of others (Arnould and Fischer, 1994). Pre-understanding for consumer researchers is found in two interrelated traditions, experience as a consumer and experience as a researcher (Arnould and Fischer, 1994).

Another important aspect of hermeneutics is the "fusions of horizons" (Thompson et al., 1994: 434). This fusion of horizons concerns achieving an agreement between researcher and respondent about the world (Bleicher, 1980: 3). Thompson et al. (1994: 22) imply that the fusion of horizons is that "any research account of a research participant's self interpretations is always informed by the intellectual background and theoretical interests of the researcher."

A hermeneutically grounded interpretive framework for deriving consumption relevant insights from the 'texts' of consumer stories were employed to give an overview of home confined consumers' experiences. The meanings that consumers ascribe to their consumer experiences are discussed as texts, stories and narratives (Thompson, 1997: 2). These metaphors express a worldview that underlies social science research, which focuses on the interpretive activities by which people make sense of their lives, and the roles that language and narrative form play in shaping these interpreted meanings (Rabinow and Sullivan, 1979; Sherry, 1991).

Wells (1993) notes that discovery oriented research addressing the meaning-based dimensions of consumption behaviour can generate insights from a hermeneutic perspective; the stories consumers tell about their consumption experiences are a prime locus of discovery. The insights offered by a hermeneutic mode of interpretation can be particularly useful when considering an understanding of consumers in relation to their perceived life circumstances and lifestyle clusters (Holt, 1997). "The hermeneutic caveat is that the voice of a given consumer will often express a nexus of personal meanings that are formed in a complex field of social and historical relationships," (Thompson, 1997: 3). The implications for nostalgic consumption experiences are inherent in this approach and fitting for the group being addressed in this research. The differing home confined contexts
provide heterogeneity of personal histories, and, by means of a hermeneutic approach, these pluralities of consumption behaviour can be explored (Holt, 1997; Thompson et al., 1994).

Human understanding is organized in terms of culturally shared narrative forms such as stories (Edwards and Potter, 1992) and myths (Barthes, 1957) and in recent years this narratological view of meaning has gained currency in relation to social psychological constructs such as self-concept (Edwards and Potter, 1992; Gergen, 1991). This theory of meaning draws from research on the narrative structuring of identity and the role of stories in constructing self-understandings (Gergen and Gergen, 1986; Hermans, 1996). The personalized cultural meanings that constitute a person’s sense of self-identity and the biographical significance of specific life events and experiences are captured within this unfolding narrative of the self (Romanyshyn, 1982). The collective form of experiences or possessions consumed by the home confined consumer holds the key to the maintenance and construction of the self, where these narratological constructions enable people to construct a sense of continuity and coherence among the flow of their life experiences (Gergen, 1991; Giddens, 1991).

These narratives of personal identity are themselves contextualized within a broader narrative, where the person’s life history is viewed as a text, whose narratives are grounded in nostalgia. It is from this premise that personalized meanings and conceptions of self-identity are constructed (Holt, 1997; Thompson et al., 1994). Consumers are self-narrators (Polkinghorne, 1988; Thompson et al., 1994) whose stories impose a meaningful historical order onto life events and who selectively highlight particular facets of these experienced events. As such these focal experiences can influence one’s interpretive standpoint (Hermans, 1996).

Interpretation of textual data proceeds through a series of part-to-whole iterations (Arnold and Fischer, 1994; Spiggle, 1994). This procedure entails two distinct stages, the first, where the text is read in its entirety to gain a sense of the whole (Giorgi, 1989) this is known as intratextual. Intertextual interpretive cycles, on the other hand, allow for patterns and differences to be viewed across interviews or cases as this research dictates. As a result, newly developed understandings can be reconsidered in light of former interviews.
A second consideration follows from the goal of hermeneutic interpretation to engender a holistic understanding of consumers’ consumption stories (Thompson et al., 1994) that is, that specific consumption stories have a relationship to a broader narrative of personal history. As a holistic understanding develops over time (Giorgi, 1989) the implementation of a hermeneutic framework must also occur over time, making this a suitable approach for case study design.

Lastly, hermeneutic research emphasizes that an understanding of a text always reflects a fusion of horizons between the interpreter’s frame of reference and the texts being interpreted (Arnold and Fischer, 1994; Gadamer, 1993). The implication is that the researcher’s interpretive orientation (background knowledge, underlying assumptions, and questions of interest) enables one to become attuned to specific characteristics and patterns afforded by the textual data. A hermeneutic interpretation seeks to be open to possibilities in the text and not constricted by predetermined meanings (Gadamer, 1993).

The quality of the research findings is contingent upon the scope of the background knowledge that the researcher brings to bear and the ability to forge insightful linkages between background knowledge and the texts at hand. As Thompson (1997: 5) states, “The cultivation of a socio-historical perspective on the research domain coupled with a sensitivity to textual nuances are probably the most critical aspects of hermeneutic interpretation.”

In these two respects, case studies 1, 2 and 3 fulfil these critical aspects and (experienced knowledge spanning twenty-four years, eighteen years, and thirty years respectively) provided insights that supported understanding and meanings derived from consumption stories. It must be remembered that a researcher’s developing sense of the historical context is always in play during all the stages of the interpretive process (Thompson, 1997).

Texts of consumer stories generated by phenomenological (Kvale, 1983; Thompson et al., 1994) or long (McCracken, 1988) interviews are particularly well suited to hermeneutic analysis. These types of interviews have relatively few pre-planned questions; instead the consumption experiences and meanings expressed by the interviewee direct the dialogue. The phenomenological interview elicits free-form
consumer driven text; it is designed to give primacy to the informant's perspective rather than to the researcher's expectations (Polkinghorne, 1988). Stern et al. (1998) makes use of this form of interview technique to elicit the consumer's perspective through means of a narrative analysis. This method mirrors the hermeneutic approach in its movement back and forth between the parts and the whole (Gadamer, 1993). Since 1985 the phenomenological interview has been used to study experiential themes in consumer behaviour (Hirschman and Holbrook, 1992) such as ownership of special possessions (Myers, 1985) and everyday consumption and shopping activities (Thompson et al., 1990). By using this technique to elicit a narrative of consumption, researchers allow consumers to reveal and evaluate their behaviour. This interview technique eases the phenomenological study of lived meaning, captured by collective single experiences, set in the context of personal history over time (Giorgi, 1986).

By looking at a narrative as an entity to be studied (Iser, 1978) researchers can gain insight into the consumer and 'others' refracted through the lens of the consumer's perception (Bruner, 1987; Scholes, 1981). The attention to narrative patterns (Stern, 1994, 1995) gives a deeper understanding of consumer behaviour by focusing on the way that individuals recount their histories (their roles, their self talk, talk about others, what they leave out). Narratives therefore can be viewed not simply as "a way of telling someone (or oneself) about one's life" (Rosenwald and Ochberg, 1992: 1), but rather a more holistic perspective of the informant is given. The stories consumers relate about everyday experiences create a situation in which a past event is relived in relation to present concerns and projected towards an envisioned future (Thompson, 1997) whilst organizing these stories into contexts of experiences that will give a coherent narrative of self-identity.

Thompson (1997) suggests there are five key aspects to the hermeneutic view of consumer stories.

1. Narratives are structured by plot lines that organize events and characters.

2. They reflect symbolic parallels among the meanings of different events and actions (Barthes, 1957).
3. They present intertextual relationships in which meanings become integrated in narratives of personal history (Polkinghorne, 1988).

4. They express existential themes by which conceptions about a person's self-identity are negotiated through reflections on consumption experiences, special possessions and consumer choices (Mick and Buhl, 1992; Thompson et al., 1994).

5. They draw from the cultural code of shared socio-historic meanings and conventionalized viewpoints (Holt, 1997; O'Guinn and Shrum, 1997; Thompson et al., 1994).

From a hermeneutic perspective, the analysis of consumption stories involves a constant interrogation of plot in order to develop an understanding of the personal significance of the circumstances and events described in a consumer story. These consumers' narratives are constructed subjectively from possession consumption experiences and reflect past, present and future perspectives. Thompson (1997: 7) states, “A key facet of a hermeneutic analysis of consumer consumption stories then is discerning the construction of personal history that underlies a consumer’s consumption goals and his or her interpretation of desirable attributes and outcomes.”

4.14 Researcher Vulnerability

Given the 'immersion' of the researcher in the home confined consumers’ lives over a relatively long period of time (two years), it was not surprising that changes in ownership of vulnerability emerged. Consumer vulnerability has attracted attention in consumer research but researcher vulnerability has not attracted the same level of concern. As consumer researchers respond to TCR (Transformatory Consumer Research) and increase the number and range of studies with vulnerable and disadvantaged consumers, this issue is likely to increase in visibility.

De Laine (2000: 3) stated that during fieldwork “researchers experience ethical dilemmas with an immediacy and personal involvement that draws on intuition and empathy, feelings and emotion.” Davison (2004) concluded that the potential to feel
isolated, vulnerable and distressed does not magically disappear because we assume the role of researcher. James and Platzer (1999: 1) suggested that hearing stories from vulnerable populations (in this case, lesbians and gay men) can be "upsetting and stressful" and consequently "it is rare to find honest accounts of the difficulties and dilemmas encountered when conducting sensitive research with vulnerable research populations."

Historically, many researchers have tended to disguise the problems arising in the research process so as not to elicit negative feedback in terms of result validity (Brewer, 1993). Furthermore, others may interpret the admission of vulnerability as a sign of weakness or even researcher incompetence and, thus, such vulnerabilities are usually experienced in isolation. Davison (2004: 338) suggests the assumption of researcher power is questionable; rather, the relationship between researcher and respondent is one of "shifting boundaries." Figure 4.3 illustrates how perceptions of researched or researcher can be viewed dependent on one's positioning. From the researched position, the researcher can be viewed as the wolf, the more dominant force in the research relationship. In direct contrast the researcher can equally align with the position of the lamb (perceived vulnerability) especially when the research addresses sensitive topics.

Figure 4.3 Shifting Boundaries of Vulnerability

Although many consumers and qualitative research accounts provide advice in relation to techniques of interviewing (Thompson et al., 1989; Carson et al., 2001), there has been limited focus on specific strategies to use in the case of sensitive
topics concerning vulnerable consumers. The implications for understanding those groups marginalized within the context of consumption relies on researchers adopting an empathetic stance to ease exploration and knowing. Some of the issues and concerns that arose during time in the field will now be discussed in terms of their personal impact on the researcher.

4.14.1 Issues and Concerns Experienced

Researching vulnerable populations can make the researcher more sensitive to the demands of those we study. With reference to the interview process, it should be acknowledged that when conducting research in private homes the risk of intrusion is high (Stalker, 1998), given the unequal exchange between researcher and respondent in the research process. The overriding challenge then for researchers has to be the ability to balance unwanted intrusion with over-immersion in 'the cause' (Stalker, 1998:17).

Davison (2004) discussed this aspect in relation to social work researchers suggesting that feelings of powerlessness arise due to the conflict between the role of the researched and the role of the social worker. The disclosure of personal circumstances and issues surrounding individual cases of home confinement aroused feelings of sympathy and compassion. Intimate details with regards one respondent’s experiences of coming to terms with the knowledge that they would never physically move again presented the researcher with additional dilemmas in relation to power asymmetries. Careful management of the researcher-respondent relationship was required to ensure that respondents were not further victimized (Edwards, 1990) in terms of their non-abelist perspective.

The style of language especially in relation to a particular home confined case was a significant factor. To illustrate this point we will consider the case of Jay, a quadriplegic as a result of an accident. Both the researcher and the researched conversed using language associated with movement and the ableist perspective. This was employed to accentuate feelings of ‘normalism’. For example, Jay did not adopt discourse related to immobility and rather made comments like, “I was up since 4 o’clock this morning” or “Imagine I had to go to bed at 10.30pm on a Friday
The significance of this style of language, given the extreme situational confinement to bed, is apparent. The researcher used strong ‘ableist’ adjectives by adopting a style dictated by respondent’s own experiential reality. During interviews with Jay, the researcher suppressed her body movements in favor of a more animated form of speech. In a situation of this nature, the researcher felt awkward and guilty with respect to her ‘ableism’ and to downplay this imbalance and prevent feelings of disempowerment, the emphasis was on oral communication.

Although the fieldwork was carried out in subject’s own homes to create as natural a setting as possible so that both sanctuary and empowerment could be maximized, it however created problems for the researcher. The primary concern of research on sensitive topics has been the protection of vulnerable subjects (Lee, 1993). In one case of home-confinement, all manner of perfumes, deodorants, soaps, and fumes of smoking created barriers to entry for the researcher and the possibility of non-entry into the respondent’s home. The respondent’s stringent testing of the researcher to be allowed entry into the home space, was ongoing. The washing ritual employed by the researcher in this particular case to eliminate all artificial odors, led to continual self-examination before conducting interviews. Obviously, attendance to such issues resides with the researcher; the adherence to respondents’ entrance criteria has to be ensured.

Respondents addressed within this study can be considered as doubly vulnerable. This highlights the danger of defining respondents in terms of one characteristic such as disability. As Henderson (1998) acknowledged, diversity exists not only across groups but also within generalized groups and as such the exploration of the human situation demands an individualized gaze. Moore and Miller (1999) noted that the inclusion of doubly vulnerable individuals in the research design might present special challenges.

The home confined context of Jay, presented the researcher with additional challenges, namely, ‘interiorization’ (one-room world) and non-physicality in the home. The significance of this extreme confinement, emotionally and physically caused the researcher to maintain a constant focus on the minutiae of interaction. The researcher must recognize their position in this context does not constitute “abuse”.
It would appear that some aspects of researcher vulnerability are inevitable as they are fundamental to conducting good research, empathy and adherence to respondents' social worlds are not just effects on the researcher, but are elements that gain the confidence of respondents and access to their consumption stories.

Figure 4.4 (pg. 107) illustrates vulnerabilities that can face the home-confined consumer and the consequent effects for the researcher. The primary source of vulnerability (home confinement) and associated non-physicality can stem from various factors such as illness, disability, ageing process, or a combination of all. The home confined context can exacerbate the experience of vulnerability, resulting in additional vulnerabilities of 'Interiorization' and 'Non-Socialization' being realized. The non-abelism associated with inability to interact directly in the marketplace and the added constraints of restricted space cultivate a bed of perceived 'Isolation', 'Invisibility', and 'Stigmatization' by those consumers, consuming at the edge of society. These factors contributed to the experiencing of researcher vulnerability.

At this point in time it would be beneficial to reflect on the research journey. Essentially this was a long, learning process for both researcher and respondents. Initially the close relationships and friendships developed over many years between researcher and respondents allowed the access I feel would have otherwise been denied. Trying to elicit consent to conduct this study with virtual strangers would probably have been as a result of third part negotiations and not of the potential respondents own willingness. The hardest part of the process of data collection has been trying to keep a fine balance between adopting intrusive measures (taking liberties with respondents just because of your position as trusted friend) and remaining natural and allowing conversations to develop. The conflict at times between personal interest and respondents concerns to elicit a rich understanding is unavoidable and has to be worked at continually. The need for self-surveillance at all times throughout the research process can be difficult to maintain but the realization that home confined consumers could become more estranged and less communicative ultimately holds the process in place and the friendships intact. The knowledge that these friendships will be ongoing after the research is ended.
ultimately protects these home confined consumers from being thoughtlessly addressed and misinterpreted.

The challenges that home confined consumers encounter in their daily lives and the often draconian measures and regimes put in place by a ‘caring’ community, were at times extremely hard to deal with, when personally witnessing the catastrophic effects that this care had on one case of home confinement. My own personal outrage had to be suppressed at times to ensure the ongoing wellbeing of the home confined consumer experiencing such episodes of domination. The feelings of self-helplessness with regards ability to change particular situations for the better left a growing self-anger directed at the supposed community of care. The inability to understand or move care beyond the medical model perspective was indeed evident where functional care was necessary to realizing independent survival.

The radical constructivist perspective allowed the home confined consumers positioning to be considered as a problem that needed solving rather than from the negative position and perception of disability. The transition from abelist to non-abelist is all about the adaptation to secure a new equilibrium and the empowering nature of radical constructivism is fitting given the context of the research.
Figure 4.4 Sources and Consequences of Vulnerability

- **PRIMARY source of vulnerability**
  - Limited Physicality
  - Home Confinement

- **SECONDARY sources of vulnerability**
  - "Interiorization"
  - Lack of identity formation opportunities
  - Non-socialization
  - Isolation "Invisibility" Stigmatization
  - Empathy

- **Consequences of vulnerabilities**
  - Adherence to respondents’ social worlds and consequent alteration to the self

- **Effects on the Researcher**
  - Security Issues

Source: Adapted from Downey et al. (2005c: 676)
4.15 Credibility, Validity, Reliability and Trustworthiness

Wallendorf and Belk (1989) present a number of procedures for assessing the validity in naturalistic consumer research. They suggest five criteria that should be considered to aid the assessment of trustworthiness as follows:

1. **Credibility**: adequate and believable representations of the constructions of reality studied.

2. **Transferability**: extent to which working hypotheses can also be employed in other contexts, based on an assessment of similarity between the two contexts.

3. **Dependability**: extent to which interpretation was constructed in a way that avoids instability other than the inherent instability of a social phenomenon.

4. **Confirmability**: ability to trace a researcher’s construction of an interpretation by following the data and other records.

5. **Integrity**: extent to which the interpretation was unimpaired by lies, evasions, misinformation, or misrepresentations by informants.

These issues are addressed in relation to the very subjective stance taken in relation to data collection and the techniques involved in drawing out the lived experience of consumption in terms of the consumers’ themselves. Their language, thoughts, actions are divulged as an expression only of their self and identity and not as a consequence of the researcher’s direction. Integrity is given over to the informant initially, whose freedom to select reflections and experiences, by means of the phenomenological interview, is counter-balanced by the researcher’s own personal socio-historical knowledge of the informant, as is the tradition of the hermeneutic interpretation.

To enhance the credibility of the research, triangulation across data collection techniques were employed. As all techniques were focused on the same phenomenon, multiple methods of collection stimulated and supported emerging themes of consumption in relation to possessions.
In relation to dependability, replication of a study conducted from an interpretive viewpoint (where people and contexts are continually changing) makes this achievement inappropriate. One possible way of enhancing dependability is by undertaking a longitudinal study; the informants concerned in this research represented individual cases that were revisited on numerous occasions. Although this is not a longitudinal approach it provides for the interpretation of narratives through the collective consumption stories of the home confined consumer.

This research relies on the trust established between the researcher and the researched. Williams (2001: 377) states, “Interpersonal trust is an important social resource that can facilitate cooperation and enable coordinated social interactions.” Lewis and Weigert (1985: 968) support such an understanding, “From a sociological perspective, trust must be conceived as a property of collective units (ongoing dyads, groups, and collectivities), not of isolated individuals.” The need for trust only arises in risky situations (Mayer et al. 1995); the importance therefore of realising it with vulnerable cases is evident. Lewis and Weigert (1985: 982) assert that the “trust which undergrids our everyday lives is a pure social construction which answers to our need for security by seeming to be a fact when it is always a projected assumption.”

Homebound consumers are generally perceived as vulnerable, where the need for security is a daily concern, “Making oneself vulnerable is taking risk. Trust is not taking risk per se, but rather it is a willingness to take risk” (Mayer et al., 1995: 712). Several techniques were used to increase the trustworthiness of the study (Erlandson et al. 1993; Fournier, 1998), triangulation of ongoing stories from respondents were conducted at multiple points in time. The purposive sampling of the informants to illicit distinctly different experiences of the phenomena allowed for the transferability of judgement of the insights obtained. The home confined cases provided extra internal checks at differing points in the collection process and this gauged the credibility of the author’s interpretative claims.
4.16 Limitations of Study

This research study explored cases of home confinement in various contexts, and the circumstances leading to such a transition, although noted, were not the overriding consideration for selection. The cases represented both self-withdrawal and enforced withdrawal from the marketplace. The aspect of enforced withdrawal could be further explored as only one case in this study reflected this situation. A small number of cases stemming essentially from this perspective may help in the understanding of the dispossession process and restrained consumer consumption behaviour. The immediacy and irreversibility of this traumatic transition warrants such exploration.

Initially the use of more creative methods to explore the consumption experiences of homebound consumers (making of collages) were considered, but given the extreme non-abelism of Jay this line of exploration was abandoned. Possibly the keeping of living diaries would have been a more suitable method to deploy in the research study, the ability for, and of, self-disclosure, is particularly amplified by this medium of communication. Jay’s life-history project has allowed self-disclosure to remain a private activity, and as such, the truly lived experience can more readily be captured.

Only one case of home confinement in this study was heavily dependent on functional caring and the consumption experiences of managing such personal community members is an area of research that warrants further exploration. The multiple challenges of home confinement are compounded by the inclusion of those persons not actively chosen to be a personal community member.

4.17 Conclusion

The context of the research and the implications of conducting ‘interviews’ with vulnerable participants, led to the adoption of radical constructivism as a sensitive and empowering approach. The acknowledgement that a more personal knowing exists is crucial to ‘capturing’ the home confined consumers’ experiential reality. Radical constructivism provided such a platform for exploring the special consumption space of home confinement. The following chapter discusses such special possession consumption experiences.
Chapter Five: Findings and Discussion: Special Possessions

5.1 Introduction

Special possessions play an important role in easing life transitions and are instrumental to the maintenance of the self-concept (McCracken, 1987). Possessions offer a medium of interaction through which parts or metaphors of self are assembled, created and extended. Material possession attachment defines the relationship between specific person and object and by doing so reflects the extent of "me-ness" associated with that possession (Kleine et al., 1995). In this chapter individual, illustrative episodes of special possession consumption will be discussed. It is the subjective heterogeneous nature of these consumption experiences that will provide insights into the home confined context and the role of special possessions in identity construction. These illustrative episodes represent a radical constructivist understanding where social conditions, no matter how harsh and unyielding, do not automatically and inevitably produce a single invariant set of experiences in all who are exposed to them. Everyone's positioning is a little different, and each person couples with elements of the social and natural environment in unique ways. People living in essentially the same situation will have different experiences of the world and of themselves. Radical constructivism addresses this gap in understanding by allowing the experienced reality of the consumer to be brought forth that reflects self-construction. The cases of Jay, Barbara and Gloria, and David illustrate the diversity of such special possession consumption. Brief life histories are provided initially to contextualise the individual cases.

5.2 The Case of Jay

After finishing a Business Studies degree during the 1970s, Jay moved back home to become involved in the management of the family business. Jay lived with his parents and enjoyed a close, supportive family network. At the age of twenty-six, Jay was left quadriplegic as a result of an automobile accident. He has been quadriplegic now for 26 years. After the accident he spent some three years in two different hospitals to enable him to come to terms with the enormity of his situation and rehabilitate him for 'home' life. A prolonged period of rehabilitation equipped Jay
with the means to survive in a home environment and set in motion a regime of care that would be necessary to achieve this outcome. Currently, Jay lives alone in his own home and carers visit daily to attend to his needs.

It is not only in terms of physicality that Jay feels constrained, the obtrusive technical appendages, in the form of medical equipment, that are a necessity in his world have compounded images and feelings of restraint and become a continual source of annoyance, which exacerbates his non-abelism, and the perceptions of others. These ‘mechanizations’ create obstacles to realising emotional intimacy. Of course, there are also positive aspects to technology. The ease and speed of communication through the Internet has provided Jay with a wealth of opportunities to engage in meaningful “conversations” with his extended family, especially the younger generations. Jay is very much aware that such emotional independence can be achieved by the close affiliation with machines, and this has been instrumental in his acquisition of the necessary equipment and skills for such self-extension. The diligence and perseverance needed to acquire a necessary level of competence in using the computer and associated software, such as Dragon Dictate, has revealed Jay to be proactive, future-orientated and, most importantly, capable.

Perhaps Jay’s most abiding fear is that he will be moved from his home environment into institutional care. For this reason any display of weakness is avoided lest members of his home care team (functional carers), who keep notes on his well-being, recommend a change in his living arrangements, even of a temporary nature. For most abelist consumers the need to attend hospital at different stages throughout one’s life is an acceptable occurrence, but for Jay it has become the “enemy”, regarded as a possible end to independent living. The risk to his self-preservation and physical survival has led to Jay’s near obsessive attendance to outer and inner body maintenance that commands a consistently high level of discipline. To this end, close friends and family members play a special role in his survival, emotionally and physically.
5.3 The Case of Barbara and Gloria

Barbara and Gloria are unmarried sisters in their late fifties and early sixties and live in the home that they grew up in as children. Barbara and Gloria grew up in a household where religion played a large role. Their father was a lay preacher and the dominant force within the home environment and, as a result, Barbara and Gloria were socialized from a very early age into the ‘right’ ways of leading a moral life.

When Barbara and Gloria were in their late twenties, both parents became ill and it was expected that the sisters would give up their respective employment to care for their ailing parents. It was a decision that they had no control over, but they did not put up any form of resistance in taking up their new roles as full time carers; roles they performed for nearly twenty-five years. Each day was carefully planned around their parents’ needs, which included a time consuming and physically draining routine of preparing their parents for a daily walk to the park where they could meet up with friends. Subsequently, these became the sisters’ friends also. A lifetime of caring for elderly parents in a semi-closed, limited social world helped prepare Barbara and Gloria for the transition to home confinement. Over a period of two years the sisters gradually withdrew into home confinement as the result of a culmination of small medical complaints and ailments, which originated from allergies.

Religion has always played a formative role in the life history of these two sisters. Personal relationships stemmed primarily from the close network of church going community members, who remain a key source of social interaction as Barbara and Gloria withdrew to the confines of their home. Church services and associated activities and events held special significance for the two sisters. It is somewhat ironic that when attending a Church service their home was burgled and cash stolen. Barbara and Gloria felt that their private space had been violated and the thought that someone had disturbed their special possessions was particularly upsetting for them. Understandably this became the catalyst for immediate and full withdrawal from the external world. The sisters could not be persuaded to go back to church. This
consumption experience was effectively their last source of marketplace interaction, and the start of a journey from abelism to non-abelism.

Barbara and Gloria have been home confined for five years and they manage this home confinement with the same level of commitment they make to their Christian beliefs. Admittance to their personal space, by personal community members, is a highly regimented and controlled process. Their home is spotlessly clean and they adhere to a very strict healthy diet. This constitutes a highly developed system of self-empowerment that is imperative for the ongoing self-identities of the sisters, especially in times of uncertainty and transition.

5.4 The Case of David

David is relatively ‘new’ to home confinement; he has been home confined now for three years. A single man in his forties, he has lived alone for twenty years in the family home since the death of his mother. David’s father died when he was twelve years old. He started work at sixteen years and from that point his mother became dependent on David financially and emotionally. She developed an addiction and the associated debts mounted up because she never got around to paying any bills. David was forced into a situation where he became the decision-maker, the sole breadwinner, and the emotional carer of his mother. It was only after his mother’s death that David was able to make decisions on his own needs and welfare.

The company he had worked for since leaving school was offering generous financial terms to anyone who took voluntary redundancy, and, at this period in his life, David saw this as an opportunity to see a bit of the world. This trip to the far side of the world represented David’s first taste of freedom, physically and emotionally. Not long after his return, he was keen to get away again. However, David had no employment to return to, no job opportunities were forthcoming, and there was no money coming in on a regular basis. David tried but could not find employment; a key factor in his experiencing low well-being and a diminished sense of self.
David had always been a very sociable and fun loving individual. His friends were concerned with his change in behaviour and made extra efforts to encourage him from the home environment. David became adamant in his position, and friends, if they wished to remain so, had to adopt a new way of interaction in David’s own special space (his home). During this time of self-withdrawal David’s physical health slowly deteriorated, specifically problems with his knees, making it uncomfortable for him to walk any distance or to stand for long periods of time. In some ways this provided David with an excuse for not being able to go to particular events, which usually revolved around walking or standing (attending concerts, drinking in bars) when other issues were really the catalyst for this change in his consumption behaviour. David’s financial circumstances had become so strained that he could not possibly socialize to the same extent as in the past.

David’s home has become the ‘marketplace’ for all relationship interaction and socialization. Although David’s ‘world’ is naturally more restricted and confined in terms of physical space, his ability for socialization has not been constrained in the same manner as the other cases. David has retained his childhood friends and his personal community has evolved, and even grown. Indeed, he has become the central focus of his community around which his self-identity is constructed and evolves.

With these personal histories in mind, the remainder of this chapter will focus on examples of special possession consumption behaviour for each of the three cases. However, the case of Jay will receive particular attention in this chapter since he is the most severely disabled of the three cases. The discussion begins with examples of special possession consumption that have strong nostalgic connotations for the consumers involved. Jay’s jade collection and his Patchouli oil are considered first and this is followed by a discussion of David and Jay’s cannabis smoking. The chapter goes on to examine the home confined consumer’s private home space as a site or workspace for displaying productivity and abelism through special possession consumption. This begins by considering Barbara and Gloria’s ‘work’ to keep their garden in optimum condition despite their illnesses and is followed by a discussion of special possession issues in Jay’s home/workspace. Functional carers visit Jay daily to ‘work’ on his body and a key issue here is the use of such possessions to display ‘self’ and, simultaneously, to achieve privacy.
5.5 Jay's Jade Collection

The cultivation of a collection is a purposeful self-defining act (Belk, 1988) and, as Rigby and Rigby (1949: 35) note, “From the small boy to the connoisseur, the job of standing before one’s accumulated pile and being able to say “this belongs to me” is the culmination of that feeling that begins with ownership of the first item... they become us.” One particular collection of jade pieces has a prominent position in Jay’s room allowing him a full view no matter what angle his bed may be in on its rotational circuit around the room; he has to be turned in bed regularly to avoid developing bedsores. Occupying the highest point in the room on a shelf specially constructed for the display and placed under a spotlight, this ‘grouping’ is given prominence over other objects and possessions.

This collection of jade pieces began as a self-gift of a single piece, a Buddha, something that Jay thought would be appropriate in bringing together two aspects of his self; his religious affiliation to Buddhism and its accompanying ‘hippie’ associations. Jay's strong religious beliefs continue to be a source of support through his traumatic lifestyle changes and this special possession keeps Jay connected to his former abelist self, and provides continuity in the midst of so much uncertainty. His ‘hippie’ lifestyle cannot be continued in the physical sense, but in the emotional sense the religious artefacts can support and strengthen Jay's religious faith.

The idea for the initial self-gift came from Jay and the task of securing the piece was entrusted to one of his sisters, the closest to him in age and attitudes. A long search for the perfect Buddha ensued and resulted in the purchase of an antique, jade piece. Jay’s family and friends admired this object and a shelf was subsequently erected to display the object of desire. Jay, with the help of his sister, proceeded to expand the collection to include water pipes, other Buddhas and incense burners, all of which had to be green jade, antique religious artefacts. It must be stressed that the decision to initiate the collection, to finance it and, subsequently, to stop collecting further pieces rested entirely with Jay.
The added factor of specialization within this collection strengthens the uniqueness and control of managing this consumption behaviour in terms of timing, purchasing and realization of pieces within self-prescribed boundaries (Belk, 1988). Jay is fully aware of the time, effort and energy set aside for the building the collection. Each piece was discussed prior to purchase with his sister. Photographs, prices and how the piece would fit with other pieces always preceded the actual purchase. These consumption experiences led to the simultaneous self-extension of both Jay and his sister. In this type of situation two identities are being maintained and extended through the acquisition, or catalytic idea, generated through this self-gift (Belk, 1988, 1991). It is the ability or catalyst of this self-gift that gives rise to communal consumption and relationship building experiences (Milligan, 2003). The knowledge of being selected over others to perform or carry out a specific task has the ability to enhance the self-worth or self-value of the chosen task provider. Jay’s sister became immersed in the activities of searching, expanding, and specialising this collection.

5.6 A Sense of Smell - Patchouli Oil

In absence of direct socialization in the external marketplace, the home confined consumer, like all consumers, must attend to the creation, maintenance and extension of their individual identity as an on-going process. Special nostalgic possessions provide such an arena of interaction that, in conjunction with significant others permit identity continuity (Davis, 1977; Holbrook and Schlinder, 2003; Milligan, 2003). These nostalgic consumption experiences provide an interaction, or
socialization process, for the individual concerned, even though this is not in an external marketplace.

Holak and Havlena (1992) suggest that smells provide a catalytic impetus for the re-experiencing of emotion associated with nostalgia. Favourite smells evoke a certain security and can help maintain identity through reliving past experiences. For Jay the recapturing of past times, memories and experiences, are evoked, or brought forth, by Patchouli Oil. Holbrook and Schindler (2003) point out the nostalgic bonding in association with the smell that, Hirsch (1992) suggests, gets displaced on to idealised past times, and this nostalgic experience is constructed to form a positive memory (Belk, 1990; Holak and Havlena, 1998). Jay’s 1970s hippy lifestyle is forever captured in ‘Spiritual Sky’ Patchouli Oil. This smell reflects the epicentre of this person’s being and represents the core identity from which many extensions of self can be acknowledged (Belk, 1988, 1991). These extensions or linkages include music, friends, culture, clothing, behaviour and attitudes (Belk, 1988, 1991; Brown and Humphreys, 2002; Milligan, 2003). When Jay was asked what it was that Patchouli Oil reminded him of, he responded: “It’s like running down a field, running wild and free through a field of corn.” His facial expression, in keeping with this response, mirrored a sense of freedom and lightness. The word ‘running’, re-iterated, has a special significance for Jay; reinforcing movement and ableism, and is particularly poignant evoking a bitter-sweet memory so in keeping with nostalgic consumption (Belk, 1988; Davis, 1979; Havlena and Holak, 1991; Jones, 1980; Summers et al., 2001). Although this smell is associated very strongly with a specific period in time, the value to the respondent in terms of consumer memories and consumption experiences cannot be underestimated; transcending past, present, and future phases of the identity life cycle.
Collecting and keeping other possessions associated with this smell is a very visible part of Jay’s consumption. Incense burners, joss sticks, and oil burners all consume only one variant of Patchouli, the fragrance ‘Spiritual Sky’. For Jay, the smell is valued in terms of the ‘calming’ and ‘soothing’ qualities that it evokes. In keeping with literature, the most valued possession is the closest to the proximal self and, ultimately, provides the essential ingredients for the construction of identity (Belk, 1988, 1990; Davis, 1977; Jameson, 1989). Milligan (2003) suggests that nostalgic possessions or experiences create identity continuity in the face of discontinuity. Nostalgic experiences means knowing who we are and, as such, reflects a self-identity that is consistent through the many transitions of a life project Jameson (1989).

Patchouli creates a certain mood or ambience in Jay’s physical space for himself and for the others who visit him; members of his close personal community and the functional carers who attend to his nursing and care needs. Jay’s self-identity is strengthened and reaffirmed through such ‘shared’ consumption experiences. As Maturana (1988:32) suggests, individual identity is a result of the on-going process of autopoiesis irrespective of the context of the individual, but emphasizes the need for the “corroboration of others” in this very subjective process. In the absence of direct marketplace interaction, the necessity for the presence of significant others is
particularly pertinent to sustain and maintain the core identity. The ‘visibility’ of this special possession initiates and forges new channels of interaction with self and others and keeps the evolving identity visible and strong. Jay keeps a plentiful supply of Patchouli for fear of running out. The constancy of its smell is cumulative in its desired effect and provides a ‘solid’ structure of support in absence of ‘others’. The engine of identity creation and self-production is kept oiled and running with such consumption behaviour to ground the core identity.

Given that Patchouli is such an important and cherished belonging, it would seem reasonable to assume that its storage would be important. Jay has set aside a particular drawer for its safekeeping along with other possessions of value, including Jay’s money. This has particular significance as the smell of the Patchouli permeates the paper money and the saturated, or positively contaminated, product takes on aspects of the individual’s identity and transfers ownership or ‘me-ness’ to this possession (Hirsch, 1992). Firat and Dholkia (1997) argue that freedom can only be realised through consumption. It seems appropriate then that the money and the Patchouli Oil, separately and together, constitute freedom, albeit from very differing aspects. The freedom in terms of ableism is provided by the nostalgic element associated with the smell of Patchouli. In direct contrast, the freedom associated with money comes from the power it gives Jay to purchase and consume and, thus, the ability to choose identity construction routes. When money is required to buy or pay for certain items, the paper notes are lifted and spread over Jay’s face so that the full sensory experience can be inhaled. This immediate consumption experience brings together the two main components of freedom and power that comprise ableism, despite Jay’s current position.

The paper notes must spend a certain period of time with the Patchouli before they reach the required saturation level and are deemed ready for spending in the marketplace. Jay’s exhibition of this ritualistic behaviour is dramatically scripted, acted out and performed with formality, seriousness and inner intensity. Solomon (1983) argues that ritualized behaviours are more likely to be associated with the maintenance of, or a change in, one’s self-perception. Further, the implication for self-extension is highlighted by this simple act. Since the smell of Patchouli is a particularly strong and lingering one, there would be few doubts as to the owner of
this special olfactory possession should members of Jay’s personal community come across them whilst interacting directly in the marketplace. Indirectly Jay’s identity is filtrated out into the marketplace.

The Patchouli saturated money is kept in the last wallet Jay used before his automobile accident, and whose presence represents a last link to abelism. There is a strong nostalgic aspect to this possession; interaction in the physical, visible sense is represented by the physical presence of the wallet. Furthermore, the contents of the wallet have remained unchanged since the accident. Notes and photographs from the time of the accident remain in place and the ableism, associated with that moment in time, is somehow captured and contained (Ball and Taski, 1992; Davis, 1979; Holak and Havlena, 1998).

5.7 Hidden Special Possessions - Jay and David’s Cannabis Smoking

Jay and David embraced the ‘hippie’ lifestyle during the 1970s and early 1980s. They have kept a high level of involvement with those possessions closely associated with those times. Music and clothing remain visible signs of their attachment to this productive time in their lives. Displaying vinyl long playing records (LPs) is one way to communicate to their respective communities, ‘this is who I am’ and ‘where I came from’. Although the LP’s are no longer played, they are a constant reminder of happy past times. Jay keeps an old Afghan coat draped over the back of a chair, “Many a great time that old coat and me had, it was my bed on many occasions and went to every concert with me. Everybody knew that coat it is so much a part of my friends, Marty, Micky, Kieran and Phelim and me. I never look at that coat without thinking of the grand times that were had”. This is the only piece of clothing that Jay owns; the need for such possessions in his current situation is extremely limited. The high level of abelism captured in this special possession keeps alive a source of energy and a life force that gives Jay a sense of well-being. The positive feelings derived from such possession consumption, and its associated attachments (place and abelism), suppress the negative aspects that also are an integral part of its presence. "Sometimes when I see the coat I get overwhelmed"
about how things are, but these feelings don't happen that often and I just try and get back to the good memories”.

David keeps his extensive collection of LP’s lying casually around and, inevitably, someone has to pick one up to clear a space to sit down. These opportunities for reminiscing are just what David enjoys, and the shared consumption experiences of former times give him a lift and a chance to laugh. “Black Sabbath, Black Sabbath, that was some album, I remember Steve, Philip, Melvin and myself lying about in Philip’s bedroom, full of QC wine. We were in the dark and the title song ‘Rain’ burst on and we thought it was a storm outside; we jumped up and were surprised there was no rain. That album had us all spooked, we were ‘wiped’ and we had a good laugh about it the next day when we recovered”. David wears similar clothing to what he wore in the 1970s; his jeans; long shirt and bandana all make David recognizable to all members of his community. The clothing and music are the ‘visible’ possession consumption that helps to contextualize Jay and David in their special space, and to their personal community members. But the hidden consumption activities of Jay and David are even more representative of the ‘who I am’ and the sense of well-being it gives.

Cannabis, as a special possession, provides Jay and David with a continued sense of self and a strong sense of identity. This special possession is one that is steeped in ableism, self-choice and autonomy. For these home confined consumers it is a consumption activity that set them apart from others when they were growing up and was instrumental in long term friendships established with other like minded individuals. David recalls, “No-one ever knew what we found so funny all the time, the endless laughing at silly things. I think people in our town thought we had lost the plot and were definitely to be avoided. This suited us, as we didn’t want particular people hanging around. It was something that everyone didn’t feel comfortable with. That brings me to another special song, ‘Comfortably Numb’ by Pink Floyd. That song makes the hair stand up on my neck every time I hear it. That’s exactly how I like to feel all the time. I try hard to manage it too”.

David’s special possession is also the most important of his daily private consumption activities. Cannabis is the medium through which he can do everyday
life and has become his support, his ‘crutch’, through his years of confinement. Being ‘numb’ to the subjective reality he now finds himself in is a self-chosen state, “I start the day off with a few spliffs before I get out of bed, I don’t think I could manage to get up at all without them. Then I get a mug of black coffee and I’m ready to get comfortable in front of the television with a good fire on. I have my table of necessities beside me, skins, matches, blow, loose tobacco and me here so I don’t have to move about too much. I’m happy enough lying here reading and watching films”. David’s only concern would be the lack of cannabis; this would present him with a most difficult challenge and an inability to function in a positive way.

A long history of smoking has provided David with a store of consumption memories associated with positive outcomes. Close personal community members share these consumption preferences for music and cannabis. These private consumption activities help to keep a strong sense of community as someone will always drop by for a smoke and a chat. “People call at all times of the day or night, they know I am up watching the television. Sometimes the house can be filled and it ends up a sort of party. We all have the same interests and we go back a long time so there is always plenty to laugh and talk about. Everybody knows I always have ‘blow’ and if they need a smoke they’ll drop by. We all share our stuff and I know if I ran out that some of my close friends would see me right”. The opportunity to smoke freely and openly in David’s home is central to the strong bond of camaraderie that has developed between these community members.

Jay, in contrast, has to keep his special possession consumption hidden, especially with the constant daily flow of functional carers in his home. The overriding need for Jay to not disclose this activity is inevitably linked to possible threats to his independent living. His smoking may not be so well received by those who manage his daily care. “I couldn’t take the risk of some of those carers finding out about me smoking cannabis, they probably wouldn’t come back and they would report me to the Trust (suppliers of personal home care). The next thing you know I would have no-one coming to see to me and then I would be stuffed in a home. I have fought hard for my independence and I’m certainly not ever going to lose it. You see how really important it is to keep all this under wraps. I hate the whole thing of it but I don’t know what else I can do about it”.

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Although his consumption level is lower than David’s, it provides similar positive outcomes in terms of freedom, well-being, and ecstasy of experience. For David and Jay this activity is significant in relation to their ongoing identity and self-concept. The abelism wrapped up in this special possession attachment is perhaps the only singular, constant, private activity that has endured over their dramatic life changes. Of course, the positive outcomes of consuming cannabis for Jay are not all of a ‘psychedelic’ nature. “Monday’s and Thursday’s are a nightmare for me; I don’t allow anyone to come here until after tea-time. I lie here sweating all day under a sheet and it is only when Mabel comes around that I can get a smoke and I can start to relax again. I get a couple of joints then just to calm me down so that the sweating will stop and I can get washed and clean sheets put on the bed. I am so wrecked that the next day is nearly given over to recovering again. Without a smoke at these particular times I couldn’t cope.”

5.8 Home Space, Workspace, Productive Space

To date consumer research has emphasized the home as the locus of the extended self (Hill, 1991; Hurdley, 2006; Tian and Belk, 2005). For the home confined consumer the workplace and home environment are as one. The need to display productivity (physicality and abelism) is a factor in consumption activity. Domestic settings can also be a domain of cultural anxiety; the ‘private’ space of the home may be the object of potential surveillance and judgement, by visitors or a ‘generalized’ other (Allan and Crow, 1989; Darke and Gurney, 2000; Hunt, 1989). Foucault (1977: 29-30) states that the power of surveillance is that it encourages people to regulate themselves through a constant introspective self-evaluation and examination, “In discipline, it is the subjects who have to be seen. Their visibility assures the hold of power that is exercised over them. It is the fact of constantly being seen, of being able always to be seen, that maintains the disciplined individual in his subjection.” Homes are also a setting for the enactment of the self, thus, the management of domestic display has been conceptualised both as performance for others and a marking practice to negotiations of identity, in other words a ‘context marker’ for the self (Bateson, 1968: 19). The inability to separate space into home and workplace means that the home confined consumer’s private space has to function in a different way and communicate different things. For Barbara and
Gloria, their garden continues to be a special possession, but it can also communicate to the outside world, and to the limited number of visitors to their home, that their high standards of home and garden maintenance have not fallen by the wayside since their home confinement.

5.8.1 Keeping Green Fingers, the Growth of Barbara and Gloria

Barbara and Gloria have always been active gardeners. When nursing their ailing parents, they considered it important to have an aesthetically pleasing landscape for their parents to enjoy. As Dunett and Qasim (2000: 44) suggest “Gardens were viewed as necessary relief and contrast to the hard elements of the built environment of the city...Some gardeners attributed religious or spiritual associations to their gardens.” Given the significance of religion in Barbara and Gloria’s lives, it is not surprising that gardening has deep-rooted connections with this. As children, the sisters grew flowers for “the Lord’s table”. A childhood duty was to keep fresh arrangements for the weekly church service. Betty recalls “our father liked everything to be clean and tidy and he specially loved fresh flowers every week, we grew the flowers for the church in the garden. I think he thought that made them more special as we worked and tended the garden after school. It was Gloria and my responsibility to look after that end of things. We enjoyed doing it and all the parishioners knew we grew and arranged them. My daddy always made some nice comment about them every week. Gloria and I always felt proud”. Cooper-Marcus (1993:27) suggest, “We garden because that activity requires knowledge and intuition, science and nurturance, planning and faith...it is one way to connect with that mythical Garden of Eden or oasis of Shambhala.” The religious connections are not lost in the context of Barbara and Gloria’s special possession consumption.

Barbara and Gloria have two distinct displays, the front garden and the back garden. Chevalier (1998:49) explains that, “The ‘back’ garden, more or less protected from outside views is a private/public space. ... (and) expresses the individual and familial identity of the owner through a sense of being ‘at home’.” By contrast the, “front garden acts as a presentation of the household, an identity marker in absence of any other sign.” Barbara and Gloria have distinctive ‘back’ and ‘front’ gardens.
Before home confinement, the sisters spent some time devoted to gardening duties. The front garden was, and still is, kept very simply, the whole area is paved and only pots and plants lined the porch of the house. A privet hedge marks out the boundary of the garden and this grows against cast-iron railings, which have been there since the house was built in 1890. The house exterior is painted black and white and repainted every year. Additionally, every two years it is given brush down with hot oil to keep it free from damp. Before home confinement, the sisters cleaned the windows, window frames, doors, railings and paved area so that they remained “free from germs and dirt, we liked to keep it all bleached down at least once a week and all the bits of litter and leaves out of the way. We hate to see untidy, ill-kempt gardens; it lowers the tone of the whole neighbourhood.” Chapman and Jamal (1997: 8) define the garden as “a publicly visible metaphor for the interior of the house.” The sisters manage still to keep the interior of their home spotless.

The ‘back’ garden, by contrast, is showered with flowers, shrubs, trees and a grass lawn. It is completely walled in and free from prying eyes. Indeed it is a ‘secret’ garden where entrance is by invitation only. The continued consumption experiences harvested in this section of the garden have been an ongoing source of pleasure and well-being for both Barbara and Gloria. For those personal community members who are allowed into this part of the garden, gifts of ‘slips’ of plants are always part of the consumption experience. The lawn, in keeping with the tidy ‘front’ exterior of the house, is kept extremely short and no patches of wilted or dry grass evident. All the plants are well cared for, fed regularly, attended to, and the floral display is outstanding. “Barbara and I love to sit at the window while we are eating our evening meal and just look at all the colour and, if it is warm enough, we open the window and let the delicate smells waft in”.

Home confinement has obviously changed a lot of the enjoyment of such special possession consumption, but Barbara and Gloria have been innovative and brought elements of the garden inside. They have ‘mini-greenhouses’ installed in the sunnier rooms of the house and, when these seedlings are ready to go outside, they enlist the help and services of next door’s gardener to attend to their specific needs. The porch at the front of the house is still considered as part of the house and an area that they can feasibly attend to themselves. Watering and feeding can still be addressed, but
removing or planting new pots will inevitably require others help. The ability to continue to receive pleasure from gardening has changed, but not disappeared. Barbara and Gloria retain control of the garden and associated experiences of well-being are still realisable. Indeed Dunett and Qasim (2000) have made the link between gardening and well-being. As Hewer (2003: 331) points out, “activities such as gardening have become shrouded in the language of philosophies of everyday life, as arenas through which ‘escape attempts’ may be imagined... Escape attempts that are rooted in the notion of garden spaces as forming a paradise or sanctuary from contemporary social life, and one form that this may take is the desire to return to more ‘peaceful’ and ‘tranquil’ times.” The garden as an extension of the self (Belk, 1988) accentuates creativity and self-expression, the consumption of ‘a neat and tidy garden’ is the realistic goal of Barbara and Gloria’s endeavours.

The process of self-disclosure through the ‘display’ of special possessions can also be seen to increase vulnerability, as it reveals intimate information and exposes the subject to outside scrutiny. This is a particular concern for Jay since his regimen of care means that a team of functional carers enter his private space daily to work on his body. There is a struggle going on here between the need to disclose aspects of self that will allow a definition of ‘who I am’ and ‘where I have come from’, and the need for a private sanctuary.

5.8.2 Jay’s Home/Workspace and Privacy

Jay, as a very private individual, has to ‘lay bare his soul’ to complete strangers in the course of his doing daily life. Independent living and care come at a very high price in terms of Jay’s own self-dignity and self-respect. The continual struggle to find the balance between private-self and public-self poses concerns in every area of his life “How can you relate in a normal way with someone who has just had to clean you up and put on a giant nappy. It is difficult not to feel embarrassed about some of the things I need done. I will never be able to come to terms with this, no matter how many times it’s carried out. I feel at my most vulnerable especially on these two occasions a week (Monday and Thursday), I just close my eyes and hope it goes away real soon”.

The reluctance to display certain possessions for Jay is something that he has had to address in order to attain a certain standing with his functional carers. Jay is now comfortable with his graduation photograph being in central position on his bedside cabinet, but displayed upside down. Those community members or specialist medical community members would be aware of the meaning of such a photograph and recognize that they are dealing with a real person and not “just a vegetable lying there who can do nothing”. The importance of self-disclosure for the home confined consumer lies in the ability to address not only the retention of a level of privacy conducive to self-growth, but to enable a system of interaction with the personal community that will sustain freedom and power in their special space.

Tian and Belk (2005: 300), referring to the work environment, explain how the self can be extended via “Atmospheric Texture”, which is employed to create an atmosphere that shields people from threats to mental performance, and to the self. Jaworski and MacInnis (1991) conceived of physical space as a consumer good, and the ‘closed-door’ as offering sanctuary from the outside world. However, in Jay’s case, his functional carers invade this sanctuary daily.

Jay pretends sleep and sickness as measures of changing the personal atmosphere inside his home. This knowledge usually deters superfluous conversation and acts like ‘white noise’ between Jay and a functional carer. At other times Jay can be preoccupied with specific programmes on the television, such as a football match, and this again provides a barrier to unwelcome conversation. Background radio noise permeates Jay’s personal space at all times and can aid peacefulness and sleep. This is in keeping with Tacchi’s (1998) findings of using radio to fill ‘empty’ spaces and time. For Jay the radio has the added benefit of keeping him focused on the present and “shutting out dark and sad thoughts, which are inclined to come upon you in the early hours of dawn”. The radio for Jay is a soothing addition to his special space, most of the time he is not even aware of its presence but, if accidentally switched off, Jay would be susceptible to engaging in negative thoughts. For Jay the ‘white noise’ is conducive to positive feelings of well-being and the emptiness experienced without it can exacerbate low well-being.
Other attempts to create fields or levels of privacy through the texturing of special spaces of confinement, through other senses, are sought. The ‘sacred’ burning of joss sticks and, in particular, Patchouli joss sticks are an attempt by Jay to create a sense of surrealism to his confined one room space. The smell from the joss sticks gives Jay a sense of freedom, contentment, and of flow (McGinnis and Gentry, 2004), “It provides a sort of haze around everything that I like and nothing seems just as stark and clear. I can hide away in the trails of smoke swirling round the room. The pungent smell is so overpowering, I love it, and it makes me feel good”. Jay can partially escape from the reality of his situation through the continuous burning of incense, as well as experience special emotional moments from his former abelist lifestyle. Subjective well-being (SWB) can be achieved from special possession consumption.

Consumer research has investigated the meanings of favourite material objects in the home across diverse cultures (Mehta and Belk, 1991; Wallendorf and Arnould, 1988). Together with studies of specific types of possessions, including collections (Belk, 1995) and gifts (Belk, 1996), this research has emphasized the home as the locus of the extended self (Belk, 1988). The home has been shown to be instrumental as a context from which consumers’ can build, construct and maintain an identity or identities, as Hurdley (2006: 718) states, “The home is a site for consumption practices and the establishment of social and economic relations.” The concept of identity building within the domestic context could be seen as based on anti-aesthetic values, objects on display are, “also vital players in ongoing processes of individuation” (Hurdley, 2006: 725). As more functional work-related possessions enter the home, more symbolic home-related possessions enter the workplace. In relation to Jay, home and work are essentially the one place. For Jay there can be no separation from these two sites of being. Yet the ‘workspace’ within Jay’s special space has afforded new arenas in which to extend the self and self-identity.

5.8.3 Jay's Life Narrative

It has become common to view a consumer’s sense of identity as structured in terms of a narrative (Escalas and Bettman, 2000; Fournier, 1998; Thompson, 1996, 1997). This means that one’s identity is linked in memory to key episodes in one’s life,
which together form a story. The link between these stories helps to provide a connected identity from past, present and into possible futures. This narrative view is consistent with metaphors that see identity as a kind of performance in which consumers use goods to enact personalized versions of cultural scripts (Murray, 2002). Current research has focused on the difficulties consumers face in developing and maintaining a coherent sense of self. Representing the self, both to oneself and to others, has been a driving force in consumption (Gergen, 1991; Giddens, 1991; Sennett, 1977).

Firat and Venkatesh (1995: 233) see the consumer as possessing a fragmented and multiple sense of self and consider this a positive development because it represents a freedom from “having to seek centred connections or an authentic self.” In contrast to this, Thompson and Hirschman (1995) and Murray (2002) have not found many examples of consumers’ disassociation from a coherent identity narrative. Their research explores the ways in which people use consumption to form as coherent as possible an identity within the context of a fragmented society. Cushman (1990) suggests that the problem arises between consumers’ continued desire for a coherent identity narrative and a lack of social and cultural support. Indeed Cushman (1990: 600) suggests it is the “significant absence of community, tradition and shared meaning” that has led to the untenable nature of such an identity project and it “embodies these absences as a chronic, undifferentiated emotional hunger.”

It is not surprising then that home confined consumers have to work that much harder to achieve a coherent narrative after the loss of abelism. Special possession consumption has the potential to harness the continuity of such an identity project and bring together the past, present and future. Jay’s computer and the access he has to the Internet afford him an opportunity to achieve this. His extreme level of non-physicality becomes hidden and submerged when ‘socializing’ by e-mail. This added mechanization of Jay’s special space has been a positive one. The computer and its attachments are everyday objects visible in many homes and, therefore, not objects that emphasize difference. By contrast, other medical equipment that Jay requires to perform daily living has the potential to exacerbate his feelings of exclusion and non-physicality.
The ability to enter into ‘real’ emotionally satisfying conversations with all generations of his extended family as well as friends adds significantly to Jay’s well-being and provides endless hours of pleasure. “My nieces and nephews are all over the world travelling about and they send me an e-mail to ask advice, tell me what they’re up to and they know I won’t be telling their parents. At their age I was doing the same thing, I was the wild one of my family and in growing up these offspring was told tales of my outlandish adventures. Two of my nephews, Sam and Matt, have started their own bands and they are really good, I would have loved to do that. I never got further than twanging on the guitar but girls liked the idea that you could play, so that’s why I always kept it up. I really love being able to talk with them all and get photos so I don’t lose out on their growing up”.

Jay does not converse with people he does not know by e-mail; these are all members of his extended family or personal community. Familial bonds or relationship ties are strong within this ‘virtual’ community. Jay has over the period of his confinement become more restrictive in who he ‘lets in’ to his home. As nieces and nephews have grown up and become young adults, it has been harder for Jay to actually see them; he feels embarrassed by his situation and worries that they may see him or relate to him in a different way. “I can keep in touch with anyone I want to without worrying about how I will look to them or what way I am feeling that day. On certain days I don’t want anyone around. I have to concentrate on keeping going and getting sweating stopped. The e-mail and the computer have opened up a whole new world to me and it keeps me busy all day. I don’t feel so bad not letting anyone visit now because we can chat without the hassle of both of us feeling awkward. It’s not everybody I can expose myself to, you know that.”

Net users are judged not by who they are, but by their ideas and what they write (Garrison, 1994; Seabrook, 1994). “The impersonality and immateriality of the online experience has a liberating and levelling effect; it blanks out race, age, gender, looks, timidity and disability. It encourages frankness and removes caution” (Roszak, 1986: 169). The Net enables users to enact a state of liminality where they are effectively removed from their trappings of status. The Net self is a relational self because it is constructed through relationships and immersed independence (Gergen, 1991). In the arena of liminality (the Net) users devoid of rank and status
become freer to connect with other users on a common basis. Jay is enabled to have multiple relationships with ‘family’ members and the freedom to disclose and relate to individual situations as they arise.

Jay is always there to provide guidance to younger generations of his family and to be a confidante when needed. This medium has allowed family members ‘a sanctuary’ for self-disclosure and Jay feels the value of such intimacy. “Peter as you know is in Barcelona at the moment and as usual has no money to get home. He has hurt his hand painting boats and needs to get back before he runs out of funds altogether. His mum will go mad if she knew the state he is in, so I got something away for him and it will be a lovely surprise for her when he walks through the door on Saturday morning”. On other occasions Jay has been instrumental in getting emotionally taxing situations resolved. Nola, one of his functional carers, had an argument with her daughter, who subsequently left home, and was very upset by this. Jay was able to send Nola’s daughter an e-mail pointing out all the reasons for her to return. The daughter, Adele, came home the next day.

As Slater (1979) suggests the Net communitas reveals itself in ways in which basic human needs for community, engagement and dependence are met. Barlow (1995: 56) considers that the traditional community as we know it is “largely a wraith of nostalgia,” and that it is possible to create a community in cyberspace with the human spirit and the basic desire to connect. These personal sites are self-expressive tools intended to communicate complex meaning across time and space (Schau and Gilly, 2003). Schau and Muniz Jr. (2002) suggest that consumer agency is demonstrated irrespective of the consumer affiliations engaged in; Jay actively draws on specific parts of his own history and experiences to strengthen the ‘familial’ bonds.

This special possession consumption has allowed Jay to exercise a freedom and ableism in his confined context. Jay has worked extremely hard to achieve a level of competence and knowledge to gain the full benefits of consuming this possession. As his confidence grew, he set about writing short humorous pieces about family and friends. Family members performed these plays when they visited. This spurred Jay on to tackle a much larger piece of work. Over the past two years Jay has worked
everyday at writing his life history, recalling childhood, adult abelist and adult non-abelist periods and special consumption experiences. This ‘all consuming’ activity has brought both joy and pain, but, overall, it has had very positive outcomes for him. "I wanted to get all the things down that were special to me in my life before it was too late. There were lots of episodes that not everybody knew about and I know some of my friends would like to hear all the mad times. The story has let me talk about how I felt about the accident; I know nobody ever wanted to talk about the finality of it all. I couldn’t talk either, as it was too heartbreaking for me as well. I feel it has been good in that way, being able to get stuff off my chest even after all this time. There are some bits though I feel are better not touched upon as maybe some people I care about too much could get hurt. I have tried to be as accurate with all the facts as I can but I will be getting a few close family members to check out a few things for me and read through it". Belk (1988) discusses this creative aspect to extending the self. This creative task has provided Jay with a real sense of fulfilment and one that he would not have thought possible to experience again.

5.9 Conclusion

The person-object relationship of those removed from society illustrates that even in an austere environment alternative uses for possessions beyond their functional purpose are sought, “Consumption encompasses many different activities and different people are situated differently in relation to those activities” (Du Gay et al., 1997: 96). Consumption not only marks social difference, but also represents an important means through which we relate to each other and, as Belk (1995: 69) remarks, “weave the web of culture.” Material possessions, as signs and symbols, are used to create and sustain social bonds or distinctions. “The opportunity for insight comes from studying a particular group of consumers whose social relations and experiences are mediated” (Giddens, 1991: 5) by a set of institutional circumstances they have in common, but which are beyond the everyday experience of the consuming community at large, the home confined consumer in this instance.

At the core of the study is the idea that consumption practices are socially and culturally defined. Millar (1997: 4) observes that consumption is a creative everyday activity, “that has its own practices, significance and determination in which
consumers shape technological and cultural artefacts and their meaning.” Consumption is seen as being the very material out of which we construct our identities. If consumption itself is a form of work and an important mode of self-expression, by constraining access to the processes and practices that constitute it, we are in effect curtailing, or even withholding, the privilege of participating in social relations and in identity formation.

The cases of Jay, Barbara and Gloria and David, although very individual in their particular histories and current circumstances, highlight the ableism and positivity that can be gained from special possession consumption experiences. In keeping with such consumption, an ableism is achieved not only for the informant to experience, but also visible to the significant others in their lives. Special possessions can provide a sense of ‘being’, and be used effectively to strengthen and progress a sense of “who I am” and “where I am going.”

Few consumer research projects focus on disabled consumers and even fewer focuses on those who are confined to their homes, an invisible and growing group. This study has shown that identity (re)construction amongst home confined consumers is an active, complex and nuanced process whereby earlier lives as well as current situations are interconnected through possessions. The sheer efforts that home confined consumers make to maintain their ‘consumer visibility’ and their links with past lives reveals that as consumers they are far from damaged, feeble, passive and dependent (Murphy, 1990; Phillips, 1990). Indeed, it could be argued that these ‘invisible’ consumers work harder and more deliberatively than other consumers at making themselves ‘visible’.

In chapter two the prevailing medical and social models of disability were discussed. To recap, the medical model considers a person’s disability as the cause of his or her limitations. Sometimes called the ‘disease’ model, the focus is on the illnesses, congenital defects, acquired injuries, or other conditions that limit individuals’ activities, defining them as different from non disabled people (Chouinard, 1997). By contrast, the social model considers society and its structure as the focal point for analysis (Oliver, 1990). This perspective argues that society places various social
restrictions on those with physical as well as mental and invisible handicaps, such as epilepsy and attention-deficit disorder. Within this perspective, consumers with disabilities are eligible (and able) to participate fully as active members of society. People who subscribe to this model believe policymakers have the responsibility to examine the social environment to identify and eliminate barriers that create a ‘disabling environment.’ It was also noted that Kaufman-Scarborough and Baker (2005) identified the weaknesses of both models, from a consumer perspective, and proposed the consumer response model. The consumer response model, however, applies to disabled consumers who are participating in the external marketplace (see Figure 5.3, page 136).

This discussion on special possession consumption has illustrated it is possible to extend this model to reflect the internal marketplace of the home confined consumer. It is argued that individual and communal consumption experiences, aided by personal communities and identified in this research, have the potential to shift current thinking about home confined consumers from the negative associations of the prevailing medical model towards the more positive social model. To reflect this, a modification of the consumer response model is proposed to incorporate consumption in the internal marketplace (the context of the home confined consumer). This is presented as Figure 5.4 on page 137. The modified model brings into play the movement via consumption experiences (concepts of identity) from medical model dependency to social model independency. The importance of the personal community in facilitating this movement is recognised. The addition to the existing model represents the internal forces at play, those hidden activities and consumption experiences that are invisible to the external marketplace. The ability to shift the perception of disability away from the medical model perspective is afforded through the consumption concepts of identity, namely, special possessions, nostalgia and ritual. These two models, medical and social, together, reflect the issues that address disability, the inclusion of the internal marketplace in this consumer response model also recognises that there exists both an abelist and a non-abelist perspective to disability, dependent on positioning.

The consumer internal marketplace response to disability aims to challenge the prevailing legacy of the medical model in relation to perceived resource deficits.
Consumption of concepts of identity can go some way to breaking down barriers of dependency and turn perceived deficits into resource assets. The diffusion of such resource assets back into the marketplace, via the personal community, can only serve to redress the negative perceptions of disability. The home confined consumers in this study were revealed to work hard at dispelling perceptions of passivity, weakness and dependency. It is in their interests to do so not only in terms of self-identity and experiences of wellbeing, but also, importantly, to demonstrate their ability to pursue independent lives in their own homes. The following chapter will discuss a very special possession, the body, and its associated rituals and ritualised behaviour in the home confined context.

Figure 5.3 Model of Consumer Marketplace Response Source: (Kaufman-Scarborough and Baker, 2005: 7)
Figure 5.4 Model of Consumer Marketplace Response, Abelist and Non-Abelist Perspectives

Source: Refined from Kaufman-Scarborough and Baker (2005: 7)
Chapter Six: Findings and Discussion: Bodily and Other Rituals

6.1 Introduction

The body, according to Belk (1988), is the ultimate possession and a major contributor to, and reflection of, our identity. Similarly, Thompson and Hirschman (1995: 150) talk about the ‘profound experiential significance that results from the body’s being a visible object with culturally salient meanings’ and that consumers are socialized to discipline and normalise their bodies in line with cultural ideals. Consumers confined to the home due to disability or long-term illnesses are not subject to the public gaze, yet they are just as conscious of idealised conceptions of what constitutes a normalised body. They strive to attain this by means of highly disciplined body self-care practices directed at managing the health and appearance of the inner body and outer body surfaces (Glassner, 1990). The highly disciplined regimes of body care constitute bodily rituals and serve to reinforce the importance of the body in the construction and maintenance of self-identity, and also highlight the relationship between the body and control of self and others. Additionally, home confined consumers engage in other rituals, some sacred, that address the spiritual body.

The chapter begins with a brief review of literature on the body before discussing regimes of body care adopted by the individual cases in this research. Barbara and Gloria, who are discussed first, try to ensure that no ‘toxic’ smells from the external environment enter their home and that no ‘synthetic’ foods enter their bodies. Jay has a similar preoccupation with natural organic food intake to regulate his inner and outer body. By contrast, David seems to be comfortable with an undisciplined body but still has some concerns over his appearance.

6.2 Review of body literature

Given the importance that consumer researchers now attribute to the role of the body in consumer identity (Belk, 1988; Thompson and Hirschman, 1995), a detailed understanding of the nature and range of consumption situations, including consumers in ‘extreme’ situations (Warlop and Beckmann, 2001), allows consumer
researchers to re-evaluate assumptions we make about ‘normal’ consumers and ‘normal’ bodies.

As Marks (1999: 129) notes “the body adopts a particular habitual way of relating to the environment.” Bourdieu (1990) argues that it is easier for the dominant classes, because of their greater access to, and possession of, cultural and social capital, to define their bodies and lifestyles as superior. The attainment of such corporeal “value” by disabled people is hampered by societal views, which tend to define, and categorize, disabled people’s bodies as “abject” and abnormal and thus, bodies without value (Grosz, 1994; Hawkesworth, 2001). Branson and Miller (1991: 41) note that “the contours of social inequality are structured through patterns of unequal access to symbolic capital, through unequal cultural competence.” In this sense, disabled people are confined in their habitus through cultural impoverishment and cultural difference.

Consumer culture latches on to the prevalent self-preservationist conception of the body, which “encourages the individual to adopt instrumental strategies to combat deterioration and decay... and combines it with the notion that the body is a vehicle of pleasure and self-expression” (Featherstone et al., 1991: 170). Indeed the suppression of the body through body maintenance routines is presented within consumer culture as a precondition of acceptability and the release of the body’s expressive capacity. Featherstone et al. (1991: 171) suggest that “diet and body maintenance are increasingly regarded as vehicles to release the temptation of the flesh.” This emphasis upon body maintenance and appearance within consumer culture suggests two basic categories: the inner and the outer body.

The inner body refers to a concern with the health and optimum functioning of the body, which demands maintenance and repair in the face of disease and aging. In contrast, the outer body refers to appearance as well as the movement and control of the body within special space. It can also encompass the organisation and surveillance of docile disciplined bodies within social space (Foucault, 1977; Giddens, 1981). Within consumer culture, the inner and outer body become co-joined and, as a consequence, the prime purpose of the maintenance of the inner body becomes the enhancement of the appearance of the outer body. Consumer
culture permits the unashamed display of the human body and this is strongly supported by images in the marketplace that make individuals more conscious of external appearance, bodily presentation and the "look". Within consumer culture the body is proclaimed as, "a vehicle of pleasure; it is desirable and desiring and the closer the actual body approximates to the idealised images of youth, health, fitness and beauty the higher its exchange-value" (Featherstone et al. 1991: 177). The penalties of bodily neglect are a lowering of one’s acceptability as a person, as well as an indicator of low self-esteem and even moral failure.

Figure 6.1 The Birth of Venus

Source: Botticelli

Figure 6.1 is shown to support an endemic preoccupation with bodily aesthetics and idealised perfection throughout world culture and ages. Throughout the history of Western culture, the state of one’s body has been interpreted as a material sign of the moral character within (Foucault, 1978). In contemporary consumer culture, consumers’ perceived responsibilities include careful monitoring and controlling not only of the physical appearance of their bodies, but also of the various foods, substances, and environmental conditions to which their bodies are exposed.
Ehrenreich's (1989) proposal that the fear of failing, the failure to live up to the cultural ideal of controlling one's life, is expressed in a variety of bodily focused anxieties.

Many consumer actions are motivated by culturally sanctioned knowledge claims regarding how consumption can be used to control the health and the appearance of the body (Glassner, 1990). As noted by Glassner (1990) this self-evident rational linkage between one's current consumption pattern and the future state of one's health (and appearance) echoes the legacy of Christian asceticism with its promise of eventual reward for resisting the temptations of the flesh. Indeed, those who substantially deviate from cultural norms of body image often include the attribution that these individuals have not exerted sufficient effort and self-care to avoid such a condition (Fallon, 1990). As Glassner (1990) suggests bodily neglect reflects lack of self-discipline and work ethic.

Figure 6.2 symbolises the decay, disease, and death of a healthy body that has neglected to care or sustain a regime that is reflective of productivity and abelism. Those consumers perceived as disabled have to address the penalties associated with such non-productivity and re-claim a body and an identity that suppresses negative association.
Body image is commonly defined as a “mental construction” embedded in a larger mental construction (self-schema) that can “deviate substantially from a person’s objective physical characteristics” (Myers, 1992: 116). The theoretical premise underlying this contemporary definition is that a person’s corporeal body is meaningfully perceived in relation to a relevant cognitive structure and, conversely, that this subjectively constructed image mediates understanding of the objective body.

Through the processes of normalization and problemization, and the pervasive operation of the disciplinary gaze, the embodied subject is readily objectified. The body that is objectifiable can also be seen as objectionable in many of its specific attributes. The social world in which each consumer is embedded operates to enforce and reinforce this system of bodily meanings and practices. The result is a form of socialization that inspires a deeply internalized duty to discipline and to the normalization of one’s body. As Featherstone (1991) notes, contemporary consumer
culture has been marked by dialectic between asceticism (self-discipline as a moral responsibility) and the pursuit of pleasure. The socialized body implies that a complex cultural ideology of the body underlies consumers’ satisfaction with their appearance, their sense of an ideal and the consumption activities that these self-perceptions motivate.

### 6.3 Barbara and Gloria’s Disciplined Regimes

Barbara and Gloria admit few people into their home. Over their period of home confinement they have become very conscious of how adversely they are affected by smells from the outside world brought into their home by callers. All callers, even the regulars who bring them necessities of life, including food and medication, are subjected to a letterbox ritual now described. After making sure of caller’s identity, there follows a typical pattern that is repeated even with regular callers, “Is that you?” followed by “Are you sure you have no perfume or deodorant on?” This will be asked over and over again before the door will be opened. On gaining entrance, the full implication of breaking the access rules will be run through, “If Barbara and I come into close contact with any of those smells you know we wouldn’t be well for days. The pain Barbara would be in with her nose, you know how sensitive it is”. Barbara will then point out Gloria’s negative side effects, “Gloria had an awful time last week with her stomach, somebody must have been in the house covered in the smell of cigarette smoke, and you know how it sets her off. We have to be very careful who we let in”.

This self-care practice is a form of “disciplined body” work, which describes a style of body use and body-to-object relatedness in relation to control. The disciplined body makes itself predictable through its regimentation (Featherstone, 1991). This is an example of such predictability that affords the control and, by extension, the power needed to maintain a visibility and an identity.

It is interesting to note that the substances that appear to irritate Barbara’s nose are essentially smells associated with others’ personal hygiene and self-care practices and for most consumers constitute “normal” product use. Yet the sisters do not seem to be affected by other pungent substances such as household bleach, which they use...
extensively around their home to create and maintain a safe and sterile environment. To understand this somewhat conflicting consumption behaviour the lifestyle of the sisters must be taken into account. Raised in a very austere religious background, Barbara and Gloria believe that “cleanliness is next to Godliness”. This colours much of their consumption behaviour including self-care practices and inner and outer body maintenance.

The same disciplined approach is adopted with respect to outer body maintenance practices in order to maintain an environment of cleanliness and sterility. Skin and hair washing and grooming products and practices maintain a special space for Barbara and Gloria, free from contamination. Clothing, for example, is hand washed in pure soap flakes. This is echoed in respect of inner body maintenance where the purest and most natural of ingredients are sourced for food. For example, no processed food products are purchased and the sisters make their own bread. It follows that very strict guidelines are given to those who shop on their behalf; every item is checked in terms of its ability to contaminate their bodies so that no product gets through the net to become “the enemy within”. For example, household cleaning products are limited to vinegar, baking soda and bleach, widely used in the days before the advent of “synthetic” cleaning products. Here again the control and power to accept and reject products and discipline the self and others lies firmly in the sisters’ domain. In other words, the operation of this disciplined regime requires the co-operation of their personal communities.

6.4 Jay’s Disciplined Regime

Jay has developed a disciplined regime for both inner and outer body maintenance. In relation to the maintenance of the inner body, the health of the bowel is a particular concern. The daily routine revolves around the intake of fluids and solids in exact quantities so that control over outputs can be scrutinized. Itemised organic fresh sources are consumed for their advantages in terms of nutritional value, vitamin content and overall consumer well-being, highlighting the importance of seemingly mundane consumption practices (Elliott et al., 1995). Foods that have been tried and tested over time ensure the optimal working of the bowel and are regulated and consumed in a strict, almost religious manner. The self-regulation and
serious manner in which these practices are implemented and maintained illustrate the importance of this consumption behaviour. Indeed, as Domzal and Kernan (1993: 498) suggest, “The body-as-object is the most visible expression of a person’s self.”

Monday’s and Thursday’s are the days when Jay undergoes private and extremely sensitive procedures in relation to bowel function. Sunday and Wednesday’s are filled with anxiety and an almost blinkered focus on the consumption of the “right” foods that will achieve the desired positive outcome. There will be no variation of Jay’s menu on Sunday or Wednesday, and no deviation from this menu will be tolerated. Everyone’s sense of self must include some form of bodily consideration, because corporality or body cathexis (Rook, 1985) influences processes such as self-identity, self-presentation, and self-evaluation.

Jay also has deep concerns in relation to the more aesthetic outer body maintenance issues that could represent signs of decay. The current deterioration in the health of his teeth has further constrained and disciplined his eating habits. The search for nutritional products that will optimize inner body health as well as outer body maintenance has become a priority. By adhering to disciplined body practices, Jay tries to ensure that the special private home space he has created does not become an institutionalized space within a hospital regime. Signs of the deterioration of the inner body or outer body surfaces may alert his medical carers to remove Jay to an institutional environment and precipitate a loss of self-identity. Of course, this disciplinary bodily maintenance can only be realised with the help of others. These others comprise his personal community of family and friends, and even his carers over whom he has some control in terms of their actions in his space.

Foucault (1980: 97) describes the type of disciplined control that Jay exhibits as an “ongoing and continuous processes which subject our bodies, govern our gestures, dictate our behaviours, etc.” The disciplinary gaze is an objectifying and moralistic one that exists everywhere and nowhere. Bodies discipline themselves, but they do so within institutions and discourses which are not their own. Disciplined behaviours not only make bodies productive in terms defined by some other (Foucault, 1980), but they can also be used by bodies themselves to achieve productive ends of their own. Those, for whom the need for self-discipline must be projected out, assume the
style of domination over others. This is the case for the home confined consumers discussed above. They have developed rules and rituals of body care in their quest for the disciplined body, independence and survival. The control over the self through extreme measures of care is often extended to their personal communities.

6.5 David's Non-Disciplined Regime

David's bodily concerns and self-care practices are addressed in a more laid back manner than the two cases discussed above. The ability to retain an abelist sense of self lies in David's ability to portray a seamless self, a self that has not altered since his home confinement. He retains the 'self' that others know and are familiar with. "I'm living my life exactly the way I want to, I get up if and when I like, and I decide what will happen that day and who I'll see. I have no work now to interfere with my day so I'm my own master now". One might assume that the outward appearance or aesthetics of the body would hold little concern for him, but this is not the case.

As Domzal and Kernan (1993) suggest it is the body as object that becomes the most visible expression of self and daily rituals of grooming are high on David's list of consumption behaviours. David has long hair and a beard, which have always been a source of pride and joy to him. They are synonymous with David and an important part of his identity. Even if there are no other visible signs of a disciplined regime in evidence, these on-going self-care practices suggest otherwise "I always wash my hair and my beard everyday; I wouldn't feel right if they are not clean and shiny. I don't want my hair becoming all matted and wild then everybody will think I have really lost the plot. You know what this town is like they'll have me like Howard Hughes next, 'Did you hear about David he's living like a wild animal in that house, his hair is full of food and dirt, he needs put into a home." Even though David is not visible in the external marketplace his identity needs to be cared for and sustained in this period of liminality (Noble and Walker, 1997). David's personal community members are responsible for diffusing his identity back out into the external marketplace. David has not only to feel in control of his life course but he has to demonstrate this control to others.
As Rook (1985) suggests everyone's sense of self includes some form of bodily consideration, David's signature hair and beard is a special possession that he feels defines him, and as such, are influential in his self-presentation and self-worth to others. David's use of this form of bodily discipline highlights the need to be productive in terms of others' social discourses (Foucault, 1980). His self-discipline must be projected out to inform others of his ability for self care. Bodily concerns highlight individuality, but an individuality stemming from societal pressures, where the visible health of a body appears to be determined by its activity (Shilling, 1993) in terms of agency. As Erickson (1982) suggests, these ritualized behaviours do not have to be performed on a large scale for the positive outcomes to be realised, the function of the ritual supports the creativity of the self and of its identity.

6.6 Discussion of Bodily Concerns

Postmodern consumer culture highlights the significance of the body as a personal resource and as a social symbol that gives off messages about a person's self-identity. We make many assumptions about a person on appearance alone; the body communicates the identity-value of its owner. The stigmatizing of non-abelist consumers and disabled bodies as diseased, inferior and lacking mental capacities and capabilities (Barnes et al., 1999) leads to an underdeveloped understanding of the interrelationships between non-abelist bodily functions and broader socio-cultural values and practices. Shilling (1993: 9) suggests that any theory of human agency or action requires an account of the body, that "acting people are acting bodies." The highly disciplined behaviours given to bodily concerns by the home confined consumers in this study illustrate self control and control over the others who comprise their personal communities.

The attainment of optimal inner and outer body conditions serves to highlight the driving desire to accomplish and maintain survival, survival not only of the self and of the identity but also survival in the special spaces they have created in their homes. The overriding fear of being removed from their special space to an institutionalized one and to lose control and power over their life course explains the unrelenting attention to detail in their self-care practices. The body itself is the seat of power and attempts by home-confined consumers to try to delay the process of
disease and decay lie in their domain. These practices help to dispel the perceived passiveness of the 'hidden' disabled body.

The discussion above also highlighted that home confined consumers have some access to the external marketplace, albeit indirectly through their personal communities, who diffuse information about them to others. The importance of the external marketplace as the site upon which an identity is constructed and maintained is heavily cited in the literature (Douglas, 1997; Firat, 1992; Miller, 1997, 2001). However, it could also be argued a new marketplace is created; the body creates its own marketplace for interaction and socialization and, hence, a site for ongoing identity construction (Downey and Catterall, 2006). Home confined consumers, in absence of direct external marketplace interaction, adapt their consumption behaviour to present an identity that demonstrates ability and abelism.

**Figure 6.3 Body as Marketplace**

![Image](image_url)

Source: Author's Own

Figure 6.3 illustrates an identity construction process from a different perspective; the home confined consumer's lived experience. Bodies in the diagram are purposively inverted to draw attention to this 'difference' in perspective. This study adopted a radical constructivist approach, which allows a more personal way of knowing, and the bodies depicted here emphasize a personal experiential reality as opposed to an external reality. Figure 6.3 offers the prospect of an internal
marketplace where the body communicates verbally, and non-verbally, the new rules and regulations that constitute an internal social reality via symbols and cues. The body is equipped to communicate in novel ways and these symbols and cues reflect those direct marketplace interactions that provide the consumer with the information and material to realise an identity. Socialization is a viable outcome for the home confined consumer, the body replicates the external marketplace and the home confined consumer can perform autonomous tasks individually, and in conjunction with others, that make up the internal marketplace. The home confined consumers and their respective personal communities interact with the body, learn the rules (rituals) of the marketplace from an internal perspective and realise a socialization process that is subjectively and privately executed.

The three cases of homebound consumers will now be discussed in relation to other rituals that are primarily connected to the spiritual body. Barbara and Gloria's prayer rituals are discussed first and this is followed by examining the role of Jay's Holy Water. To contextualise the discussion, a brief recap of the literature on ritual (provided in Chapter three) is presented below.

Religious rituals are considered more special than secular rituals (Rappaport, 1971). Religious rituals always include implicit or explicit reference to some doctrine or supernatural entity. As Hermanowicz and Morgan (1999: 203) suggest, "Ritualizing customary practice offers yet another opportunity to emphasize values, to announce, define, and reaffirm commitment to sacred aspects of customary practices." The idolization of consumer goods is perhaps the most obvious. Rappaport (1971: 29) takes the term sacred to mean a reference to the quality, "of unquestionable truthfulness imputed by the faithful." In the course of a religious ritual the person is likely to have, at least sometimes, a "religious experience", the intensity and particulars of which vary from religion to religion (Rappaport, 1971: 31). Belk et al. (1989) note that, in contemporary society, the distinction between the sacred and the profane is no longer equivalent to the distinction between the religious and the secular. A concurrent trend has seen the sacralisation of the secular whereby the essence of religion is sought in what was previously regarded as profane (Rappaport, 1971; Sell et al., 2000). Sanctity has clearly had an important role to play in
containing the self-interests of individuals and social groups and in supporting the conventions that regulate society.

6.7 Barbara and Gloria’s Rituals

Rappaport (1971: 28) distinguishes religious rituals from secular rituals and considers religious rituals as being more special; indeed they “are sacred.” Barbara and Gloria were raised in a strictly religious home environment. The explicit purpose of religious rituals is to reaffirm the deities they name; Gloria persistently offers such propositions during and at the end of even the most mundane of communications. The re-iteration of the phrases “The Lord loves us”, “Jesus died for our sins”, and “God will take care of us” are considered as sacred terms as they refer to the quality of unquestionable truthfulness by the faithful to unverifiable statements. In the course of a religious ritual the communicant is likely to have, at least a “religious experience”. These experiences are emotional and seem to support the life of the ritual through times of trauma, distress and transition. Indeed the sisters, Barbara and Gloria use sacred rituals on an everyday basis to sustain their strong faith and to let others know of their commitment to their Christian beliefs.

These rituals are played out in presence of their personal community members. Barbara will go through a monologue of “I included you in my prayers last night, and your mummy. You know we’re praying for you to stop smoking and that God will give you the strength to stop. We never forget anybody. Gloria and I have that many people to pray for; it takes us so long at night to get to bed”. Every member of the personal community will be informed of the nightly ritual of prayer and how they are an integral part of that sacred ritualized behaviour.

The sacred rituals performed on a nightly basis and recalled to personal community members give Barbara and Gloria a feeling of self-worth and self-value. Their prayers are self-constructed and inclusion in the list is at the sisters’ discretion. The productivity of the body is inherent in this ritualised behaviour and the abelism that underpins this regime helps to establish self-physicality and a normalization of body activities to the personal community. The attendance to this daily ritual helps to dispel grounded negative associations of disability (Barnes et al., 1999) and build a
more positive perception of an active body (Shilling, 1993). The function of this private ritualised behaviour supports an ongoing identity (Erickson, 1982) and as Rook (1985) suggests a sense of self comes from some form of bodily consideration.

6.8 Jay's Rituals

Jay uses Holy Water that has been either blessed by his local community priest or brought home from designated holy shrines around the world by extended family members and friends. When conventional medicine has not fulfilled its role, or, simply, to ward off potential dangers to his health, Jay indulges in splashing Holy Water on his body to act as a deterrent against hospitalization and any chance that germs could become transferred. Visitors to his home that are non-members of his close personal community, such as nurses and care workers, are perceived to pose a threat to Jay's physical well-being. These personal community members can be exposed to many different environments in their work capacity and as such bring to Jay's safe internal environment unknown risks and potentially harmful viruses. Jay's survival depends on his ability to control and manage his marketspace and filter out high risks. This ritualised consumption behaviour is a serious intensely scripted performance that realises empowerment through independent living and the knowledge that any relaxation of these regimes of care could result in experiencing a serious decline in positive well-being and a diminished sense of self.

The ritual splashing of Holy Water lost its supporting framework for Jay, at a time of personal trauma. The sudden death of his brother just over a year ago called into question his belief in this sacred ritual. Jay was depressed and withdrawn following his brother's death and even abstained from receiving Holy Communion and confession in his home. The sacred rituals that represented a continuation of self across the many transitional periods of his life were now called into question. These rituals constituted a sense of belonging to a religious faith community and a sense of value and of belonging for Jay. The socio-historic patterning of this sacred ritual consumption provides Jay with a strong sense of self and self-worth. The intergenerational influence and familial ties that are woven into this consumption behaviour give Jay a strong sense of the past, which is conducive to realising a present and a future identity. The dispossession of these rituals heralded a time of
darkness for Jay marked by a period of internal conflict that was a direct consequence of his inability to consume this special possession with the same desire and fervour that he had previously done.

Recently, these rituals have become part of Jay’s life again. He explained an incident that occurred to his sister Maud and, in its telling, there was a palpable ‘lifting’ of his spirits. “Maud was driving over to the hospital on Friday; you know the way I was telling you about her arm being all swollen up this last lot of weeks and it is really getting her down. Well on the way she poured some Holy Water over her arm and before she got to the hospital, which was only about ten minutes away, the arm was nearly back to normal. Maud couldn’t believe it, what do you think of that? She went on to the hospital anyway saying she had the appointment, but she didn’t need to go”.

Jay has related this incident to the others in his personal community and his faith in the ritual use of Holy Water has returned. “Maybe I should put some on around my face as I feel it could be going to break out in a rash again. Would you sprinkle some around me; it’s in the left hand drawer in the little brown bottle.”

Foucault (1979) and others (Spitzack, 1990) perceive Western culture as having a tradition of confessional practices by which individuals seek to acknowledge and then redeem themselves for perceived violations of the moral code. In relation to this issue Jay rationalizes that his ability to have an alcoholic drink on a Friday night after a long week is made more acceptable by the nature of his drink. “I asked my doctor (who is a personal childhood friend) what would be the best thing for me to have, he said ‘Jay for you the purer the drink the better and do not add any fizzy mixers’ so Gin is the best choice for me. I love a big tumbler full last thing before I go to sleep as long as Louise (a professional carer) is on last thing at night, she always stays on to about two in the morning and I talk some crap there. I hear all Louise’s problems and offer my advice. I get a good night’s sleep and no bother with a hangover the next morning before the nurses come in first thing. Gin is the only thing I can drink and as it’s so pure I know that it won’t be doing me any harm”
Jay feels compelled to engage in conversation that relieves him of anxiety associated with the drinking of alcohol. The discipline shown in conjunction with such a ritual shows the onus of power lies firmly in the domain of Jay as to when and how much he will consume. It should be noted that other factors are taken into account before this weekly ritual can take place, the significant others are a prerequisite for such a consumption activity. Jay would say “If Louise or Walter is on last thing on Friday night then that’s okay because I know it’ll be alright with them and they’ll stay and have a chat. We talk about lots of things and I give them the benefit of my advice, they know I’ll not be talking about it outside the house. Louise and Walter understand me and I can relate to them, I don’t know what I’d do without them coming. I enjoy my gin on Friday and I know it’s the weekend then, I can slide off into space and think about people and places that have been or still are important to me in my life”.

Rappaport (1971: 38) indicated that rituals might do more than communicate information; they may constitute programs “which return deviating variables to desired states.” The nature and content of rituals are in direct response to changes in the state of a regulated variable. The transition into home confinement and more importantly, the transition into disability, with its accompanying negative perceptions of physicality, mean that the homebound consumer has to suppress undesired personal capabilities and trait associations through ritual consumption. The creativity that underpins ritual behaviour provides homebound consumers with the means to address negative consumption experiences. Participation in rituals, both sacred and secular, stimulates emotion in humans on a personal level and also on a more ‘public’ level. The inclusion of significant others represents the more ‘public’ side of interaction, generally witnessed only in the external marketplace.

The more secular rituals created by the home confined consumers were integral to their personal welfare and inner and outer body maintenance. This form of ‘disciplined body’ describes a style of body use and body-to-object relatedness, in relation to control. The disciplined body makes itself predictable through its regimentation, in other words the ritualized behaviour exhibited by home confined consumers is an example of such predictability that affords the control and, by extension, the resource needed to maintain a visibility (Rappaport, 1971). This is
important in terms of ongoing identity construction, when this internal discipline can no longer neutralize the threat of its own contingency, the disciplined body may turn to domination. This domination, in turn, can be enforced on the bodies of others, in particular, the personal community members who are an integral extension of the self-identity of the home confined consumer.

6.9 Conclusions

Disciplines not only make bodies productive in terms defined by some other but they can also be used by bodies themselves to achieve productive ends of their own. Bodies discipline themselves, but they do so within institutions and discourses which are not their own. Those for whom the need for self-discipline must be projected out assume the style of domination over others. This is the case for home confined consumers whose social network emerges and operates according to rules and regulations set by the consumers themselves. Thus, the control over self is extended and played out by personal community members, whose selection mirrors the competencies required by the home confined consumer. In so doing, the control exercised by the home confined consumer is strengthened and internalised; it is also projected and externalized by these same personal community members into the marketplace.

Most sociological and anthropological studies of ritual emphasize separation from customary group practices on ritual occasions, and this train of thought fits well with the context of the home confined consumer. Models have emphasized rituals' function in marking either a transition from one state to another, or a temporary suspension of regular activities (Kapferer, 1979; Turner, 1969). The subjective, individualistic nature of ritual production is capable of sustaining a sense of constancy in times of uncertainty and dislocation. These privatised activities communicate and strengthen ties with personal community members and can restore an identity that has been temporarily suspended from its normal activities.

Late modernity, and especially, postmodernity, has brought about a radical change in people's relationship to, and outlook on, the body, especially their own. The preoccupation with the individual and its role in modern and postmodern societies
expresses the decline of traditional social bonds and the corresponding individualistic attitudes and perspectives. The regulation of the body in postmodernity has increased even though 'freedom' over one’s body has expanded (Varga, 2005), but this is as a consequence of the increased use of symbols and images that emphasise the individual or individualism. Varga (2005) considers the individual not in a singular context but as someone who takes responsibility for their actions and is critical and selective in their consumption behaviour. This interpretation fits with the consumption behaviour displayed by the home confined consumers in their quest to secure 'abelism' through disciplined and ritual bodily regimes. The internalized marketplace of this marginalized population operates in absence of a social dimension, but it nevertheless functions as a result of such external activity. For the home confined consumer the challenge is to create a subjective experiential reality, which fits and secures stability of the self and can be achieved through creative consumption behaviour (Downey and Catterall, 2006).

Chapter seven will discuss the findings in relation to the special possession, the personal community. The concepts of care and wellbeing are addressed in consideration of realising an identity.
7.1 Introduction

Within consumer research there has been a move away from focusing purely on the individual level of experience to address the broader communal nature of human existence and meaning (Fischer and Arnould, 1990; Fischer and Gainer, 1995; Holt, 1995; Mehta and Belk, 1991; Peñaloza, 1994; Thompson, 1996). In particular, consumer researchers have recognised the importance of community in relation to self-identity through sustained social interaction. The word community derives from the word “common” (Sanders, 1994), and is conventionally defined by such markers as race or income, and usually bounded by a certain geographical space. Although new radical forms of community such as symbolic communities (Gergen, 1991) and virtual communities (Rheingold, 1993) are not bounded geographically, they are characterized by the capacity of their members for symbolic exchange.

In consumer research literature community has typically been conceptualized in ways that emphasise sustained social interaction and the experience of “communitas” (Arnould and Price, 1993; Schouten and McAlexander, 1995). One of the major consequences of consumption based on market exchanges has been the socialization and communalization of the consumption experience (Firat, 1987). Consumption activities have long been viewed as potent, symbolically charged practices that play a central role in the development and maintenance of community. Rituals of eating (Douglas, 1971), collecting (Belk et al., 1991), and celebrity fan clubs (O’Guinn, 1991) are but a few of the consumption activities that create bonds and a sense of shared purpose. Key characteristics of postmodernity are that social relations and self-identity are centred on consumption and consumption increasingly provides a locus of community relationship (Firat and Venkatesh, 1993). Consumers in brand communities and subcultures of consumption are, by their very choices, focused on brands or consumption (Kates, 2004). Consumers join these communities only if they are interested in the focal brand (Muniz and O’Guinn, 2001). Communal
relationships, by contrast, are those in which people take care of others’ needs and have a genuine concern for their wellbeing.

Wellman (2001: 227) suggests that personal communities are “networks of interpersonal ties that provide sociability, support, information, a sense of belonging and social identity.” The terms personal community and personal network are interchangeable. Communities that are “personal” are focused on a given individual and, within the context of this study, the three individual case studies. Personal communities are the closest we can get to postmodern community life, as Delanty (2003: 187) suggests, “it is neither a form of social integration nor one of meaning, but is an open-ended system of communication about belonging.” Based on this understanding the term personal community fits the study of home confinement where “belonging” and “communication” are central to how respondents viewed their relationships.

This chapter focuses on the personal communities of consumers confined to the home through disability or long-term illness. Specifically, it explores their experiences of personal communities and, in doing so, provides insight into the roles and relationships offered by family, friends and others. Home confined consumers are active in constructing their personal communities, which are managed in such a way as to facilitate ongoing independent living within their own homes as well as offering opportunities to maintain and develop their sense of self and self-identity. The chapter begins with an examination of the nature and management of the personal communities of each of the three case studies. It goes on to show how a personal community can contribute to the wellbeing of the home confined consumer by exploring the example of animal companionship. However, before the findings are discussed, a brief review of the nature and provision of care is presented that provides context for the findings.

7.2 Nature and Provision of Care
At some point in all our lives we will require or give care, “Caring expresses ethically significant ways in which we matter to each other” (Bowden, 1997: 1). The giving and receiving of care is imperative to human existence but is experienced differently at various points in the life course. “Care, is a multi-faceted term that can
combine feelings of concern and anxiety for others, alongside the provision of practical labour and tasks that attend to a person’s needs” (Cancian and Oliker, 1999: 2). Caring, as a combination of feelings with tasks, has been conceptualized in two ways: as ‘caring about’ - the feeling part of caring; and ‘caring for’ - the practical work, of tending for others (Parker, 1981). The context of the family is often the first and the last location in which care is given and experienced. Finch and Mason (1993) highlight the complex nature of care and support in families. However, rather than caring being a consequence of relationships, they have asserted that the act of providing care, especially if repeated routinely over time, in fact, creates a relationship.

Intimacy and care is increasingly considered to be taking place beyond the family. Budgeon and Roseneil (2004) point out the increasing failing of the family to address the multiplicity of practices of intimacy and care, traditionally its prerogative. Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (2002: 203) go so far as to describe the family as a “zombie category” - “dead and still alive” and Beck-Gernsheim (1999) points out that we are moving into a world of the “post- familial family”. Similarly, Bellah et al. (2001: 9) conclude, “We are witnessing the development and public affirmation of “families of choice.” Of course, there are others who maintain that there is little evidence that friends are replacing family; indeed, Park and Roberts (2003: 203) state “Family clearly remains most people’s first source of support when things go wrong.” The world of the home confined consumer is a useful place to examine care giving.

7.3 Jay’s Personal Community

Jay requires an ongoing level of functional medical care to sustain independent living, and even survival. As such his personal community members fall into distinct groups, namely, functional carers appointed by those in charge of his medical care, functional carers who have crossed the boundary to become personal friends, family members and friends. Most of the latter group were friends before his home confinement. These members of Jay’s personal community provide differing levels and types of emotional support and functional care.
Chapter Seven: Findings and Discussion: Personal Communities

Those in charge of his medical care set the number and nature of visits of his functional carers and Jay has little control over these. This functional level of care attends to the physical needs associated with severe non-abelism. Indeed Jay’s survival, in its basic sense, is dependent on his ability to address inner and outer bodily concerns in conjunction with these functional carers. Ultimately, they provide the basis for self-production or autopoiesis.

Other community members visits are at Jay’s discretion in terms of times and frequencies and are arranged strictly by appointment. Over the years Jay has established the days and times that individual family members and friends will visit. This even extends to telephone calls, which are also subject to a similar degree of pre-planning and routine. Similarly, individual family members and friends are each entrusted with specialist responsibilities and tasks, such as the purchase of gifts for other community members. Although personal community members are aware of each other’s existence and many are known to one another, Jay manages his community in such a way as to keep individuals separate and answerable only to him. Retaining such control over the levels of interaction and communication between members is, in Jay’s view, vital to realising continued independent living. Specifically, he would be concerned that community members were discussing his situation without his participation in the discussion.

Within the medical caring part of Jay’s community there have been particular individuals that have transcended the boundary to become more than functional carers. These community members, whose levels of intimacy and care mirrors those typically associated with kin, are representative of Jay’s ability to establish exchange relationships and self-select a community that reflects and corroborates his self and his self-identity. These chosen individuals undertake personal tasks that would usually be considered outside their functional duties.

Jay, the most seriously confined case in terms of physicality in the home, provides both perspectives (kin and non-kin) in relation to the makeup of his personal community. Indeed, the situation of Jay is primarily concerned with ‘care’ in terms of his medical needs that are fundamental to self-survival. For Jay this has meant including and allowing certain individuals, who in the normal socialization process
would not be selected or chosen, as being a personal community member. The realisation that his personal community may not entirely be as a consequence of self-choice obviously holds concerns for Jay and for his wellbeing. Within this ‘caring’ part of his community there have been particular individuals that have transcended the boundary to become not merely a functional carer in Jay’s ever changing community, but an integral part of his community of choice, and as such important in terms of the exchange of intimacy and care that is central to relationship culture.

As such these chosen individuals become extremely depended upon by Jay to perform personal tasks that may be considered outside the functional duties of said ‘carers’. The intimacy and care that is built up over time through the interaction of personal community members in his special space, affords Jay the opportunity to create an indirect socialization process. This ability to not only determine the strength of and the choice of such personal relationships shows, as Finch and Mason (1993) state that this is essentially a relationship borne out of care and the interaction associated with such activities. Jay will say “Oh Lola is away on her holidays for a fortnight, I don’t know who I’ll get to cover for her. She didn’t want to go but she has to or she’ll not get paid for that time. I hate it, especially over the weekend because Lola would always stay on after her time and we have a good chat and I am able to get a good night’s sleep”. This relationship, built up primarily out of personal functional interaction has gradually grown to be inclusive of both parties in the giving and receiving of care, where Jay has now demonstrated his giving of care to Lola. “I’m really worried Lola has had a lot of stomach pains lately and I feel that something is really wrong. I have asked her to go to the doctors just to make sure everything is okay”.

There can be a distinct blurring of the boundaries where the functional ‘carer’ can become as important as, and as emotionally close, as a self-chosen community member. Lola is not the only member of Jay’s personal community to have transcended the boundary to become a significant other. Wallace has been a long-time member of Jay’s functional caring group, but he is considered a valued and trusted member of his chosen community. Initially this relationship was forged through their common interest in football where both supported the same hometown team. “Wallace goes to all the home matches and he is able to bring me a flavour of what
really happened. Sometimes you see clips on the TV but you are never going to get the whole match on. Wallace always brings a programme back with him and when he comes on Sunday night we have a chance to read through it and savour the glory. It’s great when someone feels as passionate as you about their team; I have followed and supported my home town since I was nine”.

Jay’s genuine love of football, especially his home side, gives him lots of opportunities to chat with other family and non-family members about the local football scene. Jay has a very close friend, Paul, who calls in every week to give him the gossip on his son who is playing for a rival local team. As Jay says “many a great debate takes place about who is the better team, Paul and I can go back and recall all the high points in the team’s career. We always get around to our time on the pitch playing for a lesser-known local town side. They were the days; we thought we were George Best and just as good-looking too. Paul and I were never short of fans but he will tell you I was the main man as I had both the talent and good looks to carry it off”.

Jay’s love of football has certainly been instrumental in his ability to encourage relationships and bonds within his personal community. Extended family members will give a ring, usually “three rings after the team have been out, just to let me know they have been watching with me. My brother John and brother-in law Sam are first on the blower to celebrate if my team has won. We have a whole code worked out, so I don’t have to answer the phone and disturb my viewing if they ring during the match. It’s great knowing all your friends are cheering on your side and sharing in the victories, which are many”.

Jay’s personal community comprises of members of choice and also those essential to survival, in the medical sense, but not self-selected. These two interlinking forms of membership that compose Jay’s personal community reflect direct marketplace interaction and a socialization process deemed necessary for autopoiesis. The significant others as Maturana (1980) suggests, are representative of third order coupling and by extension are able to diffuse the identity that belongs to Jay back into the marketplace. This reinforcing of one’s self, to oneself, and to the external
environment is accomplished by the interactions among and between those significant personal community members.

The slow, arduous journey of managing non-abelism for Jay, has fundamentally been in an environment of functional care, and has been filled with anxiety and episodes that compounded his helplessness and utter humiliation at being so dependent on others for survival. The realisation of being in hospital and the awareness of the severity of his injuries was an extremely traumatic time for Jay. “I was just dumbstruck, just suddenly wanted to be back at home where my friends were. It must have been another few minutes before anybody realised what had happened, for me those minutes were filled with so many, many long, lonely milliseconds. Yeah I reckon for perhaps the first real time ever in my life, I felt an acute sense of being so hopelessly helpless and alone-I didn’t like it one wee bit”.

The initial transition period of abelism to non-abelism, for Jay, was so overwhelming that it would seem natural that the emotions experienced would be of such enormity that Jay’s identity would be considered as a liminal one (Noble and Walker, 1997). “Yeah, I believe that I could very well have reached the nadir of my life so far where the despair was just so intense! I hadn’t noticed it, but there were tiny teardrops dripping southwards down over my cheekbones, right onto my already damp, sweat-saturated, and freezing cold jacket. My throat felt so tight that I really couldn’t even think about swallowing properly at all, there was one massive, great, big grapefruit firmly stuck down in there. I wasn’t crying or anything, it must have been some sort of involuntary reaction coming from my aching heart. Let me outta here God, I was thinking as my head was quietly imploding”. In times of extreme transition it is the support and care in a truly emotional sense that one needs from close personal community members and for Jay his brother John’s presence was to be a reassuring and comforting buffer against such truly testing times, “but he could see clearly through what I’d been playing at, and just stuck his sweet nicotine-scented hand slowly over my mouth, gently telling me to take it easy on myself and stop waffling on, while his other hand rested lovingly on top of my sweat-soaked head. I believe even his eyes were slightly glazed! Those words of his just made such perfect sense though. That extremely special very precious bond, which exists between some people
that understands and appreciates the significance of pure silence, speaks loudest in my opinion”.

Finch and Mason (1985) echo this sentiment that family members can be as much ‘chosen’ as the friend, to be a personal community member. The special bond that Jay has with his brother supports Park and Roberts (2003) findings that family remain most people’s first source of support but within the close family member circle it can be seen that some family members can be both special and “chosen”. The main focus of these understandings in relation to Jay’s community as Delanty (2003) suggests, concerns the communication that accentuates belonging. Indeed the concept of a personal community highlights relationships that stem from the ability to communicate on differing levels but still allow as Pahl and Spencer (2005) state relationships between and within generations. The personal community of Jay coupled with his “chosen” and functional “caring” personal members draws on this ability to transcend generational divides. These deeply emotional consumption experiences can be more easily managed if a personal community is made up of people who know how to react and offer the gift of intimacy and care.

In an earlier discussion it was highlighted that individuals not deemed ‘family’ could transcend the boundary and become an important part of a personal community. The issues of caring, for Jay is an extremely important one given the severity of his injuries. It is quite a major upheaval in Jay’s autopoietic system to have to continually socialize and interact with new members who are not familiar with his ways of doing things and his personal needs that are vital to Jay’s well-being and survival. “I obviously found it sometimes fairly tough to get the ‘right’ person, as there wasn’t always a preponderance of thoughtful, honest, people willing to perform their tasks con amore, which naturally makes such a difference, to me anyway, but overall I was mostly very lucky!” Personal communities have given Jay the ability to extend and empower the self.

Through on-going interaction and evolution of Jay’s personal community the ability to realise autopoiesis was created. For Jay the creativity exhibited in relation to the management of his transition from abelism to non-abelism, has primarily been drawn
from his personal community members and the accompanying socialization process played out in his special space.

### 7.4 Barbara and Gloria's Personal Community

Although confined to the home, the sisters have a certain degree of physicality that renders them able to interact within their own special space and they require only limited medical care provided through home visits. Their personal community is devoid of carers in the functional sense and is made up of family and friends that Barbara and Gloria feel they can trust to interact within their autopoietic reality. It is also a small community comprised of two family members, a niece and a cousin, both of whom are female, and a neighbour of over thirty years (also female), who lives close by. The local pharmacist, John, has become a regular visitor to the household to deliver the sisters’ medication and is considered someone they can discuss personal medical issues with and trust not to disclose private facts. The sisters were regular churchgoers before home confinement and they have retained a few members of their church as friends.

A history of caring for homebound parents over a twenty-five year span has created a contextual situation in which the sisters have become self-sufficient to a certain degree. However, their level of dependency on each other is high. Barbara and Gloria provide each other with both the aspects of emotional caring and functional caring that are needed to sustain independence in their private space. They have each other to support the ongoing process of autopoiesis through multiple transitions that home confinement can bring. They are highly disciplined individuals in most aspects of their lives, keeping the environment they occupy scrupulously clean, in order to sustain a special space that fits with the high standards of ‘a germ-free’ zone they have created in their daily lives. These regulations and rules not only apply to Barbara and Gloria but also filter out to the personal community members.

The personal community is heavily managed and controlled in terms of its membership; Barbara and Gloria determine interaction between members and the roles performed by each member. It is only at their request that personal members can visit; indeed they can be abrupt and dogmatic in the overly rigid and disciplined
approach they maintain. On many occasions community members have called on them when passing, just to check if they are well and to see if they needed anything from the shops, only to be met with a rebuff. “You will have to come back later we are just sitting down to lunch. Our lunch is at 1 (pm) every day so we can’t have anyone in”. Other situations have arisen where food items purchased at their request have not met their specific requirements. Personal community members that undertake such tasks are in no doubt about the outcome of incorrect purchases. Barbara, in particular, will ensure that the offending product is returned “Oh we couldn’t eat that; you’ll have to take it back. I told you the one we eat, its Gloria’s stomach we have to be careful of. I don’t want her to be up all night in pain. If they haven’t the one we like just get the money back”. As the personal community members are concerned for the sisters’ wellbeing they will change the product and try to ensure that they purchase exactly what Barbara and Gloria want.

The sisters’ overriding anxiety in relation to food consumption is very apparent; they try to ensure where possible, that only high quality whole-foods and organic products are consumed. Barbara and Gloria are focused on the need to maintain a consistent level of healthcare to support optimal inner body maintenance and a continued sense of wellbeing. Any relaxation of their dietary regime might result in a decline in health, and ultimately their physical survival in the independent sense. Since this is so important to Barbara and Gloria, it is understandable that personal community members must also take their dietary concerns seriously. Members’ behaviours reinforce and support the disciplined regime the sisters have adopted and their power and control over this personal community is exacerbated as a result of Barbara and Gloria’s vulnerabilities. Like Jay, a key concern for the sisters is to sustain their emotional and physical independence and to continue living independently in their own home. In contrast to Jay, Barbara and Gloria are more likely to direct, and even dictate, the roles of their members. Although their community is in a sense more disciplined in terms of its cohesion, it nevertheless reflects the attendance to detail that enables a level of care sufficient to sustain autopoiesis.

The concern with eating healthily is not as a consequence of confinement but is part of the socio-historical makeup of the two sisters. Barbara feels that “Gloria and I have always had to be concerned with good nutrition; our parents needed the best to
keep them healthy. If it hadn’t been for us making sure they got the best they never
would have lived so long, or been able to stay in their own home”. In their search for
‘good’ food Barbara and Gloria had in their ableist days built up a small community
of like-minded individuals. This small community would meet regularly in the park
and exchange produce that had either been home cooked or was got from a reliable
source. As Gloria says “we had been taking our parents out for air everyday in their
wheelchairs and we got talking to a few people who were sitting on the park benches.
Over time we got to know each other pretty well and we discussed issues of health and
everybody had some piece of knowledge to pass on. We had always baked our own
bread and pastries so we could ensure we were not eating anything that might upset
us. Our little group all made something, jams, pickles, soups or had access to real
free range eggs and sometimes a little bit of country butter. I guess that’s how it all
started, we all shared our foodstuffs and it became part of the day out”. The ability to
share in the consumption experiences of others and to exchange gifts of food that had
been ‘lovingly’ prepared from the finest ingredients helped to keep this small
community thriving. The personal community gave each other help, support and
advice and as such were an important addition to Barbara and Gloria’s consumption
experiences.

The regime of going to the park most days had initially been for the benefit of their
parents but this journey continued after the parents passed away. Barbara and Gloria
had become part of a personal community that offered a sense of belonging and
wellbeing. They had culinary skills that were appreciated outside the home context
and willingly shared their fare with such an appreciative community. These instances
of reinforced self-worth and self-value were the impetus for Barbara and Gloria to
leave the home and interact in the marketplace, something they relished doing.

Given the pleasure that came with such interaction it is surprising that both sisters
gave up such consumption activities. The retreating back into the home demonstrates
the discipline and control exercised by Barbara and Gloria in the pursuit of an
independent, healthy life. The self-regimentation of their personal community has
afforded Barbara and Gloria a means to feel empowered, an ability to determine life’s
course, and the ability to create a private space that ultimately reflects their self-
interests.
Personal members are never admitted to the house at the same time, everyone is told what day they can visit and the time, so that they do not interfere with the daily routines of cleaning, baking, cooking or praying that Barbara and Gloria have mapped out. If something arises outside the remit of the usual daily routine that requires urgent attention, then a personal community member will be rung to attend immediately to the problem. Barbara usually initiates such telephone calls, “I ring Heather if anybody comes to the door and I don’t know them. I will tell her to pop round and find out what they want. We are on our own here and you wouldn’t know who would turn up out of the blue. Heather is only round the corner and she comes immediately. We can trust her to get to the bottom of things”.

Barbara and Gloria are secure in the knowledge that personal community members will ‘rush to their aid’ as they are perceived vulnerable and as such open to exploitation. Members are expected to ‘drop everything’ and sort out their concerns. Barbara and Gloria do not require functional care in the home but benefit from the support of a personal community to attend to issues that they feel unable to deal with. The continuance of a highly private, independent lifestyle can only be fully realised in conjunction with those self-chosen members who can deliver a level of care that is both intermittent and at the same time highly involved. The punctuated needs of Barbara and Gloria in terms of giving and receiving of care are dictated by them solely, and the role and makeup of the personal community is determined by such consumption episodes that warrant attendance. The survival of self in its basic sense drives the momentum of a highly disciplined regime forwards, and Barbara and Gloria are enabled and experience a level of freedom, as a result of the restrictive regimes of care that they have created. The ability to demonstrate self-choice, self-discipline, decision-making qualities, leadership, power, and control, all emanate from the formation of a personal community that is reflective of the self and of its identity.

7.5 David’s Personal Community

David has a large personal community of friends that offer emotional and physical support. This community is largely comprised of former boyhood friends who have come to accept his decision to confine himself to the home. Initially efforts were made at encouraging David out at weekends, but over time they have had to accept his
position on this issue. As life-long friends they have a strong sense of loyalty and try to accommodate David’s wishes by rallying round and providing him with an indirect socialization process in his home.

In direct contrast to Jay, Barbara, and Gloria, David is less disciplined in the management of his personal community. David’s community members are all known to one another and interact socially; they are also permitted, and even encouraged, to visit his home in groups. Indeed, parties and musical evenings are held in his special home space and this brings David into contact with new people, “At least once a week I have a load of people back after the bar. Snipe and Lou just bring anyone along that wants to come. I don’t mind I’ll get up if I’m in bed and after a Chinese (meal) I will be ready to party. We have some good nights and lots of music blasting. The party could go on all night and I’ve seen me only getting back to bed about nine o’clock the next morning”. A continuous flow of new members gives David’s personal community new blood and increased ability for socialization, which mirrors the direct marketplace interaction considered so important to the self and self-identity. Some of these new extended community members come to be close personal members of choice after ongoing interaction; “Lou’s friend Clare has started calling round during the week to see if there is anything I need. She is really thoughtful and always brings me something nice back from her shopping travels or from her holidays. Clare travels a good bit and it’s good to talk to someone about different places. She is lively and bubbly and I always feel better after she has been round. I think she likes to ask my advice on things”. David is open to new consumption experiences and is flexible in his daily routine, unlike Jay, Barbara and Gloria he does not feel the need to practise a disciplined approach to doing everyday life. This is indicative of the way that David has always addressed living; open to new consumption opportunities and a highly laid back approach.

In contrast to the other two cases discussed above, David has not adopted or required a disciplined regime of care to enable him to secure ongoing survival. He is reliant on his personal community to bring him necessities of life, food, heat, and most importantly, companionship, into his special space. His oldest friend, Neil, brings David supplies of home prepared food for his freezer. David is full of praise for these connoisseur dishes and other personal community members will drop by at meal times.
when they know that Neil has delivered. David certainly feels no sense of inadequacy or impoverishment in receiving such gifts and Neil is appreciative that his culinary skills are so much in demand. The two way flow of caring is evident in this personal relationship and both parties enjoy a sense of companionship borne out of intimacy and care (Beck and Katcher, 1983).

Even though David is not socializing in the external marketplace, he is able to interact in the normal sense of socializing through his ‘avant garde’ dinner parties. As David will admit, “When Neil brings his special pheasant curries I have loads of dinner guests. It is really hot, Neil knows the way I like it. No-one has ever tasted anything like it; his fame is growing every day”. Although David is not the cook, by extension he feels highly involved in the gift-giving process of sharing the gastronomical delights with other members of his personal community. David enjoys the consumption experiences that are afforded by the unexpected events or situations that present themselves, “You wouldn’t know who would arrive at your door at any time of the night, bringing gifts of wine and fancy biscuits and chocolates, all the things I love”.

One can see that David enjoys reminiscing over many such occasions and consumption memories are particularly important to him. “The times we all used to have. Sunday’s lying around drinking wine, sliding down the banks on cardboard, those were the days. Everything is changed now, I can’t stand being in a bar anymore and I used to love it. It’s the noise, all that talking it does my head in”. David’s consumption experiences are not all positive ones but they are an essential part of his self and his self-production. Like nostalgia, the bittersweet elements of consumption (Goulding, 2002) present special aspects of self that carry the identity forward through different transitional phases and maintain abelism in the visible sense.

David has a small garden but is unable to maintain it. Fitz, a close personal community member, has now taken over this task without being asked to do so. When he is attending to his own garden he pops round to David’s, “Fritz just appears with all the stuff and has the garden all tidied up in no time at all, he has a van so he takes all the cuttings away with him. I wouldn’t be able to stand for that amount of time and I never was good at gardening anyway. I grow a few plants as you can see in the
house; I have green fingers for some types. Fritz brings some pots for the porch; he enjoys doing it so I let him just get on with it”. David’s management of his personal community appears to be quite haphazard, but it is the very freedom that he affords these friends that keeps a cohesive bond between them. The absence of rules and regulations of behaviour in David’s special space encourages a high level of socialization and new experiences of ‘third order couplings’ (Maturana, 1980) that give rise to the diffusion of, and a visibility of, a self-identity in the marketplace.

7.6 Personal Communities – Caring and Identity

7.6.1 Caring

Caring is fundamental to every society. Care is associated with institutional confinement, limited social engagement, partial citizenship, disempowerment and exclusion. To be cared for is to be in deficit and to have one’s competence as a social actor denied or questioned. Disabled recipients of care, be they male or female, live ‘tragic’ lives (Oliver, 1990) ontologically doomed to a reduction of agency. The meanings that are attributed to caring work are never ‘given’ but are variable, mutable and context bound. The context is contingent upon the biographical and present resources of the people in the caring relationship and by the public ideologies that bear upon them (Chamberlayne and King, 2000). Notions of care and caring have been the subjects of criticism in feminism and disability studies (Hanson, 2002) because of the potential for exploitation and disempowerment to be found in how caring activities are carried out.

Fox (2000: 338) points out that while care may embody masculine and custodial “technologies of domination”, it is also a “gift” and as such it is saturated with positive properties such as “generosity, trust, confidence, love, commitment, delight and esteem.” It is, however, the possessive, disciplinary element in the caring relationship that has dominated the experience of disabled people in modernity and it is against this background that the Disability Peoples Movement proposes the transformation of care into help or assistance (Shakespeare, 2000). The policy of the confinement of disabled people, for the best part of modernity, has left a legacy that constitutes impairment as a ‘tragedy’ deserving a charitable response (Oliver, 1990) and a burden on the tax-paying community.
Aside from this debate with regards terminology, it is essentially the private and special space in which care is expended that should be the focus of the research. As Thomas (2001: 55) states, “whole areas of disability experience, and thus of disability, are eclipsed because they are located in the private domain of life.” For the home confined consumer the question of power in relation to acceptance of such care, and by whom, is a major issue with regards their decision-making qualities and the realisation of empowerment. Individual circumstances demand differing expectations from care, and the recipient alone will ultimately determine the choice of whether this caring experience moves beyond the mere functional requirements into a more caring domain.

The case of the home confined consumer in relation to their individual ‘carescapes’ coupled with Fraser and Gordon’s (1994) observations on interdependency and Fraser’s observations on need (1989), and personal community membership, will aid such an understanding of an internal socialization process. This internal socialization process is crucial to the realisation of interaction that underpins such identity pursuits. It offers a means of exploring the processes of identity formation as it is produced by discourses of care. In this theory “identity or self arises through engagement with dominant norms—‘technologies of domination’ and these may be resisted or adopted in the context of both an ‘aesthetics of existence’ and a code of ethics” (Hughes et al., 2005: 262).

Findings have shown that the discourses of care played out in the home confined contexts of this study propagate two way flows of caring that are central to the emergence of a relationship culture. The ability to shift positions in terms of receiving or giving of care between respondents and personal community members highlights the abelism inherent in such practices of care. The home confined consumers experiences of care reinforced self-worth and self-value, which led to positive episodes of wellbeing being realised. The importance of these episodes of wellbeing in relation to identity construction is supported. Self-identity depends on interaction with others and the concept of care as a special possession provides the mediating material for a relationship culture to be established. For those consumers, considered as carers, the opportunities for experiencing similar episodes of positive wellbeing in a caring relationship culture is also an important aspect of their ongoing identity. To
be a valued, trusted member, of a personal community helps to strengthen communal ties and offer those members a stronger sense of self and of identity. The forms of communality that emerge from these living arrangements reveal the potential for long lasting, significant, ties. Budgeon and Roseneil (2004: 130) feel that “Central to the emergence of these ties is the institutionalized (quasi-communes) of friendship through a shared domesticity.” Home confined consumers offer rich opportunities to explore cultures of intimacy and care.

7.6.2 Identity

Identity formation as a consequence of relationships of intimacy and frequent exchanges, is, as Kellerhals et al. (2002: 224), suggest, a maieutic logic, “It is through frequent, serious exchanges among individuals that a specific family culture and a specific mode of identity transmission takes shape.” The underlying theme of the maieutic logic is conversation where the emphasis is on the ‘self’, on self-realization, achieved through interaction with those chosen people who are deemed important with respect to personal meaning in one’s life. These systems in which identities are formed are very personal, individual and intimate processes, where the home confined consumers’ ‘family’ (personal community) is responsible for displaying the distinctiveness and uniqueness of each individual member. Inherent in these types of relationships is their tendency to create dependency. The interests at stake in identity transmission and in helping to construct a social identity are ultimately confined to the domestic, intimate, private sphere of the home confined consumer. As Kellerhals et al. (2002: 225) state, “It is through the internal, relational dynamic, the management of a private space, and the way in which the group recognizes and assigns a distinct place to the person that the processes of identity construction take place.”

The maieutic relationship, essentially the art of conversation with those individuals that form the family of choice for the home confined consumer, provides the basis for identity transmission and construction. The context of home confinement embraces such a mode of conversational exchange that reflects a socialization process absent in such consumption experiences. The emotional level attained through deeply felt exchanges, with significant persons in the individual’s daily life, go some way to defining their family boundaries and ultimately their existence. The conversations or
Chapter Seven: Findings and Discussion: Personal Communities

language provides sophisticated landscapes of socially significant meanings or practices that get shaped and reshaped to fit the current reality, but also at every point (re) form it. The personal community of the home confined consumer offers the means to develop an internal socialization process and ability for self-evolvement through 'third-order coupling' (Maturana, 1980).

Personal Communities, as possessions can be used to satisfy psychological needs such as creating one's self-concept, reinforcing and expressing self-identity, and allowing one to differentiate oneself and assert one's individuality (Belk, 1988; Kleine et al., 1995). Recent research indicates that consumers construct their self-identity and present themselves to others through self-image associations (Escalas and Bettman, 2005). It should be noted that the development, creation and evolution of the home confined consumers personal communities explored within this study are self-originated and context specific, and as a consequence of such creative action, home confined consumers are both enabled and constrained in aspects of their social structure (Giddens, 1990).

These very individual personal communities represent changes in consumption behaviour associated with the transitions encountered in one's autopoietic system as a consequence of life experiences drawn from existentially meaningful social interaction. The conversations or language provides sophisticated landscapes of socially significant meanings or practices that get shaped and reshaped to fit the current reality, but also at every point (re) form it. The personal community of the home confined consumer represents an internal socialization process and ability for connections and interaction through 'third-order coupling' (Maturana, 1980).

A relationship culture formed through discourses of care is an essential part of realising an identity project for home confined consumers. This creative action is instrumental in the establishment of an individual and a collective identity deemed non-feasible in absence of a socialization process.
7.7 Regaining a Sense of Wellbeing

Personal communities can assist home confined consumers to regain and sustain special consumption experiences that would otherwise be restricted or barriered. Specifically, personal communities can enable home confined consumers to regain positive consumption experiences. The ability to retain special possession consumption may be a useful element in conceptualizing consumer wellbeing for vulnerable and disadvantaged consumers. In a consumer society the ability to consume material goods can be an indicator of personal happiness (Ahuvia and Friedman, 1998; Ger, 1997). Indeed there is a body of work that links possessions to wellbeing. To illustrate, Oropesa’s (1995) study on the relationship between possessions and wellbeing reveals that the possession of entertainment technology contributes to the life satisfaction of younger consumers. Ahuvia’s (2005) work on loved objects also demonstrated how possessions might help to create a meaningful life and define the consumer’s identity.

Home confined consumers lack the physicality and ableness necessary to participate fully in consumer society and can miss out on opportunities to experience positive outcomes of wellbeing. Interruptions in special possession consumption can lead to a diminished sense of self (Belk, 1988), and a simultaneous reduction in positive experiences of wellbeing. Increasingly, wellbeing and the related concept of quality of life are considered from the subject’s own perspective as will now be discussed.

Wellbeing is a concept of increasing interest to those working in health promotion, social and medical sociology. Yet despite its popularity, wellbeing lacks a clear conceptual base (Cronin de Chavez et al., 2005) and there is little agreement on its identification. Like happiness, wellbeing is known in the possession but is hard to define or to predict. Psychological approaches to wellbeing tend to focus on the individual and the generation of meaning in terms of sense of self. Common themes emerging from this literature include self-acceptance, sense of purpose or fulfillment in life, sense of continued growth or feeling of interpersonal connectedness, happiness and subjective wellbeing to name but a few (Schmutte and Ryff, 1997).
Quality of life research has afforded opportunities for extending the understanding of wellbeing to include a much broader definition, namely, social, psychological, interpersonal, emotional, cultural, spiritual and environmental dimensions (Logsdon and Albert, 1999; Whitehouse, 1999). Cronin de Chavez et al. (2005: 74) suggest that a, “subjective approach assumes that perceptions of what constitutes ‘good’ and ‘quality’ are embedded in the context of personal values, goals, talents, histories, and life experiences.” Increasingly, researchers are allowing individuals to choose which domains are important to their wellbeing (Barnes and Bennett, 1998). Thus, the wellbeing literature depicts wellbeing as a multifaceted concept that is fluid and ever changing, due to its very subjective construction.

7.8 Companion Animal Consumption

Psychological research shows that people acquire companion animals for a variety of reasons. Hirschman (1994) divides the roles animals play in people’s lives into two categories, animals as objects/products and animals as companions. Although Hirschman (1994) looks at the roles these animals play once in the home it is the special significance of these possessions in terms of consumer self-worth and wellbeing that is the concern of the discussion that follows. Aylesworth et al. (1999: 388) state, “While it is not surprising to say that people become attached to their pets, it may be surprising to learn the lengths they will go to ensure the relationship continues.” Voith (1985) explored the reasons behind such strong attachments, such as an increased sense of wellbeing and love, and related them to problems owners may have with their pets, such as separation anxiety.

As Beck and Katcher (1996: 6) suggest “pets do not just substitute for human relationships; they complement and add to them, giving a special and unique dimension to human life.” Companion animals play many roles in the lives of consumers (Belk 1996; Holbrook 1996; Stephens and Hill, 1996). Indeed, Hirschman (1994: 623) emphasizes the multiple roles that companion animals play in human life. An emergent theme in her study (pertinent to this study) “was that consumers who had been socialized to care for a particular type of pet as children often continued to seek out that same type of pet throughout their lives.” Hirschman further argues, “With the incorporation of the pet into the family, an enduring type of human-animal
socialization may occur, essentially, the children in such homes come to view the people-plus-animals family structure as normal and right.”

Psychologists and sociologists show extensive interest in examining the nature of the human-animal bond (Beck and Katcher, 1996; Karsh and Turner, 1998; Loyer-Carlson, 1992; Sussman, 1985; Tuan, 1984). However, only recent consumer research considers the relationship between consumer and companion animal, mainly in the areas of owner’s consumption experiences (Hirschman, 1994; Stephens and Hill, 1996); the roles of pets in humans’ daily lives (Holbrook, 1997); and the dispossession of animal companions (Stephens and Hill, 1996).

7.8.1 Jay’s Companion-Animal Consumption

Throughout his childhood Jay had a consumption history of high involvement with animals. Indeed his first memories as a young child on his grandfather’s farm were of a sheepdog called Tim. Tim turned out to be Jay’s own companion animal given to him by his grandfather. “I’ve always loved having my dogs with me and on these types of breakaways I could bring my own dog Tim. He (the dog) enjoyed that certain injection of freedom which farm life seemed to produce”. Although a childhood memory such occasions have left a profound mark on Jay. “Those were really very carefree days when we had ample time to stand and stare at absolutely anything; maybe some hares would be seen boxing away at each other in the fields. We’d eat away at those sweet-tasting, and possibly poisonous juicy leaves from the hedgerows and actually would have been able to clearly smell the powerfully scented wildflowers all around the place, such was the freshness.” These recollections are more intense, vivid, and also poignant, in the retelling. Jay has remained a firm animal lover all his life and it is a particular sadness for him that his current situation does not allow for the animal companionship of a dog.

Jay’s long held desire to be able to keep a companion-animal has been met to some extent by one of his functional carers, Wallace, who installed a tropical fish tank in Jay’s room. Although this is not really what Jay had wished for, it showed Wallace as a caring community member providing care beyond the requirements of his job. Wallace set the fish tank up and even bought the first fish occupants after many
consultations with Jay as to what species would be kept. Wallace, now a close member of the personal community over and above his functional caring job, is able to attend to the tasks of feeding, cleaning and keeping the temperature optimal for the survival of these fish. Jay can spend time watching the behaviour of the fish and reporting to Wallace on progress within the tank.

The installation of the tank has opened up new personal community consumption experiences in talking about and caring for fish. Jay’s brother, John, never visits without bringing a new fish member to replace any that have died. Jay finds it quite comical that John would be travelling by train clasping a plastic bag with a fish-swimming round. “Couldn’t you just see John swaying from side to side in the train, holding a whiskey in one hand and a fish in the other? Let’s hope he never gets the two drinks mixed up or I’ll be getting a bag with nothing in it”.

Other members of the personal community have adopted tasks to be more included in this consumption experience. Mabel, a sister of Jay’s, and an extremely close member in terms of emotional support and care, has taken on the weekly cleaning of the fish tank as her own personal task. “Mabel will see to all that on Wednesday, so don’t you bother doing anything. It’s better that she does it because she knows how to do it right”. Jay trusts that Mabel will do her best to keep the fish in optimum condition, and Mabel also feels a valued part of the personal community as a consequence of Jay’s faith and trust in her. Care, is again exhibited as a two way flow between giver and receiver and is an integral link in the relationship bond forged between the emotionally close members of the personal community.

As some members of Jay’s personal community provided the capability to renew companion animal consumption, others came to acknowledge its importance to him. Jay has a very close personal community member, Hilary, who would be termed a high involvement owner in relation to companion animal consumption. Although her consumption experiences are only with cats, this still provided Jay with an arena for engaging in communal consumption activity. Tales of Hilary’s companion animal experiences renewed an interest for Jay, not only in nostalgic consumption terms (Goulding, 2002) but also allowing him to consume the emotional aspects of wellbeing that underpin this form of consumption. Hilary was able to bring her
special possession, Baby (cat) for weekly visits and his gentle and calm nature had very soothing properties for Jay. As Jay is confined to bed the cat was an ideal companion, being able to lie beside him and give direct eye contact with comforting purring. These visits for Jay were special and the consumption experiences helped to provide a strong sense of abelism that could so easily have become diluted in his non-abelist environment.

Hilary recalled daily episodes of Baby’s often-humorous experiences by e-mail and phone calls so that Jay felt included and valued in this special consumption activity. As a result of Jay displaying photographs in his room of Hilary’s feline family members, other personal community members, who did not have prior knowledge of Jay’s interest in companion animals, were able to interact and communicate on a whole new level. Indeed, some of his less ‘emotionally’ involved personal community, functional carers, who are also companion-animal owners now bring Jay ‘family’ photographs and tales of their progress and antics. All companion-animal owners enjoy talking and listening to the various tales about their pets, it provides another level of interaction of an emotional nature that further extends Jay’s self-identity. The ability for realising relationships of intimacy and care is supported in this consumption culture and Jay’s feelings of self-worth and wellbeing are improved as a result. The mutual exchange of care played out in this type of consumption experience is one that enforces feelings of self-worth and value and is a continued source of enjoyment over a lifetime for those consumers who have been socialized into animal companionship at an early age (Downey and Ellis, 2007c).

7.8.2 David’s Companion Animal Consumption

David, like Jay, enjoyed the companionship of a dog during his childhood. As an only child David found comfort and friendship in caring for his canine companion. The childhood socialization with companion animals was a very important part of David’s growing up and his family life. At the age of twelve, David’s father died suddenly and his dog Rebel filled many lonely hours. David recalls the love and companionship that both David and Rebel shared at this time of transition, “I will never forget Rebel he was my constant companion and friend who was always there for me when I got home from school. He didn’t mind what we did, stay in or go out he just loved being beside
me all the time. Rebel slept with me and he was such a comfort through a lot of lonely and bad times in my growing up.” The knowledge that he is physically incapable of caring for a canine companion on a full time basis has led to David feeling a diminished sense of self and self-worth. “I can bear just about all the other things in life that I used to enjoy doing being taken away from me, but my deepest regret is not being able to care for a dog again in the proper way. I really miss the fun of having a pet around and someone to care for and look out for.”

Other members of David’s personal community have dogs that usually accompany their owners on visits to David’s home. Lewis and Trevor are dog lovers. Lewis’s ‘The Dude’ and Trevor’s ‘Toys’ became welcome visitors to David’s home and integrated well into the personal community. David offered to dog sit for short periods of time when it was necessary for Lewis and Trevor to attend functions or events where dogs were not encouraged. This opportunity for David to interact individually with the dogs evolved over time and all parties received benefits from the shared consumption of these special possessions.

The dog owners were not happy with putting their companion animals into kennels and the relationship culture between these personal community members grew stronger with each period of canine care that David undertook. Lewis and Trevor enjoy the freedom of deciding to go to a weekend concert or take a short break at virtually a moment’s notice. David is always available to provide the care and views such consumption experiences with enthusiasm. “I love it when The Dude or Toys come unexpectedly it really gives me a lift and puts in a weekend for me that probably would have been the same boring thing. The dogs are small and don’t need a lot of walking so I can let them into my garden for a run around and I sit at the back door and watch them running for sticks and balls I throw for them.”

Full companion animal consumption may not be possible for David but the stimulation and renewed sense of self-worth achieved from the partial consumption of such special possessions cannot be underestimated. David has regained a very crucial consumption aspect of self, which if lost, could play a major role in his experiencing a diminished sense of self and wellbeing.
7.9 Personal Communities and Wellbeing

Most consumer research focuses on the material aspect of wellbeing (Neerguard and Venkatesh, 1989). However, wellbeing needs to be conceptualized on a multidimensional basis (Lee et al., 2002; Neerguard and Venkatesh, 1989). The ability to retain a sense of wellbeing and of identity, even in periods of uncertainty and major transition, are highlighted in the discussion above. The need to consume and experience socio-historical aspects of self can become amplified in situations where barriers to consumption present themselves. For the home confined consumers Jay and David, an essential part of self, companion animal consumption (Hirschman, 1994) could have been lost as a consequence of their diminished physicality. The loss of special possessions (Belk, 1988) is instrumental in experiencing a diminished sense of self.

Companion animal consumption by its very nature affords the opportunity to mutually express feelings of sharing and caring, indicative of a sense of community and a culture rich in relationships (Beck and Katcher, 1996; Kellerhals et al., 2002). Jay and David were able to realize positive wellbeing through the ‘sharing’ in others special possession consumption. Jay and David are able to overcome barriers to special possession consumption through the relationship culture inherent in a personal community (Budgeon and Roseneil, 2004). The partial or intermittent episodes of ‘shared’ companion animal consumption experienced by Jay and David, does not dilute the positivity, joy, contentment, and overall sense of wellbeing derived from such consumption encounters.

These consumption experiences strengthened the relationships and emotional ties within their respective communities. Personal communities can help empower the individual especially in periods of uncertainty and vulnerability by providing a supporting framework for ongoing construction of self and of identity. The personal community reflects ability for self-choice, creativity, individuality (Downey and Catterall, 2007a: 185). A diminished sense of self and of self-worth is more likely to gain credence in an environment punctuated with barriers to consumption. Consumer welfare and wellbeing are reliant on an ability and freedom to consume those
possessions that are considered essential to the maintenance of self and of self-identity.

In order to conceptualize wellbeing, we need to understand the consumer experiences associated with its achievement rather than merely identify the terms of it (happiness, joy, contentment). The fluid and subjective nature of wellbeing provides an opportunity to explore, and the potential to reach, the many levels of lived experience. This study highlights the advantages of regaining former possession consumption as a basis for enhancing consumer wellbeing, with those consumers facing obstacles to consumption. We began this section of the chapter by suggesting that the inability to secure fulfillment, enhancement and happiness with special possession consumption implies low levels of wellbeing. The multidimensional nature of wellbeing suggests that home confined consumers, in particular, and consumers in general are not limited to the actual possession of consumer goods in order to experience wellbeing. Future studies on marginalized and disadvantaged consumers might explore this further.

7.10 Conclusions on Personal Communities

The home confined consumers explored in this study, exhibit capabilities to maintain a self and a self-identity through the consumption of privatized activities, in conjunction with their personal communities. Consumer agency, in terms of empowerment, creativity, and control, highlights the significance of ‘others’ to the realisation and attainment of individuality, expressed within personal community construction. In absence of direct marketplace interaction, autopoiesis can be a tenable outcome through the mutual exchange processes of intimacy and care inherent in the dynamics of personal community membership. Table 7.1 overleaf looks at care in respect of the three models, medical, social and consumer response that define perceptions essentially of the marketplace towards disability (see section 2.8). The concept of care has been addressed in a similar fashion and it is only in relation to the consumer response model that agency in terms of empowerment, creativity and control can be truly realised. The shifting balance of power in favour of the home confined consumer is as a consequence of such discourses of care and the ability for realising a relationship culture.
Table: 7.1 Model of Care

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Medical Model of Care</th>
<th>Social Model of Care</th>
<th>Consumer Response Model of Care</th>
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<tr>
<td>Disabled Consumers</td>
<td>Abelist Consumers</td>
<td>Home Confined Consumers</td>
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<tr>
<td>Domination</td>
<td>Gift</td>
<td>Caring Experiences</td>
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<td>Institutionalization</td>
<td>Generosity</td>
<td>Resistance or Adoption of Care Experiences</td>
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<td>Partial Citizenship</td>
<td>Trust</td>
<td>Choice over acceptance of Care by Whom</td>
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<tr>
<td>Disempowerment</td>
<td>Love</td>
<td>Assert Individuality, Increased Sense of Agency</td>
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<td>Non-Abelist Reality</td>
<td>Commitment</td>
<td>Identity Construction Through Relationships of Care</td>
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<td>Reduction of Agency</td>
<td>Abelist Reality</td>
<td>Empowerment, Creativity and Control</td>
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<tr>
<td>One-Way Flow of Care</td>
<td>One-Way Flow of Care</td>
<td>Two-Way Flow of Care</td>
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<tr>
<td>Diminished Sense of Self</td>
<td>Diminished Sense of Self</td>
<td>Enhanced Sense of Self</td>
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<td>Low or Non-Existent Levels Of Wellbeing Experienced</td>
<td>Intermittent Levels of Wellbeing Experienced</td>
<td>Enhanced Levels of Wellbeing Experienced</td>
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<tr>
<td>Non-existent Relationship</td>
<td>Symbiotic Relationship</td>
<td>First Amongst Equals Relationship</td>
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Source: Author’s Own

Personal communities can help empower the individual especially in periods of uncertainty and vulnerability by providing a supporting framework for ongoing construction of self and of identity. The personal community reflects ability for self-choice for creativity, and for individuality. Autopoiesis is reinforced by the consumption of a personal community. Indeed those deemed marginalized and socially excluded, and often invisible, are seen to benefit from the construction of a personal community in terms of wellbeing, welfare, and feelings of empowerment.

An underlying but no less important concern for the home confined consumers in this study is their enforced removal from independent living to institutionalized living, and, as a result the need to construct, manage and maintain a personal community, is undoubtedly of major concern.

Figure 7.1 (overleaf) shows the importance of the personal community in attaining marketplace diffusion for an identity otherwise in danger of erosion. The two way
flow of care between home confined consumer and their personal community builds a network of strong relationships imperative in defining individualism and self. The diffusion of such an identity back into the external marketplace is in corroboration with the significant others that compose the personal community. This marketplace interaction is fed back into the eco-system of care and the cycle begins again. The eco-system of care provides a nurturing culture for an identity that can become fragmented in times of uncertainty and dispossession. The concept of care is that mediating material or possession that provides a basis for ongoing identity (re)construction and has the ability to dispel myths pertaining to the positioning of disability.

The concluding chapter, chapter eight, will outline the main contributions to emerge from the research.

**Figure 7.1 Consumer Response Model of Care**
Chapter Eight: Conclusions

8.1 Introduction

This final chapter outlines the main contributions to emerge from the research. The contributions are in three main areas. First, findings contribute to knowledge and understanding of home confined consumers; secondly, they contribute to consumer research more generally in relation to special possession consumption and identity; and thirdly, there is a methodological contribution arising from the use of radical constructivism. Each of these contributions will be discussed in turn. Finally the limitations of the research and suggestions for extending the research will be presented.

8.2 Contributions to Knowledge and Understanding of Home Confined consumers

At a contextual level, the primary purpose of this thesis was to gain a deeper understanding of home confined consumers and their consumption behaviour. This study has shown that identity (re)construction amongst home confined consumers is an active, complex and nuanced process whereby earlier lives and current situations are interconnected through possessions. Dittmar (1992: 32) comments that, “material possessions have a profound symbolic significance for their owners, as well as for other people and the symbolic meanings of our belongings are an integral feature of expressing our own identity and perceiving the identity of others.” The sheer efforts that home confined consumers make to maintain their visibility and their links with past lives, reveals that as consumers they are far from damaged, feeble, passive and dependent as is often assumed (Murphy, 1990; Phillips, 1990). Indeed, it could be argued that these largely hidden consumers work harder and more purposively than other consumers at making themselves visible.

8.2.1 Resisting the Medical Model

The legacy of the medical model perceives disabled people as "disempowered victims" with "resource deficits" (Lee et al., 1999: 230). Access to contemporary consumer culture makes few allowances for disabled consumers as Chouinard (1997: 380) states, “Abelism entails a way of being that takes mobility, thinking, speech, and
the senses for granted, and which includes largely ‘unconscious’ aversion to people and bodies that remind us that the able-bodied norm is an ideal.” However, if agency is defined as a person’s capacity for action in their interests (Peñaloza, 2004), then the consumption activities of the home confined consumers in this study can be interpreted as acts of agency since they involve autonomous consumer decision making and, hence, are performing activities associated with ableism.

Discussions on consumer agency tend to consider how consumer agency impacts on the marketing system at large (Holt, 2002). However, such an emphasis tends to ignore the impacts of agency at the level of the individual; the home confined in this instance. Agency can have a significant impact on individual lives. The underlying motives driving special possession consumption lie in maintaining an independent lifestyle and realising an ableist identity that challenges stereotypes of disability. Home confined consumers employ a variety of consumption practices that are aimed at making the best of their non-ableist situation. Thus, the most obvious impact of their agency may be evident within the private sphere.

It is unlikely that the small acts of agency carried out by home confined consumers will radically challenge the dominance of the medical model. Home confined consumers act based on what they perceive to be appropriate to their consumption context and are effective in securing individual objectives of ableism and identity (re)construction in absence of direct marketplace socialization. Improved feelings of empowerment and wellbeing usually result from such small acts of consumption. Consequently, the importance of these acts of agency for individual ‘families’ (home confined consumer and personal community) should not be understated.

Disabled recipients of care, be they male or female, live ‘tragic’ lives (Oliver, 1990) ontologically doomed to a reduction of agency. Thomas (2001: 55) states, “whole areas of disability experience, and thus of disabelism, are eclipsed because they are located in the private domain of life.” The private space in which the concept of care is expended between home confined consumer and their personal community, is perceived as one in which institutional confinement, limited social engagement, partial citizenship, disempowerment and exclusion flourish (Imrie, 2001). However, the findings from this research suggest that recipients of care can develop and grow.
within their private spaces and, importantly, that discourses of care can foster relationships and communal ties. Additionally, the flow of care can be two way, rather than in one direction only. Disability activists have often conceptualised care in negative ways, as technologies of domination (Fox, 2000). Even in this research, there was some evidence of this in Jay's case where professional carers were employed. Furthermore, all of the cases in this research were anxious to perform a level of abelism that would keep institutional care at bay.

At the same time, the prevailing conceptualisation of care in this research was much more positive, and this was referred to as an ecosystem of care (figure 7.1) in chapter seven. Despite 'technologies of domination', the medical model of disability and its associated 'care for' assumptions, home confined consumers can offer some resistance. This gives meaning to Hughes et al.'s (2005: 262) comment “identity or self arises through engagement with dominant norms-'technologies of domination' and these may be resisted or adopted in the context of both an 'aesthetics of existence' and a code of ethics.” Specifically, the autonomous decision-making capabilities expressed by the home confined consumers provide the potential to (re)construct identities through individual discourses of care. The eco-system of care provides a nurturing culture for ongoing identity (re)construction; it also has the capacity to dispel myths of disability. Foucault is considered to subscribe to the “human-beings-as-manifestations-of-discourse” perspective, yet he also implied that, given the right circumstances, human agents are capable of critically analysing the discourses that frame their lives, and also to claim or resist them such that they are “simultaneously constructed by discourses... (and use them) ... for their own purposes” (Burr, 2002: 121-2).

8.2.2 Consumer Agency

Discussions on consumer agency tend to consider how consumer agency impacts on, or influences, the marketing system at large (for example, Holt, 2002). Such an emphasis neglects how such agency affects the perpetrator at an individual level. If agency is carried out in the interests of the individual, its impact on that person and their personal space should not be neglected. In the case of the home confined consumer, agency can have a significant impact on individual lives. The underlying
motives driving special possession consumption lie in securing an independent lifestyle, realising an abelistic identity to reduce perceived negative associations of disability, securing survival, and reducing marginalization. Given that the acts of agency exhibited by home confined consumers have transformatory potential, their impact should be understood. A discussion of the impact of agency on a more micro level in terms of its impact on the perpetrator will follow. Home confined consumers employ a variety of consumption practices that are aimed at making the best of their non-abelist situation. As such, the most obvious impact of their agency may be evident within the private sphere.

8.2.3 Agency, in the Private Space

Some previous research has also been pessimistic regarding the affects of agency in the private sphere. For example, Willis' (1977) study on how working class kids end up with working class jobs demonstrated how cultural processes lead to the maintenance and reproduction of the social order. Conversely, the argument put forward here is that agency can have a positive influence on people’s lives. Although on a macro level, home confined consumers’ agency is likely to make little difference, the impact of action however, will be more evident on community, family and individual levels. As such there is scope for transformative action within more narrowly defined spheres.

8.2.4 Public Agency, Private Agency

It is unlikely that the small acts of agency carried out by home confined consumers will radically change the marketing culture. However, the aim of such consumption behaviour is not to alter or challenge the marketing system and its dominance. Rather, these consumers simply want to alleviate the hardships they endure given their non-abelist perception in the marketplace. Home confined consumers act based on what they perceive to be appropriate to their consumption context and are effective in securing individual objectives of abelism and identity (re)construction in absence of direct marketplace socialization. Improved feelings of empowerment and wellbeing generally result from such small acts of agency. Consequently, the
importance of these acts of agency for individual ‘families’ (home confined consumer and personal community) should not be understated.

In some areas, there has been a blurring of the distinction between public and private spheres. The expansion of the market has resulted in its increased contribution to tasks that were once confined to the private domain (Firat, 1987). To illustrate, the shift in provision of care to non-kin and friends has increased, the marketisation of care is evidenced by the growing numbers of health trusts and other institutions where disabled consumers can receive functional caring and medical aids. The concept of care is no longer carried out invisibly in the home, but is increasingly commodified to take advantage of marketing opportunities. This shift away from predominantly kin and family discourses of care has brought care into the public domain where it is regarded as a natural development and one that can be addressed by the hegemony of the marketplace.

The interaction between structure and agency is evident in relation to the consumption strategies employed by home confined consumers, the marketplace providing many of the resources that are used to frame such strategies. This follows the belief of Giddens’ (1984) structuration theory which suggested that the rules and resources drawn upon in the production and reproduction of social action are at the same time the means of system reproduction. Many of the consumption strategies afforded the home confined consumers could not be realised without the presence of marketplace members (personal community) to diffuse their identity into the external marketplace and secure an ongoing identity project. The personal community directly interact and operate in the marketer’s domain; however, this does not mean that the market should be regarded in a deterministic way. As Burr (2002: 121) noted, even Foucault who is often said to follow the “human-beings-as-manifestations-of-discourse” perspective implied that given the right circumstances human agents are capable of critically analysing the discourses that frame their lives, and to claim or resist them depending on the changes they want to bring about. The person can thus be “simultaneously constructed by discourses and use it for their own purposes,” (pg. 122). Home confined consumers use internal marketplace discourse in conjunction with external marketplace discourse (personal community)
in ways that best suit their interests, indicating the duality between marketplace structure and consumer agency.

The linkages between the public and private spheres are therefore evident demonstrating how considering one sphere at the exclusion of the other does not provide a full account of the impact of consumer agency. For home confined consumers, the largest impact of agency is found within the context of their daily lives making it a valid area of research interest.

8.2.5 Restrained Consumption

There is a link between special possession consumption and the experiencing of consumer agency. Special possession consumption is a realisable outcome for the home confined consumer, primarily through their personal communities. They are removed from external marketplace interactions (Dobscha, 1998), but as consumers they seek inclusion within the marketing system (Peñaloza and Price, 1993) in terms of perceived abelism. Home confined consumers actively strive to achieve visibility and abelism within their special space and are productive consumers in their context of consumption. The findings suggest that home confined consumers actively strive to achieve social recognition and acceptance as a full-functioning consumer in their own right. Home confined consumers’ limited physicality and visibility in the external marketplace, places constraints on their ability to consume abelism. The consumption strategies they put in place are aimed at realising abelism, (re)constructing identity, and securing independent survival given the restraints they labour under.

Disability campaigners argue that persons with disabilities should be empowered to live as independently as possible and that physical (and even cognitive) limitations should not be barriers to expressing preferences and making decisions about how they conduct their lives (Benjamin, 2001). Special possessions can take on ‘special’ meaning when considered in the home confined context. They allow for the development of an ongoing sense of self and identity, a relationship or link with the past. Importantly, they also allow the home confined consumer to perform autonomous consumer tasks open to able bodied consumers, for example, consumer
decision making. The performance of these autonomous consumer tasks blurs one of the key distinctions between abelsim and non-abelism (Barnes, 1991). Thus, special possession consumption affords home confined consumers a means to negotiate societal perceptions of disability as that of dependency and passivity (Philips, 1990; Oliver, 1990).

The rituals and regimes of care initiated by the home confined consumers and realised through ongoing personal community management, are instrumental in these consumers experiencing agency and wellbeing. The opportunity to manage these rituals and regimes of care with the help of personal community members gives the home confined consumer achievable goals, decision-making capabilities, and performing capabilities, all associated with the possession of an autonomous self. Thus, the prevailing discourse of the medical model of care begins a shift towards the consumer response model of care (figure 7.1).

Conversely, home confined consumers' agency tends to be carried out invisibly in respondents' private places, for example, in terms of hidden meanings attached to goods and special possessions. Indeed, in some cases, such as illicit consumption, respondents fear such action becoming public knowledge because of the consequences that could arise. To illustrate this point, the case of Jay and David's cannabis consumption can be cited. Jay has the added fear that such knowledge in the public domain could seriously jeopardise his structure of care and his ability to remain in an independent lifestyle. Given the serious implications legally and medically for both these home confined consumers in acquiring agency it is understandable that there is a micro-macro divide between the intended results of action. Consumer consumption is often aimed at changing something at a macro level, with many consumer movements seeking ideological and cultural change. Alternatively, the agency of home confined consumers is primarily aimed at changing everyday life perceptions of disability in terms of realising abelism within the confined context. In addition to the realisation of abelism, private special possession consumption experiences also realise episodes of positive wellbeing. This demonstrates that there are varying ways of exhibiting and classifying consumer agency.
8.3 Agency in a Postmodern Marketplace

Firat and Venkatesh's (1995) liberatory postmodernism suggests that consumption processes have emancipatory potential and focused on micro-emancipatory rather than grand emancipatory projects. Similar to the writings of De Certeau (1984), this perspective implies that the potential for agency begins within the context of daily life. Each act of consumer choice, even if practiced within the context of everyday consumption, helps consumers to construct both their subjective and social worlds.

The postmodernist focus on fragmentation puts an end to the dominance of any one "regime of truth" (Firat and Venkatesh, 1995). Foucault also insisted that we should speak of "regimes of truth" where one regime is no more correct than another (Burr, 2002). As Firat and Venkatesh (1995: 243) suggested, "the micropractices of everyday life, discontinuities, pluralities, chaos, instabilities, constant changes, fluidities, and paradoxes better define the human condition." A postmodern perspective then advocates the acceptance of diversity and implies that deviations from accepted norms should not result in social exclusion. As Firat and Venkatesh (1995: 252) suggested "postmodern consumption is a movement toward the deconstruction of the marketing organization, its capillarization, that is, its diffusion into the hands of each and every consumer." It is through the subversion of the market that consumers release their emancipatory potential and the home confined consumers in this study exhibit many instances of such emancipation in meeting the challenges of everyday life from a constrained consumption context.

Consequently, a postmodern marketplace accepts and endorses consumer agency. It is ironic then that the debate surrounding consumer agency and whether or not consumers are inside or outside the marketplace follows a modernist perspective (Thompson, 2004). In a postmodern marketplace there is no sharp demarcation line that separates the market and consumers' emancipated private places. This study has shown that consumers can be outside of the market acting in accordance to their own cultural and contextual perspectives, but still realising abelism and an identity that constitutes full market integration. As such, the postmodern market is also consistent with Giddens' (1991) theory of structuration in that it recognises the duality between structure and agency.
The cases in this study constructed and created their own realities in absence of
direct marketplace interaction. Although these home confined consumers’
recognised the dominance and importance of the consumer society, it is not from this
perspective that they find meaning in life. Those who do not have direct access to a
consumption lifestyle may be forced to find alternative “regimes of truth” to the
marketplace. However, the need to dispel myths of disability propagated by the
prevalence of medical model thinking in the marketplace, serve to alienate home
confined consumers from experiencing wellbeing in the structures of the external
marketplace. This indicates that there has not yet been a complete transition to
postmodernism. The ability however to create and experience episodes of wellbeing,
in absence of marketplace interaction, through shared consumption experiences, is
realised in this home confined context. The internal socialization process in play in
the constrained context of this study, only serves to support alternative regimes of
truth that are subjectively constructed in corroboration with the significant others
that are self constructions of our experiential reality. The methodological approach
of radical constructivism, adopted in this study, acknowledges the importance of
others in the realisation of autopoiesis (Maturana and Varela, 1980). This third order
coupling essentially determines the subjective construction of the self and of the self-
identity. Everyone’s positioning in the world is that little bit different, radical
constructivism understands these differences but fully recognises that the self can
only be constructed from the actuality of the consumption experiences. As such the
special possession consumption experiences discussed in this research are truly lived
experiences emanating from a subjective experiential reality.

The medical model of disability continues to prioritise one position in favour of the
opposing position. Such a distinction values productive and able bodies and
devalues unproductive and disabled bodies, especially in relation to performing
capabilities. It does not recognise the diversity of individual circumstances. It is
precisely this tendency to view disabled consumers as a homogeneous group that
results in stereotypes and stigmatisation. To illustrate, instead of adopting care from
the medical model perspective, home confined consumers have successfully initiated
the consumer response model of care to address their individualistic needs. The
medical model of disability only serves to further isolate those consumers whose
diversity of consumption activities renders them outside the boundary of normalcy.
Home confined consumers are, through the consumption of the concepts of identity, able to move away from the constraints of the medical model and assume a position that is more reflective of the social model perspective (figure 5.4) in the internal marketplace that constitutes their socialization process. The ability to resist the medical model is reflective of the ability to realise special possession consumption.

Given the level of diversity in today’s society and the increasing number of people who are not members of the dominant social system, the postmodernist perspective provides a truer representation of reality. It is evident that the recognition of diversity needs to be further endorsed by both marketers and public policy makers. The concept of the marketplace and the acquisition of an identity stemming from such socialization practices perhaps should be visited again in these postmodern times.

This study provides a new geographical context for the study of home confined consumers; disability studies infrequent as they are, originate from an American perspective. Given that the environment can impact on consumer vulnerability (Darley and Johnson, 1985), it is important to consider differing aspects in relation to the consumption process. This current research explores the experiences of home confined consumers within the UK, it should be noted that no comparable study exists from an American perspective within the consumer research discipline. The marginalization experienced as a consequence of this confined context supports the invisibility of such consumers to marketers and researchers alike. Social exclusion for this group of consumers’ means exactly that, excluded from a socialization process and from attaining inclusivity in a consumer driven society.

Despite the absence of marketplace socialization, home confined consumers are adept at realising social interactions that reflect their consumption needs and context, both in terms of marketplace and personal community management. The ability for home confined consumers to secure an abelist identity in deference to a marketplace perception of non-abelism further supports a radical constructivist approach as the means to capturing a more personal way of knowing. As radical constructivism advocates, it is the purely subjective consumption experiences that construct the...
lived reality irrespective of whether it matches an external one, which supports its adoption in this study.

8.4 Contributions to Consumer Research

As well as contributions to the knowledge and understanding of home confined consumers; there are also more general contributions to consumer research in relation to identity, special possession consumption, personal communities, bodies and rituals, and wellbeing.

8.4.1 Implications for Identity

The micro perspective on consumption behaviour in this research does not lend itself especially to macro generalizability; however, it extends our currently limited knowledge and understanding of consumption constraints (Baker, 2006); in this case constrained consumption contexts. The importance of having access to the marketplace for ongoing identity construction is widely recognised; Bauman (1998: 26) states that, "The roads to self-identity, to a place in society, to life lived in a form that is recognizable as that of meaningful living; all require daily visits to the marketplace." However, the context explored in this study is constrained by the absence of direct marketplace interaction by the key consumer protagonists; the home confined. Thus, identity construction has to fit with the current context of the individual consumer, their subjective experiences, rather than the external marketplace.

The perception that the experiencing of consumption constraints inevitably leads to the non-realisation of societal inclusivity obviously stems from an abelist perspective and the prevalence of medical model thinking. The absolute view that interaction and socialization in the external marketplace are fundamental to the ability to realise an identity is challenged within the context of this study. Home confined consumers in this study have shown much evidence of performing capabilities synonymous with consumer autonomy and as such realising abelism in a perceived non-abelist context.
The episodes of a micro-emancipatory nature in terms of consumer wellbeing and consumer welfare being experienced within this constrained context impact positively on the ability for securing ongoing identity construction. These home confined consumers narratives of emancipation can go some way to inform thinking on a more macro level with regards the perception of disability. Implications for policy makers and those providing care within the community for those home confined is discussed in 8.6. The issues addressed in this section have arisen as a direct result of the research study.

8.4.2 Contribution to Special Possession Literature

Consumer research has emphasized the home as the locus of the extended self (Hill, 1991; Hurdley, 2006). Indeed, previous studies concerning special possession consumption are located in the context of the home. Tian and Belk (2005) challenged this focus with a study that explored the workplace as a context in which to extend the self. For the home confined consumer the workplace (a place of productivity) and home environment (a place of being and extended self) are as one. The need to display productivity (physicality and abelism) is a factor in home confined consumption. When one space serves two contrasting functions, that of work and play (public and private), it becomes more difficult for the home confined consumer to display both the ‘doing’ and the ‘being’ individual, simultaneously (Bourdieu, 1994). Yet this can be achieved as the home confined consumer works at making their special possession consumption activities and experiences visible and public (to personal community) and private (meaningful to self). This is a potentially fruitful area for research as more people work from their homespace.

Disability campaigners argue that persons with disabilities should be empowered to live as independently as possible and that physical (and even cognitive) limitations should not be barriers to expressing preferences and making decisions about how they conduct their lives (Benjamin, 2001). Special possessions can take on ‘special’ meaning when considered in the home confined context; they allow for the development of an ongoing sense of self and identity, a relationship or link with the past and the ability to perform autonomous consumer tasks synonymous with an abelist perception. The performance of these autonomous consumer tasks blurs one
of the key distinctions between abelsim and non-abelism (Barnes, 1991). Thus, special possession consumption affords home confined consumers a means to negotiate the negative societal perceptions of dependency and passivity (Philips, 1990; Oliver, 1990) prevalent in medical model thinking.

Consumption is an integral part of the social need to relate to other people and to have mediating materials for relating to them. The mediating materials, possessions, and more importantly, special possessions, provide linkages for interaction and social exchange (Belk, 1988; Douglas, 2002; Kleine et al., 1995). As mediating materials, special possessions enhance the possibilities for communication with personal community members interacting in the home confined space. Additionally, the acquisition and dispossession of these possessions help further to ‘normalise’ the home confined context; it is similar to any other in-home consumer decision making and behaviour. Material possessions can be used to strengthen the consumer’s need for uniqueness. However, for those already experiencing difference from other people, possession consumption can normalise an identity where ‘uniqueness’ is often perceived negatively. Thus, this may be equally applicable to other disadvantaged and socially excluded consumers.

Price et al. (2000) studied older consumers’ dispossession of special possessions and found that elderly consumers employ particular tactics to emotionally instil feelings of value within their personal community members. To illustrate, passing on a special possession to a grandchild can make the recipient feel special and, thus, can strengthen the emotional ties between the people involved. In this study, there were many examples where home confined consumers delegated or simply encouraged personal community members to undertake certain tasks. For example, one of Jay’s sisters’ looks after his financial affairs and another can be trusted to attend to the welfare of his fish collection. In David’s community one of his friends cares for his garden and another prepares special dishes for his freezer. The allocation and performance of specialised tasks, being selected or trusted to perform them, as well as the shared consumption experiences involved in their performance, all help strengthen the communal ties and relationships. This is equally important in consumer communities more generally (Pahl and Spencer, 2005).
In conclusion then, a physical visibility in the marketplace is not a necessary requirement for the realisation of the identity project, rather, it is the ability to draw from possession consumption those elements or essences of mobility, physicality, and intellectuality that harness such kinetic, 'visible' energy. Displaying abelism equates with inclusiveness in a consumer culture, and this dilution or blurring of boundaries between abelist and non-abelist, serves to challenge, the perception of non-abelism as one of exclusion and marginality. This role of special possessions in realising abelist attachments is illustrated in Figure 8.1. The home confined consumers special possession consumption experiences as discussed in the findings chapters have clearly shown that the ability to perform autonomous consumer tasks and realise personal agency is, as a consideration of such a consumption attachment. The home confined consumer can exhibit an abelist identity through the consumption of special possessions that offer such attachments that reflect abelism. Identity construction for the home confined consumer is, as a result of their ability to consume special possession, place and abelist attachments in a way that fits with their subjective experiential reality. The additional attachment, abelist, considered here in the home confined context, is central to the realisation of an identity project and to the suppression of a negative non-abelist perspective. Figure 8.1 illustrates the movement back and forth from the marketplace of an identity that is constructed from the attachments inherent in consumption experiences.

**Figure 8.1 Consumption Attachments of Identity**
8.4.3 Contributions for Personal Communities

Consumer researchers have recognised the importance of community to self-identity through sustained social interaction. Wellman (2001: 227) suggests that personal communities are “networks of interpersonal ties that provide sociability, support, information, a sense of belonging and social identity.” The home confined consumers in this study highlight the importance of a personal community in securing an ongoing identity project.

Personal communities allow for fruitful exchange relationships to be created and developed, and are the closest we can get to postmodern community life, as Delanty (2003: 187) suggests, “it is neither a form of social integration nor one of meaning, but is an open-ended system of communication about belonging.” Personal communities, considered a special possession in the context of this study, are used to satisfy psychological needs such as creating one’s self-concept, reinforcing and expressing self-identity, and allowing one to differentiate oneself and assert one’s individuality (Belk, 1988; Kleine et al., 1995). To illustrate, Jay and David can retain a socio-historic patterning of consumption in relation to companion animals, Barbara and Gloria can continue their love of gardening, as a consequence of such caring relationships.

The home confined consumers in this study exhibit performing capabilities to maintain a self-identity with the help of their personal community. Consumer agency, in terms of empowerment, creativity, and control, is realised as a consequence of such relationships of care. “Caring expresses ethically significant ways in which we matter to each other,” (Bowden, 1997: 1). In absence of direct marketplace interaction, identity (re)construction is a tenable outcome through the mutual exchange processes of intimacy and care inherent in the dynamics of personal community relationships.

In conclusion, personal communities can help empower individuals in periods of uncertainty and vulnerability, they reflect, “ability for self-choice, ability for creativity, and ability for individuality,” (Downey and Catterall, 2007a: 185). Indeed those deemed marginalized, socially excluded and often invisible, are seen to
benefit from personal community relationships, in terms of experiencing positive wellbeing, and associated feelings of empowerment. Of course an underlying concern for home confined consumers is their removal from independent living to institutionalized living, and, as a result the need to construct, manage and maintain a personal community is undoubtedly of major concern. As Kellerhals et al. (2002: 225) state, “It is through the internal, relational dynamic, the management of a private space, and the way in which the group recognizes and assigns a distinct place to the person that the processes of identity construction take place.” As more consumer researchers begin to focus on vulnerable and disadvantaged groups of consumers, under Transformatory Consumer Research (TCR), the study of personal communities offers rich potential to theorise and research empowerment.

8.4.4 Contributions to Body Literature

Postmodern consumer culture highlights the significance of the body as a personal resource and as a social symbol, which gives off messages about a person’s self-identity (Belk, 1988). Thompson and Hirschman (1995: 150) talk about the “profound experiential significance that results from the body’s being a visible object with culturally salient meanings,” and that consumers are socialized to discipline and normalize their bodies in line with cultural ideals. The stigmatizing of non-abelist consumers and disabled bodies as diseased, inferior and lacking mental capacities and capabilities (Barnes et al., 1999) leads to an underdeveloped understanding of the interrelationships between non-abelist bodily functions and broader socio-cultural values and practices. Shilling (1993: 9) suggests that any theory of human agency or action requires an account of the body, that “acting people are acting bodies”. The highly disciplined regimes of bodily care expressed by the home confined consumers show the overwhelming need to suppress negative associations and retain a positive identity-value.

Home confined consumers are restrained in their ability to access the external marketplace, but, it could be argued that they have created internal marketplaces that fit their consumption context. As Marks (1999: 129) notes “the body adopts a particular habitual way of relating to the environment.” The body itself creates a site, its own marketplace, for interaction and socialization, a place for ongoing
identity construction (Downey and Catterall, 2006). To illustrate, Barbara and
Gloria determine who enters their special space and the bodily criteria that underpins
such access. Jay’s survival is dependent on the effective management of his highly
disciplined regimes and rituals of body care. Consumer culture latches on to the
prevalent self-preservationist conception of the body, which “encourages the
individual to adopt instrumental strategies to combat deterioration and decay... and
combines it with the notion that the body is a vehicle of pleasure and self-
expression” (Featherstone et al., 1991: 170).

This study challenges the stereotypes of the disabled body as powerless and passive.
On the contrary, the home confined consumers maintain and develop their identities
and independent survival, in their self-created marketspaces, as a result of the action
and discipline given to concerns of the body. Rook (1985) suggests a sense of self
comes from some form of bodily consideration. The regulation of the body in
postmodernity has increased even though ‘freedom’ over one’s body has expanded
(Varga, 2005) but this is as a consequence of the increased use of symbols and
images that emphasise the individual or individualism. The internalized marketspace
of home confined consumers operates in absence of the social marketplace
dimension, but it nevertheless functions as a result of such external activity (via the
personal community). For the home confined consumer the challenge to create a
subjective experiential reality that fits the restrained consumption context can be
achieved through creative consumption behaviour. The importance of the body
cannot be underestimated in the consumption process and researchers such as Myers
(1992) remark that the body remains the last element of individual control over one’s
own self and this is further supported by Wood (1998: 59) “The shaping of the flesh
reflects the nature of the spirit.”

Postmodern culture can best be compared to chaos and it is not surprising therefore
that the individual who is living under the pressures of everyday life and in value-
uncertainty turns to the concern of his or her body. As a result, Varga (2005: 231)
feels “that the body has become sacred, if not “the sacred” but at least “a sacred.”
The preoccupation with bodily consumption for the home confined consumer is
understandable. A key fear is that any relaxation of rituals and body regimes would
result in institutionalized care and, thus, identity dispossession. The ability of the
home-confined consumer to delay the process of bodily disease and decay and retain a valued presence is realised through body as “a sacred.” This further challenges stereotypes of disability as one of passivity and powerlessness.

In conclusion, the regimes of body care to achieve a visible ‘abelism’ are not purely aesthetic concerns but originate from a real desire to harness physicality and self-power, to realise an identity and experience wellbeing in deference to their perceived lived context. The body becomes the ‘site of production’ for the home confined consumer, and it is the consumption experiences and performing capabilities played out in this internal marketspace that will ultimately determine marketplace perceptions of disability. Ultimately the establishment of ‘independent’ living is deemed crucial for long-term survival in the home confined context. The rituals employed to secure these positive outcomes and heighten wellbeing are self-created but they fit with the internal reality of the home confined consumer (Allen, 2002). Since consumer researchers tend to focus on the aesthetics of the body, it might be useful to consider also the body as a site of production.

8.4.5 Contributions for Wellbeing

In terms of wellbeing, the bulk of consumer behaviour research has focused on material wellbeing as opposed to the non-materialistic components of wellbeing (Neerguard and Venkatesh, 1989). In a consumer society the ability to consume material goods can be an indicator of personal happiness (Ahuvia and Friedman, 1998; Ger, 1997). Indeed there is a body of work that links possessions to wellbeing (Oropesa, 1995). Ahuvia’s (2005) work on loved objects also demonstrated how possessions might help to create a meaningful life and define the consumer’s identity. However, it has been recognized that wellbeing needs to be conceptualized on a multi-dimensional basis (Lee et al., 2002; Neerguard and Venkatesh, 1989) and this study reveals the importance of emotional aspects of wellbeing.

Personal communities can have a positive impact on consumer wellbeing. In this study, they helped home confined consumers ‘lift barriers’ to consumption. A diminished sense of self and of self-worth is more likely to occur in an environment punctuated with barriers to consumption. Consumer welfare and wellbeing is
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therefore reliant on ability and freedom to consume those possessions that are considered necessary to realize an identity project.

The fluid and subjective nature of wellbeing provides an opportunity to explore different contexts of consumption and to explore the diversity of lived experiences. This study highlights the advantages of regaining former possession consumption behaviour, or episodes of it, through shared communal experiences. Findings suggest that the 'sharing' in, or virtual experiencing of, special possessions provides opportunities to experience positive wellbeing. To illustrate, the communal discourses of care experienced by Jay and David with respect to sharing in companion animal experiences and in cannabis smoking rituals have shown that social ties and emotional bonds have been strengthened with personal community members and feelings of self-value and self-worth enhanced. Future studies could provide further insight into these emotional aspects of wellbeing.

8.5 Methodological Contributions

There is a pressing need to address consumer behaviour that combines historical, sociological, cultural, and political analysis (Murray and Ozanne, 1991). Indeed Denzin (2001) believes that a more radical consumer research agenda can advance this perspective where individuals, "freely determine their needs and desires" (Harms and Kellner, 1991: 65). This study introduced radical constructivism, a new approach to the concept of knowing within the consumer research discipline, to explore the consumption context of home confined consumers. As Von Glasersfeld (1995: 137) suggests, "Constructivism, thus, does not say there is no world and no other people, it merely holds that in so far as we know them, both the world and the others are models that we ourselves construct."

The underlying assumption that these consumers are marginalised, vulnerable, and in some cases difficult to access, accentuates the need for a methodology that is both sensitive to these concerns and does not compound their vulnerability. Bazerman (2001) suggests that the researcher should make recommendations concerning specific consumption practices and consumer choices that embrace lines of action that maximize consumer autonomy. Radical constructivism more than other constructivist psychologies recognises the importance of significant others in the
realisation of a self and of a self-identity. Its position of knowing with regards individualism and autopoiesis emphasizes self-construction is only realisable through truly subjective consumption experiences. The home confined consumers in this study construct an experiential reality that is of their making, their personal communities reflect and support that subjective experiential reality and the accompanying consumption experiences that are realisable as a result of such third order couplings.

Radical Constructivism’s focus on individual problem solving or adaptation reflects the shifting context of the home confined consumer from an abelist to a non-abelist positioning. As Von Glasersfeld (1984) suggests, it is radical, “because it breaks with convention and develops a theory of knowledge in which knowledge does not reflect an objective, ontological reality but exclusively an ordering and organization of a world constituted by our experience” (pg. 24). In this way radical constructivism might usefully be employed to address similar circumstances, for example, the theft or loss of possessions, transitions into poverty, say, as a result of unemployment, or transitions from health to ill health.

In conclusion, the shift in focus within consumer research to address the lived experience and to explore the experiential reality of those marginalized in society calls for the employment of a methodological approach that considers the context of the study crucial to capturing the lived experience. It is about how people adapt and solve their problems through their consumption experiences that are the concern of this research. The need to utilize creative methods, when researching diverse groups, should be given due consideration. Reinharz (1992) suggests, in creating an environment of social support one should be listening to people in their private space so that ultimately they can be empowered and transformed.

8.6 Implications for Policy Makers and Community Health Trusts

This study has highlighted certain issues of home confinement in relation to the concept of care. Home confined consumers in receipt of ‘care’, usually are the most vulnerable, in terms of diminished physicality and perceived powerlessness. The
focus on communal relationships in this study has shown them to be central to issues of ableism and consumer welfare. In consideration of these findings it would appear that those consumers heavily dependent on regimes of care should be afforded the chance of exercising decision-making capabilities regarding selection of such individuals. The 'giver' and 'receiver' of care enter into a particularly sensitive, emotionally charged relationship, and particular duties of 'care', could in some circumstances, further aggravate an already vulnerable situation. To illustrate, Jay, as the most 'extreme' case of home confinement in this study, indicated the need to be comfortable, relaxed, and in control, of all his care experiences. The more the boundary between receiver and giver of care is blurred the less chance there will be to experience low wellbeing. The medical model of care takes no account of the lived experience of the vulnerable consumer; health trusts and community care groups should address these gaps in understanding and place those consumers at the centre of all decision-making strategies.

Functional caring activities for the most part are carried out by females. The male presence is all too often not in existence within these discourses of care. To illustrate, Jay has only over a twenty-six year period of confinement had one male carer and this is a relatively new addition. The predominance of the female presence in relation to the concept of care needs to be reviewed. For those male home confined consumers the interaction and ability to cultivate relationships with other male carers can only increase the opportunities to experience subjective wellbeing and a two way flow of care.

Those consumers not in a position to 'buy' extra time from functional carers are even more susceptible to experiencing low wellbeing. To illustrate, the ability of Jay to 'hire' carers to attend to private consumption activities are an essential part of Jay being able to experience power and control. Jay is financially comfortable; this gives him opportunities for autonomous decision-making capabilities. Findings have shown that these consumption activities have been instrumental in Jay taking control and managing his life course.

Consumers who experience vulnerability, in whatever guise it takes, try to engage in activities that will secure personal control. These cognitive, emotional and
behavioural coping strategies (Heckhausen and Schultz, 1995) can help assist in acts of consumer agency (Penaloza and Price, 1993). However, dependence on external sources of care is unavoidable, findings highlight Jay’s ability to manage these difficult times and episodes, by emotionally removing himself from the physical situation. Incidences of feigning sleep or not being hungry at ‘specified’ meal times were measures taken by Jay to disguise his inability to manage such situations. Rather than openly offending particular community members, Jay would indicate that family members were calling by and there would be no reason for them to have to stay and ‘turn him’. These sometimes-drastic measures to alleviate feelings of vulnerability show the importance of building a community of care that expects the vulnerable or marginalized consumer to be a part of it. Community Health Trusts responsible for such functions of care should consider that individual contexts demand individual discourses of care, to fully address individual consumer welfare and issues of wellbeing.

This study draws attention to the incorporation of technology, not as a luxury, but as a necessity in doing everyday life. To illustrate, Jay incorporated technology that enabled him to extend the self (Belk, 1988) and expand and strengthen his personal community ties and relationships. The ability for creativity (Jay’s life history) and ‘shared’ consumption experiences (photographs and stories of kin adventures, writing short plays for small groups to enact out on a Friday or Saturday night) are but a few of the experiences that the ownership of a computer gave to his life. The important fact however with regards this consumption experience of Jay lies in the self-authorisation of such a consumption activity. Those deemed responsible for Jay’s welfare did not explore the possibilities that such an acquisition could bring to doing daily life. It was through Jay’s information seeking, persistence, and determination to engage with, and master, such technology, that led him to become proficient in this medium. Jay has realised a higher level of abelism and visibility as a consequence of virtual communication. By contrast, David, who would be considered more physically able to interact in such a medium, has no access to communicating by e-mail or surfing the net. David is considered disenfranchised and disadvantaged through his inability to secure such experiences. David had, prior to home confinement, attended a government training course to acquire computer
skills. David was left with a keyboard and for the foreseeable future no resources to buy a computer.

These two individual scenarios highlight the plight of those invisible to the marketplace. David’s financial restraints and inability to consume, and Jay’s assumed diminished intellect and perceived inability to engage with such consumption, raises issues of consumer welfare and vulnerability. These two cases, Jay and David both welcomed the ability to interact in such a medium but only Jay could realise such a project. Findings illustrate that Jay has experienced episodes of wellbeing and empowerment from such interaction and it would seem reasonable to assume that David would also have benefited from such experiences. The ‘abelist’ perspective demands physicality and an abelism that mirrors societal consumption practices. This study highlights the fact that Jay in his position of ‘extreme’ non-abelism has more potential than David to present an ‘abelist’ self, not only in his internal, but also, in his external marketplace.

8.7 Limitations of the Research

The cases explored in this study represented very different transitions into home confinement. However, the sample might usefully have included case study respondents who moved recently into home confinement. The home confined consumers in this study were drawn from a maturing age group. It would have been interesting to explore the consumption experiences of younger adults. Additionally, it would have been interesting to explore the consumption experiences of consumers who have not had prior experience of the external marketplace. The inclusion of cases from both these groups would provide a more rounded picture of home confined consumption.

Of course, or, indeed, to select respondents of ideal profile, problems of access make it difficult to explore a large number of cases. Further, a lot of time in the initial stages of the research is given over to trust building between the researcher and the researched. The lived experience or the more personal way of knowing cannot be addressed within a researcher driven agenda but has to evolve through ‘immersion’ in the reality of the home confined context.
The study recognised that home confined consumer's consumption behaviour is dependent on personal community relationships. However, this research has addressed the home confined consumers' perspectives. It may have been interesting to explore the perspectives of the personal communities. However, there was a danger that this would have compromised the relationship of trust between the researcher and the researched. It was noted in chapter seven that in some cases respondents try to control interaction between personal community members. They are anxious that they do not become the topic of discussion when personal members meet.

**8.8 Areas for Future Research**

This study explored home confinement within the 'natural' home setting, by contrast those confined within an 'institutionalized' context, where opportunities for possession consumption can be severely restricted (Brownlie and Horne, 1999) offers a comparative setting from which to explore issues of identity, special possession consumption, and consumer welfare.

Disability research to date has focused on the 'architectural' means of achieving 'inclusivity' for those marginalized in society but it does not focus on the transition from abelast to non-abelist consumer. Home confined consumers are not a homogenous population and the individual circumstances of transition afford a fruitful area to explore changes in consumption activity with regards restrained consumption and dispossession.

The importance of personal communities has been illustrated in this study and in particular those members who provide 'functional' care. Future research could explore specifically the role of 'functional' personal community members in terms of their role in consumers' lives. Implications for the wellbeing of the home confined citizen arising from such research warrants discovery for policymaking.

The concept of space considered in terms of home and work space in this study offer a fruitful area of research to explore identity construction when both home and work
are reflected in one space. The rise in those consumers working from home is a new space from which to consider consumption behaviour and the centrality of identity.

The concept of wellbeing within the transformative consumer research agenda has accentuated the need for future studies to enhance understanding in this area. Marginalized and vulnerable consumers offer the opportunity to explore this phenomenon to gain a fuller understanding of the subjective nature of this concept. Research in this area is still quite embryonic and multiple contributions can be made to fill the gaps in understanding within this new arena of consumer research.

8.9 Conclusion

Home confined consumers, given the level of research neglect, are further marginalized by consideration of their invisibility and 'hidden' consumption behaviour, and the disinterest afforded by marketers and consumer researchers alike. The current explorative research has made a number of contributions to the knowledge and understanding of those home confined, as well as contributions to consumer research, especially in relation to identity projects and special possession consumption. However, the paucity of research interest in this aspect of disability and in overall disability studies within the consumer research arena means that many gaps exist in current knowledge, and as such, there remains scope for countless contributions in this area. To address such neglected areas of consumer research, a Transformatory Consumer Research agenda has emerged to highlight such neglected and marginalized populations.
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