Constructing Leather: Professional and Consumer Accounts and
Experiences
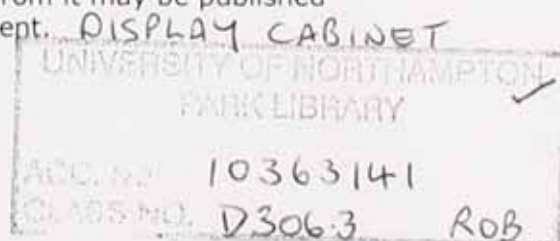
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Abstract

As one of the oldest and most widespread materials, leather has taken a multitude of forms and has accumulated manifold meanings. As will be illustrated, leather-related understandings apply not only to the material itself, but also to the conditions of its production and the wider implications of its uses. The aim of this thesis is to identify and explore patterns of representations of leather and leather objects, and the ways in which they are used in the construction and management of identities.

The thesis begins with a review of theoretical conceptualizations of the relations between material objects and human societies, drawing on psychological, sociological and anthropological literature. It then explores theorisations of identity, with a focus on the construction and management of personal, social and ethical identities in relation to objects and consumer practices. Against this background, and drawing on social constructionist and discursive resources, I conducted an informed exploration into some of the ways in which people relate to leather and leather objects. Two Q methodological studies identified patterns of understandings around leather, firstly as a generic material and then as a personal possession. The findings illustrated how such understandings tapped into current cultural resources, and combined practical and symbolic elements in conveying characterizations of both leather and of the people involved with it as consumers or producers. A series of semi-structured interviews enabled a more in-depth examination of the ways in which leather and leather objects are woven into the construction of professional, cultural, gender and consumer identities, and in conveying particular moral and political viewpoints. The analysis investigated how depictions of leather by participants with a professional involvement functioned to promote the material itself and the manufacturing industry as essential for the wellbeing of society at large, on historical, cultural or environmental grounds. Additionally, I examined the manner in which leather-related consumer practices were used to uphold or challenge cultural representations around work identities, gender roles and subcultural affiliation. Furthermore, I explored how, by drawing on various philosophical, political, economic or moral discourses, respondents constructed the choice of leather as 'green' or ethical.

Overall, the thesis considers how understandings around a material substance such as leather function to (re)produce existing social and cultural representations in the context of everyday work and consumption practices. At the same time, it illuminates the ways in which ethical and environmental debates and concerns are oriented to and incorporated in accounts of individual actions and values.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Why leather?

When I began this research at the University of Northampton, my initial feeling was curiosity regarding the subject area itself: why leather? What is special about leather? In the case of the University, it quickly became clear: Northamptonshire has been traditionally and historically linked with leather. The existence of its shoemakers was documented as early as the 13th century; local manufacturers are on record as supplying boots to Cromwell's army in the English Civil War; Northampton craftsmen and women provided specialist climbing footwear to Sir Edmund Hillary for his Everest ascent in 1953; the first Doc Martens were made by a Northampton-based company, and so on – the association with leather is depicted even on the county's coat of arms (Northamptonshire Leather, 2010). The University of Northampton itself has a strong academic interest in leather: it hosts the Institute for Creative Leather Technologies and has its own tannery on the premises. My visit there, as part of my early research, was a memorable experience, providing me with useful information and novel insights.

It is generally accepted that research endeavours, and knowledge claims in general, are shaped by the interests and values of the researcher (Danziger, 1990; Benton & Craib, 2001; Finlay, 2002; Ramazanoglu & Holland, 2002). In the light of this, I would acknowledge that my approach to the topic, in terms of the design of studies and readings of findings, was influenced by my own expectations and background. In exploring my own assumptions about the topic, I aim to identify some of the "personal alliances that open up some issues and close others down" (Parker, 2005, p. 26). Before I began looking at leather as a topic of research, the word mainly conjured up images of shoes, boots or bags, or of practical, sturdy coats. I saw it mainly as a material substance, and less as something steeped in symbolism. Leather would principally be about objects that had the advantages of comfort and longevity, with a bag or a coat guaranteeing many years of wear or use. Durability was something particularly valued as I grew up in Romania, a country which, until 1989, was part of the Eastern bloc. The scarcity of consumer goods under state socialism was a matter of common knowledge, and a feature that is considered to have played a crucial role in the eventual fall of many socialist regimes (Aldridge, 2003; Reid, 2007). In practical terms, the relative lack of consumer products often meant that items would be held on to, irrespective of fashion, mended if torn or broken, and often passed on to the next generation. In this sense, leather objects constituted a good example of objects that lent themselves to 'new beginnings', under 'new ownership'.

While accepting that leather has, historically, supplied industry with belts and pulleys, straps, linings and coverings, contemporary leather objects are primarily consumer objects. In the light of this particular consideration, my thesis will deal with questions around leather as a consumption item, and, related to that, around the wider contexts of consumption.

As discussed more extensively in Chapter 2, we live in a society characterized by a 'consumer culture' (Slater, 1997; Miles, 1998; Lee, 2000; Sassatelli, 2007). This designation is based on features which include, among others: the growing availability of consumer goods and the expansion of areas and objects regarded as 'consumable', particularly with regard to leisure activities. Over and above this, we witness the increasing organization of people's lives around consumption activities, and the emergence of a 'consumer identity', whereby people engage in 'self-construction' activities through the pursuit of certain lifestyles, based on particular consumer practices (Giddens, 1991; Lury, 1996; Edwards, 2000; Gabriel & Lang, 2006). In some respects, as Aldridge (2003) has pointed out, the notion of 'citizen' becomes conflated with that of 'consumer'. This may imply, as some theorists (e.g. Csikszentmihalyi, 2000; Bauman & May, 2001; Clarke, 2003) have observed, an understanding of consumption as a duty, a necessary act for the good of one's country; an example may be the current British government's openly encouraging people to spend, rather than save, in order to stimulate the economy (e.g. Peachey, 2010). Alternatively, as Bauman (1988) also argued, lack of (adequate) participation in consumer activities may cast doubts over one's adequacy as a citizen, or might even be "seen as a threat to the community" (Csikszentmihalyi, 2000, p. 271).

Examples such as those above highlight the ideological dimension of consumption. This aspect was also apparent in socialist Romania, where one of the dominant ideologies was to respect and value the working class, whose labour was considered to be at the basis of society. By extension, respect had to be shown towards the fruits of this labour. In contrast with capitalist societies, where products are considered disconnected and alienated from their makers (Gottdiener, 2000), socialist ideas dictated that products should be collectively appreciated and cherished, as an outcome of the communal effort of the 'working masses'. With the emphasis on production, rather than consumption, the notion of a 'consumer society' was, to all intents and purposes, a 'dirty' concept, not only because of its association with regimes and ideologies politically opposed to socialism, but also because it was seen to symbolize excessive materialism, superficiality and, above all, waste. According to official discourses, these were undesirable characteristics, which came in direct contrast with the self-restraint advocated by socialist precepts. As Reid (2007) notes, "[c]orrect attitudes toward the aesthetics of daily life and consumption were one aspect of the new (...) person's self-discipline" (p.52). The socialist response to the 'throw-away culture' of capitalism was through mobilization of

counter-discourses, aimed at achieving a culture of self-regulation, uniformity and thrift. An example of this was the 1980s version of a "three Rs" slogan - recover, re-condition and re-use. Leather, from this perspective, was a material whose physical properties made it particularly suitable for such requirements.

Even 20 years after the fall of socialism at the end of the 1980s, media and popular discourses still display a certain ambivalence towards (now 'capitalist') consumer practices: while the latter have been on the rise, they are nevertheless subjected to moral evaluations and critical historical comparisons, particularly in terms of questioning the notions of 'needs', 'waste' and 'throw-away cultures'. Moreover, subcultures (such as those linked to music or sexuality/gender-based), which were mostly invisible or unacknowledged before, have, arguably, not yet reached the levels of acceptance and 'normality' present in Western cultures (e.g. Walk With Pride Project, 2010). These considerations defined the focus and content of my research questions, which in turn shaped the content of the findings. In this light, my approach to leather as subject matter of the research was generally driven by an interest in conventional, everyday uses of the material. While it can be observed that this focus did not specifically include relatively marginal(ized) features or facets of leather, I would argue that my awareness of cultural and historical differences within this mainstream context, which has developed throughout the research process, may be considered to contribute to the required openness of approach and "attitude of curiosity" advocated by Stephenson (1953, p. 151) in relation to psychological inquiries.

As noted above, the ideological content of consumption practices can be used to (de)legitimize particular kinds of societies: socialist discourses, as well as certain Marxist analyses (cf. Miller, 2001), constructed consumerist capitalism as excessive and wasteful; on the other hand, consumerism has been portrayed as indicative of autonomy and affluence, and, as such, providing a contrast to the penury and lack of choice existent in former socialist countries (Luthar, 2006; Reid, 2007). At the same time, the representation of the consumer as citizen has been reflected in the association between consumption and political or moral stances. Barnett, Cafaro and Newholm (2005a) have conceptualized this link as having a double focus: on the one hand, it raises questions around the concept of *ethical consumption* – whereby consumer practices are deemed to reflect and take place in accordance with people's moral commitments; on the other hand, it scrutinizes the *ethics of consumption* - an approach which questions the appropriateness and morality of consumption itself, in terms of its extent, underpinning principles and implications. Studies of ecological issues have suggested, among other factors, a causal link between consumer practices and environmental problems (Ölander & Thøgersen, 1995; Howard, 2000; Oskamp, 2000; Clarke, Barnett, Cloke & Malpass, 2007). Similarly, questions are being raised about the conditions in which goods are produced, with growing interest in community-based projects and fair trade campaigns.

The increased awareness of environmental effects, such as climate change, acidification of water sources, water shortages, deforestation, chemical and noise pollution (Ölander & Thøgersen, 1995) and of wider social issues (e.g. child labour, human rights) has resulted in a problematization of consumer practices, patterns and identities (Kurz, Donaghue, Rapley & Walker, 2005; Newholm, 2005; Clarke et al., 2007). With regard to leather, ethical issues can be linked to the manufacturing process itself, as well as to certain aspects which reflect the international character of its production. As such, they might cover a wide area, from animal welfare (farming conditions, transportation, abattoir practices) to work-related circumstances (e.g. child labour, poor working conditions) and ecological effects (water consumption, chemical waste disposal). Additionally, lifestyle choices such as veganism or vegetarianism, which may or may not exclude the use of leather, are often attributed to moral convictions (Gill, 1996; Newholm, 2005). Thus, a number of the features highlighted above open up areas of inquiry concerning the ways in which people increasingly regard themselves as consumers, and the elements that contribute to the construction of this identity.

Another facet of consumption practices refers to the consumer goods themselves. As discussed more extensively in this thesis, consumption is both functional and symbolic, and goods have both instrumental and representational uses. The emblematic qualities of objects have been traditionally acknowledged (e.g. Veblen, 2005 [1899]); Douglas & Isherwood, 1996; Sassatelli, 2007). However, as several theorists pointed out (e.g. Appadurai, 1986; McCracken, 1988; du Gay, Hall, Janes, Mackay & Negus, 1997), the meanings of material goods are not inherent; they do not derive directly from the 'reality' of the things themselves. Instead, these meanings are established in "the social life of things" (Appadurai, 1986), in people's interaction with them, through the ways in which objects are used and represented through language, imagery and so on. Thus, they are embedded in and indicative of the culture(s) existent in a society, at a particular historical moment. At the same time, their representational role is used to construct and express identities, in terms of belonging to social categories (e.g. gender, ethnicity, social status, (sub)cultural affiliation) and/or espousing particular values or lifestyles (e.g. fair trade consumption, veganism).

Continuing this line of thinking, my own experience would ascribe a dual quality to leather: on the one hand, it was practical and long lasting; on the other hand, its relative scarcity made it something of a luxury, a sign of comparative wealth. In more recent times, it was also considered to say something about the people who wore it, who would have stood out for a number of reasons: as Communist party officials, or other representatives of state institutions (long leather coats formed part of police and security officers' uniforms); as being 'well-connected', and as such able to get hold of items not freely available in shops; or, at the other end of the social spectrum, as 'shady' dealers in goods which might have 'fallen off the back of a lorry': there, the black leather jacket

signified a kind of subversion, through the black market, of the official economic principles.

As I began looking into the topic, I became more aware of multi-faceted representations of leather in the UK. On hearing of my subject of research, many people's initial reaction was an amused smile or a knowing nod, often with direct references to bikers, or more covert allusions to bondage or fetishes. Further conversations with people using leather in various forms, as well as with individuals involved with leather in a professional capacity, uncovered a multitude of leather representations and uses, and opened up new potential areas of inquiry, such as issues around the welfare of animals (as the source for the material), around processes of production (and questions of environmental sustainability), as well as various (practical, ethical, symbolic) considerations surrounding the choice of leather as a consumer item. In this light, the thesis aims to examine some of these areas and concerns, and to look into how they are used by participants to construct, negotiate or resist particular identities.

1.2 Leather and the 'circuit of culture'

As noted above, material objects incorporate both functional and symbolic properties. The latter are shaped by and are to a great extent indicative of the cultural environment in a specific social and historical context. As part of the material culture, leather objects form a case in point.

My search of academic literature revealed very few studies with leather as a topic of research. A number of writers have mentioned, within wider (sub)cultural analyses, the role of the leather jacket as a (sub)cultural symbol, such as punk attire (Hebdige, 1979), gay subcultures (Cole, 2000), or an overview of leather jacket uses in various historical and cultural contexts (e.g. Farren, 1985; McDowell, 1992). Some marketing studies have looked into consumer attitudes and behaviour in relation to exotic leathers, such as alligator, ostrich or emu (e.g. Belleau, Nowlin, Summers & Xu, 2001; Xu, Summers & Belleau, 2004). Apart from such examples, which were concerned with either particular types of leather, or with specific items, there have been, as far as I have been able to ascertain, no academic investigations into general understandings around leather and leather objects and into the meanings associated with them.

With the aim to examine systematically the ways in which objects acquire meanings, Du Gay and colleagues (1997) have proposed a theoretical model for analyzing a cultural artefact: they have argued that the meanings of objects are created and shaped in a number of processes that come together, or are 'articulated', on a temporary basis and under certain circumstances. Du Gay et al. (1997) have identified five major processes, which, taken together, form "the circuit of culture" (p.3). These processes are:

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production, consumption, identity, representation and regulation (see Fig.1.1 below). Within this circuit, none of the elements is considered to take precedence over the others, as they "continually overlap and intertwine in complex and contingent ways" (p.4).

Fig.1.1 The circuit of culture (Du Gay et al., 1997, p. 3)
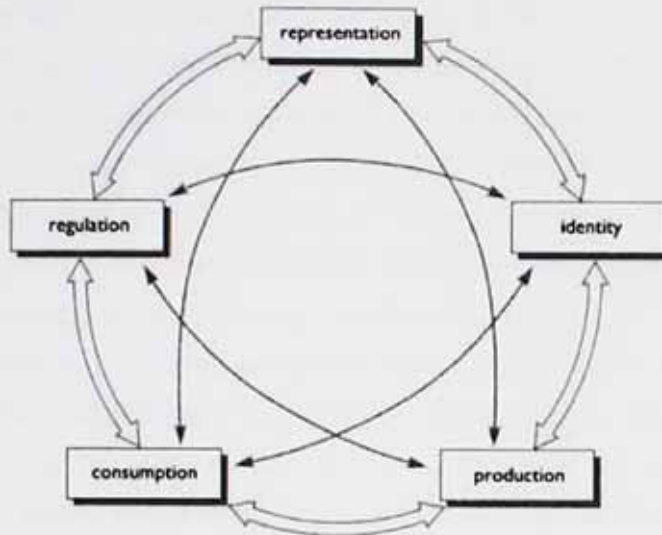
Du Gay et al. used the model for an analysis of the Sony Walkman cassette player, and looked at the conditions surrounding its production, marketing and use, and the ways in which it was linked with and gave rise to particular social identities. The Sony Walkman, however, is a specific (type of) object, with relatively well-defined properties and functions, while leather, as a material, assumes a wide range of different forms and fulfils many uses. Nevertheless, I would argue that the circuit of culture is a fitting model of examination, as it encompasses the whole 'social life' of this material.

Upon examination, the link between the *production* of leather and the other elements of the circuit would function as follows: in general, *production* is inevitably linked with *consumption*, as it provides the products destined to be bought and used. *Production* activities are also subject to rules and *regulations* regarding working practices, labour conditions, ecological impact and so on. Such compliance is made visible and acknowledged through *representation*. The various branches of the leather industry would need, for instance, to adapt their output according to the demands of potential customers and clients. At the same time, they need to conduct their activities in conformity with existing laws and regulations on the use and disposal of chemical substances and on business practices in general. Additionally, working within these industries would be associated with particular professional *identities* for the people involved. These, in turn, would shape the 'identity' of the material itself. All these activities are communicated/made known through *representation* practices which put forward particular images or messages.

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A parallel point, in respect of inter-connection, can be made with regard to *consumption*: this, it has been argued (Appadurai, 1986; McCracken, 1986; 1988; McKay, 1997), extends beyond the act of purchase, and comprises all the activities through which people make the goods they buy 'their own'. McCracken (1986) suggested that people use 'possession rituals' which are aimed at establishing a meaningful connection between the owner and the object owned. Such actions may include displaying, cleaning and talking about one's things – actions which, according to McCracken, constitute the difference between ownership (more impersonal) and possession or appropriation (whereby an object is considered to 'belong'). The connection between people and their belongings is made apparent through *representation*: as Featherstone put it, "the modern individual (...) speaks not only with his clothes, but with his home, furnishings, decoration, car and other activities" (1991, p. 86). Leather goods, for example, may function to indicate economic status (e.g. leather interiors in cars, designer handbags), cultural identities (e.g. punk) or sexuality (e.g. gay subcultures), thus acting as marks of *identity* through *representation* practices. At the same time, consumer activities are, like any social endeavours, inevitably subjected to processes of *regulation* regarding spaces and modes of consumption: a vegan would probably not appreciate the gift of a leather-bound book; similarly, wearing a full-body leather costume might seem out of place if unconnected with motorcycling-related activities. Additionally, as Bourdieu (2010 [1984]) suggested, consumption practices which delineate 'distinctions' between social categories may be regulated by members of those categories themselves, in an attempt to maintain conformity: "the calls to order ('Who does she think she is?' 'That's not for the likes of us') (...) contain a warning against the ambition to distinguish oneself by identifying with other groups, that is, they are a reminder for the need for class solidarity" (2010 [1984], p. 381). Similar regulatory practices may take place in different contexts: writing about the 'leather scene', Quilleriet (2004) noted that "[i]n New York, bars like Badlands, Pipeline and Boots and Saddles enforced a very strict dress code. The Mineshaft, an S&M club, banned the wearing of suits, denim trousers, polo shirts, sneakers and traditional footwear" (pp. 267-268).

To summarize, according to the 'circuit of culture' model, the meanings attached to material objects do not arise solely within consumption, use or appropriation activities, but are also a result of the interaction and overlap among processes of production and regulation. Across all these areas, such meanings may be used to constitute, represent, negotiate and resist identities, and to indicate ideological, moral or political standpoints. With application to leather, the implication is that the meanings associated with it are as much linked to the circumstances of its production as to the ways in which it is used. At the same time, such meanings are continuously shaped by the complex interplay between representations and norms that exist or are imposed/required in particular situations and contexts.

In the light of the above discussion, the aim of this research has been the investigation of subjective experiences around people's interaction with leather and leather articles. More specifically, the main objectives of the study are:

- to identify patterns across representations and understandings of leather and leather objects in various contexts;
- to explore the symbols and meanings attached to leather and their relevance to the wider social and cultural background;
- to examine the construction of identities around leather in professional and consumer contexts.

In the next section I will outline the structure of the thesis.

1.3 Chapter structure

The following two chapters provide the theoretical background for the research. Chapter 2 looks at the role of material goods in people's lives from a multidisciplinary perspective (anthropology, sociology, social psychology, cultural studies). The chapter begins by exploring the uses and roles of material objects in embodying and perpetuating cultural meanings and values, and in providing a context for social interaction. It continues by identifying the general context of the research as a consumer society, and moves on to explore some of the implications associated with this concept, including questions around consumer power and the ethics of consumption. Chapter 2 ends with a review of some of the theories that attempt to provide explanations concerning people's consumption practices (e.g. Veblen, 2005 [1899]; Baudrillard, 1988 [1968; 1970]; McCracken, 1988; Campbell, 1992).

Chapter 3 is concerned with some of the theoretical conceptualizations of identity, with an emphasis on the link between identity and consumer practices. The chapter starts with an historical perspective on concepts of self and examines how certain socio-cultural influences can be found in subsequent psychological understandings and theorizations of identity. It then continues with an overview of theories considering identity as a personal characteristic, a social feature or a discursive construction or achievement. The chapter moves on to examine the ways in which identities can be represented through material objects and consumption practices, which may be used to indicate both individuality or distinction and belonging/affiliation to social groups and categories. In the context of consumer practices, this chapter also explores some of the philosophical understandings of ethical behaviour, and considers the construction of ethical identities based on consumption choices.

Chapter 4 introduces the methodologies used to collect, handle, analyze and interpret the empirical data. It begins by providing an overview and discussion of approaches traditionally applied in consumer research. This section notes that, while the methods employed remain to a large extent located within a positivist framework, there has been an increase in studies which take into account the social, historical and cultural circumstances. The chapter then moves on to provide a rationale for using a discourse analytic approach (Potter & Wetherell, 1987; Potter, 1996a, 1996b; Wetherell, 1998) to explore the patterns in the interview data. This is followed by a presentation of the second methodology used, Q Methodology (Brown, 1980; Watts & Stenner, 2005a), in terms of both theoretical principles and practical application in the studies conducted. The chapter then provides an outline of the interview studies and procedures used in collecting and analyzing the data. The chapter concludes by describing how the ethical considerations in respect of conducting the research were addressed.

Having provided the theoretical background for the studies in chapters 2 and 3, and the methodological approach in Chapter 4, the following four chapters deal with the analysis of the empirical data. Chapter 5 explores general representations of leather, identified through Q Methodology. This Q study used a Q sample of statements about leather as a material (e.g. "is a symbol of power", "stimulates the senses", "is likely to cause controversy") with the purpose of identifying some of the dominant current meanings associated with the material, and the ways in which these are contextualized.

While Chapter 5 uses Q Methodology to identify general leather representations, Chapter 6 employs the same method to focus specifically on leather objects, and the meanings attached to them by participants. Here, the Q sample consists of single words (e.g. "comfort", "luxury", "nature"). This choice aims to allow more flexibility in the construction and expression of meanings associated with personal possessions, in bringing together functional and symbolic characteristics.

The next two chapters, 7 and 8, are concerned with the discursive constructions of leather in the interview studies. Chapter 7 focuses on accounts provided by participants with a professional involvement in leather (manufacturers, technicians, academics). In this context, it aims to explore conceptualizations of the material itself, participants' experience of working with it and how they address potential ethical and environmental issues around it.

Following these representations of leather as a material, Chapter 8 looks at the ways leather is used in constituting various identities (e.g. cultural, gender, ethical) through consumer decisions. The analysis of interview data concentrates on how personal and social identities are constructed and managed in talk, and on the manner in which

participants position themselves, based on, for example, references to style and ethical choices.

The final chapter, Chapter 9, brings together the principal arguments of the thesis, emphasizing the theoretical, methodological and practical implications resulting from the research conducted.

Overall, the thesis examines the manner in which manifold portrayals of a material substance such as leather function to (re)produce existing social and cultural understandings in the context of everyday work and consumption practices. Additionally, it investigates how contemporary ethical and environmental debates are oriented to and incorporated in accounts of individual actions and values.

Chapter 2: On Objects and Consumption

2.1 Introduction

In the present chapter I shall explore some of the ways in which material objects have been conceptualized in literature, with a focus on their roles and meanings and on their portrayal as repository of culture and context for social relations. In connection to this, I shall also examine the notion of current Western societies as 'consumer cultures' or societies. In doing so, I will attempt to investigate some of the implications of consumerism, and the ways in which the latter has been understood in terms of consumer power or lack thereof. I conclude the chapter by looking into certain theoretical explorations of reasons behind what has been described as an ever-increasing preoccupation with acquiring consumer goods. While the empirical studies undertaken in this thesis have a specific leather-related focus, the argument posited is that representations of leather objects, as part of the material culture, are influenced by wider social, cultural and ideological factors, and are reflected in issues related to power and identity.

2.2 The role of material objects

Social sciences have largely adopted the idea of consumption practices as a central, defining element of contemporary Western societies[1]. Notions of consumption have come a long way, from early, more or less straightforward associations with fulfilment of survival needs, to increasingly sophisticated arguments which regard it, in turn, as the driving force of society, a source of social and cultural practices, an all-embracing context of social relations, site of power struggles or communication tool at social or individual level.

This manifold understanding is complemented by notions of material goods as reaching beyond their functional or utilitarian values (e.g. Solomon, 1983; Belk, 1988; McCracken, 1988; Douglas & Isherwood, 1996; Kleine & Baker, 2004; Casey & Martens, 2007). Through their functions, both practical and symbolic, objects are enmeshed in social relations and social stratification, and are considered to play a central part in people's representations of themselves and others. In this light, objects are seen as carriers of a host of meanings and roles, and as eventually achieving lives and biographies of their own, in an increasingly (con)fused relationship with their human owners. In the words of Arjun Appadurai,

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[1] The term 'Western', while potentially problematic, has been widely used in literature around consumption. Following Woodward (2002), I use it to indicate Europe, North America, Australia and New Zealand, and take it to refer to "traditions of thought and practice" (p.5)

"Even if our own approach to things is conditioned necessarily by the view that things have no meanings apart from those that human transactions, attributions, and motivations endow them with, the anthropological problem is that this formal truth does not illuminate the concrete, historical circulation of things. For that we have to follow things themselves, for their meanings are inscribed in their forms, their uses, their trajectories. It is only through the analysis of these trajectories that we can interpret the human transactions and calculations that enliven things" (1986, p. 5).

In other words, the relationship between people and objects need not be considered a unidirectional one. Instead, it would be helpful to look for interconnections, and to take into account the ways in which the material world and human life co-exist, intermingle and shape each other in the course of everyday interactions.

2.2.1 Material objects as source and embodiment of culture

It has been generally acknowledged that objects have formed part of all human societies, throughout time and all over the world. From ancient times up to the present, significant life stages, such as birth, death, marriage, celebrations (religious or otherwise) have been accompanied by material things, which have marked the occasion and embodied the significance attributed to events (Douglas & Isherwood, 1996; Douglas, 2001; Sassatelli, 2007).

Taking *culture* in its wider sense, as referring to socially transmitted aspects of human life which inform people's thoughts and activities (O'Hear, 2000), objects have been regarded as "the stuff of material culture" (Appadurai, 1986, p. 5), or as containers of cultural meaning. They have also been seen to have a creative potential: Douglas and Isherwood (1996) assert that, by means of their concrete quality, things have the capacity to lend intelligibility to our world by giving tangibility to continuously changing meanings. From this perspective, abstract cultural concepts and ideas become easier to keep in mind and to adhere to, in as much as they take on a physical appearance, which makes "visible and stable the categories of culture" (Douglas & Isherwood, 1996, p. 38).

With regard to the topic of this research, as one of the oldest materials used by humans, leather may be seen to occupy a special position. Traces of its use are found in archaeological sites and go back thousands of years, during which time it has never ceased to be part of human existence. It has always occupied a place in daily life, a more conspicuous one at certain times or in certain places, but more generally as a taken for granted, relatively unassuming, no-nonsense, reliable material. The descriptions, accounts or perspectives related to it vary widely according to uses and ideologies.

Historically, leather has taken the form of tools, clothing and housing material; it has been shaped into drinking vessels and containers, luggage, furniture, art objects and fashion accessories; and it has been used as part of an outdoors lifestyle, in equestrian or trekking equipment, or indoors, in the form of book bindings or works of art. As a reflection of its myriad uses, people's perceptions of it also appear varied, drawing on a range of experiences. Images related to leather are as diverse as they are numerous: mural paintings of pre-historic hunters wrapped in hides; the tents and teepees of Inuit and native Americans; ancient footwear and body armour discovered in archaeological digs; intricate leatherwork in bookbinding and decorative objects; the attire of a whole range of archetypal heroes of the land (explorers, Wild West cowboys), of the air (aviators) or of the roads (motorists and bikers); the uniforms of Nazis or secret police; the glamour and sophistication of fashion creations; a mark of socio-cultural identity (e.g. punk, gay); or the material of sexual and fetish fantasies (Quilleriet, 2004).

In keeping with the way the material itself has evolved, so have additional perceptions developed to extend the meanings outlined above. Environmental concerns have been raised related to the pollution caused by the use and disposal of chemicals used in tanning processes (e.g. Ludvík & Buljan, 2000; Reuters, 2008) Animal rights groups have condemned the killing of animals for meat, fur or skins (e.g. PETA, 2010). Human rights organizations have drawn attention to labour-related unethical practices and the uncomfortable realities of sweat shops and child labour in Third World countries (e.g. Ensing, 2009). Vegetarians and vegans may or may not take a stance on leather in their discourses and practices. Positions, experiences, accounts – in a word, subjectivities - related to leather and leather objects, can be seen to depend to a great extent on particular social, cultural and ideological aspects, part of a wider social, economic and political context. Not only does leather not 'fade away', it appears to find new ways of intervening in and relating to our lives.

In a changing environment, material things have been regarded as serving to stabilize ideas and beliefs and give them legitimacy. In this sense, they have been considered to act as embodiment of culture (Wilson, 1993) and as palpable points of reference, providing continuity and consistency and helping people to make sense of the world around them. This is especially apparent in their role in the representation, communication and maintenance of social categories, such as gender, ethnicity or status. As will be discussed in more detail in the next chapter, clothes contribute to the construction and reinforcement of notions of gender (Wilson, 1985; Edwards, 1997; Entwistle, 2001). Moreover, social class and status may equally become taken for granted when embodied in culturally charged or high visibility possessions (McCracken, 1988). An expensive leather suite or car interior could be considered to convey a message regarding the owner's social and financial standing. This process of legitimating

cultural and societal practices and principles through the permanence of objects has led McCracken to conclude that

> "[Goods] seek not only to describe but also to persuade. When culture appears in objects, it seeks to make itself appear inevitable, as the only sensible terms in which anyone can constitute their world. Culture uses objects to convince (…). Ideology and the material world are one" (1988, p.132).

In other words, the concreteness of objects has the ability to endorse the status quo, and to provide a convincing argument for its 'normality'. McCracken also points out alternative ways in which the visibility and solidity of material objects might contribute to perpetuating the status quo. Dissenting social groups may use and display objects in a novel and unconventional manner, with a view to establishing a group identity, or as a gesture of rebellion directed at mainstream society. Hebdige's (1979) study of the punk subculture in the 1970s illustrates how innocuous objects such as safety pins or bin liners were altered and adapted to convey shocking and subversive messages. Eventually, however, society incorporates this novelty of approach (and the underlying meanings) by turning them into fashionable and/or marketable images. Thus, attempts at difference and rebellion soon become diluted and finally assimilated into the wider cultural system.

The notion of goods acting as stabilisers of cultural concepts has been challenged by some postmodernist theorists, which have proposed that objects are wanted not so much for their functionality, as for their symbolic loading (e.g. Baudrillard, 1988 a, b; Firat & Venkatesh, 1993, 1995). What is being consumed, in this case, are signs and images, with the relation between them and objects themselves being regarded as arbitrary and undergoing continuous changes. For example, a leather jacket can be seen as comfortable and as providing protection against the cold; alternatively, it can be perceived as fashionable or threatening. All these qualities and meanings, however, can equally be represented by or attributed to other objects. Because they can no longer be regarded as tied to certain meanings, things are considered to become 'free-floating signifiers', in a constant process of association and re-association (Firat & Venkatesh, 1995, p.251).

As well as acting as instruments of maintaining and replicating the social status quo, McCracken (1988) has suggested that goods can also become agents of social change, when used in acts of rebellion to protest against certain types of social or cultural values. Again, Hebdige's (1979) study of working-class youth subcultures offered an extensive account of how selective use and recombination of existing meanings and symbols incorporated in articles of clothing and accessories created new meanings and forms of expression. At the same time, social and cultural change may also be triggered by acts of non or anti-consumption, where boycotting or refusal to consume certain products (such

as cosmetics tested on animals, meat, fur or leather, for ethical reasons) may result in raising social awareness (John & Klein, 2003; Braunsberger & Buckler, 2011) and eventually lead to changes at wider societal level.

Consequently, it can be argued that, while our choices are influenced by cultural considerations, by whatever is held to be appropriate, acceptable or desirable in a society or in a community at a particular time, they can also act to shape culture and open the way for new concepts and values. It would appear, therefore, that consumer goods, by the way they are chosen and used (or not), constitute a major source of culture: in Douglas and Isherwood's (1996) words, consumption is "the very arena in which culture is fought over and licked into shape" (p. 37). The process of meaning making and negotiating is a continuous one, and the results become embedded in the fabric of society.

2.2.2 Material objects as context for social relations

Through their symbolic content, as well as through their functional uses, objects play an essential role in human relations. From an anthropological perspective, material goods are considered to contribute to the social cohesion of a community, through their association with community events and rituals. They are material expressions of reciprocity and sociability, especially through exchanges of gifts (Appadurai, 1986; Douglas & Isherwood, 1996; Dittmar, 1992). Wallendorf and Arnould (1988) conducted a cross-cultural study of favourite possessions with US and Nigerian participants, aiming to explore experiential meanings of the objects and the ways in which participants associated them with self-expression. Wallendorf and Arnould found that their participants regarded treasured items as indicative of social ties, acting as expressions of attachment to friends and family, as well as means of symbolic orientation in space and time (as reminders or evocations of people and events).

Several theorists have argued that objects can be used to convey cultural messages, social meanings and values (e.g. Veblen, 2005 [1899]; Lurie, 1983; Dittmar, 1992). In this sense, things can be said to be "coded for communication" (Douglas & Isherwood, 1996, p. xxi). Writing about the "social significance" of objects, Smith, Harré and Van Langenhove (1995) describe it "as conversation (...): somebody acted upon matter and transferred a message through the material substance" (p. 21).

Following an investigation into 'the meanings of things', Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton (1981) suggested objects are central to processes of similarity, by indicating "the integration of the owner with his or her social context" (1981, p. 39) or of differentiation, by "separating the owner from the social context, emphasizing his or her individuality" (1981, p. 38). In other words, things play a significant part in people's pursuit for

belonging and affiliation, or can be used as means of distancing oneself from certain values, situations or other people. Similar choices of objects can lead to perceived similarities between people (Belk, 1988; Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). Especially in the area of clothing, choices have been seen as embodying shared values and identities (Hebdige, 1979; Wilson, 1993; Schouten & McAlexander, 1995) and intermediating people's acceptance as members of groups or communities. As discussed elsewhere in the thesis, dress (and/or other external insignia) has often been employed by members of subcultures to establish and indicate group boundaries. In this regard, wearing leather can be constituted as signalling sexual orientation (Cole, 2000; Holliday, 2001; Schofield & Schmidt, 2005) or sharing common interests, by belonging to specific groups, such as motorcycling gangs or "blousons noirs" (Quilleriet, 2004). However, donning the expected external attire may not always be regarded as sufficient for belonging, if the underlying values of the group are not also seen to be observed. In writing about leather culture dress codes, Cole (2000) mentioned the latter's strictness, and also a process akin to a system of checks and balances: "The men who dressed in leather and carried crash helmets, but had no motorbike, were often mocked by those who did have bikes, or by gay men not involved in the leather scene" (2000, p.110). In this sense, objects may not communicate a message on their own; to achieve this purpose, they need to be seen as part of a coherent configuration that involves not only other matching objects (what McCracken (1988) termed 'a Diderot unity'), but also espoused values and ways of life.

With regard to ways of life, Bourdieu (2010 [1984]) also pointed out that material possessions act as a means of distinction between social classes, not only in terms of wealth (as in ownership of means of production – the economic capital), but also in terms of inferences that may be drawn from the content of consumer choices. In this way, taste (cultural capital) becomes connected with social position, and varied choices of, for example, art, books, music, holidays, may be just as indicative of social standing (by means of cultural practices) as economic assets.

It has been suggested earlier that things incorporate codes for communication. Such a code, however, does not have to be unique. In fact, as mentioned earlier, according to some postmodern viewpoints, meanings are ascribed to objects arbitrarily. This way, different people can read different messages into them, and new meanings can always be attached (Firat & Venkatesh, 1993). As discussed later in the chapter, Baudrillard (1988a [1968]) suggested that objects acquire sign values that surpass their use values. Their consumption, consequently, goes beyond being a material practice and becomes "a systematic act of manipulation of signs" (p. 22). While Baudrillard acknowledged that the functional value of objects would still play a part (for example, a leather couch will be used objectively for sitting or lying on), over and above the practical applications, it would take on other meanings, such as social status and prestige. In this latter sense,

the leather couch could be replaced by any other objects carrying similar signification of social status and prestige, so that, in the end, what is being 'consumed' are not the objects themselves, but ideas. A leather sofa may be comfortable to sit on and easy to clean, but it can also stand for notions of style and luxury; similarly, while a Harley Davidson motorcycle may not be the quickest, safest or most comfortable vehicle of its kind, it might nevertheless have a prestige or 'mystique' that transcends its functionality. In conclusion, according to Baudrillard, in the field of signification any object can mean anything, without any given, pre-determined relationship between the thing itself and the meanings it carries.

Campbell (1997) challenged what he termed the "communicative act paradigm" (p.341) with respect to the symbolic meanings purportedly communicated by goods. Taking the example of clothes, he rejected the suggestion that clothing may act as a language (e.g. Lurie, 1983), in so far as it can embody a clear message, and convey it intentionally and accurately from the wearer to perceiver(s). While some of his observations may be seen as justified, namely, that meanings can be misunderstood, and messages may not always be adequately or unmistakably transmitted from 'sender' to 'receiver', Campbell's critique may, in turn, itself be queried for its apparent attack levelled against issues which have not been raised in those terms in the first place. For example, it seems to espouse the notion that everybody is equally 'conversant' in the 'language of clothing', that meanings thus conveyed are meant to be precisely deciphered in (sometimes) pecuniary terms and/or revelation of personal qualities and so on. Similarly, it has been generally accepted that "there is no grammar, syntax or vocabulary" (p. 346) to dress, and that this comparison is usually used metaphorically (McCracken, 1988, p. 62-67). Moreover, even in the case of linguistic communication, it could be argued that meaning may often be misplaced. In this regard, while Campbell makes some cogent points about the extent to which the 'consumption as communication' thesis is applicable and desirable, it may be said that a too vigorous rejection of the 'communicative act paradigm' might in fact be counterproductive, due to the danger of overlooking some of the practices of meaning making that take place in human interaction.

2.3 The consumer society

Earlier in the chapter, I discussed how material goods have been seen to mediate and, in turn, become the object of social relations. Indeed, McCracken (1988) has suggested that they are inextricably bound with societal functioning:

> "Without consumer goods, modern, developed societies would lose key
> instruments for the reproduction, representation, and manipulation of their
> culture. The worlds of design, product development, advertising, and fashion that
> create these goods are themselves important authors of our cultural universe (...)

Without them the modern world would almost certainly come undone."
(McCracken, 1988, p. xi).

From this standpoint, consumer goods are portrayed as vital for the very existence of society. Objects themselves and the various industries that ensure their conception, production and distribution become a sine qua non condition for the survival and perpetuation of civilization as we have come to experience it. As has been outlined in the chapter so far, material goods have always played a significant part in human history, but their roles, uses and meanings appear to have been particularly enhanced in the current environment of Western societies.

The context of the present research is a modern day Western society, or, as it is generally considered, a consumer society, where preoccupation with consumption assumes a central role in social life (Giddens, 1991; Edwards, 1997, 2000; Clarke, 2003; Gabriel & Lang, 2006; Prothero, McDonagh & Dobscha, 2010). It has been suggested that the notion of a consumer society is tightly linked with the apparition and development of industrial capitalism (cf. Sasatelli, 2007). However, the use of material objects to indicate social position or as a means of self-expression is recognized to have played an important part throughout history, well before the advent of capitalism (McCracken, 1988; Gottdiener, 2000). In this respect, the distinguishing element is the notion that consumption is considered not just as one component, but as the single most defining feature of contemporary Western society, and its systemic character is what epitomizes it nowadays: in Clarke's (2003, p. 13) words, consumption appears to be "no longer just one aspect of society amongst others ... [it] performs a role that keeps the entire social system ticking over". From this perspective, consumption is constituted as a factor of cohesion and a driving force. Its pervasiveness, however, has led to an increasing process of what Edwards (1997) has termed 'commodification' – an increased integration of daily life activities with advertising practices and financial transactions. This process of commodification has been seen to extend to most aspects of human life:

> "[few] areas of everyday life are now not affected or linked to the processes of practices of consumption – from (...) the simple organization of activities and leisure time , to the formulation of worldwide economic policies (...) Even the most deeply individual of issues, such as love, happiness and personal fulfilment, are increasingly caught up in processes of consumption (....) in contemporary society almost no human need or activity avoids commodification, and consumer society (...) is increasingly all-encompassing" (Edwards, 2000, p.5).

In a similar line of argument, Sasatelli (2007) suggests that consumption becomes conceptualized as separate from work in terms of activities and spaces. As a consequence, "consumption gets increasingly coded as leisure, and leisure is increasingly

commoditized" (pp. 2-3). In this regard, Gottdiener (2000) writes about 'cultures of consumption' – taken to indicate an increased role of consumer practices, whereby social relations become more and more established around lifestyles and leisure pursuits. At the same time, however, Gottdiener (2000) also argues against a too strict delimitation between consumption and work, and points out that work-associated activities may also coincide with consumer practices (as in the case of people playing golf as an expectation of conduct within corporate culture).

Another implication of the notion of consumer societies is that not only human activities are considered to become objectified, but human bodies as well. Authors such as Van Raaij (1993), Firat and Venkatesh (1993) and Gavin (2008) write about the various ways in which people often act as if they themselves are marketable items, products to be 'consumed' by others. Such an approach is not limited to occupations with high public exposure (such as TV figures, actors, models, politicians or sportsmen/women), but is becoming increasingly common in daily life, where expressions like 'self-marketing' and 'knowing how to sell oneself' are used as a matter of fact.

The ubiquity of consumption also reflects on identity-related aspects – with people expected and encouraged to regard themselves first and foremost as consumers, and to define most of the activities they engage in as consumer activities, leisure and cultural ones included (Campbell, 1995). As a consequence, the message being conveyed is "you are what you buy" (Goss, 2003), and identities come to be defined by the quantity and nature of goods and services consumed. Some of the implications of this position will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 3.

2.3.1 Consumption and consumer power

The way that consumption has evolved reiterates certain concepts mentioned earlier, such as 'to have is to be' and 'identity through possessions' (Dittmar, 1992). These serve to illustrate the omnipresence of material goods and consumption in the social discourse, and appear as expressions of current ideologies. In this context, the power implications of consumption discourses are apparent in the circumstances in which consumer practices occur, as well as in their influence on social relations.

In many cases, theories around such issues have been polarised and become based on dichotomies of the empowerment vs. victimhood type. Consumers have been portrayed as being either in charge of and responsible for their decisions, exerting control over their lives through acts of consumption and engaging actively in self-expressing, creative activities, or have been described as vulnerable and confused, oppressed by higher societal powers, victims of economic exploitation and ideological manipulation (cf. Miller & Rose, 1997; Edwards, 2000; Clarke, Doel & Housiaux, 2003; Gabriel & Lang, 2006).

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Douglas (2001, p.263) illustrated this representation of passivity and victimisation by noting that "the wretched consumer often feels like the passive holder of a wallet whose contents are being sucked out by impersonal forces". The de-personalization imagery was also adopted by Aldridge (2003), in his analysis of ideological approaches to consumer societies. Aldridge suggested that the notion of 'market(s)' has become particularly prominent in contemporary discourses; in his words, "the language of 'the market' threatens to become the dominant *lingua franca* through which the social order is discussed and understood (...) Social relations do not become *like* market relations between buyers and sellers, they *are* market relations" (2003, p. 55). In this regard, human interaction becomes conceptualized as shaped and defined by economically based principles and considerations. In a similar line of thinking, Baudrillard (1988b [1970]) also reflected on the implications around conceptualizing everyday activities as consumer activities, and individuals as primarily consumers. In his view, consumer practices become constructed as final stages of historical development, a "'consummated' stage of evolution" (p.33), exercising control over all aspects of life. Baudrillard saw consumption as eventually rendering the whole social life as homogenized, with human activity "domesticated into the simple activity of perpetual shopping" (p.34). The term 'consummated' hints at the ambivalence of the concept of 'consumption', treated as carrying a double meaning, involving 'fulfilment' and 'destruction' at the same time (deriving from the Latin words 'consumere' - to use up, to waste, to destroy, and 'consumare' - to fulfil, to bring to completion (Clarke et al., 2003). This point has been extended to refer, more or less indirectly, to the wider impact of consumer practices and actions on the environment, and on the adverse economic and political implications of resource exploitation in developing countries (Edwards, 2000; Gabriel & Lang, 2006).

Following on from Aldridge's (2003) comments about the increase of market influence, market discourses are based to a great extent on the economic concept of the 'rational individual', whose purpose is to maximize his or her satisfaction of needs. In this view, people act on the basis of personal tastes, and their purpose is to get value for money by rationally analyzing the information available to them and acting accordingly. According to this portrayal, people are shown to be in a position of strength, because through their preferences, expressed in decisions to buy or not to buy, they have the capacity to influence and even control what is being produced. In this sense, the growth of the markets becomes associated with features seen as desirable – such as choice (as in freedom to choose), affluence (as outcome of efficient functioning of markets) and dynamism (through continuous innovation) (Aldridge, 2003; Clarke et al., 2003). Such a perspective, to be found in neo-liberal discourses, clearly provides an empowered vision of the consumer. At the same time, however, it tends to ignore the social and cultural contexts, and to gloss over issues of inequality, poverty and exploitation (see Billig, 1999a), thus functioning to legitimize and perpetuate particular social and political ideologies.

A powerful critique of increasing consumer practices related to mass production and mass culture originated from critical theorists belonging to the 'Frankfurt School' (e.g. Marcuse, 1964; Adorno, 1991). They argued that the advent of mass culture and mass consumption enabled new means of social control over people by the beaurocracy and corporations. In the view of the Frankfurt School thinkers, consumers were portrayed as victims of advertising, easily manipulated and pressured to conform. In the words of Marcuse (1964), "the people recognize themselves in their commodities; they find their soul in their automobile, hi-fi set, split level home, kitchen equipment (...) social control is anchored in the new needs which it has produced" (p.9). In this way, consumer activities were seen to contribute directly to the perpetuation of a system considered corrupting and controlling, which disempowered and alienated the individuals (Kellner, 1983; Strinati, 1995).

A similar view was proposed by Baudrillard, who argued that "the liberty and sovereignty of the consumer are nothing more than a mystification" (1988b [1970], p. 39). In his perspective, far from being in a position to exercise choice, consumers have 'freedom of choice' imposed on them by the industrial system - or, as Giddens more recently put it, "we have no choice but to choose" (1991, p.81). According to Baudrillard, by producing and cultivating needs through advertising, the system of production obscures social and political issues and acts with the sole purpose of ensuring its own perpetuation.

This line of argument has been challenged from a number of standpoints. Writing from an anthropological perspective, Mary Douglas (2001) points to the cultural content and context of consumer practices, and sees them as indispensable in the "general social effort to get on with other people and to make sense of life" (p.264). In this regard, rather than being powerless, consumers may be considered as engaging actively (and willingly) in social and cultural interaction and communication. While Douglas acknowledges the existence of differences in access to resources and financial ability, she nevertheless suggests that consumption activities are invaluable and irreplaceable in their communicational and sense-making functions. Within cultural studies, Nava (1991) argued that consumer practices allow the expression of political activism: by means of their shopping choices, people indicate political opposition or support, and may even be able exert an influence over the conditions of labour and sale. In postmodernist literature, several theorists regarded freedom of choice as embodied in consumer practices. Holbrook and Hirschman (1982) linked consumption to the experience of "fantasies, feelings and fun". In Featherstone's (1991) view, "the field of lifestyles and consumption" is to a large extent "an autonomous playful space beyond determination" (p. 84), a statement referring to freedom from the constraints of taste and fashion requirements. Giddens (1991), talking about 'the project of the self', proposed that the framework of individual self-expression is given by the 'freedom to choose', and personal

development and the fulfilment of one's potential are linked to the possession of desired goods. Similarly, according to Elliott (1997), "consumers are engaged in authentic choices in the construction and communication of self and social meanings (...) [as an] exercise of existential freedom" (p. 285). Thus, through the connection with freedom, authenticity and self-realization, consumption becomes conceptualized as intrinsically linked with human betterment and development.

A further instance where consumption becomes associated with notions of liberty and autonomy has been presented in the frequently espoused link between identity and consumption. This association has led many commentators to suggest that, in contemporary capitalist societies, consumption practices may have replaced production as an element of defining social and personal identity. In a series of writings on postmodern consumption, Firat and Venkatesh (1992, 1993, 1995) commended the opportunities consumer activities appeared to afford in the creation of multiple identities, through their purported capacity to enable the construction of different personae for different situations. Basing their position on Baudrillard's (1988a [1968]) argument of contemporary consumption as an idealist practice, Firat and Venkatesh proposed the image of the 'liberated' consumer. Based on the notion that in postmodernity objects are seen as having first and foremost symbolic, rather than utilitarian value, consumption becomes a manipulation of signs and symbols, which people are free to project and manage in actions of self-expression. As such, consumers are seen to become themselves producers of symbols, with the opportunity to engage actively in the discovery and construction of meanings. Moreover, because postmodernism is regarded as a fragmented condition (Jameson, 1983), with no need for order or unity, consumers are not constrained by the need for coherence or conformity. In these circumstances, an individual has "the liberty to live each moment to its fullest emotional peak, for the experience, for the excitement of sense, for the pleasure" (Firat & Venkatesh, 1995, p. 253), and "the potential for choice (...) among self-images and life styles expands and explodes" (ibid., 1993, p. 233).

Bauman (1988, 1991) has offered a more nuanced account of the implications deriving from the supposed equivalence between consumption and freedom in a consumer society. He noted that "[in] our society, individual freedom is constituted as, first and foremost, freedom of the consumer" (1988, p.7-8). Because what is desired is given by the symbolic qualities of goods, the use of the latter in constructing identities becomes virtually unlimited and can give rise to feelings of being in control of one's circumstances: "[the market] offers freedom to people who in other areas of their life find only constraints, often experienced as oppression" (1988, p. 61). In principle, anyone can have access to the signs on offer, and can put them together to obtain 'unique' combinations – in what Bauman calls the "DIY self" (1991, p. 206). The range of options

seems vast and continually renewed, with the additional advantage that it enables the attainment of conformity required for successful social integration. In Bauman's words,

> "model identities are (...) supplied by the market, and the only job of the individual himself is to follow the instruction attached to the kit (...) In the game of consumer freedom all customers may be winners at the same time" (1988, p. 63).

Moreover,

> "the merchandised identities come complete with the label of social approval stuck on (...) social acceptance (...) has been 'built into' the marketed product from the start" (1991, p. 206).

However, Bauman's account contains a warning: despite the apparent plethora of opportunities, access to the freedom on offer is not open to everyone. This promised liberty comes only with the act of buying, which raises questions not only of affluence, but also of "having 'the wrong skin colour' or living in a 'wrong part of the country'" (1988, p. 84). In these circumstances, the poor are denied equal or easy access to this kind of freedom. Moreover, they also run the risk of social exclusion: perceived failure to engage in consumption (seen as a socially desirable activity) at the levels deemed socially appropriate may result in stigmatization and marginalization.

Bauman's position acknowledges the systemic nature of consumption and identifies some of the dilemmas associated with the notion of consumer practices as central to social life. At the same time, as Warde (1994) indicates, his account tends to place the emphasis on consumer activities for the aim of identity seeking or display, and ignores more the existence of more routine, functional or practical considerations. Moreover, this view appears to put forward a rather individualistic view of the consumer, seen as being solely responsible for his or her choices. This, in turn, obscures, to some extent, the question of resources needed for exercising this freedom of choice, resources which are likely to be a shaped and influenced by social determinants (Warde, 1994).

Other commentators have also challenged the idea of unlimited freedom as intimately linked with exercising consumer choices. Among others, Edwards (2000) and Gabriel and Lang (2006) have pointed out that social class and consumption function in a concerted manner in establishing individual and group identities, together with wider social issues, such as gender, ethnicity and sexuality. As regards attempts to conflate the notions of consumption and freedom, they argue that such assumptions can be misleading, as they risk overlooking issues related to power and social inequality.

As becomes apparent from the various theoretical positions outlined above, the relationship between people and objects, and particularly the questions around the rationales, outcomes and implications of consumption-related activities constitute a topic of continuous debate. In the following section I aim to explore some of the theories which attempt to elucidate or explain the reasons behind pursuit of material goods.

2.4 Why do we want goods?

It has been suggested that questions around what consumption is about, and what its central concerns might be, have yet to be satisfactorily answered. In the words of Douglas (2001), "it is amazing to discover (...) that no-one knows why people want goods" (p. 262).

It has been proposed that the rise in consumption was a direct consequence of the industrial revolution, a result of the capitalist mode of production (cf. Corrigan, 1997; Sassatelli, 2007). In this view, mass production was considered to trigger mass consumption, by making available increasing quantities of goods to a growing number of people. As Sasatelli (2007) argues, this line of thought, while emphasizing the influence of production processes, tends to ignore the experiential aspects of consumption, and the role played by consumers themselves. The rest of this chapter is, therefore, dedicated to an exploration of some of the theoretical attempts at identifying the circumstances and considerations which may play a part in people's pursuit of goods.

2.4.1 Fulfilling a need

Economic theories have mostly dealt with consumption on the basis of utility theory: people consume in order to fulfil their needs, physical or psychological (Clarke et al., 2003). Such theories tend to have at their centre the notion of the rational consumer, whose goal is to attempt to maximize his or her levels of utility (satisfaction derived from consumption of products) based on his or her current tastes. As rational consumers, they will get value for money by analysing the available information and adjusting their demand to variation in prices. Consumers are seen as 'skilled agents' (Cogoy, 1999) and are placed in a position of strength within the market system: through their preferences, translated into purchasing decisions, they can influence and even control the content, quantity and quality of what is being produced (Clarke et al., 2003).

Criticism directed towards this economic position has focused on its isolation of the individual and its disregard of the wider social and political context. By unconditionally adopting personal preference as expression of private needs, and as the driving force behind consumer behaviour, the economic perspective does not provide an explanation

as to what such behaviour is based on, nor as to how it changes. At the same time, because of the way it appears to ignore the effects of social interaction and issues of inequity and inequality, this standpoint may be seen as providing a justification for a given economic (capitalist) system (Clarke et al., 2003).

2.4.2 Pursuing respectability

As an economic theorist, Thorstein Veblen went beyond the idea of consumption as purely utilitarian and individualistic, and treated it as a primarily social matter. Writing at the end of the 19th century about the burgeoning North American middle classes, Veblen (2005 [1899]) argued that social prestige was conferred mainly on the basis of possession of wealth. He regarded consumption practices as having honorific, rather than practical motivations. For higher income classes, in particular, subsistence and physical comfort would not rank high on the list of priorities. Veblen admitted that such pragmatic considerations might have a place in the hierarchy of needs of the poorer members of a community, with few possessions and little opportunity to accumulate – but even for them, he argued, utilitarian motivations were becoming less prominent. Because one's wealth constituted the basis of social esteem, accumulation of goods and their conspicuous prominent display served as evidence of achievement, success and reputation. To describe this phenomenon, Veblen coined the concept 'conspicuous consumption' (2005 [1899], p.42). In this sense, consumption constituted first and foremost a social activity, socially sanctioned:

> "[it] becomes indispensable to accumulate, to acquire property, in order to retain one's good name. When accumulated goods have in this way once become the accepted badge of efficiency, the possession of wealth presently assumes the character of an independent and definitive basis of esteem. The possession of goods (...) becomes a conventional basis of reputability (...) a meritorious act (...) [which is] intrinsically honourable" (Veblen, 2003 [1899], p.235).

The above viewpoint suggests that people would be judged based on appearance of wealth, rather than by their actions or character. As a result, conspicuous display, signifying power and prestige, becomes part of a struggle for social recognition. In order to maintain one's standing in the eyes of the community one must achieve and surpass the accepted standard of wealth. Those members who fall short of the requisite degree of affluence will be subjected to feelings of shame, as they will "suffer in the esteem of their fellow-men; and consequently (...) in their own esteem, since the usual basis of self-respect is the respect accorded by one's neighbours" (ibid.). This pursuit of social honour becomes, under such circumstances, a competition in which people struggle to achieve the community standard of wealth at a particular moment in time, and then the next one, as pecuniary standards would change as one climbs the social ladder. People on the

lower social scale were considered to be equally driven by the need of positive social assessment, and would regard the upper classes as setting the standards to aspire to. In Veblen's perspective, imitation, or 'pecuniary emulation' (2005 [1899], p.73), was the only way to achieve the desired levels of prestige. (A contemporary illustration of this argument may, arguably, be seen in the phenomenon of cut-price leather sofas, aimed to appeal to consumers with varying levels of income, while purporting to retain that touch of 'class' or 'luxury' with which such items were previously associated). In their turn, people higher up the social ladder would continuously seek to differentiate themselves from the lower classes. Consequently, this never ending dynamic was seen to provide the context for accumulation, leading to further consumption and display of goods, as visible and concrete evidence of social worth.

Veblen's emulation theory has been criticised on a number of accounts. One objection has been that not all consumption is conspicuous (Campbell, 1983): while it is generally accepted that a great part of consumption practices go beyond considerations of functionality and fulfil expressive purposes, utilitarian and financial concerns nevertheless retain an important role. The main objection, however, has referred to Veblen's over-reliance on the concept of pecuniary emulation (Corrigan, 1997; Clarke, 2003). While his observations with respect to pecuniary standards becoming the major criterion of social worth can be regarded as a criticism directed at the social values of the time (Clarke, 2003), the emulation explanation may be rather linear and simplistic, in terms of individuals 'striving to move up or to keep others down' (Douglas, 1996). Moreover, it is expressed in terms of lower classes looking up to the higher classes as an aspirational model. As Campbell (1987, p.53) pointed out,

> "individuals may gain success over their competitors through innovation rather than imitation (...) and (...) social groups (especially social classes) may actually be in conflict over the very question of criteria to be employed in defining status".

In other words, distinction may be sought and achieved not only through following established or conventional routes or criteria, but also by introducing new elements by which social status may be assessed. As studies of subcultures suggest, different principles might be at work, such as opposition to traditional values and ideologies, creativity or self-expression (Campbell, 1992). In these cases, emulation practices may be reversed, as in the case of minority styles which end up adopted by the mainstream (Hebdige, 1979; Muggleton, 2000). Despite such limitations, Veblen's writings still exert a strong influence on current consumption theories, and the concept of conspicuous consumption forms part of current advertising as well as everyday speech (Gottdiener, 2000). This, it is argued, is due to the highlighting of the social character of consumption practices and of their symbolic significance, which goes beyond practical, utilitarian considerations.

2.4.3 Seeking meaning

Baudrillard (1988a [1968]) reiterated the idea that objects are not used or consumed solely for their functional qualities, but also for their meanings, or 'sign qualities'. In this sense, his argument resonates with that put forward by Veblen, in proposing that social standing becomes linked with particular (kinds of) objects which incorporate specific meanings: in Baudrillard's words, "objects are *categories of objects* which quite tyrannically induce *categories of persons*" (p. 16-17, italics in original). In these circumstances, the link between people and actual objects is not being provided primarily by the latter's practical use. What is consumed, according to Baudrillard, is principally the symbolic value of an object: "*In order to become object of consumption, the object must become sign*" (p. 22, italics in original). Consequently, consumption becomes "an idealist practice which has no longer anything to do (beyond a certain point) with the satisfaction of needs" (p. 25), or "a systematic act of manipulation of signs" (p. 22). Because of this suggested lack of concreteness, the capacity for consumption becomes unlimited (would it be solely a matter of fulfilling needs, saturation would eventually be attained). As things stand, people appear to consume more and more, without achieving complete or lasting satisfaction. According to Baudrillard, this happens because of a continuous process of signification and re-signification from one object to another.

A further consequence of the importance of 'sign value' is that "in the logic of signs (...) objects are no longer tied to a function or to a *defined* need" (Baudrillard, 1988b [1970], p.44). In other words, as far as symbolism is concerned, objects are interchangeable, irrespective of their practical use. This was taken to render economic theories of satisfaction of needs obsolete. Baudrillard saw consumption as "an infinite social activity" (ibid.), and suggested that the nature of needs, far from being able to explain consumer behaviour, confused economic scientists (although, he noted, that did not stop these "advocates of the human sciences (...) from faithfully reciting the litany of needs" (ibid.)). According to Baudrillard, economic theories differentiate between consumption that is related to 'physiological' (or 'real') needs, and consumption influenced by 'psychological' needs, targeting 'luxury' goods. While the former is considered to reach (physical) saturation, the latter would have no such limitations and could be manipulated and artificially stimulated ad infinitum (within financial confines). Baudrillard takes issue with this approach and argues that the 'reality' or 'artificiality' of needs is impossible to establish: "from the perspective of the satisfaction of the consumer, there is no basis on which to define what is 'artificial' and what is not" (p. 40); a person can derive 'real' pleasure or feelings of freedom from listening to music or watching a television programme. In this view, 'needs' can no longer be defined and therefore used to understand consumer behaviour. Baudrillard proposed that the main driving force behind consumer choices is "the *desire for social meaning*" (p.45), for which satisfaction could never be achieved, and therefore the wish to consume would remain inexhaustible.

To a certain extent, Baudrillard's view is complemented by Cushman's (1990) portrayal of the post World War II 'empty self'. This inner emptiness, according to Cushman, is a result of a perceived absence of social aspects like "community, tradition, and shared meaning (...) [experienced] "interiorly" as a lack of personal conviction and worth (...) as a chronic, undifferentiated emotional hunger" (p. 600). The answer to the perceived feelings of alienation and emptiness is to attempt to 'fill' the self through consumption of goods and experiences, which thus become a cure for existential discontents.

Baudrillard's argument is valuable for its recognition of the importance of symbolism in social life. His approach, however, is, to an extent, unidimensional in the almost exclusive emphasis placed on the sign value of objects, to the detriment of other (financial, functional) considerations.

2.4.4 Searching for the ideal

In the search for meaning within consumption, McCracken (1988) provides a further account, linking the two notions. Writing about the "evocative power of things" (p.104), he puts forth the notion of "displaced meaning" (ibid.), understood to refer to the perceived discrepancy between 'real' and 'ideal' in social life. McCracken considers "displaced meaning" as a cultural category related to hopes, ideals or aspirations, removed from the 'here and now' of community or individual life. Instead, such ideals are seen as located in remote domains, where they can be preserved and protected from being devalued or trivialised. These domains become repositories of hope for both communities and individuals: at community level, they can provide the stimulus for historical change, through attempts to reach the ideal and bring hopes to reality; at individual level, they are seen as incentives, providing the possibility of achieving happiness and fulfilling expectations.

According to McCracken, displaced meanings can be situated in space and time, or even - in the case of religious beliefs - in other worlds. Among the examples given are societies depicted as ideal, physically remote or inaccessible enough so as to preserve the aura of perfection. Alternatively, domains for displaced meanings can be seen as belonging to the distant past, memories of an ideal golden age. Moreover, they could even be attributed to a distant future, which holds the promise of unlimited possibilities and opportunities for achievement. What is important is that such locations remain elusive, so as to avoid disappointment caused by closer scrutiny.

McCracken suggests that, at an individual level, consumer activities can also provide a link to hopes and aspirations, through the symbolic value of objects. In this sense, objects may be seen to act as pathways, or, in McCracken's words, as "bridges to displaced meaning" (p.105). The goods in question are usually "high involvement" ones

(p.111), difficult to attain or access due to reasons of cost or rarity. This difficulty is seen as a necessary condition for an object to become a bridge to displaced meaning, as "There is no point in longing for what is readily within one's reach" (ibid.). Before they are owned, such objects may signify a whole range of circumstances associated with their possession, an ideal lifestyle. After their purchase, the displacement process can operate in different ways: the goods can be regarded as a partial fulfilment, a small step towards getting nearer the ideal; another possibility is that the object loses its quality of bridge to displaced meaning, which is then transferred to another good, so that perceived intangibility is maintained and the individual's ideals are preserved.

McCracken offers the example of collecting activities as another instance of bridges to ideals. Collectible goods can be difficult to achieve, for pecuniary or rarity reasons, and this elusiveness renders them suitable for the role of bridges. Moreover, their concrete nature adds a dimension of reality to the insubstantiality of ideals, and thus makes them appear more accessible, providing an incentive for their pursuit.

McCracken's account of consumption as an action aimed towards attaining of ideals provides an attractive account of the ostensibly never-ending desire to consume. Such an account, however, appears to be more applicable in relation to luxury or rare goods, rather than in the case of everyday, or domestic consumption. In the context of 'high involvement' or exceptional objects, the association with ideals (or desired lifestyles) may be retained. In such situations, it could be argued that sufficiency may be difficult to achieve, with perpetual changes in values and priorities, and as such the appetite for consumption would be maintained and stimulated.

2.4.5 Looking for novelty

Continuing the idea of an incessant search for meaning, Campbell (1992) offers another answer to the question of what lies behind the high levels of contemporary consumption. He distinguishes between three different understandings of the term 'new': "first, the new as the fresh or newly created; second, the new as the improved or innovative; and third, the new as the unfamiliar or novel" (p. 52). In the first case, consumption activities are considered to target objects seen as worn out or in need of replacement; the second category is considered to refer to scientific or technical innovation; finally, the third meaning, 'novelty', is seen as indicating a "purely experimental contrast (...) a judgement which an individual makes on the basis of previous experience" (p.55). Campbell argues that demand for the first two categories is unlikely to amount to the high levels of modern consumption, as it would be necessarily limited by replacement or innovation needs. By contrast, for people who appear to value the stimulating qualities of the unfamiliar and unusual, the third category is considered to provide the impetus for the "rapidly changing and continuous sequence of new wants" (p.57).

Campbell attributes the social acceptance and dissemination of such consumption criteria to Romantic values, developed with the advent of Romanticism as a cultural movement in the 18th and 19th centuries (Campbell, 1983, 1987). In Campbell's view, modern consumption is distinguished by the pursuit of novelty and pleasure. In this sense, such consuming behaviours are seen as underlined by a Romantic ethos, described as "a distinct set of value biases, for feeling over cognition (...) imagination over intellect (...), a preference for the dynamic rather than the static, disorder to order (...) the cult of the individual" (1983, p. 285, in-text references omitted). According to Campbell, the Romantic perspective placed the emphasis on the uniqueness of human beings and on the quest for self-development through pursuit of novel experiences. Romantic notions of self-expression and self-improvement implied dissatisfaction with 'one's station in life' and a perceived responsibility to better oneself, particularly through new and exciting pursuits. Such aspirations are echoed by the characteristics of modern consumerism as summarised by Campbell: a learned attitude of endless dissatisfaction and desire; consumption as an end-in-itself; and a perceived feeling of obligation on the part of people to pursue this end (1983, p. 293). In Campbell's words,

> "What (...) characterises the unique "spirit" of modern consumerism is not merely the treatment of the consumptive experience as an end-in-itself but the search for ever more novel and varied consumptive experience as an end-in-itself. It is the desire to desire, the wanting to want which is its hallmark" (1983, p. 293).

Campbell argues that this invocation of Romantic ideas, promoting ideals of freedom, creativity and pleasure, has the capacity to counteract potential, more traditionalist, objections expressing a preference for the status quo. The wish for novelty becomes associated with day-dreaming and imagination, whereby "that which has not yet been experienced can be taken as embodying the realization of the longed-for dream" (1992, p. 61). This formulation echoes McCracken's notion of 'displaced meaning' outlined earlier, whereby novel objects may come to be regarded as dreams (to be) fulfilled.

Having as a starting point the humanistic notion of the individual striving for self-development, Campbell's argument acknowledges the role of cultural elements in shaping people's actions. At the same time, by conceptualizing the desirability of pursuing new and exciting experiences as a cultural message with currency in contemporary societies, he suggests that increasing consumption may be an outcome of people's positioning within this type of discourse. However, it can also be argued that, by focusing on the cultural determinants of consumer decisions, Campbell's theory does not take into consideration other social, political and economic factors potentially contributing to consumption-related behaviour, such as gender, ethnicity, financial resources or age.

2.5 Summary

The aim of this chapter has been to outline some of the various theoretical positions from which "the human romance with things" (Csikszentmihalyi & Rochberg-Halton, 1981, p. ix) has so far been perceived. Focusing on material objects, these were presented as providing concrete shape to abstract cultural concepts, acting as background for relations between people and as contributors to definitions and understandings of notions of self and identity. Given the pervasiveness of consumption practices in contemporary societies, the context of the present research was identified as a consumer society, and the main implications of this concept were reviewed. In relation to this, various opinions on the possible connection between consumption activities and concepts of freedom were explored. People's desire for objects, as one of the main features of consumer societies, was discussed from different theoretical perspectives. The central argument here was that symbolism and meaning making, over and above pragmatic considerations, need to be taken into account when investigating consumer practices.

The next chapter aims to provide an overview of some of the main theoretical conceptualizations of identity in social sciences. It will also point out the ways in which identities have been linked with consumer objects and activities, usually by means of representation practices. In this manner, the choice, display, or indeed rejection of certain consumer goods or actions have been understood to indicate and symbolize personal and/or social characteristics.

Chapter 3: Conceptualizations of Identity

3.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter I drew attention to the links established between material objects and consumer practices and notions of identity - who we are or aim to be, and how we and others see ourselves based on the goods we aspire to, possess or consume. I will now turn to examining the concept of identity itself and some of the implications of the understandings around it.

Questions around 'who we are' have a long historical tradition, from the classic 'know thyself' of the Delphi oracle to contemporary explorations of notions of identity. An extensive amount of academic literature deals with the notions of self, personality or identity, often used inter-changeably to refer to the nature of the individual, or to those aspects of a person considered to assimilate them with and/or set them apart from particular categories. Knowledge or assumptions of who we and others are guide everyday human interaction: in Rom Harré's words, "We exist as persons for other people and for ourselves" (1993, p. 3).

The present chapter begins by briefly mapping out some of the historical and conceptual developments that have influenced psychological thought. It then explores some of the conceptualizations of identity from a multi-disciplinary perspective, and continues by examining how construction of identities is commonly linked to and takes place within what may broadly be termed consumer activities. The final part of the chapter looks at definitions of ethical practices, and specifically at the connection between ethical consumption and identity.

3.2. Background

The adoption of identity as an analytic concept in social sciences is a relatively recent phenomenon. The historian Philip Gleason (1983) places it in the 1950s, and attributes its popularization to Erikson's (1994a [1959]) theories of identity. According to Grinberg and Grinberg (1974), the concept was introduced in psychoanalytical literature in 1933, by the psychoanalyst and neurologist Victor Tausk, in his paper "On the Origin of the 'Influencing Machine' in Schizophrenia", which dealt with schizophrenic patients' paranoid delusions, and the effect of these on the person's sense of self. Due to its perceived complexity as well as its contemporary relevance, understandings of the self have had a long tradition of study, with several attempts, located mainly in Western historical and philosophical thought, to trace their origins. For example, in his overview of 'discovery of the self' across historical stages, Logan (1987) proposed a series of phases in the

evolution of individuality: the 'Autonomous Self' of the Middle Ages, referring to individuals becoming more 'apparent' through new structural relationships with landowners and the Church; the more active 'Assertive Self' of the Renaissance, suggested by literary works exhorting individual achievement; the 'Competent Self' of the Enlightenment, regarded as autonomous source of reason and as having the capacity to shape its environment; the 'Reflective Self' of Romanticism and Modernity, seen not only as an initiator of action, but, more importantly, as becoming itself an object of study – an approach which has continued to the present time.

Adopting a similar historical approach, Baumeister (1987) too has located various understandings of concepts of self as juxtaposed to particular social, economic, cultural and religious contexts. Baumeister considers pre-modern times to have been largely unproblematic regarding notions of self, due to most people having a fixed identity, seen as immutable, divinely preordained and community-bound. Identity, in this context, was defined in terms of occupation, kinship or rank. Baumeister has linked the emergence of a concern with self to cultural and religious shifts starting in the 16th century, when theatre role-playing advanced the notion of different personas (a hidden and a public one), and to Protestant doctrines, where belief in a predestined salvation of the soul, promoted increased self-consciousness and self-scrutiny. Concepts of self were seen as further defined by Romantic cultural notions, which placed an emphasis on individuality, uniqueness and personal potential needing to be identified and fulfilled (see also Campbell, 1987).

While Logan's and Baumeister's analyses are based on literary and historical sources, they are useful in providing an historical background for some of the prevalent ontological and epistemological assumptions in social sciences. The common thread throughout these understandings is the understanding of the individual as a 'self-contained' or 'self-sustaining' unitary entity (Sampson, 1977; 1988; 1989a, b; Hall, 1996), regarded as separate from social surroundings, but having the capacity to influence and be influenced by them, while being ultimately in a position of autonomy. In describing this concept of the human being, Elias (2000 [1978]) uses the term "*homo clausus*, a little world in himself [sic] who ultimately exists quite independently of the great world outside" (p.286). This philosophical assumption, which places the locus of knowledge in the individual, seen as rational and autonomous being, has had far-reaching implications regarding assumptions about the nature of the world and ways of obtaining knowledge. Sampson (1981) mentions two such consequences, in terms of what he designates 'reductions': one is "a *subjectivist reduction*, which grants primacy to the structures and processes of the knowing subject. The second involves an *individualistic reduction*, which grants primacy to the thinking and reasoning of the individual knower" (1981, p.730). By implication, the person 'doing the knowing' has precedence over the object of knowledge. These observations are especially reflected in

discussions regarding relations and effects of power in the research processes. According to this view, a researcher is able to record objectively, accurately and reliably, phenomena and events, including other people's experiences, in a culturally and historically transcendent account. Under these circumstances, knowledge is seen to be the result of individual effort, and, as such, unfettered by temporal or local features, and acquiring a universal character.

The theory of the person that places individuals at the centre of the social stage, as "self-determining, autonomous sovereigns, authors in charge of their life's work" (Sampson, 1989a, p.915) has, until recently, been one of the main tenets of psychology. Sampson (1989a) points out the implications of this perspective when he writes about "the profound connections among the shape of a social order, the kinds of functional units it constitutes as central, and (...) the emergence both of the individual unit and of psychology as the discipline designed to study that unit" (p. 916). In this sense, ideas deriving from the concern with the individual can be traced in a variety of forms of psychology. The notion of hidden, inner depths opposed to external, public personas is at the centre of psychoanalytic theories. The idea of a unique self, waiting to be discovered or developed during an individual's lifetime, has been adopted by humanistic psychology (e.g. Rogers, 1967). Le Bon's (1995 [1896]) work on the behaviour of crowds (seen as dangerous and irrational in contrast with individual rationality) has influenced social psychological theories in the areas of collective behaviour, deindividuation, informational influence and conformity (Stainton Rogers, Stenner, Gleeson & Stainton Rogers, 1995; Hogg & Vaughn, 2002). An increasing number of theorists (e.g. Rose, 1989, 1998; Henriques et al., 1984; Gergen, 1989) argue that not only does psychology incorporate received forms of understanding within its theories, it also plays an active part in establishing modern forms of individuality. In the words of Henriques et al. (1984), "psychology produces individuals as objects of its theorizing and practices and in turn produces people as they act and perceive themselves" (p.2). In this regard, it has been argued that the concept of identity has become, at the same time, both a 'category of analysis' (in its use in social sciences) and a 'category of practice'; in the latter form, it is employed by people in mundane situations and activities, it can have political dimensions, and can be involved in activism and social movements (Brubaker & Cooper, 2000). Theoretical approaches to identity have varied across time, from concerns about the nature of identity to questions about how it is understood and constructed in social settings. Some of these notions are discussed in the following sections.

3.3 Understandings of identity

Identity has been conceptualized in a variety of ways: the term has been used to indicate similarity and continuity (based on its etymology – the Latin word *idem*), or to designate difference ('I' and the 'other', 'us' and 'them'); it has been understood to refer to inner

essences (personality) or as being displayed through external appearance (e.g. 'clothes make the man'); it has been seen to refer to permanent, immutable characteristics (such as biological sex or ethnicity) or as being transient and fluid (as portrayed by postmodern theorists). Because of this multiplicity of understandings, identity has been described as "notoriously elusive and difficult to define" (Wetherell, 2010, p. 3), and its appropriateness or relevance as an analytical concept has been questioned (e.g. Hall, 1996, Brubaker & Cooper, 2000). Brubaker and Cooper (2000), in particular, argue that the use of the same concept to indicate a multitude of meanings, sometimes contradictory, render it vague, ambiguous and, as such, ineffective as a social analytic tool. Following Derrida, Hall (1996) refers to the term as being "under erasure": this means that, while the term may be imprecise and arguably unfit for purpose, it is still needed to understand and answer particular questions (Sampson, 1989b; Hall, 1996). While the notion of identity has indeed many facets, I would agree with Wetherell (2010), who suggests that it remains a valuable resource and tool for social and cultural enquiries, specifically *because of* its flexibility and wealth of meanings, which render it adaptable to a wide range of research contexts. Or, as Hall puts it, "the line which cancels [it], paradoxically, permits [it] to go on being read" (1996, p. 1).

Generally, conceptualizations of identity have combined elements of the personal and the social, with varying degrees of emphasis on one aspect or another. However, as theorists have pointed out (e.g. Augoustinos & Walker, 1995; Woodward, 2002), drawing a distinction between 'personal' and 'social' in discussions of identity is arbitrary and artificial, since all definitions of identity are made with reference to socially and culturally relevant elements, existent within a specific temporal and geographic location; or, in the words of Augoustinos and Walker (1995), "the social is forever and always reproduced within the individual" (p.99) – the ways in which (individual) people make sense of their surroundings and communicate with others inevitably originate and are based in a collective, shared system of meanings.

3.3.1 Personal identities

Approaches accentuating the 'personal' aspect have traditionally focused on ideas of 'sameness' across a person's lifetime. For example, Erikson (1994a [1959], 1994b [1968]), who popularized the concept, theorized identity formation as a process occurring across an individual's lifespan, the aim being to attain "a *subjective* sense of *invigorating sameness* and *continuity*" (Erikson, 1994b [1968], p.19, italics in original). This perspective conceived identity as the result of a process of adjustment between the individual sense of self and the perceived requirements of the social world; a successful match would result in a sense of coherence and stability. In a similar approach, the humanistic tradition (Rogers, 1967; Maslow, 1968) focused on the idea of attaining an ideal, authentic self, at harmony with itself and the surrounding world, discovered or

revealed through a process of self-actualization. An understanding of identity as a fundamentally stable feature was also proposed by personality theorists (e.g. Eysenck, 1970; Cattell & Kline, 1977). Their formulations of the concept constituted it as an internal element, mainly physiologically determined, and consisting of a combination of traits. While the expression of these traits depended on the social context, the core characteristics were considered to remain essentially unchanged, and would be reflected in consistent patterns of behaviour, in what has been termed an 'honest soul' approach (Potter & Wetherell, 1987, p.96). As noted, such approaches acknowledged the influence of the social environment, but retained as their focus the sovereign individual, thereby theorizing identity as an individual project or achievement.

Role theories (e.g. Goffman, 1990 [1959]) offered a departure from the idea of 'sameness' by proposing that people modify their behaviour in accordance with the social situation they find themselves in. In other words, different pre-existent social circumstances require 'impression management', the performance of particular actions and/or the display of certain qualities. To fulfil these social requirements, people need to act accordingly, and take on specific 'roles'. This dramaturgical approach has been criticized on the grounds that it maintains the dualism between individual and society, by pre-supposing an already existent self (or core person) from which decisions to adopt particular roles originate (Henriques et al., 1984). On the other hand, role theories offer a departure from the simplistic vision of the separate, autonomous individual, by acknowledging the situated and purposeful nature of human interactions and the importance of meaning making in social relations.

3.3.2 Social identities

The idea of 'sameness' in conceptualizations of identity has also been taken to indicate similarity not only within, but also across persons (Brubaker & Cooper, 2000). 'Who people are' is here addressed in terms of representativeness of certain types or social categories, and the concept of 'social identity' refers to processes around belonging or affiliation to certain groups.

Research in the area of social identities follows Tajfel and Turner's work on inter-group relations (Tajfel, 1981; Turner, 1991) – Social Identity Theory and Self-categorization Theory. Social identity theories are based on four principles (adapted from Hogg & Vaughn, 2002, pp.19-20):

1. Interpersonal and inter-group behaviour are regarded as separate phenomena; their differentiation aims to avoid explanation of group processes by reduction to interpersonal bonds and relations.

2. Humans' perception of the social world is influenced by a need for meaningful and socially useful simplification and reduction of uncertainty; this principle implies that categorization processes are a necessary and unavoidable aspect of life.

3. Society comprises distinct social categories, which differ in terms of standing and power. In this regard, the characteristics and behaviour of group members will be influenced or even prescribed by the social and political nature of the group.

4. People have a need for positive self-esteem; the pursuit of a positive status will define their relation both to the in-group, as well as to various out-groups.

Social identity theories have been useful in the conceptualization of identity for a variety of reasons. They recognize the relational and social nature of identity, in the sense that who people are is defined by reference to others, in terms of both similarity and difference (what we are and what we are not). Moreover, they take into account the role of socio-cultural elements (the shared character of beliefs, norms and values) which underpin both people's day-to-day activities, and may be the source of collective social and political action; thus, they point to the role of ideology in people's actions. Furthermore, by addressing the salience and relevance of dimensions of comparisons among groups, they take into consideration the impact of the historical and cultural environment on people's understandings of shared identities. Self-categorization theory, in particular, aims to attend to the specific context of action as exerting an influence on the ways in which people categorize (Reicher, Spears & Haslam, 2010; Hepburn, 2003).

While acknowledging the contribution to the study of group interactions, criticisms of social identity theories have targeted some of their tenets, such as the differentiation between personal and social identity. Brown (2000) has pointed out the difficulty posed by such a distinction when analyzing people's actions. The latter, he argued, may be the result of a combination of various elements (personal, group, circumstantial), which would make the discovery or recognition of an unambiguous social identity hard to achieve and investigate.

The main concerns, however, have been directed at the emphasis of social identity theories on individual motivational and/or cognitive processes (Henriques et al., 1984; Potter & Wetherell, 1987; Billig, 1996). The focus on individual cognition accentuates the personal/social dualism, with an understanding of "the social as contingent" to human action (Henriques et al., 1984, p.61). The representations people work with in the act of categorization are conceptualized as a result of internal cognitive mechanisms, and are supposed to be accurate reflections of surrounding reality. According to this view, phenomena like prejudice and discrimination would be the consequence of error in the processing of information, deriving from a (mistakenly) simplified and distorted view of the world. As a result, as Billig (1996) argues, because categorization is seen as a

necessary simplification of a complex world, stereotypes and subsequent prejudice and discrimination become inevitable and 'natural' (p. 155-157).

Moreover, it has been argued that the focus on automatic perception processes has ignored people's active participation in defining and interpreting their social environment (Hepburn, 2003), particularly the role played by language and talk. This notion involves a change in perspective, from regarding the individual as origin of identity, to concentrating on the social, cultural and political context. In this way, discursive approaches signal the move from understandings of identity as placed in "'private' realms of cognition, emotion and experience... [to] the public realms of discourse, interaction and other semiotic systems of meaning-making" (Benwell & Stokoe, 2010, p. 83). From this standpoint, examinations of identity concentrate on language and symbolic practices, asking not what identity is, but how it is constructed and managed in texts and conversations.

3.3.3 Discursive identities

The preoccupation with the discursive production of identity forms part of a wider shift in social sciences, whereby theoretical movements such as poststructuralism or social constructionism queried the assumption of fixed, stable identities, determined unproblematically by different social categories. Questions have been asked along the lines "Did class position, gender or ethnicity operate like a 'badge worn on the back' stamping out, marking and defining identities and dictating interests? Did all members of a social category share the same essential attributes?" (Wetherell, 2010, p. 13). Attempts to answer such questions have led to investigations of the ways in which narratives of identity take place, based on the premise of the performative role of language.

Discursive approaches to identity regard it as a 'subject-of-language' (du Gay, Evans & Redman, 2000), in the sense of it being produced by and within discourses. In this view, the self is not pre-existent, but continuously constructed and performed through language. Processes of identification or differentiation, seen, for example, by social identity theories as social and psychological realities (cf. Widdicombe, 1998), are here conceived as being achieved through discursive practices.[2] While, according to traditional social psychological thought, identity implied sameness and consistency across time, discursive approaches constitute it as a "process never completed... lodged in contingency... strategic and positional" (Hall, 1996, pp. 2-3).

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[2] I use 'discursive practices' in Davies and Harré's (1999) meaning of the term, as "all the ways in which people actively produce social and psychological realities" (1999, p. 34).

Approaches vary between the study of discursive practices across wider historical, social and political contexts, generally associated with the work of Michel Foucault, and the accomplishment of situated identities in talk-in-interaction, in ethnomethodological and conversation analytic approaches (e.g. Antaki & Widdicombe, 1998). While, in similar manner to the personal/social dualism, separation between micro and macro is often artificial and blurred, it gives rise to another dichotomy, between agency and structure. At one extreme, identities may be conceptualized as determined and formed within broad regimes of political and administrative power, with people having little agency and being "recruited" or "hailed" by ideologies (Althusser, 1971). In other words, they are 'drawn' into specific identity positions offered by dominant discourses. According to this view, identity is "tied to social or institutional practices, such that selfhood takes on a subjected, structured quality and perpetuates existing power relations in society" (Benwell & Stokoe, 2010, p. 83). This is where 'expert discourses' belong (cf. Willig, 2000), such as, for instance, in the case of this study, professionals' constructions of their involvement with leather as essential for the ecological balance. At the other end, identities are seen as actively and purposefully managed and negotiated by speakers, in discursive practices occurring in the course of social interactions; as Widdicombe (1998, p.195) puts it, "making an identity salient is (...) an indexical, local and occasioned matter, shot through with speakers' interests". In other words, people's bringing up and use of particular identity-related matters will depend on the immediate, particular conversational aims. Increasingly, the argument is put forward for an integrative approach, which recognizes and takes into account the broader social, cultural, ideological and political constraints, and at the same time acknowledges the capacity of people to invest and participate actively in the shaping and managing of identities (Wetherell, 1998; Billig, 1999b; Yates & Hiles, 2010). It may be said that this argument is based on an understanding of 'agency' not as unlimited freedom, but as "the socially constructed capacity to act (...) the capacity to 'make a difference', the enactment of X rather than Y" (Barker & Galasinski, 2001, p.46).

To achieve a comprehensive account, it may be argued that positioning theory (Davies & Harré, 1999) brings together these concerns, by proposing that people's "personal-social identity can only be expressed and understood through categories available to them in discourse" (p.35), and also that "a possibility of notional choice is involved because there are many and contradictory discursive practices that each person could engage in" (ibid.). For example, when asked about leather related issues, some participants brought up possible ethical concerns, while others referred to potential style clashes between different leather garments. Thus, it may be said that respondents chose to take up particular subject positions from the range open to them via this question, and made available within a variety of discourses (e.g. environmental, ethical, style etc.).

While, on the surface, the concept of 'subject position' appears similar to that of 'role', the two notions differ in terms of content and consequences: a role is considered more rigid and pre-determined, implying "static, formal and ritualistic aspects" (Davies & Harré, 1999, p. 32); moreover, it may be enacted without necessarily requiring subjective identification (Willig, 2001). Subject positions, on the other hand, are more flexibly defined: they offer, rather than prescribe, an array of viewpoints and discursive practices. At the same time, by taking up a particular position, a speaker "inevitably sees the world from the vantage point of that position" (Davies & Harré, 1999, p. 35), and in this sense they identify with it.

Davies and Harré's positioning approach resonates with that of Hall (1996), who conceives of identities as "points of temporary attachment to the subject positions which discursive practices construct for us" (p.6). Again, this process of attachment (or, as Hall terms it, 'suturing' or 'articulation') conceptualizes identity as one possible production among many others, which can be established by 'articulating' various elements. Under different circumstances, these distinct elements may be combined in alternative ways. This notion entails the person's response to being 'hailed', as well as their personal investment in adopting a particular position, thereby combining the effect of structural elements with personal engagement. Moreover, such identities can never be constant or stable, with changes in social circumstances triggering different articulations/identities.

In the same discursive vein, Shotter and Gergen (1989) have pointed out the restrictive, as well as facilitative influence that existing cultural resources exert on the constitution of identities. They draw attention to the role of (cultural) texts, which are seen to provide "the resources for the formation of selves" (p.ix). Stainton Rogers et al. (1995) have taken up the reference to texts, understood to encompass 'practices' and 'objects in-the-world' (Curt, 1994, p. 44) and have proposed the term 'textual identities'. This notion conceives of identities as, again, not pre-existent entities, but as being constituted in narratives or stories. These accounts are narrated in particular circumstances, and bring together available cultural and symbolic elements with a person's relationship to those circumstances; in Stainton Rogers et al.'s words, "the construction of an identity (the significance of one's self) is simultaneously the construction of (the significance of) one's world" (1995, p. 62). Furthermore, the idea of (inter)textuality, understood as the capacity of texts to include, implicitly or explicitly, fragments of other texts, which leads to an accumulation of meaning (Barker & Galasinski, 2001), reiterates the notion of textual identities as being continuously changing, through continuous inclusion and exclusion of alternative texts.

The concept of identities being formed and understood within particular cultural contexts brings up the issue of representation – how identities are (re)presented and (re)produced symbolically, not only through language, but also through practices and material culture.

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3.4 Representing identity

The link between consumption and identity has been made extensively in social sciences and cultural theory. One aspect of the connection is around issues of representation. Identity is inevitably linked to representation, mainly, though not exclusively, through the signalling of similarity and difference. We categorize and are being categorized by the way we look, dress and speak, by the practices we engage in and the objects we hold on to – all these act as symbols by means of which we represent ourselves to others. In the following sections I will explore some of the connections between identities and material practices.

3.4.1 Material objects and identity

Material objects have been widely portrayed as instrumental in the process of constructing and forming identities (Solomon, 1983; Fiske, 1989; Friedman, 1994; Casey & Martens, 2007). Dittmar (1992, 1994) and Dittmar, Beattie & Friese (1995) talk about 'identity through possessions', and suggest that objects associated with individuals state something about the persons, about their personal and social qualities. The role of objects in establishing social or group identity is also put forward by Lunt and Livingstone (1992), who propose that identities are 'bound up' with objects and worked out within the context of the material conditions of the consumer society.

The connection between objects and personal characteristics, however, in terms of individuality or uniqueness, also has a long cultural tradition. At the end of the 19th century, William James was drawing a strong link between self and possessions, by asserting that

> "The empirical self of each of us is all that he is tempted to call by the name of *me*. But it is clear that between what a man calls me and what he simply calls *mine* the line is difficult to draw. We feel and act about certain things that are ours very much as we feel and act about ourselves (...) a man's self is the sum total of all that he CAN call his (...). All these things give him the same emotions. If they wax and prosper, he feels triumphant; if they dwindle and die away, he feels cast down, - not necessarily in the same degree for each thing, but in much the same way for all" (James, 1995[1890], p.205).

James's statement about the individual as the sum of his (sic) possessions has been echoed by the more recent understanding that 'to have is to be' - we are what we have (Dittmar, 1992). Belk (1988) argued that the objects we own contribute greatly to the construction of our identities. Through them "we learn, define, and remind ourselves of who we are (...) [and we use them] to express ourselves (...) to seek happiness, remind

ourselves of experiences, accomplishments, and other people in our lives" (p.160). Such objects are used to draw biographical accounts and even provide a sense of purpose, and thus become an extension of the self. Moreover, as James also noted, the loss or degradation of things regarded in this way may be seen as traumatic, and may trigger feelings of personal violation. Goffman (1968) argued along similar lines when referring to the 'stripping process' in relation to people who, on entering institutions such as prisons, mental hospitals or care homes, have their clothes and personal possessions taken away from them. Under such circumstances, individuals experience a sense of loss or diminishing of self. In the case of leather, some of the research participants noted how, because of its durability, their relation to leather objects tended to be comparatively long-lived, and what they depicted as a relationship of attachment was established; as a consequence, they described the loss or eventual wearing-out of the item as saddening.

From a developmental perspective, Allport (1949, cited in Dittmar, 1992) suggested that the expansion of one's possessions, and thus the increase in the number of things that can be considered one's own, acts as a process of self-extension, which starts in infancy and continues in adulthood. Within cultural studies, Barthes (2000 [1972]) also referred to the role of objects early in life, in his essay on French children's toys. Toys, he argues, prepare children for adulthood by providing "a microcosm of the adult world" (p. 53) and acting as models of gender identities and roles. Similarly, in her study of girls' and boys' bedrooms, Cieraad (2007) suggested that the décor emphasizes and reinforces gender specificity, both through the objects present and the decorative colour and materials.

3.4.2 Material objects and gender

The representational role of objects in displaying gender identity is equally extensively acknowledged (e.g. Roach-Higgins et al, 1995; Kirkham, 1996; Sassatelli, 2007; Casey & Martens, 2007). Dress, in particular, is one of the main external markers of gender difference. In her analysis of fashion and gender, Entwistle (2000) argues that distinguishing between male and female is still one of the essential features of clothing, despite various fashion trends promoting a more androgynous look. More strikingly, the symbolism of clothes is such that they "can come to stand for sexual difference in the *absence* of a body" (p. 141): in this sense, Entwistle (2000) gives the example of signposting of public toilets, which are differentiated by the stylised male and female silhouettes in trousers and skirt respectively; this, she notes, is a depiction which persists despite women's long established wearing of trousers. Here, the representation reinforces the typical, rather than actual imagery, and works to further reproduce traditional associations between appearance and gender, with trousers signifying 'masculinity' and skirts connoting 'femininity'. Entwistle's argument resonates with Butler's (2000 [1993]) analysis of the cultural character of gender in terms of "compulsory practice", whereby "heterosexually ideal genders are performed and

naturalized" (p.110), and thus reproduce established ideals of femininity and masculinity. The repeated association of skirts with women and trousers with men acts to normalize this portrayal and to perpetuate cultural and gender stereotypes. In this light, cross-dressing may be taken as a challenge to the stability of male/female dichotomy in clothing, and thus acting as a disruption of mainstream culture (Garber, 1992). Butler (2000 [1993]), however, questions the extent of such potential subversion, and argues that "heterosexuality can augment its hegemony through its denaturalization" (p.110); she proposes that a caricaturing of heterosexual norms, while drawing attention to their socially constructed nature, does not automatically or necessarily question their adequacy.

The association between objects and gender is not confined to clothing. In his 1978 study of the bike and hippie culture, Willis describes how motorbikes and associated gear (leather, studs and denim) served to project a tough and frightening image. The symbolic function of the motorcycle exceeded the functional one, as means of transport: motorbikes, together with long hair and clothes blowing in the wind acted as a symbol of aggressive, working-class masculinity, as well as an element of distinction between the 'motor-bike boys' and the 'outside group', the 'mods' (Willis, 1978, 1982). In a different social context, household items have been particularly related to women and their work in the house. Graves (1996) provides a critical look at the link between the washing machine and the housewife identity, observing that "woman and the kitchen have been irrecoverably yoked together" (p. 32). Graves examines how domestic activities, such as ensuring clean clothes for the family, are constituted as an inextricable part of notions of motherhood and more general feminine 'adequacy'.

Entwistle (2000) points out that the relationship between femininity and fashion, for example, has been both metaphorical and literal: for a long time, activities like weaving, clothes making and sewing have been considered part of women's sphere of activities; at the same time, metaphorically, women have been associated with change and instability – features generally attributed to fashion. Fashion has often been seen to involve a moral dimension, whereby preoccupation with matters of style has been interpreted as an indicator of extravagance, superficiality or even wastefulness, but also as a potential sign of artistic or aesthetic inclinations (Roach & Eicher, 2007). For men, the message remains ambiguous. Men's fashions and reactions to them have undergone considerable changes, from flamboyant costumes in the middle ages to puritanical and Victorian sobriety, with more variety apparent after the 1960s (Craik, 1993). Even in recent years, when notions of the 'new man' (McKay, Mikosza & Hutchins, 2005) have made it easier for men to display interest in style and grooming, some have argued that there is a sense that "very well-dressed men, unless pop or film stars, are often seen as narcissistic, silly, homosexual or all three" (Edwards, 1997, p. 101). In Steele's (1989: p. 61) words, men who attempt to look attractive "[run] the risk of looking unmanly", by

acting in apparent contradiction to traditionally established imagery of lack of interest in appearance, of dress simplicity and ruggedness. Similarly, Frith and Gleeson (2004) have suggested that men, while concerned about their appearance, still feel they should not express too openly an interest in clothing and fashion; this, the authors argued (similar to Steele and Edwards), may be aimed at avoiding associations with effeminacy or homosexuality, and at reinforcing conventional representations of masculinity and heterosexuality.

3.4.3 Material objects and distinction

Apart from gender, dress has also been linked to social categories of age, ethnicity and class (e.g. Wilson, 1985; Craik, 1993; Mort, 1996; Edwards, 1997; Andrews & Talbot, 2000; Entwistle, 2001). Edwards (1997) has argued that appearance and fashion have a major role in the 'politics of difference', meaning "those politics which affect, reinforce or even invent difference within groups and societies" (p. 100). Barnard (1996) traced this regulatory role to sumptuary laws in the Middle Ages, aimed at preserving class differentiation. In this sense, it may be said that historically, for a number of centuries at least, fashion has had a political role, in emphasizing and maintaining social distinctions.

Theorists (e.g. Giddens, 1991) have also pointed out the lifestyle implications of material goods, defined as "the ways in which people seek to display their individuality and their sense of style through the choice of a particular range of goods and their subsequent customizing and personalizing of these goods" (Lury, 1996, p. 80). In this light, consumer decisions are considered to reflect a person's taste and inclinations, as well as to indicate affiliation or distinction. As noted earlier in the thesis, this line of argument was put forward by Bourdieu, in his study of 1960s French society (Bourdieu, 2010 [1984]). Following an extensive empirical study of lifestyles and patterns of consumption, Bourdieu concluded that taste (concretized in consumer choices) acted to define, maintain and communicate social status:

> "Taste classifies, and it classifies the classifier. Social subjects, classified by their classifications, distinguish themselves by the distinctions they make, between the beautiful and the ugly, the distinguished and the vulgar..." (2010 [1984], p.xxix).

Bourdieu suggested that people's choices of material objects, and also of music, films, books and art (cultural capital), are shaped by social class and are indicative of it at the same time. He posited that taste, far from being a private, individual matter, was instead determined by the 'habitus' one belongs to, defined as "a system of dispositions characteristic of the different classes and class fractions" (ibid). This brings to the fore issues of social conformity – belonging to a group or social class is seen as imposing the need for solidarity; any attempts at deviation, by, for example, actions such as donning

objects considered inappropriate for one's 'station', are 'called to order'. In this sense, consumer goods "become the interface between public response, surveillance and opinion" (Casey & Martens, 2007, p.7). Socially sanctioned patterns of consumption provide guides as to what 'correct' and 'incorrect' choices entail, and so act as factors of inclusion and exclusion - or, as Douglas and Isherwood (1996, p.xv) put it, "can be used as fences or bridges". The normalisation of processes of judgement and evaluation, together with the criteria employed, enable the differentiation to appear as 'natural'; as a consequence, it functions to reinforce and reproduce the patterns of social and political domination within society (Featherstone, 1991; Lury, 1996; Crossley, 2008).

Processes of differentiation, however, occur not only between, but also within social classes. At subcultural level, for instance, the aim is to establish distinction between the subculture and the mainstream culture, as well as between various subcultures (as illustrated by the example above with reference to 'motor-bike boys' and 'mods'). For example, Brake (1980, 1995) proposed three representational features of the subcultural style: image (clothes), gait (posture) and argot (distinctive vocabulary); there, the combination of dress and demeanour was used to suggest affiliation and commitment to a specific community and its values, as well as its distinction from other cultures.

3.5 Consuming identities

At the wider societal level, and on the grounds that consumption activities play an important part in social life, certain theoretical approaches have suggested that consumer practices, rather than work roles, family or community, have come to exert the most important influence in defining identities (cf. Featherstone, 1991; Bauman, 1992). As Gabriel and Lang (2006) put it, "at one level, to state that someone is a consumer is almost as meaningful as acknowledging that she or he is a living being" (p.2). This argument comes to replace the notion, based in modernist thought, that who people are was primarily determined by their relationship with the means of production; correspondingly, social structures would, equally, be determined by work–related practices and experiences. As societal institutions and practices are increasingly organized around consumption (Gabriel & Lang, 2006), the notion that identity would be forged and indicated through consumer choices, above all, becomes ever more widespread. Taken to extremes, this perspective has been conceptualized as a "celebration of human diversity as market diversity" (Mort, 1996, p.6).

The suggestion that consumption has becomes the principal marker of identity is taken to undermine classic social differences. This is an understanding linked to postmodern notions of consumption as taking place primarily in the realm of the symbolic (e.g. Baudrillard, 1988b [1970]). According to this view, consumers are engaged in an exercise of existential freedom (Elliott, 1997), and consumption practices are seen as an

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exercise in creativity, with the manipulation of symbols resulting in the creation of different identities or personas.

This standpoint, however, has been criticized for its premise of apparent egalitarianism, which glosses over constraints of, among others, age, socio-economic status and geographical location. Far from being universally accessible, shared and enjoyed, as some theorists have suggested (e.g. Holbrook & Hirschman, 1982; Firat & Venkatesh, 1992, 1993, 1995), consumer experiences are influenced, to a great extent, by financial and physical factors. This becomes a problem when, as mentioned above, identity is regarded as decisively influenced by participation in consumer practices, or, as Miller (1997) puts it, consumption becomes widely seen not as "merely the act of buying goods (...) [but] a fundamental process by which we create identity" (p.19). Material and social restrictions are therefore likely to impede full participation in this process of identity construction for "many or all of the elderly, the poor, the unemployed, those without their own transport, single parents, the infirm, or those with minimal discretionary income" (Edwards, 1997, p. 128). Far from offering the opportunity of greater inclusion and participation, the outcome may, in fact, reinforce or deepen the already existent social divisions. Similarly, Bauman has also suggested that people who, for various reasons, are not able to fully participate in the consumption practices (regarded as 'normal' social behaviour) run the risk of being "defined as flawed consumers" (1988, p. 84), and, consequently, as being no longer 'normal' members of society. Overall, the suggestion appears to be, then, that consumption practices *in themselves* have become widely regarded as indicative of individual identities and values.

In this way, when a person's ability to buy goods becomes considered a marker of personal worth, the absence of such capacity is likely to attract attributions of negative identity. As various studies have documented, the pressure to consume in particular ways starts from an early age (e.g. Phoenix, 2005; Croghan et al., 2006; Evans & Chandler, 2006; Evans, 2007). For example, in a study of young people's construction of identities around clothing and music choices, Croghan et al. (2006) examined how 'style failure' (not making the 'right' or popular choices within the reference group) was constituted as an indicator of personal failure. The consequences of making the 'incorrect' style decisions, or not being able to afford the 'correct' (socially sanctioned) ones, resulted in the questioning by the peer group of a person's moral worth, leading to stigmatization and social exclusion. Similarly, Evans and Chandler (2006) and Evans (2007) investigated the contribution of children to their parents' purchasing choices, and understandings around this involvement. There, decisions to buy particular things were described not only in terms of getting (educational) value for money, or as indicative of 'good parenting', but also as enabling children to participate and integrate in specific fashions or trends, popular among their peers. Such findings illustrate how consumer practices work to position oneself and others by both integration and differentiation, and

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to establish and maintain social boundaries, with the ultimate aim being to achieve conformity, rather than individuality.

Overall, the argument is that consumer activities and choices are generally understood and accepted not only to "fulfil utilitarian needs, but... [to] give material form to a particular narrative of self-identity" (Giddens, 1991, p. 81). As Rose (1988) put it, "It is in the name of the kinds of persons that we really are that we consume commodities, act out our tastes, fashion our bodies, display our distinctiveness" (p.1), thus suggesting that the notion of connectedness between what people buy and what they are has become a dominant, 'normal' understanding.

3.6 Ethical identities

Given the prominence of consumption practices in people's lives, certain theorists have argued that consumption should not be seen as a separate domain of existence, but should instead be regarded as integral part of human life, "not itself a practice but ... rather, a moment in almost every practice" (Warde, 2005, p. 137). In a similar way, while modes of living may be scrutinized for their ethics or morality, consumption actions also render themselves open to questions about how we engage with them, and what (if any) principles should apply.

Ethical or moral codes, containing notions and principles of right and wrong, have depended to a great extent on the historical, cultural and political environment. Some of the principles held, at one time or another, as part of ethical living have included reason, concern for others, fairness, truthfulness, equal respect or impartiality (Cottingham, 2000; Crisp, 2000). At the same time, when talking about ethical living, other questions arise, such as: what makes a person a moral agent? Are moral principles universal, or do they depend on circumstances? How is living according to moral principles defined? What does a moral or ethical life involve, and how should people go about living it? With relation to consumption, some of these questions translate into ones about the object of consumer practices. The latter may refer to specific products (e.g. clothes or food), or wider issues, such as human rights, labour standards (working conditions and wage levels), animal welfare, environmental sustainability, or fair trade products (Tallontire, Rentsendorj & Blowfield, 2001). At the same time, questions may arise about the kind of action taken, or about the ethics of consumption itself (as contrasted with refusal to consume, or reduced participation in consumer activities).

Following Crisp (2000) and Barnett et al. (2005), questions about how we should live and act ethically have been approached from three main philosophical standpoints:

1. Consequentialist theories propose that ethical or moral actions should be directed at the achievement of the greatest overall good. This line of argument has been associated with a utilitarian perspective, whereby the desired outcome is conceived in terms of maximisation of utility, welfare, or general happiness. Applied to consumption, consequentialist approaches would, for example, advocate actions that ensure the fulfilment of a particular goal, such as boycotting companies which exploit their workers, or refusing to buy leather objects because of ill treatment of animals.

2. Deontological approaches argue that ethical behaviour involves following universal principles. Here, the main concern is not with the final outcome of the actions, but with the following of established tenets of right and wrong. For example, a person might refuse to buy leather or eat meat because they think killing animals is wrong under any circumstances.

The two approaches described above are deemed to place different emphases on the notions of 'right' and 'good' (Larmore, 2000): in deontological theories, what is 'right', understood as a generally applicable principle, is considered to take precedence over the 'good', seen as the outcome of the action (such as the improvement of life). For example, those people opposed to the killing of animals for food might not be concerned with the negative impact their behaviour might have on local cattle farmers, meat processing businesses, tanneries and producers of leather objects. Consequentialist approaches, on the other hand, would privilege the 'good' over the 'right': a person might buy leather products in support of local or national industries, despite possible concerns about animal welfare or environmental effects, and might expect or hope that work practices would improve.

As Barnett et al. (2005) note, the exclusive application of either approach to consumption might be questionable for a number of reasons. In the case of consequentialist theories, the critique is mainly concerned with the apparent lack of clarity regarding the grounds on which the final (desired) outcome is established. In other words, how do we decide what the best result of an action would be? How, for example, do we know that, if we boycott a company which pollutes the environment, it will not just change its location, rather than improve its work practices? At the same time, the focus on the end effects may gloss over the ways in which they are achieved (e.g. how ethical would it be to assume that the end justifies the means?). Similarly, deontological thought could be considered rather rigid and prescriptive, as well as overlooking the specificities of time and place; for example, someone might buy products made in poor working conditions because of lack of financial or time resources to look for ethical alternatives. In both perspectives, consumer actions are assumed to take place on a mostly rational basis, with people expected to either constantly check that their activities are in line with ethical precepts, or to anticipate or calculate the outcome of

each buying decision. Neither approach would necessarily take into account the social context of consumer activities, or people's personal circumstances.

A third line of argument, 'virtue ethics', has been put forward as a more suitable alternative for assessing ethical behaviour (Barnett et al., 2005). Based on ancient Greek philosophy (Crisp, 2000), this approach argues that people's particular concerns, values and situations, and the pursuit of the 'good life', should be taken into consideration when looking at the morality of particular courses of action. As Barnett et al. (2005a) note, virtue theory directly links ethical practices with identity, and assumes that people's behaviour is influenced by their notions of what kind of persons they are, or aim to be. Moreover, individual priorities and aims are held to carry similar weight with consideration of final outcomes, or with the principles followed. In other words, concern with the greater good and following moral tenets would be given the same importance as personal satisfaction. The virtue approach is based on the understanding that "'ethical consumers' are motivated primarily by a sense of personal integrity" (op cit., p. 17), and that personal virtues play a significant part in ethical decision making.

While this latter theory acknowledges that people's circumstances, experiences and concerns occupy a central part in any activities (consumption included), I would argue that the approach appears to be focusing mainly on the individual, and on internal states (virtues) that are seen to guide behaviour. "Justice, compassion, tolerance, courage, patience, persistence, intelligence, imagination and creativity" (Barnett et al., 2005a, p.17) have been included as examples of virtues. While it may be argued that understandings of what 'virtues' consist of are socially constructed, and thus part of the shared cultural environment, this approach appears to reify them, and to regard them as causally connected with (ethical) behaviour.

A number of studies (e.g. Connolly & Prothero, 2003; Belk, Devinney & Eckhardt, 2005; Newholm, 2005; Clarke, Barnett, Cloke & Malpass, 2007) have attempted to explore people's opinions about ethical consumption, in terms of the concerns involved, the kinds of responses advocated and actions taken. As discussions around conditions of production (exploitation of workers, impact on the environment) have become widespread in recent years, it would be of interest to investigate the ways in which they permeate or affect consumption discourses, and indeed how (if) they are incorporated into people's processes of identity construction and negotiation.

In a theoretical paper discussing the concept of consumer capitalism, Billig (1999a) has suggested that affluent consumers are, in general, not preoccupied with the potentially exploitative conditions in which the products they buy might be made. He argues that people distance themselves not only from the uncomfortable knowledge of poverty and workers' mistreatment, but, equally, from thinking about the actual labour behind the

products. This avoidance, Billig suggests, derives from the established link between identity and possessions, and is aimed at disrupting any connection between the consumer's own self and the selves of the people who manufactured the goods. Writing ostensibly from such a perspective, he notes: "My sense of possession would be diminished – as well as my good consuming self – if I took seriously those dark, busy fingers, working in conditions far removed from the life-world of my playful self" (p.319). This quote provides an example of the criticism directed at the self-centredness of capitalist ideologies and some of the social and political implications of globalised economies. At the same time, Billig also ironically draws attention to certain postmodern theories which, in their exclusive focus on the pleasures of consumption, ignore the hardships which lie behind so many of the consumed objects.

Belk and colleagues (2005) have drawn similar conclusions regarding the apparent lack of consumer concern about ethical issues, by following a series of cross-cultural empirical investigations. Belk and his co-researchers conducted qualitative studies in eight countries (China, India, Turkey, Australia, USA, Germany, Sweden and Spain), and examined the ways in which consumers described their response to various ethical issues, and possible courses of action. The authors concluded that participants expressed awareness of ethical concerns; at the same time, many of them, regardless of socio-economic status, claimed that their purchasing choices were based primarily on financial considerations, and attributed responsibility for any unethical actions to the corporations producing the goods. Overall, and echoing points made by Billig (1999a), Belk et al. (2005) noted a distancing of participants from problematic practices, by constructing the latter as unavoidable ('the way of the world', p.282) or as too physically remote to exert a direct impact on their lives.

While the gap between declared stances (attitudes) and behaviour has been documented (e.g. Ölander & Thøgersen, 1995; Tallontire et al., 2001), I would agree with Miller (1997) that actual consumption practices are embedded and conducted in particular local, cultural and personally significant contexts. For example, Kurz et al. (2005) explored the discursive strategies used by Australian participants in accounting for their use of water as a limited natural resource. Similarly, a study by Newholm (2005) examined how self-described ethical consumers in the UK negotiated apparent discrepancies between their notions of ethical consumption and the actual practices they engaged in. In both cases, respondents made clear their awareness of the ethical issues involved, and often acknowledged the contradictions between principles and deeds. Such apparent inconsistencies were negotiated and reconciled in discursive constructions of the self (e.g. 'conserver' or 'waster' of resources', in Kurz et al., 2005), by means of drawing on available cultural/ideological resources.

In this context, I would argue that it may be more illuminating to explore not so much how/if consumer choices are shaped by universal moral principles, by ultimate goals or by reference to virtuous living, but rather the ways in which people make sense of their actions within their environments, and how they position themselves within discourses (moral, philosophical, political) of ethical consumption. It is this approach that I take in this thesis.

3.7 Summary

In this chapter I have covered, mainly in summary form, some of the theoretical approaches to identity from a variety of disciplines (psychology, sociology, cultural and consumer studies). Taking into account the topic of the thesis, I have focused in particular on the ways material objects (including leather) have been used in connection with conceptualizations of identity. Additionally, I have examined how processes of identity definition and management have been associated with consumer practices, and within this field, how ethical understandings and considerations have contributed to identity debates. I concluded with a proposal as to the approach used in my own research.

In delineating the theoretical background for the present research, Chapters 2 and 3 have highlighted the emphasis on the social and cultural character of objects and practices under investigation. In so doing, they anticipate the arguments to be put forward in respect of the methodologies selected to explore the topic under research. The next chapter will provide an overview and a discussion of the methods used to collect and analyze the empirical data.

Chapter 4: Methodologies

4.1 Introduction

In Chapters 2 and 3 I outlined the theoretical background for this thesis. Chapter 2 located leather, as the topic under investigation, as part of the current material culture, and identified the research context as a Western consumer society. Chapter 3 examined some of the theoretical conceptualizations of identity, and explored ways in which this has been represented in relation to material objects, as well as to consumer practices. Against this background, I explored some of the ways in which the notion of consumer society has been theorized, and looked at the implications around people's relationships to material goods.

This thesis is concerned with exploring the meanings associated with leather and leather objects, and the ways in which such cultural understandings are used in the construction and negotiation of identities, within professional and consumption-related contexts. In order to achieve this, I employed a pluralistic qualitative approach (Mason, 2006; Lazard, Capdevila & Roberts, 2011) by using Q Methodology and a discourse analytic approach. I conducted three studies: two Q methodological studies, aimed at collecting (a) more general representations and understandings of leather as a material and (b) representations of leather objects in their role as personal possessions. I also conducted a series of semi-structured interviews, aimed at exploring constructions of leather and leather objects, with individuals from both within and outside leather-related professions. The interviews were analyzed using a synthetic discourse analytic approach (Wetherell, 1998; Wetherell & Edley, 1999; Edley & Wetherell, 2001) which combines a concern with the performing qualities of discourse with an exploration of the role of discourse in the construction of self and subjectivity.

In the current chapter, I shall be considering the methodological approaches employed in this thesis. Firstly, I shall discuss the epistemological framework of the research, and provide a justification for the use of qualitative methods in examining the topic. I will then provide a more detailed presentation of the two methods employed, discourse analysis and Q Methodology. With regard to the former, I shall explore some of the current debates around the various analytic approaches and will describe the method used in the thesis. In relation to Q Methodology, I shall provide an overview of its theoretical principles and procedural aspects. I will then outline the practical steps taken in conducting the research, in terms of data collection, handling and analysis, and I will conclude by looking at the ethical considerations which have guided the research.

4.2 Background

Traditionally, inquiries into consumption-related practices have been conducted mainly by using quantitative, hypothetico-deductive approaches (cf. Thompson, Pollio & Locander, 1994; Arnould & Thompson, 2005). These have fitted into the wider positivist frame of thought, based on certain assumptions about the nature of the world and ways of obtaining knowledge. Social sciences, which have traditionally been regarded as akin to the natural sciences, adopted, for a long period of time, the notion of knowledge in terms of abstract, general and universal truths, with research findings being seen as independent of the socio-historical context in which they were pursued. Positivist thought assumes the existence of a single, objective reality; the latter, while including social events and phenomena, would nevertheless be amenable to accurate and unbiased observations and measurements. Consequently, methodologies from the domain of natural sciences, experimental ones in particular, have been deemed most appropriate for use in the study of such social phenomena. In this context, the researcher's task would be to look for objective knowledge, by means of formulating and testing hypotheses. This pursuit of objectivity, and the required atemporal character and ahistorical purity of findings, imply that distance, if not independence, would have to be maintained between the researcher and the object of the research, and human influence should be avoided or discounted.

Consumer research has, until relatively recently, taken place only within this epistemological framework, and has been dominated by quantitative practices (Anderson, 1986; Marsden, 2001). Anderson (1986) provided a critique of four positivist approaches (termed "programs") employed in researching consumer behaviour; his analysis of the cognitive, behaviourist, economic and structuralist programs argued that they all have in common the aim to " 'explain', predict, and control human behaviour by subsuming it under deterministic or statistical laws that are assumed to be universal in nature" (p.159). Traditional psychological inquiries into consumer behaviour have used, among others, Fishbein and Azjen's Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA, 1975, in Hogg & Vaughn, 2002) and Skinner's (1993 [1974]) notions of operant conditioning. According to the former, consumer behaviour can be predicted by looking at a person's attitudes, social norms and intention to act. In this view, people are depicted as rational, information-processing beings, whose beliefs, attitudes and intentions determine the way they act. Behaviourist approaches contend that schedules of reinforcement result in stable and predictable behaviours: for instance, people can be encouraged to consume through intermittent reinforcement (rewards) such as surprise prizes or random lottery selections (Anderson, 1986). Other methods rely on the assumption of internal psychological traits (such as personality types or attitudes), which may influence consumption-related activities (e.g. Baumgartner, 2002). Such approaches share a) a deterministic and mechanistic perspective, whereby consumer behaviour is ruled by internal cognitive

mechanisms or external forces, within a mainly causal, predictable and controllable relationship; and b) reductionist assumptions, whereby "consumer behaviour is like a machine that can be broken down and understood in terms of its individual component parts, e.g. cognitive, affective, behavioural trait and so on" (Marsden, 2001, p.15). Such criticisms notwithstanding, hypothetico-deductive approaches still enjoy popularity in researching consumer behaviour (e.g. TRA studies - Bagozzi, Wong, Abe & Bergami, 2000; Xu, Summers & Belleau, 2004; Westaby, 2005; information processing analyses - Strack, Werth & Deutsch, 2007). Even when considering cultural and social aspects, the approach remains largely deterministic (e.g. cognitive models - de Mooij & Hofstede, 2002; de Mooij, 2003; Dimofte & Yalch, 2007).

Within a wider movement critical of positivist methods in consumer research, Anderson (1986) argued for a different, more "relativist" approach in examining consumption-related activities. His notion of relativism referred to the acknowledgement of socio-cultural context, and of the influence of historical, political, spatial elements on any research topic – and also on any research enterprise. In this sense, Anderson advocated a distancing from aims of independence and objectivity in research, and emphasised the importance of reflective practices, according to which "disciplinary knowledge claims are viewed as contingent upon the particular beliefs, values, standards, methods, and cognitive aims of its practitioners" (1986, p.156).

In the last three decades, a shift of approaches away from quantitative inquiry and towards adopting qualitative methods in consumer research has been increasingly advocated (e.g. Holbrook & O'Shaughnessy, 1988; Murray & Ozanne, 1991; Hirschman, 1993; Lunt, 1995; Marsden, 2001; Arnould & Thompson, 2005). These arguments question the appropriateness of using a natural scientific framework and methods in investigating human behaviour, and suggest that consumer research should aim to focus on the exploration of the meanings and interpretations that are associated with social (including consumption-related) practices. Indeed, as Mason (2006) argues, understanding how human actions are dependent on and/or shaped by specific contexts is an essential element of meaningful social inquiry and understanding. From this perspective, a qualitative approach can offer valuable insights, particularly because it goes beyond measurement and causality, and takes into account the wider socio-cultural environment (Mason, 2006). Within consumer research, ways of inquiry include: interpretative/phenomenological approaches (e.g. Hudson & Ozanne, 1988; Thompson, Locander & Pollio, 1989; Thompson et al., 1994; Arnold & Fischer, 1994; Smith, 2007; Stone, 2009); semiotics (e.g. Mick, 1986; Holbrook & Hirschman, 1993; Schroeder, 2002); and, more recently, poststructuralist and social constructionist approaches, which acknowledge the notion that meanings are socially and historically constructed, and are being negotiated and combined from available discourses (e.g. Holt, 1997; Marsden, 2001).

With a view to exploring leather-related representations, I used a social constructionist approach, which recognises the situated character of such understandings and aims to examine the ways in which 'reality' is culturally and discursively constituted. Before describing the actual studies undertaken, I will discuss the methods employed in terms of theoretical rationale and practical application.

4.3 Analysing discourse

As a material substance, leather takes concrete forms that are often imbued with symbolic content. In its daily life uses, in the shape of (among others) consumer objects, leather has been subjected to the processes of meaning-making that encompass all aspects of human activity and which are subject to historical and cultural influences. As outlined in earlier chapters, by being part of material culture, leather becomes a vessel of meaning and thus transcends its materiality. By means of its linguistic representations, leather also becomes an 'object to be read' (Stenner & Eccleston, 1994), constituted and located within discursive constructions.

The analysis undertaken in the interview study is based on social constructionist notions of understandings of the world. These consider knowledge not in terms of abstract, general and universal truths, independent of the socio-historical context in which they are pursued, but see it as having a situated historical and cultural character (Berger & Luckmann, 1967; Sampson, 1985; Gergen, 1973, 1985, 1997; Harré, 1993). The argument put forward is that, rather than having a universal and trans-temporal character, the ways in which we understand the world around us depend on when, where, and how we live, and are steeped in cultural, social and ideological considerations. In consequence, meanings will always be "multiple and shifting rather than unitary and fixed" (Burman & Parker, 1993, p.3).

This perspective acknowledges, notably, the social role of language, seen not only as a tool for the description of events and people, but as a medium through which social life, phenomena and practices are created and reproduced. In the words of Potter and Wetherell (1987), "language orders our perceptions and makes things happen (...) [and] can be used to construct and create social interaction and diverse social worlds" (p.1). The constructive role of language as well as the temporally and spatially situated character of knowledge are articulated, in similar vein, by Gergen, who argues that:

> "once we attempt to articulate "what there is" (...) we enter the realm of discourse. At that moment the process of construction commences, and this effort is inextricably woven into processes of social interchange and into history and culture" (1997, p. 72).

One of the early advocates of the performative role of language was J.L. Austin (1962). In his Speech Act Theory ("How to do things with words"), he examined the way vocabulary is used in everyday situations. He argued that certain utterances, in particular circumstances, have not only a descriptive or evaluative function, but also do things, or perform specific actions. As a central part of human interaction, language will be used to construct particular versions of reality and to achieve specific purposes. In this sense, language cannot be regarded as a direct, unproblematic or transparent route to cognitions or presumed internal states, but should be treated instead as a potent, action-orientated medium which functions to bring about desired results (Potter & Wetherell, 1987). A consequence of this approach will be that issues of accuracy or truth are not relevant, because the focus is on the functions that words fulfil when used to construct various accounts (or stories) of events.

The analytic method used in the present study consists of a multi-level analysis (e.g. Riley, 2002; Kurz et al., 2005; Sims-Schouten, Riley & Willig, 2007), which involves an examination of discursive practices (discursive psychology (DP) - e.g. Billig, 1987, Potter, 1996a), as well as an exploration of the ways in which discourses can shape subjectivities, inspired by Foucauldian discourse analysis (FDA - e.g. Willig, 2001, 2008) and positioning theory (Davies & Harré, 1990, 1999). A synthetic approach has also been advocated by Wetherell (1998) and Potter, Wetherell, Gill and Edwards (2003). Traditionally, the two versions of discourse analysis have been seen to answer different research questions, and to deal with the data from different epistemological viewpoints – referring primarily to questions of agency and conceptualisations of experience (Willig, 2001, 2008): while, in DP analyses, the speakers are deemed to *actively use* discursive resources in order to manage stake and interest in interaction, FDA regards the speakers as *positioned* by discursive practices, which limit or prescribe what can be said and in what ways. DP conceptualises experience as a discursive, rhetorical tool, used to validate claims, whereas FDA theorizes experience as made available and influenced by discourses: the social and psychological life of people, their ways of seeing and being in the world are considered to be defined and structured by the discursive practices existent in their respective culture (adapted from Willig, 2008, pp.90-91).

While it has been posited that DP does not address what goes on beyond the immediate context of the talk-in-interaction (Willig, 2001), I would agree with the position espoused, among others, by Wetherell (1998) and Billig (1999b), who argue that acts of interpretation on the part of both participants and researchers cannot escape being shaped by the wider social, political and cultural context in which the interaction takes place. Consequently, the analysis should be concerned both with the situated use of language (in acts of managing stake, claiming, justifying, defending, blaming and so on), as well as with the environment which permits and makes possible the use of such

devices. By taking into consideration the interplay between 'macro' elements (social, economic, cultural and political conditions) and 'micro' ones (everyday experiences and situated interactions), such an approach enables the exploration of some of its social and political consequences (e.g. Buchanan & Capdevila, 2003).

For the purposes of this thesis, the term 'discourse' is understood to refer to general processes of meaning making, and to consist of linguistic and non-linguistic elements (Wetherell, 1998). This understanding is shared by Parker (1992), who argues that discourses are not limited to the spoken and written word, but refer to anything that can constitute the object of interpretation, anything that is perceived as incorporating meanings and symbols. Such objects, which can take any form, are seen as "delimited tissues of meaning" (Parker, 1992, p. 6), where meaning is extracted from the wider social and cultural context. In their linguistic form, discourses can consist of "sets of statements and metaphors... [which provide] a coherent system of meanings" (Parker, 1992, pp.10-11), employed in representing a certain state of things, and constructing different objects in certain ways.

A similar position was put forward by the academics' collective published under Curt (1994), and by Stainton Rogers (1997/1998), when supporting the idea of a social world being represented and perpetuated through 'texts'. These are understood to refer to things being said, written or pictured, and which provide the framework of our current understandings of the world. As a social resource, such texts are themselves culturally and historically located and undergo continuous processes of change. To illustrate their dynamic character, Curt introduced the concept of 'tectonics', taken to refer to the ways discourses come into being, gain acceptance, are given prominence over others, are reproduced and replaced or eliminated in the course of time and of social interactions; in the authors' words, tectonics is "as much about the various ways stories and representations are marketed, mongered, driven underground, muted, adapted, reconstructed and disposed of as it is about their production" (Curt, 1994, p.12). All these understandings can compete with each other, may come to the fore or be abandoned or ignored, depending on contexts and purposes to be achieved. Ethical and environmental discourses, for example, have gained circulation and support relatively recently (see Harré, Brockmeier & Mühlhäusler, 1999), in a particular historic and cultural context, and they may compete and interact with older or more established ones around functionality, tradition or expediency.

While the 'tectonic' imagery is useful in illustrating the dynamic character of discourse, I would agree with the reservations expressed by Potter et al. (2003) in their exchange with Parker (2003): following on from the meanings associated with the 'tectonic' metaphor, this depiction, they argue, risks constructing discourses as "coherent (...) wholes which take on the status of causal agents for analytic purposes" (p.165). In other

words, the term 'tectonic' may suggest an objectification and 'solidity' of discourses, and confer on them a consistency which may obscure the situated character (rhetoric aims) of their use.

An alternative concept to 'discourse' is that of 'interpretative repertoires', introduced by Potter and Wetherell (1987). The original definition of the concept, "a restricted range of terms used in a specific stylistic and grammatical fashion" (1987, p.172), was considered limited/limiting by some authors (e.g. Parker, 1992, 2003; Macnaghten, 1993). According to Macnaghten (1993), as grammar is inevitably used in all discourses, the focus of such constructions needs to be on the "social relationship encapsulated" (p. 55), rather than on grammatical aspects. Interpretative repertoires were later described more inclusively by Wetherell (1998), as "an attempt to capture the 'doxic' (...) nature of discourse" (Wetherell, 1998, p. 400). According to this definition, interpretative repertoires are seen as "a culturally familiar and habitual line of argument comprised of recognizable themes, common places and tropes (doxa)" (ibid). Interpretative repertoires are thus presented as sets of discursive resources existing within a culture, which can be used, or resorted to, in order to provide particular representations of situations or circumstances. In the literature on consumption, for example, consumers may be described as 'sovereign', or 'in charge' and responsible for their decisions, exercising freedom of choice and actively engaged in self-expressive, creative activities; alternatively, they can be represented as 'victims' - vulnerable and confused, oppressed by higher societal powers, prey to economic exploitation and ideological manipulation. Each of these representations (and numerous others) may be taken forward, may be acted upon and may influence courses of action at a personal level, as well as ideologies and policies at community or society level. While arguing that the concept of 'repertoire' encompasses flexibility of use, and thus recognizes the agentic character of speakers, Potter and colleagues (2003) acknowledge that repertoires are, of necessity, influenced by cultural, societal or political constraints; in their words, "discourse analysis studies how people use discourse and how discourse uses people" (Potter et al., 2003, p.169).

According to the arguments outlined above, a synthetic analytic approach is both appropriate and applicable. The two discourse analytic versions, while differing in terms of certain theoretical assumptions, share, in the forms discussed above, (a) the concern with the constructive character of language and (b) recognition of the influence of wider material and social elements on particular situations. A more integrated approach is capable of looking at "the situated flow of discourse", and, at the same time, at " the genealogical context", concerned with "the collective and social patterning of background normative conceptions" (Wetherell, 1998, p.405). The examination of the action orientation of talk involves references to conversational practices which enable the production of particular accounts or viewpoints. Such practices include, but are not limited to: disclaimers (Hewitt & Stokes, 1975; Potter, 1996a), stake inoculation and

footing (Potter, 1996b), extreme case formulations (Pomerantz, 1986; Edwards, 2000), list construction (Jefferson, 1990), list completers (Potter, 1996a), bottom-line arguments (Edwards et al., 1995), use of idiomatic expressions (Drew & Holt, 1988). These terms are used to refer to instances of such practices throughout my analysis. Additionally, the analysis will entail an exploration of available subject positions in discourse and their consequences for subjective experience (Willig, 2000).

In the next sections I shall present the second method used, Q Methodology. Firstly I shall provide a general overview of the methodology, in terms of theoretical rationale and application procedures. Then I will describe the way in which Q has been used in the specific studies undertaken in the current research.

4.4 Q Methodology

Q Methodology was developed in the 1930s by William Stephenson as a tool for the investigation of subjectivity (Stephenson, 1935a). In his 1953 book, *The Study of Behavior*, Stephenson expressed unease about the prevailing use of the hypothetico-deductive method in psychology, on the grounds that methods used in natural sciences may not be appropriate for "behavioural science" (1953, p. 152). In this sense, psychology was considered not to have achieved the "sophisticated theoretical status, with ideal constructs such as physics has fashioned for itself. The situations in psychology, therefore, call for an attitude of curiosity (...) making discoveries rather than testing our reasoning" (1953, p.151). Moreover, Stephenson argued against what he saw as reductionist approaches, which focused mainly on "physiological or physical correlates of behavior" (ibid, p.4). In the approach he advocated, "There is to be no concern with brain, conditioning, the nervous system, or with cybernetic models of these physiological matters (...) The total person-in-action is our concern" (ibid, p.4) – thus underlining the importance of studying human behaviour in a holistic manner.

The method proposed by Stephenson was an adaptation of factor analysis (Watts & Stenner, 2005a). The originality of the technique consisted of "the correlation of persons instead of tests" (Stephenson, 1935b). While conventional factor analysis (R methodology) was concerned with *individuals being measured* in order to establish systematic differences between people in their performances on various tests or traits, Q methodology looked at *individuals doing the measuring*, evaluating tests (Q items), based on personal criteria, and identified groups of people expressing similar standpoints. In other words, if in R methodology tests or traits were correlated across persons, and the results indicated tests (traits) related to each other, in Q, persons are being correlated across tests, and the results refer to similar ways of ranking the items, and thus to the expression of similar viewpoints.

As a tool for the investigation of subjectivity, Q Methodology focuses on it in two ways (Stenner, Watts & Worrell, 2007): (a) through the collection of data via Q sorts and (b) through the by-person correlation and factor analysis of the Q sorts. Subjectivity is involved from the beginning, through the meanings which participants project onto the items when sorting them, according to their own criteria; it is also expressed in the outcome of the process - the resulting factors. In Stephenson's view, subjectivity was not to be regarded as an internal state, but as an instance of behaviour, a person's expressed standpoint, which referred to "what one can converse about, to others, or to oneself" (Stephenson, 1968, p.501). As Brown (1986) notes, "Q methodology provides the basis for a science of subjectivity (...) by (...) replacing the metaphysics of consciousness with the metaphysics of communicability" (Brown, 1986, p.74), thus shifting the focus from inner states to communication and interaction.

With regard to communication, however, it should be mentioned that, as Stenner et al. (2007) have pointed out, Q Methodology is not best understood as involving communication in a naturalistic sense, in terms of a conversation-type exchange; respondents are limited to *reacting* to a given set of items according to a pre-determined criterion (agreement, descriptiveness etc.); in this respect, they act as *observers of statements* (italics in the original), who orient themselves towards certain standpoints, which can then be compared. Despite this kind of constraint, Q Methodology nevertheless allows more freedom of expression than psychological instruments traditionally used in relation to exploration of attitudes and opinions. In, for example, questionnaires or attitude scales, respondents are being passively measured, according to pre-determined meanings and criteria. In Q, on the other hand, as mentioned earlier, it is participants who do the measuring and assessing (Brown, 1980), by engaging with the items from their own perspective and projecting on them their own meanings.

While subjectivity has, from the beginning, been the focus of Q Methodology, its theorizing in relation to the method has undergone certain changes in the last three decades. One of these changes has been termed the 'British dialect' (Stainton Rogers & Stainton Rogers, 1990), as these developments took place within the application of Q by academics from British universities. If the original (US developed) approach emphasized the self-referential aspect of Q sorting and considered it as expressing a personal frame of reference (McKeown, 1990), the 'British dialect' has been concerned with the recognition of viewpoints expressed by Q-sorters as shared, cultural patterns of understanding (Stainton Rogers & Stainton Rogers, 1990, Capdevila & Lazard, 2007/2008). In this regard, the patterns identified through Q are not unique or individual to the participants, but are collectively expressed understandings (Stainton Rogers & Stainton Rogers, 1990), located within a wider social and cultural context.

These features have allowed Q to be used for the exploration of subjective aspects of debatable or contestable issues, or of areas about which different viewpoints can be expressed (Brown, 1980; Curt, 1994; Stainton Rogers, 1991; Watts & Stenner, 2005a; Stenner et al, 2007). Q methodology has been employed in the examination of social, political or cultural problems. Examples include: identity-related understandings (Kitzinger & Stainton Rogers, 1985); experiences of emotion (jealousy - Stenner & Stainton Rogers, 1998; love – Watts & Stenner, 2005b); issues of health and illness (Stainton Rogers, 1991; Stenner, Dancey & Watts, 2000; Stenner, Cooper & Skevington, 2003; Risdon, Eccleston, Crombez & McCracken, 2003), political and administrative matters (Capdevila, 1999; Dryzek & Braithwaite, 2000; Brown, 2006; Vogel & Lowham, 2007); consumer studies (Brown & Brenner, 1972; Kleine, Kleine & Allen, 1995); environmental issues (Addams & Proops, 2000; Clarke, 2002; Ellis, Barry & Robinson, 2007).

The main stages of a Q methodological study (Stephenson, 1986, p.44) are as follows: "(1) a concourse is arrived at empirically; it constitutes a Q universe; (2) Q samples are drawn from it; (3) Q sorts are performed with these samples; (4) these are factor analyzed; (5) the factors are interpreted" [numbering by author]. Each stage is discussed in more detail below.

4.4.1 The concourse

Stephenson referred to the concourse as "a universe of statements for any situation or context" (1986, p. 37). A Q study begins then by a process of exploring and identifying what is being said about the topic under research. This can be achieved through interviews with people connected with the subject-matter in one form or another, by referring to academic literature, to radio and television programmes, books, magazines or newspapers – in short, tapping into current accounts in circulation, spoken or written, on the topic in question.

4.4.2 The Q samples

The mass of data is refined and trimmed down through piloting or through filtering by the researcher. The purpose is to arrive at items (in this case, words or statements) that provide a reasonable coverage of the topic (diversity and comprehensiveness of opinions), that are clearly expressed, do not duplicate each other and involve one idea per item (so as to avoid confusion through double-barrelled phrasing). The number of items usually varies between 30 and 80 (Curt, 1994; Stenner et al., 2007).

4.4.3 Q sorting

This phase of the methodology allows participants to engage actively in the expression of subjective understandings in a practical manner, in what Stephenson termed "operant subjectivity" (Stephenson, 1977). The participants are asked to sort the Q items into ranks along a continuum, according to a criterion provided for them (e.g. agreement or descriptiveness) in response to the research question. The sort will take the form of a grid modelled on a quasi-normal distribution, such as the example in Fig.4.1 shows.

Fig. 4.1 Q-sort grid

- Most disagree   + Most agree
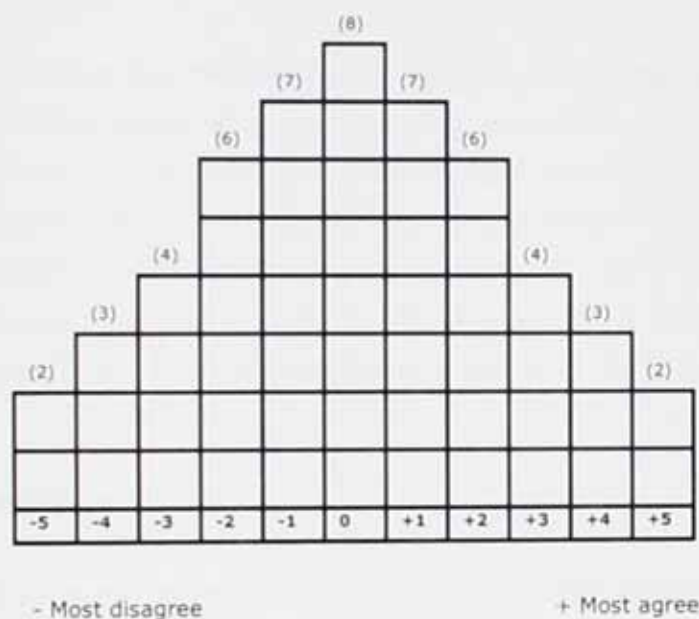
The shape of the grid determines the number of items to be placed in each of the columns, which gives it the character of a 'forced distribution'. Although the 'forced' character has been challenged on the grounds that people may find themselves constrained in expressing their opinions, it has been shown (Brown, 1971, 1980; Cottle & McKeown, 1980) that the shape of the distribution has virtually no effect on the subsequent statistical analysis of the results. As Brown, Durning and Selden (1999) have argued, the main reason for the forced distribution is pragmatic: it is assumed that certain items will be regarded as more important, descriptive or relevant than others, and as such the role of the grid is to 'force' the expression of preference by the individual(s) performing the sort. Moreover, as Lazard (2003) has pointed out, the pattern or narrative illustrated by a Q sort will make sense, irrespective of the forced or free sorting, as it taps into cultural resources or shared meanings available to participants.

During Q sorting, each item will be allocated to one of the positions in the Q grid, based on the strength of agreement/disagreement with its content. The items are ranked both in *absolute* terms, from the (-) extreme to the (+) extreme, and also *relative* to each

other. This allows the researcher to draw inferences both from the horizontal axis location of items, suggesting importance/relevance to the sorter, as well as from their positioning in relation to each other. The final configuration, which will contain all Q items, will represent a 'gestalt' formation (Watts & Stenner, 2005a), expressing an overview of the participant's stance on the subject-matter at a particular time. This, as Stainton Rogers (1997/1998) noted, can be seen as an advantage of Q methodology over other pattern analytic techniques: rather than the researcher deciding what is important in an account, and imposing a certain structure on the data, here the participants provide their answer in "an already organized and articulated whole" (1997/1998, p.9).

The sorting procedure is usually followed by the gathering of additional, supporting information from the participants. This can take place as a brief post-sorting interview, or by asking participants to fill in a response booklet or post-sorting questionnaire (Watts & Stenner, 2005a). In either form, the purpose is to gain an insight into the way participants understood or interpreted the items, and thus ranked them in particular ways, and also to assess whether the participants have additional comments they would like to make in respect of the comprehensiveness or clarity of the Q sample.

4.4.4 Statistical analysis

All the completed Q sorts are correlated (with correlation coefficients indicating the degree of similarity between them) and then subjected to factor analysis. Stephenson preferred the centroid method for its indeterminacy (i.e. no single mathematically correct solution), which allows the researcher the freedom of looking at the data from various angles by rotating the factors manually, based on theoretical considerations or personal opinions ('hunches') (Brown, 1980). Nevertheless, it has been argued (Watts & Stenner, 2005a) that principal component analysis, which provides a single, 'mathematically superior' solution, with orthogonal factors, offers an equally satisfying solution. The structure of the resulting factors is a composite (weighted average) of the individual Q sorts loading on them.

4.4.5 Factor interpretation

The analysis of the factors provides an insight into shared understandings in respect of the research topic. While the interpretation will inevitably be influenced by the researcher's own subjectivity and where "one is coming from" (Stainton Rogers, 1995, p.191), it will not rely solely on personal perspective in making sense of the data. The reading is constrained and guided by the configuration of the factors, as the pattern of items has to be taken into consideration as a whole. In this way, it can be maintained

that control over interpretation does not dwell exclusively with the person doing the interpreting, but is a shared extraction and creation of meaning between the researcher and the participants.

Moreover, the number and the content of the factors cannot be known in advance, as they depend on how the participants performed the ranking of the items. Some of the factors can be easily interpretable; however, some may appear confusing or puzzling to the researcher. In such a case, the latter may have to go back to the participants who provided the sorts upon which the factor was built and ask for additional clarification (Stainton Rogers, 1991).

It should be mentioned that the factors identified are not exhaustive: they represent the standpoints of a group of participants, at a given moment in time. Other points of view might exist outside this group, just as other points of view may emerge if the conditions of the study change – in time or through social, historical or cultural influences (Stenner et al., 2003).

4.4.6 Participants

In Q methodology, participants are usually selected strategically, based on the notion of 'finite diversity' (Stainton Rogers, 1995, p.180), taken to refer to the notion that, while variety is expected, the amount or range of viewpoints will be restrained by cultural, social or geographic aspects. The aim, in the words of Stenner et al. (2007), is "to identify and describe the manifold of positions that are *culturally available* in a given temporal and spatial location" (p.220). In this respect, participants can be chosen based on their likelihood to express a "particularly interesting or pivotal viewpoint" (Watts & Stenner, 2005a, p.79), but also as "ordinary folk" (i.e., with no specific involvement or interest in the matter; Stainton Rogers, 1995); the latter category has greater potential to offer unanticipated or minority standpoints.

4.4.7 Analysing discourse through Q

Through its features, Q methodology can and does act as a tool for the analysis of discourse. As discussed above, Q is concerned with the exploration of the multiplicity of standpoints around an issue – what Stainton-Rogers (1995) referred to as "a heterogeny in disputation, a set of views, a range of voices, a clutch of discourses" (p.183). From the beginning, Q uses existent discourse in the collection of concourse, which gathers together perspectives that circulate in a certain social and spatial context. The Q sorting process gives participants the opportunity to work with the (discursive) items by imbuing them with their own meanings. These meanings are themselves socially constructed, and

so the final factors provide an overview of shared understandings surrounding a topic in a specific social, cultural and ideological environment – a coming together of narratives or discourses (Capdevila & Lazard, 2007/2008). Unlike hypothetico-deductive methods, Q does not set out to prove or disprove hypotheses. Instead, it provides the opportunity for the novel or the unexpected to emerge, for the revelation and expression of positions that may otherwise not have been voiced (Stainton Rogers, 1995; Stenner et al., 2007). In the process of interpretation, the researchers, in their turn, are informed and guided by their cultural knowledge. Additionally, Q methodology enables the sharing of power between researcher and participants (Curt, 1994; Stainton Rogers, 1991): while the researcher is the one providing the materials – the set of words or statements to be ranked - the viewpoints which guide the rankings and the ways patterns are constructed are imposed by the participants.

4.5 Q Studies in the present research

Having outlined the general stages related to a Q methodological study, this section will discuss the particular circumstances of my research, and will deal with the specific data generation and collection procedures involved in the Q studies I conducted.

For this thesis, two Q studies were carried out, with the aim of identifying currently held views on leather and leather objects. As mentioned earlier, despite leather's widespread use in daily life and its presence in (sub)cultural imagery, within social sciences no systematic studies in this area have been undertaken. Thus, the ensuing Q studies aim to provide a starting point in exploring current leather-related representations.

4.5.1 Generating the items

The concourse was gathered in an eclectic manner (Stainton Rogers & Stainton Rogers, 1990), from both professional and popular discourse: informal interviews, books, magazines, advertising and marketing material related to leather and leather objects, internet discussion groups and sources related to animal and environmental protection groups. The items consisted of statements for the first study and single words for the second study, and were aimed at allowing the participants to express their views not only with reference to particular leather objects, but also on wider topics in which leather was seen as playing a part.

In the process of collecting the items, certain thematic areas were identified, such as outdoor practices, popular culture imagery, utilitarian aspects, eroticism, gender imagery and sensory aspects. While the concourse did not follow a specific factorial design

structure (cf. McKeown & Thomas, 1988), awareness of these areas helped in the effort to achieve a reasonable coverage of the topic and comprehensiveness of the items.

Through its long history and its use in various areas of human life, leather is generally recognised as carrying a wide range of meanings - permeated, to a considerable extent, by what Thompson (2004), inspired by Barthes (2000 [1972]), has termed 'mythologies'. The latter are understood as the imagery, archetypes and storylines that frequently accompany the ways in which a phenomenon, an object or a material are presented or promoted. The black leather jacket, for instance, has been portrayed as a symbol of freedom or rebellion, as rock 'n' roll uniform, as gangster attire or as a fashionable accessory (e.g. Farren, 1985; Quilleriet, 2004). Thompson (2004) suggests that such "cultural myths exert a significant influence on the stories consumers tell and (...) the meanings they ascribe to their experiences" (2004, p.162). In other words, people recognize such "imagery, archetypes and storylines" (ibid.) and can relate to them, and at the same time use them as props or building blocks in constructing representations and understandings. Consequently, when researching the domain of 'what is currently being said' about the topic under discussion, such considerations played a part in assembling the Q concourse.

The first Q concourse consisted of statements which could relate both directly to leather as a material, shaped into objects, as well as to a wider context in which accounts of leather could be placed, such as cultural imagery (e.g. 'the great outdoors', 'the tough guy'), ethical or environmental issues.

The second Q concourse contained single words expressing possible meanings, symbols or associations with leather. Although the words were largely selected in parallel with the statements, on the whole they referred more specifically to perceived qualities or elements that might play a role in the decision to buy, use or wear leather. In contrast, the statements could be used to express an opinion or a position without a necessary link to actual or intended possession or ownership.

4.5.2 Piloting the items

The initial 74 statements and 106 words collected were pilot-tested by a group of 22 individuals. They were asked to go through both categories of items and fill in a form indicating the extent to which they considered the items to be descriptive or not, in two situations: words were possible answers to the introductory phrase "Leather means...", while statements were possible continuations to the phrase "The choice of leather..." (see Appendices A1 and B1 for models of the pilot forms). The aim of the pilot study was to check the relevance, comprehensiveness and clarity of the Q items, and also to eliminate those items seen as unclear or irrelevant. To achieve this, the participants were also

encouraged to add any comments they deemed appropriate. The evaluative options open to the pilot participants were "Agree", "Disagree", "Neither agree nor disagree" and "Unclear/ Inappropriate".

Discussions with participants after the piloting process suggested that the option "Neither... nor" was generally used to mean "Maybe, depending on the context", while the option "Disagree" was taken to indicate that while they were aware of the point of view expressed, they did not share it (as opposed to regarding it as not being applicable to leather and/or leather objects under any circumstances – in which case they ticked the box "Unclear/Inappropriate").

Consequently, the final Q packs contained the items considered by the pilot participants to bear relevance to the topic. Those items with two ticks or more in the 'Unclear/Inappropriate' box were discarded or re-phrased. This process resulted in two packs (see Appendices A3 and B3), containing 52 statements and 54 words respectively, which covered a range of utilitarian aspects, cultural imagery, social issues and sensorial/physical characteristics. The Q sorting process (and thus the Q grids themselves) was designed to range from "Least descriptive" to "Most descriptive".

4.5.3 Participants

The participants were recruited for the studies on a voluntary basis. All participants were British, from the Midlands area of the UK. Thirty-nine participants (see Appendix A5) took part in the first (statements) study (20 women and 19 men) and 33 in the second (words) study (16 women, 15 men and 2 who did not specify gender; Appendix B5). They were selected strategically, including using a 'snowballing' technique, with a view to including a wide range of opinions on the topic. The sample included men and women of varying ages and social backgrounds. The criteria for this choice was their capacity to express a variety of viewpoints related to the subject matter, as discussed in section 4.4.6 above. The sample, therefore, included both 'lay' people (consumers/users) and professionals in the areas of studying, processing, design or marketing of leather.

4.5.4 Ranking procedure

For both studies, participants had to identify the perspective from which they would sort the items. In the first (statements) study, they were asked to think of a context involving leather, which could be an object, an image or a situation that they could associate with leather, from their own experience or from literature, film, the media etc. The statements constituted possible continuations to the phrase "the choice of leather...". Ranking values

ranged from -5 (least descriptive) to +5 (most descriptive), in a grid such as the one in Fig.4.2 below:

Fig.4.2 Quasi-normal distribution used for Q study 1. Figures in brackets indicate the number of items to be allocated to each ranking position.
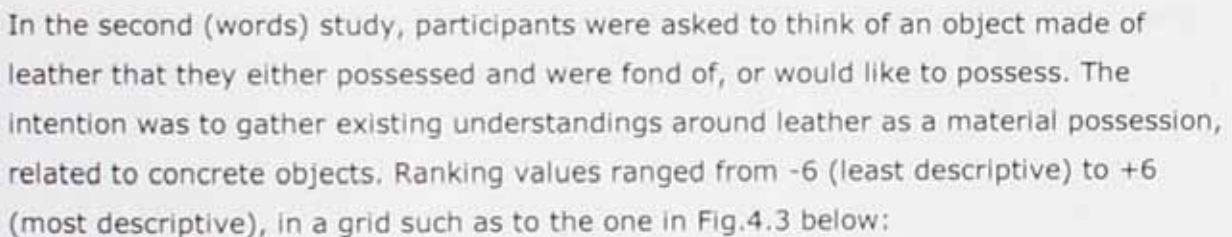
- Least descriptive   + Most descriptive

In the second (words) study, participants were asked to think of an object made of leather that they either possessed and were fond of, or would like to possess. The intention was to gather existing understandings around leather as a material possession, related to concrete objects. Ranking values ranged from -6 (least descriptive) to +6 (most descriptive), in a grid such as to the one in Fig.4.3 below:

Fig.4.3 Quasi-normal distribution used for Q study 2. Figures in brackets indicate the number of items to be allocated to each ranking position.

- Least descriptive   + Most descriptive

To facilitate the sorting procedure, participants were asked to read through all the items and while doing so, to first divide them into three categories: 1) items with which they agree, or are seen as descriptive of the participant's viewpoint; 2) items with which they

disagree, or are seen as not descriptive; and 3) items about which they have no strong feelings or cannot decide upon (Stenner et al., 2007). The expression of subjectivity in this preliminary assessment of items resonates with Brown's (1996) comments that Q methodology "provides a formal model of pleasure/unpleasure – in the form of the Q sort (...) [an] elegant way to represent subjectivity" (p.4). The participants were then asked to assign to each item a position on the respective grid.

In addition to performing the Q sorts, participants were also provided with a booklet containing the Q items and space for comments. They were asked to provide a few comments on the items they considered to be particularly relevant to their chosen position, and also any other comments regarding the study. These might include comments related to, for example, items they had difficulty in placing or understanding.

4.5.5 Statistical analysis

The processing and analysis of participants' Q sorts were carried out using the SPSS statistical package. The sorts were analysed using principle component analysis (PCA), and rotation of factors was made using Varimax. A detailed presentation and discussion of the results in the two studies will form the subject of the next two chapters.

4.6 The interview study

Data for the interview study was collected through one-to-one semi-structured interviews (Smith, 1995) and one group interview (Flick, 2009). The interview schedule consisted of five questions and a series of prompts around the role of leather in respondents' lives, their opinions about how leather is generally regarded and thoughts on potential issues. The questions were: (a) How is leather relevant to you?; (b) How do you feel/ what do you think about leather?; (c) What do you think of other people's reasons for having/wearing leather?; (d) Do you see leather as belonging to a particular generation?; (e) Are there any issues to leather that you can see? (for the full list see Appendix C1). The schedule was arrived at by drawing on a number of sources: a cultural analysis of audio, visual and written media, popular and professional literature; following informal conversations with a range of people who expressed an interest in the topic; inspired by the findings in the Q studies. The informal discussions also served as a platform to pilot the questions and to refine them with a view to achieving clarity of expression and a reasonable identification of areas of interest.

While I aimed to adopt a non-confrontational interviewing style, my positioning as a vegetarian might arguably have influenced both the interaction and the content of interviews (Burman, 1994 a,b; Rennie, 1999; Ramazanoglu & Holland, 2002; Parker,

2005). A reflexive discussion regarding this aspect of the interview process will be provided later in this chapter.

4.6.1 Participants and data collection

Participants in the interviews were recruited following a similar approach to the one used for the Q methodological studies. They were selected with a view to facilitating the expression of a diverse range of accounts and included people of varied ages, gender, and occupations, with an expressed interest in the research topic. Some of the participants took part in the Q studies, and others participated in the interviews only. From those individuals approached, only one declined to take part, giving lack of availability as a reason. All participants were based in the Midlands area of the UK.

The recruitment procedure involved participants being contacted in advance by telephone, email or in person. They were given details concerning the aims of the interview and research, and were provided with copies of the interview schedule (Appendix C1) and of the consent form (Appendix C2). All potential respondents were encouraged to contribute to the interview schedule by suggesting possible amendments, or the inclusion of additional questions they considered relevant; none of the participants suggested any amendments or additions.

The interviews were conducted in locations chosen on the grounds of convenience for respondents (i.e. participants' workplaces or homes, the university library). In all, 13 interviews were conducted, with 9 women (of whom 3 took part in one group interview) and 6 men (list of participants included in Appendix C4). Nine participants had a professional association with leather.

The group interview took place when one semi-structured interview was scheduled. When meeting the participant for the scheduled interview at her workplace, two of her colleagues expressed an interest in my research and a wish to take part as well. However, their work commitments posed difficulties in setting alternative meeting dates, therefore we agreed to hold a group discussion in the time slot allocated for the initially programmed interview. This group setting, in fact, offered a number of advantages: the respondents were part of an already-existent group, being work colleagues; they were at the same hierarchical level, which meant that power dynamics based on hierarchical considerations were not apparent; the common (work) interests gave the group a certain homogeneity, while at the same encouraging interaction, in "discussing collectively their sphere of life and probing into it as they meet each other's disagreements" (Blumer, 1969, as cited in Flick 2009, p.196). Moreover, the group set-up enabled the exploration of "co-construction of meaning" (Wilkinson, 2005, p. 86), where meanings are understood as collective endeavours and constructions, within social settings. This was

especially apparent in exchanges around vegetarianism (one of the respondents described herself as vegetarian). The interview schedule acted as a stimulus for discussion, and the participants' engagement with it offered the opportunity to explore "how opinions are formed, expressed, defended and (sometimes) modified within the context of discussion and debate with others" (Wilkinson, 2005, p. 87).

The interviews, lasting between 30 and 70 minutes, were recorded using a digital voice recorder and were subsequently transcribed.

4.6.2 The researcher in the interview process

In this section I will reflexively consider some of the specific aspects of the interview encounters. In particular, I will refer to responses in the interview to what was termed 'leather issues', associated with my position as a vegetarian. This discussion is related to the notion that the content and scope of some of the accounts may have been affected by such a positioning.

One of the elements of the qualitative research process is the reflexive practice it entails. The intricacies of the researcher-participant relationship have been extensively explored (e.g. Burman, 1994b; Rennie, 1999; Finlay, 2002; Ramazanoglu & Holland, 2002; Parker, 2005). Issues under consideration relate to various positionings and relations of power (e.g. the researcher as an academic, but also as (often) less knowledgeable about the study topic than his/her participants). Rennie (1999) suggested that there is a double hermeneutic in respect of interview texts: under the influence of the interviewer and the circumstances in which the interview takes place, the person(s) being interviewed instil(s) a certain interpretation when expressing their views; at the same time, when participating in the interview, the researcher is influenced by her/his own social, cultural and political background. This results in a 'co-construction' of objects or events. It is therefore important, in doing the analysis, that the researcher questions not only the text itself, in terms of effects or of purposes it sets out to accomplish, but also his or her own stance in the process of interpretation. In this sense, Ramazanoglu and Holland (2002) noted that part of the reflexivity processes are "attempts to unpack what knowledge is contingent upon, how the researcher is socially situated, and how the research agenda/process has been constituted" (p. 118). The importance of critically scrutinizing the role of the researcher was also emphasized by Parker (2005), who argued that "[w]hat we find and the sense we make of it are always a function of what we thought we would find and the position we try to make sense of it from" (p.27).

With this in mind, before engaging in the interview proper (often during informal, preliminary meetings) I let my participants know that I was a vegetarian. This disclosure was based on the notion that "adopting the position of detached observer would have

been disingenuous in relation to the production of the material for analysis", as well as (potentially) "alienating to the research participants" (Burman, 1994b, p. 130). At the same time, by acknowledging my own use and wearing of leather items (e.g. shoes, bag, belt), I aimed to indicate that my position was not one 'against leather'. Generally, my interviewing style aimed to be non-confrontational, based on a principle of openness to respondents' accounts. However, while I did not set out specifically to challenge the viewpoints expressed, my positioning as a vegetarian arguably influenced the interview interaction, with some questions constructed or reacted to as potential challenges. This is illustrated in instances such as the extract below, where the participant (Bridget, leather technician) talks about the meat industry as a source for leather:

Bridget: So if people are going to eat meat, or eat dairy products, then there are hides and skins that have to be dealt with, and making leather is the, the best way to deal with them.

I: Yeah... I was reading a book, called "The Leather Book", it was mostly about fashion and design, and a little bit of history as well, and they were talking about luxury leather items, lambskin and kidskin and stingray and that sort of things, are they, do they come from the meat industry?

Bridget: There are some exceptions... There's the fur industry, you know, where you've got mink and things like that, we don't eat those, so, yeah, that is slightly different. Stingray, I don't know if we eat those, or not...

I: I don't know

Bridget: I don't know whether we eat them, probably somebody does somewhere... Shark we definitely eat, I'm not sure about the stingray... But the lamb and the kids, then, yes, they would be eaten. And some are made from stillborn, we call them sling skins, little baby lambskins, which are tiny, they're made from stillborn lambs, so they haven't gone to waste, even though they never lived, they didn't go to waste (laughs)(...) I know you're a vegetarian, aren't you, I hope I didn't upset you!

I: No, no (both laugh)

Here, my query about luxury leathers is clearly interpreted as questioning Bridget's account regarding the meat and dairy industries as sole sources of leather. The participant addresses the challenge and defends her account by constructing the circumstances suggested by me as (a) exceptional and (b) related not to the leather, but to the fur industry, and thus constructing the issue as irrelevant to the topic discussed. Moreover, Bridget's additional example of leather sources may be seen as inverting the interviewer-interviewee power relationship. The reference to dead animals, by using

emotional terms in juxtaposition with a pragmatic assessment depicting them as resources ("little baby lambskins, which are tiny, they're made from stillborn lambs (...) they didn't go to waste") may potentially be considered shocking by a vegetarian. This is emphasized by Bridget's own commentary to her description ("I hope I didn't upset you"), suggesting awareness of the potential disturbing effects of her description.

The following fragment offers a further example of how my being a vegetarian was oriented to by the participant, and of the negotiation of the power relationship in the interview context. Here, Daniel (leather manufacturer) discusses the leather industry's attempts to pursue ethical courses of action:

> Daniel: But as a generality, the leather industry doesn't do a lot in that area [NB: better techniques for farming]. So it gets what it deserves! From people that [inaudible], you know, from you vegetarians! (both laugh) No, I was joking! But it's - people should care about where the things come from (...)

In this extract, Daniel pre-empts potential evaluative comments from me, regarding the extent and value of the leather industry's contribution to ethical practices, by minimizing such actions ("doesn't do a lot") and constructing possible criticism as well-deserved, and as such locating himself in a defensive position. By including me in a category apart, from which the participant distances himself ("you vegetarians"), Daniel positions me, as the interviewer, and himself, as the interviewee, on opposing, adversarial sides. Here, the respondent's stance may be read as inverting the researcher-researched power relationship in the sense that the onus would fall on me to reject (or defend myself against) the implication that I, as a vegetarian, might approve of the leather industry's economic hardship (see Chapter 7) on ideological grounds.

In general, participants' awareness of my being a vegetarian, combined with the presence of questions dealing with animal welfare and environmental issues may have led to my being positioned as supportive of animal rights/environmentalist ideas. As mentioned above, this may have influenced the content of the narratives put forward, and some of the responses addressing such aspects are discussed in Chapters 7 and 8. However, following Widdicombe (1993), I would argue that the substance of the interview would not be exclusively context specific, that is, resulting directly from the situated interaction. Rather, participants are likely to tap into culturally available resources, and "the research situation can be regarded as a context in which resources and practices are elicited or used" (Widdicombe, 1993, p. 109). Such an orientation, therefore, could be considered to contribute towards achieving the aims of the thesis, in terms of identification and exploration of discourses around the topic of leather, as well as of ways in which they are deployed and the purposes they accomplish.

4.6.3 Transcription

While the transcript offers a way of rendering the interview data "more permanent, retrievable [and] examinable" (Lapadat & Lindsay, 1999, p.80), it needs to be acknowledged that it is by no means a complete or 'true' representation of the interview encounter (Cook, 1990; O'Connell & Kowal, 1995; Bucholtz, 2000; Lapadat, 2000). As Cook (1990) argues, the background information that could be included is "infinitely expandable" (p.1), and, as such, it is the researcher who chooses what will be included and/or excluded, what "talk to write down and how to represent it" (Lapadat, 2000, p.204).

The interviews were transcribed following orthographic conventions, with the inclusion of certain paralinguistic features such as laughter, emphasis and hesitations. This amounted to a combination of "naturalized transcription, in which the text conforms to written discourse conventions" and "denaturalized transcription, in which the text retains links to oral discourse forms" (Bucholtz, 2000, p. 1439). The decisions regarding the transcription method to be used were influenced by "purpose, theoretical stance and analytic intent" (Lapadat, 2000, p. 206). The rationale for this choice was twofold: a) to assist ease of reading, and b) to contextualise the interaction between the respondents and myself as the interviewer. The system of transcription was considered appropriate for the purposes of the theoretical perspective and of the analytic method employed, as it allowed identification of discursive patterns, while also examining their functions in interaction and in speakers' positionings.

4.6.4 Analysis

The interview texts were analysed using a discourse analytic approach (Wetherell, 1998), aimed at addressing both the research questions and the respondents' concerns (Burman, 1994a). Based on close readings of the transcripts, I began by identifying all leather-related references, including oblique or implicit ones (Potter & Wetherell, 1987). These fragments of text were further examined for patterns (e.g. 'leather in dress', 'working with leather', 'leather and gender'). Following this stage, I looked for recurring themes (i.e. history, environment), and then grouped these themes under over-arching themes (Smith, 1995). Each theme was analysed in terms of action orientation of talk, discursive resources and positionings enabled (Riley, 2002).

4.7 Ethical considerations

For all the studies outlined above, I followed similar procedures in terms of ethical practices, in accordance with the British Psychological Society guidelines, as detailed below.

When I initially approached individuals about possible participation, I aimed to provide them with full information about the study. To achieve this, I described the purposes of the research, the procedures involved and the ways in which data would be dealt with. With regard to the Q study, I explained how the Q sorting would take place and how their input would be analysed. In relation to the interview study, I provided the participants with a copy of the interview questions and a copy of the consent form. Participants were invited to comment on or add to the proposed schedule, if they wished. They were also given the option to review the transcripts and make any changes they deemed necessary before analysis, and to have access to the final report if they wanted.

Participants were advised of their right to withdraw, both in the preliminary encounter and in the actual data collection meeting. I emphasized that their taking part was voluntary, and that they were free to not answer any questions, or to withhold any information they might choose not to provide. As mentioned above, they were given the option to review the interview transcripts and edit or remove parts they did not wish to be included, or to withdraw their data entirely. While some participants did effect some changes, none of them wished to withdraw from the study.

The information/consent forms for both the Q and the interview studies outlined how anonymity and confidentiality would be ensured (see Appendices A3 and B3 for the Q studies and C2 for the interview study). The participants' Q sorts and comments were numbered, and any reference was made to the relevant number (e.g. P27). Audio files were password protected, and transcripts were to be made available only to my supervisory team, after having been anonymized (by replacing names with pseudonyms and removing any other potentially identifying information).

4.8 Summary

The aim of this chapter has been to provide the epistemological and methodological background for the research carried out in the present thesis. An overview of research approaches in consumer research was undertaken, and an argument put forward for the adoption of a social constructionist frame of thought, which recognizes the historical, social and cultural character of knowledge.

The two methods chosen, Q methodology and a discourse analytic approach, were argued to be appropriate in pursuing the purposes of the present research. Unlike methods based on hypothetico-deductive principles, which are designed to test a priori assumptions and expectations, both Q methodology and discourse analysis have an exploratory character and allow the examination of existing understandings and representations as well as the identification of patterns within them. A brief presentation

of underlying principles and of stages involved was undertaken for both approaches. For the actual studies conducted, the rationale for data generation processes and the analytic procedures were detailed, thus setting the framework for the following chapters. The next chapter contains a discussion of the Q data collected in the first study, using statements, concerning general constructions of leather and leather objects.

Chapter 5: Representations of Leather (Q Study 1)

5.1 Introduction

The present chapter focuses on the interpretation of the data collected in the first Q methodological study. This study aimed to explore and map some of the ways in which current leather-related notions are located within the wider social and cultural context.

As discussed in the theoretical chapters, leather has been long associated with human societies, and has had a great diversity of uses, from mainly practical (e.g. in various industries) to symbolic (e.g. linked with subcultures, sexuality). In more recent years, leather-related understandings have concerned not only the forms in which the material itself has been modelled, but also wider social, political and ideological contexts. In this sense, as suggested in Chapters 2 and 3, such understandings encompass notions related to the material's origins and manufacturing, to animal welfare, the environmental impact of processing, production and disposal of waste, as well as to ethical issues around labour (e.g. sweatshops).

While recognizing the role of leather in industrial environments, this thesis has focused on its perceived roles and images in everyday life. Here, again, representations often alternate between what can be roughly described as functionality on the one hand and symbolic significance on the other hand. As indicated in Chapter 2, however, such considerations can never be completely detached from each other, but are in fact overlapping and interconnected (Douglas & Isherwood, 1996; Bauman, 1988; Baudrillard, 1988a, b). Furthermore, as du Gay et al. (1997) have argued, there can be no clear separation between industry (production) and consumption, as they influence each other through practices of representation and regulation.

Along this line of thought, the purpose of the present Q study is to tap into understandings of leather linked to popular culture imagery (e.g. rebelliousness, elegance, notions of power, the great outdoors and so on), the material's daily uses, and also to potentially relevant issues around ethical consumption (e.g. animal welfare, environmental impact). From this perspective, the present study aims to offer a more systematic examination of broad-based representations of leather, by means of identifying and exploring some of the contemporary dominant perceptions.

5.2 Analysis of accounts

For the present Q study, participants were asked to sort the 52 items from a leather-related perspective. This could refer to an object, an image or a situation associated with

leather. The statements constituted possible continuations to the phrase "the choice of leather..." (see Appendix A3 for study instructions).

The processing and analysis of 39 Q sorts were carried out using the SPSS statistical package. Five factors were retained for rotation, explaining 55% of the variance. The five factors were rotated using the varimax procedure, and factor structures were generated based on the weighted averaging of all the sorts that loaded significantly on that factor alone. Participant loadings reached significance at 0.51 ($p<0.01$). The table of factor loadings is included in Appendix A4.

The factor structure is presented below in table form (Table 5.1). S1-S5 indicate the respective factor(s), with S2a and S2b referring to the two factor structures corresponding to factor S2, which was bipolar. The numbers indicate the ranking of each statement within a particular factor. For ease of reference, the interpretation of each factor will include the respective factor grid.

Table 5.1 Factor arrays for Q study 1

Statement	S1	S2a	S2b	S3	S4	S5
1. is a statement of independence	0	2	-2	2	-1	2
2. comes across as very masculine	0	2	-2	1	1	1
3. is a sign of sophistication	2	-5	5	-3	-4	0
4. conveys straightforwardness	2	0	0	-1	1	-5
5. is a symbol of power	0	2	-2	0	-1	1
6. conveys a no-nonsense outlook	1	1	-1	1	3	-3
7. shows taste	4	-1	1	-2	-5	1
8. projects a feminine image	-2	-4	4	-2	-2	-4
9. is a sign of rebelliousness	-1	3	-3	3	3	2
10. projects an image of daring and adventure	-1	3	-3	2	0	-1
11. is an expression of elegance	2	-5	5	-1	-2	-2
12. is a symbol of youth	0	1	-1	2	-1	0
13. is a sign of wealth	1	-3	3	-1	-4	2
14. creates a classy look	3	-4	4	-2	-2	1
15. is a sign of the tough guy/girl	-2	5	-5	2	1	2
16. brings to mind wide open spaces	-1	2	-2	-1	-1	-5
17. has a primitive quality	-1	1	-1	0	2	-2
18. conveys sensuality	-1	-4	4	1	0	0
19. suggests indifference to environmental issues	-3	0	0	-5	2	3
20. makes a person look out of reach	-3	1	-1	-3	-2	-1
21. is a practical choice	4	5	-5	-1	4	-1
22. projects self-confidence	1	3	-3	5	2	2
23. is a mark of being in control	-1	2	-2	0	-4	1
24. shows appreciation of beauty	3	-2	2	-2	-1	-3
25. shows style	5	-2	2	4	-2	-1
26. comes across as seductive	-3	-2	2	5	0	-2

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27. raises ethical concerns	-2	0	0	-3	5	5
28. is a symbol of the outsider	-3	3	-3	0	-3	-1
29. suggests indifference to the welfare of animals	-2	1	-1	-4	3	3
30. is a means of attracting attention	0	4	-4	3	0	4
31. stimulates the senses	1	-1	1	2	2	-2
32. comes across as showy	0	-1	1	1	-1	4
33. is a matter of tradition	2	0	0	-5	0	0
34. shows a taste for the classic	3	0	0	-2	0	3
35. is an indicator of social status	2	0	0	-4	-3	1
36. is an expression of creativity	1	-3	3	-1	-3	-2
37. is the stuff of heroes	-5	2	-2	0	-3	-4
38. is a fashion statement	3	-1	1	3	3	4
39. creates a feeling of nostalgia	-1	-2	2	-4	0	-4
40. creates a sexy look	0	-3	3	4	1	1
41. is an expression of individuality	2	-1	1	1	1	0
42. shows appreciation of quality	5	0	0	-1	1	0
43. comes across as aggressive	-4	4	-4	0	2	3
44. conjures up images of fitness	-2	-1	1	2	-5	-3
45. shows a taste for the exotic	-2	-1	1	-3	-2	-1
46. says who you are	1	4	-4	0	0	2
47. is an extravagance	0	-2	2	0	-1	0
48. brings fetishism to mind	-5	-2	2	4	4	0
49. is likely to cause controversy	-4	1	-1	1	4	5
50. is an expression of authenticity	1	1	-1	-2	1	-1
51. has a timeless quality	4	0	0	1	5	-2
52. is erotic	-4	-3	3	3	2	-3

5.2.1 Factor summaries

The following sections present an interpretation of the five factors identified in Q study 1. The reading is based on the factor grids and is also informed by the comments provided by the participants whose Q sorts were merged to obtain the factor-exemplifying sort. For each factor I will specify the amount of variance explained, the Q sorts loading on it and the perspectives from which the Q items (statements) were sorted.

Fig. 5.1 Factor S1: The epitome of quality and style

Least Descriptive ← → **Most Descriptive**

-5 (2)	-4 (3)	-3 (4)	-2 (6)	-1 (7)	0 (8)	+1 (7)	+2 (6)	+3 (4)	+4 (3)	+5 (2)
					1. is a statement of independence					
				9. is a sign of rebelliousness	40. creates a sexy look	6. conveys a no-nonsense outlook	41. is an expression of individuality			
			45. shows a taste for the exotic	39. creates a feeling of nostalgia	5. is a symbol of power	31. stimulates the senses	4. conveys straight-forwardness	24. shows appreciation of beauty		
		28. is a symbol of the outsider	44. conjures up images of fitness	10. projects an image of daring and adventure	47. is an extravagance	36. is an expression of creativity	11. is an expression of elegance	38. is a fashion statement	7. shows taste	25. shows style
37. is the stuff of heroes	49. is likely to cause controversy	26. comes across as seductive	27. raises ethical concerns	23. is a mark of being in control	12. is a symbol of youth	46. says who you are	35. is an indicator of social status	34. shows a taste for the classic	21. is a practical choice	42. shows appreciation of quality
48. brings fetishism to mind	43. comes across as aggressive	20. makes a person look out of reach	8. projects a feminine image	17. has a primitive quality	30. is a means of attracting attention	13. is a sign of wealth	3. is a sign of sophistication	14. creates a classy look	51. has a timeless quality	
	52. is erotic	19. suggests indifference to environmental issues	15. is a sign of the tough guy / girl	18. conveys sensuality	32. comes across as showy	50. is an expression of authenticity	33. is a matter of tradition			
			29. suggests indifference to the welfare of animals	16. brings to mind wide open spaces	2. comes across as very masculine	22. projects self-confidence				

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Factor S1: The epitome of quality and style

Factor S1 explains 18.489% of the variance and has an eigenvalue of 7.211. Fourteen sorts loaded significantly on this factor (Q sorts 37, 8, 35, 39, 9, 28, 16, 12, 22, 38, 26, 36, 11 and 7). The positions from which the statements were sorted included shoes, boots, bag, saddle, jacket, wallet, furniture, personal perspective [sic]. Three viewpoints were unspecified.

Interpretation

According to Factor S1, leather possesses the ideal combination of aesthetic and practical characteristics. From this perspective, leather appears to entail, first and foremost, notions of quality (42:+5), in more than one sense. In the words of participant 38, leather is "universally considered as 'quality' material". Quality is seen to have a range of sensory associations and as covering a whole range of functional and visual elements.

A further consideration, important to this account, reflects pragmatic awareness. Leather is very much regarded as a practical choice (21:+4), a view based on the physical and mechanical qualities extolled by participants loading on this factor in their comments: "strong and useful" (participant 7), "versatile, easy to clean, easy to wear" (participant 35), "hardwearing, durable, easy to maintain" (participant 38), "wears well and stays looking good for an age" (participant 37), "durable, long lasting, comfortable" (participant 8). Moreover, leather is seen as comparing favourably to other materials: "would last longer than plastic" (participant 16), and is "more durable than fabric" (participant 26).

In addition to the practical aspects, the aesthetic qualities of leather appear to play a central part. Leather items are considered to indicate appreciation of beauty (24:+3) and to create a classy look (14:+3). They set the owner apart (41:+2) by being elegant (11:+2), extremely stylish (25:+5), tasteful (7:+4) and sophisticated (3:+2). In some cases, leather articles may even be thought of as an indicator of social status (35:+2), possibly through intimations of wealth (13:+1).

Factor S1 regards leather as combining tradition (33:+2) and a taste for the classic (34:+3) on one hand, and as being a fashion statement (38:+3) on the other. By bringing together past and present, leather is seen to achieve a timeless character (51:+4): in the words of participant 8, it "has been around for many years and will continue to be used in the future".

According to this account, leather comes across as a down-to-earth material. It is constituted as conveying straightforwardness (4:+2), with little or no room for

controversy (49:-4). Erotic or fetishist connotations are rejected (52:-4; 48:-5), as well as suggestions of seductive potential (26:-3). At the same time, leather appears to have few associations with imagery in popular culture, such as archetypal heroes (37:-5) or outsiders (28:-3), and is not considered to project an impression of aggression (43:-4) or inaccessibility (20:-3).

Ethical, environmental or animal welfare-related issues are not seen as a major concern in the account offered by this factor (27:-2; 19:-3; 29:-2). Participants 36, 37, 38 describe it as a by-product of the meat industry, and, as such, ensuring a use for waste materials which "would otherwise cause vast problems" (participant 36); or, as participant 38 emphasizes, "Not converting waste skins into leather causes more ethical problems and environmental issues with disposal".

Overall, Factor S1 portrays leather as a material with special qualities, which is, at the same time, attractive and practical, a timeless classic thanks to its perceived beauty, longevity and strength.

Factor S2 (bipolar)

Factor S2 is a bipolar one, which means that it has both positive and negative significant loadings. A bipolar factor offers two accounts, described by two separate Q sorts, one being the inverted image of the other. The statements which one account strongly agrees with are the ones with which the other account strongly disagrees, and vice versa. In relation to bipolar factors, Brown (1980) observed that "in everyday language and thought the opposite of one idea may be another idea rather than a mere negation" (p. 134), implying that each account provides a narrative in its own right. In the case of Factor S2, the two narratives, analyzed in detail below, are S2a "The sign of the tough guy" and S2b "Elegance and sophistication". Factor S2 explains 10.364% of the variance and has an eigenvalue of 4.042. Seven sorts loaded significantly on it, 5 sorts on Factor S2a and 2 sorts on Factor S2b.

Fig. 5.2 Factor S2a: The sign of the tough guy

	-5 (2)	-4 (3)	-3 (4)	-2 (6)	-1 (7)	0 (8)	+1 (7)	+2 (6)	+3 (4)	+4 (3)	+5 (2)
1						19. suggests indifference to environmental issues					
2					44. conjures up images of fitness	33. is a matter of tradition	17. has a primitive quality				
3				39. creates a feeling of nostalgia	32. comes across as showy	35. is an indicator of social status	20. makes a person look out of reach	23. is a mark of being in control			
4				25. shows style	38. is a fashion statement	27. raises ethical concerns	12. is a symbol of youth	37. is the stuff of heroes			
5			40. creates a sexy look	47. is an extravagance	7. shows taste	4. conveys straight-forwardness	50. is an expression of authenticity	2. comes across as very masculine	28. is a symbol of the outsider		
6		8. projects a feminine image	36. is an expression of creativity	24. shows appreciation of beauty	31. stimulates the senses	42. shows appreciation of quality	6. conveys a no-nonsense outlook	5. is a symbol of power	9. is a sign of rebelliousness	43. comes across as aggressive	
7	3. is a sign of sophistication	18. conveys sensuality	13. is a sign of wealth	26. comes across as seductive	41. is an expression of individuality	34. shows a taste for the classic	29. suggests indifference to welfare of animals	1. is a statement of independence	10. projects image of daring and adventure	46. says who you are	15. is a sign of the tough guy / girl
8	11. is an expression of elegance	14. creates a classy look	52. is erotic	48. brings fetishism to mind	45. shows a taste for the exotic	51. has a timeless quality	49. is likely to cause controversy	16. brings to mind wide open spaces	22. projects self-confidence	30. is means of attracting attention	21. is a practical choice

Least Descriptive   Most Descriptive

Interpretation

Factor S2a: The sign of the tough guy

Factor S2a has 5 Q sorts (27, 3, 5, 34 and 33) loading significantly on it. Perspectives from which the statements were sorted include jacket, biker clothing (two sorts), biker gangs and a personal view.

The account put forward by Factor S2a associates leather with notions of assertiveness and power, and reflects, to a considerable degree, archetypal images of nonconformity, such as those associated with bikers or Wild West cowboys. Here, leather is constituted as resonating with acts of daring and adventure (10:+3) and with visual representations of the wide open spaces (16:+2): in the words of participant 34, it's "the cowboy/biker fantasy... the modern lone ranger".

According to Factor S2a, one's leather outfit is seen as providing a direct link to identity: your leather objects "say who you are" (46:+4). In this perspective, leather may come across as the stuff of heroes (37:+2), and may have connotations of self-confidence (22:+3), power (5:+2) and control (23:+2). The latter notions are qualified by participant 34 as being about "power over one's destiny" and "control of own life".

The leather imagery proposed by this account is forceful, aggressive even (43:+4). Leather is constituted as attracting attention (30:+4), but at the same time as not particularly encouraging proximity (20:+1). Wearing it may be read as a symbol of the outsider (28:+3) and a sign of rebelliousness (9:+3). While it can be considered, to an extent, as a manifestation of an independent spirit (1:+2), it does not necessarily point towards individuality (41:-1). As participant 34 observes, in relation to statement 41, it does so only "to a point. [It can also indicate] belonging – depends where you are".

Factor S2a constructs leather as tightly linked to the rugged image of the tough guy (15:+5). From this perspective, aesthetic notions of elegance, sophistication and style are rejected (11:-5; 3:-5; 25:-2): "raw and simple – non-fad", participant 34 comments. Equally, wearing leather is not considered to create a classy look (14:-4): "too heavy and bulky", participant 3 writes. Suggestions of sexiness and eroticism are, likewise, dismissed (40:-3; 52:-3). Overall, leather is portrayed as not matching representations of femininity (8:-4), and as rather more suited to a masculine image (2:+2).

In this narrative, considerations of sensuality are treated as out of place or irrelevant (18:-4), and creativity does not appear as an issue either (36:-2). The choice of leather

is constituted as being, in the first instance, a practical decision (21:+5), possibly linked to safety considerations: in the words of participant 3, "leather is probably the most practical thing bikers can wear". From this perspective, leather is not regarded as an extravagance (47:-2); its tough qualities may extend beyond appearances, into the area of physical protection.

Fig. 5.3 Factor S2b: Elegance and sophistication

(2)	(3)	(4)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(7)	(6)	(4)	(3)	(2)
					19. suggests indifference to environmental issues					
				17. has a primitive quality	33. is a matter of tradition	44. conjures up images of fitness				
			23. is a mark of being in control	20. makes a person look out of reach	35. is an indicator of social status	32. comes across as showy	39. creates a feeling of nostalgia			
	28. is a symbol of the outsider		37. is the stuff of heroes	12. is a symbol of youth	27. raises ethical concerns	38. is a fashion statement	25. shows style	40. creates a sexy look		
	9. is a sign of rebelliousness		2. comes across as very masculine	50. is an expression of authenticity	4. conveys straight-forwardness	7. shows taste	47. is an extravagance	36. is an expression of creativity	8. projects a feminine image	3. is a sign of sophistication
15. is a sign of the tough guy / girl	43. comes across as aggressive	10. projects an image of daring & adventure	5. is a symbol of power	6. conveys a no-nonsense outlook	42. shows appreciation of quality	31. stimulates the senses	24. shows appreciation of beauty	13. is a sign of wealth	18. conveys sensuality	
	46. says who you are	22. projects self-confidence	1. is a statement of independence	29. suggests indifference to welfare of animals	34. shows a taste for the classic	41. is an expression of individuality	26. comes across as seductive	52. is erotic	14. creates a classy look	11. is an expression of elegance
21. is a practical choice	30. is a means of attracting attention		16. brings to mind wide open spaces	49. is likely to cause controversy	51. has a timeless quality	45. shows a taste for the exotic	48. brings fetishism to mind			
-5	-4	-3	-2	-1	0	+1	+2	+3	+4	+5

Least Descriptive   Most Descriptive

Factor S2b: Elegance and sophistication

Two Q sorts (2 and 18) loaded significantly on this factor, viewpoints not specified.

Factor S2b expresses a distinctive position to that proposed by Factor S2a. Here, far from appearing rough and down-to-earth (15:-5), the choice of leather emerges as sophisticated and stylish (3:+5; 25:+2). According to this account, leather may at times appear somewhat exotic (45:+1) and even slightly extravagant (47:+2). However, the overall depiction is not of a flamboyant image (30:-4): the representation proposed is rather one of discreet, classy elegance (22:-3; 14:+4; 11:+5).

According to this portrayal, leather appears as a sensual material (18:+4), with an erotic appeal (52:+3: 40:+3), and, as such, potentially seductive (26:+2). In the perspective proposed by Factor S2b, the leather option has nothing to do with practical considerations (21:-5). Rather, it is regarded as expressive of creative inclinations (36:+3), part of a wider appreciation of beautiful things (24:+2). There are even wistful undertones, with nostalgic feelings being invoked (39:+2). This is a benign, gentle portrayal, which rejects ideas of power (5:-2), control (23:-2) and aggression (43:-4). Equally, leather is not seen as indicative of adventure, rebelliousness or of an outsider position (10:-3; 9:-3; 28:-3). Instead, it brings to mind images of prosperity and wealth (13:+3), or, in participant 18's words, "social recognition and success". Factor S2b strongly associates its depiction of leather with a feminine image (8:+4), and constructs it as not very representative of notions of masculinity (2:-2).

In contrast with Factor S2a, Factor S2b does not make explicit identity-related claims (46:-4). According to participant 18, the objects one possesses do not, or should not, represent a statement of who one is: "I don't think that material objects should define a person".

On the whole, leather as constituted by Factor S2b as highly aesthetic, at the same time sophisticated and seductive, elegant and discreet, sexy and classy – and as an expression of idealized femininity.

Fig. 5.4 Factor S3: An exciting matter

(2)	(3)	(4)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(7)	(6)	(4)	(3)	(2)
					47. is an extravagance					
				49. is likely to cause controversy	37. is the stuff of heroes	16. brings to mind wide open spaces				
			1. is a statement of independence	51. has a timeless quality	46. says who you are	21. is a practical choice	50. is an expression of authenticity			
		30. is a means of attracting attention	44. conjures up images of fitness	18. conveys sensuality	28. is a symbol of the outsider	42. shows appreciation of quality	14. creates a classy look	3. is a sign of sophistication		
	48. brings fetishism to mind	9. is a sign of rebelliousness	10. projects an image daring & adventure	41. is an expression of individuality	23. is a mark of being in control	36. is an expression of creativity	34. shows a taste for the classic	27. raises ethical concerns	35. is an indicator of social status	
26. comes across as seductive	40. creates a sexy look	38. is a fashion statement	12. is a symbol of youth	32. comes across as showy	43. comes across as aggressive	11. is an expression of elegance	24. shows appreciation of beauty	20. makes a person look out of reach	29. suggests indifference to welfare of animals	33. is a matter of tradition
22. projects self-confidence	25. shows style	52. is erotic	31. stimulates the senses	2. comes across as very masculine	5. is a symbol of power	4. conveys straight-forwardness	7. shows taste	45. shows a taste for the exotic	39. creates a feeling of nostalgia	19. suggests indifference to environmental issues
			15. is a sign of the tough guy / girl	6. conveys a no-nonsense outlook	17. has a primitive quality	13. is a sign of wealth	8. projects a feminine image			
+5	+4	+3	+2	+1	0	-1	-2	-3	-4	-5

Most Descriptive ← → Least Descriptive

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Least Descriptive ← → **Most Descriptive**

Score	Items (count)
-5 (2)	33. is a matter of tradition · 19. suggests indifference to environmental issues
-4 (3)	35. is an indicator of social status · 29. suggests indifference to welfare of animals · 39. creates a feeling of nostalgia
-3 (4)	3. is a sign of sophistication · 27. raises ethical concerns · 20. makes a person look out of reach · 45. shows a taste for the exotic
-2 (6)	50. is an expression of authenticity · 14. creates a classy look · 34. shows a taste for the classic · 24. shows appreciation of beauty · 7. shows taste · 8. projects a feminine image
-1 (7)	16. brings to mind wide open spaces · 21. is a practical choice · 42. shows appreciation of quality · 36. is an expression of creativity · 11. is an expression of elegance · 4. conveys straight-forwardness · 13. is a sign of wealth
0 (8)	47. is an extravagance · 37. is the stuff of heroes · 46. says who you are · 28. is a symbol of the outsider · 23. is a mark of being in control · 43. comes across as aggressive · 5. is a symbol of power · 17. has a primitive quality
+1 (7)	49. is likely to cause controversy · 51. has a timeless quality · 18. conveys sensuality · 41. is an expression of individuality · 32. comes across as showy · 2. comes across as very masculine · 6. conveys a no-nonsense outlook
+2 (6)	1. is a statement of independence · 44. conjures up images of fitness · 10. projects an image daring & adventure · 12. is a symbol of youth · 31. stimulates the senses · 15. is a sign of the tough guy / girl
+3 (4)	30. is a means of attracting attention · 9. is a sign of rebelliousness · 38. is a fashion statement · 52. is erotic
+4 (3)	48. brings fetishism to mind · 40. creates a sexy look · 25. shows style
+5 (2)	26. comes across as seductive · 22. projects self-confidence

Factor S3: An exciting matter

Factor S3 explains 9.322% of the variance and has an eigenvalue of 3.636. Four sorts (29, 21, 25, 1) loaded significantly on this factor. Perspectives from which the items were sorted include leather clothes (two sorts), leather jeans and one unspecified viewpoint.

Interpretation

Factor S3 presents an energetic, vibrant view of leather. In this perspective, leather objects are a means of standing out (30:+3) and of projecting a confident image (22:+5). Far from being considered traditional or as denoting classic tastes (33:-5; 34:-2), leather is seen as fashionable (38:+3) and youthful (12:+2). Equally, suggestions of contemplative or wistful appearance are rejected (39:-4), and instead leather is associated with vigour (44:+2), rebelliousness (9:+3) and with bold and exciting endeavours (10:+2): participant 25 comments, "When I think of leather I think about motorbikes and highways which I associate with adventure and excitement". In the same vein, participant 29 refers to "James Dean and 'rebel without a cause'". The exciting side of leather is also constructed through its perceived erotic and stimulating qualities (52:+3; 31:+2), with a strong emphasis on its fetishist connotations (48:+4). The image put forward is extremely sexy and seductive (40:+4; 26:+5); in the words of participant 13, leather "can be used in a variety of ways to seduce people".

According to Factor S3, leather items come across as stylish (25:+4), but not necessarily sophisticated (3:-3) or classy (14:-2): participant 13 comments, "You don't have to be sophisticated to wear leather. Anyone can". Despite the associations with thrills and adventure, Factor S3 does not portray leather as out of the ordinary or exotic (45:-3), and does not express a particular concern with notions of authenticity (50:-2). Leather items are not regarded as creating an unapproachable appearance (20:-3). At the same time, links with social standing are strongly rejected (35:-4): "I don't see leather related to class", participant 1 writes.

This account expresses strong feelings in respect of possible moral or environmental concerns. It vigorously rejects suggestions of indifference to environmental issues (19:-5) and the welfare of animals (29:-4), and protests against the idea that leather can be ethically dubious (27:-3). The objections range from "I can't think of any environmental issues related to leather" (participant 25), to the more extensive comments of participant 29: "If an animal give (sic) its life so we might live, we have a responsibility to use all parts, not just the meat for sustenance... leather is a wonderful, renewable, natural resource, over which we must act responsibly, as with all things". Overall, leather as depicted by Factor S3 appears as a popular choice - fashionable, modern, exciting and desirable.

Fig. 5.5 Factor S4: A mundane material

(2)	(3)	(4)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(7)	(6)	(4)	(3)	(2)
					46. says who you are					
				47. is an extravagance	39. creates a feeling of nostalgia	50. is an expression of authenticity				
			…expression of elegance	…symbol of youth	…matter of tradition	…ecay look				
			45. shows a taste for the exotic	24. shows appreciation of beauty	30. is a means of attracting attention	41. is an expression of individuality	22. projects self-confidence			
		37. is the stuff of heroes	25. shows style	32. comes across as showy	34. shows a taste for the classic	15. is a sign of the tough guy / girl	43. comes across as aggressive	29. indifference welfare animals		
	3. is a sign of sophistication	35. is an indicator of social status	20. makes a person look out of reach	5. is a symbol of power	18. conveys sensuality	42. shows appreciation of quality	17. has a primitive quality	6. conveys a no-nonsense outlook	21. is a practical choice	
7. shows taste	23. is a mark of being in control	28. is a symbol of the outsider	14. creates a classy look	16. brings to mind wide open spaces	26. comes across as seductive	4. conveys straight-forwardness	19. indifference environment issues	38. is a fashion statement	48. brings fetishism to mind	51. has a timeless quality
44. conjures up images of fitness	13. is a sign of wealth	36. is an expression of creativity	8. projects a feminine image	1. is a statement of independence	10. projects an image of daring and adventure	2. comes across as very masculine	31. stimulates the senses	9. is a sign of rebelliousness	49. is likely to cause controversy	27. raises ethical concerns
-5	-4	-3	-2	-1	0	+1	+2	+3	+4	+5

Least Descriptive   Most Descriptive

Factor S4: A mundane material

Factor S4 explains 9.259% of the variance and has an eigenvalue of 3.611. Five participants (31, 15, 30, 19 and 20) loaded significantly on this factor. Perspectives include: bikers, leather as a whole and three unspecified viewpoints.

Interpretation

According to Factor S4, the choice of leather is driven to a great extent by practical considerations (21:+4), with great emphasis on timelessness (51:+5) - which here appears to be related mainly to durability: according to participant 19, "it ages well". Perceived affordability (13:-4) may also play an important role: participant 19 comments, "anybody can own leather nowadays, as it is widely available – a lot in charity shops, very cheap".

Factor S4 portrays leather as fashionable (38:+3), but in a casual way (6:+3), involving little sophistication (3:-4), style (25:-2) or elegance (11:-2). Leather objects are not regarded as a mark of personal taste or an expression of creativity (7:-5; 36:-3); in participant 19's view, they "can look quite cheap and tasteless".

According to this account, leather has a certain primitive quality (17:+2) and stimulates the senses (31:+2). In this respect, it may be considered erotic (52:+2), and is seen as having strong fetishist associations (48:+4).

Factor S4 acknowledges some of leather's popular culture connections, but appears to consider them superficial: while it may be intended as an outward sign of rebelliousness (9:+3), leather is not perceived as denoting an outsider status (28:-3). Participant 20 notes, "it used to be, but I think that feeling's changed now". A leather outfit is not associated with being in control (23:-2) nor with images of fitness (44; -4), and it is not perceived as 'the stuff of heroes' any longer (37:-3). On the contrary, the impression given is one of a routine, everyday material: participant 31 comments, "it is too everyday now", and "anyone can wear leather".

At the same time, this factor sees the leather option as likely to cause controversy (49:+4), and shows concern about the ethical questions which arise in leather-related contexts (27:+5), including those in connection with animal welfare (29:+3). Participant 19 writes, "I don't agree with animals being used for fashion", and a similar position is expressed by participant 20: "it comes [down] to ethical issues of animal rights". Overall, Factor S4 does not appear to endow leather with outstanding aesthetic or symbolic qualities. Instead, it sees it as a practical, no-nonsense option, albeit raising some issues on ethical grounds.

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Fig. 5.6 Factor S5: A questionable choice

-5 (2)	-4 (3)	-3 (4)	-2 (6)	-1 (7)	0 (8)	+1 (7)	+2 (6)	+3 (4)	+4 (3)	+5 (2)
					42. shows appreciation of quality					
				25. shows style	33. is a matter of tradition	14. creates a classy look				
			26. comes across as seductive	50. is an expression of authenticity	12. is a symbol of youth	7. shows taste	46. says who you are			
		44. conjures up images of fitness	31. stimulates the senses	20. makes a person look out of reach	48. brings fetishism to mind	23. is a mark of being in control	1. is a statement of independence			
	39. creates a feeling of nostalgia	52. is erotic	36. is an expression of creativity	45. shows a taste for the exotic	47. is an extravagance	40. creates a sexy look	22. projects self-confidence	34. shows a taste for the classic		
16. brings to mind wide open spaces	37. is the stuff of heroes	24. shows appreciation of beauty	17. has a primitive quality	21. is a practical choice	41. is an expression of individuality	35. is an indicator of social status	15. is a sign of the tough guy / girl	29. indifference welfare of animals	30. is a means of attracting attention	27. raises ethical concerns
4. conveys straight-forwardness	8. projects a feminine image	6. conveys a no-nonsense outlook	51. has a timeless quality	28. is a symbol of the outsider	18. conveys sensuality	5. is a symbol of power	13. is a sign of wealth	43. comes across as aggressive	38. is a fashion statement	49. is likely to cause controversy
			11. is an expression of elegance	10. projects an image of daring and adventure	3. is a sign of sophistication	2. comes across as very masculine	9. is a sign of rebelliousness	19. indifference environmental issues	32. comes across as showy	

Least Descriptive — Most Descriptive

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Factor S5: A questionable choice

Factor S5 explains 7.663% of the variance and has an eigenvalue of 2.988. This factor has four sorts (32, 14, 23 and 24) loading significantly on it. Perspectives from which the items have been sorted include: leather jacket (three sorts) and one unspecified viewpoint.

Interpretation

Factor S5 offers a mainly critical perspective with regard to leather. According to this view, leather is depicted as something of a vanity object, being constituted as ostentatious (32:+4) and as a means of attracting attention (30:+4). Its choice appears to be less triggered by practical considerations (21:-1), such as longevity (51:-2), and more by fashion concerns (38:+4): as expressed by participant 14, "It would appear to be [practical], but it is less practical than 'fashionable'". The resulting image may indicate conservative taste (34:+3), but without nostalgic undertones (39:-4). The effect appears to be a contrived one, perceived as not entirely open and truthful (4:-5; 6:-3): according to participant 14, "it's manipulative", while participant 32 comments: "it does convey straightforwardness, but in the wrong way. It expresses selfishness".

Factor S5 does not seem to credit leather with great aesthetic or sensory appeal. Suggestions of appreciation of beauty and elegance are rejected (24:-3; 11:-2), and notions of seductiveness or eroticism do not fare much better (26:-2; 52:-3). While this perspective acknowledges, to some extent, projections of independence (1:+2), self-confidence (22:+2) and rebelliousness (9:+2), it does not associate them with fitness (44:-3) or heroic imagery (37:-4), but rather with intimations of aggression (43:+3; 15:+2). Suggestions of open spaces are strongly rejected (16:-5); instead, the impression conveyed appears to be a more oppressive one, with participant 23 writing "my last thought would be a large open space", and participant 14 concurring: "no, more of confined, constrained places".

Importantly, the choice of leather is presented as overwhelmingly tainted with ethical issues (27:+5), and as being extremely likely to cause controversy (49:+5). This account expresses concern with regard to possible environmental effects (19:+3), and animal welfare considerations are also constituted as a problematic issue (29:+3), with participant 24 commenting " due to killing animals to keep us warm".

Overall, Factor S5 appears to construct leather as conspicuous and fashionable, but laden with ethical and environmental issues and concerns.

5.2.2 Discussion

In the sections above I reported six separate accounts that reflect the ways in which participants made sense of notions around leather. Below I will briefly summarize each factor and mention, where applicable, the items that serve to distinguish them clearly from other factors, through their placement in either the negative or the positive area of the grid.

Factor S1, "*The epitome of quality and style*", regards leather as a superior material, which combines functional and aesthetic characteristics and is perceived at the same time as classic, traditional and sophisticated.

Factor S2a, "*The sign of the tough guy*", puts forward a representation of leather linked markedly to cultural imagery of male heroes, rebelliousness and adventure. From this perspective, leather is portrayed as a rugged material, withstanding physical hardships and promoting an assertive outlook. Out of the six factors, Factor S2a is the only account which agrees with the assertions that leather "is the stuff of heroes" (37:+2) and "is a symbol of the outsider" (28:+3), that it "brings to mind wide open spaces" (16:+2) and "makes a person look out of reach" (20:+1). It is also the only factor that disagrees with the suggestions that leather "is a fashion statement" (38:-1), "creates a sexy look" (40:-3) and "is an expression of individuality" (41:-1).

Factor S2b, "*Elegance and sophistication*", represents leather as characterized primarily by aesthetic features, having a sensual appeal and being (broadly) associated with a feminine image. This is the only account which agrees with the statements that leather "projects a feminine image" (8:+4), "creates a feeling of nostalgia" (39:+2) and "shows a taste for the exotic" (45:+1); all the other factors place these items in the negative (or in the case of item 39, neutral) area of the grid. It is also the only factor that disagrees with the assertions that leather "comes across as very masculine" (2:-2), "projects self-confidence" (22:-3), "is a means of attracting attention" (30:-4) and "says who you are" (46:-4).

Factor S3, "*An exciting matter*", offers a depiction of leather as an exciting material, constructing it as conspicuous, fashionable and with strong erotic connotations. This is the only account which disagrees with the suggestions that leather "is a matter of tradition" (33:-5), "shows a taste for the classic" (34:-2) and "shows appreciation of quality" (42:-1).

Factor S4, "*A mundane material*", constitutes leather as a fashionable and practical option, good-looking and with a certain erotic appeal, but lacking in sophistication or style and problematic from an ethical point of view. In this sense, it presents the

strongest rejection of the statement "shows taste" (7:-5). Additionally, together with S5, it displays the strongest approval of the items "raises ethical concerns" (27:+5) and "suggests indifference to the welfare of animals" (29:+3).

Factor S5, "*A questionable choice*", echoes Factor S4's concern with leather's ethical and environmental credentials, and constructs it as projecting an aggressive and ostentatious image. Factor S5 is the only account rejecting the idea that leather "has a timeless quality" (51:-2).

The factors identified and described above are of a narrative nature - they constitute discursive ways in which the topic of leather is being made sense of by the participants by drawing on available cultural resources. The meanings of such resources, however, will be dependent on the context in which they are deployed. On this basis, and with reference to some of the theoretical points raised in previous chapters, I will examine how these accounts are shaped by portrayals of leather and gender representations in popular culture, as well as potential ethical considerations.

Popular culture imagery - archetypal representations

As mentioned earlier in this chapter and discussed in more detail in Chapter 4 (Methodologies), the process of collecting items for this Q study revealed that visual and written representations, as well as responses and reactions from the interviewees with regard to the topic of this thesis, were frequently linked to images of leather promoted by media and popular culture. The references ranged from rock and punk stars' attire to sexuality and fetish-related aspects, from allusions to cowboys and Red Indians to bikers and expensive cars. Many such references have been reflected in sociological and anthropological literature on objects and consumption, as well as in cultural studies on dress signification (e.g. Willis, 1978, 1982; Cole, 2000; Quilleriet, 2004).

In the section below I will look at how the factors identified related to some of these themes, and at commonalities and differences among them in these respects.

Statement	S1	S2a	S2b	S3	S4	S5
9. is a sign of rebelliousness	-1	3	-3	3	3	2
10. projects an image of daring and adventure	-1	3	-3	2	0	-1
15. is a sign of the tough guy/girl	-2	5	-5	2	1	2
16. brings to mind wide open spaces	-1	2	-2	-1	-1	-5
22. projects self-confidence	1	3	-3	5	2	2
28. is a symbol of the outsider	-3	3	-3	0	-3	-1
37. is the stuff of heroes	-5	2	-2	0	-3	-4

In general, Factors S1 and S2b place these statements in the negative area of the grid (with item 22 in factor S1 occupying the lowest positive position); this indicates that these two accounts have been less influenced by popular culture connotations. Factors S2a, S3, S4 and S5 all agree that wearing leather could be read as "a sign of rebelliousness" (item 9) and of "the tough guy/girl" (item 15). The contextualizing of the statements, however, makes it clear that they are performing quite different actions in each of the factors.

The account proposed by Factor S2a is the one closest to archetypal images, with references to heroes, outsiders and open spaces. The emphasis is on toughness and practicality, the appearance of power and the projection of self-confidence.

The representation put forward by Factor S3, by contrast, is located in a different modality: here, the rebelliousness, sense of adventure and self-confidence are linked to issues of sexuality and eroticism. The narrative revolves not around pursuing safety in an adverse physical environment, but around attracting attention by displaying a stylish, sexy and seductive appearance. In this regard, the references to open spaces, heroes and outsiders are seen as less important.

For Factor S4, rebelliousness and self-confidence appear to form part of a 'look', and in this way there is a resemblance to Factor S3, where leather is also described as a fashion statement. The link with Factor S2a lies mainly in the projection of self-confidence, in the valuing of practical qualities and in rejection of wealth and aesthetic connotations such as elegance, creativity or sophistication. Unlike S2a, Factor S4 rejects references to heroes and outsiders, and places little emphasis on the suggestion of adventure, constructing leather as a more everyday type of material.

S5 resembles S2a, S3 and S4 with regard to accepting suggestions of rebelliousness, of embodying a tough guy image and of projecting self-confidence. S5 is similar to S4 in rejecting links to open spaces, outsiders and heroes. However, where the other factors embedded these items in a daring, seductive or fashionable image, S5 appears to portray the result as superficial and, at the same time, ethically problematic, coming at the cost of damage to the environment and animal welfare.

The items listed below (5. "is a symbol of power", 12. "is a symbol of youth" and 41. "is an expression of individuality") were also inspired by cultural references to leather (Quilleriet, 2004). They appear to share a common feature across factors, by being all placed in the central area of the grid. As mentioned in Chapter 4 (Methodologies), participants were requested to rank in this area the Q items they were uncertain or neutral about. From this perspective, the statements mentioned below could be

considered as insufficiently defining for the narratives identified, or they could be regarded as having a more general applicability. I would like to take a closer look at these statements, aided by commentaries provided by the participants in the study.

Statement	S1	S2a	S2b	S3	S4	S5
5. is a symbol of power	0	2	-2	0	-1	1

The reference to leather as a symbol of power (inspired by visual representations of military, aviators, police, bikers etc.) appears to be outside the focus of most accounts. Some of the comments from participants illustrate this point:

> P7: Not really to this date
> P39: It's more a 'movie' thing than the real life

Participant 39, in particular, refers to a perceived division line between 'reality' and the 'imaginary' space created by films. This comment appears to go against the grain of postmodernist line of thought according to which, in today's media-saturated society, the boundaries between 'reality' and 'fantasy' have become blurred, and people's sense of what is real and what is not is increasingly dominated and shaped by popular cultural signs (e.g. Baudrillard, 1988a,b; Venkatesh, 1999). The use of the term "thing" can be read as further minimizing the suggested link between leather and power. Thus, the central ranking of the item may indicate awareness of cultural symbolism, and at the same time, a lack of its endorsement from a subjective viewpoint.

Statement	S1	S2a	S2b	S3	S4	S5
12. is a symbol of youth	0	1	-1	2	-1	0

The reference to "youth" also triggered negative or doubtful reactions from participants:

> P3: I found this difficult to place because I also associate motorcycling with the desire to stay young or people pretending to be younger than they are.
> P6: Iconic images regarding leather are youthful punk, bikers, cowboys.
> P14: Would like to be perceived as such.
> P16: Youth orientated 60s culture – mods, rockers.
> P18: Not really – goes with all ages.
> P39: People all ages wear leather.

Here, responses also suggest awareness of the symbolic connection. Participants 6 and 16 bring up popular culture references in their evaluation of the item. Participant 16's comment suggests the link with youth would have been more applicable/relevant in the past, and is therefore not of current interest. In other cases, the statement is questioned

on the grounds of doubts regarding, again, the 'reality' of the image (participants 3 and 14 refer to playing a role, or putting on a mask). Finally, participants 18 and 39 do not reject it completely, but suggest that the appeal or use of leather is more encompassing than the statement implies.

Statement	S1	S2a	S2b	S3	S4	S5
41. is an expression of individuality	2	-1	1	1	1	0

In response to the idea of "individuality", some comments point to the ambiguity of meaning and/or situation, for instance:

P34: "yes, but also belonging"

This dual position is reflected in literature on the communicative aspects of material possessions, dress and fashion. As discussed in Chapter 3, they are seen to have the capacity to convey both personal characteristics (such as originality, creativity) as well as act as elements of social identification, to both set apart and bring together (Douglas & Isherwood, 1996; Stone, 1995; Barnard, 1996). Other comments, however, imply that "individuality" can be achieved through a whole range of other products:

P38: "So many products available that it's possible to create a unique 'look' or 'feel' – quirky, classic etc."

Here, the implication is that leather is neither necessary nor sufficient for the wearer to stand out: a similar effect could ostensibly be obtained through other means, or other products. Again, this last comment echoes notions of the so-called DIY self or off-the-peg identity, whereby consumers are offered the possibility to adopt, create or exchange multiple identities or lifestyles, by means of buying the goods available on the market (Bauman, 1991; Featherstone, 1991; Edwards, 1997, 2000).

Gender representations

Of the 52 statements that constituted all factors, only two (2 and 8) were explicitly gender related, and I will focus on them below.

Statement	S1	S2a	S2b	S3	S4	S5
2. comes across as very masculine	0	2	-2	1	1	1
8. projects a feminine image	-2	-4	4	-2	-2	-4

For the purposes of this research, the notions of 'femininity' and 'masculinity' have been used in a social constructionist sense. This involves the notion that gender-related

understandings do not have an essential or 'natural' foundation, but are instead adapted and negotiated in culturally and contextually specific ways and situations (Woodward, 2002; Burr, 2003). In this respect, the contextualization enabled by Q sorting is particularly suited to allow the identification and examination of such gender-related constructions.

While overall leather did not emerge as strongly gendered, the accounts tended to associate it more with notions of masculinity than with a feminine image. Item 2 ("comes across as very masculine") is tentatively accepted by S2a, S3, S4 and S5; item 8 ("projects a feminine image") is mostly rejected across factors, with the exception of factor S2b.

Factor S2, which is bipolar, offers the most clear-cut representations of gender, embedded in two alternative accounts of leather. Factor S2a, "The sign of the tough guy", has the highest ranking for the item "comes across as very masculine" (2:+2). The account associates notions of masculinity with references to power and control (5:+2; 23:+2), aggression (43:+4) and self-confidence (22:+3), putting together a picture of forceful domination. This depiction is supported by the highest rankings for items related to archetypal images of heroes and rebels engaged in audacious deeds: "projects an image of daring and adventure" (10:+3), "brings to mind wide open spaces" (16:+2). This viewpoint also associates masculinity with independence, self-reliance and non-conformity (1:+2; 9:+2; 28:+2) and gives the impression of power and self-determination, and of a down-to-earth, pragmatic approach (21:+4) and "has a primitive quality" (17:+3). This portrayal corresponds closely to traditional ideals of masculinity, present in numerous media representations, which promote images of men as assured, active and dominant (Berger, 1972; Chapman & Rutherford, 1988; Harris, 1995; Edwards, 1997).

In relation with Factor S2a, Factor S2b provides a representation of femininity as 'the other', and agrees with everything S2a disagrees with. For example, S2b is the only factor which strongly agrees with the connection between leather and "a feminine image" (8:+4). This item is placed in a context rich in aesthetic and erotic imagery. The association with femininity is complemented by links with elegance, style and sophistication (11:+5; 25:+2; 3:+5; 14:+4), a sense for the aesthetics (24:+2) and creativity (36:+3). Just as in the representation of masculinity proposed by Factor S2a, the image of femininity here corresponds to traditional ideals, which portray women as visual spectacle and objects of gaze (Berger, 1972, Wilson, 1985, Entwistle, 2001). At the same time, there is a strong sexual element. In this account, leather is represented as erotic (52:+3), sexy (40:+3) and seductive (26:+2). The sensory element is also emphasized, with leather seen here as sensual (18:+4) and possessing a fetish quality (48:+2). The association of femininity with both sensuality and fetish also works to

construct women as sexual objects; this, and the rejection of the dynamic characteristics ranked positively by Factor S2a, and negatively here, contribute to link femininity with a message of passivity (Burr, 1998).

Apart from Factor S2b, all the other accounts denied any suggested connection between leather and femininity. Factor S5 was the only one where this connection was not only generally dismissed, but categorically rejected (8:-4). This rejection was accompanied by that of aesthetic qualities in relation to leather, such as "appreciation of beauty" (24:-3) and "expression of elegance" (11:-2), as well as of erotic connotations (52:-3; 26:-2). This account renders a critical evaluation of leather by means of agreeing strongly with the statements regarding ethical, environmental and animal rights issues (49:+5; 27:+5; 19:+3; 29:+3), and also by constructing wearing it as a rather superficial endeavour (32:+4; 38:+4; 30:+3). The implication would be that, overall, the use of leather is damaging to the environment, and has no redeeming aesthetic qualities either. While it would be difficult to draw gender-related conclusions from this pattern, it can be noted that the "masculinity" item is positioned closer to this critical appraisal than the "femininity" one (placed next to the opposite extreme). It may be argued that this placement makes notions of femininity appear somehow less compatible with superficiality or dubious ethical practices than those of masculinity.

As previously remarked, Factor S1 does not regard gender associations as an important issue in its account of leather. Its negation of femininity connections seems to form part of a wider rejection of sexual connotations (52:-5; 48:-5; 26:-3), or of popular culture imagery (37:-4; 28:-3; 20:-3). However, the relatively higher positioning of 'masculinity' together with the "self-confidence" and "power" items (22:+1; 5:0) may suggest that such associated imagery, while not necessarily of defining importance for the topic, may appear comparatively more relevant to the image proposed by this factor.

Factors S3 and S4 have the same rankings for gender related items. In neither of them are notions of eroticism, sexiness, sensuality or fetishism linked with references to femininity. Instead, these items are in closer proximity to the allusions to masculinity. The account proposed by S3 places item 2 ("comes across as very masculine") in the proximity of items referring to individuality (41:+1), daring and adventure (10:+2) and tough imagery (15:+2); in this sense, the account can be said to conform to classic portrayals of masculinity. However, as indicated above, it also locates references to erotic, sensual and fetishist qualities relatively closer to item 2 rather than item 8 ("projects a feminine image"). References to masculinity come more closely associated with attracting attention (30:+3), fashion (38:+3) and style (25:+4), as well as with eroticism (52:+3), sexiness (40:+4), seduction (26:+5). In this context, the portrayal of masculinity has less connection with classical views and is more related to more recent representations, in which men display more preoccupation with dress and personal

appearance generally (Edwards, 1997; Chapman & Rutherford, 1988; Frith & Gleeson, 2004). The link between fetishist practices and men has also been documented (Steele, 2007).

Factor S4 shares with S3 the association of masculinity, rather than femininity, with fashion (38:+3), eroticism (52:+2) and sexiness (40:+1). Here, however, the aesthetic element is not as prominent, and is overshadowed by critical references to ethical and environmental impacts of leather.

In relation to the above comments, it could be noted that eroticism-related items draw a distinction between factors:

Statement	S1	S2a	S2b	S3	S4	S5
26. comes across as seductive	-3	-2	2	5	0	-2
40. creates a sexy look	0	-3	3	4	1	1
48. brings fetishism to mind	-5	-2	2	4	4	0
52. is erotic	-4	-3	3	3	2	-3

Factors S2b, S3 and S4 are more accepting (S3 particularly so) of the erotic connotations of leather. Factor S2b associates them with images of femininity, while for factors S3 and S4 they appear more closely connected with references to masculinity. In contrast, factors S1, S2a and S5 are generally dismissive of this notion: S1 constructs leather, in preference, as both a pragmatic and aesthetic option; for S2a, leather is rugged, hardwearing, eminently practical; finally, as noted before, S5 displays more concern overall with ethical implications.

Ethical issues

Beside eroticism-related items, the statements with most movement across factors were those around green or wider ethical issues.

Statement	S1	S2a	S2b	S3	S4	S5
19. suggests indifference to environmental issues	-3	0	0	-5	2	3
27. raises ethical concerns	-2	0	0	-3	5	5
29. suggests indifference to the welfare of animals	-2	1	-1	-4	3	3

Literature on consumption suggests that consumer acts may take place to illustrate and/or promote certain convictions or values (Douglas, 1996; Edwards, 2000; Gabriel & Lang, 2006, Sassatelli, 2007). Indeed, in Sassatelli's words, "goods... are not neutral... it is *refusals* that most clearly underline both subjective preferences and the cultural role of consumption" (2007, p. 98, italics in original). It is generally accepted that considerations

of environmental and ethical issues surrounding goods are at the basis of many decisions to buy (Newholm, 2005; Connolly & Prothero, 2008). In the case of leather, its animal provenance, as well as the manufacturing processes involving substantial use of water and chemicals make it particularly prone to objections on this basis.

Statements 19, 27 and 29 are rejected by Factors S1 and S3. Some of the participants loading on Factor S1 suggested that, far from creating ecological problems, the leather industry is actually performing a service. Even where the potential environmental effects are tentatively acknowledged, efforts to carry out improvements are pointed out or emphasized – as suggested by the following comments on item 19:

> P28: There is a responsibility for proper handling of tanning waste products, as with the waste of the petrochemical industry (acrylic materials).
> P36: Would otherwise create vast problems.
> P37: The opposite – it uses a waste product from the meat industry.
> P38: The leather industry is constantly trying to improve environmental impact.

Alternatively, the comment of participant 25, loading on Factor S3, questions the link between leather and environmental issues:

> P25: I can't think of environmental issues related to leather.

Factors S4 and S5 agree on the existence of such issues; loading on S5, participant 14 suggests that people may be aware, but they choose to do nothing about them:

> P14: In practice, yes. 'I know but I don't really care'.

With regard to the question of ethical concerns, all factors make references to animal issues. S1 defends the use of leather based on arguments such as:

> P36: Everyone has feet.
> P38: Not converting waste skins into leather causes more ethical problems
>   and environmental issues with disposal etc.
> P39: We should distinguish between leather and fur. Leather is made from
>   animal skins that have been previously killed for us to eat.

The implications, according to the comments above, seem to involve: a) the inevitability, and thus normalization, of the use of leather in footwear (P36); b) a reiteration of the waste disposal and environmental argument (P38); and c) a qualitative distinction as to the context surrounding the provenance of leather (P39). The latter draws a parallel with fur, indicating that, by contrast, leather is inextricably linked with the provision of food

(and not merely with dress or fashion – which may be considered less important or superficial), and is therefore associated with an essential aspect of life. The use of the pronoun "us" implies a collective benefitting from this situation and, by extension, a collective responsibility.

Factors S4 and S5 strongly agree with the idea that leather raises ethical concerns. In their reaction to item 27 ("raises ethical concerns"), they bring up the issue of fashion, and construct it as shallow or unnecessary (cf. Wilson, 1985; Craik, 1993):

> P19: I don't agree with animals being used for fashion.
> P24: Is it right to kill for unnecessary reasons!
> P32: The use of leather definitely causes concerns and raises ethical issues – mainly in fashion industries.

These comments echo arguments put forward by animal rights campaigners and organizations (such as PETA or Animal Aid) who criticize the use or wearing of leather as involving cruelty to animals, and advocate the abandonment of such practices.

The animal welfare issue is picked up again in the comments to item 29 ("suggests indifference to the welfare of animals"). These are dominated by participants loading on factor S1 and S3, rejecting the item:

> P28: Leather is a natural renewable resource. It is within our power to give animals a good life, probably longer than in the wild!
> P36: Leather is a by-product.
> P37: As a by-product of a well controlled meat industry should be no problem.
> P38: Experience of slaughterhouses indicates generally very good animal welfare – stressed animals produce poor quality meat!

The above comments emphasize the connection between leather and the meat industry, constructing leather as an outcome rather than as an aim in itself. The focus is shifted to the meat industry, which is described as well regulated (P37), and by implication, an industry which takes into consideration all possible issues regarding animals. Participant 38 makes the argument persuasive by citing personal experience; the use of "generally" suggests that any (rare) instance of animal distress would constitute an exception to the rule of keeping animals happy. A different situation, the argument goes, would be counterproductive, and would therefore be actively avoided. Participant 28 uses a multi-faceted argument in defending the use of leather and rejecting any negative implications for animal welfare. An economic discourse is employed to construct leather (and by implication animals) as sustainable resources; such a construction can work to minimize ethical considerations, and justify a utilitarian, resource-valorization approach (Kurz et

al., 2005). Moreover, there is a moral argument, with animals portrayed as benefitting from their circumstances, by having a better and longer life than their wild counterparts. Finally, by constructing leather as "natural", the participant taps into discourses of nature (see also Chapter 7), whereby 'naturalness' is constituted as positive and desirable (Macnaghten, 1993; Harré et al., 1999).

A different approach (although with the same purpose of rejecting statement 29) is adopted by participant 1 (loading on Factor S3):

P1: Clearly vegetarians may feel this (although some still wear leather).

The comment above appears to indicate that concerns about the potential negative impact on animals may well be limited to a minority (vegetarians). At the same time, there is an implied accusation aimed at this group of the population, constructed as not practising what they preach, by wearing leather despite a declared opposition to it.

5.3 Summary

This chapter has identified six distinct constructions of leather – of the material itself and of leather-related contexts. The ways in which narratives are constituted take into consideration a variety of elements, including imagery promoted in the media and popular culture, gender representations as well as ethical and environmental perspectives. These elements allow diverse contextualizations of leather, thereby enabling a more systematic understanding of the numerous meanings embodied by the material in its various guises.

Although the participants sometimes made reference to particular objects, the focus of this chapter has been on generic depictions of the material, and the ways in which these accounts are shaped by social, cultural and economic concerns. The next chapter will concentrate more directly on the exploration of meanings attributed by participants to their leather possessions.

Chapter 6: Leather in Objects (Q Study 2)

6.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter, Q methodology was used to explore general cultural representations and understandings around leather. Using the same methodological approach, this chapter focuses specifically on leather objects and on the meanings attached to them by participants. As discussed in Chapters 2 and 3, it has often been suggested that possessions are regarded as indicative of personal characteristics or values, or, in other words, are used to or considered to 'say something' about their owner (Csikszentmihaly & Rochberg-Halton, 1981; Belk, 1988; Dittmar, 1992; Lunt & Livingstone, 1992; Sassatelli, 2007).

Moreover, theorists have argued that when people engage in consumption activities they are not only concerned with the functional aspects of things, but are using them in symbolic ways, to say something about themselves and to convey certain messages to others, in what Campbell (1995) has termed 'the communicative act paradigm' (p.341). From this perspective, consumption is linked with the provision of information about one's gender, personality, occupation, lifestyle or values. Aldridge (2003) has posited that this conceptualization prioritizes the symbolic features of things over functional ones and entails the impossibility of consumption without communication - an approach considered to render an *over-culturalized* concept of humanity (2003, p. 19, italics in original). I would, however, argue that all aspects of human life occur within cultural contexts, and are thereby culturally influenced; in this regard, attaching meaning to objects and actions becomes inevitable. Therefore, these two facets of objects or consumption - the functional and the symbolic - do not have to be, and should not be, separated. That does not imply, however, that they might not be differently prioritized in discourse, according to the aims and circumstances of the varied constructions.

This chapter will aim to identify and map out symbolic understandings around leather objects, using single words as Q items. It was anticipated that the lack of a grammatical context would allow participants more room for manoeuvre in their interpretation (Watts, 2001) while remaining located within the contemporary cultural environment.

6.2 Analysis of accounts

For the present study, participants were asked to sort the items with a specific leather object in mind (one they either possessed and were fond of, or would like to possess).

The Q items consisted of single words, referring to possible meanings attributable to particular leather objects (see Appendix B3 for study instructions).

The processing and analysis of the 33 Q sorts were carried out using the SPSS statistical package. Five factors were retained for rotation, explaining 62.5% of the variance. The five factors were rotated using the varimax procedure, and factor structures were generated based on the weighted averaging of all sorts that loaded significantly on that factor alone. Participant loadings reached significance at 0.45 (p<0.01). The table of factor loadings is included in Appendix B4.

The factor structure is presented below in table form. W1, W2 etc indicate the number of the factor(s), with W5a and W5b referring to the two factor structures corresponding to factor W5 (bipolar). The numbers indicate the ranking of each statement in a particular factor. For ease of reference, the interpretation of each factor will include the respective factor grid.

Table 6.1 Factor arrays for Q study 2

Words	W1	W2	W3	W4	W5a	W5b
1. comfort	2	4	1	1	4	-4
2. quality	6	1	4	1	3	-3
3. tradition	3	1	-5	-4	-2	2
4. confidence	0	6	4	2	1	-1
5. attraction	0	4	6	4	0	0
6. glamour	-1	-6	0	-3	4	-4
7. character	3	0	0	-3	-6	6
8. softness	0	-3	-1	-2	1	-1
9. practicality	5	6	4	0	-1	1
10. style	4	1	6	1	-2	2
11. wealth	1	-3	-3	0	1	-1
12. sexiness	-4	0	2	1	3	-3
13. decoration	1	-1	1	-6	-2	2
14. smoothness	1	-2	2	-3	1	-1
15. power	-1	0	-3	-2	-1	1
16. rebelliousness	-5	2	-2	0	-3	3
17. genuineness	5	0	-1	1	-4	4
18. fashion	0	0	5	3	3	-3
19. design	1	-1	3	-1	-2	2
20. versatility	1	0	3	-4	5	-5
21. seduction	-5	-1	2	0	0	0
22. status	2	-4	0	-1	-3	3
23. luxury	2	-5	0	2	6	-6
24. raunchiness	-6	-2	-1	1	1	-1
25. fragrance	0	-2	-6	3	-5	5
26. warmth	-1	3	-1	0	0	0
27. control	-1	-1	-4	-4	-2	2
28. elegance	4	-6	-3	3	-1	1
29. creativity	0	-3	1	-5	-4	4

30. appearance	3	1	3	4	-5	5
31. assertiveness	-1	0	0	-1	2	-2
32. durability	6	4	-2	6	0	0
33. nonconformity	-4	1	3	0	2	-2
34. class	3	-4	-2	-1	2	-2
35. youth	-2	-2	0	-3	2	-2
36. reliability	4	1	1	5	5	-5
37. armour	-3	3	-6	2	-1	1
38. masculinity	-1	3	-3	2	6	-6
39. action	-3	2	-2	-2	0	0
40. sensuality	-2	-1	-1	3	1	-1
41. modernity	-2	-5	2	-2	3	-3
42. toughness	1	5	-4	6	2	-2
43. texture	2	-1	-1	2	-3	3
44. adventure	-3	2	1	4	-4	4
45. kinkiness	-6	-2	-1	0	-1	1
46. wildness	-4	0	2	-1	-6	6
47. fitness	-2	2	-5	-1	4	-4
48. environment	0	-1	-2	-6	1	-1
49. resilience	2	5	0	5	-3	3
50. femininity	-3	-3	5	-5	0	0
51. nature	0	1	-4	0	-1	1
52. extravagance	-1	-4	1	-2	0	0
53. protection	1	3	0	1	0	0
54. freedom	-2	2	1	-1	-1	1

6.2.1 Factor summaries

The following section will deal with the interpretation of the five factors identified in Q study 2. The reading is based on the factor grids and is informed at the same time by the comments provided by the participants whose Q sorts were merged to obtain the factor-exemplifying sorts. For each factor, I will indicate the amount of variance explained, the Q sorts loading on it and the perspectives (i.e. specific objects) from which the Q items (words) were sorted.

Fig. 6.1 Factor W1: Class and distinction: a respectable choice

		(8)	(7)	(7)									
		29. creativity	53. protection	15. power									
			4. confidence	38. masculinity	14. smooth-ness	(5)							
	(5)		48. environment	31. assertive-ness	20. versatility	49. resilience	(4)						
	(4)		18. fashion	27. control	13. decoration	22. status	3. tradition	(3)					
(3)	47. fitness		8. softness	26. warmth	42. toughness	1. comfort	34. class	36. reliability	(2)				
33. non-conformity	41. modernity		51. nature	6. glamour	11. wealth	43. texture	30. appearance	10. style	17. genuine-ness	(2)			
(2)	39. action		5. attraction	52. extravagance	19. design	23. luxury	7. character	28. elegance	9. practicality	32. durability			
46. wildness	44. adventure		25. fragrance							2. quality			
21. seduction	37. armour	54. freedom											
16. rebellious-ness	50. femininity	40. sensuality											
45. kinkiness	12. sexiness												
24. raunchiness													
-6	-5	-4	-3	-2	-1	0	+1	+2	+3	+4	+5	+6	

Least Descriptive   Most Descriptive

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Factor W1: Class and distinction: a respectable choice

Factor W1 explains 25.290% of the study variance and has an eigenvalue of 8.346. Ten sorts loaded significantly on this factor (24, 7, 4, 26, 9, 6, 33, 16, 3 and 12). The objects described by the participants included leather bound book/photo album, leather briefcase/satchel, leather furniture/armchair, wallet, jacket/coat, shoes/boots and leather pillow.

Interpretation

Factor W1 describes leather primarily as "quality material" (participant 16) (2:+6), in more than one sense. This account focuses on the physical characteristics, with durability considered outstanding (32:+6) (in participant 33's words, it "will last forever") and resilience noticeable (49:+2) (participant 6 notes: "it is good for all weathers and lasts well"). Such qualities make it a highly practical choice (9:+5), as well as a dependable one (36:+4); participant 24 describes it as a "strong and tough material", and participant 6 notes that it "copes with a range of environments and uses".

The attraction of leather appears to go beyond the acknowledgement and appreciation of its pragmatic, hardwearing qualities. This account constructs it as a versatile material (20:+1), at the same time decorative and protective (13:+1; 53:+1), comfortable and luxurious (1:+2; 23:+2). Participant 6 comments, "[leather] can make strappy sandals or chunky biker boots, soft suede jackets or protective clothing for work", and malleability is brought up by participant 6 ("leather adapts to the body") as well as participant 33 ("leather can adapt easily making the clothes comfortable"). Factor W1 constitutes leather as more than just a sensible choice: the versatility is given not only by leather's perceived variety of uses, but also by its appearance (30:+3). According to this perspective, leather objects are seen as refined (34:+3): participant 7 writes, "adds a touch of class certainly" – a view echoed by participant 24 ("certainly classy") and by participant 12 ("very classy and elegant").

This account constructs leather as linked to tradition (3:+3) (on this point, participant 6 and participant 24 note, respectively: "leather is a very traditional material" and "it has strong associations"), as full of character (7:+3) and conferring a mark of authenticity (17:+5) ("a genuine material" – participant 4).

The representation of leather put forward by Factor W1 rejects sexual or erotic connotations. While constructed as very elegant and stylish (28:+4; 10:+4) (according to participant 5, it "adds an elegant touch" and "stylish quality irrespective of contents"), leather is not considered sexy or seductive (12:-4; 21:-5): "not likely", participant 7

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notes, and participant 24 comments: "has image of staid, upright, boring person". Suggestions of kinkiness or raunchiness are also rejected (45:-6; 24:-6) (participant 4 – "no way!", participant 3 – "don't agree at all"). In terms of gender imagery, associations with femininity are more strongly dismissed than suggestions of projections of a masculine character (50:-3; 38:-1): participant 4 comments, "more true than femininity", and participant 24 notes "definitely not"; according to participant 7, leather is "too hard-looking to be feminine".

In this account, environment-related concerns occupy a neutral position (48:0). With regard to this aspect, participant 24 writes, "Some doubts. Probably not good for the environment because of the way it is processed", while participant 6 questions the provenance of the material: "I hope leather is a by-product of the meat industry".

Overall, factor W1 appears to construct leather objects as attractive primarily for their perceived image of distinction and solidity. This representation is not particularly concerned with notions of rebelliousness or non-conformity (16:-5; 33:-4), action or lack of constraints (39:-3; 54:-2). According to participant 24, leather is "more indicative of conformity - conservative". Equally, leather is not associated with wildness and adventure (46:-4; 44:-3); "no connection, really", participant 7 comments, and participant 6 writes: "you can be very boring and still wear leather". Instead, leather seems to fit better into more conventional settings, coming across as an expression of elegance (28:+4) and indicative of a certain maturity (35:-2): in the words of participant 4 - "not really a youthful choice or display".

Fig. 6.2 Factor W2: Practical and tough: things you can rely on

(2)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(7)	(8)	(7)	(5)	(4)	(3)	(2)	(2)
						20. versatility	33. non-conformity					
					43. texture	15. power	51. nature					
				25. fragrance	21. seduction	7. character	36. reliability	47. fitness	26. warmth			
			11. wealth	14. smooth-ness	48. environment	18. fashion	10. style	54. freedom	38. masculinity	32. durability		
		34. class	50. femininity	45. kinkiness	13. decoration	46. wildness	30. appearance	39. action	37. armour	5. attraction	42. toughness	9. practicality
28. elegance	41. modernity	22. status	8. softness	24. raunchiness	27. control	12. sexiness	2. quality	44. adventure	53. protection	1. comfort	49. resilience	4. confidence
6. glamour	23. luxury	52. extravagance	29. creativity	35. youth	19. design	31. assertive-ness	3. tradition	16. rebellious-ness				
						17. genuine-ness						
-6	**-5**	**-4**	**-3**	**-2**	**-1**	**0**	**+1**	**+2**	**+3**	**+4**	**+5**	**+6**

Least Descriptive   Most Descriptive

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Factor W2: Practical and tough: things you can rely on

Factor W2 explains 12.094% of the study variance and has an eigenvalue of 3.991. Three sorts (28, 27, 17) loaded significantly on this factor. The objects described were cowboy boots, biker jacket and leather coat.

Interpretation

The account put forward by factor W2 prioritizes the functional qualities of leather. From this perspective, the practical features are constituted as paramount (9:+6), and its hardwearing characteristics are particularly valued: toughness, resilience and durability occupy key positions in opting for leather (42:+5; 49:+5; 32:+4): participant 28 comments, "yes – protects me, doesn't get dirty, no messin'!". According to this factor, the main role of leather is to ensure safety, security and comfort (37:+3; 53:+3; 1:+4). In fulfilling these aims, leather objects could be seen to act as armour against adversity and as helping to keep warm (26:+3); in the words of participant 28 – leather is "warm and protects on the motorbike [and] doesn't stain". Fitness (47:+2), according to this account, could be interpreted as suitability for the purpose ("seems to mould to me", participant 28 notes).

Within this narrative, leather's perceived functional properties constitute it as a suitable accompaniment to an active lifestyle. Factor W2 associates it with adventure (44:+2), action (39:+2) and feelings of freedom (54:+2); according to participant 17, it can project a "sense of fun and journey". There are certain intimations of nonconformity and rebelliousness (33:+1; 16:+2); with regard to these proposed connotations, participant 28 comments: "I freely buy into this when I wear it!". The picture painted comes across as a lively, dynamic one (4:+6), in which leather is described as an ingredient of an energetic existence (participant 28: "Get up, go!").

According to this account, the choice of leather is definitely not considered extravagant (52:-4), nor is it seen as a luxury (23:-5) ("no luxury at all", participant 28 writes). On the contrary, it appears as a matter of pragmatism and of necessity – using a reliable, rugged material (36: +1; 14:-2), seen as fit to deal with tough circumstances (8:-3). Such qualities make it, as participant 28 puts it, "always a safe [option], when in doubt". In this context, a modern character could be considered irrelevant (41:-5), and notions of glamour and elegance could be entirely superfluous (6:-6; 28:-6): "the exact opposite!", participant 28 comments.

Overall, in the portrayal proposed by factor W2, leather comes across as eminently practical, with few symbolic associations. Its choice does not appear to be indicative of social or financial standing (22:-4; 11:-3): "quite anti-status I think", participant 28

notes. Any erotic connotations are equally rejected or treated with indifference (45:-2; 24:-2; 21:-1; 12:0). Despite its apparent dynamism, the image projected is not particularly associated with youth (35:-2), but may be seen to "suit all ages" (participant 28).

This representation rejects connections with femininity (50:-3) and is linked more to a masculine image (38:+3). In general, factor W2 illustrates the appeal of leather as a highly practical and sturdy material, an eminently appropriate accompaniment for physical activities.

Fig. 6.3 Factor W3: Stylish and innovative: pushing the boundaries

(2)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(7)	(8)	(7)	(5)	(4)	(3)	(2)	(2)
						49. resilience						
				48. environment	8. softness	31. assertiveness	52. extravagance					
			38. masculinity	34. class	24. raunchiness	7. character	36. reliability					
		51. nature	15. power	16. rebelliousness	43. texture	53. protection	29. creativity	14. smoothness				
	3. tradition	27. control	11. wealth	39. action	17. genuineness	22. status	13. decoration	46. wildness	20. versatility			
25. fragrance		42. toughness	28. elegance	32. durability	26. warmth	35. youth	54. freedom	41. modernity	33. non-conformity	2. quality	18. fashion	5. attraction
37. armour	47. fitness				40. sensuality	23. luxury	44. adventure	21. seduction	19. design	4. confidence	50. femininity	10. style
					45. kinkiness	6. glamour	1. comfort	12. sexiness	30. appearance	9. practicality		
-6	-5	-4	-3	-2	-1	0	+1	+2	+3	+4	+5	+6

Least Descriptive

Most Descriptive

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Factor W3: Stylish and innovative: pushing the boundaries

Factor W3 explains 11.280% of the study variance has an eigenvalue of 3.722. Three sorts (32, 21 and 18) loaded significantly on this factor. The objects described were red leather bag, leather jacket and belt.

Interpretation

The account proposed by Factor W3 appears to associate leather with items with a difference. In this representation, the appeal of leather is largely visual, with objects standing out by means of their appearance (30:+3); in describing the chosen object, participant 32 writes, "colour and design together are very eye-catching". This perspective constructs leather primarily in relation to stylish, fashionable guises (10:+6; 18:+5). Design is a key aspect (19:+3), with emphasis on the expression of originality (33:+3) (participant 32 comments, "personally like to be a bit different"), and without losing sight of creativity (29:+1).

While looks appear important, more pragmatic aspects are also taken into consideration, and their role is emphasized (9:+4). For participant 32, functionality takes the shape of "lots of nice pockets and space to keep everything". In this account, leather items seem to be appreciated for their high quality (2:+4) and versatility (20:+3).

This construction of leather items appears to be a light-hearted one. The image put forward is open and confident (4:+4). There are slight associations with freedom and adventure (54:+1; 44:+1), but not in the context of action or physical activities (47:-5; 39:-2). Hardwearing qualities are not regarded as essential (32:-2) and leather is not considered tough (42:-4) or acting as an armour (37:-6) ("not for protection", participant 18 writes). Symbolic connotations of power and control are rejected (15:-3; 27:-4). In the description put forward by this factor, leather is associated less with notions of masculinity (38:-3). The emphasis is on femininity (50:+5), with participant 32 writing "Makes a change from all the boring men's styles".

Factor W3 does not associate leather with tradition (3:-5) ("it's not very traditional", participant 21 comments), but constructs it as linked more to modernity (41:+2). Elegance does not come across as a requirement for the enjoyment of objects (28:-3), nor do the latter have to be expensive (11:-3). This narrative portrays leather as extremely attractive (5:+6), possibly projecting a certain erotic, seductive appeal (12:+2; 21:+2; 14:+2). As mentioned earlier, however, the emphasis appears is on the visual qualities, with other sensory aspects, such as smell, texture and feel, not playing a major role (25:-6; 43:-1; 8:-1). On the whole, this account values leather for its perceived capacity to take innovative, flexible and at the same time eye-catching forms.

Fig. 6.4 Factor W4: Strong and good-looking: a useful indulgence

	(2)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(7)	(8)	(7)	(5)	(4)	(3)	(2)	(2)
					41. modernity	46. wildness	21. seduction		37. armour				
				6. glamour	15. power	47. fitness	45. kinkiness	1. comfort	38. masculinity	40. sensuality			
		20. versatility	7. character	8. softness	22. status	11. wealth	17. genuine-ness	4. confidence	28. elegance	5. attraction	36. reliability	32. durability
	50. femininity	27. control	14. smooth-ness	52. extravagance	19. design	33. non-conformity	24. raunchiness	12. sexiness	43. texture	18. fashion	44. adventure	49. resilience	42. toughness
13. decoration	29. creativity	3. tradition	35. youth	39. action	31. assertive-ness	16. rebellious-ness	10. style	53. protection	23. luxury	25. fragrance	30. appearance		
48. environment					34. class	51. nature	12. sexiness... 2. quality	2. quality					
-6	**-5**	**-4**	**-3**	**-2**	**-1**	**0**	**+1**	**+2**	**+3**	**+4**	**+5**	**+6**

Least Descriptive   Most Descriptive

Factor W4: Strong and good-looking: a useful indulgence

Factor W4 explains 7.674% of the study variance and has an eigenvalue of 2.532. Four sorts (23, 22, 1 and 29) loaded significantly on this factor. The objects described are: expensive sofa, leathers (i.e. motorcycling suit), jacket (two Q sorts).

Interpretation

For Factor W4, the appeal of leather consists of a combination of hardwearing and aesthetic qualities. This account values leather's capacity to withstand wear and tear and to pass the test of time. Toughness (42:+6), resilience (49:+5) and durability (32:+6) are emphasized as important reasons for choosing it; for participant 1, the latter "is an important aspect of leather, related to ruggedness and masculinity". Leather is portrayed as a life-saver in particularly adverse situations, as participant 23 writes: "Time and again leather is shown to be the most durable protection in a motorbike accident".

This account describes leather as a purpose-suited material. Versatility has a low ranking (20:-4), which seems to suggest that this feature is not considered a necessity; in this sense, participant 22 comments: "not versatile - practical, leather aids practicality"). In the same vein, there appears to be no particular need for creativity (29:-5). Furthermore, the representation put forward by factor W4 does not specifically connect leather objects with symbolic significance, with many of the associations often accompanying leather being rejected: notions of character, power, nonconformity or rebelliousness come across as being of little or no relevance (7:-3; 15:-2; 33:0; 16:0); participant 1 writes: "I have no sense that leather is related to power". Similarly, connotations of either tradition or modernity are dismissed (3:-4; 41:-2).

While this perspective constructs leather as not meant for decorative purposes (13:-6), looks appear to matter nevertheless (30:+4). Participant 1 comments, "I love the appearance of good leather". Reliability is also strongly appreciated (36:+5); participant 22 associates it with durability and aesthetics: his leather sofa is described as "a good product that will not get thin and look shabby in just a couple of years".
From a visual point of view, Factor W4 depicts leather as fashionable and elegant (28:+3; 18:+3). Without appearing glamorous (6:-3), it also constructed as somewhat of a luxury (23:+2) (according to participant 22, it is "an expensive luxury with durability benefits").

This account projects upon leather a strong sense of thrill or adventure (44:+4). Leather is portrayed as protecting and attracting at the same time, acting as armour (37:+2) but with hints of sexiness, raunchiness even (12:+1; 24:+1); participant 23 comments, "it is also figure-hugging, not bad-looking!". Within the representation of leather objects

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expressed by W4, associations with femininity are strongly rejected (50:-5); the suggestion appears to be that a masculine image would be relatively more appropriate (38:+2).

Within the W4 narrative, leather comes across as a sensual material (40:+3), whose smell and texture add to the powerful element of attraction (5:+4; 25:+3; 43:+2): participant 22 writes, "I will clean it every couple of years to renew its leather smell".

The extreme negative ranking of the "environment" item (48:-6) suggests that, for Factor W4, this does not constitute an area of concern in relation with leather. This reading is supported by the comment from participant' 22: "I do not see the environmental impact of leather as an issue – it has benefits". Overall, W4 portrays leather as desirable for combining valuable functional qualities with an attractive and luxurious appearance.

Factor W5

Factor W5 is bipolar. As discussed in the previous chapter, this means that two distinct accounts are present. These accounts are illustrated by separate exemplifying Q sorts, one being the 'mirror' image of the other (the words one account strongly agrees with are the ones with which the other account strongly disagrees).

Factor W5 explains 6.181% of the variance and has an eigenvalue of 2.040. Two sorts loaded significantly on it: Q sort 5 loaded on Factor W5a and Q sort 2 loaded on Factor W5b.

Fig. 6.5 Factor 5a: Fashionable and sexy: the luxury of feeling good

(2)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(7)	(8)	(7)	(5)	(4)	(3)	(2)	(2)
-6	-5	-4	-3	-2	-1	0	+1	+2	+3	+4	+5	+6
						32. durability						
					28. elegance	50. femininity	40. sensuality					
					9. practicality	5. attraction	48. environment					
				3. tradition	15. power	53. protection	4. confidence	31. assertiveness				
			49. resilience	13. decoration	37. armour	39. action	11. wealth	34. class	2. quality			
		44. adventure	22. status	10. style	54. freedom	21. seduction	24. raunchiness	35. youth	12. sexiness	1. comfort		
46. wildness	30. appearance	29. creativity	16. rebelliousness	27. control	51. nature	26. warmth	14. smoothness	33. non-conformity	41. modernity	6. glamour	36. reliability	23. luxury
7. character	25. fragrance	17. genuineness	43. texture	19. design	45. kinkiness	52. extravagance	8. softness	42. toughness	18. fashion	47. fitness	20. versatility	38. masculinity

Least Descriptive ← → Most Descriptive

Interpretation

Factor W5a: Fashionable and sexy: the luxury of feeling good

The objects described by the participant P5 (exemplifying Factor W5a) were shoes. This account conveys a representation of leather as luxurious and stimulating, while at the same time retaining its functional characteristics. The image is bright and exciting: modernity and fashionable qualities are appreciated (41:+3; 18:+3), and leather objects are described as sexy (12:+3) and glamorous (6:+4). A particular effect or appearance is not, however, actively or purposefully pursued (30:-5). Moreover, associations with luxury, although strong (23:+6), are constructed as a side effect: according to participant 5, " I didn't buy my shoes for luxury but they do give that feeling".

The portrayal has specific associations with youth (35:+2 – highest ranking) and with characteristics often connected with it, such as nonconformity and assertiveness (33:+2; 31:+2). Nevertheless, the imagery remains to an extent subdued: the notion of wildness in connection to leather appears to be considered extreme, outlandish even (46:-6). This depiction of leather rejects notions of rebelliousness (16:-3) and adventure (44:-4), and is not particularly associated with ideas of freedom (54:-1) or power (15:-1).

Additionally, as noted above, pragmatic qualities seem to take precedence over abstract, symbolic references. In this sense, notions of character are not seen as a relevant or a sought-for feature (7:-6), and neither is genuineness (17:-4). Allusions to the past, in the form of tradition, appear to matter little (3:-2). On the contrary, comfort (1:+4), reliability (36:+5) and versatility (20:+5) are among the main aspects which are considered to render leather appealing. Fitness seems to be read in terms of suitability (47:+4): in the words of participant 5, it is important that the object "suits the purpose". In this sense, toughness is considered sufficient (42:+2), while actual resilience is not required (49:-3).

From a sensory perspective, smell or texture are not among the main concerns (25:-5; 43:-3), although softness and smoothness could be considered to contribute, to an extent, to the general appeal (8:+1; 14:+1). Overall, Factor W5a constructs leather as indicative of quality (2:+3) and as having a widespread appeal due to its accessibility on a number of features: it is regarded as fashionable (18:+3), irrespective of style (10:-2) or design (19:-2). Moreover, leather items can look classy (34:+2), but are not taken as indicative of social status (22:-3). All the above considerations are strongly associated with a masculine image (38:+6), in a representation evocative of what has been termed the "new man"(Kimmel, Hearn & Connell, 2005) – a construction of masculinity associated among others, with an increased interest in personal appearance and lifestyle aspects.

Fig. 6.6 Factor 5b: Wild and fragrant: the exotic choice

Q-sort grid (Least Descriptive −6 to Most Descriptive +6; number of items per column in parentheses):

Score	(count)	Items (top to bottom)
−6	(2)	23. luxury; 38. masculinity
−5	(2)	36. reliability; 20. versatility
−4	(3)	1. comfort; 6. glamour; 47. fitness
−3	(4)	2. quality; 12. sexiness; 41. modernity; 18. fashion
−2	(5)	31. assertiveness; 34. class; 35. youth; 33. non-conformity; 42. toughness
−1	(7)	40. sensuality; 48. environment; 4. confidence; 11. wealth; 24. raunchiness; 14. smoothness; 8. softness
0	(8)	32. durability; 50. femininity; 5. attraction; 53. protection; 39. action; 21. seduction; 26. warmth; 52. extravagance
+1	(7)	28. elegance; 9. practicality; 15. power; 37. armour; 54. freedom; 51. nature; 45. kinkiness
+2	(5)	3. tradition; 13. decoration; 10. style; 27. control; 19. design
+3	(4)	49. resilience; 22. status; 16. rebelliousness; 43. texture
+4	(3)	44. adventure; 29. creativity; 17. genuineness
+5	(2)	30. appearance; 25. fragrance
+6	(2)	46. wildness; 7. character

Least Descriptive — Most Descriptive

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Factor W5b: Wild and fragrant: the exotic choice

One sort (participant 2) loaded significantly on this factor. The object described was a leather-bound notebook from South America.

Factor W5b puts forward an intense depiction of leather, which combines physical attributes with symbolic elements and could be seen to instil a sense of thrill and stimulation. Here, the appeal of leather objects resides in the strong sense of authenticity (17:+4) and their special character (7:+6). Participant 2, who exemplifies this factor, writes about the chosen item: "it is very unique in appearance, new and functional but with a sign of the past". Indeed, this factor associates leather more with tradition than with modernity (3:+2; 41:-3), and associations with youth are not immediately apparent (35:-2). According to this perspective, leather brings wildness strongly to mind (46:+6), and is connected with adventure and rebelliousness (44:+4; 16:+3); participant 2 comments, "by reflecting on exotic places".

For Factor W5b, the appeal of leather is complex in its multiplicity. Its appearance may be striking or outstanding (30:+5). However, although leather objects are seen as having a decorative quality (13:+2), they are not considered glamorous (6:-4) (participant 2 describes his chosen object as "not glamorous or chic, more authentic"). Notions of luxury are strongly rejected (23:-6): in the words of participant 2, the value of the notebook lies in it being "thoughtful, meaningful, beyond luxury". A leather object, Factor 5Wb seems to suggest, does not have to be fashionable to be appreciated (18:-3). Creativity appears to be much valued (29:+4), and design and style are seen as playing a part (10:+2; 19:+2) in its appeal.

This account appears to construct leather objects as attractive mainly because of a unique character and individual associations. Relatively mundane features, such as reliability, versatility and comfort are described as having little or no importance (36:-5; 20:-5; 1:-4), and associated ideas of quality are equally dismissed (2:-3).

There is a certain ruggedness in the representation proposed by this factor. The smell and texture of leather are important (25:+5; 43:+3), with other sensory elements, such as softness or smoothness, considered less relevant (14:-1; 8:-1). In this account, erotic notions are either discarded (12:-3) or treated with indifference (40:-1; 21:0; 5:0). Regarding gender, connotations of femininity are neutrally located (50:0), and suggestions of masculinity are firmly rejected (38:-6).

6.2.2 Discussion

This study has identified six distinct accounts regarding understandings of leather objects. As in the previous chapter, a brief summary of the factors will be presented below, together with a presentation of some of the common features and inter-related themes.

The majority of factors, with the exception of W5b, depicted leather objects as comfortable, reliable and indicative of quality, and rejected references to power, control and kinkiness. With the exception of W5a, all accounts displayed concern with appearance and style and expressed recognition of resilient qualities. Apart from W3's perspective, leather was not generally described as seductive.

Factor W1, "*Class and distinction: a respectable choice*" constructs leather articles as comfortable, practical and hardwearing, and at the same time stylish and giving an impression of elegance. This is the account that rejects most strongly suggested associations of leather with seduction (21:-5), raunchiness (24:-6) and kinkiness (45:-6).

Factor W2, "*Practical and tough: things you can rely on*" extols the functional qualities of leather objects within a dynamic, energetic context. This account appreciates leather's capacity for protection and its durability, and associates it with an active lifestyle. Out of the six factors, W2 is the only one which associates the material with warmth (26:+3) and action (39:+2), and which most strongly rejects its portrayal as an extravagance (52:-4).

Factor W3, "*Stylish and innovative: pushing the boundaries*" offers a mainly visual representation of leather, placing it in a fashion-related context, where creativity, originality and design play an important role. This account puts forward a portrayal of leather as strongly associated with notions of femininity. W3 is the only narrative which connects leather with seduction (21:+2), femininity (50:+5) and (tentatively) with extravagance (52:+1), and which shows the least concern with durability (32:-2).

Factor W4, "*Strong, long-lasting and good-looking: a useful indulgence*", appreciates leather objects for their durability and resilience, and also for the favourable impression they are seen to project. Constructed as attractive and fashionable, they are depicted as the best option in terms of both their visual impact and of their longevity and strength. This account has the lowest ranking of the "environment" item (48:-6), indicating strong opposition to suggestions that leather might be ecologically damaging.

Factor W5a, "*Fashionable and sexy: the luxury of feeling good*", conveys a tactile representation of leather, where its comfort and fitting qualities are described as giving a

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sexy and luxurious feeling. Of the six accounts, this is the perspective that appears least concerned with practicality (9:-1) and resilience (49:-3), and also with style (10:-2) and appearance in general (30:-5). At the same time, it is the only factor proposing slight associations with youth and assertiveness (35:+2; 31:+2), and the only account where references to softness and the environment are positively ranked (8:+1; 48:+1).

Factor W5b, "*Wild and fragrant: the exotic choice*", constructs leather as a special material, with a distinctive smell and texture and suggestive of character, originality and creativity. Factor W5b is the account least preoccupied with considerations of comfort (1:-4), quality (2:-3), reliability (36:-5) or indeed fashion (18:-3) or self-confidence (4:-1). This factor is the only one which presents positive, albeit low, rankings for power (15:+1), control (27:+2) and kinkiness (45:+1).

Function or sign?

In accordance with the points made at the beginning of this chapter regarding the functional and symbolic characteristics of material goods, it is apparent that all narratives favour, to a greater or lesser extent, a combination of both features. Factor W1, for example, values practicality, durability and reliability (9:+5; 32:+6; 36:+4), and at the same time places emphasis on style and elegance (10:+4; 28:+4), in a combination of aesthetic and functional elements. Similarly, Factor W2, which appears to be particularly 'pragmatic', by prioritizing comfort, practicality, durability, resilience, toughness, protection (1:+4; 9:+6; 32:+4; 49:+5; 42:+5; 53:+3) and, uniquely among factors, warmth (26:+3), also appreciates an attractive and confident image (5:+4; 4:+6). Factor W4 values both functionality and looks, with high rankings for attraction, fashion, elegance and appearance (5:+6; 18:+5; 28:+3; 30:+4), and shows a similar regard for durability, reliability, toughness and resilience (32:+6; 36:+5; 42:+6; 49:+5).

Equally, narratives which appear to be 'aesthetically-inclined', such as W3 and W5a, while prioritizing, respectively, attraction, style and fashion (W3: 5:+6; 10:+6; 18:+5) and glamour, sexiness, fashion and luxury (W5a: 6:+4; 12:+3; 18:+3; 23:+6), do not lose sight of practicality (W3: 9:+4) and comfort and reliability (W5a: 1:+4; 36:+5). This mixture of functional and aesthetic considerations appears to suggest that, even when 'saying something' about the owner, the practical uses of objects are not necessarily overlooked. In this regard, the leather narratives identified here do not rely exclusively on the 'sign qualities' (e.g. Baudrillard, 1988a [1968]) of leather, but also take into account the utility features of objects.

From this perspective, factor W5b seems at first sight to constitute an exception: this account prioritizes features such as character, genuineness, creativity, appearance, wildness and adventure (7:+6; 17:+4; 29:+4; 30:+5; 46:+6; 44:+4), in what appears to be a largely abstract outlook. Nevertheless, W5b also appreciates more 'concrete', this time sensory, leather qualities, such as fragrance and texture (25:+5; 43:+3). Thus, it can be considered to address more than purely 'figurative' functions or purposes, and to promote not also a symbolic mode of consumption, but also a tangible, sensorial one.

Popular culture imagery revisited

The inclusive character of accounts, which appear to value, but not necessarily favour or prioritize, representational aspects, can be observed in the ranking of some of the features conventionally associated with popular cultural imagery:

Words	W1	W2	W3	W4	W5a	W5b
15. power	-1	0	-3	-2	-1	1
16. rebelliousness	-5	2	-2	0	-3	3
31. assertiveness	-1	0	0	-1	2	-2
33. nonconformity	-4	1	3	0	2	-2
35. youth	-2	-2	0	-3	2	-2
42. toughness	1	5	-4	6	2	-2
44. adventure	-3	2	1	4	-4	4
54. freedom	-2	2	1	-1	-1	1

With the exception of W5b, an account highlighting the 'exotic' potential of leather, and of W2, which tentatively acknowledges it, the notion of rebelliousness is mostly rejected or neutrally regarded. As far as "adventure" is concerned, W4 is the only factor apart from W5b to give it a high position on the grid. In the case of W4, however, "adventure" is seen in the context of sensuality and eroticism (40:+3; 12:+1; 24:+1 – highest rankings for items 12 and 24), whereas for W5b the term seems to connote independence of spirit, with high rankings for wildness, creativity and genuineness (46:+6; 29:+4; 17:+4).

Similarly, references to assertiveness, freedom and power appear as having little or no relevance to descriptions of personal leather objects. This feature is illustrated by comments from participants:

Assertiveness (item 31):

> P7: not these days
> P24: not any more

With regard to "freedom" (item 54), participant 4 writes "*P4: not very important*", while participant 28, describing a biker jacket, places it in a specific context: "*P28: adds to the feeling of freedom when I park up and wander around*".

Equally, references to "power" (item 15) appear to hold little importance in the meanings attached to leather items:

> *P1: I have no sense that leather is related to power*
> *P7: doesn't really have this anymore*
> *P24: not these days*

With the exception of factor W5a, associations with "youth" (item 35) are negatively or neutrally ranked, with participants commenting:

> *P4: not really a youthful choice or display*
> *P7: unlikely, too traditional*
> *P22: youths can't afford £1500 for a leather suite!*
> *P24: you don't see an 18 year old with an expensive leather sofa*

Here, accounts seem to propose particular understandings of "youth", with P7 contrasting it with "tradition" and P22 and P24 pointing out that young people would not have the financial capacity to afford leather furniture (constructed here as an expensive, luxury item).

Unlike in the previous chapter, where popular culture imagery was more apparent in generic portrayals of leather, here, with regard to personal possessions, such considerations appear to be less emphasized. Depictions of objects, while including references to various symbolic meanings, remain at the same time concerned with the usefulness and practical qualities of material things.

Shifting meanings

As has been pointed out elsewhere in the thesis (for example in Chapters 4 and 5), the placing of items within a grid in Q Methodology allows them to be interpreted on the basis not only of ranking, but also of their positioning in relation to each other. This allows the same items to be employed in expressing different viewpoints, or indeed meanings, through different associations or groupings (a feature which was also exemplified in the previous section). Through the act of placing the items, each participant is given the opportunity to provide a viewpoint. Such a viewpoint is part of a shared pool of cultural resources, and has,

at the same time, a 'personal' quality, by being the sorter's representation of his/her possessions, experience and background. While it is not claimed that constructions of objects through Q say something about an 'inner world', they can be read as ways in which participants relate to culturally available discourses surrounding material goods and consumption practices.

Items such as "fitness" (47), "luxury" (23) and "tradition" (3), by means of their wide range of movement across ranks, may be seen as providing examples of this variety of meanings:

Words	W1	W2	W3	W4	W5a	W5b
47. fitness	-2	2	-5	-1	4	-4
23. luxury	2	-5	0	2	6	-6
3. tradition	3	1	-5	-4	-2	2

With regard to "fitness", Factors W1, W3, W4 and W5b ranked the item in the negative area of the grid, with some of the participants commenting:

> P6: unfit people enjoy wearing leather
> P16: nothing to do with fitness!

In this context, "fitness" was understood as referring to the outcome of physical exercise, or to a person's health or strength. For these factors, this meaning of "fitness" did not match their representations of leather objects (classy and respectable for W1, stylish for W3, a durable and good looking for W4 and exotic for W5b).

Factor W2, which gave the item a +2 ranking, understood it and used it to indicate a physical compatibility, as suggested by participant 28's comment:

> P28: seems to mould to me

Factor W5a gave "fitness" the highest ranking (47:+4), and used it together with "comfort" (1:+4), "reliability" (36:+5), "versatility" (20:+5) to express suitability, or appropriateness: in the words of participant 5, "fitness for purpose".

In a similar manner, the item "luxury" (23) was ranked negatively by factors W2 and W5b, and positively by W1, W4 and W5a:

Words	W1	W2	W3	W4	W5a	W5b
23. luxury	2	-5	0	2	6	-6

Writing about "The legacy of luxury", Hilton (2004) has traced some of the debates around what he termed the 'moralization' of consumption – the political and moral elements of consumption practices, and their association with discourses of luxury over the last 200 years. He argues that an increasingly economic approach resulted in the dismissal of morality concerns, as it was considered that mass production and trade interests depended on greed and acquisitiveness. From this perspective, to consume was regarded as a civic duty, or as "individual economic chivalry" (in the words of Marshall, 1907, as cited in Hilton (2004), p. 106). Hilton also notes that, with the advent of mass production, the distinction between 'needs' and 'wants' became increasingly blurred. As a consequence, additional terminology emerged, outside the dichotomy luxury-necessity, which was considered too morally rigid. Thus, concepts such as 'comforts' or 'decencies' were adopted, with a view to reflecting the changed perspectives. Hilton argues that, in contemporary Western society, where consumption has a defining role (as discussed in Chapter 2), material accumulation becomes normalized. As a consequence, the 'mere' amassing of material goods is no longer the target of moral debates. Instead, what becomes scrutinized are the perceived transgressions against society's current cultural ideals (e.g. the maintenance of a fit, healthy body, as a reflection of the ideal self) or ethical aspects linked to globalization (such as buying organic food in preference to factory-farmed products). In conclusion, these wider changes in cultural and moral discourses become reflected in the numerous and, at times, conflicting understandings behind morally evaluative concepts, such as "luxury".

As mentioned in the factor interpretation above, W2 displayed an interest in the hardwearing qualities of leather, and constructed using the material as a necessity; in this context, the item "luxury" was taken to mean 'unessential' or 'dispensable with', and was, as such, rejected (together with items such as "extravagance" and "glamour"), with participant 28 writing:

P28: not luxury at all!

Factors W1, W4 and W5b all understand the term to indicate sumptuousness or opulence, but relate to its moral implications in different ways. Factor W5b rejects the association with luxury by resorting to an inferred contrast with an object's sentimental value; in the comment provided by participant 2, a luxury connotation appears shallow or irrelevant by comparison with what is seen as important, in this case the intentions behind the gift (leather-bound notebook from South America):

P2: thoughtful, meaningful, beyond luxury

Factors W1 and W4 agree, to an extent, with the proposed "luxury" descriptor in connection to leather, by understanding it to refer to its pecuniary value. No moral evaluation is apparent in participant 12's comment about a leather pillow (*P12: quite expensive object*). The statement by participant 22, however, suggests an awareness of potential negative reactions to the luxury notion, and appears to attempt to deflect criticism, by pointing out the pragmatic qualities of the object (leather sofa):

P22: an expensive luxury with durability benefits

Offering yet another reading of item 23, Factor W5a gives it the highest ranking and places it in the vicinity of "comfort" (1:+4), "fitness" (47:+4) and "quality" (2:+3); this account interprets "luxury" to refer to the pleasure given by a comfortable, well-fitting, suited for purpose object:

P5: I didn't buy my shoes for luxury but they do give that feeling

Here, the luxury connotation appears to be both rejected and embraced. The shoes were not bought "for luxury" (the implication being that other, more practical reasons, were behind the purchase), but the hedonistic pleasure they give is thoroughly appreciated.

A similar negotiation of meaning is apparent with regard to the notion of "tradition":

Words	W1	W2	W3	W4	W5a	W5b
3. tradition	3	1	-5	-4	-2	2

Representations around leather often contain strong references to time, in connection with the material's historical connections, as well as to its perceived durability characteristics. Mentions of tradition occurred in both informal and formal interviews (see Chapter 7) as well as in wider media contexts. Furthermore, literature on consuming practices discusses the part played by objects and consumption in general in encapsulating cultural values and conveying notions of history and tradition (e.g. Appadurai, 1986; McCracken, 1988; Holt, 1995; Douglas & Isherwood, 1996; Lury, 1996; Clarke et al, 2003).

The "tradition" item (3) was accepted by W1, W2 and W5b, and rejected by W3, W4 and W5a. For instance, the account put forward by W1 gives "tradition" the highest ranking (3:+3). W1's appreciation of leather objects, while acknowledging functional elements such as durability (32:+6) and practicality (9:+5), places a heavy emphasis on characteristics like genuineness (17:+5), style (10:+4), elegance (28:+4), character (7:+3), class (34:+3) and

status (22:+2). This viewpoint constructs leather articles as objects of distinction, and depicts them as instilled with aesthetic qualities. In this way, it can be said to endow leather objects with what Bourdieu (2010 [1984]) referred to as "scope [for] the aesthetic disposition" (2010 [1984], p. 88); in Bourdieu's words, "nothing is more distinctive, more distinguished, than the capacity to confer aesthetic status on objects that are banal or even 'common' (...) or the ability to apply the principles of pure aesthetic to the most everyday choices of everyday life" (ibid.). While it cannot be asserted that factor W1's depiction is purely aesthetic, as it appears to value functionality highly as well, it nevertheless is, among all the narratives identified, the one most concerned with presenting leather as classy and refined. "Tradition", in this context, is one of the features defining and setting apart leather items, and possibly acting as an indicator of their owners' taste.

In factor W2, which describes leather in the context of tough objects for rough conditions, "tradition", ranked relatively low at +1, may be read in terms of cultural imagery. Participant 28 (biker jacket) mentions "James Dean and Easy Rider". The latter is a reference to a film depicting episodes in the lives of two drug-dealing bikers travelling across America in search of their version of freedom (Easy Rider, 1969). In this account, leather appears to be constructed oxymoronically, as the 'traditional' uniform (or 'mark') of rebellion.

Factor W5b's use of the item is more similar to that of W1. Here, "tradition" (3:+2) is placed in close association with "style" (10:+2), "status" (22:+3), "genuineness" (17:+4) and "character" (7:+6). Unlike W1, however, where "tradition" suggests a more conservative application, and implies stolidity and respectability, here the emphasis is on "wildness" (46:+6), "adventure" (44:+4) and "rebelliousness" (16:+3). The reading of item 3 is based on the participant's description of the chosen object (i.e. leather bound notebook, from travels in South America), with comments mentioning Incas, "sign(s) of the past" and "exotic places" taken to connote history and times gone by. While the allusion to the passage of time echoes W1's representation, for W5b the notion of "tradition" appears to be less linked with the material's longevity, and more associated with "creativity" (29:+4) and evocations of long-established qualities of local craftsmanship.

Having explored some of the semantic opportunities enabled by Q, I will continue this process in the following section, where I aim to examine how gender representations have been constructed through Q in this study.

Gendered objects

Earlier notions of consumption as a mainly feminine concern (cf. Hollows, 2000) have been challenged with the advent of what is termed "the consumer society". This concept constructs consumer practices as an integral part of general, everyday life, and therefore not as particularly associated with certain parts of the population. Indeed, consumption literature in recent decades indicates that men, as well as women, are regarded as image-aware consumers (Attwood, 2005).

In the present study, two items ("38. masculinity" and "50. femininity") referred explicitly to generic notions of gender. It will be recalled that, in the previous chapter, general representations of leather did not emerge as strongly gendered. In this study, focused on personal possessions, references to gender in the depictions of such possessions were more apparent.

Words	W1	W2	W3	W4	W5a	W5b
38. masculinity	-1	3	-3	2	6	-6
50. femininity	-3	-3	5	-5	0	0

As mentioned earlier, Factor W3 was the only account which not only gave "femininity" a positive ranking, but also expressed strong agreement with this connection. To recapitulate briefly, factor W3 described leather objects as distinguished through their appearance - colour, design and so on. While factor W3 provides a representation of particular leather things, the high rank given to item 50 suggests an association between notions of femininity and the items described. In this sense, the representation of femininity (by proxy) put forward by factor W3's is a dynamic one - bright, confident and assertive. There is preoccupation with appearance (30:+3), but not necessarily with elegance (28:-3). Indeed, the idea of freedom seems to be prioritized (54:+1). This might be read to suggest that the pursuit of elegance, as a need to observe particular stylistic conventions, might be regarded as limiting. W3 values the fashionable character of the objects described (18:+5). However, if we were to consider "fashion" in terms of balancing the need to conform (to fashion requirements) with the desire to look different (see Wilson, 1985), the depiction proposed by W3 places a particular emphasis on the latter feature. Elements of individuality, originality and creativity (33:+3; 29:+1) are constructed as taking precedence over more conservative concerns (3:-5). For factor W3, attractiveness appears to be indicated by a personal style (10:+6) and a modern, daring design (5:+6; 10:+6; 41:+2; 46:+2).

This portrayal offered by W3 might be read in terms of what Lazar (2009), in a discussion of postfeminist representations of femininity, termed 'hybrid' feminine identities (p. 389). In her analysis of beauty advertisements, Lazar examined apparent tensions between traditional representations of women as passive, finding satisfaction in domestic roles and prioritizing the needs of others, and some contemporary media depictions, portraying women as independent, assertive and in control of their lives. Lazar suggests that such tensions are ostensibly resolved in the image of postfeminist woman. The latter has been portrayed as combining 'feminist' and 'feminine' identities (understood as potentially conflicting), by deliberately embracing traditional stereotypes (such as concern with physical appearance, frivolousness and pursuit of a youthful image). At the same time, this portrayal emphasizes the entitlement to pleasure and the pursuit of personal freedom through consumption practices.

With the exception of Factor W1, which ranked both items negatively (albeit 38 less so than 50), factors rejecting notions of femininity gave masculinity a positive ranking (W2 and W4). W5a, with the highest positioning of item 38 (38:+6), placed "masculinity" in the vicinity of "glamour" (6:+4), "sexiness" (12:+3), "modernity" (41:+3) and "fashion" (18:+3). This representation resembles the 'consuming form of masculinity' (Edwards, 1997), constructed as hedonistic, showing a keen interest in personal appearance, paying attention to clothes and lifestyle products and enjoying the pleasures of consumer practices.

The W2 account probably comes closest to illustrating a more traditional representation of masculinity (Carrigan, Connell & Lee, 1985; Edwards, 1997) through its prioritization of functional qualities, such as "practicality" (9:+6), "confidence" (4:+6) and "toughness" (42:+5). According to Edwards (1997, p. 41), the 'consuming' equivalent of this position would be 'outdoor casual'. Here, a certain interest in "appearance" is acknowledged, but given a low priority (30:+1), with the emphasis placed instead on "comfort" (1:+4). This representation resonates with the findings of Frith and Gleeson's (2004) study of men's body image and appearance. One of the themes identified there, "Men value practicality", suggested a stated preference for functionality and fitness for purpose, over aesthetic considerations.

Alternatively, factor W4 put forward a hybrid construction, one where "toughness" (42:+6), "resilience" (49:+5) and "durability" (32:+6) enjoyed a similar level of appreciation as "appearance" (30:+4), "fashion" (18:+3), "elegance" (28:+3) and "sensuality" (40:+3). The placement of "masculinity" (38:+2) in the vicinity of items such as "luxury" (23:+2), "sensuality" (40:+3), confidence (4:+2) resonates with constructions of the 'new man' (McKay et al., 2005) and highlights the complexity of gender representations. As Petersen

(2003) noted, "the notion of masculinity may contain many images and behaviours that may be competing, contradictory and mutually undermining" (p.58). In this respect, the accounts identified through Q are particularly useful in enabling and facilitating the expression of multiplicity and intricacy of cultural imagery (gender-related included), and in emphasizing the fluidity of meaning associated with it.

6.3 Summary

This chapter has presented six shared narratives of meanings associated with leather possessions. The accounts identified illustrate the ways in which material objects are seen to embody both functional and symbolic characteristics, and highlighted the diversity of understandings achieved through different contextualisation of items. Furthermore, these narratives exemplified how gender-related notions are constructed, (re)presented and negotiated in connection with material objects, in resonance with concepts of things as substantiating cultural and social categories (Lunt & Livingstone, 1992; Douglas & Isherwood, 1996).

The next chapter will use discourse analysis to investigate how leather is represented in accounts of participants with a professional involvement in the material.

Chapter 7: The Identity, Experience and Impact of Leather

7.1 Introduction

The present chapter provides a discourse analytic account of representations of leather as a generic material. In doing so, this approach takes into consideration both the situated character of the conversational interaction and the wider social context from which discursive resources are drawn (as outlined more extensively in Chapter 4). In this sense, the analysis looks at the use of language in interaction and its rhetorical functions (e.g. extreme case formulations, list construction, concessions and so on), and also at the ways in which particular constructions are influenced by and feed into wider social or political issues.

The representations of leather presented here were identified primarily in the interview data from participants who worked, in various capacities, within the leather industry. This chapter builds on the theoretical examination in earlier sections of the thesis. It explores the symbolic and functional meanings of material objects, their roles in embodying and perpetuating social and cultural values and their perceived contributions to social relations. Following a discursive analysis of the data, I identified three over-arching themes, each with a number of sub-themes. The three over-arching themes, to be discussed in detail in the following sections, are: (1) *The identity of leather*; (2) *Working with leather*; and (3) *In defence of leather*.

7.2 The identity of leather

The first theme, *The identity of leather*, contains generic representations of the material, revolving around its roles and uses in society. This theme includes three sub-themes. The first sub-theme, *Leather as a material apart*, portrays the material's relation to human society as (i) *A matter of heritage* and (ii) *A natural appeal*. The second sub-theme, *Leather as necessity*, underlines the material's economic, functional and 'green' qualities and represents leather in terms of its roles as (i) *An environmental solution* and as (ii) *An irreplaceable practical benefit*. The third sub-theme, *Leather as normal part of life*, focuses on the self-evidential, matter-of-fact status of leather. Each theme with its respective sub-themes will be discussed separately.

7.2.1 Leather as a material apart

During the course of the interviews, participants working with leather described it as a material apart, for a variety of reasons. Some accounts focused on leather's longevity and its historical character, and described it as linked intimately with the evolution of human societies (*A matter of heritage*). In other narratives, leather was depicted in terms of its association with nature, as having an organic, unadulterated character, and, as such, exerting an appeal at a basic, essential level (*A natural appeal*).

(i) A matter of heritage

In talking about their connection with leather, some of the respondents emphasized the historical continuity in humankind's involvement with the material, and its social contribution. When asked about his feelings towards leather, Daniel, who runs a private business, constructed its significance both in personal and in collective terms:

Extract 1 (Daniel, leather manufacturer)

> Daniel: *I'm very proud of what I do, very proud of its relationship to nature, and its relationship to society as a whole. You know, it's been a material that has helped develop humankind for many, many thousands of years, so... It's a good material, it's got a good honest base to work with.*

The respondent uses emotive language to depict leather as having an historic role, functioning as provider to and facilitator of humanity's advancement. Here, society and nature are constituted as separate, with leather providing a bridge between the two. The material's importance is explained through its dual character – being at the same time a representative of society and a representative of nature - and thus encompassing everything that is considered relevant to people. The longevity of this relationship, emphasized through repetition ("many, many thousands of years") places leather as a constant accompaniment of humankind and justifies conferring on it moral, human characteristics ("so... It's a good material, it's got a good honest base to work with"). The suggestion is that working with leather is a worthy, honourable activity, a source of professional pride, as well as a down-to-earth, practical pursuit. The association with leather through his work places Daniel in a position to claim a share of the responsibility and merit derived from leather's stated contribution to the social good. The implications of such an involvement are presented in the form of personal and professional fulfilment and satisfaction - "I'm very proud of what I do".

Depictions of leather as a crucial contributor to general progress come across in the accounts below, which, again, emphasize its continuing relevance and constantly developing functions:

Extract 2 (Bridget, leather technician)

> Bridget: Historically it's been used to turn the wheels of industry, it used to be used in industrial realty, which made the factories work, and some bizarre uses, like in gas meters, and hinges on cars, and... So many uses, it's fascinating.

Extract 3 (Anne, leather technician)

> Anne: It's an ever-changing product, you know. It's probably, historically... one of the very, very first products ever invented... and yet it's still changing. And that's what I find it's quite fascinating, you know? That literally from the day man first started eating meat, we've been making leather. And yet, you know, what we're doing now, is still making leather, but much, much more technical products, challenging products, and fashionable products.

Both Extracts 2 and 3 refer to the use of leather as "historical", thus working to establish its long-standing existence and its importance to the wider society. In Anne's account, the duration of leather's presence for humanity is illustrated through the repetition ("very, very first") and use of an extreme case formulation (Pomerantz, 1986): "literally from the day man first started eating meat..."; by its association with the act of eating, leather is thus linked to humans' very existence.

Leather is also described as omnipresent in humankind's technological achievements, from the beginnings ("one of the... first products ever invented") to the present day ("we're... still making leather"). The use of the collective "we" in Anne's account may be read as positioning the participant within a community associated with and contributing to leather's progressive role and achievements; at the same time, it may work to construct leather as a shared benefit, and to call attention to its practical and communal significance.

The special character of leather is also constructed by drawing attention to the material's versatility. In Extract 2, the technological uses put forward as examples range from an over-arching "turning the wheels of industry" to less visible, but nevertheless necessary roles, in

unexpected capacities - "some bizarre uses, like in gas meters, and hinges on cars". Anne points out that, although leather has been around a long time, this aspect has not rendered it obsolete or irrelevant to contemporary society. A three-part list is used as a rhetorical device to suggest the ways in which guises and uses of leather have evolved and expanded, keeping pace with scientific innovation, while still having an aesthetic appeal ("much, much more technical products, challenging products, and fashionable products"). Both Anne and Bridget's use of the word "fascinating" with reference to leather implies that, although they are intimately acquainted with it in their professional capacity, its ability to innovate and surprise is always present. Beyond its functionality, leather is constituted as intriguing, retaining an unknown side, which leaves room for further exploration and discovery.

The concept of leather as a heritage object is given a new dimension in the excerpt below. Here, participants discuss certain museums' reluctance to display vintage fur or leather, for fear of reprisals from animal rights activists. Leather, here associated with fur, is constructed as a repository of knowledge, the existence of which is endangered by misplaced ethical objections.

Extract 4 (Joanne, restoration specialist; Michelle, restoration specialist)

Joanne:	But historic fur and leather, I mean I just cannot see, I mean it's done and dusted, and it's how people were.
Michelle:	Yeah
I:	Yeah
Joanne:	I mean it's showing what they thought, you know, how they did things...
Michelle:	Showing how...
I:	And how life was
Michelle:	Yes.
Joanne:	And in some ways I think it was more ethical. I mean not the leopard skins, you know, killing for entertainment, I still don't agree with that, but you know a lot of the leather... I mean, it's because it, it was what was around, it's like, you know, the native people still do it...
Michelle:	Oh yes!
Joanne:	Because they don't nip down the road for a bit of plastic this and the other, so they use what... It is, like I say, part of history, so I don't understand the extreme reactions to that, and I never will.
Michelle:	No, certainly. It is like, to me it's like trying to say slavery never happened.
Joanne:	Yeah

It's part of the history. You know, we're so worried about denying things that we're losing this huge chunk of history. And we're also losing the knowledge that goes with it.

In this extract, Joanne expresses her incomprehension of potential opposition on ethical grounds to what she terms "historic leather". Such an antagonistic stance is constructed as unfounded and unreasonable - both indirectly, through the emphatic use of "just" (Lee, 1987) ("I just cannot see") and the extreme case formulation ("I never will [understand]"), as well as more directly, through the characterization of this standpoint as "extreme". Overall, the participant gives three reasons why such rejection would be misplaced: first, by describing the situation as an accomplished fact - nothing can be any longer achieved or changed by choosing to protest against displaying old objects ("it's done and dusted"). Secondly, by using an anthropological discourse, which connects leather with history and culture: "it's how people were... showing what they thought... how they did things"; the rhetoric of the three-part list contributes to the presentation of leather (and fur) as involved in all aspects of human life; here, the account works to re-create an image of a past society, with the implication that denying this role of leather would act as denial of history. Thirdly, Joanne employs the ethics argument, closely linked with the cultural context mentioned before: "in some ways I think it was more ethical ... it's because it, it was what was around". The participant pre-empts potential counter-arguments about the unethical character of hunting by pointing out that her stance does not include agreeing with "killing for entertainment". Using leather in the context described is constructed as a matter of necessity or availability of resources ("what was around"), as well as of cultural circumstances ("how people were"). The mention of "native people" evokes Dryden's 'noble savage' and puts forward notions of unadulterated, close-to-nature existence, where best use is made of what nature offers: "they don't nip down the road for a bit of plastic this and the other". The reference to plastic objects acts as an extreme case formulation to underline the absurdity of possible protests against a 'natural', as well as inevitable, way of life.

Talking about rejection of vintage leather, Michelle presents it as having two consequences: firstly, and endorsing Joanne's stance, she constructs it as equivalent to the denial of historical events because of their potentially disturbing or unpleasant connotations; the slavery example is used rhetorically, to suggest the absurdity of trying to brush off an indisputable event of enormous significance, a "huge chunk of history". Secondly, such a misplaced standpoint is likely to result in a loss of intellectual heritage ("the knowledge that goes with it"). The collective "we" serves here to indicate the society at large, which is portrayed as running a serious risk of harming itself, as a consequence of misjudged

practices of political correctness: "we're so worried about denying things that we're losing this huge chunk of history [and] ... the knowledge that goes with it".

Another construction of leather as heritage is achieved through references to its animal origins, by bringing into focus farming practices and the preservation of rural landscape.

Extract 5 (Bridget, leather technician)

> Bridget: A lot of the animal rights activists who say we shouldn't eat meat or use leather or anything like that, I often wonder how far they have thought about their argument... Because if you just look at the, just take in England, for instance, if you look at the countryside that we have, a lot of people say what a lovely countryside we have, because we've got fields and we've got trees and hedges and all that sort of thing, and birds live in the hedges and in the trees and everything and isn't it lovely... But if we stopped using animals to provide meat, milk, hides and skins for us, the face of our countryside would change, and you, you wouldn't recognize it, because the only reason we have fields with hedges is to keep animals in... You don't need hedges to keep a field of wheat in... So all our hedgerows would go, and all the birds that live in the hedgerows would go, and... Do you remember the photographs of the, you know, the huge plains in America, you know, when they did away with all the Indians and the buffalo and everything and sowed wheat on them, our countryside would look like that. Because we'd have to produce so much more grain to compensate for, you know, the fact that we're getting our proteins from meat, that you just would not recognize this countryside anymore...

Bridget constructs her argument in the form of an answer to potential criticism from animal rights campaigners. Here, the defence of meat-eating and, by implication, leather, takes the form of attack, through the suggestion that this particular standpoint has not been thought through and does not take into account possible negative consequences. As a point in question, the participant chooses the example of the English countryside. The association of animal farming with the rural English landscape works to connect leather, through animal rearing, with notions of national identity.

Bridget uses a rhetoric of place (Wallwork & Dixon, 2004) in order to depict leather as a matter of national significance. The narrative contains various rhetoric devices which

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contribute to making the description powerful and convincing: the softened extreme case formulation (Edwards, 2000) "a lot of people" suggests that admiration of the English rural landscape is something generally shared; the three-part list ("fields... trees... hedges") works to indicate the diversity of scenery and the wealth of wildlife that inhabits it; the repetition of the collective "we have" emphasises the shared quality of these resources, and the participant's identification with the people/nation owning this natural treasure. Together with the voicing of imagined praise ("isn't it lovely"), this depiction conveys an idyllic picture, at the same time aesthetically pleasing and ecologically friendly.

This account is contrasted with a 'worst case scenario' - the alternative of stopping animal farming altogether. Such a course of action is portrayed as entailing stark consequences: the implied loss of valuable animal products (with the four-part list "meat, milk, hides and skins" stressing their variety and indicating their 'basic necessity' status) would be followed by changes at an ecological level: "the face of our countryside would change, and you, you wouldn't recognize it ... all our hedgerows would go, and all the birds that live in the hedgerows would go...". The use of extreme case formulations ("all hedgerows", "all the birds") serves to emphasise the enormity of the effects, both geographically and in terms of human experience. The latter is portrayed in terms of loss in the feeling of national identity: "you just would not recognize this countryside anymore". The pronoun "you" constructs the impact of this hypothetical development as more than an individual standpoint - a shared, collective experience. The example of the American wheat fields functions rhetorically to project strong emotional imagery: the idiomatic "they did away" suggests finality and irreversibility; together with the extreme case formulation and the three-part list ("all the Indians and the buffalo and everything"), it works to accentuate the size and severity of the anticipated consequences. In this way, the account portrays animal rights activists as not only misguided, but also, by implication, anti-nature and as eroding notions of Englishness.

As outlined in the discussion, the above account draws on a number of discourses of nature (Macnaghten, 1993; Harré et al., 1999). 'Nature as visual harmony of activities' (Macnaghten, 1993, p. 62) is illustrated by references to wildlife coexisting harmoniously with agricultural activities (animal farming), in an aesthetically pleasing ensemble. This narrative serves to construct farming and the natural world as interlinked, in a symbiotic relationship of existence and development. A second discourse, 'nature as ecological balance' (ibid. p.63), comes to the fore through the contrast between the image of a diverse but stable way of life, the elements of which complement each other and function in a sustainable way, and the potential negative consequences (i.e. the destruction of wildlife), should this balance be threatened. The allusion to the American wheat plains taps into a third discourse, 'nature as wilderness' (ibid. p.58). This assumes an equivalence between

'nature' and absence of human interference or involvement; by turning the fields into exclusively grain cultivated, and thus human-managed areas, their 'natural' status, with all it implies (wildlife, picturesque quality) would be lost. This account is not without a certain ambiguity: the hedgerows are constituted as a kind of human artefact through their sole stated purpose, for "keeping animals in"; at the same time, however, their existence forms part of a picture of unspoilt countryside. Their potential removal, following lack of practical uses ("you don't need hedges to keep a field of wheat in"), would paradoxically result in loss of natural character.

The link between English rural landscape and British national identity has been documented (Lowenthal, 1991; Daniels, 1992; Wallwork & Dixon, 2004). By associating leather with the countryside scenery, constructed as both a space for wildlife as well as an iconic representation of national identity, the participant's narrative reinforces the notion of leather as a socially important material. The expression of concern about the welfare of the countryside thus constructed positions the respondent as ethically minded, responsible and dedicated to maintaining national natural beauty, as well as upholding national identity. Moreover, the use of collective pronouns enables the participant to indicate her belonging to this identity, and thus underlines her position as an insider who is authorised to hold these views and justified in speaking about this topic (Wallwork & Dixon, 2004).

Overall, constructions of leather as a heritage object function to portray it as part of a collective historical and cultural identity, with roots in the distant past and, as such, indelibly linked with the history of humanity. As well as acting as repository of accumulated knowledge, leather is portrayed as having contributed to technological progress in general. These constructions also shape the presentation of participants' own identities: Extracts 1 and 3 link leather's qualities with speakers' work identities; as leather-makers, they are associated with and bear some responsibility for this general social good. The narrative in Extract 4 constitutes respondents as concerned about survival and transmission of knowledge, as well as about the preservation of traditional/primitive ways of life. Extract 5 positions the participant as a speaker for the perpetuation of national identity, discursively linked with leather through a rhetoric of place (Wallwork & Dixon, 2004).

(ii) A natural appeal

In the following extracts, understandings of leather as special are constituted around notions of naturalness and authenticity.

Extract 6 (Michelle, restoration specialist)

> Michelle: I like natural fibres, I think the liking for leather is an extension of that. I like cotton and linen and wool, and leather is another natural material.

Michelle attributes her "liking for leather" to it being a "natural material", and exemplifies the category with a three-part list ("cotton and linen and wool"). The examples and the terminology used ("natural fibres") imply a contrast with synthetic products, and construct the natural character as different from human-made materials. The choice of leather is constituted as a personal preference for a certain kind of textiles, usually regarded as healthy and authentic.

While the above fragment presents Michelle's selection as an individual, reasoned decision, based on the "objective" criterion of non-artificiality, the accounts below portray leather as a material that people relate to on an instinctual or intuitive level.

Extract 7 (Anne, leather technician)

> Anne: That's what I find quite fascinating, the fact that it's something, you know, natural materials generally – silk, wool, cotton, you name it, people always have that, are drawn towards natural materials. It's not a conscious decision, I think, in many cases, no. (...) it appeals to the senses, I think it must be something very basic, that natural materials appeal, you know, at that level...

In a similar manner to Michelle, Anne begins by attributing the appeal of leather to its natural constitution, and illustrates her argument by using a three-part list ("silk, wool, cotton"); the list completer "you name it" (Potter, 1996a) suggests that the enumeration does not necessarily stop here, and the participant could provide additional examples, as these are a matter of common knowledge. The extreme case formulation "always" serves to construct the appeal of natural materials as normal occurrence. If Michelle's account described her preference for natural fibres as a personal, reasoned choice, Anne's description constitutes it as a stance generally shared, but not necessarily based on rational decision-making. Through stating that the determination to choose leather is "not a conscious" act, Anne draws on psychoanalytic and biological discourses, depicting such a choice as the result of an essential, irresistible drive of 'natural' elements: "people... are drawn towards natural materials". This narrative constructs leather consumers as acting on

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instinct ("it must be something very basic, that natural materials appeal"), and positions them as unaware of the reasons for their choices ("not a conscious decision"), yielding to desires that occur at a deeper, irrational level. This construction resonates with the concept of largely passive consumers, prone to manipulation by advertisements targeting hidden desires (e.g. Packard, 1957; Ewen, 1976). By talking about "people", the respondent appears to distance herself from the proposed explanation, and positions herself as an outside witness, observer of human nature ("that's what I find quite fascinating").

The idea of leather conveying a deep, instinctive appeal is also put forward by Daniel, in the extract below:

Extract 8 (Daniel, leather manufacturer)

> Daniel: *I got to... I got to love it. It's a material which you can feel very close to, it's a natural material, like wood and stone and... certain sorts of glass, that has a very nice, um, energy to it, and so... it depends, if you can pick up on natural materials, and I suppose I was lucky enough to be able to do that. (...)*
> *Yeah, I think leather is... The beauty of it comes out of it being a natural material. And people feel this energy, empathy towards natural materials. So I think that has been the bedrock of why leather has maintained its position - that it has.*

Daniel describes the appeal of leather using emotional language ("I got to love it. It's a material which you can feel very close to"), constructing it as a personal relationship. Here, again, the preference for leather is attributed to its being a natural substance, and once again a three-part list is used ("wood and stone and... certain sorts of glass") to illustrate this notion. The examples used here do not include clothing materials, but refer to more unadulterated, primeval substances, thus constituting leather as part of an unspoilt, raw nature. While the attraction is at first presented as a one-to-one relationship, the transition from 'I' to 'you' constructs it as a shared experience, albeit constrained by certain levels of sensitivity and openness: "it depends, if you can pick up on natural materials". The participant identifies with such privileged individuals, who possess the required qualities, by including himself in this select group: "I suppose I was lucky enough to be able to do that". Later in the interview, however, through the use of the collective noun "people", the capacity to relate to leather in this way is described as universal, within everyone's ability: "people feel this energy, empathy towards natural materials". While this account resembles Anne's in Extract 7 above, by depicting attraction to leather as originating from inner

depths, the terminology used is more agentic, and the discourse is a humanistic one: here, people are not "drawn towards", but "feel energy, empathy", and are thus positioned less as passive, but more as consciously enjoying the "beauty" of the material.

In the next extract, the naturalness of leather is constructed in terms of authenticity and individuality:

Extract 9 (Eric, leather researcher)

Eric: *To me, now, I think the word 'authentic' comes across in my feeling about it. I think it's an authentic material, and that, that's a basic thing, I think. Because it's, if you like, an ancient material, that's been around a long time, but it has about it an aura of authenticity. Um, maybe because it's - I think with leather it's - it's not like a fabric, which, you can change a fabric, you can make all sorts of things with fabrics. I don't think a fabric has the same identity as leather, which is - somehow it's got personality almost. I mean, perhaps that's another way of putting it, it's got more of a personality as being a material, perhaps because it's a, you know, a very natural material that... You're modifying it slightly from nature, but it's still, in its construction, in what it is, it's still quite a natural... And I think it's maybe like wood, might feel the same about wooden things, you know, they're natural materials.*

Eric describes the main appeal of leather as residing principally in its authenticity. The special character is constructed from several, at times contradictory perspectives; authenticity is defined in relation to longevity and historical character, but at the same time as occurring in spite of them: leather is "an ancient material, that's been around a long time, *but* it has about it an aura of authenticity" (italics added). The suggestion is that despite its long-standing utilisation, leather has managed to maintain a certain purity, an unspoilt quality. By contrast with fabrics, presented as relatively mundane and mutable, leather is endowed with almost supernatural attributes ("an aura"), and, at the same time, with human characteristics: it has an "identity", a "personality almost". Although the respondent acknowledges the manufactured aspect of leather, this is depicted as minor, unimportant: "You're modifying it slightly from nature, but it's still... it's still quite a natural...". The association with wood, echoing the one made by Daniel in Extract 8, confers on leather an essential, immutable and solid character. Similarly, appreciation of leather is constructed as deriving from a personal capacity to recognize and admire authenticity ("to me... I think...").

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Extracts 8 and 9 portray leather as special on the grounds of the existence of a deep, fundamental relationship between it and human beings, based on a shared history and a common organic origin. The recognition of such a connection, however, is described as requiring certain individual qualities, such as openness and sensitivity to leather's essential characteristics. The accounts above construct the participants as exceptional in their own right, through possessing the requisite awareness, and being particularly able to evaluate the material's qualities.

7.2.2 Leather as necessity

Descriptions of leather were not limited to its perceived distinctive elemental qualities. Participants also emphasized its 'green' credentials and its valuable contribution to the greater good (*An environmental solution*), as well as its pragmatic uses (*An irreplaceable practical benefit*).

(i) An environmental solution

In some participant accounts, leather was constructed as the most appropriate solution to a circumstantial necessity. Specifically, respondents discussed leather in connection with the meat-processing industry, as apparent in the following excerpts:

Extract 10 (Catherine, leather technician)

> Catherine: *How do I feel about leather? Well, to me, it's saving the world, isn't it, because just think of the waste products if we didn't do something with it. You know, we would have huge mountains of biological waste. And I do eat meat, so that doesn't worry me, so... I mean, obviously I don't agree with the shooting of wild animals and making of skins that way, I think that's totally wrong, and it's banned, and that's a good thing, but... I've nothing against using the by-product of the meat industry for the good of us all, really.*

Extract 11 (Michelle, restoration specialist; Natalie, restoration specialist)

> Michelle: *And what would you do with it all if you didn't make it into other stuff?*
> Natalie: *Well, yes.*

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> Michelle: If you think of the quantity of cowhides coming out of America, if
>   somehow the market would collapse, what would they do with all those
>   cowhides? I remember [a colleague] telling me that Hush Puppies were
>   invented as a way of using up the pigskin surplus in Chicago, cos they
>   had a... Chicago's really well-known as a pig meat capital, and they just
>   had so many pigskins they didn't know what to do with them, and so this
>   was a planned way of dealing with the problem.
> I: Hmm... So it can be a problem...
> Michelle: Yes, if you don't... It's a by-product, but it is quite useful that someone is
>   willing to take this waste product on and make it into something.
> Natalie: If you can't get rid of the thousands and thousands and thousands,
>   hundreds of thousands of cattle hides...

Extract 12 (Eric, leather researcher)

> Eric: [I]f we didn't use the skins we would have a big problem as to what to
>   do with them...

In the extracts above, leather is constructed as an inevitable result or by-product of the meat industry, and as the best way to deal with the animal skins. In Extract 10, Catherine resorts to hyperbole to describe the need for making leather: "it's saving the world". The tag question "isn't it" constructs this standpoint as indisputable and as collectively acknowledged. In both extracts, the invitation to reflect on the topic functions rhetorically to constitute this use of hides as an obvious course of action, the unavoidable outcome of a rational evaluation: "because just think of the waste products if we didn't do something with it" (Extract 10), and "if you think of the quantity of cowhides coming out of America..." (Extract 11). In the first example, the use of "we" positions the respondent as one of the people dealing with a potentially problematic situation. The reasoned, logical character of this process is conveyed by its description as "a planned way of dealing with the problem" (Extract 11).

The issue is constructed as serious in all accounts, from the relatively subdued "a big problem" (Extract 12) to the use of vivid imagery, of rhetorical effect: "huge mountains of biological waste" (Extract 10), "thousands and thousands and thousands, hundreds of thousands of cattle hides..." (Extract 11). The latter sentence, left unfinished, works to suggest the enormity of the possible outcomes. The use of metaphors and repetition works to construct the circumstances to be dealt with as a clear danger, of almost apocalyptic proportions.

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These constructions resemble what Ungar (1992) referred to as a 'social scare'. Ungar has elucidated on the efficacy of such an argument by suggesting that "environmental claims are most likely to be honoured – and accelerate demands in the political arena - when they piggyback on dramatic real-world events" (1992, p. 483). By posing the issue of the disposal of hides as an environmental emergency, constituted as generally relevant through the direct appeal to 'think about it' and to imagine the consequences, leather making is constructed as an indisputable course of action.

As mentioned above, in Extracts 10, 11 and 12, respondents portrayed leather as the by-product of the meat industry – a construction that provides another justification for leather, by connecting it directly with food. Catherine makes this link explicit when she expresses opposition to "the shooting of wild animals and making of skins that way", a practice she vehemently condemns: "I think that's totally wrong, and it's banned, and that's a good thing". The implication is that the link with meat production makes the use of skins legitimate. By stating "I do eat meat, so that doesn't worry me", Catherine suggests that the only objections may come from non-meat eaters. In the following account, Bridget widens the area of concern when elaborating on the issue of waste:

Extract 13 (Bridget, leather technician)

> I: What about animal issues?
>
> Bridget: I don't see that there are any (laughs). The leather that we use is a by-product of the meat industry, so if people eat meat, there will always be hides and skins. And even if they don't eat meat... we still keep cows and sheep and goats to produce milk, to produce cheese, butter and things like that, so as long as people are going to eat those types of foodstuffs there will always be hides and skins available... And what would we do with the hides and skins if we didn't make leather out of them? So if people are going to eat meat, or eat dairy products, then there are hides and skins that have to be dealt with, and making leather is the, the best way to deal with them.

In similar fashion to the previous account, Bridget initially constructs leather as a disposal solution for the hides and skins resulting from the meat industry, and thus as a reasonable and justifiable course of action. Pre-empting potential objections to meat-eating, the respondent points out additional uses of animals: "even if they don't eat meat... we still keep cows and sheep and goats to produce and things like that". The three-part list ("milk...

cheese, butter") followed by a generalised list completer ("things like that") emphasizes the variety, as well as staple quality of animal-sourced products obtained. Through the repeated mention of eating practices, the account suggests a collective responsibility for this particular use of animals: "as long as people are going to eat those types of foodstuffs there will always be hides and skins available", "if people are going to eat meat, or eat dairy products, then there are hides and skins that have to be dealt with". The narrative draws on a 'sovereign consumer' discourse, which positions people as having the power to influence or even determine production outputs, through their consumer choices (Clarke, Doel & Housiaux, 2003). In relation to my initial question, which referred specifically to animal issues, this construction also serves to allocate accountability for any possible ethical issues not only with meat-eaters, but with everybody who uses other animal-related products, thus suggesting a collective responsibility for a potentially problematic situation.

While Extracts 10 to 12 constitute organic waste mainly as a predicament to be overcome, Extract 13 describes it also as an opportunity to valorize a resource: "making leather is the, the best way to deal with them [hides and skins]". This stance constructs animal skins as an accessible raw material, ready to be taken and incorporated into something valuable for society. In the fragment below, Anne elaborates on the idea of using waste, by drawing a comparison between circumstances surrounding processing of leather and those related to the production of synthetic materials:

Extract 13 (Anne, leather technician)

> Anne: ...even from the environmental point of view, you know, everything nowadays is this sustainable, is that, and if you look at synthetics, compared to leather, we've got a much more sustainable product, um, because we're taking a waste. We're probably the very first environmentally friendly industry in the world, because we've always taken another waste product and converted it into something. And we've converted it into something that's added value to us. We haven't just, you know... we haven't just tried to find a home for it, we've actually made something from it, that has actually far more value than the original waste product... Having said that, we do generate quite a lot of waste from producing leather, we've also had to tackle that as an industry, we've had to look at how we can generate other materials from our wastes. And that's a whole sort of issue in itself. But, yeah, we're quite a strange sort of industry in that sense. I mean, you know, if you were to make a handbag from a synthetic, you've got to now generate

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that synthetic material from scratch. We don't have to do that. Yes we do use chemicals, we do use other resources, I mean there's no doubt about that, and we have to try and control that as best we can, but fundamentally we've got a material that is readily available... and there would be a huge cost of disposal and removal if we didn't make leather from it. So actually, you know, we're supporting lots of other industries in a way, helping them. I mean, the meat industry would have a huge problem, and disposal costs and environmental issues if we didn't take their skins.

Anne suggests that making leather is the answer to the question of sustainable development, which she describes as an omnipresent issue, by means of an extreme case formulation: "everything nowadays is... sustainable". This point is reinforced through the comparison with synthetic materials, which, again, constructs leather as both more useful and more ecological, by making use of what would otherwise be considered as waste. The description of the leather industry as "the very first environmentally friendly industry in the world" works to constitute leather making as a precursor of the green movement, and, as such, in possession of incontestable ecological credentials. Anne specifies the concrete ways in which the industry is considered as fulfilling its environmental obligations in a gradually ascending order of achievements: the leather industry takes a waste material and converts it into "something"; drawing on an economic discourse, this outcome is depicted as having "added value to us", a description which indicates that what entered the process of transformation was exceeded in value by the results; the pronoun "us" serves to indicate a collective beneficiary, suggesting that the result is for the general good. The idea of recovery and useful transformation is emphasized by being repeated and elaborated upon: far from being solely the disposal of something unwanted ("we haven't just tried to find a home for it"), making leather is again constructed as an economic achievement: "we've actually made something from it, that has actually far more value than the original waste product". The deprecatory use of "just" (Lee, 1987), suggesting that simply re-using the waste would have been insufficient, contrasts with the repetition of "actually", which reinforces the factuality of the industry's contribution and its positive effects. Throughout the account, the use of the collective pronouns "we" and "us" indicates the participant's identification with an industry rich in achievements and ecologically oriented, and positions her as an active participant in its accomplishments.

Anne pre-empts the possible challenge that the leather industry itself causes pollution, by bringing up the issue herself: "Having said that, we do generate quite a lot of waste... we've also had to tackle that". Again, the use of "we" indicates identification with collective

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accountability, but also with collective remedial action. The acknowledgement functions as a display of openness and impartiality, and the argument is constructed as two-sided, thus giving the impression of balance. The participant uses a two-pronged approach to address this potentially problematic aspect: on the one hand, by playing it down, and constructing it as somewhat quirky ("we're quite a strange sort of industry"); on the other hand, by presenting it as an opportunity for learning, development and further creative outlets: "we've had to look at how we can generate other materials from our wastes". Through constructing the issue of the industry's own capacity to pollute as a chance to show resourcefulness and ingenuity, the account reinforces the image of the leather industry as a force for the greater good.

The comparison with plastics reiterates the notion of leather as the preferred environmentally friendly material, from a number of perspectives. Acknowledging the use of chemicals works to reinforce the speaker's honesty and openness ("Yes we do use chemicals... there's no doubt about that"), and is, at the same time, downplayed by the construction of such substances as additions, not as main sources, and, as such, posing comparatively minor problems. Finally, the account revisits the idea of reclaiming waste by means of a bottom-line argument (Edwards et al., 1995) - "fundamentally we've got a material that is readily available" – which suggests that reclamation of resources is the important issue to be tackled, and here leather enjoys an unquestionable advantage over plastics. This narrative uses a 'sandwich structure' (Riley, 2002), whereby an account is made persuasive by its statement in the first place, followed by a counter-argument and thirdly by re-iteration of the account. Here, the issue of recycling waste 'sandwiches' the notion of leather pollution. This structure functions to present potential pollution by the leather industry as a) comparatively unimportant and b) in process of being dealt with in a satisfactory manner.

Anne's account concludes by summarizing the contribution of leather making processes to economic and environmental stability. The hyperbolic description of alternatives ("there would be a huge cost of disposal and removal", "the meat industry would have a huge problem, and disposal costs and environmental issues") serves to strengthen the notion of making leather as an indispensable environmental solution. Again, the collective 'we' ("we're supporting lots of other industries", "if we didn't make leather", "if we didn't take their skins") restates the participant's identification with the leather industry, and the account positions her, through this association, as responsible, environmentally aware and engaged in worthy activities with ecological and economic benefits.

The ways in which leather is constructed in the narratives above, as solution to a problem and/or as taking advantage of an economic opportunity, act ideologically to portray making leather as a public service and an initiative for the common good. By association, as mentioned above, speakers are themselves positioned as ethically inclined, and as contributors to the positive achievements described.

(ii) An irreplaceable practical benefit

The following accounts look at leather from the perspective of its functional qualities. Some participant narratives emphasized the practical uses of leather and its high degree of versatility. In the fragments below, respondents construct leather as the best material to use under specific circumstances:

Extract 15 (Daniel, leather manufacturer)

Daniel: ...you can put a lot of high-performance properties, you can change the properties of leather significantly. You can make it pretty well waterproof, you can make it more abrasion-proof, you can make it stronger. So, lots of different properties can be changed, to be promoted. [...] [leather] is a wonderful material that you can work in conjunction with wood, or in conjunction with stone, I mean... You can put creativity into it and it combines aesthetics and functionality. It's probably the most functional sheet material that there is, you know. It's a natural sheet material that can be used to make anything, really.

Daniel presents the practical qualities of leather by drawing on a technical discourse. This works to construct the assertions as objective, and to position the speaker as an expert, thus contributing to the factuality of the account. The three-part list ("waterproof... abrasion-proof... stronger") exemplifies the adaptability of leather, with the associated generalized list completer ("lots of different properties") acting to summarize and to imply that there are other, yet unmentioned, characteristics, which illustrate leather's utility and versatility. The participant constructs leather as complex in its functionality, by adding to its mechanical characteristics elements of a different, artistic nature: "you can put creativity into it", "combines aesthetics and functionality". The resulting portrayal is of an almost perfect, impossible-to-improve-further material – construction emphasised by the extreme case formulations "the most functional sheet material that there is", "can be used to make anything, really".

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The presentation of leather as having multiple and important uses can also be seen in Bridget's account (partially presented earlier):

Extract 16 (Bridget, leather technician)

> Bridget: I find it a fascinating and... very useful product. I can't think of any other natural raw material that can be used in so many different ways.
>
> I: Would you like to say more about this?
>
> Bridget: Well, I could give some examples, the obvious ones are in footwear and clothing, but... Historically it's been used to turn the wheels of industry, it used to be used in industrial realty, which made the factories work, and some bizarre uses, like in gas meters, and hinges on cars, and... So many uses, it's fascinating.
>
> I: That's because it's tough, I suppose?
>
> Bridget: Yes, and it's strong and flexible.

Similarly to the earlier theme *A matter of heritage*, Bridget traces leather's usage to the past, by pointing out its role in historical industrial achievements. This construction serves to indicate that leather's practical uses have an established, recognized character. The reference to clothing and footwear as "obvious" constructs the use of leather in these areas as normal and unquestionable. The account depicts leather as having not only mundane, "obvious", applications, but also more unexpected, "bizarre" ones, exemplified by the three-part list "gas meters, and hinges on cars, and... so many uses". The qualification "it's fascinating" serves to present leather as a material of many facets. The statement "I can't think of any other raw material..." functions as an extreme case formulation (i.e. there is no other material) to illustrate the material's uniqueness. To my question as to the reasons for leather's widespread and long-term industrial use ("That's because it's tough, I suppose?"), Bridget responds by completing a three-part list ("Yes, and it's strong and flexible"). The effect obtained, an emphasis on the multiplicity of physical qualities, works to increase the persuasive effect of the description. The construction of leather as extremely versatile and extensively applicable can be seen further in Anne's account:

Extract 17 (Anne, leather technician)

> Anne: It's an ever-changing product, you know. It's probably, historically... one of the very, very first products ever invented... and yet it's still changing. And that's what I find it's quite fascinating, you know? That literally from

the day man first started eating meat, we've been making leather. And yet, you know, what we're doing now, is still making leather, but much, much more technical products, challenging products, and fashionable products. And there are not many materials that can do that, there are not many materials that actually can do so many things, that can actually be, you know, practical, can have all the different benefits that they can have...

As also noted with regard to Extract 3 earlier, leather is described here as rooted in the historical past. This portrayal of the material as a continuous presence in human life, linked directly with sources of sustenance, works to normalize it and to accentuate its importance in everyday life. In the same way, the use of continuous verbal forms ("it's still changing", "we've been making leather", "what we're doing now, is still making leather") serve to emphasize leather's permanent, uninterrupted relevance; together with the use of the pronoun 'we', this portrayal reiterates the value of the material, by constructing its production as a constant and collective involvement. The listing of products functions rhetorically to exemplify leather's practical applications and highlight the multiplicity of its uses, thus constituting it as truly exceptional. Echoing Bridget's account, Anne depicts leather as unique, by an implicit comparison with other (unnamed) materials; the description of the latter's failure to match leather's achievements is made persuasive through the use of another three-part list ("there are not many materials that actually can do so many things... be...practical... have all the different benefits").

In the following quote, Anne elaborates on the practical uses of leather by discussing a specific example, that of leather as a medical accessory:

Extract 18 (Anne, leather technician)

> Anne: *On the health side of it, I've done work in the past with the orthotics and prosthetics people. You know, when you look at the people who have to have artificial limbs, or have to have some sort of calipers, or something to help them with, you know, a problem, they tend to use leather quite significantly, because... If, for example, say you have an amputee, who's had to have, you know, a leg partly removed. By fitting a false limb, they will use leather to line it with, because it actually adapts to the shape of their existing leg. It causes, again, less issues with rubbing and sores, so there's lots of reasons why they use it in the medical profession. You may also come across things like sheepskins used to prevent bedsores,*

so, you know... (...) You still see baby... In fact, (laughs) I shouldn't say
it, really, it's embarrassing, my son who's nearly seventeen still sleeps
on his sheepskin that he had when he was a baby, because it's just so
light, it's always been so comfortable in his bed and it's... We do wash it,
you know (laughs). He'd probably be really embarrassed to hear me
saying so. But the fact is, you know, for nursing and in those situations,
the real sheepskin and things, have lots of benefits for people.

The account starts with the participant mentioning having worked with medical professionals. This reference positions Anne as possessing insider knowledge, and thus entitled to express a valid opinion on the topic. The use of a technical/medical discourse in describing the role of leather as a treatment device also functions to increase the persuasiveness of the narrative.

Leather's multiplicity of medical uses is illustrated rhetorically through the use of three-part lists in relation to health issues ("people who have to have artificial limbs, or have to have some sort of calipers, or something to help them with... a problem") and to the benefits that leather provides ("it actually adapts to the shape of their existing leg. It causes... less issues with rubbing and sores... there's lots of reasons why they use it"). The generalized list completers ("or something", "lots of reasons") imply that the examples given are just a few from, potentially, a much longer inventory of health advantages. Similarly, the use of medical terminology works to emphasize the seriousness of the issues involved, that the use of leather addresses.

The anecdote included in the account further endorses the health qualities of leather. The respondent inoculates against potential sceptical reactions by claiming reluctance to tell the story ("I shouldn't say it, really, it's embarrassing"). The rhetoric effect of the narrative is achieved both through the emotional image of a child (first a baby, later a teenager, sleeping on a "light" and "comfortable" sheepskin) and by positioning the speaker as a mother, who pursues the wellbeing of her child and is best located to take the right decisions regarding his health. Throughout the account, the collection of examples provided (people with health issues and children) works to construct leather as a valuable support, in various ways, to vulnerable social categories, and to position the participant, through her professional involvement with the material, as aware, concerned and actively engaged in addressing such issues.

The narratives discussed in the previous two themes constructed leather as exceptional because of intrinsic characteristics or for the variety of its practical uses. The next theme constitutes it as inextricable and regular part of everyday life.

7.2.3 Leather as normal part of life

A number of narratives constructed leather as a 'normal' aspect of human existence, with leather objects being present - unquestioned and sometimes even unnoticed - in a variety of shapes and situations. This notion was highlighted through multiple references to leather's diversity of uses and their often ordinary, routine character. In the following excerpt, Anne suggests that people are so used to having leather around, that they do not take notice of it any more:

Extract 19 (Anne, leather technician)

> Anne: *I'll just say, I always think people grossly underestimate how much leather is in the world. (...) you can find, you know, leather curtains, leather lampshades, leather placemats. (...) You look at sports and you've got leather gloves, you've got leather footballs, you've got leather cricket balls (...) So there's so much leather everywhere, in every aspect of our lives, and we just don't question it.*

The introductory phrase "I'll just say", through the restrictive use of "just", may be read as an implication that the topic would warrant a lengthier discussion, thus constructing leather as a complex issue, one not always correctly or completely assessed. Such an understanding is illustrated by Anne's following comments: the collective reference to "people" and the extreme case formulation "grossly underestimate" suggest a generalized lack of awareness about the role of leather in the contemporary world. Again, the respondent is positioned as an expert and a holder of insider knowledge. The extreme case formulation "I always think" works to emphasise Anne's personal investment in the subject.

Leather is emphatically constructed as ubiquitous and versatile through the use of three-part lists ("leather curtains, leather lampshades, leather placemats" and "leather gloves... leather footballs... leather cricket balls") and extreme case formulations, "There's so much leather" and "in every aspect of our lives". The repeated use of the generalized pronoun ("you can find", "you look", "you've got") in conjunction with the lists indicates the shared, collective usefulness of the material. Anne is here positioned as an educator, someone who points out and raises awareness of leather's qualities and potential applications. The transition from

'you' to 'we' ("we just don't question it") constructs a 'we are in this together' type of argument, implying the need of collective action to give leather the recognition it deserves, and re-positioning the participant as among those needing/willing to embark on such an endeavour.

In the next extract, the 'normality' of leather is constructed by an emphasis of the commonness of use and the association with the average person:

Extract 20 (Anne, leather technician)

> I: So how do you feel about it, when you think about leather?
>
> Anne: OK, people would say I'm probably quite passionate about the subject. Yeah, it's funny because it's just part of my life. I always say to people, you know, "Imagine a world without leather!" It's one of those materials that's completely taken for granted. You put your shoes on, you put the belt on your trousers, you put your watch on, you go to your diary and see what you're doing for the day, you pick up your handbag and go out the front door... You know, a typical person, at any point, is using three, four or more items of leather. And I'm probably more extreme, in that I probably would have nine or ten items at any one time on me. But it's just something that's always there, always taken for granted...

Anne makes her personal investment in leather clear in a number of ways: by implicitly accepting (or not resisting) the "quite passionate about leather" identity ascribed by unspecified external others; by emphatically claiming leather as an element of personal identity ("it's just part of my life"); by (ironically) qualifying her leather wearing habits as "more extreme". The confession of stake (Potter, 1996a) functions, in one way, as a display of honesty: the ready acknowledgement of her interest in leather acts to disarm potential accusations of bias. At the same time, it is used as a starting point for exploring the implied "excess".

The participant's identity is constructed as in need of defence; the extreme case formulation "I always say to people" implies that Anne's stance has to be constantly justified and defended against scepticism or reservations. One form of defence is the proposal of an extreme scenario - "Imagine a world without leather!"- the implication being that this would be an impossible, absurd situation. The argument is further developed through the use of the five-part list (shoes, belt, watch (strap), diary, handbag), which illustrates and reiterates the ordinariness of objects and actions and their common occurrence. Using leather items is

portrayed rhetorically as the norm, part and parcel of a "typical person's" life. In this light, Anne's declared "extremeness" is downplayed, appearing to be given 'only' by a marginally larger number of objects used or worn: "nine or ten items" compared with "three, four or more". Finally, the extreme case formulations ("something that's always there, always taken for granted") constitute leather as not just part of Anne's own life, but as universally used. This narrative also implies that leather does not receive the recognition it deserves ("always taken for granted") and locates Anne as a champion, a defender of the material, someone who promotes leather's qualities and ensures they are acknowledged and appreciated.

The next two extracts construct the use of leather in particular areas as a 'natural', 'goes-without-saying' course of action:

Extract 21 (Daniel, leather manufacturer)

> Daniel: *Wearing shoes out of leather is a very natural thing, wearing a handbag out of leather is quite natural, belts made out leather, waist belts, are almost the thing to do - you know.*
> *[...] leather as a position in leather boots, in handbags, in briefcases, where it always maintains its position, is recognized as the best material to use, right?*

Extract 22 (Eric, leather researcher)

> Eric: *I think with leather in shoes, I just think that's where it should be, and, um, I don't think too much about it.*

Again, these excerpts normalize leather by portraying the wearing of leather objects as ordinary and generally accepted. In Daniel's account, this is exemplified through a three-part list (shoes, handbags, belts) illustrating various stages of 'naturalness'; these range from an unquestioned or unnoticed decision ("quite natural") to a selection that is expected, and amounting to something close to a social norm ("almost the thing to do"). The implication is that rejection of, or failure to choose leather in such cases would be surprising or uncommon. A similar point is made by Eric, who constructs using leather for shoes as normal or normative ("that's where it should be") and unproblematic ("I don't think too much about it").

In Daniel's account (Extract 21), leather's qualities are depicted as certain and indisputable through the extreme case formulation "leather... always maintains its position"; this phrasing

endows leather with agency, suggesting that, in a potential competition with other materials, it is certain to emerge as superior. Additionally, the use of impersonal language works to establish the factuality of the standpoint expressed. In this sense, the construction "is recognized" implies neutrality – the reporting of this piece of information as objective, generally accepted fact. This, and the rhetorical call to agreement ("right?"), positions the respondent as someone voicing a collectively accepted stance, which requires no additional scrutiny or consideration.

The construction of leather as an unquestionable aspect of life is also apparent in the fragment below, where Catherine argues for the inclusion of leather as a subject of study:

Extract 23 (Catherine, leather technician)

> Catherine: [I]t would be a useful thing for them to do in school, it's general information really, isn't it. It's there in life all the time, isn't it, leather things.

Catherine describes leather as ubiquitous, by means of an extreme case formulation ("there in life all the time"). This account constitutes leather as an inseparable part of human existence, and legitimizes it as an object of inquiry and a topic for education purposes. The repetition of "isn't it" may be read as a request for agreement, both with the notion of leather's ubiquity, as well as with the rationale for its inclusion in the education curriculum. Due to the ever-present character of the material, leather-related knowledge is constructed as practical and useful – a life skill needed to fill what appears as a gap in schools' provision of instruction. Through the references to education, this account also constitutes leather as part of Britain's cultural heritage – valuable and in need of preservation and support.

The previous narratives portray leather, through an emphasis on the routine character of its uses, as inextricable aspect of life, and also as a universally accepted norm, which need not be questioned or doubted. By constructing leather as special, necessary and/or normative, participants make an ideological argument for the material's importance and benefits for the society as a whole. In the following extracts, participants focus more explicitly on their personal involvement with leather as a work object. The analysis of the accounts identifies two main areas: (a) the constitution of working with the material as personal investment and fulfillment; and (b) the leather industry as a business under threat from economic and social factors.

7.3 Working with leather

The second broad theme, designated *Working with leather*, was concerned more directly with depictions of participants' work experiences. In this respect, constructions portray working with the material as a source of personal satisfaction and fulfillment (*More than just a job*), and also as an insecure situation, due to various economic and social elements perceived as posing difficulties for the industry (*An industry under threat*).

7.3.1 More than just a job

In discussing the relevance of leather in their lives, participants usually began by outlining the reasons surrounding their choice of profession and describing the appealing features of their work, as in Anne's account below:

Extract 24 (Anne, leather technician)

Anne: *I was drawn to the industry I think because when I started looking into it as a subject, while I enjoyed the science, I had science in the background, I've also enjoyed creating things (...) So I suppose... the combination of that appealed to me and once I looked into the subject I thought, OK, you're using your scientific background, your sort of more technical background, but actually you're feeding into an industry which is fundamentally creative... The travel side of it as well, it appealed to me because it's a very international industry. (...) So all those things sort of influenced why I chose leather, I suppose. It's very strange, I mean it's just such a big part of my life! That sounds awful cos it's a job, you shouldn't be obsessed by your work, but it's, it is what I do... and I can't imagine not doing it. I mean lot of people who've been in the industry left the industry and have gone into completely different things, and I just can't imagine doing that. You know, that's quite a scary... I mean, a few years ago I tentatively looked at other jobs outside the industry... But it's part of my identity, and I think that's really quite bizarre actually... perhaps a bit sad (laughs).*

I: *That's very lucky, actually, to do something that you really love.*

Anne: *It is, and now I'm running my own business, I mean that really, that enables me... (...) And it's challenging and it's good fun. So I suppose, in a way, I look at us and how we started, leather has actually given me,*

enabled me to have my lifestyle, I suppose, indirectly. And that's not to say I couldn't go and do something else, because I know I could, but... I would rather not. I would rather stay, knowing what I know, learning, because you're still learning, I mean every time we talk to a customer we find out something new and we learn different things about leather and what it can do...

The participant describes herself as having a wide range of interests, in science as well as arts-related areas. In this sense, working with leather is constructed as a perfect match between opportunities offered and personal abilities. Anne depicts the leather industry as eminently suited for her, as an outlet for her personal skills and inclinations: this particular type of work offers the opportunity to be both "technical" and "creative", and the possibilities to travel within "a very international industry" make it even more dynamic and exciting. The use of "drawn" in describing the choice of profession ("I was drawn to the industry") makes this decision seem almost inevitable, a 'match made in heaven' between the respondent and her work. The passivity of "drawn to", suggestive of lack of choice, contrasts with the agency of the described deliberation with self, rendered as a dialogue: "I thought, OK, you're using your scientific background... but actually you're feeding into an industry...". The imagined conversation with self, with the explicit laying out of options and implications, serves to construct the decision to work with leather as the logical, appropriate outcome, and shifts the participant's positioning from a comparatively passive fitting-into-a-job ("drawn to") to an active, reasoned evaluation of work requirements and implications ("I chose leather").

Anne further constructs herself as empowered through having and running her own business. This is depicted as primarily a source of personal and professional satisfaction, by offering scope for the expression of creative skills and abilities: "it's challenging and it's good fun". Again, Anne positions herself as being in control, by deciding against a career change: "that's not to say I couldn't go and do something else, because I know I could, but... I would rather not. I would rather stay, knowing what I know, learning...". Here, the participant rejects the implication that 'leather as a perfect occupation choice' is somehow equivalent to 'leather as the only area suitable for her skills'. At the same time, the acknowledgment of her occupation's financial importance is tentative: "I suppose, in a way... leather... enabled me to have my lifestyle, I suppose, indirectly"; the implication is that material considerations play a less important part in the choice of career: what matters most are the opportunities for self-fulfillment. By constructing her career choice as a chance for continuous learning and professional development, Anne's account taps into a humanistic

discourse of self-actualization, which draws a direct link between work identity and personal identity.

At the same time as stating her love for her occupation, Anne suggests that this may be seen as an unusual stand to take, a potentially problematic approach: "That sounds awful cos it's a job, you shouldn't be obsessed by your work... that's quite a scary... I think that's really quite bizarre actually... perhaps a bit sad". Enjoyment of one's work is described here as going against social expectations or norms (implied by the generalizing pronoun "you", which depicts the stance as shared and collective). A diverging stance, such as the one declared by Anne, is constructed as atypical, through the use of a series of qualifications (awful, quite scary, quite bizarre, a bit sad), and even potentially pathological, through the use of psychological terminology ("obsessed"). The implication here is that a job is normally seen as a chore, a means to pay the bills and not something to be enjoyed; in this light, working with leather becomes an exceptional activity, and locates the participant herself in an exceptional position.

In the extract below, Daniel makes some similar points in describing the relevance of his relationship with leather:

Extract 25 (Daniel, leather manufacturer)

> Daniel: *It's just my life, it's... I think leather from four o'clock in the morning through till eleven o'clock at night, seven days a week. Terrible! I think - I think I ought to be sectioned! (laughs) (...) If the business is to do with anything you love, then you tend to spend all your life doing it. So no holidays, three hundred and sixty days a year, doing leather.*

Here, Daniel constitutes his relationship with his work in terms of "love", as deep attachment. In an argument resembling Anne's above, he implies that such opinions (expressing love for one's job) may well be regarded as contrary to accepted social norms. The ironic use of extreme case formulations serves to deflect possible reactions of disbelief towards this standpoint ("Terrible!... I think I ought to be sectioned!"). Again, the notion of enjoying one's work is constructed as problematic: the participant draws on a medical/legal discourse to humorously suggest that such a stance would be seen as extremely unusual. Such constructions can be traced to traditional understandings of work as by definition unsatisfactory, something to be dreaded and suffered. These understandings have been discussed in sociological (Marxist) literature as work alienation, whereby workers lose connection with their activities, and consequently experience feelings of dissatisfaction and

estrangement (O'Donnell, 1981; du Gay, 1996). In his account, Daniel employs extreme case formulations to indicate his personal investment in work, and to constitute emphatically his love for his job as all encompassing: "it's just my life", "I think leather from four o'clock... through till eleven o'clock... three hundred and sixty days a year".

Both Daniel's and Anne's narratives draw on a humanistic discourse of self-actualization, which constructs their work as valued, not only (or primarily) for pecuniary reasons, but for the satisfaction it offers. This portrayal, described as going against general expectations or norms, constitutes work with leather as exceptional and the participants themselves as enjoying a position of privilege.

Notions of personal satisfaction deriving from working with leather were also constructed in terms of experiences shared. In the extracts below, Bridget and Eric refer to the leather industry as a community:

Extract 26 (Bridget, leather technician)

> Bridget: it's a very nice industry, because everybody is so friendly and everybody
>   knows everybody else, you can't keep any secrets in the leather industry
>   (laughs). They're very sociable people who work in the industry.

Bridget describes the leather industry as a homogenous entity, using an anthropomorphic qualification ("a very nice industry"). Here, working with leather is constructed with relation to feelings of belonging. The leather industry is depicted as a closely-knit community through a series of extreme case formulations ("everybody is so friendly and everybody knows everybody else"). The jocular reference to the impossibility of keeping secrets could be read as an implied criticism, suggesting that, in some circumstances, this closeness may become disconcerting or "too close for comfort". The subsequent characterization of people in the industry as "sociable", indicating friendliness and conviviality, works to soften the earlier, less favourable implication and to avoid potential accusations of disloyalty to the industry.

Extract 27 (Eric, leather researcher)

> Eric: I think when you work professionally with leather you think about it in a
>   different way, because it's part of your life. (...) You know, when you
>   start working professionally with something, I think it just changes your
>   attitude, and you think about it a lot more (laughs).

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I:	Yeah, yeah... and from a different perspective I suppose, as well.
Eric:	Yes, but I mean I think intellectually and emotionally, you know, both perspectives have sort of changed.
I:	Can you tell me a little bit more about that?
Eric:	I think, well I think if you're working professionally in an area, it's like you're in a team. You know, I'm more supportive of leather probably now than I would've been. I wouldn't say I was not supportive, but I feel I'm part of the leather world (laughs). You know, you go to these conferences and you interact with people that also work with leather and generally - all people you meet anyway are supportive of leather. You know, you feel supportive of the industry, making leather and using leather, and you want it to be successful, so it's like you're playing for that team.

Eric's account describes working with leather as a transformational experience: "you think about it in a different way... it just changes your attitude, and you think about it a lot more". To my follow-up comment on thinking about leather ("from a different perspective"), the respondent reiterates the dual approach – intellectually and emotionally – thus constructing his work as a complete experience, encompassing both reason and feeling. This depiction resembles Anne's account (Extract 24), where she also talked about combining technical and artistic elements. Again, work is portrayed as more than 'just a job' – as something with personal relevance, to be analyzed and reflected upon. Again, the general pronoun 'you' constitutes this reflective process in relation to one's occupation as a common occurrence and as a shared understanding.

In a similar manner to Bridget, Eric constructs work in terms of belonging, by using a metaphor: "I feel I'm part of the leather world (laughs)". The laughter may act as a way of distancing himself from what could be read as a clichéd statement; in this sense, the subsequent reference to conferences and people sharing work and interests may function as a factual re-casting of a more emotional assertion. The sense of affiliation is further reinforced through the use of sports-related terminology and the allusion to team spirit ("it's like you're in a team... it's like you're playing for that team").

While Extracts 24-26 depict working with leather as enjoyable due mainly to the special character of the material itself, Eric's account constitutes it as an instance of a more general, abstract principle – manifesting loyalty towards one's work ("when you start working professionally with something... if you're working professionally in an area"). This

construction brings together personal and social/professional identities, and positions Eric as dependable and committed (here, to the leather industry).

All the accounts above portray working with leather as more than a livelihood, or a means to a (material) end. The profession is described, in part, as a source of personal fulfillment, by appealing to essential, inner qualities, or by providing a feeling of belonging, a sense of work-group identification and the opportunity for pleasant social interaction. These constructions resonate with literature on what du Gay (1996) termed "craft-based identity" (p. 9), whereby work is represented as a traditional source of meaning in people's lives.

7.3.2 An industry under threat

Talking about leather as a work object, participants with a professional involvement alluded to various branches of the leather industry as being in decline, or even in danger of disappearance.

Catherine:	...the English, British leather industry really, has died. I mean there are some left, but they do struggle.
Neil:	The tanneries, the British tanneries have disappeared.
Bridget:	...so much leather is now made in the Far East and imported into this country, rather than being made here, in UK or Europe.

Decreases in the tanning and manufacturing leather industry in the UK have been documented (e.g. Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO), 2008; Learning and Skills Council, 2010). From within the industry itself, such developments have been attributed to various factors, such as the economic developments in far eastern countries (described as more permissive in terms of business practices), the impact of increased environmental legislation, lack of professional training and replacement of leather by synthetic materials (Redwood, 2009; just-style, 2000; Hopkins, 2010). In the account below, Daniel argues that the reason for leather's perceived decline lies in a lack of interest and shortage of information among the general public:

Extract 28 (Daniel, leather manufacturer)

| Daniel: | People have got to see the benefits of leather in their lives. And as a society, that's getting less, it's got to build up again. [...] I worry that if we do not make leather part of the modern world, it will decline as a |

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material, long term, long term. (...) So leather as a material, it's by no means certain that it is a way that's going to go up again. So the thing that you have to do is create market value for it, at any moment in time, so people want it. And, you know, young people want it. So that's, that's part of what I believe, and a lot of people who work in leather should be doing. Because young people don't have a, a real - feeling for leather, I don't think. Because it's not really intimately involved in their education, their parents are less inclined to extol the virtues of leather than they were two generations ago. So young children that are coming into the world now don't have too much of a perception of leather as a material, you know, even as a quality material.

This account constructs awareness of leather qualities as a form of social or moral obligation ("People have got to see the benefits of leather..."). Failure to do so is portrayed as failure at a wider systemic, social level ("as a society"). Leather is constructed as a substance on the verge of extinction, running the risk of becoming a thing of the past ("it's by no means certain... that's going to go up again"). To ensure its survival, the participant suggests that contemporary society needs to awaken to its merits ("it's got to build up again"). Daniel expresses this as a personal concern ("I worry") and at the same time positions himself within a wider community, a collective "we" ("if we do not make leather part of the modern world"), whose responsibility is to act to save leather from the threat of oblivion. The participant is here located both as an observer, evaluating and assessing leather-related developments, and as an adviser, directing and counselling upon a course of action ("the thing that you have to do... [what] a lot of people who work in leather should be doing"). The change of personal pronoun form 'I' to 'you' constructs this as a collective accountability, made explicit by the reference to "a lot of people". The respondent draws on an economic/marketing discourse in outlining the one of the proposed solutions ("you have to... create market value... so people want it"). The solution proposed is to familiarize young people with the qualities of leather, so that they understand and value it more. This account contains representations previously identified: there is the notion of heritage, apparent in the talk about appreciation for leather being passed on from one generation to the next. There is also a sense of leather's presumed appeal to people at a profound, emotional level, with the absence of such a link being constituted as a problem ("people don't have... a real feeling for leather"). The material's wider social relevance is suggested by the implied regret for its absence in education programmes. In discussing the consequences of leather's decline, the emphasis shifts from the initial focus on the construction of leather as endangered entity and in need of rescue, to people themselves and the losses they would

suffer, by missing out on the practical advantages provided by leather "as a quality material".

Alternatively, Anne describes the leather industry as fluctuating, and attributes these changes to the impact of various fashion trends for particular categories of products:

Extract 30 (Anne, leather technician)

> Anne: It's a fashion. Again, the trouble with fashion is, it's, with clothing, particularly, it's more cyclic, you tend to go through phases. Now when I was first in the industry in the eighties, leather clothing was really, really, you know, really big. (...) And then, the industry just stopped completely, and there was almost a lull for a good ten to fifteen years. Well there was still a certain amount of leather around, but very, very low volume compared to what had been... And yet that's changed again in the last few years now, probably last five years. There was a huge push in the demand for leather for upholstery, that's happened in the last five to seven years, really big change in people wanting leather in their furniture. (...) with clothing it's much more fickle, you know, it's in and it's out, and when it's out it's out big style. So you just have to sort of, from the tanner's point of view, you just keep hoping that trends go in your favour. And there's a shift in production because of that, there's been a big change, and a lot of tanners, you know, the upholstery side of business is taking on whereas we're seeing garments tanneries have closed. It's... you know, people are really affected quite heavily by what happens in fashion. And it's very difficult to predict what's gonna... to predict the future.

This account portrays the leather industry, the tanneries in particular, as mostly passive, reacting to the changes in people's buying choices. Anne's narrative resonates with economic discourses around the 'sovereign consumer', who is considered to have the capacity to influence or control what is being produced. The terminology used (extreme case formulations, idiomatic expressions) acts rhetorically to construct such changes as considerable and potentially confusing ("really big... stopped completely...a lull... very, very low volume... a huge push in demand... it's out big style... a big change"), and the industry as relatively powerless, reduced to following the different fashions and styles. The image of powerlessness is accentuated by the description of such changes as hard to foresee ("it's very difficult to predict what's gonna... to predict the future"), with the implication that an

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adequate response or adaptation is difficult to achieve. The emphatic use of 'just' emphasizes the limited number of options ("you just keep hoping that trends go in your favour").

This lack of power is also suggested by the construction of changes in fashion as "cyclic, you tend to go through phases". Together with the general 'you', the account implies an inevitable occurrence, an unstoppable event, with the use of impersonal forms contributing to the factuality, and thus persuasiveness, of description. The biographic information (also present elsewhere in the interview) reiterates Anne's position as experienced, having direct knowledge of the situation and, as such, entitled to express an informed opinion. At the same time, by not working as a tanner in the present, the respondent is positioned as neutral, and, as such, able to speak on behalf of those affected without having a direct personal involvement or interest.

An economic discourse is also present in the following excerpt. This time, however, the positioning of the industry is different, with tanners portrayed as in control, and thus accountable for the outcome of their actions:

Extract 31 (Catherine, leather technician)

> Catherine: I think the British tanners, sort of, you know, "Yes you can have any
> colour as long as it's black or brown" (both laugh). I think they did
> themselves out of business in the end, because they weren't flexible
> enough, they weren't, they weren't forward thinking of the gains from
> the colours that people would be wanting for their leather. I think they
> were just too slow in changing...

According to this depiction, the industry itself bears a significant responsibility for its decline. In this version, producers are portrayed as largely to blame for their own downfall; the bottom line argument constitutes them as having been instrumental in bringing about their misfortune: "they did themselves out of business in the end". Here, lack of adaptation is presented not as an unfortunate result determined by unpredictable circumstances, but as a consequence of unwillingness to respond appropriately to consumer requirements. Catherine uses humour to exemplify her argument through an active voicing device (Potter, 1996a) – the imagined tanners' reply to potential customers' requests "Yes you can have any colour as long as it's black or brown". This limited option acts as a basis for conclusion, which places responsibility almost exclusively on the tanners' side: "they weren't flexible enough (...) they weren't forward thinking (...) they were just too slow in changing". The use of the

three-part list serves to constitute rhetorically British tanners' perceived failures as extensive and systematic. Whereas the previous narrative by Anne portrayed them as, to a great extent, victims of circumstance, the present account constructs them as agents with controlling potential and thus directly responsible for the consequences of their own (lack of) action.

The following fragment, following immediately from the previous one, offers an alternative construction of the circumstances surrounding the decline of the leather industry. Catherine alludes to an external event, the outbreak of BSE in 1986 (Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy), otherwise known as 'mad-cow disease'. BSE is an infectious fatal illness that affects cattle; if transmitted to humans through contaminated meat, it can cause a fatal neurological disease, Creutzfeldt Jakob Disease (CJD). Steps taken to tackle and contain it involved the destruction of large numbers of animals, as well as banning exports and imports of cattle and beef. Such restrictive measures were considered to have had a negative impact on the leather industry, through the decline in the quantities of hides and skins available (DEFRA, 2009; The Real Sheepskin Association, 2007a,b; BBC, 2001; just-style, 2000). In the extract, the respondent refers to the reaction from the industry against the background of the outbreak:

Extract 32 (Catherine, leather technician)

> Catherine: And also, I mean, like most of Europe, in the legislation, you've got to do things correctly. And the Brits are great for doing things correctly, whereas I think, the rest of Europe sort of do it and think about it, yeah (laughs), until they get caught they'll carry on. Whereas the Brits just get on and have to do things correctly or they'd have to own up if they haven't, you know, whereas I don't think... I always remember with the BSE situation, now we knew there were cases in France, but you never really heard about them... Whereas it was all over the, you know, everything was, you know, everything stopped [...] But there were cases of it in Europe, there were definitely some in France, but it was never such a big thing as it seemed to be in our country. So um, we do tend to sort of go down the line of doing things properly...
>
> I: Which...
>
> Catherine: Which is good in a way, but as I say it's sometimes, we're our own worst enemy I think in that.

In this account, some of the difficulties encountered by the leather industry are attributed to what is seen as a feature of national character – a spirit of fair play. British companies are constructed as playing by the rules, following correct procedures; foreign firms, by contrast, are described as deliberately ignoring such rules, with the implication that by doing this they gain an unfair economic advantage.

The participant begins by suggesting that "in the legislation, you've got to do things correctly". The use of the collective 'you' emphasizes following the rule of law as universally expected, normative behaviour. British companies are depicted as conforming fully to such expectations – a notion underscored by the repetition: "the Brits are great for doing things correctly... the Brits just get on and have to do things correctly"; such behaviour is also constructed as a moral obligation, not needing external pressure ("*have* to do things correctly or they'd *have* to own up if they haven't"). By contrast, other European businesses are seen as taking little or no notice of inconvenient regulations and in need of monitoring from outside ("until they get caught they'll carry on"). Against this background, "the BSE situation" is given as an example of how playing by the rules may have damaged the British leather industry. Extreme case formulations are used to set out rhetorically the contrast between the reactions in Great Britain ("it was *all over* the, you know, *everything* was, you know, *everything stopped*") and those elsewhere ("you *never* really heard... it was *never* such a big thing").

The account draws on an ethnocentric discourse, which constitutes spirit of fair play as a feature of British national character (Capdevila & Callaghan, 2008). The phrase "we do tend to sort of go down the line..." reiterates the notion of appropriate behaviour, while at the same time pre-empting any potential challenges by exception/counter-example, through the use of qualifiers "tend to", "sort of". At the same time, this otherwise laudable trait is constructed as potentially counterproductive, by bringing about comparative economic disadvantage ("we're our own worst enemy... in that"). This stance is illustrated by some of the terminology used: the reference to the BSE cases as "never such a big thing as it seemed to be in our country" appears to trivialize the issue, and to constitute the British response as excessive. Despite the implied criticism, the participant does not disassociate herself from this identity. The repeated use of 'we' indicates self-inclusion in, and therefore acceptance of, the category discussed.

The accounts discussed above work to construct the leather industry as being under threat for a variety of reasons, ranging from vagaries of fashion to economic factors and intrinsic aspects of national identity. Together with previous depictions of leather as generally important and useful, the narratives convey a need to support the material and its

production, for the benefit not only of people working with it, but for the whole of society. In the following section, I will explore some of the arguments employed by participants when addressing particular areas of criticism against leather, mainly from environmental and animal welfare perspectives.

7.4 In defence of leather

As argued earlier, professional participants constructed the leather industry (and by extension leather itself) as endangered as a result of certain social and economic developments. It has been suggested (Du Gay, 1996; Gill, 1996) that if an identity is perceived to be threatened, one of the ways in which it can be defended and (re)established is by challenging the aspects perceived to constitute a threat. Within this third broad theme, the three sub-themes identified are (i) *Countering arguments*, (ii) *Relocating responsibility* and (iii) *Making progress*. In the subsequent sections I will discuss each in turn. The following accounts bring up specific examples and work to counteract implicit or explicit criticisms against leather and the leather industry.

7.4.1 Countering arguments

In some cases, participants addressed possible objections from an animal welfare perspective by openly acknowledging such concerns, and then bringing up arguments to counter them. In the extract below, Anne begins by expressing explicit agreement with the existence of potentially problematic aspects:

Extract 33 (Anne, leather technician)

> I: *Can you see any issues about leather?*
> Anne: *Issues, yes, yeah, there's always issues. [...] There's the animal rights side of the industry, where we're always going to be, because we're using a product that's animal sourced, there's always gonna be a section of the population that takes, you know, takes offence at that. A lot of that's misguided, in the arguments that they put forward, um...*

Anne answers my question about "issues" by adopting the term and elaborating upon it. The use and repetition of the word indicate willingness to engage with what can be read as an implied criticism. The participant's reference to "the animal rights side of the industry" resonates with the notions of identity construction in relation to 'that which it is not' (Du

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Gay, 1996; Woodward, 2002); here, the use of the word "side" portrays the leather industry as bordered and constrained by animal rights concerns. Through the repetition of the extreme case formulation ("there's always issues... we're always going to be... there's always gonna be a section of the population"), such objections are constituted as a common and unavoidable occurrence. The image of inevitability is also achieved through the portrayal of animal-related issues as intrinsically linked with the leather industry, due to the latter's very nature: "because we're using a product that's animal sourced". The use of economic terminology ("sourced") and the impersonal construction function to constitute the situation as matter-of-fact, devoid of emotional elements.

The account appears to set out rationality and reasoned argumentation as preferred criteria in evaluating claims. In this sense, the depiction of criticism as "taking offence" works to undermine the validity of animal-related critique, by implying – a stance developed later in the interview - that it is based on feelings, and thus on subjective, rather than on objective criteria. The arguments of animal rights campaigners are also questioned on two further fronts: the phrase "a section of the population" serves to marginalize, perhaps even trivialize them, by suggesting they are a minority concern; secondly, the soundness of their case is dismissed, by being labelled as mostly wrong or mistaken ("A lot of that's misguided").

Anne continues by providing an anecdotal example from her own child's school environment, which aims to support her assertion regarding the flawed quality of protests:

Extract 34 (Anne, leather technician)

> Anne: [the school] sent home a letter saying they were going to invite a
>   vegetarian speaker. Which I had no objection with, because I think,
>   again, as a subject you've got to look at all aspects of the subject, I say,
>   I quite often worked with vegetarians myself, and I've got friends who
>   are vegetarians etc, so I got no problem with that. And then I read
>   further that said that this particular speaker that was coming, wasn't
>   coming from The Vegetarian Society or something, which you'd think
>   would be logical, but was coming from an organization called I think
>   Animal Aid, and straightaway I thought "That sounds a little bit, you
>   know, that sounds a bit odd". Anyway, I think I also posed the question,
>   are they also bringing in someone from the meat industry, to get the
>   balance to that particular, which they didn't, but, anyway... And as it
>   turned out, I had a look on the internet, and this particular organization

was very much an animal activist website, and it's like "all meat is murder", one of these things. So I thought, "Hmm, that's gonna be interesting, as to how balanced a view they're gonna get on vegetarianism"... (...) And when she'd had the talk I asked her "How was it?", and she said oh, this man, he'd made quite a fool of himself, and... Basically she said he wasn't vegetarian at all, he was vegan, and he was very much anti, he just came over as being anti everything that was connected with meat and animals and also trying to, sort of, tell them that what they were doing was wrong, I think the majority of the class were meat eaters. And then he made the mistake of saying to a class of thirteen and fourteen year olds that they've been indoctrinated by their parents, and that was the only reason they ate meat. So one of the children in the class, not my daughter, one of the children put his hand up and said, "Excuse me, do you have children?". And he said "Yes, I've got an eighteen year old and a nineteen year old", and he said, "Do they eat meat?", and he said "No, of course not, they're vegans, same as I am", and this kid just turned around and said, "So you've indoctrinated your children then, they weren't given the opportunity to eat meat, and of course that never happened", so all his arguments completely were shot down in flames, and I found that quite interesting! So, I think, really, he actually did himself a disservice by not taking a balanced view, he actually, you know...

The participant begins the account by positioning herself as a fair, open-minded observer, willing to look at all aspects of an argument and evaluate them on their merits: "you've got to look at all aspects of the subject". Anne further declares her openness towards vegetarianism ("I got no problem with that"), and substantiates it by mentioning that she has vegetarian friends and co-workers. This is a classic example of 'credentialing' (Hewitt & Stokes, 1975), whereby a speaker recognizes that their stance may be regarded as prejudiced, but implies that the mentioning of friendship places them "in a protected category of people who cannot be so typified" (Hewitt & Stokes, 1975, p.4). Here, the participant anticipates that, by virtue of her occupation, she might be considered prejudiced against vegetarianism. The reference to friendships and work relationships, together with the previously stated impartiality, serves to deflect potential accusations of bias.

Having established her position as a fair narrator, Anne questions the proposed set-up of the talk to be given. She firstly implies that the speaker's position was misrepresented, by coming not "from The Vegetarian Society or something... but... from an organization called I

think Animal Aid"). The qualification "I think" works to display uncertainty, and inoculates against the implication that the participant was suspicious to begin with, and would have actively looked for elements to confirm her misgivings. Later in the account, Anne mentions that, in fact, an Internet search left her in no doubt that "this particular organization was very much an animal activist website". The use of the by-line "all meat is murder" and the generalizing "one of these things" function to distance the speaker from the viewpoints said to be espoused by the organization, and to constitute the latter's position as extreme and unreasonable. Secondly, further doubt is cast on the impartiality of the proposed arrangement: "I think I also posed the question, are they also bringing in someone from the meat industry, to get the balance to that particular, which they didn't, but, anyway...". The implication is that the set-up was flawed from the beginning, through the school's failure to ensure the expression of opinions from more than one perspective.

The participant then recounts the situation from the point of view of her daughter. In this way she acts as an 'animator' – a person who speaks the words produced by another person (Potter, 1996a). This rhetorical device further reinforces Anne's position of objectivity and impartiality, by indicating that all she does is 'passing something on' (Potter, 1996a, p.143). The repetition of "she said" makes it clear that the participant reports the events as someone else's claim. The related narrative serves as confirmation of the respondent's previously stated doubts with regard to the misrepresentation of the invitee ("he wasn't vegetarian at all, he was vegan") and to his biased orientation ("he was very much anti, he just came over as being anti everything that was connected with meat and animals"). The extreme case formulation serves to constitute the Animal Aid speaker's position as largely inflexible and lacking in subtlety, thus creating an implicit contrast with Anne's declared open-mindedness. The weakness of the campaigner's position is further suggested by the construction of his argument as clumsy: "[he was] also trying to... tell them that what they were doing was wrong... And then he made the mistake of saying...". The construction challenges the validity of the speaker's argument on two levels: firstly, he is portrayed as someone likely to alienate his audience by adopting the moral high ground; secondly, by suggesting that, in any case, "the majority of the class were meat eaters", Anne implies that the negative effect was further amplified by the audience not sharing the invitee's values.

The impartiality of Anne's standpoint is further reinforced by her adoption of 'active voicing' (Potter, 1996a, p.161), a rhetorical device which functions to indicate objectivity through the provision of direct quotes, purportedly derived from actual witnesses to an event. Here, the narrative is said to originate from one of the pupils present at the meeting, but not - as Anne makes clear - her own daughter. This clarification inoculates against objections that the participant's daughter might have been influenced by or act as a mouthpiece for Anne

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herself, and further distances the respondent from the narrated event. The persuasiveness of the account is thus achieved in three ways: in the first place, the participant herself is twice removed from the set-up, with at least one independent witness reaching the same critical conclusion as she does, with regard to the animal rights speaker's position. The 'out-there-ness' (Potter, 1996a) created in this manner underscores Anne's lack of influence on the viewpoints expressed, and provides independent corroboration. Secondly, the notion that the pupil quoted is anonymous, "one of the children in the class", positions him as having no particular stake in the matter, and thus as more likely to be voicing the opinion of the average pupil. Thirdly, the adoption of active voicing to illustrate the exchange between the pupil and the speaker creates the impression of immediacy and openness, and acts to emphasize the veracity of the account. As a result, the campaigner's stance is discredited on at least two levels: he comes across as bigoted and inflexible ("he was very much... anti-everything"), and also as hypocritical, by criticising children's parents for not adopting a behaviour which he himself does not display, i.e. allowing a choice with regard to eating habits. This purported defeat is colourfully summed up through an idiomatic expression and an extreme case formulation - "all his arguments completely were shot down in flames". The wording of the conclusion ("and I found that quite interesting") implies that the participant did not necessarily take pleasure in the speaker's failure to put his views across successfully, but rather that she was more impressed with the nature of the debate. The implication, again, is that it was not primarily the speaker's views that Anne did not agree with, but rather the nature of the argument and the manner in which he chose to present those views.

In the following extract, Catherine discusses potential concerns around slaughtering animals for meat, and suggests that such objections are unfounded:

Extract 35 (Catherine, leather technician)

> Catherine: [...] they have so many regulations now about clean animals and the way that they're killed. You know, that they even have a sensor (?) now, that if you frighten an animal it actually affects the meat, whereas if they're calm then you get better meat.... Sounds awful, really, but I think we're very humane in the way we do away with our animals to eat. So, I don't, I can't see that there's... I mean they do get themselves in a twist, the animal rights people, don't they. But they haven't stopped us eating meat yet (laughs)... I'm very sorry for the foxes, but they haven't stopped us eating meat...

This account constructs slaughtering animals for meat as an institutionally regulated area, and, as such, wholly legitimate, covering everything from animals' state of cleanliness to measures for eliminating stress. This description suggests that, under the circumstances, any concerns or objections would be unsupported by the prevailing reality, and thus unreasonable. By anticipating a negative reaction ("sounds awful, really"), the participant inoculates against criticism, through the acknowledgement that the situation described may still be received with disapproval. Catherine constructs the slaughtering process as both adequately managed and justified, by referring to its ultimate end (meat provision): "I think we're very humane in the way we do away with our animals to eat". In this sense, the participant implies that nothing more could be reasonably expected: "I don't, I can't see that there's...". Here, failure to finish the sentence may be read as implying that the argument is exhausted, having provided a convincing refutation of possible criticisms.

The frailty of potential opposing views is reinforced by the use of a further idiomatic expression, which constructs the position of animal rights activists as irrational and ultimately pointless: "they do get themselves in a twist, the animal rights people". The use of the idiom works to underscore the strength of the participant's feelings regarding the position espoused (Drew & Holt, 1988). In the same way, the tag "don't they" appears to act as an appeal to shared knowledge (Kurz et al, 2005), suggesting that, in the light of everything mentioned, the respondent regards the interviewer's agreement as implicit.

Similarly with Anne's narrative, Catherine's description suggests that the animal rights activists' stance is weakened by its perceived lack of objectivity. Their approach is constituted as unsound, and as affected by misplaced emotionality – displayed through their failure to acknowledge that the best outcome is achieved in an unavoidable situation (animals have to be slaughtered to provide food, and the procedure is done in a humane way). The participant's concluding remarks ("I'm very sorry for the foxes, but they haven't stopped us eating meat") appear to suggest that, while emotional arguments may be appropriate and may achieve their aim in specific contexts, such as opposition to fox-hunting, they are not apposite or successful in the particular discussion of killing animals for food. Again, in a similar way to Anne's stance, the account locates Catherine as a reasonable commentator, who, unlike imagined opponents, takes into account multiple elements and forms an opinion on objective and reasoned grounds.

In Extracts 34 and 35, would-be criticisms from an animal welfare perspective are rejected as inadequate. Respondents dealt with such objections by constructing them as misplaced or unfounded, as lacking objectivity (therefore becoming untrustworthy), or even as plain hypocritical, when attempting to adopt the moral higher ground. According to these

constructions, the 'flawed' character of such criticisms is seen as ultimately causing them to backfire, or to have negative consequences for their own cause. Through the narratives put forward, participants position themselves as open to debate, receptive to criticism and displaying an unbiased stance. The tenet of their arguments, however, does not address the purported root of the concerns, by taking the practice of eating meat as a given, questioned only by an (allegedly misguided) minority.

Another way of constructing criticism from ethical perspectives as flawed was by suggesting that such objections had a token character, and were not followed through with concrete actions, as in the extract below:

Extract 36 (Daniel, leather manufacturer)

Daniel: *Issues, oh, issues! I think there is a general society thing, that people worry about the use of animals in an exploitative way. Certain people do, certain groups of people in society, um... which is relatively general. So, there is an animal care issue... Well, there are two issues. There's, you know, 'should you do it', and 'should you do it if you look after the animals well'. So these two issues - it's mostly... 'Should you do it at all' is quite an extreme position for people to take, but 'should you do it only if you look after the animals well' - I think most people would agree with that. So it is an issue, but really not a considered issue with the vast majority of people in society. They don't do many things to act on it. You know, nobody in life nowadays thinks that life is going to be fair, like - 'nobody told you that life was going to be fair'. So people have a basic, not cynicism, but a basic way of looking at life, that life isn't fair. And things that are unjust, like a footballer spending millions of pounds on his wedding, when there are children dying every day of malnutrition - basically that's so unfair, and so wrong. And people have that in their minds all the time, that things happen in this world that they can't do anything about, so they just don't think about it. So the sort of animal issue, these questions, for the vast majority of people, fall into that category of they don't take too much action on, and if they like something made out of leather, they buy it. There are groups of people that do take action, in, you know, quite strong ways.*

Similarly to Anne, Daniel appears to suggest that concern with animal welfare is to be expected and is, therefore, understandable: the participant describes it as a "general" aspect

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of society. The respondent seems to imply that such standpoints have a limited public following, by depicting them as restricted to "certain people... certain groups", only to conclude, as an afterthought, that the stance is "relatively general". Daniel proposes a clarification of the area of concern, by reducing it to two main questions: "'should you do it', and 'should you do it if you look after the animals well'". The first notion is dismissed as being "quite extreme": this description serves to construct killing animals for meat as the norm, and thus places it outside the area of debate. The second idea, of ensuring adequate care for animals, is constructed as a social norm, a straightforward, common sense concept: "I think most people would agree with that". Again, the social context thus constructed depicts meat eating as a given and unproblematic, as long as good treatment for the animals is provided.

While the account constructs interest in animal welfare as a standard position to adopt, its description as a "society thing" appears to downplay the seriousness of this issue. This position is made explicit subsequently through the suggestion that the public's concern regarding animal exploitation is largely superficial, and not acted upon ("They don't do many things to act on it"). Such lack of action is described as yet another social norm, adopted by "the vast majority of people in society", with only a minority willing to take an active stand: "There are groups of people that do take action". Despite the allusion to a lack of activism, the participant does not appear to sympathize with such activist groups or with their methods, which are depicted as potentially disproportionate ("quite strong ways").

At the same time as expressing reservations about particular manifestations of concern with animal welfare, Daniel indicates that there may be mitigating factors for what he described as passivity on the general public's part. These factors are explained by the existence of a general, fundamentally pessimistic, outlook: "people have... a basic way of looking at life, that life isn't fair". Such a perspective, the participant argues, is not the result of inappropriate thinking ("not cynicism"), but is the outcome of external, uncontrollable elements ("things happen in this world that they can't do anything about"); awareness of these "things" is constructed as ever-present, and as affecting people's whole life experience ("people have that in their minds all the time"). The examples given, which contrast children suffering from malnutrition with the wealth of footballers, serve to emphasize rhetorically the perceived generalized injustice and lack of moral values: "basically that's so unfair, and so wrong". The account works to construct animal welfare issues in two ways: firstly, as relatively minor when compared with human suffering; and secondly, as falling into a category of morally problematic aspects, which are nevertheless outside people's sphere or capacity of influence. This dual construction serves to justify inaction, by portraying it as a defensive mechanism, aimed at avoiding a troubling reality ("they just don't think about it").

As a consequence, consumer decisions are constructed as taking place outside moral qualms or concerns ("if they like something made out of leather, they buy it").

This account positions Daniel as an observer of social life and human behaviour, as someone who understands, but does not necessarily agree with what comes across as shortcomings of human nature. The extract above constructs the general public as 'sympathetic but apathetic' - well intentioned, but incapable or unwilling to take concrete action in support of professed beliefs. While this inactivity is portrayed as understandable under certain circumstances and as part of a larger picture, the participant seems to convey a certain amount of implied criticism regarding this lack of involvement, and to suggest that critique loses credibility if not followed by action. At the same time, the narrative may be read as working to shift responsibility for taking a stand (or indeed for acting to change any problematic aspects) away from the industry, and into the social arena. It is this type of shift which is discussed in more detail below.

7.4.2 Relocating responsibility

In other cases, respondents dealt with the question of ethical and/or environmental implications by describing such situations as taking place elsewhere, outside Britain or Europe.

Extract 37 (Anne, leather technician)

> Anne: There's always the case, they'll find a case somewhere of animal cruelty. Now, you know... you hate to say it, but if you look hard enough you can always find something somewhere in the world, somewhere where things aren't being done properly, you know. And I've spent quite a bit of time at various times in abattoirs, looking at the animal welfare side of the industry as well, and, you know, I feel quite confident, certainly in the UK, certainly in Europe, the animals, the animal welfare, that's not an issue, they're looked after, they're not abused in any way, um... But of course, you know, there's no doubt, you can go somewhere in the world and you can find a situation where, you know, the animal has not been treated correctly.

While the respondent acknowledges the existence of situations where animals may be exposed to cruel treatment, her account constructs them using competing discourses. In the first place, such occurrences are seen as exceptional in two ways: (a) they are described as

deviating from a generally accepted norm - as incorrect treatment or as something improperly done (with the implication that humane treatment is the norm in the UK); (b) such cases are depicted as rare, and as requiring a particular effort to discover ("a case somewhere... if you look hard enough you can always find something somewhere... a situation"). Secondly, the construction of animal cruelty as exceptional competes with the portrayal of this occurrence as inevitable – by using an extreme case formulation ("There's always the case"). Finally, instances of cruelty are constituted as taking place in unspecified remote settings ("somewhere in the world"), with the vagueness of the location serving to distance such occurrences from the immediate environment.

There is an implied contrast with places where "things [are] being done properly", and the participant goes on to provide specific examples: "certainly in the UK, certainly in Europe... that's not an issue". The repetition of "certainly" and the categorical denial function to enhance rhetorically the persuasiveness of the argument, by constructing the adequacy of animal-related practices in the places mentioned as indisputable. By mentioning her personal experience in the matter, Anne positions herself as an expert and establishes her entitlement to an informed standpoint. Such experience is constructed as first-hand, covering an extended period of time and more than one aspect of activity, thus further warranting the veracity of the account: "I've spent quite a bit of time at various times in abattoirs, looking at the animal welfare side of the industry as well". Pronouns are used rhetorically, to indicate distance or proximity with regard to various positions: people looking for instances of inappropriate behaviour are represented by a distancing 'they'; the use of 'you' brings the action closer, while still maintaining the speaker's distance: "if you look hard enough you can always find [...] you can go somewhere [...] and you can find a situation"; finally, Anne's own position is expressed in the first person ("I feel quite confident"), suggesting her endorsement of, and identification with, the viewpoint stated.

The argument that improper practices take place, if at all, outside Britain or Europe can also be found in the next three extracts:

Extract 38 (Michelle, restoration specialist; Natalie, restoration specialist)

I:	Do you see any issues about leather?
Michelle:	There are questions about the polluting problems of tanneries, but I think the ones in Europe are pretty well policed.
Natalie:	Yeah
Michelle:	It's the Chinese once again.

Extract 39 (Catherine, leather technician)

I: *You don't think there any animal welfare issues.*

Catherine: *No, not really, I think, you know, especially in this country, the animals to slaughter to make hides, the abattoirs in this country are very, very well organized.*

In these accounts, both animal slaughtering and the functioning of tanneries (posing pollution risks) are described as unproblematic "in this country" or "in Europe". This state of things is attributed to rigorous supervision ("pretty well policed") and excellent organization ("very, very well organized"). The implication that elsewhere the situation may be different is emphasized in Extract 39 through the repetition of "this country". Similar to Anne's description, this narrative constructs good work practices within a geographical and political framework. Later in the interview, Catherine gives specific examples:

Extract 40 (Catherine, leather technician)

Catherine: *[pollution]'s an easily treatable problem, you know, in the poorer countries they've a lot of these sort of reed beds where you treat tannery effluent, and it comes out clean at the other end. So, you know, the technology's there, it's just um, forcing people to use it. I mean, you know, if they'll let you discharge in the river and do nothing you're not going to do anything, are you? You keep producing the cheap leather... But as I say, I know it's swept through India, you've got to have your effluent treated properly, and I'm sure it will go round in China. They're having to clean up for the Beijing Olympics, aren't they?*

I: *Yeah*

Catherine: *I mean, you can't imagine, knowing what the West, the rest of the world knew, you can't imagine how they've polluted themselves, can you? They can't be ignorant, because the rest of the world's done it, made those mistakes and corrected those mistakes, but they still seem to, er, to still do it, maybe because it's cheaper, I don't know. I can't think it was ignorance...*

This account also locates polluting practices mostly outside developed countries. The issue of pollution itself is somewhat minimised, by being described as simple to solve, "an easily-treatable problem". Specific methods ("reed beds"), in particular, are constituted as basic, and therefore accessible and affordable, especially for "the poorer countries", which may

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have limited access to sophisticated technology. This narrative constructs failure to tackle pollution issues adequately not as a consequence of absence of resources, but as a lack of motivation and will: "the technology's there, it's just um, forcing people to use it". Polluting practices are depicted as an economic expedient, which offers financial advantages through reduced costs ("producing the cheap leather"), and which is made possible by the lack of constraints in the shape of supervision or legislation ("if they'll let you discharge in the river and do nothing you're not going to do anything, are you?"). The participant gives the example of India and China, with the former portrayed as having worked through its pollution issues, and the latter as still affected by toxic waste problems, but under pressure to solve them in preparation for hosting the 2008 Olympic Games. The narrative is particularly critical of China, and positions that country as deliberately ignoring tried and tested ways of tackling pollution, and unwilling to learn from others' experience ("They can't be ignorant, because the rest of the world's done it... I can't think it was ignorance") and persisting in damaging actions ("they still seem to... to still do it"). This behaviour is portrayed as incomprehensible ("you can't imagine how they've polluted themselves, can you?"), with the tag question, rhetorically requesting the interviewer's agreement, serving to further emphasise the unacceptable character of the situation. The explanation offered ("maybe because it's cheaper") would position China as financially vulnerable, and may be read as a mitigating element for dubious work practices. However, the use of "I don't know" as a display of uncertainty (Potter, 2004) appears to cast doubt on this justification, and thus works to undermine it. By reiterating disbelief in purported lack of knowledge ("I can't think it was ignorance"), the account suggests an element of deliberation, and therefore increased culpability on the part of the perpetrators.

The construction of inadequate practices as primarily situated outside developed countries is also apparent in the next extract, which addresses the question of treatment of animals. Here, this issue is framed in an historical development discourse, and responsibility for animal welfare is relocated through a temporal, as well as geographical, distancing.

Extract 41 (Eric, leather researcher)

I: *Do you think there any other environmentally related issues, leather has*
           an impact...?

Eric: *Environmentally, it has done. Yeah, yeah... It has had an environmental*
           impact. I think it's improved a lot, I think that, I'm speaking sort of in
           terms of technology now, I think the way it's made now and the way you
           can treat the waste material coming from the processes, it's so much
           better than it used to be... and I don't think it has a, you know, not in the

developed world. I mean you still probably might worry about it in developing countries, but I think it's only just part of the whole situation, isn't it, I mean it's a) an industry that potentially does use chemicals and you can imagine situations in some developing countries where very little is done to the waste chemical before it's put into the local river, which is not good. But I mean that's all part of best practice around the world, isn't it, it's part of the world developing. So, yeah, but it is potentially, or has been if you like, a dirty manufacturing process. But I do think that certainly in the developed world that's not a problem.

By positioning himself as an expert, through the reference to technology ("I'm speaking sort of in terms of technology now") and the use of technical vocabulary (e.g. "you can treat the waste material coming from the processes"), the respondent establishes the legitimacy of his standpoint. In a similar manner to other participants, Eric does not dispute the suggestion that making leather has environmental consequences, but his account portrays them as distant, of no immediate relevance. The participant downplays the effect of waste resulting from leather making activities by describing them, in the first place, as more efficient than in the past ("so much better than it used to be"), and secondly by consigning such effects to certain geographic and political areas outside the immediate context of the discussion. Pollution resulting from the leather industry is thus re-framed in terms of relative progress (in relation to the past) and as a distant concern. The latter construction is achieved in several ways: firstly, in geographic and political terms, it is not an issue close to home ("not in the developed world"); if it happens at all, it is more likely to concern "developing countries"; even there, it is not a generalized situation, affecting only "some" of them. Secondly, any negative environmental effects are presented not as certainties, but as scenarios, possibilities ("you can imagine situations"). Finally, polluting practices are further normalized through being portrayed, on the one hand, as an almost inevitable consequence of the particular type of industry (one "that potentially does use chemicals"), and on the other as transitory, attributable to a particular stage of economic and political development ("it's part of the world developing"). According to this account, pollution-related issues are portrayed (a) as largely obsolete, mainly a thing of the past (as the verbal constructions suggest – "it has done... it has had an environmental impact... [it] has been... a dirty manufacturing process"); (b) as geographically distant; and (c) as a transient stage in the wider economic development processes.

The majority of the accounts above use an ethnocentric discourse to construct 'Western' countries as a model in respect of good production practices, and to create a category of 'the other' in this regard. This is especially apparent in Extract 40, where the reference to "the

West" is rectified as "the rest of the world". The boundaries of 'otherness' appear to shift in accordance with the terms of comparison: in Extract 32, for example, Britain is constituted as a model of industrial responsibility and as committed to correct practices, with other European countries portrayed as deviating from this model and only altering their economic behaviour under external pressure. A similar construction is present in Extract 40, with the difference that, this time, the comparison is between developed and less developed countries – with the latter described as needing coercion to renounce environmentally damaging ways of working. Across the accounts, the British leather industry is represented as functioning responsibly, following regulations and legislation, while any ethical or environmental transgressions are firmly attributed to distant others.

7.4.3 Making progress

Participants' defence of the leather industry against potential challenges on environmental or ethical grounds also took the form of references to the measures planned or already taken, aimed at minimizing or eliminating potential problematic outcomes. In the following excerpt, Bridget suggests that the polluting effects of making leather are a thing of the past.

Extract 44 (Bridget, leather technician)

I: What about... you know, some people have qualms about the
            environmental impact of leather, of the leather industry, what are your
            views on that?

Bridget: Well, it's certainly the case that producing leather can produce a lot of
            effluent, a lot of waste water and things like that. But waste treatment
            technology has improved tremendously over the last twenty years and
            it's nowhere near the polluting industry that it used to be [...] it doesn't
            have to be a polluting industry any more. It used to, admittedly, but not
            any more.

Bridget appears to unreservedly acknowledge ("it's certainly the case") that leather-processing might be regarded as problematic in terms of environmental impact. The factual statement used serves to suggest that this aspect is largely indisputable. However, the respondent immediately softens this assertion by constructing it as a potentiality ("can produce"), and thus introducing an element of doubt regarding the extent of the alleged problem. The three-part list, detailing the substances resulting from leather-making processes, indicates transparency and openness about the topic. However, the specification of waste substances also works to downplay the pollution implications: 'effluent', defined as

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"liquid waste such as sewage or waste from a factory" (Macmillan English Dictionary, 2002: p. 445), is similar in meaning to 'waste water'; the addition of the generalized list completer "and things like that" combined with the vagueness of the terms render the enumeration somewhat repetitive and minimize the validity of concerns, through the suggestion that they involve mostly (and innocuously) water.

At the same time, similarly to other instances, the technical discourse used serves to locate the speaker as knowledgeable about the extent and nature of the processes involved. Through this positioning as a competent and reasonable expert, the participant establishes her entitlement and legitimacy to put across an informed, weight-carrying viewpoint regarding the topic under discussion. From this perspective, pollution issues are described as bearing little relevance to present times. The ways of dealing with waste are depicted as having significantly changed for the better, through formulations that maximize the extent of the progress achieved ("waste treatment technology has improved *tremendously*... it's *nowhere near* the polluting industry that it used to be"). The time reference ("over the last twenty years") constructs ecological awareness and the implementation of relevant measures as ongoing for a considerable amount of time, and thus serves to represent the leather industry as a genuinely responsible entity. At the same time, any concerns about its polluting potential are placed firmly in the past: "it doesn't have to be a polluting industry any more". By constructing, once again, past concerns as valid ("it used to, admittedly"), the participant reiterates her objectivity, and thus increases the persuasiveness of her description of the issue as unproblematic.

In the next extract, the progress made by the leather industry, here on ethical issues, is represented as particularly commendable, by being achieved against a background of general economic adversity:

Extract 45 (Daniel, leather manufacturer)

Daniel: *Has the leather industry done enough with regard to supporting better techniques for farming? No, it hasn't. Leather industry has had a hard job to survive on its own, whatever. But it should pay more attention to it. But it is - it's slowly happening. We're developing an organic method of making leather, and we use hides that come from organic cows, organic sheep, and it's a sort of very early start to thinking about things in a more positive light.*

Here, leather industry's contribution to ethical issues is constructed in terms of involvement with farming practices and the treatment of animals before being slaughtered. Daniel prefaces his account with a rhetorical question about the adequacy of the leather industry's contribution in this area, and follows it up immediately with a negative answer. This acts as a display of honesty, which positions the participant as impartial and open-minded, ready to accept what may be seen as unfavourable conclusions. While the allusion to the difficulties encountered by the leather industry (discussed in more detail earlier in the chapter) may be read as a mitigating element, or as a possible justification for the industry's alleged lack of engagement, the phrase "whatever" appears to undermine it somewhat, as if to imply that such an explanation might not be sufficiently convincing to an interlocutor. Again, the display of a self-critical approach functions to enhance the credibility of the account.

The repetition of the term "organic", used to describe methods and sources of materials, emphasizes the positive character of steps taken by the industry, by encompassing references to naturalness, purity and ethics (McEachern & McClean, 2002; Harrison, Newholm & Shaw, 2005; Hustvedt, Peterson & Chen, 2008). The description of such steps as happening "slowly", and as a "sort of a very early start", may be read as an implied caution against a too severe or hasty evaluation of the industry's actions; the implication is that, given time, a more extensive pursuit of such actions would take place in the future. This juxtaposition between the measures mentioned and the reference to economic hardship functions to constitute the leather industry as environmentally well-intentioned and particularly committed to fair and principled practices.

This type of dedication is elaborated upon in Anne's account below, where production practices are discussed in relation to their environmental impact. Here, the leather industry is portrayed as occupying a special position in the pursuit of ethical practices.

Extract 46 (Anne, leather technician)

> Anne: So the other issue is probably the environmental side of it, and that is a big issue, because we have to look at how we can process in a way that causes the least impact on the environment, you know, there's no doubt about it, we've all got to be responsible, regardless what the industry is... You know, whether you're making metal, whether you're making synthetics, you have to do that... And I think the leather industry is very proactive in its stance, it's always trying to keep one step ahead, trying to look at legislation that's coming in, trying to do everything it can to, you know, change the way we do things, trying to do business as clean

as possible. But again, you'll always find situations where there are problems, you can't help that. But generally, as an industry, I think it's a very responsible industry... But we will be targeted, there's no doubt, because we are a large user of water, we're a large user of chemicals... and we're aware of it, and we're always trying to improve it, but we're not there yet. So, you know, that's gonna be one of the biggest challenges, actually, is how we still make a product that's, you know, environmentally friendly and... But that I think is a challenge in any industry, it's not just the leather industry, but there will be issues in the future I'm sure, still... And that's why we're changing, we have to keep changing, we have to do research, we have to, you know... try and produce a product the consumer wants, but in a way that minimizes the impact in doing that. And socially, as well, I mean we have things, we have, um, situations now where you know we're working with companies who will look at social responsibility, who will look at ethical auditing, who will look at environmental auditing and those are things that the industry has to take on board, you know, and that's the right way to move, so that's... You know, we're not employing ten year olds in Pakistan for making footballs, or whatever, whatever the situation is. I mean, again, these things do happen, the challenge is to make sure that you try to eliminate them, and stop them from happening, really.

In this account, Anne describes awareness of environmental issues as an important and indisputable question ("that is a big issue... there's no doubt about it", and as a shared, collective obligation ("we've all got to be responsible"). The respondent indicates that the leather industry should not be singled out in having to deal with environmental matters, and that the requirement for awareness and action should constitute a communal duty ("regardless what the industry is... whether you're making metal, whether you're making synthetics, you have to do that"). The reference to collective responsibility is reiterated later in the extract ("that... is a challenge in any industry, it's not just the leather industry"). In this context, Anne describes the leather industry as leading the way in terms of decisive actions ("is very proactive"). The four-part list detailing the ways in which the industry attempts to fulfil this duty ("always trying to keep one step ahead, trying to look at legislation that's coming in, trying to do everything... to... change the way we do things, trying to do business as clean as possible") exemplifies rhetorically the range of the efforts made. At the same time, it serves to construct the industry as genuinely committed to the green cause, by suggesting that it does not merely follow a trend, but is actually an initiator, an opener of new avenues.

Having established the leather industry as a leader in the field, the participant warns against too high expectations, before describing the leather industry as essentially well-intentioned and reliable. This argument takes the form of a 'show concession' (Antaki & Wetherell, 1999), whereby an initial proposition, considered potentially open to challenges, is qualified through a concession, which is then followed by a re-assertion of the initial statement. Here, the construction of the leather industry as "proactive", although illustrated by examples, is seen as potentially vulnerable to being disputed; the extreme case formulation ("you'll always find situations where there are problems"), followed by the idiom ("you can't help that") may be read as concessions, constructing the industry's efforts as inevitably hindered at times, and thus inoculating against possible counter-examples; finally, the original assertion is re-stated ("But generally, as an industry, I think it's a very responsible industry"), making the initial claim stronger.

Anne pre-empts specific points of criticism by identifying possible areas of concern in the industrial processes ("we will be targeted, there's no doubt, because we are a large user of water, we're a large user of chemicals"). This anticipation works as a confession of stake (Potter, 1996a), which defuses possible challenges by indicating awareness of them. The explicit acknowledgement of issues ("we're aware of it") and the admission ("we're not there yet") further reinforce the position of honesty and openness, thus functioning to strengthen the declared commitment to solving such problems ("we're always trying to improve it"). Additionally, the extreme case formulation "always" re-emphasizes this commitment, by suggesting that such actions are not sporadic, but are a permanent feature of the industry.

This account constructs the industry's tackling of environmental issues as constructive in the face of difficulties ("that's gonna be one of the biggest challenges"), and as engaged in a continuous development ("we're changing, we have to keep changing, we have to do research"). The repetition accentuates rhetorically the transformational aspect of the actions undertaken. In this context, Anne's anticipation of future obstacles and her depicting them as certain ("there will be issues in the future I'm sure") positions the respondent as having an objective, realist outlook, and, again, adds to the persuasiveness of her narrative.

The argument around environmental issues ends with a purported dilemma, between the industry's asserted commitment to protect the environment and its need to maintain its economic position, by fulfilling consumer demand ("try and produce a product the consumer wants, but in a way that minimizes the impact in doing that"). By drawing on an economic discourse of the 'sovereign consumer', the construction serves to shift some of the

(potential) responsibility for ecological damage onto the people buying leather products, who may be seen as a major driving force behind industrial production.

In the quote above, Anne represents the leather industry as concerned with wider ethical issues, including social justice. The three-part list describing commercial partners ("we're working with companies who will look at social responsibility, who will look at ethical auditing, who will look at environmental auditing") illustrates the range of ethical concerns and areas of action covered, and indicate, by association, the industry's involvement as serious and comprehensive. The shift from the use of "we", indicating identification with the industry, to the impersonal "the industry has to take on board... that's the right way to move", positions the participant as personally endorsing the course of action, as an individual who is aware of and engaged with ethical matters.

Anne re-assumes the work identity when alluding to child labour in Pakistan. This emotionally charged reference acts as a rhetorical device to portray the participant (and the industry) as alert to social injustice and troubled by instances of it. The change of pronoun to 'you' in the following statement of aims ("to make sure that you try to eliminate them, and stop them from happening") acts to construct such actions as a collective responsibility, and the industry as active in this communal pursuit of social justice.

By alternating mentions of efforts and achievements with acknowledgement of difficulties and impediments, the accounts above provide a persuasive depiction of the leather industry as an entity and of participants themselves (through their professional connection) as ethically minded, concerned about the social and moral circumstances and impact of their activities, and as firmly committed to addressing these matters in a pragmatic and constructive manner.

7.5 Summary

This chapter mapped out and discussed representations around leather emerging from the accounts of participants professionally involved with the material. Three main themes were identified, each with a number of sub-themes, tracing a path through descriptive portrayals of leather to individual experiences and industrial processes.

In their accounts, respondents put forward constructions of the material which prioritized its role in human society in a number of ways, including, but not limited to: depository of cultural and historical knowledge; condition of and contributor to ecological balance; and unquestionable, useful and ubiquitous, part of day-to-day life. Despite its depicted

significant role in society, the leather industry itself was constructed as endangered, and therefore in need of support and defending. In this respect, criticisms of it were met with counterarguments emphasising the industry's position as environmentally responsible and active.

In the next chapter, the analysis will focus on representations of leather in consumer-related contexts.

Chapter 8: Consuming Identities

8.1 Introduction

Wearing leather is a, um... a thing that you do to express yourself, at any moment in time. Yes, I think so. I think so. (Daniel, leather manufacturer)

As discussed in Chapter 3, consumption choices have been considered to provide clues about people's identities – to give indications about personal qualities or characteristics (e.g. Mackay, 1997; Woodward, 2002; Croghan et al., 2006) - and/or to be used to "mark *social* and *cultural* boundaries" (Sassatelli, 2007, p. 91, italics in original). In this chapter, I aim to explore constructions of identity around consumer choices related to leather and leather objects, by means of a discourse analytic approach. More specifically, the analysis will focus on two main areas: (1) an examination of the ways in which affiliation or ascription to certain social and cultural categories are proposed, adopted, negotiated or resisted; and (2) an exploration of how certain moral identities, in particular related to notions of ethical consumption, are constructed and managed by participants.

Corresponding to the issues mentioned above, I have identified two over-arching themes: (1) *You are what you wear*, with two sub-themes: (i) *Negotiating distinction: individuality and belonging* and (ii) *Negotiating gender: fashion matters*; and (2) *Ethical consumers*, with three sub-themes: (i) *A question of knowledge*, (ii) *A matter of choice* and (iii) *A balancing act*. In the following sections I will examine each of these constructions in turn.

8.2 You are what you wear

As noted in Chapters 2 and 3, the notion that material objects fulfil a communication role has a long tradition (e.g. Veblen, 2005 [1899]; Bourdieu, 2010 [1984]; McCracken, 1988). According to this "communicative act paradigm" (Campbell, 1997, p. 341), possessions can be understood and used to display social and personal identities – to say something about oneself in terms of gender, age, income and even what we stand for (Lurie, 1983; Entwistle, 2001; Heath & Potter, 2005). With 'culture' taken to generally refer to the way of life, beliefs and values within a society, subcultural identities can be seen to mark similarity and difference, by indicating the groups or categories we are (and, by extension, we are not) members of (Barnard, 2007). In this regard, the following sections illustrate how leather objects were described by participants as markers of certain professional or subcultural

categories. Furthermore, the analysis highlights the ways in which consumption practices in themselves were constructed as reflecting particular gender roles and representations.

8.2.1 Negotiating distinction: individuality and belonging

Following Bourdieu's (2010 [1984]) argument that consumption choices are used to 'distinguish' social groups in terms of social position, class, culture and values, Heath and Potter (2005) proposed that, generally, appearance or style might be regarded as a means of achieving distinction or differentiation on a variety of dimensions. In this section, participants talk about using leather objects or wearing certain leather items to convey professional affiliation, or to adopt or negotiate particular subcultural features.

In the extracts below, Anne, Bridget and Daniel directly associate wearing leather or choosing leather objects with work identity. Here, leather is constructed as more than a sartorial or consumption choice – rather as a deliberate gesture of professional commitment.

Extract 1 (Anne, leather technician)

> Anne: It's partly uniform, I suppose, now, in terms of my job. I tend to... I haven't got a leather jacket on now, but I tend to, if I'm doing something workwise, I would wear leather as a matter of course, because I think it's supporting my industry. [...] I went to a leather dinner actually, one evening, and I suddenly realized I actually hadn't anything leather on me [...] and I actually thought "Aargh, I've come to a leather dinner with no leather!" And nobody else would think twice about it, but for me it was quite a, you know, it felt wrong.

Anne describes leather as "partly uniform" – serving, in other words, as a visible expression of professional allegiance. In this sense, it may be considered to act as "legitimating symbol of membership in an organization" (Heath & Potter, 2005, p. 170) and to provide a means of distinguishing the participant through her profession. Anne depicts choosing leather in one form or another as a normative, almost automatic gesture of support for her line of work ("as a matter of course"). At the same time, the personal and possessive pronouns ("*I* would wear leather... because *I* think it's supporting *my* industry") constitute this decision as voluntary and fully endorsed by the participant, and emphasize Anne's declared identification with her profession. The participant rhetorically illustrates her dedication by recounting an episode where, while attending a work-related event, she "realized [she] actually hadn't anything leather on [her]". In the narrative, Anne's strong personal

commitment to the leather industry is conveyed in a number of ways: by portraying her reaction to the 'discovery' of lack of leather items as one of surprise and disbelief ("I actually thought "Aargh"..."); by constituting the choice to wear leather as self-imposed ("nobody else would think twice about it"); and by suggesting that failure to comply with this course of action would result in negative emotional effects, in feelings of discomfort ("it felt wrong").

A similar recourse to feelings appears in Bridget's account, where she relates how she felt when her husband, also working with leather, came home having bought a leather imitation object.

Extract 2 (Bridget, leather technician)

> Bridget: I was _really_ disappointed in my husband yesterday because (...) he'd
> bought this picture frame [...] And then I looked at the label and I was _so_
> disappointed, it said 'faux leather' on it, false leather it means... And I
> thought, _how_ could you do that? (laughs) We both work in the leather
> industry, and you buy a false leather picture frame!

Like Anne, Bridget constructs the choice of leather as an expression of loyalty to the profession, an only-to-be-expected course of action for anyone working in the field. Here, the husband's failure to live up to this expectation, through his choice of purchase, is presented (albeit somewhat jokingly) as incomprehensible, almost an act of betrayal ("I thought, how could you do that?"). Again, the reaction to this behaviour is described in personal, emotional terms ("I was really disappointed (...) I was so disappointed").

In both Anne's and Bridget's accounts, the reference to feelings can be read as functioning rhetorically to suggest the depth of personal commitment to their work. As Widdicombe (1993) argues, 'feelings' are understood to imply something profound, and to indicate authenticity. In this sense, Anne and Bridget position themselves as genuinely devoted to their profession, and construct the choice of leather as a visible mark of this devotion.

In the fragment below, Daniel also links wearing leather with his work identity. Unlike the participants above, he presents this choice as influenced less by feelings, and more by rational considerations:

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Extract 3 (Daniel, leather manufacturer)

> Daniel: [...] I have thousands of leather objects. I do, I wear them often - I wear
> them winter, more than I wear them summer - yes, I do wear leather
> quite often. I try not to over-do it, you know, in terms of wearing it
> every day. I just wear what I like, and if I feel like wearing leather, I
> wear leather. I have four, five leather jackets, leather shoes, leather
> belts, everything, yes. You have to, you know. One part of it is, if you
> don't do it, how do you expect other people to do it, you know?

In this extract, the participant's commitment to his area of work is suggested by the amount
of leather items owned ("I have thousands of leather objects") and the frequency of use ("I
wear them often"). The extent and variety of leather possessions are given by a three-part
list ("leather jackets, leather shoes, leather belts"), followed by an extreme case formulation
("everything"). Unlike Anne, who described wearing leather as the result of routine or
feelings, Daniel portrays it as a mainly reasoned, considered issue. Such considerations may
be pragmatic, such as fitness for the season ("I wear them winter, more than I wear them
summer"), or the result of personal preference or inclination ("I just wear what I like, and if
I feel like wearing leather, I wear leather"). The participant indicates awareness of potential
challenges of excess, which he constructs as wearing leather "every day", and pre-empts
them ("I try not to over-do it"), thus reinforcing the rationality of his stance.

Daniel's initial positioning as an autonomous, pragmatic decision-maker, subsequently shifts
to an alternative one, echoing Anne's and Bridget's stances: through the transition from 'I'
to 'you', the use of leather becomes framed as an almost moral obligation – as setting a
personal example of behaviour, expected of a member of a leather-related profession: "You
have to, you know... if you don't do it, how do you expect other people to do it...?". Thus,
extracts 1, 2 and 3 portray the choice of leather for people working with it, not only as an
external indicator of work identity, but also as an expression of personal allegiance to their
profession.

In the next excerpts, wearing leather is discussed in the context of marking (sub)cultural
affiliation. Talking about his leather jacket, Steve describes it as having particular symbolic
and cultural connotations:

Extract 4 (Steve, humanities student)

Steve: [...] that's quite an important, that's, almost a self-definitional kind of item, a leather jacket, for me [...] So like, my sort of, in a sense in which a leather jacket is definitional, it's this kinda punk rock element. It's, you know, skinny jeans, Converse and a leather jacket. [...] looking at it seems almost a little bit shallow, but I do think of um, connotations, particularly with the punk rock movement, with the... I don't know, I think it's got sort of hand in hand with the fact that I started listening to people like The Ramones, Iggy Pop and the Stooges, The Velvet Underground, this kind of bands, and... I've seen it as, a leather jacket as a sort of, I mean, also when I was like sixteen I started defining myself in a much less, much edgier kind of way, a bit more anti-establishment, you know how it is, I was kind of late coming into rebellion as a teenager, so, a leather jacket was always very much sort of a symbol of that.

(...)

I'd say that, in my case, the leather jacket thing would be very hard to get over, at least as long as I think it's defining myself a little bit in this way. In fifteen years from now maybe I'll define myself with tailor-made suits, or whatever (laughs). For the time being, I think, that's sort of - there's an edginess I think I get from leather jackets, and also skinny jeans and Converse - I think those three sort of do go together in terms of my conceptual scheme. That, that defines an edginess that I don't know if I can quite get from other clothes.

Here, Steve describes his leather jacket as directly connected with identity ("a self-definitional kind of item"), through the object's cultural connotations ("this... punk rock element"). This account resonates with Baudrillard's (1988a [1968]) notions of objects as signs and of consumption as symbolic practice. At the same time, it illustrates what Hebdige (1979) termed 'homology' – the correspondence between the style and the values of a subculture. In this sense, the jacket is constructed as homologous with, or as a symbol of values ostensibly associated with punk rock, rebelliousness in particular. Steve's narrative constitutes music and dress as markers of identity (e.g. Bennett, 1999; Croghan et al., 2006), and appearance as expression of a 'true self' (Widdicombe, 1993). By wearing the jacket, the participant claims to identify with and espouse punk rock values, and positions himself as rebellious, "edgy" and "anti-establishment"; "a leather jacket was always very

much... a symbol of that". The subcultural image adopted is not limited to the leather jacket, but includes two other items - "skinny jeans" and Converse trainers. This ensemble comes across as an example of what McCracken (1988) called 'a Diderot unity' – here, consumer goods that complement each other by "correspond[ing] to the same set of cultural categories" (1988, p. 120), and by carrying a certain meaning: as Steve puts it, "those three sort of do go together in terms of my conceptual scheme". Here, the three items mentioned are considered to signify the "punk rock element" and some of the characteristics associated with it.

The reference to the age when this process of identification is claimed to have started ("when I was like sixteen") may be seen to have two apparently contradictory implications. On the one hand, it constructs Steve's subcultural identification as long established, thus suggesting that his interest is authentic and consistent, and not merely a passing phase (rebelliousness as part of adolescence). On the other hand, the participant himself states that this identity might, in fact, be transient, and connected with particular life stages; in a few years, Steve suggests, he might use different types of clothes to express identification with different values (implied success and affluence): "In fifteen years from now maybe I'll define myself with tailor-made suits, or whatever". The laughter may be read as a means of distancing himself from potentially problematic statements – either in terms of concern with appearance (possibly questionable in relation to notions of masculinity), or of the direct correspondence proposed between clothes and self. This dilemma has also been hinted at earlier, when Steve pre-empted accusations of superficiality ("looking at it seems almost a little bit shallow"). Such comments notwithstanding, the participant goes on to reiterate the connection between appearance and identity: "that defines an edginess that I don't know if I can quite get from other clothes".

Steve's discussion of his punk rock affiliation echoes the notion of 'neo-tribes' (Maffesoli, 1996; Bennett, 1999). Writing about musical and style-based groupings (e.g. urban dance music), Bennett (1999) refers to them as "temporal gatherings characterised by fluid boundaries and floating memberships" (p.600), formed around particular patterns of consumption. According to Bennett, young people may choose to join, selectively and temporarily, groups on the basis of common tastes in music and appearance. Such groups, or 'neo-tribes', are seen not as stable or well-delimited, but rather in terms of indicating "a certain ambience, a state of mind (...) to be expressed through lifestyles that favour appearance and form" (Maffesoli, 1996, p. 98). In the extract above, the participant indicates his affiliation through the expressed preference for certain consumer items - clothing and style of music. As noted above, the temporary quality of this attachment is

suggested by Steve himself; moreover, anticipated future identifications are being linked, again, to other consumer objects.

The notion that dress style can be regarded as indicative of personal qualities is also put forward in the next excerpt. Here, a different kind of leather item, a long coat, is portrayed as signifying a different subcultural identity – one that Steve explicitly rejects:

Extract 5 (Steve, humanities student)

> Steve: (...) if I see a guy with a full-length black leather coat, I suppose, and in the absence of other contrary indications, I would think they're probably a bit of a geek, just, in so far as, I would, in so far as The Matrix connotations, and the people I know who're obsessed with The Matrix they're all fairly geeky. And I'm not using that in an entirely pejorative way, I'm using that just to demarcate a particular kind of style. But... so I would avoid that, I think, in my own case. (...) the full-length leather jacket would be like, I think... it's got strong cyber-punk connotations, I think it's the technical term (laughs).

Here, the full-length leather coat is associated with the main character in "The Matrix", a SF film involving computer-based, virtual realities. This account provides another instance where particular style choices become connected with personal characteristics, with Steve describing male wearers of this type of coat as "geeky". The participant explicitly rejects identification with people sharing this kind of cultural interest ("I would avoid that, I think, in my own case"). Additionally, the distancing is emphasized by a derogatory ("a bit of a geek", "fairly geeky"), even slightly pathologizing ("obsessed with The Matrix") depiction. Steve deflects potential accusations of prejudice or derision by framing his criticism of The Matrix fans in terms of a judgement on style or taste ("I'm not using that in an entirely pejorative way... just to demarcate a particular kind of style"). At the same time, however, the laughter following the denomination of this particular subculture as "cyber punk... I think it's the technical term" appears to reinforce this categorization as derisory and as such undesirable. This account positions the participant in relation to two subcultures, each connoted by particular leather items and considered to signify certain identities to be adopted (e.g. punk rock, understood as 'rebellious') or rejected (cyber punk, associated with 'geek').

A similar connection between leather items and cultural identity is present in Richard's narratives below. Richard rides a motorcycle and owns a biker-style leather jacket. Here, the

identity connoted by the jacket, that of 'biker', is being negotiated in terms of acceptable and/or objectionable features:

Extract 6 (Richard, humanities student)

> Richard: I don't think you see a lot of biker jackets around, certainly not as many as you used to. But I just sometimes, I actually worry that I look too intimidating in certain circumstances, say if I go into a shop and this that and the other, I kind of... I actually, I actually overcompensate slightly by being more friendly and smiley (I: Uh-huh) I definitely do that when I got it on, because being tall, I sort of think I can quite easily look quite unfriendly or intimidating, and I tend to have a frowning habit, which I get from my dad, um... so if I go into a shop and there's just, a couple of old ladies in there or something, I really make me smile and try and make conversation for a bit, cos I don't want to be perceived as in any way, um, threatening or aggressive. (I: Uh-huh) It's because there's something I really disdain in people, I don't like it when people dress and their look is about aggression. You know, some people seem to, I think they actually style themselves to look aggressive... And you know work out so they can get a big arm and they get tattoos on it and a vest and, and... just kind of things that... and have a demeanour to go with it, actually some, actually want to be threatening, actually want to look imposing, and I just really hate that. Obviously I worry I can look like that myself, when sometimes I wanna wear them just enough to feel a little bit safe, but I definitely don't want anybody to feel threatened by that, that really bothers me.

In this account, while displaying some of the external features of a particular subcultural category, the participant resists other inferences which may be associated with this group. Specifically, Richard addresses the assumption that wearing a biker jacket may convey an impression of aggression, and describes himself as strongly opposing this type of intimidating behaviour ("I don't like it when people dress and their look is about aggression... I just really hate that"). Aggression is constructed here as taking a mainly visual form, and as associated with physical appearance, body or clothing. The features the participant focuses on, "a big arm... tattoos on it and a vest and... have a demeanour to go with it... actually want to be threatening, actually want to look imposing" may be seen as conventional representations of the 'macho man', and especially of cultural images of bikers. In this respect, the respondent can be seen to distance himself from certain aspects of the

categorical (biker) identity, by rejecting some of the 'criterial features' (Widdicombe, 1998, p.58).

Among the elements proposed by Richard as building up an intimidating image are the jacket, his height and his "frowning habit". While it can be argued that the last two factors would be difficult to alter, the choice of a leather jacket would, by comparison, be easier to change. Wearing a biker jacket, in such circumstances, makes the participant vulnerable to criticism of inconsistency – through espousing an attire that has connotations of which he disapproves. The participant is faced with a dilemma which he acknowledges ("obviously I worry I can look like that myself") and which he attempts to manage in two ways: firstly, by showing self-awareness and concern for those who may be on the receiving end of the (wrong) impression conveyed by his appearance. The participant illustrates this by indicating the kind of behaviour he would deliberately adopt (i.e., display of an overly friendly and reassuring demeanour) - aimed at dispelling any potential worries of others, represented here as vulnerable members of society, and polar opposites in terms of age and gender ("a couple of old ladies"). The second approach is to reframe the aggressive potential of the jacket into an element of safety or self-protection ("I wanna wear them just enough to feel a little bit safe"). The playing down of the level of security thus obtained ("just enough", "a little bit") functions to diminish the intensity of the potentially aggressive image. The safety reasoning is particularly emphasized in Richard's account below:

Extract 7 (Richard, humanities student)

Richard: If I'm strolling out and I'm going to a pub, and it's a busy pub, I'm more
             likely to wear [the biker-style jacket], cos I feel physically _safer_ when
             I've got it on. I actually do. And I feel - _protected_, cos it's so tough. But I
             know that it makes me look physically bigger as well. Not so that I can
             openly admit (laughs), but I always feel safe, so if you're kind of in a
             busy place and sort of rub up against other people a lot, it helps me
             assert my own ground, um... Just feel a little bit safer, and I think that's
             always been true, oddly enough, so I wouldn't be without it. Even though
             my confidence has actually improved, and I'm more comfortable and less
             threatened in busy places, but that's because my confidence has gone
             up. Cos I used to be, I used to be really thin, I used to hate it... Um, so
             the jacket really helped with that.

The concept of personal safety constitutes the dominant thread in this account, with the leather jacket described as a means of achieving it. The participant initially attributes the effect to the jacket's intrinsic characteristics of resilience ("cos it's so tough"). However, it is apparent that the protection role is attributed equally to the image this item of clothing projects: "But I know that it makes me look physically bigger as well", "it helps me assert my own ground".

Here, Richard appears to invest in the previously rejected 'macho' imagery, by constructing the biker jacket as an indispensable prop ("I wouldn't be without it"), aimed at helping him perform an assertive role. This rationale is justified, again, by using the argument of achieving safety. Richard describes the leather jacket as a means of avoiding intimidation, and as a concrete way of ensuring personal protection and security. The notion of safety is emphasized throughout the fragment ("I feel physically safer", "I feel protected", "I always feel safe"). In a similar manner to the earlier fragment, the aggression dilemma is managed by downplaying the protection achieved (and implicitly the aggressiveness of the image put across): "Just feel a little bit safer". The projection of this image is constructed as something unwanted but necessary, and required by the circumstances of "a busy pub", or a "busy place", where the participant has to "sort of rub up against other people a lot". Finally, in a humanistic discourse, the jacket is described as a means of self-actualisation, having helped the participant to evolve as a person, by increasing his self-confidence ("I used to be really thin, I used to hate it... the jacket really helped with that"). Richard's account specifically links clothing with body image, and illustrates the notion of managing appearance in order to fulfill cultural ideals of masculinity (here – more muscular and imposing) (Frith & Gleeson, 2004).

In the excerpt above, Richard concomitantly adopts and resists particular characteristics associated with the biker identity: he rejects the connotations of aggression, but makes practical use of this category-associated feature in aiming to ensure personal safety. In the next fragment, the respondent puts forward the idea of 'wearing a mask' (Speer, 2001) in relation to the image projected by "being in a biker jacket". This notion of role-play implies that Richard regards the 'role' as not a 'true' identity. At the same time, however, the latter is set against an unwanted identity, signified by a different item of clothing (an outdoors coat); here, the negative comparison suggests, again, an alignment with the previously rejected image.

Extract 8 (Richard, humanities student)

Richard: *Having said that, if I'm walking about town on my own or something and I'm in a real mood (laughs), um, it feels, it actually feels like I could actually be more safely [sic] being in a mood, and - it sounds ridiculous, doesn't it - but be left alone, or possibly... perhaps I even enjoy the idea of being regarded as if I'm some scary fellow walking through the street, to be left alone. It's ridiculous, it's all in my head, again, it's, I've never seen anything that backs this up, but... I think if I look pissed off, being, I think probably being in a biker jacket, if I'm pissed off and walking about, I'll probably um... enjoy it ever so slightly. You know, actually enjoy - just the ridiculous idea that others see me as that tough bloke there who's in a mood, just, d'you know? (I: uh-huh). It's, I've never really sort of thought about it, but I think, I think if I'm being profoundly honest, um, I would enjoy that, a bit... In the same way that if I was wearing my very practical many-pocketed fleece-lined Regatta coat, that's green, I think I'd look ridiculous if I was in a mood walking along. You know what I mean, I think it'd be just like a, you'd think, "What's the problem, did your Mondeo not start", or something, you know, it just wouldn't feel right, whereas, I'd feel more entitled in my jacket. So, I don't think there's a way I can explain it (laughs)...*

Again, Richard positions himself as not endorsing connotations of aggression, which he constructs as foreign to him, as a part that he may choose to play in certain situations ("if I'm walking about town on my own (...) and I'm in a real mood"). The potentially intimidating image is depicted, as in earlier excerpts, firstly as a safety precaution ("it actually feels like I could actually be more safely being in a mood"). The participant continues by constructing it as playing a role, as well as engaging in a private joke: "perhaps I even enjoy the idea of being regarded as if I'm some scary fellow... I'll probably um... enjoy it ever so slightly". The threatening image is now constituted as a parody of subcultural stereotypes, a practical trick to play on unsuspecting others. Richard distances himself from this representation by seemingly mocking both the image itself, as well as the response it may engender, described as unwarranted: "the ridiculous idea that others see me as that tough bloke there who's in a mood".

The participant expands on the notion of deliberate impression management by comparing images projected by the leather jacket and by a "very practical many-pocketed fleece-lined Regatta coat, that's green". Wearing a biker leather jacket while being "in a mood" is

constructed as an accepted, culturally consistent image, to which the respondent feels "more entitled". In rejecting his Regatta jacket, Richard rejects its constructed connotations of middle class values; the "Mondeo man" identity, seen as an exponent of middle class Britain (Stone-Lee, 2005; Jones, 2007), is similarly refused. Richard thus implicitly constructs the biker jacket as a self-representational item, indicating an orientation towards personal values such as individuality and nonconformity.

In negotiating the subcultural identity, the participant also manages his gender identity, particularly with regard to those traditional representations of masculinity (power, aggression, assertiveness) associated with the biker subculture. An imposing physical appearance forms part of dominant notions about ideals of masculinity (Harris, 1995; Edley & Wetherell, 1995; Coles, 2009). Being masculine has been associated with "having a formidable presence in the world, one that conveys, in an instant, notions of power, control and invulnerability" (Wienke, 1998, p. 255). Richard buys into macho imagery by constructing his wearing the biker jacket to bolster his physical appearance ("Cos I used to be, I used to be really thin, I used to hate it") and thus to project a more assertive image. At the same time, the respondent distances himself from the aggressive projection, and portrays his dress choice as necessary from a self-preservation perspective, as a safety measure required by particular circumstances. By dismissing this kind of macho look as extreme and unwanted, Richard adopts what Wetherell and Edley (1999) call an "ordinary position" of resistance, which rejects certain ideal notions of masculinity as negative stereotypes and aligns itself by implication with 'normal' or 'average' imagery.

As noted above, the participant distances himself from connotations of aggression by constructing them as a mask or a trick, thus locating himself outside the macho ideal. At the same time, by constituting the jacket as an accepted cultural artefact, a symbol of nonconformity and rebellion, Richard positions himself as valuing ideas of originality and individuality – another "hegemonic way in Western society", held to demonstrate autonomy from social pressures (Wetherell & Edley, 1999). In this way, the account combines complicity with resistance, and achieves both an alignment with, and a rejection of, conventional notions of masculinity. This process of negotiation has been documented by Connell (1987, 1995), who argued that in constituting their sense of identity, men orient themselves towards notions of hegemonic, or traditional, masculinity, and negotiate them through complying with or resisting their prescriptions. In their turn, such prescriptions are historically and culturally shaped, and therefore not immutable, but are constantly redefined and reconstructed (Wetherell & Edley, 1999).

8.2.3 Negotiating gender: fashion matters

As noted in Chapter 3, a number of theorists have argued that the consumption of dress and fashion is one of the means by which certain social categories, particularly gender, are being (re)produced and negotiated (e.g. Wilson, 1985; Chapman & Rutherford, 1988; Barnard, 1996; Hollows, 2000). In Wilson's (1985) words, "Modern fashion plays endlessly with the distinction between masculinity and femininity. With it we express our shifting ideas about what masculinity and femininity are" (p. 122). While traditionally it has been assumed that men show less interest than women in clothing and fashion (cf. Edwards, 1997), this supposition has been increasingly challenged. Craik (1993), for example, argued that the 'un-fashioning' of men (1993, p.178) is an historically, culturally and geographically bounded phenomenon, to a great extent limited to European/Western cultures; within this context, it was located mainly in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and began to fade again after the 1960s. Indeed, studies suggest that men increasingly develop an interest in their appearance (Mort, 1996; Frith & Gleeson, 2004; McKay, Mikosza & Hutchins, 2005). According to McKay and colleagues (2005), the concept of the 'new man' was an archetype created by the media, with the aim of selling what has been termed 'soft' products (particularly for grooming) without them being seen as posing a threat to traditional notions of masculinity. Rutherford (1988) argued that in representations of masculinity there is competition between two predominant positions, the 'retributive man', representing more traditional forms of masculinity (such as toughness, competitiveness, incapacity to express emotions), and the 'new man', who is comparatively more caring, self-aware and concerned about his appearance. With the emergence of the 'new man' as a cultural frame of reference, Rutherford suggested, men are becoming more aware of their gendered status and of the multiplicity of understandings of masculine identity.

While participants were not asked specific questions about gender, talking about leather provided, in some cases, an opportunity to discuss gender-related issues and representations. In the following fragments, respondents negotiate gender identities defined around consumption practices. In the next excerpt, Richard brings up the topic of fashion, while discussing how leather was relevant to him:

Extract 9 (Richard, humanities student)

> Richard: It does stand out to me as different from everything else. It does, it is singular for me... (...) I have two coats, and I'd find it very difficult to buy a coat that isn't leather. I don't know, I'd never know what to get if it's not leather, it feels like the only sort of thing I can get, as a coat... Does that make sense - I just...

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I:	So why is that?
Richard:	Well, I mean I'm not very, I'm not very, um, fashionable... You know, I don't have any idea about style, I never know what I'm doing, I just have one or two very small ideas that have been with me for a long time, and a leather coat or jacket's always been part of that. And so - it's blue jeans or whatever, you know, it's just the same stuff, year after year, without any idea of what else to wear. I've been pushed a little by my girlfriend to try other things that actually work, but it's not something I would've arrived at by myself. Yeah...

Richard associates his stated preference for leather with what he describes as a lack of fashion knowledge. The participant portrays himself as "not very fashionable" and constructs his ignorance in such matters as virtually complete, by using extreme case formulations ("I don't have *any idea* about style... I *never* know what I'm doing"). Any concern with appearance is downplayed, a state of affairs described as long established ("I just have one or two very small ideas that have been with me for a long time"). Richard describes himself as a fashion innocent, and his girlfriend as the mobilizing force behind sartorial decisions ("I've been pushed a little by my girlfriend"). Although the effect is constructed as perhaps unexpectedly positive ("things that actually work"), this development is depicted as not typical of the participant, but as foreign to his nature, and entirely a direct consequence of female influence ("it's not something I would've arrived at by myself").

Extract 10 (Richard, humanities student)

Richard:	Sometimes I'm wondering if it's a bit of a default for me... At some point, much earlier on, it was comfortable and felt right to wear, and I never really moved on, I never really explored anything else... (I: uh-huh). I never... Um... But I tend to do that a bit anyway with clothing, if I find something that - that sort of seems to fit right, and I quite like the look of, I'll just, I'll replace it with the same thing, when it's worn out... Again, I was, that's largely until I met my girlfriend (laughs). In the last several years the wardrobe's expanded very slowly, it's been pulled in new directions, but, um... but without that influence I'd tend to just get the same stuff over and again, cos I think it sort of works.

Here, again, the participant constructs his purported lack of interest in clothes as 'natural' ("a bit of a default for me"), and positions himself as mostly passive where dress issues are concerned, bowing to the persuasive powers of his female companion (see Craik, 1993). The

notion of fashion is implicitly contrasted with dressing for suitability and comfort ("it was comfortable and felt right to wear... seems to fit right"), although some recognition is given to the role of appearance ("I quite like the look of"). The respondent positions his girlfriend, again, as the main initiator with regard to clothing decisions ("that's largely until I met my girlfriend"). In relation to his own stance, Richard's phrasing suggests resistance to dress-related actions, as well as personal distancing ("the wardrobe's *expanded very slowly, it's been pulled* in new directions"). The participant reiterates his lack of interest in clothes and fashion, implying that any sartorial changes are due mainly, if not exclusively, to his girlfriend's influence: left on his own, Richard suggests, he would show no concern with trying on new things ("without that influence I'd tend to just get the same stuff over and again").

Richard's construction of his attitude to clothes and fashion is inscribed in the traditional representations of men as not fashionable, and of women as fashionable. This viewpoint is illustrated by Craik (1993), who proposed that "the rhetoric of men's fashion takes the form of a set of denials that include the following propositions: that there is no men's fashion; that men dress for fit and comfort, rather than for style; that women dress men and buy clothes for men men; [...] that men do not notice clothes; and that most men have not been duped into the endless pursuit of seasonal fads" (p.176). The understanding that women, more than men, are intrinsically interested in attire, is also proposed by Steve, in the extract below. There, the participant talks about his newly discovered interest in shoes following working in a shoe shop, and suggests that such an interest must be an experience typical for "girls":

Extract 11 (Steve, humanities student)

> Steve: ... *since I've worked in the shoe shop I'm much more conscious of people's shoes (I: uh-huh) I mean I think it's sort of what it must be like to be a girl all the time, cos in my experience girls do look at - sorry, terribly daring thing to say there - but I think girls tend to be much more acutely aware of what people are wearing on their feet, whereas I literally never looked below eye level really, until, you know - or neck level or whatever - for a, a very long time. But now, and particularly when I'm on the tube in London I'll just amuse myself guessing what everyone's got on (I: uh-huh) So I can recognize most of the major brands now [...] and it's like, "Nice trainers, ooh, yeah". And so, I look around and I'm more aware of it. Whereas I heard somewhere that the first thing (laughs) one of my, a girl I knew said to me that, um, I was*

wearing a really bad old pair of trainers but with a quite nice outfit, honestly, and the first thing this girl notices about a guy she meets is what kind of shoes he's wearing. And, so that's where I get the idea that women notice shoes. So I suppose that's made a, that's made a, that, and working in a shoe shop, and that kind of thing, has made me more aware of what shoes I'm wearing and what shoes other people are wearing.

In a similar manner to Richard, Steve describes preoccupation with clothing, in this case interest in shoes, as an intrinsic characteristic of female identity ("it's sort of what it must be like to be a girl all the time"). The reference to personal experience serves to increase the persuasiveness of the argument, by giving it an element of factuality. The participant indicates his awareness of the potential implications of his statement, which could be read as stereotypical or sexist, by interrupting his account with an apology ("sorry, terribly daring thing to say there"). The use of the term "daring", however, suggests that Steve regards his evaluation not necessarily as unacceptable, but rather as an issue open for debate. He amends his narrative by re-articulating the claim, in a softened form: previous certainty ("in my experience girls *do* look") is replaced by a more speculative assertion ("I think girls *tend to be* much more acutely aware"). Nevertheless, the description of girls' awareness as "acute" works to re-establish women's interest in shoes as much more intense than men's, exemplified here by the participant himself, and accentuated by an extreme case formulation ("whereas I *literally never looked* below eye level really").

Steve further acts to deflect possible challenges of sexism by constructing his opinion as originating from unspecified external sources ("I heard somewhere"). This line of argumentation appears to be considered unsatisfactory and is abandoned, with the participant attributing his standpoint to one particular occurrence, and one particular female source. The anecdote serves again to establish the credibility of Steve's initial assertions about women's interest in shoes, by presenting them now as being based on an actual event and, furthermore, as being directly acknowledged by a member of the category under discussion ("a girl I knew said to me that... the first thing [she] notices about a guy she meets is what kind of shoes he's wearing"). At the same time, the story serves as justification for generalizing the behaviour to apply to an entire category: "And, so that's where I get the idea that women notice shoes". Although Steve discusses his own noticing of shoes, his own interest is constructed as unproblematic, being the understandable consequence of having worked in a shoe shop. By contrast, there is no similar explanatory background for his girl friend's corresponding interest – an absence which contributes to the constitution of such a preoccupation as inherent to the 'female nature'.

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In the following fragment, Eric constructs the male-female dichotomy with regard to fashion around what he describes as physical qualities of leather:

Extract 12 (Eric, leather researcher)

I: *Do you think many people share your feelings about leather, how do you think other people see it?*

Eric: *Yeah, I thought about that, it's hard to say... I imagine, I think the feeling of ruggedness is probably quite shared. I think what other people might find... I think intellectually I can see the fashion side of it but I think probably it's more of a female thing, I'm probably being very sexist there, but I think the female probably is more fashion-conscious, I don't know... I don't want to be sexist, you know (laughs) (I: No). I mean, you know, I think, cos it plays a role in fashion, doesn't it, which is an important problem...*

I: *So do you think it's more important for women, than for men, to have something made of leather...*

Eric: *Possibly, possibly, yeah, I don't know... But clearly you could see it as a fashionable material, and that aspect... To me, it's more, it's durable. I mean, fashion, to me, is something that changes (yeah, yeah). In that sense, from one season to another. I don't think, I just don't think I'm quite so - I don't feel I have to go out and buy the latest new fashion, but... So I'm really saying, I like the enduring quality of leather, you know, more than any changing fashion type of thing.*

        [...]

I: *So it's difficult to say whether it's a fashion choice or a practical choice, it can be either.*

Eric: *Or a practical choice, yeah, you might say... I'm a bit of a conservative, in that I tend to... I'm sure you'll find other people who'll go for changing things. I don't like to change things too often, so, you know, if I buy a leather jacket I'll keep it for quite a long time, till it falls to pieces (laughs).*

When asked how he thinks his own views on leather fit in with other people's opinions, the participant begins by constructing this as a not immediately straightforward issue ("it's hard to say"). Referring to an earlier description of leather as "rugged", Eric opines that that image "is probably quite shared"; the participant does not follow this assertion with further

comments or qualifications, which suggests that he regards this portrayal as unproblematic and in no need of further explanation.

The respondent goes on to offer another angle on leather – as potentially fashionable: "I think what other people might find... I think intellectually I can see the fashion side of it but I think probably it's more of a female thing". This is a depiction from which Eric distances himself in a number of ways: firstly, by disowning this specific viewpoint through ascribing it to "other people", later specified as "female"; secondly, through a partial, qualified adoption of the idea – as an "intellectual", abstract exercise, one the participant has no personal investment in; and finally by trivializing this viewpoint through its description as a "thing". In this description of leather, the account taps into traditional gender representations, through the implicit contrast between women and fashion on one side, and men and ruggedness on another.

Through the repeated use of the term "female", which belongs to a biological discourse, the participant appears to construct women's perceived interest in fashion as an essential characteristic, one that is biologically intrinsic. This aspect is again implied a few lines later, through the reference to 'feelings' in relation to fashion ("I don't *feel* I have to go out and buy the latest new fashion"). This implication of emotionality (traditionally associated with femininity) forms a contrast with the previous references to rationality ("intellectually I can see the fashion side of it") - again, traditionally associated with masculinity - and reiterates Eric's distancing from the (suggested feminine) portrayal of leather as "fashionable".

The respondent signals his awareness that the direct association of women with fashion may be seen as problematic. More specifically, he acknowledges that his own statements may position him as prejudiced and open to accusations of stereotyping or sexism. To address this, Eric pre-empts allegations of sexism, by admitting that his words might be read as such ("I'm probably being very sexist there"), and by explicitly rejecting the "sexist" identity through a disclaimer ("I don't want to be sexist, you know"). The subsequent re-framing of leather as 'fashionable' as a state of fact ("it plays a role in fashion, doesn't it" and "clearly you could see it as a fashionable material") may be seen as a further attempt to deflect accusations of prejudice, by acknowledging what he previously described as women's perspective ("probably... more of a female thing") as a valid standpoint. At the same time, in contrast with the earlier minimization of the fashion issue, the participant now describes it as significant and worthy of attention ("an important problem").

The participant then reframes the argument by appealing to the material's physical characteristics, and constructing his appreciation of leather as based on the material's

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durability ("to me... it's durable"). The repeated use of pronouns constitutes this position as personal, with the implication that 'others' might see things differently. Additionally, the self-description as "a bit of a conservative" may also be seen as reinforcing the individuality of the standpoint, by constructing it as traditional, and ostensibly eccentric. In this way, the account may also address another potentially problematic interpretation, that of women as inconsistent (via associations with transient fashion). The extreme case formulation ("if I buy a leather jacket I'll keep it for quite a long time, till *it falls to pieces*") constructs the participant's position as individual, as well as humorously extreme, and thus undermines the potential questionability of previous assertions.

In the extract below, Steve also appears to align himself with notions of 'unfashionable men'. At the same time, however, he attempts to reconcile this image with the expressed interest in his appearance:

Extract 13 (Steve, humanities student):

> Steve: *I suppose, I mean at a very practical level, um, there's something that's quite unaffected about a leather jacket, as opposed to other... There's something unaffected but smart about a leather jacket, not that, unaffected but fashionable about it. In the sense that, you know... I've got, the two nice cloth jackets I've got, two nice fabric jackets, they both look like, like they're trying quite hard, if you see what I mean. So if I was, I'd wear those for like a night out clubbing or something - but wearing them to a, just to the bar or the pub, I'd feel a tiny bit overdressed. Just a tiny bit (I: Uh-huh). Whereas with a leather jacket I feel, I feel much more like, I wouldn't feel in danger of being overdressed, but I would feel, I would be, feel that I was, you know, well-dressed [inaud.], with nice shoes and a nice pair of jeans (I: Uh-huh). So in that sense I think, that is the gap that I see that a leather jacket is really filling, the, as a way to be both, as a way to make me feel fashionable but without me feeling conscious of being self-conscious, if you see what I mean. Sort of, without me feeling that I might appear affected.*

Steve starts with a reference to practicality, a feature traditionally associated with notions of masculinity. The reasons that follow, however, do not include mentions of hardwearing qualities or similar functional attributes of leather, and are mostly concerned with appearance. The participant describes the advantages of a leather jacket using a succession

of paired qualifications: "unaffected but smart", "unaffected but fashionable", "I wouldn't feel in danger of being overdressed, but I would feel... well-dressed".

The participant appears to orient himself towards traditional notions of masculinity – according to which men are supposed to show little or no interest in fashion and/or clothing (Steele, 1989; Frith & Gleeson, 2004). In this sense, while expressing an interest in appearance and fashion, Steve also plays it down. According to his account, leather's main quality is the lack of affectation - an image complying with conventional ideas of masculine appearance (Barnard, 2007). The participant balances attention shown to appearance with the preoccupation to conform to accepted standards. The former is illustrated by Steve's concern with the appropriateness of certain items of clothing to particular environments ("I'd wear those for like a night out clubbing or something - but wearing them to a, just to the bar or the pub, I'd feel a tiny bit overdressed") and attention to adequate combinations of items ("with nice shoes and a nice pair of jeans"). The latter is expressed by concern towards how he might be perceived by others ("without me feeling that I might appear affected"). The idea put forward is that a leather jacket permits Steve to appear stylish without apparently having made a deliberate effort in this sense. This allows the participant to position himself as aware of appearance and style requirements (reminiscent of the 'new man'), but also as conforming to conventional notions of masculinity – i.e., lacking interest in fashion matters.

In the fragments discussed above, male participants manage and negotiate the relation between masculinity and fashion, adopting and/or challenging established stereotypes. There, talk about leather was used to convey the idea of difference between masculine and feminine identities on the basis of fashion-related preoccupations, with narratives constructing a notion of femininity as essentially fashion-oriented. This construction echoes conventional understandings of interest in clothing as mainly associated with the display of the female body, and as a "technique of femininity" (Craik, 1993). In this sense, fashion has been seen as not only as 'normal' part of the female domain, but also as an inherent feature of the female character, "a natural weakness of women, something they could not help" (Hollander, 1980, p. 360). By contrast, the fragments below illustrate how some of the women participants used the opportunity to talk about leather in order to challenge the conventional association between femininity and fashion.

In the next extract, Catherine engages in a critical comparison of men's and women's clothing, and deplores the perceived lack of 'sensibility' in women's shoes:

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Extract 14 (Catherine, leather technician)

Catherine: ... we all have to wear our shoes in, don't we? I find it very annoying that men seem to be able to try on shoes and away they walk! But women, I know I try on so many pairs of shoes to find one that are actually comfortable, cos I've got quite narrow feet, and yet my husband will go in and just literally wear the pair of boots... I mean it's the same with clothes, I think, as well, they don't seem to have the difference in sizes that we do! [...] They don't have that problem at all, do they? (laughs) Well they're a sensible shape, men's shoes, aren't they, they don't go with fashion the way that women's shoes do.

In contrasting men's and women's shoes, Catherine concludes that the former are more adequate, as a result of not "go[ing] with fashion the way that women's shoes do". Here, being fashionable is understood as problematic and undesirable, by being not "sensible", and ignoring issues of comfort and practicality. In this sense, finding adequate women's footwear is constituted as complicated, time consuming and frustrating ("I try on so many pairs... to find one that are actually comfortable"). To illustrate her viewpoint, the participant describes men's shoes as not posing any problems for the wearer ("men... try on shoes and away they walk!"); by comparison, women's footwear, portrayed as influenced by fashion trends, is depicted as uncomfortable and in need of getting used to, in order to fit ("we all have to wear our shoes in, don't we?"). The use of the collective "we all" constitutes this experience as shared and common to women in general. Unlike in previous male participants' accounts, where women were portrayed as fashion experts, happy to offer advice and assistance to men who would be otherwise oblivious of such matters, Catherine offers here a construction of women as 'victims' of fashion. By implication, the pursuit of fashion is depicted as disadvantageous and unreasonable.

In the extract below, Catherine discusses the potential trade-off between looks and comfort. In opposition, again, to traditional views of women as ready to 'suffer' for the sake of style, Catherine's account specifically rejects this option:

Extract 15 (Catherine, leather technician)

I: So do you think that's [leather's] main quality, comfort?
Catherine: Comfort, yes... I know there's style, but I, personally, I'm a comfort... and obviously I like them to be nice, but I wouldn't buy an

*uncomfortable pair of shoes because I thought they looked good. I might
have done many years ago but I wouldn't now (laughs)... As I say, you
get to be practical in life, and I wouldn't go for style over comfort. I say
that but I don't think that.... No, the only time I bought a pair of boots
that... were a bit more stylish than comfortable was when my husband
decided that I would like that pair. And I think eventually I got a
different pair which I wear most of the time now (laughs). So, perhaps
you shouldn't listen to your husband if he's got different ideas, cos he
doesn't have to wear them, you see...*

Catherine acknowledges style as a consideration in buying choices, but she distances herself
from this course of action, by presenting it as an abstract notion, not affecting her directly
("I know there's style"). By contrast, the idea of comfort is more readily owned ("I,
personally, I'm a comfort..."). Thus, the respondent positions herself again outside traditional
views of femininity as concerned with looks and fashion. However, unlike in the previous
extract, the participant herself does not make references to women as a category, nor does
she use the collective "we", when expressing the preference for comfort over style; in this
sense, she does not appear to challenge the stereotypes, but rather to position herself as an
exception ("I, personally"), with the implication that this stance may not be widely shared.

In a reversed scenario of men being influenced by women in terms of buying choices,
Catherine narrates a situation when she did in fact buy a pair of uncomfortable but stylish
shoes, on the advice of her husband. She distances herself from that decision, by
constructing it as not her choice ("my husband decided"). Resistance against the
'fashionable' identity takes here the form of circumventing the situation, through buying and
wearing a different, comfortable pair of shoes, and also by advocating subversion ("So,
perhaps you shouldn't listen to your husband if he's got different ideas...").

In Catherine's account, the capacity or willingness to resist the feminine 'fashionable'
identity is constructed as a product of maturity. Wearing uncomfortable shoes is something
she "might have done many years ago but... wouldn't now... you get to be practical in life...".
In this respect, preoccupation with fashion is portrayed as connected, not necessarily with
gender, but with absence of maturity and less practical priorities.

Extract 16 (Michelle, restoration specialist; Joanne, restoration specialist)

| Michelle: | *I say I like leather shoes, but I mean, leather shoes, not... [inaudible]* |
| Joanne: | *Yeah, yeah...* |

| Michelle: | No, I'm not talking about little girlie shoes, I mean, leathery shoes, <u>big leather shoes!</u> Shoes! (puts foot on table, all laugh) |
| Michelle: | So when I say shoes and handbags, I don't mean [high-pitched voice] "shoes and handbags"... not girlie things, but things that can stand... |

In this extract, Michelle emphasizes her preference for practical, hardwearing qualities in footwear. The participant describes what she regards as adequate shoes as "big", and "things that can stand [heavy use]". Again, the requirement is for functionality over aesthetics. Similarly with Catherine's narrative, notions of 'femininity' in relation to footwear are portrayed as having negative connotations – here suggesting fragility and lack of durability. The description of such items as "little girlie" also echoes Catherine's position outlined above, whereby giving priority to appearance over pragmatic considerations is associated with lack of maturity.

The analyses above illustrate some of the ways in which participants' accounts used consumer choices, specifically related to leather objects, to construct belonging to particular social and cultural categories, and to manage ascription of various characteristics (such as fashion sense and concern with appearance) conventionally or stereotypically connected to such categories. In the following section I will examine how respondents constructed ethical identities in addressing potential issues around the production and consumption of leather.

8.3 Ethical consumers

As discussed more extensively in Chapter 3, it has been posited that consumer choices can be used to display adherence to moral values, and to indicate alignment with or distancing from particular ideological positions (Tallontire et al., 2001; Barnett et al., 2005; Barnett, Cloke, Clarke & Malpass, 2005; Newholm, 2005; Clarke et al., 2007). With ever more attention directed towards the link between consumption practices and multiple ethical and environmental implications and consequences (Halkier, 1999; Connolly & Prothero, 2003, 2008; Belk et al., 2005; Kurz et al., 2005), the notion of ethical or sustainable consumption constitutes an element increasingly taken into consideration when accounting for one's purchasing choices.

In the analysis below I examine three themes identified in participants' discussion of their consumer decisions from an ethical standpoint. These are: *A question of knowledge*; *A matter of choice*; and *A balancing act*. Each theme will be considered in turn.

8.3.1 A question of knowledge

In the following excerpts, participants describe having relevant information about the origin of goods, or about the circumstances of production, as an important element influencing their decision to buy.

For Joanne, this type of knowledge is depicted as information about the wellbeing (or lack thereof) of animals whose skins are being used in making leather. The participant, who described herself as vegetarian, discusses with her colleague, Michelle, the rationale behind accepting (in terms of using or wearing) certain leather items:

Extract 17 (Joanne, restoration specialist; Michelle, restoration specialist)

> Joanne: I think it's your level of knowledge, because I wouldn't wear leather if it was, it's the way that the animals are killed that I don't like, and how they're killed and - it's cruel. And the way they're transported, the lot of it... So, I'd sort of like to know where the leather comes from, but then I wouldn't want, you know, Dolly the sheep and wear <u>her</u>. But then the fact that I have, I acquired a deerskin I know it came from a deer park, where they cull them, where the gamekeeper killed it humanely himself, and skinned it, and I really don't have much of a problem with that. [...] So I, it's your level of knowledge, I don't want to know it intimately! (all laugh)
>
> Michelle: Just as long as it was happy!
>
> Joanne: Yeah, I don't want to know its name, I just want to know that it was OK (laughs)

In this account, Joanne describes wearing leather as acceptable from the viewpoint of a vegetarian, as long as the welfare of animals is observed. The participant thus offers a construction of vegetarianism in terms of protest against inhumane treatment of animals. The focus of concern is not on the fact of animals being killed for meat, but on the surrounding circumstances: "it's the way that the animals are killed that I don't like, and how they're killed and - it's cruel. And the way they're transported, the lot of it". The three part list conveys a dramatic picture of conditions experienced by animals, and serves to exemplify and substantiate the characterisation of such conditions as cruel. Within this narrative, as long as animals benefit from what Joanne considers humane treatment, wearing leather is not seen as conflicting with her principles.

This respondent recounts, by way of illustration, a situation she constructs as acceptable, concerning the use of deer skins. The difference which makes this context tolerable lies in the animals' environment: the deer park is depicted as the nearest alternative to wildlife's ideal habitat. The way the culling of deer is represented ("the gamekeeper killed it humanely himself"), suggests that the participant regards a closer relation with the animals as more acceptable than the impersonal one hinted at in the previous description ("the way they're transported, the lot of it").

With knowledge constructed as an essential element in establishing acceptability of leather, a further differentiation is made, related to the amount of information necessary when making a buying decision. According to Joanne, knowing about the conditions in which animals are reared (with factory farming considered intolerable) is a prerequisite to making a decision. At the same time, acquiring more detailed, intimate knowledge, is deemed unnecessary and ultimately undesirable: "I'd sort of like to know where the leather comes from, but then I wouldn't want, you know, Dolly the sheep and wear her... I don't want to know its name, I just want to know that it was OK (laughs)". Joanne appears to adopt her colleague's jocular suggestion as to the kind of information she needs in order to accept wearing leather ("Just as long as it was happy!"). The laughter following the statement "I just want to know that it was OK" suggests a certain distancing from this stance, by framing it as humorous. A possible explanation may be that the participant, while stating her principles, wants to avoid her position being seen as too inflexible or extreme.

In the next excerpt, Richard expresses a similar need for information, to help ensure that his consumer choices are ethical:

Extract 18 (Richard, humanities student)

Richard: I actually think, and I have done for a number of years, about where my food comes from. And - it does bother me, I do try, and I have for quite a long time, tried to get as ethical food as I can. And, you know, as soon as you kind of find out something new, and learn something new, then OK, well I don't think that's ethical, so I'll buy something from somewhere else. [...] You know, as I find the information, as it comes to me, then I will make adjustments. And I have quietly wondered, where exactly is all the leather coming from? (I: uh-huh) Cos the thing is I don't really know. I mean I'm assuming there must be some cooperation with the food industry, that it's not completely separate cows, it must be that. Is, is the respect being shown, is the question. Are we talking

about ethical farming or, or intense farming? And that's something that I actually don't know about. Um... Truthfully it's something I would like to know about, cos it - I think it would actually have an effect on me eventually [...] If it did come to a point where there was a, was a, you know, stories that a genuinely unethical process is involved in getting this leather, it's something I would rethink, I would, and eventually probably stop doing it, or I'd be looking for the ethical versions, if they existed. That would, that would actually matter to me, I don't, um, I can't, I can't justify something to myself if I know the truth behind it, I can't, it catches up with me, so... (laughs) (I: Yeah) So I have to respond to it, and adjust.

Similarly with Joanne, Richard emphasizes the importance of knowledge, as essential in ensuring a principled character to his purchasing decisions. The participant constructs his preoccupation with ethically sourced food as long-standing ("I have done for a number of years... for quite a long time") and as a matter of personal concern ("it does bother me"), thereby positioning himself as aware of and committed to ethical values. Richard describes consumer behaviour as directly influenced by information received, and through the shift from 'I' to 'you' constitutes it as a common, shared occurrence ("as soon as you kind of find out something new, and learn something new..."). The reverting to 'I' for the rest of the excerpt suggests identification with the positions discussed.

The role of information is constituted as crucial through a series of rhetorical questions, which illustrate the kind of ethical queries the respondent is aware of: "where exactly is all the leather coming from?... I don't really know... Are we talking about ethical farming or, or intense farming?... that's something that I actually don't know about". In the absence of specific information, the participant is left to make assumptions ("I'm assuming there must be some cooperation with the food industry"). Richard presents his stance in the form of a dialogue with self; together with the presuppositions mentioned, this serves to indicate a genuine concern with ethical matters, defined here in terms of animal welfare, as well as openness to address such issues. The account underscores rhetorically Richard's willingness and determination to act on the information received, with the three-part list outlining possible courses of action in order to eliminate ethical doubts ("I would rethink... I would... probably stop doing it... I'd be looking for ethical versions").

Knowledge of ethical issues is described as affecting the respondent emotionally ("it does bother me", "it would have an effect on me", "would actually matter to me"). At the same time, the decision to deal with the matter is constructed as rational, considered, based on

analysis of evidence ("as I find the information", "stories that a genuinely unethical process is involved"). Overall, the need to consume ethically is portrayed as a moral, inescapable obligation ("I can't justify something to myself if I know the truth behind it... I have to respond").

In the two accounts above, the participants' reference to the need for information resonates with the consequentialist ethics approaches applied in some ethical consumption campaigns (Barnett et al., 2005a). In this sense, ethical behaviour is seen as shaped and guided by relevant knowledge and advice. In accordance with this notion, both Richard and Joanne emphasize the importance of knowing about the conditions in which goods they use and consume are produced, and argue that such awareness is an essential requirement for ethical action.

In the following examples, participants construct ethical consumer practices as an outcome of personal convictions and values.

8.3.2 A matter of choice

In the fragment below, Joanne talks about her reaction when, as a vegetarian, she is challenged about using leather objects:

Extract 19 (Joanne, restoration specialist; Michelle, restoration specialist)

Joanne: It's my opinion, isn't it, I mean it's not what I say to people when they ask me about leather. I mean my thing is how the animals are treated, so I started the chop, like you say, it's a by-product, I choose not to eat it, so I think if it's less being killed, so it's a bit less by-product, d'you know what I mean? That's where I come from.

Michelle: Yeah

Joanne: And if it's right or if it's wrong it's how's my conscience, that's the way I live in the world, whatever...

The above account frames the choice of leather as a personal decision and a matter of conscience. The participant uses an individualistic discourse, whereby lifestyle choices are represented as private issues, and therefore outside the scope of others' scrutiny. Joanne emphasizes ownership of her position, and reinforces her entitlement to it through an implicit request for validation ("It's my opinion, isn't it"). Despite the inference that justifications are not necessary, she gives an explanatory account of her standpoint, albeit

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playing down the significance of doing so through the use of the colloquialism "I started the chop". Joanne explains her vegetarian stance as a protest against "how the animals are treated" and, again, as a personal choice ("I choose not to eat it"). Any potential moral judgements coming from others ("And if it's right or if it's wrong") are countered by reiteration of the individual's right to freedom of opinion, followed by the implicit suggestion that there is no real need for further justification ("it's how's my conscience, that's the way I live in the world, whatever"). Throughout the account, the respondent oscillates between two positions: one, that of an independently thinking individual who does not need to account for her life decisions; and a second one, that of a person in possession of ethical values, making a stand for a particular conviction (here, the welfare of animals).

In the following excerpt, Steve, who also described himself a vegetarian, constructs his wearing leather as potentially dilemmatic in terms of his "conscience":

Extract 20 (Steve, humanities student)

> Steve: I suppose, I think probably the best way I'm gonna find to salve my
> conscience is to find vintage leather stuff. Cos obviously a vintage leather
> jacket looks so good anyway! Leather is one item of clothing actually that
> really does look good when it's a little bit aged, and it's got a little bit worn.
> [...]
> I suppose I would've said, yeah, it's possible to get by with just, without
> leather shoes or something out of leather, or I would have said, yeah, but I
> mean, I'd have to completely alter my life in all these ways. And then I met
> someone who hadn't particularly altered their life in many ways and just made
> a few subtle purchasing decisions and seemed to avoid the problem
> altogether.

Here, the answer to a perceived ethical dilemma is constructed in terms of alternative consumer actions (Connolly & Prothero, 2003). Steve suggests that, from a vegetarian's point of view, the use of leather may appear questionable, and thus he positions himself as ethically conscious. He proposes that vintage leather may represent an adequate solution to this dilemma; the implication may be that vintage leather, by virtue of its age, is situated outside relatively recent concerns about animal welfare, and is thus constituted as unproblematic. In this way, buying old leather is described as advantageous from two points of view: (a) as fitting from a moral perspective ("the best way I'm gonna find to salve my conscience"); and (b), as having the added benefit of aesthetic value ("really does look good when it's a little bit aged").

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Discussing a hypothetical situation where he would not wear any leather items, Steve argues that, while it is a potentially acceptable scenario ("it's possible to get by without leather shoes or something out of leather"), the effects would be disproportionate ("but... I'd have to completely alter my life in all these ways"). Here, leather, as a consumer object, is constructed as an essential component of lifestyle. The participant does not expand upon the nature of the implied consequences, but the construction "all these ways" serves to indicate the considerable scope of such changes, and to suggest that they are, therefore, inconvenient and undesirable. The solution to the dilemma of being faithful to one's principles as opposed to perceived great discomfort is seen, again, as lying in a different kind of consumer choices, "a few subtle purchasing decisions"; the latter are depicted as a satisfactory answer to the participant's implied misgivings, as they permit the circumventing of the purported predicament ("seemed to avoid the problem altogether").

In the previous extract, Joanne constructed the notion of choice in terms of individual right to freedom of thought, and declared herself ready to accept the consequences of her decisions. Whereas her position was mainly one of attack, Steve's approach in the fragment above has a more defensive quality. He adopts a utilitarian stance, by attempting to evaluate the practical effects of strict adherence to principles. For Steve, the matter of choice is framed not ideologically, in terms of individual rights, but as a pragmatic way to avoid the conflict perceived to exist between beliefs and actual behaviour. The choice argument, used by both participants in dealing with a dilemmatic situation, works rhetorically in a number of ways: it displays their awareness of a possible ethical/ideological conflict; it allows them to re-frame or avoid the dilemma by locating it into a wider philosophical context; and it constitutes them as independent-minded, within an individualistic discourse.

In the following two extracts, participants construct ethical decision-making as the result of rational evaluation and careful weighing-up of a variety of factors.

8.3.3 A balancing act

In the fragment below, Steve discusses how his choice to wear leather needs to be explained and defended in the face of challenges from people who are aware of his vegetarianism:

Extract 21 (Steve, humanities student)

> Steve: [...] *people always point out, like, see, it's the kind of thing I have to get into arguments about, my vegetarianism, but they always say, "Yeah, but, you know, at the end of the day you're wearing leather shoes", and I'm like, "All right, fair enough, yeah, that's right". I mean I know I can't really defend that, but at the same time I do feel that it's slightly different, just because I get so much pleasure from a leather item, like... Obviously I'm still subordinating the interests of an animal to my interests - well, I do that all the time in, you know, via using, via, for example, the effects of all my actions on the environment, or whatever. But it's obviously a very direct way of subordinating another creature's interests to your own. But at the same time I do feel that I'm more justified in doing that than having just a KFC bucket, you know what I mean. A KFC bucket, I'm subordinating the interests of lots of animals for twenty minutes satisfaction of a momentary desire or whatever, whereas with a leather jacket I, I'm having an item that I will love and cherish and develop a relationship with for years. And I do feel that does make a difference in a sense. Not, not a, a qualitative difference, but a quantitative difference, so...*

Steve describes his situation - that of a vegetarian wearing leather - as in need of permanent justification, by means of an extreme case formulation ("people always point out... they always say..."). By acknowledging such challenges as reasonable and indisputable, the participant positions himself as rational and open-minded, and as aware of the potentially dilemmatic character of his stance.

Steve inoculates against potential challenges by a ready admission of the incongruity of his actions ("All right, fair enough, yeah, that's right") and by constructing his position as untenable ("I know I can't really defend that"). Thus, the respondent pre-empts criticism by appearing to accept it unconditionally, and by constructing his standpoint as ultimately indefensible. Having positioned himself as reasonable and unbiased, Steve goes on to re-frame the issue under debate: "I do feel that it's slightly different, just because I get so much pleasure from a leather item". The participant shifts the focus from the apparent ideological dilemma (Billig, Condor, Edwards & Gane, 1988) to his personal feelings, and to the sensation of fulfilment that leather may offer. Again, Steve forestalls possible ethics-related counter-arguments by accepting them as indisputable, and thus rendering them redundant: "Obviously I'm still subordinating the interests of an animal to my interests". He

positions himself as ethically aware, by acknowledging not only that his wearing of leather may involve animal suffering, but also by proposing that everything he does as part of daily life might have negative ecological effects. The reference to environmental consequences works in two ways: on the one hand, it constitutes such impact as inevitable, by being inextricably linked to existence itself ("I do that all the time... via... the effects of all my actions"); on the other, it constructs the implications of wearing leather as trivial by comparison. In the light of this depiction, wearing leather, by its relative insignificance, becomes an acceptable behaviour.

Having established the comparative harmlessness of using leather in the bigger picture, the participant counters further potential objections, this time concerning the directness of action. Earlier depictions of environmental effects as indirect and inevitable, linked with existence in general, served to relativize the importance of wearing leather. By contrast, this latter act is here pre-emptively recognized as selfish and avoidable ("a very direct way of subordinating another creature's interests to your own"). Once again, through the repetition of "obviously", Steve constructs such an argument as commonsensical, and implies that he would not attempt to challenge it. The respondent thus reiterates his ethical orientation, by positioning himself as alert to moral issues and thereby inoculating against any criticism from this perspective. While constructing the dilemma as "not... a qualitative difference, but a quantitative difference", the participant redefines once more the criteria for ethical acceptability, this time in terms of personal happiness: the "twenty minutes satisfaction of a momentary desire" derived from eating a fast food chicken meal is contrasted with the long-term contentment of owning a leather jacket. The three-part list used to describe Steve's feelings for his jacket ("an item that I will love and cherish and develop a relationship with for years") constructs wearing leather as a close, intimate, long-lasting relation. The argument becomes located in humanistic discourse, whereby the leather jacket is depicted as an element contributing to the participant's personal wellbeing and fulfilment.

Throughout this account, Steve makes clear his awareness of potential ethical challenges to his standpoint, acknowledging the apparent contradiction between declared vegetarianism and the wearing of animal skins. By referring to his own contentment as a key factor in the justification of his stance, the respondent's account resonates with notions of 'virtue ethics' (Barnett et al., 2005a), which conceptualize ethical behaviour as involving not only the following of moral rules and the consideration of outcomes, but, equally importantly, the achievement of individual satisfaction and happiness.

In the following extract, Frank also considers leather from various angles, and compares different arguments pertaining to ethical, ecological and functional standpoints before drawing a conclusion:

Extract 22 (Frank, health professional)

Frank: I see it [leather] as a very practical product... But I appreciate that it has its costs! The costs of the animals that lived in the skins before I got to them... One hopes that they are killed humanely... There are costs I've only recently really been made aware of, and that's like the processing, to actually convert a hide to leather. Is - quite noxious chemicals to kill off the bacteria in there, and remove, strip off the hairs and all the rest, and all of these are by-products that have got to be disposed of somehow, somewhere, in some land, not necessarily in your [inaudible], probably in the originating country. So there are actually hidden costs to leather, so... But I balance the, the benefits of the material, the usefulness of the material against the costs, but also regard it as a renewable resource. In the same way that the wind is renewable, well, so is a cow, we can breed another one given enough grass, um, or sheep, or whatever. And given that we're growing the animals for food anyway, it would be stupid to throw away this by-product of the food industry. So I see it as a renewable resource, um, but I appreciate it's not the most efficient way of using a field of grass. Cos a field of corn would actually feed more people, you know, than a field of grass, you know, you only get, you know, half a dozen cows on it, whereas you could feed fifty-odd people with corn. So in some regards the food is a luxury item for the West, but we live on it well, er, too well! (laughs). So, OK, it's a renewable resource, but it has its costs for the environment, it has its costs regarding the world staying hungry... But, in some regards, you know, the biggest problem for this planet is there are too many people, we breed like rabbits particularly where we can't afford to, like Africa. You know, Europe has its problem with its aging population cos we're not breeding fast enough, China's got its solution with the one child per family, Africa, it's - an epidemic! So for all the famines, all the floods, um, and all the wars in Africa, they are still breeding like rabbits and stripping the land bare, to the grass roots. Hmm! So, OK, so leather takes land resource, and it feeds the West. Gives some things back, difficult to weigh it up exactly. But on balance I

*think I prefer to wear leather, than something derived from oil, which is
a one-off process and is very difficult to recycle. (...) OK, I've actually
had a hat that's been made from PET plastic bottles in the past, but
we're only just in infancy with that lot! And so, you know, I think, you
know, animal products can be re-grown, whereas oil products can't be,
and it's gonna be increasingly valuable to sort of conserve oil, I think.*

In the account above, Frank approaches the topic of leather in terms of advantages and
disadvantages, and puts forward an argument structured as a cost-benefits analysis. The
participant taps into economic, business and technical discourses ("renewable resource",
"processing", "convert a hide to leather", "noxious chemicals to kill off the bacteria and
remove... the hairs"). This choice of vocabulary, together with the two-way/pros and cons
structure of the argument, positions Frank as a rational and informed individual, who takes
into account a variety of sources of information and makes decisions based on careful
examination of all factors involved. At the same time, the respondent constructs himself as
an ethically minded person, by indicating his awareness of the animals from which leather
originates, and expressing an interest in their welfare ("one hopes they are killed
humanely"). The use of the impersonal pronoun "one" may suggest that this expectation is a
shared, collective concern; alternatively, it may also function to create a certain distancing,
which is reinforced by the passive construction employed when mentioning the issue of
waste disposal ("by-products that have got to be disposed of"). In the latter example, the
distancing is also expressed in geographical terms, whose vagueness ("somewhere, in some
land... probably in the originating country") works to constitute this stage of leather making
as 'someone else's problem', and thereby to diminish its relevance or importance.

Initially, Frank's evaluation of leather juxtaposes apparently pragmatic uses ("the benefits...
the usefulness of the material") alongside ethical and environmental "costs". The
description of the material as a "renewable resource" can be seen as coming to redress the
balance with regard to ethical considerations. The term "renewable" brings it into the 'green'
category of 'sustainable' resources, and works to counterbalance the portrayed ecological
cost with a related ecological gain. Leather's incorporation into the "renewable" category is
made through a direct comparison, which also assimilates the material with its source: "In
the same way that the wind is renewable... so is a cow". By being equated with inanimate,
natural phenomena, animals are objectified and constructed as disposable economic
resources. This construction is reiterated in the next sentence: "given that we're growing the
animals for food anyway, it would be stupid to throw away this by-product of the food
industry". Here, the participant uses a utilitarian discourse of efficiency and frames the issue
again in economic terms, with the advantage of renewability set against the drawback of

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inefficiency: "not the most efficient way of using a field of grass". The parallel is drawn in both quantitative and qualitative terms, in terms of both numbers and species potentially sustained by "a field of grass". By juxtaposing the "feed[ing of] fifty-odd people with corn" and "half a dozen cows", the respondent appears to problematize the growth of animals for food, as opposed to a vegetarian diet.

This picture presents the participant with a further dilemma, that of reconciling the perceived benefits of leather (i.e. practicality and best use of a "renewable resource") with the ethical questions around food sufficiency from animal or vegetal sources. The contrast here is between "the West" and "the world staying hungry". The former is portrayed as excessive in its consumption of food, with the comment "we live on it... too well" appearing to refer to what has been termed 'the obesity crisis' in the 'Western world' (Saguy & Almeling, 2008; Rail, Holmes & Murray, 2010). The account now poses a luxury vs. necessity dilemma for Western consumers, in contrast to the issue of inadequate nutrition elsewhere. Frank attempts to avoid this dilemma, by re-framing the issue in different terms. He constitutes food deprivation as being, in fact, the result of overpopulation, and not of excessive consumption: "but... the biggest problem for this planet is there are too many people". This is a construction which problematizes consumption with regard to the numbers of people engaging in it, rather than to consumer practices themselves (Connolly & Prothero, 2003); at the same time, it places the responsibility for food shortages onto those who are most affected by it, with Africa portrayed as ultimately accountable for its own poverty. The argument is set, again, in terms of rationality, or rather lack thereof. In this sense, African people are described as irrational on two levels: firstly, from an economic perspective, where reproduction is described in terms of affordability ("where we can't afford to, like Africa"); secondly, through a dehumanizing construction ("breeding like rabbits"), whereby humans are depicted as instinct-driven animals, who, by their actions, risk destroying their environment ("stripping the land bare, to the grass roots"). The account thus functions to shift the focus from the implications of consumer practices in the developed world to the actions of those suffering deprivation, and portrays them as directly responsible and to blame for their situation.

In attempting to draw a line to summarize his argument, Frank constructs the issue again in terms of pros and cons, and concludes that the result appears uncertain ("difficult to weigh it up exactly"). As a deciding factor, the participant offers another ethically-oriented reason, related to leather's perceived recycling potential: "on balance I think I prefer to wear leather, than something derived from oil, which is... very difficult to recycle". Here, again, the 'green' solution is seen as related to recycling and management of waste, and not with dealing with consumption itself (Connolly & Prothero, 2003). By giving the example of his

hat "made from PET plastic bottles", Frank asserts his entitlement to discuss green issues: his avowed direct engagement in green activities reiterates his initial position as ethically oriented. The final dilemma is posed again on the grounds of sustainability of resources, considered to provide the crucial argument: "animal products can be re-grown, whereas oil products can't be, and it's gonna be increasingly valuable to sort of conserve oil". By this conclusion, the participant emphasizes his ethical identity by positioning himself ultimately as a conservationist. At the same time, this final summing-up is given weight by appearing as a matter of common sense, the result of a reasoned and thorough evaluation of a multitude of elements and aspects (Gill, 1996).

8.4 Summary

This chapter explored representations of leather as an object of consumption. The narratives identified here constructed leather items as indicative of personal and social identities, and portrayed them as indicators of professional belonging and (sub)cultural affiliation. Additionally, in their descriptions of leather-related consumption choices, participants produced and negotiated understandings of gender, particularly in connection with dress and fashion, proposing and/or resisting conventional representations of women as fashionable and men as less concerned with clothes and appearance. Finally, the chapter identified and examined narratives that constructed and defined ethical consumption in relation to leather, with particular emphasis on animal welfare, but also in connection with green discourses of renewability and sustainability.

In the next chapter I will bring together the principal theoretical, methodological and practical implications of the thesis. To achieve this, I will revisit briefly the theoretical arguments, provide an overview of the analytic chapters and discuss the findings in relation to the aims and objectives of the research.

Chapter 9: Conclusion

The physical forms taken by leather and the meanings and symbols potentially associated with them cover a wide and diverse range. During the research, participants alluded, on numerous occasions, to the difficulty of arriving at a unified or all-encompassing set of opinions on the topic, with varied understandings becoming more or less prominent or relevant depending on contexts and standpoints. Throughout this thesis, I have endeavoured to explore the ways in which this versatile material substance is understood, related to, constructed and represented in everyday life. In doing so, I identified and mapped out patterns of such representations, and I examined how these accounts and constructions incorporate and (re)produce cultural and social categories and discourses, and are used to adopt, resist or negotiate personal and social identities.

This chapter aims to provide a summary of my research and to explore the main theoretical, methodological and practical implications of this thesis. I will conclude by exploring potential avenues for future studies.

9.1 Revisiting the research context

As noted above, the research aim of this thesis has been an exploration of subjective experiences around a material substance, leather and objects made out of leather. More specifically, returning to the aims and objectives outlined in the introductory chapter, the present thesis has been concerned with:

- an identification of general patterns across representations and understandings of leather and leather objects;
- an exploration of the symbols and meanings associated with leather and an inquiry into their relevance to the wider social and cultural environment;
- an examination of processes of identity construction around leather, in professional and consumer contexts.

In this regard, the subject-matter itself constitutes one of the features that make the current research innovative: while the physical, chemical and mechanical properties of leather have been extensively investigated for a variety of industrial and manufacturing purposes and applications, the experiential qualities of leather, the ways in which it is represented and related to by people in everyday life, have not been so far systematically examined. Indeed,

during my literature review, I was unable to identify any studies engaging in an in-depth qualitative analysis of understandings related to a material substance. In attempting to clarify the boundaries of my research, I conceptualized leather as a topic of inquiry in the following ways:

- as a concrete, material object, with a wide range of shapes and uses;
- as a consumer item, produced, bought and used in everyday contexts;
- as a complex entity, associated with a range of economic, social, cultural and ideological issues, arising from its animal origins and the conditions of its production.

In the following sections I will engage in an overview of the chapters in the thesis. In doing so, I will endeavour to integrate the empirical findings with the theoretical arguments that have framed the research.

9.2 Summary of arguments

I began the thesis by elucidating my own engagement with leather. In attempting to identify and reflect upon the ways in which my background and assumptions have impacted on the form and content of the research, I was faced with the transdisciplinarity required for this study. Material culture and anthropological approaches have traditionally focused on the situated uses and cultural values of material objects. In this respect, their insights were useful in looking at leather - a potentially rich source of meaning due to its origins, longevity, diversity and ubiquity. The concern of cultural studies with the roles and influence in society of popular culture and of various forms of cultural practices helped cast light on the contexts in which leather is used. Sociological perspectives helped the analysis of leather as an object of consumption, and some of the wider political and social circumstances in which various consumer activities take place. Certain philosophical approaches were at the basis of questions about the (kinds of) morality that certain acts and behaviours around leather engender or impose. Finally, it should be stressed, from psychology, investigations into identity issues enabled an exploration of the ways in which diverse identities become relevant, are endorsed or rejected in participants' talk about leather, and of some of the implications arising from such positionings.

The theoretical background to the empirical studies was provided in Chapters 2 and 3. The former explored some of the conceptualizations of the relationships between material objects and human society, while Chapter 3, discussed below, focuses on theoretical notions of identity. Threaded through Chapter 2 was a discussion of how both functional and symbolic elements were at the basis of the relationships mentioned above. I noted that, in

the last decades, theorists have increasingly highlighted the importance of the sign value of objects – the meanings attached to and projected by material things. This symbolic value may be seen to reflect, in different circumstances, social position, (sub)cultural allegiance, exclusion or belonging to categories and groups, as well as moral or ethical qualities. Within this research, such arguments were reflected by constructions of leather as indicators of professional identity and of subcultural (for example, punk rock) membership (Chapter 8). The choice of leather objects, in turn, was constituted in many cases as suggestive of certain personal characteristics. For example, participants' comments in Chapters 5 and 6 often described leather by making reference to the character of its owners or wearers (e.g. "can look quite cheap and tasteless" (Factor S4, Chapter 5); "it expresses selfishness" (Factor S5, Chapter 5); "personally I like to be a bit different" (Factor W3, Chapter 6)). Similarly, material possessions might be considered as indicative of economic standing. The Q study in Chapter 5 provides a few instances of this kind, whereby participants make judgements of financial worth with relation to particular leather objects ("youths can't afford £1500 for a leather suite!" and "you don't see an 18 year old with an expensive leather sofa"). Such constructions can thus be read as tapping into and putting forward particular understandings of young people's economic and social standing.

The discussion in Chapter 2 also highlighted the ways in which material things are inextricably connected with social, historical and cultural developments, and how they might support and perpetuate particular ways of life and thinking, including representations of social roles and categories (McCracken, 1988; Miles, 1998; Tilley, 2006). Such depictions are illustrated in Chapters 5 and 6, where constructions of leather through Q methodology put forward particular gender representations. For example, Factor S2a offered a traditional portrayal of masculinity as powerful, active and dominant, reminiscent of popular culture imagery. Correspondingly, Factor S2b provided a traditional image of femininity, one associated with elegance, creativity and style, and also with eroticism, seduction and sensuality. In these instances, material objects/leather could be seen to reproduce established ways of thinking and representing the social world. Chapter 2 also noted how material things can be used to indicate change, or subversion of conventions and customs. Returning to gender constructions, in its representations of leather in material possessions, Factor W3 put forward a portrayal of dynamic, rebellious femininity, echoing postfeminist imagery of independent, assertive and hedonistically inclined women (Gill, 2009; Lazar, 2009). Alternatively, the depiction of masculinity offered by Factor W4 illustrated some of the competing and contradictory features of contemporary masculinities, whereby qualities like "sensuality", "elegance" and "appearance" were given similar weight to ones traditionally more associated with men, such as "toughness" and "resilience".

While theorists acknowledge that material goods have always formed part of human life, it is increasingly argued that in contemporary societies they are assuming ever more prominence and importance. In this sense, they are seen to influence and shape the ways in which we live our lives, both in terms of how they are used, and of how we connect with others by means of their use (Miles, 1998; Hoskins, 2006). The analytical chapters here illustrated how, by using particular descriptions of leather and its uses, participants tapped into available cultural resources to endorse certain viewpoints and identities. In Chapter 7, constructions of leather as essential, in various ways, for the wellbeing of society at large, positioned people working with leather as being crucial in enabling and ensuring such outcomes. In both Chapters 7 and 8, expressing awareness of and adherence to matters of 'green' production and consumption positioned participants as informed, responsible and ethically-minded individuals, within a wider environment which increasingly promotes and prioritizes 'green' discourses (e.g. Harré et al., 1999; Prothero et al., 2010).

As mentioned above, Chapter 3 outlined how the concept of identity has been variously theorized, and noted some of the still existing areas of tension in terms of definitions, applications and implications. Building further on issues raised in Chapter 2 about identity and material objects, Chapter 3 addressed in more detail the relationship between selves and the material world. Following on from theorists who posit that consumption is a dominant part of human life (Bauman, 1988, 1992; Miles, 1998; Gabriel & Lang, 2006), I noted that 'who we are' is increasingly defined primarily not by what we do, but by what we consume (in terms of possessions and lifestyles), and the association between personal identity and possessions has become a part of the dominant social discourses. In relation to this aspect, I argued that issues of 'why' and 'how' we consume have been gaining prominence, particularly in the context of current debates around the links between consumption practices and socio-political and environmental issues. Based on these considerations, I explored some of the philosophical conceptualizations and theoretical tenets of ethical actions, and illustrated a number of ways in which ethical principles have been seen to apply to consumer activities. However, I argued that, due to the situated character of consumption practices, it might be particularly helpful to consider the latter not in the light of universally applicable principles, but within the local social and cultural contexts in which engagement with consumer objects takes place.

The two theoretical chapters, 2 and 3, highlighted the social quality of representations of material objects themselves and of their roles in people's lives. Building on this, the research adopted a social constructionist approach, and looked at the manner in which leather has been constructed by respondents through talk and by tapping into available cultural

resources. In the next section, I will address the methodological concerns and standpoints adopted in the thesis.

9.3 Methodological considerations

Following on from the theoretical framework of the research, the methodologies used to conduct the research were described and discussed in Chapter 4. In the first part of the chapter, I briefly discussed how inquiries into consumer behaviour have traditionally taken place: these have mostly been located within a hypothetico-deductive perspective, which aimed to explain and predict behaviour by, for example, reference to internal psychological traits (personality determinants), or in information-processing terms, with people considered to take into account relevant information and to act based on rational criteria (cf. Thompson, Pollio & Locander, 1994; Arnould & Thompson, 2005). The argument was that quantitative approaches have a limited engagement with the social and cultural context in which consumer activities take place. Moreover, while quantitative research may be able to identify associations between variables (e.g. personality and/or attitudes and consumer decisions), such findings do not explain what these decisions mean, or how they are understood in specific, situated contexts (Mason, 2006). As a social endeavour, coming under the influence of historical and cultural elements and characterized by local and temporal situatedness, consumption cannot be adequately studied within a positivistic framework, stripped of meaning and in search of generalisable and universal rules. In this regard, I noted that alternative approaches are increasingly being adopted, which highlight the importance of the social background and of cultural meanings in human practices (e.g. McKay, 1997; Casey & Martens, 2007). In the light of this argument, the research methods used in this thesis have been chosen with a view to enabling a qualitative exploration of how people make sense of their experiences of leather, and of the cultural resources they draw on for this purpose.

As noted above, the research was undertaken from a social constructionist perspective, which regards the nature of reality as socially constructed (Berger & Luckmann, 1967; Gergen, 1985; Burr, 2003). In other words, this approach was based on the understanding that people's accounts of objects and phenomena – here leather-related - are not the result of any intrinsic characteristics of such things, but are social artefacts, the products of a specific historical and cultural context. Concomitant with this, the role of language was considered essential in constructing leather as an object of inquiry, and in exploring the 'realities' and implications enabled or foreclosed by particular constructions.

In the first part of Chapter 4 I outlined and justified the discourse analytic method used for the analysis of the interview data. Following Wetherell (1998) and Davies and Harré's (1990,

1999) positioning theory, I argued that an inclusive approach, taking into consideration both the located character of talk (participants' orientations) and the wider social, cultural and political context and implications of viewpoints expressed, would be the most appropriate for the purposes of this thesis. The second method, Q Methodology, was considered appropriate to enable the identification and mapping out of current understandings around a topic. Q Methodology was applied in two studies, which aimed to investigate general representations of leather and more specific meanings of participants' leather possessions. As argued in Chapter 4, Q Methodology may also act as an instrument for the analysis of discourses, through its use of pre-existing discursive resources (the Q items) and by allowing the production of a multitude of accounts, through various contextualisations of items.

The remainder of Chapter 4 was dedicated to a description of the practical implementation of the methods and of the procedures involved in analyzing the data. Within this discussion, I drew attention to specific instances where the researcher-researched encounter might be influenced by the researcher's background and assumptions (e.g. my being a vegetarian). In this context, I exemplified shifts in the power relationship between researcher and researched, and the ways in which these shaped particular aspects and/or the content of the research interaction.

As discussed in Chapter 4, the methodological approach was a pluralist one, in as much as it comprised an analysis of discourse (a qualitative approach) and Q Methodology studies, with the latter combining quantitative (statistical) and qualitative (discursive) elements, in a *qualiquantological* approach (Watts & Stenner, 2005). Here, the two methods came together in investigating the research topic: Q Methodology identified patterns of representations of leather and leather objects, thus allowing a mapping of some of the current cultural understandings of the material and its guises. Following this mapping of perspectives, the interviews enabled a more in-depth examination of the insights offered by the Q studies. The discursive analysis of the interview transcripts explored how the material was variously constructed to put forward specific standpoints and locate speakers in particular positionings. Through their shared focus on language and subjectivity (Lazard et al., 2011), the methods employed allowed an exploration of the meanings around a material which is part of everyday life, and of the ways in which such meanings become interconnected with identities, as well as with broader cultural and ideological contexts.

9.4 Synopsis of analytical chapters

This thesis contains four analytical chapters. The contents of each one will be briefly outlined, before moving on to discuss the interrelationships and implications of the findings.

The first analytical chapter, Chapter 5, used Q Methodology to identify broad-based representations of leather and its uses. This study identified six distinct accounts of leather based on consideration of varied characteristics of the material, such as appearance, functionality, style, as well as ethical implications. The findings illustrated how understandings around the material combined practical and symbolic elements, putting forward characterizations of both leather and people involved with it in different capacities. Additionally, the study showed how accounts drew on popular culture imagery in (re)producing particular representations of gender roles. For example, one factor specifically associated masculinity with archetypal images of rebels and heroes; similarly, another factor endorsed a traditional portrayal of femininity - as elegant, sexy and sophisticated, but also as passive sexual object. It was also noted how some popular culture references, such as those connecting leather with youth and power were questioned and/or contested, by being constructed as anachronistic or as not adequately encapsulating the complexity of meaning. Through the comments made, participants indicated awareness of such cultural connotations, while not always endorsing them. This illustrates the social and historical locality of cultural resources and understandings, with their recognition or relevance contingent on the particular contexts in which they are employed.

The study also highlighted the presence of narratives indicating ethical concerns around leather. Two accounts in particular, S4 and S5, prioritized such concerns over aesthetic and pragmatic considerations. Statements about green or ethical issues registered a wide range of movement across factors, indicating interest in such debates, and therefore supporting the argument that environmental and broader ethical concerns are increasingly part of everyday discourse (Harré et al, 1999; Connolly & Prothero, 2008; Prothero et al., 2010). While the statements themselves referred to animal welfare, the environment and ethics in general, the various positionings of items in relation to each other allowed the expression of nuanced representations, thus avoiding polarized (and thereby reductionist) standpoints. Participants' comments brought to the fore a number of issues, from the ecological impact of manufacturing processes and the disposal of waste, to the ethics of animal use – in terms of both humane treatment, as well as a general principle. Overall, the narratives identified illustrated the complex interrelationships between various considerations and representations (functional, cultural, symbolic, ideological) in people's engagement with material things.

Following debates outlined in Chapter 2 around the symbolic and functional roles of material things, Q Methodology was also used in Chapter 6 to explore how such considerations were combined and prioritized in representations of leather possessions. By focusing on the

meanings attributed by participants to particular leather objects they owned, the study aimed to investigate notions regarding the communicative role of objects. The study findings showed that a combination of functionality and symbolism characterized descriptions of leather objects. This indicated that in participants' portrayals of possessions, 'saying something about oneself' did not necessarily come at the expense of practical concerns – a notion counter to postmodern arguments about the primacy of 'sign' over 'function'. Moreover, an examination of the positionings of items inspired by popular cultural imagery suggested their use in describing personal leather objects was not particularly prioritized. Participants' comments indicated awareness of such connotations, but conveyed doubts as to their contemporary or personal applicability. Again, these findings come to illustrate the role of context and the specificity of social, temporal and cultural circumstances in consumption-related practices.

This Q study also highlighted how particular notions (e.g. luxury, tradition, fitness) can achieve distinct meanings and encompass diverse cultural or moral messages by different contextualisations and associations of items. In this manner, the analysis highlighted some of the ways in which meanings are not only projected, but also negotiated through people's relationships with objects. The constructions of gender in this study constitute a further example of this. As noted above, the portrayals of femininity and masculinity conformed less to traditional representations, by illustrating the complexity and contradictoriness of contemporary gender roles and understandings.

Chapter 7, the first discourse analytic chapter, focused on constructions of leather by participants with a professional involvement with the material. I would mention here that, although issues around the areas of production and consumption of leather have been analyzed in separate chapters, this was not indicative of a conceptualization of these domains as distinct. This presentation of findings had an analytical, rather than theoretical, grounding. While, in Chapter 8, consumption-related accounts were identified across participants, the narratives presented in Chapter 7, put forward by professional respondents, were not found in data from 'lay' participants.

Chapter 7 thus identified professionals' constructions of leather in three main areas: portrayals of the material itself (*The identity of leather*), work-related aspects (*Working with leather*) and examinations of potential green and/or ethical considerations around making leather (*In defence of leather*). A common feature of participants' depictions was the emphasis placed on the role of leather on a broader scale, beyond direct personal relevance or use. The narratives provided manifold descriptions of the material, constituting it as distinctive and at the same time as part and parcel of everyday life, as important in its

immediate, practical uses, and also as essential for the greater good of humankind. The accounts put forward representations of leather as inextricably linked with the evolution of humanity and paramount for its continued wellbeing. In this sense, narratives stressed leather's historical origins, 'natural' character and ubiquity in daily life. Additionally, leather's 'green' qualities were brought to the fore, thus functioning to compound the material's asserted contribution to the general interests of society. By contrast with these extensive functions and responsibilities, the leather industry itself was portrayed as being endangered due to a range of economic, political and ideological factors over which it had little control. At the same time, despite such difficulties, the industry and the individuals involved with it were depicted as environmentally aware and as actively engaged in ecologically friendly activities. Overall, through the narratives proposed, the constructions of leather identified in Chapter 7 function, in ideological terms, to frame the material's and the industry's social role and importance, as providers of vital services to society in general, and as valuable contributors to environmental protection.

In Chapter 8, the exploration of leather-related representations concentrated on consumer objects and choices. Here, I examined understandings around the role of objects, dress in particular, as conveying information about affiliation to certain groups or categories, such as profession, subculture and gender (*You are what you wear*). At the same time, I explored the manner in which participants (re)defined and negotiated the meanings associated with such categories, with regard to subcultural connotations and gender roles and stereotypes. In one of the accounts, for example, the leather jacket was linked with a biker identity, while in another an allegiance to punk-rock subculture relied on a similar choice. In relation to this, boundaries around what did or did not constitute acceptable features of such an identity were redrawn and reframed in terms of 'genuineness' and role-play, or mask wearing. Additionally, the analyses illustrated how, by drawing on discourses of style and fashion, gender-related imagery, roles and expectations were addressed and negotiated, and attempts were made to reconcile apparently contradictory standpoints and understandings. Echoing theoretical arguments presented in Chapter 3, such constructions illustrated the ways in which material objects function to (re)present and 'perform' gender, and to adopt or resist particular characteristics or meanings.

Finally, Chapter 8 investigated the discursive ways in which participants oriented themselves to green/ethical issues, and looked at how consumer choices were defined and reconstituted in accordance with ethical principles (*Ethical consumers*). With regard to consumption practices, it was apparent that participants acknowledged the notion of objects and possessions as linked to and indicative of personal standpoints and values. In this way, the research reaffirmed the idea of identities being marked out and explored on the basis of

lifestyles and personal interests, reflected by and concretized in ways of consumption (Bennett, 1999; Gabriel & Lang, 2006; Sassatelli, 2007).

9.5 Discussion, implications and suggestions for further research

In this final section, I will discuss some of the findings from the research in terms of their implications and directions for future investigation. Given the manifold shapes of the research object itself and the variety of contexts in which material items and consumption activities manifest themselves, I would argue that the insights gained transcend the material itself and find applications in numerous social, cultural and political settings and discourses. To support this notion, I address three main areas, reviewing the notions of the 'circuit of culture', 'consumption as communication' and 'green' debates, outlining the ensuing implications.

The 'circuit of culture' revisited

As noted in Chapter 1, this research was also informed by the notion of the 'circuit of culture', proposed by Paul du Gay and his colleagues (1997) as a means of investigating a cultural artefact. According to this perspective, the analysis of leather as a cultural object (i.e., located within a particular culture) would need to take into account all the processes within which the object's meanings are formed (identified as areas of *production, consumption, representation, regulation* and *identity*) and examine the ways in which the various elements interact.

To examine these notions and processes with specific reference to leather, I explored it in the context of its production, as well as in everyday uses and interactions. Within these areas, I examined the ways certain issues gained prominence or were sidelined, and certain features were included or excluded in putting forward specific objects, connotations or values. Central to this examination was the understanding of material objects as repositories of cultural meaning within a certain socio-historical and geographical context. The present research, therefore, looked at how leather, in its production as well as in its various material guises, contributes to the embodiment and perpetuation of specific values and ideas, through processes of representation. In this regard, the analysis of empirical data exemplified how representations of leather and leather objects might incorporate cultural and ideological understandings, and might function to challenge and/or perpetuate them. At the same time, the studies illustrated how the use of leather objects may regulate or be regulated by particular circumstances, activities or moralities. In this sense, the thesis has

thus been able to investigate not only the identity of the material itself but also constructions of the identities of people using leather and/or working with it, and the ways in which the two come together and become, at times, intertwined.

Returning to the 'circuit of culture', various articulations between production, representation, identity and regulation were apparent in the narratives identified in both the Q and interview studies. In Chapter 7, for example, leather making was portrayed in relation to historical continuity, and also to innovation and change. Leather itself was constructed as a source of culture, as a necessary material, as a ubiquitous substance and as an environmental solution. Thus, various ways of representation functioned to justify and validate the production and consumption of leather, and to make a case for the continuation thereof. Similarly, depictions of leather as beneficial for humankind functioned to bring together the identity of the material with that of its producers, in their role as makers or providers of a valuable and valued item.

As discussed in Chapters 2 and 3, consumption practices can be associated with identity in a variety of forms. For instance, in Chapter 8, participants working with leather described wearing or buying it as an external mark of belonging and of support for the industry. This consumer decision was constructed, at the same time, as a personal choice, and also as a social obligation, the result of (self) regulation (e.g. Anne, Extract 1, Ch.8: "partly uniform"; Daniel, Extract 3, Ch.8: "you have to [wear leather]; if you don't do it, how do you expect other people to do it...?"). Similarly, processes of regulation may come into play with regard to the wearing of particular items of clothing in specific contexts, such as biker jackets (e.g. Richard, Extract 6, Ch.8: "I actually worry that I look too intimidating in certain circumstances, say if I go into a shop...") or casual leather jackets (e.g. Steve, Extract 13, Ch.8: "to the bar or the pub (...) with a leather jacket (...) I wouldn't feel in danger of being overdressed, but I would feel (...) well-dressed"). As these examples illustrate, the idea that a leather jacket might be 'out of place' illustrates how the presence of certain objects in certain places may contradict or challenge expectations about what belongs where, within a particular set of social and cultural regulations (du Gay et al., 1997).

Additionally, various cultural 'identities' of leather can be connected through representation with the wearer or user, in a number of ways: with reference to the objects themselves (e.g. Steve, Extract 4, Ch.8: "the leather jacket thing would be very hard to get over, at least as long as I think it's defining myself a little bit in this way"); by attributing meanings to consumer actions (e.g. P3 in Ch.5, "people pretending to be younger than they are"); and by constituting leather things in relation to one's inner self or general outlook on life (e.g.

Richard, Extract 9, Ch.8: "*I just have one or two very small ideas that have been with me for a long time, and a leather coat or jacket's always been part of that*").

The examples above provide instances of how uses of leather, while tapping into pre-existing meanings and connotations, undergo different constructions in specific contexts, in situated instances of articulation between production, consumption, identity and representation. With regard to such links, I will briefly revisit the understanding of consumer actions as communicative practices.

Consumption as communication

As discussed in Chapters 2 and 3, while the notion of consumption as communication of personal and social identities, values and messages is widespread in literature, questions about its extent, accuracy and adequacy have been raised (e.g. Campbell, 1997). Among other objections, Campbell argued that the idea of objects (clothes in particular) communicating something about the wearer reflects more the views and expectations of the researchers, and less the views of participants themselves. In stating this, Campbell voiced his scepticism about symbols 'discovered' by academics, but not 'stated' by consumers themselves, and questioned the "presumption that individual consumers *intend* their actions to be interpreted by others as 'signs' or 'signals'" (p.349, italics in original); in other words, he questions "the presence of communicative intent" (ibid.). While the discursive analysis of participants' accounts was not aimed at the drawing of conclusions about their mental states or the presence of 'true' intentions, it was apparent that the idea of 'sending a message through clothes' constitutes a cultural resource both available to and drawn upon by participants in their accounts. As exemplified earlier, such messages are seen to include both displays and indications of social categorization, as well as references to inner features or characteristics. As stated by Daniel (Chapter 8), "*Wearing leather is (...) a thing that you do to express yourself, at any moment in time*". Similarly, narratives around leather identified in the Q studies (Chapters 5 and 6) also illustrated the ways in which discourses of identity through objects have become disseminated in current culture. The Q accounts revealed a range of constructions of the link between 'who you are' and 'what you have', over and above unquestioned acceptance or rejection, in nuanced, critical ways of engaging with the applications and implications of the notion 'you are what you buy'.

As Campbell rightly points out, the notion of consumption as message is not straightforward, and may lead to confusion or to drawing potentially incorrect inferences, as the fragment from Richard above (Extract 6, Ch.8) exemplifies, with the participant expressing concern about misinterpretation or unintended effects of dress. Richard's constructing of others both

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as attuned to connoted meanings, and as potentially misled by them, illustrates how the notion of 'clothes saying something' may apply. In this context, I would argue that the focus of inquiries into consumption choices should be less concerned with the 'reality' or 'accuracy' of the communication, but more with the exploration of the communicative role of things as a discourse in its own right. As suggested by the findings in this thesis, understandings around the meanings conveyed by objects are not only part of the academic discourse, but appear to have been adopted into everyday talk as a commonsense notion – a shared cultural resource. Given that consumer practices and experiences have been gaining ever greater prominence in contemporary society (as discussed in Chapters 2 and 3), it would be useful to investigate understandings around and implications of 'consumption as communication' discourse. In this regard, further research could examine the latter's functions in the wider social, economic and political context, and the ways in which it may work ideologically to legitimate, promote and potentially stimulate consumerism in general, by constructing it as 'normal' and inevitably linked with social interaction and personal and social identity.

'Green consumption' and 'green' leather

As noted in Chapter 3, studies into environmental issues have generally highlighted the impact of human actions on the environment, related to both production and consumption patterns. Within these debates, increased consumption has been considered a particularly powerful force in depletion of natural resources and generation of waste (Howard, 2000; Oskamp, 2000; Belk et al., 2005). As mentioned earlier in this chapter and discussed more extensively in Chapter 3, it has been posited that 'green' understandings and behaviours are becoming more widespread in daily life and experiences. As a concomitant of this, numerous forms of 'green' discourse have emerged. Some examples are found in my research. In the Q studies, for instance, shared narratives, such as those provided by factors S4 (*A mundane material*) and S5 (*A questionable choice*), exemplified the regulation of consumer behaviour in the light of ethical principles. There, participants' comments emphasized the importance of adhering to green considerations, and expressed criticism of conduct falling short of ethical guidelines regarding animal welfare and the environment.

Among the suggested remedies for ecological damage, environmentalist approaches have emphasized the need for different patterns of consumption among individual consumers (such as organic or recycled products), for a reduction in waste, through re-use and recycling, and also, particularly, for decreasing overall levels of consumption. Other perspectives advocate a shared responsibility between producers and consumers in addressing ecological concerns (e.g. Halkier, 1999; Connolly & Prothero, 2008). At the same

time, however, consumer practices are extolled and encouraged by economic and political discourses, according to which growing consumption is necessary for economic prosperity and political stability (e.g. Peachey, 2010). Finally, as discussed above, there are culturally accepted understandings connecting possessions with identity and with symbolic notions of empowerment and freedom (e.g. Fiske, 1989, Nava, 1991; Venkatesh, 1999). In this context, consumption activities are being subjected to various competing discourses and regulatory practices, with people having to negotiate the desire or pressure to consume, with the wish or pressure to consume less, that is, to balance these in different ways.

Possible avenues for future research may be concerned with an exploration of how specific consumer decisions are constituted in relation to both identity construction processes (as self-definitional) and to various ethical considerations, within circumstances that might be regarded as potentially dilemmatic. In this thesis, this has been explored, to an extent, in Chapter 8, with regard to leather and vegetarianism and animal welfare issues. Beside the dilemmas emanating from the juxtaposition of 'green' concerns and the 'normality' of using animals for meat, additional issues associated with leather arise from the differentiation between the 'acceptable' use of skins resulting from the meat industry, and 'unacceptable' sources such as hunted animals or endangered species (see Chapter 7 and 8). In this way, future research could investigate in more depth the 'language of differentiation' employed in negotiating the relationship between moral or lifestyle choices and consumer practices with regard to a range of products (e.g. clothes, food, electronic equipment) and aspects such as product origins, labour conditions, human rights issues, trade conditions and so on.

Additionally, it has been proposed that debates around environmentalism have led to the emergence of a self-regulating, ecologically conscious consumer, who displays awareness of 'green' issues and engages with them in the course of everyday activities (Connolly & Prothero, 2008). Within this thesis, participants' awareness of 'green' (as well as wider ethical) concerns was apparent in the Q studies - in the narratives identified and also in comments made on aspects such as pollution, recycling and animal welfare, as well as within the interview studies. As noted in Chapter 3, theorists have pointed to a discrepancy between expressed attitudes and actual behaviours (e.g. Ölander & Thøgersen, 1995; Tallontire et al., 2001). A number of elements considered obstacles to ethical consumption have been identified, such as lack of time, knowledge, financial resources, availability, as well as the desirability of the products themselves (Tallontire et al., 2001). However, it has been suggested that such barriers may be used as discursive resources in themselves. In this sense, they may function to sustain current actions – or, in the words of Kurz et al. (2005, p. 605), they may be used "to account for practices that may be undesirable, from a sustainability perspective... to discount responsibility for the negative environmental impact

of certain practices, or [to] minimize their negative implications". Returning to leather, the findings in this thesis have illustrated how the same topic or activity – here, leather and its production - might be portrayed, among others, as environmentally friendly (through the necessary use of a by-product) or unfriendly (because of its polluting effects), as ethically acceptable (leather originating from organically grown animals) or unacceptable (the use of animals per se), as a natural renewable resource, a practical benefit, or a heritage matter. In this regard, potential critiques or challenges to leather-related issues (e.g. pollution, animal rights or labour conditions) are circumvented or sidelined by being re-framed in terms of the general social good or functional and cultural value. Based on these findings, it would be useful to examine in further research the discursive strategies used by individuals to account for some choices over others within an ethical/environmental framework, in making certain concessions or standing by certain actions or decisions. At the same time, such an investigation would feed into on-going debates around the ideological implications of discourses of 'choice' that are put forward by current economic and social policies.

Furthermore, in connection to wider ethical considerations (e.g. ecological damage, human rights violations in certain countries of origin), future research would need to look at an exploration of subjectivities and understandings around potential dilemmas arising from the 'individualisation' of 'green' responsibility (by placing the onus of ethical behaviour on individuals, rather than on states or institutions). Such a study would tie into debates around consumer power, and also into the functioning and implications of certain contemporary political and moral discourses.

9.6 Final remarks

Overall, this research has highlighted the ways in which various understandings of leather have ramifications for an extended range of issues, including constructions of personal and social identity, of social and economic phenomena and of ethical implications and outcomes of consumer practices. At the same time, I conducted an exploration into how cultural meanings around leather are adopted, challenged or negotiated, and into the manner in which particular features or issues are included or excluded, in specific discursive contexts, and with specific purposes.

In connection with the arguments regarding the ideological character of leather constructions, the research findings suggest that discourses around leather focused not only on its uses and connotations, but also on its ecological credentials, here seen mainly (but not exclusively) in terms of animal welfare and pollution-related environmental consequences. Leather was also discussed in relation to nature discourses, in terms of it

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being a natural resource, and also as having a role in the preservation of natural habitats and landscape features. The thesis thus makes a contribution to the academic examination of symbolism around issues of environmentalism, and of the manner in which meanings pertaining to this domain are constituted and represented.

To conclude, the present thesis has been novel through its investigation of a little-researched topic – leather. The methods used enabled the identification and mapping out of cultural resources drawn upon by participants in their portrayals of the material. This research has provided an exploration of the diverse ways in which a material substance may be depicted and accounted for in a number of contexts: work and/or consumption related; in the construction, representation and negotiation of identities; and in defining and assessing the ethical character of actions at an individual or collective level. The analysis of participants' narratives illustrated the complex and contestable meanings around a visible, versatile and accessible material, and how particular discourses gain prominence, priority, relevance, inclusion or exclusion in putting forward various positions and values. In this respect, the research contributes to the examination of material culture in the current environment, and opens up further avenues of inquiry into how consumer practices become problematized and negotiated in a changing social, economic and political environment.

Appendix A1: Q Study 1 - Pilot Form

Participant no. .....

Date:

Pilot Form Q Study 1

Below are statements in relation to a study of leather and leather objects. They represent possible answers to the question "What does a person's choice of having or wearing leather items say about that person?"

Please tick the boxes according to how you feel about the answers.

At the end of the list there is space for you to make any comments about the statements, for example, if you think there is repetition of ideas, if any items are difficult to understand or if you think areas have been missed out. Such comments would be very helpful and any contribution to this space would be greatly appreciated.

Participation in this research is voluntary, and you should not agree to take part if you find any of the above unsatisfactory. You also have the right to withdraw your data from the study any time within the first 2 weeks after you have completed this form, using the contact details given below. While some of your comments may be used to inform the study, any identifying information will remain confidential.

Thank you very much for your help.

The researcher can be contacted at the following address:

Anca Roberts
The University of Northampton
c/o The Knowledge Exchange
Park Campus, Boughton Green Rd.
Northampton NN2 7AL, UK
e-mail: anca.roberts@northampton.ac.uk

What does a person's choice of having or wearing leather items say about that person?

	The choice of leather...	Agree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Unclear / Inappropriate
1	is a statement of independence				
2	shows appreciation of the good things in life				
3	suggests being at one with nature				
4	is a symbol of rebelliousness				
5	is an indication of strength				
6	is a sign of wealth				
7	is a sign of distinction				
8	shows a practical nature				
9	shows style				
10	is a symbol of the outlaw				
11	shows disregard for the welfare of animals				
12	is an expression of freedom				
13	is a mark of power				

	The choice of leather...	Agree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Unclear / Inappropriate
14	indicates attachment to tradition				
15	is an expression of sexual assertiveness				
16	is for people who won't move on with the times				
17	is an extravagance				
18	is the stuff of heroes				
19	is a symbol of anarchy				
20	is an expression of individuality				
21	shows a taste for the exotic				
22	comes across as very masculine				
23	suggests a mixture of wildness and conformity				
24	conveys straightforwardness				
25	likes to cause controversy				
26	projects a daring image				
27	is an indication of class				
28	conveys sensuality				
29	suggests lack of confidence				
30	is seductive				
31	is a means of attracting attention				
32	shows a taste for the classic				
33	brings to mind images of fetishism				
34	shows appreciation of quality				
35	says who the person is				
36	creates an aggressive image				
37	is a sign of sophistication				
38	is a mark of being in control				
39	shows lack of taste				
40	is the sign of a wild, unrestrained nature				
41	is an expression of elegance				
42	comes across as 'gay'				
43	shows a liking of the simple things in life				
44	suggests ignorance of environmental concerns				
45	is meant to accentuate the body				
46	is a sign of risk-taking				
47	comes across as exploitative				
48	is a sign of the tough guy				
49	is a mark of 'having arrived' socially				
50	makes you think of bondage and SM				
51	is a sign of virility				
52	creates an image of reliability				
53	is meant to emphasize femininity				
54	gives an impression of violence				

	The choice of leather...	Agree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Unclear / Inappropriate
55	suggests unconventional sexual practices				
56	is a symbol of youth				
57	shows liking of outdoor activities				
58	allows a person to rediscover themselves				
59	can make the person look out of reach				
60	suggests physical threat				
61	only fits adventurous types				
62	shows appreciation of beauty				
63	suggests artistic inclinations				
64	is associated with extremism				
65	is meant as a provocation				
66	comes across as showy				
67	is an expression of creativity				
68	creates a sexy image				
69	is a sign of selfishness				
70	gives the impression of insensitivity				
71	shows sporting inclinations				
72	is a fashion statement				
73	shows expensive tastes				
74	is a symbol of domination				

Comments:

Q Grid Study 1
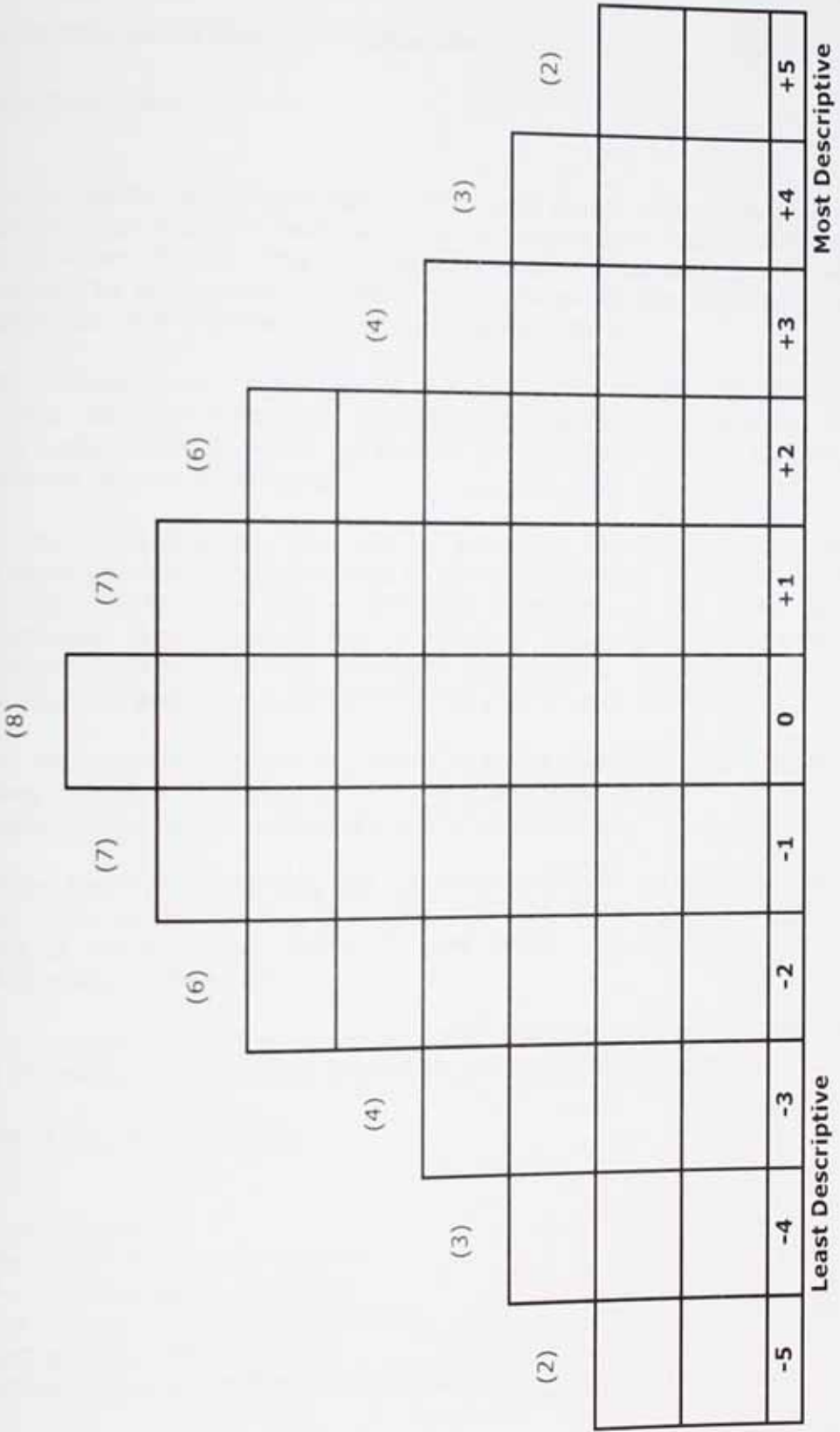
	(8)	(7)	(6)	(4)	(3)	(2)				
(2)	(3)	(4)	(6)	(7)	(7)	(6)	(4)	(3)	(2)	
-5	-4	-3	-2	-1	0	+1	+2	+3	+4	+5

Least Descriptive   **Most Descriptive**

You can cross out numbers as you write them into the grid:

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20
21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31	32	33	34	35	36	37	38	39	40
41	42	43	44	45	46	47	48	49	50	51	52								

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Appendix A3: Q Study 1 - Materials

Dear Participant,

Thank you for agreeing to take part in this study. I am a second year PhD student carrying out research into people's representations and understandings of leather and leather objects. This investigation is concerned with the varied ways in which leather, as a material and also in the shape of the objects it is turned into, is perceived, and the role it occupies in people's lives.

The method used is not a test of any kind, nor is it aimed to draw conclusions about your or other people's lives. Its aim is to explore in a systematic manner the many and varied ways in which we look at and relate to leather objects, and to identify patterns across these views.

In the present study, you will be asked to fit into a pattern statements which express various opinions related to the use or choice of leather objects. Your pattern (numbers you write into a grid) and those of all the other participants will be introduced, anonymously, into a computer programme which identifies similarities between responses. All personal information, however, will remain strictly confidential and at no point will it form part of any database.

Any other comments you are asked to make regarding the topic will be used for the same purpose of exploring common perceptions. While some of them may be quoted in the study, anonymity will be maintained.

Please remember that you are not obliged to take part, and are free to withdraw at any time within the first 2 weeks after you have completed this form, using the contact details given below. I very much appreciate you taking the time to participate in the study.

If you would like to find out more about the research, please feel free to contact me or my supervisor, Dr Rose Capdevila, at the address below.

Thank you for your help!

Anca Roberts
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c/o The Knowledge Exchange
Park Campus, Boughton Green Rd.
Northampton NN2 7AL, UK
e-mail: anca.roberts@northampton.ac.uk

INSTRUCTIONS FOR THE Q STUDY

Along with the introductory letter, you will have been provided with the following:

- 52 Q items (a set of statements, each appearing on its own numbered card)
- Q grid
- Set of markers (going from -5 to +5)
- Q response booklet
- Participant information form

1.   The first thing to do is lay out the 11 markers and place them in front of you, on a table or on the floor, making sure that you leave plenty of space above, as follows:

$$-5 \quad -4 \quad -3 \quad -2 \quad -1 \quad 0 \quad +1 \quad +2 \quad +3 \quad +4 \quad +5$$

2.   Think of a specific context in which leather is used. This can refer to a leather item in particular or to a wider situation that you associate with the possession, use or wearing of leather. You can choose the example from your own experience, or you can refer to something you have indirect knowledge of (for instance something you have read about or you have seen in a film). Describe your choice in a few words in the space provided, at the top of the Q Response Booklet (feel free to use extra paper if necessary).

3.   In order to do the actual sorting, start by looking at each card in turn (the order you do this in doesn't matter). <u>Related to the context you have chosen</u>, divide the statements into three piles, so that you have a pile of statements with which you AGREE (they describe the context reasonably well), a pile with which you DISAGREE (they are not descriptive of the context), and a pile of statements about which you have no strong feelings or you cannot decide upon / you feel unsure about.

4.   The idea of Q sorting is to allocate each statement (card) to one of the positions in the Q grid, based on the strength of your agreement/disagreement with its content. In effect, you will rank each statement on a continuum ranging from +5 to -5. The only condition is that the final pattern of statements must 'mirror' the shape of the Q grid. Having allocated the appropriate number of statements to a particular column, the placement of items within that column (above or below one another) makes no difference to the final sort, as ranking is only registered horizontally.

5.   Work on each of the three piles separately, starting with the AGREE pile. Choose the two items you agree with most strongly and put them in +5/6, then continue with the three items which you consider the next 'most descriptive' and put them in +4, and so on, until you have used up this pile.

6.   Then sort the cards in the DISAGREE pile in the same way, starting with the two items you find 'least descriptive' in the -5 column, then the next three items

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you feel strongly about in the -4, and so on, until you have exhausted the second pile.

7.	Finally, put the unsure/undecided cards from the third pile in the remaining middle columns, making sure that all items are placed and all columns have the correct number of cards.

8.	Having placed all the items, you can shuffle them around in order to achieve a pattern you are largely satisfied with, taking care to maintain the form of the grid.

9.	When you have finished sorting the items please enter the numbers of the items, as they appear in your sort, in the blank Q grid. If you feel that the grid does not match your ideal distribution of items (e.g. if there are far more items that you disagree with than you agree with) then mark this with a dividing line on the grid.

Q RESPONSE BOOKLET

10.	After having filled in the grid, please turn to the **Q Response Booklet**. The main purpose of this is for you to give information which will help to interpret the emerging patterns. The most useful thing you can do is to fill in the space beside every item stating how and why you placed it where you did or making any other comments you might consider relevant (e.g issues the item might raise, phrasing etc). However, this would require a fair amount of time, so I would appreciate it if you would try to comment, at least, on those items placed at the extreme ends of the grid (+5, +4, -5, -4) or on those you found especially difficult to place.

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION FORM

11.	Finally, you should complete the **Participant Information Form**. Please be assured that any information you give here will be held in strict confidence and seen only by me for administrative reasons.

Thank you once again for your time and effort.

Q RESPONSE BOOKLET

Perspective: ....

Please comment on the reasons for your sorting of the items, or comment on any items you feel particularly strongly about (e.g. items you feel you most agree / least agree with from your chosen perspective).

1. is a statement of independence	
2. comes across as very masculine	
3. is a sign of sophistication	
4. conveys straightforwardness	
5. is a symbol of power	
6. conveys a no-nonsense outlook	
7. shows taste	
8. projects a feminine image	
9. is a sign of rebelliousness	
10. projects an image of daring and adventure	

11. is an expression of elegance	
12. is a symbol of youth	
13. is a sign of wealth	
14. creates a classy look	
15. is a sign of the tough guy / girl	
16. brings to mind wide open spaces	
17. has a primitive quality	
18. conveys sensuality	
19. suggests indifference to environmental issues	
20. makes a person look out of reach	
21. is a practical choice	
22. projects self-confidence	
23. is a mark of being in control	

24. shows appreciation of beauty	
25. shows style	
26. comes across as seductive	
27. raises ethical concerns	
28. is a symbol of the outsider	
29. suggests indifference to the welfare of animals	
30. is a means of attracting attention	
31. stimulates the senses	
32. comes across as showy	
33. is a matter of tradition	
34. shows a taste for the classic	
35. is an indicator of social status	
36. is an expression of creativity	

37. is the stuff of heroes	
38. is a fashion statement	
39. creates a feeling of nostalgia	
40. creates a sexy look	
41. is an expression of individuality	
42. shows appreciation of quality	
43. comes across as aggressive	
44. conjures up images of fitness	
45. shows a taste for the exotic	
46. says who you are	
47. is an extravagance	
48. brings fetishism to mind	
49. is likely to cause controversy	

50. is an expression of authenticity	
51. has a timeless quality	
52. is erotic	

Other comments and observations:

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION FORM

(If you do not wish to answer any, or all, of the questions listed below, please feel free to leave the appropriate spaces blank).

Please write in capital letters:

First name:

Last name:

Your age:

Your gender: male/female (circle as appropriate)

Your ethnic background and religious affiliation (if any):

Occupation:

Optional information:
In some situations I may need to get back to participants for clarification purposes. If you do not object to being contacted please fill in your contact details below:

Email:
Telephone number:

Any other information you would like to give:

Having read the introductory materials, completed the Q sort and filled in the above questionnaire, please sign below to confirm your agreement to participate in the study. Thank you!

Date

Signed

Appendix A4: Q Study 1 - Table of Factor Loadings

Factor Loadings for Q Study 1

	Component				
	1	2	3	4	5
P37	.899	-.017	.062	-.121	.010
P08	.761	-.128	-.146	.080	.015
P35	.727	.064	-.427	-.016	.142
P39	.723	-.058	.064	.104	-.361
P09	.694	-.157	.058	-.069	.097
P28	.692	.204	.164	-.328	.069
P16	.673	-.117	.030	.243	.124
P12	.660	.224	-.137	.043	.395
P22	.630	-.151	-.152	-.137	-.064
P38	.586	-.144	.441	-.030	-.121
P26	.581	-.086	-.363	-.132	.149
P36	.566	-.181	.238	.017	-1.5E-006
P11	.527	-.174	-.001	.319	-.206
P07	.518	.142	-.421	.472	-.072
P04	.489	.136	-.362	-.428	.036
P27	-.174	.713	-.128	.247	.313
P02	.280	-.673	-.119	.144	.216
P03	-.165	.673	.058	.052	.351
P05	.030	.656	.457	-.148	.103
P34	.008	.583	.018	.228	-.127
P18	.185	-.567	.305	.145	.080
P33	.191	.535	-.243	.378	.151
P06	.061	.459	.154	.294	.245
P17	.292	-.369	-.036	-.062	-.040
P29	-.064	-.077	.840	.046	-.054
P21	-.182	-.170	.597	.045	.476
P25	-.086	.285	.567	.076	.226
P01	.089	.232	.540	.077	-.264
P13	.037	.050	.405	-.322	.320
P31	.004	.312	.083	.663	-.203
P15	-.008	.035	.190	.653	.198
P30	-.210	.254	-.111	.649	.062
P19	.075	.086	-.113	.591	.030
P20	.020	-.145	.427	.559	.100
P32	-.309	.245	-.313	.140	.658
P14	.156	.152	.033	-.140	.654
P23	.352	-.206	.051	.240	.540
P24	-.228	-.107	.122	.500	.512
P10	.208	.310	.185	.179	.464

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis
Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization

Appendix A5: Q Study 1 - List of participants

Participants Q study 1 (statements)

	Gender	Occupation	Age	Perspective
P1	M	leather	58	jacket
P2	M	lay	36	wearing leather for protection
P3	F	lay	23	biker clothing
P4	F	lay	20	riding saddle
P5	F	lay	20	leather jackets
P6	M	lay	20	personal
P7	F	lay	20	shoes/bag
P8	F	lay	19	shoes
P9	M	lay	21	personal
P10	M	lay	20	leather as portrayed through film and media
P11	F	lay	20	unspecified
P12	M	lay	20	jacket
P13	M	lay	21	jacket/coat
P14	M	leather	59	jacket
P15	M	lay	20	topic as a whole
P16	F	lay	19	unspecified
P17	M	lay	19	unspecified
P18	F	lay	19	unspecified
P19	M	lay	21	unspecified
P20	F	lay	21	clothes
P21	M	lay	21	clothes
P22	F	lay	20	dance shoes
P23	F	lay	21	jacket
P24	F	leather	24	coat
P25	F	leather	25	clothes
P26	M	lay	29	wallet
P27	F	lay	34	bikers
P28	M	lay	45	shoes
P29	M	lay	39	jeans
P30	F	lay	35	unspecified
P31	F	lay	26	bikers
P32	M	lay	21	unspecified
P33	M	lay	20	unspecified
P34	M	lay	33	biker clothing
P35	F	lay	45	fabric for shoes and clothing
P36	M	leather	59	footwear casual
P37	F	leather	61	furniture
P38	F	leather	44	personal reasons
P39	F	leather	28	leather for common uses (boots, jackets, bags)

Appendix B1: Q Study 2 - Pilot Form

Participant no. ...

Date:

Pilot Form Q Study 2

Below are words in relation to a study of leather and leather objects. Please tick the boxes according to whether you feel that the possible associations apply to leather or do not apply to leather.

At the end of the list there is space for you to make any comments about the words, for example, if you think there is repetition of ideas, if any items are difficult to understand or if you think areas have been missed out. Such comments would be very helpful and any contribution to this space would be greatly appreciated.

Participation in this research is voluntary, and you should not agree to take part if you find any of the above unsatisfactory. You also have the right to withdraw your data from the study any time within the first 2 weeks after you have completed this form, using the contact details given below. While some of your comments may be used to inform the study, any identifying information will remain confidential.

Thank you very much for your help.

The researcher can be contacted at the following address:

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University of Northampton
c/o The Knowledge Exchange
Park Campus, Boughton Green Rd.
Northampton NN2 7AL, UK
e-mail: anca.roberts@northampton.ac.uk

	Leather means...	Agree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Unclear / Inappropriate
1	comfort				
2	attraction				
3	softness				
4	wealth				
5	aggression				
6	rebelliousness				
7	versatility				
8	raunchiness				
9	warmth				
10	creativity				
11	brutality				
12	nonconformity				
13	kitsch				
14	kinkiness				
15	rigidity				
16	action				
17	integrity				
18	toughness				
19	resilience				
20	wildness				
21	femininity				
22	quality				
23	vulgarity				
24	safety				
25	practicality				
26	sex				
27	smoothness				
28	genuineness				
29	mystery				
30	openness				
31	durability				
32	eroticism				
33	fragrance				
34	honesty				
35	intimidation				
36	heroism				
37	economy				
38	virility				
39	appearance				
40	straightforward-ness				
41	threat				
42	class				

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	Leather means...	Agree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Unclear / Inappropriate
43	protection				
44	sensuality				
45	texture				
46	exoticism				
47	feminism				
48	sport				
49	nature				
50	seduction				
51	nostalgia				
52	glamour				
53	speed				
54	provocation				
55	simplicity				
56	fetish				
57	oppression				
58	reassurance				
59	cruelty				
60	gay				
61	fashion				
62	inaccessibility				
63	status				
64	insolence				
65	hippies				
66	armour				
67	pollution				
68	violence				
69	rock'n'roll				
70	assertiveness				
71	danger				
72	youth				
73	chic				
74	outlaw				
75	modernity				
76	adventure				
77	roughness				
78	environment				
79	charisma				
80	anarchy				
81	extravagance				
82	confidence				
83	fascism				
84	character				

	Leather means...	Agree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Unclear / Inappropriate
85	style				
86	domination				
87	decoration				
88	power				
89	control				
90	design				
91	force				
92	suffering				
93	personality				
94	luxury				
95	thrills				
96	bondage				
97	elegance				
98	freedom				
99	delinquency				
100	reliability				
101	fear				
102	masculinity				
103	risk				
104	exploitation				
105	symbolism				
106	sado-masochism				

Comments:

Q Grid Study 2
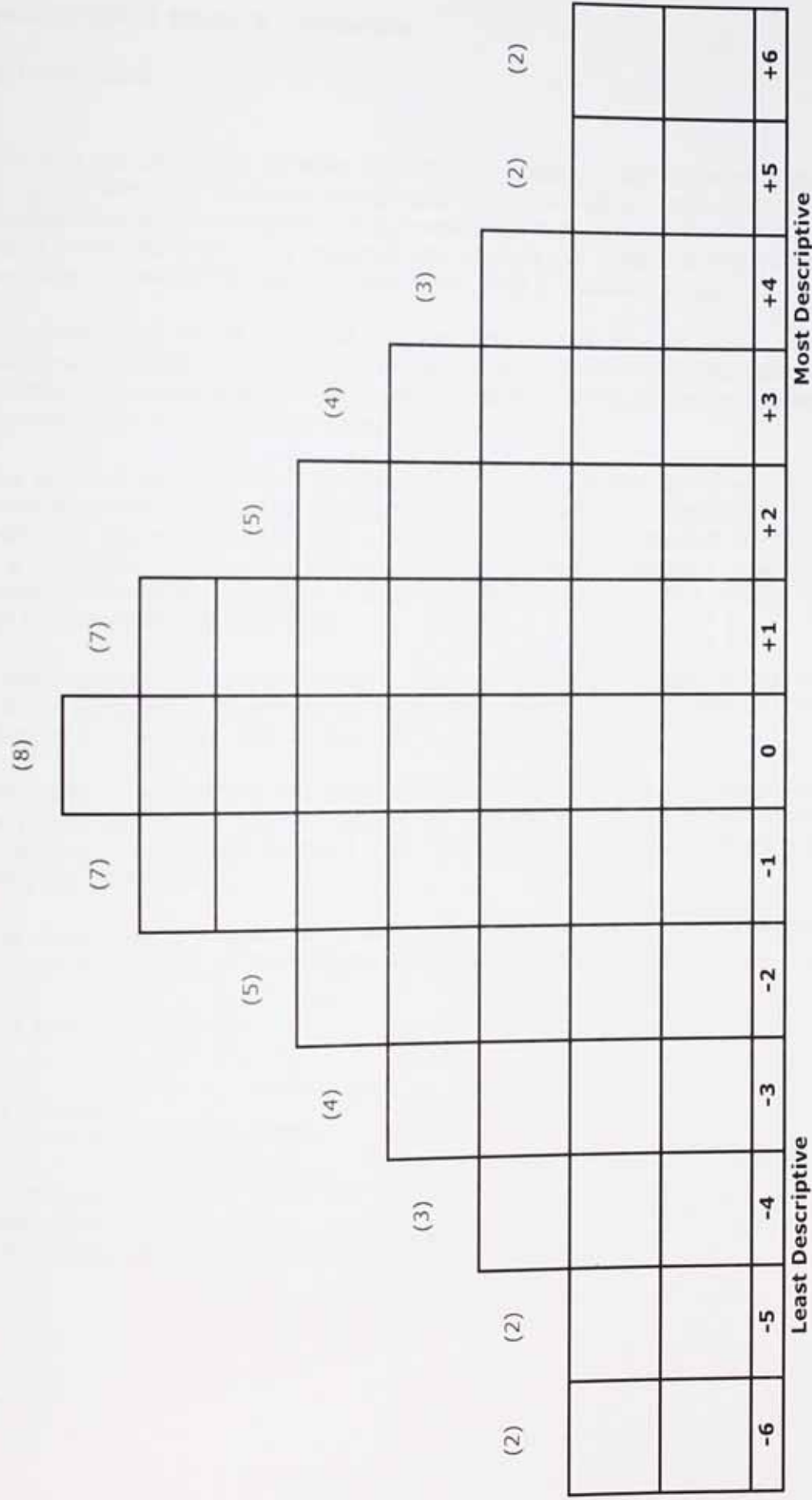
(2)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(7)	(8)	(7)	(5)	(4)	(3)	(2)	(2)
-6	-5	-4	-3	-2	-1	0	+1	+2	+3	+4	+5	+6

Least Descriptive   **Most Descriptive**

You can cross out numbers as you write them into the grid:

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20
21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31	32	33	34	35	36	37	38	39	40
41	42	43	44	45	46	47	48	49	50	51	52	53	54						

Appendix B3: Q Study 2 - Materials

Dear Participant,

Thank you for agreeing to take part in this study. I am a second year PhD student carrying out research into people's representations and understandings of leather and leather objects. This investigation is concerned with the varied ways in which leather, as a material and also in the shape of the objects it is turned into, is perceived, and the role it occupies in people's lives.

The method used is not a test of any kind, nor is it aimed to draw conclusions about your or other people's lives. Its aim is to explore in a systematic manner the many and varied ways in which we look at and relate to leather objects, and to identify patterns across these views.

In the present study, you will be asked to fit into a pattern words which express various meanings associated with leather. Your pattern (numbers you write into a grid) and those of all the other participants will be introduced, anonymously, into a computer programme which identifies similarities between responses. All personal information, however, will remain strictly confidential and at no point will it form part of any database.

Any other comments you are asked to make regarding the topic will be used for the same purpose of exploring common perceptions. While some of them may be quoted in the study, anonymity will be maintained.

Please remember that you are not obliged to take part, and are free to withdraw at any time within the first 2 weeks after you have completed this form, using the contact details given below. I very much appreciate you taking the time to participate in the study.

If you would like to find out more about the research, please feel free to contact me or my supervisor, Dr Rose Capdevila, at the address below.

Thank you for your help!

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INSTRUCTIONS FOR THE Q STUDY

Along with the introductory letter, you will have been provided with the following:

- 54 Q items (a set of words, each appearing on its own numbered card)
- Q grid
- Set of markers (going from -6 to +6)
- Q response booklet
- Participant information form

1.   The first thing to do is lay out the 13 markers and place them in front of you, on a table or on the floor, making sure that you leave plenty of space above, as follows:

-6   -5   -4   -3   -2   -1   0   +1   +2   +3   +4   +5   +6

2.   Think of a leather object in your possession that you are particularly fond of, or alternatively, of a leather object that you would like to possess. Write down your choice and describe it in a few words in the space provided, at the top of the Q Response Booklet.

3.   In order to do the actual sorting, start by looking at each card in turn (the order you do this in doesn't matter). The words on the cards refer to possible characteristics of your chosen object. Related to the object you have chosen, divide the words into three piles, so that you have a pile of words with which you AGREE (you see them as related to the object), a pile with which you DISAGREE (they are not related to the object), and a pile of words about which you have no strong feelings or you cannot decide upon / you feel unsure about.

4.   The idea of Q sorting is to allocate each word (card) to one of the positions in the Q grid, based upon the strength of your agreement/disagreement with its content. In effect, you will rank each word on a continuum ranging from +6 to -6. The final pattern of words must 'mirror' the shape of the Q grid. Having allocated the appropriate number of words to a particular column, the placement of items within that column (above or below one another) makes no difference to the final sort, as ranking is only registered horizontally.

5.   Work on each of the three piles separately, starting with the AGREE pile. Choose the two items you agree with most strongly and put them in +6, then continue with the three items which you consider the next 'most descriptive' and put them in +5, and so on, until you have used up this pile.

6.   Then sort the cards in the DISAGREE pile in the same way, starting with the two items you find 'least descriptive' in the -6 column, then the next three items you feel strongly about in the -5, and so on, until you have exhausted the second pile.

7.   Finally, put the unsure/undecided cards from the third pile in the remaining middle columns, making sure that all items are placed and all columns have the correct number of cards.

8.   Having placed all the items, you can shuffle them around in order to achieve a pattern you are largely satisfied with, taking care to maintain the form of the grid.

9.   When you have finished sorting the items please enter the numbers of the items, as they appear in your sort, in the blank Q grid. If you feel that the grid does not match your ideal distribution of items (e.g. if there are far more items that you disagree with than you agree with) then mark this with a dividing line on the grid.

Q RESPONSE BOOKLET

10.   After having filled in the grid, please turn to the **Q Response Booklet**. The main purpose of this is for you to give information which will help to interpret the emerging patterns. The most useful thing you can do is to fill in the space beside every item stating how and why you placed it where you did or making any other comments you might consider relevant (e.g issues the item might raise, phrasing etc). However, this would require a fair amount of time, so I would appreciate it if you would try to comment, at least, on those items placed at the extreme ends of the grid (+6, +5, -6, -5) or on those you found especially difficult to place.

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION FORM

11.   Finally, you should complete the **Participant Information Form**. Please be assured that any information you give here will be held in strict confidence and seen only by me for administrative reasons.

Thank you once again for your time and effort.

Q RESPONSE BOOKLET

Object: ....

Please comment on the reasons for your sorting of the items, or comment on any items you feel particularly strongly about (e.g. items you feel you most agree / least agree in the context of your choice).

1. comfort	
2. quality	
3. tradition	
4. confidence	
5. attraction	
6. glamour	
7. character	
8. softness	
9. practicality	

10. style	
11. wealth	
12. sexiness	
13. decoration	
14. smoothness	
15. power	
16. rebelliousness	
17. genuineness	
18. fashion	
19. design	
20. versatility	
21. seduction	

22. status	
23. luxury	
24. raunchiness	
25. fragrance	
26. warmth	
27. control	
28. elegance	
29. creativity	
30. appearance	
31. assertiveness	
32. durability	
33. nonconformity	

34. class	
35. youth	
36. reliability	
37. armour	
38. masculinity	
39. action	
40. sensuality	
41. modernity	
42. toughness	
43. texture	
44. adventure	
45. kinkiness	

46. wildness	
47. fitness	
48. environment	
49. resilience	
50. femininity	
51. nature	
52. extravagance	
53. protection	
54. freedom	

Other comments and observations:

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION FORM

(If you do not wish to answer any, or all, of the questions listed below, please feel free to leave the appropriate spaces blank).

Please write in capital letters:

First name:

Last name:

Your age:

Your gender: male/female (circle as appropriate)

Your ethnic background and religious affiliation (if any):

Occupation:

Optional information:
In some situations I may need to get back to participants for clarification purposes. If you do not object to being contacted please fill in your contact details below:

Email:
Telephone number:

Any other information you would like to give:

Having read the introductory materials, completed the Q sort and filled in the above questionnaire, please sign below to confirm your agreement to participate in the study. Thank you!

Date

Signed

Appendix B4: Q Study 2 - Table of Factor Loadings

Factor Loadings for Q Study 2

	Component				
	1	2	3	4	5
P24	.873	.164	-.020	.138	.126
P07	.867	.343	-.029	.060	.050
P04	.864	.156	.090	.186	.019
P26	.839	-.244	-.072	.088	-.118
P09	.819	-.262	.127	.079	.031
P06	.774	.083	.031	-.117	.105
P33	.673	-.080	.334	.016	-.060
P14	.630	.577	-.108	.070	-.012
P16	.624	-.004	.224	.380	.182
P25	.568	-.561	.186	.218	.191
P31	.568	.128	.512	.032	.189
P08	.546	-.526	.339	.184	-.222
P03	.528	-.244	.400	-.062	.316
P12	.461	-.426	.361	.210	.295
P30	.448	.192	-.034	.349	-.138
P28	-.013	.790	.117	.279	-.137
P27	-.133	.692	-.148	.173	-.141
P17	.240	.580	.128	.002	.120
P13	.294	.395	-.017	.004	.175
P32	.002	-.037	.728	.064	-.193
P21	.175	.299	.641	-.077	.367
P18	-.222	-.134	.617	-.097	.136
P11	.575	-.120	.586	.165	-.079
P20	.217	.090	.586	-.020	.480
P10	-.043	-.482	.540	.256	-.199
P15	.472	.314	.531	.090	-.121
P23	-.043	.310	-.057	.809	.011
P22	.419	.023	.057	.701	.037
P01	-.179	.440	.161	.499	-.040
P29	.123	-.155	-.046	.467	.280
P19	.245	-.068	.365	.382	-.016
P02	.238	.222	.073	.028	-.753
P05	.200	.190	.081	.238	.646

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis
Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization

Appendix B5: Q Study 2 - List of participants

Participants Q study 2 (single words)

	Gender	Age	Occupation	Item
P1	M	58	leather	jacket
P2	M	36	lay	leather bound notebook South America
P3	F	23	lay	boots
P4	M	59	lay	leather bound photo album
P5	M	21	lay	shoes
P6	F	45	lay	coat/shoes
P7	M	n/g	lay	briefcase
P8	F	35	leather	bag
P9	F	22	leather	armchair
P10	F	n/g	leather	long coat
P11	F	n/g	leather	rucksack
P12	F	20	lay	pillow
P13	M	20	lay	shoes
P14	F	20	lay	briefcase/satchel
P15	F	19	lay	shoes
P16	M	20	lay	wallet
P17	n/g	n/g	lay	coat
P18	F	34	lay	belt
P19	M	19	lay	bag
P20	F	21	lay	boots
P21	n/g	n/g	lay	jacket
P22	M	45	lay	expensive sofa
P23	M	46	lay	leathers
P24	M	55	lay	chesterfield chair
P25	M	21	lay	shoes
P26	F	51	lay	leather bound books
P27	F	21	lay	cowboy boots
P28	M	33	leather	biker jacket
P29	M	30	lay	jacket
P30	M	59	leather	elephant briefcase
P31	F	61	leather	shoes
P32	F	44	leather	bag
P33	F	28	leather	black jacket

Appendix C1: Interview questions

1. How is leather relevant to you? / How did you get interested in / involved with leather?

2. How do you feel/ what do you think about leather?

   2.1 What is it about it that you like/dislike?

   2.2 How is it different from other materials?

   2.3 Do you notice objects as being leather (or not)?

   2.4 What sort of part does it play in your life?

   2.5 What about leather substitutes?

   2.6 Would you notice / regret the absence of leather?

   2.7 Would you say your feelings towards leather have changed in time?

3. What do you think of other people's reasons for having/wearing leather?

   3.1 Do you think your views are shared by many people?

   3.2 Do you see having / wearing leather as some kind of a statement?

4. Do you see leather as belonging to a particular generation?

   4.1 Is leather part of the past/present/future?

5. Are there any issues to leather that you can see? (environment? animal welfare?)

Appendix C2: Interview study - Informed Consent Form

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this study. This form outlines the purposes of the study and provides a description of your involvement and rights as a participant.

The project forms part of my PhD studies which I am currently undertaking at the University of Northampton. The project is supervised by Dr. Rose Capdevila and it aims to explore people's representations and understandings of leather and leather objects. Participation will involve your agreeing to take part in a semi-structured interview lasting between 40-60 mins approximately. The interview schedule itself is attached to this form. Please ensure that you are happy with the interview content before agreeing to take part.

If you consent to participate, the information from this interview together with data obtained from other interviews will be used to write a report about how leather / leather objects are viewed by the participant group. This means that some of your comments may be cited directly in the final thesis (although these will obviously be anonymised). You should not agree to take part if you find this problematic.

As I have already implied, however, your real name will not be used at any point during data collection, nor in the final report. If you do grant permission for audio recording, the audio records will not be used for any other purpose, nor played for any reason not related to this study. At your discretion, these records will either be destroyed or handed over to you once the PhD process is complete. You can also ask to receive a copy of the final report by using the contact details provided below.

I would reiterate that your participation in this research is voluntary and that you should not agree to take part if you find any of the above unsatisfactory. You also have the right to withdraw your data from the study at any time using the contact details given below.

Thank you for your time.

Do you grant permission to be quoted directly?

Yes _____   No _____

Do you grant permission to be audiorecorded?

Yes _____   No _____

I agree to the terms

Signature _____ Date _____

The researcher can be contacted at the following address:

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Northampton NN2 7AL, UK
e-mail: rose.capdevila@northampton.ac.uk

Appendix C3: Interview study - Transcription notation

(...)   Material deliberately omitted

(laughs) Hearable laughter from the speaker

text   Speaker emphasis

Appendix C4: Interview study - List of participants

No.	Name	Gender	Age	Occupation
1	Anne	Female	47	Leather technician
2	Bridget	Female	n/g	Leather technician
3	Catherine	Female	61	Leather technician
4	Daniel	Male	52	Leather manufacturer
5	Eric	Male	58	Leather researcher
6	Frank	Male	43	Health professional
7	Michelle	Female	39	Restoration specialist
8	Natalie	Female	45	Restoration specialist
9	Joanne	Female	41	Restoration specialist
10	Richard	Male	33	Humanities student
11	Steve	Male	25	Humanities student
12	Elizabeth	Female	60	Medical secretary
13	Neil	Male	44	Leather buyer
14	Rebecca	Female	51	Leather designer
15	Diane	Female	21	Design student

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