Examining and conceptualising the negotiation process of the self-in-relation: The role of cosmetics consumption within personal narratives of the self

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ABSTRACT

The University of Manchester, Chihling Liu, Doctor of Philosophy, 02 Dec 2014

Examining and conceptualising the negotiation process of the self-in-relation:
The role of cosmetics consumption within personal narratives of the self

This thesis seeks to contribute to theory building on the relationship between self and consumption (e.g., identity projects in Consumer Culture Theory (CCT)). CCT refers to a family of theoretical perspectives that address the sociocultural, symbolic, experiential, and ideological aspects of consumption (Arnould and Thompson 2005). Existential phenomenology is used to theorise the negotiation process of the self-in-relation that has been largely overlooked in earlier research. By self-in-relation I mean the self that operates in a variety of different social contexts in response to or interactive with others, and hence its growth is dependent on the development of self-other relationships. Earlier research has largely focused on exploring the content of a series of definable and separate selves that emerge from experiences. Yet, the process through which each self is created has attracted rather less research attention. Therefore, the focus of this thesis is on examining and conceptualising the negotiation process of the self-in-relation, by bringing together two theoretical lenses from the consumer research and authenticity literature of existentialism. Whereas the former offers a complementary perspective of negotiation processes between the internally and externally focused self-narratives, the latter largely focuses on describing an individual’s negotiation process of the self-in-relation from a conflictual perspective. Cosmetics are chosen as the empirical context for the phenomenon under exploration, because they serve as important socio-cultural markers on women’s self-creation.

Findings that emerged from the thirty-one unstructured phenomenological interviews conducted in this thesis make four substantive contributions to the literature. First, the research findings shed light on the debate in the consumer research and authenticity literature concerning how ‘a self’ is negotiated, by highlighting the dual-nature of self-narratives. Two strands of self-narratives are identified that focused firstly, on the level of self-acceptance and secondly on the felt security in the referent point (e.g., a significant other). These two strands lead to a series of mixed complementary and conflictual negotiation pathways (i.e., nine prominent negotiation pathways that my informants engage in to determine which aspects of the self-in-relation get presented to outside world). Second, my findings contribute to the limited consumer research on issues around felt authenticity about the self by illustrating how different negotiation pathways can influence the extent to which someone might feel authentic about her self-presentation in a particular social context (e.g., ‘this is me’ vs. ‘this is not me’). Third, the thesis contributes to a theoretical understanding of the link between negotiation and consumption, by showing how consumption fits in with self-management within a social context, from an internal and external perspective of managing the self-in-relation. Whereas the target audience for the internal perspective of managing the self-in-relation is the self (e.g., confidence builder), the target audience for the external perspective appears to be the specific other(s) (e.g., prove one is worthy). I show how the different ways through which the self-narratives are merged (i.e. complementary versus conflictual) can affect the type of goals and strategies pursued for managing the self-in-relation. Finally, from the findings I propose a conceptualisation of the relational dynamic interface that seeks to explain how different selves compete to be heard and enacted within the context of everyday lives. My thesis has taken some first steps to present the first half of the picture with respect to how the self-in-relation is negotiated – it looked at women.
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Examining and conceptualising the negotiation process of the self-in-relation: the role of cosmetics consumption within personal narratives of the self

Chapter 1: Introduction

I didn’t have a very good time in high school so I think it was all peer pressure to conform to the same way, to kind of look better or have the makeup and show your makeup in the toilet to the girls, it was like I used to hang around in the toilets in high school you know in break times to sort ourselves out or fix ourselves, umm it was probably up until year 10 until I got moved to the other half of the year away from this group of girls who were quite popular always you know wearing the best clothes, short skirts and all these. And that’s when I started to change and started to wear less and started to worry about my skin...as soon as you remove yourself from a situation, you probably wanna change your appearance, you wanna change your hair, you wanna change certain aspects of yourself. (Jennifer, age 29, art teacher)

My thesis sits within the context of Consumer Culture Theory (CCT) research into the relationship between self and consumption (Arnould and Thompson 2005). Prior work investigating this relationship exposes individuals’ experiences and personal meanings embodied in each self-creation. However, earlier research tends to focus on

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1 Consumer Culture Theory (CCT) is a term introduced by Arnould and Thompson (2005) and refers to “a family of theoretical perspectives that address the dynamic relationships between consumer actions, the marketplace, and cultural meanings”, that is, the sociocultural, symbolic, experiential, and ideological aspects of consumption (868). According to the CCT official website (http://consumerculturetheory.org/), CCT is “the denomination of a certain approach to the study of consumers and consumption. This approach basically considers consumption and its involved behavioural choices and practices as social and cultural phenomena – as opposed to psychological or purely economic phenomena.”
the resultant self, and not on the process through which each self is created, limiting our knowledge of how a self may come about (Fournier and Alvarez 2012; Pollner 2000). To address these limitations, in my research, I use existential phenomenology (Thompson, Locander, and Pollio 1990) to extend our understanding from the ‘product’ of the self-creation process to the intricacies of the process itself. The opening vignette illustrates Jennifer’s experience of one aspect of her “self-in-relation”. By self-in-relation I mean the self that operates in a variety of different social contexts in response to or interactive with others, and hence its growth is dependent on the development of self-other relationships (Kaplan 1986). Jennifer’s account shows how she manages herself in the particular social context of school and school friends, and how she negotiates the challenges represented by this context, e.g., peer pressure; the ‘cool’ girls, through self-adornment practices. The focus of my thesis is thus on using women’s stories about their cosmetics use as an experiential lens to explore and conceptualise the processes that underpin the creation of their self in relation to others.

In line with Kaplan’s (1986) conceptualisation of women’s self-in-relation, from the existential phenomenological perspective of Heidegger (2010), the meanings constructed by the self always encompass the existence of others. Individuals negotiate ‘a self’ to present to the outside world by choosing to be more or less true to the inner self when interacting with others (Erickson 1995; Heidegger 2010). In order for a person to have a meaningful existence, s/he conforms to external forces (e.g., social rules and conventions) and consequently falls into “inauthentic” everydayness (Sartre 2001, Heidegger 2010). Where inauthentic in this case is defined as “falling prey to the “world’”, that is, “inauthenticity does not mean anything like no-longer-being-in-the-world, but rather it constitutes precisely a distinctive kind of being-in-the-world which is completely taken in by the world, essentially taking care of that world” (Heidegger 2010, p.169). For example, if a woman has a job interview for a management consultant role, she knows very well that she has to appear professional or she will not succeed. Therefore, she wears tailored suits and office makeup, or speaks the language they speak in order to achieve success (as if it were not her free choice to wear tracksuits, present her makeup free self, or not speak the language they speak) (Sartre 2001). Persons, as authentic beings, in contrast, are marked by their
individuality and freedom from conventionality and conformity to the predominant beliefs of society (e.g., standard of beauty) (Spinelli 1989). Angst and nausea, however, emerge from being authentic as one chooses to follow one’s own values and personal preferences, and not the needs and expectations of the social others. To circumvent feelings of angst and nausea, a person thus consumes and acts in accordance with social norms, as a form of defence, to construct the ideal or false impression of a meaningful, regulated, and restricted existence (Sartre 2001). Yet, the defences they put up to suppress anxiety in order to sustain a sense of well-being paradoxically cause feelings of fragmentation, confusion and learned helplessness. It is this ongoing battle between the pursuits of the authentic self and a perceived meaningful existence (i.e., the inauthentic self) that characterises individuals’ everyday interaction with others, namely, their negotiation process of the self-in-relation (cf., Kaplan 1986). This is the phenomenon I seek to address in this thesis.

Past consumer research has successfully used existential phenomenology to gain insights into how people experience their being-in-the-world through consumption. Whereas the field of consumer research clearly incorporates diverse streams of literature, in this thesis, I use the term consumer research to largely refer to the works that draw on the concept of consumer narratives to investigate the phenomenon of interest (e.g., the link between self and consumption). For example, how and why consumers choose which ‘face’ to present to the outside world (Thompson and Haytko 1997); the dilemmas they experience in making everyday consumption choices (Thompson et al. 1990); and the role of their relational self-conception in making purchase decisions (Thompson 1996). Yet, it appears that each of the studies is primarily focused on exploring the experience of how consumers create a self within the settings of their everyday lives. For instance, Thompson and Hirschman’s (1995) work on the socialised body views this experience as an ongoing ‘struggle’ whereby consumers strive to meet normalised cultural ideas of physical beauty. In the present thesis, I broaden this focus into investigating what is the underlying mechanism that brings about these ‘struggles’ and across different social contexts (e.g., ranging from the family context to the romantic context, and to the professional context, and in the public or semi-private spaces). Indeed, the process through which these ‘struggles’ are involved in a self-creation is not systematically examined. As
such, building on past research efforts, I use the opportunity provided by existential phenomenology to help explore and understand the underpinnings of consumers’ experiences of the negotiation process of the self-in-relation, and how consumption then comes into play.

1.1 Negotiating the self-in-relation

Early sociologists and philosophers recognised the importance of others in self-construction (e.g. Cooley 1964; Goffman 1959; James 1890; Mead 1934). James (1890) argued that there are as many different selves as there are different positions that an individual holds in society, hence the selves interact with groups in different ways. Ever since, there have been many attempts to conceptualise the linkages between self and society. Three key approaches are identified from this body of work (the first two approaches draw on social psychology, whilst the third derives from consumer research): (1) the social self (Brewer 1991); (2) the relational self (Andersen and Chen 2002); and (3) the extended self (Belk 1988). Brewer views the social self from the level of how the self relates to social groups. In contrast, the relational self is concerned with working models of the self that are fundamentally intertwined with an individual’s significant others. In Belk’s work, the extended self provides the basis for exploring how subjective meanings are embodied in possessions and consumption activities. These possessions and consumption activities characterise individuals’ efforts in constructing a series of different selves in response to different social others. Each self-construction is comprised of a composite of experiences, feelings and meanings of being, for example, a relationship partner, parent, colleague or friend. As such, these theories of the self demonstrate clearly the content of each self, and highlight the complexity of individuals’ subjective assessment about their ought self in a particular social context.
However, they are less developed on the nature of the negotiation process (Pollner 2000; Holstein and Gubrium 1999). For example, we know that a series of selves have been created to respond to everyday social relations, but have less insight into what kind of negotiation takes place within the self which determines what dimensions of the self-in-relation then emerge in a specific social context (Pollner 2000). This knowledge gap persists because the focus of earlier research has often been on investigating the content of a series of definable and separate selves, and not on the process through which each self is created. In the light of the earlier focus on the content of the different selves, there is considerable scope for exploring the processes behind the development, maintenance or transformation of the self-in-relation, especially over the course of life-long relationships (Schlenker and Weigold 1992). For example, there is scope for further research to improve our understanding of what is the mechanism for deciding which self in the end wins out and gets presented in which social context. Ultimately, accordingly to Kaplan (1986), a self is gradually differentiated in the process of facilitating and fostering connectedness with others, and achieves articulation within the relational process. I seek to move the focus away from the emphasis on the product of the self-creation process to a focus on the process itself (Fournier and Alvarez 2012; Pollner 2000).

As a means of addressing this issue, I draw on the concept of consumer narratives to examine the phenomenon of negotiating the self-in-relation. Individuals’ narrative constructions are defined as the internal dialogues of the relationship(s) among self-relevant events and happenings, including interactions with people and objects, across time (Gergen and Gergen 1988). Narratives provide a valuable way of understanding how a self may come about (Bahl and Milne 2010). That is, a self can develop as an interaction between the internally and externally focused self-narratives. Here, I offer preliminary definitions of the terms internally and externally focused self-narratives

2 Pollner (2000) critiques Holstein and Gubrium’s (1999) book on The Self We Live By that “although other dimensions of selfhood are addressed, most notably embodiment, the focus is on the self as topocalized and referenced. Yet, of course, the self is not only storied but also experienced, emoted, enacted, and engaged in inner dialogue. These aspects of the self comprise a budget of issues that could and should be pursued. Specifically, the constructionist perspective – so well served by The Self We Live By will want to consider how narrative constructions radiate inward to lived experience and internal dialogue and outward to embodied action (409).”
to help readers develop a conceptual framework for understanding the phenomenon under study. The terms are further discussed and detailed in chapter four where I demonstrate how they emerge from my findings. “Internally focused self-narratives”, as applied in this thesis, refer to one’s inner self, including situational self-values, personal preferences and beliefs about the self (e.g., what I really want) (Erickson 1995; Sartre 2001). “Externally focused self-narratives”, on the other hand, are defined as individuals’ interpretation of their outer self-representation in a particular context, and how it relates or what it means to the social interplays in the outside world (e.g., what I perceive the society wants) (Sartre 2001). The outside world symbolises the mechanisms of the market and social systems, which frames consumers’ lived experience (Askegaard and Linnet 2011). Therefore, a self is created as one negotiates between being more in line with his or her internally or externally focused self-narratives, which results in a more or less authentic experience of the self (Heidegger 2010; Sartre 2001). Bahl and Milne’s (2010) study is significant in this respect as it provides an account of how consumers create and negotiate a particular dimension of the self by engaging in inner dialogues at the level of different I positions that represent different voices or selves.

Indeed, earlier work in consumer behaviour has shown how narratives can provide insights into the negotiation process. Schouten (1991) demonstrates the process of identity (i.e., totality of the selves) reconstruction by describing how individuals experience a need to separate the self from some past role or relationships through the consumption of aesthetic plastic surgery. The need for separation is triggered due to a perceived change in their internally or externally focused self-narratives (hence the renegotiation of the self-in-relation). In a related vein, Thompson and Hirschman (1995) examine the process of how consumers manifest their externally focused self-narratives. The manifestation threatens their internally focused self-narratives, and propels them to renegotiate their sense of body image through rituals of self-care. In a more recent study, Coulter, Price and Feick (2003) depict how Central European women negotiate their involvement with cosmetics. The involvement is largely linked to their externally focused narratives that emphasise their perceived ought self-presentations in relation to the different roles that they occupy in the outside world (also see Thompson and Haytko 1997). In sum, these studies suggest that consumers’
internally focused narratives are directly translated into, or complementary, to the externally focused ones (and vice versa), which prompts consumption choices that shape their outer self in different social contexts. This is what we could term a complementary perspective of negotiation between the internally and externally focused self-narratives. This dominant focus in consumer research on describing consumers’ negotiation process of the self-in-relation from a complementary perspective largely focuses on the act of self-maintenance. For example, the question typically raised is in what ways consumption is utilised as a form of outward existential signs that satisfy externally focused self-narratives (e.g., standards of beauty), with the aim of maintaining social relationships and the positive sense of self in relation to others (Ahuvia 2005).

An alternative, what we could term, a conflictual perspective of negotiation between the internally and externally focused self-narratives is offered in the authenticity literature of existentialism (e.g., Heidegger 2010; and Sartre 2001). By conflict I mean the consumer struggle in negotiating between their commitments to the self (i.e., the authentic self) and the socially and relationally defined goals (i.e., the inauthentic self), as expressed in the philosophy of existential phenomenology (Erickson 1995; Heidegger 2010; Sartre 2001). According to authenticity research, one is neither authentic nor inauthentic but more or less so (Lenton et al. 2013). Individuals experience a more or less authentic experience of the self as they encounter more or less conflict when negotiating a merging of their internally and externally focused self-narratives. Through negotiation, an individual can then conclude which ‘merged’ self to present in a social context, focusing on the act of self-transformation. One central issue concerns how people attempt to utilise consumption as a form of defence to prevent the self from falling into the state of a perceived meaningless existence (Sartre 2001). In transforming the self into a meaningful existence, however, one ultimately loses a sense of individuality and autonomy (i.e., the authentic self), and thereby becomes inauthentic. In plain words, there exists a persistent conflict between pursuits of a meaningful existence and the authentic self (Heidegger 2010; Sartre 2001).
What becomes apparent is that how the self-in-relation is negotiated remains unclear in terms of whether it can be best described as a rather complementary or conflictual process. The goal of this thesis is hence to investigate the interplay of individuals’ internally and externally focused self-narratives in social contexts, and thereby probe further into the maintenance (complementary) and transformative (conflictual) elements manifested in the negotiation process of the self-in-relation.

1.2 Revealing the phenomenon

I start from the position that self-adornment practices have a vital role to play in cultivating an individual’s self-presentation, which is crucial in shaping desired self-in-relation, and thus fulfilling a sense of existential meaningfulness. Whilst commonly referred to as something that adds to attractiveness, self-adornment practices are widely used for acts of self-expression (Belk 2003; Thompson and Haytko 1997; Thompson and Hirschman 1995). As such, self-adornment practices can be usefully conceptualised as a way of gaining insight into the negotiation process (or processes) because they serve as a means to maintain or transform physical appearance in some way. From a complementary perspective of a merging between the internally and externally focused self-narratives, self-adornment practices can function as outward existential signs that one adopts to achieve existentially fulfilling experiences (e.g., being perceived as successful) – because what individuals want is largely in line with what the society wants (e.g., Thompson and Hirschman 1995). Alternatively, from a conflictual perspective, self-adornment practices may function as a form of defence that one undertakes to avoid anxiety that may surface from not conforming to the externally focused narratives (e.g., standard of beauty). This is because what the society wants remains inconsistent with what s/he really wants (Heidegger 2010; Sartre 2001).
The product category of cosmetics is hence chosen as the empirical research context for this thesis, as a means of revealing/exploring the phenomenon of the negotiation process of the self-in-relation - because cosmetics are simultaneously public, visible to others as in the case of makeup; intimate, biologically linked to the face; and highly malleable to strategically fit socio-cultural norms (externally focused self-narratives) and/or individual preferences (internally focused self-narratives) in answer to daily dynamics (Firth 1973; Weitz 2001).

The most significant macro-oriented analysis of cosmetics is found within feminist writing (Joy and Venkatesh 1994; Walters 2005). The traditional feminist critique of cosmetics has sought to explain its prevalence by reference to the cultural oppression of the female body that is subject to theories of male domination (e.g., objectification theory) and capitalist exploitation (Brownmiller 1984; Jeacle 2006; Sister 1971). However, this perspective may not be the most useful one for understanding the critical role that cosmetics play in women’s negotiation of the self-in-relation today, even though its relevance cannot be denied here (Askegaard, Gertsen, and Langer 2002). This is because the cultural oppression as defined by traditional feminism, especially radical feminists, is not just limited to women but it has become a crucial dimension to all human interactions today because “the body of the social lies in mutual limitations of freedom” (Askegaard et al. 2002, p.796). In other words, the traditional feminist critique of cosmetics has become rather a narrow framing and is increasingly challenged as to whether the cultural oppression is just a woman’s issue or a cross-gender issue that applies to both men and women in contemporary society (Groovan 2010; Ottes and Zayer 2012; Pompper 2010).

More recent arguments within the third-wave of feminism, nonetheless, challenge the prevailing social stigma of how beauty and artifice contribute to the sexual objectification of women. For example, Scott (2006) opposed the traditional feminist critique of beauty and artifice that curtail women’s freedom, instead she highlights the liberating capacity of adornment for the portrayal of these women’s different selves. In other words, ‘ordinary’ women today are said to utilise fashion as a means to emancipate, please, endorse and empower the self. This perspective of course does
still acknowledge that self-adornment practices may be more central and pressing to women’s self-construction than to men’s. For instance, Downing (2012) noted that, whilst many women today have found cosmetics liberating, this sense of liberation is intimately intertwined with that of an almost unbearable obligation. This is because these women tend to internalise others’ standpoints as a fundamental representation of their physical selves. That said, this perspective has taken a step forward to present a more complex view of the intricate interplay between women’s inner and outer selves in postmodernity than the traditional earlier feminist approaches have indicated (Joy and Venkatesh 1994).

Yet, the third-wave of feminism still tends to place a strong emphasis on the disciplining and regulation of the body that is fundamentally gendered, and subject to the power structures of modern society (e.g., a person internalises the norms advocated by ‘the science of sexuality’) (Foucault 1979, 1980). In line with the arguments advanced by Askegaard, Gertsen and Langer (2002) in their work on the body consumed, the present thesis recognises the importance of such an emphasis in studying women’s negotiation process of the self. However in this thesis I follow Askegaard et al. (2002) and adopt a different approach that is mainly inspired by Giddens (1991). That is, this thesis is less concerned with the power structures of modern society and the cultural oppression of female body, and more focused on “the role of social discourses in bodily reflexivity and self-imagery” that is central to determining which aspects of the self-in-relation get presented in which social contexts (Askegaard et al. 2002, p.797). Indeed, just as with the informants in Askegaard et.al’s study (2002), Giddens’ (1991) vantage point is evidently more in line with my informants’ lived experience of cosmetics consumption. Thereby, in contrast to the feminist approach that tends to take a macro perspective on studying the link between self-adornment and women’s being-in-the-world (e.g., ‘the should’), I focus on exploring what this link means to each individual by taking an existential phenomenological approach to explore and understand what these women are actually experiencing, that is, the process(es) through which they negotiate their self-in-relation. As such, in the writing of this thesis, whilst I acknowledge the relevance and importance of the ongoing feminist conversation about the ‘true or legitimate prejudices’ (a key facet of existential phenomenology – see section 3.2.2), I
endeavour to stay as close to my informants’ lived experiences as possible and let their lived experiences distinguish the ‘true or legitimate prejudices’, which lead to understanding, from the false ones which lead to misunderstanding (Sartre 2001). Concentrating on their lived experiences allows me to dig more deeply into the underlying reasons for cosmetics consumption as an integral part of understanding the negotiation of the self-in-relation within the context of everyday lives.

1.3 Key research aim and objectives

The main aim of this existential phenomenological research is to explore and understand the phenomenon of women’s negotiation process of the self-in-relation as expressed through their experiences of cosmetics consumption. I concentrate particularly on the following three research questions:

a) How do women experience the phenomenon of the negotiation process of the self-in-relation in terms of the internally and externally focused self-narratives?

That is, I investigate if indeed women do experience the negotiation process in terms of these narratives (whether complementary or conflictual) or whether we should understand the negotiation process differently (Chapters five and six specifically address this research question).

b) How does the negotiation process of the different selves (externally and internally focused), as defined by informants, of the self-in-relation shape women consumers’ management of the self-in-relation?

In particular, in what ways does self-adornment come into play for managing the self-in-relation and how do the uses of self-adornment illuminate our
understanding of the link between negotiation and consumption (Chapter seven specifically addresses this research question).

c) In chapter eight, the discussion chapter, I draw together the emergent understandings from my findings into a framework that explores how different selves compete to be heard and enacted within the context of everyday lives (see figure 24: the relational dynamic interface, page 207). In this way I answer the final research question: Building on the emergent understanding of negotiation processes, what determines which aspects of the self-in-relation win out, and get presented to the outside world in the end?

1.4 An overview of the thesis

Chapter two: Literature review

Chapter two reviews extant literature relating to the interrelationship between self, social relationships, and consumption. The chapter first introduces a framework for understanding the phenomenon of the negotiation process of the self-in-relation. Different literatures about how the self operates in a range of social settings are thus examined in order to highlight current understanding of how individuals negotiate which ‘face’ to present in a specific social context. What becomes apparent is that it remains an open question as to the nature of the negotiation process of the self-in-relation for each individual. In other words, are there any thresholds in terms of directing the negotiation into a complementary or conflictual process of a merging between a self’s internally and externally focused narratives? Addressing these questions should allow a better understanding of how the self is managed in everyday interaction, and its implication for our subjective well-being in the consumption context.
After I have identified the central importance of investigating the negotiation process, I continue this chapter by offering a framework for understanding the link between authenticity and consumer subjective well-being. Literatures from consumer research and the authenticity research are reviewed to reveal our current understanding of how the different ways in which a self is negotiated may impact on people’s felt authenticity and subjective well-being. What becomes clear is that we still know little about whether adhering to the internally or externally focused self-narratives promotes optimal subjective well-being when negotiating the self-in-relation, and its implication for individuals’ felt authenticity. In addressing this gap in the knowledge, I examine individuals’ reflections on how the self-in-relation is negotiated, and over time. That is, the temporal and spatial dimensions of how consumers negotiate the dynamics (e.g., ups and downs) that are at work within social relationships (e.g., a romantic partnership) for the creation of a self.

The literature review builds on the argument in the introduction, and suggests that existential phenomenology can be usefully drawn on to address the research questions by eliciting consumers’ narratives about how they negotiate their being-in-the-world, and the link to their felt authenticity and well-being.

Chapter three: Methodology

In chapter three, the methodology adopted within this thesis is introduced. This chapter begins with presenting an overview of the phenomenological philosophical underpinnings of the thesis. In particular, key features of existential phenomenology are defined and described to provide readers with a clear picture of the perspective adopted to explore and understand the phenomenon under study. The key features that are central to the thesis include concepts such as epoché (bracketing), intentionality, the first person perspective, meaninglessness and nothingness, essence, temporality and culture. The phenomenological interview adopted and applied in the thesis, as a
method of data collection, is then presented. Thereafter, I depict key hermeneutic philosophical concepts, including the hermeneutic circle and fusion of horizons, that guide the contextualisation of my informants’ lived experiences. Chapter three concludes with a demonstration of how the interpretative process is applied in this thesis.

Chapter four: A conceptualisation of the negotiation pathways

Chapter four offers a conceptual framework of the negotiation pathways that emerged from the etic contextualisation of my informants’ emic descriptions. It demonstrates the dual-nature of self-narratives that are involved in the negotiation process of the self-in-relation: (a) narratives around level of self-acceptance, and (b) narratives around level of felt security in the referent point (e.g., ‘the significant other’, ‘the social group’ or ‘the world as a whole’). The ways in which these two parallel strands of self-narratives are merged reveal a range of personal goals and associated existential dilemmas (e.g., to have X, I need to sacrifice Y). These dilemmas are resolved through a series of mixed complementary and conflictual pathways that my informants engage in to negotiate which aspects of the self-in-relation to present to the outside world (e.g., the internally focused self or the externally focused self). Self-adornment practices are then used to achieve the desired self-presentation in a given social context. The self-presentation embodies the degree to which an individual feels authentic about the self-in-relation (i.e., ‘this is me’ vs. ‘this is not me’) as a result of the negotiation process.

The conceptual framework provides readers with a frame of reference for better understanding the four individual case studies presented in the following chapter five. It also sets up the scene for chapter six that presents a cross case analysis of the negotiation pathways emerged from our informants’ experiences, and chapter seven that illustrates the emergence of self-management from negotiation.
**Chapter five: The ideographical consumer experiences: The negotiation of the self-in-relation**

Chapter five first presents four individual accounts at the ideographic level to advance our understanding of what negotiating the self-in-relation means to each individual (e.g., Fournier 1998; Holt and Thompson 2004; Thompson et al. 1990). In doing so, I demonstrate the particulars of the challenges my informants face in negotiating the self-in-relation. In particular, I illustrate how each account offers a similar but distinct insight into the different negotiation pathways that are taken up for self-creation, and across a variety of different social settings.

**Chapter six: Cross case analysis of the negotiation pathways**

With the nuanced insights into the different negotiation pathways gained at the level of individual lived experiences, the analysis then moves on to the cross-case platform for providing greater clarification of the diversity and complexity that emerged between and within my informants when negotiating the self-in-relation. Specifically, this chapter demonstrates *nine prominent negotiation pathways* that my informants engage in to determine which aspects of the self-in-relation to present in a particular social setting.
Chapter seven: The emergence of self-management from negotiation

Having shed light on the negotiation pathways in chapter six, chapter seven focuses on detailing how consumption fits into managing a self within a social setting. The self-management that emerged from negotiating the self-in-relation reveals women consumers’ efforts in constructing a desired shared experience with others. Therefore, in this chapter, I describe a series of personal goals that are embodied in self-adornment practices, and the strategies used in goal pursuit, from both an internal and external perspective of managing the self-in-relation. Whereas the target audience for the internal perspective of managing the self-in-relation is the self (e.g., confidence builder), the target audience for the external perspective appears to be the specific other(s) (e.g., prove one is worthy). In addition to the goals and strategies identified through the informants’ experiences, I show how the different ways in which the self-narratives are merged can influence the type of goals and strategies pursued for managing the self-in-relation.

Chapter eight: Discussion

Chapter eight answers the third research question (see 1.2) by summarising the findings that were presented in chapters five, six and seven, and outlines the theoretical contributions of this thesis. As I will have demonstrated, the kind of negotiation process through which a self is created has attracted less research attention to date than the content of resultant selves. To address this gap, and building on extant work on narratives, I have examined and conceptualised the ways in which a self is created, and the underlying dilemmas that linger within each self-creation and over time. My findings add to the extant research investigating the relationship between self and consumption (Arnould and Thompson 2005) by offering a self-in-relation perspective of how different selves compete to be heard and enacted. The resultant findings are used to propose a framework of the relational dynamic interface (see figure 24, page 207) that show how our self-narratives focused on the level of self-acceptance and of felt security in the referent point are merged to
determine which aspects of the self-in-relation get presented to the outside world. The framework of the relational dynamic interface extends and challenges our current knowledge about the self and how it operates in a variety of social contexts, particularly in relation to women’s trajectories.

Following a detailed discussion of the theoretical contributions, the managerial implications are presented, illustrating the challenges for policy makers, social marketing practitioners and consumer educators in terms of promoting consumers’ subjective well-being. Finally, I conclude the thesis by acknowledging the limitations with recommendations for future research.
Chapter 2: A framework for understanding the negotiation process of the self-in-relation

Consistent with the experience of other existential phenomenologists (e.g., Thompson 1996; Thompson, Pollio, and Locander 1994), the aim of this chapter is to draw on past literature to build a preliminary conceptual framework for illuminating the phenomenon under exploration in this thesis, rather than generating a specific set of research hypotheses. Building on the argument in the introduction, the preliminary conceptual framework is thereby intended as an initial blueprint for understanding the negotiation process of the self-in-relation, and how it relates to the relationship between authenticity and consumer subjective well-being. In chapter four (following the methodology), I then present how this preliminary conceptual framework is advanced in the light of the emergent findings (reported in chapters five, six and seven). The emergent findings are grounded in the voices of my research informants, and invoke new ways of examining and conceptualising the negotiation process of the self-in-relation.

Overall, chapter two argues that the topic of self-in-relation has been a continuing preoccupation in philosophy, psychology, sociology, anthropology and consumer research. Yet, there is still much to discover about the nature of the negotiation process of the self-in-relation, and the link to our sense of authenticity and subjective well-being, especially in the consumption context. There are two main sections in this chapter. The first section focuses on our current knowledge of how a self is negotiated and managed in order to be presented to the outside world. In particular, I highlight how different literatures about the self have approached the topic of negotiating the self-in-relation in a similar but distinctive manner (see section 2.1). Following on from this, the consumer research and authenticity literature of existentialism are reviewed to highlight the current understanding of how the ways through which a self is negotiated may impact on people’s felt authenticity and subjective well-being (see section 2.2). Finally, a brief conclusion is offered to sum up the main gaps identified in the literature review, and which will be addressed in the findings’ chapters.
2.1 The negotiation process of the self-in-relation

Research on the self-in-relation dates from the late nineteenth century, and builds on James’s (1890) concept of the social me. James emphasises that one’s self is experienced in reference to other influential beings or groups. Post James, contemporary debates within and between a broad spectrum of academic disciplines are particularly concerned with the link between the self and the social world (Andersen and Chen 2002; Belk 1988, 2013; Belk and Coon 1993; Brewer 1991; Chen, Boucher, and Tapias 2006; Cooley 1964; Epp and Price 2008; Goffman 1959; Horberg and Chen 2010; Joy 2001; Kleine, Kleine, and Kernan 1993; Park 1982; Simpson, Griskevicius, and Rothman 2012; Slotter, Gardner, and Finkel 2010; Solomon 1983; Thompson and Haytko 1997). In reviewing these literatures, what becomes apparent is that our self-creations are born out of the negotiation process of the self-in-relation (Giddens 1991; Murray 2002; Schouten 1991; Thompson and Hirschman 1995). Yet, our current understanding of this process remains at a primitive stage (Pollner 2000, p.409).

Gergen and Gergen (1997) claim that “the bulk of the negotiation process (of the self-in-relation) is anticipatory or implicit; it takes place with an imaginary audience prior to the moment of action. People take into account others’ perspectives and the likelihood of their actions being accepted prior to acting. In this way most human interaction process proceeds unproblematically” (p., 269). Yet, this perspective has been criticised for presenting an oversimplified description of how a self may come about because it largely overlooks how the self is “experienced, emoted, enacted, and engaged in inner dialogue” and “how narrative construction radiate inward to lived experiences and internal dialogue and outward to embodied action” (Pollner 2000, p.409). That is, although prior research has successfully described how and why a self is presented within a specific social setting, we still have little understanding about how the internal dialogues between the internally and externally focused self-narratives interact in determining which aspects of the self-in-relation then emerge to construct desired social relationships. This knowledge gap persists because this body
of research typically focuses on the resultant self at the societal and/or cultural level, and not on the nature of the negotiation process behind an individual’s self-creation. Exceptions are Ahuvia’s (2005) work on loved objects, and Bahl and Milne’s (2010) dialogical self. Their emphasis however is still largely placed upon how conflicts can be experienced and reconciled between separate selves from the perspective of a rather autonomous self (e.g., ‘who I want to be’), and not upon how a self may come about by negotiating between its internally and externally focused narratives from the perspective of the self-in-relation (e.g., ‘who I want to be in a given social relationship’). This lack of understanding is problematic, as we cannot fully appreciate why some aspects of the self surface in a particular social context and not others without knowing what is being negotiated. To shed light on this phenomenon, I use consumer narratives (Bahl and Milne 2010) to systematically examine how persons negotiate between a self’s inner (e.g., inner feelings, beliefs and states) and outer (e.g., outer self-presentation) selves, and between the internally and externally focused narratives for a self-creation in a given social context.

Indeed, everyday human experience of the inner self is deeply intertwined with the corporeal existence, especially in postmodernity. According to Falk (1994), the inner self is hidden inside the body. Persons receive feedback about their self-presentation and associated performance in everyday interaction, and based on which they adjust the present state of the self. It is the desire to adjust the cognitive and affective states that provokes self-regulation efforts directed at altering the content of each self-presentation in social encounters (Zimmerman 1999). The alteration often involves seeking to maintain or transform others’ perceptions about the self, in order to fulfil “self-generated thoughts, feelings, and actions that are planned and cyclically adapted to the attainment of personal goals” (Zimmerman 1999, p.14) (see figure 1 below).

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3 In Ahuvia’s paper (2005), separate selves are referred to as different selves (e.g., the feminist self or the decorative feminine self). The author looked at how different objects are associated with distinct aspects of the self. In a similar fashion, in Bahl and Milne’s (2010) paper, separate selves are described as different I-positions or voices (e.g., the artistic self, the teacher self, the helpless self, the sensitive self, the spiritual self and so forth). That is, separate selves can experience different consumption meanings and it is through a range of dialogical relationships between selves, internal conflicts are somehow experienced and reconciled.
As such, people’s management of their outer selves is closely associated with and reflective of their complex covert self-regulation efforts, which offers insights into the strategic, fluid and purposeful aspects of human behaviour within specific social settings (Schau and Gilly 2003; Schlenker and Weigold 1992; Schouten 1991). In these terms, the body now can be seen as twofold: “the outer manifestation (expression) and the inner being. The body is subsumed to the ‘total culture of appearances’ turning into a collection of signs to be interpreted. It becomes a façade, which at the same time both conceals and expresses the inner being. The body enters the realm of signs and becomes a mannequin” (Falk 1994, p. 53). People’s self-presentation remains key for expressing desired life stories, and yet self-presentation simultaneously conceals the negotiation that takes place between a self’s internally and externally focused narratives, enabling people to determine which aspects of the self-in-relation get presented to the outside world (Schau and Gilly 2003; Vohs, Baumeister, and Ciarocco 2005). It is what has been concealed in the process of covert self-regulation, that is, the negotiation process of the self-in-relation, that we still know very little about.

Two streams of literature can be usefully drawn on in order to shed more light on the phenomenon of the negotiation process of the self-in-relation. First, Goffman’s (1959)
dramaturgical theory is what I would term a complementary perspective of negotiation because it involves a merging between the internally and externally focused self-narratives. Goffman’s theory has been a cornerstone in seeing social interplays as occasions when persons perform as actors to create fronts. These fronts enable the actors to move from character to character when facing different audiences in the front and backstage regions of everyday social life. Whereas the front stage is where persons present idealisations of the self in the public arena, the backstage is where they step out of character in a (semi-)private space, and "where the suppressed facts make an appearance" (Goffman 1959, p.114). The actors, however, are said to have no interior and exterior, because acting, to Goffman, is an existential metaphor, and is used to conceal irrelevant information, not some real truth (Karreman 2001; Mangham 1988; Tseëlon 1992). This is what I might term a complementary perspective of negotiation in order to achieve a merging between the internally and externally focused self-narratives. Contemporary consumer researchers have predominantly adopted this perspective, and focused attention on the act of self-maintenance in the eyes of others (Ahuvia 2005; Thompson and Hirschman 1995), and/or the self (Cherrier and Murray 2007; Schouten 1991). That is, consumer research tends to locate performance in the foreground where “social dramas occur at the interface between an individual or group and a wider system of social relations” (Epp and Price 2008, p.54).

Second, in a similar fashion to Goffman’s stage metaphor, impression management theorists distinguish between private realities and public appearances, but they differ in terms of presentational behaviour (Tseëlon 1992). That is, whereas Goffman is more concerned with an individual’s representation of the self as an end in itself, many impression management researchers tend to deal with mispresentation or deception as a means to an end for acquiring benefits (Tseëlon 1992). As such, they often underline the inconsistencies between the internally and externally focused self-narratives when considering which self to present (Jones 1973; Schlenker 1975; Tunnel 1984). This is what I would term a conflictual perspective of negotiating a merging between the internally and externally focused self-narratives. The authenticity literature has largely adopted this perspective, and emphasised the act of self-transformation, because these authors typically treat the internally and externally
focused self-narratives as competing forces in constructing a self (Erickson 1995; Heidegger 2010). In this view, whereas consumer research has typically focused on external dramas that occur in everyday interaction, the authenticity research has devoted much more attention to depicting the internal dramas that people experience in negotiating the self-being-in-the-world (Erickson 1995; Heidegger 2010; Lenton et al. 2013).

In sum, these two streams of literature, each adopts a distinctive set of assumptions in drawing inferences about the negotiation process of the self-in-relation. Yet, it remains an open question as to whether this negotiation process can be best characterised as a complementary or a conflictual merging between the internally and externally focused self-narratives – or whether we should understand this negotiation process differently, particularly within the context of consumer behaviour (Tetlock and Manstead 1985; Vohs et al. 2005)? This lack of exploration is problematic because if we do not know how the self is negotiated, we have few legitimate grounds for understanding the resultant experiences associated with each self-creation, further limiting our understanding of the ways through which a self is managed in everyday interaction, and the impact of this self-management process on consumer subjective well-being.
2.2 The link between authenticity and consumer subjective well-being

“Authentic being a self is not based on an exceptional state of the subject, detached from the they (i.e., everyday averageness; “publicness”), but is an existentiell modification of the they as an essential existential”. (Heidegger 2010, p.126)

According to Heidegger (2010, p.116), “the others are always already there with us in being-in-the-world”. In a related fashion, Joy and Venkatesh (1994) maintain that otherness is always within women’s self-construction. That is, women’s self-construction is intimately linked to their capability to maintain the integrity of social relationships (Kaplan 1986; Miller 1976; Thompson 1996). That said, whereas these authors generally agree on the importance of others in constructing the self, there is an ongoing debate about whether optimal subjective well-being can be obtained by conforming to either the internally or externally focused self-narratives when negotiating the self-in-relation.

Two key perspectives prevail in understanding the link between how a self is negotiated and people’s subjective well-being. First, from the perspective of existential philosophers, optimal subjective well-being is attained by adhering to one’s internally focused self-narratives, namely, one’s authentic self (e.g., Heidegger 2010; Sartre 2001). For example, Sartre (2001) considers people who follow externally focused self-narratives as inauthentic beings, and as living in “bad faith” (also see Heidegger 2010). By bad faith he means individuals’ perceived inability to escape from external forces (e.g., social norms) that mold them into who they are, and dictate what they should do. The bad faith reinforces our stereotypic and ritualistic

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4 Heidegger (2010) distinguishes between the terms “existentiell” and “existential”. Whereas “existentiell” refers to an ontic understanding of how things work within the context of the world, “existential” is about the ontological understanding of our being-in-the-world. The ontological understanding of being, whilst it can appear vague, it is an essential prerequisite for ontic understanding.
(consumption) behaviour promoted by the externally focused self-narratives in a
given socio-culture. Existential meaningfulness is attained, at least on a surface level,
by *conforming* to their externally focused self-narratives (e.g., women cabin crew
wear uniforms and/or light makeup in seeking to appear and feel professional)
(Heidegger 2010; Sartre 2001). Yet, the conformity simultaneously restricts
individuality and personal freedom, limiting the potentials of one’s being-in-the-
world. As such, Heidegger (2010) regards the fulfilment of internally focused self-
narratives as what generates higher and fuller existentially satisfying experiences,
despite the fact that the fulfilment concurrently produces feelings of anxiety about
failing to meet social expectations (Guignon 2004). Indeed, recent research on the
link between *authenticity* and *self* identifies the importance of being authentic when
interacting with others. For example, individuals’ sense of being authentic to the self-
in-relation has been noted to produce positive mood (e.g., contentment) (Lenton et al.
2013) and optimal self-esteem (Kernis 2003; Leary 2003) and this is what we could
term an internal perspective of promoting our subjective well-being.

An alternative, what we could term an external perspective on promoting our
subjective well-being is offered by consumer researchers (Elliott 1994; Firat and
show how postmodern consumers select identities from externally focused self-
narratives (e.g., a series of cultural images), with the aim of gaining a more favorable
today’s young feminists adorn their body to meet externally focused self-narratives
(e.g., standard of beauty), in a bid to acquire power and derive pleasure from their
feminine tricks of beautification. Failing to meet the externally focused self-
narratives, on the other hand, is found to have a profound negative impact on
consumers’ self-perceptions and their sense of well-being (Gulas and McKeage 2000;
Richins 1991). In sum, consumer researchers have largely chosen to accept the
importance of fulfilling (internalised) externally focused self-narratives in enhancing
our subjective well-being, even though it may potentially lead to a rather inauthentic
sense of self. This is perhaps why little research has been done on the topic of the
authentic self within the context of consumer behaviour. Yet, one important question
thus arises, if we have no authentic self, how do we feel more or less true to the self within a variety of different social settings (Erickson 1995)?

Consumer research concerning authenticity typically focuses on the perceived authenticity of market offerings (Gulas and McKeage 2000), including a place (Debenedetti, Oppewal, and Arsel 2014), an object (Beverland and Farrelly 2010), a brand (Kates 2004; Muniz and Schau 2005; Thompson and Arsel 2004), or a consumption experience (Kozinets 2002; Peñaloza 2001; Rose and Wood 2005). Whereas these studies show that there is an implicit link between authenticity and consumers’ subjective well-being, they have not explicitly theorised or further elaborated on how consumers experience this link when negotiating the self-in-relation. Where the link is hinted at, it is only alluded to and/or treated as mere background for the examination of the relationship between self and the extent to which market offerings are perceived to be authentic. For example, in Thompson and Arsel’s (2004) work, local coffee shops (e.g., café flâneurs), also called urban third-places, are perceived as corporate-free bastions that offer experiences of authentic local cultures through which consumers obtain “a palliative for the distressing feelings of isolation, inauthenticity, and de-personalization” (p., 640). The authors have successfully theorised the criticality of a perceived authentic experience in fulfilling consumers’ quests for enjoyable identity-play, communal solidarity, and/or connections with like-minded people (e.g., “think globally, act locally”). Yet, the focus is on consumers’ experiences of market offerings, and not on issues of authenticity about the self in relation to someone (e.g., like-minded people), somewhere (e.g., local coffee shops) and/or something (e.g., drinking coffee). This lack of knowledge is regrettable because to understand the link between consumption experiences and our subjective well-being (cf., Bahl and Milne 2010), I argue we need to first have a more nuanced view about the issues around authenticity and the self-in-relation.

What becomes clear is that we still know little about whether adhering to the internally or externally focused self-narratives promotes optimal subjective well-being when negotiating the self-in-relation, especially in the consumption context. Or
if there are other ways that best enhance or maintain our subjective well-being in a given relationship? The present thesis hence further explores the link between authenticity and people’s subjective well-being by investigating consumers’ narratives about the self-in-relation, and over the course of a long-term relationship (cf., Schlenker and Weigold 1992). In investigating the potential development of the self-in-relation over time, it further allows me to examine the temporal and spatial dimensions of how consumers negotiate and manage the self-in-relation in response to the dynamics (e.g., ups and downs) that are at work within social relationships (e.g., a romantic partnership).

2.3 Conclusion

Figure 2: An overview of current literature on negotiating the self-in-relation

(1) Whether the process of negotiating the self-in-relation can be best understood as a complementary or a conflictual merging of the internally and externally focused self-narratives?

(2) Whether adhering to the internally or externally focused self-narratives promotes optimal subjective well-being when negotiating the self-in-relation?
What emerges from the current literature is that there are two ongoing debates for understanding the negotiation process of the self-in-relation and how the self-in-relation relates to consumers’ felt authenticity and subjective well-being (see figure 2 above). Consumer research is dominated by an assumption of a complementary merging of the internally and externally focused self-narratives, when negotiating which aspects of the self-in-relation to present to the outside world. This perspective therefore has a tendency to focus on investigating acts of self-maintenance because it assumes that what the society wants is largely in line with what an individual wants. As such, consumer researchers often place a strong emphasis on endorsing an external perspective of promoting people’s subjective well-being (e.g., by satisfying what is expected) (Elliott 1994; Firat and Venkatesh 1995; Hermans 1996). In contrast to this perspective, the authenticity literature appears to be largely in agreement with theories relating to impression management (Tseëlon 1992) that treat the internally and externally focused self-narratives as a ‘tensioned’ dialectic in constant dispute and negotiation. Hence, this latter body of literature often stresses acts of self-transformation, and advocates the importance of adhering to an internal perspective of promoting people’s subjective well-being in order to gain ‘truly’ meaningful life experiences (e.g., Heidegger 2010; Sartre 2001).

In sum, the literature review clearly shows that there is an opportunity to investigate and increase our understanding of the negotiation process of the self-in-relation. I take this opportunity to examine the experiences associated with negotiating the self-in-relation, and to conceptualise the underpinnings of the negotiation processes around the self-in-relation; from here I identify the emergence of self-management from this negotiation – that is, how consumption fits into managing a self within a social setting.
Chapter 3: Methodology

It is important for researchers to offer an account of their epistemological and ontological stances, as these stances guide and inform the particular vantage point and methodology they have adopted to explore the phenomena under study. This chapter firstly introduces an overview of the Heideggerian tradition of existential phenomenology as the philosophical underpinnings of this thesis (section 3.1). The key features of existential phenomenology are then presented, including concepts such as epoché (bracketing), intentionality, the first person perspective, meaninglessness and nothingness, essence, temporality and culture (section 3.2). Following the demonstration of an account of the methods adopted and applied in this thesis (section 3.3), key hermeneutic philosophical concepts (e.g., the hermeneutic circle, fusion of horizons) that guide the contextualisation of my informants’ lived experiences are described (section 3.4). Finally, the interpretative process employed in this thesis is illustrated in a step-by-step manner (section 3.5).

3.1 An overview of existential phenomenology

In line with the qualitative inquiry movement that calls for context rich research, an existential phenomenological approach is adopted in this thesis to explore and understand the phenomenon of women’s negotiation process of the self-in-relation, through their experiences of cosmetics consumption as lived (Askegaard and Linnet 2011). Indeed, the fields of marketing (Thompson, Rindfleisch, and Arsel 2006) and consumer research (Thompson, Locander, and Pollio 1989) are increasingly influenced by the tradition of existential phenomenology (Thompson et al. 1990). Existential phenomenology focuses on giving the voice back to the experiencing individuals, and exploring their meaning making process(es), in seeking to reveal the
personal meanings they attach to the fine-grained details of everyday life (Spinelli 1989).

The term ‘phenomenology’ has its roots in the Greek word ‘phainomenon’ or ‘phainomena’ in plural, meaning the appearances of things. Phenomenology is the art or practice of letting things show themselves (Spinelli 1989). We make ‘sense’ of individuals’ perceptions, interpretations and reactions as they appear and emerge, that is, *in the very way that they present themselves* (Heidegger 2010). In essence, Heidegger’s existential phenomenology endorses the concept of ‘Dasein’, that is, human existence as essentially *being-in-the-world*. For Heidegger, the construction of meanings about the self always involves the existence of other people. This is what he termed ‘intersubjectivity’, namely, "*the shared, overlapping and relational relationships of our existence in the world*" (Smith, Flowers, and Larkin 2009, p.17). The present research shares this focus on the concept of ‘Dasein’, and explores the untapped significance of the relationship between self and consumption (Arnould and Thompson 2005).

### 3.2 Key features of existential phenomenology

The following key features of existential phenomenology represent the philosophical assumptions of the present thesis, and guide how I conduct research and interpret research findings. Phenomenological studies are primarily concerned with seeking first-person knowledge through a form of intuition, and from the viewpoint of the subjects living through their everyday occurrences (Crotty 1998). The key features of phenomenology, as I will now discuss in the following section, are always anchored back to this first person perspective.
3.2.1 Epoché (bracketing)

Unlike Husserl’s (1962) endeavour for objectivity, the current research acknowledges ‘the intersubjective relationship’ between the researchers and the researched due to the impossibility of bracketing all our presuppositions, assumptions and beliefs regarding the external world. When it comes to the phenomenon, ‘the person’ is not the focal point, but the concept of Dasein, that is, our existentiality or experience in the world that is fundamentally intertwined with our relational others (Heidegger 2010; Sartre 2001). In these terms, people and the world are always entangled. The common, shared world is the basis of intelligibility, namely, shared knowledge/comprehension, enabling us to be empathetic and comprehend one another. Therefore, instead of attempting to bracket all biases or preconceptions, the researcher acknowledges that many voices, including the researcher’s own, contribute to the construction of individual realities (Lowes and Prowse 2001). Simply put, epoché in the present study refers to putting the ‘hidden prejudice’ in brackets and highlighting the ‘true or legitimate prejudice’ that enables me to gain a genuine understanding of the text being studied (Gadamer 1993; Heidegger 2010).

3.2.2 Prejudice

Prejudice refers to pre-understanding, that is, “a forestructure or a condition of knowledge in that it determines what we may find intelligible in any given situation” (Koch 1996, p.177). The concept of prejudice or pre-understanding is central to the hermeneutic philosophy (Gadamer 1993) and existential phenomenology (Heidegger 2010), because in advance of any reflection and prior to any interpretation, we belong to a cultural world (e.g., the temporal distance in time, namely, the accumulation of
internalised norms, values, myths, ideologies, traditions, beliefs, and theories) (Arnold and Fischer 1994). Hence, ‘hidden prejudice’ is defined as unacknowledged prejudgment, which makes us deaf to what speaks to us (Gadamer 1993). ‘A true or legitimate prejudice’, on the other hand, is one that advocates a coherent understanding of the text, focusing on “the right use of reason in the understanding of transmitted texts” (Gadamer 1967, p.262 quoted in Goldstein 1991, p.29). The present thesis advocates the suspension of our ‘hidden prejudices’ (leading us to treat the text as ‘nonsense’), whilst highlighting the prerequisites for a genuine understanding of the text to occur (‘true or legitimate prejudices’ is the necessary condition of all understanding) (Prasad 2002).

3.2.3 Intentionality

The term ‘intentionality’ originates from the Latin intendere, means ‘to stretch forth’, and refers to the movement of “the fundamental action of the mind reaching out to the stimuli which make up the real world in order to translate them into its realm of meaningful experience” (Spinelli 1989, p.11). According to Husserl (1962), every act of intentionality consists of correlational poles, that is, ‘noema’ and ‘noesis’. Figure 3 below shows the dialectic between noema and noesis. Noema refers to an individual’s subjective experience of an object in a particular context. Noesis, on the other hand, is the real object, the reference point of the individual’s experience to which s/he adds various personal meanings to the experience based on his or her life stories. Indeed, noema are the realities we are experiencing, whilst noesis is always an experience of something. Therefore, through the act of epoché, one gains closer and deeper understandings of ‘how I really feel’ and ‘what the experience really means to me’, that is, the essential personal meanings inherent in the dialectic between noesis and noema, object and subject(s) (Bruce 1994). As such, the focus of this thesis is on using women’s personal accounts to explore and comprehend the essential meanings
inherent in the dialectic between cosmetics use and individuals’ negotiation of the self-being-in-the-world.

Figure 3: The dialectic between noema and noesis. (Note: Adapted from Husserl 1962, pp. 238-239)

3.2.4 Meaninglessness and nothingness

Existential phenomenology studies the questions we do not raise in our everyday engagement, particularly during the authentic moments (Finlay 2009). Authentic moments are defined here as the lived experience of being anxious, scared and/or
worried. For example, why do we have guilt, angst and/or fear? To avoid the confrontation with the meaninglessness and nothingness of our being-in-the-world that gives rise to a deeply rooted spiritual condition of insecurity, we build up our defences to construct existential meanings that supply and maintain our sense of well-being (e.g., responsibilities or principles to fulfil). The present thesis focuses on exploring the consumption defenses individuals put up to fulfil their perceived socio-cultural obligations in order to suppress the authentic moments.

3.2.5 Essence

The search for and discovery of the essence embedded in a phenomenon are of central importance to phenomenological studies as a whole. An essence, in Husserlian terms, refers to “an invariant rule of possible phenomenal variations; and conversely the restricted set of possible variations of individual fact-like presentations points towards a certain “essence’” (Bitbol 2002, p.7). That is, for Husserl, the essence is the invariant structure that underlines all the variations of sense (Jennings 1986; Lusthaus 2002). In contrast, Heidegger views the essence as a constantly changing entity that varies from culture to culture, and can be framed in a different way or expressed in a language in a different form. As Askegaard and Linnet (2011) described, a true phenomenological study on consumer culture addresses “the coexistence of different orientations within cultures and also within individuals, for whom they can create tensions or function as different modes of perception and self-presentation across a range of everyday situational contexts” (393). The present thesis is in line with the Heideggerian thought that “the ‘essence of truth’ does not refer to anything static, but to an ‘occurrence’ within which the human being is actively situated” (Heidegger 2004, p. xiv).

The essence of each lived experience can be uncovered through ‘eidetic reduction’ (Husserl 1962). Eidetic reduction refers to the process of abstracting essences that are implicit in the experience or consciousness by means of intuition, reflection (Sanders
1982), and imaginative variations (Giorgi 2006). Like peeling an onion, we systemically remove one layer at a time (e.g., the essential aspects, the symbolic meanings and contextual relations) to get to the core where we find the essence that constitutes the experience (Husserl 1962). As such, this thesis focuses on discovering the essence of women’s lived experience of negotiating the self-in-relation within the context of cosmetics consumption, by observing how they determine which ‘face’ to present to the outside world.

3.2.6 Temporality

Sartre emphasises the temporal trajectory of our past, present, and future being-in-the-world, which is constantly being shaped and re-shaped by space and time (Heidegger 2010), and our contextual relations to the things in the world (Sartre 2001); as Kierkergaard (1974) reflected, “An existing individual is constantly in the process of becoming” (79). The present thesis adopts this view and hence investigates how a woman’s experiences of the self-in-relation differ, if at all, over the course of a social relationship. That is, how do the temporal and spatial dimensions provide further insight into the phenomenon of the subject-world relation.

3.2.7 The hermeneutic circle

The concept of the hermeneutic circle is explicitly acknowledged as an instrument of existential phenomenology (Arnold and Fischer 1994; Prasad 2002; Thompson et al. 1989), as “hermeneutics without phenomenology can become relativist. Phenomenology without hermeneutics can become shallow. Yet both without existentialism can become too captivated with thought and language, and thus forget our ontological presence that is more complex than any form of thought or language”
The term ‘hermeneutic circle’ refers to the harmonious circular relationship between understanding the whole in relation to the details, and the details in relation to the whole. Or more precisely, “the anticipation of meaning in which the whole is envisaged becomes actual understanding when the parts that are determined by the whole themselves also determine this whole” (Moran and Mooney 2002, p.326). Like an artist, in order to paint a full picture, we must pay attention to the finer details; in order to paint the finer details, we must be aware of the bigger picture.

The hermeneutic circle was used as a method of contextualisation in my study to move back and forth between the parts and the whole of the text, between the particular and the shared, and between the descriptive and the interpretative (Bontekoe 1996; Debesay, Nåden, and Slettebø 2008; Heidegger 2010). For example, in the specific context of textual interpretation, I study the text with a pre-understanding of the historical and cultural background (i.e., the whole) within which the text in question (i.e., the part) resides (Prasad 2002). This continual circular movement leads to an evolving understanding of the phenomena under study as a whole.

3.2.8 Fusion of horizons

A horizon is everything that is ‘visible’ from a particular viewpoint as “the horizon of the interpreter is his or her [pre] understanding. The horizon of the text (representative of the other) is its sense discerned through semiotic-structural analysis and progressive iterations of the hermeneutic circle” (Arnold and Fischer 1994, p.63). Yet, these horizons are temporal as they are subject to the historical movement of human life and such historicity of our existence begets prejudices or pre-understanding (Gadamer 1993; Koch 1996).
My own pre-understanding can be thought as ‘the old horizon’ subject to my own cultural perspective and my place in the history (Thompson 1990). When the old horizon meets with ‘a new strange one’ (i.e., the text) leading to the fusion of horizons, new forms of understanding occur (Debesay et al. 2008; Moran and Mooney 2002). As my informants’ accounts appear to be puzzling, unexpected, or foreign, my prejudice or pre-understanding is challenged to change (Arnold and Fischer 1994; Lowes and Prowse 2001; Prasad 2002). Fusion of horizons thus is the coming together of different vantage points from the interpreter and the text being studied through the circular dialectical hermeneutic movement. As I open myself to let the text speak and influence me, I am on the path to reaching the fusion of horizons where the interpretation takes place (Debesay et al. 2008; Koch 1996; Thompson 1990). Understanding is enhanced by engaging in a process of “personal, cultural and historical reflexivity” in relation to the text which I encounter (Todres and Wheeler 2001, p.7). Misunderstandings are recognised through the discovery of a tension or disparity between the whole and the parts in the hermeneutic circle (Debesay et al. 2008). In this circle of moving back and forth from my horizon to the horizon of the text, I do not stay in the same place but constantly and progressively uncover new understandings of the phenomenon being investigated in this thesis (i.e., the negotiation process of the self-in-relation) (Debesay et al. 2008; Packer 1985). I thereby gradually become more aware of the concerns, rituals, activities, and emotions that form the background against which the phenomena emerge (Packer 1985), as meaning must be derived from the social context in which it forms (Mishler 1979).

3.3 Methodology

The main purpose of this thesis lies in exploring how individuals negotiate the self in everyday interaction within the consumption context. The methods adopted in this thesis are consistent with the existential phenomenology perspective. This section
starts by describing informant selection and recruitment processes (see section 3.3.1). I then discuss how the unstructured in-depth phenomenological interviews were conducted in this thesis, as a means to explore my informants’ lived experiences of negotiating the self-in-relation, and within the context of cosmetics consumption (see section 3.3.2).

3.3.1 Informant selection and recruitment

The study phenomenon determines the research method, including the type of informants (Hycner 1985). Existential phenomenological studies do not require a certain number of informants, rather the focus is on generating information-rich cases (Porter 1999). Nevertheless some guidelines have been stipulated. For example, whilst ethnographic studies and grounded theory are recommended to consist of 30 to 50 interviews, existential phenomenological research is argued to typically include approximately six to ten informants (Morse 1994; Porter 1999). Whilst, differences in the ultimate goal of the study and within-method diversity can alter the requisite number of research informants (e.g., the search for maximum variation) (Sandelowski 1995). For instance, for interpretative phenomenological analysis, the focus is sometimes on exploring one single research informant’s perceived realities and his/her experiences of being-in-the-world in extreme detail (Smith et al. 2009). However, as Van Kaam (1959) indicated, in order to capture the essential meaning structures that constitute the human experience, a minimum set of 10-50 descriptions of the target phenomenon is required. The number of research informants included in existential phenomenological research within the context of consumer behavior, relevant to this thesis, typically comprises between seven (e.g. Thompson 1996) to just over twenty informants (e.g. Arsel and Thompson 2011; Luedicke, Thompson, and Giesler 2010).

As my empirical contexts are women and cosmetics, the key criterion for informants’ recruitment is women who consume cosmetics on a daily basis. As I aim to also explore age differences in potentially effecting the studying phenomena (e.g.,
strategies of negotiating the self-in-relation), thirty-one women consumers, living in the United Kingdom and ranging from 19-62 years of age, have been recruited for the present thesis. The youngest informant was a nineteen-year-old college student, whilst the oldest was a sixty-two-year-old retired estate agent. These women consumed cosmetics on a daily basis but had different levels of product involvement (e.g., must wear foundation every day or only wear powder everyday) and skin conditions (e.g., spot-free or spot-prone skin and/or aging skin) and have been purposefully selected and recruited by means of personal contacts and referrals. As the existential phenomenological goal is to explore the dynamics and multiplicity of individuals’ lived experiences within the common everyday phenomenon, variation within the informants was also sought on their occupation, race and relationship status (Porter 1999) (see table 1 below). The variation sought was data-driven, as interpretation and informants’ selection were executed simultaneously in this thesis (Coyne 1997).

Table 1: Informants’ profile (N=31)

Note: For race, C represents ‘Caucasian’, A represents ‘Afro-Caribbean’ and M represents ‘Mixed race’.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Fictitious name</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Occupation</th>
<th>Race</th>
<th>Relationship status</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Jennifer</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>School art teacher</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>In a relationship for 3 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Katie</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>Fashion trainee buyer</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>In a relationship for 3 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Betty</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>Admissions officer and events assistant</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>Engaged for 6 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Brittany</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>HR manager</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>Single</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Adele</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>Teaching assistant</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>In a relationship for 7 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Joanna</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>Researcher</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>In a relationship for 4 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Amy</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>Investment analyst</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Engaged for 2 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Sandra</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>Auditor</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>Single</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Valeria</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>Accountant</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>Married for 3 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Lisa</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>Communications manager</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>In a relationship for 2 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Luna</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>Marketing executive</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>In a relationship for 7 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Name</td>
<td>Age</td>
<td>Occupation</td>
<td>Status</td>
<td>Relationship Duration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
<td>--------</td>
<td>-----</td>
<td>-------------------------------------</td>
<td>--------</td>
<td>-------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Alice</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>Assistant administrator</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>In a relationship for 7 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Isobel</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>Social worker (used to work in Selfridges)</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>In a relationship for 10 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Ruth</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>Graphic designer</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>In a relationship for 3 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Vicky</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>School teacher</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>In a relationship for 4.5 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Carley</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>Legal assistant</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>In a relationship for 3.5 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>Genette</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>Student</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>In a relationship for 2 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>Cyndi</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>Administrator and a qualified hair dresser</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>Single parent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>Emily</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>Accountant</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>Single</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>Helen</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>Copywriter</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>Single</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>Joyce</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Receptionist</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>In a relationship for a year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>Nancy</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>Personal Assistant</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>Divorced but engaged at the time of the interview</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td>Victoria</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>Youth worker</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>Married for 33 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24</td>
<td>Lindy</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>Beauty therapist</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>Married for 40 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25</td>
<td>Charlotte</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>Working part-time in clothes stores</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>Married for 28 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26</td>
<td>Tina</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>Business owner</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>Married, met her husband since she was 18 years old</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27</td>
<td>Jordan</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>Cashier for Tesco</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>Married for 38 years since 19 years old</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28</td>
<td>Janet</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>Retired state agent (used to work at school too)</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>Married for more than 40 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29</td>
<td>Linda</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>Administration</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>Married for more than 30 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30</td>
<td>Karen</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>Social worker</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>Divorced but married to another man at the time of the interview</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31</td>
<td>Sarah</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>Cleaner</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>Married for more than 30 years since 19 years old</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The first informant I recruited via personal contact was Joanna who was very articulate, forthcoming, reflective and culturally sensitive (Bogdewic 1999). As new perspectives in the research were discovered, informants were asked to recruit specific others who possessed the particular set of characteristics (e.g., differences in age, skin conditions, and/or relationship status) required to enable me to explore the new facets/phenomena that were emerging in the data. In accordance with existential phenomenology, the present thesis strove to better capture social and/or demographic factors that may potentially influence the phenomenon under exploration (Baker, Wuest, and Stern 1992). In doing so, I aim to discern the ‘essence’ of the world-as-experienced by my informants when negotiating the self-in-relation.

3.3.2 Phenomenological interview as a method

In line with the university policy on research ethics, signed consent was obtained to protect the rights of all informants prior to conducting any interviews (see appendix X). Thirty-one unstructured in-depth interviews were conducted, audio recorded and transcribed verbatim. Following existential phenomenology, these interviews were directed by the evolving research foci (Lowes and Prowse 2001; Marshall and Rossman 2010; Wimpenny and Gass 2001). Each interview ranged in length between one and two hours and began by asking, “when you think about a cosmetics brand, what comes to your mind?” This question was utilised to prompt each informant’s feelings, perceptions and experiences about cosmetics consumption, whilst exerting little influence upon the direction of the dialogue (Thompson et al. 1990). All the other questions emerged spontaneously from the informants’ narratives, therefore ensuring minimal influence from the interviewer. As such, I am able to stay as close to the lived experience as possible, and allow my informants to make sense of their experiences at their own pace. That is, I followed the course primarily set by my informants (Thompson and Coskuner-Balli 2007); as “while the interviewee does not know what he (she) knows, the interviewer does not know what he (she) is looking for” (Petitmengin 2006, p.255). Overall, my informants in this thesis largely regarded
cosmetics as substances used to enhance their appearance and as equivalent to the application of makeup, except for six (out of thirty-one informants) who also mentioned the use of skincare products. It should be noted that the interview dialogue concerning cosmetics is enhanced with informants’ spontaneous mentions of elements, including clothing, dieting and media consumption.

To ensure both a level of comfort and confidentiality, all informants were told prior to the interview that anonymity would be guaranteed, no judgments would be passed on any of the descriptions given and they could terminate the interview, if at any point, they did not feel comfortable. To capture their immediate, direct experiences as lived, they were merely informed upon their recruitment that the study’s purpose was to examine their experiences on the topic of cosmetics consumption. All ‘why’ questions were avoided to prevent informants from rationalising or doubting their own experiences (Thompson et al. 1989). During the course of each interview, repeated probes were used to gain further insights into the phenomena described by the informant, without being directive (see table 2).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 2: Examples of probes used to further enlighten and clarify informants' descriptions of their lived experiences</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1  Could you please elaborate on that a bit more?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2  Could you please give me some examples?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3  How did that make you feel?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4  What do you mean by…? E.g., being confident, timid or able to be out there.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5  So are you saying…?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6  How about…? E.g., your mother, friends or partner.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The ultimate aim of this thesis is to discover explicitly the implicit personal meanings embedded in the everyday cosmetics use that has been taken for granted by its users. It should be noted that, similar to the experience of others (e.g., Ahuvia 2005), this thesis began not as an exploration of identity issues but as an exploration on the self-
brand relationship in which informants were asked, in an open-ended question, to articulate their experiences with a cosmetics brand of their choice. Yet, across the thirty-one unstructured in-depth interviews conducted, the self-brand relationship seemed merely superficially important, whilst issues related to the negotiation of the self-in-relation were naturally discussed and pervaded the dialogues. Cosmetics in general as I go on to discuss appear to serve as a means to maintain or transform the self-in-relation, and resolve identity conflicts at least on a surface level. The different ways in which the self-in-relation is negotiated emerged as the primary theme, which led to the repositioning of this thesis around the nature of the negotiation processes that underpin the creation of a self in relation to others.

3.4 Contextualising women’s lived experiences

“The term “hermeneutics” derives from Hermes, messenger of the Greek gods, who announced messages verbatim to mortals and made them understandable. The implication is that hermeneutics has two tasks: to determine what a text has to say and to provide instruction about what to do.”

(Arnold and Fischer 1994, pp. 55-56)

A hermeneutically grounded interpretative framework was adopted to contextualise the deeply embedded personal meanings that arose from the relationships my informants developed with their everyday cosmetics use (Bleicher 1980; Thompson 1997). Whilst hermeneutics was initially developed for the exegetical analysis of biblical texts, focusing on the revelation and reconstruction of the God’s messages in the context of religious studies, it later became a method that investigates the study of human action and is regarded as an art or technique of interpreting verbal, written, or displayed text for understanding and explicating experiences (Arnold and Fischer 1994; Dowling 2004; Gadamer 1993; Packer 1985; Prasad 2002; Todres and Wheeler
2001). The hermeneutic inquiry primarily studies human existential meanings rooted in the semantic or textual structure of individuals’ daily practices, particularly the ready-to-hand mode of engagement that involves a complex interrelated network (e.g., actions, situations, and socio-historical backgrounds) (Packer 1985). To Heidegger, the ready-to-hand mode of engagement refers to those ongoing everyday activities that are so over-practiced, we are simply not aware of their significance (Packer 1985). Philosophical hermeneutics based upon the work of German philosopher Gadamer (1993) encompasses several key dimensions that delineate the theory and practice of interpretation: the hermeneutic circle, fusion of horizons, prejudice, dialogue, temporal distance, and historicality of understanding (Arnold and Fischer 1994; Debesay et al. 2008; Koch 1996; Moran and Mooney 2002; Prasad 2002).

The hermeneutic circle was used as a method of contextualisation in this thesis to constantly attain new insights and revise my interpretations as I gained a greater understanding of the text on its own terms by bringing together the parts into the whole and vice versa (Debesay et al. 2008) (see section 3.2.7 above). The essential meanings embedded in a text revealed, through a dialectical dialogue between myself, the interpreter, and the text (Prasad 2002; Warnke 1987). Importantly, at the core of hermeneutic thinking, understanding demands one to ask questions, be open-minded and believe she can be wrong (Debesay et al. 2008). As “the hermeneutic conversation between the interpreter and the text is a dialogue in which the interpreter puts questions to the text, and the text, in turn, puts questions to the interpreter”, the goal is to “find those questions to which the text constitutes the answers” (Prasad 2002, p.19). My pre-understanding was challenged and altered until it was able to incorporate the distinctive horizon of the text – as such, my pre-understanding developed into understanding (Arnold and Fischer 1994) (see section 3.2.8 above). In doing so, I seek to elucidate and make explicit the implicit meaning structure deep-seated in the textual descriptions (e.g., my informants’ stories that reveal the ontological meaning of cosmetics consumption). I use the two terms, ‘interpretation’ and ‘understanding’, interchangeably, as interpretation is “the development of understanding...in interpretation understanding appropriates what it has understood understandingly” (Heidegger 2010, p.144).
3.5 The interpretative process

The interpretative process adopted in this thesis consisted of five phases: (1) The naïve understanding as a whole; (2) Dividing the data into parts, units of meaning; (3) My acquaintance with the literature; (4) Idiographic analysis of individual cases; and (5) A nomothetic understanding (thematic analysis). In addition, it is important to note that, expert checking was incorporated as part of the process by having my two supervisors challenge the product of each interpretation.

3.5.1 Phase one: The naïve understanding as a whole

Interview transcripts were initially read several times to grasp a provisional understanding of the text as a whole with an effort to be open-minded and let the text speak to me and tell me its story on its own terms – without looking for descriptions that fulfil preset categories, rules or constructs. I was therefore prevented from narrowly focusing on enhancing or improving apparent significant ‘variables’, or diminishing those ‘variables’ that emerge to be minor and unimportant. In these terms, the aim of this thesis was to discover the unrealised and untapped significance of our being-in-the-world (Spinelli 1989). This initial understanding as a whole was the first conjecture and used to determine how parts were constituted (Giorgi 1997) (see appendix 2 for an illustration), and guide the subsequent interpretative process (Lindseth and Norberg 2004).
3.5.2 Phase two: Dividing the data into parts, units of meaning

As phenomenology as a whole is essentially concerned with personal meanings that symbolise our being-in-the-world within a particular culture and time (Todres and Wheeler 2001), the basis of the data division into parts is the discovery of meaning units (Giorgi 1997). The term ‘meaning units’ refers to “a certain meaning, relevant for the study, and to be clarified further, is contained within the segregated unit” (Giorgi 1997, p.246). Operationally, a verbatim transcript was again closely read and re-read to identify the implicit or explicit meanings underscoring the variety of conflicts, symbolic relations and paradoxes that emerged within my informants’ reflections on their everyday cosmetics choices and experiences, across a number of social settings (Baker et al. 1992). These meaning units could be a phrase, a sentence or several paragraphs. They are understood and reflected on against the naïve understanding as a whole (Lindseth and Norberg 2004). They are then commented on in everyday words regarding the potentialities of personal meanings embedded in the text, and then summarised as succinctly as possible (see illustration 1). During this process, I continually raised questions about my own pre-understanding and the credibility of the research findings that are an outcome of the harmony between the parts and the whole (Debesay et al. 2008). Lines of inquiry resulting from the part/whole dialectics progressively shape the formation of research questions, literature review, and data collections, enabling me to gain a deeper understanding of the phenomena being explored.

5 My own pre-understanding is based on my own individual experience with cosmetics consumption, that treats cosmetics as a way of appearing more attractive and presenting the self in various forms. Cosmetics enabled me to conduct “identity play” (Holbrook and Hirschman 1982), feel more confident when interacting with others and conceal insecurities, fears and doubts about presenting the ‘real’, ’natural’ self. For example, is there something about me that if s/he knows, s/he will think that I am not worthy of connection? In sum, based on my own individual experience, I understand the use of cosmetics can be intimately linked to women’s struggle against their existential anxiety and ontological security (Giddens 1991), that is, their sense of “being” in the world and with specific others.
Illustration 1: Dividing the data into parts, units of meaning

**A meaning unit excerpted from one of the transcriptions**

It wouldn’t occur to you that you are not wearing makeup when you are at home, in your comfort zone with people you feel comfortable with. Whereas when you first start dating someone, if you invite him around, then you put your makeup on before he comes. So I guess it’s, I guess it is that kind of getting him into your comfort zone…

(Brittany, 28, HR manager)

**Comment**

Brittany described how the act of wearing makeup signals her comfort zone. She wears makeup when meeting someone whom she is not familiar with (not in the comfort zone). Whereas, as she builds a more intimate connection with the person (gradually incorporates him into the comfort zone), she will not mind appearing without makeup in front of him --- This comment leads me to pursue more reading on literature such as romance and the extended self.

**Summary**

The act of wearing makeup symbolises her comfort zone.

**Emergent lines of inquiry**

- How does the process of incorporating someone into the comfort zone occur?
- How does cosmetics consumption reflect the phases of an ongoing relationship?
- What is it like for the older generation?
3.5.3 Phases three: My acquaintance with the literature

My acquaintance with relevant literature is used to develop and deepen my understanding further. That is, the fusion of horizons in the hermeneutic circle involves the horizons of the literature, my pre-understanding or prejudice, and the textual data (Koch 1996). However, I was conscious of not imposing findings from the literature on the interview text but letting the literature illuminate the text and the text illuminate the literature (Lindseth and Norberg 2004) (see illustration 2).

Illustration 2: My acquaintance with the literature

A portion of text excerpted from one of the transcriptions

I think going to uni kind of made you realise the importance of having a boyfriend or I felt it was a place to have a boyfriend and therefore you know, I suddenly felt this pressure to sort of say I haven’t made it or I’m not successful unless I get a boyfriend or at least I have got a boy to be with me. As a result, you know, following on for more the pressure I felt at school and I had the extra pressure, you know, to need to be slim or looked pretty, have the right hair, you know, looked naturally attractive etc.

(Lisa, age 27, communications manager)

Literature

Past research has demonstrated the importance of outward appearance, particularly in terms of the face (Argyle and Cook 1976), in the evaluation of physical attractiveness; and in the mediation of interpersonal interactions as it functions as an immediate communication channel of non-verbal information (Cash et al. 1989; Graham and Jouhar 1980; Graham and Kligman 1985; Tesser and Brodie 1971). The physically attractive (the use of cosmetics) received more positive ratings of personality as perceived by both other males and females (Graham and Jouhar 1981). Socialised by the media – films,
advertising or literature, especially in Western society, individuals are propelled to decorate the self, e.g. through use of cosmetics, in an attempt to arouse romantic interest at first acquaintance (Graham and Jouhar 1980)…

My interpretation is grounded in my pre-understanding (Gadamer 1993; Heidegger 2010) and my pre-understanding is broadened by reading relevant literature (Lindseth and Norberg 2004). Phase one, two and three demonstrate the ongoing, simultaneous circular process of adding new research informants, identifying new research questions, reading relevant literature, interviewing, and interpreting (Crist and Tanner 2003).

### 3.5.4 Phase four: Idiographic analysis of individual cases

Individual cases are treated as contextualised life events, illustrating my informants’ experiences with their cosmetics use, and the ways in which these experiences are connected with their life world (Benner and Wrubel 1989). Individual cases thus consist of salient excerpts that characterise existentially fulfilling meanings derived from lived experience through which I discern the essence(s). In demonstrating ‘lived’ descriptions, the actual words of the informant and an overview of her personal background are also presented, enabling the readers to have a sense of being moved by her life story (Koch 1996).

Indeed, a phenomenological researcher should describe the life world of the informants “*with such vividness that you could imagine yourself there*” and see it through their eyes (Wimpenny and Gass 2001, p.1491). Each individual interview was used to attain a better understanding of shared experiential meanings, which in turn enables a more thorough contextualisation of each individual case (Schleiermacher 1998; Thompson et al. 1990). As such, four individual accounts are
demonstrated at the ideographic level in chapter five to advance our emic understanding of what negotiating the self-in-relation means to each individual (e.g., Fournier 1998; Holt and Thompson 2004; Thompson et al. 1990). The emic understanding serves as the conceptual basis for the emergent etic conceptualisations (see figure 4 below).

Figure 4: Map of the emergent etic conceptualisations from the emic-idiographic analysis of individual case studies

The emergent etic conceptualisations represent a nomothetic understanding of the research findings as a whole (see section 3.5.5).
3.5.5 Phase five: A nomothetic understanding (thematic analysis)

Bringing the texts together generated new questions. My interpretation was thus further developed by reading, questioning, writing, re-reading, re-questioning, and re-writing (Spence 2001). Through the iterative movement between the parts and the whole of the text for each dialogue, thematic similarities and deviations among the transcriptions being studied were derived, comprehended and situated between and within each interview (see illustration 3) (Thompson 1996).

Illustration 3: An example of thematic similarities and deviations

**Portions of text excerpted from the transcriptions**

**Jennifer:** I couldn’t even imagine waking up next to him, you know without makeup on. I used to have makeup in secret compartments in his bathroom or my bathroom, you know wherever we stopped, wherever and I’d hide it in the same places. (Age 29, school art researcher)

**Katie:** He [my boyfriend] won’t think oh, gosh that’s not who I went to bed with (so I have to wake up early to put makeup back on). (Age 26, fashion trainee buyer)

**Emily:** I’m exactly the same [throughout the relationship]. If I’m at home and you happen to be at home with me, you’ll see me with no makeup on. If I’m going out meeting friends and you’re coming out with me, you’ll see me with makeup on. I’d not change at all. (Age 25, accountant)

**Katie:** If I am not going out over a weekend say like on a Sunday, I am literally just staying in the house I won’t put makeup on because I think it’s a waste of money, because no one is going to see me well you know my
boyfriend will see me but I obviously I don’t care (laughter). (Age 26, fashion trainee buyer)

**Initial summary**

Whereas Jennifer and Katie share an identical approach of negotiating the self in relation to their partner at the start of a given love relationship, Emily’s account shows a different approach, highlighting the diversity of human experience in negotiating the self-being-in-the-world.

Katie’s dialogue further demonstrates how she renegotiates the self in relation to her partner as the relationship reaches equilibrium.

**Questioning**

How do we understand the phenomenon of the negotiation process of the self-in-relation in terms of the internally and externally focused self-narratives, and over time?

This dialectical, circular interpretative relationship enables a more thorough analysis of each individual case, and a broader understanding of consumer ‘intentionality’ (Holt 1997; Schleiermacher 1998; Thompson et al. 1990). It is important to note that thematic meanings derived from the part/whole dialectics stand in relation to one another and the lived experience emerges from such interrelationships (Thompson et al. 1990). In keeping with the aim of the thesis, I focused broadly on identifying the most recurrent and robust patterns of descriptions that symbolise ‘being-in-the-world’ (Thompson and Coskuner-Balli 2007); namely, “fundamental and general categories of human existence that throw light on qualitative modes of experience which reveals a world” (Todres and Wheeler 2001, p.5). More specifically, the thematic analysis is achieved by attending to what is ‘problematic’ or ‘taken-for-granted’ in my pre-understanding. That is, “the lacunae, the gaps, and the contradictions that, in our everyday practice, we habitually gloss over” (Packer 1985, p.1089). During the entire interpretation process, I acknowledge that my pre-understanding is temporal and may be revised, refined, or rejected on the basis of the textual data (Arnold and Fischer 1994; Lowes and Prowse 2001; Prasad 2002).
Throughout this chapter, existential phenomenology (Heidegger 2010) and hermeneutic philosophy (Gadamer 1993) underpinned my selected method of inquiry and means of contextualisation. The next chapter four marks the beginning of my four findings’ chapters (chapter four, five, six and seven) (see figure 4 above). Chapter four first offers an emergent conceptualisation of the negotiation pathways as experienced by my informants to provide readers with a frame of reference for better understanding of the following four ideographical consumer accounts presented in the next chapter five. Chapter six then offers the cross-case analysis of informants’ experiences and demonstrates nine prominent negotiation pathways that they engage in to determine which aspects of the self-in-relation to present to specific social others. Finally, chapter seven further details the phenomenon of self-management that arises from negotiating the self-in-relation, shedding light on the different types of consumption goals and strategies used to bring about the desired joint experiences with others, and/or the world as a whole.
Chapter 4: A conceptualisation of the negotiation pathways

A preliminary conceptual framework of understanding the negotiation process of the self-in-relation is proposed in the literature review, which reveals ongoing debates concerning (1) whether the process of negotiating the self-in-relation can be best understood as a complementary or a conflictual merging of the internally and externally focused self-narratives; and (2) whether adhering to the internally or externally focused self-narratives promotes optimal subjective well-being when negotiating the self-in-relation (see figure 2). Chapter four hence builds on the preliminary conceptual framework, and addresses these debates by offering an initial conceptualisation of the negotiation pathways that emerged from the etic contextualisation of my informants’ emic descriptions. Specifically, in a similar fashion to the experience of many existential phenomenological researchers (e.g., Thompson 1996), the conceptualisation acts as a frame of reference for better understanding of the idiographic consumer accounts that I will present in the following chapter five. In presenting the idiographic consumer accounts, the goal is to preserve my informants’ lived experiences in a holistic fashion whilst still offering a sense of analytic clarity.

As demonstrated in the previous chapters, the focus of this thesis is to theorise the negotiation process of the self-in-relation that has been less well understood in earlier research. Indeed, earlier research has a tendency to treat self-narratives as either a rather complementary whole (Thompson and Hirschman 1995; Coulter, Price and Feick 2003) or a conflictual mixture (Sartre 2001; Heidegger 2010). Each of the two perspectives then sees optimal subjective well-being as promoted either by an external or internal perspective of negotiating the self-in-relation respectively. The findings that emerged from this thesis draw together the earlier research by elucidating the dual-nature of our self-narratives and how the merging of the dual-narratives reflects a series of mixed complementary and conflictual pathways in which the self-in-relation is negotiated. The different ways in which the self-in-relation is negotiated then yield important implications for how optimal subjective well-being is sought in a
variety of different social contexts. As such, a description of the dual-narratives as experienced by my informants will be given first as foundational knowledge that is required to help readers to quickly grasp the complexity inherent in the negotiation process of the self-in-relation (section 4.1). Building on the description, I will then demonstrate the emergent conceptualisation of the different negotiation pathways that my informants engage in to determine which aspects of the self-in-relation to present to the outside world; in seeking to generate more existentially fulfilling experiences and achieve optimal subjective well-being (section 4.2). I conclude this chapter by describing how each findings chapter will be used to address aspects of the negotiation pathways (section 4.3).

4.1 The dual-nature of self-narratives

Table 3: The dual-nature of self-narratives

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>(a) Narratives around level of self-acceptance (see 4.1.1)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(i) An internally focused perspective of constructing the self-in-relation (High in self-acceptance)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(ii) An externally focused perspective of constructing the self-in-relation (Low in self-acceptance)</td>
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</tbody>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>(b) Narratives around level of felt security in the referent point (see 4.1.2)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(i) An internally focused perspective of constructing the self-in-relation (High in felt security in the referent point)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(ii) An externally focused perspective of constructing the self-in-relation (Low in felt security in the referent point)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Two parallel strands of self-narratives are identified through my informants’ experiences that are involved in the negotiation process of the self-in-relation: (a) narratives around level of self-acceptance, and (b) narratives around level of felt security in the referent point (e.g., the significant other, the social group or the world as a whole). Each strand of the self-narratives has an internally and externally focused perspective of constructing the self-in-relation (see table 3 above). Whereas the internally focused perspective assumes a self-presentation (or belief) that is not in line with the external expectations in a given socio-culture (e.g., standard of beauty), the externally focused perspective conforms to what is expected.

4.1.1 Narratives around level of self-acceptance

Narratives around *level of self-acceptance* emerge as an important contributing factor in the process of self-creation in this thesis. The term ‘self-acceptance’ has a long history and describes the state of self in everyday life. It is commonly referred to as acceptance of self in spite of a perceived deficit in character or failure to fulfil a desired role (Ellis 1977). According to Shepard (1979), self-acceptance is the value or affect associated with the way in which one describes the self to the outside world. The person high in self-acceptance is one that acknowledges both her strengths and weaknesses, yet still values her self that is of “unique worth” (English and English 1958). In contrast, the person low in self-acceptance is one that considers her self as of little worth, and tends to internalise blame for the problems (Zuckerman and Monashkin 1957). In clinical psychology, high self-acceptance has been found to buffer the self against anxiety (Chamberlain and Haaga 2001). It is also considered as the source for behavioral change to occur by tolerating the self as incomplete (e.g., Smith et al. 2006; Wilson 1996).
Building on these findings, the present research refers to ‘self-acceptance’ as an ongoing narrative. The stories that guide individuals are of a spatio-temporal nature, and prove instrumental in determining the outer self-presentation. The outer self-presentation is cultivated with the aim of generating what they perceive will be more existentially fulfilling experiences (e.g., adhering to self-values or others’ expectations). The research findings reveal that narratives of high self-acceptance tend to be internally focused in terms of constructing the self-in-relation (also called the internally focused self or self-narratives), leading to more willingness to disclose the untransformed self. For example, Emily justified her willingness to show the untransformed self in a public context by describing how she grows more tolerant within the self over the years. Alternatively, narratives of low self-acceptance tend to be externally focused (also called the externally focused self or self-narratives), leading to more presentation of the transformed self. For instance, Katie stressed the criticality of presenting the transformed self in order to “look like normal”. In this case, the informants conform to the external expectations, in a bid to seek existential meaningfulness in life (e.g., feeling approved or being perceived as successful by others).

4.1.2 Narratives around level of felt security in the referent point

In a parallel fashion to the narratives around level of self-acceptance, the importance of the narratives around level of felt security in the referent point also becomes apparent in terms of self-creation. In previous literature, the term ‘felt security’ commonly refers to the state of self in specific relationships and/or groups. According to Murray and her coauthors (2000), “reflected appraisals – working models that stress the nature and conditions surrounding the partner’s (or the significant other’s) regard for the self – provide a representational structure that is subjectively experienced as a sense of felt security” (p., 494). Indeed, attachment and interdependence researchers advocate the view that people regulate the space (i.e.,
closeness, dependence) between self and others with a sense of felt security (Murray et al. 2000; Rempel, Holmes, and Zanna 1985). The person high in felt security in the referent point assumes that others’ love and acceptance are unconditional, and that their significant others see as many imperfections in them as they see in themselves (Murray et al. 2000). It has been found that persons high in felt security tend to self-disclose more (Mikulincer and Nachshon 1991), experience greater self-esteem, and show fewer depressive symptoms (Roberts, Gotlib, and Kassel 1996). On the other hand, the person low in felt security in the referent point is believed to behave in a more cautious fashion for self-protective reasons, focusing on acts of self-enhancement that seem safe and self-reassuring (Baldwin 1997; Baumeister, Tice, and Hutton 1989; Campbell 1990).

The present research unveils the spatio-temporal nature of the self-narratives around level of felt security in the referent point. Narratives of high level of felt security in the referent point are internally focused. Informants do not feel obliged to transform the self prior to interaction to feel existentially fulfilled. In contrast, narratives of low level of felt security are externally focused. In this case, a sense of obligation is felt to transform the self prior to interaction, in a bid to pursue a perceived more meaningful existence. For instance, Katie expressed feelings of relaxation about not needing to transform the self to keep her partner when the relationship reaches equilibrium (e.g., “he obviously loves me for the way I am”) – an example of narratives around high level of felt security. Yet, she concurrently described her persistent efforts that were made to transform the self at an early stage of the relationship when she was unsure of her partner’s feelings (e.g., “I wake up in the morning the first thing I do is to run into the bathroom to put foundation on”) – an example of narratives around low level of felt security. Katie’s experience is commonly shared among other informants. That is, the narratives of felt security transform/develop over the course of a relationship, and are intimately tied to it.

Having discussed the dual-nature of the self-narratives, I will now build on this and describe through my informants’ lived experiences, the emergent conceptualisation of negotiation pathways in the following section.
4.2 The negotiation pathways

Figure 5: The merging of the self-narratives

My informants experience the merged self-narratives in a complementary (i.e., ‘high in self-acceptance + high in felt security’ or ‘low in self-acceptance + low in felt security’) or a conflictual (i.e., ‘high in self-acceptance + low in felt security’ or ‘low in self-acceptance + high in felt security’) manner (see figure 5 above). The co-existing self-narratives create a set of existential dilemmas when they are merged for deciding which goal to pursue in terms of cultivating the desired self-in-relation (e.g., to feel liberated, to manipulate others, or to ensure relationship well-being) (see figure 6 below).
The existential dilemmas associated with each goal-pursuit are resolved at least on a surface level through the negotiation process or processes. Individuals then choose which aspects of the self-in-relation to present to the outside world (or indeed the self) (i.e., the adoption of an internal or external perspective of constructing the self-in-relation), with the aim of achieving what is perceived to be more existentially fulfilling experiences (e.g., showing who I ‘really’ am or fitting into a social group). Consumption strategy is then deployed to endorse the chosen self-presentation. As a result of the negotiation process, the self-presentation embodies the degree to which one feels authentic about the self-in-relation (i.e., ‘this is me’ vs. ‘this is not me’).

Note, however, that it should be recognised that the negotiation of the self-in-relation is an ongoing process that is dynamic and transient rather than a static snapshot.
4.3 Conclusion

In sum, based on the different types of interplays between the self-narratives, my informants engage in a series of negotiation pathways that enable their felt existential dilemmas related to each self-creation to be somehow resolved on a surface level (i.e., *self-presentation*) (cf., Murray 2002; Schau and Gilly 2003; Thompson and Holt 2004). Yet, I argue that whereas these dilemmas seem to get resolved at the level of self-presentation, they may endure within the self over years as experienced by my informants.

The findings in chapter five show how four different individuals negotiate their self-in-relation in an idiographic and holistic manner to provide a conceptual platform as a basis for this thesis. Chapter six then presents the *cross case analysis* of *nine prominent negotiation pathways* that emerged through my informants’ experiences. Finally, chapter seven further details the phenomenon of self-management that arises from negotiating the self-in-relation in the consumption context.
Chapter 5: The idiographic consumer experiences: The negotiation of the self-in-relation

Consistent with past consumer research that advocates the necessity of presenting consumers’ lived experiences at the idiographic level (e.g., Fournier 1998; Holt and Thompson 2004; Thompson et al. 1990), this chapter offers four individual case studies in a holistic manner, to deepen our understanding of what negotiating the self-in-relation means to each individual. The interpretations of my informants’ accounts were developed by means of the iterative part-to-whole and whole-to-part movement, as previously noted in the methodology chapter (Thompson 1997).

Figure 7: Four individual case studies in an idiographic sense
A main tenet of the emergent framework (see chapter four) is that, a self is born out of a merging between the self-narratives around levels of self-acceptance and felt security in the referent point. Figure 7 above shows the divergent paths each of the four individual accounts (i.e., Katie, Emily, Linda and Amy’s lived experiences) represents in terms of merging different types of self-narratives for self-creation. The four individual accounts reveal the diversity and complexity between and within each of my informants in negotiating the self-in-relation. Katie’s account reveals how the negotiation process(es) of the self-in-relation are dominated by her self-narratives focused on a low level of self-acceptance. In contrast, Emily’s ways of negotiating the self-in-relation are in the main influenced by her self-narratives around a higher level of self-acceptance. Unlike Katie and Emily who both seem to be strong extroverts, Linda’s experiences of negotiating the self-in-relation show a life story from the perspective of an introvert. Finally, Amy’s reflections illustrate the persistent fluctuation in her self-narratives around levels of self-acceptance and of felt security in the referent point. The fluctuation is caused by the process of aging, and the exposure to different cultures when growing up.

Each individual case study begins with a background summary written up from the informant’s self-description. An overall individual diagram of each case is then presented following the background summary, and prior to the unfolding of the interview dialogue. The individual diagram clearly exhibits how each of the informants’ accounts offers a somewhat divergent, yet comparable insight into the emergent research themes. Like the conceptualisation of the negotiation pathways presented in the previous chapter four, the diagram is provided as a guide to enable the readers to grasp a sense of analytic clarity of the emergent findings, without losing sight of the holistic quality that marked the informant’s descriptions. Furthermore, like Fournier’s (1998) work, descriptive analyses of the phenomenon of negotiating the self-in-relation are seeded throughout the four individual case studies (see section 5.1 for Katie’s lived experience; section 5.2 for Emily’s lived experience; section 5.3 for Linda’s lived experience; and section 5.4 for Amy’s lived experience). I conclude the chapter by offering a summary of the idiographic analysis of the four individual case studies.
5.1 Katie’s lived experience

5.1.1 Katie’s background summary

Katie is Caucasian and was born and raised in the United Kingdom (UK). She gained a first class undergraduate honours degree in fashion buying. Katie is a 26-year-old trainee buyer in the fashion industry and one of the key responsibilities of her role was to work with the principle buying department to update merchandise for the forthcoming seasons. The interview lasted 86 minutes.

“I’m quite a bubbly person, confident, very girly and I like clothes, fashion and makeup that sort of thing. Well I think sometimes I want everything to be perfect but it can’t always be perfect. Like around the house, I always want it to be tidy, like everything needs to be neat and tidy like when people come around, I want the house to look clean like it’s always clean like this but it’s actually not clean like that (laughter). Or like I don’t like to fall out with people or things like that, I just want everyone to be happy. I don’t like to have arguments I just want everyone to be happy. Umm, well in some situations I’m very confident. I think that because I’m quite loud, people think I’m always confident but actually I’m not always confident, probably I’m actually not that confident, but I just try to come across like I am.”

(Katie’s self-descriptions)

Katie describes her early memories of the self in relation to others. She had an extremely close relationship with her immediate family, including two parents and two older brothers, and their relationship could be described as being very relaxed and friendly, in fact she described herself as a “daddy’s girl”. It was often the case that
Katie would help out her mother doing charity work to support families with critically ill children. She received a state funded primary education at a mixed gender school between the ages of 5-11. She then went to a private, all girls’ secondary school between the ages of 11-18. She was a consistently high performer at school, achieving top grades in her GCSE's and A-levels. She was very popular in her school and had a wide circle of friends who looked up to her and enjoyed being in her company. Her friends would describe her as a fun, energetic and loyal person. At the time of the interview, she had been in a three-year-relationship with her boyfriend, and owned a house and two dogs together. Katie’s age, her success and popularity at school, her deeply ingrained insecurities about the self (i.e., *self-narratives around low level of self-acceptance*), and the fashion industry she is in, shape our understanding of her being-in-the-world, that is, the fabric of her everyday life that unfolded in her interview dialogue later.

#### 5.1.2 Katie’s experiences of the self-in-relation

Seen in the context of Katie’s interview as a whole, her self-narratives around *level of self-acceptance* and *level of felt security in the referent point* are largely merged in *three different pathways*. The different pathways appear to have a profound impact on her goal-pursuits in a social relationship (see figure 8 below). There is a strong indication of the cyclical, dynamic nature of “fitting in” as Katie constantly (re)positions herself against other beings-in-the-world. Whereas Katie is at times in disagreement with social norms, a strong theme of *self-protection* surfaces in her account, which she keeps in check by adhering to, or getting around social rules. Moreover, Katie appears to experience a mild form of body dysmorphic disorder. It seems that Katie is very concerned with perceived defects of her physical features. As such, she suffers from feelings of great terror and anxiety when cosmetics are not there to conceal the perceived physical defects, navigating her away from being deemed as *unworthy of connection*. This explains why Katie has a tendency to express
her experiences of cosmetics as hiding in everyday encounters. Yet, cosmetics become redundant in a perceived stable relationship within which she feels secure and liberated. That said, the redundancy only applies to the (semi) private context where the expectations and demands of others (e.g., partner’s friends and/or other men) are less salient. It is apparent that Katie’s romantic self plays a significant role in fulfilling her existential needs (e.g., the need to belong), and cosmetics are varied in a strategic manner in order to ensure this fulfilment.

Overall, Katie seems to experience tensions and dilemmas persistently when negotiating which ‘face’ to present to the outside world. As a consequence, Katie clearly encounters difficulties in satisfying her distinct and contradictory selves. The
experienced tensions and dilemmas characterise Katie’s challenges of self-management in diverse social/relational contexts.

5.1.3 The unfolding of Katie’s dialogue

Three key phenomena emerged from Katie’s experiences of negotiating the self-in-relation: (1) the role of the romantic self in constructing and dominating the experiences of the self-being-in-the-world; (2) the terror of not conforming to the social norms; and (3) a sense of self-disgust deeply embedded in the untransformed, makeup-free self. Katie’s relationship with cosmetics is largely experienced as a means of hiding the self to mask what is occurring beneath the everyday interaction. Her dialogue in the interview unfolds as follows:

I: When you think about a cosmetics brand, what comes to your mind?

K: Like when I think about a brand it’s like luxury and maybe when you say the word brand more expensive, or just like a nicer quality rather than if it was just say Boots own or something like that.

I: Can you tell me more about this luxury aspect of a brand?

K: I really like luxury cosmetic brands. Obviously when I was at school I couldn’t afford this, when I was at uni I couldn’t afford this. Now that I have finished uni and I’m working and I’ve got more money and I have started to buy a bit more brands. I think there is like high-end brands and lower brands...high-end brands make you just feel a bit more confident especially like on a night out you might think that if its more luxury you might feel like you look a bit nicer than you do just in your everyday makeup say it might give you bit more confidence or make you feel special might make you I think maybe because it’s a luxury brand also you think it might stay on longer so if
you are confident for longer not like oh, you might have to go on and check in the toilets as you need to put makeup on or something.

I: Yeah, could you elaborate more on feeling special?

K: Yeah, so I think when I wear like sparkly Benefit eye shadows, you just put it around your eyes and it glows and I think because its sparkly I feel more girly and when I feel girly like very feminine then I feel more special like it’s more exciting it’s more fun and you just feel better about yourself because you just yeah, I think maybe I feel a bit more girly and a bit more pretty because it’s sparkly and just a bit more dressy.

Clearly, the surface level meanings of cosmetics consumption revolve around luxury, quality, initiation, and developing affordability. Katie then went on to reveal that for her there was a highly context-specific distinction between the application of higher-end cosmetics brands and the cheaper or lower-end ones, depending on changes in her everyday experiences of the self-in-relation. To Katie, higher-end brands are part of the special occasion experience within which a sense of flawlessness is sought to generate a greater boost to her confidence. The feeling of increased confidence is marked by an all-encompassing sense of competence, from the perceived longevity of higher-end brands’ performance on sustaining a longer-lasting flawlessness, to her financial ability to afford such brands, to other people’s positive reaction to her flashier, dolled-up presence. The sense of competence enables her to feel “special”, “excited”, “successful”, and “attractive” inwardly, and as a result, creating more “fun” at a special event outwardly (e.g., going on a night out). Paradoxically, Katie’s attitude towards lower-end brands is genuinely utilitarian in a way. Rather than indulgence, such cheaper brands are used for “everyday makeup” in a bid to simply look natural, “fit in”, and maintain a basic sense of self-being-in-the-world. Therefore, it appears that Katie utilises distinct cosmetic brands (e.g., higher-end or lower-end brands) in a strategic manner to manage, constitute and set boundaries for each of her inner and the corresponding outer selves, in order to fulfil specific personal and social/interpersonal (e.g., fun, fit in) goals pursued in different moments or situations in life.
Katie then gave an account of not wanting to “stand out” in her work environment by having a more “natural” makeup.

It’s like that whole feeling of people like talking about you or thinking “oh, look, she is very fake or look how much makeup she has got on”, whereas if you are just natural you are not standing out from the crowd you are not really drawing attention to yourself you are just you and I think there is definitely a difference between what makeup you should wear in the day when you’re in the office and what you should wear at night that’s my personal opinion. I think it’s like a waste of money to put lots of makeup on when you are just sitting at home on a Sunday. It is supposed like you are going on a night out because you just want to look nice you know you are out in a bar. If you are in the house no one will see you so it doesn’t really matter much what you look like.

Katie’s self-presentations appear to be in direct response to change in her self-narratives around the level of self-acceptance and the level of felt security in the referent point. When low in self-acceptance and felt security, Katie feels compelled to adhere to external expectations by presenting a somewhat transformed self. When high in self-acceptance and felt security, cosmetics become redundant. The makeup-free self is perceived as being in a condition within which she does not need to “prove” herself to anyone.

Moreover, Katie’s description of the self-defined distinction between day and night makeup characterises her ongoing negotiation of the self-in-relation in meeting the perceived ought self in different occasions. For Katie, the self-defined distinction appears as an effective way of managing the contradiction between the experience of fitting in by day, but standing out by night. That is, Katie utilises her cosmetics to
establish a particular dimension of the ought self to bring about a specific type of social intercourse in a particular context.

I: Could you please elaborate more on what you just said, when you are at home you don’t really put on make up because ‘no one’ is going to see you?

K: Yeah, it’s really bad, because obviously I live with my boyfriend so I should make an effort and I do make an effort but, not as much as if I was going out on a night out, which is probably the wrong way round because you should probably make more efforts for your boyfriend because you want him to think you are pretty. When I am in the house as soon as I get home from work, I’ve my tea and everything and then I will always take my makeup off in the evening because I like to give some air to my skin as well. And if I am not going out over a weekend say like on a Sunday, I am literally just staying in the house I won’t put makeup on because one, I think it’s a waste of money, because no one is going to see me well you know my boyfriend will see me but I obviously don’t care (apologetic laugh) and two, it’s not very good for your skin to have makeup on all the time.

In the above section of dialogue, Katie’s makeup use appears to be largely utilitarian when she experiences high self-acceptance and felt security in the referent point. In this self-condition, Katie explicitly equates cosmetics use in the house with a “waste of money” and being “bad for the skin”. At the implicit level, Katie’s depiction almost erases the existence of her partner in the house they share together, and underlines a blurring of the boundaries between herself and him, that is, her incorporation of him as part of me (Aron, Paris, and Aron 1995). The incorporation characterises her redundant need to feel obliged to wear makeup, which she clearly experiences elsewhere. Moreover, the existence of Katie’s partner almost seems to be like ‘an invisible audience’. Katie has rendered him invisible perhaps because the context is (semi)private rather than public; namely, being in the (semi)private space is what renders him invisible. Yet, it seems that what Katie is experiencing is more complex than the concept of invisibility. The inner feeling underlying this experience is mixed
and perhaps somehow resistant, as she says, “I obviously don’t care (my boyfriend sees me without makeup)” with an apologetic laugh. This notion of public/(semi)private space is discussed further in the later sections of Katie’s dialogue.

The next passage offers a detailed account of how Katie’s self-narratives around high level of self-acceptance quickly shifted to a lower level when her partner’s friends enter the space shared between herself and the partner.

I: Could you tell me a little bit more about you don’t really care about your boyfriend being there when you are without makeup?

K: I do care like if I did have a really big spot on my face I would cover up. I think it’s that feeling of like he is with you, he is seeing me looking all sorts. He has seen me looking poorly and I have got makeup on, he says I look really nice, he sees me when I have got no make up on, obviously still looks at me and thinks “oh, she looks nice”, whereas other people it’s always like, it sounds very vain and I am not very vain, but it does sound like you are trying to impress people because if say one of his friends is coming and I know they are gonna come, I would quickly go upstairs and just put some mascara and a little bit brusher on my cheeks just so that you look nicer. I want them to think, “oh, John’s girlfriend is nice, John’s girlfriend is pretty”. I don’t know why I do, I really don’t know why I care but that’s just what you want them to think. Like his friends I am not attracted to them in any way but I will always make an effort when they come because I want them to think I look nice, so if he ever says a bad word they could say, “oh, Katie is really nice”. I don’t know why and like I say to my boyfriend “oh, I just take my makeup off, does Michael have to come around?” But yeah, if I am just sitting in with him watching films I wouldn’t get up in the morning and put all my makeup on to just sit in the house.
In this excerpt, Katie’s relationships with others, such as her partner’s friends, almost revolve around, and evolve with, her romantic affair, and vice versa. It seems that Katie’s romantic experience is in actuality multilayered and includes different levels, for example, goals, strategies and a sense of ‘space’. Her implicit personal goal of maintaining or enhancing the well-being of her romantic relationship is highlighted by the act of putting her makeup back on. The reapplication of makeup is strategically executed, in seeking to elicit positive perceptions of others toward the self, especially those who are closely related to her partner. These positive perceptions are in turn used to Katie’s advantage like ‘a defensive ring’ in the maintenance of a relationship, and the enhancement of social satisfaction. In these terms, Katie almost appears to hide in her cosmetics as a ‘space’ for preempting any potential threat to her relationship that could occur at any time.

Interpreting this phenomenon from another angle, as soon as Katie’s partner’s friends enter the house shared by herself and the partner, the relationships that exist there suddenly become more complicated, resulting in a renegotiation of the self-in-relation. Having his friends around underscores the breach of the comfort zone that she and her partner as one are in, leading Katie to transform her outer self in a bid to tackle sudden life demands that occurred due to a perceived change in her social dynamics. Katie’s makeup transformed self reveals her potentially subconscious defence in preventing the self from entering a state of anxiety (e.g., not approved of by her partner’s friends). She finds it difficult to articulate her initial attempt at rationalising her makeup use in a perceived private space (“I really don’t know why I care [about putting makeup on when my partner’s friends visit our house]”). Katie’s need for defence or self-transformation is triggered by a shift in the way her self-narratives are merged (e.g., from ‘high in self-acceptance and felt security in her partner’ to ‘low in self-acceptance but high in felt security in her partner’). Whilst, we should be aware that, the shift from high to low level of self-acceptance can also be construed as the result of her self-narratives around low level of felt security in her partner’s friends (e.g., ‘low in self-acceptance and felt security in her partner’s friends’).
The following passage offers further delineation of changes in Katie’s self-narratives as she encounters different social spaces with her partner:

If I am going out in the evening with my boyfriend, we’re going out somewhere for meals or something, I will put my makeup on because I want to look nice and it’s just that feeling oh you are doing something, so it’s kind of exciting to get ready and look and feel nice and you want to enjoy the time that you are going to spend because it’s nice to maybe make efforts and to look nice especially you live together so sometimes my effort doesn’t really show so when he decides, you know, let’s go out or something then I will try to make an effort.

The existing body of literature supports an intuitive way of interpreting the makeup phenomenon described in this passage. On the occasions she goes out with her partner, wearing makeup allows Katie to implicitly and strategically convey her love and show her appreciation of their time together. However, looking more closely at this experiential phenomenon embedded in her cosmetics consumption, Katie’s excitement of going out and looking good is wrapped up with looking nice for someone else. There is ambiguity in her descriptions in terms of whom Katie is referring to for her makeup use. Focusing on the order in which Katie unfolds the subtleties of life concerning a variety of interwoven issues, her motive for wearing makeup when out with her partner is mixed in with her wanting to look pretty and the joy she experiences from this; and only latterly does she express the effort devoted to looking nice for her partner. It appears that it is not judicious to disaggregate Katie’s desire to look nice for somebody else from looking nice for herself and the ensuing excitement for going out. Katie’s illustration highlights the fact that all of these different needs and wants are woven together for her, and shows how they are stored in succession.

I: So how do you feel when you’re with makeup, compared to when you’re without?
K: Without makeup I do feel a bit more like not relaxed, but I think because I am at home I am not trying to impress anyone or anything so if am out on a night out I will be thinking when it gets to oh, I need to put some more lip gloss on; I need to look nicer so maybe when I am at home not wearing anything I just feel more relaxed more just chilled more sloppy I think, just like hoody, no makeup just like really chilled out whereas if I’ve got makeup on, I am going somewhere trying to look presentable if I am going on a night out maybe try and look prettier that sort of thing.

Katie’s sentiments toward makeup use fluctuate as a result of change in the ways in which her self-narratives are merged. When a complimentary merging between her self-narratives around high level of self-acceptance and high level of felt security in the referent point is experienced, the internally focused perspective of constructing the self-in-relation is adopted to achieve a sense of relaxation. The makeup free self is thus assumed to endorse this goal. This explains why when the makeup self is instead presented in this situation, Katie experiences feelings of uneasiness and discomfort, as she later comments, “I feel more chilled out with my makeup on when going out but if I have got a whole face of makeup on I couldn’t just lie down and watch DVD at home, it would feel really weird.” The makeup self here represents Katie’s enduring attempts to “impress others” (e.g., low in self-acceptance and felt security in the referent point).

Furthermore, it is interesting to note that cosmetics consumption hitherto has always been consistently referred to the purpose of impressing other people in some way; and this is the important role that makeup plays in Katie’s life. It also shows Katie’s self-creation is largely influenced by her self-narratives around low level of self-acceptance. Therefore, the underlying rationale why Katie “feels weird” about wearing “a whole face of makeup” at home seemingly is due to the fact that there is no audience to impress, which generates no need to negotiate or manage the self-in-relation. Alternatively, this seemingly “weird” home experience can also be attributed to the fact that, the act of wearing makeup is against how she feels how she should be
in relation to the home environment and with those people who are at home whom she feels very secure about.

In the next excerpt, Katie further describes her endeavor to impress others and the role makeup plays in achieving this.

Well I think the first perception people have is when they first see you so if you got like a big spot on your face they might think, “oh, look at that!” (in a negative tone of voice) and you got no makeup on they might think like that too (in a negative tone of voice). Your first perception of someone is from looks and I know that’s really bad and it shouldn’t be, but it is always the first thing people see and then after that you get to know a person and I just think I don’t know, it sounds awful what I am saying but, you kind of do want to impress people and the way you can do that maybe is by how you look because you can’t change your voice, you can’t change your personality so much, but you can improve yourself by just putting a little bit make up on. It just makes you feel more confident.

Despite acknowledging that a first impression is not always legitimate, Katie expresses her deeply ingrained fear of being misjudged or mistreated by other people with whom she anticipates interacting and feels insecure about. Seen in the context of the whole interview, there is a constant emphasis on the importance of presenting her perceived ought self in a variety of circumstances. Katie seems to have a set of standards that she adheres to in order to determine the ought experience of the self-in-relation. Therefore, in Katie’s description, there is a strong focus on manipulating what people should see of her in the outside world. For Katie, having bad skin is almost equivalent to the abnormal aspect of the self. Makeup application is utilised as a management tool to block people from seeing her perceived physical flaws, enabling her to blend in with the crowd and not to stand out in a negative manner.
When I am walking in the street people don’t notice that [my bad skin] and they don’t think “oh, God”. I always feel very sorry if people have disabilities because people would turn and look at them and I think that’s horrible and how it must make you feel, and I think if you can look like normal, whatever normal is, or just like the same as everyone [with makeup on] so you are not immediately attracting attention to yourself in a negative way.

Katie’s illustration of disabled people further connotes her mounting terror of not conforming to the norms and being seen as the outcast of society. There appears to be a clear link between Katie’s self-narratives around low level of self-acceptance and/or felt security in the referent point and her consumption of cosmetics for reasons such as being “normal” in the outside world. However, in her enduring attempt to create a “normal” self, Katie is forced to disguise her natural state of the self. Katie then gave a meticulous account of the increasing importance of physical appearance in attracting the opposite sex, as she grows older.

When I was younger obviously I couldn’t wear makeup at school, you are not allowed. I would always wear mascara though and then when you start having more money I think as you get older your appearance becomes more important because girls start liking boys and they want boys to like them and they think to do that they need to be pretty and there is not all about the personality, it’s all about the way they look because it’s so much in the media at the moment about how you should look and that really influences you so you start to get interested in it then you start to maybe save up your money [to buy cosmetics].

Katie is propelled to decorate the outer self through cosmetics use, in an attempt to arouse romantic interest on the first acquaintance. Katie’s account also divulges that one meaning or personal goal of wearing makeup and appearing attractive is facilitating the progress of her sexual development, and the transition of her psychosocial maturity. Inspecting closely Katie’s descriptions here, however, it appears that she in fact experiences dilemmas and tensions during the process of
renegotiating her self-in-relation. Katie seems to be juggling between her respective school self and maturing self that symbolise distinct social expectations (e.g., social rules) that she needs to obey in order to satisfy her existential needs (e.g., being considered as good in both contexts). As a result, the consumption of mascara is born out of this juggling practice, and it is strategically adopted to avoid social punishments, but social rewards. That is, the mere act of wearing mascara allows Katie to feel “pretty” enough to appeal to the boys, but not enough to cause serious trouble breaking the school rules.

Even though you weren’t allowed to wear it [mascara at school], all the girls did because I think it makes you feel a bit grown up and maybe a bit naughty because you weren’t allowed it and you were wearing it. Well I was probably the first one to do it [wearing mascara] and then I would always give it to them [the girls] because I had older brothers so my mum has been more relaxed with me so I had them [mascaras] passed around but, yeah, it’s like, trying to fit in the crowds, and if one girl is wearing mascara you might think “oh, she is going to look prettier so I need to wear too”.

A feeling of rebellion against authority further highlights the makeup experience at school, as Katie seeks to acquire more control and independence at puberty. The meanings embedded in the consumption of cosmetics again change in a different social/relational context, underlying the social comparison process. At the first glance, for Katie, the application of makeup here is used to keep up with other girls in order to “fit in”, and to add a sense of fairness and competitiveness to an otherwise seemingly downgraded physical self. The act of sharing cosmetics also strikingly establishes and secures Katie’s dominant, popular position among her peers. Nonetheless, taking a closer look at Katie’s descriptive account, there is an apparent contradiction between being the first one to wear mascara, and her understanding of having to “fit in” by passing her mascara around. It is somehow puzzling as to who needs to fit in. Is Katie referring to herself or her female friends? There is a strong indication of the cyclical nature of “fitting in”; as Katie started applying mascara and then appreciates that having started, other girls would then
strive to fit in with her enhanced beauty, and this in turn will enable her to fit in with the crowd. The end result is that they all fit in again. Simply put, Katie wears mascara but then wants the crowd to fit in with her, whilst being aware of the fact that they all desire to fit in and feel that they belong. Katie’s rebellious makeup experience of growing up raises the interesting question of who is fitting in with whom. The answer appears to remain rather ambiguous, which characterises the dynamics and intricacy inherent in the dialectics between Katie’s self-narratives around *self-acceptance* and *felt security in the referent point.*

K: As you get older how you look is more important because you want to be attractive. You want men to be attracted to you or woman to be attracted to you and you kind of feel successful if you look nice, I don’t know.

I: Can you elaborate more on how you feel successful when you look nice?

K: Well I think if you can afford nice makeup, if you are buying it yourself with your own money then you are like doing well because you can afford to buy it. I think if you look really scruffy and don’t wear makeup or your hair is messy or your clothes are dirty then people would automatically feel you are not very successful and you don’t have a job or something like that. Whereas if you look presentable people will think, “oh, Katie is a nice person maybe from a nice background or she has got a good job, she is successful”, makes you feel presentable.

The theme of employing makeup for managing a favourable self-image in the eyes of others recurs frequently. Katie’s detailed description firmly depicted her reliance on other people’s positive recognition towards the self, to feel a sense of existential fulfilment (e.g., feeling accepted and/or successful). The employment of makeup therefore is her way of communicating a professional, respectful self to the outside world. The subject of affordability again surfaces in Katie’s dialogue, and it seems that she constantly sees her ability to afford fine makeup and appear presentable as a symbol of success, which helps her feel superior in some way and cultivate quality social/interpersonal relationships.
In the following portion of dialogue, Katie once again illustrates a vivid account of the changes she experienced in merging her self-narratives for self-creations over the course of her ongoing romantic relationship.

When I first met him [my partner], I made lots of efforts. You want to look nice, you want him to think you are really pretty and you want him to be attracted to you and not attracted to anyone else. And like I would go to bed with mascara on and I definitely cover up a spot or something. Yeah, I definitely put concealer on as soon as I wake up in the morning the first thing I do is to run into the bathroom to put foundation on at least and a little bit pretend like I didn’t have any on, then when I moved in with him it’s a bit different because then he always sees me in the shower and I can’t help I can’t wear makeup in the shower and then like, if I had a spot and I just thought this is ridiculous, we live together, he obviously loves me for the way I am, and I just really slowly wear less, even before if we were just relaxing in the house watching film and I would still wear my makeup, but now it’s been like two years, if I have a big spot I would put a big lump of cream on it and sit in front of the TV whereas I would never have done that, I think he loves me for who I am and then he will say “oh, a spot is a spot”, he is not gonna break up with me because I have got a spot or something like that.

The romantic self is apparently an essential facet of Katie’s self-conception, as it emerges repeatedly throughout the interview. In Katie’s previous description, wearing makeup for her partner appears to be “a waste of money” and “bad for her skin”; notwithstanding in this passage, cosmetics consumption connotes a quite different account and is seen as essential in the maintenance of her relationship. The gradual changes in Katie’s makeup application symbolise the continuous progression of her romantic affair and the ongoing renegotiation of the self in relation to her partner. Clearly, such changes are a result of shifting dynamics experienced in the relationship as it matures. That is, Katie’s initial endeavour for perfection at the start of her
romance is accentuated by her constant application or re-application of makeup. Makeup is adopted to maintain the flawless self, allowing her to be in the most desirable state in a bid to secure her partner, and not letting any potential imperfection hinder his growing affection towards her. The makeup experience here highlights Katie’s self-narratives around low levels of self-acceptance and felt security in her partner.

Further reflecting on her progressively redundant reliance on makeup use as her relationship reaches equilibrium, Katie admits feeling a sense of relief and an improved notion of self owing to the increased affinity and confidence in the relationship. These positive feelings about the relationship lead to a general positive evaluation of both the self and other (Bartholomew 1990). Thus, Katie at this stage is willing to show her makeup-free self in an attempt to feel authentic about the self-in-relation and build real intimacy. The willingness to show her makeup-free self underlines a complementary merging of Katie’s self-narratives around high levels of self-acceptance and felt security in her relationship partner.

From an alternative point of view, nonetheless, despite the fact that Katie has re-evaluated her makeup use as the relationship matures, it seems that she has not done so in a totally secure environment, and thus was almost forced to abandon it in some way, e.g. “I can’t help” or “this is ridiculous”. Part of her re-evaluation perhaps springs from the ridiculousness she felt at her constant craving for perfection and the impossibility of achieving this.

I: How do you feel in the future you would be like with your partner?

K: I think it will be the same I think I will always make an effort if we are going out somewhere if it’s just me and him in the house or say my parents then I won’t, but, say if his mum is coming around, even if I have known her for ages, like even his brothers I will start [putting on makeup]. I won’t put the whole face but I will put my mascara on for sure. I am not bothered about my
mum and dad and my brothers, but his friends that come around, his family then I will. Well I hope I will always still make an effort till I am a granny at home I will put on my face, but yeah, it’s just I always think when you are pregnant as well like maybe you will put more makeup on because you want just feel a bit better about yourself or like when you just had a baby and you feel really fat, you might put more makeup on. I always see these young mums I always see these mums have young face and they have got all the makeup on and it’s like they are kind of hiding behind that because they don’t feel good about themselves.

I: So are you saying the unhappier they are the more makeup they wear?

K: I think maybe yeah. It can go two ways if you are really unhappy and like almost depressed then you won’t be bothered to do it coz you can’t be bothered to make the effort, but if you are feeling a bit insecure about the way you look like if I am feeling a bit fat or something then maybe I will put more on my eyes so it takes people’s attention away so they look more at my eyes rather than thinking she has put on weight.

In this passage, cosmetics consumption is clearly directed at distinguishing, negotiating and setting the boundaries for the degrees of bonds Katie has (or intends to have) in relation to other beings-in-the-world. With those who are valued most, and closest to the self, makeup is seen as unnecessary and pointless, as their love appears to be “unconditional” (e.g., Katie’s self-narratives around high level of felt security in her immediate family and long-term partner). With those whom she still perceives as strategically important to win over, on the other hand, a minimum simple, basic makeup is needed to be in place in order to subtly endorse the self and facilitate desired interaction (e.g., Katie’s self-narratives around low level of felt security in her partner’s friends and family).

One noteworthy point of Katie’s description is the link between her cosmetics use and her changing emotional state. Apparently, a decline in her physical attractiveness is anticipated, as Katie envisages becoming pregnant, and subsequently taking up the
mother and grandmother roles in the future. The anticipated decline clearly has a negative impact on her self-narratives around level of self-acceptance, which prompts an increase in her future cosmetics use. An underlying message inherent in her articulation is that the more insecure she is toward her physical self, the more makeup she will need to conceal her insecurity, up until a point where depression sets in, perhaps as a result of a major life shift. In these terms, Katie’s makeup is utilised tactically almost as a mask to hide her negative feelings toward the self, in order to project a positive self to the outside world. It is also exercised to manipulate people’s thoughts about the self by distracting them from noticing her self-perceived flaws.

Interpreting Katie’s case further on a micro level of understanding, the use of mascara plays a central role in her makeup routine. Throughout her interview, Katie repeatedly described her struggle against “spots” on her face, whereas her eyes are immune from these spots. This nicely explains why mascara is recurrently narrated as a means of accentuating her eyes, enabling Katie to control people’s focus on her perceived positive self-aspects. On another note, Katie’s account reveals that she suffers from minor body dysmorphic disorder to a certain degree, because it seems that her makeup concentration is constantly on hiding or enhancing her specific facial features to hide. As such, Katie’s makeup use is in the main intended as a tool for counterbalancing some of her insecurity and/or uncertainty about the self-being-in-the-world, whether physical or not.

Another relational context in which Katie experiences a complementary merging of her self-narratives around low levels of self-acceptance and felt security in the referent point:

K: Well I think if I am going on a night out and if I just turned up, just like my makeup like now like I just finished work, I think people would think she has not made much of an effort, you know, I am going out with the girls, they have all got fake eyelashes on, the dark eye shadows and if you not really got
much on then they might think, it might feel like, you have not made much of an effort.

I: What do you mean by making an effort?

K: Just taking the time to care about yourself. I think spending that time just to like looking into the mirror and making an effort yeah, spending time on yourself rather than just coming out like you don’t really care what you look like, so showing that you do care about how you look like.

Katie’s strong emphasis on her eyes (e.g., “fake eyelashes”, “eye shadows”), and her need to “fit in” come to the fore again in this portion of dialogue. Katie’s efforts to achieve more layers of makeup can be construed in different ways: as her endeavour to promote team efforts in attracting the opposite sex, her affection towards her friendship with “the girls”, or her appreciation for the time they are going to spend together during a special occasion. More specifically, Katie’s construction of her ought self indicates a picture of a social environment where the girls focus on dressing up. As a result, more makeup is consumed as a strategy to be “one of them”, and as a way of bonding and building rapport and social connectedness (so that they will not leave her) (Jiang et al. 2010). However, in doing so, Katie simultaneously and unavoidably encounters an underlying pressure of having to keep up with “the girls” as previously noted.

From another vantage point, the increase in Katie’s makeup use also denotes the additional time she spends on her self, and hence demonstrates Katie’s efforts in getting herself to a level where she feels acceptable to present to the outside word; in the hope of generating people’s positive perceptions of her. Makeup use is seemingly synonymous with her notion of “making an effort”, marking an underlying revelation of ‘I do care about myself, I am not ugly’, as indicated in the succeeding passage where Katie spoke about her deep concern about showing her bare face in public spaces and the perceived social consequences.
It feels like maybe people are looking at you [when I’m without makeup], thinking, “oh she looks awful or she looks really ugly”. Well not like anyone would say that in the supermarket or that I would really care about their opinion, but it’s just the fact that I am going outside now I never know who I’d bump into. I might bump into one of my boyfriend’s friends or I might bump into his mum and I then won’t want her to see me without makeup on because she might think [I’m ugly], oh, you know.

Katie’s story not merely highlights her horror of being perceived as “ugly”, but also the unpredictable relational context that might surface in a public place. To Katie, having makeup on as she goes outdoors is a sign of her precaution or preparation for any possible social or interpersonal encounter that she might find herself in, particularly for those whom she regards as critical in presenting the ideal self (because they may not accept the untransformed self). Makeup here again acts as a space, within which she hides herself, in order to observe social or relational dynamics, and prepare the self for potential ought performances.

Katie then attempts to rationalise her makeup use in a stable relationship by further elaborating on the need to protect the self from relationship dissolution, highlighting a conflictual merging of her self-narratives around low level of self-acceptance and high level of felt security in the referent point.

I don’t want to attract more boys, but knowing that a boy thinks you look nice, you feel better about yourself so if I’m on a night out and I’d never cheat on my boyfriend, but I would like the fact that I knew a boy might think, “oh, she looks nice” because you then think, “oh, I am still attractive and oh, that’s good, if he is horrible to me, I can go and get someone else (laughier)”. But, like yeah, its that kind of feeling of like still wanting to look and feel attractive so maybe that’s why I am bothered when his friends come around because I want them to think that I am attractive not because I would ever do anything with them.
Here, despite of the fact that Katie has repeatedly expressed her felt security in her partner at the present relationship stage, her self-narratives around low level of self-acceptance appear to surface from time to time, prompting her to transform her self. In transforming her self, Katie aims to augment her sexual confidence to a level where she feels ‘acceptable’ in allowing her to belong somewhere. By belonging I mean her perceived existential needs to secure ‘a partner’, and not to be left without one. Therefore, in this section of her description, makeup is explicitly expressed in terms of purely attracting men’s admiration as a self-reassuring boost to her self-confidence or sense of belongingness, with no intention of going further.

At a deeper, more implicit level of interpretation, however, Katie’s account further illustrates the issues of control discussed before, and her previously stated experience of using makeup to elicit positive perceptions of others toward the self, as a means of maintaining her romantic affair.

Figure 9: Katie's strategic employment of cosmetics for her romantic self

Note. Whilst arrow 1 represents ‘a defensive ring’, arrow 2 refers to ‘a get-out strategy’.
Figure 9 above demonstrates Katie’s strategic employment of cosmetics in an attempt to put others around her partner and have them on her side as ‘a defensive ring’ (e.g., “if he ever says a bad word they could say, “Oh, Katie is really nice’”) (see arrow 1), or, alternatively, as ‘a get-out strategy’ (e.g., “if he is horrible to me, I can go and get someone else”) (see arrow 2). In plain words, arrow 1 shows how Katie uses her makeup self to draw affections from those who are dear to her partner so that they become her defensive alliance that feeds her partner with positive feelings about her, especially when he is in doubt about the relationship. In contrast, arrow 2 depicts how Katie’s makeup self is aimed at eliciting romantic interests from her male counterparts so that if her belonging needs are not met by her current romantic relationship (e.g., I deserve better), she is able to branch off from her partner and establish a new romance that is deemed to be more existentially satisfying. Yet, it is important to note that it appears not to be a concern to Katie who that new romantic partner could be in her ‘get-out strategy’, as what he represents is an opportunity. On the whole, although Katie may not have the intention to attract others, cosmetics use is applied meticulously as ‘a contingency plan’ or ‘a safety net’ to protect the self from different dimensions (e.g., sense of belongingness), if she is to encounter a perceived relationship breakdown (e.g., her partner becomes no longer able to fulfil her belonging needs).

Katie then reflected on her childhood memories where the ability to wear makeup was marked by an aura of excitement, a sense of treat and a feeling of being a grown-up.

As a child, you are allowed to wear makeup, like my mum would say you are not allowed to have your own makeup so wear a bit it’s like a treat, maybe feel grown up because all the adults had it and as a child you’re not allowed so they were letting you do it, you feel you’re grown up enough to have it.

Contrary to the positive affect of wearing makeup when she was a child, the next section of dialogue painfully uncovers a makeup experience that is later transformed into an obligation, suggesting a gradual transformation of her self-narratives from a
high level of self-acceptance and felt security in the referent point to a lower level as she grows older.

K: It’s just routine, like every day in the week I get up when I have to do my makeup and even some days I really can’t be bothered but I would never go to work without makeup, never. It’s like I have an order of how I put it on and it’s a bit of an effort sometimes you just can’t be bothered, but it’s something you feel you have to do just to fit in, to look nice, to be like everyone else.

I: How does this make you feel?

K: Well it’s been annoying really, I have never really thought about it until now. It’s been annoying that you feel that you have to do that to look nice and like men they don’t have to do that so why women should do that.

The idiographic account given by Katie here has drawn together the previous themes regarding “efforts”, “looking nice”, and “fitting in”, and she arrives at the conclusion that actually “it’s been annoying”. Katie’s description symbolises the accumulating pressure of having to look a certain way as she enters adulthood in today’s society. Katie’s gradually internalised social standards and expectations appear to be forcing her into daily cosmetics consumption, which deeply frustrates her as she juxtaposes the experience of women against men. Therefore, for Katie, whilst makeup use proves invaluable in creating different aspects of the self-in-relation and maintaining a sense of subjective well being, it is simultaneously experienced as a responsibility to satisfy socio-cultural expectations imposed on her in her everyday social/interpersonal interactions. This deeply felt obligation is the result of a conflict between ‘her inward sense of annoyance towards having to wear makeup on a daily basis’ and ‘her perceived outward social responsibility of having to present her makeup self in everyday interaction’ (in order to feel normal and/or belonged). Importantly, Katie’s makeup experience here not only constrains the authentic being marked by her individuality, but also symbolises her reluctant submission to external forces (e.g., the predominant values and beliefs inherent in the contemporary consumer culture) (Sartre 2001; Spinelli 1989).
I think maybe I am one of those few that thinks maybe looks is more important than who you are because I am in the fashion industry so every day I am doing clothes and weighting the way people look and media so it’s kind of drummed into my head what looks good and what’s not so I think without sitting back and thinking about it I am one of those people that does encourage all this, which is really bad.

This description presents Katie’s contradictory experiences between her professional self as a trainee buyer in fashion and another aspect of the self that is striving for freedom and a non-judgmental society concerning women’s physical appearance. As a result, Katie struggles to come to terms with her self-narratives in terms of the ought level of self-acceptance and/or felt security in the referent point in creating a self, which consequently leaves her feeling dreadful and with a sense of guilt.

I: Can you tell me more about how you look is more important than who you are?

K: Well I don’t think you should be and I think your personality is more important, but I think it’s because it’s the first thing people see and I think they will compare you to celebrities and compare you to Cheryl Cole or someone like that, so that’s why your looks are important. No one is going to be like oh, you are just like Cheryl Cole in terms of your personality because no one knows Cheryl Cole whereas if you look like her then boys think oh, she is Cheryl Cole well she might have been nothing like Cheryl Cole but because you look like her, people think that she is like that so I think that’s why looks to people are really important because that’s what you first see rather than before you get to know someone.

Despite an obvious struggle between knowing what people think and knowing their perception is false, Katie illustrated her desire to reproduce the looks of celebrities
who are perceived or portrayed as having the ability to be liked by many. Ideologically, her longing can be linked to the broader socio-cultural expectation towards the supposed look promoted by the media. That is, the self is only accepted if it conforms to the supposed look. In a metaphorical sense, Katie’s physical appearance is almost like an advertisement that requires a celebrity endorser to promote and sell her self. By mimicking a celebrity’s outer self, the cultural meanings inherent in the celebrity are being transferred to the self, driving endorsement outcomes such as increased likability or persuasiveness (McCracken 1989; Miller and Allen 2012). The following passage then provides a detailed illustration of how makeup is used for deception, allowing Katie to manipulate people’s impressions of her.

Like if someone was really girly say like me, you could do really dark eyes and eyeliner and I would look gothic even though I don’t know a thing about being gothic. I am not like that but make up could make me look like that. It’s a bit deceiving to people if you never met me and I turned up looking gothic, that’s what you’d think of me because that’s how you saw me whereas if you started to get to know my personality, you’re like she is not like that so it’s a bit deceiving. Like when I was younger and I was trying to get into bars when I wasn’t 18, I was like 16 or 17 so I had put makeup on because it made me look more grown up definitely. Or to try winning over a boy that you are going on a date you put makeup on to look prettier than you are because if you turn up with no makeup then they might think twice.

Different types of makeup seem to represent a manifold range of deliberately tailored social realities, enabling Katie to feel secure in each role she plays. Indeed, the different types of makeup are used to manage self-impressions, alter aspects of the self, and trick other people into believing in an otherwise non-existent self. Cosmetics consumption in this instance endows Katie with a sense of control, empowerment, and gratitude for being a woman.
Seen in the context of the entire interview, we can easily grasp Katie’s volatile sense of self that is born out of the persistent shifts in the ways her self-narratives are merged, at different points in time and in a social relationship. Cosmetics are strategically employed to enable Katie to achieve her personal goals (e.g., self-protection, manipulating others’ perceptions of the self), to be who she intends to be and endorse her desired self-in-relation. Yet, the employment simultaneously creates annoyance, dissatisfaction, and angst for her being-in-the-world.

Despite of the fact that both Katie and Emily are loud and outgoing, unlike the former who is a very insecure, fashion conscious girly girl (e.g., *self-narratives around low level of self-acceptance*), the latter, in the next case, is more of a “tomboy” who wears makeup but is not ‘into’ makeup and feels generally more secure about the self (e.g., *self-narratives around higher level of self-acceptance*). In addition, unlike Katie who consumes cosmetics largely for the purpose of hiding herself, Emily’s lived experience, nonetheless, shows the opposite.

### 5.2 Emily’s lived experience

#### 5.2.1 Emily’s background summary

Emily is Afro-Caribbean and was born and raised in the UK. She had been an accountant for three years and has had mostly male colleagues working alongside her. Emily’s parents were both born in Nigeria, but her mother was brought to England when she was only two years old. The interview lasted 108 minutes.
“I’m probably very ambitious, hard working. In terms of socially, they would say I don’t know how to shut up, I’d talk to anyone. I’m quite a friendly person. All my close friends would say like yeah I’m quite like smothering; I’m very territorial. I like guarding my friends with my life. When I think about myself, I don’t like thinking myself in regard to my looks. I think many people would probably think of me more academically and me as a personality. My mum has always kind of taught me that in everything you do, be it academics, be it socially, be it your looks or whatever, be a good representation of your family like look the best you can be and do the best you can do.”

(Emily’s self-descriptions)

Emily energetically and confidently tells stories about her being-in-the-world with her significant others. When Emily was a child up until the age of sixteen, she had been going back to visit her remaining relatives in Nigeria almost twice a year. Since she has grown older, Emily has stopped going back to Nigeria as she has become too busy with her life in the UK and felt it was never a holiday there, having to run from one family to another for her parents. At the time of the interview, Emily was a 25-year-old single woman living in a one-bedroom apartment on her own. She was very close to her family, including her two parents and a younger brother. Most of her good friends were Caucasian, and loved her for being a genuine person who is loud, witty, honest and not afraid of being who she is. Emily had a very high level of self-confidence/acceptance, and often called herself the “amazeballs” and/or “Queen Emily”. She read celebrity gossip in magazines or online on a daily basis and was always the one whom her friends would come and ask, “is this true about XXX?” Generally speaking, Emily described herself as more of a “tomboy”, very sociable, not superficial, and brought up valuing the importance of excelling and/or being the best in whatever she sets out to do. This deeply ingrained family value of succeeding in life largely shapes our understanding of her negotiation process of the self-in-relation as unfolded in her interview dialogue later.
5.2.2 Emily’s experience of the self-in-relation

Emily’s self-narratives are merged in four different ways through which Emily embraces distinctive goal-pursuits in creating different dimensions of the self-in-relation (see figure 10 below).

Figure 10: Emily's experience of the self-in-relation

Emily’s upbringing shapes the strong value she places on the importance of excelling or being the best that she can be. This value, in turn, embodies Emily’s makeup experience as a means of bettering the self, with the aim of navigating herself away
from an otherwise downgraded sense of self. As such, the principle aim of Emily’s cosmetics use seems to be primarily concerned with the matter of succeeding in some way, in a bid to strategically fulfil her existential philosophy of getting ahead. Yet, this reliance on cosmetics clearly unsettles her self-narratives around high level of self-acceptance, that is, Emily’s strong self-belief of not being a superficial person. The principle aim also underpins Emily’s strong tendency to perform social comparison, in a bid to reach timely conclusions about her being-in-the-world in relation to others. In doing so, she is able to respond promptly to shifting social landscapes, ensuring a continuous sense of control, and a constant feeling of superiority. Cosmetics use in this case is purposefully varied based on change in social landscapes to maintain a superior, positive conception of the self. Indeed, Emily sees cosmetics as the symbol of “power and control” in terms of manipulating people’s perceptions of her.

In the context of a romantic affair, Emily’s experience of cosmetics represents mixed, layered, and at times contrasting feelings of wanting to impress, wanting to feel superior, and wanting to be loved for who she is (e.g., the importance of wearing makeup to impress; not wearing makeup to show the true self for a real connection). These contrasting feelings underline the different ways in which her self-narratives are merged when negotiating the romantic self at different points in time.

Emily’s account further reveals a sharp change in her experience of transforming the self that is triggered when her skin condition turns from good to bad, leading her self-feelings to alter from self-love to self-hate (e.g., self-narratives change from a high level of self-acceptance to a lower level) when applying cosmetics. That said, it seems that Emily finally arrives at the conclusion at the end of the interview that, for her, the importance of physical appearance declines over time. This increasing self-tolerance or self-acceptance appears as a direct outcome of growing older and recognising that there are many other important qualities, aside from beauty. The self-realisation at the end, however, is in contradiction to her emphasis on the importance of cosmetics in enabling her to succeed in life, expressed in many parts of the dialogue. The contradiction underlines the ongoing debates within her self, and the fleeting nature of
the different ways in which her self-narratives are merged in producing contrasting goals to pursue in a social relationship (e.g., makeup can help to achieve one goal, but forfeit another).

5.2.3 The unfolding of Emily’s dialogue

Four key phenomena are exemplified through Emily’s experiences of negotiating the self-in-relation: (1) an achievement-oriented mentality (e.g., “look the best you can be and do the best you can do”), (2) the lived experience of a “tomboy” who is not particularly into makeup, (3) the essential role of cosmetics in exerting control over desired social/interpersonal interactions, and (4) the importance of being loved the way she is. The opening passage of the dialogue was as follows:

I: When you think about a cosmetics brand, what comes to your mind?
E: Mac, quite simply yeah.
I: How does Mac make you feel?
E: Well, I guess it’s quite a luxury brand but I think my reason for using it is because whenever I go to the Mac counter, it’s very personalized. If you’re going there for just one thing, they sit you down and talk you through everything and just makes you feel like you’re the only customer they gotta deal with that day. It just makes me think like being a princess, yeah, everyone catering to me (laughter). Mac kind of brings out the best of all your features.

The experience of being pampered transports Emily into an aura of superiority. The next passage illustrates the complementary merging of Emily’s self-narratives around low levels of self-acceptance and felt security in the referent point. The
complementary merging prompts Emily to endorse the transformed self, with the aim of satisfying external expectations (e.g., the standard of beauty). Yet, when she fails to transform the outer self as a result of involuntary dispossession (e.g., loss of makeup), she consequently experiences a profound sense of discomfort about the self-being-in-the-world.

There have been days when I’ve forgotten to go and buy some powders so I haven’t got any left to wear to work. I remember there is one day I’ve fallen sleep in this very boring meeting and then this boy made a reference that “oh you’re tired, aren’t you?” And I thought he was talking about my face and I just said, “I’ve got no makeup on, it’s not my fault (high pitched voice)” and he was like, “I didn’t even notice that you’ve got no makeup on, I was actually just talking about the fact that you’ve fallen sleep”. If I had my makeup on, I’d probably have remembered that I’ve fallen sleep but because that was all that was on my mind, that was the first thing I went to. I was like even if you have got, just like a bit of concealer, you just feel like so much more confident and people stopping and talking to you than when you haven’t got any makeup on. Even if your face isn’t that bad without it, you kind of just start focusing on the little things, which in turn will make you slightly more reclusive because you don’t feel comfortable with the image you’re portraying out there. It’s not the standard, because everyone else out there has got all their makeup on.

In this passage, Emily gave a vivid example of her overpowering self-consciousness as she finds her makeup-free self incompatible with what is expected of her. To Emily, the makeup transformed self functions as the “standard” way of being-in-the-office. And it is this standard that she feels compelled to fulfil so that she can secure people’s positive responses toward herself, and have a better interactional experience in her workplace. The incompatibility thus triggers a sense of paranoia and discomfort, leading Emily to withdraw into a more reclusive state.
In the next section of the conversation, Emily further elaborated on her perceived “standard” way of living in the contemporary consumer culture.

I: Can you please tell me more about this standard?

E: I mean let’s face it. We live in a visual world so you do wanna look the best version of yourself possible. For the most part, you’ll compare the way you perceive yourself to look and the way you see somebody that you’re looking at to look. And when you’ve got a bit of makeup on, you feel like, “you know what, we might not look the same but I damn look good” and that’s great. Whereas if you haven’t got any makeup on, it’s not standard you just think to yourself, “oh no, I’m supposed to look nice, I’m supposed to make an effort, I can’t go out and look scruffy” and it’s that sort of thing it’s not standard. Whereas once, you’ve got a bit on like you’re actually worthy to work in that function like everybody else. Whereas when you haven’t, it’s just a bit like you’re almost like the outsider looking in because everyone else looks a certain way and you’re very much the natural you.

Implicit in Emily’s self-interpretation is her low level of self-acceptance in not being the best she can be, her fear of being deemed unworthy of connection, and her subconscious awareness that a difference exists between her outer self and those who are of the Caucasian origin. With the makeup self, Emily experiences a greater confidence boost in her perceived social status, which alleviates her anguish of not looking the same as the majority of her friends. Indeed, makeup here is applied to achieve Emily’s personal goal of obtaining approval from both self and others.

Emily’s illustration also symbolises her explicit self-evaluation against others in the domain of physical attractiveness. Being natural in this case connotes a negative experience of the self – e.g., the sense of failing to blend in and catch up with others and be a “better version of me”. The concept of “natural you” is later further defined by Emily as “the me who is makeup free when I wake up in the morning and just roll
out of the bed”. The theme of bettering the self as a way of preventing an otherwise degraded sense of self emerges repeatedly throughout Emily’s dialogue.

That said, the next passage shows how Emily buffers her anxiety of not meeting external expectations (e.g., self-narratives around low level of felt security in the referent point) with her self-narratives around high level of self-acceptance.

I just generally think if I’m like leaving my flat, I’d be like crap I haven’t got any makeup on but I can’t be bothered I’m just going here but the moment I started speaking to someone, I generally forget that I haven’t got any makeup on because then knowingly unknowingly I’ve moved more into socially so my mind set has just moved far away from thinking about the situation I’m in so it’s very much spontaneous. Luckily enough, I’m not that sort of person that would feel like horrendously insecure in terms of not wearing makeup. If I’m out, I’ll generally forget the fact that I haven’t got any on.

Although Emily evidently feels self-conscious when presenting the makeup-free self in a public context (where the makeup self is instead expected), she finds her mindset slowly drifting away from being uncomfortable about her untransformed self to concentrating on being sociable as she begins to make an interpersonal interaction. This shift in the mindset apparently re-boosts her self-acceptance, as Emily gradually and successfully dismisses or neglects the discomfort associated with not meeting what is expected of her (e.g., presentation of the makeup self in public). Emily’s ability to shift her mindset appears to be largely owing to her self-narratives around generally high level of self-acceptance, enabling her to not feel “horrendously insecure” when she just “can’t be bothered” to wear makeup for reasons such as saving time and energy.

It seems that unlike Katie who uses cosmetics in the main to attract the opposite sex, Emily uses cosmetics largely to promote a sense of fairness, and endorse or maintain
the superior self. The superior self (e.g., being the best I can be) is what Emily accepts for her being-in-the-world, as depicted in the following section of dialogue.

Like all of my friends they put on lots of makeup like all their different concealers and their foundations and then their powders so they’ve got like this flawless face and if you’re sat there with no makeup, it just accentuates how non-flawless your face is (laughter). No one wants to kind of feel they’re apart from everyone who they’re with so it just makes you feel inferior. It’s like this person has made an effort to conform to a standard and you look like a tramp in the street (laughter). Like whenever I go back to Essex. All of my friends in Essex all wear false eyelashes. But like it’s one of those things where normally I would be quite happy with how my eyelashes are with mascara, because my eyelashes are a lot larger than my friends when they haven’t got their fake eyelashes on. Whereas when women who have got their fake eyelashes on, I’m just like well I don’t wanna be the one with the scritti eyes. You then you’ll take it up a level. And then that’s just you fit in again.

This vivid description marked Emily’s comparison with other women in her immediate social environment, in an attempt to reach evaluations about her being-in-the-world from moment to moment. The outcome of the evaluations apparently determines Emily’s self-narratives around the level of self-acceptance. With a focus on “fitting in”, Emily is constantly aware of the changing social dynamics in the outside world. Upward comparison is performed for not merely her self-evaluation endeavours, but also self-improvement, informing Emily what is acceptable for herself to be seen alongside her friends. Makeup is implemented to maintain the perceived superior self in a bid to acquire a positive self-experience. The next portion of dialogue further demonstrates Emily’s sense of fairness, when she evaluates her self against a friend whom she considers to be not as attractive as her in the ‘natural’ state.
You just kind of think to yourself, well she is totally average. I know this because I’ve either stayed over or I’ve seen her just come out of shower, she is totally average but with her makeup on, she looks fab. I think I’m better looking than you naturally, so I see no reason why everyone else should think I’m not as pretty since I consider myself to be better looking than her anyways.

Emily’s superior mentality symbolises her extremely low tolerance of being seen as inferior to those whom she perceives to be parallel to or even worse-off compared to her self. Makeup use here attains deeper personal meanings by enabling Emily to be seen in a better, fairer light, as she is being compared and evaluated against another woman. She then gave her positive thoughts on today’s media industry that promotes idealised images of female beauty.

Oh I think you can’t really blame them (the media) because they’re only showing what’s the consumers are putting out. I think especially in terms of makeup, I think it’s one of those things where it’s quite nice to be able to see how you can enhance your features because I guess makeup is one of those ways completely noninvasive, everyone has access to it that you can like bring out the best looking version of yourself so in that way I quite like it because they put it out there and they give you the steps and how to do certain things so it just makes it readily accessible. I’m just like well at the end of the day why settle to be the person who just rolls out of the bed when there’re things that are within your control like putting a bit of makeup on would make you be an A grade version of you. You’re still you, just better.

For Emily, the media is a mirror or a portrayal of individuals’ everyday lives. Makeup provides “readily accessible” ways of enhancing women’s physical attractiveness. One critically positive aspect of the media, particularly in terms of cosmetics, is its supply of knowledge that is regarded as essential in helping Emily to achieve an upgraded, improved experience of her physical self. This feeling of achievement
endows Emily with a sense of control, and pleases her deeply ingrained motive to succeed in some way. The theme of *being in control* here is similar to the lived experience of taking control that emerged in Schouten’s (1991) work concerning the symbolic consumption of aesthetic plastic surgery. Indeed, Emily sees cosmetics as a means of *exerting control over her outer self*, and as a way of *expressing personal efficacy*.

In the next passage, *the longing for control* appears to be closely related to Emily’s changing life-world concerns, and further characterises the cosmetic consumption strategies that Emily utilises in seeking to achieve a certain aura about herself, and manipulate, manoeuvre, or deceive others in her process of achieving her desired interaction.

For me, cosmetics are just control. If I’m going out and like I’m meeting a new guy and I want him to listen to what I’m saying, then I’ll place a little bit emphasis on my eyes because blokes are very visual, they can’t help themselves so then that’s where their eyes are drawn to and that keeps their focus on me. Whereas if you’re like not interested or whatever, then you might just put on concealer and nothing else or maybe not even put on anything because at that point, you’re just basically saying “no, I’m not trying to make an effort, this is me, I’m not trying to impress you, I don’t care what you think”. That’s kind of how you control if you want something to end quite quickly. The way you put on your makeup, basically says how you feel about that day. People will know that just by how you like made your face and things like that. So yeah that’s just that power and control that’s cosmetics. You’ve that power in your hand to determine the sort of person that talks to you.

Cosmetics consumption here is again experienced as “*control*” in the sense that it enables Emily to create a particular dimension of the self-in-relation, allowing her to communicate specific messages to the target audience. The need to control highlights
Emily’s self-narratives around low level of felt security in the referent point that s/he will respond to as desired. As nicely depicted in Emily’s description, her makeup use is strategically varied to convey contrasting messages. With a potential romantic partner, Emily appears to envisage his visual desire for attractive women and applies her eye makeup accordingly as a means to subtly draw his attention to the self and send out the underlying message, “yeah, I’m interested, I want you to like what you see, look at my eyes, do you like what you see”. Paradoxically, with an undesired partner, Emily makes a point of wearing no makeup or making minimum efforts in decorating the self to tactically communicate, “no, I’m not interested, like I’m only here because I kind of have to be or whatever”. Varied makeup applications represent Emily’s strivings for diverse, sometimes opposing trajectories of relationship developments (e.g., different degrees of interpersonal interactions). Interestingly, cosmetics here act as a space within which Emily sets the desired boundaries between self and other. The following illustration further describes the influence of makeup on the building of her social relationships.

I’m at the gym sometimes and I see girls with full faces of makeup on. If I’m going for a run on the one treadmill that’s free next to a girl who has got full face of makeup on, I’ll wait or I’m gonna use another machine. I’m like I’m not gonna run and start sweating with you. You’ve got your eyeliner on, your foundation and everything else, not sweating or anything next to me huffing and puffing away, “I don’t think so” (laughter). If I’m at the gym, I feel like “ok, I’m there to sweat, I’m not there to look pretty, then I’d rather be around people, to my mind, the same mentality who are happy to take off their makeup and just go for the run that they’re going on.

For Emily, being at the same makeup level is the key to quality interpersonal interaction, and represents an experience of fairness and equality. Juxtaposing her makeup-free self against those in makeup generates upward social comparison, leading to a negative impact on Emily’s overall evaluation of her self, and her self-narratives around the level of self-acceptance. Therefore, to avoid resultant negative feelings such as anxiety and/or angst, Emily affiliates herself with similar others. This
explains why Emily prefers to interact with those whom she observes to be similar to herself in terms of attitudes and “outward mentality”, because they confirm or lend social support to Emily’s manner of being-in-the-world and hence increase her sense of personal worthiness and/or self-acceptance (Morse and Gergen 1970). Seen in the context of the whole interview, it seems for Emily the practice of social comparison is conducted to foster, maintain or reject her connections to specific others, enabling her to fit in, feel accepted, and diminish negative feelings. Cosmetics use is purposefully varied to assist Emily with expressing her personal identity, and seeking for like-minded companions who share a similar approach of negotiating the self-in-relation.

Yet again, the following conversation shows the profound impact of involuntary dispossession (e.g., loss of makeup) on Emily’s sense of vulnerability.

I: What do you mean if people looked at you when you have got no makeup on, you would take it as a negative thing?

E: Like if someone was like to take time and look at my face with no makeup on, my first reaction would be probably to do that (using both hands to hide her face) like what you’re looking at my face coz when you’ve got no makeup on, you’re exposed, you’re a bit more vulnerable because you’re just showing you, like no airs and graces, this is what you look like. Whereas if you’ve got a bit makeup on, if someone looks at you, you’d generally think “oh well they like something on my face, you’re more willing to smile or just look them right back in the eye”.

The sense of being looked at by other people evokes strong contrasting feelings in response to change in Emily’s outward representations, and perceived visual appeals. Emily’s makeup-free self here embodies a sense of nakedness, exposure, and vulnerability, as she sees it as being incompatible with the standard of beauty promoted by external expectations. To prevent this emotional suffering, makeup is strategically applied to transform her self into a more desirable form, in an attempt to
attain positive self-meanings and experiences. The ability to present the perceived socially approved self affords Emily feelings of personal pride, comfort, and confidence in interacting with other beings-in-the-world in a bright, positive manner.

If I’m going to a bar with my friends, I’m never not gonna wear makeup, just purely because if I’m out there and I see someone that I think I like, it would never get anywhere. Just purely because from the outset he won’t like what he sees, because compared to my friends who are around me all got their makeup done, I haven’t reached, I’m not at that standard. I’m not as pretty because obviously makeup can hide a multitude of everything. So on that initial viewing, I’m not as good looking as the people around me, therefore not worthy of the conversation. Whereas, when you’ve put a bit of makeup on, and you’re all at the same level, then at that point, you’re pretty enough to talk to, therefore, it makes you pretty enough to then make them laugh and all the other things. I can then find out more about him.

This passage reveals the different layers of personal meanings deeply embedded in Emily’s makeup strategies in establishing the initial blush of romantic chemistry. In a first layer, Emily’s efforts at self-adornment are to prepare the self to meet the “standard” way of being. In a second layer, these efforts represent the competition between self and others for physical attraction from “the boys” in a social space. Looking more closely, in a third layer of meaning, wearing makeup is in actuality executed to allow Emily to determine the suitability of a potential partner, as she looks for their psychological compatibility when in contact.

That said, in the next section of the dialogue, Emily gave a seemingly contradictory account of her makeup experience within the context of a romantic encounter, highlighting the experience of a conflictual merging of her self-narratives between high level of self-acceptance and low level of felt security in the referent point.
All of my relationships started from friendships so they’ll see me without my makeup because we’re just a mate. And then they see me with my makeup, they’d be like “wow”. The difference is like amazing. So it’s just one of these things, they get to see that progression. So that’s kind of just how I work, I’m just like wheeled in with my winning personality. I’m not a really flashy flashy, go to the club and then trying to peacock feather my way for all the blokes to see me, that’s never been my thing. So I wouldn’t say I use makeup to kind of get guys because I wouldn’t generally pay attention to a guy I met on a night out because to my mind, I think to myself “well you’ve seen me looking my social best, if you still fancy me when I’m walking into the shop in the morning to buy my bread then by all means, come over and talk, probably won’t”.

In sharp contrast to her previous dialogue, Emily dismisses her use of makeup in the hope of attracting interest from potential partners, and instead emphasises the critical role of her “winning personality” in progressing in a romance. This apparent contradiction underscores change in the ways in which Emily’s self-narratives are merged when negotiating the self in relation to a potential partner - from a complementary merging of self-narratives around low levels of self-acceptance and felt security in the referent point as noted previously to a conflictual merging of self-narratives between high level of self-acceptance and low level of felt security in the referent point. Here, whereas Emily accepts the norm of having to appear attractive in order to meet a guy and transforms her outer shell accordingly, deep down she doubts such an approach in establishing a genuine relationship. Thus, she uses her untransformed, makeup-free self as a way of filtering out those potential romantic partners who are not ‘truly sincere’ to the self.

It seems that for Emily, entering a romantic affair requires being loved and accepted in every aspect of her life, that is, with or without her makeup. This mentality is perhaps why Emily reports no change responding to the fluctuations of a relationship, as she later describes, “I’m exactly the same [throughout the relationship]. If I’m at home and you happen to be at home with me, you’ll see me with no makeup on. If I’m
going out meeting friends and you’re coming out with me, you’ll see me with makeup on. I’d not change at all.”

Despite her mixed experiences of makeup in helping her find love, Emily then delineates the underlying message rooted in her cosmetics use when she is seen in a public environment with her (potential) romantic partner.

I wouldn’t say that makeup like gets me guys, but if I’m like out with a guy, and I’ve got some makeup on then I feel as though “yes, I’m worthy, it is acceptable for me to be in this environment with this man”. Whereas if I didn’t have any makeup on, you kind of feel as though people look at you thinking “what is he doing with you there”. You know there will always be one girl who has made amazing efforts, probably think to herself “why is he with her, average girl, when he can be with me”.

The thought of how others may judge her when she is out with her partner fuels Emily’s self-narratives around low level of self-acceptance. Makeup is thus employed to assure Emily of her self-worthiness, which bequeaths her a sense of rightfulness to be seen with her partner in a public arena. That is, Emily utilises makeup to prevent potential threats to her relationship by communicating to others that my partner and I are worthy of being together, and deterring other girls from attempting to steal him away.

Indeed, the makeup self not only endows Emily with a sense of rightfulness to be with her partner, but also a sense of rightfulness to demand for more, as showcased in the next passage.

The only place in my life that I’d say I’ve traditional values is the fact that I think blokes should pay. To my mind is like “you know what, makeup,
especially like my Mac makeup isn’t cheap and it’s a standard like I said earlier, the society has placed on you. If I’m gonna go out and meet someone it’s expected I’d make an effort and that includes my makeup and all of that has a cost. I’m like if I’m making all that efforts and that’s all costing me money then you can buy me a few drinks (laughter). If you want me to walk in together and other guys think “how did he get her, she looks fabulous” then you can buy me a few drinks (laughter).

Emily speaks of a situation where she expects her (potential) romantic partner to pay for the expenses that may occur as they go on a date. Cosmetics consumption characterises Emily’s financial investment in increasing her physical attractiveness, which in turn pleases her partner’s visual taste, and enables him to be admired by other people with her by his side. To Emily’s makeup self, being paid for symbolises her endeavour for equality between women and men, as they then strike a balance in terms of financially investing in the well-being of their love relationship.

However, the next passage highlights how Emily’s self-narratives around the level of self-acceptance fluctuate based on the perceived attractiveness of her romantic partner.

For me, I prefer them not to make an effort because then you always think you’ll need to look better than the bloke you’re with so you always thought you need to look a bit better than him if he is making a bit more effort then in turn you gotta make a bit more effort. So you know what I’d rather him just be my blokey bloke.

This passage highlights Emily’s keen need to feel superior to her potential or romantic partner in the domain of physical appearance. This sense of superiority seems to bestow Emily with a feeling of security, entitling her to have his continuous adoration.
and love. In other words, Emily experiences less fear or anxiety of him leaving her, as she is deemed better than him in some physical way.

Emily then further gives an account on the different underlying intentions inherent in her makeup use at different moments in time, which engenders her distinctive experiences of the self.

I: What do you mean if your skin were worse, you’d be putting on more makeup?

E: Because you don’t like the way you look, you don’t feel comfortable with it, you try to hide it, hence the makeup. To me, it doesn’t feel natural to have to spend a lot of time staring at myself in the mirror to feel confident enough to go out. So when I’m doing it, I’m like inwardly cursing my face for doing this but I’m also pissed off myself that I even care (laughter) so just a lot of self-loathing going on when my face is breaking out.

The amount of makeup Emily needs for her daily life fluctuates with her varying skin conditions, that is, the worse her perceived skin condition is, the more makeup she needs to cover it up, and the less she feels her being is accepted by herself and others. Moreover, as her perceived skin condition changes from good to bad, Emily’s underlying intention in using makeup shifts from enhancing to hiding the self, and her feelings toward herself consequently are transformed from self-loving to self-loathing. Nonetheless, these feelings of self-loathing appear to be compensated by Emily’s increased ability to meet the perceived social standard of beauty, and hence manage people’s perceptions of her self.

The intense feeling or makeup experience of “self-loathing” seems to be closely associated with a sense of the inauthentic self, and the accumulating annoyance Emily feels from a number of life perspectives when her skin suffers from breakouts:
I’m just annoyed because, one, I’m in my 20s, I shouldn’t be having spots, two, I’m more annoyed because I’m having to use way more makeup to get my face looking to the normal average that I general look, and three, I’m annoyed that’s costing me money, four, I’m annoyed because I’m wasting my time. No longer I’m using makeup to enhance, I’m using that to hide and I don’t like that.

Having commented on the disastrous impact of breaking out on her experience of the self and emotional well-being, Emily then offered a rather conflicting viewpoint as to the lack of relevance of her skin condition to her overall present-day sense of self-worthiness. This conflicting viewpoint underlies Emily’s growing self-acceptance or tolerance within the self as she matures.

When you’re a teenager, everything is just magnified 150%. The smallest thing is like life shattering, life destroying. But as you get older, you’re like “you know what, hold up, I’ve brought so much more to the table, it doesn’t matter if I’ve got an extra spot, it doesn’t matter. I don’t know, I guess it’s all growing pains. I just think when you’re younger, your world is so small and it’s so easy to let the most minor things to take over your life. Whereas now I think, yeah, you know what, I feel quite confident in the decisions I’ve made and all that other things that are going on around me. Nothing is so major as to make me worried or make me panic about such things as a few spots on my face.

Emily’s experience of her teenage self is critically influenced by her physical appearance, and her self-narratives at the time are seemingly marked by relatively low level of self-acceptance. However, a strengthening sense of self-worthiness/acceptance is experienced, as she grows older. Being older acts as a symbol of the increasingly broadening horizons in her life and her acknowledgement
of the many important qualities that she possesses, other than physical attractiveness. Having been through many difficulties in life and knowing that there are other things that are equally valuable as, or more crucial than, having “a pretty face” (e.g., “being a good person”, “being a good cook”, or “being clever”), the importance of physical appearance for Emily appears to decline over time as she matures. This perhaps explains why Emily increasingly emphasises herself as an intelligent person, instead of “being pretty”. That said, Emily appears to struggle with this account as her self-narratives around the level of self-acceptance fluctuate from time to time and from one context to another, as seen and pinpointed in her entire dialogue.

Whilst both Katie and Emily are strong extroverts, the following case of Linda, on the other hand, demonstrates a life story from the perspective of an introvert and how she negotiates her self-in-relation.

5.3 Linda’s lived experience

5.3.1 Linda’s background summary

Linda is Caucasian and was born and raised in the UK. She has been married for more than thirty years and is a proud mother of three, including two daughters and a son. Linda had two younger brothers, and is grateful for having two healthy parents in their 70s. Linda’s mother was a quite outgoing, loud person as opposed to her father who was gentle, quiet, and very understanding.

“I’m quite happy but I don’t relax much. I love being at home. I love doing all the housework like cooking. I like going to the shops. I think
I’m quiet. I like to be quiet, but still to be involved in a group. I’m not extrovert. I like to be with others, but I’m not the outgoing one. I sometimes spend quite a bit of time on my own just reading or catching up with watching films on TV. Yeah, I’ve quite a few friends who are always asking me to come out. It’s me, I do not want to go out at the nighttime, but I have friends and people I can go and visit anytime. I’m more romantic, quiet, secluded kind of person. I enjoy being a mum. I love the family. I wouldn’t say I was a career person. I’ve chosen to have a family. I do also enjoy work but when it comes down to it, the family will come first. I like being married and going out. For instance, I prefer to go out during the day and doing a bit shopping and sightseeing than getting ready to go to a dinner party. I prefer a quiet, secluded, cozy kind of thing. I think that because of my age as well and I think it’s to do with having energy to do these things. When I was younger, I used to love getting ready to go out every weekend.”

(Linda’s self-descriptions; the interview lasted 105 minutes.)

Linda describes herself as “a routine person” who went through the same routine everyday. During the week, she got up at the same time every morning, went to work, attempted to park her car in the same place, came home, and put her pajamas on to relax for the rest of the evening. Linda had no money when she was younger, but as her financial condition improved over time, she and her husband had managed to afford going on a holiday a few times a year. During their daily lives, they enjoyed going to their local pubs a couple of nights a week, or simply being cozy at home. They both had full-time jobs and loved going to “the pictures” and having a curry during the weekend. Apart from spending time with her husband at the weekend, Linda also enjoyed doing chores around the house (e.g., cleaning), and going out to town to look at clothes shops to absorb new ideas for colours and fashion. Linda felt she had not achieved much academically as she had only gone to secondary school, and this explains why she had just gone back for further education. At the time of the interview, Linda was a 56-year-old administrator, a loyal Catholic, and confessed that raising her children was the toughest thing she had done in life. Working for a living,
on the other hand, had been experienced as a very easy task for her. Unlike Katie and Emily who are enthusiastic extroverts, Linda is more of an introvert Catholic, whose consumption of cosmetics largely fluctuates, as she faces different challenges of (re)negotiating the self-in-relation, particularly at the stages of relationship development and parenting.

5.3.2 Linda’s management of the self-in-relation

Figure 11: Linda's experience of the self-in-relation

The figures represent the frequencies of how a self is negotiated
Linda’s self-narratives are merged in three different ways, which generates divergent personal goals to pursue, in seeking to endorse the desired self-in-relation in a variety of different social contexts (see figure 11 above). Linda’s experiences of negotiating the self-in-relation reveal her endeavours for a better life condition, and the pursuit of fantasies, mood changes and fun. In contrast to an extrovert who tends to be an active social networker, it appears that, for Linda, as an introvert, cosmetics have instrumental and strategic values to transform the self so that she can subtly appeal to others, create a favourable impression of the self, and thereby gain approval or other interpersonal rewards (e.g., life opportunities). It is also clear that the transition to motherhood caused major changes to Linda’s ways of negotiating the self-in-relation, highlighting a shift in her perceived relationship with the outside world. That is, Linda’s personal goal for the self-being-in-the-world shifts from wanting to appeal to the outside world (e.g., the transformed self) to wanting to retreat from it (e.g., the untransformed self). This sense of retreating apparently develops her self-narratives around high level of self-acceptance, enabling her not to be affected by external expectations of how she ought to be. Yet, it is important to note that as soon as Linda gave birth, her way of engaging with the outside world gets flipped back again to want to appeal to people. To compensate for the time she has lost during her pregnancy, a strong desire is expressed to ‘get herself back’ by making greater efforts than before in eliciting people’s positive impressions of her self. The resultant strategy of presenting the transformed self appears to be her way of getting back into the world.

Furthermore, like Katie and Emily, Linda feels a sense of self-liberation when she feels unconditionally accepted by others (i.e., self-narratives around high level of felt security in the referent point), which in turn generates her self-narratives around high level of self-acceptance. Yet, in the meantime, Linda mourns about ‘a loss of spark’ as a result of the comfort and/or liberation experienced in the relationship. In sum, like others, cosmetics are purposely and strategically varied, as Linda encounters shifting relations to the outside world, in different social contexts, and over a number of life stages. These shifts underline change in Linda’s self-narratives around levels of self-acceptance and felt security in the referent point, and the intricacies inherent in her experiences of negotiating the self-in-relation.
5.3.3 The unfolding of Linda’s dialogue

Three key phenomena of negotiating the self-in-relation are demonstrated through the case of Linda: (1) an introvert’s perspective of the self-in-relation; (2) the importance of the parental self in the negotiation process of the self-in-relation; and (3) the management of the impression of the aging self. From an introvert’s point of view, Linda vividly speaks of her naturally occurring shifts in her everyday social world, particularly in the stages of relationship development and parenting. These naturally occurring shifts have a profound impact on the ways through which her self-narratives are merged, and the resultant consumption strategy that is utilised to certify her desired self-in-relation at different points in time. Linda speaks in a quiet tone of voice, at a slow rate of speed throughout the interview process. The first section of her dialogue is presented as follows:

I: When you think about a cosmetics brand, what comes to your mind?

L: if it’s all stay on or if it’s durable. Umm obviously money is not a big issue, if I think I’m getting good value then I don’t mind treating myself. It’s not always been the case because obviously when I was younger then the budget was tighter. As I’ve got older, I’ve started wanting to wear foundation whereas I’ve never dreamed of it before because now obviously I’m needing to use foundation more.

Clearly, the aging process has led to Linda’s self-narratives around low level of self-acceptance. As she grows older and becomes more financially secure, Linda not only experiences a need to increase her makeup use, but also a drive for consuming more expensive, quality cosmetics, in order to prevent the self from being labeled as ‘an old women’. Linda then further described her newly altered routine in the application of foundation as a sign of her emotional turmoil.
I used to watch my grandmum wear powder foundation. It always reminded me it’s a sign of getting older so it didn’t appeal to me. I have always worn mascara, not always lipstick but mostly mascara and lipstick and as I got older, foundation and everything now.

Linda’s resistance to wearing foundation in the past comes from its close association with older people that is deeply ingrained in her childhood memories. She admitted her struggle of realising her growing reliance on the use of foundation, which she sees as a symbol of her aging self (e.g., loss of her fair complexion), and a sign of her lowered self-acceptance. Yet, despite the struggle, the foundation transformed self apparently provides Lisa with a more positive experience of the self-being-in-the-world, as depicted in the next passage.

It [looking pretty with makeup] makes me feel happier. I think it makes somebody look kinder as well. You somehow look more approachable and you want to be in with the world and you want to appeal to people, you want to appear you’re young. People get the impression that you actually care about things because you’ve made an effort to look after yourself.

The makeup-enhanced beauty endows Linda with a sense of happiness, an aura of kindness, and a feeling of self-respect, enabling her to appear approachable and protect the image of herself in the mind of other people as a person who still cares for her everyday living (e.g., self-narratives around low level of felt security in the referent point). Makeup seems to be something Linda holds onto, to defer her aging self, and implicitly inform others of her not-yet-so-old-and-grumpy self.

Having a good image is the key to everything. I have seen it through my life. I think sometimes intelligence will come with good looks. It must be confidence
you get from looking good and to how people perceive you and to the confidence you get from your own self and that feedback I think it's like a continuous cycle. I think a person looks after the self, it shows a certain kind of intelligence to be able to master their appearance in a way.

In this excerpt, Linda evidently delineates the process of a two-way ongoing feedback loop occurring between her inner and outer selves, and the role makeup plays in facilitating this process. For Linda, intelligence comes from successfully managing her outer self-presentation that is essential in appealing to the outside world. Mastering her appearance through the means of makeup is not merely her way of expressing personal efficacy, but also her tactic for endorsing her desired self-impressions in a bid to live a flourishing, existentially fulfilling everyday life (e.g., being regarded as “intelligent”). In simple terms, Linda’s makeup self experiences a boost in self-confidence as her physical attractiveness increases. This increase in her level of confidence helps her create a good impression in the outside world, which in turn grants her further self-assurance; prompts her continuous makeup use for ensuring a constant supply of self-confidence; and assists her with managing her public image in a favorable light.

The next passage suggests that the deeply felt circular interrelationship between makeup use, people's approval, and increased self-confidence is a learned lived experience for Linda. Makeup use here is born out of the complementary merging between low levels of self-acceptance and felt security in the referent point.

When I was younger, umm I would go for a job interview. I was slim. I used to have a nice outfit. I’d go and I’d get the job more times out of none. They seem to look up to the person that’s looking better. You realise that people treat you better when you’ve got a bit makeup on.
From an observer’s perspective, this passage articulates Linda’s subtle sensitivity to people’s change of attitude towards her, as a result of her outward transformation in makeup. In sharp contrast to her makeup-free self, Linda’s makeup self experiences mounting success in job interviews. The positive makeup experience underscores her constant craving for or *addiction* to cosmetics, as Linda gradually applies her learning to other areas of life.

It’s (physical appearance) like a book, the front of the book but you’ve not read the story. Sometimes you’ll pick a book because it looks interesting. It’s just health as well. Looking bad [no makeup] I always feel it’s a sign of not being well. It’s perhaps poor health. Some sort of being down, being depressed, things like that.

To Linda, her physical appearance is like “the front of a book”, and her personality is somewhat analogous to its contents waiting to be discovered. A book’s front cover that appears interesting will prompt people to keep reading page after page. Likewise, by decorating her outer self, Linda strives to attract people to know her as a person. Linda perceives a strong association between “looking bad” and wearing “no makeup” - both are comprehended to constitute negative implications of encountering some form of physical or psychological difficulties, or illness. The perceived association also reveals Linda’s tendency to embrace self-narratives around *low levels of self-acceptance* and *felt security when interacting with others*.

Unlike her exterior motives of dressing up for others as noted previously, Linda then describes the joy of dressing up for herself in the following passage.

I think even if I wasn’t going out to meet anybody particular or no one is gonna see me, I think you still like to feel, get that picture in your own mind, because you can’t see so you put something on and picture that’s you, that’s
your identity. I’ve dressed because, for me, I do like to put different things on, your mood changes from what you want to wear.

The makeup experience here represents Linda’s relationship with herself, or with her real or imagined, present or anticipated relational others, and is directed toward her pursuit of fantasies, mood changes, and fun (Holbrook and Hirschman 1982). By wearing variegated types of makeup here, Linda is able to enhance her self in different dimensions, and engage in explicit forms of identity play (Jantzen, Østergaard, and Sucena Vieira 2006; Thompson and Arsel 2004). It appears that makeup not only serves to create a good impression on others and elicit their approval, but also acts to regulate self-feelings, actively transforming her psychological and mood states, particularly those of a negative nature.

Linda then turns to describe the influence of her best friend on her makeup use, and how she negotiates the self-in-relation in the next excerpt.

I used to think “oh people are gonna call her names [my best friend who wore makeup at 12, 13]” and they did sometimes. I don’t want to be called by names. I used to just think “no, it’s not for me, wearing too much”. But when I got to my teens, about 15, 16, I started to wear more makeup. Because my parents’ influence started to wane a bit and I’m out more at the college and doing a bit of a job. I’m feeling a bit more responsible and I feel as though it’s right to do a bit more.

Linda’s fear of possible social rejection and punishment contributes to her reluctance to go against the group’s norms in her circle of friends. However, it is critical to note that the perceived social norms and expectations change, as Linda grows older and develops through different life stages. As nicely illustrated in Linda’s description, her refusal to wear makeup in her early schooldays was due to her striving to avoid ridicule, dislike, and embarrassment in the external social world. Nonetheless, as
Linda reaches the end of puberty, makeup application has paradoxically become her new way of fitting into the crowd, in an effort to navigate her self away from being teased, and feeling ashamed as a result. Wearing makeup also highlights Linda’s transition from childhood to adolescence, as she becomes markedly more responsible and independent in her own decisions and financial well-being. Linda then gave a detailed account of the times when she experiences a dramatic shift in the ways through which she negotiates her sense of being-in-the-world.

L: There was a stage when I was having babies. I didn’t have the time to take care of myself, all the things came into my life where looking good isn’t a bothering anymore. Some women still make an effort when they were pregnant and I think “God I just didn’t bother” coz I seem to be withdrawn when I was pregnant. I didn’t have a very good time, I think that was probably it, the morning sickness and stuff but the truth is it becomes more important to have a baby than your image. Image goes out of the window.

I: How did you feel about yourself at that time?

L: When I was younger, I used to be skinny. So when I was pregnant, I can never put weight on. When I got pregnant, your face got a bit round. You just got a bit of a glow and you definitely look healthier and my hair is ok, your skin improves. It’s all these good things. You think how can I do without it. It’s like almost this is I always wanted. I don’t care about anything else, I don’t care about how I look. I’m so happy, you know you’re in this different world, it doesn’t matter anyway what anyone says, it doesn’t matter. When you’re having a baby, it takes over, it really does. You soon get back into it when the baby is out (laughter). It’s probably more than ever I think “you know, after I’ve the baby, I need to look extra special, good now and get more makeup”.

Linda experiences major changes to her sense of self-acceptance, and an altered account of the self during pregnancy and birth (Patel et al. 2005). Undergoing the transition to motherhood, Linda encounters the discomforts of pregnancy, a lack of
time, and shifts in priorities. As a result of this changing experience of the self, Linda undergoes withdrawal symptoms from the outside world, and is seemingly excused from various aspects of her previous self-conceptions (e.g., the importance of appealing to others). As Linda lays aside her previous self-conceptions selflessly to acquire a new status of motherhood, her once important makeup consumption, utilised for enhancing her image, becomes redundant. The redundant need to use makeup to maintain self-impressions seems to boost her self-narratives around high level of self-acceptance. As a direct outcome of Linda’s parental development that changes her both mentally and physically, the portrayal of a smart, successful woman is seemingly peripheral in her life at this point. In spite of feeling withdrawn from her daily routine, Linda appears to attain inner happiness and a heightened sense of self-worth as her affection grows towards the foetus. Linda is somehow transported to a space where only the self as a mother and a relationship with her unborn child exists, where cosmetics are no longer required to impress because there are no other people in her perceived relational realities in the outside world.

Looked at from another point of view, we can see Linda’s redundant need for makeup is layered with another level of personal meaning or self-experience. That is, Linda’s diminishing need for makeup and growing sense of self-acceptance at the time may partially, if not largely, be due to her skin improvements, as she speaks of her improved complexion in rosy terms during pregnancy. On the whole, Linda appears to be caught up in an ongoing debate, conflict or confusion within her newly constructed sense of self, as she first expresses “I didn’t have a very good time”, only to later give a seemingly opposing statement, “it’s all these good things...how can I do without it”; as Linda struggles to justify her makeup-free physical appearance against her deep-seated internalisation of social expectations. Importantly, Linda’s contrasting statements highlight conflicts that emerge from the different ways of merging the self-narratives between her previous makeup selves (e.g., low level of self-acceptance) and her newly formed sense of cosmetics-free pregnant self (e.g., high level of self-acceptance). However, these conflicts emerge as temporary and transitional (Bailey 1999). Following the birth of her child, Linda quickly reverts back to her long-standing mentality of having to make a good impression, as the importance of others once again surfaces in her daily existence. To compensate for
the time when her life is taken over by the child, Linda admitted consuming more cosmetics to help her “feel like herself” again.

I: How did you feel about this transition?

L: Because you started to get yourself back together again, you’re back to your energy levels, you’re going out meeting people, you’re fed up at the end of it of having a big tummy, not making an effort, thinking what’s the point and then it comes back with a vengeance in a way because you think “oh, it’s over. You sort of wanted to make up for the lost time if you like. I’m gonna make a real effort. I’m gonna prove that I’m a mum but I can still look good”. Because you meet people and you want to get the sense that I’m still glamorous. So I think it does come back, a bit more perhaps. You appreciate it a bit more, how much it can do for you.

This passage sheds further light on the fluidity and complexity of how Linda negotiates her self-in-relation, which changes over the course of her parental development. Linda apparently experienced a rebound as she approached the end of her pregnancy - feeling “fed up” about the whole process, including what she previously cherished (e.g., inner happiness, improved skin tone – narratives around high level of self-acceptance). Linda’s re-adoption of cosmetics seems to be due to her coming out of the shell, as her social landscape reverts back to pre-pregnancy where meeting and greeting other persons are again perceived to be part of her being-in-the-world. Linda, as a result, returns to her profound internalisation of cultural prescriptions and gender conventions once more – her outward cosmetics use is a marked symbol of her return to her self-narratives around low level of self-acceptance.

Looking more closely at her lived experience, Linda seems to have lost her excuse of not being in shape or not living up to social standards of beauty since she gave the birth. This realisation may have also contributed to Linda’s longing for more makeup to enhance her outward appearance, and “get herself back together again”.
Furthermore, there is a strong, underlying focus on “coming back with a vengeance” and “proving that I’m a mum but I can still look good”. It almost feels like Linda is attempting to prove not only to others, but also to her self, that she is able to play out different aspects of the self-in-relation, and continue expressing her sexuality. Cosmetics enable her to boost her once lost sexual confidence during pregnancy and for that, Linda admitted learning to re-appreciate the important role cosmetics play in fulfilling her existential need for acknowledgment of her different roles in life, not only as a mother, but as a woman.

I: Can you tell me more about the priorities that you’ve mentioned earlier?

L: Well it’s like when you were younger, I didn’t have any interest in putting makeup on. I put it on, but I didn’t particularly think they made me look better, I just used to do it because that’s the thing to do. Then I realised it actually does give you attention when you get older, you realise it does make you look better and you want to appeal to people. I don’t think that ever goes away ever. It’s a forced habit. I’ve been putting on more often than not and especially more when I’m older, I never go a day without putting on.

Linda’s illustration depicts the gradual development of her self-narratives around low level of self-acceptance as well as those around low level of felt security in the referent point. With repeated exposure to the array of awards makeup brings (e.g., the ability to appeal to people and succeed in life), cosmetics use becomes increasingly embedded in, and a necessity for, Linda’s everyday life. It also shows how the meanings deep-seated in Linda’s cosmetics consumption become layered. In a first layer, for example, Linda strives to “fit in” for interpersonal inclusion. In a second layer, she attempts to achieve other life purposes such as appealing to others and appearance enhancement. Linda’s fear of losing her appeal or the affection of others seems to characterise her increasing habitual monitoring of her physical appearance and routine cosmetics consumption (Fredrickson and Roberts 1997). Linda’s cosmetics consumption appears as a strategy to manipulate how others treat her in order to experience a better interpersonal/social life.
I: How would you feel if you went out without makeup?

L: Right, I think a bit like my defenses are down. I was in a quieter mood. Even people say you look better, you don’t need it, you still want to put it on. I think it’s almost you feel dressed, you just appear stronger and more confident, things like that.

I: You mentioned about these defenses, could you tell me more about them?

L: Well you feel a bit like untouchable. You just think it’s just for show, not actions involved. I feel it’s a bit of a barrier in a nice way, in a positive way. When I say barrier, it’s a bit like a mask. You’re hiding what you really like.

In this portion of dialogue, the absence of makeup (as a result of involuntary dispossession) has important psychological and experiential consequences, resulting in feelings of nakedness and defenselessness. Therefore, Linda layers herself with cosmetics to create an explicit “barrier” between her self and the outside world, so that she can be “untouchable”, and enable a different way of being (e.g., a confident and strong woman) that is in contrast to who she perceives she really is (e.g., the otherwise vulnerable, not-wishing-to-appeal self). Metaphorically, similar to Katie, Linda utilises cosmetics as a space to hide within, within which she sees everyday interaction as a show and to mask what is really going on beneath the interactional surface for self-protection purposes. However, unlike Katie who utilises the space for concealing her perceived physical flaws and her terror of being deemed unworthy of connection, Linda employs it for disguising her real personality (e.g., an introvert) in order to appear stronger and appeal to others.

In the next passage, Linda changes the topic to reflecting on the development of her self-narratives over the course of her ongoing romantic relationship.
L: I suppose you start to dress up a bit more when you get somebody. When you actually get somebody, you do start wanting to look better all the time. I think it does lead you into buying more makeup because if they respond to you, you don’t want to lose it in any way. You still want to keep that romance going for as long as you can. I think if you’re in a relationship already, you tend to spend more money on looking best than you’ve done in your life (laughter). Of course after a while, you don’t care about that much and you just think that would do. Because you know they notice everything about you and you’re in a relationship. Well when you’ve been together for a while, you have passed that, it’s no longer the main thing. I feel more relaxed.

I: How do you feel about passing this phase?

L: I wish I hadn’t, I really do. I used to love the buzz of looking for new makeup, going out, meeting.

This passage vividly depicts the development of Linda’s romantic self, as a reflection of her lived experience. Different from the initial purpose of wearing makeup to strike an initial spark, as Linda enters a relationship, the underlying goal of cosmetics consumption transforms into keeping the romance and passion going for as long as she can. This aim leads Linda into her increasing efforts into self-adornment, in order to ensure the growing love from her partner towards her. At this relationship phase, Linda’s self-creation is underscored by a complementary merging of her self-narratives around low levels of self-acceptance and felt security in her romantic partner. As the relationship stabilises and her partner is able to see her in all the other different aspects besides the initial physical attraction, Linda expressed her redundant need for makeup that is previously noted as a tool to create a “barrier”. This is because Linda is no longer fearful of her partner leaving her as an outcome of losing her outward attractiveness, highlighting a complementary merging of her self-narratives around high levels of self-acceptance and felt security in her romantic partner.
Yet, despite admitting a sense of relief, this sense of relief is layered with Linda’s mourning of the loss of “the buzz” in the relationship, missing the process of making an effort, and the initial passion they shared as a result. Apparently, based upon which relationship stage Linda finds herself in, she creates a corresponding self accordingly. Over time a series of selves are created, which embody different personal goals to be fulfilled (e.g., ‘passion’ versus ‘stability’; ‘increasing need for cosmetics’ versus ‘diminishing need for cosmetics’). The mourning is thus seemingly an inevitable outcome as Linda compromises “the buzz” for a sense of self-liberation.

Seen in the entire interview, Linda’s self-narratives around levels of self-acceptance and felt security in the referent point fluctuate as she faces different life challenges, leading to different ways of negotiating her being-in-the-world. As a result, the amount of makeup Linda wears is strategically varied in response to the different personal goals that emerged from the different ways in which Linda’s self-narratives are merged.

The next case of Amy, yet again, demonstrates a different set of realities from Katie, Emily, and Linda’s lived experiences in relation to the negotiation of the self-in-relation.

5.4 Amy’s lived experience

5.4.1 Amy’s background summary

Amy was born in Sweden, and moved to the UK when she was 18 years old. Her mother was a Sales Representative for Kanebo, a mid-range cosmetics brand in Japan.
At the time of interview, Amy was a 30-year old investment analyst, looking for a change in career path. She used to work as a Marketing Executive to cultivate and develop the Scandinavian market in Prague. During her two years working in Prague, she had stayed in prestigious hotels and travelled regularly in Europe for business. She speaks fluent English, Swedish, French, German and Arabic. The interview lasted 81 minutes.

“I’m very close to my big sister. She is like a friend forever but we’re different in some ways. For example, I enjoy playing with makeup but she is never interested in makeup anyway. So even today, she is like married and she’s got husband and stuff. She puts makeup only occasionally but on the daily basis she wouldn’t put makeup. I think I was more like babyish maybe (laugh). It’s like, because I was just like, I’m just always used to what I want to do. And I was trying like, you know what I mean, different things, and experimenting different sort of makeup styles. In that sense, I didn’t care about the household, cleaning up and washing dishes and all that, just thought that that’s not my job and I don’t have time for these. It was all about me and my friends and like, you know, like enjoying life.”

(Amy’s self-descriptions)

Amy describes her close ties with her family (two parents and an older sister) whose origins had roots in Kenya and the Middle East. Amy has been going out with her partner since she was a teenager. They were engaged about two years ago and co-owned a city centre apartment together. Amy used to have a clear complexion until approximately three years ago, where she started suffering from signs of aging and dark circles. The majority of Amy’s close friends in England are originally from Lebanon, UAE, and Pakistan. They would describe her as a happy, enthusiastic, and cheerful person, although being unreliable in terms of keeping a promise from time to time. Overall, Amy’s age, her involvement in a stable romantic relationship since she was a teenager, her cultural and family backgrounds, as well as the complexion
change that is directly due to aging and a changing lifestyle, construct and represent her existential dilemmas embedded in her negotiation process of the self-in-relation.

5.4.2 Amy’s experience of the self-in-relation

Amy’s self-narratives are merged in three different ways, characterising how Amy negotiates her self-in-relation at different points in time, and the different personal goals that ensue as a result (see figure 12 below).

Figure 12: Amy's experience of the self-in-relation
In Amy’s account, there is a seemingly constant struggle about coming to terms with the self that she is presenting in her daily living. The constant struggle underlines Amy’s battle against the process of aging and the experienced cultural differences between where she was brought up (i.e., Kenya) and where she spent most of her adulthood (i.e., UK). It is important to note that Amy also lived with her family in Sweden for a short period of time from the age of sixteen to eighteen. Apparently, the battle within the self causes Amy’s self-narratives around *levels of self-acceptance and felt security in the referent point* to fluctuate in a persistent manner (see figure 13 and 14 below).

Figure 13: Amy's battle against the process of aging

![Figure 13](image)

Figure 14: Amy's battle against cultural differences between Kenya and the UK

![Figure 14](image)

The persistent fluctuation in the ways in which Amy’s self-narratives are merged causes her to subconsciously create different and often opposing selves that represent multiple realities of the self-being-in-the-world, underscoring her shifting relationships and experiences with cosmetics (e.g., makeup is a necessity to me vs.
makeup is not a necessity to me). Indeed, the constructed multiple realities highlight Amy’s efforts in managing the different roles she possesses in life, and/or protecting her positive self-evaluations. For example, by presenting the makeup-free self in the context of parenting, Amy is able to convey the unspoken message to her future offspring that “beauty comes from inside”. By hanging onto her past sense of self when her perceived skin condition is “still good”, Amy is able to embrace her self-narratives around a high level of self-acceptance. The self-narratives around a high level of self-acceptance enable Amy to neglect external expectations (e.g., standards of beauty), and present her untransformed makeup-free self without fear and anxiety. That said, whenever Amy is reminded of her aging self (e.g., skin condition is not as solid as before), she encounters self-narratives around a low level of self-acceptance, and expresses the necessity of transforming her self with makeup in order to avert the anxiety of not meeting external expectations.

Moreover, for Amy, cosmetics consumption offers her new opportunities to express her individuality, and break through the influence of her more conservative family culture. However, these new opportunities for the acquisition of personal freedom are paradoxically layered with a sense of increasing constraint, as she submits to the pressure of conforming to Western society’s expectations of beauty. As such, Amy’s love and appreciation for cosmetics are in actuality interwoven with a sense of obligation and denunciation.

In sum, Amy’s self exists and conflicts in the different time frames of past, present and future, and two different cultures that embody contrasting social expectations. As such, Amy clearly experiences inconsistencies and contradictions within herself, as she encounters persistent shifts in the ways through which her self-narratives are merged, urging her to present different ‘faces’ to the outside world. These inconsistencies and contradictions are characterised by Amy’s recurrent contradictory statements concerning her cosmetics experiences and associated sense of authenticity, as she strives to locate her being-in-the-world from moment to moment.
5.4.3 The unfolding of Amy’s dialogue

Four key themes of negotiating the self-in-relation are exemplified through the case of Amy: (1) the sense of self-in-relation that conflicts in the different time frames of past, present and future; (2) the sense of self-in-relation that conflicts between different socio-cultural norms experienced during the process of growing up; (3) the assorted “messages” embodied in the cosmetics use, targeting self and others; and (4) the management of multiple role responsibilities in postmodernity. The opening dialogue of Amy’s interview was along these lines:

I: When you think about a cosmetics brand, what comes to your mind?

A: Umm, beauty. Sometimes like umm society expectation on how you should look like and be presentable in the society around friends and family. Obviously, happy moments so when you go to a wedding or party, cosmetic brands would then come into my mind. They just make me feel like a beauty king. It’s all about beauty and taking good care of yourself. It’s quite exciting.

I: Could you tell me more about society expectations?

A: Yeah. Umm obviously there were a lot of advertisements in the society at the moment, emphasising on the looks so you have to look in a certain way, you have to kind of be a certain size. You can’t just like back in the day, just like go out to the supermarket without makeup. Everyone is like keeping up appearances and they always take care of themselves. So even men, in generally, I like more Metrosexual and they kind of take care of themselves. They start using cosmetics and cream, and moisturising for their skin. Society expectation back to the question is that everyone is getting more aware of taking care of yourself and looking good and feeling good.
Amy’s experience of cosmetics consumption connotes not only her “happy moments” as she envisages the excitement of beauty transformation on special occasions, but also her understanding of external expectations with regards to the ought self in a social context. As a result of the media influence, Amy further elaborated on an increasing emphasis on taking care of the outer self in today’s society, namely that “looking good” is equivalent to “feeling good”; and confessed her liking for so-called “metrosexuals” who care for their outward presentation. In Amy’s description, there is an apparent focus on the dramatic, deeply felt shift in what is expected of her from the past to the present. This shift is further explored in the next section of her dialogue.

I: Can you tell me more about back in the days?

A: before I think it’s ok to be size 12, whereas now it’s seen like you are overweight and everyone is trying to be healthy lifestyle. But I think it’s also like before people had more time, there was not as much as technology, life wasn’t as hectic as it is today. There is more value and family, it’s kind of life outside the city. Whereas now with the busy lifestyle it starts, everyone is just like career focus, it’s all about me me me me and it’s like how I want to look, how my society has an image of me, that kind of thing. So it always like pushes yourself out there and it’s not actually relaxed as it was back in the days.

I: How do you feel about this?

A: Umm, sometimes it is a pressure because sometimes you feel like you just want to be yourself but you can’t because other people might be judgmental. And I think it’s bad because you don’t have individual anymore kind of thing. Because everyone is kind of trying to be individual. They are always claiming, “oh I am individual I’m special”. But at the end of the day, they are all trying to aim to the same thing and I think that comes down to like advertisement nowadays.
A clear experiential distinction is made between “back in the days” and “the busy lifestyle” in the present day, which underpins Amy’s different levels of self-acceptance. For Amy, life “back in the days” symbolises comfort in your own skin, family values, and an idyllic, slow-paced lifestyle, highlighting her self-narratives around high levels of self-acceptance and felt security in the referent point. Paradoxically, the hectic city life today has given rise to an individualistic culture within which people focus on satisfying the wants and needs of themselves. Owing to this focus, it seems that there is a compulsion in the culture that advocates the necessity of “pushing yourself out there” to express the self as a unique individual, underlining Amy’s self-narratives around low levels of self-acceptance and felt security in the referent point. The compulsion is experienced as a source of profound pressure, as Amy feels constrained about conforming to external expectations (e.g., standard of beauty) so that she will not be judged in a negative light.

Nonetheless, whilst everyone is perceived to strive for being unique, Amy observes a peculiar loss in individuality in the contemporary society as each person seeks to achieve, or at least emulate, the idealised lifestyle depicted in advertising. For Amy, there is a clear preference for the way of living “back in the days”. However, in the later portions of her dialogue, Amy appears to be somehow in favour of “the busy lifestyle” today, or rather she is seemingly caught in between the two different time frames of “back in the days” and “the busy lifestyle”. The shift in her personal preference highlights the existential dilemmas inherent in each chosen lifestyle.

I: Can you give me some examples of the society’s expectations in the past versus now?

A: Yeah. Umm for example, back in my mum’s generation, she lives with her in-laws, her family and stuff like that whereas my generation I move out from home, Sweden, to another country when I was only 18 years old and I’m not married. This would’ve never happened in my mum’s generation because everything has to be a certain way, so in Africa for example where I’m from, the daughter would get married and move to her husband’s house and then like
build a family, raise the kids and stuff, whereas now you are allowed, it’s more acceptable, for a woman to go abroad, take a flight by herself and go to another country and kind of live there and try to find herself kind of thing. So maybe technology that’s enabled us to move around. And in our generation, things are different. They are as traditional and as narrow-minded as they worked before.

This portion of dialogue describes how change in today’s social structure, including people’s beliefs, endows women with new opportunities to unchain and free the self. Back in her mother’s generation, Amy vividly illustrates how women’s lives largely revolved around traditional stereotypes of gender role responsibilities to maintain the well-being of a family, which in turn restricted their own life developments and the many other possibilities of living outside the family. In sharp contrast to her deeply felt restrictions “back in the days”, and to her bitter condemnation of the social norms today in the preceding passage, Amy feels an aura of liberation in contemporary society where she is able to move, travel, express her individuality and find herself. Nonetheless, she then once again gave an apparent criticism against the social expectations of the present time where they are “as traditional and as narrow-minded as they worked before” - as the focus has now shifted to the issue concerning superficial physical appearances. There is a strong indication that feelings of appreciation and denunciation, and authenticity and inauthenticity are intertwined, as Amy reflects upon the shifting external expectations, highlighting the complexity and intricacy of her multilayered lived experiences. Specifically, these mixed feelings underpin the struggle Amy encounters during the process of negotiating the self-in-relation.

In the next passage, Amy gives a meticulous account of the subtle unspoken messages embodied in her varying applications of makeup to manipulate people’s perceptions of the self.
If you want to feel more classy, then I will put more like nude kind of makeup and not too much, not too aggressive on the face. If you want to come across like more sexy, then I will put like more black eyeliner and more like smoky kind of looking. So it depends on how people want to see me as, if it’s for wedding I will be like classy and more presentable and more acceptable kind of thing whereas if I go on a night out, I am more daring and I can put like more harsh colours and maybe three eye shadows.

Clearly, Amy understands what society expects of her on different occasions and in response, different types of makeup are used strategically to satisfy these expectations. Amy uses makeup to not only compel others to see a certain aspect of her self, but also mold herself into acting as such, whether it should be “classy” or “sexy”. Amy then described her boosted sexual confidence as she “makes an effort to put all her makeup on” (e.g., self-narratives around low level of self-acceptance) and how that is in actuality interwoven and layered with a sense of pressure to conform, and compete against other women (e.g., self-narratives around low level of felt security in the referent point).

When I make an effort to put all my makeup on, it boosts my confidence because if I want people to see me like, “she is so pretty because eyes are so beautiful”, then I will emphasize eyes more. If I want people to concentrate more on my lips then I will obviously put more lipstick and a bit lighter on eyes. It’s like unconscious of doing that. But at the same time I also sometimes feel like you are of pressure because especially when you go out, so many people put so dramatic makeup these days and everyone is different. So it is like sort of competition that your makeup should be like better than your image. You spend so much money using all the cosmetic products, for what? Is it really for yourself or is it for other people? To a certain extent, I use cosmetic products for my skin like moisturizer and makeup I do use it obviously because when you go out, there is nobody in the [night] club does not use makeup. So it is like competition I think between women, like how good is your makeup, comparing to others’ makeup.
Similar to Emily and Linda, Amy seems to view cosmetics use as a means of *self-discipline* for her embodied selves (Trethewey 1999), and a way of communicating her *personal efficacy* (Schouten 1991), which in turn affords Amy an increased sense of self-confidence and/or achievement. For Amy, cosmetics are strategically applied to accentuate her physical features in an attempt to manipulate and control people’s focus on the self. That said, this attempt appears to be somehow *a subconscious habitual act* that is intimately and inextricably connected to her internalisation of social norms and expectations. Despite the fact that Amy previously described how everyone looks the same at the end of the day, she then gave a contradictory statement here as being under the pressure of having to stand out, because “*everyone is different*”. The contradiction highlights the dynamic process of Amy’s ongoing negotiation between which aspects of the self-in-relation to present to the outside world.

The mixed and layered makeup experiences concerning “*happy memories*”, boosted self-confidence, competition between women, and society’s pressure of fitting in and standing out, seem to cause Amy to wonder about the true fundamental purpose of her cosmetics use. As she explores her experiences in life further, Amy appears to arrive at a conclusion that skincare products are predominantly for her self-care, whereas makeup is primarily experienced as a means to compete against other women, meet her socially expected images, and manipulate how she is seen by others. A detailed account is then given with respect to her daily skincare regimens that she implements religiously to take care of her self. Apparently, Amy experiences a sense of self-violation, when her everyday skincare routine is neglected for convenience.

A: I would wake up, and then I’d wash my face with cleanser and then I’d put like cleansing water, then I would put the moisturizer. And after that, I’d obviously put some makeup. And afterwards I want to remove, I would use makeup remover. And then I would use a foam soap to wash my face, maybe an exfoliator to peel my face and then after that again the day and night cream.
I: How would you feel like if you haven’t done all of this?

A: Umm, I felt guilty when I went to bed. Sometimes it does happen like when I’m really lazy or if you go out you have a wild night out. You do come home and just go to bed without taking off your makeup, which I shouldn’t but it’s really really bad because obviously your face doesn’t get time to breathe. So in the morning I do wake up with like guilty feeling and start to think, “oh no I haven’t like washed my makeup” and then I would do an extra thing like putting on a mask to compensate that I have not done my routine the night before.

Strikingly, a robust sense of guilt is experienced due to a merely one-day discontinuity in Amy’s everyday skincare routine. Moreover, it seems that deep angst is experienced as a result of failing to treat herself the way she feels it should have been, leading to her self-narratives around a (even) lowered level of self-acceptance. To ease feelings of guilt and/or angst, Amy takes her skincare routine up a level to compensate for her ‘bad’ practice that puts her at risk of violating perceived cultural ideologies (e.g., the youthful ideal of outer beauty).

I: So how would you feel about going out without makeup?

A: I don’t mind going out without any makeup on. I am not really that bothered. But it could also be like I’m quite happy with my skin; it’s quite clean and clear. I’m quite confident in that sense and I don’t have to put makeup all the time.

I: What if you had problematic skin?

A: Then I would obviously cover that and not go out without makeup. I wouldn’t be as daring because I would be thinking like, “oh, what would people say, my skin is so bad and I’m not taking care of it”. So to protect those comments, I would probably use a lot of coverage, a lot of makeup to hide.
Like Emily, Amy’s self-narratives around the level of self-acceptance are largely dependent on her skin condition. Amy’s self-narratives around high level of self-acceptance are characterised by her perceived “clean and clear” complexion at present, enabling her to neglect external expectations that promote the makeup transformed self (i.e., the self-narratives around low level of felt security in the referent point). The ability to neglect allows Amy to present her makeup-free self unproblematically without anxiety.

That said, Amy experiences strong anguish as she imagines herself to suffer from a problematic skin, marking her self-narratives around low level of self-acceptance. The strong anguish prompts her to conceal perceived physical flaws in seeking to prevent potential negative comments on the self, ranging from her physical imperfections (e.g., “bad skin”) to her self-efficacy (e.g., “not taking care of it”). Besides, despite having expressed that she is not “bothered” about going out without makeup owing to her present “clean and clear” skin, Amy once again describes a remarkably conflicted self-experience in the later sections of her dialogue, as she further reflexively comments on her everyday experience of the makeup-free self.

I: How do you feel about having problematic skin, and having to put more makeup on?

A: Umm, at first like I would do for the society, but at the same time I know it shouldn’t be like this because everyone was born like their own way and everyone has got different skin types. But I think how we have seen like how everything is coming across, like in advertising, in TV, all these pretty women with all these makeup. And you want to feel that, you want to feel like confident, you want to feel beautiful, you want to feel like sexy. You want everyone to think that, you are so pretty and amazing, and I think it is a pressure, obviously, you need to kind of always think about how your appearance should be and how you should dress and how you should come across and stuff like that, be presentable. But at the same time like with my friends and family, close ones, obviously they’ve seen me the worst days, then
you wouldn’t make that much effort. But when I go to see new people, I would put more makeup on than I would normally do just meeting up regular friends kind of things.

Like Katie, despite acknowledging the superficiality of the outer self, Amy expresses a robust desire to fit into the idealised images heavily advocated by the media. In doing so, she is able to feel “confident”, “beautiful” and “sexy”, and be regarded as such in the minds of others. However, this desire appears to be laden with a sense of persistent pressure (e.g., having to conform to the standard of beauty). Indeed, to attain self-confidence, beauty and sexual attraction that are closely associated with the makeup transformed self, Amy has to compromise on her personal freedom of, for example, having the choice to show her self without some form of transformation.

It seems that the act of covering up the problematic skin is perceived to be almost like a responsibility that Amy fulfils for society, thus preventing the self from falling into a meaningless existence of being. The makeup transformed self is thus utilised as a shield to protect the self from being misjudged at first sight, highlighting her self-narratives around low level of felt security in the referent point. However, it should be noted that the pressure of conforming to external expectations appears to gradually diminish as the social/emotional bond between two parties deepens, leading to increasing self-narratives around high levels of self-acceptance and felt security in the referent point. This experience is commonly shared among all my informants.

I: Have your makeup patterns changed since you started using cosmetics?

A: No. I don’t think so. I wouldn’t say that. I don’t think they change at all.

I: Have you changed the brands you are using?

A: Yeah the brands have changed. Because before it used to be like cheap brands when I was like a teenager, when I was 17, 18. I used like eyeliner, mascara, and stuff. So the brand there obviously has changed dramatically coz
I used to use cheap brands from like H&M, any like cheap brands you get in supermarkets, and then eventually I move to like prestigious brands so I started to use like Chanel, Lancôme. I think with age as well, like when you reached over 25, I noticed my skin kind of changed, it wasn't as strong and solid as when I was young. So that kind of has pushed me like, okay, it is okay maybe to spend a little bit more but then you taking care of your skin to stay younger and take care of yourself, like eye cream for dark circle.

Seen in the context of the whole interview, it seems that Amy is constantly struggling to come to terms with the naturally occurring changes in her outer self that are a result of the aging process. As evidenced in this paragraph, Amy first firmly denies any adjustment in her makeup patterns as she grows up, only to later give a counter confession in regards to her apparent modification of the cosmetics brands and products she used to apply. As Amy later comments, “my make up behaviour obviously has changed because it used to be down to basics whereas now I'm using all sorts of things, from primer to everything”. Amy’s shifting statements, or more specifically, her shifting self-narratives around the level of self-acceptance, indicate the increasing pressure from society to conform to the youth and beauty ideal. It appears that this increasing sense of pressure underlines Amy’s deep-seated resistance to acknowledging her aging self, and the need to apply more expensive, higher-end cosmetics to conceal, and take extra care of, her aging skin that is perceived as not “as strong and solid” as in her younger years. Cosmetics here emerge as a space within which Amy negotiates her sense of the aging self.

Amy then sheds further light on the external audience of her makeup transformed self:

Wearing makeup is more for myself because my fiancé always said that he first met me without makeup, and obviously in the recent years when I started using all these extra products that I don't really need to, but I look more dramatic and stuff and every time I came out of the room or like with loads of makeup, he would like "oh my god she looks very different". But he always
said he prefers me without makeup and stuff, so it's more for me I think. And it's more for me and how I fit in the society and fit in with my friends and environment. Whereas he has obviously seen me since very young. So he kind of prefers me without makeup.

Again and again, Amy stresses the critical role that makeup plays in taking care of her self by helping her to “fit in” with the society, and securing approval from others. The audience for her makeup self, however, does not seem to incorporate the presence of her fiancé. This is perhaps owing to his apparent preference for her natural self, as he initially fell in love with her in their teens. Despite the fact that Amy’s fiancé is dazed by her various transformations in makeup, his strong penchant for her makeup-free self appears to be the driving force behind her self-narratives around high level of self-acceptance. Seen in the context of the entire interview, the strong preference of Amy’s fiancé for her makeup-free self seems to further contribute to her apparent struggle in terms of rationalising the necessity of makeup in life from time to time.

I: So you mentioned about trying to hide a spot before, how do you feel about it?

A: Sometimes I do feel like obviously I don't wanna walk out of the house looking like a meerkat. So I would feel like I would have to put like concealer and powder to cover my dark circle. So yeah I wouldn't walk out of house if I have dark circles I would feel like very ugly. And it only started in the recent years it wasn't like that obviously ten years ago.

I: What do you mean by only started in the last three years?

A: Yeah because I think I'm more conscious now. When you mature and when you start working, you graduated, stuff like that. I think with age, you're more conscious of how you look whereas before I was like maybe a teenager and I was like happy, good looking, used to having a good time. Nobody really cared, and you can do whatever you want to. Whereas now you have to think
how you look like, like ok my wrinkles are showing and I need to do something about that.

In direct contrast to Amy’s earlier description that, “I don’t mind going out without any makeup on” (due to her strong confidence in her clear complexion), in this section of the dialogue, Amy gives an inconsistent account, and expresses her deeply ingrained fear of walking out of the house without concealing her dark circles. The inconsistency marks a shift in Amy’s self-narratives from high level of self-acceptance to a lower level. It seems that Amy is constantly battling against signs of aging and the growing pain of acknowledging the fact that her physical appearance is changing as she grows older. At times she almost denies this fact and speaks as if she was still young and things were still perfect, as she later again evidently and immediately delineates, “without makeup I still feel like I’m pretty and I still feel like confident and I don't feel like I need to put on makeup all the time” - overcoming her earlier fear of appearing “ugly” without makeup. Whilst Amy might feel the same about herself on the inside, her outer shell has inevitably changed, and confusion within the self ensues (Saucier 2004). Amy seems to be caught up in memories of her carefree times in her teens and speaks of them in rosy terms. This cherished past time is contrasted with the experience of her now grown up, maturing self that emphasises the responsibility of fulfilling external expectations. This explains Amy’s growing consciousness of losing her fair complexion, and her increasing longing for staying young and vibrant.

Throughout Amy’s descriptions, she expresses juxtaposing experiences that are a result of her rather unstable self-narratives around the level of self-acceptance. She at times feels ugly and less confident without makeup (e.g., low in self-acceptance); other times, she feels confident and pretty even without it (e.g., high in self-acceptance). The rather unstable self-narratives characterise Amy’s constant struggle in coming to terms with the negotiated self. In the following passage, Amy envisages a potential change in her makeup use for the future self.
A: I think I will use less makeup [when I’m older]. I think I will come back and use less makeup and not put as much makeup on as I am at the moment.

I: How do you feel about this change?

A: Erm, it's kind of fun. You try different things and you have the opportunity in the certain age, the certain peak of life. For example in my age I can't afford to be daring, I can't afford to try experimenting different things and try the more dramatic look cuz it is my age. In the future I don't think I'll get away with it because if I come out with loads of makeup, people would be like what the hell is wrong with her?

Amy anticipates her future self to be wearing fewer cosmetics, with the aim of barring the risk of being evaluated in a negative light. There is a focus on the different opportunities she has in terms of makeup experimentation and appropriateness at varying stages of her life. However, despite admitting her inability to afford being “daring”, “experimental” and “dramatic” with cosmetics consumption at an older age, her descriptions later suggest otherwise, revealing the constant conflict within her self in slowly coming to terms with the aging process.

I: So what sort of roles you think you will play in the future?

A: Obviously the wife role and then you have the mother role, and then obviously like raising kids and stuff. You won’t be as free and daring again with cosmetics. And also I think once you have kids and stuff you have less time to take care of yourself. So I might like using quick products because you just won't have time. I think your priority will change as well in the future. It's more about me at the moment whereas in the future if I have kids, then your priority changes. I think it is like once you are a mother, I think because you are a role model as well and kids look up to you. I want my kids to grow up with confidence that they are beautiful in the way they are naturally. And that’s the message I would like to give my kids.

I: How would you feel about that? The changes in your priority?
A: I think you just have to adjust and adopt and make the most of it. Obviously, still look good and still look sexy for you and your husband. But at the same time, you won't have as much time in your hand that's for sure because I personally believe I will still be working, and if I have kids and I have to take care of my husband and the house and everything. So you need to prioritise what is more important in life, is it just cosmetic, or is it like your husband, kid or your career? So you kind of need to balance that more and maybe not spend as much time concentrating on yourself. I think during the day, I'll probably be a mum. And once my kids go to bed I would be a wife. It is doable and I think it's quite important, not only for the family but for yourself as a person, to feel like you’re sexy, maybe put a bit more makeup at night for your husband and stuff. You don’t want to forget your moment, your passion you had before.

Amy envisages her evolving life roles in various areas (e.g., a wife and mother), as she moves through the normal transitions of life. The vision endows Amy with a sense of constraint on cosmetics use as a result of potential change in her life priorities, shifting from caring for the self to her husband and offspring. The shift symbolises the lessening time she will have for the self, and the importance of passing the right values on to her children. As such, the consumption meanings inherent in the act of wearing less or no makeup here underscore not only the fulfilment of Amy’s cravings for serving as “a role model”, but also the unspoken message to her children that “beauty comes from inside”. The felt responsibility to educate her children about the ‘right’ way of being elicits Amy’s self-narratives around high level of self-acceptance.

That said, Amy simultaneously envisions wearing more makeup at night for herself as a woman, and for her husband in order to feel sexy and attractive as a wife. The distinction between day and night underlines the different ways in which a self is negotiated, and Amy’s deep commitment to managing and fulfilling her distinct roles she may potentially take on in life. The commitment symbolises the ‘superwoman’ and/or ‘supermum’ cultural icon of femininity who could do it all in contemporary
society (Callahan, Cunningham, and Plucker 1994; Thompson 1996). Indeed, Amy anticipates more makeup to be utilised in the evening to not only remind her of the still attractive self, but also maintain the passion she first shared with her husband. The different ways of consuming cosmetics here suggest Amy’s sensitivity to her potentially accumulative responsibilities for others that are clearly not of concern when she was young and only focused on self-care. On the whole, as Amy anticipates growing into more duties and obligations in life, there is an increasing emphasis on successfully juggling between different role responsibilities (Thompson 1996). Cosmetics are thus used to strategically set boundaries for each role she plays in the future.

The aim of Amy to balance between career, love and motherhood for the future self (by transforming or not transforming the self) is repeatedly emphasised in the rest of her dialogue.

The priority back home [Kenya] is to, basically take care of their kids, drive them to school, bring them back and just let themselves go. And I think it’s wrong in a way as well because I think it’s not fair once just because you have become a mother, you should forget you are still a woman. You’re still like, you know, you still have a husband, he always has needs as well, and you need to kind of be still presentable and attractive as well. I’m hoping to become like mother and a wife at the same time and not forget that as a woman just because I became like a mother.

There is a strong focus on sacrificing the self to take on family responsibilities and obligations for the married women in Kenya. These women represent Amy’s deeply feared negative future self. Indeed, cultural differences have a seemingly strong impact on the priorities women choose to fulfil, leading to differentiations in their self-adornment practices. For Amy, a strong sense of resistance is felt against such sacrifice (e.g., not accepting the should-be accepted and/or sacrificed self promoted by the Kenya culture), as the importance of still looking “presentable and attractive”
is once again stressed for herself as a woman and for her husband as a wife. Cosmetics here seem to function as a mechanism to sustain her sanity and authenticity, and communicate or enhance the different dimensions of the self that she is capable of implementing. In so doing, she satisfies feelings of self-worth and a sense of self-autonomy as she meets the needs of many others, and promotes some aspects of the self that are not in line with *what is expected in the culture of Kenya*. The subjective experience of promoting some ‘unacceptable’ aspects of the self in the *Kenyan cultural frame* (e.g., spending time on self-adornment) underscores Amy’s self-narratives around a *high level of self-acceptance*. These narratives in turn allow her to *neglect* the discomfort that may arise from not conforming to what is expected in Kenya (e.g., caring for the family, not the self).

Amy then illustrates her present priority in life in terms of taking care of herself.

> My priority, cosmetic wise is to take care of my skin, and maybe like, you know, trying different things, different sort of makeup. Trying like, you know, do fun stuff with my face at the moment. Because I think this is the age I can afford to do fun stuff and experiment different things.

This excerpt once again highlights Amy’s shifting self-narratives around *the level of self-acceptance*, resulting in conflicting statements about her experiences of cosmetics use as lived. Amy previously commented that she is now at an age where she is no longer able to experiment with different dramatic looks. Yet, in this portion of the dialogue, she expresses her desire to do “*fun stuff*” and continue experimenting with different makeup types, because she feels this is the age at which she can still afford to do so before taking on more responsibility in life.
5.6 Conclusion

The above idiographic analysis shows the diversity and intricacy between and within each informant’s account in negotiating the self-in-relation. For each informant, I was able to identify how and why a self is created as a result of a merging between the self-narratives around *level of self-acceptance and level of felt security in the referent point*. Clearly, the four women interviewed experienced a series of mixed complementary and conflictual negotiation pathways, as they merge their self-narratives around *the level of self-acceptance* with those around *the level of felt security in the referent point*, to create the desired self-in-relation at different points in time. Informants’ self-narratives around the *levels of self-acceptance and felt security in the referent point* seem to shift over time, and fluctuate in response to the ever-changing self-notions and/or occurrences in the outside world. For example, Amy experiences *a complementary merging* between her self-narratives around *low levels of self-acceptance and felt security*, when she is reminded of her aging self. The makeup self is hence presented to hide signs of aging and ensure a sense of existential meaningfulness (e.g., meeting the standard of beauty). Yet, *a conflictual merging* between her self-narratives around *a high level of self-acceptance* and those around *a low level of felt security* is instead experienced, when Amy is caught up by memories of the cherished past time when her perceived skin condition was still strong and solid. As such, the makeup-free self is shown to generate perceived more existentially fulfilling experiences (e.g., *sense of self-autonomy*).

It seems that it is the self-narratives around *level of self-acceptance* that ultimately determines which aspects of the self-in-relation get presented to the outside world. That said, the different interplays between the self-narratives around the *levels of self-acceptance and felt security in the referent point* apparently generate distinctively different experiences of *negotiating the self-being-in-the-world, and the existential dilemmas* that ensue as a result. For instance, Linda experiences *a complementary merging* between her self-narratives around *high levels of self-acceptance and felt security in her partner*, when her love relationship reaches equilibrium. The makeup-
free self is therefore presented, and a sense of self-liberation is experienced. Yet, in experiencing the sense of self-liberation, Linda simultaneously mourns the loss of “the buzz” in the relationship.

The next chapter draws together findings that emerged from each of the case studies by systematically detailing the different kinds of negotiation pathways (e.g., see figure 6 in chapter 4) that my informants take in creating a self, providing greater clarification of the diversity and complexity inherent in human experience when negotiating the self-in-relation.
Chapter 6: Cross case analysis of the negotiation pathways

With the insights into how a self is negotiated gained at the level of lived experiences, I move to present the cross case analysis of nine prominent negotiation pathways that emerged through my informants’ experiences; by offering theoretical specifications of the nature of the negotiation process of the self-in-relation. As such, I demonstrate a series of interlinked elements that underpin each negotiation pathway in the process of creating a self (see chapter 4 figure 6): (1) the existential dilemmas inherent in our lived experiences; (2) the way in which the self-narratives are merged to create a self; (3) the personal goal (or goals) that is born out of this merging; (4) the negotiation process used to ‘resolve’ the ‘surface-level’ existential dilemmas (or ‘surface-level’ conflicts within the self); (5) the presentation of the self-in-relation that is chosen to achieve the goal (adopting an internal or external perspective of constructing the self-in-relation); (6) the consumption strategy assumed to endorse the self-presentation; and finally (7) the sense of authenticity about the self-in-relation embodied in the resultant self-presentation. Whilst, it should be noted that the contents of the interlinked elements vary depending on the kind of negotiation pathway one embarks on at any point in time – I will now turn to discuss this in detail by illustrating how each negotiation pathway flows in the following section (see table 4 and figure 15 below).
Table 4: The negotiation pathways

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Illustrative narratives (Existential dilemmas)</th>
<th>The nature of the self-narratives being merged</th>
<th>Personal goals</th>
<th>Negotiation process</th>
<th>The presentation of the self-in-relation</th>
<th>Consumption strategy</th>
<th>Sense of the authentic-self-in-relation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Linda: Well when you’ve been together for a while, you have passed that [having to adorn the self for love], it’s no longer the main thing. I feel more relaxed… [Yet,] I wish I hadn’t, I really do. I used to love the buzz of looking for new makeup, going out, meeting.</td>
<td>Complementary merging of the self-narratives (High level of self-acceptance – the internally focused self vs. high level of felt security in the referent point – the internally focused self)</td>
<td>To feel liberated, create a deeper connection, and/or show care</td>
<td>Compromising (outward benefits)</td>
<td>Adopting an internally focused perspective of constructing the self-in-relation</td>
<td>Less or no cosmetics use</td>
<td>This is me</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Katie: I’d never cheat on my boyfriend, but I would like the fact that I knew a boy might think, “oh, she looks nice” because you then think, “oh, I am still attractive and oh, that’s good, if he is horrible to me, I can go and get someone else (laugher)”.</td>
<td>Conflicting merging of the self-narratives (Low level of self-acceptance – the externally focused self vs. high level of felt security in the referent point – the internally focused self)</td>
<td>Protecting the self from potential relationship dissolution</td>
<td>Self-protection</td>
<td>Adopting an externally focused perspective of constructing the self-in-relation</td>
<td>Cosmetics use</td>
<td>This is not me</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Katie: I want them to think I look nice [adorning the self], so if he ever says a</td>
<td>Ensuring relationship well-being</td>
<td>Precaution</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Cosmetics use</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>ensuring</td>
<td>well-being</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
bad word they could say, “oh, Katie is really nice”. I don’t know why and like I say to my boyfriend “oh, I just take my makeup off, does Michael have to come around?”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Emily: It’s quite nice to be able to see how you can enhance your features because I guess makeup is one of those ways completely non-invasive, everyone has access to it that you can like bring out the best looking version of yourself.</th>
<th>Complementary merging of the self-narratives (Low level of self-acceptance – the externally focused self vs. low level of felt security in the referent point – the externally focused self)</th>
<th>To Fit in, stand out, and/or manipulate</th>
<th>To enhance the self</th>
<th>Compromising (inward benefits)</th>
<th>Adopting an externally focused perspective of constructing the self-in-relation</th>
<th>Cosmetics use</th>
<th>This is me and accepting the natural state of self as me too</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Emily: Because you don’t like the way you look, you don’t feel comfortable with it, you try to hide it, hence the makeup. To me, it doesn’t feel natural to have to spend a lot of time staring at myself in the mirror to feel confident enough to go out. So when I’m doing it, I’m like inwardly cursing my face for…so just a lot of self-</td>
<td>To hide the self</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>This is not me (the natural state of self is me); or this is me (the natural state of self is not me)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emily:</td>
<td>I just generally think if I’m like leaving my flat, I’d be like crap I haven’t got any makeup on but I can’t be bothered I’m just going here but the moment I started speaking to someone, I generally forget that I haven’t got any makeup on.</td>
<td>Conflicting merging of the self-narratives (High level of self-acceptance – the internally focused self vs. low level of felt security – the externally focused self)</td>
<td>To save time and energy from conforming to the external expectations</td>
<td>Neglecting</td>
<td>Adopting an internally focused perspective of constructing the self-in-relation</td>
<td>Less or no cosmetics use</td>
<td>This is me</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emily:</td>
<td>I think to myself “well you’ve seen me looking my social best, if you still fancy me when I’m walking into the shop in the morning to buy my bread then by all means, come over and talk.</td>
<td>Filtering out those people who are not ‘sincere’ to the self</td>
<td>Filtering</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Linda:</td>
<td>You’re fed up at the end of it of having a big tummy, not making an effort, thinking what’s the point and then it comes back with a vengeance in a way because you think “oh, it’s over. You sort of wanted to make up for the lost time if you like.</td>
<td>To fit in, stand out, and/or manipulate ‘again’ after adhering to the internally focused self</td>
<td>Compensating</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Linda: God I just didn’t bother [without makeup] coz I seem to be withdrawn when I was pregnant.

Amy: The priority back home [Kenya] is to, basically take care of their kids, drive them to school, bring them back and just let themselves go. And I think it’s wrong in a way as well because I think it’s not fair once just because you have become a mother, you should forget you are still a woman.
6.1 The negotiation pathways

To provide readers with easy ways of comprehending the different negotiation pathways as experienced by my informants, I start by focusing on detailing the ways through which their self-narratives are merged in determining which personal goal to pursue (as the rest of the elements then follow accordingly):

(1) The complementary nature of the merged self-narratives
   (‘High in self-acceptance’ + ‘high in felt security in the referent point’)
   (*As identified in the top right corner in figure 15)

The self-narratives around high levels of self-acceptance and felt security in the referent point are merged in a rather complementary manner. Compelled
by this merging, my informants’ *personal goal* (or *goals*) for the self in a social relationship are *to feel liberated, create a deeper connection*, and/or *show care towards the interacting other* (e.g., Amy: “I want my kids to grow up with confidence that they are beautiful in the way they are”). Yet, in pursuing these goals, whereas these women are endowed with feelings of self-liberation, self-reassurance and/or improved self-esteem, they seem to simultaneous experience *a sense of loss* and/or *helplessness* (e.g., Katie: “I can’t help [I can’t wear makeup all the time since we now live together]” or “this is ridiculous”). For example, Linda expressed a *sense of relief* when her partner is perceived to accept the untransformed makeup-free self. However, in presenting the untransformed self, Linda appears to *compromise* on the ability to generate “*the buzz*” in the love relationship. Therefore, for Linda, the felt sense of relief is deeply intertwined with the mourning of the loss of “*the buzz*” in the relationship, characterising her existential problem of being.

As such, *the negotiation process of compromising (outward benefits)* is adopted to resolve the existential problem of being (at least on a surface level), in order to proceed with self-creation. The negotiation process underlines how my informants decide on adopting *the internally focused self* (i.e., *the revelation of ‘the untransformed self’*), as a way of achieving their personal goal (or goals). Yet, in adopting the internally focused self, they *compromise* on the outward benefits (e.g., being regarded as ‘successful’) that may be yielded from the alternative act of adhering to the externally focused self-narratives (i.e., *the presentation of ‘the transformed self’*). The internally focused self is strategically endorsed by *wearing less or no makeup*, allowing these women to feel ‘*authentic*’ about the self-in-relation by expressing “*this is me*” (e.g., Katie: “he loves me for who I am [so I don’t need to wear makeup to impress]”). In sum, this negotiation pathway repeatedly emerges when my informants experience no need of transforming the self in a social encounter within which they feel they are accepted the way they are, and they can be “*me*” in the relationship.
The conflictual nature of the merged self-narratives

(‘Low in self-acceptance’ + ‘high in felt security in the referent point’)

(*As identified in the bottom right corner in the figure 15)

The self-narratives around low level of self-acceptance and high level of felt security in the referent point are merged in a rather conflictual fashion to direct goal-pursuit behaviours. Two different negotiation processes are experienced to facilitate the goal-pursuit(s): (A) the negotiation process of self-protection; and (B) the negotiation process of precaution. These negotiation processes lead to the adoption of an externally focused perspective of building the self-in-relation.

A. The negotiation process of self-protection.

One of the goal-pursuits here is to protect the self from potential relationship dissolution. For example, Katie depicted the importance of preserving her attractiveness in a stable relationship so that “if he (my partner) is horrible to me, I can go and get someone else”. Note, the focus of Katie’s description here is not about Katie not trusting her partner, but how she can have ‘other (better) options’ to fulfil her existential need of belonging somewhere. However, in preserving her attractiveness, Katie loses a sense of self-liberation as she described, “that’s why I am bothered when his friends come around because I want them to think that I am attractive”.

Therefore, the negotiation process of self-protection is assumed to justify the perceived loss of personal freedom (at least on a surface level), with the aim of achieving the desired goal-pursuit. The desired goal-pursuit here is endorsed by adopting the externally focused self. Makeup is thereby utilised as a get-out strategy through which Katie is able to preserve her attractiveness, and continue fulfilling her existential need for belongingness (e.g., by having the ability to secure another partner) if she is to encounter a perceived
relationship breakdown (Baumeister and Leary 1995). The transformed self here, however, symbolises a rather inauthentic sense about the self-in-relation (i.e., “this is not me”), as Katie feels urged to transform the original state of the self in seeking to maintain her emotional well-being (e.g., not to be left on my own) (Kaplan 1986).

B. The negotiation process of precaution.

Another goal that arises as my informants negotiate a conflictual merging between the self-narratives here is to ensure the well-being of an existing relationship. For instance, Katie illustrated the criticality of preserving her attractiveness, with the aim of being cautious about the possibility that “if he (my partner) ever says a bad word they (his close others) could say, “oh, Katie is really nice”” instead. Yet, the fulfilment of this particular personal goal is again tainted with a sense of loss of self-liberation (e.g., Katie: “oh, I just take my makeup off, does Michael have to come around?”) (cf., Jagger 2001). Likewise, another informant (Lisa, aged 27, communications manager) vividly described, “literally there is no reflection on him (my partner) because he is really not superficial…but my own paranoia means I was not willing to take that risk [of revealing the untransformed, makeup-free self].”

Hence, in a similar fashion to the negotiation process of self-protection, the negotiation process of precaution is assumed to justify perceived loss of personal freedom (at least on a surface level), in seeking to achieve the desired goal-pursuit. The desired goal-pursuit is thus also advocated by adopting of the externally focused self. Consequently, makeup is applied strategically as a defensive ring through which my informants feel more assured that their partner will not leave them due to their perceived physical flaws. Note here, it is the self-narratives around low level of self-acceptance that are driving these informants into transforming the self here, as they clearly acknowledge that the significant other accepts the way they are (e.g., Katie: “we live together, he
(my partner) obviously loves me for the way I am”). Yet, as revealed previously, in presenting the transformed self, these women concurrently experience an underlying sense of annoyance about failing to validate the liberated self that should have surfaced in the presence of a (rather) stable social relationship. This sense of annoyance underlines a rather inauthentic sense about the self-in-relation (i.e., “this is not me”).

(3) The complementary nature of the merged self-narratives

(‘Low in self-acceptance’ + ‘low in felt security in the referent point’)

(*As identified in the bottom left corner in the figure 15)

The self-narratives around low levels of self-acceptance and felt security in the referent point are merged in a rather complementary fashion to direct goal-pursuit behaviours. Two different negotiation processes are experienced to facilitate the goal-pursuit(s): (A) the negotiation process of compromising (inward benefits); and (B) the negotiation process of compensating. These negotiation processes lead to the adoption of an externally focused perspective of building the self-in-relation.

A. The negotiation process of compromising (inward benefits).

What surfaces from the self-narratives that merged here is the personal goal of manipulating people’s perceptions of the self (e.g., to fit in, stand out and/or change self-impressions). For example, Emily seeks to manipulate others’ perceptions of the self, in order to fit into the crowd, appeal to others and/or sustain a sense of the superior self. Emily’s account is commonly shared among my informants. Yet, depending on the underlying intention of the goal-pursuit(s) (i.e., enhancing or hiding the self to manipulate others), my informants experience different dilemmas, and varying degrees of authenticity about the resultant self in a social context. I will come back to discuss this further at the end of this section.
The negotiation process of compromising (inward benefits) here is in direct contrast to the negotiation process of compromising (outward benefits) as characterised previously in theme one. In plain words, the contents of what is being compromised differ greatly. Whereas the goal-pursuit(s) in theme one is achieved by adopting an internally focused self, an externally focused self is instead assumed here to accomplish personal goal(s). That is, unlike theme one that compromises benefits associated with presenting the makeup transformed self in fulfilling the personal goal(s), benefits that may emerge from presenting the untransformed makeup-free self (e.g., sense of autonomy) are compromised here instead to generate perceived more existentially fulfilling experiences (e.g., be seen as successful).

Indeed, it has been observed that, when my informants’ underlying intention of transforming the self is for self-enhancement (as a means of achieving goal pursuits), feelings of being ‘true’ to the self (i.e., ‘this is me’; the authentic self-in-relation), and/or self-love are often experienced (see Emily’s account about a “better version of me”). These positive self-feelings, however, are mixed with a lingering sense of loss of control, as Emily later comments, “if I’m gonna go out and meet someone it’s expected I’d make an effort and that includes my makeup and all of that has a cost” (cf., Jagger 2001). In contrast, when these women’s underlying intention is for self-concealment, they often experience feelings of not being myself (i.e., ‘this is not me’; the inauthentic self-in-relation) and/or self-loathing. For example, Lisa expressed “the real me” is rather insecure and timid, but makeup enabled her to pretend to be whoever she sought to be in a social context (e.g., ‘a respectful manager’ or ‘a forward flirtatious woman’). That said, Lisa wished one day she could develop more tolerance within her self, and no longer use makeup to hide but enhance her self. Yet again, these negative self-feelings are compensated by a sense of victory where she later described, “because he (my partner) thinks this is how I look so it almost felt like a victory”.

Whilst, it should also be noted that some women expressed ‘being me’ even when their underlying intention is to hide the perceived somehow flawed self
within makeup to enhance aspects of the self-in-relation (e.g., Emily: keeping a strong personality for social interaction). For example, Joyce (age 20, receptionist) described, “I just feel like I’m myself when I've got it [Rimmel fake tan] on, which is a really sad thing to say. I feel really ugly when I’m not wearing it”. It seems that in accepting the makeup transformed self, these women tend to deny the natural, untransformed self and declare ‘this is not me’. This is different from when their underlying intension is to enhance the self through cosmetics where they accept both the transformed and untransformed self as ‘being me’.

B. The negotiation process of compensating.

Like the negotiation process of compromising (inward benefits) described above, the personal goal(s) here is also to manipulate people’s perceptions of the self in order to fit in, stand out or change self-impressions. However, the underlying intention here gains another layer of complexity. That is, here, the personal goal of manipulating others’ perceptions of the self only surfaces in situations where my informants just convert from assuming the internally focused self to the externally focused self. For example, Linda described how she began adorning the self ‘again’ at the end of her pregnancy to “make up for the lost time [when she has not been adorning the self]...to prove that I’m a mum but I can still look good”. Amy illustrated her extra efforts in taking her skincare routine up a level to compensate for the fact that she has missed it for a day and put her ability to meet external expectations of youth and beauty at risk. Yet, it should be noted that, whilst the re-adoption of the externally focused self clearly restricts my informants’ sense of personal freedom, those who have readopted this focus to reconstruct the self-in-relation have all revealed a somehow more positive state of self as a result (e.g., Nancy: “with makeup on, I feel more like I am able to face the world again”), and/or shown a sense of appreciation towards the ability to adorn the self again (e.g., Linda: “you appreciate it (adorning the self) a bit more, what much it can do for you
The negotiation process of compensating is thus assumed to resolve the issue of having to let go of some form of personal freedom, enabling these women to proceed unproblematically with (re)acquiring some past desired aspects of the self-in-relation (that are in line with external expectations). As such, cosmetics are applied to get back ‘some desired aspects’ of the self-in-relation. This experience is largely experienced by my informants as ‘being me again’.

(4) The conflictual nature of the merged self-narratives

(‘High in self-acceptance’ + ‘low in felt security in the referent point’)

(*As identified in the top left corner in the figure 15)

The self-narratives around high level of self-acceptance and low level of felt security in the referent point are merged in a rather conflictual fashion to direct goal-pursuit behaviours. Four different negotiation processes are experienced to facilitate the goal-pursuit(s): (A) the negotiation process of neglecting; (B) the negotiation process of filtering; (C) the negotiation process of retreating; and (D) the negotiation process of campaigning. In contrast to theme two, these negotiation processes lead to the adoption of an internally focused perspective of building the self-in-relation, namely, adopting a self-presentation and/or belief that is not in line with the external expectations in a given culture.

A. The negotiation process of neglecting.

One of the goals driven by the conflictual merging of the self-narratives here is to save time and energy from conforming to external expectations (that require some form of self-transformation). For example, Emily described how she just “can’t be bothered”, and through the process of neglecting, she “generally forget the fact that I haven’t got any on”. That is, the negotiation
**process of neglecting** enables my informants to suppress the anxiety of not meeting the perceived social norms (e.g., standard of beauty), so that they can forgo felt uneasiness and/or discomfort associated with the presentation of the **makeup-free, untransformed self**. In doing so, these women verify a sense of **self-autonomy**, as Emily later comments, “luckily enough, I’m not that sort of person that would feel like horrendously insecure in terms of not wearing makeup”. This sense of **self-autonomy** generated through the adoption of the **internally focused self-narratives** bestows these women with an aura of **authenticity** about their being-in-the-world.

**B. The negotiation process of filtering.**

The second goal I captured through my informants’ experiences here is to **decipher if the socialising other is sincere to the perceived ‘real’ self**. For example, Emily described her goal of seeking out the potential partner who ‘loves her for her’, including the undisguised self. To achieve this goal, the **negotiation process of filtering** is assumed to rationalise the downside risk associated with adopting the **internally focused perspective of constructing the self-in-relation** (e.g., the **makeup-free** self) that is perceived to undermine her capability of appealing to the opposite sex. The presentation of the **untransformed self** here underlines these women’s felt **authenticity** about the self-in-relation, and their efforts in showing ‘**this is me**’.

**C. The negotiation process of retreating.**

The third goal that is generated through the conflictual merging of the self-narratives here is concerned with **preventing other people from entering the unique ‘self’ space**. For instance, in the case of Linda, **withdrawal symptoms** were experienced at the time of pregnancy. **The negotiation process of**
retreating is thus assumed to enable Linda to retreat to a space within which merely the self and her unborn child exist, and where she could be exempted from external expectations. Indeed, the negotiation process enables Linda to justify the loss of her ability to appeal to others as a result of the retreat. The internally focused self-narratives are hence adopted to allow the retreat from the outside world to take place, and create a perceived safe, sheltered environment for the self. As such, Linda is able to remain untransformed without potential social sanctions (e.g., being deemed as unworthy of connection). Less or no cosmetics are thereby strategically utilised here to promote the internally focused self. The untransformed makeup-free self is experienced as the authentic self (i.e., ‘this is me’) that is freed from the perceived external expectations.

D. The negotiation process of campaigning.

The final goal that is brought out by the conflictual merging of the self-narratives here is in regards to showing others ‘who I am’ in a traditional cultural frame. By a traditional cultural frame I mean where the external expectations upon women are to take care of the household, and/or not to spend time pursuing personal satisfaction (e.g., adorning the self), as experienced by some of my informants. For example, Amy described her desire to break through the traditionally defined social values in Kenya. Hence, the negotiation process of campaigning is used to avoid the discomfort of breaking perceived cultural rules, and campaigning about the ‘socially rather unaccepted self’ that seeks for ‘personal freedom’. The internally focused perspective of constructing the self-in-relation is thus assumed, and cosmetics are applied to feel ‘true’ to the self (i.e., ‘this is me’; ‘the authentic self-in-relation’). Yet, it should be noted that as Amy appears to be caught in between two cultures, in presenting the makeup self, she simultaneously feels constrained by the contemporary values that emphasise the constant need of “being an individual”.

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6.2 Conclusion

In the previous chapter five, four individual accounts were presented at the ideographic level to provide a conceptual background as a whole for the cross case analysis demonstrated in this chapter (e.g., Fournier 1998; Holt and Thompson 2004; Thompson et al. 1990). A series of mixed complementary and conflictual negotiation pathways emerged from the analysis, shedding light on the debates regarding whether the nature of the negotiation process of the self-in-relation can be best described as a rather complementary (cf., Coulter et al. 2003; Thompson and Hirschman 1995) or conflictual process (cf., Erickson 1995; Heidegger 2010); and issues around our sense of authenticity in a social relationship (e.g., this is me vs. this is not me). The issues around our authentic self-in-relation I argue yield important implications for the ways through which one’s optimal subjective well-being is sought in a variety of different social contexts. I find that my informants’ self-narratives around the level of self-acceptance and those around the level of felt security in the referent point work together to negotiate and determine which ‘face’ to present to the outside world, and the ensuing sense of felt authenticity about the self-in-relation. These ongoing self-narratives are of temporal characteristics corresponding to change in the perceived self-other relationships, and across a variety of social contexts. Personal goal(s) and the inherent existential dilemmas are born out of the merging of these self-narratives. Whereas each negotiation process allows my informants to achieve some sort of inner balance by ‘resolving’ the existential dilemmas, it appears that they remain largely within the self and embodied in each resultant self-presentation.

Building on the present findings that offer an overview of the different negotiation pathways one can take in creating a self, the next chapter seven focuses on further detailing the phenomenon of the emergence of self-management from negotiation. Indeed, the element of self-management emerged from the present findings as an important key to understanding the negotiation process of the self-in-relation. As such, chapter seven further elucidates the elements of consumption goals (that are born out of the merging of the self-narratives) and strategies (that are used to endorse
the chosen self-presentation to achieve the goal) which were originally noted in the emergent framework demonstrated in chapter four (see figure 6). Specifically, I describe how consumption fits into the picture in terms of managing or facilitating a self within a social setting, as experienced by my informants.
Chapter 7: The emergence of self-management from negotiation

Following on from chapters five and six that examine the phenomenon of the negotiation process of the self-in-relation, chapter seven focuses on further detailing how consumption fits into managing a self within a social setting.

7.1 The principle emergent themes: The consumption goals and strategies

Figure 16: The emergence of self-management from negotiation
Figure 16 above shows four key consumption goals and the related strategies that are directed at constructing the desired self-in-relation as experienced by my informants. By desired self-in-relation I mean the desired joint experiences with others, and/or the world as a whole. Each of the four consumption goals is found through my informants’ experiences to be facilitated and achieved by a divergent set of strategies: (1) the goal of self-aversion: to avoid perceived undesirable aspects of the self-in-relation by compensating and/or rejecting a specific self-dimension (see section 6.1.1); (2) the goal of self-advocacy to maintain desirable aspects of the self-in-relation by cheering up the self and/or empowering a specific self-dimension (see section 6.1.2); (3) the goal of intimacy: to create intimacy between parties by caring for others and/or bonding with others (see section 6.1.3); and (4) the goal of survival: to survive from an otherwise difficult circumstances by fitting in with others and/or misleading others (see section 6.1.4).

What emerges through my informants’ experiences is that whereas for the consumption goals of self-aversion and self-advocacy, the target audience largely remains the self (e.g., confidence builder; what we could term an internal perspective on managing the self-in-relation), for survival and intimacy, the target audience appears to be the specific other(s) (e.g., prove one is worthy; what we could term an external perspective on managing the self-in-relation). Moreover, as illustrated in the previous chapter five, depending on the ways through which the self-narratives are merged, different personal goals are sought for in the process of negotiating the self-in-relation. As such, to enable readers from dissimilar theoretical perspectives to obtain an overview of the emergent findings, I further demonstrate how the nature of my informants’ goal-pursuits in the consumption context is largely influenced by how the self-narratives are merged. It appears that the consumption goals of survival and self-aversion arise from a rather conflictual merging of the self-narratives (e.g., The perceived external expectations are not in line with what I want and/or what I represent), underlining the experiences of self-transformation (Erickson 1995; Heidegger 2010; Sartre 2001) In contrast, the consumption goals of intimacy and self-advocacy are born out of a rather complementary merging of the self-narratives (e.g., The perceived external expectations are in line with what I want and/or what I
represent), symbolising the experiences of *self-maintenance* (Coulter et al. 2003; Thompson and Hirschman 1995).

Overall, the consumption goals and strategies identified through my informants’ experiences work together to elicit a desired social experience from an internal or external perspective of managing the self-in-relation. In doing so, my informants advocate their desired self-in-relation, whilst preventing the undesired. I will now turn to detail each consumption goal and the related strategies in the following sections.

7.1.1 Self-aversion

Figure 17: The consumption goal of self-aversion
The consumption goal of **self-aversion** is born out of a conflictual merging of the self-narratives (cf., Erickson 1995; Heidegger 2010; Sartre 2001), and endorsed by two key strategies that cultivate a desired social experience from an internal perspective of managing the self-in-relation (see figure 17 above): **the strategy of compensating the self** (see section 6.1.1.1), and **the strategy of rejecting the self** (see section 6.1.1.2).

### 7.1.1.1 The strategy of compensating the self

Ruth: There were times when I just needed that confidence [by wearing makeup]. I’m not naturally gifted in exams; I think I was a slow learner. I think it’s the people around you as well were more clever so that used to get me down where I used to work double as hard to try and get a decent percentage in my schoolwork. (Age 29, graphic designer)

Clearly, the perceived academic inadequacy has thrown Ruth into a rather negative sense of the self-being-in-the-world. Ruth’s makeup use here underscores her attempts to navigate herself away from the negativity, to protect an overall positive sense of self-worthiness. In plain words, the makeup transformed self is utilised to boost Ruth’s (sexual) confidence, which in turn compensates for her sense of unworthiness that is a result of the perceived academic inadequacy.

Likewise, when prompted to elaborate on feelings of looking good in makeup, Jordan describes how makeup is consumed to compensate for the fact that she was brought up without a mother, and the fact that she had been treated as a “tomboy” up until approximately the age of fifteen.
Jordan: Don’t forget I didn’t have a mum, so I was brought up with a man influence, my dad, and we could never watch girly things on the telly…He used to have my hair cut, not like a bowl was put on it, so I could never have my hair long. When I left home I grew my hair down there. I had my hair that long because he’d always said to me I couldn’t have long hair because your hair is too thick…When I left home, the hair come down here, the makeup was on, everything…I wasn’t a feminine looking person up to when I started, probably 15. Up to then I was always a tomboy, so I never looked a girly girl…I was always the man [when I used to do stage stuff], never the girl, so this way of putting makeup on is making you look girly as well, isn’t it? (Age 57, cashier for supermarket)

Indeed, in Jordan’s entire interview dialogue, she has repeatedly emphasised the criticality of wearing makeup when stepping out of the house, and for her daughter to stay feminine. This experience is in stark contrast to that of her childhood within which self-adornment practices were largely restricted, and the self was perceived to be lacking femininity. As such, consuming makeup seems to be Jordan’s way of compensating for the undesired self-in-relation experienced during her teens (e.g., being treated as a “tomboy”, unattractive to boys, and having an authoritarian dad), because it promotes the now transformed self that embodies the desired self-in-relation (e.g., an attractive woman, bonding with her daughters).

7.1.1.2 The strategy of rejecting the self

Joyce: I just feel like I’m myself when I’ve got it [Rimmel fake tan] on, which is a really sad thing to say. I feel really ugly when I’m not wearing it, and I don’t know why that is, I feel like I look fat, my arms look fat. (Age 20, receptionist)
Alice: I hate it; absolutely hate it [being pale: her natural colour]. I feel down. I don’t feel like I want to do anything. I just feel disgusting. I think it’s because I love the way I look when I’m tanned so much that I just don’t enjoy looking pale anymore and that’s why I’ll go to any lengths to keep my colour, for example, the tanning injections. (Age 22, assistant administrator)

Valeria: I’m “me” as long as I’ve got makeup on. (Age 31, accountant)

Joyce, Alice and Valeria’s experiences are not uncommon among the many women I interviewed. There is a strong focus on rejecting the unadorned self through cosmetics use. The unadorned self is apparently closely linked to experiences of self-disgust, self-loathing and/or shame. The rejection of the unadorned self is seemingly a defence mechanism assumed for ego-protection. That is, these women perceive the unadorned self as socially undesirable and/or disapproved of, as the Western cultural tradition emphasises the importance of physical attractiveness in social perception and interpersonal attraction (Dion, Berscheid, and Walster 1972; Landy and Sigall 1974; Lemay Jr, Clark, and Greenberg 2010). As such, the unadorned self emerges as a source of shame focusing on the defective self, which generates a self-defeating loop of negative affect. As these women endeavour to avoid shame and seek approval in a bid to fit into external expectations (e.g., standard of beauty), they seem to ultimately become addicted to cosmetics use, that is, the makeup helps transform their idealised images of the self. As evinced by Joyce, Alice and Valeria’s descriptions, they appear to become so addicted to the extent that they no longer acknowledge their unadorned self. The self in an unadorned state becomes something they dislike, something they deny of who they are, something they perceive as the inauthentic self.

The unadorned self apparently endows these women with feelings of inferiority, which often leads to interpersonal difficulties, as Alice later comments, “I just kept my head down and didn’t speak to many people and wasn’t very talkative. It just puts me in a mood [when I’m without makeup in front of others].” Overall, cosmetics here are utilised as an instrument to actively reject the undesired self-being-in-the-world.
The consumption strategy of rejecting the self is further evidenced in other specific contexts, which highlights the prevalence of this strategy adopted by my informants for a wide range of different existential purposes. In sum, for these women, the everyday self-adornment practices are tirelessly performed for the purpose of rejecting the self to achieve perceived more existential fulfilling experiences.

7.1.1.2.1 Rejecting the self that does not look the same as the dominant others.

Lisa: I’ve been brought up in a country where I don’t look like the majority of people. So I always feel like a bit of outside the world. For example, I often wear extensions and I recently took them out and he [my boyfriend] thinks it suits me much better having my natural curly hair but now I’m so used to conforming and having straight hair. It almost becomes so much a part of me. My makeup is now almost part of me that even though I know he likes me like that, I now don’t feel comfortable without it all on. (Age 27, communications manager)

For Lisa who is mixed-raced, self-adornment practices have instrumental values in allowing her to reject aspects of the self that are “black” (e.g., natural curly hair), and transforming the self into what is desired by the dominant “white” culture (e.g. straight hair). This experience is commonly shared among other Afro-Caribbean and mixed-race informants. The self-transformation is aimed at obtaining social rewards that are perceived to come with “being white”, as Lisa later vividly describes her admiration for ‘the popular girls’ at school, “the majority of people in the cool crowd or the popular crowd were white girls”. Whilst, it should be noted that, in rejecting self-aspects that are “black” to gain a sense of self-worth, Lisa simultaneously experiences an increasing sense of constraint on her being-in-the-world (e.g., Lisa: “it’s an awful thing to think I’m that reliant on makeup”). Yet, apparently, Lisa’s
robust longing for fitting into the image of ‘the popular girls’ continues to drive her self-transformation/rejections endeavours.

7.1.1.2.2 Rejecting the aging self.

Janet: I think it also comes with how people perceive you as well. I think if they look at me without makeup, they think, ‘Oh gosh, doesn’t she look different without makeup?’ She looks naked, you know without the makeup, mascara, so it’s how something on my face makes me feel normal and it makes you feel brighter and you think, “Oh yes, they’re looking at me and they think she hasn’t changed, she looks just as young as she used to look years ago.” (Age 62, retired)

Jordan: So if I go out, say I’m meeting somebody, I put my makeup on and I think, “Right, she’s going to look at me, I’m going to look good.” If I don’t wear that and I’m meeting somebody and they look at me and think, “Oh God she looks a bit of a misery today.” I don’t want them to think that I’m like a 60-year-old woman. (Age 57, cashier for supermarket)

Whereas aging affords status to the elderly in countries such as China and Japan, in the United States and many other Western nations, they often suffer from negative labelling and stereotyping that views the aged as the vulnerable, powerless, and sick old person who engages in nonsocial behaviours (Butler 1970; Rodin and Langer 1980). Janet and Jordan’s descriptions here characterise how they use makeup to reject the aging self, in order to feel “normal” and prevent the self from falling into the undesired self-in-relation (e.g., being treated as an old person, the perceived ‘abnormal’ self in relation to others).
The outward self-transformation is actively sought for as my informants combat a diminished sense of self-control (e.g., appearance) that compels them to pursue others’ confirmation and beliefs in the not yet aging self (e.g., “she looks just as young as she used to look years ago”). Although these confirmation and beliefs may be based on erroneous perceptions, they create the illusion of a desired reality or set the standards for these women to follow religiously. Makeup is thereby persistently consumed in seeking to reject the aging self.

7.1.1.2 Rejecting the chaotic, hopeless self.

Jordan was prompted to further elaborate on “the 10 minutes” she spent on looking after her self at the time when she was taking care of her young children:

Janet: I think it’s just showing that it’s still you, although you’ve got children, you’ve got to be so many different people, you’ve got to be different personalities, it’s nice to come back and look in the mirror and think, “Okay, you don’t look too bad; I know you’ve got all this behind you,” but you can focus on your face and think, “Yes, I’m still me even though I’m five other, different people,” and focusing on yourself like that just brings you a bit more sanity, if you want to put it like that.

Interviewer: What do you mean by sanity?

Janet: Sanity, when you’ve got young children, is a bit of “me time”. Because you’re running ragged, you’re running after everybody else, you forget about who you are at times and the next thing you’re looking in the mirror and you’re thinking, “Oh my gosh, who is this wild woman?” You need 10 minutes just to focus and by focusing means getting out your makeup and just concentrating on what you’re doing with your face. I think it’s just that calming time, just to register that, “yes, you’re doing okay, you’re doing alright, it’s hectic all around you, but you’re still okay”. Makeup, powder,
In this passage, the “10 minutes” experience of pampering the self with makeup appears critical in rejecting the perceived hectic self (e.g., the constant juggling between the various role responsibilities), endowing Janet with a sense of “sanity”. In other words, by rejecting the hectic self, Janet experiences the restoration of her perceived authentic (or core) self (e.g., an attractive woman). Indeed, the self-restoration further provides Janet with an increased sense of self-efficacy in terms of her capability to fulfil different role responsibilities in life and live up to the external expectations (e.g., the supermom cultural icon). It seems that for Janet, having no makeup on during the rough periods in life underpins her inability to reject aspects of the undesired self-being-in-the-world. This inability to reject has profound emotional ramifications, as Joanna (age 26, researcher) comments on her experience post-breakup, “I felt horrendous if I have no makeup on then because I don’t feel very good about myself inside and then if I wore with no makeup as well. It’s like double whammy!”

7.1.1.2.3 Rejecting the past self.

Jordan: I had eczema as a child. Maybe that is a camouflage on my makeup when I had eczema. I remember having it and having to wear these gloves and stuff. That was before I started using the makeup, so maybe going down that path and then thinking I look a lot better with the makeup on. (Age 57, Cashier for Tesco)

Makeup here is utilised as a means of rejecting Jordan’s perceived deficient self in the past that struggled with eczema. Clearly, Jordan’s painful childhood memories linger, and seem to generate her constant craving for the makeup transformed flawless self.
Yet, Joanna’s account below demonstrates the *boundary effect* of cosmetics use in rejecting undesired aspects of the self-in-relation, when the reality and the desired state of the self are in great conflict.

7.1.1.2.4 *The boundary condition of rejecting aspects of the self-in-relation.*

Joanna was prompted to elaborate further on the last a few months she spent with her late father:

Joanna: So I’ve been at the hospital that day and it was a really horrible day because it’s the first time my dad refused to eat since he got cancer and that’s the only thing I could help him with, I couldn’t help…and then I was meant to be going out with my friend for a night out and I’ve put on my makeup and I’ve done my hair and then I just looked into the mirror, I just got really upset about what has gone on, I cried, and obviously ruined my makeup then I felt crap and I didn’t wanna go out so I just washed it all off but yeah sometimes I suppose you know your makeup can’t do everything, you can’t cover up everything that’s going on in your life.

Interviewer: How did you feel when you were putting on makeup?

Joanna: It felt a bit wrong I think umm when you’re going through something like that. In the first place, I tried to put on makeup to cheer myself up, to mask what’s going on and going out, trying to act as if things were normal. Normally I go out with friends and go out and put makeup on to enjoy myself. I was trying to go through like process like I normally would but then there must have been a moment of reality set out in my mind about what is actually going on at that moment then I couldn’t go through with it and I just stayed at home. (Age 26, researcher)
In this portion of dialogue, makeup was explicitly utilised for *a temporal escape* from the harsh reality that her late father had been in a critical condition in hospital. There is a strong focus on *rejecting* an aura of negativity around the self-father relationship, and restoring a sense of *normality* in life, at this very turbulent time. Indeed, makeup was utilised to “cover up” major traumas in life (e.g. father’s illness), which, according to Joanna’s past experience, would always enable her to transform the perceived negative state of the self-being-in-the-world. Nonetheless, her makeup transformed self here clearly failed to reject the negative state, owing to the sharp contrast between the *reality* and the *desired state of the self* that could not be amended by “a bit of makeup” or “going out”.

Overall, although Joanna endeavoured to utilise cosmetics as a strategic tool to *reject* the undesired reality (e.g., “I tried to put on makeup to cheer myself up, to mask what’s going on and going out”), she could not “go through” with the transformation to embrace an *altered reality* as she always did; as she later comments, “I just felt a bit wrong putting on makeup and going out and enjoying yourself, your dad is dying in the hospital, it felt all a bit wrong and I just got upset about myself.”

### 7.1.2 Self-advocacy

The consumption goal of *self-advocacy* is born out of a complementary merging of the self-narratives (cf., Coulter et al. 2003; Thompson and Hirschman 1995), and promoted by two key strategies that cultivate a desired social experience from an *internal perspective of managing the self-in-relation* (see figure 18 below): the *strategy of cheering up the self* (see section 6.1.2.1), and the *strategy of empowering the self* (see section 6.1.2.2). Before I proceed further, however, it is important to note that whereas the key purpose of the consumption strategies associated with *self-aversion* is to *hide* aspects of the self-in-relation, for *self-advocacy*, it is to *enhance* aspects of the self-in-relation.
7.1.2.1 The strategy of cheering up the self

Sarah: I think if I went out [without makeup] I wouldn’t be as chatty to people I don’t think. I’d rather stay in my own little space… I feel personally happier when I’ve got makeup on and I can engage with people better. (Age 50, cleaner)

Janet: I’ve got no makeup on me and I feel very, shall we say, relaxed and really not bothered to do anything. If I have a bit of makeup on me and I dress a little bit better, not as casual, I feel as though I’m ready for anything, to tackle anything. You just feel more dressed, but if you don’t wear makeup and you’re casual, you feel as though, for me, you let things drift. (Age 62, retired)
In Sarah and Janet’s descriptions, there is a seemingly clear distinction in their affective experiences between the adorned self versus the unadorned self. Makeup here is utilised as a means of inducing positive affect, enabling them to be pro-social, and cope with life challenges. That is, the positive affect that is brought out by the adorned self enables these women to facilitate social connectedness, goal-directed behaviours, and positive interaction with the outside world, ultimately leading to potential successful life outcomes (e.g. “I’m ready for anything”). Indeed, for these women, positive affect begets success, and success makes them happy, which further strengthens the desired self-world relationship.

7.1.2.2 The strategy of empowering the self

Interviewer: What do you mean by coping defence [when you talked about makeup being your coping defence]?

Isobel: Maybe it was just a way of, like, you know, because, I was a lot tougher with makeup, I acted a certain way, it did make me feel more ready, like, I was, kind of, more stronger, in a way, I had empowerment.

Interviewer: How did you feel about this?

Isobel: I think, it helped me cope [with being black at school], it helped me keep my personality, I think, you know, if I wasn’t as strong, then, when I was growing up, I probably wouldn’t have got through my teens, it would have been really difficult, for me, to get through my teens. (Age 27, social worker)

Isobel’s skin colour that differs from the majority in the school context seems to endow her with a sense of inferiority, pose a major threat to her sense of well-being,
and undermine her ability of showing the perceived ‘authentic’ self that is tough and strong. Indeed, for Isobel, cosmetics were what allowed her to cope with being different at school, maintain her perceived inherent personal characteristics (e.g., strong and tough), and interact with others as such. Isobel is thereby able to cultivate her desired self-in-relation in the school context (e.g., not be teased and/or bullied).

7.1.3 Intimacy

Figure 19: The consumption goal of intimacy

The consumption goal of creating intimacy between parties is born out of a complementary merging of the self-narratives (cf., Coulter et al. 2003; Thompson and Hirschman 1995), and promoted by two key strategies that cultivate a desired social experience from an external perspective of managing the self-in-relation (see figure 19 above): the strategy of caring for others (see section 6.1.3.1), and the strategy of bonding with others (see section 6.1.3.2).
7.1.3.1 The strategy of caring for others

Joanna: Mark, my partner, he doesn’t want me to see me like that either [big eyelashes, big hair, loads of brushes, loads of red lipsticks, really like slutty looking]. Because I think he would think like why she is wearing that much makeup because she has got me, does she want to attract other people? (Age 26, researcher)

When asked about change in her makeup patterns, Joanna illustrated how her makeup use has been toned down to care for her partner’s feelings, and reassure him that she is loyal to the relationship. As such, she is able to foster the desired intimacy and trust between them. In contrast to Joanna’s experience here, Nancy (age 55, personal assistant) consumes more makeup instead as a means of caring for her partner in the public arena, as she comments, “I would want to look attractive for him, to other people; to show that he is with an attractive woman”. Put simply, in consuming more makeup, Nancy attempts to not only cultivate the desired self in relation to her partner, but also enable her partner to attain a more desired state of self in relation to others (e.g., I am with an attractive woman).

Joanna and Nancy’s contrasting ways of caring for their loved ones highlight the diversity of human experience in managing the self-being-in-the-world. Indeed, whereas Joanna and Nancy differ in their approach of showing that they care, they appear to both anticipate somehow enhanced appreciation from their partner as a result. The anticipated increase in appreciation in turn further reinforces their chosen approach of caring for the loved ones.
The consumption strategy of caring for others has also been noted in a professional context:

Sandra: I used to do some mentoring and if I am mentoring someone who is unemployed, I will make a point of wearing very little makeup [and more casual clothes], because I do understand that given this social and the money condition it might not be a priority in their life [looking good] and therefore I don’t want them to feel threatened in anyway and I want somehow to mirror for them to feel we’re at the same level to a point. (Age 30, auditor)

Clearly, Sandra tones down her self-adornment practices to show her care towards those whom she perceived to be vulnerable. In doing so, she is able to communicate with them at “the same level”, which in turn nurtures a certain degree of intimacy that enables her to be a mentor in a more effective and humane fashion.

7.1.3.2 The strategy of bonding with others

Jordan: It brings you closer to people, doesn’t it? It’s that bonding session you have with your siblings [being pampered by her sister], which helps you as a person to develop. (Age 57, cashier for supermarket)

For Jordan, cosmetics are what bring people closer. The makeup sessions attain deeper personal meanings by helping Jordan as a person to develop in domains like family values, people skills and a sense of who I am/am not.
In contrast to Jordan’s experience that highlights cosmetics use as a bonding mechanism, in the following passage, Betty describes her experience of bonding with others through the act of makeup removal:

Betty: I know a few girls there’re absolutely no chance to let somebody see them without makeup on. The few of them, I’ve never seen them without makeup on. I’ve known them for years. It would be nice if they were comfortable to show themselves without makeup, because it's like without a mask and it's like you getting to know them more I guess. It's hard to describe it, but it's like I guess they kind of trust you if they can do that [show themselves without makeup in front of her] and they can't do that with everybody else. (Age 27, admission officer and event assistant)

For Betty, self-disclosure is the defining element of intimacy in a social relationship. Betty’s account, commonly shared among the informants, reveals that the willingness to reveal the untransformed self shows a profound sense of trust in the socialising other(s) (that the self is unconditionally accepted). It is this trust that liberates the self, and nurtures growing intimacy between parties. Like Jordan’s cosmetics use, makeup removal here is also experienced as a bonding mechanism, because it evidently facilitates feelings of the authentic self-in-relation, mutual trust (e.g., I trust that you will not judge my undisguised self, and you appreciate that I trust you as such) and/or an increasing sense of existential meaningfulness. For example, Ruth (age 29, graphic designer) comments, “I use a lot less makeup [being in a relationship] because he [my partner] gave me that confidence and assurance that I didn't need as much, so I was pretty much without it”.
7.1.4 Survival

The consumption goal of survival is born out of a conflictual merging of the self-narratives (cf., Erickson 1995; Heidegger 2010; Sartre 2001), and promoted by two key strategies that cultivate a desired social experience from an external perspective of managing the self-in-relation (see figure 20 above): the strategy of fitting in with others (see section 6.1.4.1), and the strategy of misleading others (see section 6.1.4.2). Before I proceed further, however, it is important to note that whereas the key purpose of the consumption strategies for creating intimacy is to have a deeper connection with others, for survival, it is to defend the self from potential existential threats (e.g., ridicule, relationship breakdown).
7.1.4.1 The strategy of fitting in with others

Jennifer: Started [wanting to change certain aspects of myself] at primary school, [I] got moved to another half the year to a group of girls that kind of new and then ended up probably four years there would be instances of bullying; because I had an older brother who had red hair, ginger, he couldn’t defend me because he was getting bullied even more severe than what I was kind of getting bullied and I would defend him, but then I was in the popular group (I wore makeup as a mask to fit into this group), they would be against me and call in my brother to me and then say you’re all [a short pause], you know, just like what kids do. (Age 29, school art teacher)

Jennifer’s makeup use here appears to be a way of transforming her social status into being part of “the popular group”, in seeking to avoid instances of bullying in the school context. Besides, the personal meanings inherent in her makeup use attain a deeper level of complexity, as Jennifer utilises the makeup transformed self not only for self-protection, but also for other-protection (e.g., protecting her older sibling who is teased and taunted for having “red hair”). The self-transformation reveals Jennifer’s enduring attempts at altering the undesired social dynamics (e.g., ridicule) for both self and her older sibling, in a bid to ‘survive’ at the time.

In the next portion of dialogue, Jordan depicts how makeup was consumed to enable her to fit into the perceived image of adulthood.

Jordan: Because I was young to get a job, I needed to look older [when she was a teenager]. My way of looking older was to put the makeup on so I can also get into the clubs and the pubs. (Age 57, Cashier for Tesco)
Like Jordan, many of my informants expressed how makeup was utilised to their advantage to fit into ‘the adult world’ at the time of their teenage years (e.g., Jordan: “if I wore makeup, I was one of them”). Indeed, makeup in this case is utilised as a means of fitting into a particular social group to prevent the self from being exposed during wrongdoing (e.g., job hunting and/or nightclubbing when not allowed to); and cultivate the desired self-in-relation (e.g., being treated in the same way as those who are older than me).

7.1.4.2 The strategy of misleading others

Sandra’s account below describes how her makeup use is varied to ‘mislead’ others about the self, in order to “either attract or push people away”:

Sandra: For example, you can go on a date with someone you don’t like…I will make sure that my makeup does not look spotless that day. I don’t know maybe I’ll go as far as putting the wrong eye shadow on. (Age 30, auditor)

Apparently, Sandra deters perceived unsuitable romantic partners by intentionally wearing the “wrong” makeup, in an attempt to create an aura of negativities around their social interaction. In these terms, the “wrong” makeup is utilised as a means of conveying the unspoken message that “I am not interested”, as depicted in Emily’s account (see chapter five section 5.2).

In the next excerpt, Lisa commented on how makeup is applied to mislead her partner into believing the otherwise ‘non-existent’ self:
Lisa: It was annoying that I have to get up a bit earlier to go and do my makeup in the bathroom. But I felt almost like I was winning because I was…not lying to him but I was cheating. It was almost like I was kind of tricking him. So it felt almost like a mini victory, like I was being a bit naughty, I was getting away with it. And like yeah, because he thinks this is how I look. So it almost felt like a victory. (Age 27, communications manager)

Lisa’s makeup experience here is closely associated with her longing for the desired interaction between self and her partner (e.g., sexual attraction). The perceived ability to “trick” her partner (enabled by hiding in the bathroom to get her makeup done) endows Lisa with an increased sense of self-efficacy (e.g., “winning”; “a mini victory”), and confidence in the love relationship. Yet, whilst the successful implementation of the “trick” allows Lisa to construct the desired self-in-relation, it appears to simultaneously restrict her sense of self-autonomy (e.g., “It’s annoying that I have to get up a bit earlier”). That said, it is a cost that Lisa is willing to pay, in exchange for the ability to eliminate potential relationship threats (e.g., loss of interests).

7.2 Conclusion

Four key consumption goals in managing the self-in-relation have been observed through my informants’ accounts. These self-management goals are achieved by a series of strategies that are directed at endorsing the desired self-in-relation. The consumption goals and strategies identified in this chapter show how a desired social experience/relationship can be constructed through an internal or external perspective of managing the self-in-relation. Importantly, this chapter presents how the ways through which the self-narratives are merged can have a differential impact on individuals’ self-management practices, by bringing together two theoretical lenses
from the authenticity literature (i.e., a conflictual merging of the self-narratives) (cf., Erickson 1995; Heidegger 2010; Sartre 2001) and consumer research (i.e., a complementary merging of the self-narratives) (cf., Coulter et al. 2003; Thompson and Hirschman 1995).

The next chapter answers the third research question raised in this thesis (see chapter 1.2) by summarising the findings, and detailing the contributions to theory building about the relationship between self and consumption (e.g., identity projects in CCT), from the perspective of the self-in-relation. I also discuss the managerial implications. I conclude the thesis by acknowledging the research limitations, and highlighting future directions for research.
Chapter 8: Discussion

Prior research has largely focused on examining the content (e.g., personal meanings, points of conflicts, ambivalence and internal contradictions) of the underpinning self (i.e., the constitution of the self), but the process through which a self is created has received less attention in the literature. One of the main propositions of this thesis is that in order to understand how a self may come about, we must capture the intricacies of the processes that underpin the creation of a self in a social context, that is, the negotiation process of the self-in-relation (cf., Kaplan 1986). In this chapter, I present the contributions and implications of the findings of this thesis. Research questions addressed by these findings were: (1) how do women experience the phenomenon of the negotiation process of the self-in-relation in terms of the internally and externally focused self-narratives (see section 8.1.1); (2) How does the negotiation process of the different selves (externally and internally focused), as defined by informants, of the self-in-relation shape women consumers’ management of the self-in-relation (see section 8.1.2); and (3) Building on the emergent understanding of negotiation processes, what determines which aspects of the self-in-relation win out, and get presented to the outside world in the end (see section 8.1.3)?

Figure 21: Which is ‘me’?

In the sections to come, I begin by answering the first two research questions by summarising my findings (see sections 8.1.1 and 8.1.2). Building on these findings, I
then address the third research question (see section 8.1.3) by proposing the framework of the relational dynamic interface (see figure 24) as a way of understanding how the self is *negotiated* and then *managed* from the perspective of the *self-in-relation* (cf., Kaplan 1986). The relational dynamic interface reveals how the *centrality of relationships* and the *desire for self-management* work together in influencing an individual’s *consumption choices* for self-creation. In so doing, the relational dynamic interface offers a systematic way of examining *how different selves compete to be heard and enacted* within a variety of different social settings (see the illustrative figure 21 above which shows a face with and without makeup), which Bahl and Milne (2010) identified as a limitation in the literature.

Following on from a discussion of the theoretical contributions (section 8.1), section 8.2 sets out the managerial implications that I have identified from my findings. In particular, I illustrate the challenges for policy makers, social marketing practitioners and consumer educators in terms of promoting consumers’ subjective well-being. Finally, limitations and future research are addressed in section 8.3. Please note that I tackle the important issue of how my research findings may be understood within the context of the various *feminist debates* towards the end of the thesis (sections 8.2 and 8.3).
8.1 Theoretical contributions

8.1.1 The negotiation process of the self-in-relation

**R1:** How do women experience the phenomenon of the negotiation process of the self-in-relation in terms of the internally and externally focused self-narratives?

That is, I investigate if indeed women do experience the negotiation process in terms of these narratives (whether complementary or conflictual) or whether we should understand the negotiation process differently (Chapters five and six specifically address this research question).

Consumer research on identity has in the main adopted a narrative identity approach that focuses on conceptualising the underpinning self as a series of personal narratives (Arnould and Thompson 2005). Indeed, a social identity or categorical approach presumes the self as rather static and enduring, such that under normal conditions entities within that category will exhibit appropriate ‘categorical’ behaviours (Somers 1994). In contrast, the narrative identity approach treats the self as fluid and emergent in social interaction that can vary dynamically over time and social space. In short, the focus of the narrative identity approach is on the contingent narratives of meaning rather than categorical stability. Personal narratives in this case are thereby referred to as an individual’s ongoing stories that situate her meaningfully in relation to her environment and communities, enabling her to form a somehow integrated sense of the past, present and anticipated future. These narratives are of a spatio-temporal nature as social relationships sustain and transform the self over time (Polkinghorne 1991; Singer 2004). My findings are consistent with this body of literature that shows the development of personal narratives as a process of becoming. But although many of my findings overlap with previous work, earlier research on personal narratives has tended to provide a descriptive rather than explanatory
account of the underpinning self. For example, it tends to focus on describing ‘an experience’ that is embodied in a self and constituted through personal narratives (Fournier 1998; Murray 2002; Thompson 1996; Tian and Belk 2005), and not on detailing the ‘constituent elements’ of personal narratives that generate the experience embodied in the self. My findings thereby broaden this stream of research by revealing *the dual nature of self-narratives*, as experienced by my informants, when negotiating the self-in-relation. The two strands of self-narratives focused on the *level of self-acceptance* and the *level of felt security in the referent point* are identified to be the ‘constituent elements’ of personal narratives through which one negotiates which storyline about the self to present in a given social context. Each strand of the self-narratives is associated with an internally and externally focused self (see chapter four and figure 22 below).

Furthermore, my findings draw together two different theoretical perspectives from the *consumer research* and *authenticity* literature of existentialism that define, address and discuss the merging of self-narratives either as usually a *complementary* whole, highlighting *the act of self-maintenance* (Thompson & Hirschman 1995; Coulter, Price, & Feick 2003), or as a conflictual mixture, characterised by *the act of self-transformation* (Sartre, 2001; Heidegger, 2010). In so doing, I provide a nuanced account of how the different ways through which the two strands of self-narratives are merged can have a profound impact on the negotiation process of the self-in-relation and consumers’ sense of the authentic self (see figure 22 below).
Figure 22: Summary of the findings - the negotiation process of the self-in-relation

Personal narratives

Self-narratives around level of self-acceptance

An internally focused perspective of constructing the self-in-relation (High in self-acceptance)

Complementary merging of the self-narratives
- The negotiation process of compromising (outward benefits)

Conflictual merging of the self-narratives
- The negotiation process of neglecting, filtering, retreatting or campaigning

Self-maintenance
Self-transformation

Self-presentation
This is me vs. This is not me

An externally focused perspective of constructing the self-in-relation (Low in self-acceptance)

An internally focused perspective of constructing the self-in-relation (High in felt security)

An externally focused perspective of constructing the self-in-relation (Low in felt security)

Existential dilemmas
As I have demonstrated in chapter six, women consumers experience *a series of mixed complementary and conflictual negotiation pathways* in the process of evolving their self-presentation. In addition, my research shows that existential dilemmas (e.g., to have A, I must sacrifice B) surface when the two strands of self-narratives are merged in negotiating the self-in-relation. This finding complements and extends past research that assumes identity conflicts may be experienced and then *resolved* in creating a self (Ahuvia 2005; Bahl and Milne 2010) – because I show how the *underlying dilemmas* or *conflicts* as experienced by my informants are embodied and resolved on the ‘*surface*’ level of self-presentation but remain largely within the self.

As an example, Linda (see page 128) describes her deeply felt dilemmas in negotiating the self-in-relation: “*Well it’s like when you were younger, I didn’t have any interest in putting makeup on. I put it on, but I didn’t particularly think they made me look better, I just used to do it because that’s the thing to do*.”

Moreover, this thesis provides insights that bridge the authenticity literature and the consumer research literature. The authenticity (existentialism) literature views ‘truly’ optimal subjective well-being as something that can only be attained by adhering to *the internally focused self-narratives* – because what the society wants remains inconsistent with what s/he really wants (Sartre 2001; Heidegger 2010; Lenton et al. 2013). In contrast, the consumer research literature focuses on investigating the importance of adhering to *the externally focused self-narratives* in order to achieve people’s subjective well-being – because what individuals want is largely in line with what the society wants (Elliott 1994; Firat and Venkatesh 1995; Thompson and Hirschman, 1995). From my findings, consumers’ sense of the authentic self (i.e., ‘*this is me*’ vs. ‘*this is not me*’) appears to be transient, fluid and emergent in social interplays that can vary dynamically over time and place, rather than something that is static and enduring (i.e., the idea of a core self). This finding answers Erickson’s (1995) question as to if we have no authentic self, how do we feel more or less true to the self within a variety of different social settings? That is, the extent to which a consumer feels authentic about her self or self-presentation in a given social setting (i.e., ‘*this is me*’ vs. ‘*this is not me*’) largely depends on the ways in which a self is negotiated against its narratives focused on the level of self-acceptance and the level of felt security in the referent point (see chapter six and figures 22 above and 23
The self-presentation is the ‘product’ of negotiating a complementary or conflictual merging of the two strands of firstly self-narratives around the level of self-acceptance and secondly of self-narratives around the felt security in the referent point. It appears that regardless of whether or not the self-narratives are focused on a high or low level of felt security in the referent point, when they are merged with those self-narratives focused on a high level of self-acceptance, women consumers tend to privilege the internally focused self-narratives to cultivate their self-presentation – for the purpose of maintaining/preserving aspects of the self that may be in conflict with external expectations. The internally focused self-presentation in this case appears to be largely experienced as the authentic self-in-relation (i.e., this is me). In line with Heidegger’s (2010) proposition that authenticity generates anxiety, I find these women experience a certain degree of anxiety when presenting the internally focused self (e.g., Emily: the negotiation process of neglecting; Linda: the negotiation process of compromising (outward benefits) – see section 6.1). That said, their anxiety is compensated for by an increased sense of self-autonomy, improved self-esteem and/or contentment in a social relationship. These findings corroborate the work of Lenton et al. (2013) that the subjective sense of being true to the self produces a positive mood, and fulfils an individual’s inherent needs for self-esteem, relatedness and autonomy (also see Heppner et al. 2008). In addition to the corroboration of earlier studies, my findings extend these theories into the consumption context by showing how the state of feeling authentic about the self-in-relation creates positive experiences of the self-being-in-the-world (e.g., improved self-esteem) that are intricately intertwined with an underlying sense of anxiety, uncertainty and/or discomfort, which characterise our existential problem of being. For example, in Emily’s account (see page 104), the presentation of her makeup-free self (= ‘anti-consumption’ in this case) validates her sense of authenticity about the self in a social context, and enables her to distinguish her self from those women who feel, as she perceives it, “horrendously insecure in terms of not wearing makeup”. However, in promoting her sense of authenticity through the presentation of her makeup-free self, Emily clearly experiences a lingering sense of anxiety, as she commented, “if I’m like leaving my flat, I’d be like crap I haven’t got any makeup on but I can’t be bothered”.
Yet, when the self-narratives around a high or low level of felt security in the reference point are merged with those around a low level of self-acceptance, women consumers tend to adopt the externally focused self-narratives instead in order to cultivate the self-presentation – for the purpose of transforming aspects of the self that may be in conflict with external expectations. Whereas the merging of the self-narratives around a low level of self-acceptance and a high level of felt security in the referent point largely elicits a sense of the inauthentic self-in-relation (i.e., this is not me) (e.g., the case of Katie; see section 5.1), the merging of the self-narratives around low levels of self-acceptance and felt security in the referent point can lead either to a rather authentic or inauthentic sense of the self-in-relation depending on the underlying intention for self-creation (i.e., to hide or enhance the self) (see figure 23 below). I find that when the underlying intention is to enhance the self, these women tend to perceive the self-presentation as the authentic self-in-relation, underscoring their acceptance of both the untransformed and transformed self as being who I am. Specifically, these women appear to experience an aura of self-love as a result of the self-transformation process, despite a lingering consciousness of the potential loss of personal freedom (e.g., having to transform the self).
Figure 23: To hide or enhance the self through consumption

An external focused perspective of constructing the self-in-relation (Low in self-acceptance)

Complementary merging of the self-narratives
- The negotiation process of compromising (inward benefits) or compensating

Self-transformation through consumption

The underlying purpose for consumption is to:
Enhance the self

This is me
(The natural state of self is me too)

Consumption experience/subjective well-being:
Self-love vs. a lingering consciousness of the potential loss of personal freedom

This is not me
(The natural state of self is me)

Consumption experience/subjective well-being:
A sense of victory (e.g., the ability to deceive others) vs. an aura of self-hate (e.g., having to hide the ‘true’ self)

This is me
(The natural state of self is not me)

Consumption experience/subjective well-being:
When the transformed self is perceived as the ‘true’ self, acts of self-transformation are experienced as a means of maintaining the self that sets free the inner self

An external focused perspective of constructing the self-in-relation (Low in felt security)
Nonetheless, when the underlying intention is to hide the self, these women tend either to experience their externally focused self-presentation as the inauthentic self-in-relation by viewing the untransformed self as the ‘true’ self (e.g., Lisa: “me is standing in front of the TV, worried about what I’m gonna do with my hair, etc.”), or as the authentic self-in-relation because they see the transformed self as the ‘true’ self (e.g., Valeria: “I’m “me” as long as I’ve got makeup on”). I find through my informants’ experiences that when the untransformed self is perceived as the ‘true’ self, these women often experience tensions between a sense of victory (e.g., the ability to deceive others) and an aura of self-hate (e.g., having to hide the ‘true’ self).

In contrast, when the transformed self is perceived as the ‘true’ self, acts of self-transformation are experienced as a means of maintaining/preserving the self that sets free the inner self – that is, the self is maintained/preserved through its very own transformation. These findings add to the growing literature that suggests the important role of self-transformation in resisting aspects of the undesired self (Ahuvia 2005; Ogilvie 1987; Schouten and McAlexander 1995). For example, Cindy in Ahuvia’s (2005) work talked about the self-transformative power of clothing through which she abstains from her perceived distasteful self. My findings extend this focus by demonstrating the value-laden nature of self-transformation as experienced by women consumers.

Furthermore, my findings reveal that depending on the movement or trajectory of the self in a social relationship (e.g., at the initial stage of a social relationship or when the social relationship reaches equilibrium) (see chapter five), my informants are found to adhere either to the internally or externally focused self-narratives, in seeking to feel existentially fulfilled at each phase of a given social relationship. For example, Amy (see section 5.4) appears to largely conform to the externally focused self-narratives, when a friendship is perceived to be uncertain or needing some form of approval. Yet, she reverts to following her internally focused self-narratives to achieve a sense of self-liberation once a high degree of closeness is reached. These findings broaden Erikson’s (1963) schema that claims intimacy can only be established once autonomy and freedom are ensured. Indeed, I find that Erickson’s schema only applies to those women in my study whose self-narratives are focused on a high level of self-acceptance when negotiating the self-in-relation (e.g., the case of...
Emily; see section 5.2). In contrast, for those women in my study whose self-narratives are more focused on a low level of self-acceptance, this process is reversed (e.g., the case of Katie; see section 5.1). By this I mean autonomy and freedom will only be pursued when intimacy between parties is established.

Finally, I find that when women consumers fail to endorse the result of the negotiation process(es) of the self-in-relation, they tend to experience some form of violation about the self-being-in-the-world. For example, when these women fail to transform the self in the situation of involuntary dispossession (e.g., cosmetics loss), profound negativities are experienced toward the self (e.g., sense of self-disgust). In contrast, when these women are unable to present the untransformed self in the situation of involuntary consumption, they often encounter feelings of uneasiness. For instance, Katie expressed feeling “weird” about sitting at home and in full makeup in a space she shares only with a partner with whom she feels very secure. These findings thereby contribute to the body of knowledge on the intimate link between self and material consumption by shedding light on the impact of involuntary dispossession and involuntary consumption on our negotiated sense of self, which has received limited research attention to date (Kleine and Baker 2004).

8.1.2 The emergence of self-management from negotiation

**R2:** How does the negotiation process of the different selves (externally and internally focused), as defined by informants, of the self-in-relation shape women consumers’ management of the self-in-relation?

In particular, in what ways does self-adornment come into play for managing the self-in-relation and how do the uses of self-adornment illuminate our understanding of the link between negotiation and consumption? (Chapter seven specifically addresses this research question).
In my study, the experience of cosmetics consumption, a seemingly everyday, mundane product category, appears to be an integral part of understanding negotiation of the self-in-relation within the context of everyday lives (cf., Borgerson 2005; Epp and Price 2008; Kleine and Baker 2004). My findings reveal the emergence of self-management from negotiation. Specifically, they show that self-management efforts through consumption (self-adornment in this case) are directed at cultivating the desired self in relation to others. For example, Emily expressed that to her, cosmetics are a symbol of “power and control”, utilised to tailor a specific and well-defined shared experience between parties, and facilitate the desired self in a given social context. This experience is commonly observed among my informants’ accounts in an implicit or explicit manner.

These findings are consistent with previous work that emphasises the ‘why’ of consumption for self-management. For instance, Schouten’s (1991, p.418) exploration of aesthetic plastic surgery as “a perceived means of control over one’s body and one’s destiny”. Thompson’s (1996, p.403) inspection of caring consumers whose consumption practices are grounded in “maintaining the integrity of their social network” and “interpersonal care”. Tian and Belk’s (2005) examination of workplace possessions that are employed to (re)negotiate the boundary between home and work. Adding to this discussion, I provide a nuanced account of how the ‘why’ of consumption fits in with the process(es) of managing the self-in-relation, in seeking to elicit desired everyday interaction between parties. Specifically, my findings show how the ‘why’ of consumption is manifested through an internal and external perspective of managing the self-in-relation. From an internal perspective of managing the self-in-relation, consumption is utilised to elicit the consumer’s preferred social behaviour/orientation about the self in constructing her desired self-in-relation (e.g., confidence builder). For instance, Isobel adorns the self to maintain and protect her “strong” personality so as not to be bullied in the school context. Alternatively, from an external perspective of managing the self-in-relation, the consumer directs her consumption at prompting the desired impression and/or reaction of others towards the self in constructing her desired self-in-relation (e.g., prove one is worthy). As an example, Jennifer described how self-adornment enables
her to be part of the popular group experience, which in turn gives her the capability to protect both herself and her brother from “instances of bullying” (see page 189).

Indeed, earlier consumer research has indicated an intimate link between self-management and self-protection. For example, in Schouten’s (1991) work, Jane, Lisa and Kate talked about how plastic surgery has enabled them to improve intimate relations with their husbands, which in turn protects the self from potential relationship dissolution. Moreover, in Thompson and Hirschman’s (1995, p.147) study, Marcia expressed the importance of managing one’s self-presentation to protect the self from negative evaluations (e.g., “if they can’t take care of themselves, how can they manage this project?”). Jennifer’s account in my research (see section 7.1.4.1) complements and broadens this body of literature by showing how self-management extends from self-protection to including other-protection in the consumption context. It also sheds light on how self-management fits in with the intricate interplay between individual (e.g., protect the self from being bullied), relational (e.g., protect brother from being bullied) and collective (e.g., the popular group that does not get bullied) narratives, which Epp and Price (2008) identified as a knowledge gap.

Furthermore, prior research has emphasised the role of (mundane) consumption in negotiating a sense of who and what we are (Kleine, Kleine, and Kernan 1992; Kleine et al. 1993; Thompson and Haytko 1997). My findings contribute to this stream of research by revealing not merely the consumption goals and strategies consumers utilise for self-management, but also how a particular consumption goal and its related strategies may be born out of the different ways through which a self is negotiated. As I have stressed in the literature review, whereas the authenticity literature proposes a conflictual perspective on negotiation between the internally and externally focused self-narratives (Heidegger 2010; Sartre 2001), the consumer research literature offers a complementary perspective on negotiation between the internally and externally focused self-narratives (Thompson 1996; Tian and Belk 2005). These findings draw together the authenticity and consumer research literature by showing how each of the theoretical lenses can shed different degrees of light on
how consumption fits in with how a self is negotiated, managed and then experienced in relation to others.

It is also worth noting that the consumption strategy of self-rejection appears to be adopted most widely by my informants, as a means to fulfil a wide range of existential purposes, from rejecting the aging self to rejecting the chaotic, hopeless self, and to rejecting the self that does not look the same as the dominant others (see section 7.1.1.2). This finding resembles the work of Bahl and Milne (2010) that suggests the powerful role of the undesired self in driving consumption choices (also see Ogilvie 1987). However, whereas Bahl and Milne’s (2010) work tends to foreground the link between the undesired self and consumption choices from the perspective of the autonomous self (e.g., Brad’s undesired self sees interesting food in terms of “gaining weight” and “desperate grasping”), I explain this link from the perspective of the self-in-relation (e.g., Janet’s aging self represents her undesired self because it hinders her from constructing a desired social experience with others). This perspective shows how an undesired self is rejected or transformed through consumption in pursuing desired everyday interaction, which in turn optimises the consumer’s positive sense of the self-being-in-the-world. This sense of optimism seems to be generated from the self-belief of possessing the relational capability to form a positive self-other relationship, which in turn produces existential meaningfulness (Kaplan 1986).

Nonetheless, boundary conditions are identified in regards to an individual’s perceived capability to reject aspects of the undesired self-in-relation, especially when the reality and the desired state of affairs are in great conflict. For instance, self-adornment failed to transform Joanna’s undesired self-in-relation as it normally would because the cancer condition of her late father deteriorated, and so her normal self-adornment strategies did not work in managing her undesired self-in-relation. It seems that the experienced incapability to pursue a transformation of the self-in-relation can be quite detrimental, fostering a profound sense of ‘helplessness’ or ‘despair’ in a given relationship (cf., Polkinghorne 1991). These findings add to the growing literature that studies how an undesired self is rejected in the consumption context.
(Hogg, Banister, and Stephenson 2009). My findings illustrate the boundary condition of consumers’ attempts to reject the undesired self-in-relation, and the repercussions for their emotional well-being.

8.1.3 The relational dynamic interface

R3: Building on the emergent understanding of negotiation processes, what determines which aspects of the self-in-relation win out, and get presented to the outside world in the end?

That is, I draw together the emergent understanding of the negotiation process between the various narratives of the self into a framework that explores how different selves compete to be heard and enacted within the context of everyday lives.

The findings from this thesis as a whole are used to propose a framework of the relational dynamic interface that I argue systematically captures how a self may come about in relation to others (see figure 24 below). The relational dynamic interface around the self is what deals with what is going on in the self-narratives focused on the level of self-acceptance and the level of felt security in the referent point, and what is going on in the external social world (or the outside world). ‘The two-way feedback loop’ is the mechanism that communicates daily occurrences to the inner self in negotiating and then determining which aspects of the self-in-relation to present in a given social setting (e.g., the internally or externally focused self-narratives). However, to determine what is to be negotiated, each strand of the self-narratives needs to be first filtered to ascertain if the self-narratives that are to be merged are focused on a high or low level of self-acceptance and on a high or low level of felt security in the referent point respectively (e.g., a complementary or conflictual merging of the self-narratives).
The ‘filter’ noted in figure 24 characterises how each strand of the self-narratives is scanned or screened. This poses the question of what is the filter mechanism composed of? The components of the filter can be identified through my informants’ experiences as: (1) the different degrees of closeness in social intercourse (e.g., acquaintance, familiarity, and intimacy); and (2) the variegated social spaces within in which an encounter takes place (e.g., the public and private areas of everyday interaction) (see chapter five). For example, in the case of Katie (see section 5.1), when she first met her partner, she made great efforts to endorse the externally focused self-narratives through her consumption choices in both public and private social spaces, as a result of the complementary merging between her self-narratives.
around low levels of self-acceptance and felt security in her partner. As the relationship reached equilibrium, she switched to promote the internally focused self-narratives due to the complementary merging between her self-narratives around high levels of self-acceptance and felt security in her partner, especially in a perceived private social space (e.g., their home). Yet, when her partner’s friends come onto the scene and/or when she finds herself in a public context, Katie again conforms to the externally focused self-narratives in order to protect the self from potential relationship dissolution – as a direct outcome of the conflictual merging between the self-narratives around a low level of self-acceptance and a high level of felt security in the partner. Generally speaking, the closer one is to another person, the more likely one is to adopt the internally focused self-narratives to cultivate her self-presentation, especially when the social intercourse takes place in a private context. In contrast, the more distant one feels from another person, the more likely one is to adopt the externally focused self-narratives to cultivate her self-presentation, regardless of the social spaces. Yet it should be noted that the intricacy of the co-existing self-narratives changes with personality, age, culture and/or gender. For example, unlike Katie, even in situations where the self-narratives appear to be focused on a low level of felt security in the referent point, Emily’s self-narratives around a high level of self-acceptance often prompted her to present the internally focused self, in order to achieve a sense of self-autonomy and/or filter out perceived insincere social other(s) (see section 5.2). Indeed, whereas the ‘operation’ of the relational dynamic interface does not vary, the ‘outcome’ may vary between individuals as what one person regards as existentially fulfilling experiences may differ greatly from another person’s views. In the present thesis, the relational dynamic interface is utilised to explore the different negotiation process(es) someone might engage in in order to achieve her perceived existentially meaningful experiences of the self-being-in-the-world.

The relational dynamic interface broadens past literature – that in the main focused on exploring the self as an identifiable set of social (Brewer 1991), relational (Andersen and Chen 2002) and/or extended selves (Belk 1988) – by detailing the negotiation process through which a self is created. In detailing the negotiation process, the relational dynamic interface demonstrates how the negotiation between self-maintenance (i.e., the internally focused self) and self-transformation (i.e., the
externally focused self), and between the desired self-in-relation and the undesired self-in-relation motivates an individual’s consumption behaviour in cultivating a particular self-presentation that satisfies the situational demands for existentially fulfilling experiences. Evidently, an individual encounters a struggle in reconciling dilemmas that arise as the two different strands of self-narratives are merged for self-creation. Ahuvia’s (2005) three ways of reconciling identity conflicts can be usefully drawn on here to aid our understanding of the struggles that are experienced, which he calls “demarcating” (when identity A is strongly preferred over identity B), “compromising” (A and B seek for the middle ground) and “synthesizing” (the creation of C to resolve the conflict between A and B) solutions. From the perspective of the self-in-relation, the solution of “demarcating” represents one dominant desirable relationship script the consumer pursues in creating a self. As such, the self appears rather unaware of the other potential opposing selves. For example, Katie described many of the benefits linked to the presentation of the externally focused self (e.g., “looking nice”, “fitting in”), and only when she was prompted to describe how these benefits had made her feel, did she then go on to express a deeply felt sense of annoyance and feelings of inauthenticity about the self-being-in-the-world (e.g., “well it’s been annoying really, I have never really thought about it until now”). This adds to Ahuvia’s (2005) construal of “demarcating” that largely focused on drawing a clear line between the desired and the undesired self by revealing a rather more blurred line between the desired and the undesired self-in-relation. This is consistent with Belk, Ger and Askegaard’s (2003) observation that human ‘desire’ is both discomforting and pleasurable. I argue this is particularly the case for constructing the self-in-relation.

In addition, in contrast to Ahuvia’s (2005) interpretation of “compromising” where the focal point is the loved objects, the emphasis in my thesis is placed upon the compromise of the different dimensions of the self-in-relation – consumption is used to endorse this compromise. Indeed, the solution of “compromising” in my work appears to be closely associated with the act of compromising either the internally or externally focused self for optimal personal, relational and/or collective gains. For instance, in the case of compromising the internally focused self, some informants described the experience of having to consume cosmetics in order to fit into a
particular group, despite of the fact that they do not particularly like the feel, or the look of makeup on their face. On the other hand, in the situation of compromising the externally focused self, Linda vividly described how she appreciates the relationship stage where there is no longer a need for adorning the self to keep her partner (i.e., adhering to the perceived standard of beauty), and she can just be ‘herself’ when she is with him. Yet, in so doing, she evidently experiences the loss of “the buzz” in the relationship because she used to enjoy getting ready to see her partner and it is now more difficult to keep “the buzz” (or passion) going. Finally, whereas Ahuvia’s (2005) “synthesizing” solution is about resolving self-related conflicts (e.g., Cindy’s antiques enable her to be rural and urban at the same time), in my study the “synthesizing” solution emerges as a way for the women consumers to fulfil different perceived relationship obligations at one and the same time. For example, the use of mascara (rather than a full face of makeup) allowed Katie to not only avoid social punishments (e.g., not enough to cause serious trouble in breaking school rules) but also obtain social rewards (e.g., feel “pretty” enough to appeal to the boys).

Furthermore, whilst the relational dynamic interface bears the closest resemblance to Bahl and Milne’s (2010) description of the dialogical self as a way of addressing “how inconsistencies are experienced and dealt with in consumption contexts” (p., 177), my findings and conceptualisations differ in four important ways. First, Bahl and Milne (2010) are concerned with how consumers experience a particular type of consumption from the lens of their different selves (e.g., the strong self, the giving self, the insecure self etc.). I focus on how consumers experience different consumption choices in terms of endowing them with different relational capabilities to fulfil their desire to facilitate and/or control potential social interactions, which in turn enhances or protects their subjective well-being (Kaplan 1986; Baumeister and Leary 1995).

Moreover, in contrast to Bahl and Milne (2010) who investigate inconsistent consumption preferences across a variety of different product categories, I emphasise how women consumers negotiate the different use of one key product category to endorse their desired relationship accounts, and transform the undesired accounts (cf., Borgerson 2005; Epp and Price 2008; Kleine and Baker 2004). A third vital
difference is that although each of Bahl and Milne’s selves are given a voice, how the voice is manifested has not been systematically examined. A self’s internally and externally focused narratives have been distinguished in this thesis in order to obtain a better understanding of the inner struggle or dilemmas embodied in each self or voice. Finally, whilst Bahl and Milne provide a dialogical framework to study how consumers navigate opposing needs of their different selves, the role of contextual factors in influencing the outcome of the navigation was not explicitly investigated. The relational dynamic interface illustrates that the ways in which the consumer negotiates the self-in-relation are largely context dependent, determined by the interplay between where the social intercourse takes place and the movement of the self in a given social relationship (see chapter five). In sum, the relational dynamic interface provides a new lens by which to address issues related to the underpinnings and the experience of the negotiation of the self-in-relation, as distinct from, but related to, the different selves that may result.

8.2 Managerial implications

In line with the work of feminists who revisited the link between self and artifice (e.g., fashion and beauty) (Peiss 1998; Scott 2006), my findings can inform the ways through which public policy makers and marketing practitioners might plan their programmes of social marketing to promote consumers’ subjective well-being. In the United Kingdom alone, it is estimated that retail sales of beauty and personal care products will reach up to approximately £11 billion annually by 2017 (Euromonitor International, 2013). The (almost) obsessive contemporary focus on physical appearance has caused some women to suffer from severe health consequences (e.g., body dysmorphic disorder, anorexia nervosa) (Burton, Netemeyer, and Lichtenstein 1995; Phillips et al. 1993; Rief et al. 2006), and increasing instances of looks-related teasing or bullying (e.g., acne, psoriasis and atopic eczema) (Magin et al. 2008). Indeed, cosmetics ads have long taken advantage of and/or fostered women’s fear of
not satisfying social expectations by employing airbrushed images of models in promoting standards of beauty – these visuals in advertising campaigns have often resulted in a distortion of women’s sense of self (Richins 1991). Yet, in recent years, consumers have become increasingly aware of the unrealistic standard of beauty depicted in the media, and have started to demand more realistic portrayals of women from everyday life. In response to this consumer trend, the Advertising Standards Authority in the UK has begun to tackle cosmetics ads that have been overly airbrushed (e.g., Poulter 2011), and some industry leaders have attempted to revolutionise the way they market beauty-related products. For example, the Boots Heath and Beauty Magazine, which has more than three million readers, has abandoned retouching and airbrushing in all their materials (Owen 2013). However, despite all these efforts, a growing number of girls and young women remain unhappy and/or anxious about their physical appearance (Meikle 2013). According to a 2013 survey conducted by the charity Girlguiding (N: 1,288 girls and young women aged between 7 and 21), 33% of the survey respondents (aged: 7 to 21) were not happy with the way they look, 75% (aged: 11 to 21) felt boys want them to look like the girls and women portrayed in the media, and an overwhelming 87% (aged: 11 to 21) thought women are judged more for their looks than ability (Girlguiding 2013).

As such, to develop women’s sense of self-worth as it relates to their physical appearance, Dermablend Professional, a brand of corrective cosmetics designed for people with skin conditions (e.g., severe acne, vitiligo), launched its latest 2014 advertising campaign that put a twist on the recent natural beauty trend by showing how women embrace their flaws rather than hiding them through cosmetics consumption. Indeed, recent marketing campaigns have increasingly moved to promote women’s sense of the authentic self and/or their self-narratives focused on a high level of self-acceptance (e.g., the ‘no makeup selfie’ trend on Facebook to raise awareness for cancer research). However, whilst these (no)cosmetics ads have attempted to be authentically inspiring, they have largely focused on promoting women’s sense of ‘the autonomous self’ (e.g., I want to accept myself as who I am), and neglecting to also focus on ‘the self-in-relation’ (e.g., other people accept me as who I am). This focus is problematic because of two main reasons. First, the neglect of the centrality of relationships in influencing women’s sense of subjective well-
being; as my findings have demonstrated, women’s sense of well-being appears to be intimately and intricately linked to their relational capability to produce and leverage relational capital with significant others, social groups and/or the outside world as a whole (Kaplan 1986; Miller 1976; Thompson 1996). Second, the persistent promotion of only the autonomous self poses the danger of broadening a mismatch between the development of ‘the autonomous self’ and that of ‘the self-in-relation’. The mismatch as experienced by my informants evidently undermines their sense of subjective well-being. It seems that, for these women, optimal subjective well-being is in the main attained through a complementary negotiation of self-creation between the self-narratives focused on a high level of self-acceptance (i.e., promoting ‘the autonomous self’) and those focused on a high level of felt security in the referent point (i.e., promoting ‘the self-in-relation’). Indeed, the complementary negotiation of self-creation here is found to liberate women consumers from perceived socio-cultural obligations (e.g., the standard of beauty), increase their sense of self-esteem, and/or improve their perceived intimacy with the significant other(s).

It is thereby important to note that by taking a homogeneous approach focusing on promoting one aspect of the self to enhance people’s subjective well-being (e.g., either ‘the autonomous self’ or ‘the self-in-relation’), social marketing runs the risk of having a negative impact on those women who do not correspond to the ‘standard’. By this I mean even within women, each of them might require a different approach with respect to optimising her subjective well-being. For example, whereas some women are more ‘feminine’ and thus tend to pursue the fulfilment of ‘the self-in-relation’ as the means to achieve subjective well-being (e.g., the case of Katie; see section 5.1), others can be more ‘masculine’ and seek to achieve subjective well-being by fulfilling their sense of ‘the autonomous self’ (e.g., the case of Emily; see section 5.2). Here, the terms ‘feminine’ and ‘masculine’ refer to activities and characteristics that traditionally and socially, have come to be associated with women (e.g., expressiveness, relational and attachment-oriented qualities) and men (e.g., forceful, assertive and autonomy-oriented qualities) respectively (Hoffman, Hattie and Borders 2005). Moreover, it is also worth noting that even for people with more ‘masculine’ (or ‘feminine’) characteristics, there can be times when they may demonstrate more ‘feminine’ (or ‘masculine’) attributes depending on the social context (see chapter five for each individual account) (Belk 1975). Besides, people
with more ‘feminine’ qualities can potentially become more ‘masculine’ over time, and vice versa. For instance, in Emily’s account (see page 115), she described how she grows more tolerant with the self over the years, and increasingly seeks for autonomy and personal freedom. This information can help public policy makers, marketers and consumer educators to better understand, and be mindful of, the complexity of the challenge of improving people’s subjective well-being. In sum, my findings indicate the importance of customising and developing more tailored social marketing messages/practices that take into consideration the differences at the individual level (e.g., more feminine or masculine) in terms of how subjective well-being can be achieved. For example, various social marketing messages/practices can be designed to best tackle these differences by helping individuals to ‘balance’ their differential needs for other-acceptance versus self-acceptance in creating a self to achieve optimal subjective well-being.

8.3 Limitations and future research

According to West and Zimmerman (1987, p.140), “a person’s gender is not simply an aspect of what one is, but, more fundamentally, it is something that one does, and does recurrently, in interaction with others”. Indeed, gender is treated as “a social concept referring to psychologically, sociologically, or culturally rooted traits, attitudes, beliefs, and behavioural tendencies...through which individuals experience their social world, consumption activities are fundamentally gendered” (Bristor and Fischer 1993, p.519). Research in the tradition of consumer culture theory has long emphasised the importance of exploring the gendering of consumer lifestyles (i.e., the underlying institutional and social structures) and the impact on consumption choices and behaviours (Arnould and Thompson 2005). For example, Thompson (1996) described how working mothers’ relationship with consumer products and services reflected their relational sense of self that strives to care for the interpersonal responsibilities of family life. Essentially, gender appears to be a powerful ideological
force that produces, legitimates and limits our consumption choices in cultivating our different selves in relation to others (West and Zimmerman 1987). That said, social movements (e.g., feminism) can challenge existing ideologies (e.g., what it means to be a girl) and offer social support for a person to pursue alternative self-narratives, that is, an alternative way of being-in-the-world (Ingraham 1994; Joy and Venkatesh 1994; Scott 2006). The present thesis demonstrates one set of voices and its ideological meaning structure in the empirical contexts of women and cosmetics. Whereas the empirical contexts are women and cosmetics, the relational dynamic interface identified in this thesis can be usefully employed to examine men’s lived experience of the negotiation of the self-in-relation as well. For example, for future studies, we can investigate how the interface works for men? What are their negotiation pathways? Do my findings transfer across? If so, we can perhaps have a rather consistent view about how the self-in-relation is negotiated across gender. If not, we then need a much more nuanced understanding about the different negotiation pathways that men and women consumers take up for self-creation. My thesis has presented the first half of the picture – it looked at women.

Moreover, like Askegaard and his coauthors (2002), whereas this thesis has not focused on joining the ongoing feminist debates about the link between the body and self (Joy and Venkatesh 1994), future research may benefit from directly comparing women’s lived experience of the self-in-relation with the assumptions made in the different streams of feminist literature (e.g., Wolf’s (1991) proposition of the “beauty backlash” vs. Scott’s (2006) efforts in readdressing fashion and feminism; ‘radical feminism’ vs. ‘lipstick feminism’). For example, my findings suggest the various ways through which women maintain/enhance the desired self-in-relation, and/or reject/transform the undesired self-in-relation to achieve their subjective well-being. What is desired versus undesired can clearly differ among these women. For instance, at the initial stage of a romance, whereas Katie sees beauty and artifice as a means to construct the desired romantic self (see section 5.1), Emily treats beauty and artifice as constructing the undesired romantic self as she regards her adorned self as something that may attract ‘the wrong men’ and cost her sense of self-autonomy (see section 5.2). In other social contexts (where her superior self surfaces), however, Emily evidently views beauty and artifice as a way of obtaining “power and control”.


In these terms, these findings question a rather homogeneous view of what constructs a desired or undesired self for women’s being-in-the-world (Walters 2005), as it may vary depending on the ways in which a self is negotiated in relation to a specific social context (see chapter six). This perspective is in line with Baumgardner and Richards’ (2005) view that feminism can change with every generation and individual.

Furthermore, mother-daughter relationships are highly significant, as they exist, in the main, as a central socialisation structure within the female life course (Fox 1980). This means future research should investigate the nature of, and the intricacies embedded in, the mother-daughter relationship to provide a better understanding of how a mother-daughter dyadic relation influences each party’s personal narratives, in turn affecting their consumption choices. This would also further allow the exploration of the intersection of different relational dyads (e.g., mother-daughter; and mother (or daughter) with partner, sibling, family members or work colleagues) and the impact of these intersecting relational experiences on individuals’ self-narratives, as individuals are enmeshed in a series of relationships.

Finally, in chapter seven, I have presented the emergence of self-management from negotiation, in seeking to construct the desired self-in-relation. There is certainly merit in exploring the lived experience of those involved on the other side of these relationships (e.g. partners; friends; family members; work colleagues) as they respond to the everyday consumption strategies of their significant other in a variety of social or relational contexts. This further exploration may address the concern of self-presentation bias, as my informants could potentially express a higher degree of ‘bravado’ or ‘control’ when describing their intimate, personal life stories. It would also enable us to investigate the actual, or at least, competing interpretations of the impact of everyday consumption on the shared experience beyond those reported by my informants. All in all, my interpretation is grounded in my narrators’ lived experiences. I hope that my study will facilitate future research into how the self is negotiated across different product categories, and the implication for consumers’ subjective well-being.
Appendix 1: Information sheet and consent form

The role of consumer self-concept in their decision-making process:

A mixed methods approach in the cosmetics industry

Participant Information Sheet

You are being invited to take part in a research project which is part of a wider study that will contribute to the researcher’s PhD. Before you decide it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve, please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Please ask if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information. Take time to decide whether or not you wish to take part. Thank you for reading this.

Who will conduct the research?

Chihling Liu
PhD Candidate

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Postgraduate Research Programme
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Title of the Research

Women’s lived experience of cosmetics consumption

What is the aim of the research?

The research project aims to understand women’s cosmetics consumption experiences.

Why have I been chosen?

You have been chosen to participate in the study because you meet our sampling criteria that require women who wear cosmetics on a daily (regular) basis.

What would I be asked to do if I took part?
You would be expected to take part in an interview with myself lasting around two hours. You will be asked to answer questions primarily regarding your experiences of cosmetics consumption.

What happens to the data collected?

Once the data is collected, it will be transcribed and contextualised in comparison with other consumers to understand the differences and similarities between and within each interview. Your data will only be accessed by the researcher and her supervisory team.

How is confidentiality maintained?

Recorded interviews will be transcribed by the research in a private environment. Once the interview is transcribed, recordings will be destroyed. Pseudonyms will be used to provide anonymity to all participants.

What happens if I do not want to take part or if I change my mind?

It is up to you to decide whether or not to take part. If you do decide to take part you will be given this information sheet to keep and be asked to sign a consent form. If you decide to take part you are still free to withdraw at any time without giving a reason and without detriment to yourself.

Will I be paid for participating in the research?

A gift voucher from ‘Love2shop’ with a value of £20 will be given to you as a small token of gratitude for your time.

What is the duration of the research?

Approximately two hours

Where will the research be conducted?

The researcher is willing to travel to a place where you feel comfortable and convenient to carry out the interview.

Will the outcomes of the research be published?

Findings of the research may be published later in academic journals to help academicians and practitioners understand the consumer consumption phenomenon.

Criminal Records Check (if applicable)

N/A

Contact for further information

Chihling Liu
Tel: 07703737509

Email: Chihling.Liu@postgrad.mbs.ac.uk

What if something goes wrong?

Contact myself using the details above. If you wish to make a formal complaint about the conduct of the research they should contact the Head of the Research Office, Christie Building, University of Manchester, Oxford Road, Manchester, M13 9PL.
The role of consumer self-concept in their decision-making process:
A mixed methods approach in the cosmetics industry

CONSENT FORM

If you are happy to participate please complete and sign the consent form below

1. I confirm that I have read the attached information sheet on the above project and have had the opportunity to consider the information and ask questions and had these answered satisfactorily.

2. I understand that my participation in the study is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving a reason and without detriment to any treatment/service

3.

I agree to take part in the above project

Name of participant    Date    Signature

Name of person taking consent    Date    Signature
Appendix 2: The naïve understanding as a whole – An example of the case of Isobel

Isobel’s (age 27, social worker) story demonstrates how cosmetics enabled her to have multiple selves, particularly in terms of her contrasting selves; when she wears makeup (e.g. demanding, tougher, and argumentative) compared to when she wears no makeup (e.g. timid, caring and vulnerable) (see figure 25). Her obsession with perfection grew out of her childhood issues she faced in the family and at school. Makeup was used as a ‘shield’ to protect herself and a ‘sword’ to attack others.

Figure 25: Isobel’s sets of realities

Isobel used makeup to cover her impurities in order to be flawless and perfect. It is very important to her to dress for the occasion with the right personality. If she does not look right for the occasion, her confidence diminishes dramatically. In addition, she would not want to give a wrong impression. For example, if she had a lot of makeup on when she was with a male client, her client might think she had feelings for him. She would wear lighter makeup in the day and dress for the occasion in the
evening with more makeup to match her outfit because this is a time when it is all about looking her best and being sociable (e.g. going to bars or restaurants). Different makeup would enable her to have different personalities and present herself in a different light. Makeup is almost like a fancy dress; she took on the character of the fancy dress. For example, when she wore cute makeup, she would behave more foolish. When she wore more nude makeup, she would be more business-like and no one could mess with her. When she wore more makeup, e.g. dark smoky eyes, she would be more seductive and wanting people to think she is extremely attractive and beautiful. Using makeup in different ways (more or less) allowed her to realize different aspects of herself. She would become more demanding and less caring when she had more makeup on. She would feel no one was on her level, not even her boyfriend. She would feel she deserves more and expects extra services from people because she would feel like a designer brand, like a celebrity; because she had spent time on herself and dressed for the occasion. She would expect everything and nothing is unattainable. She would become more opinionated, full of herself and demanding. In general, she felt empowered when she was above the norm; when she was perfect. Somehow Isobel strongly associated being perfect with having power or feeling powerful. For example, if she had her makeup on when she entered a club, she would expect not to pay to get in because they were taking her time. However, if she had no makeup on, she would feel she would have to pay or pay for a higher rate to get in as she did not dress for the occasion and did not follow the rules of clubs, e.g. looking pretty. She would feel powerless when below the norm; below the acceptance level. The acceptance level was described as what you should wear and how you should look on different occasions. In her narratives, not looking right for an occasion or not conforming to the norm would almost lead to some sort of social punishments. Having lighter makeup on would make her less aggressive and calmer about a situation rather than giving trouble straight back when someone gave her trouble (if she had more makeup on). Without makeup, she would feel normal, just chilled for a lazy day and would want to hide this side of herself in front of others.

Further, for Isobel, different types of work have different acceptance levels. When she used to work for Selfridges as a sales assistant for clothes, the acceptance level was “dress to impress” and to present herself as if everything is ok with her hair and
makeup done like she is going out in order to provide high performance of services to top clients. She felt higher and empowered with cosmetics, especially in a higher social class environment. In contrast to her experiences in Selfridges, working in the care industry made her feel she could be more herself. She wore no makeup when she was doing her care work as she did not want to over emphasize herself with her use of makeup. She needed to look after those in need in their best interests and therefore she would like to be at a level where she could interact with them without being above them with her makeup on. When she had her makeup on, she would have this “I am the best in the world” attitude and she would not want to portray this side of herself to her patients. Instead of feeling she has to hide without makeup as described before, in care, she felt they are accepting the way she is and she is accepting the way they are. She did not mind exposing herself to them as they were seen as vulnerable just like her without makeup. Makeup here would act as a distraction from her care work as she would feel over the top when she has got her makeup on.

Moving into Isobel’s childhood, a totally different acceptance level at school was experienced. The school wanted to make them all equal and look the same, e.g. the same length of skirt. She felt it was wrong to make everyone the same because everyone is different and has different personalities. The school was trying to force them into having the same personality. She struggled to be equal and follow the rules because at the end of the day she went to a white school and she was not looking the same as everyone else, e.g. Afro hair and dark skin. For example, the school did not want her to have hair extensions because they wanted everyone to have the same hair whereas she needed extensions to look the same because she does not have European hair but Afro hair. They also used to complain when her parents used to shave her brother’s hair because it was too short for them. However, it was better to maintain an Afro hair by cutting the hair back. She felt the school put up their own social barriers without much understanding of the differences. Also, when she just started wearing makeup, she could not find many brands that did her colour except for Mac. Such lack of understanding and lack of variety that she could choose from made her realise the acceptance level in the society, perhaps what is the norm, e.g. looking white and do what they do.
Makeup was also used as a coping defence, especially when she was a teenager. When she was a teenager, she used to wear a lot of makeup and would not even go to shops without makeup. In order to be perfect, she even had an eating disorder. Despite feeling timid without makeup, she felt perfect with her makeup on, like she got her clothes on. This perfection made her feel empowered, stronger and not bothered about others e.g. friends because she would be above everyone. She used makeup to mask and hide any issues she had at the time and appear perfect. With makeup, she could feel perfect and put on another strong personality to face the world. She was able to leave the issues behind without having to deal with them. For example, she had issues in the family e.g. her father was not a person she could talk to and she never bonded with her mother and sister. She used to go out and do things on her own and moved out from her parents’ house when she was fifteen or sixteen because they did not get along. Apart from the family issue, she had issues at school because she looked different. Isobel started wearing makeup when she was about ten or eleven because she felt she could not be herself. Wearing makeup was her way of saying this is me; her way of picking herself up and becoming a strong person. She almost like she needed to ‘toughen herself up’ in order to leave the issues behind and not let them affect her. Makeup as a coping defence made her tougher, stronger, empowered, argumentative and ready to fight back. It was also used to be a barrier between herself and others to stop people from getting too close to her – her timid self without makeup. Makeup helped her attain a strong personality and cope with growing up in a white school. Without makeup, it would have been very difficult or almost impossible for her to get through her teens because she would have been picked on for looking different, e.g. black, not pretty, especially when she also had bad skin at the time. During her teens, she wore more and more cosmetics and read magazines to make herself feel better and stronger.

Having Afro hair seems to be a symbol of difference to her. It took her a long time to come to terms with her Afro hair; to grow up with having hair that was clearly different from others. Growing up in a white school made her question herself but it is something she learned to live with. As she grew older, she understood herself more, was not so scared of showing herself without makeup and started letting her barriers down. Unlike in her teens when she would not go out without makeup, she now could
go out and chill even without makeup and let people get closer to her to know both sides of her – her contrasting selves with makeup (strong, demanding) and without makeup (timid, caring).

At the beginning of her relationship, it used to take her two to three hours to do her makeup. She ended up being caked in makeup. Her boyfriend used to only see her makeup side and he and his friends used to say that she was always very bitchy, very much in his face and had not got any tolerance level at all. Nonetheless, over time, she started showing him more her personal side without makeup and they had grown to like each other because he understood both sides of her. Now it only takes her fifteen minutes to do her makeup. He had seen her at her worst in the morning without anything on and did not leave her and therefore she felt accepted. She felt she would only reveal herself as in without makeup and the personality comes with it, when she got to know a person better. She would reveal one layer at a time. She would not show her personal self straightaway as it would make her feel vulnerable. Makeup was a barrier to stop people coming to close.

Although Isobel contended that no peer pressure influenced her in terms of putting on makeup, she was caught between standing out and being different and being the same (conformity). She started wearing makeup because she wanted to be different and to keep her character. At the same time, she wore makeup because she looked different and did not want to look different.

For her future self, although depending on her job at the time, she anticipated herself wearing more and more makeup to make herself look more presentable. However, the reasons for putting cosmetics on would change. Before she used makeup to hide issues but in the future, she would only like to use it in order to boost her confidence. As she has never bonded with her mother and her sister, she would use makeup as a bonding mechanism between herself and her children. She would give them tips on makeup, hair and nails, like what she did with her friends. Doing their makeup together could give them the time and space to talk about feelings and emotions. She felt makeup is like a therapy to her. Because makeup had helped her get through difficult times (e.g. teens), she felt it could be a good thing for her children. However,
she is against tattooed makeup as that way, she would never be able to reveal her true self.
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