



Aalto University
School of Business

Mikkeli Campus

SYMBOLIC CONSUMPTION MEANINGS IN SUBCULTURAL GLOCALISATION

A Hermeneutic Analysis of the Sneakerheads of the Helsinki Region

Simo Lehtovirta

International Business
Bachelor's Thesis
Supervisor: Dr. Paurav V. Shukla
Date of approval: 7 April 2020

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Objectives

The first objective of this study is to perform a hermeneutic analysis of consumption stories of the sneakerheads of the Helsinki region. The ways in which these consumers interpret and assign glocalised consumption meanings related to their footwear within the frameworks of their own personal histories, subcultural histories, and wider sociocultural history are unravelled. The second objective is to present the marketing implications of analysing the sneakerhead subculture as a platform for identity work.

Summary

This research was conducted through a qualitative study in which sneakerheads of the Helsinki region were interviewed about their consumption stories related to sneakers. Through a hermeneutic analysis, symbolic consumption meanings that these consumers associate with their footwear were traced and analysed. The prevalence of different local and global cultural referents for the sneakerheads of the Helsinki region was investigated.

Conclusions

The consumption meanings that the sneakerheads of the Helsinki region associate with their footwear are plural and heterogeneous, but points of convergence exist. Sneakers represent values such as communality, rebelliousness, self-expression and possibly even self-actualisation. Sneakerheads use their shoes as focal elements in their consumer identity projects and their culture of consumption is proposed as a platform for their identity work. Global cultural referents have more prevalence and influence than their local counterparts, but cultural referents inherent to the sneakerhead subculture of the Helsinki region exist and possess relevance for the study and practice of marketing. As such, it might be feasible to apply the glocal and translocal orientations to studying marketplace cultures of sneakerheads in parallel.

Key words: sneakerhead, glocalisation, hermeneutics, consumer culture theory, marketplace cultures, consumer identity projects

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ABSTRACT

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background and Research Interest

Sneakerheads are consumers who collect, trade, and/or admire sneakers (Powell, 2014). Involvement with sneakers might constitute a hobby for these people (ibid), or even an overarching lifestyle (*Sneakerheadz*, 2015). Many sneakerheads spend considerable amounts of time and money on learning about the history of the scene in the process of expanding their shoe collections (Powell, 2014).

The sneaker phenomenon is not showing any signs of slowing down in growth. Brands are launching new sneaker models and reviving old models in the form of retro releases at an increased pace. In addition to new releases, a bright spotlight is placed on the secondary market of sneakers in the subcultural discourse. The biggest player on the resale market, StockX, reports astounding figures in its report for 2019. The gross merchandise value of the company was more than one billion USD, and their registration growth more than 100% (StockX, 2020). In their extensive list of the fastest growing markets, they report that in France the gross merchandise volume grew by 281% in 2019 (ibid). In Germany, the number of new sellers spiked by 274% (ibid). In Qatar, the sales of adidas shoes skyrocketed by 1486% (ibid). Therefore, it can be contended that the growth in reselling will generate more growth and exposure for the subculture as a whole. The soaring prices and the hype on the secondary market create 'intangible value' for the sneaker brands associated with the phenomenon (Denny, 2020: 9).

Theoretical contributions under the umbrella of Consumer Culture Theory (CCT) offer valid tools and knowledge for tracing and understanding the glocalised consumption meanings of the sneakerheads of the Helsinki region. The study of Consumer Identity Projects offers avid explanations and theorisations for postmodern consumption patterns that have the aim of constructing, reconstructing and communicating an identity or identities through consumption (Arnould & Thompson, 2005; Arnould et al., 2019). As the material for the construction of a social life resides in consumption communities (Arnould et al., 2019), the study of Marketplace Cultures can offer insights

into how consumers use these communities and cultures as platforms for identity work. These paradigms open avenues for researching and understanding the assigned consumption meanings of the sneakerheads of the Helsinki region (Thompson, 1997) and assist in understanding the interplay between global and local cultural referents. Thus, notions of translocalness (Rokka, 2010) and glocalness (Robertson, 1995) are apparent.

1.2 Relevance for International Business

It is safe to contend that sneakers have become a global phenomenon (Brooklyn Museum, 2015). Subsequently, different geographical concentrations have their own sneakerhead communities with unique intricacies (Kawamura, 2018). As the sneakerhead phenomenon became global, consumers within local communities adopted the products that presumably went through a process of creolisation or hybridisation (Howes, 1996; Kjelgaard & Askegaard, 2006; Rokka, 2010), meaning that these items were assigned new cultural meanings in the cultural spheres of the adopters (Howes, 1996). It is also possible that consumption meanings stem from global cultural referents, when a translocal orientation for researching a marketplace culture is beneficial (Rokka, 2010). Essentially, as such goods originate from cultural settings that are different from their destinations (Howes, 1996), an international business orientation to understanding the phenomenon can be highly conducive. In the case of this research, the sneaker phenomenon was born in New York City in 1970s, and subsequently became an international movement (Kawamura, 2018), landing also to Finland and the Helsinki region in particular. Also, as the theory on glocalisation is situated under the broader study of globalisation (Robertson, 1995), glocalised consumption communities are abundant in relevance for international business research and practice.

It is emergent that the regional communities of sneakerheads have their own unique traits, but similarities can also be found (Brace-Govan & de Burgh-Woodman, 2008; Kawamura, 2018). In the context of Finland as a Fennoscandian culture, the adoption of the sneakerhead subculture offers interesting insights into how a movement born largely as a result of oppression is understood by these adopters in a completely

different sociocultural setting. In the cultural context of Finland, it can be contended that hardships related to socioeconomic injustice and ethnic and/or racial oppression have not been as prevalent in the national history as in, for instance, the United States. Thus, a different interpretive orientation might be called for in order to understand the symbolic consumption meanings of the sneakerheads of the Helsinki region.

It is paramount to understand what kinds of consumption meanings the sneakerheads of different regional consumption communities associate with their shoes, as they might be more or less detached from those that fostered the birth of the subculture (Brace-Govan & de Burgh-Woodman, 2008). As Cooper and Chalfant (2016: 124) discuss the global spread of graffiti, another element of the hip-hop culture: 'It never crossed my mind that kids in squeaky-clean countries like Sweden would want to paint trains.' It is claimed that the youth in wealthier countries, such as Sweden and Denmark, are attracted to graffiti because of 'the fun and adventure' (ibid: 124). These statements have relevance also for the case of Finland as Sweden and Denmark are Fennoscandian nations as well. Thus, sociocultural and socioeconomic similarities are apparent between these countries. In the context of the sneakerhead subculture, researching the consumers in the Helsinki region offers a complementing lens for the study of the sneakerhead subculture and the global spread of subcultures in general. As many of the sneakerheads of the Helsinki region might be detached from the meanings associated with the birth of the subculture at least to an extent, they associate glocalised consumption meanings with their footwear. As such, they might seek to extract different cultural meanings onto themselves from their consumption objects (McCracken, 1986) than other sneakerheads around the world. This should be taken into account in marketing research and practice regarding subcultural consumption in heterogeneous regional markets. The case of the sneakerheads of the Helsinki region offers a complementing example of phenomena that marketers need to take into account.

As an emergent phenomenon, the glocalisation of subcultures possesses relevance for the study of marketing within an international business setting. As consumers seek to construct and express their identities through consumption choices in the postmodern era (Firat & Venkatesh, 1993; Arnould & Thompson, 2005), the effect of globalisation on consumers' identity work is something that should be understood in

marketing practice and research (Arnould et al., 2019). Research on the glocalised consumption meanings of the sneakerheads of the Helsinki region can generate both managerial and academic implications relevant for the field of international business. For academic purposes, it is paramount to understand what kinds of meanings these consumers associate with their shoes, and why. Also, unravelling the interplay between global and local cultural referents offers insights into understanding the extent of glocalness or translocalness within the marketplace culture. Thus, the desired ingredients for identity work that these sneakerheads look for can be identified. This knowledge can then be used in marketing practice in order to offer these consumers with products that are coherent with their desires and expectations.

1.3 Research Problem

The research problem of this thesis is illuminating the assigned consumption meanings behind the adoption of the sneakerhead subculture originating from a different cultural environment (the United States/New York) by consumers in another (Finland/Helsinki).

1.4 Research Questions

In order to address the given research problem and produce a theoretical and applicable contribution, two research questions have been identified.

1. What are the underlying consumption meanings that the sneakerheads of the Helsinki region assign their sneakers in the context of their glocalised subculture?
2. What are the implications for companies attempting to sell their products to the people in this community?

1.5 Research Objectives

The research objectives of this thesis have been formulated to address the specific research questions. Pertaining to the first research question, through consumption stories derived from semi-structured in-depth interviews with the sneakerheads, a hermeneutic analysis shall be performed in order to elaborate the ways in which the sneakerheads of the Helsinki region interpret and assign consumption meanings related to their footwear within the frameworks of their own personal histories, subcultural histories, and wider sociocultural history. As Walker and Olson (1991: 111) pertinently state, marketers need to be able to understand how consumers understand and reflect products 'in relation to themselves'. Additionally, the interplay between global and glocal cultural referents shall be illuminated.

For the second research question, the marketing implications of analysing the sneakerhead subculture as a platform for identity work shall be presented. The implications derived from the consumption stories in terms of identity work and cultural referents will be reflected on the existing marketing operations of international sneaker producers, and prospective actions shall be proposed.

Following the introduction, the literature review of this thesis will critique and recontextualise existing contributions to the study of the relevant fields. In the methodology section, the use of a qualitative approach to study the phenomenon will be justified, and the research procedure shall be explained. Using the hermeneutic approach as a research strategy shall be critiqued and reviewed. The findings section will lay down recurring themes that are emergent in the interviews. These themes will be used as reflection points for the assigned consumption meanings of the sneakerheads of the Helsinki region. Also, the salient cultural and subcultural referents that the interviewees refer to shall be specified. The discussion and analysis section seeks to connect the findings with each other and unveil possible patterns of interplay. Lastly, the main findings, managerial and academic implications, limitations and future suggestions of this research shall be presented.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Introduction

Sneakerheads are consumers 'who collect and wear sneakers with great enthusiasm' (Choi, Cluver & Kim, 2015: 1). For some sneakerheads, their beloved shoes become a lifestyle that permeates all aspects of their lives (*Sneakerheadz*, 2015). The sneakerhead subculture was born on the streets of New York City in 1970s as a counterculture among ethnic minorities but has since become a global phenomenon and undergone a change in underlying values to an extent (Kawamura, 2018). As the sneaker phenomenon exploded, a whole industry was formed around it: everything ranging from conventions to media houses and from expert maintenance and customisation services to supplies, all focusing on sneakers. As the subculture entered the global estrade, a reverse development gained impetus in parallel, and local communities emerged around sneakers (ibid). Therefore, the sneakerhead subculture became glocalised (Robertson, 1995).

Construed according to the principles of the theoretical framework, this literature review proceeds as follows. First, the theoretical concept of glocalisation will be introduced in a subcultural context. Then, the hip-hop culture and the role of the sneakerhead subculture within it will be illuminated. The tenet of Consumer Culture Theory (CCT) is identified as the relevant sub-field of marketing studies due to the inherently socio-cultural nature of the researched phenomena. Contributions to the study of Marketplace Cultures and Consumer Identity Projects will be reviewed and recontextualised, and a conceptual framework for the generation of glocalised symbolic consumption meanings within the sneakerhead subculture of the Helsinki region shall be proposed.

2.2. Glocalisation of Subcultures

Glocalisation is a concept coined by Roland Robertson (1995), which refers to the fusion of the global and the local in the context of globalisation. In a business setting,

Robertson (1995) refers to micromarketing as a possible example of glocalisation: global market offerings need to be tailored for and advertised to heterogeneous local markets. As the world has become even more globalised and interconnected, products and brands are increasingly produced in one cultural setting and consumed in another (Howes, 1996; Jackson, 1999; Rokka, 2010). As Levy (1959) postulates, marketplace offerings are consumed for their symbolic meanings. These assigned symbolic meanings, however, might differ greatly between the cultural settings of the producer and the consumer (Howes, 1996).

As goods and brands enter new cultural spheres, they are assigned new meanings (Howes, 1996; Jackson, 1999; Jackson, 2004). This process has been dubbed creolisation or hybridisation in different contexts (Howes, 1996; Kjelgaard & Askegaard, 2006; Rokka, 2010). Interpretively, all of these concepts pertain to the fusion of the global and the local, which creates a new entity of its own (Arthur, 2006). However, Rokka (2010) challenges the concept of glocalisation and calls for a translocal orientation for studying marketplace cultures. He deems the concept of glocalisation restrictive due to its preoccupation with 'national, ethnic and territorial contexts' (ibid: 6). As such, the argument is valid, but it disregards the existence and relevance of the unique intricacies of regional communities that are apparent in research (Robertson, 1995; Jackson, 1999; Arthur, 2006). Be it due to geographic, linguistic, or any other reasons, local variations of different global phenomena have distinctive attributes of great relevance, especially for the field of marketing.

The theory of glocalisation possesses subcultural relevance. In the context of youth culture, global homogenous consumption patterns have varying cultural meanings in different cultures (Kjelgaard & Askegaard, 2006). In addition, the artefacts and manifestations of hip-hop culture have taken on glocalised symbolic meanings in different parts of the world (see Arthur, 2006; Tervo, 2014; Westinen, 2014). This applies to the sneakerhead subculture as well, and research on local communities within the subculture is called for (Kawamura, 2018). Addressing this theoretical gap, an analysis of the consumption meanings that the sneakerheads of the Helsinki region assign their beloved shoes offers an elaboration.

2.3. The Influence of the Hip-Hop Culture on Sneakers

As Kawamura (2018) contends, the sneakerhead subculture needs to be examined in the broader context of the hip-hop culture. Hip-hop culture was born in the impoverished parts of New York City in 1960s and 1970s (Price, 2006). The new culture, like the neighbourhoods where it was created, was mostly dominated by racial and ethnic minorities (McLeod, 1999; Rabaka, 2011; Kawamura, 2018). As the City of New York declared bankruptcy in 1970s, the citizens' standard of living plummeted and crime rates soared (Kawamura, 2018). Under these circumstances, hip-hop was born as a 'solution, the product of self-determination, self-realization, creativity and pride' (Price, 2006: xi).

The main elements of hip-hop include DJing, graffiti, b-boying/b-girling and MCing (Price, 2006). As such, street fashion is not traditionally included in the equation that includes music, dance, and visual art. However, as the hip-hop culture evolved, additional elements have been included in the cultural universe, such as fashion, beat boxing and language (ibid). As Kawamura (2018) asserts, sneakers have been an essential 'part of rap musicians' uniform'. All things considered, the sneakerhead subculture emerged as a part of the overarching hip-hop culture (ibid). This influence is prevalent today, as sneakers continue to be a staple part of the hip-hop aesthetic. Famous hip-hop artists are invited by major sneaker companies to design shoe models that consumers even camp out and queue for (Vuoripuro, 2015; BBC, 2019). Then, these shoes are sold on the secondary market for substantial amounts of money (Choi, 2017).

The sneakerhead subculture, like the hip-hop culture as a whole, has undergone a change in underlying values to an extent as these cultural forms have become commercialised (McLeod, 1999; Arthur, 2006; Kawamura, 2018). What used to be a celebration of inclusivity, creativity and pride, has now become a materialistic platform for status games in some contexts (Podoshen, Andrzejewski & Hunt, 2014; Kawamura, 2018). However, it goes without saying that this development does not necessarily mean that everyone who subscribes to hip-hop's cultural ethos would not stand for the original values anymore. As such, it can be contended that being a sneakerhead does not automatically result in being intrinsically materialistic (Belk, 1985), even though the

subculture manifests endemically in material possessions. Nevertheless, sneaker collecting, like any other collecting, can have deteriorating repercussions (Belk, 1995).

Overall, the hip-hop culture constitutes an important frame of reference (Thompson, 1997) for this study. Also, the modifying effects of the Finnish culture and the urban city culture of Helsinki should be reflected on in the analysis, like all other relevant cultural referents in a case-by-case analysis. Thus, a relevant a priori context of investigation is determined for the analysis of consumption meanings of the sneakerheads of the Helsinki region (ibid).

2.4. Research on Sneakers

As different kinds of consumption communities have been extensively reviewed in academia (see Schouten & McAlexander, 1995; Kozinets, 2001; Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001; Leigh, Peters & Shelton, 2006; Goulding, Shankar & Canniford, 2013), the sneakerhead subculture has remained relatively underexposed regardless of its significance to the field and relevance as a consumer segment. The overall global athletic footwear market is anticipated to reach 95.14 billion USD by the year 2025 (Grand View Research, 2018) and the resale market of coveted sneakers is estimated to range from 2 (Financial Times, 2019) to 6 billion USD (StockX, 2020), depending on the source. Denny (2020: 1) describes sneakers as a marketplace icon that is 'an all-consuming subcultural obsession.' It is eminent that sneakers have arisen to a mythical status through an interplay of cultural intermediaries (ibid). Thus, the sneakerhead subculture can be seen as a cornucopia of different symbolic consumption meanings.

According to StockX (2020), 33% of men and 26% of women in the Generation Z age group identify themselves as sneakerheads, offering further evidence for the significance of the sneakerhead subculture as a lucrative target market. This postulation, however, might be based on a sample that consists mostly of American consumers and should therefore be hedged. Nevertheless, as a target market, the sneakerheads are profitable customers who are willing to spend considerable sums of money on their footwear purchases (Thompson, 2015; Vainio, 2018).

Brace-Govan and de Burgh-Woodman (2008) have investigated the sneakerhead subculture through a postcolonial lens in the United States and France, but such an interpretive device might highly likely not be as conducive in the context of Finland. Finland has its own history regarding colonialism (Hiilamo, 2018), but the sociocultural effects of it are arguably diminutive when compared with those of many other countries, such as the two nations in question. Many Finns continue to be completely oblivious of Finland's role in colonialism altogether (ibid).

Lindsay-Prince (2013: 4) claims that female sneakerheads negotiate 'their femininity and identity, through a bricolage of masculinity and femininity.' Albeit the predominance of masculinity within the sneakerhead subculture (Lindsay-Prince, 2013; Choi, 2017; Kawamura, 2018), or perhaps because of this very reason, female sneakerheads are able to pursue different kinds of feminine identities through their consumption (Lindsay-Prince, 2013). Similar contentions are made by Martin, Schouten and McAlexander (2006) in the context of Harley Davidson riders, which is also a predominantly masculine subculture. Arguably, female consumers possess a great deal of relevance as a marginalised subgroup within the sneakerhead subculture. However, due to their marginalised status, it might be very challenging to recruit them to research projects, as illuminated by Choi (2017).

Due to the lack of extensive scholarly coverage of the sneakerhead phenomenon, an abundance of popular and journalistic sources is used in deriving information about the community even within academia. This is a shortcoming that requires further attention amongst academics. More research is called for to address the theoretical gaps, especially when it comes to converting the knowledge and findings into utilisable business intelligence.

2.5. Consumer Culture Theory

CCT is a stream of research within marketing studies that perceives consumption as a sociocultural practice (Askegaard, 2015). By utilising sociocultural approaches to consumer behaviour and market research (Arnould & Thompson, 2005; Arnould et al.,

2019), CCT recognises consumption as a social and cultural enterprise. CCT research is traditionally divided in four distinctive domains: Consumer Identity Projects, Marketplace Cultures, Sociohistoric Patterning of Consumption, and Mass-Mediated Marketplace Ideologies and Consumers' Interpretive Strategies (Arnould & Thompson, 2005).

The foundational article by Arnould and Thompson (2005: 869) defines consumer culture as

‘a social arrangement in which the relations between lived culture and social resources, and between meaningful ways of life and the symbolic and material resources on which they depend, are mediated through markets.’

Another more simplified definition states that ‘consumer culture is a dynamic network of boundary spanning material, economic, symbolic, and social relationships or connections’ (Arnould et al., 2019: 3). Thus, consumption phenomena can only be understood in their multitude of meanings by perceiving them in their sociocultural contexts, and by taking into consideration the whole consumption cycle all the way from acquisition to disposition (Askegaard, 2015). Also, what happens before acquisition and after disposition can possess valuable insights into understanding consumption.

The view of culture within CCT is dramatically different from that of traditional consumer research, as CCT recognises that in consumer culture the actions, beliefs and thoughts of consumers are paramount instead of treating attributes of character, such as nationality or ethnicity, as the most salient cultural constituents (Arnould et al., 2019). CCT also canonises methodological plurality (Arnould & Thompson, 2005), rejects epistemological commitments and seeks to unravel the multiplicity of cultural groupings and meanings that manifest within consumption and market capitalism (Arnould et al., 2019). However, the existence of national cultures should not be outright denied but treated as a modifier that may or may not be of significance in an individual's specific consumption choice. This argument can be based on the postmodern turn of marketing, which recognises the eschewal of forces such as unity, authority and continuity (Firat & Venkatesh, 1993).

Due to the postmodern forces in situ, traditional sources of identity, such as ascribed personal attributes, education, employment and religion, can be argued to have lost some of their meaning (Firat & Venkatesh, 1993; Arnould & Thompson, 2005; Kawamura, 2018). When the society has a multitude of norms and virtually no regulations for who one can be, a state of Durkheimian anomie is manifested (Kawamura, 2018). In the age of postmodernism, experiences are fragmented and detached from their original referents, constituting hyperreality (Firat & Venkatesh, 1993). Luecke's (2019) assertions on the sneakerhead subculture are abundant in postmodern notions regarding the detachment of meanings and referents:

'Sneakerheads take something with a specific intended use and repurpose it to their own needs, subverting its original meaning without political intentions. Take Jordan 11s, sneakers designed to be worn for basketball. They're performance shoes right down to the full-length carbon fiber plates in their soles. So, when a sneakerhead repurposes Jordan 11s as a fashion statement, an icon of commodity fetishization, and a marker of community identity, that original athletic intention has been subverted. The mainstream wears Jordan 11s for basketball, but sneakerheads wear them as an emblem, creating a whole web of meaning around them that exists outside of athletics. And that's the essence of a subculture.'

Perceivably, sneakerheads remove their sneakers from their original cultural referents and connect them with new meanings. In the age of postmodernity, the divide between reality and appearance is removed (Arnould et al., 2019), offering marketers with virtually unlimited possibilities to position their offerings on the market. In today's consumption society, commodities can become epitomes of luxury and what once used to be of value may become undesirable.

Marketing consciously and continuously redefines signifiers (Firat & Venkatesh, 1993), projecting desired cultural meanings on consumer goods (McCracken, 1986). While accepting the postmodern assertions, a critical point to consider is that a coherent self-identity, social ties, and community involvement continue to be in the center of psychological life, constituting a modernist quest (Bellah et al., 1985; Romanyszyn,

1989 cited in Thompson & Haytko, 1997). This calls for specific interpretive strategies from consumers (Arnould & Thompson, 2005), as identity is no longer based on what you produce but what you consume (Firat & Venkatesh, 1993) and the distinction between a consumer and a producer is blurred (Pongsakornrunsilp, 2010; Ritzer & Jurgenson, 2010).

By their nature, the abstract and intangible cultural and social capitals can be converted into economic capital in different fora (Bourdieu, 1986). As Bourdieu (1986) attests, cultural capital might manifest in e.g. educational qualifications or cultural know-how, and social capital in social connections or titles of nobility, among other things. Thornton's (1995) theory on subcultural capital is an extension to Bourdieu's (1986) original theorisation of cultural capital. It works in a very similar manner to cultural capital, making it possible for a member of a subculture, a sneakerhead for instance, to be distinguished, recognised by their peers and be 'in the know' (Thornton, 1995: 27). As Arthur (2006) pertinently attests, the knowledge of perceivably authentic brands can constitute subcultural capital within a subculture. For sneakerheads, subcultural capital may be knowing the brands that belong to the sneakerheads' cultural universe, in addition to being able to name, recognise and distinguish relevant shoe models from each other and from non-relevant sneakers.

In his groundbreaking work, 'Theory of the Leisure Class', Veblen (1899) coins the concept of conspicuous consumption, which is still relevant over a hundred years later. Once a society starts accumulating surplus in production, a relationship between property and status is instantiated (Veblen, 1899; Trigg, 2001). This property that the person with disposable income possesses and consumes becomes specialised and rigorous quality standards are imposed on it (Veblen, 1899). It has been traditionally attested that consumption ideals would 'trickle down' from the upper echelons of the society to the bottom (Trigg, 2001), but this phenomenon can also occur in reverse (Fine & Leopold, 1993; Lears, 1993 cited in Trigg, 2001). This is perceivable in the way how the sneakerhead culture has evolved from the counterculture in the streets of New York in 1970s to become a platform for status games for consumers with means (Kawamura, 2018). As such, it might be contended, at least to an extent, that sneakers have been removed from their original referents and planted in the realm of hyperreality

(Firat & Venkatesh, 1993), indicating different cultural meanings than in the past (McCracken, 1986).

2.5.1. Marketplace Cultures and Consumption Communities

Contributions to the study on consumption communities are by and large credited to one of the core streams of research of CCT, Marketplace Cultures (Arnould & Thompson, 2005; Arnould et al., 2019). According to Arnould & Thompson (2005: 873)

‘The key research question driving this program of research is this: how does the emergence of consumption as a dominant human practice reconfigure cultural blueprints for action and interpretation, and vice versa?’

From the postmodern perspective of CCT research, the material used in the construction of a social life resides in consumption communities that have been formed around market-mediated phenomena (Arnould et al., 2019). These different kinds of consumption communities can, for instance, create value (Cova, 1997; Fournier & Lee, 2009; Schau, Arnould & Muniz, 2009), facilitate social bonds (Celsi, Rose & Leigh, 1993; Muniz & O’Guinn, 2001; Närvänen, Koivisto & Kuusela, 2019) and foster loyalty among consumers (Schouten & McAlexander, 1995; Muniz & O’Guinn, 2001; Fournier & Lee, 2009).

Canniford (2011) pertinently calls for a clear divergence between different forms of consumption communities. Each of these community types have their own attributes and implications for marketing research and practice and should not be treated as similar entities. The existing three prevalent theorisations include neo-tribes (see Cova, 1997; Cova & Cova, 2002; Goulding, Shankar & Canniford, 2013), brand communities (see Muniz & O’Guinn, 2001; Algesheimer, Dholakia & Herrmann, 2005; Fournier & Lee, 2009), and subcultures of consumption (see Schouten & McAlexander, 1995; Arthur, 2006; Leigh, Peters & Shelton, 2006).

2.5.1.1. Neo-Tribes

The concept of neo-tribes was coined to theorise the ephemeral socialisation in the postmodern era (Cova, 1997). As a result of the hyper-individualisation of the postmodern society, Cova (1997) attests that a reverse phenomenon is emergent, driving individuals to a desperate hunt for social connections. Neo-tribes are characterised by weaker commitments (Canniford, 2011) and temporality (Goulding, Shankar & Canniford, 2013). Consequently, tribal memberships overlap and are not mutually exclusive (Närvänen, 2013). Inherently, tribal activities offer an escape from the everyday life (Goulding, Shankar & Elliott, 2002). As neo-tribes gather and disperse with alternating participants and resources to create temporal platforms for socialisation, their fluid and transient nature poses challenges for managerial control (Canniford, 2011). In essence, marketers should recognise that their product or brand might not be an intrinsic resource for the consumers in itself (Närvänen, 2013), but rather serves as an element for creative marketplace play in pursuit of fun and enjoyment (Canniford, 2011). The clubbing culture is an exemplary form of tribal communal consumption (Goulding, Shankar & Elliott, 2002; Goulding et al., 2009; Goulding, Shankar & Canniford, 2013). Clubbers assemble in pursuit of socialisation and escapism from the everyday life, disperse, and reassemble with different people and resources, such as alcohol and narcotics, even in varying locations. As a general premise for neo-tribes, 'the link is more important than the thing' (Cova, 1997: 307).

2.5.1.2. Brand Communities

According to Muniz and O'Guinn (2001: 412), '[a] brand community is a specialized, non-geographically bound community, based on a structured set of social relations among admirers of a brand.' Brand communities differ from neo-tribes by revolving around a central, focal brand, constituting shared empathetic or moral bonds between members, and creating strong (oppositional) loyalty (ibid). Schau, Muniz & Arnould (2009) present distinctive concepts to theorise value creation within brand communities. As per their remarks, the level of socialisation of members can vary within a brand community. Also, brand communities are characterised by a hierarchical structure, which, however, is inherent for subcultures of consumption as well

(Närvänen, 2013). Brand communities also engage with businesses (Canniford, 2011). Through the practice of commoditizing (Schau, Muniz & Arnould, 2009), members communicate explicitly or implicitly with the company management in order to influence their actions and decisions. As Fournier and Lee (2009) claim, companies can choose from a plethora of possible brand community building strategies, making the community type arguably more manageable than, for instance, neo-tribes.

An exploratory netnographic study on an online sneakerhead brand community, NikeTalk, adds to the academic study on sneakers (Choi & Kim, 2019). In the study, the communication practices, topics of discussion and decision-making processes of sneakerheads are discussed (ibid). As per Choi & Kim (2019), sneakerheads seek to exchange information about upcoming sneaker releases, help each other to find desired shoes on the market, and debate about sneakers. Thus, they exhibit moral responsibility inherent for brand communities (Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001) and commitment to a certain product class, a characteristic of subcultures of consumption (Schouten & McAlexander, 1995), amongst other aspects. It was also found out that consumers are prone to reacting to leaked, and possibly false, release information, regardless of the legitimacy of the source (Choi & Kim, 2019). As Choi & Kim (2019) lay down, brands need to find ways to prevent information leaks from happening to protect the official brand promotion and maintain consumers' trust.

2.5.1.3. Subcultures of Consumption

A subculture of consumption is 'a distinctive subgroup of society that self-selects on the basis of a shared commitment to a particular product class, brand, or consumption activity' (Schouten & McAlexander, 1995: 43). Distinctive from brand communities (Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001), subcultures of consumption do not necessarily revolve around a specific brand. By comparing subcultures of consumption with neo-tribes (Cova, 1997), it can be seen that subcultures are eminently more intrinsically committed and connected to their objects or activities than neo-tribes. As Canniford (2011) consolidates, subcultures of consumption are traditionally characterised by cohesion, dedication and resistance. Subcultures of consumption are hierarchical, have their own rituals and communication practices, and share a common set of values

and beliefs (Schouten & McAlexander, 1995). Also, subcultural members have different underlying motivations, which results in heterogeneity within the subcultural group (Närvänen, 2013).

Subcultures of consumption tend to have a problematised relationship with commercialisation and commodification (ibid), which is exhibited in the cases of hip-hop (Price, 2006; Rabaka, 2011) and sneakerheads (Choi & Kim, 2019) too. An example of this would be the conundrum between accessibility and exclusivity of sneakers. The most coveted sneakers are often released in very limited quantities (Choi, 2017; Choi & Kim, 2019). Even though scarcity and competition have been perceived to add to the value and lustrousness of market offerings (Byun & Mann, 2011; Choi, Cluver & Kim, 2016), engaged sneakerheads who have experienced frequent stock-outs or been displeased with the quality of the products have even withdrawn from the subculture (Choi, 2017; Choi & Kim, 2019). Choi (2017) rightfully calls for an increased effort from the suppliers of sneakers to research the optimal supply for exclusive releases.

Kozinets (2001) and Canniford (2011) challenge the concept of subcultures of consumption. As argued by Kozinets (2001), the 'sub' prefix should be omitted from the concept to detach the connotations of inferiority and subordinate status from the cultural community. He coins the concept of culture of consumption

'to conceptualize a particular interconnected system of commercially produced images, texts, and objects that particular groups use—through the construction of overlapping and even conflicting practices, identities, and meanings—to make collective sense of their environments and to orient their members' experiences and lives' (ibid: 68).

As such, his proposition is very much congruent with the postmodern view of CCT (Firat & Venkatesh, 1993; Arnould et al., 2019), but has not gained momentum in the theoretical discourse. Canniford (2011), on the other hand, claims in the light of recent research that subcultures no longer exhibit cohesion, dedication and resistance like before. He argues that such communities 'require a different theoretical description altogether' (ibid: 61). Canniford (2011) further emphasises how subcultures and neo-

tribes are distinctive concepts with their own attributes. However, he pertinently recognises that it might be beneficial to apply the concepts in parallel in analysing a consumption community (ibid). As hip-hop and the sneakerhead subculture have entered the mainstream, their subcultural status can indeed be contested.

2.5.2. Consumer Identity Projects

Consumer Identity Projects is a domain of inquiry within CCT that deals with questions pertaining to the construction of an identity narrative in collaboration with market-mediated resources (Arnould & Thompson, 2005; Arnould et al., 2019). Shankar, Elliott and Fitchett (2009: 79) refer to consumer culture 'as a smorgasbord of symbolic resources' that individuals interact with in order to produce and reproduce identities. According to Arnould et al. (2019: 16), questions posed by consumer identity work researchers include:

'Why is identity such an issue in consumer culture? How do consumers pursue their identity projects? How do they use commercially circulated products, services, knowledge, images, and experiences to construct identities? What meanings do consumers pursue? How does a sense of selfhood form in market-mediated societies? What problems does globalization of consumer culture pose to individuals in diverse cultural contexts?'

As postulated, consumers consume goods for the symbolic meanings that reside within them (Levy, 1959). We seek to extend our personal identities by consuming goods (Belk, 1988) that allow us to extract desirable cultural meanings onto ourselves (McCracken, 1986).

McCracken (1986) proposes a revolutionary model for the movement of cultural meaning in consumer goods. According to the model, cultural meaning, organised in cultural categories and cultural principles, resides in the culturally constituted world. The meaning is then transferred onto consumer goods through advertising and fashion systems. Finally, consumers extract the meaning onto themselves through possession, exchange, grooming and divestment rituals. By its nature, cultural meaning is never

static, but 'is constantly in transit' (ibid: 71). As such, it can be contended that changes in the cultural constituents and referents are instantly reflected on the consumption meanings.

McCracken's (1986) model, however, has been contested for its preoccupation with an assumed downward movement of cultural meaning (Thompson & Haytko, 1997). The model assumes that consumption meanings are 'handed down' in the described chain of meaning transfer until they reach the consumer (ibid: 38). This is not in line with the postmodern view of the transfer of meaning (Firat & Venkatesh, 1993), and to a large extent disregards the 'diffuse, transformative and consumer-centered' aspects of meaning transfer (Thompson & Haytko, 1997: 38). Thus, the model should be revised to accommodate the possible vertical and horizontal paths for meaning transfer that are inherently bidirectional in the postmodern era. To reflect these arguments on the sneakerhead subculture, it can be contended that consumption meanings of sneakers are understood in relation to personal socio-cultural histories (Thompson, 1997; Thompson & Haytko, 1997), in addition to considering the wider socio-cultural frame of reference (Thompson, 1997). Also, meaning transfer can happen in all directions on all levels of the meaning transfer chain, for example from a consumer to another, from a consumer to a producer, from a producer to a consumer, from an object to an individual and from an individual to an object. As Belk (1988: 141) states: 'we may impose our identities on possessions and possessions may impose their identities on us'.

Belk (1988) introduces the concept of the extended self, in which objects act as extensions of identities. This self-extension can occur through four distinct processes, which shall be elaborated with examples. Through control and mastery, a surfer can extend their identity by the skilful use of a surfboard. By creation, a pottery aficionado extends their identity by the making of beautiful ceramics. By having knowledge of an object, a sneakerhead can validate their identity by continuously educating oneself on sneakers. Lastly, through contamination, the presence of, for instance, bodily fluids, such as sweat, on an object, leads into the incorporation of the object into self. As such, someone might seek to incorporate the traits of others into their own identity by using contaminated products (ibid). All things considered, Belk's (1988) theorisation manifests in the sneakerhead subculture in a multitude of ways. Arguably, sneaker

customisation, searching for information about sneakers, and wearing sneakers all result in identity extensions.

Additionally, consumers are constantly in danger of having their identity investments devalued (Arsel & Thompson, 2011). This is also apparent in the contexts of hip-hop and the sneakerhead subculture, as elaborated in earlier sections. As a devaluing marketplace myth that attracts flocks of consumers to a certain consumption activity is instantiated, consumers who have made identity investments in the field have to protect the value of their social and (sub)cultural capital (ibid). This protection can happen by espousing demythologising processes of aesthetic discrimination, when a subcultural consumer disavows unfavourable associations, symbolic demarcation, when a consumer projects the negative associations on the consumers who are not favourable within the subculture, or proclamation of consumer sovereignty, when the subcultural consumer re-emphasises that the subcultural membership is only one part of their identity among many other traits (ibid).

As hip-hop and the sneakerhead subculture have become commercialised and commodified, the hard-core consumers have to use numerous demythologising practices (ibid) to maintain the symbolic value of their identity investments.

Denny (2020) refers to Arsel and Thompson's (2011) contribution when stating that marketplace myths have become decentralised in consumers' identity work. Extending the dialectic on decentralisation, it can be contended that consumers possess a great deal of influence in both negotiating and negating these myths on their own terms. This argument can be corroborated with Denny's (2020: 10) claim on the co-curation of marketplace myths: 'Brands ... recognize consumers in many respects as co-curators of their marketplace myths.'

2.6. Conceptual Framework

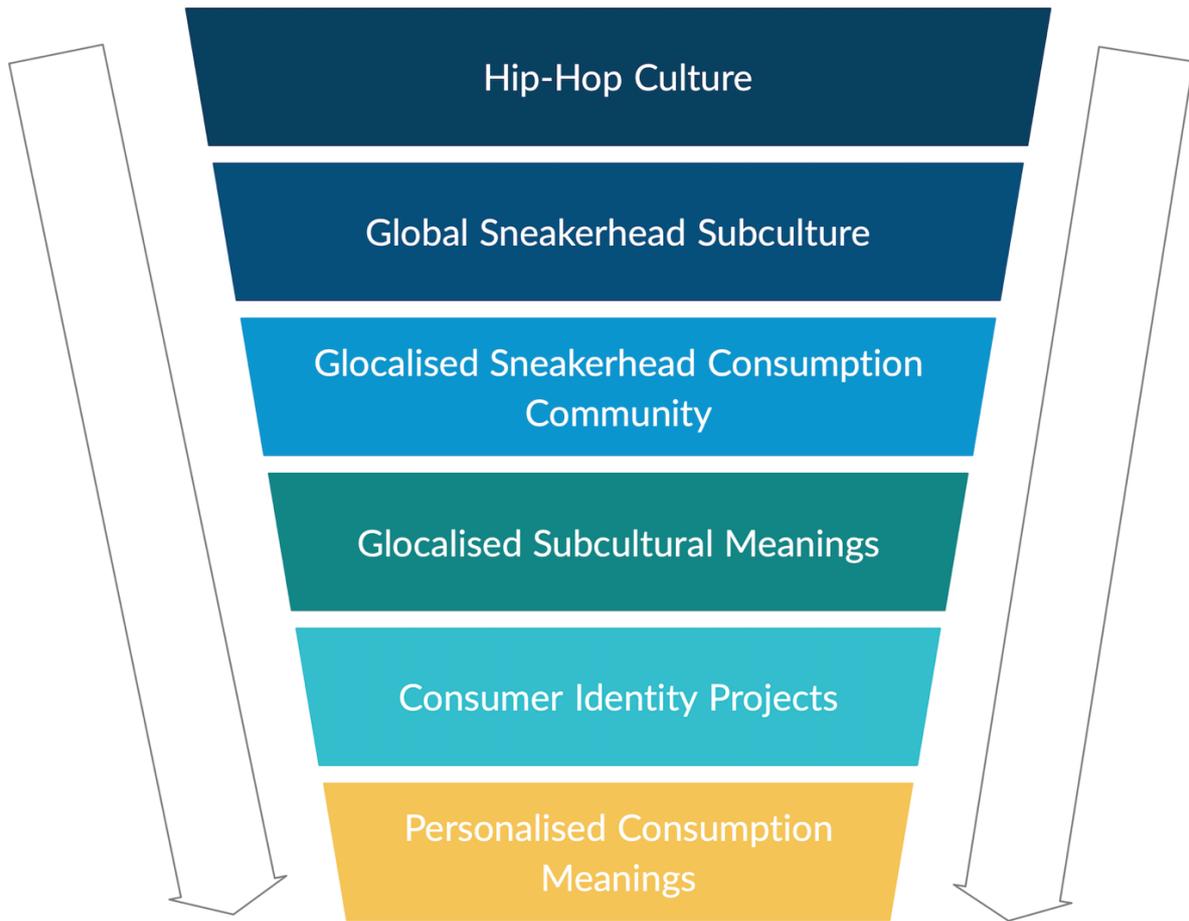


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework for the Generation of Glocalised Symbolic Consumption Meanings

The conceptual framework (see Figure 1) offers an illustration of the process of generation of glocalised symbolic consumption meanings relevant for this study. Following a funnel-like shape, the model moves from the broadest conceptual category to the narrowest one. Recognising the state of postmodernity (Firat & Venkatesh, 1993), the framework should not be mistakenly perceived to serve as an illustration of downward meaning transfer. Rather, it illustrates how the process of glocalisation proceeds from broad, global cultural referents (Hip-Hop culture and Global Sneakerhead Subculture) into the formation of a glocalised community. Then, glocalised subcultural meanings are generated within this community that are subsequently incorporated into consumers' identity work. As the consumers interpret

these meanings in respect to their own socio-cultural histories and a broader frame of reference, they become personalised. Thus, in order to understand the glocalised subcultural consumption meanings of the sneakerheads of the Helsinki region, these meanings have to be traced from inherently personal consumption stories.

2.7. Conclusion

This literature review has offered an extensive look on the relevant theories concerning glocalisation, marketplace cultures, and consumer identity projects in the contexts of hip-hop culture and the sneakerhead subculture. An existing theoretical gap has been identified, and conditions for a supplementing contribution have been established. Through critique of the existing theoretical contributions, a justification for the usage of the relevant concepts and constructs is presented. Existing theorisations have been recontextualised with examples, and a process for deriving and analysing subcultural consumption meanings has emerged.

3. METHODOLOGY

In this section, the methodological approach of this study shall be elaborated. The first subsection will elaborate the study design of this thesis. Then, the data collection procedure shall be explained. Lastly, the process of sampling design utilised in this work will be explained.

3.1. Study Design

This thesis utilises both secondary and primary data in order to address the research questions. The secondary data is discussed in the literature review of this study. This section shall elaborate on the generation and usage of primary data. As this thesis sets out to understand the glocalisation of subcultures, and subsequently the glocalised consumption meanings that are eminent within such subcultures, a coherent

methodological approach is needed. The existing pool of CCT research is abundant in qualitative research (Arnould & Thompson, 2005). As such, the themes and phenomena that CCT research seeks to unravel, such as symbolic consumption meanings, are often accessible through qualitative methods (ibid).

Using interpretivism as the underlying research philosophy, this thesis aims to understand the meanings that the sneakerheads of the Helsinki region attach to their consumption experiences (Spiggle, 1994). Subsequently, this study sets off to decipher how the consumption 'meanings cohere and form patterns' (ibid: 497). Lastly, these findings should lead to interpreting 'how symbolic forms, rituals, traditions and cultural codes ... affirm and reproduce cultural themes and culture' (ibid: 497). From an interpretive standpoint, the aim of this thesis is not to produce a verifiable, logical and detached theorisation of the researched phenomenon emergent in many accounts on consumer behaviour (Askegaard & Linnet, 2011), but to describe 'the contextualized personal expressions of an individual consumer', adhering to hermeneutics (Arnold & Fischer, 1994: 61).

Espousing the inductive logic, this study uses research-generated evidence in order to draw conclusions and generate contributions that are coherent with the findings through an interpretive process. As such, this study moves inductively from data generation and interpretation to theory building (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2019). In essence, the inductive logic is highly contextual and makes it possible to better understand the emergent phenomenon while offering leeway to explore multiple possible explanations for it (ibid).

As consumption meanings can be perceived as a fuel for socialisation and forces that drive consumers to assemble in communities, a device for capturing and interpreting them is required. Hermeneutics (Arnold & Fischer, 1994; Thompson, 1997) shall be used as a foundational research strategy for this study. Thompson (1997) proposes a hermeneutical framework for deriving marketing insights from consumption stories. The framework generates

'three levels of interpretation: (1) discerning the key patterns of meanings expressed by a given consumer in the texts of his or her consumption stories,

(2) identifying key patterns of meaning that emerge across the consumption stories expressed by different consumers, and (3) deriving broader conceptual and managerial implications from the analysis of consumer narratives' (ibid: 438).

Instead of offering for example parsimonious explanations for consumption stories in terms of spending and value, hermeneutic readings aim to dig deeper to reveal points of symbolic significance and meanings that underlie behind the assigned perceived value (ibid).

The process of hermeneutic interpretation proceeds in two distinct stages: intratextual and intertextual cycles (ibid). The consumption stories should be examined as individual units, and then analysed intertextually in search for patterns and points of difference (ibid). However, the process of interpretation is far from linear, and multiple iterations are done during the process, resulting in back-and-forth movement between the different stages (ibid). This spiral-like movement of the interpretive process is called the hermeneutic circle (Arnold & Fischer, 1994).

An important aspect concerning the hermeneutic process is the fusion of horizons between the interpreter and the consumption stories that are interpreted (ibid). As Arnold and Fischer (1994: 63-64) describe:

'The horizon of the interpreter is his or her [pre-]understanding. The horizon of the text is its sense discerned through semiotic-structural analysis and progressive iterations of the hermeneutical circle. ... [Pre-]understanding becomes understanding.'

It is paramount for the hermeneutic interpretation that the interpreter studies and explores the historical and cultural conditions relevant to the analysed phenomenon and thus selects an a priori context of investigation (Thompson, 1997). The a priori context of investigation of this study, the sneakerhead subculture of the Helsinki region, along with its relevant cultural referents, have been analysed and explored extensively as a part of this research.

Following the pre-examination of the domain of interest, the consumption stories that have been generated through a qualitative study have been investigated, first intratextually and then intertextually, in order to interpret these texts as self-referential projections in terms of identity work (ibid). An important interpretive question is '[w]hat meanings and symbolic associations expressed in this specific consumer event/experience is the consumer using to construct his or her sense of identity?' (ibid: 447).

Finally, the emergent meanings, associations, and cultural myths are analysed in order to develop an integrative interpretation of the individual consumption stories that can be situated in a broader sociocultural and sociohistoric frame (ibid). This integrative interpretation can in turn be used to generate marketing implications by understanding the meanings that consumers associate with and seek to extract from the consumer goods. These aspects are reviewed in the findings, discussion and analysis, and conclusions sections of this thesis.

Hermeneutics have been used for example in analysing the symbolic meanings of fashion discourses (Thompson & Haytko, 1997), dissecting the distress associated with the pursuit of a sustainable consumer lifestyle (Valor, Antonetti & Carrero, 2018), and understanding the consumer experiences in the context of virtual reality fashion shows (Jung et al., 2019). The consumption meanings that the sneakerheads of the Helsinki region assign their shoes will be analysed in order to generate marketing insights concerning glocalised subcultural meanings. As Arnold and Fischer (1994) state, the application of the hermeneutic philosophy offers leeway for the choice of methodology and context of application. In pursuit of a deep level of understanding, the hermeneutic process enables a rigorous analysis to be performed (Thompson, 1997).

3.2 Data Collection

Following a monomethod approach, the primary data for this thesis was generated through a method of interviewing. A total of 7 semi-structured, one-on-one in-depth interviews were conducted in order to elicit consumption stories from the sneakerheads

of the Helsinki region. The generated data is cross-sectional, and therefore no longitudinal follow-ups were made. A pre-planned interview guide was used as a research instrument (see Appendix A). Questions were asked in slightly different ways and order in different interviews, and additional questions were posed when necessary.

The interview guide is modular in its design. Following initial warm up questions, the respondents were asked about their experienced statuses as sneakerheads, the number of sneakers owned, and the frequency of sneaker purchases made among other things. Specific thoughts and emotions were probed for in this question set regarding the responses.

Then, respondents were asked to describe a pair of sneakers, which is very special to them. This section elicited multiple different stories that offer insights into the symbolic consumption meanings. Many of these stories were highly personal, validating the choice of a hermeneutic approach for this study. Identity work insights were also probed for when respondents were asked to explain what these special sneakers tell about them as a person. After covering the significance of the special sneakers, the respondents were asked to express their thoughts, emotions, and possible actions in an event in which they would lose this special pair of shoes due to some unfavourable circumstances.

Following these stories and scenarios, questions pertaining to the relationship between money and sneakers were asked. Then, the exclusivity and rarity of some sneaker models were discussed. Respondents were also probed more deeply about their personalised consumption meanings (Thompson, 1997) related to sneakers, in addition to asking questions pertaining to the experienced membership in the subcultural group or community. Unveiled underlying themes include for instance communality, rebelliousness, self-expression and possibly even self-actualisation, which the respondents extract onto themselves through various consumption rituals (McCracken, 1986) in order to extend their identities (Belk, 1988). Thus, they use their culture of consumption (Kozinets, 2001) as a platform for their consumer identity projects (Arnould & Thompson, 2005).

Subsequently, subcultural referents were traced by asking the respondent to state specific people, movies, musical phenomenon, pieces of art or any other aspects that they think of when they think of sneakers. Then, this question set was framed again to only account for associations that are specific to Finland and Helsinki. Essentially, global and especially American cultural referents were more salient and influential than their local counterparts. However, local cultural referents inherent for the subculture of the Helsinki region are apparent, ranging from Finnish sneaker influencers to local rap artists. As such, notions of both glocalness (Robertson, 1995) and translocalness (Rokka, 2010) are observable. Moreover, possible negative issues related to sneakers were also discussed. Before moving on to the wrapping up section in the interview guide, the respondents were asked to describe their possession and divestment rituals regarding sneakers.

The interviews were conducted in varying locations, such as coffee shops, private apartments, and office spaces. It was necessary to make sure that no acquaintances of the respondents were in the vicinity during the interviews to avoid influence in responses. All interviews were audiotaped. The respondents were briefed about the confidentiality and anonymity of and voluntary participation in this study among their other rights in the research process before confirming their consent.

The respondents were offered an option to choose between Finnish and English as the language for the interview. They were encouraged to choose the language in which they best could express their sneakerhead status and involvement with sneakers. 2 out of 7 interviews were conducted in English, and the remaining 5 out of 7 interviews were conducted in Finnish. The question sets remained the same for both language options. Whenever references are made to the interview material in this thesis, the material shall be translated to English by the author when needed.

The length of the interviews varied between 39 minutes and 1 hour and 13 minutes. An estimated grand total of 7 hours of interview material was generated. Due to time and resource constraints in the thesis process, the interviews will not be transcribed in full. Therefore, only key parts of the interviews that will be used in the analysis in order to generate insights into the research questions and objectives will be available in a text format. A caveat should be expressed in using the hermeneutic

framework of analysis in this study, as the method is essentially based on analysing complete texts (Arnold & Fischer, 1994; Thompson, 1997). Under the present circumstances, the analysis and interpretation are partly dependent only on audio content. In an ideal setting, complete transcripts of the interviews would be available, and the lack of them might affect the results of this study.

3.3 Sampling Design

The sampling design of this study consisted of a mixture of sampling methods. Firstly, participants were recruited by the means of convenient sampling from the personal networks of the author. Secondly, participants were found by the means of snowball sampling, when respondents referred to their own contacts after taking part in the study. Thirdly, the thesis research was promoted in a Facebook post in the biggest sneaker-related Facebook group in Finland, Sneakermarket Finland, which has approximately 13 400 members. The respondents received no rewards and no incentivisation was used in the participant recruitment process.

Respondents were required to be at least 18 years of age in order to participate in the study. The ages of respondents varied between 18 and 32 years. The sample would have ideally included individuals of different genders, but only male respondents were successfully recruited to participate in the study. As per prior studies, the sneakerhead subculture is largely dominated by young males (Choi, 2017; Kawamura, 2018). This was observable in the sampling process.

Another prerequisite for participation was that the respondent feels that they in some way or capacity take part in the sneakerhead subculture of the Helsinki region. Thus, an address neither in Helsinki nor in any specific towns in the vicinity was required in order to participate in the study. As Helsinki is the capital city of Finland and the center of many subcultural activities, an individual who lives relatively far away from the city might spend significant amounts of time there and be an active member of a local subcultural community.

The sample included individuals who expressed varying degrees of commitment to the subculture and to the sneakerhead identity. Two of the respondents were not sure if they espouse the sneakerhead identity as they define it or not, but they fulfilled the prerequisites for participation and based on the interview data have a significant involvement with sneakers overall.

Table 1 Summary of Respondents

Respondent	Age	Gender
Respondent A	22	Male
Respondent B	32	Male
Respondent C	22	Male
Respondent D	18	Male
Respondent E	23	Male
Respondent F	20	Male
Respondent G	20	Male

4. FINDINGS

In this section, some of the emergent recurring themes from the interview material will be reported and described. The research material covered a wide spectrum of topics within the sneakerhead subculture. Phenomena and aspects such as money, exclusivity, personal identity, community and group memberships, associations, possession and divestment rituals, and positive and negative aspects of the sneaker phenomenon were discussed. As such, the possible avenues for analysis are many, resulting in a situation in which some aspects cannot be included in this research.

4.1. Recurring Themes in Consumption Meanings

Emergent themes regarding the consumption meanings that will be covered in this thesis are to be laid down in three distinct sections. Firstly, it is contended that sneakers

are expressive of personal identities. Secondly, sneakers and sneakerheads of the Helsinki region exhibit traits congruent with the theory on cultures of consumption (Kozinets, 2001). Thirdly, sneakers have negative baggage that the sneakerheads need to negotiate.

4.1.1. Sneakers and Personal Identities

Overall, it is very much emergent from the data that the sneakerheads of the Helsinki region use their footwear choices to express their identities. It could be detected from the interviews that the respondents extract desired cultural meanings from sneakers onto themselves (McCracken, 1986) and by having substantial amounts of knowledge about the shoes they extend their identities with the objects (Belk, 1988). As such, sneakers are used as symbolic resources by these consumers in pursuit of an identity construction (Shankar, Elliott & Fitchett, 2009). Thus, the sneakerheads of the Helsinki region wear, display and collect their shoes as an integral element in their consumer identity projects (Arnould & Thompson, 2005).

Interviewer: What do sneakers mean to you in your own life?

Respondent A: It's a way of self-actualisation. ... My own thing. They are so strongly in my identity, the shoes.

Confirming the hermeneutic postulations (Arnold & Fischer, 1994; Thompson, 1997), the sneakerheads exhibit and use consumption meanings that have become highly personalised. As such, the meaning-based relationships that consumers have with their products are plural and possibly different from each other (Thompson, 1997). Different sneakerheads assign sneakers different consumption meanings.

Interviewer: If you had to think about what kinds of values and meanings sneakers represent, what would you say?

Respondent B: Probably, in the end, maybe being down to earth, relaxed, possibly even like a lifestyle. Comfortability. I probably can't think of more things right now.

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Interviewer: What kinds of values and meanings sneakers represent in your opinion?

Respondent D: Maybe for me that I belong to some community. The communality is something that prevails around sneakers. It is an important value.

The heterogeneity in consumption meanings is also apparent in the multiplicity of definitions for the sneakerhead identity. All of the respondents have slightly different definitions for the term 'sneakerhead'. As mentioned, two of the respondents are not sure if they want to espouse the sneakerhead identity. As such, they are negotiating the personalised meanings that they associate with the identity.

Respondent G: Well, I mean I still do care about shoes a lot and they are a big part of every outfit that I match, but I would say that I'm not as into footwear as I was a few years ago. When I was into footwear, I remember that I would try and use that as a focal point whenever I would be matching an outfit, but nowadays it's more that I use the shoes to complement the outfit, if that makes sense.

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Respondent F: There was a time in my life when I would have considered myself one (a sneakerhead), but not anymore, I guess. I'm still somewhat interested in it, but shoes are, I guess, only one part of an entire outfit.

After Respondent F had expressed that he might not consider himself as a sneakerhead, he was asked to define a sneakerhead in his own words. This elicited further reflection on his identity projects.

Respondent F: Well, I think we started a little bit there, but if the true meaning, I guess that just anyone who is more into sneakers than the average person. And if that's how you classify it, I guess I would be a sneakerhead. But I guess you can take it a little further than that. I don't know specifically. I guess anyone who is more interested than the average person in sneakers. Like for some whatever reason, the story, the design, something like that.

As observable from the quotes, Respondent G and Respondent F might feel that their overall involvement with fashion in a broader context discriminates the sneakerhead identity, and vice versa. Such an interpretation can be buttressed with an excerpt from the interview with Respondent A, when he was asked to give a definition for a sneakerhead in his own words.

Respondent A: This is a very hard question. I have been asked this many times. But maybe what I would say would be that someone, who thinks of shoes as the most important part of dressing per se.

However, when probed directly about the possible mutual exclusivity between the sneakerhead and overall 'streetwear aficionado' identities, the respondent denied such a connection. Nevertheless, it can be contended that a sneakerhead identity might have to be negotiated if one does not use sneakers as the most focal element when assembling an outfit.

Many respondents described different kinds of familial ties in their consumption stories. Reflecting on the possible consumption meanings, these aspects are highly personal, leading to an interpretation of assigned consumption meanings within the framework of one's own personal history (Thompson, 1997). It was a common occurrence that the sneakerheads would describe their fathers having some kind of an effect on their sneaker hobby or lifestyle. Their fathers might have been sneaker enthusiasts themselves, or they might have partially induced sneakers in the lives of their sons by

shopping for sneakers together, or at least made it possible for their sons to acquire the shoes. Familial ties also affect the way one of these young men preserves his beloved shoes, as exhibited in a consumption story of Respondent E.

Interviewer: What do you think causes it (wanting to take good care of one's sneakers)?

Respondent E: It might come from how I was raised. My father has always taught that you take care of your own things. So that you take care of, like, your laptop. I do not like it when people touch my stuff, because then I am not in control of what they will do with it. It is maybe a thing for me that comes from the way I was raised.

By gifting sneakers through exchange rituals, movement of cultural meaning from consumers goods to the consumers have been instantiated (McCracken, 1986). Then, the sneakerheads use these cultural meanings and their own personalised consumption meanings in their identity work. It was also apparent that the parents of some sneakerheads might have been sceptical of sneaker collecting as a hobby. As such, the parents have probably had to internally negotiate the meanings behind their children's behaviour to understand it and be in terms with it. Moreover, the sneakerheads might also have to negotiate their parents' feelings about their hobby or lifestyle in some way. An example from the interview with Respondent D illuminates this phenomenon.

Respondent D: Well, at least my parents are always terrified when a new pair is coming out. They ask questions surreptitiously, like 'well how much money was spent?', but it does not affect in any other way. My parents are just okay with my hobby.

Even though the consumption meanings of the sneakerheads of Helsinki are plural, there are points of convergence as well. Many respondents associated rebelliousness with sneakers. It can be contended that sneakers allow the sneakerheads to diverge from formal, corporate, or mainstream dress codes. Interpreting Respondent B's claims, sneakers can be seen as an identity work resource that allows him to be

connected to a more laidback and 'cool' identity, regardless of his position in the conservative corporate ladder in professional life.

Interviewer: How does it (involvement with sneakers) affect your identity?

Respondent B: A hard question. Probably in such a way that although one would get a very official job, one would want to remind oneself that you kind of have the streetwear side of yourself and do not want to take life too seriously or become too stiff.

Moreover, Respondent B described that sneakers are not a part of his professional attire, but he might want to bring them with him to his working life too. He elaborated that sneakers are appropriate in some lines of business nowadays, such as in the advertising sector, but some fields remain conservative in these questions in the present day, at least for now.

Some respondents provided stories on using sneakers as a part of a professional or formal outfit. Interpretively, by the means of such behaviour, they are able to discriminate an unwanted identity while they espouse all the desired meanings that they associate with sneakers. Thus, they negotiate their presence and participation in a setting that might not be inherently congruent with the identity projects that they pursue. They exhibit a manifestation of rebelliousness in their style choices. Respondent D explained his dress choices in festive occasions in the following excerpt.

Respondent D: Normally, if there is a party, I do not dress up according to the normal pattern so that you have a suit and black shoes. I might take a more casual look to it and wear sneakers. They are like dress shoes for me at the same time.

Interviewer: Why do you think that you prefer to dress up more casually to a festive event rather than respect the traditions more?

Respondent D: For me it might have a lot to do with comfort. I think that you should not have clothes that are not comfortable to wear. So, I do not like to

wear clothes that I do not feel comfortable in. It is also a way of self-expression. You get to look a bit different from everyone else. You can be like fresh there.

Respondent A, on the other hand, described how he espoused rebelliousness in his attire that he wore to the office. Even though his former employer required men to wear suits to the office, and thus a formal paradigm was imposed on the respondent, he found a way of negotiating that through footwear.

Respondent A: These shoes are kind of a rebel thing for me. For example, I do not want to wear dress shoes. If there is like a wedding, I do wear dress shoes. But for example, in my old job we had to wear suits. When I wear the shoes (sneakers), it is a way for me to be like 'I do not want to fit your mould. I want my own freedom and that is my shoes.' It is also good with shoes that you are able to do this through them. Let's say that you work somewhere where you have to wear a suit. Then it is really hard to bring some high fashion, oversized clothes with you. But again, with the shoes, it is kind of like 'fuck you, you have these rules, but we did not actually talk anything about shoes.'

4.1.2. Sneakers, Sneakerheads and Their Culture of Consumption

When perceiving the sneakerhead phenomenon in terms of consumption meanings, it is beneficial to view the consumption communities of sneakerheads as platforms for identity work. As per prior postulations, the resources for the construction of a social life reside in consumption communities (Arnould et al., 2019). When perceiving the role of the consumption community by utilising an individual consumer as the unit of investigation, the various effects of the community involvement on the identity projects of the consumers can be dissected from the consumption stories.

When analysing the sneakerhead phenomenon as a whole, the brand community concept (Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001) does not suit the needs. A focal brand is not emergent, and particularly strong loyalties or oppositional loyalties towards certain brands were not observable in the interviews. As a matter of fact, many respondents

felt strongly that a true sneakerhead can wear any sneaker brand they want to wear and represent.

Interviewer: Do you think that some brands or sneakers should be avoided altogether if one is a true sneakerhead?

Respondent F: No.

Interviewer: Why do you think so?

Respondent F: If one is a true sneakerhead, I feel like they would be able to appreciate any brand from any perspective, unless they are just made like garbage. I feel like you should be able to appreciate at least something, you know.

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Interviewer: Do you think that some sneakers or brands should be avoided if one is a true sneakerhead?

Respondent A: No. True sneakerheads wear just that what they like. I am ready to fight over this, or not like actually fight. Look at me, I am small and skinny. But I just know that I am right on this one. There is no wrong sneaker. ... I am infuriated by the thought. It also frustrates me when people go and laugh at and mock someone who wears shoes that are not so cool. I'm just like, c'mon.

Regarding the theory on subcultures of consumption (Schouten & McAlexander, 1995), the postulations made by Canniford (2011) are seemingly accurate. The sneakerheads of Helsinki do not exhibit cohesion, dedication and resistance in the same way as traditional examples of subcultures of consumption do, such as the Harley Davidson riders researched by Schouten and McAlexander (1995). Resistance is eminent in how the respondents appropriate meanings related to rebelliousness, but cohesion and dedication are prevalent only to an extent. By interpreting the consumption stories of the respondents, it can be argued that an individual sneakerhead can form their own

independent and unique interpretation of the sneakerhead identity that is deemed acceptable and correct. A deep interest and passion for sneakers is paramount, but other than that, there are no points of cohesion or dedication that one should really adhere to. Everyone understands and interprets their sneaker-related consumption within the frameworks of their own personal histories and wider frames of reference, buttressing the hermeneutic foundations (Thompson, 1997).

It is very much perceivable that socialisation is an important part of being a sneakerhead. Sneakers make it easier to spark a conversation with someone and identify likeminded individuals. The respondents name sneaker events and online groups focused on sneakers as important aspects within their community. However, these fora of socialisation do not clearly play inherently dominant roles in the lives of the sneakerheads of the Helsinki region. Overall, the socialisation that occurs within the consumption community can be ephemeral in its nature to an extent in some situations (Cova, 1997). It is perceivable that the sneakerhead community and the online groups associated with it have made it possible for many of the respondents to form deep friendships, but these friendships seem to unfold in the spheres of their personal lives, and not within the community activities per se. Also, memberships in online communities, such as Sneakermarket Finland and Hypend, which were named many times in the interview material by the respondents, do not constitute loyal or shared commitments among members. They definitely are platforms that make it easier to share or get information, buy or sell sneakers, or meet new people, but other than that, the communities seem not to be crucial parts of the respondents' lives or identity projects intrinsically. A sneakerhead is not likely to espouse a primary identity narrative of a Hypend member or a Sneakermarket member, but those are more of sub-memberships within the overall culture of consumption (Kozinets, 2001).

Sneakers can be argued to possess some neo-tribal characteristics (Cova, 1997). The commitments of sneakerheads for their consumption community are weaker than those that would fit the descriptions of subcultures of consumption (Schouten & McAlexander, 1995) or brand communities (Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001), fitting the neo-tribal description (Canniford, 2011). Also, the respondents' consumption stories offer no reasons to believe that one's sneakerhead identity would make other overlapping consumption community memberships excluded, which is another neo-tribal

characteristic (Närvänen, 2013). Respondent C even re-emphasised that there are other aspects in his identity other than just sneakers.

Respondent C: Because there is a lot more in me than that I just like sneakers. I don't want people to think that I am just a sneaker person.

However, it should not be argued that the neo-tribal theory would be even nearly a perfect descriptor for the sneakerhead community of the Helsinki region in its essence. The sneakerhead identity is an overarching identity investment and has a lot more presence in the daily lives of the respondents than for example clubbing has in the case of the clubbing culture (see Goulding, Shankar & Elliott, 2002; Goulding et al., 2009; Goulding, Shankar & Canniford, 2013). Also, sneakers are an intrinsic resource for sneakerheads in themselves, which is incongruent with neo-tribal assertions (Närvänen, 2013).

Subsequently, Kozinets' (2001) theorisation offers the most fitting descriptors for the sneakerhead phenomenon when the unit of analysis is an individual consumer and their relationship with the community. For sneakerheads, the link is not more important than the thing, rejecting Cova's (1997) assertion. Rather, the link is important, but so is the thing. Based on the consumption stories of the sneakerheads of Helsinki, it is indicated that they use

'commercially produced images, texts and objects ... through the construction of overlapping and even conflicting practices, identities and meanings ... to make collective sense of their environments and to orient their ... experiences and lives' (Kozinets, 2001).

As such, the culture of consumption of the sneakerheads of the Helsinki region is proposed as a platform for the consumer identity projects (Arnould & Thompson, 2005) of these individuals.

4.1.3. Negative Baggage of Sneakers

The sneakerhead culture has its own issues with misbehaviour, as do virtually all walks of human life. Globally, there have been milder cases of violence resulting from sneakers, and even extreme incidents, such as murders (Choi & Kim, 2019). These kinds of issues are largely credited to the imbalance between supply and demand (ibid), and thus elaborate how exclusivity is a double-edged sword in the context of the sneakerhead subculture, as Choi, Cluver and Kim (2016) would call it. However, such cases are very rare in Finland, which was specifically pointed out by Respondent C. In Finland, frustration is a lot more common by-product in this context, as ultimately in other locations too (Choi & Kim, 2019). Denny (2020) claims that violence is somewhat of an over-publicised phenomenon in the context of sneakers. In many cases, that can be contended to be true.

The problematised role of minors within the subculture was discussed by many of the respondents, who were all over the age of 18 years in this study. It might be that the aspects of the subculture that can be mistakenly perceived to be endemically materialistic have negative effects on some of the underaged members of the consumption community. As such, it was brought up that some of the minors might not even understand what the subculture is all about. It might also be emergent from the interview material that it is possible that some of the underaged consumers even boost the prevalence of materialism and undesirable values in the subculture of the sneakerheads of the Helsinki region.

Also, the production of sneakers causes a hefty amount of emissions, constituting an ecological problem for the industry (Chu, 2013). Ecological aspects and issues of sneaker consumption were brought up by the respondents.

4.1.3.1. Conundrum Between Exclusivity and Inclusivity

It is perceivable that the sneakerhead subculture of the Helsinki region has a somewhat problematised relationship with exclusivity in the context of sneakers. It is only sensible, given the fact that the sneakerhead subculture was born under the umbrella

of the hip-hop culture, and it can be contended that one of the most foundational values of hip-hop has been inclusivity. It goes without saying that there is no inclusivity in exclusivity. As mentioned, according to Choi (2017) and Choi and Kim (2019), the frustration that has resulted from the inaccessibility of coveted shoes has even caused some sneakerheads to turn away from the subculture. Due to the discrepancy in supply and demand, many avid resellers try to get their hands on the products and sell them forward at a profit, driving up the prices that the consumers would have to pay in order to acquire the shoes (Financial Times, 2019).

Interviewer: What was negative about the experience (a product drop)?

Respondent F: Having to go all the way there to win absolutely nothing. The feeling of disappointment.

However, the respondents in this study show no signs of withdrawal from their subculture, even though they exhibit feelings of frustration due to the limited supply. The respondents seem to think that new shoes come and go, and therefore it is not the end of the world if you miss out on a pair in the end. It was also re-emphasised by some of the respondents that they think that the hype and limited-edition models are an integral part of the culture in themselves. Should those aspects be omitted from the equation, the whole subcultural experience would be drastically different.

Interviewer: What do you think of the fact that some sneakers are very hard to get?

Respondent F: I mean, of course it's kind of a bummer. Like, if I had that pair that I've been wanting for a while and it is insanely limited, I would say that it's a great thing that it is limited, 'cause no one else can get it but I have it. But if I don't have it, of course I would want there to be more of that product so that I could personally get it. So, it's hard to say. It's very subjective and depends on, like, which one you're talking about.

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Respondent C: The hype and reselling are a part of the culture, and I would not like to have it removed. But I don't want that some young boy gets beaten up because of his shoes either.

Also, it is eminent from the interviews that sneakers become more special if you have invested a lot of time and effort in acquiring them. The effort and anticipation are a part of the fun. As Respondent F described the positive aspects of sneaker drops:

Respondent F: The feeling of anticipation. Like, am I gonna win it, am I gonna get this thing?

Respondent B, on the other hand, offered an insight into the added value that effort brings to the shoes when he described what it feels like to let go of sneakers. It is also apparent that he has to negotiate some of the meanings and values he assigns these shoes. He perhaps underestimates the significance of the object on purpose in a way by stating that it is 'kind of stupid' to feel bad when he lets go of some sneakers.

Interviewer: Why does it feel bad (to let go of sneakers)?

Respondent B: Somehow it is that you lose the shoe that you have acquired with effort. Kind of stupid, but there in the end is some kind of an emotional attachment. It is so hard to get the shoes and also the memories that are linked to them are there.

Respondent A pointed out that there are certain situations in which the rarity factor is more understandable and justifiable than in others. Many of the contentions he makes can be argued to be abundant in terms of the authenticity dialectic. Authenticity is a concept that has been researched in the contexts of the glocalisation of the hip-hop culture (Arthur, 2006), and jeans and sneaker advertisements (Botterill, 2007).

Interviewer: What kinds of thoughts do you have regarding limited-edition sneakers?

Respondent A: This is very two-folded. In a way, in my opinion, when you make a shoe that looks good, there is a good story behind it, and you make only a small number of pairs, I think that it is just fine. But when you make this kind of a hype that makes no sense, it is kind of artificial. 'Just make it so that there are only very few of them. It so fucking hard for you to get these now. Then everyone suddenly wants them.' I think that is not cool, because it is not, like, real. The reason for me also to become even more excited about shoes has been the good stories. Like, what Run DMC have been and how Jordan got his shoes banned. But when you make only so fucking few of the shoes that everyone wants them, it is just stupid. But then again, this shoe culture would not be so big if there were no rare pieces.

4.1.3.2. Problematisation of Minors in the Subculture

The presence and participation of minors in the subculture was a topic that was brought up by many of the respondents. Predominantly, the respondents' accounts on minors within the subculture are characterised by worried and negative notions. Interpretively, the sneakerheads of the Helsinki region are worried of the possible materialistic values that the participation in their subculture might foster among the children and youth. Consequently, the increased prevalence of such values might give impetus for arguably undesirable developments within the subculture.

Interviewer: What kinds of values and meanings do sneakers represent in your opinion?

Respondent C: Well, a hard question. I feel like that it might even be about negative values nowadays. Especially the younger generation thinks more about how much the shoes cost and try to communicate with the value of the shoes that they would be richer than they are. This kind of flexing.

Interviewer: Is this a negative direction for the development in your opinion?

Respondent C: Well, it kind of is, yes. Maybe it is a bit toxic to just think about the price of the shoes and compare with others rather than liking the shoes for real.

Acknowledging the postmodern arguments on bidirectional meaning transfer, it can be contended that subcultures can affect their members and the members can affect the subcultures. Therefore, the imminent increased prevalence of undesirable values and meanings within the subculture might become a self-fulfilling prophecy. Instead of espousing the foundational values of the overarching hip-hop culture, such as 'self-determination, self-realization, creativity and pride' (Price, 2006: xi), or values of the sneakerhead subculture proposed by the respondents, including for instance rebelliousness, communality, self-expression and possibly even self-actualisation, especially some young sneakerheads might possibly glorify sneakers as materialistic possessions (see Belk, 1985). Thus, they might be in danger of possibly misunderstanding the whole ethos of the subculture. An excerpt from the interview with Respondent G elaborates the situation even further.

Interviewer: Do you think that there are some negative issues that are related to sneakers?

Respondent G: Yea, I feel like that the culture is at risk of being saturated. At least when I'm in public, when I'm in the city, I feel like I see so many young people, like really young people, under 15, wearing expensive sneakers. And I know for a fact, or okay I don't know for a fact, I'm also making an assumption, but I feel like that those kids are not part of the culture at all. They see a celebrity wearing those shoes, so for that reason they buy this shoe. Simply because of that. And I think that's probably the one and only problem and also the biggest problem in the sneaker scene. Streetwear and sneaker culture is getting saturated because of all these kids that are trying to be like that YouTuber they like, without actually knowing or understanding anything about the actual culture behind.

4.1.3.3. Ecological Dilemmas of Sneakers

Ecological dilemmas are imposed on the sneakerheads of the Helsinki region. An MIT-led research project unveiled that the manufacturing of a pair of sneakers causes a total of '30 pounds of carbon dioxide emissions, equivalent to keeping a 100-watt light bulb on for a week' (Chu, 2013). Ecological issues were mentioned by many of the respondents in their consumption accounts. As reselling of sneakers is so prevalent today (Choi, 2017; Financial Times, 2019; StockX, 2020), also used pairs change hands often. This is also one of the main functions of online communities, such as Hypend and Sneakermarket Finland, as laid down by the respondents.

Respondent D seemingly negotiates the accumulation of material possessions that has instantiated as a result of his sneaker hobby. He arguably has a somewhat problematised relationship with the ecological burden his hobby causes. This was unravelled when he was probed about his feelings and thoughts about owning a large number of pairs.

Interviewer: If you gave a ballpark estimate, how many pairs of sneakers do you currently own?

Respondent D: About 23.

Interviewer: Does stating this amount elicit any specific thoughts or feelings?

Respondent D: Well, maybe climate change and all those kinds of things. Like, do I really need 23 pairs of sneakers? Not necessarily. But it sort of makes me feel like that am I being too negligent of the prevalent society of today? Like, you should think more about environment and such. But I don't know. It has been a fun hobby for me, so I continue it.

In the context of divestment rituals (McCracken, 1986), Respondent B is able to negotiate some of the hard feelings that result from letting go of sneakers by thinking about the ecological benefits. Overall, he describes it as a positive occurrence that one lets go of their sneakers that are not abundant in value for oneself.

Interviewer: What does it feel like when you let go of sneakers and now think about the fact that someone else has the shoes that were once important to you?

Respondent B: Pretty good actually. I think that it is even ecological in a way as well that you recycle the shoes, and if I have sneakers that I don't for example wear, I think that it is kind of cool that someone else can use them in their own outfit combinations that I might have not been able to do. So, I do see it as a kind of a good thing.

4.2. Cultural and Subcultural Referents

Following the dissection of consumption meanings, prevalent cultural referents will be reported. The associations between hip hop and sneakers that the respondents make shall be described. Regardless of the glocalisation of the subculture, and the presumed creolisation or hybridisation of sneakers as consumption objects (see Howes, 1996; Kjelgaard & Askegaard, 2006; Rokka, 2010), the superiority and relevance of American subcultural referents is observable. Lastly, emergent Finnish subcultural referents identified from the research material will be reviewed.

4.2.1. Sneakers and Hip-Hop

It is definitive that the sneakerheads of the Helsinki region see a strong connection between hip-hop and sneakers. Rap music is one of the strongest connections that the respondents make, and sneakers have arguably been a way of emulating oneself to the rap culture for many of the respondents. Sneakerheads pay close attention to the shoe choices of hip-hop artists and admire shoes that have been designed by them. Rappers perform in sneaker events and are important cultural referents for the sneakerheads. Overall, it is evident that the sneakerhead subculture still resides under the larger umbrella of the hip-hop culture and has not been detached from it in terms of cultural referents.

Interviewer: When you think about sneakers, what associations do you make for example in terms of people, movies, music, art or any other phenomena?

Respondent G: I would say that when I think of sneakers, I think of rap celebrities. When they wear sneakers, they are the most kind of vocal about it. You know, they're not saying anything, but I think that they are very vocal with what they wear. When I think of sneakers, I think of them.

4.2.2. Superiority of American Cultural Referents

It should be mentioned in the beginning of this section that the contentions on the glocalisation, creolisation and hybridisation paradigms in the context of the sneakerhead subculture of the Helsinki region are fulfilled only to a certain extent. It is eminent in the research data that American subcultural referents have a superior status in the subculture of the Helsinki region compared with Finnish and Helsinkian cultural constituents. When the respondents were asked to name associations that come to mind when thinking about sneakers, American subcultural referents were among the first occurrences. Rappers such as Jay-Z, Kanye West, and ASAP Rocky, all originating from the United States, were mentioned frequently. Also, basketball was an important cultural referent in general. American basketball players, such as untimely deceased Kobe Bryant and sneaker and basketball icon Michael Jordan were brought up. In terms of cinema, Back to the Future was mentioned in multiple interviews, most likely not least because of the futuristic Nike Mag sneakers portrayed in the second film of the franchise. These shoes were released in very limited quantities through philanthropic raffle campaigns first in 2011 and again in 2016 (Nike, 2016).

Interviewer: If you could get any sneaker pair in the world for free, which sneaker pair would it be?

Respondent C: The Back to the Future shoes.

Interviewer: Why these particularly?

Respondent C: Because it is a really good movie and they are cool shoes.

4.2.3. Prevalent Finnish and Helsinkian Cultural Referents

The respondents associated sneakers with many aspects related to Helsinki and Finland as well. Organically, many of the sneaker stores located in Helsinki, including for example Beamhill, My Favorite Things, and Beyond, were brought up in the discussions in many contexts. It is perceivable that these establishments serve as kinds of connecting hubs for the sneakerheads of the Helsinki region. Additionally, the sneaker manufacturer Karhu was mentioned in the interviews for its Finnish heritage.

The Finnish sneakerhead subculture has also given impetus for content creators and influencers within the subculture itself. People such as Shava Sofy, a social media content creator and the founder of the website Home of Sneakers, and Scott Gold, the host of the YouTube series 'Sarja Kengistä' (in English: Series About Shoes) and one of the founders and organisers of Sneaker Bash, a Helsinkian sneaker convention, were named by many of the respondents as associations between sneakers and Helsinki or Finland.

Finnish rap musicians were mentioned by multiple respondents. For example, Brädi, Cledos, and Uniikki were among the cultural referents that were brought up. Also, Jimi Vain, an up-and-coming designer known for his customised Nike sneakers and other fashion items, was mentioned multiple times. Overall, despite the prevalent American and global influences, the sneakerhead subculture of the Helsinki region has its own subcultural referents that are very much inherent and unique for this particular consumption community.

5. DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS

This section seeks to connect the findings of this study with each other and with existing contributions to the relevant fields in order to produce an analysis that unravels possible patterns of interplay.

5.1. Hypebeasts as a Devaluing Marketplace Myth

Essentially, a devaluing marketplace myth (Arsel & Thompson, 2011) is arguably imposed on the culture of consumption of the sneakerheads of the Helsinki region. As postulated, marketplace myths have become decentralised (Denny, 2020), meaning that consumers are able to negotiate and process these myths on their own terms. Consumers are therefore co-curators of marketplace myths in co-operation with sneaker brands (ibid). As perceivable from the analysis of Kawamura (2018) and brought up implicitly or explicitly by the respondents, a diffused 'hypebeast' marketplace myth is imminent in the marketplace and mass media. These hypebeasts are attracted to the streetwear market offerings solely or predominantly because of the hype itself. The presence of these consumers within the marketplace and the consumption community of the sneakerheads of the Helsinki region might manifest for instance in the presence of some of the consumers who do not allegedly understand the culture behind sneakers. Interpretively, the respondents use the demythologising practices of aesthetic discrimination, symbolic demarcation, and proclamation of consumer sovereignty in their identity work to protect the value of their identity investments (Arsel & Thompson, 2011).

Aesthetic discrimination is a practice that consumers employ 'to parse out subtle but consequential points of distinction' regarding identity investments, such as 'product and brand constellations that have been subsumed' into the devaluing marketplace myth (ibid: 799). It is evident that even though sneakerheads and hypebeasts are attracted to the same styles, brands, and stores, sneakerheads disavow hypebeast attributions, supporting Arsel and Thompson's (2011) theorisation.

Sneakerheads who possess accumulated social and (sub)cultural capital in lesser amounts can utilise symbolic demarcation to 'project the negative connotations' of the hypebeasts 'onto the scenester and, in the process, legitimate their position within the' sneakerhead community (ibid: 800). This might unfold in Respondent G's account on the possible saturation of the sneakerhead subculture due to the presence of illegitimate consumers. Respondent G has given up on some of the social and (sub)cultural capital as he is not sure if he espouses the sneakerhead identity and is therefore not as heavily invested in the field as more committed and hardcore members. Thus, instead of employing outright aesthetic discrimination, he utilises symbolic demarcation to make his point.

Finally, it is evident that many of the respondents proclaim their consumer sovereignty by re-emphasising the fact that the sneakerhead identity investment is 'merely one facet of their syncretic identity projects' (ibid: 801). Interpretively, by doing so they are able to protect their sneakerhead identity investments from devaluing connotations regarding the hypebeast myth. The sneakerheads do not want people to mistakenly think that they would be solely devoted to sneakers, or that they would be in the scene to make flashy statements in order to portray their wealth. It was brought up explicitly by Respondent E that he does not like when people ask about the price of his shoes. It might be that price inquiries make sneakerheads feel like the inquirer would be trivialising their subculture: trying to understand or portray something of great symbolic significance in monetary terms. During the interviews, it could be sensed that the respondents were the least engaged in the question set regarding money and sneakers. This makes sense on the grounds of this analysis. Even though the sneakerhead subculture manifests endemically in material possessions, aspects related to money are not glamourised or canonised by the respondents. The situation is rather quite the contrary.

5.2. Community and Effort

As laid down in the findings, many respondents associate connotations of community with sneakers and the sneakerhead subculture. In addition, it was emergent from the research material that the extra amount of effort that you put into acquiring rare shoes

makes them even more special. As such, there are possibilities for connecting and synergising these two aspects.

Camping out and lining up for sneakers can be argued to be a social enterprise. However, this is an underutilised aspect in sneaker marketing. It can be argued that right now the product drops are not about the journey but the destination. As such, the importance of the journey could be emphasised as an element in the customer experience. The communality aspect can possibly offset some of the frustration caused by the limited supply, as the lining up in itself would be a shared experience with friends and new acquaintances. Such a narrative is hardly observable in the marketing communication of the companies that operate in the sneaker scene. It should be noted that this might be due to the possible dominance of an independent self-construal among sneakerheads (Markus & Kitayama, 1991) and might therefore be antithetical in the worst-case scenario. However, it might very well be possible to portray highly individualistic sneakerheads engaged in a communal experience in pursuit of fun and socialisation without imposing interdependent hegemonies on them, if done correctly. The subcultural membership in the sneakerhead community is after all associated with communality.

It can be argued that limited edition sneakers have traits inherent for luxury products due to their strong desirability and exclusivity. In some cases, the price point can be relatively high as well. Also, as sneakers are consumed by wealthy celebrities in same outfit combinations with luxury products, bidirectional meaning transfer can occur. Broström, Palmgren and Väkiparta (2016) argue that when individuality is re-emphasised in the concept of luxury, it can be used to refer to virtually any tangible or intangible good that the customer values so much that they are ready to pay a significant price for it. However, an expensive price does not make an item luxurious, but it must be connected with the best possible quality and execution, rarity and accessibility, and desirability and a possibility for identification (ibid). Denny (2020: 7) pertinently claims that the consumption of rare and/or coveted sneakers 'reflect[s] the economic capital of the wearer less than their social capital.' It is more important in the context of sneakers to be 'in-the-know' or willing to make an effort to acquire special sneakers than to be able to spend large amounts of money on the items (ibid: 7).

In essence, it can be argued that the sneakerheads do not expect luxurious treatment in consumption settings that are related to sportswear heritage, skateboard stores, or other street culture phenomena. They do most likely expect luxuriousness if they are shopping for sneakers by luxury brands, but dominant sneaker brands such as Nike, adidas and Puma are not in pursuit of a luxury positioning. Thus, a luxury marketing dialectic should not be imposed on such products.

All these postulations are in line with the prior analysis on the undesirable emphasising of money in the subcultural consumption of the sneakerheads of the Helsinki region. All things considered, making an effort in acquiring the sneakers is an important factor in the production of value, corroborating the blurred distinction between a consumer and a producer (Pongsakornrungrungsilp, 2010; Ritzer & Jurgenson, 2010). This can in turn be connected with communality to provide the sneakerheads with the value they are looking for in sneaker consumption.

5.3. Self-Expression, Rebelliousness and Authenticity

The narratives pertaining to self-expression, rebelliousness and authenticity can be interconnected to an extent. Self-actualisation was also brought up as a concept in the interviews. Maslow (1943) presents self-actualisation as the highest need in the hierarchy of needs. Thus, a person seeks to achieve self-actualisation only after the more imminent needs are satisfied. Therefore, it is only natural that the sneakerhead phenomenon unfolds in largely developed societies with disposable income.

The self-actualisation aspect, however, requires more careful scrutiny than what meets the eye. The word self-actualisation (in Finnish: *itsensä toteuttaminen*) was brought up in the interviewing process, but the contextual underlying definition of the term might not be completely congruent with Maslow's (1943) definition. In fact, the word was used in a manner that can be linked very strongly to self-expression (in Finnish: *itsensä ilmaiseminen*), which was also brought up by many of the respondents. These concepts might be easily mixed in the spoken language.

Maslow (1943) defines self-actualisation as a need that becomes apparent when an individual grapples with feelings of discontent, although they have satisfied virtually all of their needs in life. Such a state is imminent, 'unless the individual is doing what he (sic) is fitted for. A musician must make music, an artist must paint, a poet must write, if he (sic) is to be ultimately happy' (ibid: 382). In essence, a self-actualising individual is doing what most intrinsically and extensively fulfils them.

Maslow (1943) notes that self-actualisation does not have to occur through creation per se. He asserts that someone might self-actualise for example through being 'an ideal mother' (ibid: 383). Thus, it can be contended that it is not inherently impossible to self-actualise through consumption activities as well, especially when the consumption activity is of great intrinsic significance to the consumer, which is the case with sneakerheads. In addition, as value is co-created through the interplay of production and consumption (Pongsakornrunsilp, 2010; Ritzer & Jurgenson, 2010), consumption can be seen as the creation of value in itself perhaps even as well as production. From such a perspective, self-actualisation might indeed be possible through consumption.

However, it might be that the respondents are addressing their esteem needs instead of self-actualisation. Esteem needs deal with individual's needs to have a high evaluation of oneself, 'for self-respect, or self-esteem, and for the esteem of others' (Maslow, 1943: 381). When an individual seeks to address their esteem needs, they are firstly in pursuit of strength, achievement, adequacy, independence and freedom (ibid). Secondly, reputation, prestige, recognition, attention, importance and appreciation are sought after (ibid). All things considered, reading self-actualisation as self-expression might link the narrative more to esteem needs than self-actualisation. Essentially, the possible self-actualisation through consumption is a domain that would require its own investigation and theorisation altogether.

Sneakerheads use their footwear to communicate and express their identities that are buttressed with highly personalised consumption meanings (Thompson, 1997), by pursuing their own interpretations of traits such as rebelliousness and authenticity. Many of these connotations have already been espoused by marketers, but the significance of them cannot be overemphasised. As per conclusions made by Botterill

(2007), consumers have a tendency to reward the authenticity of a brand with sales. In terms of authenticity, it can be contended that the companies should take part in the subculture directly in order to assert their relevance for these consumers. Marketers should think of ways to have a meaningful impact on the community on both community and individual level.

5.4. Sneakers, Paternity and Gender

Familial ties, especially paternal relations, were emergent aspects in the consumption stories of the respondents. Sneaker collecting has, at least when the sneakerheads have been younger, been an activity in which the fathers have had influence or taken part in some way or capacity to an extent. This is an aspect that has arguably been underutilised by sneaker producers at least partially.

For example, adidas releases coveted Yeezy sneakers in kids and infants' sizes in addition to launching them in men's sizes. Therefore, sneakerhead parents are able to buy the shoes for their children. However, more potential resides in this aspect that could possibly be utilised. For example, paternal relations are something that can offer impetus for storytelling in marketing. Also, specific product launch events could be targeted at sneakerheads who have children. If sneaker-related events succeed in devising family-friendly activities or for example have a specific time slot for children in their programme (e.g. a family-friendly afternoon), these children could grow into committed customers in the future. Overall, it might be possible that a sneaker-related event is family-friendly in its essence.

As such, the presence of some minors in the subculture is problematised, as laid down in this study. Therefore, it would be paramount that these familial aspects would not foster more of the undesirable developments within the subcultural community. If that would happen, these marketing efforts would backfire. Also, the familial connotations would have to be subtle enough not to override the connotations related to rebelliousness and authenticity. The espousal of such marketing narratives would have to be carefully considered, planned, and targeted at the right consumers at the right time.

Kawamura (2018) refers to sneakers as hypermasculine, gendered objects. In essence, sneakers are a predominantly masculine field within fashion as laid down in this study as well. However, some of Kawamura's contentions on the gendered status of the subculture are likely to be addressed on the market. As per prior indications, 26% of Generation Z women identify themselves as sneakerheads (StockX, 2020). Also, exclusive sneaker releases aimed at women doubled their market share on the secondary market in 2019, and the amount of female sneakerheads is projected to increase as sneaker brands pay more attention to the market for women (ibid). Therefore, if content pertaining to the construction of a masculine identity is too prevalent and portrayed as being bound to traditional masculine hegemonies in sneaker marketing, it might prove to be counterproductive. As sneakers and hip-hop stand for inclusivity, the possible inadvertent reproduction of masculine hegemonies should be carefully analysed and reviewed before espousing essentialised gender representations, such as father and son duos, in marketing operations. This does not mean that the usage of such content should be avoided or frowned upon, but it should be implemented in the right way to avoid boosting the prevalence of detrimental hegemonies and advocate for positive developments instead.

5.5. Parallelism of Glocal and Translocal Orientations

As laid down in the findings, global cultural referents enjoy from a superior status in terms of prevalence and influence when compared with their local counterparts in the context of this study. This calls for a translocal orientation (Rokka, 2010) to studying the marketplace cultures and consumption meanings of sneakerheads. It is perceivable that national borders do not break the chains of meaning transfer, especially in the case of American subcultural referents. It is only natural that these cultural referents are prevalent, as the subculture was born in the United States.

However, local endogenous referents are apparent as well, and arguably have an important complementing role in constituting what it means to be a sneakerhead in Finland or in Helsinki. Thus, a glocal orientation (Robertson, 1995) can offer insights into the consumption meanings that the sneakerheads of the Helsinki region associate with their footwear in terms of their local community. For example, an American

sneakerhead would not connect events such as Sneaker Bash, stores such as Beyond, Beamhill, or My Favorite Things, hip hop artists such as Cledos, Brädi, or Uniikki, or sneakerheads such as Scott Gold or Shava Sofy with sneakers. However, for the sneakerheads of the Helsinki region, these are all important referents that in essence might just be what sets a Finnish sneakerhead apart from, for example, an American one. The most significant point in this reflection is that the symbolic meanings that the sneakerheads link with the local cultural referents can differ significantly from those that they associate with their global counterparts.

As indicated, the sneakerheads of the Helsinki region might be very detached from the experiences of poverty and oppression that inherently gave impetus to the birth of hip-hop and the sneakerhead subculture. However, as laid down, the whole subculture has detached from its original values to an extent (Kawamura, 2018). In essence, it is emergent that it might be feasible to apply the translocal (Rokka, 2010) and glocal (Robertson, 1995) orientations in parallel when researching the regional consumption communities of sneakerheads.

6. CONCLUSIONS

This section will summarise and conclude the findings of this study and propose academic and managerial implications relevant for international business research and practice. Additionally, the limitations of this study will be reported and suggestions for future research shall be offered.

6.1. Main Findings

The findings of this study regarding consumption meanings are laid down in three distinct categories. Firstly, it is contended that the sneakerheads of the Helsinki region use their footwear as focal resources in their identity work. The espoused and exhibited consumption meanings are highly personalised and plural, but points of convergence exist. Based on the sample, possible consumption meanings include values such as communality, rebelliousness, self-expression and possibly even self-actualisation.

Secondly, when the unit of investigation is an individual consumer and the aim is to perceive the consumption community of the sneakerheads as a platform for their consumer identity projects (Arnould & Thompson, 2005), the culture of consumption (Kozinets, 2001) is proposed as the most descriptive theorisation with its respective implications. However, this research does not have ethnographic goals, and therefore does not aim to describe the traits or functions of this culture of consumption in-depth. Rather, the role of this community as a factor in the construction and reconstruction of consumption meanings is illuminated.

Thirdly, sneakers have negative baggage and are threatened by a devaluing marketplace myth (Arsel & Thompson, 2011). Sneakerheads have to negotiate some of the connotations and meanings related to sneakers and they exhibit the usage of demythologising practices in protecting their identity investments against the possible inflation of their social and (sub)cultural capital resulting from the hypebeast myth (ibid).

Also, salient cultural referents and constituents were reviewed in this research. It is emergent that global and especially American subcultural referents enjoy from a superior status when compared with their Finnish counterparts. This essentially speaks for the adoption of a translocal orientation in studying marketplace cultures (Rokka, 2010). However, cultural referents inherent to Finland, Helsinki, and the sneakerhead subculture of the Helsinki region were brought up by the respondents. Thus, a glocalisation paradigm (Robertson, 1995) is benevolent and useful as well regarding the orientation of this study.

6.2. Academic Implications for International Business

This study has the aim of unveiling the consumption meanings behind the glocalisation of the sneakerhead subculture to the Helsinki region. As per the findings, the respondents use their footwear as intrinsic resources in their consumer identity work. The unravelled consumption meanings are plural and personalised, and thus even heterogeneous. Points of convergence exist as well, but it seems that every

sneakerhead has the freedom of defining their sneakerhead identity in their own terms. These aspects further reaffirm the postmodern turn in marketing (Firat & Venkatesh, 1993), show how the marketplace myths are co-curated by the sneakerheads and the sneaker brands (Denny, 2020), and illuminates how value is co-created through production and consumption, which have become fused to an extent (Pongsakornrunsilp, 2010; Ritzer & Jurgenson, 2010).

As per prior analysis, when researching consumption communities or the members of these groups, it might be beneficial to apply translocal (Rokka, 2010) and glocal (Robertson, 1995) paradigms in parallel. In this study, global and especially American subcultural referents enjoy from a superior status when compared with their local counterparts, but the local referents and glocalised consumption meanings might be of great significance in constituting what it means to be a sneakerhead in Helsinki or in Finland as opposed with for instance the United States. In our interconnected world, it is only natural that subcultural consumers find relatable cultural referents that do not originate from the same cultural spheres. Thus, these global references can be superior in their relevance and influence. However, as illuminated in the extant literature and this research, glocal referents are emergent too as a consumption item or practice lands in a new cultural sphere different from its origins.

6.3. Managerial Implications for International Business

As such, it is important to note that companies that have the aim of exhibiting congruence with the sneakerhead culture should eschew undesirable connections to the hypebeast myth. This can be immensely difficult as consumption communities can only be managed to an extent. Overall, the authenticity dialectic can play an important role in this quest (Arthur, 2006; Botterill, 2007). As long as the brand remains relevant and connected to the sneakerhead subculture, the sneakerheads are able to demythologise the undesirable connections to the devaluing marketplace myth (Arsel & Thompson, 2011).

As indicated, companies need to find ways to have a meaningful impact on the subculture both on a community and individual level. This can be carried out by for

example being present in subcultural events where sneakerheads gather and bringing added value instead of gaining mere visibility for your own brand. Event-exclusive offerings and give-aways constitute one potential avenue, and direct sponsorship another. However, it is paramount to bring something new to the table instead of doing what every other brand already does. Overall, it is important to think about ways in which the consumers can and want to co-curate marketplace myths related to your brand (Denny, 2020), and thus co-create value for your market offerings (Pongsakornrunsilp, 2010; Ritzer & Jurgenson, 2010).

This research has identified multiple themes that can be utilised in the marketing operations of sneaker companies that cater to the glocalised consumption community of the sneakerheads of the Helsinki region. These themes include rebelliousness, familial ties, self-expression, inclusivity and communality among other things. Many sneakerheads do not mind at all putting in extra effort in acquiring coveted shoes, and the effort itself makes them more special. This is even in line with Botterill's (2007) finding concerning the usage of deferred gratification as a theme in sneaker advertisements. You have to work hard in the present moment in order to acquire something of value after. Thus, making your customers wait for and make an effort in order to get your product can increase its value in itself, as long as the item is perceived as authentic and worth the work and wait. Also, the communality aspects can be utilised in this respect: entice your customers to make the effort and queue together to create a shared experience.

Even though global referents have an arguably superior status when compared with their local counterparts, utilising glocal cultural constituents in marketing might boost the authenticity of the product within the glocalised subculture. If a company is to involve focal community members or relevant local subcultural referents in the design or branding process, a novel unique selling proposition might emerge. However, the importance of global referents should not be overlooked carelessly. The possibility of using glocal and translocal referents in parallel is also an interesting proposition that would need further investigation.

6.4. Limitations of the Study and Suggestions for Future Research

The sample of this study consists exclusively of male sneakerheads who are young adults. Thus, the voice of female sneakerheads is unheard. An interesting research paradigm would be to conduct a feminist examination of the sneakerhead subculture of the Helsinki region to unravel the multiple femininities among these female sneakerheads. Such a study has been conducted in the United States (Lindsay-Prince, 2013), and also in the context of Harley Davidson riders, which is a predominantly masculine subculture as well (Martin, Schouten & McAlexander, 2006).

Moreover, underaged sneakerheads were excluded from this research. It is eminent from the research data that minors have a perceivably significant role in and effect on the consumption community. Thus, an examination of underaged sneakerheads might offer a further elaboration for the emergent phenomena. However, such a research should be conducted with caution as the sample would consist of members of a vulnerable population.

This research touches upon marketplace cultures, but does not aim to offer descriptions or analyses of a consumption community per se. The objective is to offer insights into the usage of glocalised symbolic consumption meanings in identity work among subcultural members, and that is what this thesis does. An ethnographic approach (see Elliott & Jankel-Elliott, 2003) to analysing the sneakerhead subculture of the Helsinki region would be suitable for analysing the phenomena when the unit of investigation is the consumption community and not individual consumers within it.

The sneakerhead phenomenon has opened multiple possible avenues for research to better understand subcultural consumption. For example, the interview material offers indications that sneakerheads might be dominant in terms of independent self-construal as opposed to interdependent self-construal (Markus & Kitayama, 1991). This could be measured in a quantitative study (Singelis, 1994) to further advance a holistic marketing approach to understanding the sneakerhead community. Also, exploring and investigating self-actualisation (Maslow, 1943) in the context of consumption would expand the horizons of consumer and consumer culture research in the age of postmodernity. It might also be illuminating to investigate how consumers

would react to the usage of both global and local referents in parallel in sneaker marketing. To conclude, research on glocalised consumption communities can offer valuable insights into the intricacies of communal consumption in the era of globalisation.

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APPENDICE A

RESEARCH INSTRUMENT: Interview Guide

Before Start:

1. Check recording instruments
2. Record date, location and interviewee's information
3. Double-check

When Starting:

1. Thank the interviewee for their time and effort
2. Double-check whether the interviewee would like to have the interview conducted in English or in Finnish
3. Introduce the topic (glocalisation of the sneakerhead subculture, the case of the Helsinki region / sneakerhead-alakulttuurin globalisaatio Helsingin alueella: DEFINE GLOCALISATION IN UNIVERSAL TERMS)
4. Explain that the data will be used for a BSc Thesis at Aalto University School of Business, Mikkeli Campus.
5. Explain confidentiality and the rights of the interviewee
6. Explain the interview process:
 - a. Questions about e.g. consumption stories related to sneakers, interviewee's thoughts about sneakers, interviewee's thoughts about how the interviewee thinks others perceive sneakers or sneakerheads
 - b. Scenarios might be introduced by the interviewer
 - c. Interviewer might ask 'stupid questions' and questions that might challenge interviewee's own perceptions, but the intention is not to be hostile
 - d. Encourage sharing personal experiences as they come to mind
 - e. Most importantly: There are no right or wrong answers
7. Start recording and record interviewee information and verbal consent

Warm Up:

1. Could you please tell a little about yourself in a few sentences?
 - a. Background (age, nationality, town of residence, ties to Helsinki / the sneakerhead subculture of Helsinki)
 - b. School / Work
 - c. Leisure

2. Getting to the Topic: (Leisure hopefully leads to sneakers, if not, probe)
 - a. Considering your significant involvement with sneakers, do you identify yourself as a sneakerhead? If not, why?
 - b. How would you define a 'sneakerhead' in your own words?
 - c. What do sneakers mean to you in your life? Why is that?
 - d. What is your first sneaker-related memory?
 - e. How many pairs of sneakers do you own (approximately)? Does stating the amount evoke any thoughts or feelings in you?
 - f. How often do you buy sneakers? Does stating the frequency evoke any thoughts or feelings in you?
 - g. Where do you usually buy your sneakers? Why?

3. Do you have a pair (or pairs) of sneakers that is (/are) very special to you? Why?
 - a. What is special about them?
 - b. How did you acquire these shoes?
 - c. What do these sneakers tell about you?
 - d. Is the brand meaningful to you? Why?
 - e. When do you wear these shoes, or do you wear them at all? Why?

4. What does it feel like to imagine yourself without these special sneakers? E.g. if something happened to them or you had to let go of them for some reason.

Sneaker Value and Prices:

Okay, let's talk about things related to money next.

5. How much money do you approximately spend on sneakers annually? What do you think of or feel like stating the amount? Why?
6. What is the most expensive sneaker purchase you have made? Do you think this is a lot of money to spend on one pair of shoes? Why or why not?
7. Are you happy and content with making this purchase? Why or why not?
8. Do you ever regret expensive sneaker purchases? Why or why not?
9. Is the price a factor you think about a lot when buying sneakers? Why or why not?

Sneaker Value and Scarcity:

Thank you for your responses so far. Next, let's discuss sneakers and rarity/exclusivity.

10. What are your thoughts on limited edition sneakers? Tell me more?
11. There are sneakers that some people say are really hard to get. Do you think it is so? What are your thoughts about it?
12. Have you ever participated in a product drop online or on site at a store?
 - a. Could you describe this experience in your own words?
 - b. What was positive? Negative? Why?
 - c. What aspects might make you participate (again) in the future?
13. Do these product drop experiences make the sneakers more special or less desirable to you? Why or why not?

Shifting to the Personal Symbolic Meanings:

Let's go through a few questions about your own personal relation with sneakers.

14. Do you think that your involvement with sneakers affects your identity? How?
15. What does your involvement with sneakers say about you to others? E.g. family, friends, people at school or work, people who are yet to get to know you. What does it feel like?
16. Do you think that your involvement with sneakers makes you a part of some group or community? Why or why not?

17. Would you like to be recognized as a member of such a group or community?
Why or why not?
18. Would you like to stand out with your sneakers within the group or the community? Why or why not?
19. Do you think that sneakers add to your social life? How?
20. Are you a member of any organised sneaker-related community online or offline? What do you do as a member of the community? Do you find this community involvement important? Why?
21. Have you taken part in sneaker-related events? What do you do in these events? Why is this important?
22. What kinds of values or meanings do you think sneakers represent? Why?

Subcultural Meanings and Referents:

Now, let's talk about sneakers and culture.

23. When you think about sneakers, what associations do you make e.g. in terms of people, movies, music, art or any other phenomena?
24. What makes you think of these things?
25. What associations do you make between sneakers and Helsinki or Finland?
(e.g. people, movies, music, art or any other phenomena)
26. What makes you think of these things?
27. Do you believe that these associations affect the way how people see sneakers in the Helsinki region?
28. Do these associations affect the way how you see sneakers?
29. Do you think that some sneakers or brands are more relevant than others? Why or why not?
30. Do you think that some brands or sneakers should be avoided if one is a 'true sneakerhead'? Why?
31. Do you think that there are some negative issues related to sneakers? What and why? What does it make you feel like when you think about these things?

Possession Rituals (+Divestment):

Now, let's talk about things that are related to sneaker ownership.

32. Do you maintain or take care of your sneakers somehow? Please explain.
33. Why do you think this is or isn't important?
34. Is it important to you that others get to see what kinds of sneakers you own, e.g. on social media or in live social occasions? Do you post sneaker-related content online? What does it feel like / Why is it important to you?
35. What does it make you feel like to let go of sneakers, e.g. when you sell them, trade them or throw them away? Do you have a specific story in mind?

Wrapping Up

36. If you could get any pair of sneakers in this world for free, what would it be? Why?
37. Is there anything else you would like to say that I have not asked you about?
38. Can I contact you later for possible clarifications once I am processing the data?
39. Would you like to receive a link to the final paper once it is available online?

Thank you once more for your participation!

APPENDICE B

Interview Transcript, Respondent A

I: Miten sä määrittelisit sneakerheadin muutamalla lauseella?

R: Tää on tosi vaikee kysymys, mult on kysytty tätä monta kertaa. Mut, ehkä se mitä mä sanoisin ois se että joku, joka lähtökohtasesti pitää kenkiä tärkeimpänä osana pukeutumista.

I: Mitä lenkkarit merkitsee sulle sun omassa elämässä?

R: Tapa toteuttaa itseensä. Tääki ehkä vähän kliseistä, mut mulle se on se että on vähän niinku se, että mä en oo ite tykänny koskaan pukeutuu hirveen värikkäästi tai tämmöstä. Mut sit taas se että mul voi olla vaikka just tosi värikkäät kengät. Ja se on semmonen pieni yksityiskohta, joka tuo kumminkin esille sen että tykkään väreistä, ja mä tykkään väreistä tosi paljon, mä oon vaan tosi huono käyttämään niitä. Mut sit, se on niinku itsensä toteuttamista. Se oma juttu. Se on niin vahvasti mun identiteetissä, kengät. Tavallaan nää kengät on mulle viel semmonen 'rebel' juttu. Just tälle et, mä en esimerkiksi haluu käyttää puvunkenkiä. Jos on jotkut häät, jotka on sillee oikeesti, nii kyl mä käytän puvunkenkiä. Mut tämmönen vähän niinku esimerkiksi, kun mä olin mun vanhassa duunissa, nii oli semmonen et meillä piti olla puku päällä. Samalla kun mulla on kengät, niin se tavallaan on mulle semmonen tapa olla sillee että mä en halua nyt teidän muottiin vaan haluan tän mun oman vapauden ja ne on ne mun kengät. Koska sillee että, tän kaa mikä on kengissä sillee hyvä, että sä pystyt toteuttaan sitä kautta kanssa. Sanotaan vaikka että sä oot duunissa missä sulla on vaikka pakko olla puku päällä, sillon on tosi vaikee alkaa tuomaan jotain high fashion oversized vaatteita. Mutta taas kengillä, se on vähän samalla semmonen niinku 'Fuck you', teil on nää säännöt, mutta me ei itseasiassa puhuttu mitään kengistä.

I: Minkälaisia ajatuksia sulla on limited edition lenkkareihin liittyen?

R: Tosi kaksjakonen. Tavallaan mun mielest se on se et kun tehdään oikeesti joku hyvä kenkä, joka on hyvän näkönen, siinä on hyvä tarina takana, ja sit voidaan tehdä

et siin on vähän pareja, niin mun mielestä se on ihan fine. Mutta sit kun tehdään tällöinen hype missä ei oo mitään järkeä. Se on tavallaan teennäinen. Tehdään vaan että näit on tosi vähän nyt. Teidän on helvetin vaikee näitä nyt saada. Sillon nyt kaikki sit yhtäkkii haluaa. Se on mun mielestä nihkeetä. Koska se ei oo niinku oikeeta. Miks mäki niinku oon innostunu kengistä viel enemmän on just nää hyvät tarinat. Just mitä Run DMC on ollu ja miten Jordanilla kiellettiin sen kengät. Mut sitten kun vaan tehdään kenkiä niin että tehdään niitä aivan helvetin vähän niin sitten kaikki haluaa nää, se on vaan typerää. Mut sit taas ei tää kenkäkulttuuri ois niin iso jos ei olis sitä että on niinku harvinaisuuksia.

I Do you think that some sneakers or brands should be avoided if one is a true sneakerhead?

R: No. True sneakerheads wear just that what they like. I am ready to fight over this, or not like actually fight. Look at me, I am small and skinny. But I just know that I am right on this one. There is no wrong sneaker. ... I am infuriated by the thought. It also frustrates me when people go and laugh at and mock someone who wears shoes that are not so cool. I'm just like, c'mon.

APPENDICE C

Interview Transcript, Respondent B

I: Miten sä määrittelisit sanan 'sneakerhead' muutamalla lauseella?

R: Henkilö, joka on kiinnostunut lenkkareista. Niinku ehkä normaalia enemmän. Periaatteessa kuka tahansa voi olla sneakerhead, mutta ehkä sellanen normaalia isompi, ehkä vähän jopa epätavallinen kiinnostus lenkkareita kohtaan.

I: Mitä lenkkarit merkitsee sulle sun elämässä?

R: On ne siis, kuulostaa tyhmältä sanoo näin, mutta on ne varmaan osa sillee identiteettiä ja sillee että voi eri asusteiden kanssa laittaa erilaisia lenkkareita. On ne iso osa periaatteessa, vaikkakin tavallaan vähän turhanpäivänen osa. Mun mielestä harrastus siinä missä muutkin.

I: Miks se on sulle erityinen lenkkaripari?

R: Tietenkin se on vähän harvinaisempi. Tietenkin se on ehkä tästä Air Jordan 1 -mallistosta yks näistä klassikkomalleista, joka on myös ehkä vaikeempi saada. Sitä on varmaan kopioitu paljon. Niit näkee harvoin. Tavallaan siinä on erityinen fiilis, kun sen laittaa jalkaan, kun kovin monella ei oo sitä samaa, ja kun se on must tosi kiva väri. Se menee melkeen kaikkien kaa.

I: Miks se on sulle tärkeätä että kovin monella ei oo sitä samaa kenkää?

R: Ehkä siitä tulee semmonen eksklusiivisuuden tunne vaikka se on vaikea itselle myöntää. Tavallaan vähän kun sulla olis joku uus auto tai uudet vaatteet että ihan jokasella ei tuu sitä vastaan. Ehkä sä tavallaan voit näyttää sillä että se kuulut siihen alakulttuuriin. Ainakin se oli aiemmin niin. Jos sulla oli vaikka jotkut ihan perus Air Maxit, ei niitä kukaan käyttänyt joskus kymmenen vuotta sitten niin sä erotuit joukosta tavallaan. Näytit sun pukeutumisella sen kuuluminen alakulttuuriin. Ehkä sillä haetaan vähän semmosta samanlaista fiilistä nykyään.

I: Mitä nää lenkkarit kertoo susta ihmisenä?

R: Vaikea kysymys. Ehkä mä haluisin että ne viestii sillä että ne on ns niitä ensimmäisiä pareja mitä tuli silloin Jordan merkiltä. Ja ehkä jotenkin haluisin että se kertoo siitä tietynlaisesta kuulumisesta ehkä alakulttuuriin jos pitäis oikein miettii.

I: Minkälaisia ajatuksia sulla on limited edition lenkkareista?

R: Sellasia että ne on halutummia ja varmasti myös silloin vaikuttaa myös omaan fiilikseen että tota ne on paremmat siinä mielessä että jos sä hommaat ne niin niitä ei tuu joka toisella vastaan. Sit ehkä voi taas enemmän viestiä siitä alakulttuuriin kuulumisesta, että sulla on semmoset lenkkarit päällä minkä hommaaminen on vaatinut vähän vaivaa. Ja sit sä et nää perus pulliaisella sitä ehkä kadulla vastassa.

I: Mitä se kertoo susta sun mielestä että sulla on kengät minkä hankkimiseen on mennyt vaivaa?

R: Että ei oo varmaan ihan normaalia touhua. Mutta sit taas toisaalta...

I: Miksei se oo normaalia touhua?

R: Ehkä sen takia että monet ihmiset käsittää kengät kenkänä, että sä meet kauppaan ja ostat siitä eikä nää mitään järkee siinä jos sä haluat tietyn värin nii sä käytät siihen hirveesti aikaa kun se on ihan sama mikä väri, kunhan se on tietyn mallinen. Mut sit taas itelle se on tosi tärkeätä.

I: Jotkut ihmiset sanoo että on olemassa sellasia lenkkareita jotka on tosi vaikea hankkia. Mitä sä mietit tästä väitteestä?

R: Se on ihan totta. Jotkut on tosi vaikeeta hankkia. Se pitää paikkaansa.

I: Minkälaisia tunteita tai ajatuksia sulla on siitä että ne on tosi vaikea hankkia?

R: Ehkä sitä, että ne luultavasti menee joillekkin julkkiksille sillä niiden hinta on jo niin korkea että ei kukaan edes normaali kenkäharrastaja luultavasti saa niitä. Eikä toisaalta viitsi ehkä pitää koska ne on niin arvokkaat että siinä menettää vaan niin paljon rahaa. Puhutaan nyt sit ehkä tuhansista, kymmenistä tuhansista euroista. Niin ehkä siinä vaiheessa mä en ehkä halua niitä koska ne on niin kalliita ja mä en vois pitää niitä.

I: Miltä se tuntuu susta että ne lenkkarimallit on vähän niinkun sun ulottumattomissa?

R: Ehkä joskus pahalta, mutta jotenkin ei ehkä enää koska mä tietäisin että mä en kuitenkaan viitsisi käyttää niitä. Nii ehkä mä aattelin vaa että se ois vaan vähän kuin joku kallis taideteos. Että se on siisti, mutta ei mulla oo mitään järkeä hommaa sitä.

I: Mikä oli positiivista täs kokemuksessa?

R: No ehkä se yhteisöllisyys ja tavallaan ehkä fiilis jopa siitä että kuuluu johonkin alakulttuuriin. Ja tietenkkin se että mä oon tavallaan sillä omalla työlläni, joka on ollu se neljän tunnin odottaminen, saanut ne kengät.

Regarding waiting in line: R: Ehkä siinä vähän mietti että onks täs mitään järkeä.

I: Ajatteletko sä, että se että sä olet paljon lenkkareiden kanssa tekemisissä vaikuttaa sun identiteettiin?

R: Varmasti vaikuttaa.

I: Millä tavalla?

R: Hyvä kysymys, koska varmaan saattaisin jossain muussa yhteydessä sanoa että ei vaikuta, että ne on vaan lenkkareita. Mutta kyllähän se vaikuttaa varmasti. Siinä tulee seurattua jonkun verran katukulttuuria enemmän, ehkä ottaa musiikista vaikutteita, kyl se varmasti, kyl se vaikuttaa.

I: Millä tavalla vaikuttaa identiteettiin?

R: Vaikea kysymys. Varmasti sillee että vaikka menis tosi virallisiin töihin niin haluis kuitenkin muistuttaa itelleen että on se tavallaan streetwear puoli ja ei halua ottaa elämää liian vakavasti tai tulla liian jäykkikseks.

I: Ajatteletko sä että se että sä oot paljon tekemisissä lenkkareiden kanssa tekee susta jonkun ryhmän tai yhteisön jäsenen?

R: Kyl siin varmasti on jotain sellasta. Vaikka se pohjimmainen niinku juttu siinä on ihan vaan rehellisesti kiinnostus lenkkareita kohtaan, että ite pitää niit hienoina, ja miettii että ne näyttäis hienoilt jonkun asun kanssa, mut sit mitä enemmän on tekemisis noiden kaa, väkisinkin tuut tekemisiin eri kauppojen ja ihmisten kanssa, nii kyl sä pikkuhiljaa huomaat että sä tavallaan oot osa semmosta kulttuuria. Varsinkin Helsingissä.

I: Haluisiks sä että ihmiset tunnistaa sut tällaisen ryhmän tai yhteisön jäsenenä?

R: Varmasti joo. Ainakin siinä on aluks, niinku paljon aiemmin jos pukeutu vähän erikoisempiin lenkkareihin, niin siitä pysty heti tunnistaan että ei kukaan muu pukeudu tolleen. Että hän nyt kuuluu, varsinkin siihen aikaan, niinku rap kulttuuriin. Se oli silloin jotenkin tosi iso osa jotenki just rappia. Ja et toi fiilistelee just rap musiikkia. Joskus kymmenen viistoista vuotta sitten. Se liitettiin jotenkin siihen. Ite oli paljon siinä tekemisissä, nii jotenkin sillä halus osittain että kun jenkkiräppärit käytti tällasii nii sit mä tavallaan myös haluan osottaa että mä kuulun siihen. Ehkä se oli silloin rap-musiikkiin liittyvää. Tavallaan kun silloin se oli sitä että nimenomaan halus että ihmiset tunnistaa että okei toi fiilistelee räppii tai kuuluu semmoseen alakulttuuriin. Ehkä siin on edelleenkin vähän semmosta että sä osotat niillä erikoisilla kenkävalinnoilla että sä kuulut tämmöseen katukulttuuriin. Että varmasti joo.

I: Jos sun pitäs miettiä että minkälaisia arvoja ja tarkoituksia lenkkarit edustaa, niin mitä sä sanoisit?

R: Varmaan semmosta loppupeleissä ehkä maanläheisyyttä, rentoutta, ehkä ihan elämäntyyliä. Mukavuutta. Ei varmaan tuu enempää nyt mieleen.

I: Miks se tuntuu pahalta (luopua kengistä)?

R: Jotenkin se että menettää sen vaivalla hankitun kengän. Tavallaan typerää, mut sit siihen kuitenkin liittyy se tunneside jollain tavalla, että se on niin vaikee hommata ja muistot siihen.

I: Milt sust tuntuu kun sä luovut lenkkareista ja ajattelet että nyt jollain toisella on ne lenkkarit jotka oli sulle joskus tärkeit?

R: Ihan hyvältä oikeestaan. Mun mielestä se on niinku tavallaan ihan ekologistakin että noit kierrätetään ja jos mulla on lenkkarit mitä mä en vaikka käytä niin mä tavallaan nään sen ihan siistinä että sit joku muu pystyy käyttämään niitä hänen omissa asuyhdistelmissään mitä mä en oo ehkä voinut tehdä. Että kyl mä niinku nään sen hyvänä juttuna.

APPENDICE D

Interview Transcript, Respondent C

R: Koska on mus paljon muutakin ku et mä tykkään lenkkareista. En mä haluu et ihmiset ajattelee et mä oon vaan lenkkari-ihminen.

I: Minkälaisia arvoja ja merkityksiä lenkkarit sun mielestä edustaa?

R: Jaa, paha kysymys. Must tuntuu et jopa vähän negatiivista arvoa nykyään. Varsinkin nuorempi sukupolvi miettii enemmän tai paljon just sitä että kuinka paljon maksaa ja sit yrittää viestittää sillä kenkien arvolla sitä että olis rikkaampi kun mitä on. Tällasta just flexaamista.

Interviewer: Onko tämä negatiivinen kehityssuunta sun mielestä?

R: No on se vähän joo. Ehkä se on vähän toxic mieltä vaan kenkien hintaa ja vertailla muita kun että oikeesti tykkäis niistä kengistä.

I: Sanoisitko sä että lenkkareihin liittyy jonkinlaisia negatiivisia asioita?

R: Varmasti joo.

I: Minkälaisia?

R: Esimerkiksi, ei täällä niin paljoa, mutta esim jenkeissä niitä varastetaan ihmisiltä jaloista ja on ollut pahoinpitelyjuttuja mukana.

R: Jos ihmiset ei olis niin ahneita ja jos kenkii julkaistas kaikille nii ne ois asioita jotka sen korjais mutta tuskin tulee muuttumaan.

R: Kyl se haippi ja resellaaminen on osa sitä kulttuuria, enkä mä haluis et se menee pois. Mut en mä haluu et jotain nuorta poikaa hakataan sen kenkien takii myöskään.

I: Minkälaisia arvokkaita asioita sieltä historiasta vois löytyä jos paneutuu siihen?

R: No esimerkiksi siellä on mielenkiintoisia tarinoita. Tulee ekana mieleen että New Balancen nimi tulee siitä kun niiden kengänpohjissa on kolme kiintopistettä, mikä tulee kukosta. Ne on niinku kopioinu kukon jalkaa. Jotenki se on niinku New Balance.

I: Jos sä pystyisit saamaan minkä tahansa lenkkariparin mitä on olemassa maailmassa ilmaiseksi, mikä lenkkari pari se olisi?

R: Back to the Future kengät.

I: Miks just ne?

R: Koska se on tosi hyvä leffa, ja ne on siistit kengät.

APPENDICE E

Interview Transcript, Respondent D

I: Miten sä määrittelisit sneakerheadin muutamalla lauseella?

R: Täst on tosi paljon käyty keskusteluja. Mä oon aina sitä miettiny miten mä ehkä luokittelisin itteni sneakerheadiks. Mut mun mielestä se on siinä, että on se niinku palo niitä hommia kohtaan ja on niinku se arvostus kaikkia vanhempiakin julkaisuja kohtaan. Ja osaa ymmärtää toisten harrastuksia, niinku olla sillee niinku ylpeenä kantaa sitä mitä on.

I: Mitä lenkkarit merkitsee sulle sun elämässä?

R: No, mulle ne on tosi kiva harrastus ja omal tavallaan työväline millä oon saanut tosi paljon uusii ystäväii ja tapa ilmasta itteensä ja sitten niinku se et miten mä havainnoin ympäristöä, nii kaikki ne vaikutteet mitä mä saan missä mä liikunkaan niin ne muodostaa semmosen oman visuaalisen kuvan hyvästä tyylistä. Ja sit se kulminoituu siihen et mitä mä puen ite.

R: Yleensä jos on jotkut juhlat, nii mä en pukeudu sillee normikaavan mukaan, että on se puku ja on ne niinku mustat kengät. Mä ehkä otan semmosen enemmän kasuaalimman lookin ite siihen ja käytän lenkkareita. Ne on samalla niinku puvun kengät itelle.

I: Miks sä luulet että se mielummin pukeudut kasuaalimmin juhlatilaisuuteen kun enemmän perinteitä kunnioittaen?

R: Mul se on ehkä se, paljon itellä kiinni siitä mukavuudesta. Mun mielestä niinku, ei saa olla vaatteita jotka ei olis niinku mukavia itensä päällä. Et mä en tykkää pitää vaatteita joissa mä en ite viihdy. Se, että se on tapa myös ilmasta itteensä. Saa näyttää vähän erilaiselta kun ne kaikki muut. Voi olla sillee ihan freshisti siel.

R: ... Paitsi ehkä ne henkilöt jotka sit tietää näistä kengistä jotain ja on ehkä ite vähän mukana, niin ne saattaa arvostaa sit omalla tavallaan.

R: Se on just se että se madaltaa sitä kynnystä tulla juttelemaan asioista. Esimerkiksi että 'makeeta että säki oot pistäny noi kengät tänään jalkaan.'

I: Minkälaisia arvoja ja merkityksiä lenkkarit sun mielestä edustaa?

R: Ehkä itselle se että kuuluu johonkin yhteisöön. Se yhteisöllisyys on mun mielestä se mikä tässä vallitsee koko sneakereiden ympärillä. Se on tärkeä arvo.

R: No ainakin perhe aina vanhemmat on sillee että ne kauhistelee taas kun on joku uus pari tulossa. Vähän kyselee sillee vaivihkaa että no paljos meni rahaa, mutta ei se niinku muuten vaikuta. Että noi vanhemmat on ihan OK mun harrastuksen kanssa.

I: Suunnilleen jos arvioisit, niin kuinka monta lenkkariparia sä omistat tällä hetkellä?

R: 23 about

I: Tuleeks sulla jotain tiettyjä ajatuksia tai tunteita kun sä sanot tän määrän ääneen?

R: No, ehkä se niinku ilmastonmuutos ja kaikki tommoset asiat. Että tarviinks mä oikeesti 23 paria lenkkareita? En mä tarvii välttämättä. Mutta, se omal tavallaan on vähän sillee että tulee semmonen vähän että onko vähän liian turhan välinpitämätön tästä nykyajan vallitsevasta yhteiskunnasta. Että pitäis ajatella enemmän ympäristöä ja näin. Mut en mä tiedä, tää on ollut mulle kiva harrastus niin jatkan sitä.

APPENDICE F

Interview Transcript, Respondent E

I: Miten sä määrittelist sneakerheadin muutamalla lauseella?

R: Muutamalla lauseella: ihminen, jolla on aito kiinnostus, ei pelkästään siihen että niinku omistaa niitä kenkiä mut niitten niinku historiaan. Niihin liittyviin kulttuurisiin yhteyksiin. Että millä tavalla ne liittyy johonki tiettyyn kulttuuriseen aiheeseen tai mikä niiden taustalla on. Tai miksi ne on niin ehkä kulttuurisesti relevantteja ne kengät.

I: Mitä lenkkarit merkitsee sulle sun elämässä?

R: Mulle ne on tapa ilmasta itteeni sillee first and foremost. Mä tykkään ite kans tosi paljon ehkä mä en mee aina semmosiin niihin kaikista hypeteityimpiin, suosituimpiin malleihin. Mua kiinnostaa oikeesti löytää semmosii malleja juttuja millä on oikeesti mielenkiintosii tarinoita tai mistä mä voin sitten ehkä niinku, ei nyt kouluttautua mut kertoo muille niinku niistä että mitä sen tietyn kenkäparin takana on.

I: Minkälaisia arvoja tai merkityksiä sun mielestä lenkkarit edustaa?

R: Mulle se merkitys on ehkä siinä, että mulle liittyy paljon koripalloon. Siihen niinku mun harrastukseen on kiinnostus tosi paljon lähtenyt siitä. Että ehkä se merkitys on siinä että on vähän semmonen OG:mpi meininki. Tää on kuitenkin semmonen aika vanha liike tai ilmiö. Mulle se merkitys on että on oikeesti kiinnostus semmoseen historiaan. Mä oon ite henkilökohtaisesti semmonen että mä tykkään tietää asioiden taustat ja historiat. Se on mulle tärkeä merkitys että näillä lenkkareilla on myös se semmonen rikas ja monimuotoinen historia. Arvo on sit ehkä siinä että on semmonen itseilmaisuus ja semmonen että sun ei tarvii näyttää kaikilta. On niin paljon eri vaihtoehtoja lenkkareissa. Kaikilla ei tarvii olla samat kengät. Voi ilmaista itseään sillä tavalla. Se on ehkä semmonen arvo mikä mulla tulee ensimmäisenä mieleen.

I: Ajatteletko sä että on olemassa jotain brändejä tai lenkkareita joita pitäis vältellä jos on aito sneakerhead?

R: En mä sanois, että jotain tiettyjä. Ensisijaisesti semmosia brändejä jotka vaan kopioi tai ei innovoi itsessään, vaan oikeesti vaan nappaa muilta ne ideat ja tekee niistä oman version. Se on semmonen yleinen käsitys mikä on mulle semmonen tosi iso pet peeve. Tosi usein etenkin näissä fast fashion paikoissa sä näät selkeesti että mikä isompi lenkkari tässä on ollu inspiraationa takana. Ja sit vaan tehdään siitä niinku oma halpis versio.

I: Ajatteleks sä että lenkkareihin liittyy jotain negatiivisia asioita?

R: Mä sanoisin että se että viimesten vuosien aikana se resell kulttuuri on vähän lähtenyt vähän käsistä mun mielestä. Siihen pisteeseen että ihmiset jotka halua tosi paljon jotain kenkiä että ne vois pitää niitä kenkiä nii ei oo mahdollisuutta saada niitä. Muuta kun että maksaa jotkut järkyttävät resale hinnat. Että se on ehkä semmonen negatiivinen asia joka on lähtenyt tän uuden myyntitavan, netti-resell sivujen kautta lähtenyt lentoon, joka on mun mielestä aika huolestuttavaa.

R: Ehkä se että ennen tää sneaker alakulttuuri on ollu niin semmosta, ei eksklusiivista, mutta semmosta pienimuotosta hommaa, niin ihmiset ketä on oikeesti harrastanu sitä on ollu aika aitoja. Että tuntuu että välil tulee vastaan vähän semmosii mistä mä puhuin aikasemminkin nää 'hypebeastit'. Että on tuonu vähän sitä puolta siit kulttuurista esille mikä ei välttämättä oo niin toivottavaa. Kaikki saa harrastaa tätä asiaa omal tavallaan, mut sit mulle se on ehkä vähän surullista ettei löydä enää niit semmosii aitoja ihmisiä niin helposti.

I: Miks se on tärkeetä pitää lenkkareista huolta?

R: Mulle se on ehkä semmonen oma, että mä tykkään pitää omista asioista huolta. Ehkä se on mulle enemmän semmonen persoonallinen juttu enemmän kun se että koitan näyttää ulospäin että mulla on niinku hyvännäköset kengät. Mä oon vaan tosi neuroottinen joskus omista asioista ja pidän huolta että mulla on asiat puhtaana ja hyvässä kunnossa.

I: Mistä sä luulet että se johtuu?

R: Tulee ehkä mun kasvatuksesta. Mun isä on aina opettanut että pidetään omista asioista huolta. Että just joku läppäri voidaan pitää aina mahdollisimman puhtaana. En tykkää siitä että muut ihmiset koskee mun asioihin koska silloin mä en oo kontrollissa siitä mitä se tekee sillä. Se on mulle ehkä semmonen mikä on tullu mulle siitä kasvatuksesta.

APPENDICE G

Interview Transcript, Respondent F

I: Considering your significant involvement with sneakers, would you identify yourself as a sneakerhead?

R: There was a time in my life when I would have considered myself one, but not anymore, I guess. I'm still somewhat interested in it, but shoes are, I guess, only a one part of an entire outfit.

I: At the moment you would not consider yourself to be a sneakerhead?

R: Not necessarily. I guess I'm more focused on the whole outfit than just like sneakers. I guess that it's just a one part of the outfit instead of focusing solely on the sneakers.

I: How would you define a sneakerhead in your own words?

R: Well, I think we started a little bit there, but if the true meaning, I guess that just anyone who is more into sneakers than the average person. And if that's how you classify it, I guess I would be a sneakerhead. But I guess you can take it a little further than that. I don't know specifically. I guess anyone who is more interested than the average person in sneakers. Like for some whatever reason, the story, the design, something like that.

I: What do these sneakers tell about you as a person?

R: I don't know. Fucking, I guess they give a certain opinion or a certain idea about the aesthetics that I like. I like the technical-type aesthetics quite a lot. I guess I don't like go for straight techwear anymore, but I still like technical influence stuff.

R: The feeling of anticipation. Like am I gonna win it, am I gonna get this thing.

R: Having to go all the way there to win absolutely nothing. The feeling of disappointment.

I: What do you think of the fact that some sneakers are very hard to get?

R: I mean, of course it's kind of a bummer. Like, if I had that pair that I've been wanting for a while and it is insanely limited, I would say that it's a great thing that it is limited 'cause no one else can get it but I have it. But if I don't have it, of course I would want there to be more of that product so that I could personally get it. So, it's hard to say. It's very subjective and depends on, like, which one you're talking about.

I: Do you think that some brands or sneakers should be avoided altogether if one is a true sneakerhead?

R: No.

I: Why do you think so?

R: If one is a true sneakerhead, I feel like they would be able to appreciate any brand from any perspective, unless they are just made like garbage. I feel like you should be able to appreciate at least something, you know.

APPENDICE H

Interview Transcript, Respondent G

R: Well, I mean I still do care about shoes a lot and they are a big part of every outfit that I match, but I would say that I'm not as into footwear as I was a few years ago. When I was into footwear, I remember that I would try and use that as a focal point whenever I would be matching an outfit, but nowadays it's more that I use the shoes to complement the outfit, if that makes sense.

I: Would you identify yourself as a sneakerhead?

R: I would've said yes a few years ago but now I would say, I think I'm on kind of like in the middle. I'm still in the middle. I haven't completely gone away from sneakerhead culture because I still do care about sneakers and I have a deep understanding of them, so I would say I'm kind of in the middle.

I: Why do you think that you don't identify yourself as a sneakerhead?

R: I feel like it's because my kind of like, I feel like my interest for shoes, like shoes alone, like sought after sneakers, has gone down a bit. I feel like nowadays I would not be so inclined to you know, line up early at a store for a release. But a few years ago, I would have definitely done that, and I have done that in the past.

I: Yea. How would you define a sneakerhead in your own words in a couple of sentences?

R: Well, if I had to define it in a few sentences... I would say that it's somebody who, I think that it's somebody who obviously loves sneakers. Someone, who doesn't buy the sneakers just to wear them but also thinks of them as collector's items. They don't just have them as shoes, they also keep a collection and they take care of them. They clean them all the time, they don't just view sneakers as shoes that you wear for everyday life. They view them as like, kind of like, a piece of art in a way.

I: What do sneakers mean to you in your life?

R: Well, I mean, like I said, I used to be really into the sneaker culture, I remember I would enter every Yeezy raffle. They were like the only things that I was interested in with regards to fashion. Like I said, back in the day I used to use sneakers as a focal point in every outfit that I made or like every outfit that I dressed in.

I: When you wear them, the fact that you like them, what do they tell about you as a person to others?

R: I feel like that's a hard question because I mean I don't know what people think of me. But at least whenever I wear them, I'm most comfortable. Because, of of course I like to wear my other shoes as well, but when I wear them I'm still like feel that I have to be aware of where I'm stepping because I don't want them dirty, but when I'm wearing Air Force 1s I can like forget about all that. It doesn't really matter if they get dirty, they can be used as beaters, but I feel so comfortable, I feel like so free and comfortable in them. I don't have to think about taking care of them, but they still look good. And they're still very comfortable.

I: Yea. When you have this state of mind when you're wearing the shoes, how do you think that others see that in you?

R: Maybe I could say that when I wear them, people might perceive me as relaxed and laidback. Another thing that I didn't say earlier is that I feel like the Air Force 1s are so amazing because it's not a show-off shoe. You know, it's not like a pair of Yeezys, but still everybody like likes them and there have been so many collaborations and the shoe itself is just so versatile. Yea, it's not a show-off shoe, it's a comfortable shoe, like, I kind of have a loss for words, I'm thinking of a way how to explain this. I think that people perceive me as relaxed and calm when I wear them.

I: What thoughts or emotions does the exclusivity factor evoke in you?

R: Well, I guess when I have a pair of shoes that I know if exclusive it makes feel like, it makes me feel good. You know, because I have these shoes and not many people

have these shoes. And it makes me want to wear them even more because of how exclusive they are. I remember when I got my pair of (certain limited edition sneakers), we actually flew to the States. I went on a trip with my family, and of course I brought them there with me. Like, maybe two-three weeks after the release. In America, I know that they were even more exclusive than in Finland, and I'm serious, I got so many people to like looking at the shoes. Even workers at stores stopped me at were like 'Oh, those are nice shoes! How did you get them?'. I just felt like that was so interesting. You know, that when you have an exclusive shoe also people, like, they notice that. So yea, it makes me feel good wearing them.

I: Yea. There are people who say that there are sneakers that are really hard to get. Do you think that it is so? What are your thoughts about this?

R: I feel like that's an interesting statement, because I think of a better way of saying that would be that sneakers are hard to get at retail. Because if you have money, you can get any sneaker you want. It's just, you know, you have to pay a lot. I could buy the Off-White Air Jordan 1s right now if I had five thousand to spare. I could just buy them. But getting them for retail, that's hard. You have to deal with the bots and the competition. That's what I think.

I: What was positive about it (a live product drop experience)?

R: Actually, I thought that it was really cool that I was there because I actually started talking to the other people there. I think that it's also that having live drops is a good way of meeting people that have the same interests as you. Everybody's waiting for the same product, so everybody's who's in that line is into sneakers or fashion. So you can pick up a conversation by looking what somebody is wearing like 'Oh hey, I like your jacket!' or 'Those are nice shoes, where did you get them?' I feel like you can like talk to anybody there. They share that one interest in fashion and sneakers. I would say that that's probably my favourite part of a live drop experience.

I: Do you think that your involvement with sneakers affects your identity?

R: Yea, I guess so. I feel like fashion is so interesting, because you are basically showing your style to everybody. You are not talking to people that walk by you, but they can still see what you are wearing. I feel like that immediately tells something about the person, just based on how they styled their outfit. Yea, I definitely think it has shaped my identity.

I: What does your involvement with sneakers say about you to others? For example, your family members, friends, people at school or work, or people who are yet to get to know you?

R: I think that nowadays pretty much everyone I know knows that I'm into fashion and sneakers. They know that I like to buy expensive clothes. I remember my parents didn't really like it at first, but now they're pretty used to it.

I: Why didn't they like it?

R: I guess they were thinking about the prices of these shoes and saying that I could be spending my money or saving it in so many different ways. They're not as into it as me. And I do see their point, but, you know, I was a rebellious teenager and I wanted to do the things that I wanted to do. I think that in general my involvement with sneakers makes others think of me as, like I'm not afraid to wear what I like. It doesn't matter how avant garde it is, how weird it is, but like, I'm still going to wear it if I like it. That's something that people can see about me when I dress in what I wear and shoes that I wear.

I: When you think about sneakers, what associations do you make for example in terms of people, movies, music, art, or any other phenomena?

R: I would say that when I think of sneakers, I think of rap celebrities. When they wear sneakers, they are the most kind of vocal about it. You know, they're not saying anything, but I think that they are very vocal with what they wear. When I think of sneakers, I think of them.

I: Can you name any specific rappers?

R: ASAP Rocky probably. Yea, ASAP Rocky is probably the first one that comes to my mind when I think of that. And Kanye West, obviously. But then I also think of designers. The first designer I think of is Virgil Abloh, the designer of Off-White and also men's in Louis Vuitton right now. Yea, I think of him also because of his collaboration with Nike.

R: Do you think that some brands or sneakers are to be avoided if one is a true sneakerhead?

I: I want to say that I'm kind of on the fence with this one. I understand that if you are a hardcore sneakerhead there are certain no-nos. I personally think that if you were a hardcore sneakerhead you probably don't think NMDs are very interesting anymore and you probably would never want to buy a pair. But, also, I disagree with that statement as well like fully, because being a sneakerhead is not what other people want. It is what you want. If you still want to wear NMDs, then, you know, go right ahead. I'm kind of like on the fence, because I am making an assumption about what a true sneakerhead, or like a hardcore sneakerhead thinks. My own opinion is that you should be allowed to wear whatever you want. And you should not be constrained by trends.

I: Do you think that there are some negative issues that are related to sneakers?

R: Yea, I feel like that the culture is at risk of being saturated. At least when I'm in public, when I'm in the city, I feel like I see so many young people, like really young people, under 15, wearing expensive sneakers. And I know for a fact, or okay I don't know for a fact, I'm also making an assumption, but I feel like that those kids are not part of the culture at all. They see a celebrity wearing those shoes, so for that reason they buy this shoe. Simply because of that. And I think that's probably the one and only problem and also the biggest problem in the sneaker scene. Streetwear and sneaker culture is getting saturated because of all these kids that are trying to be like that YouTuber they like, without actually knowing or understanding anything about the actual culture behind.