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The relationship between product modification and personal identity

Bhana, Muhammad-Uzayr

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The relationship between product modification and personal identity

A research report submitted by

Muhammad-Uzayr Bhana

Student number: 0501926R

Masters in Management of Strategic Marketing (MMSM)

Tel: 084 628 3483

Supervisor:

Dr. Kerrin Myres

Wits Business School

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Abstract

Central to this study is the question of how males utilise car modification in the construction of their identity and what effect this has on their purchase behaviour. This research explores the process of how individuals utilise their cars to construct, enhance and maintain their identities by modifying them. The research explores six areas: the self-concept as the primary influencer, possessions influencing personality traits, car as extension of self, importance of differentiation, meanings and values and identity influencing consumption.

A sample size of 14 males aged between the ages of 20 and 25 residing in Johannesburg and Durban who were or had actively modified their cars were the research participants. This study used a qualitative semi-structured interview process to collect data, and inductive content analysis as the analytical approach. The findings reveal that the self-concept remains to be the primary influencing factor for the type of modifications carried out. The modified car is able to add identity traits to the core identity of the individual. The public and private meanings derived from ownership are interdependent and require each other in order to be valuable. The identity created through car modification did not influence the consumption habits of the individual. The identity, as with the self-concept, was always evolving, never remaining stagnant. The research participants were looking to standout from those around them. They needed to be differentiated and their cars provided the means by which to do this. This study has relevance for car marketers and could be used as a way for them and manufacturers to better enhance their understanding of the individuals to whom they market their cars and what impact they have on others within the social space.

Declaration Form

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1 Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this research is to understand how product modification is used to construct, enhance, and maintain personal identity and to explore the marketing implications of this behaviour for consumption patterns generally. The study will focus on the marketing implications of the car modification behaviour of males aged 20 to 25 years.

1.2 Context of the study

Following the thoughts of Belk (1985), research examines the role that car modification has to play in the construction, enhancement, and maintenance of an individual's personal identity. Motor cars have played an important role in society, affecting identity, individualism, and economies, since their widespread availability to consumers (Bayley, 1980). In the present time (21st century), motor vehicles have become more and more linked to the driver of the motor vehicle, focusing on what the vehicle portrays about the driver. Drawing on this, it can be seen that within a consumer-orientated society, motor vehicle manufacturers have moved on from producing motor vehicles that serve only utilitarian functions to those also service strong psychological functions (Lunt, Peter, Livingston, 1992).

Motor vehicle manufacturers produce cars that try to fulfil an array of functions for the consumer. However, cars remain mass produced commodities. This has led to consumers purchasing cars and actively involving themselves in processes of modification, by which consumers do not leave their cars the same in appearance and performance as when purchased. The process of modifying a car can be looked at from various perspectives, including external visual modifications, interior visual modifications, and performance modifications. However, due to the public nature of the motor vehicle, car modification has been examined from the perspective of the role it plays in constructing, enhancing, and maintaining personal identity. The broader marketing implication of such a study is the possibility that such identity

creation engulfs an individual, influencing not only his consumption of motor cars and accessories, but his consumption of all products.

South Africa has a growing motor industry and has large car manufacturers manufacturing cars. The motor Industry in South Africa is important as it contributes a large portion towards the country's GDP, as at the end of 2012, it stood at 7% contribution. It also contributed 12% to exports (Naamsa, 2011). It has become a growing industry and is increasingly being used by a number of large multinationals, such as VW, BMW, Mercedes-Benz, and Toyota, to produce cars and export them to markets across the globe (Southafricainfo, 2012). South Africa has also become a fiercely competitive market, with the number of brands totalling more than 65 in 2012, a large increase from 1994, when there were only 14 (News24, 2012). South Africa as a developing country is enjoying large growth in car sales, approximately 10% each year, with the motor industry exceeding revenue of R429-billion per annum (StatsSa, 2012) and vehicle accessory sales exceeding R70-billion per annum (StatsSa, 2012). This is a contribution of 16% to the total motor industry. Therefore, it provides significant value to business and provides a compelling opportunity to understand the car accessory business.

Motor vehicle companies are utilising their brand identities and the marketing of their brands to try and give themselves a competitive advantage over competitors. This differentiation of brands within the motor industry is of particular importance. To do this effectively, marketers need to have an in-depth understanding of their consumers. Looking at this subject from a behavioural perspective, we severely lack understanding as little research work has been done in this area (Reto, 2012).

When analysing prior studies, it is evident that brands and possessions are purchased, not only for their utilitarian value, but more for their self-expressive and identity benefits (Richins, 1994). This behaviour, as evidenced in prior studies, has not however, been conducted specifically in relation to motorcar modification in the South African market. All of the studies in this field have been conducted in developed markets (Belk, 1988; Ahuvia, 2005; Hewer, Brownlie, Treanor, Ferguson & Hamilton, 2008) but are also limited in number, and therefore leave a gap from which much understanding can be gained, as highlighted earlier, and can also be of significant importance to the South African motor vehicle industry. In the light of this,

this study aims to understand how product modification is used to construct, enhance, and maintain personal identity and to explore the marketing implications of this behaviour for consumption patterns generally. This is expected to guide marketers and producers of motorcars in the formulation of strategy and its implementation in the South African motor vehicle industry. Brand managers would find this study of particular importance, such as active brand management with relation to car modification, how the modification of cars may affect their corporate brand and reputation, and the behaviour that consumers undertake to perform these car modifications. This could assist brands in developing ways to facilitate car modification in order to increase their customer equity, as well as easing the process of car modification. The personal identity created through car modification could influence an individual's perception and consumption of all products, thus affecting not only car brands, but all the brands consumed by the individual. The extent to which the modified car influences this behaviour is of particular importance to the marketing discipline, as it could highlight an important aspect influencing consumption.

This study does not assume that car modification is the only method used in the formation of an individual's identity, but understands that there are many other symbols in society that are used, mutually or exclusively, in the formation of personal identity (Elliot, 1998). This report is based on the premise that some individuals consciously or subconsciously manage their identities through the modification of motor vehicles.

Elliot (1998) describes products as symbolic tools that can be used for the maintenance, construction, and enhancement of identity. This then relates to the consumption of these products as it can be said that consumption is able to be communicative (Grubb & Grathwohl, 1967). After this, the process of car modification that individuals actively engage in has symbolic meaning, which in turn, affects their self-identities (Grubb & Grathwohl, 1967), supporting the link between symbolic consumption and identity construction. It has been explained by authors that products are not only purchased for the functional benefit they provide, but for the symbolic meanings attached to them (Underwood, 2003; Sorensen & Thompson, 2006). From this point of view, this report focused on two main ways in which

possessions are used to assist in personal identity construction. Firstly, the inherent communicative ability that products have and, secondly, the way in which the consumer feels about himself after or during consumption of the product (Sorensen & Thompson, 2006).

Belk (1988) draws the parallel that, for many men, vehicles act as a kind of prosthesis, and that extreme identification with automobiles is a predominantly male fascination. Therefore, this study will also focus on males in South Africa.

Motor vehicles are possessions that have an inherent communicative ability. Manufacturers are aware of this and manufacture motor vehicles to satisfy as many functions as possible (Belk, 1988). Drawing on this, in this study car modification is analysed from how these mass produced cars are acquired and then modified in order to communicate the personal identity of the owner. This encompasses both the private meanings and public meanings the modified motor vehicle communicates. This report aims to uncover the capacity of motor cars, once they have been acquired and modified, to reflect and communicate an individual's identity.

1.3 Problem statement

1.3.1 Main problem

The minimal number of studies on how identity is constructed through the modification of products has resulted in this study analysing the role that car modification plays in constructing identity in both the private and public aspects of an individual's self. This allows an understanding to be developed of the marketing implications of this behaviour (Howell, 2007).

As outlined earlier, products communicate something about an individual's personal identity, and cars represent one of the largest purchases, evident in the public domain and therefore having arguably the greatest ability to communicate to others an individual's identity. Car modification takes this a step further, as consumers take a mass-market product and customise it to reflect their individual identities, with males doing this more so rather than females.

1.3.2 First sub-problem

The first sub-problem is to understand what meaning and value possessions have for individuals and how these possessions are used to construct and communicate an individual's identity.

1.3.3 Second sub-problem

The second sub-problem is to determine how this identity influences consumer behaviour with respect to other product categories.

1.4 Significance of the study

According to Belk (1988, p.139), "We cannot hope to understand consumer behaviour without first gaining some understanding of the meanings that consumers attach to possessions. A key to understanding what possessions mean is recognising that, knowingly or unknowingly, intentionally or unintentionally, we regard our possessions as part of ourselves."

This study looked at possessions, specifically cars and how men intentionally or unintentionally use them to create a part of themselves by the types of cars they own and drive. How public perceptions form the identity of men who drive different cars. Lastly, how the driver forms a self-perception (which may be intentional or unintentional) by the brand of car he drives.

The way in which the public views the drivers of car brands, and whether these views that the public have are actually true or not is also of importance. This research will provide an understanding of the link between consumer behaviour and how one's possessions, specifically cars, affect one's sense of self as humans and the way in which cars are an important extension of self.

The study fills a gap in that there have not been any studies conducted within South Africa on identity construction with specific focus on cars and the role that car modification plays in identity construction. In-depth studies have focused predominantly on America consumers (Belk, 1988, 2004; Howell, 2007). This study fills a gap in terms of car modification in the identity formation of people, predominantly

men, focused in South Africa. Research in this area has not been conducted in South Africa previously, and has a small footprint globally as well. South Africa is the first developing country in which a study of this kind has been conducted and the results highlight differences between developing and developed countries.

The study provides guidance to marketers and producers of motor cars with regard to how they will be able to modify their practices to cater to this increasingly popular culture of car modification from a commercial aspect. Brand managers would find this study of particular importance, such as active brand management with relation to car modification, how the modification of cars may affect their corporate brand and reputation, and the behaviour that consumers undertake to perform these car modifications. This could assist brands in developing ways to facilitate car modification in order to increase their customer equity as well as to ease the process of car modification. It can also assist the marketing discipline in understanding to what extent the formation of personal identity through modified cars influences an individual's consumption habits of all products, with the possibility of this becoming a dominant identity when purchasing products.

1.5 Limitations of the study

This qualitative study focuses on men who are actively involved in modifying cars, with a regional focus on Johannesburg and Durban. The limitations of the study are specific and have decreased the generalisability of the study. This is particularly due to the nature of the study, which advocates understanding over generalisability. The study adopts an inductive approach.

1.6 Clarification of terms

Car Modification	The process of modifying a car can be looked at from various perspectives, including external visual modifications, interior visual modifications, and performance modifications.
Identity	Individuals have two aspects of identity, these being personal identity and social identity. Personal identity is shaped by possessions, characteristics, relationships with others and how we are different to other people, whereas social identity arises from being part of certain groups, such as males, or belonging to a certain car group. In addition, Ahuvia (2005) says that personal identity is concerned with representing the self, to oneself and to others.
Self-concept	Each individual has a self-concept and this is the body of information that any given person has about themselves. In the formation of the self-concept, the multiple identities an individual has play a significant role (Eysenck, 2004). Once the self-concept of an individual has been developed, this concept is then used by the individual (subconsciously) to influence how they view themselves (Grubb & Grathwohl, 1967).

1.7 Assumptions

It was assumed respondents have a thorough understanding of cars and what modification of a car entails. It was assumed respondents know what car modification entails as it is an active process in which they engage, and they will have an understanding of this to understand and adequately answer the questions. It was assumed the level of knowledge of their car modifications assisted in understanding the research problem, as it is directly related to how it affects their identity construction. It was assumed that respondent was truthful in their responses. It was assumed that influences outside of the areas being researched would not affect the responses of respondents

2 Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

Following the thoughts of Belk (1985), this study examines the role that car modification has to play in the construction, enhancement, and maintenance of identity. Motor cars have always played an important role in society as they affect identity, individualism, and economies, since their mass availability to consumers (Bayley, 1980). In the 21st century, motor vehicles have become increasingly linked to the driver of the motor vehicle, focusing on what the vehicle portrays about the driver. Drawing on this, it can be seen that, within a consumer-orientated society, motor vehicle manufacturers have moved on from producing motor vehicles that serve utilitarian functions to vehicles with strong psychological functions as well (Livingstone, et al, 1992).

Motor vehicle manufacturers produce cars that are intended to fulfil an array of consumer needs. However, these cars remain mass produced commodities and, as such, have led to consumers purchasing these cars and actively involving themselves in processes of modification. The process of modifying a car can be looked at from various ways, but due to the public nature of the motor vehicle, car modification is examined from the role it plays in constructing, enhancing, and maintaining personal identity among men in South Africa.

This approach to this study does not assume that car modification is the only method used in the formation of an individual's identity, but understands that there are many other symbols in society that are used mutually or exclusively in the assistance of the formation of personal identity. This report is based on the premise that individuals consciously or subconsciously manage their identities by modifying of their motor vehicles.

Elliot (1998) describes products as symbolic tools that can be used for the maintenance, construction, and enhancement of identity. This then affects the consumption of these products as it can be said that consumption is able to be communicative (Grubb & Grathwohl, 1967). Therefore, the process of car

modification has symbolic meaning, which in turn affects self-identity (Grubb & Grathwohl, 1967). This supports the link between symbolic consumption and identity construction.

This report focuses on two main ways in which possessions are used to assist in personal identity construction: firstly, understanding the meanings and values possessions have for individuals and the ways these possessions are used to construct and communicate an individual's identity; and, secondly, understanding individuals' self-concepts, how possessions are used by consumers individually and how this is viewed in private and public settings.

As possessions, motor vehicles have an inherent communicative ability. Manufacturers are aware of this and manufacture motor vehicles to fulfil as many functions as possible. Drawing on this, car modification is analysed from how mass produced cars are acquired and then modified in order to communicate the personal identity of the owner. This encompasses both the private meanings and public meanings communicated by the modified motor vehicle. The age group of 20 to 25 has been selected as this identity construction is primarily initiated during these ages (Hewer, Brownlie, Treanor, Ferguson, & Hamilton, 2008). This research uncovers the importance of a motor car, once it has been acquired and modified, in reflecting and communicating an individual's identity.

2.2 An individual's psychology in constructing personal identity

2.2.1 *Individuals self-concept influencing identity*

Each individual has a self-concept, comprising the body of information that any given person has about himself. Each individual desires to view himself in a more positive light, with a higher self-image, and this could be in the form of aspirations (Grubb & Grathwohl, 1967). The more positively the individual views himself, the more likely it is to affect his consumption habits, by purchasing possessions which are more in line with his self-view, which in turn, will affect how people perceive him, as possessions have an inherent communicative ability as mentioned earlier.

The multiple identities an individual has play a significant role in the formation of the self-concept, so it can be said that the formation of the identity is concurrent with the formation of self-concept (Eysenck, 2004). Now, if the identity an individual is forming is looked at positively by others (friends and family), this positively affects the individuals self-image, which will result in that individual enhancing this identity, due to acceptance from those people the individual considers important (friends and family). Thus, if the definition of a post-modern individual is that of one who has multiple identities, multi-layered, multi-faceted and that always reflects on itself, it can be said that an individual's identity exists in his self-image and his perception of self, and thus he will consume products to support that identity. Due to having multiple identities, different products are consumed to support different identities. However, the motor vehicle is used to support not only one, but a number of the identities, due to its public nature (Eysenck, 2004).

2.2.2 *Personal Identity*

The concept of identity needs to be examined to be fully understood. Individuals have two aspects of identity, these being personal identity and social identity. Personal identity is shaped by possessions, characteristics, relationships with others, and how we are different to other people, whereas social identity is being part of certain groups, such as being a male, or belonging to a certain car group. In addition, Ahuvia (2005) says that personal identity is concerned with representing the self, to oneself and to others. The identity of an individual cannot escape either, and these two aspects combine to form an individual's unique identity.

Post modernism accounts of consumption constitute it as a way of gaining identity, and this is important in understanding the desire for a unique identity. Taking the above into account, one can safely say that an individual's identity of self is made up of personal identity and public identity, Elliot's (1998) readings further lead to saying that together both the public identity that a person has and his personal identity form the identity of self, and this quest for self-identity is a key characteristic of the post-modern individual (Elliott, 1998).

Postmodern individuals have the ability to construct their own unique identities, which are made up of both the personal and social factors, such as possessions,

attributes, who they want to be, and who they actually are (Maxwell, 2007). Cited in Sorenson's (Sorensen & Thompson, 2006) articles, an individual may have many identities and this is a trait of the post-modern individual. In different contexts and settings, different identities come through. The identity constructed by post-modern individuals is also a transformative one in which possessions play a large role (Sorensen & Thompson, 2006). The hybrid identity is influenced by society and the perceptions associated with an individual, such as the choice to drive a Toyota Prius to work and a BMW M3 on weekends. These communicate different things about an individual due to the symbolic meaning attached to the different cars by society, and, in so doing, relate to the different identities the individual may have. Identity is constructed through possessions, people, and places, which include family and public perceptions (Belk, 1985; Grubb & Grathwohl, 1967).

Proposition 1: The self-concept has a strong influence on the personal identity of an individual. The self-concept is the guiding influence on an individual's choice of possessions in constructing personal identity.

2.3 The role possessions play in construction of personal identity

2.3.1 *The value possessions provide to individuals*

The importance of possessions, for both their private and public meanings, can be placed into four broad categories, namely: the utilitarian value: the enjoyment value: the identity value: and interpersonal ties (Richins, 1994).

Some writers argue that motor vehicles can only be used for their utilitarian value, which is the actual usefulness of the commodity. In this case it is transportation, and the role the possession plays in providing the necessary function. Kleine all authors (1995) further emphasises that possessions that are not self-identifying can only be used for utilitarian functions. The enjoyment value a possession provides, which includes the sensory pleasure that possessions provide to the user, is significant here. This can be the pleasure one gets from playing with a beach ball with one's children, or looking at old photographs and the memories they evoke. The third category is that of interpersonal ties. These are the roles that possessions play in the formation of social relationships and this has particular importance in relation to

public space. Interpersonal ties are apparent when an individual's possessions reflect his or her connections with other people (Richins, 1994). Identity value comprises the role possessions play in reinforcing and expressing the individual's identity, or the identity he wishes to portray (Richins, 1994).

When considering modified vehicles, the utilitarian value of the car is transcended by the other categories, and the car is used for self-expression (Richins, 1994). Since the basic function of a car is transportation (its utilitarian value), the car as a possession is purely public in nature, and this is why it has become such a widely used commodity for personal representation of one's identity, as well as for interpersonal ties (Cassel, 1989). This leads to the argument that cars are not bought for their utilitarian function, and that this plays a secondary role to what the car says about the owner. Thus, a car has more importance placed on what it communicates, rather than on what it does, and this is seen in the process of modifying cars and manipulating the looks to represent oneself, more so than the functional benefits that may be gained.

2.3.2 *Meanings that are ascribed to possessions*

Focusing on both the public and private meanings a possession communicates, a much broader, complete picture can be presented of how possessions are used to construct identity, and how one possession can be used in different contexts to communicate different meanings. This is further expanded by Levy (cited in Underwood, 2003), who suggests that a symbol can be a term used in general for all occasions where an action, word, picture, object or behaviour is used and perceived to represent ideas or feelings other than itself. To expand on this, he is saying that observers perceive and act on a meaning they have developed in relation to the situation and context. However, the symbolic meaning that a possession has can change in relation to what different groups attach to it (Grubb & Grathwohl, 1967).

It can be deduced that the meanings possessions provide can be the centre of consumption. The communicative ability of a possession is dependent on the observers within a given context understanding the message it communicates, without too much variation in interpretation (Richins, 1994). Although the meaning can be coherent with observers, interpretation can vary among individuals and

contexts. This is an area which the individual cannot fully control and will be viewed in terms of those interpretations (Richins, 1994).

Public and private meanings are very distinct but related entities (Richins, 1994). In looking at private meanings of possessions, it is “the sum of the subjective meanings that an object holds for a particular individual” (Richins, 1994, p. 523). The owner’s personal history (retention) and the public meanings of possessions also play a role in what that possession communicates privately to that individual. Belk’s (1988) article states that our possessions are a major reflection of our identities and our identities reflect who we are. Private meanings attached to possessions differ from one individual to the next and this can be attributed to many factors that are outside the scope of this paper.

Public meanings “are those subjective meanings of a possession that are shared by society at large” (Richins, 1994, Pp 334). Where possessions are meaningful to their owners, the owners will often make an effort to amplify and modify the communicative ability of these possessions in the public space (Belk, cited in Howell, 2007). This can be attributed to the fact that, because possessions play a role in the formation of identity, that which is valued most by the owner will be amplified to communicate this identity (Richins, 1994).

The motor vehicle as a possession is of particular importance as it has high public visibility and due to this has become one of the most accessible areas of construction of identity (Belk, 1985). Post-modern individuals use this possession to rigorously lay stake to a unique personal identity by modifying these possessions. In examining public meanings of possessions, studies have found that observers (the public) are likely to have different meanings for possessions. However it has been found that the general population will have some agreement on many aspects related to the possession (Richins, 1994). This is so much so that Marsh and Collet’s (1986) studies have found that women judge men by their motor vehicles because they look at the vehicles and see elements of the drivers’ personalities.

2.3.3 *Possessions as a means of communication*

All possessions have an inherent communicative ability, whether an individual is aware of this or not. Different possessions communicate different things, however, and the motor vehicles as a possession communicates both publicly, due to the public nature of the possession translating to very important private meanings for the individual that owns it. Richins (1994) explains that the communication characteristics come about from the role that semiotics play in regard to possessions. Visible possessions have signs that are interpreted by observers (the public) within a given context, using an interpretive code. Richins (1994) explains that this is the reason consumers have moved away from purchasing products for their utilitarian value, but rather for the social meaning they convey through their communicative ability. This reinforces the point that possessions, utilised publicly, are used to create an impression of ourselves to others. We are in a decade where individuals are overwhelmingly concerned about representing themselves to others, and what their possessions communicate about them is of the utmost importance for their personal identity (Ahuvia, 2005).

2.3.1 *Possessions and the extended self*

Belk (1988) states that in order for us to try and understand consumer behaviour, we need to gain an understanding into the meanings that consumers attach to possessions. One of the key areas that is identified by Belk (1988) is that knowingly or unknowingly, whether intentional or not, people regard possessions as being a part of themselves. Tuan (1980) argues that we have a fragile sense of self as consumers and this needs support, we gain this support by having possessions because we are what we possess , James (1890) who laid the foundations for modern conceptions with regard to the self also defines people as the sum of their possessions. McClelland (1951) has suggested that objects external to us become part of the self when we are able to exert control and power over these objects as we might do on our own arms and legs, he went on to argue that the greater the control, the larger the acceptance into the extension of self. This was further cemented by Prelinger (1959) in his study where he identified items deemed to part of the self, in

which possessions and products emerged strongly to be a part of self by research participants within his study.

If possessions are regarded as part of self, any damage or unintentional loss to those possessions will be regarded as a loss of self (Goffman, 1961). This is evidenced in prisons and mental hospital whereby possessions are deliberately taken away to give these individuals a new clean identity. Individuals also make things a part of themselves by acts such as altering them or modification of these possessions as the individual views himself as the maker of the object (Herskovits, 1952). Sartre (1943) has suggested there are three ways within which possessions can become a part of self, one is that of exercising control over an object for an individual's own personal use, which supports McClelland's (1951) findings. The second way of making possessions a part of the extended self is by creating this possession, this could be through thought with an idea, or the physical act of creation into something tangible, regardless of the tangibility, the individual will regard it within his identity as long as it retains its mark of the original owner. The third way that Sartre (1943) has identified is that of individuals knowing their possessions, regardless of whether it is living or inanimate. The relationship in knowing an object on an intimate level is sufficient to regard the object as an extension of self. Possessions can be regarded as an extension of self if any of the three methods are exercised over an object, and the individual will treat the possession as such should this be the case (Belk, 1988).

2.3.2 *Individualism through possessions*

The varied opinions between meanings, public and private, and values has already been discussed, and as this paper is focusing only on the possession of vehicles and modification of these vehicles, the aspect of individualism cannot be ignored, and the importance in relation to identity and car modification will be discussed further.

The motor vehicle, as well produced or manufactured, is still viewed by many as an undifferentiated mass produced commodity (cited in Howell, 2007). It can be said that car modifiers are those individuals that actively produce unique commodities that represent their individualism (cited in Howell, 2007). So in establishing their individualism through car modification, modification can be seen as a personal and

public activity of identity creation. The process of car modification is used because it enables an individual to differentiate himself from others and constitute himself as a unique individual.

Car modifiers use modified cars as commodities or tools for identity construction, which carry important aspects of identity and personal significance, such as individualism, being unique (Belk, cited in Howell, 2007). Car modification is an attempt to appropriate standardised cars, and create an individual personal creation that stands out from the crowd, while also being associated with the owner. The need to emphasise individualism is so strong that even if a motorcar already has an identity attached to it, which is of a high social perception, these individuals will still not be content with this possession, as it is still mass produced and thus not a unique reflection of identity. To de-familiarise the possession and re-produce it is the practice of car modification. The importance of the individuality that the car communicates is so strong that studies have found the individuals driving the cars do not have a personalised sense of dress code, but that they rely on the modified car to communicate their individualism, rather than other possessions (cited in Howell, 2007). The modified car is 'delegated' to do the public identity work, while also producing fulfilling private meanings for the individual.

Proposition 2: Individuals are more likely to utilise possessions within economic reach and adapt them to reflect their desired self-concept to construct their desired personal identity. Individuals utilise possessions that have strong personal value and meanings in the construction of identity.

2.4 Relationship between personal identity and consumption

2.4.1 *Identity construction and consumption of products*

Consumption is "the search for choice, acquisition, and disposal of goods and services" (Hogg & Mitchell, 1996, p.629). There is a strong relation between consumption and construction of identities, which is supported in various articles on consumer research (Belk, 1985; Grubb & Grathwohl, 1967; Underwood, 2003). The meanings attached to consumption of certain objects facilitate the construction of

identity (Sorensen & Thompson, 2006). A more intense look at consumption reveals that consumption patterns of individuals have a strong relation to an individual's self-concept. Thus, individuals consume products that they believe are in line with their self-image, or more importantly for this study, their desired identity. This can be seen when individuals look at cars and say, "I can see myself driving that", or "No, I don't see myself rolling in one of those cars." Thus, consumers are consciously, or even subconsciously, making the connection. In the case of car modification, it is a very conscious action of being congruent with one's self-concept.

Articles on post modernism, as mentioned earlier, state that an individual's identity is not made up of only one identity but is multi-faceted (Mittal, 2006). The literature supports other authors who maintain that identity is constructed though consumption and can be an aspirational identity, enhanced through consumption, to depict who they aspire to be. Each identity assumed by a post-modern individual requires consumption to construct and enhance that identity (Mittal, 2006). Therefore, different consumption choices affect different identities an individual might have. The choice of product to construct one's identity may be subject to factors that an individual may not be able to fully match to the identity to which they aspire. If one looked at the specific possession of a motor vehicle, for many young individuals the choice they make may be the result of factors such as money available, insurance costs (of certain cars), age restrictions, and fuel consumption. While the main choice of product consumed may not be ideal to their particular identity, modification will take place to manipulate what that possession communicates to match the desired identity.

When a particular possession or product is viewed by an individual from a public recognition point of view, and is in line with his current identity or aspirational identity, it will be chosen over other possessions (Hogg & Mitchell, 1996). Thus, the importance of public recognition is as important as one's self-image, and this is due to the communicative ability of the item. An individual's friends and family's view on a possession before that possession is purchased is also subconsciously or consciously taken into account by that individual when acquiring a possession (Richins, 1994). Possessions with negative perceptions from an individual's peers, even if this is contrary to what the individual believes, will probably be avoided by

that individual. Observers and the general public also have perceptions regarding individuals based on their choice of products consumed. Grubb and Grathwohl's (1967) advocate that the acquired possession that an individual uses serves a semiotic purpose that communicates an aspect of the individual's identity. Thus, the personality that the possession has is interpreted as an expression of the owner's personality.

2.4.2 *Personal identity as primary influencer of consumer behaviour*

From the above mentioned area of consumption, it can be seen that consumption is taken into account from two sides: firstly, the public's view of the possession being consumed (Belk, 1988); and, secondly, the message the individual wants to communicate about themselves to others (Belk, 1988). As discussed earlier, there may be exceptions, but the general message communicated will be understood in a 'stereotypical' way, with most ascribing a very similar meaning to that individual based on his consumption of products (Richins, 1994).

Products are also an important part to the creation and maintenance of an individual's identity (Belk, 1988; Csikszenthihalyi & Rochberg-Halton, 1981). Consumers form positive attitudes towards those products that assist them in maintaining their personal and social identities, expressing who they are, and how they would like the public to view them (Shavitt, 1989). Products that are in line with their individual identities facilitate the expression of their personal identities (Evans, 1989).

However, personal identities are not all alike (Reed, 2002). Reed (2002) uses the example of two individuals who are both athletes. However, athlete A is one who does athletics on a casual level, taking up athletics as a pastime on weekends and playing the occasional game. Athlete B is one who has focused on athletics from a young age and a large portion of his activities are to keep up his athletic ability. He eats healthily and trains daily, taking all forms of athletic competition seriously. He works hard to achieve his goals and will not simply give up his athletics, as it part of who he is. Both of these consumers consider being an athlete as a part of who they are, a part of their identities. However, athlete B's personal athletic identity is more all-embracing and, as such, has a higher chance of influencing his attitudes,

judgements, and consumer decisions. Reed (2002) goes on to say that athlete B is more likely to view certain products in a more favourable light, products that are in line with his athletic ability, from the shoes he purchases to the food he purchases. The self-concept and importance to personal identity can manifest itself in a temporary public viewpoint or it can manifest itself to a degree where it engulfs an individual and forms a powerful basis for self-definition (Schlenker, 1985).

Proposition 3: Personal identity created through modified cars has a strong influence on consumer purchase decisions.

2.5 Conclusion

In conclusion, from this lens of the role possessions play in constructing one's identity, how the modification of cars are used as a way to construct identity, and how modification of cars are also used to enhance and maintain identity was examined. The literature revealed that possessions are used to set an individual apart in society and give the individual a better self-image.

Consumption of possessions then leads to the maintenance of this identity and helps constructs personal identity, making the social space an area to communicate a desired self-image. This proves to be an on-going process of continuous enhancement and identity transformation, a trait of the post-modern individual (Sorensen & Thompson, 2006).

Cars appear to be the ideal possession to do this, due to the public nature of this possession and the link this possession has with the societal space. They are thus used because of the public and private meanings they can convey about the individual (Richins, 1994) .The modified car becomes the link to the individual, communicating his identity to the world around him, due to the communicative ability of the possession (Richins, 1994). The identity constructed can also be the dominant role in the consumption of all products and not just those directly related to the car, thus having the ability to influence all consumption choices (Reed, 2002).

3 Chapter 3: Research methodology

3.1 Research paradigm

There are two broad approaches to research, the positivist approach and the interpretivist approach. The interpretivist approach is one in which the researcher aims to understand and establish the actions and motivations that lead to various patterns of behaviour, and, due to the lack of research on this subject, an exploratory research approach will be utilised in this research study (Baker, 2001).

Qualitative research is a subjective yet systematic way to explain the life experiences of respondents and assign meaning to them (Burns and Grove, 2009). Qualitative studies afford researchers the chance to explore experiences, perspectives, feelings, and behaviours in an in-depth manner, while taking into account the quality and complexity of the context in a holistic manner (Holloway and Wheeler, 2002).

A foundation for qualitative research is that it does not aim to measure; it has a purpose to provide insight. The insight is reached through a process that is made up of meaningful analysis and integration of the views and opinions expressed by respondents (Spiggle, 1994). Behaviour and attitudes are then experienced in a holistic way, which is in part conscious and in part subconscious. Within the qualitative research framework, this is separated into meaningful fragments, and allocated or assigned to abstract associations, emotions, motivations, meanings and dimensions, and finally puzzled together into one big picture that is utilised for various reasons (Ko de & Norbert, 1998).

Qualitative research is able to provide in-depth insight, while being flexible and within a small sample base. The results, once analysed, are concrete and real life, providing depth and insight (de Ko & Norbert, 1998).

3.2 Research design

The research design that is selected for a research report should be the one that is best matched to the research question in obtaining data that would best answer the proposed research question (Parahoo, 2006). For this paper, a cross-sectional qualitative research design has been chosen to understand how car modification is utilised to construct, maintain, and enhance personal identity for men in South Africa.

Data was collected using semi-structured interviews. Participants in the study were be interviewed alone, utilising a clearly laid out research instrument (Appendix I). The interviews used semi-structured open-ended questions and were scheduled to last between 45 and 90 minutes per respondent.

A semi-structured interview methodology was selected for two primary reasons: firstly, they are suited to the exploration of perceptions and the opinions of the respondents regarding the research problem, enabling probing for more information as well as clarification of answers and, secondly, the respondents in this sample group would be ultimately suited to an interview process which was guided in a meaningful way as opposed to being too formally structured, cutting off depth of answers, or too informal, allowing for the conversation to wander from the research problem (Barriball & While, 1994).

Semi-structured interviews have a range of benefits for this study as they operate within a flexible framework. Participants can be questioned within a loose framework, and encouraged to talk about their experiences, opinions, and perceptions, through open-ended questions. The ordering of the questions can be guided by the respondents, lending fluidity to the conversation and allowing a more in-depth analysis into responses. The validity of the study can also be increased by the collection of data that is rich in explanation and analysis (Hussey & Hussey, 1997). The very nature of the interview framework also allows for re-entry into the field at differing intervals, where existing categories and concepts identified that were emerging, could be explored (Dearnley, 2005).

3.3 Research population and sample

3.3.1 *Research population*

The targeted population for this research report were male individuals in South Africa between the ages of 20 and 25 who

1. Have purchased their own cars
2. Are personally responsible for the selection decision

3.3.2 *Research sample*

As suggested by Cormack (2000), a smaller selective sample is utilised, due to the in-depth nature of the study, and the data analysis that was needed. As the researcher intended to acquire a purposive sample, there were some criteria that needed to be met.

Respondents needed to own a car and needed to have modified the car or be in the process of modifying their cars. This ensured they had the relevant exposure to car modification in order to provide relevant data. Respondents who were currently in the business of modifying cars were also eligible for the sample. This provided a method of triangulation as an alternative source was utilised for data collection. Respondents needed to be men and needed to be residing in South Africa. Respondents were chosen in either Durban or Johannesburg, as this will provide access to a large portion of the population (due to population density) as well as ease of access for the researcher. The respondents needed to be experts in the field of car modification, as this allowed for richness in data as well a smaller sample being utilised for saturation to occur. As highlighted in the data saturation study, 12 participants represent a large enough sample to obtain saturation point in a qualitative study (Fuerst, McAllister, Van de Wetering, &Wyatt, 2011).

The sample was made up of 14 respondents: seven from Johannesburg and seven from Durban, this was a sufficient sample size in which saturation was achieved.

3.4 Research instrument

The data for this study was collected utilising a semi-structured interview approach, designed by the researcher. The research instrument (Appendix I) was be that of a semi-structured interview method, utilising open-ended questions. The interviews took approximately 45 to 90 minutes.

The interview schedule contained characteristic, behavioural and attitudinal questions. The characteristic questions elicited responses about the types of cars that individuals have purchased, why they purchase these cars, and what the intention is for the use of these cars. This data helped identify what role cars play in their lives and how they interpret the use of these possessions.

The behavioural questions further probed what role their cars played in their lives, how they went about modifying their cars, and what the modification entailed. These questions gave the researcher an understanding of how these individuals interacted with their cars.

The last set of questions, based on attitudinal questions, solicited information describing their feelings and perceptions surrounding cars, and modification of cars. This gathered information on how these individuals perceive their cars and the modification of cars and how the cars contribute to their lives.

A covering letter (Appendix II) was sent before the interviews. The letter provided potential participants with a general outline of the purpose of the study as well as the research teams' contact information. The confidentiality of a participant's responses was highlighted.

3.5 Procedure for data collection

The one-on-one face-to-face interview gives the researcher the ability to take notice of and observe non-verbal communications and allows the respondent, as well as the researcher, to clarify areas or questions (Barriball & While, 1994). The interviews consisted of questions that were developed for this study to assist the researcher in answering his research question.

All the interviews were audio-taped, after permission had been granted by the respondent. This was needed to ascertain accuracy and validity of the interviews, which can be replayed for analysis purposes. Audio tapes provide detailed insight into the performance of, not only the respondent, but also the interviewer. Audio tapes give access to data such as pauses and intonations, enhancing the validity and accuracy of the information collected. Audio tapes also assist in reducing the potential for researcher error, which could occur by recording data incorrectly or taking answers to questions that were not asked. These audio tapes were then transcribed and analysed.

Anonymity was assured throughout the course of the interview recording and all respondents were made aware and reminded that they had the right to withdraw from the interview before it started. The assurance of the respondents remaining anonymous was further ensured by conducting the interviews in a private room. The interviews were conducted over ten days.

3.6 Data analysis and interpretation

As per Polit and Beck (2008, p. 507), “The purpose of data analysis is to organize, provide structure to, and elicit meaning from research data”. Data analysis was not stagnant; it was an on-going process, running in conjunction with data collection. This was as per Polit and Hungler (1999), who said interviews are conducted and the data is then gathered, synthesised, interpreted, and lastly communicated to give meaning to the data. However, according to Burns and Grove (1999), the process of qualitative research methodology and data occurs in three broad phases: description, analysis, and interpretation.

The data analysis technique used in this study was inductive analysis. Prior research had not been conducted in South Africa and this left a gap in existing studies that could benefit from further description. Thus, an inductive analysis approach was selected. The inductive analysis approach involves detailed analysis of raw data, which is primarily utilised to determine themes or concepts by the researcher. This aligns with the description given by Strauss and Corbin (1988) wherein the researcher starts with an area of study and then lets the theory emerge from the

data. This analytical approach allows research findings to present themselves from the more frequent or significant themes that are identified in the raw data, without limits enforced. The number of codes and categories were kept to a minimum to assure coherency in the data coding (Saldanha, 2009).

The analysis process, using an inductive approach, is represented in Figure I and explained thereafter.

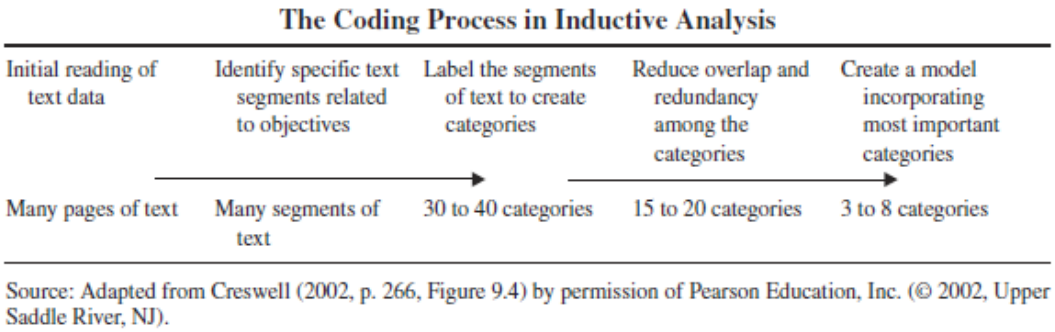

Figure I: The coding process

The transcribed audio files and notes were presented in a common format. This included font sizes, margins, questions, and highlighting. Each file was printed and backed up for safekeeping. The next step was to read all of the text in detail, until familiarity was reached with the content and an understanding was gained of themes and events that appeared in the text. The third step was for the researcher to code the data and subsequently identify themes or categories. The more general categories were developed from the evaluation objectives. However, less general categories were determined from the raw data. Qualitative analysis programmes were utilised to speed up the coding process (Durkin, 1997). The fourth step was to determine whether there was overlapping coding and whether all the uncoded data was irrelevant. The last step was to continuously revise the categories, looking for potential sub-topics, or points of contradiction that presented new insights. Quotations were also identified to support the core theme of a category (Thomas, 2006).

Permission to carry out the study was granted by the Wits Business School ethics committee. For access to participants, a letter (Appendix II) was be drafted and sent

to all potential respondents, inviting them to participate in this study. With this letter of invitation, a short explanation was given, concerning the aims of the study, what the participation of respondents would entail, what rights the participants would have, the discussion and confidentiality thereof, as well as all contact details of the researchers needed for clarifying any areas of concern. With this letter of confirmation, a consent form (Appendix III) was provided, which was then read, understood, signed and returned to the researcher by the respondent. The researcher then allowed for a period of two weeks before a final selection was made based on the set criteria, ensuring adequate time for respondents to consider the proposal and make a decision on participation, to allow for any questions that may arise, after this, final approval was reached and the research conducted.

3.7 Research limitations

The research limitations are:

- Sample size limited to 14
- Lack of prior research on this subject of study
- Qualitative research
    - Respondent exaggeration
    - Respondent untruthfulness
- Data cannot be generalised
- Time constraints on the researcher

3.8 Validity and reliability of research

Verification is a process that involves checking, confirming, making sure and being certain. Within the qualitative research paradigm, verification refers to those mechanisms that are used during the process of research to continuously contribute to making sure reliability and validity are met, and thus confirming the rigor of the study. These mechanisms are woven into every step of this research to construct a solid verification to the research (Creswell, 1997; Kvale, 1998). This is done by ensuring all errors are identified and corrected before being utilised and before these errors change the analysis of research. These principles were followed throughout

the process to ensure that the analysis was corrected before any discrepancy occurred.

The process employed is a non-linear process, where the researcher continuously moves between the following elements to ensure congruence: instrument formulation, literature, recruitment, data collection strategies and analysis. Data were systematically checked to make sure that focus was maintained and that the data congruence to the conceptual work of analysis, followed by interpretation, was constantly monitored and confirmed. Verification strategies were also employed to help the researcher to move on, halt, or amend the research process to achieve validity and reliability. The verification strategies involved were the following: methodological coherence, sufficiency of sampling, collection of data, analysis of data, theoretical mind frame, and the development of theory (Morse, Barrett, Mayan, Olson, & Spiers, 2002).

3.8.1 Validity

Investigator responsiveness was utilised to ensure greater validity to the research, especially at the data collection phase. The investigator remained sensitive, open, utilising creativity and insight as well as having the ability to stop any ideas that appeared to be poorly supported, regardless of the potential or excitement they may initially appeared to have had (Morse et al., 2002).

The strategies utilised to promote qualitative research validity are not limited to, but include, low inference descriptors, triangulation (data and method), peer review and reflexivity. Low inference descriptors are the use of descriptions phrased very similarly to that of the participants' accounts and researcher's notes. Direct quotations were used as a type of low inference descriptors. Triangulation also validated the research by utilising multiple sources. This allowed for corroboration. Data triangulation was a validity structure of this research, where multiple data sources were utilised. Peer reviews, in which the researcher's interpretations, as well conclusions, were discussed with other people. This was discussed with a disinterested peer, and they were requested to view the research in a sceptical way to provide a more solid case for interpretations and conclusions. Peer review by

individuals who are well versed with similar research was also used to provide insights (Johnson, 1997).

3.8.2 Reliability

In qualitative research, reliability is the trustworthiness of procedures and data generated (Stiles, 1993). First, to overcome researcher bias in the interpretation of the data, the interview data was sent to an independent researcher to verify the extent of agreement with regard to the findings and the analysis. This is a form of inter-rater reliability (Weber, 1990). The researcher also kept detailed notes of all decisions that were taken during the process. This allowed for greater auditability, contributing to the reliability. The data analysis process was coded to describe data, such as statements made by respondents. This added to reliability as the coded data could be cross-checked with interview transcripts (Roberts, 1999). The data analysis programme Atlas TI was used to also enhance reliability as rules were applied that were built into the programme (Robson, 1994). The additional methods for increasing reliability were that of ensuring technical accuracy with the audio recordings, and how these were transcribed (Atkinson & Heritage, 1984; Roberts, Priest, & Traynor, 2006).

4 Chapter 4: Findings

4.1 Introduction

This chapter reveals the qualitative meanings from the respondents of Gauteng and KwaZulu-Natal with regard to their car modifications. It is written in order to capture the important findings of the research conducted over the 2013 year. Some elements have been written in the first person to show the emotional connection the informants have with the research subject and to conform to narrative traditions in qualitative research studies (Creswell, 2003).

The respondents were purposely selected based on these primary characteristics: the individual (1) had to have a modified car or be in the process of modifying a car; (2) had to be in the age group of 20 – 25 years old; (3) had to be male; (4) had to have actively been involved in the purchase decision process. Upon introducing the research study to the respondent and receiving consent to participate, I provided him with a letter informing him what the research was about and the areas of focus of the study. I collected first name, phone number and email address in order to contact the respondent for additional information that might be required. After this, respondents were contacted to set up a suitable time and place for the interview.

Fourteen respondents who were car modifiers were interviewed over a period of six months. The respondents were mixed in race and age, ranging between 20 and 25 years old. They identified themselves as ‘car modifiers’ and had owned cars that were substantially modified. All the respondents were employed and lived either on their own or with partners.

The interviews comprised open-ended questions that sought responses related to the research study. I used (see Appendix A) a discussion guide to make sure all relevant areas of the study were covered and to keep the conversation on track if it deviated too far from the research topic. Respondents were fully aware that they controlled the overall length of the interview. On average each interview took 45 minutes. The interview covered:

1. Introduction
2. Respondent's car
3. Respondent's modification of car
4. What does your car say about you?
5. How do you treat your car?

4.2 Self-concept as primary influencer

The self-concept emerged as a key focus within the literature and any findings to support or negate this were of particular interest. The findings in this section go into further detail with regard to the level of involvement these respondents had with their cars and the modification of their cars to meet their desired self-concept. The car had high visibility in the public space. This was highlighted further by respondent's association of the car modification scene with how the media portrays street racing.

4.2.1 *Consideration before purchasing a car is a lengthy process*

Respondents would go through a lengthy process in determining what car to buy for themselves, because of a number of factors. Respondents were very aware of their economic limitations and would therefore consider a car within their financial means, but this did not mean that the self-concept would be abandoned in light of economic constraints. Such constraints would merely cause respondents to re-evaluate the purchase decision and the car would nevertheless be the basis of their public identity as well as their desired self-image.

> *"Many of my friends know me and they know how long it took me to buy this car. I looked for 9 months to find that specific model, that specific spec of a car and that colour that I wanted. It took me 9 months." (Respondent 1)*

Even though the car chosen would be modified, the car needed to have the correct image on which to base the modification. That image differs from individual to individual because the self-concept and the individual's desired projected image

differ. The car provided a suitable platform to begin the process, and from there would be further built upon. The respondent below illustrates this point by saying that the standard car had what he needed, namely a certain look and appeal onto which his personality and image could be transferred by modification of the car.

> *"It is very simple. VW is very conservative so that is what I liked about it, it is very simple. It can be changed and made, it is a people's car for a person that can modify it as there are ways to improve the car. That is why I love my car" (Respondent 6)*

> *"If you knew about cars then you knew about the car that I was driving whereas the Polo even if you had never heard of cars in your life, you would know about the VW so that is the main reason" (Respondent 6)*

The respondent below chose to purchase a certain car, but it may not have been his first choice had he been in a better financial position. He was influenced quite strongly by his friends, but mentioned that differing car brands had higher maintenance, suggesting that he might have chosen a different car brand had he been able to afford the higher maintenance. He made a choice that was acceptable to him and that had his friends' approval.

> *"Also, taking into consideration maintenance of the cars. The other brands, maintenance is much higher, especially cars which are out of warranty and maintenance plan." (Respondent 6)*

Respondents would take into account the existing identity and stereotypes of the potential purchase, the possibility of enhancing or changing that identity to their own liking, and the potential negative connotations of that identity and that could be overcome. The quote below highlights this very point adeptly. The respondent was aware of the perceived identity of the car, before purchase, and this remained one of the main reasons for the purchase of this car. The identity the car had was a trait that he did not possess nor wished to possess in his capacity when dealing with people on a more intimate level, the cars identity was transposed onto his current identity when he drove the car and to those that saw him with the car. However, when out of that setting the identity the car had given him did not remain with him. This is in line

with the multiple identities that modern individuals possess and how they choose to project those identities when communicating with the public.

> *"It gives you, it allows you to be much more confident in type of situations. It makes you say, "Oh that's my car and what are you gonna say about it," cause look people respect you not because you are any kind of person but you are really just a pale kid from the middle class suburb and you take on the car's identity to a lesser extent. I kind of moulded myself a bit to the car. It gave those reasons to be confident, the Opel to a much certain extent" (Respondent 14)*

A strong influencer would also be that of the individuals within their personal space, typically identified as their family, friends and social circles within those two realms.

4.2.2 *Car is utilised to enhance the external appeal of the individual*

The car, when modified, is utilised by respondents to enhance their identity and appeal externally. The car has a strong communicative ability in the public setting and therefore any enhancement of the car will reflect on the individual, giving him a better perceived identity to those external to him, as identified by the respondents.

The key point here related to how the respondents' images were enhanced in the way they wanted them to be enhanced. It is not in one certain aspect that all respondents want to be enhanced, but differs from respondent to respondent. In this example the respondent wanted to be portrayed as a gangster; others might not want to be seen in this way, so how the individual's identity and appeal is enhanced is based purely on the individual and should that be achieved, the goal of enhancement is also achieved.

> *"They will think that I am a car enthusiast and that I am a bad boy and a gangster and that I am loud and in your face which is what the car is and someone who is interested in cars. I think they think that I am somebody who is, ja, a gangster and a bad boy. I would think that they think that I am probably a muscular boy and coloured and that it is associated with*

coloured people. So, ja, that is probably what people will think" (Respondent 7)

For the following respondent the element of arrogance was being communicated across to the external, and this was not necessarily what he wanted to communicate, but he noted how this perception could not be avoided with the choice of modifications he had made. He wanted his car to look aggressive and had achieved that, but in so doing he believed, also started communicating arrogance. The trade-off was worth it for this respondent and he left the car as is. Even though his appeal was enhanced, the trait of arrogance was added.

"About the E30, that communicated a young arrogance to an extent. If I look at the rims it wasn't something over the top but it wasn't subtle either. It was an aggressive car, everything about that car was aggressive from the stance to the flared arches it was aggressive. Other than that people would still view that car as cheap so I don't think there's that element of pretentiousness about it, when you are superficial about the car through other people's eyes. There was possibly arrogance I used drive that car more that itself definitely aggressive nature" (Respondent 10)

The last highlight in this section was a respondent who had modified his car and believed the appeal to the external was twofold, the first being an individual who was hard working, saved up and bought an enthusiast's car. This first view was when the car was seen without his being present. The second view he believed was when he was physically present with the vehicle and the external view changed from that of hard working, to arrogance and a 'cocky' perception as the respondent put it, due to his age and the type of car he had.

"To an extent yes I used to get long looks from that car just from just generally driving around talking, people's perception on me, me coming from driving an Opel that would be of a work perception to people. I think in that car getting back to that young and cocky answer, when I got in the

car I had that young cocky look-at-me kind of perception to people" (Respondent 14)

4.2.3 *Media depictions have effect on image perceptions*

The media depiction of modified cars and the image associated with modified cars had a big influence on the decisions individuals made. A number of respondents cited the first 'Fast and Furious' movie as a key influencer of their perceptions of modified cars.

The first 'Fast and Furious' movie was cited by a number of respondents as being a big influencing factor on how they pictured the car modification culture and how they perceived modified cars. This was a major factor they took into account when modifying their own cars. Even though it remained as a secondary influencer it was the only outside influence from the media that was mentioned by the respondents, aside from the car brands that they preferred. The movie represented a lifestyle which they aspired to and the cars played a central role in that lifestyle depiction.

"Yes, the movie 'Fast and the Furious' too and also my brother is a mad car fanatic and he had a lot to do with that – he influenced my decisions too. So, ja, but I would not change anything" (Respondent 4)

"Yes, we all watch 'Fast and the Furious' and we can all associate with Fast and the Furious. In the era that we were born, I mean, everything with cars started with Fast 1 and then it kind of evolved from there. I mean I always wanted to own the Supra from Fast 1, I don't know about you, so like, I would associate like those guys like Paul Walker, Vin Diesel with that and with car modelling because there hasn't been, I mean no one makes a movie about OEM Plus cars. Most people perceive it as boring even though there are so many finer touches that the people wouldn't share. That is who I would associate" (Respondent 13)

4.2.4 *Social status of individual is altered with modified car*

Respondents mentioned how their modified car to some extent influenced the status the external public gave them and increased their social status among that group.

To highlight this point the respondent in this case identified the status his friends and society gave him as one of the reasons he modified his car. He was looked up to by people younger than himself while also being looked upon in a better light by his peers in society. The modified car gave him status in society and even though it was not identified as a primary driver by the respondent, the approval of the public was directly related to approval of his desired self-concept.

> *"I mentioned earlier that to me it was that the status thing back home with modified cars and there were a lot of guys younger than I was and when they saw me they would come and check the car out so to me it felt that the car elevated my status amongst them but in actual society I wouldn't know if it made a difference but to that clique of cool people, yes, it did" (Respondent 4)*

In the following case the respondent noted how he was getting fame from his modification of his car, but he initially identified the reason for the modification was self-enjoyment. Respondents were careful not to sound narcissistic in their response and as such the initial response would be a more carefully considered statement, followed by one aimed at seeking societal acceptance, in this case, fame.

> *"Basically the aim for the modification was for self-enjoyment, it was just for me to enjoy my car but just the exclusivity was a bonus I did enjoy the exclusivity it did give me a little bit of fame" (Respondent 8)*

For some it was to break the stereotype and this was highlighted by the respondent in getting recognition and approval for not choosing a certain type of car of a certain stereotype. He made a conscious choice to avoid that stereotype and as a result was looked upon as someone who was able to think for himself and make decisions for

himself. This was appreciated by society and as a result they looked upon him more favourably, according to the respondent.

> *"Generally they would think I'm successful in that sense and that I've made good choices buying this, not buying a GTI and also that I'd be a fun person more, or so I'd be someone as fun that would like to talk to you at times" (Respondent 3)*

4.2.5 *Public setting is an important area to gain acceptance/approval*

The car as a possession is exposed to the public in almost all instances. Respondents thus have a strong need to gain acceptance and approval from those who are in that public setting. The car represents the respondent and any judgement made about the car is a judgement made about the respondent, thus it is a critical area for respondents to gain acceptance.

These respondents were aware of their need to seek approval from those around them and those that saw them when driving their cars. They had affection for their car and enjoyed what they had done to modify the car, but that was not enough. They needed the public to ratify and give their car approval in whatever form that may be, in order to truly feel they had made the correct choice of modification for their cars. Their own contentment without the general public approval was not enough.

> *"We always look for approval but I knew that when I looked at my car, I loved it but you still want the approval." (Respondent 6) @@ you've just introduced full-stops at the end of quotes. None previously.*

> *"Yes, you don't want to me the Golf 1 stock standard, you don't want people to look at you and say check that car out so that did have a major influence." (Respondent 4)*

The respondent in this case was overjoyed by the fact that individuals from the public had come up to him to ask him about his car and display their approval of the car he had modified. The public played a large role with regard to his feelings towards his

car as the acknowledgement boosted his affection towards the car. The acknowledgement and appreciation from the public made the respondent feel better about himself, through the car.

> *"So that is about it. Yes, it makes me feel better about myself. It is nice to know that you get that acknowledgement." (Respondent 7)*

The respondents in this case referred to the external public as 'them' and referred to their success in achieving public approval by making their cars faster than others within that space. Their goal was to be faster and thus better than the others and they achieved this when they would engage in illegal street racing and beat their opponents. This was an important development for them as the car's competitiveness and success was taken to be an individual victory, and if there were any losses, the same would apply.

> *"I achieved my goal. I was faster than most of them" (Respondent 8)*

> *"But it wasn't enough power for me 'cause of my friends all had faster cars so wanted to keep up" (Respondent 8)*

> *"Stock, it was very slow so we had to do a few modifications to keep up with the rest of the guys on the street." (Respondent 1)*

The respondent in this case would transfer the identity traits he thought the external public would give him when he won illegal street races with opponents. He mentioned that he thought everybody would think he was cool if he had the fastest car and thus went out and modified his car to be the fastest that it could be, within his resource limits. The ability to prove his worth and gain the trait was a driving factor for his modifications.

> *"Well, for me it was only a cool factor, I always thought I will be considered cool if I had a machine car that was faster than everyone else's" (Respondent 14)*

4.2.6 *Modification of cars evolves, does not remain static*

Modification of the respondents' cars never reached a stage at which the car was not being modified further; it was constantly evolving. Respondents had a view in their minds of the direction in which they wanted to modify their car and where they wanted to get with their modifications, but that did not stop once they had reached that goal; the goal posts simply moved. This is in line with their self-concept constantly evolving and as such the car would need to continually evolve.

> *"At the time that I got the car, there wasn't much that I disliked about it. There were a few cosmetic things that I didn't want but anyway, that changed over time like the rims on it were 13 inch tyres and gave an overhaul at the time. Small things like the aerial in the front, a bee-sting aerial. It had standard lights in the front, no boot spoilers. You look at how the Golfs at the time looked, everyone is pimped up. So, when I first got it, I was like let's try and get to the next level of doing something. At the time, I was quite content with it" (Respondent 4)*

Modifications were done primarily to get increased performance out of the car by extracting more power from its engine. The reference below to having more power was that the amount of power the car had at any given time was not enough. The future modifications planned by the respondent would remain insufficient. It displayed the respondent's needs to continually modify their cars and get more out of their cars at any given point. The car would never represent a completed state, in their minds.

> *"Basically then you want more power and more power." (Respondent 3)*

Respondents were also aware of the fact that as they aged, their preferences in modifications would evolve, contributing to this cycle of continual modification. A respondent highlighted this particularly well when he referred to his future and being older, saying that his modifications would differ from when he was younger. This

showed an awareness of the stages in their lives and that as they progressed through these stages their tastes would change and ultimately what they wanted out of the car would change. Respondents did not mention that they would stop modifying the car, but rather that the type of modification would change.

> *"There will be a time when my favourite modification would be an extra bit of a chair because of ageing. You grow with modifications and when I had the E30 I could have had a modification, had I been able to make a car much faster I would have absolutely, I would have loved it, I would never thought that adding the brakes, I wouldn't have never thought the E30 inherit a lack of safety for ABS airbags, those kind of things. You grow with your modifications. Yes I still enjoy speed and mine is very fast and in future it'll be equipped with big brakes, roll cages, bucket seats, wise choices to go along with branches of the car"* (Respondent 14)

The self-concept emerged as a strong influencer for the respondents with regard to their choices in cars and the modifications they then carried out on these cars. The respondents engaged in lengthy purchase decisions before purchasing their cars to better match their desired self-concept. The car then became the ideal conspicuous possession to enhance the way they were perceived, thereby reaching their desired self-concept. The self-concept was also influenced by external media, such as car-related movies and the portrayal of car modifiers in those movies. While engaging in these activities and processes, the respondents found their social circles evolving and changing as well. This served to enhance their self-concept as they would gain approval from their peers in these circles and therefore gain acceptance into the modified car culture. The modification process for these respondents never reaches a point of satisfaction. It continually evolves as their self-concept evolves.

4.3 Possessions influencing personality

The manner in which possessions influenced the respondents' personalities and identities was a clear focus of this study and a key theme that emerged through analysing the data researched. The findings have identified to what extent the car as a possession did influence the personality of the respondents. The possessions (cars) in this study played numerous roles in the influence of their personality through various means such as how their closest family and friends would view them, the evolution of their social circles due to their cars, the sense of belonging they would achieve by association with the car culture and how they utilised different forms of interaction with fellow car modifiers, which in turn affected their personalities. The findings on this sub-section are presented below.

4.3.1 *Personalities are used when needed, individual has multiple.*

Individuals do not have one static identity with which they identify; they have a number of different personalities between which they can switch whenever they like. When driving their cars in the societal setting in which cars play an important role for them, they utilise the car to enhance their identity, taking the traits from their cars and transposing those traits onto their personal identities.

> *"Everything that car represents is not what I represent in reality so it is my alter ego and that is my split personality" (Respondent 7)*

> *"Ja, exactly, ja! We both have separate identities" (Respondent 5)*

The respondents identified with having unique identities aside from their cars, but the identity developed with the car had become the dominant identity for these respondents. The car was used to add traits to the respondents for those who only experienced their identities when they were with their car, whereas those who knew the individual before his car ownership would not necessarily say he was the type of person portrayed post-ownership. The car could be worn like a garment, giving the respondents a specific identity when they desired, but in the public setting the car became synonymous with the individual and thus the dominant identity.

> *"I've always liked to look kind of gangsterish" (Respondent 14)*

4.3.2 *Personality is changed/affected with modified car*

Respondents had made mention of how in certain cases the car had changed or affected their personality in some way. Some behaved differently or became more confident in the way they carried themselves and for others their personalities changed, fitting the stereotype attached to the car.

In reference to the personality change, one of the respondents referred to individuals he knew who had bought a car and begun modifying it, developed personality changes in a negative way. The respondent highlighted how these individuals had become increasingly arrogant and over-bearing, resulting in their not having any friends, with only their car remaining by their side. The respondent then mentioned how he was consciously avoiding this situation himself by keeping a level head at all times and never letting his modified car change his personality. The respondent's modified car did, however, change his personality, but his concern related specifically to a negative, rather than a positive, personality change.

> *"I have seen it happen to quite a few people where they start off with a standard car and as their car gets modified, their mouth begins to open more and at the end of it all, they end up with no friends and more enemies and they just become like bets with "Let's race" and not taking into consideration what can happen after and you can end up with no friends and also personality changes and you can end up being all alone with just you and your big mouth and your fast car." (Respondent 1)*

Another respondent highlighted how he had changed his identity and personality whenever he was with his car. He would act and behave according to the identity he assumed the car had. The car in this case was associated with gangsters and as a result he acted as he thought a gangster would, spinning his tyres at every chance he could, making a loud noise with his car's exhaust system and he even changed the way he dressed and the music he listened to. The car he chose had a large impact on his personality but it was aligned to his self-concept.

"I behave differently when I am in the car. I am not a gangster or a criminal but I race at every robot, I get that car sideways properly, but in real life I am a very calm person so it definitely makes me act differently and makes me look at myself differently and even dress differently when I am in that car, even the music I listen to and does it match the car, so I change myself quite a bit when I am in that car." (Respondent 7)

To further expand on this point, a different respondent also drove a car that he associated with thugs and gangsters, but he did not change the way he behaved. It did, however, change the way he felt about himself. The car gave him confidence and made him see himself in a more positive light. He mentioned how the car was what he needed at that point in his life to get out of his socio-economic situation in which he was seen as a middle class 'pale kid' as he put it.

"But to a certain extent I think you do conform to certain aspects of a stigma or of a reflection that appeals to you as a person and forms of your past personality but as to enhance or further reflect whatever personality trait that is the car also has an influence on" (Respondent 10)

"You know what the whole point the thuggery and the gangsterisms, I think that definitely helped my confidence, that definitely makes you more confident, because now who are you, are you that guy with that cool BM?" (Respondent 14)

4.3.3 *Personal setting is a big motivator/influencer for car modifications*

The individuals within the respondent's very immediate personal space, such as close family, friends and those in places of socialising have an impact on the direction the respondents choose to go with car modification, and in some cases were the reason for his interest in car modification. The personal setting plays a big role in the respondent's car modification decisions.

The respondents in these cases were influenced by their friends as to which modifications to make and why to make them. At the time they consulted no other resources and for some respondents this was a regrettable decision as the car became unreliable thereafter. The respondents, however, remained influenced by their friends and, although they would not blindly take what their friends said as the best route, it influenced the direction in which they looked for modifications.

> *"A guy who has now become a friend of mine, he owns a performance company" (Respondent 1)*

> *"The main reason was that I think because of seeing my friend's car and how it performed and I took the reins from him and my car became the development car, you know." (Respondent 6)*

In this case, the respondent had been influenced at a very young age by his family members who had modified cars. The respondent then looked up to those family members who were modifying cars. This aspiration remained with the respondent until he had reached a time in his life when he could engage in the same behaviour and fulfil those aspirations. Even though he was much older, the reference point remained that of his family members.

> *"I developed as I had the car. Being a small boy seeing family, cousins and uncles with M3s and big performance cars, you always wanted something like that, never thought that you would modify a Citi Golf and then it just grew on me as I grew older and I started doing more things to the car." (Respondent 4)*

The social circles to which the respondents were exposed continually also played a big role in influencing the modifications that they made. These respondents identified that having a standard car was not the image they wanted to portray to those in their social space because the car is associated with the man. Instead, he wanted to be known for having a car that people thought was good-looking and they would

acknowledge him for it. When individuals did get acknowledgement it served to confirm that what they had done was the right modification. The need for the modification was born from the exposure to that social space and from them having an initial desire to modify their cars.

> *"Yes, you don't want, to me, the Golf 1 stock standard, you don't want people to look at you and say check that car out so that did have a major influence." (Respondent 4)*

> *"A lot of other people, the general look of the car is appealing to most, judging by the amount of looks that I get obviously you gonna notice that people do look and they appreciate the car by the small elements. I got a lot of compliments for the general appearance of the car even if they judge it I don't care, so be it" (Respondent 10)*

The three respondents quoted below had a unique view on the reasons for their modifications. The respondents gave their racial group as the reason for modifying their cars. Being Indian influenced what cars they chose, what modifications they made and the choice of belonging to the modified car culture. These respondents were the only three to identify race as an influencing factor and all these respondents identified themselves as Indian. For one respondent his choice of car was primarily to break away from what he saw as a stereotypical 'Indian car' and for the others, modifying the car gave them a greater sense of belonging.

> *"Well I suppose, the choice of cars as well, I think I would have felt pressured a bit and things like that, to do certain modifications. I had purchased a car that is uncommon in the Indian community, being a Renault. I don't think it's as common as a few other brands within the Indian community and therefore not many people know what it's about and a lot of my friends, most of my Indian friends, to be precise, are quite amazed about the car after they driven it. Before that, they had no idea." (Respondent 9)*

"Well I think still going back to, well I think I'm going to go back to and I'm gonna still use that Indian thing, again it's in our genes regardless of what you have, you going to modify it." (Respondent 9)

"If you are an Indian, and I am, you would know the car culture. It is all about modifying cars and that is important and that is an influence" (Respondent 7)

4.3.4 *Social circles are affected by the modified car*

A number of respondents mentioned how through their choice of cars and modifications their social circles started changing and evolving. For some respondents their social circle had changed to be primarily made up of friends with whom their relationships had been formed through their cars or modification.

Respondents' social circles had changed as a result of purchasing a certain brand of car and then trying to get more information about the car they had purchased as this resulted in speaking to people who had common interests and goals. This led to the respondents spending more of their social time with these individuals and becoming close friends with whom they could spend hours discussing cars and modification, among other topics. The respondents and these individuals formed a bond through their cars and sometimes became closer friends than those friendships formed elsewhere.

"You start getting comfortable learning from people who share the same interests as you. It was a big thing for me, people who drive the same car, how they got there, learning from their mistakes" (Respondent 3)

"I really enjoyed the people. They became actually better friends than friends I have from varsity 'cause we share a common interest. Basically, you can sit with someone and talk about 2-3 hours about cars. I could never do that with my normal friends – they'd be like bored and talk about something else" (Respondent 11)

For this respondent his social circle had changed to be predominantly made up of friends he had found through an online forum after purchasing his car. He mentioned that these friends were now closer to him than those friends he had had since childhood. The bond formed with these friends was much stronger because of their common interest in cars and more specifically a common interest in the same brand of cars. The bond between the respondents and their cars was shared with those friends who had the same bond with their cars.

> *"More socially, I think about 70% of my social day-to-day I have from the club. It's a quite big collaboration in there, yes" (Respondent 12)*

This respondent had made new friends through the brand of car he purchased and as a result spent most of his time with these new friends. The social events he attended had also changed and he would now spend hours with these friends, as they all modified their cars together while having a braai and a few drinks. The act of modification was the point of their social interaction. As they grew closer to their cars, so they did as friends.

> *"Yes, as a younger guy things like this you turn into an event or a day out or a day in so you get a few beers, you get guys together. Fair enough, you doing it whether you have a braai, sitting and talking rubbish, you still together having a few beers" (Respondent 9)*

This respondent also used an online forum to find out more about his car and became close friends with the members of that forum. He mentioned how he could express himself more freely with the members of the forum, enabling him to be himself, thus implying that he was unable to do so with his friends from outside of this setting. The new social circle gave him the ability to express his love of cars and modification with fellow enthusiasts who shared his passion.

> *"Well, apart from this car itself, when I purchased a vehicle I joined a club for the vehicle a car club called Renault sport club and the friends are also*

family I've actually generated from this club is something. It's something I could only imagine because of my car that I actually I found out about this club and joined it and I've got such good friends and I actually take them as family that are in this club and part of that enable me to be just be me" (Respondent 12)

4.3.5 *Belonging to the modified car culture is important*

All of the respondents interviewed had a deep passion for motor cars and this began at different ages for the respondents, some from a very young age and others later. This identification, passion and enthusiasm they had for cars was an inherent trait in their personality and identity, which may not have had a chance to emerge and be communicated until they had the opportunity of owning a car. Once owning a car and modifying it, they were part of a culture for which they had a passion, long before they were able to communicate it and gain entrance into this culture.

"Alright, I am much like you, always had an interest in cars at a very young age and it has just gotten worse with time and I think it's because the great understanding of cars and the inner workings and the whole process behind the engineering, the market research, the company behind the cars it's just a kind of greater influence of the love and passion, growing that passion for cars. I've always, always had a thing and I will forever have a thing about cars." (Respondent 10)

Almost all the respondents described themselves as car enthusiasts and their car needed to communicate this. When asked the question regarding what they think their car communicates about them, they replied that being seen as a car enthusiast was an important factor. Some of the respondents said they wanted their car to look as close to standard as possible, with very subtle changes to the exterior appearance, so that only a motoring enthusiast would notice, and as such pay attention to the car. This formed part of their identity as being a part of the modified car culture and it remained an important point for them. Without openly saying it, it was a common thread to have approval from peers and belonging to the modified car culture, a driving factor for modification of their cars.

"I think it communicates that it's a little bit different, it's a bit more niche. This guy bought it for a particular reason, nine out of ten times when buying a Renault Sport you an enthusiast nine out of ten it does say you are an enthusiast. You have to be a petrol-head and you really have to like cars. Very rarely do you see somebody driving - I'll use the sport example again - very rarely you see somebody driving a Renault Sport that are not interested in cars, racing and all the motoring aspects." (Respondent 9)

"The reason I chose those two cars, I was an enthusiast. With the cars parked, completely not running; I like to maintain them, they are looked after by an enthusiast. To me it's important to be part of a certain culture and I want to be part of a culture of car enthusiasts." (Respondent 14)

The respondent in this case was getting questions from bystanders regarding the car next to which he was standing. It was his own car, but people had not associated him with the car. When they looked at the car they would ask him who the owner of the car was, because the car had been modified very well, in their eyes, and they wanted to congratulate the owner. What is important is that this gave the respondent that sense of pride through acknowledgement from members of the modified car culture. They were looking at and appreciating his car, and this was important, as the car was able to communicate his enthusiasm and passion for cars beyond that which his own personal identity could do, to a degree where he was getting acknowledged for it.

"Ja, ja, ja, definitely. People come and ask me if they know who the owner is because the car is amazing. But yes, I have heard people talk about my car and they absolutely love it, which makes me feel great and that I have done a good job." (Respondent 7)

4.3.6 *Online car forums form a big part of identity change*

A large majority of respondents cited online car forums as a big motivator for making modifications, the type of modification they did and for the friends that they had.

Online car forums played an important role in bringing these car enthusiasts together under the commonality of car brands or models.

For these two respondents the car brand and brands of car accessories were both influencers in their forming an association and identity with other individuals who had bought the same brands. They would feel a part of the modified car culture and often referred to hanging out with their friends, whom they referred to by the brand that brought them together. The individuals' names were never mentioned, not once, but the brand that brought them together was always mentioned. The association remained with the brand and not the friends, and all this was done through online car forums.

> *"We loaded the folder drive into my car and we sat there the whole afternoon. He bought food for us. It's more of a friendship, its - Revo is more part of the family, type of thing, than just a customer" (Respondent 13)*

> *"I will always be selling the Renault Sport brand. I will always sell it to everybody and tell them what a good brand that it is, especially being part of it, the culture of the brand itself as I said about the Renault Sport club, where it has brought me to" (Respondent 12)*

> *"I was part of the Seat Sport Forum which I became very active on and that started the platform for why I modified the vehicle." (Respondent 3)*

Belonging to an online car forum was not just for technical modification advice and car advice. It became an important space in which the individual was identified with the car he drove, and thus the car's identity and his identity became one. It was an important route for respondents to take to become synonymous with their specific cars. Respondents were not just user names, but became associated with the car they drove.

> *"The people there become your friends. I didn't know anyone in the Club but the Club was very welcoming. They post pictures of your car – what*

you like and you start getting to know the people behind the user names. You start getting comfortable learning from people who share the same interests as you. It was a big thing for me, people who drive the same car, how they got there, learning from their mistakes" (Respondent 3)

"Well I wouldn't go far as that. To an extent yes, the main reason for that I think, going back, the Renault Sport club, a lot of guys are the same, fellow enthusiasts. They share the same brand etc and I think a lot of their influences, a lot of their car influence and their attitudes, have rubbed off on me, so indirectly, yes, it is a larger kind of community, a Renault sport community combined. You got access of that community through your car and through your modifications of your car. It has influenced you to the other people's similar type of cars. I assume it has influence" (Respondent 9)

For a particular respondent the brand of car he drove influenced his personal relationships to such an extent that he identified 70% of his social interactions as being with individuals from the online car forum. The commonality and association he had with the individuals from the car group became so strong that he had changed his entire social circle to individuals who were part of the same club. His identity was undoubtedly influenced by these individuals, as well as the image the club portrayed.

Because of the very involved purchase process, limited financial spend and the need to enhance their cars through modification, the respondents became associated with a number of car forums in order to make the best decision possible at the time. Online forums proved to be the best source of information and subsequently became the social circle with which they identified. This is due to the involvement on the online forum; it is not a one-way relationship, but a conversation that takes place daily between users on the forum, and thus strong relationships with users on the forums are formed.

"I would do my research online and go onto the E30 club and check the research and be recommended, 'cause I don't want anyone messing

around with my car and I went to Budler Motor Sports, who are the best E30 builders in the country, and they have a vast display of E30s in the world. Ja, that is pretty impressive and, ja, that was it" (Respondent 7)

"So for me, I have had quite a few influences and I belong to a lot of forums, a lot of car forums, and there are always modified cars there." (Respondent 7)

4.3.7 *Illegal racing is one of primary drivers of modification*

All of the respondents identified performance modification as the primary reason for modifying their car, with the intention of engaging in illegal racing. Most of the respondents had performance modification listed as their first modification made, and those who did not do a performance modification first cited financial constraints as the reason and not because they had not wanted to.

Most of the respondents had made performance modifications as their first modification to their car, and this was a right of passage into the performance car culture. Once this had been done, they could identify with those in that culture. The respondents who had not modified the performance as their first change did not have the funds available, but did it as soon as they were able to afford it.

"But the main thing for me was the engine – a properly modified engine" (Respondent 10)

"The first thing I did was throw the whole engine out." (Respondent 2)

"The sole purpose of the car was for speed. We were building it for drags" (Respondent 2)

"Software. The next day the car had software. The reason for that was that I needed more power as soon as possible and that was the easiest mod to do quickly. We made the car faster and it was easier to do" (Respondent 1)

"Performance is always a major thing even if I had a chance with R200 000 for a used car and the car has better performance I would buy the

used car. I would love it in every way possible as it is what I have always wanted "(Respondent 5)

This respondent had engaged in performance modification because peers in his public setting had faster cars than he and he needed to have a car that could compete with them in terms of speed. His primary goal with performance modification was to beat these individuals when he raced them. The visual modifications were secondary. His identity in the performance car culture was first established by engaging in racing.

"Stock, it was very slow so we had to do a few modifications to keep up with the rest of the guys on the street." (Respondent 1)

This respondent mentioned how having a car that was a bit too powerful for the car's suspensions was his goal. The car needed to be 'uneasy' from having too much power. The reason for this was that it gave the individual a sense of accomplishment and pride that he was able to make his car faster than the manufacturers had anticipated could be possible, and he was able to control the car while beating others in illegal racing.

"Because I am a speed freak and we enjoy that, when a car is uneasy on the road. We feel happier because of the power that it has and the faster you can get it, the better, but it also needs to be reliable." (Respondent 1)

All of the respondents made specific mention that racing their car illegally was the key reason for performance modification. They wanted to modify the car, then go out and race it with others who had done the same, at illegal race setups. In these illegal race setups, large crowds gather and witness the racing, so the identity of the individual is immediately and directly affected by the outcome of the race. His identity would either gain from it or lose from it, depending on what happened; therefore

putting all their effort into the performance aspect of the car became a critically important area.

> *"Yes, I had a part-time job at the time so I had a bit of money and wanted to race the car. That is the reason that I did it" (Respondent 4)*

> *"One of my friends had one and his car was really quick so once he modified it, you know, I was very impressed with that because the E46 was the king car and he used to roll next to them and just open them up so I was very impressed with the car and decided that I wanted to get one" (Respondent 6)*

> *"I haven't really had a chance. It was funny because when I didn't have the mods I was out racing stock cars and once lined up an ODR one and I raced the E36 version when I had down pipes and I would give them a hiding and I never, I haven't met one since then. But I know my car is a lot faster than it was so I am quite impressed with it" (Respondent 6)*

The car as a possession was the primary influencer on these respondents' personalities and identities. The respondents used the car to change enhance their personalities by adding personality traits which were conferred onto them through their cars. The respondents were able to utilise their cars due to the car having an inherent communicative ability in the individual's social space as well as the ability to project their desired image on to other people. Car modification was central to these respondents, and as such this was the possession by which they defined themselves to others. This extended not just to one element of the car, but to the type of car being driven, the way it was driven, the visual appearance and the performance of the car. Respondents understood this and as such tailored their entire proposition of self so that it could be understood clearly by others in that group, with the desired self-concept being projected.

4.4 Car as extension of self

The car as an extension of the individual presented very strong findings in the research data. The respondents did not simply see the car as a possession but as a part of themselves, with reference being made to their cars as human beings. The respondents clearly had a very strong emotional connection with their cars. This translated to other areas of their personalities in which their egos would be boosted, and conversely, should any damage occur to their car, they would experience emotional distress and trauma. This section will highlight key findings in relation to this in order to fully grasp the extent of this extension of self.

4.4.1 *Car and owner seen as one unit*

In this study, the car as a possession was almost always synonymous with the owner. Individuals clearly identified themselves and the car as one unit, with the car representing an extension of the self from an emotional and physical point of view. The cars were looked after, treated, cared for, and nursed to health whenever the need arose.

The modified car becomes a physical extension of the individual for a number of reasons. The car was often purchased under a lot of financial constraint with the purchase decision being a long and sometimes tedious process for the owners. This gives the individual an attachment to the car from the outset, as he is so involved in the purchase process.

Moving on from this, the individuals themselves often made modifications in areas in which they had the expertise. The reason for this was that they enjoyed spending time with their cars and the ability to make a modification personally, with their own hands, resulted in their imparting some of themselves into the car. The more this process continued, the more the individuals found themselves attached to the car, or the car becoming an attachment to them.

The quote below highlights the degree to which it seemed silly for somebody to try and describe the individual without describing his car as well. The two are so closely

linked that it seemed far-fetched that you would be able to describe him without his car.

> *"Ja, you wouldn't be able to describe me without describing my car, with the amount of time I spend on it." (Respondent 7)*

In the quote, the car and individual became so intertwined that the partner (girlfriend) asked the individual to choose between her and his car, upon which he terminated the relationship. He would rather have his car by his side than his girlfriend. This is the extent to which the modified car and individual had become one.

> *"Yes, definitely, that is one of the reasons why my ex-girlfriend and I broke up, because she believed that I cared more about the car than I did about her and I agreed to that to her face and my current girlfriend. The one thing that doesn't have emotion and that will always be consistent and not let you down and always can be fixed is your car and it is has been a very weird rule in all of my relationships that you can do whatever you want to, but my car is my personal extension of myself and you do not buy anything for my car." (Respondent 6)*

To further expand on this finding, below is the answer from Respondent 2 on the opening question I had posed to him at the interview: his introduction to himself was done with an introduction to his car. The points highlighted in the paragraph above are quite neatly summarised by Respondent 2's reaction, in which he mentions that he built the car himself, which took over two years.

> *My name is Thabo. I am 25 years old, so borderline for your research. I drive a 1987 Citi Golf which I built from scratch myself. It was a shell in someone's back yard which we picked up for next to nothing. It took two years to build. She is on the road running. Okay, I was in an accident last year, a hectic accident, but we rebuilt her again" (Respondent 2)*

4.4.2 *Car as a human being*

The respondents all referred to their cars as if they were human beings, beings that were alive. They had feelings for the car, and they spoke as if the car had feelings of its own. Most of the respondents had named their car and all the cars were given female names, implying a heterosexual relationship with the car. In some instances, the individuals actually referred to their cars as having a 'life' and 'breathing', clearly equating the car to a living breathing entity.

> *"It is like you asking me if a car has a name which personifies a car which is a little 1.4 and sucking in air like it has asthma, you know, it is breathing, so that is what I love about it" (Respondent 6)*

The cars they had were much more than just possessions for utilitarian value, or even identity value. It went even further, with the cars almost being referred to as mistresses in their relationships or in some cases being their primary partner. This finding indicates and further cements the view that this car is viewed as a separate entity, but one that exists because of them and of them only. Nobody else has that relationship with that car except the owner.

> *"Initially it was quite hard 'cause I bought the car when I was married so I think that what happened was that she missed the attention as now this car stole away weekends and days and weeks and nights so now, from going out to a restaurant or going to her Mom's house so that I can work on the back of the car. So in the beginning it was difficult, she hated it" (Respondent 2)*

A part of themselves has been imparted into this car, and as such it is treated as one would a partner or even a child, putting the car before your own needs and feeling genuine remorse and emotional trauma should anything go wrong with the car. One of the respondents took a leave of absence from his place of employment when his car was damaged in an accident.

"I was crying at the scene. I was completely broken when I saw the car. I just started crying and I actually didn't care about anything else and I didn't care, I just wanted to get the car out of there. It was very hard. The car was taken to my in-laws' and I stayed there for two weeks to make sure that everything was sorted out properly and everything was done and when we started building it again I took a month's leave from work to fix the car up" (Respondent 2)

The respondents very rarely let anybody else drive their cars. Often, nobody was allowed to drive their cars except themselves and if anybody did have to drive the car, it was after long and careful consideration. A number of respondents cited not having the trust or faith to hand over their car to anybody else, and should something happen to the car, it might damage the relationship they had with that person irreparably. The first consideration remained that of keeping the car with the owner at all times and, should anything go wrong, he would have only himself to hold accountable.

"To be honest, I think about it every day. You know sometimes when you have your own alone time, where would your car be now – are people taking care of it – obviously not like you would have done – what is the car going through – you give it more of a life ." (Respondent 1)

4.4.3 *Individuals had an emotional connection with the car*

Respondents displayed an emotional connection with their cars that they did not have with any of their other possessions. The cars were fondly referred to by their names or mentally raised on a pedestal. The respondents found it hard to part with the car as well and often could simply not sell the car even though the decision had been made by them to do so. To part with the car became very difficult.

An emotional connection with car had been built up with the respondents and their cars as they had progressed from the purchase to the modification of the car. Often the emotional connection respondents had with the car would be brought up when

referring to damage that had occurred to their cars, citing a special bond with the car as they had spent so much time and personal input in getting the car to its current form, only for that car to be damaged.

> *"It is like you lost a loved one because of everything you put into it. Your blood, sweat and tears and time away from family and friends, because it was something I was passionate about and this is what I achieved and for that, for me, to see all of that just die in front of you was difficult." (Respondent 2)*

> *"It is like automatic depression. You feel down until something is sorted out and you are generally uneasy and will try anything for your car to be done and sorted out as soon as possible" (Respondent 1)*

> *"It was for a while after that, because of the bond that I had with my car and also with it being my first car and the fact that I had spent a lot of money on the car and knowing the joy and pleasure that it used to bring to me and the feeling that it gave me" (Respondent 1)*

Respondents were quick to mention that they treated their cars differently to any other possessions they owned. Most of the respondents said they treat their cars better, although one respondent did mention treating his car worse, but this was because of his special bond with his car and as such he used his car to its full potential, driving the car hard, but ultimately getting the most gratification from it. The cars were held in high esteem by respondents, who referred to them as 'royalty' and their 'first love'.

> *"I treat my car differently, like royalty. I will spend six hours washing my car. I don't care about a laptop that can be replaced. Even though I know my car can be replaced, for some reason, if someone took my wife, I would kill the person like if they smashed my car" (Respondent 2)*

For those respondents who had engaged in the process of selling their cars, it was an exceptionally difficult decision to reach and a difficult decision to carry through. A

respondent mentioned how he had tried three times to sell his car but could not bring himself to do so because of the connection that he had with his car. Another individual mentioned how much he loved his car, only making the decision to sell the car when he had found a better and more suitable replacement for this beloved car of his.

> *"I have had numerous opportunities to sell the car. We have sold two cars since then but this is my only car at the moment; I just can't bring myself to sell the car – I don't know why – it is impossible" (Respondent 2)*

4.4.4 *Ego of the individual is increased with modification of the car*

The respondents displayed an increased ego with their modified cars. Respondents also cited other individuals with larger egos since having their cars modified. They did not explicitly mention that their egos had been boosted but implied it through the interview.

The respondents definitely displayed an enhanced and bigger ego once their cars had been modified. The first respondent said that getting a bigger ego had a negative association in the modified car culture as it influenced individuals to such a degree that they would end up in a physical fight and lose all their friends. He also implied that this would not happen to him. However, as with all the respondents, they mentioned other elements which relate to an increased ego due to their car being modified.

> *"Yes. No one likes to race me anymore. That is true – no one wants to race me because of the car itself." (Respondent 2)*

Respondents believed that having a modified car would automatically increase their appeal to the opposite sex. It would give them a higher status among their peers, show success to their friends and that it represented a second personality, an alter ego. This directly relates to the respondents' egos as it increased both their self-esteem and self-importance relative to their peer groups and individuals in the modified car culture.

"If you think about it, any guy who drives a performance or modified car, girls will have a thing for him. Whether he has the personal looks or not as long as he is driving a sports car, women tend to be easier with that person" (Respondent 1)

"It was more of a status kind of thing to me for the Golf 1 to have the power and the looks, which was important to me" (Respondent 4)

"It gives me a second personality, an alter ego and I like that, I love it." (Respondent 7)

The respondents' egos were further enhanced with identity traits that the car had now given them access to. The car communicated an identity that the respondent did not have on his own; it gave him the image of a bad boy, gangster or of being well-balanced and it increased their appeal to the opposite sex, all from driving their modified cars around. This is an important factor for respondents when modifying their cars.

"They will think that I am a car enthusiast and that I am a bad boy and a gangster and that I am loud and in your face" (Respondent 7)

"It screams out that I'm a well-balanced bachelor in the sense it screams that out, you know" (Respondent 14)

4.4.5 *Damage to car resulted in respondent having emotional stress*

Respondents who had encountered damage to their cars or had been involved in accidents displayed emotional stress at the occurrence. The car having been damaged was not something that was treated as a simple occurrence and something that could be remedied quickly by taking it to an auto shop to get it fixed; it was treated as a personal blow to the owner.

The respondents below highlighted the degree to which smaller incidents like stone chips on their cars would affect them, and larger incidents where their car had been involved in an accident or stolen. The responses among respondents did not vary

much in terms of the emotional trauma experienced by the respondents, regardless of the size or extent of the damage.

> *"Yes , correct, anger incredible cause of how much love had been put in the car and again I felt robbed of the car because it wasn't my fault, had it been my fault I could've grown from the experience and said I made a mistake" (Respondent 14)*

> *"I honestly had, I couldn't think, I couldn't, it is not something that you can think about or talk about, it is like this feeling, even today, if I go to the garage here my car was parked, sometimes you think your car is still there but you know it is gone. It is just that like when I heard about it, thinking you could prevent it and going to see that it is gone, you don't know where to turn, who to tell, or what to think. It is like you are stuck and don't know how to go forward." (Respondent 1)*

> *"I was crying at the scene. I was completely broken when I saw the car. I just started crying and I actually didn't care about anything else and I didn't care, I just wanted to get the car out of there. It was very hard." (Respondent 2)*

> *"You feel like losing all hope, I immediately want to phone someone to find out how much it will cost to re-spray the panels." (Respondent 5)*

Respondents were uneasy to be seen with their car if it had damage to it, some respondents saying they would not drive their car while others said they would immediately find out where to fix the damage and how much it would cost. The car is linked so strongly to their personal identities that the respondents felt the damage would reflect on them as being irresponsible owners, with no love or passion for themselves or their cars, someone who would go through life with no consideration for his personal belongings or his self-respect.

> *"If a person looks after a car, I think people can tell what kind of person you are by how you respect your car and their personality, like if you are*

looking at a car that is dented and scratched, has worn-out tyres, that the owner has no respect for himself because he doesn't respect his car and he doesn't care about anything. Also neatness and presentation" (Respondent 1)

The emotional connection the respondent had with his car was so great that even when the car was sent by the respondent to a modifier of his choice, the respondent needed to be there in person to avoid any emotional distress. Should the respondent not have been present, he would have felt uneasy. This is of particular interest as this modifier was chosen by the respondent, yet still he felt uneasy. This could be equated to the car going for an operation: even though it would be improved upon, the process was still risky and brought emotional trauma to the owner.

"It would make me feel uneasy and on edge where your car is with someone else and you are not knowing what they are doing to your car exactly because you are not there and your mind won't be at ease and whatever work you are doing will not be done because you are only thinking about your car" (Respondent 1)

Respondents viewed their cars as they would a spouse or significant partner in their lives. The findings indicate how the respondents and their cars are seen as one unit and not as separate entities. The car became a symbol representative of themselves whether they were present or not, regardless of whether this representation was perceived in a positive or negative light. The level of interaction they had with their cars clearly made this their most valued possession.

4.5 Importance of differentiation

The importance of differentiation was another strong theme that presented itself in the data. The findings identify which areas respondents utilise in order to differentiate themselves and why this important to them and their identities. Respondents had a vast array of choice at their disposal when it came to differentiating themselves as

the car modification encompasses many areas, some related directly to the actual car and others indirectly. The findings clearly highlight which were the most conspicuous and thus utilised by the respondents. The differentiation would allow them to stand out and was actively pursued, at some level, by all the respondents.

4.5.1 *Individuals need to be seen as unique*

The respondents who engaged in car modification needed to establish themselves as unique individuals. The way in which cars are mass-produced and not customised in any way to differentiate its owner when compared to anybody else who bought the same car, was a key factor in the modification of their cars. Their car needed to be individualised and made unique so they, as individuals, could stand out in the world.

All of the respondents highlighted how their cars needed to be unique. The cars needed to be different from the mass produced cars, different in every way that the respondents could afford: interior, exterior and performance modifications. The car was a canvas for them to express their individuality and from their purchase decision through to every modification they had made, it was apparent that needing to be unique was a key driving factor.

> *"To be different than other people" (Respondent 1)*
>
> *"No, not really, the black was unique."(Respondent 3)*
>
> *"I don't really know but I think that I am a very extroverted guy and I think that because I own a car and I felt that I wanted to make it my own in a way and make it stand out from the rest of the crowd." (Respondent 5)*

This particular respondent mentioned how he had spent his resources modifying his car to be different and to stand out from the crowd, only to find other modifiers copying his modifications. He became frustrated as others copied him and he had to continually re-modify his car in order to stand out. Even though he mentioned being frustrated, it also gave him pride in that his modifications were being copied and that was huge acknowledgement and flattery.

“I wouldn’t say they copying me, and get angry. Whatever you feel, in a way it makes you feel good cause it’s nice and people are doing it as well but especially if I wanted something unique then if someone does something like that will make you want to make it more unique, it would frustrate me cause I really wanted to make something different more unique” (Respondent 11)

Respondents were influenced by their friends and online forums of which they were a part, regarding which modifications would work best, but they remained true to themselves and modified the cars in a way that was still unique from other cars. The modifications would need to be different from what they had seen and often they mentioned doing the modification for themselves and not anybody else as the key reason. The underlying factor remained that, if they copied somebody else, the car would not be truly reflecting their uniqueness or portraying their personal identity. It would not be associated with them or linked to them, but rather to the original modifier who had started the trend

“I never bought both of those cars to be the same as it was to be different, absolutely everyone has their take on modifications in terms, are you a follower or are you a leader. I like to think of myself as a leader not I’m incredibly good in leading maybe I don’t care what people think; for the most I do the machines, I do what I do because I like it” (Respondent 14)

One of the respondents had specifically mentioned that if he was spending his financial resources on the car and modifying the car, it had to add something unique and special to the car. His meaning was that it was not wise to spend money on a car if it was not differentiating the car from the others cars on the road. Uniqueness was important as he was spending his hard-earned money and the car needed to reflect that.

"Yes if I'm spending money on something I want it to be special and I don't want it to be something that everyone has, so uniqueness is very important to me" (Respondent 8)

4.5.2 *Ability to individualise and personalise car is a big motivator*

For respondents, having the ability to individualise and personalise a car to their liking was a big motivator for the modification. Respondents repeatedly mentioned that they would purchase a standard vehicle that had not been touched by anybody else. This gave them the ability to start the process of enhancing the car's identity by making the modifications they felt would be best for their needs.

"I didn't want to buy a modified car. I wanted to buy a standard car so I could have the pleasure of making all the changes myself. Obviously, something neat and in a good condition" (Respondent 8)

The need to have a car that was standard and to the owner's liking was often a quest because it called for intensive research and months of searching before it was found. In an isolated case, the respondent would rather not have a car at all than have one that did not meet his criteria. These individuals were well aware of their motives for this: not only did it serve the need for a clean slate to begin modification, it also represented a state of enhancement of themselves when the car was enhanced. Respondents almost always referred to the car being standard initially in a proud way, as it was a positive change, an enhancement to get the car to the state it was in at the time of the interview. It represented a sense of pride and achievement that they had been solely responsible for transforming that car, and in doing so, transforming themselves as they modified the car.

"What else do I love about it? It is very simple. VW is very conservative so that is what I liked about it, it is very simple. It can be changed and made, it is a people's car for a person that can modify it as there are ways to improve the car. That is why I love my car" (Respondent 6)

The respondents were well aware of what modifications were being done around them on cars, more so with the same type and model of car that they owned. This played an important part in respondents needing to have a standard car to differentiate not only from the mass-production of the car, but also from those that had already engaged in the process of modification on that model of vehicle.

One of the respondents felt the need to have a car that was unique in its appearance to that of other cars of the same model. He wanted a car that could be uniquely attributed to him. This is an informative finding as it explains why purchasing a car that had already been modified by somebody else gave the new owner the previous owner's identity, as the car would already have been attributed to and associated with the previous owner. The motivating factors of having a standard car as a base to modify then fall away, something that these respondents would not accept, as the car had to be uniquely modified to their liking, by them.

> *"Yes and most of the time it is also the Polo GTIs weren't really being given much attention mod wise and even at that time the normal 6Rs were being done but not really visual mods. I wanted to bring something different, like for the average person to have a look at the car and to stare at it. That sort of thing and I get so many people who come and shake my hand and say how awesome the car is and it's doing something different. I entered the Auto Motor Show and I looked at my car and there wasn't a single car that looked the same or had the same rims. My style is different to everyone else so I was happy about that in such a big show like that. I bought the set of rims from a big store and I was happy about that." (Respondent 6)*

The respondents were also motivated by modifying to their own taste. As much as the car is in a public setting (of which they are well aware) the car needs to be uniquely their own and give them gratification through the choice of modification carried out on the vehicle. This applied particularly to exterior visual modifications, which expose the individual's choices to judgement from society. The key tension here is that even though they expose themselves through their own modifications, it is a necessary risk to make sure that the modifications were done to their liking and

importantly not to anybody else's liking, even though they remain strongly influenced by friends and online groups.

> *"There are certain types of people who do modifications on what they want to achieve with the car and then you get certain types of people who do modifications to please the person who looks at the car – I am not that kind of person. You should do something for yourself. I am not a sheep. Don't do something because that guy said you should do it. Discover for yourself" (Respondent 2)*

The cars themselves had an identity attached to them even before purchase, and this was one of the influencing factors for purchase. It ranged from the brand name influencing respondents to the specific identity that particular model had attached to it. Respondents chose these cars because the car's identity would be transposed onto themselves, adding traits onto their personal identities.

Respondents utilised the car's identity to add traits to their own identities. One of the respondents was particularly aware of the car's identity as that of a gangster's car and a badboy's car. He was also aware that he did not portray that identity in his personal setting, but when he drove that car, he believed he would be seen with that image and identity attached to him. The car added the gangster and badboy image to his identity and he was proud to have that identity - it was a driving factor for him in purchasing that car.

> *"I'm not sure if you are familiar with the E30s and the box BMWs, they are quite legendary in South Africa. They have a very gangster association with them; they are criminal kind of a car. They have a badboy attitude with them which is typically not what I am but all people aspire to be the bad boy. So I wanted that car, I was going to get it sometime whether it was now or later, I was going to get this car" (Respondent 7)*

> *"They will think that I am a car enthusiast and that I am a bad boy and a gangster and that I am loud and in your face, which is what the car is, and someone who is interested in cars. I think they think that I am somebody who is, ja, a gangster and a bad boy." (Respondent 7)*

The respondent in this case referred to the car changing his existing personality and not just enhancing it. The important thing to highlight is that the car's identity became the dominant identity for him only when he drove it. His own personality was pushed back and he adopted the car's personality, affecting the way he dressed, the way he spoke, the way he drove and what music he listened to. He was very aware of this but it was exactly what he wanted, as he lacked those traits in his personality. The car transposed its identity onto him.

> *"They do affect me, they definitely do. The cars do affect me. I mean, when I am in my car, I act very differently" (Respondent 7)*

Another respondent believed the trait of responsibility had been added to him when he drove the car. His image was changed to make him look 'cooler', as he put it, a view shared by another respondent as well. The respondent realised at the time of owning the car that he did not possess the maturity or emotional intelligence, as he put it, to convey the message he wanted to, to the public. The car, however, became the perfect possession for him to do exactly that, and he utilised it to the best of his ability.

> *"They think I'm a cool kind guy 'cause the cars look chilled out and they look cool" (Respondent 8)*

> *"That I was cool and that I was responsible" (Respondent 14)*

> *"It was an extension of my personality, a part of my personality that I could never have the emotional intelligence at the time to come across as a new incredibly confident individual so the car was my confidence" (Respondent 14)*

4.5.3 *Car is utilised to enhance the external appeal of the individual*

The car, when modified, is used by respondents to enhance their identity and appeal externally. The car has a strong communicative ability in the public setting and therefore any enhancement to the car will reflect on the individual, giving him a better perceived identity to those external to him, as identified by the respondents.

The key point here related to how the respondents' images were enhanced in the way they wanted them to be enhanced. It is not in one certain aspect that all respondents want to be enhanced, as it differs from respondent to respondent. In this example, the respondent wanted to be portrayed as a gangster; others might not want to be seen in this way. Therefore, how the individual's identity and appeal is enhanced is based on the individual and should that be achieved, the goal of enhancement is achieved.

> *"They will think that I am a car enthusiast and that I am a bad boy and a gangster and that I am loud and in your face, which is what the car is, and someone who is interested in cars. I think they think that I am somebody who is, ja, a gangster and a bad boy. I would think that they think that I am probably a muscular boy and coloured and that it is associated with coloured people. So, ja, that is probably what people will think" (Respondent 7)*

For the following respondent the element of arrogance was being communicated to the external, and this was not necessarily what he wanted to communicate, but he noted how this perception could not be avoided with the choice of modifications he had made. He wanted his car to look aggressive and had achieved that, but in so doing he believed, also started communicating arrogance. The trade-off was worth it for this respondent and he left the car as is, so even though his appeal was enhanced, the trait of arrogance was added.

> *"About the E30, that communicated a young arrogance to an extent. If I look at the rims, it wasn't something over the top but it wasn't subtle either. It was an aggressive car; everything about that car was aggressive - from the stance to the flared arches, it was aggressive. Other than that people*

would still view that car as cheap so I don't think there's that element of pretentiousness about it, when you are superficial about the car through other people's eyes. There was possibly arrogance" (Respondent 10)

This last quote in this section was a respondent who had modified his car and believed the appeal to the external was twofold, the first being an individual who was hard working, saved up and bought an enthusiast's car. This first view was when the car was seen without him being present. The second view he believed was when he was physically present with the vehicle and the external view changed from that of hard-working to arrogance and a 'cocky' perception as the respondent put it, due to his age and the type of car he had.

"To an extent, yes, I used get long looks from that car just from generally driving around talking, people's perception on me, me coming from driving an Opel that would be of a work perception to people, I think in that car getting back to that young and cocky answer, when I got in the car I had that young cocky look-at-me kind of perception to people" (Respondent 14)

At all areas of involvement respondents wanted to be seen as unique and different and this was one of the primary reasons for modification. Whether it be exterior, interior or performance modification, it was a conscious decision to stand out. The respondents used their limited financial and time resources to decide carefully what modification would best achieve differentiation, then carried out this modification. If they were going to be using their resources, they needed to derive some level of differentiation from it even though it might not be the primary purpose of the modification. Respondents needed to be seen as unique from the mass population and in the car culture.

4.6 Meanings and Values

Possessions have both private and public meaning and respondents were aware of this in a simplistic manner. They would actively manage the meanings the cars had for them in both these settings. The cars also had value outside of the monetary value definition. The findings relating to how the respondents utilised their cars to increase the level of meaning the cars had to the public, and what the car meant to them personally, as well as the value the car provided, are discussed in the section below. Even though explicitly not mentioned, the theme of meaning and value played a large role for the respondents with regard to their modified cars.

4.6.1 *Personal achievement in owning and modifying a car*

Respondents displayed a great amount of pride in owning a car at a young age, combined with the modifications that they personally had made. Both represented a sense of personal achievement for the respondents at a young age. This is also a reason for their close bond with their car, as it represents the individual's success and communication of that success to the public.

The respondent in this case mentioned how he had developed a sense of pride from doing the modifying by himself. If the modification was done correctly by the respondents, it gave them a feeling of achievement, because of their input and effort. This effort resulted in their cars performing or looking better, making the respondents more cognisant of those modifications compared to modifications made to the car by somebody other than themselves.

> *"When you do it yourself, you have a sense of pride and like 'I did it' kind of feeling and when you use your car all the time and know it is reliable and know whatever you did on it didn't go wrong. You have that contentment that you can do something." (Respondent 1)*

> *"I found pleasure in doing things myself, love doing things myself. I'm a DIY fan and it just makes me happy to see what I can do with my own hands" (Respondent 8)*

Another reason for modification in person, as identified by one of the respondents, aside from pride, was that doing it himself gave him an intimate relationship with his car in which he felt he knew the car better as he had done all of the modification himself and therefore knew every bit of his car 'from the ground up', as he put it. Learning how to build a car, in his case, also gave him immense pride. The respondents built a special relationship between their cars and themselves through this method as they had shared their blood, sweat and tears with the car.

> *"I could have but it was my project and I wanted to learn the technical knowledge and wanted to know the ins and outs of the car as the car was obviously bought as a project and it was my way of learning and by building this car and I can actually build a complete Citi Golf from the ground up with no help whatsoever from the body to the interior to the motor, I know the ins and the outs of the car" (Respondent 2)*

> *"Your blood, sweat and tears and time away from family and friends, because it was something I was passionate about and this is what I achieved" (Respondent 2)*

Highlighting the importance of this act in establishing a bond between the respondents and their cars, this respondent identified spending time with his car as a bonding session between him and his car. This became a ritual for him and, when he completed washing his car, he would give the car a physical pat on the car's badge. He realised the pat on the badge was, in essence, saying thank you to the car, while also congratulating himself.

> *"Yea 100 percent, I think because I wanted to pay great attention to it and into detail. When you take your car to a car washer it will be clean. You fine toothbrush, it's all for your enjoyment, you bond with it. As much as I keep saying it's just steel and oil, you give them a personality and that's the personality that you bond with. You give it a pat on the badge, not that it needs a pat on the badge, 'cause it's a cold piece of steel, because of your ego. It's a badge so you pat the badge. As I said to you,*

cars are just an extension of your personality, they not individuals they not humans they are steel and oil" (Respondent 14)

For a certain respondent, having built his car completely by himself resulted in his having personal pride in the achievement, but also because his close friends and family acknowledged his accomplishment and respected him for this achievement. He became a role model for his friends, displaying to them what could be achieved if you set your mind to something, and he was exceptionally proud of this.

"My dad is very proud of it and my friends are very proud of it – the achievement." (Respondent 2)

For a number of respondents, just owning a car was a significant achievement as they were quite young when they purchased the car. Having been so young gave them pride as not many could say the same thing regarding the type of cars they owned. This also communicated on a social level the success that they had achieved, giving them a symbol with which they could communicate this success to those around them.

"When I bought the car I was 21, just turning 22, and it was a sort of personal achievement on itself to own such a vehicle at that age because not many people can say that, especially with my friends and family, being that age and owning such a car" (Respondent 12)

4.6.2 *Car is a cocoon from the world*

Respondents use their car as a cocoon and shell from the day-to-day world that they live in and experience, driving the car as a form of escapism from the stress of their daily lives and the constrictions they have within which they are allowed to behave or how they choose to behave.

The car very clearly gives them the ability to step out of that environment and into one that is more sheltered by the physical metal of the vehicle and to act out of the

ordinary, to act in defiance of that day-to-day life. The car became a vehicle for them to express themselves in a way that would not be acceptable in person.

The respondent's inclination to be a bit more outgoing and 'wild', as the respondent put it, is given the outlet through the modified motor vehicle. Another respondent had referred to his car as keeping him out of trouble as he spent most of his time focusing on modifying his car and therefore did not leave any time open to get into things he considered trouble such as going out to night clubs. He referred to the modification of his car as a goal he wanted to achieve and as long as he kept focusing on that goal, he would not be involved in other trouble, as he referred to it. Again, the car is referred to as a cocoon, a protective unit in which he can act out and still maintain his individual identity.

> *"I get joy from my vehicles. Life is stressful, you work hard. Just the pressures of living, both these cars bring me happiness and in order for me to enjoy them I needed them to be at that optimum level and modifying them offers that" (Respondent 8)*
>
> *"I think for me it's all about, I live a very controlled life, I'm a very controlled person, I don't ever get angry. I try to stay very even term, it's important to have an outline for that, and in the machine and gives me the ability to feel, get wild" (Respondent 14)*

4.6.3 *Car must serve basic functional needs*

The basic function that a car serves is that of transportation and for these individuals that remained an important driver that, in some cases, did influence their decision when purchasing a car. Reliability remained at the forefront as, for many of them, this was their only car and therefore they could not afford a car that was unreliable from the outset. Other basic functions also needed to be served, such as taking into account what else the car would be used for aside from being modified, such as transporting their families, or taking into account the event of having children with their wives.

> *"There was also the Superboss route, which would be an expensive conversion. So, I didn't want to go that way and that was a two-door car and I hated it because I had friends and was the only one who had a car to*

take people around and it wasn't fun. It was funny the first couple of times and then it wasn't funny. Having to get in and out and let people in and out was, you know" (Respondent 6)

Reliability was mentioned across all the respondents and was brought up constantly when their purchase decision and modification choices had been made. Running costs in terms of fuel usage and maintenance also played a very big role in determining which car would be the best to go with. Most respondents' post-purchase dissonance was with regard to functional needs not being served adequately, such as lights not operating correctly, maintenance charges being high or even poor service when having to deal with the manufacturer for parts or services.

"The Polo, it was reliability, cheap to maintain, something that was sporty and funky and something that has low running everyday running cost cause it's a Polo TDI diesel; you can get a lot of mileage, diesel more than petrol, so that was the main focus point having the Polo - it was a run-around car" (Respondent 8)

At the time one of the respondents got his car he was using it primarily for going to university and back. He then formed a lift club, which was a method for him to gain cash to modify his car. The basic utilitarian value that the car provides is still highly important to individuals especially in the instances where it was their only car. With individuals who had more than one car, or did not rely on that one car for all their transport, this utilitarian function became secondary to the main goal of modifying the car.

"No, I knew nothing about cars or modifications. My past car was a 1.1 Uno. I put sound in it but I didn't have intentions of modifying it to make it faster. It was just changing things that needed to be changed. I was very blind what you can do to a vehicle. I just needed to get to campus and work" (Respondent 4)

4.6.4 *Proving others wrong is important*

A number of respondents said they would modify their car in such a way that somebody who did not know cars would not know from the appearance that it had been modified. This also gave the respondents an upper hand in illegal street racing (a common practice among all the respondents) as their opponent in an illegal street race would be making a judgement of the respondents for attempting to race them, and the respondents would in fact have the upper hand and emerge from the race in first place. This was a judgement being made on the individuals and not their cars. The respondents seem to enjoy being the proverbial 'underdog' who comes out as the winner.

> *"No, none at all. I believe that a car must have its own secrets. From the outside it will look standard but only you know what's done underneath so when driving around people may think, well look at this car - standard rims, standard exhaust, standard suspension - but only when it comes to race time, you surprise them and show them what was standard on the car" (Respondent 1)*

Respondents repeatedly mentioned how they enjoyed taking opponents by 'surprise' during illegal street racing as this was a reflection on what the opponent thought of the respondent in the street race. The opponent would make a judgement on the respondent based on the car he was driving, often thinking that the respondent's car was not a worthy match for his. This gave the respondent immense joy as he had used his car to prove to the opponent that you cannot make a judgement just by looking at someone.

> *"The sleeper look is because I like to take people by surprise. Like, a habit I have which is bad is if I know at the first robot I will let them take off and go wild and I just know what their car is doing and at the second robot I open up and kick their arse. They either smile at me or look straight" (Respondent 2)*

"They call it something cute but when they see what the car can do, it is a different story" (Respondent 2)

The respondents derived more public meaning through the consumption of their cars in the social context. They would also engage in activities that would further enhance the public meaning of these cars, such as illegal street racing. The private meanings were gained through activities in the public setting as this was where their private meaning was shaped. The private meanings were mostly gained from the exposure in the social setting, as approval and acceptance in this setting provided personal meaning for them, such as boosted egos. Both the private and public meanings provided great value for these respondents.

4.7 Identity influencing consumption

The identity the respondents developed through their cars provided useful insight into their consumption activities. The car was utilised to such an extent that it formed the dominant identity, but of particular interest was how this then shaped their other consumption habits. The car would provide the central context and role to which their consumption would be affected, as this would affect the identity they had created with their car. The limitations on their resources also provided an interesting area to probe as this had an overall effect on consumption, but more so as they had to feed their dominant identity as well. The findings for this section are reported below.

4.7.1 *Identity of car is transposed onto the individual*

The cars themselves had an identity attached to them even before purchase, and this was one of the influencing factors for purchase. It ranged from the brand name of the car influencing respondents, to the specific identity that particular model had attached to it. Respondents chose these cars because the car's identity would be transposed onto themselves, adding traits to their personal identities.

One of the respondents was particularly aware of the car's identity as that of a gangster's car and a badboy's car. He was also aware that he did not portray that identity in his personal setting, but when he drove that car, he believed he would be seen with that image and identity attached to him. The car added the gangster and

badboy image to his identity and he was proud to have that identity. It was a driving factor for him in purchasing that car.

> *"I'm not sure if you are familiar with the E30s and the box BMWs, they are quite legendary in South Africa. They have a very gangster association with them. They are a criminal kind of a car. They have a badboy attitude with them which is typically not what I am but all people aspire to be the bad boy. So I wanted that car, I was going to get it sometime whether it was now or later, I was going to get this car" (Respondent 7)*

> *"They will think that I am a car enthusiast and that I am a bad boy and a gangster and that I am loud and in your face which is what the car is and someone who is interested in cars. I think they think that I am somebody who is, ja, a gangster and a bad boy." (Respondent 7)*

The respondent in this case referred to the car changing his existing personality and not just enhancing it. The important thing to highlight is that the car's identity became the dominant identity for him only when he drove it. His own personality was pushed back and he adopted the car's personality, affecting the way he dressed, the way he spoke, the way he drove and also what music he listened to. He was very aware of this but it was exactly what he wanted as he did not possess those traits in his own personality. The car transposed its identity onto him.

> *"They do affect me, they definitely do. The cars do affect me. I mean, when I am in my car, I act very differently" (Respondent 7)*

Another respondent believed the trait of responsibility had been added to him when he drove the car and his image was changed to make him look 'cooler', as he put it, a view shared by another respondent. The respondent realised at the time of owning the car that he did not possess the maturity or emotional intelligence, as he put it, to convey to the public the message he wanted to. The car, however, became the perfect possession for him to do exactly that, and he used it to the best of his ability.

"They think I'm a cool kind guy 'cause the cars look chilled out and they look cool" (Respondent 8)

"That I was cool and that I was responsible" (Respondent 14)

"It was an extension of my personality, a part of my personality that I could never have had the emotional intelligence at the time to come across as a new incredibly confident individual so the car was my confidence" (Respondent 14)

4.7.2 *Influencing factors are born from economic conditions*

Economic conditions for respondents were a big influencing factor for all the purchases and choices of modification. The respondents were well aware of the trade-off between what they could do with their money and what it would cost them, the opportunity cost. Individuals were also aware that they could purchase more expensive cars, but not have the ability to modify them, or buy a cheaper car and spend the money saved to modify it. The choice to purchase the cheaper car was made by all respondents.

This particular respondent had not planned any modification for the first few months of ownership of his car, a decision he had made before purchasing the car. At the time he purchased the car, a modification company was running a special on a certain performance modification for his car and this influenced him to modify the car in the very week he had bought the car, even though his plans were to begin modification in a few months. Respondents were very aware of their financial constraints and would need to adapt their timelines and their vision of their self-concept as financial opportunities presented themselves.

"No, not really, I was actually with a friend that Saturday that owned the same car and he told me that the tuning company was having a special that was ending on that same day so, being it that nowadays money isn't so easy to come by and where you can save, you might as well do so. I just said, you know what, initially my plan was to keep the car for a few

months, drive it for a few months standard, get bored with it and then modify it, but I guess there were other plans" (Respondent 1)

For another respondent, the purchase of his car was an unexpected decision. He knew that he would eventually change the car he had for a better car but he did not expect it to happen so soon. The deciding factor was the price for which the car had become available and as a result he changed his plans and purchased the car well ahead of schedule. The financial influences on this individual made him purchase a car. He had not planned to do so in the next few years.

"This car was a no-brainer as I was looking forward to moving to the Leon Cupra. I just didn't expect it to happen when it happened. The Leon came up at a good price and next thing I knew I had a new car." (Respondent 3)

The respondent in the following case identified how he had saved his money for almost a year before making a certain performance modification to his car. He was a newlywed and as a result had to cut back on other amenities to save for his car modification. He did mention how he had been advised by friends and others on doing this modification first by saving up, but at the time he had spent the money on other modifications which he regretted later. The opportunity cost for modifications is high with individuals modifying cars and the tradeoff is a well thought-out decision for the respondents.

"Then I saved up again 'cause I wanted to now go to fuel injection because that leads to a faster car so about 8 months ago I managed to get a fuel injection end system and I got it installed and it has been running like that for the past 8 months. It is quite amazing considering that you have gone from an 1800 to a 2 litre but you don't expect the power to be so much from carburettor to fuel injection. Guys would advise me to save the money and I should have listened in the first place. I guess that is how we learn." (Respondent 4)

"Allowances come in very rarely. I had to plan my modifications and as time went on it so went that I got some jobs and earned money and started working on more modifications" (Respondent 5)

The respondent in this case referred to learning how to do modification himself as he could save a lot of money and time by doing it in person. It was interesting to note that this very respondent had said he would not leave his car alone when it was being worked on. Be it a service or for modification, he would be there to watch over the work being carried out. In his case the cost of modification was not only financial but also time costs as he would often need to leave work or take a day of annual leave to get the modifications completed.

"For me, personally, it is an economic and financial factor as certain guys that do work on their cars are quite out there and a distance from home and also time as well, you need to set aside time and costs and stuff to get there and then spend time there while getting things sorting out so I know what the problems are I can diagnose them and sort them out in my garage rather than budgeting my time around other people. Time and Finance."(Respondent 5)

Maintenance of the cars was also a strong contributing factor in the car chosen for purchase and was also one of the leading reasons for post-purchase dissonance. Respondents would have to pay a lot of money for maintenance of certain cars and as a result they could not spend the money on anything else. It must be mentioned that most of the respondents cited reliability as a problem after modifying the car, and only general maintenance as a problem before modifying the car.

"It wasn't very fast and very heavy on fuel so that was almost a put-off, hey. It became very expensive to run and the agreement I had with my parents was that they would give me the car but I had to sort out the fuel and the maintenance of the car, so that was really bad" (Respondent 7)

"General maintenance expenses, maybe that could've put me off the car if would've known exactly what I was in for but that being said, the amount of money I have spent on the car for modifications and maintenance, I look at the amount I've spent on that and I look at the cars I can get at that same price bracket without knowing the history either I don't think it would've been worth it, it would just ended up costing the same if not more and that time and without delivering enough pleasure and involvement" (Respondent 10)

This respondent mentioned an important point, namely that the choice of car is born from the financial situation you are in at the time. Most of respondents identified with wanting to own a better car, but did not have the resources to do so, and therefore settled for a cheaper car that they could modify. In time, for some, the attachment grew too strong to part with the car, and they would purchase a second car and not sell the car they had modified.

"Absolutely. I've gone to expensive cars 'cause I can afford expensive cars" (Respondent 14)

All the respondents in this study had purchased their cars second-hand. Respondents did not see value in purchasing their cars new because of the high cost of new vehicles as well as knowing that they would spending a considerable amount of their money changing the car from its standard appearance and performance.

"I always buy all my cars second hand"

Q: And why is that?

A: "It's just that if it's a second-hand you can get it at a better price. For me it's not worth it to get a brand-new car" (Respondent 13)

The dominant identity formed by the respondents served to influence their consumption habits only when they were with their car in a social setting that would

affect the identity constructed. If they found themselves outside of these situations, the dominant identity would not influence their consumption behaviour. The financial constraints within which they found themselves did also influence their purchase behaviour, as they would want to save as much possible to spend on modification, but what they purchased would not change; they were just increasingly price sensitive.

4.8 Conclusion

The chapter has revealed the qualitative meanings from the respondents of Gauteng and KwaZulu-Natal with regard to their car modifications. It was written to capture the important findings from the research conducted over the 2013 year.

The research data has led the findings to six key areas, which were focused on in this chapter. These were the self-concept being a primary influencer, possessions influencing personality traits, car as extension of self, importance of differentiation, meanings and values and lastly identity influencing consumption. Within these broader themes, there were key focus points that emerged from the data findings.

The findings have indicated that the self-concept remains the primary influencer for the active modification of cars and car modification was the process by which they were able to get closer to their desired self-concept. Using their cars as a means to achieve the desired self-concept meant the respondents needed social acceptance and approval from their peers as the car is a highly visible possession, consumed in the public context.

The car as a possession, however, also influenced the respondents' personalities, adding traits to their personalities, which did not exist, or further enhancing those they had already. This was also important for the respondents as they were unable to achieve that without the car, at this point in their lives. The cars they chose in certain instances had their own identities, which the respondents would take on as their own when driving their cars. The car as a possession was used by them to define their identities to the external world. Due to the relationship the respondents had with their cars, the car became an extension of themselves, and they would treat them as such. The respondents would identify their cars as human beings, and

display emotional happiness or trauma in situations when the car performed well, or was damaged.

The process of becoming an extension of the self was manifold, starting from the purchase decision, through to the thought process for modification and, among others, to making the actual modification in person. The respondents rarely let anybody else drive their cars. In all of the interviews, respondents had mentioned the importance of differentiation in the modifications they carried out to their cars.

Differentiation was central to all modification made by the respondents, whether it be the external, internal or performance modifications. It needed to deliver something unique that could be attributed to the respondent. This served to differentiate them not only from the mass population, but also from others in the car culture.

The meanings and values the cars provided to the respondents were related to the public and private meanings derived from the car. The private meanings were as a result of the public meaning, because of the car's high visibility. The public meaning was a necessity in order for respondents to realise any private meanings. Social acceptance played a large role in this section as differentiation needed social acceptance in order to be fulfilled.

The influence of identity on the consumption behaviour of these respondents was only evident when they were in the context and setting of car modifiers. Within these settings, they would change the consumption habits to match their desired self-concept and also the identity and image they had created through their cars. Should they not act in accordance with this, it might negatively affect their desired self-concept.

The six key themes of this chapter, which were the self-concept being a primary influencer, possessions influencing personality traits, car as extension of self, importance of differentiation, meanings and values and lastly identity influencing consumption, provided the crucial understanding to relate back to the literature to further analyse and understand. This analysis will be provided in the following chapter.

5 Chapter 5: Discussion

5.1 Introduction

Chapter 4 presented the analysis of the data. This was explained in terms of the role the car modification played in the creation, maintenance, and enhancement of personal identity, also looking to see if this had any effect on consumption behaviour. This chapter discusses the findings and their significance in relation to the current literature related to cars as possessions affecting identity. Having reviewed the literature, designed an appropriate methodological framework and analysed the data gathered, attention now turns to the interpretation of the results in specific connection with previous studies conducted in this field. The chapter examines six key areas, these being the self-concept as the primary influencer (5.2), possessions influencing personality traits (5.3), car as extension of self (5.4), importance of differentiation (5.5), meanings and values (5.6), and identity influencing consumption (5.7).

5.2 Self-concept as primary influencer

The self-concept is a strong influencer on the type of car purchased and the modifications carried out on the car by the respondents. The purchase and modification of a car was not a random process, because the participants wanted to buy a brand of car that was different from others. Therefore, not all the brands had an equal preference among respondents.

The purchase process became complex as respondents were limited financially, but they needed to make a decision based on their desired self-concept and not their actual self-concept. This somewhat confirms Grubb & Grathwohl's view (1967) in which they identified that individuals want to view themselves in a more positive light. The authors added that the more positively individuals view themselves, the higher the chance that this will affect their consumption patterns and habits, cause them to purchase products aligned to their desired self-concept. This will affect how people perceive them because of the inherent communicative ability of possessions.

Expanding on this is how the respondents adapted their consumption habits, yet remained aware of other factors such as the maintenance, reliability, and insurability of their cars. The purchase habit was not solely focused on the self.

Respondents already had some emotional connection to the brands they had purchased through having a positive association with their desired self-concept and the experiences they had encountered in the social setting. There existed a high congruency between these two areas, the social setting and their desired self-concept. The finding in this case expands on Eysenck's (2004) findings in which he linked identity formation and creation with the self-concept formation. This progresses so that as the identity of the individual is being formed and is then looked on positively by others. This would affect the individual's self-image. This in turn would result in further enhancement of the individual's identity as he has now gained acceptance from those within the reference group (Eysenck, 2004).

Individuals also displayed a high congruency in relation to the social acceptance of the modification brand they desired to own as the image was always more positive when compared to their current self-concept. This relates directly to the car being a highly visible possession used primarily in the public space. This becomes the means by which the respondents can upgrade their self-concept towards the goal of their desired self-concept.

This was a predominantly conscious decision as the participants were aware of their current status and how they would like to be perceived in the public setting, through their modified cars. The decisions made by respondents can be clearly construed as individuals wanting a better perceived self-image. This finding expands the research of Eysenck's (2004) study in which he reported that an individual's identity exists within his self-image and perception of self. He will thus consume products that support this identity. Car modification was the appropriation and modification of cars, moulded into a creation that supported identity. Belk (1985) goes on to say that the motor vehicle, due to its consumption in public, has become one of the most accessible areas of identity construction. The research study clearly concurs with Eysenck's (2004) and Belk's (1985) findings.

This also relates strongly to the work done by Khan (2012), which indicates a higher congruence between the desired self-concept and conspicuous products when compared to inconspicuous products. This also emerged in this study, in which respondents placed much less importance on the modification of their cars' interiors when compared to their exteriors and performance-enhancing modifications. Interior modifications remained fairly inconspicuous when compared to exterior modifications.

This relates and extends to a key point made by Belk (1985) and Grubb and Grathwohl (1967) in which they had found the different types of car communicated different things about individuals, because of the meaning attached to those cars by society. In the case of this study, meanings were attached by society not only to the cars, but at a more detailed level, to the type of modification carried out, with different meanings for various modifications, where Belk (1985), Grubb and Grathwohl (1967) focused only on the standardised possession, the modification of the possession was the focus for these respondents, to achieve the same goal.

A number of respondents cited the 'Fast & Furious' film as a strong driver for car modification, indicating the effect that the media have on them relating to cars and this had a significant effect on their decisions as they directly related it to their self-concept.

The car as a conspicuous product played such a large role that individuals would dedicate their savings to modification of cars in view of the way they would be perceived, and conversely would rather not be seen with a damaged car. This again indicates the importance of the desired self-concept influencing their decisions and behaviour in relation to their cars. Because of cars' high visibility, the desire for these individuals was primarily consumption for social status.

The desired self-concept only becomes a reality for these participants when their peers are impressed and have approved of their cars and modifications. Until that has been achieved, the self-concept has not moved from the current state to the desired state. This directly correlates Grubb & Grathwohl (1967).

5.3 Possessions influencing personality traits

The way in which these respondents viewed themselves and how they wish to be viewed by others presented a gap in their self-concept. This gap was being filled by utilising the modified cars to portray the desired social self-concept.

The respondents were able to utilise their cars to close this gap thanks to the car having an inherent communicative ability within the individual's social space. This communicative ability was used to project their desired image onto other people by employing a subconscious template used to judge people within that reference group. Respondents were therefore able to judge others on their cars and how those people conducted themselves as the template used by those people was very similar to their own, and this applied vice versa.

This does relate to and confirm Richins' (1994) work in which he identified that all possessions have a communicative ability, whether or not an individual is aware of it. This would be based on their template for reading possessions. Richins went on to explain the strong role that semiotics play within this communication and this study was a strong confirmation of this as each modification had a semiotic ability to communicate, as interpreted by those within the respondent's reference group.

The elements used to draw conclusions about a person were almost universal within that setting. Car modification was central to the respondents, and became the means to define themselves to those around them. This extended not just to one element of the car, but to the type of car being driven, the way it was driven, the visual appearance and the performance of the car.

This confirms the literature presented by Levy (cited in Underwood, 2003) in which he suggests that a symbol can be used for all occasions wherein an action, word, picture, object, or behaviour is used to represent ideas or feelings other than itself. In the case of the respondents, they were using multiple methods and symbols at the same time to communicate their identity to others. This, however, had particular meaning within the context of car modification. This is a core reason for consumers moving away from purchase of products purely for their utilitarian value, as they have

far more value in terms of what they can communicate, as evidenced by the research supporting Richin's (1994) findings.

Respondents understood this and as such tailored their proposition of self so that it could be clearly understood by others in that reference group, projecting a clear definition of their desired self-concept. The projection utilised by these respondents is very much related to materialism as the judgement is made primarily on the consumption of products, compared to the four other mediums such as value, character, body and personality traits (Mittal, 2006). The main area is that of possessions and consumption, and as such the four other media become secondary. The more they can consume on their cars within that space, the more powerfully they can project their desired self-concepts. This supports studies on consumer research (Belk, 1985; Grubb & Grathwohl, 1967; Underwood, 2003) in which it is found that there is a strong relationship between consumption and the construction of identities.

Respondents were well aware of this, and therefore the consumption and creation decision was extremely well thought out, involving the choosing of cars that had some of the desired self-concept inherently in that type of car and the modification thereof enhancing those traits, to the way in which they would approach an illegal street race. None of it happened haphazardly; it was all carefully crafted.

This confirms and expands on what Mittal (2006) says in that identity requires consumption to construct and then further enhance that identity, but, within this study, behaviour also played an important role. Different consumption choices affect the identity differently. In this study, consumption affected not only identity but behaviour as well, when consuming the product, and it was carefully tailored to deliver the desired identity.

Problems do, however, exist with such a method and this was evidenced in the research study wherein the template used is comprised of universal elements, but the importance of each element is slightly different between people. This confirms what Richins (1994) found, that while meaning can be coherent, it is subject to interpretation that one individual cannot control, and therefore meanings can be altered, and the desired goal may be harder to achieve.

Based on this, however, the respondents would make judgements according to their templates of importance, whereas others would do the same to them. What the hierarchy of those elements is to each individual is not known. Hogg & Mitchell (1996) mentioned something very similar to what was found in this study wherein a particular possession or product is viewed by an individual from the lens of public recognition, and they have found that this is aligned to their aspiration identity. They will choose this over other possessions. In this study, it was not witnessed simply on possessions, but more specifically on the type of modification to that possession, going further than Hogg & Mitchell suggested.

What the individual may desire is to be seen as an alpha male with a fast car who would race anybody, but this at some points was interpreted as trying too hard to impress others and came across as arrogant. This resulted in his having no friends and only his car by his side, as evidenced by one respondent in this study.

The second part of this problem is that an individual may not have the right possession to portray what he thinks he may be portraying, as the research indicated. To one respondent the type of car he drove communicated car enthusiast, but to another respondent the same car communicated a non-sporty run-of-the-mill car and that the driver was not a car enthusiast. The third is that existing stereotypes could be so strong that one would have to abandon going in a certain direction to avoid being stereotyped, or to go with the stereotype in order to fit in, both of which were evidenced during the study.

This definitely adds to the literature as Richins (1994) made mention of how an individual's family and friends view of a possession would be taken into account subconsciously by that individual. In this study it emerged as a conscious, well thought-out, decision in which the respondents were clearly aware of what the stereotype was and whether to avoid it or be part of it. This depended on what the respondent wanted to gain from his car, from observers and the general public, as they would be the ones making the judgement of him.

For all these problems the respondents adjusted their reference groups, to align with their desired self-concept, such as online groups and with whom they associated, by educating their friends who may have thought otherwise, and lastly by modifying

their consumption habits to resolve the tension. This confirms Grubb & Grathwohls (1967) findings in which observers perceive a meaning they have developed in relation to that situation and context, and this meaning changes as the context and situation change. Respondents would overcome this by changing their contexts, situations and reference groups to get alignment with the desired meaning, without a large degree of variance.

5.4 Car as extension of self

The study had identified how research participants actively extended themselves through their cars using various methods. These methods correlate directly to Sartre's (1943) study in which he describes the three primary methods in which individuals learn to regard objects as a part of themselves. The first method identified was that of appropriating control over the car for the research participant's personal use. This was initiated by respondents learning to drive their new cars, followed by mastery of the control of their new cars once they had begun modifying them. Respondents exerted control over this possession, from their initial purchase decision in which they felt they understood the car they were buying and what it would offer them, through to the act of performance modification.

As these cars had performance enhancements, the act of controlling this new-found power meant gaining control over this possession and as such this was one of the key means by which the car became a physical extension of themselves. This strongly relates to how individuals displayed reluctance in letting anybody other than themselves drive their cars, as it meant they needed to relinquish control to somebody who was not the owner of the car. When allowing another individual to drive their cars, this was an act of giving a gift and a positive extension of self to another individual as they were allowing somebody to control a part of themselves.

The second way as identified by Sartre (1943) is that of having an object and then incorporating this object into one's self is by the act of creation, creating the object. Car modification is both the act of consumption and of creation as respondents actively create a unique possession differentiated from that of the standard car (Richins, 1994). The act of creation begins before the purchase of the car as the

individuals envisioned how their cars would be transformed through the modification process, the creators (respondents in this case) retain the identity over their cars for as long as that car retains any mark of their doing in transforming the car and making it into something unique. This correlates directly to each respondent wanting to purchase a completely standard car as the act of creation needed to be uniquely associated with them, allowing full control of the degree to which the self was extended.

The identity retention to creator is normally within copyrights or patents (Sartre, 1949) but in this study it is within the social context with which the car has been identified and associated with the original creator. The extent to which individuals extended their sense of self to their modified cars was a twofold process, that of the financial ability giving the participants an improved desired vision for their cars and carrying out this vision. The larger the financial ability, the more the car could be modified, and as such the larger the role it played as an extension of the self.

The third way identified by Sartre (1943) and evidenced in the study was that of an object becoming an extension of self by knowing the object. In Sartre's view, knowing another person allows us to consider that person as part of self. Research participants identify their cars as a person and as such, by having intimate knowledge of their cars, are extending themselves to their cars. This is also observed by Beaglehole (1932) as any intimate knowledge of an object makes them not only ours, but also a part of self, but the important distinction is that the object, however, cannot be distanced from the individual; it needs to be driven by a stronger passion, as evidenced by the respondents, and thus becomes part of self.

All three means as identified by Sartre (1943) to make a possession a part of the extended self (control, creation, and knowledge) were active and intentional methods utilised by respondents in the study, resulting in the car becoming a second skin to the respondents through which the external public viewed them.

Respondents had a relationship between their extended selves and the maintenance of their cars. Individuals reported washing and waxing their cars and taking a tooth brush to areas of their car their hands could not reach to keep their cars at the

highest possible level of maintenance. This relates to the role that the cars play in their lives and the importance to their extended selves.

5.5 Importance of differentiation

The act of car modification happens at two levels for respondents, these being at a cultural and a personal level, relating to both identity construction, and that of active consumption. It is an involved process allowing and enabling individuals to differentiate themselves symbolically from the mass of the population and to constitute themselves as unique individuals by owning cars that they consider to be unique. This confirms Howell's (2007) study in which he found the motor vehicle, produced or manufactured, is still viewed by the majority as an undifferentiated mass-produced commodity.

The importance of the car modification process is not for the car to be unique in the entire world, but the act of owning and possessing a car that had been modified served to validate the claims individuals made when referring to themselves as unique and different to the mass population. This also confirms Belk's (cited in Howell, 2007) findings that car modifiers are those individuals who go out and produce unique commodities that represent their individualism. Car modification is used to establish their individualism with observers and the general public, and is therefore an act of identity creation. This is one of the key drivers for the modification of cars, as they become tools for identity construction and for being unique.

Respondents frequently made claims to individuality through their cars through the interview process when referring to the type of car they bought and the car modification activities they had engaged in. Respondents identify themselves as 'car enthusiasts' and this term was generally used to differentiate the type of car modifiers, whose identities were embodied in unique cars, from the general mass of standard cars and their drivers. Most of the respondents would regularly socialise with other car modifiers and attended similar car events and social settings in which modified cars were the main attraction. This adds to Howell's (2007) view in which he says individuals attempt to appropriate standardised cars and create and individual creation to stand out from the crowd but which must also be associated

with the owner. This study, however, also identifies the way the car becomes linked to the owner, by association through similar social and reference groups, creating something of a public relations effect.

The respondents, all aged between 20 and 25, had made a strong attempt to project themselves in a far more desirable identity position through the symbolic actions that they had done in the modification of their cars.

The practices they had engaged in were in accordance with post-modern theories of consumption, where possessions operate as tools of identity construction (Sarup, 1966), which symbolise important aspects of an individual's identity and convey meanings of personal significance (Belk, 1988; Kamptner, 1989). An aspect of the study that became particularly interesting was that of the ways in which car modifiers used standard production cars as a means of identity construction. All of the respondents had purchased standard vehicles as a basis for the modification activities they would be engaging in, but in the process of modification they would produce a totally exclusive possession that would distance itself from the association of a standard car. This confirms what Howell (2007) found in his study, where individuals would go to great lengths to emphasise individuality even on standard cars with which social perception was already regarded as highly individual. Without modification it remained a mass-produced car, not reflecting identity. Individuals would also engage in active modification of cars that had negative social perception, changing the cars' looks and badges to de-familiarise the possession to the public.

The desire that respondents had to own a unique car led them to engage in lengthy purchase decisions on car parts and accessories, reinforcing this as a dominant consumption practice. As such, respondents' practices and engagement in consumption were both unconventional and conventional, identifying them as both producers of cultural commodities and active consumers.

The studies conducted on people's consumption specifically related to clothing, have highlighted the importance of brands in identity construction, with certain brands being actively sought and those that are less important being avoided (Miles et al. 1998; Frosh et al., 2002). Taking the understanding we currently have of association with brands and brand loyalties influencing consumption, the way in which

respondents engaged in the consumption of branded cars and modifications was of particular interest (Miles et al. 1998; Frosh et al., 2002).

The consumption practices of younger people tend to be influenced by the symbolic qualities of possessions rather than their intrinsic qualities in the context of the individual's peers (Miles et al., 1998). In the study, most respondents had a number of external factors restricting them to certain types of car, which may not be the brand they would ideally have wanted to purchase. This is somewhat contrary to the existing understanding of people's consumption, which suggests that the respondents, being young males, would actively select a car that may be viewed in a more negative manner by their peers. It was within this context that car modification and association with car groups of the same brand became a particularly important practice.

This contradicted Grubb & Grathwohl's (1967) paper in which they found individuals would avoid those possessions perceived negatively by an individual's peers. Observers and the public have perceptions regarding individuals based on their choice, but the respondents in this study did not always avoid those cars viewed negatively, with some of the respondents adopting this as a positive way of creating identity, opposing the general stereotype. The possession has communicative ability, and this was being used by the respondents to break out of stereotypes, establishing themselves as unique individuals.

Car modification served to deconstruct, to an extent, the car's standard identity and symbolically distance it from the undesirable meanings associated with it, which could then be used to constitute a new, desired identity. This practice embodied a symbolic attempt at solving the problem of being a young male with an undesirable car.

The production of meaning through the act of modifying a car is a focused creative process that young male car modifiers use to stand out from the mass of people who own standard cars (Howell, 2007; Belk, 1985), and can thus constitute themselves as unique individuals. All of the research participants were employed in paid work, but there was little importance given to their occupations. Their employment was a

necessity to fund their car modification projects, which they would do in their leisure time away from their employment, at the principal site for their identity construction.

Constructing their identity primarily through consumption was not possible for these research participants because of the financial constraints they were under, so identity construction was through active consumption as well as the symbolic act of modification. Most respondents did, however, consider themselves to be privileged to own cars and have the ability to modify these cars to become highly conspicuous, to which cultural value was attached. This confirms the findings of Howell (2004), which found the consumption choices individuals made with regard to cars were subject to a number of factors, such as insurance costs, fuel consumption, and finances available. The main choice of consumer product may not be the ideal choice, and therefore it is manipulated by the respondents to communicate what the individual desires. The act of modification becomes symbolic of physical labour and dominant consumption behaviour that becomes a source of considerable cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1979).

The modification of cars allowed and enabled respondents in this study to distance and differentiate themselves from those who had standard cars and used them for just a functional need, no matter how desirable or prestigious those standard cars were. The modified cars were the dominant conspicuous possession, which encompassed the personal achievements and practical abilities of the respondents who had laboured to produce them.

5.6 Meanings and values

The research has highlighted the nature of possessions in terms of their private and public meanings and the value these possessions had to the research participants. Public and private meanings are distinct but related entities (Richins, 1994). The respondents did not place a higher value on the utilitarian ability of their cars, but on the ability they had to be self-expressive and to communicate an identity to the general public. This confirms Cassels' (1989) findings that the utilitarian value is often transcended by the self-expressive value of a possession.

The respondents extracted a large amount of meaning from consuming their modified cars within the social space, and participating in activities that further enhanced this meaning for them, such as but not limited to, illegal street racing. The private meanings were derived from the actual participation within the public space, as this shaped the experiences, knowledge and even the self-concept of the respondents in relation to how the modified car was perceived within the social setting. Thus, the private meanings to the respondents were very much influenced by the experiences with their cars in the social space. This adds to the findings of Belk (1988) that the car owner's personal history and public meanings of a possession play a strong role in what that possession is able to communicate privately to the individual. The findings of the study indicate that it is not only the car owner's history, but the observers' and general public history and perception that not only influence their judgement of the respondents, but also influence the respondents' own judgement of themselves, which adds to Belk's findings.

Respondents looked for approval in public setting to boost their personalities, identities and egos and thereby increase the meaning the possession had to them in private. Had this approval not been achieved in the social space, the meaning derived for the respondents would not be complete, and as such would not translate to a positive individual self-concept: public approval was critical. This ties in to Richins' (1994) findings in which the communicative ability is dependent on observers being able to understand what is communicated, and either approve or reject it.

The respondents were extremely aware of this in a much more simplistic way, but would manage this by getting feedback from those within their social space, before actually modifying their cars. This served as somewhat of a fail-safe for them as they would have clarity in the way their immediate social space might react to their modified cars, thus affecting what the car meant to them. The meaning related to the modified car was primarily influenced by the self-concept, which was then influenced by the public perception, which in turn reinforced the self-concept or did not. This adds to Richins' (1994) findings in which the interpretation of meanings to the public can vary and can be either negative or positive. The way these respondents

overcame this was to have close reference groups and to use many resources to make sure the interpretation would be positive.

5.7 Identity influencing consumption

The identity developed by the respondents with their cars was clearly the dominant identity as evidenced by the effect on their self-concept and the extent to which it formed part of their extended self. The congruity between the current self-concept developed through their modified cars and the role it played in other aspects of decision-making, did not come into play. Respondents would change their consumption habits only if they should be in a setting and context in which their dominant identity would be in jeopardy of negative judgement and association. This ties in to what was discussed by Richins (1994), namely, that all possessions have a communicative ability, and this can be interpreted in a stereotypical way. Should respondents engage in consumption of a possession that was not in accordance with their dominant identity, this would be interpreted as such by the general public.

Consumption of inconspicuous items did not come up in any conversations related to their cars, and this is because it had no effect on their self-concept. Their identity and how it was perceived did not correlate between their cars and other products. In an isolated instance an individual did change his consumption behaviour, when he was in his car, to match his desired self-concept, but outside of that situation he would not be engaging in consumption of those products. The dominant identity, when in use, will affect the consumption of products should the consumption of those products have the ability to influence the self-concept negatively.

This somewhat expands the literature in which it is stated that products play an important role in the creation and maintenance of an individual's identity (Belk, 1988; Csikszenthihalyi & Rochberg-Halton, 1981). Products that are in line with the self-concept will be consumed by individuals, but because they have multi-faceted identities, the dominant identity would be the first consideration should the opportunity exist to negatively or positively affect it. Schlenker (1985) identifies how for some individuals this can manifest itself and engulfs the individual, forming a

powerful basis for self-definition. This is confirmed by the fact that this was evident in some respondents.

5.8 Conclusion

This chapter has explored and discussed the findings in this exploratory research and compared them with results of previous studies. Most of the findings were in general agreement with the majority of similar studies in the aspects investigated. Where this was not the case, clear, plausible explanations were given. In summary, the six main findings were: First, the self-concept remained the primary influencer of individuals' decisions regarding the modification processes carried out. Second, possessions served to influence their personality by adding traits from the modified car to their repertoire of traits. Third, the car was clearly seen by research participants as an extension of self and was thus treated as such. Fourth, research participants held individualism and differentiation in high regard and tried to exert this at all points of modification. Fifth, the meanings and values derived from cars were mutually dependant. In order to deliver value, the car needed to provide external meaning. Sixth, the identity created by the modified car was, however, not an influencer on the purchase decision in other product categories. The findings as a whole were interpreted in the light of an enhanced theoretical understanding of the construction of identity through car modification. Finally, the next chapter draws the conclusions of the study and makes suggestions for further research.

6 Chapter 6: Conclusion

6.1 Introduction

Chapter 6 discusses the study's findings and their significance in the creation, maintenance, and enhancement of males' identities in South Africa and whether this had any direct effect on their consumption behaviour. This chapter is a summary of the study, including the aims and research undertaken. The significance of the findings in terms of the limitations, the implications of this study on motorcar brands and their marketing activities, suggestions for future research, and personal reflection are presented below.

6.2 Re-visiting the aims, research questions and propositions

The aim of this research was to understand how product modification is used to construct, enhance, and maintain personal identity as well as exploring the marketing implications of this behaviour on consumption patterns generally. The study focused specifically on the marketing implications of the car modification behaviour of males in South Africa aged between 20 and 25 years old.

This qualitative research has investigated three specific research questions. First, what role car modification plays in the construction of identity in both the private and public aspects of an individual's self. Second, to understand what meaning and value possessions have for the individuals, and how these possessions are used to construct and communicate an individual's identity. Finally, to determine how this identity influences consumer behaviour with respect to other product categories.

These research questions led to the development of three propositions. First, the self-concept has a strong influence on the personal identity of an individual. The self-concept is the guiding influence on an individual's choice of possessions in constructing personal identity. Second, individuals are more likely to acquire possessions within economic reach and adapt them to reflect their desired self-concept, to construct their desired personal identity. Individuals' possessions have strong personal value and meaning in the construction of identity. Lastly, personal

identity created through modified cars has a strong influence on consumer purchase decisions.

6.2.1 *Research question 1: What role does car modification play in the construction of identity in both the private and the public aspect of an individual's self?*

The first research question concerns what role car modification plays in the construction of identity in both the private and public aspects of an individual's self. It is argued in this study that car modification is the ideal method used by respondents to influence their self-concept. The car is used to construct, maintain and enhance their identity as this has a direct effect on the private and public aspects of an individual's self. The following example demonstrates the point that an individual can own and modify a car, but if he is not seen or associated with that car in public, his identity remains unchanged and his self-concept and identity will not be influenced.

The findings have shown how car modifiers identified themselves as belonging to the modified car culture, differentiating themselves from the mass through car modification, actively sought-out social circles that would provide them with approval or acceptance and adding traits to their personality by association with their cars. A combination of these forms the basis for the construction of their identity and enhancement of self-concept.

The data also showed that the conspicuous nature of the car as a possession provided the perfect tool for these individuals to actively engage in the practices above to fully achieve what they needed to in terms of identity construction, as the car had an inherent communicative ability and, as such, was central to enhancing the sense of self and their self-concept.

The self-concept is the primary influencer for the respondents' active engagement and modification of cars. The car was the ideal tool for reaching their desired self-concepts. The car was important for its ability to communicate to observers and the public. The respondents thrived on social acceptance and approval. The car was modified but it also allowed the respondents to add traits to their personalities, simply

by association to the car. The car had existing meanings attached to it and therefore to the driver. This allowed the respondents to communicate elements they wished to do so, but had no means to do so before purchase of their cars at this stage in their lives. The identity creation between the respondents and their cars was a mutually beneficial one as both cars and respondents were enhanced.

This, therefore, serves to confirm the first research proposition: The self-concept has a strong influence on the personal identity of an individual. The self-concept is the guiding influence on an individual's choice of possessions in constructing personal identity.

6.2.2 *Research question 2: What meaning and value do possessions have for individuals, and how are these possessions used to construct and communicate an individual's identity?*

The second research question looked at understanding the meanings and values that possessions have for individuals, and how this is used to construct and communicate an individual's identity. The public and private meanings were critical areas in which the respondents needed to enhance their self-concept. Public meaning was of paramount importance as this directly affected the private meaning derived by respondents. Social acceptance played an increasingly important role, with respondents changing social groups and forming new reference groups to achieve positive public meaning.

The results also suggested that the values of possessions play a vital role in the communication of identity to the individual, but the meanings possessions have are what facilitate communicating this identity to the external public. Car modifiers placed high importance on the self-expressive benefits of modifying a car while maintaining the car served a somewhat basic and limited utilitarian function.

The self-expressive value of the car as a possession only serves to be enforced when the value can be communicated externally, linking quite strongly the value provided and the meaning derived from possessions. The findings provided important insights into how the research participants made use of this to further the

construction of their identity. This was reflected in the way they had changed their reference groups, social groups and engage in many forms of informal research to determine what the conveyed meanings of the modified cars would be within these settings.

They would gain an understanding of what the potential meanings of their modifications were within those settings and would either choose to progress with them or further develop them to achieve the desired meanings. Research participants often made statements regarding their modifications not being regarded in a favourable light by their social groups and reference groups. The findings concerning this research question identify that for value to be gained from their modified cars, research participants need to understand what the meaning of the inherent communication the car will be. If this is not understood, the construction of identity could go in a number of directions over which the individual would have no control.

Respondents sought individualism and differentiation both from the mass population and within the modified car culture. Respondents' cars differentiated them from others in three key areas: the exterior, interior, and performance of their cars. Individualism was a strong motivator for modification.

This served to confirm the second research proposition: Individuals are more likely to utilise possessions within economic reach and adapt them to reflect their desired self-concept and to construct their desired personal identity. Individuals employ possessions with strong personal value and meaning in the construction of identity.

6.2.3 *Research question 3: How does this identity influence consumer behaviour with respect to other product categories?*

The third and last research question was concerned with understanding how the identity constructed influences consumer behaviour with respect to other product categories in general. A trait of the post-modern individual is a multi-faceted identity, but one dominant identity would be the default identity and for these research participants the identity constructed through their modified car was the dominant

identity. This, however, did not serve to influence their consumer behaviour in relation to other product categories, unless their dominant identity was at risk of being negatively affected. Research participants mentioned how they would change their behaviour and sometimes even their choice of music to reinforce their dominant identity, but only when they were in a setting that would facilitate that.

The influence the dominant identity had on the consumption behaviour in categories not related to cars was minimal. Respondents would only display changed consumption behaviour should the dominant identity be at risk of being negatively affected. Their behaviours were also confined to this context.

This served to disprove the last research proposition: Personal identity created through modified cars has a strong influence on consumer purchase decisions.

6.3 Recommendations for future studies

The study suffered from unavoidable limitations that need to be examined. First, despite the limitations in sample size of the research participants, the study employed a semi-structured interview methodology but further integration of respondents in the typical car modification setting, behaviours within their social groups and actual data from their purchases might have provided a more comprehensive view of the connection between car modification and identity construction, followed by the effect it had on the consumption behaviour. Second, there are also limitations in the methodology used for the research, as the qualitative study limited generalisation. Even though the study advocated understanding over generalisation, a mixed method approach might have provided a way to generalise the findings and extrapolate them. Third, the research sample was limited to respondents residing in the cities of Johannesburg and Durban, the result of the researcher's travel limitations. The sample was limited to individuals who were actively involved in modifying cars.

The opportunity exists to expand this research into a number of areas that this study excluded. This would provide a more comprehensive study and a more complete view of this car culture. Focus could be placed on the entire process, drawing

respondents not only from those who modify their own cars, but from those who run a business modifying cars.

Future research should be conducted over a longer period to gain an in-depth understanding of the role of car modification. Data could be gathered at varying stages of individuals' lives and as they progress through the modification of their cars, track their change in identity and personality. Additionally, data could be gathered from formal and informal events where the respondents socialise and interact each week as this might yield a better understanding of the car culture and behaviours within this culture.

The perception of car modifiers from their own eyes could be contrasted with how they are viewed by those who do not modify their cars, friends, family and their social circles. This wider scope could also contribute to consolidating a broader perspective in the understanding the role car modification plays in the formation of identity. Additionally, future research could analyse the illegal drag racing events that the findings suggest play a large role in the formation of identity for the respondents in this study.

6.4 The implications of the study

6.4.1 *Implications for car marketers and manufacturer*

The findings of this study represent an important contribution to the understanding of how car modification is used to construct, maintain, and enhance personal identity by males aged 20 to 25, specifically for car manufacturers and those marketers working in the automotive industry.

First, marketers need to create an impression on individual of what their car brands can offer individuals should they be modified. Marketers need their cars to be seen by individuals as ones that have the ability to improve the buyer's self-concept, when purchased and when modified. Marketers can do this by actively creating concept cars to showcase how the cars could look and perform, with modifications. These need not be actual production versions, but would allow individuals to see how their self-concept would be enhanced.

Second, marketers should position their brands with distinct personalities. This can be achieved, inter alia, through design, communication, pricing, exclusivity and by unique association, features that individuals can own just by association with the car brand. What the brand can offer in terms of personality traits is of utmost importance as individuals are hoping to enhance their identities and personalities.

Third, marketers need to understand the relationship individuals have with their cars once purchased, and offer these individuals the means to cement this relationship between not only car and individual, but between brand and individual. The key is for marketers to acknowledge this bond and actively promote it. This could be done through social networks or with the use of video and photographic albums, creating memories that track the journey the individual had with the car, as individuals do currently through 'Facebook Lookback' and 'Nokia Storyteller', which highlight the user's journey through the years.

Fourth, individuals in the car modification culture are looking for differentiation and individualism through every modification they engage in. Marketers need to offer some sort of individual aspect to models of cars they produce, such as having race car pedigree or unique colours associated with racing cars. Respondents gravitated towards cars like these and aspired to own them even because though they may be popular, they remain unique in that setting.

Lastly, car brands need to be understood in the context of the modified car culture. The brands are only valuable to the individuals if they are socially accepted brands; if not, they offer no private meaning and therefore have a much stronger chance of rejection.

Car marketers should focus on their larger target market as, often, these individuals are influenced by word of mouth, discussed on car forums, in magazines and in social settings, by car modifiers and not marketers. Marketers should enable these individuals to talk about their brands by offering, among others things, what was highlighted above. The element of influence from friends and fellow car modifiers was considerable, even among those who did not consider themselves car enthusiasts initially but became car enthusiasts and changed much of their identities

and social lives accordingly. If a brand is not within a favourable space, it will result in a definite negative effect on sales.

6.4.2 *Implications for marketing discipline*

The overall implications of this study on the marketing discipline are many. The self-concept as an influence is applicable to not only car modification, but to all products and possessions. If a product or possession is not categorised by individuals as enhancing their self-concept, or at the very least, aligned to their self-concept, there is a higher likelihood that the individual will not purchase that product.

In order for a product to be utilised for construction of identity, the products need to be in the individuals consideration set, while also having a positive approval from their reference and social groups. Individuals will always look to these groups before purchasing a product. If the product is regarded in a negative light, more often than not this product will not be purchased.

It is important for marketers to understand the difference between a negative association and that of differentiation. Individuals are open to consider products which clearly differentiate them from their peers, this might initially insight negative views from their social and reference groups, due to being different, and not due to it having negative associations.

Marketers need their products not only to be different from competitors, but to also be able to communicate that difference to those that purchase their products. Just by consumption of those products, they need to be able to communicate differentiation. Individuals are looking to be seen as unique and different at every product purchase they buy within the context of identity creation. By utilising marketing techniques which by association automatically communicate differentiation in a positive light would boost individuals self concept, thereby boosting brand equity and purchases.

Products have many different types of meanings, with the case of the motorcar, it is founded in public meaning which translates to private meanings for the individual. Depending on the product type, marketers need to understand this relationship and how the public and private meaning interact with each other in that product category.

The marketing implications for general marketing have been summarised above, however the details regarding these implications are founded in this study which provide clear examples of this.

6.5 Personal Reflection

This study is certainly the most grounded scholarly task I have ever undertaken. The processes I went through, such as topic selection, definitions, literature understanding, research design, analysis, and evaluation have resulted in an extremely rewarding experience and a solid foundation, despite high levels of anxiety, frustration and anger, which were unavoidable during the growth and development of my research study. This process began for me with my decision to strengthen my academic skills at a Masters level. Since this undertaking I have the firm belief that my research and professional skill levels have developed immensely. This will undoubtedly translate into greater possibilities as a scholar and a marketer. I feel better prepared for any future academic undertakings and for transferring skills learned into my professional workplace.

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Appendix I

Discussion Guide V1: Car modification
October 2012

1. Introduction

- Introduce self
- Review purpose of study, explain method of data capture and analysis
- Confidentiality and anonymity, contract
- Estimated completion time
- Benefits to respondent

2. Respondents car

- Tell me about your car
- What is the make, model and age?
- What factors did you consider when buying this car?
- What would have made you not buy this car at all?
- When, how and why did you purchase this car?
- What influenced you to buy this car?
- What did you dislike about the car after you bought it?
- What did you like about the car?
- Do you let anybody else drive your car?
- Does your car have a name? why? What does it mean?

3. Respondents Modification of car

- Tell me about the first modification you did to your car?
- Why did you do that modification?
- Tell me about all the modifications you have done to this car.
- Why did you do these modifications?
- Who did the modifications and why?
- Why was it important to modify this car?
- Which is your favourite modification and why?
- Have you had any damage on your car? How did that make you feel?
- Was it always a plan of yours to modify a car you owned? Why?
- What influenced this?

4. What does your car say about you?

- To your friends? Family? Elders? Opposite Sex? Peers? Why?
- Do they look at you differently since you bought the car?
- Do they look at you differently since you modified the car?
- To people you don't know?
- What do you think they think when they see your car?
- Would they think differently if the car wasn't modified?
- Is your image now different with this modified car? How?
- Does the type of car and modifications make you look at yourself differently? Why is this?

- Who do you associate with modified cars? Who do you associate with your type of modified car?
- Are there certain modifications that certain type of people do?
- Have you ever overheard other people talking about your car? How did you feel?
- If your closest friend/wife/partner was describing you, would your car be a describing factor? Why so?
- Can your friends describe you through your car? Please explain.

5. **How do you treat your car?**
   - Like any other of your possessions? If no, Why?
   - If your car gets damaged, how does it make you feel?
   - How often do you clean your car?
   - Do you do it yourself?

Any other comments? Anything not asked?

Appendix II

Letter of Invitation

Mr. Bhana

16 Linden Road

Bramley

Johannesburg

Re: Research Study: A Qualitative Research Study to determine how car modification is used by males in South Africa between the age of 20 – 25 to construct, enhance and maintain their personal identity.

Dear Sir,

I am currently undertaking a research study as part of my Masters Degree (Masters in Management in Strategic Marketing). I am a senior student with an interest in all aspects of motor cars and hope to carry out further research into the construction of personal identity. This study aims to answer the question: How does car modification used by males in South Africa between the age of 20 – 25 help to construct, enhance and maintain their personal identity? I hope to identify, highlight and improve any areas of understanding in this field which may be under developed. This will not only aid in the understanding, but potentially be viable for motor car brands to look at and assist in this process.

I would like to invite you, if you have a modified car, or are currently in the process of modifying your car to take part. If you choose to take part, you will be requested to sign a consent form to partake in one short audio taped interview, which will be held in a neutral place with an estimated duration of 45 to 90 minutes. Any information gathered during this study which is identifiable to you will remain fully confidential and anonymity will be maintained throughout the study. All participants have the right not to take part or to withdraw from the study at any stage without penalty.

Thank you for taking the time to read this letter. Should you wish to take part in the study or have any further questions you would like to ask before making a decision, please feel free to contact me at the above address or alternatively you can call me on 084 628 3483 or email muhammadubhana@gmail.com.

If you do decide that you would like to participate in this research study, please sign the consent form attached, and return it to me .

Should I not hear from you I will assume that you do not want to take part and I will not contact you again.

Yours sincerely,

Muhammad-Uzayr Bhana

Signed: _____

Appendix III

Consent Form

I _____have read and understand the letter of invitation to

take part in the research study: A Qualitative Research Study to determine how car modification is used by males in South Africa between the age of 20 – 25 to construct, enhance and maintain their personal identity. I have received adequate information regarding the nature of the study and understand what will be requested of me. I am aware of my right to withdraw at any point during the study without penalty.

I hereby consent to participate in this research study.

Participants Signature: _____

Date: _____

Researchers Signature: _____

Date: _____