Culture and Consumption
A Study of Beer Consumption in Australia

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ABSTRACT

This thesis examined the relationship between culture and consumption through the in-depth analysis of beer consumption in the Australian context. The aim was to explore the extent to which consumption decisions and behaviours are individually-versus culturally-determined. The literature pertaining to the bi-directional relationship between culture and consumption was categorised into two perspectives: the Consumer as King perspective and the Consumer as Pawn perspective. The choice of these titles intentionally likens the consumption process to the game of chess, a game in which power positions are all-important. Each perspective is characterised by a different orientation towards the autonomy of the consumer relative to cultural imperatives. They also differ in terms of their positions regarding consumer rationality, the nature of social reality, the importance of managerial relevance in consumer research, and the process of cultural meaning transfer. Due to the underlying theoretical differences between these perspectives, the choice and application of research methods differ between them.

This thesis combined research methods that are uncommon in consumer research. Data generated by an ethnographic study of beer consumption were analysed using the grounded theory method. Interviews were conducted with 115 Australians in drinking contexts, and a further 300 Australians were interviewed in non-drinking contexts. The intention was to generate a description and analysis of the cultural influences impacting upon beer consumption in Australia. The analysis provided support for the Consumer as Pawn perspective, demonstrating that beer consumption behaviours in the Australian context are highly culturally specified. The self-concept and cultural meaning constructs were found to be particularly useful in illuminating the data generated through fieldwork, and were thus employed to explicate the differences between the two perspectives named above.

The grounded theory analysis generated the core category of image management. It is this consumer objective that best explains the phenomenon of beer consumption as it occurs in Australia. Drinkers were found to be concerned with choosing the appropriate form of alcohol in the right amounts for consumption in specific contexts. For certain sorts of Australians, beer is a required beverage in numerous contexts. For many of these consumers, individual decision-making is all but
irrelevant as societal expectations come to replace individual preferences. Similarly, for other Australians beer consumption is socially decried and therefore avoided. The levels of conformity to these cultural norms indicate that consumers readily sacrifice consumer autonomy in order to achieve the social interaction and integration they desire.

The importance of the self-concept to consumption became apparent throughout the study. Consumers were found to attempt to communicate those aspects of self that are (sub)culturally specified as desirable. Thus, rather than consciously choosing a desired form of self, it is suggested here that many consumers experience constant pressure to conform to culturally and socially sanctioned versions of self. They therefore act defensively in self-concept construction, attempting to communicate those messages they consider appropriate for specific situations.

Also explored in the thesis were the various coping strategies employed by beer drinkers in overcoming the tensions produced by the often paradoxical requirements that they face. Five beer consumption myths were identified, each contributing to the resolution of the tensions surrounding beer consumption in the Australian context. These myths include the All-Australian Myth (all Australians drink beer), the Taste Myth (taste is the primary reason for drinking beer), the Advertising Myth (advertising is ineffective in influencing beer consumption), the Pleasure Myth (beer consumption is a totally enjoyable activity), and the Control Myth (consumers are completely in control of their own beer consumption decisions and behaviours).
TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER ONE - INTRODUCTION ................................................................. 10
   Introduction .................................................................................. 10
   Research Objectives .................................................................... 11
   Theoretical Background ............................................................... 11
      Existing Theories of Culture and Consumption ......................... 11
      Cultural Meaning .................................................................... 14
   Relevance ..................................................................................... 16
   Methodology ................................................................................. 18

CHAPTER 2 – LITERATURE REVIEW ....................................................... 21
   Introduction .................................................................................. 21
   Background .................................................................................. 21
   A Macro Perspective ................................................................... 23
      Culture ...................................................................................... 25
      The Role of Culture in Consumption ......................................... 28
      Cultural Principles and Categories ........................................... 29
      Cultural Change ....................................................................... 31
      Cultural Meaning .................................................................... 32
      The Self-Concept ..................................................................... 35
      The Extended Self-Concept .................................................... 37
   The Consumer as King Perspective ............................................. 39
   Symbolic Rationalism .................................................................... 39
   Culture ......................................................................................... 40
      Cultural Change ....................................................................... 41
      Cultural Meaning .................................................................... 42
      The Self-Concept ..................................................................... 45
   A Paradigm Shift .......................................................................... 47
      Characteristics of Postmodernism ................................................ 48
      Diversity Within Postmodernism .............................................. 51
   The Consumer as Pawn Perspective ............................................ 53
   Culture ......................................................................................... 54
      Marketing as a Cultural Institution ............................................. 57
      Cultural Change ....................................................................... 59
      Cultural Meaning .................................................................... 59
      The Self-Concept ..................................................................... 61
   Acknowledging Negative Feelings .............................................. 66
   Irrational Symbolic Consumption .............................................. 71
   Research Approaches ................................................................... 73
      Qualitative Research Methods .................................................... 75
      Role of the Researcher in Qualitative Research ......................... 77
      Ethnography ............................................................................ 78
      Trustworthiness Issues ............................................................. 81
   Summary ....................................................................................... 83

CHAPTER THREE - AUSTRALIAN CULTURE ........................................... 85
   History ......................................................................................... 85
   Australia Today ............................................................................ 87
   A Culture in a State of Flux ......................................................... 89
   Social Class .................................................................................. 90
Gender roles ................................................................. 91
Values................................................................................. 92
Mates and Mateship ..................................................... 95
Materialism ....................................................................... 96
Leisure............................................................................... 98
Australian Beer Culture.................................................. 101
The Role of Beer in Australian Culture ......................... 101
Drinking rituals .................................................................. 109
Pubs................................................................................... 110
Gender differences in beer consumption ....................... 111
Age Differences in Beer Consumption............................ 113
Class differences in beer consumption............................ 114
Beer Marketing ................................................................. 115
Beer Advertising .................................................................. 116
Summary ........................................................................... 123

CHAPTER FOUR - METHODOLOGY .................................... 125
Overview ........................................................................... 125
Introduction ...................................................................... 127
Selection of Approach..................................................... 127
The Grounded Theory Method ........................................ 129
Grounded Theory and Ethnography ................................. 134
Product Selection ............................................................. 136
Sample .............................................................................. 137
Data Collection Techniques ............................................ 141
Interviews ......................................................................... 141
Observation ....................................................................... 145
Focus Groups .................................................................... 147
Documentary Analysis .................................................... 148
Trustworthiness Issues ..................................................... 148
Apparatus ......................................................................... 150
Data Collection ................................................................. 151
Data Collection in Drinking Contexts ......................... 152
Data Collection in Non-Drinking Contexts ..................... 153
Data Analysis .................................................................... 154
Interpretation .................................................................... 156
Methodological Limitations .......................................... 157
Researcher ........................................................................ 157
Data Collection ................................................................. 158

CHAPTER 5 - RESULTS .................................................. 160
The All-Australian Beverage Myth ................................... 161
Beer Consumption as a Social Phenomenon .................... 166
Beer Consumption as a Gendered Construction ............... 166
Attitudes Towards Female Beer Consumption ................. 170
The Potency Myth .............................................................. 173
Changing Perceptions of BDFs ........................................ 177
Physical Justifications ....................................................... 179
Volume .............................................................................. 180
Bitterness ......................................................................... 181
Social Class ....................................................................... 182
Conclusion ......................................................................... 186
The Taste Myth ................................................................. 186
Taste as a Justification for Selection of Beverage .............. 186
List of Tables

Table 1 – Sample Characteristics

138
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Paper produced by the PhD Candidate

CHAPTER ONE - INTRODUCTION

Introduction

Consumer behaviour as a subdiscipline of marketing draws from many disciplines, with theoretical contributions originating from psychology, anthropology, sociology, and economics (Dichter 1964; Douglas and Isherwood 1979; Englis and Solomon 1995; Hagerty 1980). According to Holbrook (1995a), one outcome of this cross-pollination is that consumer researchers are unable to reach a consensus regarding the scope of their area of research. It is also suggested that consumer behaviour has suffered from inconsistency in the interpretation of the theories imported from these disciplines, resulting in disagreement over issues that are central to theory development (Otnes 1996). One of these areas of disagreement is the influence of culture over the consumption behaviours of the individual, and it is this particular relationship that is the primary focus of this thesis.

As Jacoby (1976) pointed out over twenty years ago and Holbrook (1995a) reiterated recently, consumer researchers have focused their efforts on the purchasing component of consumption (examples include Dhar and Simonson 1999; Bettman, Luce, and Payne 1998; Mela, Jedidi, and Bowman 1998; Jacoby, Chestnut, Weigl, and Fisher 1976; Miller and Zikmund 1975). The emphasis typically has been placed on cognitive processing rather than on the emotional or subconscious aspects of consumption (Woodside and Trappey 1992; Bettman 1979; van Raaij 1977). According to some, this approach has resulted in "deficiencies in the market research community’s capacity for ‘knowing’ the consumer" (Rook 1988, p. 248). In particular, there is increasing concern that there has been an over-emphasis on the buying process at the expense of the broader category of behaviour known as consumption (Joy and Venkatesh 1994; Kleine, Schultz-Kleine, and Kernan 1992; Belk 1988a; Solomon 1983). One symptom of this focus on purchase decisions has been the neglect of culture in theoretical accounts of consumption. Sheth and Gross (1988) and Costa and Bamossy (1995a) suggest that as marketers have traditionally operated in the culture in which they and their consumers have been enculturated, they have historically had little need for analyses of the relationship between culture and consumption. According to Firat (1985, 1987a), the study of macro variables was thus considered the domain of other disciplines within the social sciences.
Consumer behaviour is currently experiencing a change in focus. In its early years, economics and psychology provided the dominating theoretical inputs (e.g., Hagerty 1980; Sheth 1979; Walton and Berkowitz 1979; Lutz and Kakkar 1975; LaPlaca 1974). More recently, techniques from anthropology and sociology have been increasingly applied to the field, bringing with them a more interpretive stance towards consumer research (McCracken 1990a, 1990b; Solomon 1983; Douglas and Isherwood 1979). This adjustment in focus has resulted in varying perspectives of the relationship between culture and the consumer. The literature review in the next chapter classifies these perspectives into two competing accounts of the ability of culture to impact upon the consumption behaviours of individuals. These two accounts have been labelled in this thesis the Consumer as King perspective and the Consumer as Pawn perspective, reflecting their opposing positions on the role of the consumer in the “chess game” of consumption. These two terms also derive from the economics literature and the debate on rational economic man (Gordon and Lee 1972). The assumptions underpinning these perspectives are explained in detail in chapter 2.

**Research Objectives**

The general purpose of the research was to explore the relationship between culture and consumption behaviour through the analysis of a specific consumption activity in Australian culture. The grounded theory method was employed in this research, and consequently there was no precise initial research question in the traditional sense. Instead, a substantive theory of beer consumption was sought that could add insight into the relationships between culture and consumption. Throughout the course of the research a more specific objective began to emerge. This objective was to examine the extent to which consumers’ consumption behaviours are individually versus culturally determined, an issue that is rarely directly addressed in the consumer behaviour literature.

**Theoretical Background**

**Existing Theories of Culture and Consumption**

Economic theory has traditionally been based on the premise that the consumer is a rational being seeking utility in consumption (Samuel, Hancock, and Wallace 1970;
Lipsey 1963). As a result, early consumer behaviour theories assumed that consumption activities are motivated by utility maximisation (e.g., Lancaster 1966; Peter and Tarpey 1975; Hilliard, Vaughn, and Reynolds 1975). Economic theories of utility are generally devoid of consideration of the cultural context (for a discussion on this point see Costa and Bamossy 1995b). While economic assumptions of rational utility-maximising behaviour have been largely discounted in current consumption theories, such interpretations of choice behaviour are still to be found within the consumer behaviour literature (e.g., Aldridge 1994).

The traditional focus within consumer behaviour on individual decision-making relating specifically to purchases has resulted in an emphasis on variables such as price and packaging (Morwitz, Greenleaf, and Johnson 1998; Creyer and Ross 1997; Twede 1997; Blackston 1992). This emphasis on micro consumer behaviour has been recognised as producing a reliance on quantitative research techniques (Manning and Cullum-Swan 1994). Given this historical focus on micro consumption behaviours, it has been suggested that the application of a macro perspective that takes into account the social and cultural environments in which consumers live and consume has the potential to reveal and fill significant gaps in our understanding of consumption (Holbrook 1995a). According to Belk (1987, p. 1), a macro orientation is “The view that emerges when consumer behaviour is placed within the perspective of the rest of life.” Along with the macro interest in consumption has come the appreciation of culture as an important variable in consumer behaviour, resulting in the active examination of consumption as a cultural phenomenon (McCracken 1987, 1990a, 1990b). However, even within the macro consumer behaviour literature there is disagreement concerning the role of culture in consumption. Kahle (1991) suggests that there remain substantial shortfalls in our understanding of the ways in which culture influences consumption, and the ways in which consumption can impact upon culture.

In this thesis, the disagreement among macro consumer researchers concerning the ways in which culture influences consumption has been categorised into two positions that have been labelled the Consumer as King perspective and the Consumer as Pawn perspective. There is no clear demarcation in the consumer behaviour literature between these two competing perspectives, and the boundaries between them are hazy and often transgressed.
The Consumer as King perspective currently dominates the consumer behaviour literature. According to this perspective, the increasing role of consumption in consumers’ lifestyles has seen consumption become a recreational activity just as much as a survival requirement, with the consumption process considered an enjoyable end in itself (Belk 1996; Holt 1995; Sherry 1990). Consumers are viewed as thinking, feeling subjects who imbue the consumption process with many different levels of meaning (Tetreault and Kleine 1990). The picture is painted of emancipated individuals who have more choices and latitude in consumption than ever before. Consumers are seen to be in total control of their consumption projects, with an unlimited array of product options from which to choose in their efforts to mould their self-determined self-images (Holt 1995; McCracken 1990b). Perceived as optional and selective, cultural guides are used by consumers only when they are beneficial to the achievement of their objectives.

An important implication of the Consumer as King perspective is that the marketer has to be very careful when communicating with potential customers to enhance the possibility of a sale (Scott 1990). Hence extensive market research must be undertaken to correctly structure the product offering around the needs and wants of consumers (for examples of this approach see Englis and Solomon 1995; Domzal and Kernan 1992; Scott 1990). According to the logic of the Consumer as King perspective, unless marketers can satisfy consumers’ self-determined needs for both functional and symbolic outcomes, their products will fail in the market place (Englis and Solomon 1995; Firat, Dholakia, and Venkatesh 1995; Manning and Cullum-Swan 1994). Brown (1994, 1995a, 1995b) posits that the result is the plethora of product options that is available in many product categories, an outcome that he attributes to the fragmenting markets and intensifying competition that encourage niche marketing.

In contrast, the Consumer as Pawn perspective offers a very different interpretation of the relationship between culture and individual consumers. The cultural environment is viewed as a major determinant of consumption behaviour, with consumers acting out the roles dictated to them by those wielding cultural power (Firat 1991). Cultural ideals are seen to be manufactured by marketers and a limited number of other powerful opinion leaders, enabling them to compel consumers to repeatedly acquire products that may provide no persisting happiness or gratification (Murphy and Miller 1997; Kilbourne, McDonagh and Prothero 1997; McCracken 1990b). The world of consumption is argued to exist to perpetuate the dominant culture, a task that is
accomplished by the reinforcement of existing cultural practices through the presence of consumer goods (Firat 1987a, 1987b, 1991).

The Consumer as Pawn perspective acknowledges that in most developed economies, individuals' consumption choices do not appear to be constrained by anything except their own preferences and incomes (Fenster 1991; Baudrillard 1988). However, the forces of culture and society are seen to exert their influences subconsciously on consumers in their decision-making processes (Amine 1993; McCracken 1987; Bourdieu 1984; Levy 1981). The result is that consumers are unwilling or unable to acknowledge sociocultural influences when traditional research methods are employed (Costa and Bamossy 1995b; Venkatesh 1995; Droge, Calantone, Agrawal, and Mackoy 1993; Fenster 1991). Although simple observation of individuals' consumption behaviours suggests that they choose freely between product alternatives, thus choosing the products with the most appropriate cultural meanings for their individual needs, the CaP perspective suggests that their choices are more likely to be a reflection of their social, ethnic, religious, and regional backgrounds (Bourdieu 1984). Parallels are apparent with the main theme of Aldous Huxley's 1932 novel *Brave New World*, where humans happily engage in centrally programmed consumption under the assumption that they are acting according to their individual preferences. They are largely oblivious to the comprehensive social programming to which they are exposed throughout their lives. It is proposed in the Consumer as Pawn perspective that today's consumers also presume their product selections are made from free choice, failing to appreciate the social and cultural programming that is masterminding their drives and motivations.

**Cultural Meaning**

Consumer researchers have only recently come to acknowledge the critical importance of product symbolism in consumption (Holbrook and Hirschman 1982; Solomon 1983). The result has been a growing recognition of the cultural meaning embedded in many products, and the importance of this meaning to both individual consumers and groups of consumers (Amine 1993; Hyatt 1992; Shore 1991; Kleine and Kernan 1991; Sherry 1990; Scott 1990). The meanings resident in consumer goods are thought to be representative of the prevailing cultural principles and categories (Wallendorf and Arnould 1991; Belk, Wallendorf and Sherry 1989). As such, consumer
goods are seen to provide the “key instruments for the reproduction, representation, and manipulation of ... culture” (McCracken 1990b, p. xi). In recognition of the significance of culture in consumption decisions and practices, the symbolic meaning of products has been labelled cultural meaning (McCracken 1987).

Cognitive processing models from psychology have long been appropriated to aid comprehension of individual-level cognitions and the role they play in meaning assignment and manipulation (Dichter 1964; Sheth 1979). More recently, anthropological and sociological discussions of culture and society have been increasingly employed by consumer researchers in attempts to understand the cultural meanings attached to consumer goods (McCracken 1990a, 1990b; Shore 1991; Tetreault and Kleine 1990). This has provided access to detailed accounts of behaviour, many of which are directly related to consumption (see for example Douglas’ [1987] anthropological discussion of the consumption of alcohol). While it is acknowledged that difficulties are encountered when crossing the theoretical boundaries between disciplines, these difficulties are considered to be less damaging than the artificial separation between disciplines that prevents a comprehensive understanding of human (and therefore, consumer) behaviour (Venkatesh 1995; Shore 1991; Cole 1991).

In line with the Consumer as King and Consumer as Pawn perspectives outlined above, there are two competing perspectives regarding the role of consumers in the production and consumption of cultural meaning. The first, related to the Consumer as King perspective, assumes that the consumer has a significant degree of power in the relationship, with consumers free to assign meaning to goods and services (Wallendorf and Arnould 1988). Examples of this approach include McCracken (1987, 1990a, 1990b), Scott (1990), and Belk et al. (1989). Ordinary individuals are empowered with the ability to alter cultural meanings, introducing cultural change through the idiosyncratic ways in which they use products (Wallendorf 1993; Wallendorf and Arnould 1991; Appadurai 1986). The second viewpoint on cultural meaning, consistent with the Consumer as Pawn perspective, proposes that the generation of meaning is largely carried out by the marketing system, with consumers exerting little control over the process (Firat 1991; Kleine and Kernan 1991). Only certain powerful members of a culture are seen to be capable of altering the cultural meaning found in products (Holt 1997; Firat 1991). Through the discussion of the role of the consumer in consumption,
this thesis addresses the role of the consumer in the assignment of cultural meaning, thus contributing to the limited debate on this subject.

Relevance

This thesis contributes to several theoretical areas. The nature of culture’s influence over consumption is explored, McCracken’s work on cultural meaning is extended, consumption is studied for the purpose of consumer enlightenment, a rare combination of methodologies is employed, and an analysis of Australian culture in terms of consumption is offered.

It has been noted that consumption behaviour has become more complex and erratic over time (Firat and Venkatesh 1995; Homma 1991), creating the need for new theories and strategies to account for consumption behaviours. According to Solomon (1983), there is a particular deficiency in information regarding the influence of social and cultural environments and the effects of objects on individuals and the relationships between people. Rather than explicitly researching the balance of power between cultural forces and the individual in the determination of consumption behaviours, a more common approach among consumer researchers is to acknowledge the effects of both forces without attempting to measure their relative influence (e.g., Amine 1993; Homma 1991; Henry 1976). An improved understanding of the nature of the interaction between consumer behaviour and culture has benefits for the general comprehension of human motivations and actions, as well as for those operating in the marketing arena. This thesis directly addresses this issue, with the aim being to gain greater insight into the degree of cultural influence over the consumption process.

Grant McCracken has provided a significant contribution to our understanding of the relationship between the variables of culture and consumer behaviour, particularly in relation to the process of meaning transfer. In his book titled *Culture and Consumption* (1990b), he outlines his views of the history of this relationship, the forms in which it exists, and the processes by which it operates in Western consumer societies. McCracken has offered a systematic explanation of the way in which culture impacts directly and indirectly upon consumption activities, and equally importantly, the way in which the process works in reverse to evoke cultural change. Venkatesh (1995) argues that different cultures exhibit different consumption behaviours, necessitating the use of
local cultural frameworks to analyse consumption in different cultures. There thus exists a need to examine the applicability of McCracken’s theories outside of North America to assess their transferability to the Australian consumption context. This thesis seeks to perform this function in the Australian context through a focus on the cultural significance of a particular consumption behaviour. A product was selected for analysis that is characterised by high levels of cultural significance, the objective being to explore the nature and extent of this significance. Beer was the product chosen, as it is recognised to have close links to Australian culture in the eyes of both Australians and others (Fiske, Hodge, and Turner 1987; King 1978).

As noted above, the consumer behaviour literature is dominated by studies of micro consumption issues. Conducted from a managerial perspective, the purpose of consumer research has been to provide useful information to marketers (e.g., Solomon and Englis 1994; Solomon and Greenberg 1993; May 1979; Jacoby et al. 1976). There exists an opportunity to balance the field by exploring consumption more broadly, with the specific intention of investigating issues of interest to consumers. As the title indicates, consumer behaviour is characterised by an interest in consumption activities. A focus on consumers leads to the consideration of factors that ordinarily would be ignored, such as the feelings of consumers throughout the entire consumption process. According to Holbrook (1995a), feelings are typically of interest to marketers only when they impinge directly on the purchase decision. Holbrook and Hirschman (1982) posit that the result has been a tendency to focus on consumers’ likes and dislikes towards products, rather than on the experience of more complex emotions.

The objective of this thesis is to further the subdiscipline of consumer behaviour for its own sake. As stated by Holbrook (1995a, p. 16), “…consumer research is and should be conducted for the sake of studying consumer behaviour where that type of knowledge serves as an end in itself.” A valued by-product of this objective is the potential for the empowerment of consumers through the provision of information concerning their own consumption behaviours. While there has been interest in consumer education in the past (Royer 1980; Wallendorf and Zaltman 1977), the forecast increase in consumer education programs, and thus in consumer awareness, has not been forthcoming. Almost twenty-five years ago, Bloom (1976) optimistically anticipated a significant increase in government, industry, and school efforts at consumer education that would see consumers taking a more “rational” approach to
consumption. Given the failure of this outcome to eventuate, perhaps it is time for consumer researchers to make some contribution to increasing consumers' awareness of their own motivations and mental processes; if not to encourage rational consumption as such, then to make consumption a more satisfying and fulfilling process.

The dominance of micro studies using quantitative methodologies in consumer behaviour offers another opportunity to broaden the field. A macro approach to consumption that employs qualitative research methods has the potential to provide additional insights into the consumption process. This research adopts such an approach, applying a combination of grounded theory and ethnographic methods for data collection and analysis. These methods are uncommon in isolation, and rare in combination.

This research is thus characterised by three non-traditional parameters: (1) the intention is to advance knowledge per se, rather than focusing specifically on managerial relevance; (2) the application of qualitative research methods to explore macro consumption issues; and (3) the employment of the grounded theory method of theory induction. Together, these characteristics make this research innovative, with the potential to provide a meaningful contribution to the consumer behaviour literature.

**Methodology**

Qualitative research methods are particularly useful in the examination of macro factors such as culture (Arnould and Wallendorf 1994; Geertz 1975). Qualitative research encompasses a number of methodologies, many of which are discussed in chapters 2 and 4. In the search for methods that would best suit this research topic, the grounded theory method from sociology and ethnographic methods from anthropology were selected for combined use. The specific techniques used for data collection were in-depth interviews, ethnographic interviewing, and observation. The analysis was then performed using the grounded theory method of theory generation.

The main sample was comprised of 115 people interviewed and observed in drinking contexts across three Australian states. The data obtained from these informants supplied the primary input for the interpretation of beer consumption that was generated. In addition, approximately 300 school students and retirees were
interviewed in schools and retirement villages to provide a general perspective of Australian culture. The objective was to generate a substantive theory of consumption specific to the consumption of beer in the Australian context that also has the potential to offer insights into the consumption process in general. In other words, beer consumption in the Australian context was examined qualitatively at the emic level (the perspective of the consumer), with tentative etic (theoretical) implications drawn from the findings.

Although naturalistic research methods such as ethnography and grounded theory are not new, their application to the field of consumer behaviour is much more recent (e.g., Wallendorf and Arnould 1991; Mick and Fournier 1998). Particularly in the Australian context, the application of ethnographic research techniques to the study of consumer behaviour has been uncommon in published journals. Two exceptions are separate ethnographic studies into Aboriginal consumption patterns conducted by Brady (1992) and Belk, Groves, and Østergaard (1999 forthcoming). The formal and explicit use of the grounded theory method is even more rare, with its use largely confined to the discipline of sociology (Wells 1995). Grounded theory provides an alternative method to the hypothetico-deductive approach most commonly employed in consumer research. According to the canons of grounded theory, the researcher is “immersed” in the social phenomenon of interest prior to or concurrently with the conduction of a literature review (Glaser 1992). The researcher’s interpretation is said to be less blinkered, an outcome that is achieved by avoiding the contamination that occurs when the researcher engages in an extensive literature search prior to data collection (Glaser and Strauss 1967; Locke 1996). By examining the literature during and after data collection and analysis, the researcher is in a position to take advantage of the raw data without theoretical expectations being overly imposed on the emerging interpretation (Glaser 1992). As analysis proceeds, the literature becomes useful in consolidating and extending the interpretation (Strauss and Corbin 1990). The rationale behind grounded theory and the processes involved are explained in detail in chapter 4.

In the following chapter, the literature pertaining to the relationship between culture and consumption is reviewed. The current state of culture-related consumption research is described and gaps in existing knowledge are identified. In order to achieve this outcome, sources deriving from multiple disciplines have been integrated to provide a discussion of the relationship between culture and consumption. Chapter 3 focuses on
literature that directly addresses Australian culture and Australian beer consumption. The methodological direction taken in this thesis is explained in detail in chapter 4. In chapter 5, findings from the literature are transformed into an ethnographic account of beer consumption in Australia. The grounded theory of beer consumption that has been generated from the ethnographic data is described in chapter 6.
CHAPTER 2 – LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

Regardless of the theory generation method employed, it is generally expected that findings are reported in the literature as if they had been discovered deductively (Richardson 1994). In keeping with this research convention, the literature review has been placed here in the traditional location (i.e., before the methodology and results chapters). However, in accordance with a grounded approach, most of the cited literature sources were not accessed until data collection and analysis were well underway. There is thus a quality of hindsight to the following literature review, with the research conclusions implied in its structure and composition.

The primary objective of this chapter is to examine the theoretical discourses relevant to the relationship between culture and consumer behaviour. In particular, the arguments posed for attributing weight to consumers’ individual consumption preferences versus the forces of society and culture on consumption decisions are compared and assessed. First, the three major theoretical areas to be compared between the two perspectives are outlined to give background to the discussion to follow. These areas are culture, cultural meaning, and the self-concept. The Consumer as King and Consumer as Pawn perspectives are then discussed in terms of their core suppositions, with comparisons drawn between them. In order to distinguish between these perspectives, a discussion on the paradigm shift that is occurring in consumer research is provided. This discussion outlines the aspects of postmodern consumer research that contribute to the primary differences between the Consumer as King and Consumer as Pawn perspectives. (Appendix A provides a table summary of the key points of difference between these two perspectives.) Lastly, the research methods employed by researchers from both perspectives are detailed to demonstrate the relevant differences in core assumptions and applications.

Background

As noted in chapter 1, early in the history of consumer behaviour, concepts were drawn largely from economic theory and were therefore concerned fundamentally with buying behaviour. The consumer's role was perceived to be active in that the individual
was seen to consciously source relevant information and cognitively process this information to make informed decisions to maximise utility (Peter and Tarpey 1975). This perceived concern for utility resulted in little acknowledgment of the symbolic function of consumption. Instead, consumers were expected to measure outcomes against intentions, consciously analysing product information to determine optimal purchase decisions (Miller and Zikmund 1975). Income constraints were thought to provide the main parameters for consumption (Miller and Zikmund 1975), making price a critical decision criterion (LaPlaca 1974; Mathews, Wilson, and Tan 1974). At the root of this emphasis on utility maximisation was the assumption of consumer autonomy in decision making (Gardner 1977; Hilliard et al. 1975).

Over time, the focus on buyer behaviour resulted in theories being borrowed from psychology to assist in the understanding of purchase decisions (Sheth 1979). An example is the multi-attribute models that remain popular in consumer research (Ahmed and d’Astous 1996; Alpert, Kamins, and Graham 1992). Much attention has been given to the problem-solving activities of consumers, the result being an emphasis on information processing (Creyer and Ross 1997; Wright 1979; Jacoby et al. 1976). According to Holbrook (1995a), this focus on buying behaviour is a result of the managerial relevance approach that dominates the discipline of marketing flowing on to the subdiscipline of consumer behaviour. Similarly, Firat (1985, 1987a) has noted that the business managers who are generally considered to be the principal audience of marketing are also the primary audience for consumer behaviour.

Marketing as a research area traditionally places emphasis on markets rather than individuals, so the evolution of consumer behaviour as a subdiscipline has marked a change in focus from aggregate markets to the activities of individuals (Sheth and Gross 1988). However, the interest in individual consumers has remained dependent upon the ability of this approach to generate meaningful data for practising marketers, hence the appropriation of models from psychology (Sirgy 1982). Implicit in this approach is the assumption that consumers have free choice in their consumption decisions, with the marketer’s role being to discover the workings of the consumer’s intricate cognitive processes (see for example Solomon and Englis 1994; Bettman 1979; Jacoby et al. 1976).
A Macro Perspective

Belk (1987), along with a growing number of others (e.g., Firat 1985), advocates greater attention to the entire consumption process, including post-purchase behaviour. This has been prompted by a concern that the purchase-oriented managerial orientation lacks the capacity to provide an adequate comprehension of consumers and their behaviours (Bristor 1995; Hill 1992a). In particular, the information processing approach has been recognised as inadequate in facilitating an understanding of many forms of consumption (Clarke, Kell, Schmidt, and Vignali 1998; Holbrook 1995a; Mick 1986). This realisation has encouraged the adoption of a macro approach that, among other things, takes into consideration the broad societal effects of marketing and consumption activities (see for example Kilbourne et al. 1997). This represents a clear move away from the dominant micro orientation of traditional consumer research characterised by an almost exclusive focus on the acquisition process. As Firat (1985) points out, a focus on purchasing can exclude acts of consumption that are important in human lives that do not involve a purchase encounter. Mick (1986) provides as an example the many forms of leisure activities that do not directly involve the purchase of products. Several writers have noted that the move towards a macro perspective is gradual and has yet to achieve mainstream status in consumer behaviour (Kleine et al. 1992; Belk 1988a; Firat 1987a, 1987b; Firat and Dholakia 1982). However, there is a growing number of researchers who are active and vocal in their support for a broad consumption focus (Kilbourne et al. 1997; Holt 1997; and Joy and Venkatesh 1994).

In reaction to the prevailing emphasis on micro consumption behaviours, Belk (1987) cites Bellow’s (1975) description of consumer research as being stuck at the level of intensely examining issues of little significance to mankind, such as refining the way dog food is marketed. Holbrook (1995a) suggests that consumer researchers reduce their focus on the study of consumer reactions to individual products, and broaden their interests to include analyses that involve multiple product categories and forms of expenditure other than money (such as time and effort). Due to the work of researchers such as Belk and Holbrook, there is now a much greater appreciation of the importance of consumption to human life. There is growing consensus that the objects that are purchased, swapped, gifted, consumed, and discarded in the Western world play very significant roles in people’s lives (Wilson 1995; Firat 1991; McCracken 1987, 1990b; Solomon 1983; Levy 1981).
The term *homo faber* has been proposed as a term that describes man's relationship with the objects he makes and uses (Levi-Strauss 1963). The use of the term *homo faber* acknowledges that much consumption behaviour is social behaviour, and that much social behaviour is consumption behaviour (Solomon 1983). Thus, it is argued that to be a person in today's society is to be a consumer (Baudrillard 1988; Holbrook 1996; Wright 1994; Solomon and Greenberg 1993). As a result of this realisation, the rational man of economic theory has been replaced with the conception of a consumer who is involved with products in ways that cannot be explained by discussions of functional utility (Douglas and Isherwood 1979).

The macro interpretation of consumption as an integral component of human life has lead to the study of very different topics with the application of very different research methods (Holbrook 1995a). One outcome is the increasing use of everyday consumption activities as a source of cultural information (Mackay 1997b; Piot 1993), and an emphasis on research that concentrates on "the messy contextual details of consumer life" (Holt 1997, p. 344). A more pluralistic approach to methodology has been recommended to facilitate a macro approach to consumer research (McGrath 1996; Holbrook 1995a). Also, there has been an increased focus on theory generation to offset the emphasis on theory validation, opening up opportunities for alternative forms of research such as grounded methods (see for example Mick and Fournier 1998; Holt 1997; Hirschman and Thompson 1997).

The gradual change to a consumption focus (as opposed to a purchase focus) suggests to some that consumer behaviour may diverge from marketing, creating a separate discipline (Nevett and Fullerton 1988; Sheth and Gross 1988; Firat 1987b). The argument is that such a fragmentation of the marketing discipline is inevitable due to the increasing conflict between the philosophical underpinnings of the two research areas. Sheth and Gross (1988) explain that on the one hand marketing continues to require consumer information to meet the needs of marketers in their profit objectives, and this is usually achieved by taking a micro approach that emphasises brand choice. This micro stance remains necessary to produce the predictive results required by marketers (i.e., a focus on "how many" rather than "why"). On the other hand, many consumer researchers are adopting a macro perspective and becoming increasingly concerned with consumption as experienced by consumers (Clarke et al. 1998; Holt 1995; Arnould and Wallendorf 1994; Rook 1988; Holbrook and Hirschman 1982). There are thus
fundamental differences in purpose and outcomes between marketing as it is currently positioned and where consumer behaviour appears to be heading in the future. According to Holbrook (1995a), it may not be possible for consumer behaviour to flourish without a separation from its parent discipline due to these differences in orientation. Firat (1985) notes that mature disciplines possess both macro and micro explanatory frameworks, suggesting that consumer behaviour will remain immature and subordinated to marketing as long as the primary focus remains on micro consumption theories.

Part of a macro orientation to consumer research is the explicit acknowledgement of consumption as a cultural phenomenon (McCracken 1990a, 1990b; Firat and Dholakia 1998). The following section defines and discusses the concept of culture as it has been employed in this thesis.

**Culture**

There are literally hundreds of definitions of culture, and consensus has yet to be reached regarding the precise meaning of the word (Dubois and Duquesne 1993; Nasif, Al-Daeaj, Ebrahimi, and Thibodeaux 1991). Most definitions of culture refer to basic differences in patterns of thinking and behaviour among specific groups of people. Kluckhohn (1962) and Welte (1977) have defined culture as man's social heredity, as opposed to his genetic heredity. Triandis (1980) draws a distinction between the physical and subjective elements of culture, defining physical culture as comprising all man-made objects and subjective culture as encompassing human responses to these objects. Sheldon (1967) establishes a boundary between explicit culture (aspects of a culture that can be vocalised by culture bearers) and implicit culture (aspects that are not consciously realised or acknowledged). Hill (1988) describes culture as a meaning system that provides guidance for daily life, while Geertz (1975) describes culture as the human equivalent of the web in which the spider lives. In using the concept of culture to examine consumption phenomenon, Venkatesh (1995, p.30) defines culture as "the overall system within which other systems are organised".

There appears to be some consensus that behaviour per se does not constitute culture (Bagramov 1977; Freilich 1977). Culture is a theoretical construct (Sheldon 1967), and as such cannot be directly observed (Freilich 1977; Kluckhohn 1962).
Rather, it is the analysis of the patterns of behaviour exhibited by a particular culture that assists in the understanding of that culture (Sarantakos 1993; Welte 1977). Hofstede (1993) and Becker and Geer (1958) have recommended that the researcher infer the characteristics of a culture from the perceptible actions and lifestyles of its inhabitants. The researcher thus gets to know the culture through the detailed analysis of the experiences of its members (see Geertz 1975). This suggests that the study of consumption activities and patterns can assist in the description and understanding of a particular culture (Venkatesh 1995).

Fundamental cultural values are thought to be instilled by early childhood through exposure to various institutions, including the family, schools, religions, and governments (Kale and McIntyre 1991). Culture is therefore "built into its carriers" (Kluckhohn 1967, p. 396), with consistent cultural values believed to be held by the majority of the population within a given society (Hofstede 1993). Differences between cultures are viewed to be the result of the varying contexts in which they have evolved, including such variables as ecological and historical factors (Triandis 1990; Kluckhohn 1962).

McCracken (1990b, p. 73) has described the relationship between culture and human behaviour in this often-quoted paragraph that explains the two ways in which culture constitutes the phenomenal world:

Culture is the "lens" through which all phenomena are seen. It determines how the phenomena will be apprehended and assimilated. Second, culture is the "blueprint" of human activity. It determines the co-ordinates of social action and productive activity, specifying the behaviours and objects that issues from both. As a lens, culture determines how the world is seen. As a blueprint, it determines how the world will be fashioned by human effort. In short, culture constitutes the world by supplying it with meaning.

There is significant support for the view that culture plays an important role in the interpretation of external stimuli (Chalmers 1982). According to Kluckhohn (1962) and Kale (1991), culture has its greatest impact on man's interpretation of, and subsequent reaction to, the external world. McCracken's description above has similarities to Kluckhohn's discussion of culture as a screen which exists between "culturalised organisms and their surroundings" (1962, p. 39), and "a set of blueprints for action" (1962, p. 53). Similarly, Kale (1991) has described culture as "a screen through which outside stimuli are selectively transmitted." While there appears to be general agreement regarding culture as a perceptual screen, there is less agreement concerning the extent to
which this screen is able to affect interpretations of external stimuli, and therefore exert influence over behaviour. Kale (1991) gives the impression of significant control by the social actor during the viewing process, while McCracken (1990b) appears to favour the dominance of culture over the individual.

It is recognised that cultural standards handed down from one generation to the next can serve the psychological, social, and physical self-preservation needs of the individual (Hill 1988; Freilich 1977). Culture provides both a sense of self and a sense of community (LaFromboise, Coleman, and Gerton 1993; Hill 1988), with the needs of the individual (e.g., to self-expressive action) being sacrificed at some level to permit productive human interaction (Adler 1977). Thus culture provides its members with a sense of identity, although this comes at the cost of a degree of behavioural regulation.

It is understood that individuals crave social interaction, and will engage in behaviours designed to locate them within a social environment (Mackay 1993; Hill 1988; Turner 1987). In order for humans to effectively achieve this social interaction it must have some pre-existing guidelines, as people appear to be more comfortable when they know what to expect from others (Geertz 1975; Kluckhohn 1967). According to Parsons, Shils, Allport, et al. (1967), this provides an integrating force that promotes consideration of group values by individuals, effectively aligning the individual’s interests with those of the group. The result is that culture members hold common “frames of reference and value systems” that encourage a degree of conformity that permits social stability (Maynard and Clayman 1991, p. 387). Kluckhohn (1967) explains that this stability is required to enable productive interactions among culture members, in which individual and group goals are accomplished. In this way culture works to maximise personal security and minimise ambiguity and confusion, as the behavioural specifications found within cultural guides or models provide the behavioural predictability that is required in a functioning society (Hill 1988; Hofstede 1984).

The tendency towards conformity does not guarantee that all members of a culture confine their behaviours to those that are socially sanctioned. However, behaviours considered subversive by the majority have been found to fall into typical “non-proper” categories (Brislin 1983; Freilich 1977). Thus culture provides the parameters for behaviours that appear to contradict societal norms (McCracken 1990b). Each culture has its own penalties for those who choose to disregard group values (Tse,
Belk, and Zhou 1989), and significant discomfort is often experienced by those acting against their cultural conditioning (Fenster 1991; Kluckhohn 1967). For those few individuals whose behaviour falls outside all proper and non-proper norms, the likely interpretation of their actions by other cultural members is that they are eccentric or insane (Tetreault and Kleine 1990; Kluckhohn 1967).

Throughout the consumer behaviour literature, consumption as a behavioural form is generally understood to be affected by the characteristics of the dominant culture and other subcultures (Holt 1995; Dubois and Duquesne 1993). For example, McCracken (1987, p. 121) states that “the consumer is an individual in a cultural context engaged in a cultural project,” indicating the importance of the cultural environment in the determination of acceptable parameters of consumption behaviour. This connection between culture and consumption renders it necessary to incorporate consideration of the social and cultural environments in the development of consumer behaviour theories. However, Firat (1985) and Sekaran (1983) note that where culture is incorporated into consumer studies, it is typically separated from the spheres of economics, politics, law, technology, and religion; spheres that have in the past been considered part of culture. While most basic consumer behaviour texts have traditionally given only cursory attention to culture, usually placing the discussion towards the end of the text (see for example Solomon 1994; Howard 1989), more recent editions have brought culture to the front of the text and have enlarged the coverage (see for example Solomon 1999; Lawson, Tidwell, Rainbird, Loudon, and Della Bitta 1996).

The Role of Culture in Consumption

Culture is thought to have an important role in the ways in which basic needs are interpreted and satisfied (Dichter 1964). However, as noted above, there is a lack of consensus concerning the ability of culture to govern the actions of the individual. A common approach to this issue is to acknowledge the effects of both individual and group forces, without attempting to gauge the relative strength of either source of influence. Examples of this approach include Pentland (1995), Amine (1993), Celsi, Rose, and Leigh (1993), Shore (1991), Kleine and Kernan (1991), Roth and Moorman (1988), and Henry (1976). Such an approach enables the discussion of cultural influences on behaviour without broaching the difficult issue of the extent of this influence. While such a position has value in that it fosters an environment in which
culture can be integrated into accounts of consumption behaviour, the issue of determinancy remains under-researched.

Culture performs certain functions of specific relevance to consumption. By shaping the way individuals view themselves, others, and the objects in the world around them, culture plays a major role in the everyday choices of the consumer (Cushman 1990). The cultural environment specifies the parameters for product manufacture and usage (Holt 1997), and serves to maintain the balance between product homogeneity and heterogeneity (Otnes and Scott 1996; Kopytoff 1986). In other words, culture assists in determining which products are to be valued over others, prioritising some for their ability to sustain and reinforce the existing structure of values and beliefs (Douglas and Isherwood 1979; Hill 1988).

Subcultures are understood to provide parameters for consumption by specifying for members the meanings contained within products (Schouton and McAlexander 1995). Gender as a subculture has attracted research aimed at explicating its effects on consumption (see for example Stephens, Hill, and Hanson 1994; Evans and Rutberg 1991; Settle and Alreck 1987). It has been found that subcultures hold expectations concerning what type of products constitute appropriate versus inappropriate choices for males and females, influencing decisions to accept or reject products (Englis and Solomon 1995). The communication of gender occurs with the use of products that are selected on the basis of their ability to communicate feminine or masculine meaning (Englis and Solomon 1995; Firat 1994). Settle and Alreck (1987) have found that females are much more likely to consume products that have masculine meanings than males are to consume products that have been assigned feminine meanings. Firat (1994) maintains that while gender meanings as communicated in advertising are now less demarcated than they have been in the past, they remain an important element of consumption decisions.

**Cultural Principles and Categories**

Culture provides a framework for thinking about the world (Triandis 1990), with language providing a limitation through the categories and words made available (Nasif et al. 1991). It is the role of culture to create systems of classification, and cultural categories and principles play a key role in constructing and maintaining such systems.
(Kopytoff 1986). McCracken (1990b) defines cultural categories as the way in which the world is compartmentalised into fundamental elements, describing them as the distinctions made between things, places, and people. According to McCracken, these distinctions are made according to the cultural principles that underlie the assumptions implicit in the existence of cultural categories. Cultural principles are thus the cultural "facts" upon which cultural categories are based. To borrow McCracken's example, in most societies a distinction is made between males and females. This distinction is a cultural category. Many rituals, traditions, and work and family roles are based on this demarcation between genders. The prevailing cultural principle is that men and women are different, therefore clothing, speech and occupations should reflect this "fact" or principle. As a result, females are expected to wear softer, more feminine clothing, to be employed in more nurturing roles, and to speak in a more refined manner than their male counterparts (McCracken 1990b).

On a different level, the different colours found in the menu sections for breakfast, lunch, and dinner meal items at McDonalds have been suggested to be indicative of the cultural distinctions made between the food types that are considered appropriate for different times of the day (Manning and Cullum-Swan 1994). The categorisation of foodstuffs appropriate for consumption at different times are representative of the cultural principle that different forms of nourishment are appropriate for the human body over a twenty-four-hour period.

Douglas and Isherwood (1979) describe objects, including consumer goods, as manifestations of consumer categories and principles. They are the material realisation of cultural categories, and as such they provide a tangible representation of cultural principles (McCracken 1990b). Consumer goods, as cultural products, are thus recognised as classifications for viewing the world and the people within it (Holt 1995; Baudrillard 1988; Bourdieu 1984). According to McCracken (1990b), the ability of consumer products to represent cultural categories and principles is reliant upon their ability to convey cultural meaning. Over numerous publications, McCracken (1987, 1989, 1990a, 1990b) has extended the discussion of the association between products and the meanings they convey. While not the first to recognise the relationship between products and their associated cultural meanings, he has progressed the discussion of the types of meaning that exist, and how the transfer of meaning may occur. The process of meaning transfer is discussed in a following section.
Cultural Change

The ways in which culture protects its form and gradually evolves over time have long been of considerable interest to anthropologists (Harper 1994; e.g., Kluckhohn 1962). Consumer researchers, however, have only become interested in the subject more recently (e.g., Ray 1997; Homma 1991). Cultural change as a subject of study is increasing in importance as the rate of change in Western cultures continues to accelerate (Cornish 1996; Appadurai 1986).

Consumer products have been discussed at length in terms of their contribution to social order (see for example Hill 1988, 1990). They are viewed as a mechanism by which cultural order is created and maintained, as the classifications of goods and services and their consumption within society are based upon existing cultural categories (McCracken 1990b; Hill 1988; Kopytoff 1986). McCracken (1990b) discusses how the role of products in the maintenance of a culture commences with their design and creation, with new products generally compatible with and supportive of the prevailing culture. However, while consumers and consumer goods are offered as a stability mechanism in their relationship to cultural categories and principles, they are also posited to be a source of cultural change and evolution (Wallendorf 1993; Douglas and Isherwood 1979; Bernadi 1977). Consumer goods have therefore become recognised in the consumer behaviour literature as vehicles for both cultural continuity and cultural change (Holt 1995; Wallendorf and Arnould 1991).

According to Kluckhohn (1962), culture is not static, but is constantly altered by events such as exposure to foreign cultures. Cultural change can also occur through technological advancements (Fertig 1996; Homma 1991; Hill 1988), with developments in communication technologies playing a particularly important role (Carley 1995). Crises such as famine, plague, and war are further forces of cultural change (Thornton and Thornton 1996). McCracken (1987, 1990a, 1990b) has proposed that the transformation of culture now also occurs through the advertising and fashion systems. Appadurai (1986) suggests that these systems can cause the diversion of products from traditional paths in the search for creativity.

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1 The fashion system determines the meanings that are placed in different products at different points in time, relating specific styles to cultural principles and categories (McCracken 1990b).
Others have also suggested that the advertising and fashion systems are two of the primary means by which cultural change is instigated, diffused, and legitimised (Ruane 1995; Firat 1991; Tse et al. 1989). Their effectiveness is suggested to be a result of their ability to affect consumption rituals (Otnes and Scott 1996). Due to the centrality of rituals to consumption experiences via the process of meaning transfer (Tetreault and Kleine 1990; Belk et al. 1989), the proposed ability of the advertising and fashion systems to alter consumption rituals has significant implications for the processes of cultural change in consumer economies.

**Cultural Meaning**

Symbolic meanings are important to cultures, as it is the common understandings between members that provide the necessary social cohesion required for the existence of a culture (Parsons and Shils 1967). These symbols can be found in consumption items, providing people with a means of communicating their norms and values (Solomon and Englis 1994; Belk et al. 1989). As noted in chapter 1, the importance of symbolic meaning to the existence of a culture explains the re-naming of symbolic meaning of products to cultural meaning (McCracken 1987).

The term “meaning” as used in consumer behaviour theory is described by Kleine and Kernan (1991, p. 312) as:

A perception or interpretation of an object ... [which] is not inherent in the object itself; rather it arises from the interaction of individual, object, and context.

Many products are particularly abundant in meaning, as their consumption relies primarily on their symbolic meaning rather than on their physical utility (Cova 1996; Solomon 1983; Holbrook and Hirschman 1982). In some instances, products have attained such an elevated symbolic standing that their role within a society takes on ‘mythical’ proportions, such as wine in France, tea in Britain, and beer in Australia (Manning 1987; Fiske et al. 1987).

According to McCracken (1989), meaning is fluid in nature, and constantly seeks modes of expression. As such, the cultural meanings of objects are seen to be variable over time (Bourdieu 1984). Shore (1991) describes meaning construction as an ongoing process that involves a culturally constituted world and an object requiring
meaning. Bourdieu (1984) suggests that the human effort required to perform the necessary association can be performed at or below the level of consciousness. The existence of meaning within products is sometimes clearly apparent to the consumer and/or the researcher, although at other times it can be difficult to perceive (McCracken 1990b). As a result, meaning is viewed as subjective, with its interpretation influenced by the characteristics of the individual and the situation (Roth and Moorman 1988).

The role of individuals in decoding the cultural meaning embedded in consumer goods is commonly recognised (Hyatt 1992; Fenster 1991; Firat 1991; Kleine and Kernan 1991; Solomon 1983; Belk, Bahn, and Mayer 1982). It is agreed that consumers have to engage in decoding efforts to effect the process of meaning transfer (Scott 1990; Bourdieu 1984). The meaning transfer process is completed when the consumer successfully decodes the meaning inscribed in the product as intended by the marketer (McCracken 1989, 1990b). McCracken (1989) posits that the purchase of a consumption item does not ensure the transfer of the resident meaning to the consumer. The consumer must “claim, exchange, care for, and use the consumer good to appropriate its meanings” (1989, p. 317). According to McCracken, this process occurs quite deliberately as the consumer ritualistically works with the product and its meanings in order to incorporate them into the sense of self. Different types of products will require different levels of work, with favoured possessions more likely to receive greater attention (Wallendorf and Arnould 1988). McCracken (1990b) explains how consumers are not always successful in their attempts to extract meaning from objects, an outcome that has the potential to result in negative feelings for the consumer. However, he sees the successful use of ritual to extract meaning as the norm rather than the exception.

Different people are thought to have different information processing and decoding abilities (Carley 1995), potentially resulting in different interpretations of cultural meanings among individuals. Just as different ways of consuming products are suggested to result in cultural change, variations in meaning assignment are also posited to alter meaning systems within a culture over time (Roth and Moorman 1988). Meanings as found in products are thus suggested to perform both a stabilising and destabilising role in a culture (Ger and Belk 1996; Firat and Venkatesh 1995).
Differences in decoding ability are particularly apparent among consumers of different ages (Belk et al. 1982). It is suggested that decoding ability peaks at college age, but is almost fully developed amongst sixth graders (Belk, Mayer, and Driscoll 1984). The meanings attributed to products have also been found to differ according to gender and social class categories (Holt 1997; Rochberg-Halton 1984). Thus, while signs and symbols function through their shared meaning within a culture, the universality of their meaning is incomplete (Brown 1994). Culturally constituted meaning can claim only a "reasonably high probability of a significant overlap within a community" (Shore 1991, p. 22). This overlap is necessary to enable consumers to be confident that their interpretation of a consumer good is similar to that of others, thus permitting the performance of image management behaviours (Solomon 1983). But there always exists some ambiguity in the system (Jennings and Waller 1994), necessitating some degree of private classification that can result in confusion and unsatisfactory interactions with others (Kopytoff 1986). The failure to assign meaning to products "correctly" can result in unpleasant feelings for the consumer, as effective interaction with others in today's society requires the appropriate assignment of meaning to products (Hyatt 1992; Turner 1987).

The marketing system is a very important component of the meaning transfer process in consumer societies (McCracken 1990a). The ability of visual and verbal messages to effectively ascribe cultural meaning is an essential condition of the transfer process (McCracken 1990b). As described in classical learning theory, it is possible to convey the desired meaning of a product by associating it with other objects, people, or products (Kleine and Kernan 1991). By providing a visual or verbal image of items already widely accepted as possessing a particular cultural meaning, the advertiser can make the association with the new product very clear to the audience by the juxtaposition of the two objects (Solomon and Greenberg 1993; Domzal and Kernan 1992). In the Australian context, for instance, there are numerous examples of products that are promoted via the use of strong "Australiana" images (O'Regan 1993; Fiske et al. 1987). Despite this common usage of such techniques, our understanding of the process of meaning transfer remains inadequate (Ottes and Scott 1996), particularly concerning the role of the individual in meaning assignment and decoding.

In concluding this background discussion on culture and cultural meaning, the recognition of the importance of culture to consumption has resulted in the purposeful
inclusion of culture theory into macro accounts of consumer behaviour. However, the integration of culture and consumption theories continues to be problematic. There exists no single theoretical perspective on culture as a concept (Triandis 1980; Henry 1976; Geertz 1975), as fundamental philosophical differences amongst the disciplines of psychology, anthropology, and sociology result in divergent approaches to the definition and operationalisation of the concept (Nasif et al. 1991; Kluckhohn 1967). Culture is thus often depicted as a black box, the contents of which have yet to be fully understood. One point of consensus among the feeder disciplines to consumer behaviour appears to be that through the processes of socialisation and enculturation individuals develop into members of a particular culture, sharing common values, motivations, and habitual activities (Fertig 1996; Sarantakos 1993; Welte 1977). One of these activities is the consumption of goods and services (Ger and Belk 1996). These goods and services hold cultural meaning that anchors them and their users in a particular culture.

An understanding of the self-concept assists in the explication of the relationship between culture and consumption, and is discussed in this context below.

The Self-Concept

The self-concept is a theoretical concept that is recognised to hold considerable significance for consumer behaviour theories (McCracken 1989, 1990b; Belk 1984a and 1988a; Solomon 1983). Humans are understood to instinctively aim for positive and consistent self-concepts (Maslow 1970; Levy 1986), a task that is accomplished by managing their internal and external environments (Bern 1972; Sampson 1978). Cognitions concerning the self are thus influenced by the cultural and social environments in which the individual exists (Thompson 1997; Collins 1991; Belk 1989; Lyotard 1984; Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton 1981). An individual's "self" is seen to be in a constant process of production and development (Belk 1984a; Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton 1981). Individuals understand their own self-concept on the basis of observations of their own behaviour, as well as the reactions of others to these behaviours (Sirgy 1982; Shrauger and Schoeneman 1979). As the self is viewed in terms of what actions are performed by the individual (Shrauger and Schoeneman 1979), consumption behaviours have been suggested as instrumental in the

Early assumptions of the existence of a static, core self are being replaced with suggestions of a range of selves that are engaged in different situations (Solomon 1983). This can occur to the extent that multiple selves that may be in conflict with each other can exist within individuals (Kopytoff 1986). This is particularly relevant to modern, complex societies where there are fewer behavioural guides for specific situations, as opposed to the more pervasive and rigid cultural rules of more simple societies (Kleine et al. 1992; Kopytoff 1986). However, the existence of a single self versus multiple selves remains contentious (Sirgy 1982). A complicating factor in attempts to understand the self is that individuals are likely to attribute their own behavioural variations to situational variables, while onlookers tend to attempt to account for such variations via their assessments of the person’s enduring self or personality (Shrauger and Schoeneman 1979). According to Cushman (1990, p.599), “The self is a difficult concept on which to get a perspective, precisely because it is such a central aspect of the horizon.”

Consumers are thought to derive their sense of self at least partially from the goods and services they consume (Solomon 1983), and the use of consumption as a communication about self appears to be universal (Wallendorf and Arnould 1988). Consumer research has identified numerous instances where product ownership is clearly associated with self-definition and self-esteem (see for example Schouten and McAlexander's [1995] study of the Harley Davidson motorcycle subculture). Through the consumption of the symbols contained in products, consumers attempt to enhance their self-concepts by using products to communicate self-characteristics to self and others (Wallendorf and Arnould 1988; Sirgy 1982). For this reason, consumption is argued to operate as an effective means of communicating identity and positioning oneself relative to others (Mackay 1997b; Miller 1997; Holt 1995; Belk 1984a).

The link between self-concept and consumption can be explicated through the analysis of role performance. Roles enacted by individuals constitute important social structures (Parsons et al. 1967), and role playing and role definition are central to the consumption of the symbolism in products (Solomon 1983). Solomon (1983) suggests that the presence or absence of products that are culturally associated with a particular
role will serve to facilitate or inhibit this role behaviour. However, rather than individual products, consumers are thought to require "constellations" of products to effectively communicate role information (Solomon and Englis 1994; McCracken 1990b). Consumers therefore need to ensure that they are employing the right products to communicate the desired self-concept to the particular audience involved in each role (Murphy and Miller 1997). (See Appendix B for an illustration of this requirement to consume products in specific combinations.)

Belk (1984a) notes that there are innumerable products available to consumers that are capable of communicating desired images to others. However, the choice between products is considered to be more difficult for some consumer segments than for others. For example, Levy (1986) comments on the greater ability of older consumers to formulate stable personal identities, based on their greater perceptual capabilities. Younger consumers have been found to experience more difficulty establishing a satisfactory self-concept (Mackay 1997b), accounting for their consumption choices that reflect the greater need for external sources of self-definition. Rochberg-Halton (1984) notes that a shift appears to occur in consumption preferences from objects of action to objects of contemplation over the human life span. Teenagers exhibit greater dependence on objects such as clothes and electrical equipment than members of other age groups (Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton 1981), a phenomenon that has been attributed to their weaker self-concepts at this stage of their development (Mackay 1993; Belk 1988a).

The Extended Self-Concept

Jean-Paul Sartre (1943, cited in Belk 1988a) studied the relationship between having, doing, and being. He concluded that we determine who we are by observing what we have, indicating that the self and possessions are inseparable but distinct concepts (Belk 1984a). Belk (1988a) has labelled the sense of self that includes possessions the "extended self". The concept of the extended self is based on the human tendency to consider special belongings as part of the self. This tendency is thought to include mental "possessions", such as goals and ambitions (Dixon and Street 1975), although the emphasis in consumer research has typically been on physical possessions. The extended self encompasses the notions of both "me" and "mine" (Belk 1988a, p. 140), with the mine category enabling the inclusion of products into the sense of self.
According to Belk (1989), the extended self offers a useful conceptual tool for the analysis of consumption due to its ability to facilitate an understanding of the relationship between people and their possessions.

The extended self is culturally influenced in that different cultures and subcultures incorporate different objects into their sense of self (Belk 1989). The relationship between the extended self and culture is reflected in the term “cultural anchoring”, a term that describes the process by which certain products become part of the person’s self-concept (LaTour and Roberts 1992). Cultural anchoring is said to occur when “a product becomes so inextricably a part of the consumer’s life and sociocultural surroundings that the ‘person/product interface’ is an important parameter of the individual’s self-concept” (LaTour and Roberts 1992, p. 29/30). The product comes to be considered necessary to the individual’s lifestyle, and its ownership is linked to the ego. Those objects that are perceived to be central to the self-concept have been found to vary between individuals, and within individuals as they age (Belk 1988a, 1989).

The concept of the extended self can be linked to the use of stereotyping as a social tool. Every culture-member is both a source and a subject of judgements made according to product ownership (Douglas and Isherwood 1979). Belk et al. (1982) describe stereotyping as part of the symbolic process that allows consumers to express themselves non-verbally via consumption. They suggest that the tendency for people to assess others based on their consumption behaviour is a “culturally universal phenomena” (1982, p. 4).

Stereotyping works on the principle that as people’s consumption decisions are considered part of their selves, others can monitor consumption to gauge the nature of an unknown individual (Firat 1995; Kleine et al. 1992; Belk 1988a). Visible consumption enables personality traits to be attributed to unknown persons, thus assisting in the formation of opinions and impressions (Kleine et al. 1992; Belk 1988a). Illustrating the use of products to communicate and interpret the self, Baudrillard (1988, p.29) has said that “men of wealth are no longer surrounded by other human beings, as they have been in the past, but by objects.” The communication of social class membership is a particularly important stereotyping function that is performed by consumer goods (Fenster 1991; Solomon 1983). Through their consumption of goods
and services, consumers consciously or unconsciously indicate their current and potential location in the social strata (Bourdieu 1984; Englis and Solomon 1995; Arnould 1989).

The remainder of this chapter outlines two perspectives on the control of the individual over consumption relative to the influence of culture, and outlines the paradigm shift that has facilitated the distinction between these perspectives. This thesis labels these two perspectives the Consumer as King and Consumer as Pawn perspectives, indicating the very different role that the consumer plays in each interpretation of consumption.

**The Consumer as King Perspective**

The Consumer as King perspective (hereafter the CaK perspective), as defined in this thesis, is characterised by a modernist stance. This means that reason and rationality are assumed to guide behaviour, with the individual being viewed as a free subject (Cova 1996). While factors such as culture are discussed as influential variables, there is believed to be a significant component of behaviour that is idiosyncratic and under the direct control of the consumer. In particular, consumers are considered to have significant latitude in their use of products for the purpose of communicating with self and others (McCracken 1990a, 1990b). Central to the CaK perspective is the conception of consumption as one of the most important means available to humans for improving the quality of their lives (Kilbourne et al. 1997).

**Symbolic Rationalism**

In the CaK perspective, consumers are assumed to be not only rational in an economic sense, but also in a symbolic sense. McCracken (1990b) has discussed at length how consumers are active in the generation, maintenance, and interpretation of product symbolism, and how they actively monitor such symbolism to facilitate the communication of symbolic meaning through their consumption behaviours. In this interpretation, consumers actively employ products to help them make sense of their world, and to assist in their efforts to achieve social integration (Mick 1986; Douglas and Isherwood 1979).
The symbolic rationalism assumption of the CaK perspective requires a cognitive orientation, much the same as found in the economic rationalism arguments. Consumption choices are seen to be based largely on consumers’ evaluations of competing products on the basis of symbolic meaning (e.g., McCracken 1990a). Functional utility has thus been joined by symbolic utility in consumer behaviour theory. The underlying assumption of a conscious intention towards maximisation by a thinking subject (Magnarella 1997) remains essentially the same.

Culture

Researchers employing the CaK perspective have come to see individuals as products of the culture in which they live, often explicitly acknowledging that culture is an influential force on behaviour (see for example Pandey 1990; Henry 1976). However, it is maintained that the individualistic element remains significant (Mackay 1997b, McCracken 1990b). Consumers are viewed as self-directed in their consumption projects, choosing alternatives that will maximise symbolic as well as utilitarian requirements (Mackay 1997b; Arnould 1989). It is argued that awareness of one’s culture and the choice of cultural norms to guide behaviour are too selective to justify an "all-powerful" view of culture (Tse, Lee, Vertinsky, and Wehrung 1988). Instead, the focus in the CaK perspective is on the role of the individual in the formation of culture (Mackay 1997b; Frow and Morris 1993).

Within the CaK perspective there is perceived to be considerable scope for variation in behaviour, with individuals able to exhibit widely ranging behaviours that are deemed culturally appropriate (Roth and Moorman 1988). Examples of consumer researchers who have written in this vein include Samli, Wills, and Jacobs (1993), Domzal and Kernan (1992), and Collins (1991). Consumers are seen to have considerable autonomy in decision-making that derives from their individual personalities and their individual interpretations of the cultural frameworks to which they are exposed (Holt 1997; Holbrook and Hirschman 1982).

Freedom of choice is emphasised in the CaK perspective, with suggestions of the controlled nature of consumption found inconceivable (e.g., Douglas and Isherwood 1979). Instead, by depicting consumers as contented, satisfied, and autonomous creatures, the CaK perspective reinforces the dominant culture that includes marketing
activities and the capitalist system in which they occur (Appadurai 1986). Thus while the CaK perspective includes a detailed consideration of culture, it encourages the conclusion that the individual has significant power in decision making pertaining to consumption activities (see for example Belk et al. 1989; McCracken 1987; Appadurai 1986; Kopytoff 1986).

**Cultural Change**

Cultural systems are perceived to be malleable in this perspective, with consumers deemed capable of effecting incremental change via their consumption decisions and ritual performances (Mackay 1997b; Wallendorf 1993; Wallendorf and Arnould 1991; Bernadi 1977). Due to different abilities to understand and invoke cultural models, it is important for enough leeway to exist in accepted behaviours so that cultural members of differing skills and abilities can operate successfully within a culture, while providing adequate specificity to facilitate effective social interaction (Thompson 1997; Parsons et al. 1967). This results in the somewhat idiosyncratic utilisation of models, which in turn imposes small, incremental pressures on the models to change over time (Shore 1991). The interpretation is that not only are social actors exposed to the dominant culture from the day of their birth, but from an early age they contribute to its construction, maintenance, and transformation (see for example McCracken 1990b).

Consumer influence over cultural change is said to occur through the incremental adaptation of consumption rituals (Otnes and Scott 1996). The CaK argument is that while consumers typically presume that the way in which they utilise goods and services is universal within their particular culture (Wallendorf and Arnould 1991), it is often the case that there are significant differences in usage methods and patterns (Shore 1991). These differences are said to allow consumers to not only express their culture, but to adapt and modify it at an individual level (Wallendorf 1993). In this way, new cultural meanings are negotiated through consumption rituals (Arnould 1989), with incremental changes in the ways in which rituals are performed offered as evidence that consumers' uses of rituals can result in cultural change (Wallendorf and Arnould 1991). This argument for the influence of the individual over culture in the CaK perspective is in line with the economic theory of cultural dislocation, where it is maintained that the behaviours of individuals can aggregate to produce social change (Jennings and Waller 1994).
The relationship between consumer behaviour and culture in the CaK perspective is thus said to be reciprocal in nature, with consumers viewed as both the products and the creators of the culture in which they consume and exist. Consumption activities are studied in order to obtain an understanding of the ways in which the consumption behaviours of individuals contribute to the culture in which they live. For examples of discussions of consumer actions and choices as potent contributors to cultural change see Manning and Cullum-Swan (1994), Piot (1993), Wallendorf and Arnould (1991), Arnould (1989), Belk (1988a), and Parsons et al. (1967).

**Cultural Meaning**

Those subscribing to the CaK perspective typically purport that consumers are active in the creation and assignment of meaning, ascribing them the ability to allocate meanings of their choice to products, especially favoured possessions (e.g., Ger 1997; Wallendorf and Arnould 1988; Hirschman and Thompson 1997; Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton 1981). The underlying assumption is that consumers’ accumulation of knowledge is not always passive or unconscious, rather it can be directed and purposeful, aimed at achieving consciously formulated objectives (Bourdieu 1984; Solomon 1983).

While most CaK researchers allocate the consumer a significant role in the meaning transfer process, McCracken’s (1990a) work illustrates the unresolved nature of the consumer’s role in determining the cultural meanings resident in products. At one point he notes that advertisers are particularly powerful in this regard, being capable of assigning almost any meanings to almost any products (1990a, p. 7). He also states that the cultural meanings found in products are determined by a range of groups and individuals, including product designers, advertisers, marketers, journalists, producers, consumers, and opinion leaders. At another point, however, he stresses the distinct role that individual consumers play in meaning assignment. He describes consumers as both the “choosers and users” of the cultural meanings resident in products (1990, p. 5). He persistently attributes to consumers the ability and motivation to actively encode and decode the cultural meanings resident in products, and to utilise this information for their own purposes. He emphasises the role of rituals in the meaning transfer process, discussing how meanings are accessed by individuals and groups for communication.
purposes through ritual performance. Individuals are credited with the ability to utilise rituals to alter or reinforce existing meaning structures, depending on their desires.

It is difficult to reconcile consumer control over cultural meaning with the power that McCracken (1990a, 1990b) allocates to advertisers. It appears that although McCracken endows individuals with some control over the meanings of the products they consume, he regards certain elites to be more powerful than the ordinary consumer. Where McCracken addresses meaning assignment, it is usually in terms of the fashion and/or opinion leaders who have the ability to “help shape and refine existing cultural meaning, encouraging the reform of cultural categories and principles” (1990b, p. 80). These privileged leaders are those who have obtained higher standing than the average person, whether it be due to celebrity status or some other form of accomplishment. In a trickle-down effect, the more lowly members of society are then drawn by marketing promotion to imitate these fashion leaders, hoping to absorb or inherit the meaning associated with the group (or individual) to which they aspire (Darnton 1992). However, McCracken (1990b) makes the qualification that the fashion system merely assists the process of cultural change, as he believes that any group of people can adopt a set of goods and charge them with meaning of their own design. Despite this assertion as to the power of consumers, McCracken does not discuss in any detail the instigatory role of the ordinary individual in the process of meaning assignment. Instead, the emphasis is on the meaning extraction process as accomplished by the consumer. There is thus conflict between McCracken’s two competing views that: (a) certain individuals can assign meaning to products on behalf of others, and (b) that all consumers constantly change and construct culture through their everyday consumption activities. Such conflict is the result of combining a CaK perspective of consumer autonomy with an appreciation of the human tendency to conform to cultural imperatives.

An adjunct to this belief in the meaning-assignment abilities of consumers is the proposition that advertising is a tool available to consumers for use at their convenience. In the CaK perspective, consumers are endowed with an understanding of the purpose and functioning of the media that enables them to receive all messages with scepticism and suspicion, recognising the vested interests of marketers (Scott 1990). Consumers are conceived as individuals who have the ability to pick and choose between the images they assimilate (e.g., Cornish 1996). As such, advertising represents a source of cultural meanings for consumers to examine and adopt if they are to their liking.
Advertising thus constitutes a valuable source of product information that serves consumers well in their ongoing search for symbolic meaning (Holbrook 1995a).

This interpretation of the effects of advertising is partially a result of a perception that advertisers are constrained by the cultural environment in which they operate (Domzal and Kernan 1992). Consumers are seen to be cautious in their acceptance of the meanings imposed on products by marketers, making it necessary for advertisers to limit their attempts to assign culturally inappropriate meanings to products (Hirschman and Thompson 1997; Cova 1996). This outcome is considered to be a result of consumers’ constant exposure to cultural categories and principles as manifest in consumer goods (Domzal and Kernan 1992). Consumers come to expect certain meanings to be inherently attached to certain products, and these expectations need to be met by marketers if they want to take advantage of product-meaning associations. McCracken (1989) agrees that marketers need to determine which cultural categories and principles apply to a particular product, although this is inconsistent with his assertions that advertising can attach almost any meaning to any product.

Despite some disagreement concerning the role of the individual in the assignment of cultural meaning, the CaK literature is generally in agreement over the relative autonomy of the consumer in the usage of product meanings, if not the construction of these meanings. The overwhelming impression is that of consumers who are aware of the symbolic meaning of products in the market, and who can choose when and if to employ this meaning depending on their purposes or intentions. The dominant interpretation is that consumers employ product meanings on a voluntary basis, and are content in their meaning assignment activities (McCracken 1990b).

While greatly contributing to the discussion of cultural meaning and its transfer, McCracken’s work is recognised as leaving some gaps in the explanation of the interaction between cultural meaning and consumption goods and the way advertising combines the two (Otnes and Scott 1996; Kleine and Kernan 1991). One area of cultural meaning theory that is particularly problematic is the way in which meaning moves between the prevailing culture and products. Meaning is said to move from the culturally constituted world to consumer goods via instruments such as advertising, the fashion system, and other forms of promotion (McCracken 1990b). According to
McCracken’s logic, the relationship between consumer goods and the culturally constituted world is circular. Meaning somehow exists in the culturally constituted world, this world itself being a product of the perceptions of the individual surveying it. The individual thus determines the nature of meaning in this world, while at the same time being a product of its beliefs and assumptions. Upon consumption of a good endowed with cultural meaning, the individual both receives and conveys this meaning. Therefore, through the consumption of goods charged with cultural meaning, the individual is seen to simultaneously mould and reflect culture.

This circularity of reasoning is acknowledged by McCracken in his statement that goods are “both the object and objectification ... (and) the creations and creators of the culturally constituted world” (1990b, p. 77). The argument that goods produced and consumed according to existing cultural categories serve to perpetuate these categories is understandable enough. What is not clear is how cultural change can be instigated by goods that have been inculcated with cultural meanings reflective of the prevailing cultural code. CaK advocates offer as explanation the previously discussed consumer-instigated minor modifications to product usage rituals that work on aggregate to effect cultural change (Wallendorf 1993; Wallendorf and Arnould 1991). However, the explanation of the process of cultural change via the manipulation of cultural meaning is far from complete. Kleine and Kernan (1991) note that inadequate attention has been given to the consumer’s role in the determination of cultural meaning, and McCracken (1989) acknowledges that there exists insufficient research into the process by which consumers contribute to the transfer of meaning.

**The Self-Concept**

Those adopting a CaK perspective tend to view the use of objects in the construction and maintenance of the self-concept as a conscious, controllable process in which consumers engage to maximise their satisfaction (Ger 1997; Ger and Belk 1996). For example, McCracken (1989, p. 314) states that “Consumers are constantly finding gender, class, age, life-style, time, and place meanings in their possessions, and using these meanings to fashion aspects of the self.” According to this view, consumers shop for a self-identity just as they would shop for a consumer good (Hirschman and Thompson 1997). There is therefore an assumed intentionality in their actions that stems from a conscious thought process.
One possible problem in the process of self-definition via consumption is the effort to mould a unique self with the use of mass-produced goods. However, proponents of the CaK perspective see this issue as largely irrelevant due to the ability of individuals to manufacture unique selves through the deliberately varied combinations of these mass-produced products (Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton 1981). The argument is that these products in their sameness can perform the valued function of communicating social integration, while permitting some degree of individuality in their combination (Wallendorf and Arnould 1988). Fiske et al. (1987) give the case of the ubiquitous T-shirt, explaining how this product simultaneously provides a mechanism for communicating group membership and individual difference. The generic form of the T-shirt symbolises conformity, while the vast range of T-shirt designs allows personal differentiation.

Contributing to the perceived autonomy of the individual in the CaK perspective is the fracturing of social systems that traditionally have been considered suppliers of self-definition. McCracken (1989) nominates the significant changes in family, religious, and community relationships as circumstances that allow greater individual control over self-concept formation and communication. In an environment in which stereotyping according to consumption is the norm, this ability to choose a self-concept should mean that consumers can use the stereotyping activities of others to their own advantage. As societies come to operate on a larger scale, the growing anonymity and diversification of duties result in identities being increasingly inferred via the ownership of symbolic possessions, rather than reliance on familiarity (Firat 1994; Belk 1984a). There is thus the opportunity to construct versions of the self that will receive favourable interpretations from self and others. This may be interpreted as liberating for the consumer (Firat and Dholakia 1998; Ger 1997), but McCracken (1989) notes that it also brings obligations on individuals to choose an appropriate self-concept. Overall, however, consumers are perceived to be in control of their own consumption projects, selecting freely between symbolic options to construct versions of the self deemed desirable. Individuals are thus posited to have power over their own self-expression, presumably resulting in their personal happiness.

To conclude this section, the CaK perspective as a macro approach to consumer behaviour has a direct interest in the relationship between culture and consumption.
Culture is recognised as an important element in the consumption process, although the individual is conceived as having considerable autonomy, with the effects of culture varying between individuals and consumption occasions. Through their assignment of cultural meaning and their consumption practices, individuals are perceived to be capable of influencing culture. This leads to the conclusion that individuals are not primarily dominated by culture, but have significant control over their consumption behaviours and their constructions of self.

At this point it is necessary to briefly outline the paradigm shift that is occurring in consumer behaviour, as it is this shift that has made apparent the existence of an alternative perspective to the CaK perspective in the consumer behaviour literature.

A Paradigm Shift

Consumer behaviour as a field of research is experiencing a paradigm shift that has facilitated a growing awareness of culture as a highly influential force over consumption. The newly emerging paradigm comes under many names, including interpretivism, postpositivism, poststructuralism, and postmodernism (Denzin and Lincoln 1994; Venkatesh, Sherry, and Firat 1993). While each of these labels represents a different orientation to consumer research, these differences are not well understood within either marketing or consumer behaviour (Holbrook 1995a; Brown 1994, 1995b). Postmodernism is the term that will be employed here to describe the paradigm shift, as it stresses the role of consumption in human life (Firat 1987b), prioritises the consumer (Firat and Venkatesh 1995), and emphasises a multi-disciplinary approach to research (Richardson 1994; Venkatesh et al. 1993; Mick 1992).

Lyotard (1984, p.xxiv) defines postmodernism as “incredulity towards metanarratives”. This means that all knowledge is open to suspicion, with power structures recognised as important determinants of knowledge structures (see also Foucault 1980; Rabinow 1984). The application of a postmodern perspective to consumer research is recent, and much of what little research exists focuses on culture as it relates to consumption (Joy and Venkatesh 1994; Jameson 1984). Stephen Brown (1994, 1995a, 1995b) and Fuat Firat (1985, 1987a, 1987b, 1991, 1994, 1995) are two of the most prolific and significant writers in postmodern consumer research. They believe that postmodernism has great potential for generating new insights into consumption
behaviours. According to Venkatesh et al. (1993), postmodernism as employed in consumer research has its greatest potential in the framework it offers for studying consumption as an integral and essential facet of human life. It focuses on the meaningfulness of consumption for consumers, resulting in the heightened importance of symbolic meaning in postmodern consumer research (Firat 1987b). Postmodernism as applied in consumer research, however, remains undefined (Fahy 1998; Brown 1994).

While a definitive description of postmodernism as practised in consumer behaviour remains unavailable, there is a tendency to employ the more conservative conception of postmodernism that encompasses the questioning of assumed knowledge and the blurring of boundaries between traditional disciplines (Fahy 1998; McLennan 1995; Stem and Costa 1993). The more radical treatments of postmodernism insist that all conceptual disagreements are unresolvable, effectively nullifying all attempts to compare differing positions (Alvesson 1995; McLennan 1995). As the ultimate aim of marketing research is representation (Calder 1977), the radical postmodern claim of the inability to achieve complete representation suggests that such research is practically impossible (Brown 1995a, 1995b). By comparison, the conservative interpretation maintains that postmodernism allows the simultaneous suspicion of knowledge claims and the claim of knowledge (Richardson 1994). This is achieved through the acceptance that all knowledge is only partial and that it serves particular interests (Firat and Venkatesh 1995). Even partial and self-interested knowledge is argued by Richardson (1994) to be knowledge, suggesting that the postmodernism emphasis on plurality need not discourage consumer researchers from adopting this approach in the search for understanding.

The following section outlines the characteristics of postmodernism as applied to consumer research that are particularly relevant to this thesis.

**Characteristics of Postmodernism**

Brown (1995a) has listed the key features of postmodernism as fragmentation, hyperreality, de-differentiation, pastiche, anti-foundationalism, pluralism, and chronology. In the same vein, Firat (1991, p.70) lists the features of postmodernism as fragmentation, hyperreality, reversal of production and consumption, decentering of the
subject, and juxtaposition of opposites. Translated into layman’s language, these terms refer to an environment in which images dominate reality and change their form frequently. Reality and image become blurred beyond recognition, and the past is considered as desirable as the present. Authority of knowledge is questioned, and high and low culture are ranked equally. And importantly for this thesis, consumers are relegated to a passive position of acceptance in the marketplace, merely playing out their roles as dictated by the products they consume.

By combining the varying contributions to the postmodern consumer research literature, four characteristics of postmodernism that are especially relevant to this study were identified. These characteristics are: (1) a focus on consumers rather than marketers; (2) a refutation of the assumption of consumer sovereignty; (3) the acceptance of multiple realities; and (4) the search for particularistic rather than universal theories.

In postmodern consumer research, an increasing concern for the interests of consumers, as well as marketers, has resulted in both groups being considered important stakeholders (Holbrook 1995a; Firat 1987a). This is a consequence of the recognition that consumption is a significant area of study due to its status as an important element of human life in its own right, rather than purely as a source of information to aid marketers (Firat and Dholakia 1998; Firat 1987a). In order to understand consumers’ needs rather than accepting them as givens in the consumption equation, the postmodern approach emphasises the role of consumer in human experience, placing consumers and their feelings at the centre of theorising (Firat and Dholakia 1998; Firat 1987a). This focus on consumers rather than marketers constitutes a very different approach to traditional consumer behaviour with its managerial orientation. Also, the emphasis on consumers’ feelings in consumption represents a departure from the traditional concern with cognitions.

The second characteristic of postmodernism of interest to this thesis is a reconsideration of the autonomy of the consumer (Brown 1995a; Alvesson 1995: Ogilvy 1990). External forces are recognised to substantially limit the consumption choices of consumers (Lyotard 1984), even though consumers are generally unaware of their existence or their effects (Firat and Dholakia 1998; Firat 1987a). In particular, culture is an especially important subject area within postmodern consumer research, with attention given to the effects of cultural parameters on consumption behaviours.
(Firat and Venkatesh 1995). The controlled nature of the individual is called the decentring of the subject in postmodern literature (Firat and Dholakia 1998; Caughie 1995; Firat 1991). This characteristic has significant implications for marketing research as it is typically practised, as an implicit assumption behind such research is the autonomy of the individual (Brown 1995b). The lack of consumer autonomy recognised in postmodernism is critical to this research project, and is discussed in greater depth in the discussion of culture to follow in the Consumer as Pawn section.

The third characteristic of postmodernism relevant to this thesis is an acknowledgment of multiple realities (Cova 1996; Firat and Venkatesh 1995; Joy and Venkatesh 1994). This is opposed to the single, objective reality that has been presumed to exist in the social as well as physical sciences (Hudson and Ozanne 1988; Mick 1986; Chalmers 1982). Postmodernism directly addresses the theoretical premises that underlie much social research, questioning the accepted philosophical principles of ontology and epistemology as employed in the social sciences (Brown 1995a; Venkatesh et al. 1993). Rather than accepted as the ‘truth’, knowledge is posited to be a reflection of the prevailing power structures (Foucault 1980; Rabinow 1984; Lyotard 1984; Jameson 1984). Postmodernists describe individuals as lacking the ability to objectively view their external world and to engage in cognitive processing that is unaffected by their conditioning (Brown 1994). Consumers are thus depicted as conditioned individuals who are steeped in the requirements of their culture and language (see Derrida 1972; Lyotard 1984; Brown 1995a). In this sense, it becomes futile to attempt to obtain evidence of an objective reality via interaction with conditioned individuals.

An adjunct to this acknowledgment of multiple realities within postmodernism is the accepted subjectivity of all research methods. A postmodern approach recognises that all research is biased (Brown 1995b), and as a result the intention in social research can only be to represent one social reality, one of many (Denzin and Lincoln 1994). Multiple interpretations are accepted as both possible and desirable (Holbrook 1995a), and the interpretation of a particular researcher is seen to reflect the philosophical orientations and personal prejudices that always apply to the research process (Rheding-Jones 1996; Stem and Costa 1993). This issue will be discussed further in the research methods section to follow.
The final characteristic of postmodernism of relevance to this research concerns the particularistic nature of consumption, which results in the requirement for different consumption theories in different locations, and different theories for different groups of consumers (Firat and Venkatesh 1995; Brown 1995b). This effectively precludes the construction of all-encompassing consumption theories. Firat and Venkatesh (1995) warn against constructing totalising theories that aim to explicate consumption processes through the resolution of contradictions, contending that such contradictions are inevitable when the subject matter is truth as experienced by the individual. Contradictory localised explanations are seen to co-exist without the need for competition between them (Rhedding-Jones 1996). Rather than attempting to develop theories that resolve these contradictions, Firat and Venkatesh (1995) recommend research designed to develop a number of smaller theories that each contribute to our comprehension of consumption as a variable and fragmented phenomenon (see also Denzin and Lincoln 1994).

**Diversity Within Postmodernism**

Postmodernists derive from a wide variety of disciplines, and their common title does not mean that they share common views on the meaning of this title or on key theoretical issues (Fahy 1998; Cova 1996; Brown 1994, 1995a). In fact, Alvesson (1995) suggests that the numerous disparate themes that are combined under the category of postmodernism are too diverse to be included in a single conceptual category. Even within the more confined area of postmodern consumer research there is a decided lack of agreement on many subjects. For example, although a common theme is the reduction in consumer autonomy resulting from cultural forces, there is disagreement concerning the nature and extent of this cultural influence. Firat and Venkatesh (1995) classify the competing arguments into two major categories: sceptical postmodernists and liberatory postmodernists.

According to Firat and Venkatesh (1995), sceptical postmodernists hold that the value systems fostered by capitalist markets inevitably result in unhappiness for the individual, and are detrimental to society as a whole. The individual is conceived as socially displaced, seeking an unachievable stability in sense of self (Caughie 1995; Jameson 1984). This leads to negative feelings being experienced by the individual in the process of consumption, and, according to Brown (1995a, p.64), “Panic is the
archetypal postmodern state of mind”. Baudrillard’s (1988) work exemplifies the sceptical postmodernist position. He describes a world in which objects have come to hold more privileged positions than people, describing objects as “tyrannical” entities that control the meanings that are attached to them. He depicts consumer sovereignty as a myth that disguises an environment in which individuals are compelled to consume to ensure the survival of the system. Similarly, Firat (1991, p.72) has suggested that:

The subject [person] is not in control but controlled, becoming, in effect, an object in the consumption process. The individual subject and individualism is lost, instead we have humans repeating and replicating the mechanics necessitated and imposed by the natures of the products they use or consume.

Liberatory postmodernists acknowledge that consumption as it currently occurs is driven by external forces, but point to the potential of the individual to subvert the market and the imminent “liberation” of the consumer as the theorised postmodern market becomes a reality (Firat 1994; Mick 1992; Jameson 1984). Postmodern consumers are seen to be liberated in the sense that they are highly individualistic people who resist market-produced images and the modern devotion to grand projects, instead seeking to experience a range of different experiences that can extend them as individuals (Cova 1996; Firat et al. 1995). The result is posited to be consumers who are whimsical and hedonic, rather than forced into socially-sanctioned patterns of consumption (Firat et al. 1995; Ogilvy 1990). Such consumers are described as those who change between behaviours quickly and easily in order to gain satisfaction (Firat and Venkatesh 1995; Brown 1995a), or, in Derrida’s (1972) terms, “bricoleurs”. However, liberatory postmodernists concede that the liberatory potential of postmodernism is being hampered by the continuing dominance of the modern institution of the market over human life (Firat and Dholakia 1998; Firat and Venkatesh 1995).

This dissension within postmodernism reflects the discord that is evident in positivist writings pertaining to the influence of culture over consumption. However, in postmodern discourse, the disagreement typically concerns the extent of consumer autonomy in the present compared to the anticipated future, while modern discourse is troubled by disagreement regarding the current state of consumer autonomy. It is thus apparent that no single theoretical approach has achieved consensus on the complex
issue of cultural influence within postmodern consumer research, just as it has failed to
do so in other areas of academic inquiry.

The following section describes the Consumer as Pawn perspective as it is
developed in this thesis. The characteristics of postmodernism described above are
central to this perspective.

The Consumer as Pawn Perspective

The dominant tenet of the Consumer as Pawn perspective (hereafter the CaP
perspective) is that the consumer has very little latitude in consumption decisions.
However, it is important to note that this perspective is not completely demarcated from
the CaK perspective in the consumer behaviour literature. Some consumer researchers,
such as McCracken, appear to simultaneously hold views of relevance to both the CaK
perspective and the CaP perspective. This becomes apparent in the occasional
references in common between this section and the preceding section on the CaK
perspective. This overlap illustrates the uncertainty within consumer behaviour
regarding the ability of consumers to control their own consumption.

The CaP perspective as it is proposed here portrays the consumer as passive in
the consumption process, with culture attributed a dominant position in explanations of
behaviour. Consumers are perceived as reactors rather than instigators in the dominant
consumption patterns of a culture (Miller 1997; Firat 1987a). They can use the symbolic
meanings found in goods and services, but lack the ability to exert influence over the
specific nature of these meanings (Firat 1991). They exist within a cultural environment
that is controlled by the cultural elite, lacking the motivation or ability to effect change
on the culture in which they live (Magnarella 1997).

Anxiety lurks behind much consumption in this perspective, and the defensive
objective of fitting in to a particular social sphere drives much behaviour (Firat and
Venkatesh 1995). To effectively achieve the desire for social integration, consumers are
viewed as compelled to continually monitor the consumption behaviours of others and
of themselves (Firat 1994). They must specifically monitor the cultural meanings
resident in goods and services to facilitate the process of representation that is critical in
consumer markets (Firat, Sherry, and Venkatesh 1994). They perform consumption
rituals according to their perceptions of the requirements of their culture (Tetreault and Kleine 1990; Belk et al. 1989), and variations in performance are attributed to different interpretations of cultural imperatives, rather than the exercise of free choice (Shore 1991).

**Culture**

Those committed to the CaK perspective maintain that while culture is undoubtedly a significant influence in consumption behaviours, the individual has the ultimate ability to accept or reject culture’s guidelines. The CaP perspective draws the opposite conclusion. The power of individuals over their own consumption is seen to be minor relative to the overwhelming influence of culture. Social and cultural pressures are attributed a dominating influence over consumption choices, and people are perceived as programmed individuals who behave largely according to the dictates of the social and cultural environment (Manning and Cullum-Swan 1994). In this view, individual identity is only achieved with cultural guidance (Geertz 1975), and perceptions, interpretations, and responses are seen to be culturally structured (Cushman 1990; Adler 1977). The individual is viewed to have no control over the larger system, reduced to the reactionary position of playing with the cards dealt by the cultural and social environments (Brown 1994).

According to the CaP interpretation of cultural influence, individual differences in behaviours between consumers are negligible, as at the macro level of analysis conformity to culture’s dictates is all but complete (Firat and Dholakia 1982; Levy 1981). Firat (1987a) notes that while considerable variation in choice at the brand level is apparent, choice at the level of consumption pattern tends strongly towards convergence, with very little real choice available to consumers. Analyses of those products that have achieved mass dissemination have indicated that the selection of these products occurs at a social and cultural level, with the individual having a negligible role in the process (Droge et al. 1993; Douglas and Isherwood 1979). Firat (1987a) cites cars and television sets as examples of such products. As a result, the values that determine consumption patterns are argued to be socially specified, effectively nullifying the conception of the consumer as a conscious decision-making agent free from external constraint (Firat and Dholakia 1982).
Douglas and Isherwood (1979) note that the desire for the ownership of culturally-specified products is experienced as a powerful consumption motivation, although the individual is largely incapable of realising this motivation as anything but the exercise of free choice. The consequence of the perception of free choice is said to be that consumers mould their consumption around the requirements of dominant culture, usually achieving a state of consumption that they believe to be in their best interests (Magnarella 1997; Fenster 1991; Bourdieu 1984; Firat and Dholakia 1982). The CaK interpretation can thus be seen as a natural outcome of this situation, as perceptions of individual control over behaviour prevent consumers from questioning the state of play. Similarly, consumer researchers also conclude that consumption is primarily a self-fulfilling process. Firat (1987a) posits that rather than merely discouraging a focus on possible external controls over consumption, the requirements of the prevailing market system serve to place a taboo on any questioning of consumer sovereignty.

According to Firat (1987a), the consumption pattern of a culture is self-reinforcing, as the values of the pattern are consistent with those of the society (see also Hill 1988). The result is that individuals aspire to the reigning consumption pattern whether they can afford it or not, resulting in cycles of poverty that are inescapable (see also Wildavsky 1993). To illustrate this point, Firat notes that low socio-economic consumers often engage in consumption levels beyond their means in an attempt to conform to societal expectations. The pressures to consume according to the dominant consumption pattern are thus seen to be omnipresent and inescapable.

Similarities in consumption patterns at the societal level are interpreted in the CaP perspective as indicating that cultural models are very effective in prescribing behaviour at the aggregate level (Firat 1987a; Firat and Dholakia 1982). The argument is that consumers continually attempt to utilise the most appropriate behavioural model for their social grouping(s) (Firat 1991), and any variations are attributed to differences in judgement as to which model is most culturally suitable for which situations. In other words, differences in behaviours are considered to be the result of differences in “cultural expertise” (Roth and Moorman 1988, p. 403). Individuals are seen to internalise a selected variety of cultural traits, depending on the cultural alternatives to which they have been exposed (Roth and Moorman 1988; Bernadi 1977). In particular, subcultures are viewed to determine exposure to certain consumption patterns (Douglas and
Isherwood 1979), determining in turn the ranges of behaviour deemed acceptable and appropriate.

Due to this compulsion to employ the "appropriate" cultural model in specific circumstances, the CaP perspective views the selection of these models of behaviour as automatic, thereby denying the consumer any conscious or intentional choice. The extent to which the required cultural knowledge has been assimilated determines the ways in which the models are employed (Shore 1991; Roth and Moorman 1988). Differences in assimilation are said to occur as different people at varying levels in society are exposed to different cultural information throughout the course of their lives (Carley 1995; Jennings and Waller 1994). The impossibility of possessing complete knowledge of the culture in which one lives means that it is necessary for interpretations to be somewhat idiosyncratic (Carley 1995; LaFromboise et al. 1993; Shore 1991; Roth and Moorman 1988). For example, people may be aware of many of the cultural norms that apply to their particular age, sex and class groupings, but even this awareness will be incomplete (Kluckhohn 1962). These idiosyncratic interpretations are therefore seen to be outside of the consumer's control, rather than being the result of a conscious decision to be different. This has implications for the concept of taste in consumer research. Bourdieu (1984, p. 466) defines taste as "an acquired disposition to 'differentiate' and 'appreciate'". The taste structures taught to members of subcultures form what Bourdieu calls cultural capital, providing an unconscious guide to decision making. This effectively ensures that consumers limit their acquaintance circles to those whom they find similar or appealing, limiting the range of consumption patterns observed and favourably contemplated (Thompson 1997; Holt 1997).

The importance of individual taste to consumption decisions takes on new meaning when the conditioned nature of taste is appreciated. According to the CaP perspective, individuals' attempts to personalise their consumption activities are necessarily constrained by the (sub)cultural frameworks in which their tastes have been formed (Holt 1997). Bourdieu (1984) argues that taste is socially determined, structuring his arguments in terms of the differing consumption patterns exhibited by consumers belonging to different social classes. Social class membership has since been proposed by other consumer researchers to be critical to the configuration of tastes (e.g., Holt 1997). The CaP perspective argues that economic theories of consumption behaviour that are based on the assumption that individual tastes exist independent of
the marketer’s efforts fail to recognise the extent to which tastes are influenced by the cultural environment (Douglas and Isherwood 1979; Bourdieu 1984; Firat and Dholakia 1998). The marketer is an increasingly important component of this cultural environment (Bouchet 1995; Joy and Venkatesh 1994; Firat 1987a).

**Marketing as a Cultural Institution**

From a CaP perspective, consumers as products of culture are also products of marketing (Venkatesh et al. 1993). The modern market is discussed as the key means of societal management (Firat et al. 1994), with marketing playing a primary role in the communication of cultural images (Ger 1997; Firat 1994). Through marketing mechanisms, consumers are viewed as socialised into making consumption choices that comply with the dominant consumption pattern operating within their culture (Fullerton 1988; Firat 1987a). In this way, consumers are seen to have been created by marketing processes (Firat and Venkatesh 1995), particularly the advent of widely available credit (Cushman 1990; Baudrillard 1988).

According to the CaP perspective, marketers have actively promulgated the benefits of consumption through advertising (Ger 1997; Ger and Belk 1996; Anderson and Wadkins 1991). They have found it necessary to expand the motivations and abilities of consumers to consume the vast quantities of goods and services that are produced in a marketing culture (Baudrillard 1988; Gordon and Lee 1972). The mass media is a particularly important component of culture in the CaP perspective, as it is by this means that the symbols and images so important to consumption are transmitted (Ger 1997; Ger and Belk 1996; Firat and Venkatesh 1995; Alvesson 1995; Hill 1988; Baudrillard 1988). (For example, Holbrook (1995b) suggests that television game shows reinforce the desire for consumption for its own sake.) Consumption in return is seen to reproduce existing cultural categories, providing the stability that is favourable to the longevity of the marketing organisation (Fullerton 1988).

The CaP perspective does not, however, suggest that individual marketers have great power over consumers or over the cultural meanings resident in consumer goods, despite the global awareness that some brands have achieved. Instead, marketers in aggregate are seen to create an environment in which certain versions of social reality are presented and accepted as more desirable than others (Davis 1997; Englis and
Solomon 1995; Solomon and Englis 1994; Hill 1988). Firat and Venkatesh (1995) discuss advertising as a form of public discourse, one that comments on society and the role of individuals within it. The “reality” portrayed by the media comes to be accepted, as consumers can imagine no other way of existence (Hill 1988). It is thus the conditioning achieved by marketers in aggregate that is seen to result in the association of certain cultural meanings with certain products, rather than individual marketers being capable of assigning any meaning to any product.

The consumption culture encouraged by marketing is seen to bring with it a perpetual need for more possessions, a need that is instilled from a very young age (Droge et al. 1993). Firat (1987a, 1987b) explains that it is important for consumers to want to consume products designed for individual consumption, as opposed to public consumption, as this increases total output for the economic system. He notes that this desire to consume is essential for the survival of the market, as the assumption of voluntary participation is necessary for the ongoing success of the system. However, he also argues that what is desired through voluntary participation is itself culturally determined.

Firat and Dholakia (1998) raise the possibility that the range of products available on the market is determined by the relatively small proportion of the population who have both the greatest buying power and the greatest influence in producing organisations. They also point out that although consumer sovereignty is formally assumed in marketing theory, this is incompatible with the focus on the continual refinement of methods to increase consumers’ susceptibility to marketing persuasion (see also Brown 1995b; Gordon and Lee 1972). Instead, they suggest that claims of consumer sovereignty are a political necessity to preserve the autonomy of marketers. The consumer in the CaP perspective is thus a creation of the market whose existence is possible due to the “relentless activism of marketing and advertising in creating new wants and needs that did not exist before” (Firat and Venkatesh 1995, p. 247; see also Kilbourne et al. 1997).

An example offered of this “constructed” nature of consumers is the extent to which the media have contributed to people’s perceptions of appropriate body images (Joy and Venkatesh 1994; Cushman 1990). (See Appendices C and D for illustrations of concerns about body image.) Murphy and Miller (1997) note that a common theme in
Advertisements is to draw attention to the inadequacies of the individual that can be overcome with the assistance of the right products, representing a move away from the previous focus on the functional aspects of products. A reported result is self-dissatisfaction among consumers, particularly females, resulting in the sales of products that are promoted as being capable of remedying the deficiency (Stewart 1997; Stephens et al. 1994; Hirschman and Thompson 1997; Cushman 1990). This ability of advertising to stimulate needs through the generation of self-dissatisfaction suggests the likelihood of negative feelings being experienced in consumption. This issue will be discussed in detail in a later section.

Cultural Change

Postmodern consumer theorists suggest that the nature of the relationship between consumers and culture has changed over time. While individuals may have previously been able to exert some influence over their culture via their consumption practices, as suggested in the CaK perspective, this ability has been significantly reduced with the increasing sophistication of marketing techniques (Firat 1991). According to the CaP perspective, marketing as an institution has commandeered the role of cultural catalyst (Holbrook 1995a), and the products introduced to the market by marketers constitute a powerful impetus for cultural change (McCracken 1990b).

This interpretation has major implications for our understanding of the processes of cultural maintenance and evolution. Cultural change becomes deliberate and planned rather than spontaneous and unpredictable, with only those wielding power within the dominant marketing institutions able to influence the cultural change that is accomplished through consumption activities (Firat 1987b, 1995). The perceived result is that the individual consumer comes to be a cog in the wheel, rather than the raison d’etre for the system (Baudrillard 1988).

Cultural Meaning

The cultural meanings found in products are very important to the CaP perspective. Consumers perform the task of self-construction through the consumption of products laden with specific meanings, a task that is considered (1) obligatory, and (2) necessarily achieved via consumption (Firat 1994, 1995). At the same time, consumers through their consumption decisions are viewed to be reinforcing the social
codes to which the products relate (Firat and Venkatesh 1995; McCracken 1990b). The system of meaning is thus seen to be forever present, mediating interactions between people and products (Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton 1981).

According to the CaP perspective, meaning occurs only through cultural and social channels, rather than being the product of individual cognitions (Mick 1986; e.g., Manning and Cullum-Swan 1994). Meaning is produced at the (sub)cultural level (Solomon 1983), and is interpreted in the light of the cultural discourses and language structures available to the individual (Richardson 1994; Mick 1986). While the individual is required to complete the meaning transfer process, the role is restricted to translation according to the guides of culture and society. In short, the individual can make no real difference to the culturally accepted meaning of the product (Holt 1997). The CaP perspective thus recognises the conditioned nature of the individual, placing emphasis on conformity in meaning assignment rather than the expression of individuality.

In the CaP perspective, image becomes the primary motivation for consumption (Brown 1995a). This is seen to be evident in the way fashion cycles have permeated almost all forms of consumption (Firat et al. 1995). The suggested outcome of this emphasis on imagery is that consumers can no longer decide for themselves which cultural meanings are to be attached to specific products. Instead, they play a much more passive and reactive role in the meaning assignment process, looking to advertisers, fashion leaders, and opinion leaders for guidance in the meaning assignment process (McCracken 1990b). This is seen to result in a situation where consumers often unquestioningly accept the cultural meanings that marketers as a group allocate to products (Hirschman and Thompson 1997).

The CaP interpretation that consumers are at the mercy of marketing institutions for the assignment of cultural meaning to goods and services means that it is inappropriate to endow ordinary individuals with the ability to exert influence over cultural categories and principles and their manifestation in consumer goods. They can only manipulate product meanings in attempts to construct and express their own self-concepts within the parameters of self-expression permitted by their culture, not to effect cultural change. (However, as is to be discussed in the next section, the nature of
the desired self-concept is also considered to be culturally determined in the CaP perspective.)

In support of the CaP perspective, Shimp, Stuart, and Engle (1991) stress that the associative nature of the learning of much consumption symbolism indicates that it may be misguided to focus so much attention on the analytical learning processes that are assumed to be involved with the development of thoughts and feelings about products. In particular, there is an unconscious element to decoding activities that needs to be explicitly recognised (Shore 1991; Bourdieu 1984). Even McCracken (1990b) notes that the meanings in products can enter at the level of the subconscious, preventing counter-argument. The process of socialisation is such that from a very young age consumers are aware of the symbolic meanings of many products, including an understanding of how to interpret the meanings communicated by the mass media (Hirschman and Thompson 1997; Joy and Venkatesh 1994). These factors suggest to CaP researchers that meaning assignment can be viewed more as a culturally conditioned function than an active and conscious effort on behalf of the consumer.

In summary, the CaP interpretation of meaning transfer relegates the consumer to a passive, emasculated state. The power-holders in the meaning assignment process are seen to be the marketing institutions that deliberately blend products and meanings in profitable combinations (Venkatesh et al. 1993). The creation of meaning is considered to be in the hands of specialists, who include advertising copywriters, fashion designers, and musicians (McCracken 1990b; Solomon 1983). Consumers are viewed as increasingly reliant upon the cultural meanings decreed by the cultural elite (including marketers), possessing only the ability to project their desired self-image according to preset product-image associations (Firat 1991). They must constantly monitor the ways in which meanings are employed to enable them to make appropriate consumption selections, and are thus consigned to a reactive position where they absorb the cultural meanings advocated by product promoters and fashion leaders (Firat 1991).

**The Self-Concept**

Just as objects provide a degree of stability for cultures, so they also serve as a mechanism for stabilising self-concepts (Cushman 1990; Hormuth 1990). According to both the CaK and the CaP perspectives, self-definition is now largely perceived to be
reliant on consumption (Firat and Venkatesh 1995; Firat et al. 1995; Firat 1991; McCracken 1990b; Wallendorf and Arnould 1988; Belk 1984a). Both perspectives recognise that the study of the self-concept can assist in appreciating the role of consumption in everyday life, and can provide greater insight into consumer drives and motivations. The difference is that the CaP perspective views consumers as highly dependent on consumption for communication, to the point that consumers have no choice but to employ products in their social interactions (Firat and Dholakia 1998; Kleine et al. 1992; Hornuth 1990).

According to this view, the self develops to operate within a culture (Thompson 1997), and in doing so reinforces the prevailing cultural code (Cushman 1990). An outcome of the dependence on products for self-construction is seen to be that not only must consumers acquire specific products, but in order to effectively operate in society they must consume complements of products that have been decreed by society to belong together (Englis and Solomon 1995; McCracken 1990b). Social roles are recognised to be culturally connected to a range of consumer goods that are considered crucial to the “correct” performance of the role, and culture is seen by CaP researchers to be the force that specifically provides the associations between objects and social roles (Solomon 1983). Culture thus specifies the personal characteristics required to communicate relevant aspects of self. For example, in the Australian context, males are expected to be more sports- and alcohol-oriented than their female counterparts (Fiske et al. 1987).

The CaP perspective sees consumers as reactively driven to develop self-concepts that are appropriate to their age, gender, and social groupings (Levy 1986). They feel compelled to fulfil the requirements of these classifications, usually accepting the role assigned to them by the culture in which they exist (Firat 1991). The inherent nature of this drive to conform to societal expectations remains unapparent to consumers, allowing them the perception of free choice rather than coercion. As described by Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton (1981, p. 105):

Thus, by a process whose beautiful inevitability recalls that of a cell duplicating and differentiating itself into a complex organism, the self through its own seemingly autonomous choices replicates the order of its culture and so becomes a part of that order and a means for its further replication.
The CaP perspective thus acknowledges that individuals are convinced of their own free choice, while recognising the importance of the perception of free choice to the continuation of the prevailing system.

Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton (1981) note that free choice is only possible where individuals are in possession of their own selves, rather than being under the influence of external forces such as a consumer culture. Postmodernists argue that the consumer culture is well and truly established, making its presence felt in all aspects of human consumption (Joy and Venkatesh 1994; Mick 1992). The resulting proposition from these two arguments is that consumers are no longer in control of their own self-constructions, as free choice has been greatly reduced by the emergence of a powerful consumer culture in Western societies. As one response to this consumer culture, the individual’s sense of self that was once considered stable and enduring is now perceived to be constantly changing and evolving (Mick 1992; Ogilvy 1990; Belk 1984a). People are thought to exhibit different identities, depending on the situation or environment (Kleine et al. 1992; Sirgy 1982).

In the CaP perspective, the communication of multiple selves is no longer viewed as an optional activity, but a compulsory one in a world where effective social interaction requires the communication of different selves in different situations (Firat 1995). While liberatory postmodernists view a continually changing self to be liberating (see for example Firat et al. 1995), it has been proposed that an outcome of this development may be individuals who are alienated from themselves due to the discomfort of being unable to identify their own core selves (Havel 1995; Ogilvy 1990). This close relationship between the self and consumption is seen to be a necessary by-product of the need for high levels of consumption in capitalist markets (Murphy and Miller 1997; Miller 1997; Kilbourne et al. 1997).

In order to explain the mental state of many consumers, Cushman (1990) describes the “empty self” as a symptom of modern life. The empty self is described as the result of the withering of those influences that have historically provided the individual with direction, such as community, family, and tradition (see also Caughie 1995; Brown 1995a; Belk 1984a). According to Cushman, the result is an emptiness that the individual attributes to personal failure, a feeling that is addressed by the constant acquisition of consumer goods that never quite fill the void. This in turn fosters
the intense sense of individualism that provides the economic impetus required by the capitalist system. The posited result is “narcissistically wounded individuals” who are very vulnerable to efforts of persuasion such as advertising (Cushman 1990, p.605). But despite the promises of a better life awaiting post consumption, Cushman argues that the emptiness that the consumer feels is only temporarily assuaged. The emptiness inevitably returns, bringing with it the drive for further consumption.

Belk (1984a) has noted that the trend towards increased anonymity has resulted in greater emphasis on possessions as identity markers. A CaP interpretation would be that a non-controllable tendency to judge others according to external cues is likely to manifest itself in the perceived need for the manipulation of products for the purposes of image management to others (Firat 1995). Consumers are thereby forced into defensive modes of consumption that are designed to protect them from unwanted judgements. According to this viewpoint, self-representation via consumption requires planning and organisation, as opposed to being an optional pastime in which consumers can participate if they so desire (Firat et al. 1995; Firat 1987b, 1994; Hill 1988; Douglas and Isherwood 1979). The underlying assumption behind this interpretation is that consumers have some degree of awareness that they are judged according to their consumption, the result of which is a heightened need to possess certain types of products (Baudrillard 1988; Firat 1994, 1995).

According to CaP researchers, the importance of stereotyping, and the image management function it facilitates, cannot be overestimated. The fear of ridicule from respected others is argued to be a potent motivation to consume (Firat 1985), creating a need to employ consumption as a form of personal communication. Firat (1995) and Holbrook (1995a) point to the serious crimes that are committed in attempts to obtain symbolic possessions to suggest that consumers implicitly understand the importance of stereotyping. Consumers are thus seen to be prepared to take extraordinary measures to possess the products that will concisely communicate desired messages to themselves and others. According to the CaP perspective, this concern with presenting a desired image via consumption in anticipation of the stereotyping activities of others is actively encouraged in consumer markets, as this is a source of ongoing consumption among the population (Droge et al. 1993; Kilbourne et al. 1997).
The connection between the self-concept and consumption has significant implications for the image management activities postulated to be frequently performed by humans (see Wallendorf and Arnould 1988). The prevalence of the image management motivation contributes to the CaP argument that consumers cannot be completely in control of their consumption projects. Compelled into consumption designed to manage their images to others, consumers as conceived in the CaP perspective are not free to consume any products in any combinations, as such behaviour is unlikely to achieve the image outcomes that they have been conditioned to desire. Consumers are therefore perceived to be constantly in catch-up mode, attempting to construct the “right” self, using consumption objects to assist in the process (Murphy and Miller 1997; Anderson and Wadkins 1991). In order to communicate the appropriate self in a given situation, they must acquire specific products and consume them in specific ways (Belk 1988a). The power of choice of the individual in this scenario is more perceived than real (Kilbourne et al. 1997; Droge, et al. 1993), and this may leave consumers more susceptible to advertising and other forms of marketing communications than is currently acknowledged (Kleine et al. 1992).

The tendency of consumers to monitor their behaviours in the management of their self-concepts has been addressed in self-monitoring theory. Hormuth (1990) and Sampson (1978) discuss two classifications of people, high self-monitors and low self-monitors. According to these authors, low self-monitors are those who rely more on internal cues, exhibiting secure and stable self-concepts across situations. High self-monitors are more insecure, and their behaviours are more dependent on the nature of the situation in which they are operating. They are more likely to exhibit behavioural variation between contexts, as their self-definition exists primarily in relation to those with whom they are interacting. High self-monitors are constantly in search of information to enable them to act appropriately, and as a result they prefer situations with minimum ambiguity. They lack conviction in their attitudes and beliefs, as such convictions reduce the flexibility that they require to adapt to new situations. According to the CaP perspective, the demands of the market are such that consumers must be vigilant in their monitoring of the products in the market and their associated meanings (Firat 1991). Rather than being an enjoyable pastime in which consumers engage, monitoring becomes a mechanism for social survival. Such a situation compels individuals to be high rather than low self-monitoring.
Complications can occur in the process of integrating objects into the extended self (Holt 1995). Due to imperfect decoding of product meanings and the inability of individuals to encode products with the meanings of their choice, the self-construction process can be difficult and imprecise (Firat 1994, 1995). The CaP view on the difficulties surrounding the construction and communication of the self-concept through consumer goods can be illustrated with the previously mentioned example of mass-produced items. It is argued that the individual wishes to feel unique in consumption, thus supposedly selecting objects that are somehow special or unique (Hirschman and Thompson 1997; Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton 1981; Celsi et al. 1993). Paradoxically, the objects selected are often mass-produced products, and are thus common to many other consumers (Hormuth 1990; Droge et al. 1993). The huge demand for mass-produced products is attributed to the increasing substitution of human interaction with product interaction in human lives (Anderson and Wadkins 1991), with consumers becoming convinced that they can express their individuality through the consumption of mass-produced products (Firat 1991). They thus continue to employ mass-produced products in their self-projects, believing that their consumption assortments are unique (Baudrillard 1988; Murphy and Miller 1997). To CaK researchers this belief is legitimate as small differences in product combinations are considered to be adequate to claim uniqueness (Murphy and Miller 1997; Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton 1981). To CaP researchers, however, it is a form of self-delusion as small differences only camouflage the over-riding similarity between the consumption patterns of individuals (Droge et al. 1993; Anderson and Wadkins 1991).

Acknowledging Negative Feelings

Emotions play an important role in consumption (Clarke et al. 1998), although in the consumer behaviour literature they appear to have been regarded as less relevant than cognitions. The following discussion summarises the CaP position on the negative emotions that are proposed to be relevant to consumption behaviours.

Over two decades ago, Geertz (1975, p. 80) described man as “a peculiarly high-strung animal”, and referred to emotions as cultural artefacts. Given the importance of emotions to human existence, Geertz suggested that researchers should view human behaviours as being centred around a need to assess the emotional significance of their
surroundings, rather than being directed purely towards information gathering. It is this focus on emotions that has been noted as lacking in much consumer research (Holbrook 1995a; Holbrook and Hirschman 1982). Holbrook and Hirschman (1982) have said that while there remains a place for the information-processing approach in consumer research, the incorporation of an experiential perspective holds great potential for enhancing our understanding of the consumption process. They list the range of emotions relevant to consumption as “love, hate, fear, joy, boredom, anxiety, pride, anger, disgust, sadness, sympathy, lust, ecstasy, greed, guilt, elation, shame, and awe” (1982, p. 137).

Most of the limited attention that has been given to emotions has focused on the role of affect in the formation of attitudes relevant to purchasing behaviour (Holbrook 1995a; e.g., Woodside and Bearden 1977). In this discussion, there is often recognition of the pleasurable aspects of consumption (Ger 1997; Ger and Belk 1996; Mackay 1997b). By comparison, there is little appreciation of the emotional pressures that can also accompany consumption (Kilbourne et al. 1997; Frow and Morris 1993). In the relatively few instances where negative emotions are discussed, there is general acknowledgement that the consumption of some kinds of products (such as cigarettes and alcohol) can have negative consequences for the consumer (e.g., Pavis, Cunningham-Burley, and Amos 1997). There is much less reference, however, to the possibility of negative feelings arising from the consumption of more “innocuous” products.

With its conceptual distance from the managerial perspective, postmodern consumer research encourages the researcher to entertain a conception of consumer behaviour in which negative feelings may also be associated with consumption (Brown 1995a; Joy and Venkatesh 1994; Firat 1987a). According to Baudrillard (1988), consumption is not about personal pleasure at all (or personal needs, for that matter), because it is not about individuals. Instead, he views consumption as a social or collective activity designed to facilitate the process of production. This means that the expectation for individual pleasure is misplaced as consumption is conceived as a duty rather than a right.

Anxiety is one of the negative feelings most frequently discussed in the postmodern discourse on consumption (Derrida 1972; Firat and Venkatesh 1995). (See
Appendix E for an illustration of the anxiety that can be experienced in the consumption process.) One source of consumption anxiety is suggested to be consumers' awareness of the relationship between self and possessions, and in particular the tendency of others to stereotype according to consumption (Kilbourne et al. 1997; Anderson and Wadkins 1991). (See Appendices F and G for illustrations of this point.) This awareness can lead consumers to agonise over consumption decisions pertaining to products with high image-management implications, only too aware of the social ramifications of an incorrect choice (Murphy and Miller 1997).

Postmodern consumer researchers have also raised the information requirements involved in consumption as a source of anxiety. In a fragmented and complex world where one is expected to play different roles in different situations, the knowledge required to satisfactorily present oneself to others increases exponentially, requiring consumers to actively monitor the external environment to maximise their role performance (Firat 1994, 1995). According to the CaP perspective, society assumes that consumers are automatically aware of the optimal products to consume in given situations, and that they will implicitly know how and where such products can be acquired (Kleine et al. 1992). Such assumptions are seen to be misguided, as the accumulation of this knowledge is considered to be a life-long enculturation project that all culture-members experience (Fertig 1996). This extended process of information accumulation presents the possibility that consumers experience anxiety brought on by inadequate product knowledge where this knowledge is necessary for culturally-appropriate consumption. Rising levels of anonymity place additional emphasis on one's ability to communicate via consumption, intensifying the pressure to consume appropriately (Belk 1984a). In this sense, anxiety becomes a significant consumption motivator in itself (Joy and Venkatesh 1994).

Consumers can also feel anxiety when attempting to choose among the proliferation of similar brands in the market (Mackay 1997b; Joy and Venkatesh 1994; Psychology Today 1992). While a CaK account of consumer culture would point to the advantages of a greater range and choice of products for consumers (Fenster 1991), a CaP interpretation is that the consumer can feel confused when endeavouring to choose between products that are only finely differentiated in terms of physical characteristics, but that may have significant amounts of symbolic differentiation (Levy 1986). Similarly, consumers can feel thwarted in their attempts to achieve individuality, as
mass-produced products can only provide a semblance of individuality (Droge et al. 1993).

Some of the other negative feelings that are acknowledged to be experienced by consumers include insecurity and inadequacy (Dichter 1964). Many advertisements highlight the negative outcomes associated with failing to consume appropriately (such as isolation and embarrassment), while demonstrating the favourable results that accrue to those who consume adequately and correctly (such as happiness and success) (Murphy and Miller 1997). According to the CaP perspective, the sophistication of marketing communications is such that advertising represents a powerful influence over individuals’ perceptions and expectations of reality (Stephens et al. 1994; Joy and Venkatesh 1994). These created expectations may prove very difficult for many consumers to fulfil, the result being feelings of inadequacy leading to self-reproach and unhappiness (Kilbourne et al. 1997; Joy and Venkatesh 1994; Holbrook and Hirschman 1982). Some consumer researchers manage to convert this feeling of inadequacy to a favourable outcome of consumer markets. For example, Hirschman and Thompson (1997) argue that unattainable ideals are part of the innate human desire to strive for improvement, thus suggesting that the elevation of expectations by marketers can be viewed as a positive rather than detrimental activity.

Another negative feeling that can be experienced by consumers is an ongoing sensation of dissatisfaction. Consumer markets require continually increasing levels of consumption (Kilbourne et al. 1997; Ruane 1995; Anderson and Wadkins 1991), which according to the CaP perspective necessitate consumers who engage in consumption levels that are not necessarily in their own best interests (Murphy and Miller 1997; Kilbourne et al. 1997). The traditional argument that marketing is incapable of stimulating new needs does not hold sway within the CaP perspective (for a discussion of the inability of marketers to create needs see any basic consumer behaviour text, e.g., Solomon 1996, p. 139). Instead, marketing efforts are assigned considerable power over consumers, including the ability to create needs to increase total consumption levels (Firat and Venkatesh 1995; Kilbourne et al. 1997). The requirement for ever-increasing consumption leads to a preference for the production of goods and services that demand individual, private, and passive consumption (for a full discussion of these product qualities see Firat 1987a). Examples of such products include microwave ovens and VCRs (Firat and Dholakia 1998; Mackay 1993). (See Appendix H for an illustration of
the increasing consumer dependence on these types of consumption goods.) The suggestion is that through the consumption of products that encourage individual consumption, total consumption across a society is maximised while consumers experience negative feelings in the form of loneliness, dependency, weak self-concepts, and general dissatisfaction (Firat 1987a, 1987b).

Encouraged to consume at great levels by the promise of happiness and satisfaction, consumers can be disillusioned when new possessions fail to markedly improve their lives (Gibbs 1997; Cushman 1990; Holbrook and Hirschman 1982). Belk (1984b) has found that those who are more materialistic tend to be less happy, suggesting that material possessions are incapable of assuring contentment. Negative consumption outcomes, however, do not necessarily serve to prevent further consumption. In the CaP perspective, the resulting dissatisfaction can serve to exacerbate the felt needs for further consumption (Lejoyeux, Ades, Tassain and Solomon 1996; Cushman 1990). Just as the gambler on a losing streak wants nothing more than the opportunity to gamble again, the dissatisfied consumer constantly reaches for new products in the search for self-actualisation (Baudrillard 1988). (See Appendix I for an illustration of this point.)

According to the CaP perspective, there is no linear relationship between consumption and the emotional well-being of consumers (Cushman 1990; Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton 1981). Kilbourne et al. (1997) and Droge et al. (1993) discuss the possibility that consumers’ preoccupation with the employment of goods and services to satisfy personal and social needs can effectively prevent them from finding more productive ways of achieving these ends. According to Dichter (1964, p.422), it is the educator’s responsibility to show the consumer the way to “real happiness”, although consumer researchers tend not to address the issue of possible forms of self-actualisation other than consumption. Ger (1997) sees potential in consumer associations and consumer policy that can represent consumers’ interests to increase their position relative to resource-rich organisations. Another function of these associations is suggested by Ger to be the representation of those too poor to vote with their consumption choices. Firat and Dholakia (1998) raise the possibility of the evolution of multitudes of lifestyle communities that will enable consumers to experience a variety of life modes, reducing the dependence on the market as the primary source of self-determination. Similarly, Etzioni (1998) pins hope on voluntary
simplicity in consumption to reduce total consumption levels and provide ecological relief.

Envy represents yet another negative feeling associated with consumption (Ger 1997; Belk 1984b, 1988b). A constant need to maintain consumption levels that are at least level with peers and aspirational others drives higher and higher levels of consumption (Isaksen 1995; Baudrillard 1988; Fiske et al. 1987; Dichter 1964). Such feelings can result in theft and other crimes to redress feelings of consumption deprivation (Ger 1997; Jacobo 1992). As discussed previously, Firat (1987a) has noted the tendency of many poor consumers to undertake consumption that is beyond their financial limits. He suggests that much of this consumption is driven by the need to emulate more affluent others, rather than by survival needs. He notes the unenviable position of these consumers, as they cannot feel satisfied consuming at levels lower than those recommended by their culture, but to consume at higher levels ensures that they exist in a state of financial hardship and debt.

The final category of negative emotions to be discussed is the tension caused by conflicting demands experienced by consumers. The noted requirement for the presentation of different versions of self across different contexts represents a form of tension (Hormuth 1990). Also, as noted above, consumers face limited financial resources in the face of pressures to consume to great levels (Lejoyeux et al. 1996). In addition, consumers are usually members of numerous subcultures, each making its own demands on their consumption behaviours (Triandis 1990). Discomfort can therefore be experienced when attempting to balance these competing expectations (Bourdieu 1984). The result can be a feeling of helplessness in the face of external pressures that are so powerful as to prevent even the contemplation of resentment or reproach (Douglas and Isherwood 1979). Consumers tolerate the conflicting emotions brought on by societal expectations (Firat and Venkatesh 1995), unaware that they have any other choice.

Irrational Symbolic Consumption

To summarise the positions on rationality discussed previously, early consumer researchers assumed that the consumer valued functional utility, and that the maximisation of this utility would result in consumer satisfaction. The rational symbolism assumption behind the CaK perspective states that the consumer values both
functional and symbolic maximisation, which again is assumed to result in consumer satisfaction. Both of these perspectives base their assumptions on an expectation that consumers are either functionally or symbolically enhanced post consumption, and that as a result their behaviours are explainable and understandable (Firat et al. 1995). The CaP perspective offers an alternative interpretation where irrationality in the consumer is acknowledged and accepted (Douglas and Isherwood 1979). In particular, emotions are seen to be more important to consumption than rationality (Clarke et al. 1998). While the consumer seeks both functional and symbolic value from goods and services consumed, and while consumption activities are undertaken in the expectation that these benefits will accrue, it is possible that not all consumption behaviours produce these results (see for example Joy and Venkatesh 1994). It is possible that some or even many consumption activities that are undertaken in an effort to obtain some rational outcome, be it either functional or symbolic maximisation, actually achieve neither. The fact that these outcomes are not forthcoming on a regular basis makes continued consumption in an effort to achieve these outcomes irrational from the CaP perspective.

In line with this CaP explanation of irrationality, rational consumption is defined here as consumption that is undertaken for the realisation of some desired outcome. These outcomes can be very diverse, ranging from functional utilities to emotional wellbeing. An example of the latter is the prevention of being ridiculed by others. Rational consumption therefore entails any consumption activity that can be expected to result in favourable outcomes for the consumer. Irrational consumption, then, is consumption that does not result in the desired outcome but is continued regardless.

To CaP researchers, the negative feelings associated with some consumption activities indicate the existence of irrational consumption in consumer markets. Consumers are seen to continue to engage in patterns of consumption that fail to bring them satisfaction (Murphy and Miller 1997; Gibbs 1997). According to this view, consumers operate in a cycle where they spend most of their time acquiring and maintaining products that they then have little time to enjoy (Ger 1997), effectively becoming subservient to the products and the system (Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton 1981). (See Appendix J for an illustration of this point.) Consumers continue to enact these consumption behaviours because they are conditioned to believe that the promised better life must be forthcoming (Firat 1995), and therefore any failure on their part to achieve this outcome is a result of their inabilities as an individual rather than the
product of a failure within the system. In the meantime, consumers are seen to continue to rationalise their behaviours, reluctant to admit that their behaviours may be irrational (Dichter 1964).

According to the CaP perspective, the existence of irrational consumption has been hidden by the managerial approach to marketing and consumer behaviour. This approach is seen to have constructed the notion of rational consumption as a legitimisation for consumption behaviours that are conducive to the continuation of the system (Aldridge 1994). The focus on cognitive decision-making resulting from the managerial approach to consumer research is argued to have inhibited the realisation of negative consumer outcomes further down the consumption process (Kilbourne et al. 1997). At the same time, an almost complete lack of consciousness of irrational consumption by consumers is seen to perpetuate current consumption levels (Firat 1987a). According to this perspective, the eternal optimism espoused by advertising and the attributing of negative consumption outcomes to the inabilities of the individual assure consumers that their consumption efforts will eventually result in happiness and satisfaction (Murphy and Miller 1997; Joy and Venkatesh 1994). The perceived result is that consumers continue to repeat unsatisfying consumption behaviours. This is even seen to be the case for impoverished consumers who financially over-extend themselves in order to possess those products that are considered life’s necessities, such as television sets and designer clothes (Firat 1987a). Such behaviour is considered irrational in the CaP perspective.

Research Approaches

The different underlying assumptions behind the CaK and CaP perspectives have implications for the research methods adopted and the ways in which these methods are employed. Researchers subscribing to the CaK perspective usually display a preference for one of two orientations towards the awareness of consumers regarding their own motivations and behaviours. Brown (1994) outlines the key differences between the two orientations. The first views the consumer as possessing direct access to an external reality that can be accessed through qualitative methods such as depth interviews. The second orientation assumes that an external reality exists, but that variables such as culture prevent the consumer from experiencing it directly. In this second orientation, the peculiar view that the individual has of this reality is viewed to be interesting in itself, and again the
expectation is that it can be accessed through appropriate methods. CaK researchers thus spend their time trying to locate reality through their interactions with informants.

CaP researchers, by comparison, make no such assumptions concerning social reality. As previously noted, one of the key characteristics of postmodernism is the assumption of the existence of multiple realities. As such, all research is viewed as subjective (Rhedding-Jones 1996), with demands for objectivity considered fundamentally flawed since they contradict the very nature of human life in which multiple realities co-exist (Brown 1994). In this view there can never be a single correct answer to a question (Firat and Venkatesh 1995). Instead, reality is treated as “purely contextual, cultural, historical and timebound” (Venkatesh et al. 1993, p. 221). As such, subjective accounts become fully acceptable as sources of knowledge (Firat and Venkatesh 1995). In postmodern consumer research, the development of theory can be legitimately achieved with the use of any relevant source of insight, including self-introspection and narratives (Ogilvy 1990; Holbrook 1995a, 1998; Holbrook and Hirschman 1982). Not just behaviours, but also beliefs and emotions become relevant to the research task, as postmodernism actively invites the study of fantasies, myths, and symbols as sources of data in themselves (Brown 1994, 1995b; Venkatesh et al. 1993).

An interest in culture as a variable of interest in consumer behaviour among both CaK and CaP researchers has meant that they have had to come to terms with the difficulties inherent in culture research. Across disciplines, the measurement of culture is known to be problematic. As culture is a phenomenon that typically exists at the level of subconscious awareness (Kale 1991), it usually remains unrecognised and unarticulated by culture members (Costa and Bamossy 1995b; Wallendorf 1993; Kluckhohn 1962). This has implications for data collection techniques, as the impact of culture on consumption has to be inferred rather than directly observed (Welte 1977). Research methodologies are therefore required that facilitate the inference process, such as naturalistic inquiry, ethnography, projective techniques, and focus groups (Manning 1987; Lincoln and Guba 1985).

The analysis of culture is further complicated by the difficulty of generating information about a culture based on data collected from individuals (Roth and Moorman 1988; Hofstede 1984). Some researchers have argued that culture is not a characteristic of individuals, and therefore cannot be illustrated by the description of a typical person.
(Hofstede 1993). Rather, it involves a group of people who have been exposed to similar environmental forces, such as education, social institutions, life experiences, and societal norms (Kale and McIntyre 1991). As a result, the responses of individuals are considered by some to be unrepresentative of the group dynamics involved in the cultural context (Hudson and Ozanne 1988), a problem known as the ecological fallacy (Adler 1983). Many researchers, however, make generalisations about cultures by aggregating data obtained from individuals (Huo and Randall 1991; e.g., Hofstede 1984). Apparently, the difficulties associated with the collection of data that are truly representative of a culture have resulted in the grudging acceptance of the responses of individuals as a substitute for cultural input.

Some overcome these concerns by arguing that as individual behaviours are patterned by group relations or culture, it is possible to closely study the actions of individuals to determine the social meanings of these actions (Piot 1993; Hudson and Ozanne 1988; Manning 1987). Geertz (1975) argues that culture should be understood through the close examination of its individual human elements, encouraging researchers to continually descend into levels of greater detail in order to better comprehend humanity. He specifically suggests that revelations can be found in the study of the objects that humans use and possess. An important proviso made by Geertz is that such studies are not meant to be predictive, their purpose being to explore and describe. The study of the behaviour of the individual is thus seen to have the potential to access a culture by providing a window into its workings (Sarantakos 1993).

Qualitative Research Methods

In line with the move towards macro analyses of consumption in academic consumer research is a trend towards greater acceptance of qualitative research methods. The simultaneous occurrence of the two emerging trends of macro consumption analysis and the employment of qualitative research methods has not been coincidental, as qualitative methods are particularly well suited to the study of macro forces (Glaser 1992). To date, quantitative researchers have been unable to develop an instrument capable of satisfactorily explicating the influence of culture on consumption, resulting in an increasing interest in qualitative methods (Holbrook 1995a).
A wide variety of research activities can be categorised as qualitative (Locke 1996), although the primary methods in the category include in-depth interviewing, focus groups, participant observation, pure observation, and projective techniques (Holt 1997; Denzin and Lincoln 1994; Graetz and McAllister 1988; Rook 1988). Due to its broad scope and wide use across multiple disciplines, qualitative research is difficult to define (Denzin and Lincoln 1994; Strauss and Corbin 1990). This is reflected in Glaser's (1992, p. 11) definition of qualitative analysis as "any kind of analysis that produces findings or concepts and hypotheses...that are not arrived at by statistical methods," and Calder's (1977, p.353) definition of qualitative research as research characterised by "the absence of numerical measurement and statistical analysis". Qualitative research is therefore defined in terms of what it is not, rather than what it is.

Qualitative approaches are considered more appropriate where the intention is primarily exploratory rather than predictive (Harper 1994), and where the operationalisation of concepts is problematic (Barnes 1996). Generalisability is not an objective, instead new conceptual insights are sought (Calder 1977). Quantitative approaches, by comparison, are seen to be better suited to more finite research questions that are conducive to the concrete operationalisation of concepts and statistical analysis of causal relationships (Denzin and Lincoln 1994). Qualitative techniques are acknowledged to involve a greater degree of subjectivity (Atkinson 1992; Holt 1991; Johnson 1990; Calder 1977), but can provide more detailed descriptions of the workings of cultures and subcultures and the consumption behaviours in which members engage (Arnould and Wallendorf 1994; Rook 1988; Manning 1987). Quantitative techniques are argued to provide greater objectivity, but by necessity generate less thick description of individual cultures (Belk 1990; Marcus 1986). Qualitative methods have been suggested to have much to offer the study of the relationship between culture and consumption, as they permit a more intense exploration of preferences, tastes, actions, attitudes, and experiences (Holt 1997; Mackay 1993; Glaser 1992).

While the limitations of qualitative methods as generators of objective data are acknowledged by consumer researchers employing them, it is argued that the benefits obtained via their use can only be achieved by accepting the imperfections inherent in any methodology relying on human observation and interpretation of phenomena (Adler and Adler 1994). Holbrook (1995a) notes that quantitative research is also subjective in that someone has determined what issue is to be studied and how, illustrating that all research
represents someone’s value system (see also Hudson and Ozanne 1988). The combination of qualitative and quantitative methods has been proposed as a possible means of enhancing research outputs, as the strengths of both approaches can be tapped in a single research project (Strauss and Corbin 1990; Wallendorf and Belk 1989; Hudson and Ozanne 1988).

**Role of the Researcher in Qualitative Research**

Due to the very nature of qualitative research, the researcher becomes instrumental in the recording and interpretation of data (Fontana and Frey 1994; Wallendorf and Belk 1989; Spradley and McCurdy 1972). The need for a human research instrument is problematic, as researchers inevitably have different skill and experience levels that impact upon research outcomes (Johnson 1990). Just the presence of the researcher can bias results, a problem that is magnified when recording or note-taking equipment is visible (Rose 1990). This feature makes comparisons between studies very difficult (Heider 1988; Manning 1987), with considerable scope for variation in results and subsequent disagreement (De Vault 1995; Huberman and Miles 1994). The famous Mead-Freeman debate in anthropology is an example of the academic conflict that can occur over the interpretation of cultures where qualitative research methods have been used (see Freeman 1992).

According to the CaK perspective, it is the task of cultural researchers to attempt to acknowledge and overcome their own cultural conditioning when interpreting the phenomenon under study (Atkinson 1992; Spradley and McCurdy 1972). A significant part of the acknowledgment of conditioning is the self-disclosure process (Holbrook 1995a; Fontana and Frey 1994; Belk 1990; Wallendorf and Belk 1989; Belk, Sherry and Wallendorf 1988; Manning 1987). This is where researchers acknowledge any personal characteristics that may have some bearing on the offered interpretation. Of particular importance is the academic training that the researcher has received that may influence method selection and data interpretation (Barnes 1996; Denzin and Lincoln 1994; Valentine and Evans 1993; Rose 1990). The use of multicultural and multidisciplinary research teams is often suggested by CaK proponents as a means of overcoming the cultural conditioning of individual researchers in an attempt to obtain a bias-free interpretation (Nasif et al. 1991; Belk et al. 1989; Adler 1983).
In the CaP perspective it is acknowledged that researcher bias is inevitable, but this is viewed as a necessary part of the research process (e.g., Annells 1996; Barnes 1996; Holt 1991; Berg and Smith 1988). In particular, creativity is recognised as an essential part of research (Thompson 1997; Locke 1996; Strauss and Corbin 1990). The researcher is seen to be active in deciding upon research topics (Robrecht 1995), establishing the appropriate methodology (Annells 1996; Atkinson 1992), determining the appropriate amount of time to spend in the field (Wallendorf and Belk 1989), interpreting results (Locke 1996; Fontana and Frey 1994), and generating insight into phenomena (Berg and Smith 1988). The researcher is thus considered a critical component of data collection and analysis, and as such, the issue of bias is accepted as a necessary element of the analytic process (Richardson 1994; Holt 1991; Manning 1987). By comparison, the researcher in the CaK perspective is considered the weak link in the research process that needs to be accounted for or “corrected” with a range of measures (Longabaugh 1980). Examples of such measures are discussed in the section on trustworthiness criteria.

The perception that all research is inherently subjective would appear to reduce the emphasis on self-disclosure by the CaP researcher. As there is no expectation of an objective reality, the description of the characteristics of the researcher cannot assist readers in their attempts to account for the qualities of the researcher in order to access the underlying reality being examined. As all research is influenced by the “self” of the researcher (Bristor 1995; Richardson 1994), research results devoid of researcher influence are impossible. This means there is no “true” base from which to add compensation for the characteristics of the researcher, rendering the consideration of these characteristics impractical and pointless.

**Ethnography**

As the macro analysis of consumption is concerned with the role of consumption in human life (Belk 1987), naturalistic methods have become popular among those studying consumption from a macro perspective (Sheth and Gross 1988). Naturalistic research methods are those that record behaviours in the settings in which they naturally occur (Longabaugh 1980). Belk et al. (1988, p. 466/467) have discussed naturalistic research as an iterative process that continually “.... refines ideas with the mutually supportive objectives of better ideas and stronger tests of these ideas.” The reflexive
nature of this approach means that researchers can nominate areas of research interest that remain undefined by an hypothesis throughout the course of the study (Berry 1980; e.g., Annells 1996).

Ethnography is a form of naturalistic inquiry that has a specific interest in culture (Sarantakos 1993), and it is a methodology that is employed by both CaK and CaP researchers. The word “ethnography” literally means the writing of culture (Atkinson 1992). Ethnography is both a process and a product, and its purpose is the “representation of the total aspect of a society, culture or social scene” (Johnson 1990, p. 10). Through analysis of the cultural variation evident in everyday behaviour, researchers employing ethnographic techniques hope to uncover revelations concerning the bi-directional relationship between culture and behaviour (Arnould and Wallendorf 1994). One of the primary ways this is achieved is by the direct observation of culture members, often including participant observation (Arnould and Wallendorf 1994).

Two aims of ethnographic research are to see the world through the eyes of the members of the culture being examined (Barnes 1996), and to document the social interactions among these members (Arnould and Wallendorf 1994). An effort is made to account for information learned by members to enable interaction, and to study the way in which behaviour is subsequently organised (Triandis 1980; Spradley and McCurdy 1972). Another aim of ethnography is to explicate those activities that engage cultural members for significant amounts of time (Triandis 1980). Consumption as a human activity that accounts for an ever-increasing proportion of people’s time represents a phenomenon that can be productively addressed with the use of ethnographic techniques (Thompson 1997; Arnould and Wallendorf 1994). Implicit in ethnographic consumer research is the assumption that the social meanings found in material possessions can be analysed for their employment as cultural communicators (Douglas and Isherwood 1979).

Despite being suggested more than 30 years ago as a viable consumer research method (Belk et al. 1988), ethnography has only recently become popular in consumer behaviour (Hill 1991 and 1992b). Originating in anthropology where it was primarily used to study small indigenous groups (Marcus 1986; Bagramov 1977), ethnography is now advocated as an effective research tool to be used in the marketing discipline, and in consumer behaviour in particular (Cova 1996; Otnes 1996). Arnould and Wallendorf
(1994) have specifically discussed the benefits of ethnography for market-related research, suggesting that product ethnographies performed for their own sake rather than in the interests of marketers have the potential to illuminate the meanings of products in consumers' lives. Belk (1990) discusses ethnography as a method that can provide thick description that offers insight into the ways of life of others. Given Geertz's (1975) arguments in favour of the intense examination of the day-to-day lives of culture-members, ethnographic methods provide a useful means of combining the variables of culture and consumption.

A CaK application of ethnography seeks to identify a "truth" that is based on the assumption that the ethnographer, through a position of assumed authority, has the ability to represent the informant's viewpoint without distorting it (see Holt 1991 for a discussion of this point). A CaP application acknowledges that as ethnographic research is emic in design (i.e., it attempts to describe occurrences as they are experienced by the subject [Venkatesh 1995; Arnould and Wallendorf 1994]), efforts to make it more objective in nature are futile (Thompson 1990). Ethnographic research conducted from the CaP perspective acknowledges its role as an instrument designed to add insight into human behaviour, with the ethnographer presenting one version of the "reality" of the life of the informant, a version that is at least partially determined by the characteristics of the researcher (Holt 1991). As such, the ethnographic account is perceived as a partial truth, just like all other social research findings in the CaP perspective (Rhedding-Jones 1996; Harper 1994).

The interpretation of ethnographic outputs as partial truths is especially relevant to the CaP concern with consumer autonomy. Sirgy (1982) suggests that consumers may be unable to differentiate between their own personal feelings towards a product and the anticipated perceptions of others. If it is possible that consumers are unable to differentiate between their own preferences and those of some larger group, research methods that assume that access is being gained to some truth may fail to fully identify the influences of external forces over consumption choices (Venkatesh 1995). The CaP application of ethnography that accepts informants' viewpoints as subjective accounts is more open to the acknowledgement of the influences of macro forces on behaviour (Celsi et al. 1993).
Trustworthiness Issues

Trustworthiness as applied to qualitative research has been defined as the credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability of the data and the resulting interpretation (Lincoln and Guba 1985). These four items have been offered in lieu of the traditional criteria of internal and external validity, reliability, and objectivity (Denzin and Lincoln 1994; Wallendorf and Belk 1989). While to many researchers guidelines for qualitative techniques are critical (e.g., Robrecht 1995; Wallendorf and Belk 1989), others argue that they fail to guarantee a bias-free interpretation of a given culture while increasing the risk of distancing the researcher from the informant and stifling creativity (Johnson 1990; Rose 1990; Punch 1986). CaK researchers with their focus on “correctly” portraying the “reality” of the consumer are likely to favour trustworthiness criteria (e.g., Wallendorf and Belk 1989). By comparison, CaP researchers with their acknowledgment of the unattainability of a “correct” representation of informants’ realities would consider these criteria to be pointless and restrictive (e.g., Richardson 1994).

The techniques suggested to improve the quality of research results obtained via naturalistic research methods include (Wallendorf and Belk 1989; Belk et al. 1989; Lincoln and Guba 1985)²:

- researching in natural settings;
- purposive sampling;
- cross-context testing for transferability;
- depth and intimacy in interviewing;
- prolonged and persistent observation;
- negative case analysis (i.e., asking questions designed to identify exceptions to the patterns becoming apparent in the results obtained);
- debriefing by peers;
- member checks (where respondents are asked to comment on the interpretations generated from their input);
- independent audits;
- the maintenance of exhaustive journals; and
- triangulation across sources, sites, researchers, methods, and data collection media.

² At this stage the objective is merely to outline the criteria of trustworthiness as employed in the CaK perspective. For a discussion of the use (or non-use) of these criteria in this thesis, refer to Chapter 4.
Triangulation refers to using a combination of measures (Huberman and Miles 1994; Denzin and Lincoln 1994). This can occur between methodologies at a macro level, such as a combination of quantitative and qualitative approaches, or at a micro level, such as combining interviewing with observations (Lincoln and Guba 1985).

Many of these trustworthiness criteria have been strongly criticised as being impractical or even undesirable (Rose 1990; Kosnik and Bonoma 1986). Thompson (1990) questions the wisdom of advocating prolonged engagement on the one hand and an external auditor on the other, arguing that the need for one excludes the relevance of the other. His argument is that both the interviewee and the interviewer have their own perceptions of reality, and any attempts by one to describe the reality of the other will be fraught with problems of interpretation. Thus where auditors are introduced to verify the interpretation of the researcher's data, their interpretations are equally as prone to idiosyncrasy as the original researcher's, if not more so due to their limited exposure to the study. Member checks are also contentious. Wallendorf and Belk (1989) warn that the researcher's interpretation will not always agree with informants' understandings of their own behaviours. These tensions remain unresolved among those using qualitative research methods.

With the increasing tension between modern and postmodern approaches to consumer research, the issue of trustworthiness has become increasingly controversial. While the limitations of triangulation and other trustworthiness criteria are acknowledged within the CaP perspective, there is also a concern that the application of postmodern principles to the issue of data collection can result in a lack of direction, leaving the researcher in a parameter-less limbo (Rhedding-Jones 1996). This issue is recognised within postmodernism, with postmodernists acknowledging the difficulties inherent in “researching the unresearchable” (Brown 1994, p. 44). As such, some of these criteria are considered appropriate in the CaP perspective, such as researching in natural settings and purposive sampling (Johnson 1990). In addition, Rhedding-Jones (1996) has recommended several ways of integrating a postmodern outlook with research activities. These include reporting multiple findings, conceding the impossibility of correctly representing social phenomena, permitting many voices to be heard in the data, and combining the researcher and the subject.
Summary

This literature review has covered the theoretical treatment of culture as it relates to consumer autonomy. It has been demonstrated that although not explicitly stated in the literature, major disagreement exists as to the relative autonomy of the consumer in current consumer theories. The postmodern approach as encompassed in the CaP perspective provides a theoretical framework with which to view the individual as less autonomous than has been assumed to date.

In the early years of consumer research, culture was considered to be an exogenous variable of little operational interest. Viewed as a utility maximising individual, the consumer was granted the freedom to enact any form of consumption as long as it was accommodated by income. The macro view of consumption that has recently become more popular takes a much more direct interest in culture and its implications for consumption. In the CaK perspective, consumers are viewed as both symbolism and utility maximising creatures, considered capable of choosing the extent to which they abide by culture’s requirements. The autonomy of the consumer remains intact, with individuals perceived as masters of their consumption domains. By comparison, the CaP perspective acknowledges the power of culture over the consumption behaviours of individuals. The consumer is viewed as a conditioned individual who makes consumption decisions on the basis of learned criteria. Instead of consciously maximising utility or symbolic outcomes, consumers are seen to be reactive and passive. Their efforts are directed at mastering the symbolic meaning resident in a range of relevant goods and services in order to interact effectively in the world in which they live. Rather than masters of their consumption domains, consumers are perceived to be constrained on every front, with resulting consumption decisions emanating from a combination of culturally acquired expectations and marketing suggestion.

It is thus apparent that the consumer as the focal point of consumer behaviour theory experiences a radical difference in role between the two perspectives. These differences in the ways in which the consumer can be viewed relate to interpretations of the processes of cultural meaning transfer and self-concept construction. Both concepts have been discussed by advocates of the CaK and the CaP perspectives, and each is offered as evidence of the degree of individual autonomy purported by each perspective. Cultural meaning changes from being considered the work of individuals and cultural
forces alike in the CaK perspective, to being conceived as purely in the hands of culturally dominant individuals and institutions in the CaP perspective. Similarly, the self-concept ranges from being highly malleable by the individual consumer, to being effectively externally determined. Self-concept formation ranges from being viewed as the inherently enjoyable work of the consumer, to being a difficult process that can be unrewarding.

The differences between the CaK and CaP perspectives are largely theoretical, with little documented empirical evidence available to specifically support either position. Research undertaken from within the CaK position has assumed a significant level of consumer autonomy, and the tendency to examine consumption at the level of the individual has served to reinforce this interpretation. CaP advocates would argue for a more holistic analysis of consumption in order to trace more effectively the macro forces at work behind consumption decisions. This may be achieved by studying the societal consumption of particular products, as well as by studying the consumption activities of individual consumers. Research methods such as ethnography can assist in both of these forms of analysis.

While these two perspectives are presented here as dichotomous, they offer consumer researchers alternative ways of interpreting consumption behaviours. It is likely that both can be useful in understanding specific consumers and product categories. Rather than adopting one or the other as “truth”, a more useful approach may be to seek examples of each among the many variations of consumers and consumption behaviours.
CHAPTER THREE - AUSTRALIAN CULTURE

This chapter examines Australian culture as it is described in a wide range of literature sources. The purpose is to provide a background to the analysis of beer consumption within the Australian context that is to follow in chapter 5. Consistent with a postmodern approach, this literature review combines input from academic literature with more informal sources. For example, novels set within the Australian context have provided insight into the workings of the culture as it is experienced by some of its members (for a discussion of the use of fiction in research see Glaser and Strauss 1967). Similarly, newspaper articles have contributed significantly to this discussion of Australian culture, as they represent an up-to-date and self-analytical approach to different aspects of Australian culture. These non-academic sources have been employed as valuable additional resources in constructing an interpretation of Australian culture. It was found that this eclectic approach yielded insights into Australian culture that were not forthcoming from the academic literature alone. Together, these disparate sources of information provide a picture of Australian culture as it exists today, with some reference also made to its past nature.

History

Australia’s convict beginnings have impacted upon the nature of the development of Australian culture. King (1978, p. 38) discusses how the “every man for himself” mentality fostered by the penal colony environment created a materialistic bent that has survived to modern times. He posits that wealth generation is the primary motivation for many Australians, which combined with a solid disrespect for authority figures has resulted in a population characterised by very individualistic tendencies. The pattern of migration since the cessation of convict transportation to Australia has consolidated this tendency, as migrants separated from the familiarity and security of their home cultures have responded well to the call of materialism (King 1978).

Alcohol consumption has been an important part of the Australian lifestyle from the time of settlement. The convicts drank for amusement and rebellion, taking pleasure in an activity that could temporarily transport them from their surroundings (King 1978). By the early 1880s there was one pub for around every 88 people living in Sydney, and this number did not include the numerous alcohol shops that were not...
attached to public houses (Conway 1985). At this time there were also around 190 breweries, although this number had more than halved soon after Federation in 1901 (Harvey 1994). The early years of Australian settlement saw a very high male to female arrival rate (Morse and Marks 1985), and until 1960, female immigrants were still in the minority (Graetz and McAllister 1988). This male-dominated society was very conducive to heavy drinking, along with a limited range of other pastimes such as sport and wealth accumulation (Horne 1988).

The concept of “the Australian way of life” has evolved gradually, but was initially introduced in the 1940s as a response to three external forces. White (1979) lists these as the increasing numbers of immigrants from regions other than Britain, the threat of communism, and the cultural influence of America. He suggests that these three elements resulted in pressures to preserve existing cultural norms, which were considered superior to those that were encroaching upon Australia from outside. The concept of the Australian way of life thus provided the instrument to generate an emotional public response to these perceived threats. In terms of government policy, it was effectively a justification for an assimilation policy for both immigrants and Aboriginees (Tavan 1997; White 1979). Immigration intensified at the end of WWII, and until the 1970s the emphasis was on migrant assimilation into the Australian lifestyle (Graetz and McAllister 1988). Importantly, over the years since its inception, the term “the Australian way of life” has come to include an expectation of material affluence (Tavan 1997).

The nature of Australia’s early settlement has resulted in the legend of the Outback, which is characterised by the male bush worker (Melleuish 1995). This image has proven remarkably resilient, with many modern-day Australians still exhibiting a cognitive connection with the bush character who is effectively a myth for most (Mackay 1993; Moorhouse 1984). For some time now, analysts have been pointing out that Australia is in fact a nation of suburb-dwellers rather than bush-dwellers (e.g., Wilson 1998; Ross 1990; Horne 1988), with more than 80% of Australians living in major population centres (Australian Bureau of Statistics [ABS] 1997a). However, the image of the bush-dweller continues to hold a prime position in the minds of Australians (Mackay 1993; Moorhouse 1984). For example, it was not until the 1950s that books about Australia began to use photographs of the Sydney Harbour Bridge, Bondi, and Kings Cross rather than bush scenes to symbolise life in Australia (White 1986).
1979). Despite this reluctance to give up the bush myth, the suburbs are holding an increasingly important place in Australian culture, and to some they represent the essence of the Australian lifestyle (see for example Healy 1994). In the move towards new symbols of Australian life, the beach and the suburbs are forming the modern myths of Australian culture (Fiske et al. 1987).

Australia Today

As a society, non-Aboriginal Australia is very young (Wilson 1998; Gibson 1993). This has led some to conclude that Australia has no “culture” to speak of (Watts 1998). Analysts are still seeking evidence of a national identity (e.g., Mackay 1993), with critics often pointing to a perception among Australians that their culture lacks legitimacy (Tavan 1997; King 1978). The sheer size of the Australian continent contributes to the difficulties experienced when attempting to define or describe Australian culture. Federation has resulted in differing perceptions of Australian culture by region, with many Australians viewing Australia as a nation being effectively the same as their own particular state or city (Horne 1988). Definitions of Australia and Australian culture have also been complicated by the inherited nature of the culture, initially from Britain and subsequently also from other countries (Keneally 1984; King 1978). This lack of cultural or national definition prompts many writers to attempt to develop a definitive description of Australian culture (Fiske et al. 1987). A tendency in social commentary is to consider Australian culture as an amalgamation of famous national landmarks and other icons, neglecting the human components of the culture (Rowse and Moran 1990). The overuse of such icons disguises the experience of life in Australia, and neglects the important elements of Australian culture that are present in other countries to a greater or lesser extent (Rowse and Moran 1990).

Where key words are used to represent Australia, they typically include one or more of the four Bs: the bush (e.g., Matthews 1997; Moorhouse 1984; King 1978), the beach (e.g., Slattery 1997; Fiske et al. 1987), barbecues (e.g., Healy 1994; Bedwell 1992; Moorhouse 1984), and beer (e.g., Slattery 1997; Bedwell 1992; Horne 1988; Conway 1985; White 1979). (See Appendix K for an illustration of some of these key elements of Australian culture.) Stereotyped images of Australia often present a culture in which respect for authority is not generally forthcoming (Lusetich 1997; Feather 1986; King 1978), where “low” forms of culture (e.g., television) are prized more than
“high” culture (King 1978; e.g., Strickland 1998), and where people are generally disinterested in hard work (Horne 1988; Fiske et al. 1987; Archer 1984). The last point has been suggested to have resulted in an environment in which professional success is not regarded as especially desirable (Dewhirst 1989; Horne 1988). Instead, Australians are seen to value their leisure time over their career aspirations (Mackay 1993). It is therefore not surprising that each of the four descriptors of Australian culture (i.e., the bush, the beach, barbecues, and beer) are also representative of activities undertaken by every-day Australians in their leisure time.

Fiske et al. (1987) propose that the stereotypes of Australian culture listed above arise from trying to describe a complex culture in a few short sentences. They note the need for a description that engenders more than a single definition, stating that a comprehensive understanding of Australian life is required, one that encompasses “the whole way of life of a people, their customs and rituals, their pastimes and pleasures, including not only the arts but also practices such as sport and going to the beach” (1987, p.viii). Such a description would take into account mundane factors, including the clothes that are worn, how leisure time is utilised, and other facets of day-to-day life. They argue that “Australianness” should be seen as a system of meanings that, when combined, encompass many aspects of Australian life.

Stereotypes at the level of the individual are prevalent in Australian culture. It is effectively impossible to describe a typical Australian, as ethnic, gender, age, and social differences preclude any such generalisation (Rowse and Moran 1990; Rowse 1978). As a multicultural nation in which over 140 cultures are represented (Mackay 1997a; Ho 1990), the benefits of a description of an average Australian are questionable. Australian stereotypes, however, are alive and well (O'Regan 1993). Stereotypes typically focus on the Anglo-Saxon component of the population, ignoring the significant proportion of the population that derives from non-British backgrounds (Meade 1997; Graetz and McAllister 1988). These stereotypes have much in common with the assumptions often made about Australian culture as discussed above. Australians are often seen to be lacking in confidence, both in themselves and in their country (Powell 1997; Horne 1988). They have a reputation (among themselves as well as others) for laziness, although this co-exists with the stereotype of the hard-working bushman and the Aussie battler (Mackay 1993; Fiske et al. 1987). The Australian male (and most stereotypes
refer to the male of the species) is seen to be lacking in feelings and compassion, or at least unable to communicate these emotions (Conway 1985).

Alcohol plays a major role in Australian stereotypes, with beer being particularly associated with the Australian lifestyle (Fiske et al. 1987). The connection between Australians and alcohol consumption is not misplaced, as Australians are the twentieth largest per capita consumers of alcohol in the world, particularly in the consumption of beer where they rank ninth on a per capita basis (Productschap Voor Gedistilleerde Dranken 1997). Australians are also renowned for being heavy consumers of meat products (Conway 1985), with the average Australian consuming 76kg of meat each year (ABS 1996/97). With Australian stereotypes oriented so heavily around consumption, the study of these consumption patterns offers a useful and productive way of exploring Australian culture and expanding our knowledge and comprehension of Australian lifestyles.

A Culture in a State of Flux

According to Australian social commentator Hugh Mackay (1993), Australia is in a phase of rapid social change, which he calls a cultural revolution. The result is a widespread reconsideration of the stereotypes discussed above, with many long-standing assumptions of the nature of Australian culture becoming inappropriate (Mackay 1993). Advances in technology alone have contributed greatly to the social changes currently being experienced (Hollands 1997). Mackay (1993, 1997a) nominates several specific areas of cultural change, including evolving gender roles, the redistribution of income, changing family structures, increasing affiliation with the USA, and escalating levels of stress and anxiety. While some suggest that Australian culture has now achieved its own unique character (e.g., Porter 1997), Mackay (1993) argues that in this period of cultural flux, cultural identity remains a source of underlying tension among Australians.

Mackay (1993, 1997a) suggests that the rate of change in Australia is too fast for many Australians to comfortably adjust to the changing social environment. The result is uncertainty and stress, which is manifest in a variety of social problems (Safe 1998). Divorce rates are escalating to the extent that in 1997 almost a quarter of Australian children were living with only one of their natural parents (ABS 1997c), and Australia
is now included among those countries in the world with the highest rates of lone parenthood (Birrell and Rapson 1997). Suicide rates in Australia peak in the group under 30 years of age, and this is the only country in the world to exhibit this distribution of deaths by suicide (Mackay 1997a). Crime rates are increasing, with the largest increases occurring in those categories relating to crimes against property, especially theft (ABS 1997d). In 1997, over 670,000 Australians were victims of some form of theft, be it armed robbery, unarmed robbery, motor vehicle theft, or unlawful entry involving theft (ABS 1997d). In a population of around 18.5 million people (ABS 1997a), this represents a significant number. These crime statistics suggest that the desire to possess certain objects has intensified in Australian society, and/or that social stratification is increasing to the point that the have-nots are acquiring consumer goods through the only means available to them.

The following discussion centres around cultural change in terms of several specific elements of Australian culture, namely social class structures, gender roles, value systems, and mateship. These elements combine to offer a perspective of life in Australia in a period of significant transition, where anxiety levels are increasing and consumers are faced with uncertainty.

**Social Class**

The conception of Australia as a classless society has long been popular (Long 1999; Manne 1998; Horne 1988; White 1979; e.g., Rowse 1978). To justify this position, some point to a level of economic equality that makes concerns over class distinctions irrelevant (e.g., DeMuth 1997; Horne 1988; Conway 1974). While there has always been a distinction between blue- and white-collar workers, Australians have not historically perceived occupational differences of this sort to constitute class differences (Mackay 1993). In fact, many Australians have prided themselves on their status as a “worker”, with solidarity among workers being a valued cultural characteristic (Mackay 1993; Dewhirst 1989). Simultaneously, Australians in general have considered themselves to be middle class (Mackay 1997a). In more recent years, the polarisation of income distribution has reduced economic equality and the previously large middle class to the extent that Australia must now be recognised as a stratified society (Long 1999; Manne 1998; Neill 1996; Mackay 1993, 1997a). Of all Australian children under the age of fifteen, 43% now live in welfare-dependent families (Birrell and Rapson
As a result of this increasing stratification, there is now more emphasis placed on seeking social approval through the attainment of white-collar, or even executive, status (Conway 1985). These changes in the social structure have implications for self-definition, as many Australians are now uncertain as to which social class they belong (Mackay 1997a; Neill 1996).

**Gender roles**

The traditional demarcation in gender roles has been quite pronounced in Australian society, with males typically classified as breadwinners and females as home-makers (Healy 1994). In previous decades the nature of gender roles was determined early, as children were raised - by both parents and educators - in different ways according to gender (Conway 1974). Consequently, Australian males and females have lived out their lives with very different expectations of appropriate behaviour for members according to gender. The result has been a segregated society where men and women have worked and socialised in different places and in different ways. Despite the fact that Australian females are now enjoying the levels of education that were traditionally confined to males (Mackay 1997a), the Australian workforce remains one of the most segregated in the developed world (ABS 1998). In terms of socialising, the classic example has been the state of affairs at the typical Australian party (Horne 1988, p. 81):

> At parties men stood at one end of the room and talked about sport, money, motor cars - and women. At the other end of the room women sat and talked about children, homes, undies - and men.

There has been an historical emphasis on masculinity in Australia (Fiske et al. 1987), which has been manifest in considerable societal pressure on Australian men to conform to the profile of the hard-drinking man’s man (Cox 1997; Horne 1988; Donovan Research 1988; Conway 1985). They have been expected to demonstrate the appropriate level of bravado when in the presence of their peers (Yallop 1997), a requirement that is suspected to cover underlying insecurities (King 1978). According to Conway (1985, p. 122), the result has been a conception of masculinity within Australian culture that “is about as attainable as that of James Bond and as functional as that of Fred Flintstone.” Critics have been scathing of the Australian male’s inability to communicate emotions and overcome “matey” peer pressure (e.g., Conway 1985 and King 1978). In more recent years, however, some softening of the male demeanour has been noted among the younger members of the Australian male population (Mackay...
1993; Conway 1985). At the same time, there has been a notable change in gender roles in Australian culture, particularly in the home and the workplace (Mackay 1997a; Fiske et al. 1987). These changes are more pronounced for the female role, which is in the process of significant transition (Mackay 1993).

For a long time seen as peripheral to the male population, Australian females have lacked the strong cultural stereotype that has accrued to males (Conway 1985). More recently, the female has progressed from being viewed as socially destined to live a life of personal sacrifices as the property of the male to being a fully-fledged Australian in her own right (Matthews 1997; King 1978). Mackay (1993) discusses at length the nature of this change in the female role, and his conclusion is that the definition of gender roles has been the most influential factor in the changes occurring in Australian culture over the past twenty years. He notes that the number of working women has increased dramatically, resulting in a reshuffle in the ways in which both homes and workplaces are organised. An ABS study of Australian social trends (ABS 1998) showed that as of March 1998, 43% of employed Australians were female. The report attributes this figure to changes in both legislation and social attitudes, although it is noted that females still tend to be employed primarily in traditionally female occupations. The trend towards more women in the workplace has been marked by an increase in the levels of personal stress experienced by Australians in general, and females in particular as they try to fulfil multiple roles (Carruthers and Pryor 1998; Mackay 1993). The assimilation of women into the workplace is far from complete, as many Australian men continue to resent the intrusion, believing that the role of breadwinner belongs first and foremost to males (Mackay 1993).

**Values**

The Australian value system has been inherited largely from Britain, with current values reminiscent of Australia's colonial past (Hill 1990; Horne 1988; de Lacey and Poole 1979). There are several consistent themes throughout the literature pertaining to Australian cultural values. These include: the priority given to family life (Horne 1988); the possession of specific material objects, including the family home (Mackay 1997a; Horne 1988; White 1979); independence (Tedmanson 1998; Fiske et al. 1987); the importance of leisure time (Mackay 1993; Bedwell 1992; Horne 1988); solidarity and mateship (Devine 1998; Fiske et al. 1987); individualism (White 1979);
holding a job (Horne 1988; Fiske et al. 1987); toughness and endurance (Devine 1998; Matthews 1997); freedom (White 1979); privacy (Conway 1974; Horne 1988); and egalitarianism (Devine 1998; Fiske et al. 1987).

At this point it is useful to briefly discuss Hofstede's cross-cultural study of cultural values. Hofstede's work is arguably the broadest and most intensive cross-cultural analysis ever conducted (see Hofstede 1984 and 1993; Franke et al. 1991; Hofstede and Bond 1988). Spanning over forty countries, his study was based on a theoretical and statistical analysis of the trends evident in data gathered from groups of employees in different branches of the same multinational company - IBM (Hofstede 1984). Hofstede (1984) proposed four cultural dimensions: individualism, power distance, masculinity, and uncertainty avoidance. Individualism and masculinity were derived from factor analysis, while power distance and uncertainty avoidance resulted from theoretical analysis (Franke et al. 1991). A concern for the biases associated with analysing one's own culture led Hofstede to compare his results with those obtained by Chinese social scientists in a similar study called the Chinese Value Survey (CVS) (Hofstede and Bond 1988). By combining results they were able to identify one other factor that may account for some of the cultural differences between Eastern and Western cultures. This fifth dimension was called Confucian dynamism (Franke et al. 1991; Hofstede and Bond 1988). Each of these five dimensions is described in Appendix L. Briefly, the individualism dimension measures the inclination of a culture to favour consideration of the individual over that of the group (Hofstede 1993), power distance reflects how a society as a whole rates the need for hierarchical structures in all facets of life (Franke et al. 1991), the masculinity dimension describes the extent to which the male and female roles within the society are polarised (Hofstede and Bond 1988), uncertainty avoidance refers to the level of discomfort experienced by members of a particular culture when faced with unstructured, unusual, or ambiguous situations (Franke et al. 1991), and Confucian dynamism relates to the degree of financial conservatism and long-term orientation exhibited within a culture (Hofstede and Bond 1988).

Hofstede’s cross-cultural study of cultural values included an analysis of Australian culture. In terms of his five dimensions, Australia was found at the time of the study to be highly individualistic, to be relatively low in power distance, to be slightly masculine, to be low in uncertainty avoidance, and to be low in Confucian dynamism (Hofstede 1984). These findings largely reflect the themes in the literature,
with high individualism and low Confucian dynamism being particularly salient. These characteristics, with their emphasis on the needs of the individual and the short term, provide a cultural environment that is conducive to an emphasis on consumption activities. One area of difference between the Australian literature and Hofstede’s study is the masculinity dimension. Australian writers frequently point to the masculine nature of Australian culture, noting the historical polarisation between male and female roles (e.g., Healy 1994; Fiske et al. 1987). However, Australia failed to rank anywhere near the high end of Hofstede’s masculinity dimension. Perhaps the Australian definition of masculinity differs significantly from that of other cultures, or else the Australian infatuation with masculinity is exaggerated in the light of more intensely masculine cultures such as Japan.

Although Australian values have been changing for some time (Mackay 1997a; Rowse 1978), some still point to the need in Australian society for a new set of values that are better suited to the needs and lifestyles of modern Australians (e.g., Mackay 1993; Fiske et al. 1987). Such a period of change in values is an inherently uncomfortable process for many, especially for groups who feel compelled to hold the outgoing and the incoming sets of values simultaneously. Mackay (1993, 1997a) gives the example of women who are attempting to fulfil the expectations associated with both family values and feminist values, and he notes the high levels of tension that accompany this uncomfortable reconciliation. Younger Australians are particularly influenced by the changes in values that are occurring, as they have generally experienced high levels of disrupting factors such as divorce and unemployment rates (Mackay 1993, 1997a). A result has been a revision of the work ethic and other traditional values among members of this age group as they face increasing social and economic pressures (Tedmanson 1998). These changing values are in direct contradiction to the expectations of older Australians that their children will settle down in respectable employment to prepare for families of their own, as described by Horne (1988). There are thus pronounced differences emerging between older and younger Australians, adding to the general levels of stress and anxiety evident in Australian society (Mackay 1997a).
The tradition of mateship has been long associated with Australian culture. It is said to have derived from the need of the early Australian male to settle into a harsh new environment, often without the presence of women (Morse and Marks 1985). Mateship is strongly connected to egalitarianism in the Australian psyche, and both of these values are linked to the historical forces that have shaped Australian culture (Feather 1986). As Australia was settled largely by working class immigrants from Britain, it is not surprising that working class values such as mateship have permeated Australian society (Morse and Marks 1985). However, the British ethos of mateship has come to attain a cultural significance in Australia that it lacks in Britain (Morse and Marks 1985). This phenomenon is perhaps due to the particular characteristics of Australia’s settlement as discussed earlier.

In Australia, the term ‘mate’ was used originally to describe the working partner assigned to the bush worker (Eccleston 1998). Morse and Marks (1985) sought out the meaning of the term “mateship” to Australians in the early 1980s. While fraught with sampling problems, their study did provide insight into the way in which Australians perceive each other in their social relationships. Their results indicate that while the term “mate” is normally associated with working class males, it is also sometimes employed by middle class males, and occasionally by females.

The concept of mateship has weakened over the years, as individual success has become more attractive to Australians (Eccleston 1998; Conway 1985; Rowse 1978). The term “mate” is now used much more loosely, with its application to strangers and acquaintances becoming acceptable and frequent (Horne 1988). It can even be used in warning to those who are annoying the speaker (Eccleston 1998; King 1978). This change in the status of those called mates has caused some to question the existence of mateship as a true Australian value at any stage of Australian history. King (1978) is emphatic that the lack of social skills of the average Australian male has effectively prevented him from attaining the levels of mateship that have been mythologised in Australian culture. Instead, he suggests that mateship has merely provided Australian men with companionship in their efforts to escape from the responsibilities of the family home. This leads him to conclude that the bonds between Australians are no greater than those between members of other cultures. Horne (1988) also refers to the myth of mateship, commenting that it has been conjoined with the myth of Australian heavy
drinking. Mateship has thus provided a degree of justification for the drinking behaviour for which Australian males are renowned. Conway (1985) takes the position that mateship has been crucial in the past, but that it has been downgraded in recent times in line with the increasing trend towards individualism. According to his interpretation, mates can now be seen as friends who do small things for each other, rather than lifelong comrades who are connected by some unbreakable bond.

**Materialism**

A consistent theme throughout the literature is the importance that Australians place on material possessions. Some see materialism as the primary guiding force in the behaviour of Australians due to a weak sense of personal and cultural identity (e.g., King 1978), while others consider materialism to be just one of the many attributes that define an Australian (e.g., Mackay 1997a; Horne 1988; White 1979). According to Hoskins (1994), just the spatial dimensions of Australian suburbs speak volumes about a materialistic nature, and Horne (1988, p.26) has described Australians as possessing a "strong materialist streak". King (1978) discusses how a lack of other commonalities (such as religion or tradition) causes Australians to value money and goods above all else. He sees the inevitable outcome to be a materialistic society where keeping up with the consumption levels of others becomes a primary motivation, one that is inherently stressful for the individual. Mackay (1997a, p. 113) comments that although many Australians are now realising that they are "hooked on materialism", this recognition has not prevented them from continuing to seek security through their possessions.

As mentioned previously, ownership of the family home is frequently posited to be an important Australian ambition. Many specific smaller possessions are also considered "must-haves" in Australian culture, including telephones (Long 1997; Neill 1996), kitchen appliances (Mackay 1993; Bedwell 1992), cars (Mackay 1997a; Healy 1994; Horne 1988; King 1978), televisions and VCRs (Healy 1994; Mackay 1997a; Hill 1990; Horne 1988), and various forms of music-playing equipment (Mackay 1993; Bedwell 1992). The desire to possess these products is such that consumers are willing to go into debt to obtain them (King 1978).

While the consumption of consumer goods is a vehicle for the social conformity that provides safety and security, King (1978) notes that the need to consume in order to
obtain these benefits becomes an invisible constraint in itself. As an illustration of their relative materialism, Australians have been found to adopt new products at faster speeds than many other countries (Hill 1990; for example, Long 1997 discusses the high rate of adoption of mobile phones). Consumer goods assist in the provision of the meaning of life for Australians (Horne 1988), and as such they have become an important part of the Australian lifestyle (Bedwell 1992). As discussed in chapter 2, possessions can provide a sense of identity (Fiske et al. 1987), and this is becoming increasingly relevant as social class distinctions are becoming more pronounced in Australia (Mackay 1993). The result is a culture in which expectations of product ownership continue to increase, leading the consumer to ever-increasing levels of consumption (Wilson 1998; Neill 1996).

This emphasis on materialism is interesting in a society where the production of manufactured goods is relatively low. Hill (1990, p. 283) describes Australian culture as “tonnage out, lifestyle in”, referring to the economic reliance on primary industries rather than the manufacturing sector. This state of affairs has resulted in a dependence on consumer goods imported from other countries (de Lepervanche 1990). Over the years many Australians have come to distrust locally produced products, perceiving imports as more symbolically desirable and often higher in quality (Mackay 1993; King 1978). A notable exception has been the bush-related products for which city-based Australians have demonstrated a passion (Mackay 1993; King 1978). R.M. Williams, the famous Australian bush-attire company, has experienced a turnaround in their customer base to the extent that they now sell more of their shoes and clothing to city-dwellers than to residents of the Outback (Moorhouse 1984). It has become very fashionable in the cities to “look as if one has just returned from – or is about to leave for – rural pursuits” (Mackay 1993, p. 220).

A general tendency in the Western world towards passive, individualistic consumption was noted in chapter 2. Australian commentators have observed this occurrence to be pronounced in Australia (Yallop 1997). The rapid adoption of products such as video games and personal CD players has facilitated a change in Australian lifestyles that has reduced human interaction and increased autonomous activities (Mackay 1993; Bedwell 1992). Family disintegration has in turn encouraged greater use of such products (Mackay 1993). Even the nuclear family, where it remains intact, has served to encourage much greater consumption of such products than occurs in systems
characterised by extended family structures (Dye 1998). Mackay (1993) views an outcome of this increasing individualisation of consumption to be a heightening of anxiety among Australian consumers. In addition, he discusses how the increasing use of credit and technology in retailing has depersonalised the shopping experience to the extent that consumer anxiety is further exacerbated.

Leisure

The ways in which people organise and experience their leisure time indicates much about their culture (Holbrook and Hirschman 1982). In Australian culture in particular, there is symbolic meaning to be found in the ways in which people utilise their non-working hours (Fiske et al. 1987). Implicit in the term “The Australian Way of Life” is an emphasis on leisure, an emphasis that has historically served to divert attention from any differences in social standing (Rowse and Moran 1990; White 1979). Rather than just being an important aspect of Australian life, leisure has been argued by some to be the meaning of life for the average Australian (e.g., Horne 1988). The dominance of leisure in the minds of Australians is apparent in the over-representation of leisure scenes in advertisements compared to work scenes (Rowse and Moran 1990).

It is also evident in the specific areas set aside in the family home for leisure activities, such as the television room, the games room, and the outdoor pool area (Fiske et al. 1987).

The Australian Bureau of Statistics defines leisure as “the free time people have for pursuits other than those which are necessary, contracted or committed” (ABS 1992, p. 349). Leisure is then divided into passive leisure (e.g., watching television and reading), active leisure (e.g., activities such as sport), volunteer work, and social life and entertainment. Adult Australians on average dedicate 23% of their day to leisure, with passive activities accounting for just over half of this leisure time (ABS 1992). Twenty-four per cent of leisure time has been found to be devoted to social life and entertainment (ABS 1992). Active pastimes such as sport and hobbies account for 13% of leisure time, while volunteer and religious activities account for less than 5% (ABS 1992). Employed married females typically have the lowest levels of leisure, averaging at 18% per day (ABS 1992). This figure actually represents an increase in female leisure time, as traditionally leisure time and leisure activities in Australia have been the domain of the male members of the culture (Horne 1988). White (1979) cites a 1948
Gallop Poll in which almost half of the women surveyed claimed that they had virtually no leisure time.

Horne (1988) counters the argument that Australians are lazy because of their attitudes to work by arguing that they are instead deliberately focused on their leisure. By proposing that Australians “work hard at their leisure,” Horne (1988, p. 18) manages to avoid the lazy stereotype that has been popular in the literature (e.g., Archer 1984). Mackay (1993) agrees that Australians have always had a serious attitude to their holidays. Paradoxically, leisure is a concept that is reliant on the performance of work (Fiske et al. 1987), so those with no work cannot have leisure (Mackay 1993). Work and leisure are therefore inseparable, with work providing the means with which people can enjoy their leisure. Even though leisure is often the priority, to remain unemployed in Australia is generally considered to be personally and socially irresponsible (Fiske et al. 1997).

Australians exhibit some notable trends in their uses of leisure time. Watching television is the primary form of passive leisure activity (Rowse and Moran 1990), with adult Australians spending on average between 10 and 15 hours per week watching television, depending on marital and parental status (ABS 1994). An ABS study found that 94% of Australians over the age of 14 had watched television in the week prior to the survey (ABS 1992). Another study found that almost all Australian homes have a television set, with almost 60% possessing two or more televisions (ABS 1997b). Almost 80% of homes also have a VCR (ABS 1997b). Television has thus become one of the main ways in which Australians interact with the culture in which they live (King 1978), and it provides them with much of their understanding of the Australian identity (O'Regan 1993). This is particularly the case for Australian teenagers, who can receive much of their socialisation via television (McCaughan 1995).

The lack of representation of non-Anglo-Saxon cultures on Australian television becomes an issue when the socialisation role of television is acknowledged (Meade 1997). Similarly, the high levels of imported content on Australian television have implications for the self-perceptions of Australians (McCaughan 1995). Approximately half of the content on Australian television is imported, with American and British content dominating the imported content (O'Regan 1993; Rowse and Moran 1990). The influence of American programming content has been particularly noted, due to the
tendency for Australian teenagers to emulate American clothing and music fashions (McCaughan 1995). However, O'Regan (1993) argues that the Americanisation of Australia is more imagined than real, proposing that Australians take television much less seriously than is often assumed. King (1978) takes the opposite view to the power of television, describing Australians as prisoners of television, suggesting that they are incapable of extracting themselves from viewing habits derived from conditioning that informs them that there is nothing else to expect from life. The result is that Australian consumers feel compelled to strive for the pleasures promised in television programming and advertising, which King (1978) views as an inherently futile objective.

In terms of active leisure, Australians pride themselves on their interest in sport (Horne 1988). The Australian Bureau of Statistics has stated that sport and recreation are “a vital component of the Australian way of living” (ABS 1997f, p. 1). Almost a third of Australians aged 15 years and over participated in sport over the last 12 months, although the participation rate was typically higher among males than females (39.8% and 25.2% respectively) (ABS 1997f). When the category of sport is expanded to include all forms of exercise (rather than just organised sporting activities), the proportion increases to two-thirds of the Australian population aged 15 years and over (ABS 1995). The passive activity of sport spectating is an important part of the Australian infatuation with sport (Conway 1985; King 1978), and over a third of Australians attend sporting events such as football games and horse racing each year (ABS 1997f). Interest in sport is not an optional activity for the approval-seeking Australian male, as his ethics, masculinity, and sexuality are likely to be called into question should he fail to demonstrate the appropriate level of sporting passion (Fiske et al. 1987; King 1978). Sport thus holds important symbolic meanings in Australian culture, although these are more to do with its mythical role than its actual role in the day-to-day lives of most Australians. Despite the outward interest that Australians show in competitive sports, walking and gardening are two of the most popular active pastimes among adult Australians (ABS 1992)

Another active leisure pastime popular among Australians is going to the beach. For Fiske et al. (1987), the beach holds many meanings of relevance to Australian culture. It is representative of the informal outdoors, and provides a “close-to-nature” alternative to the less accessible Outback. They also point out that despite their (usual)
public ownership, the usage patterns of Australian beaches are indicative of social distinctions, with members of different social classes using different beaches. Matthews (1997) suggests that the reason why the beach has yet to overtake the Outback in the minds of Australians is because the bush is symbolic of hardship and endurance, while the beach represents hedonism and pleasure. This suggests that Australians are not entirely comfortable with their own emphasis on leisure relative to their work ethic.

The consumption of alcohol is yet another leisure activity that is important to Australian culture. Most of the rest of this chapter addresses this activity, with specific reference made to beer consumption. Suffice to say here that for many Australians, leisure and drinking are synonymous (King 1978), and the pub is a location where numerous leisure hours are spent by many Australians (Bedwell 1992).

AUSTRALIAN BEER CULTURE

The Role of Beer in Australian Culture

Barr (1995) has studied the role of alcohol in human society. He notes that humans have been interested in alcohol for 10,000 years, using it extensively in facilitating social interaction and performing rituals. Beer as a form of alcohol has been in use for around 7,000 years, originating in the Middle East (Harvey 1994). Alcohol consumption has extensive social significance across human cultures, with the social context recognised as especially important to the consumption process (Douglas 1987). In particular, the consumption of alcohol has an important social function as a mechanism for determining and communicating group membership or exclusion (Douglas 1987; Heath 1987). Barr (1995) traces heavy alcohol consumption to the development of a cash society, which is characterised by a disassociation between home and work. This produced a situation where workers were able to go to alehouses on the way home from work, with workers in this sense being males (see also Heath 1987). Those who worked outside the home found themselves in a position where they could drink far greater quantities than would have been considered appropriate in the home. Even in present times, alcohol consumption is symbolic of male labour (Douglas 1987).
Alcohol can have emotional significance for drinkers, involving both positive and negative outcomes. On the positive side, the consumption of alcohol is recognised to reduce anxiety and stress while intoxicated (Heath 1987). The negative consequences of alcohol consumption can include hangovers, violence (including suicide and homicide), injuries from motor vehicle accidents, vandalism, exposure to heavier drugs, long-term health problems, foetal abnormalities, and family disintegration (Garretson and Burton 1998; Pavis et al. 1997; Donovan Research 1994; Brady 1992; Heath 1987). Despite the importance of alcohol consumption in many cultures, there are few formal studies of the way in which the young are enculturated into the drinking process (Heath 1987).

Alcohol consumption has been found to have a distinct relationship with variables such as gender, age, and social class (e.g., Levy 1986), thus enabling its use as a stereotyping tool (Englis and Solomon 1995). One of the most important symbolic distinctions communicated by beer in Western societies is gender, as there exists a strong association between beer and masculinity (Gough and Edwards 1998). Beer has long had particular relevance for the working man in societies with British origins (Barr 1995), and this is especially the case in Australia where the population was originally based on the lower classes of British nations (Mackay 1989; Morse and Marks 1985).

Beer is the most popular form of alcohol in Australia (ABS 1995; Bedwell 1992), and according to most beer drinkers, alcohol is beer (Mackay 1989). The beer gut is sometimes even considered a status symbol (Wannan 1982), and according to King (1978), drinking prowess among Australian males is of greater importance than sexual competence. While the existence of the bond between beer and Australian culture is implicitly understood and accepted, there has been little research to explicitly explore the nature of this relationship. Beer companies have tended to focus their research primarily on specific brands, rather than on the role of beer in Australian culture (personal communications with representatives from CUB [20 January, 1998] and Lion Nathan [15 January, 1998 and 7 December, 1994]). There is thus considerable scope for studies that address this form of consumption at a macro level.

Across beer-drinking cultures there appear to be the common consumption motivations of a concern for social approval, the alleviation of peer pressure, and the desire for mind-altering effects, especially the reduction of inhibitions (see for example
Parker 1998; Pavis et al. 1997; Beck, Thombs, and Summons 1993; Plant, Bagnall, and Foster 1990; Dichter 1964). The satisfaction of thirst is conspicuous in its absence from this list of motivations. According to Heath (1987), even drinkers do not typically suggest that alcoholic beverages are consumed for this basic physiological purpose. Ackoff and Emshoff (1975) suspected that most drinkers do not understand their own motivations to consume beer, and so conducted an experiment to gain insight into driving forces behind beer consumption. An experimental design was chosen as they wanted to avoid the rationalisations that drinkers provide to explain their consumption behaviours (as would be offered in interviews), and to delve instead into those feelings of which drinkers are unaware, or those which they are unwilling to disclose.

In this study 250 regular beer drinkers were required to taste four beers and select the one they preferred. The drinkers were unaware that all four beers were actually the same product. During the course of the experiment, all claimed that they were able to discern significant differences between them. In fact, all were able to choose one as superior to the others, and most were able to nominate one as considerably inferior to the others. The deciding factor in these assessments was found to be the mock advertisements for each brand that were shown to participants. Ackoff and Emshoff concluded that the symbolic information provided in the advertisements was the most important factor used to determine brand preference. It is thus not surprising that the motivations listed above are all oriented around relating to others, rather than pertaining to the more functional aspects of consumption of beverages, such as taste and refreshment.

While it is not possible to condense a culture into a single object (Rowse and Moran 1990), the Australian literature suggests that beer is the product that enjoys the strongest bond with Australian culture. Beer is often used in the process of self-definition (Mackay 1989; Fiske et al. 1987), and as such it is very important to the Australian psyche. As was discussed above for alcohol in general, beer in Australia is a consumer good that has a vital role in communicating and reflecting the social categories of gender (Horne 1988; Fiske et al. 1987; Conway 1985; e.g., Cox 1997), age (Fiske et al. 1987), and social class (Horne 1988). Beer is thus an important social text, one that is highly symbolic of Australian culture (Fiske et al. 1987). The social categories of gender, age, and social class are addressed later in terms of their relationship with the symbolic meaning contained in beer.
From the early days of settlement, alcohol consumption has served as a marker of Australian history. The convicts drank to rebel against their situation (King 1978), and, according to Fiske et al. (1987), Australians have had an alcohol problem ever since. Fiske et al. attribute some of the Australian male compulsion to drink heavily to the six o’clock swill. The swill is the name that was given to the intense drinking session that used to occur between 5pm and 6pm on weekdays. This situation arose from the laws that were introduced during the First World War that required all pubs to close by 6pm. Part of the purpose of these laws was to ensure that men spent their evenings at home with their families rather than at the local drinking venue. These laws were not repealed until the mid-1950s or later, depending on the Australian state in which the drinker lived. As the working day typically ceased at 5pm, a 6pm closing time meant that drinkers had to maximise consumption in a one-hour period. The result was bingeing, often resulting in urinating and vomiting in the public bar. It is this state of affairs that led to the adoption of the tile- and lino-covered surfaces that can still be found in many pubs today (Fiske et al. 1987).

The Australian Bureau of Statistics classifies beer into three categories, full-strength beer, low alcohol beer, and extra/special light beer. Full-strength beer has an alcohol content of 4% or more, low alcohol varieties have 2-2.9% alcohol, and extra light beers have less than 1% alcohol (Health Department of Western Australia 1997b). The breweries have a fourth category of mid-strength beer, which has an alcohol content of around 3.5% (personal communications with a representative from CUB, 20 January, 1998). The vast majority of beer consumed in Australia continues to be full-strength beer (around 76% of domestic sales [Shoebridge 1997]), with the average Australian drinking 70.8 litres of full-strength beer per year (ABS 1996/97). The preference for full-strength beer relative to other types of beer exists across males and females of all age groups (ABS 1995). However, the demand for low alcohol beer has increased since the advent of random breath testing in Australia (Skurray 1993), a development that has provided a legitimate justification for the consumption of reduced-alcohol beers (Donovan Research 1988). The move by some to lower-alcohol beer is in line with a general trend towards the encouragement of moderation in alcohol consumption by Australian governments (Harvey 1994). In 1996/97, Australians consumed an average of 24 litres per capita of low alcohol beer, up from 22 litres per capita in 1991/92 (ABS 1996/97).
In the 1995 National Health Survey (ABS 1995, n = approximately 54,000), the average daily quantity of absolute alcohol consumed across all types of alcoholic beverages among those who reported consuming alcohol in the previous week was 47.3mls per person. When broken down by gender the consumption rates were 57.6 mls per day for males and 32.8 mls per day for females (ABS 1995). Given that medical researchers warn that 46.4 mls and 26.4 mls are the maximum recommended daily doses of alcohol for males and females respectively (Holman, English, and Winter 1996), these average consumption rates provide cause for concern. The picture becomes much more extreme when the analysis is limited to those consuming full-strength beer. The average daily consumption of absolute alcohol in the form of full-strength beer per drinker was 74.7 mls, representing 79.3 mls per average male drinker and 54 mls per average female drinker (ABS 1995). Low alcohol and extra light beer accounted for 37.4 mls and 21.2 mls of absolute alcohol per drinker. Spirits had an average daily alcohol consumption of 54.1mls, while wine consumption was lower at 37.9mls of alcohol per person (ABS 1995). These figures indicate that beer drinkers are heavier drinkers in terms of volume than those who predominantly consume other forms of alcohol. As beer has a lower percentage of alcohol than most wines and spirits,3 in order to accumulate large amounts of absolute alcohol, drinkers have to consume much larger quantities of beer than other forms of alcohol.

Although Australians on average are heavy consumers of beer, many individuals do not fit into this category (Horne 1988). For example, the 1989/90 National Health Survey (ABS 1989/90, n=16,999) found that 13% of adult females and 4.8% of adult males had never consumed alcohol. The 1995 National Health Survey (ABS 1995) found that 55% of the adult population sampled had consumed alcohol in the previous week to the survey, indicating that almost half the adult population does not drink alcohol on a regular basis. Such statistics suggest that while per capita consumption levels are quite high, heavy drinking is found among certain sections of the population rather than being evenly distributed. For example, those living in the Northern Territory are much more likely to consume beer than those living in other states (ABS 1989/90), and those aged 75 years and over are much less likely to drink heavily than those

3 Beer contains 4-6% alcohol/volume, wine contains 10-14% alcohol/volume, and spirits contain 37-43% alcohol/volume (Health Department of Western Australia 1997b). A standard drink of any type of alcoholic beverage contains 10mg of alcohol (Health Department of Western Australia 1997b).
belonging to younger age groups (ABS 1995). To illustrate this difference in consumption between different age groups, the daily average intake of alcohol derived from full-strength beer for the 75+ group is 38.6 mls compared to the average across all age groups of 74.7 mls per day (ABS 1995). As is the case for beer consumption, wine consumption differs between segments of the population. For example, adults residing in the ACT (Australian Capital Territory) had an incidence of wine consumption of 39% in the week prior to the 1989/90 National Health Survey, compared to the national average of 26% (ABS 1989/90).

There are several specific reasons why Australians like to drink beer. One is that it provides mind-altering affects that are valued for their ability to remove the drinker from the concerns of the here and now (Wannan 1982; Mackay 1989; Donovan Research 1989). Rather than consumption to enhance meals, as is found in the European model of alcohol consumption, Australians actually want to achieve a state of drunkenness, however mild (Donovan Research 1988; King 1978). Douglas (1987) describes drunkenness as culturally prescribed and therefore expressive of the culture in which it occurs. Australians associate drunkenness with egalitarianism, as social distinctions become less noticeable and meaningful among the intoxicated (Fiske et al. 1987). However, not all share an appreciation for the state of drunkenness. King paints a bleak picture of beer consumption in Australia, viewing inebriation as a ritual that is enacted far too regularly in Australian culture. He is scathing of the perceived excesses of Australian males (1978, pp. 173-175):

For a significant number of Australian males to have a crashing hangover is to be respected, to be able to drink vast quantities well beyond the call of thirst is commendable, to 'chunder' this unnecessary liquid is hilarious, and to collapse paralytic on the floor from intoxication is magnificent. If conditions allow a fight then the ultimate plane has been reached.

Twenty years later, Australians are still renowned for their drinking, although the description of excessive consumption provided by King above is now largely confined to younger drinkers (Kerin 1998b). Conflict among drinkers, however, is still a frequent outcome of intoxication (Cox 1997). Carruthers and Pryor (1998) attribute increases in alcohol among young people, and among females in particular, to increasing levels of anxiety. King (1978) also nominates anxiety as a primary cause of excessive alcohol consumption, and Mackay (1993) discusses drinking as a form of escapism from the stresses of life.
The consumption of alcohol is a rite of passage in many cultures (Psychology Today 1992). In Australia, to come of legal drinking age is a significant rite of passage, as is indicated by the common birthday gift of an Esky (a portable cold box) in which to hold one’s beer (Bedwell 1992). A specific point in a man’s life in which alcohol consumption dominates is the buck’s night (the night before the marriage ceremony), and the success of a buck’s night is often gauged by the drinking activities that take place (see Condon 1996). Beer drinking also constitutes an on-going rite of passage, as Australian males are required to repeatedly demonstrate their manhood through heavy beer consumption in order to fend off accusations of being a bore (Murray 1997), or even a “bloody poofa” (King 1978, p. 175). A hangover is considered something to be proud of in Australian culture, as it brings sympathy from others and reassures the drinker that a good time has been had (Mackay 1989). King (1978) notes the contradictions in Australian attitudes towards alcohol. Heavy drinking is encouraged in the name of sociability, but those who become alcoholics are considered socially unacceptable. The drinker must therefore walk the fine line between achieving the desired level of drunkenness at the required frequency, without falling victim to addiction.

The other functions of beer consumption for the Australian male include its ability to provide evidence of “tribe” membership (Mackay 1989), giving consumers a way of differentiating themselves from some groups and aligning themselves with others. In the advertising industry, beer brands are described as badges that drinkers use to communicate with others, either through direct consumption or through the wearing of the brand name on various pieces of clothing or paraphernalia (Khermouch 1997). The consumption of beer can be an effective way of achieving social approval (Donovan Research 1988, 1989), filling the function of a “social adhesive” (Mackay 1989, p. 3). A similar function of beer consumption is its role as a “social lubricant” (Mackay 1989, p. 3), a function that is also evident in the use of alcohol in other cultures (see Barr 1995). Beer consumption assists the socially inept Australian male in his interactions with others, as “after a few quickies anyone can relate on the level of the beery bar” (King 1978, p. 175). The association between beer and social interaction is so ingrained that it may be the case for many Australians that to give up alcohol is to all intents and purposes to give up one’s mates (see for example Brady 1992). Beer consumption is often the reason for social gatherings, with Australians sensing a natural relationship between drinking beer and enjoyment (Donovan 1989; Mackay 1989).
While the discussion of beer consumption in the literature is usually confined to males, it is also acknowledged that it can provide females with a means of communicating their desire to be considered “one of the boys” (Mackay 1989, p. 3).

Despite the vast array of individual beer brands on the Australian beer market, there are only two major brewers producing beer in Australia: Carlton United Breweries (CUB) and Lion Nathan. Between them, these two brewers account for 97% of beer sales in Australia (Gluyas 1998). CUB is the market leader with around 55% market share, while Lion Nathan claims a 42% market share (Gluyas 1998). Lion Nathan’s biggest brands are Tooheys, Swan, Hahn, Castlemaine XXXX, and West End (Gluyas 1998; Burbury 1998b; Myers 1997). CUB produces Carlton Cold, Fosters, and the country’s number one selling beer, VB (Victoria Bitter) (Jarrett 1998; Burbury 1998a). The beer market in Australia is a mature market, the result being a proliferation of brands with only minor levels of differentiation among them (Mackay 1989). Brands used to be sold primarily on the basis of the location of the brewer, as residents of each city tended to favour the brands brewed locally (Jarrett 1998). However, this form of differentiation has disappeared as state-based breweries have been bought out by national and international conglomerates and marketing efforts have intensified across state boundaries (Jarrett 1998).

Wine as an alternative form of alcohol has been increasing in popularity among Australian drinkers. Wine consumption has increased threefold since the 1940s, rising from 5.9 litres per capita in the late 1940s to just under 19 litres per capita in 1996/97 (ABS 1996/97). Fiske et al. (1987, p.16) attribute this growth in wine consumption to the increasing “civilisation” of alcohol consumption in Australia, making in the process an interesting comment on the perceived social standing of beer relative to wine. By comparison, total beer consumption in Australia, as in most Western nations, is gradually declining (Fisher 1996; Prince 1996). Total beer consumption decreased each year between 1989/90 and 1996/97, ranging from 145.4 litres per capita at the beginning of the period to 94.7 litres per capita at the end of the period (ABS 1992; ABS 1996/97). This latter amount is a lower figure than the 100 litres per capita that was consumed in 1958/59 (ABS 1996/97). Fisher (1996) attributes this decline to changing demographics, changing lifestyles, and government intervention in the form of taxes and drink-driving restrictions. Even with this decline in beer consumption and the
growth of wine consumption, beer remains the dominant alcoholic beverage in Australia (ABS 1996/97).

**Drinking rituals**

For many Australians, beer drinking represents a ritual celebration of the work-free periods in life (Fiske et al. 1987). The use of alcohol to demarcate the change from work to leisure is common across numerous cultures (Douglas 1987; Heath 1987). A specific ritual associated with beer consumption in Australia is “shouting” (Fiske et al. 1987; King 1978). Shouting entails each member of the drinking group paying for a round of drinks in turn, introducing a system of reciprocity to the drinking process (Brady 1992). It ensures that individuals consume at levels considered appropriate by the group, and thus has a coercive element despite its perceived equity (Fiske et al. 1987). Another of the ritual elements of beer consumption is drinking in hot weather (Donovan Research 1988), as is evidenced by the peak in consumption that occurs in most Australian states in summer (Burbury 1998a; ABS 1989/90). Also, those states that exhibit the highest rates of per capita beer consumption are the Northern Territory, Western Australia, and Queensland (ABS 1989/90). Not coincidentally, these are the three states that experience the highest temperatures, illustrating the association that Australians make between hot weather and beer consumption.

The pub-stop on the way home from work is also a well-entrenched ritual, and the after-work period is a busy time for many Australian pubs (Fiske et al. 1987). However, this is a ritual that is experiencing a gradual but marked reduction in popularity (Burbury 1998a). Similarly, the ritual of binge drinking is being replaced with drinking in moderation (Burbury 1997; Harvey 1994). Binge drinking involves imbibing large amounts of alcohol (five or more drinks) in a single sitting (Yaman and Kerin 1997; Health Department of Western Australia 1997a), and is more common among beer and spirits drinkers than among wine drinkers (Stockwell, Masters, Philips, and Daly 1998). This reduction in excessive consumption at a single sitting is seen to be a result of the introduction of random breath testing and an increasing awareness of the physical dangers of over-consumption (Mackay 1989). This has meant that the ritual of beer consumption now includes a slower pace of drinking, the partial substitution of beer for soft drinks, and/or prior negotiations to determine who will fill the role of skipper (i.e., non-drinking driver) (Mackay 1989). Rituals have not changed to this
extent amongst all drinkers, as although random breath testing has had a marked downward effect on non-home beer consumption, there are many Australians who continue to drink and drive (Kerin 1998a). Many of those who have altered their consumption behaviours in line with changing social attitudes have increased their home consumption relative to pub consumption (Mackay 1989), resulting in bottle shop sales increasing at the expense of pub sales (Plane 1997b). This is a significant alteration in consumption rituals, as historically Australian males have reserved beer consumption for the local pub, and have actively avoided consumption in the home (Horne 1988; King 1978).

**Pubs**

As an icon of Australian culture, the pub earns its place by its association with beer (Fiske et al. 1987). Other forms of alcohol, such as wine, are more strongly associated with private consumption (Stockwell et al. 1998). Pubs are central to many Australian cities, providing points of identification and distinction (see for example Sheil’s [1997] discussion of the importance of pubs to the city of Sydney). The pub is supposed to be a social leveller, providing an egalitarian environment in which men of all backgrounds can socialise and relax (Fiske et al. 1987). Other than the public house, the public drinking venue in Australia can also take a variety of other forms such as rugby leagues clubs, Returned Soldiers Leagues clubs, bowling clubs, workers clubs, bars, and taverns, many of which are located in the suburbs (Bedwell 1992). Regular patrons of these venues pride themselves on their loyalty to their “local”, although the attachment to a drinking location is often tempered by a feeling of guilt about abandoning the wife and children and the associated family responsibilities (Fiske et al. 1987)

The male partiality for the pub environment has been interpreted as escapism from the family home and from the family it houses (King 1978). Such escapism has been justified by the male’s need to use harsh language that is not fit for female ears, along with his need for raucous behaviour that serves to establish his manhood in front of his peers (King 1978). Thus the pub has historically been an institution specifically created to cater for male drinking needs, with women actively discouraged from participating in pub culture (King 1978). The pub has been the bastion of mateship, providing males with somewhere to bond and interact, enabling a level of intimacy that
is not permitted in other contexts (Bedwell 1992). As most pubs are designed to attract male drinkers, their décor, at least until recently, has been typically spartan and unaesthetic (Fiske et al. 1987).

Changes in clientele resulting from cultural change have led to the advent of newer-style pubs (Plane 1997a), with younger patrons of both sexes frequenting the modern pubs and older drinkers preferring the more traditional pub environment (Mackay 1989). However, while females are increasingly drinking in pubs, they are still usually in the minority, and the suburban pub for all intents and purposes remains the male domain that offers Australian males respite from the confusing external world of changing gender roles (Fiske et al. 1987).

**Gender differences in beer consumption**

As noted earlier, beer in Australian culture is strongly associated with masculinity (Cox 1997; Scott 1997; Mackay 1989; Horne 1988), a link that is also found in other cultures (e.g., Gough and Edwards 1998; Levy 1986; Dichter 1964). Many Australian males are conditioned early to consider beer consumption one of life’s necessities, a belief that includes the expectation that “real” men get “pissed” (i.e., drunk) (Cox 1997). However, the tendency to consume beer rather than other forms of alcohol with higher alcohol contents suggests that intoxication is not the primary objective (Fiske et al. 1987). This leads to the interpretation that the masculine symbolism of beer incorporates more than just its ability to induce intoxication - it is considered masculine in itself, relative to other forms of alcohol.

The strong association between beer and masculinity is now considered a significant disadvantage to brewers, who in an era of decreasing demand are realising that half of their potential market is female. American brewers are currently trialing berry beers in an effort to capture the large untapped female market (Hannon 1995). Marketers of other alcoholic beverages have also acted to take advantage of the market opportunity that is represented by the female drinker. Products such as Two Dogs, an alcoholic lemonade, have been launched to cater to the growing market of females drinking in pubs and other venues (Management Today 1998). Efforts in Australia to increase beer consumption among females, however, have been rendered largely ineffective by the historically strong stereotyping of beer as a male product category
Australian females tend to have a different attitude to alcohol in general. In many situations, they are more likely to avail themselves of tea, coffee, and softdrinks than alcohol, with alcohol considered more a social stimulant than a lifestyle necessity (Conway 1985).

The relative consumption levels between the sexes illustrate that beer (and alcohol in general) plays a much more important role in the lives of Australian men than in the lives of Australian women. The incidence of beer consumption among Australian females is relatively low at 14.3% (ABS 1989/90). The 18-24 age group has the highest incidence rate at 19.4% (ABS 1989/90), and university students have been found to be among the heavier female consumers of beer (Donovan Research 1995). Of those females who do drink beer, full-strength is the most popular variety (ABS 1995). The preferred alcoholic beverage in all adult female age categories except the youngest is wine, with an average incidence rate across all age groups of 30.5% (ABS 1989/90). Spirits were the next most popular alcoholic beverage for these age groups (18.2%). The order is reversed for female drinkers between the ages of 18 and 24, who firstly prefer spirits (32.8%), followed by wine (25.9%) (ABS 1989/90). Despite preferring beverages with higher alcohol contents, the total absolute alcohol consumed by females is on average less than half that consumed by males. Male drinkers by comparison exhibit a much stronger preference for beer, with 65% of adult males drinking beer and 22% drinking wine in the week prior to the 1989/90 National Health Survey (ABS 1989/90). Fewer females are likely to consume alcohol to levels that are injurious to health (3% of female drinkers versus 8% of male drinkers) (ABS 1995). Those females who do are most likely to belong to the 18-24 age group and to be employed in male-dominated occupations, such as labourers and plant operators (ABS 1989/90).

The masculine association with beer consumption is gradually fading in intensity. As discussed earlier, the definition of what it is to be an Australian male and female is in a phase of transformation (Mackay 1993, 1997a; Conway 1985). In their study of Australian pubs, Fiske et al. (1987) found that more females are now evident at drinking venues, and they attribute this to the new code of equality emerging in the workplace that is being progressively transferred to the pub. However, they also note that the sexism that remains in many workplaces is still apparent in pubs, slowing the growth in female patronage. Despite this, beer consumption as a male-dominated activity actually has benefits to some females. According to Mackay (1989), beer
consumption is one way in which females can enter male society and communicate their desire to be treated as equals. It effectively gives them “a passport into the world of men” (Mackay 1989, p. 9), signalling their new-found liberation. This can lead to heavy alcohol consumption among younger females, as they adopt the consumption patterns of their male peers (Yaman and Kerin 1997). Carruthers and Pryor (1998) warn that when females drink at the same levels as males, they can encounter significant health problems due to their decreased ability to absorb alcohol. However, they have found that females tend to cease such binge drinking sooner than their male counterparts, a trend that they attribute to the requirements of the child-bearing stage of the life cycle.

Age Differences in Beer Consumption

Just as there are significant differences in the attitudes and values of the different age generations in Australia (Mackay 1997a), so there are differences in their beer consumption patterns. Younger drinkers are the heaviest drinkers of alcohol in Australia. Drinkers in the 18 to 24 age bracket have the highest per capita consumption rates for all major types of alcohol, with the exception of the extra light beer category which is dominated by the 24-34 age group (ABS 1995). Younger drinkers are more likely to engage in binge drinking (Yaman and Kerin 1997; Donovan research 1989), although females who drink are more likely than males who drink to adopt a binge drinking pattern in their drinking (Batey 1996; Health Department of Western Australia 1997a). As a result, those in the 18-24 years bracket are significantly more likely to drink to damaging levels, with over 17% consuming quantities that place them in the medium to high risk categories (ABS 1995). The age at which drinking commences is thought to be getting progressively lower, especially among Australian females (Yaman and Kerin 1997).

Very young drinkers who face legal or financial impediments to pub patronage often choose to drink heavily at home before going out for the evening (Health Department of Western Australia 1997a). As drinkers get older they are less likely to drink to dangerous levels, with the proportion of those drinking to medium and high risk levels decreasing progressively with age from 17% of those aged 18-24 down to 8% of those aged 75 years and over (ABS 1995). Mackay (1989) traces the beer consumption patterns of the Australian male from the heavy drinking to the point of vomiting among teenagers and those in their early twenties, to the more sedate drinking of the older
family man. He posits that the physical changes of the human body with age contribute to these changing consumption patterns, as hangover recovery time is lengthened and bloating becomes more uncomfortable. The outcome is that while older drinkers prefer to drink smaller amounts more regularly, younger drinkers drink large amounts more infrequently. Younger drinkers have also been found to be less likely to drink alone, as the social aspect of beer consumption is particularly important to this group (Donovan Research 1989).

**Class differences in beer consumption**

Dichter (1964) discussed the tendency of consumers to choose those forms of alcohol that match their ideal selves, while avoiding those that represent self-images from which they wish to disassociate themselves. He discussed this tendency specifically in terms of the actual and aspirational social class of the drinker. However, at this point in time there is inadequate information to enable a meaningful discussion of the impacts of social class on beer consumption in Australia. Even the breweries perform only limited analyses of the relationship between social class and consumption, although the brewery representatives spoken to indicated that they assume that per capita beer consumption is higher among members of the lower classes (personal communications with CUB [11 November, 1998] and Lion Nathan [16 November, 1998]). The literature generally presumes that the Australian working class man is somewhat of a boozer, while other segments, such as wealthy women, consume virtually no beer (Bedwell 1992; Horne 1988). These assumptions in the literature suggest that while beer consumption is often perceived as a great leveller, it is in fact susceptible to class distinctions. Other supporting themes in the literature are that higher-alcohol beverages, such as wine and spirits, tend to be more associated with the upper classes (Stockwell et al. 1998; Mackay 1989). This pattern is consistent with the results of Levy’s (1986) American study of beverage consumption across a range of alcoholic and non-alcoholic beverages.

The data available through the ABS does not support the proposition that it is members of the lower classes who consume the most beer, although a lack of information specific to this issue leaves the matter unresolved. The 1989/90 National Health Survey provides details of alcohol consumption incidence by personal income bracket (ABS 1989/90). The general rule appears to be that more members of the high-
income brackets drink each of the major classifications of alcohol (i.e., beer, wine, and spirits). For example, 75% of males in the top personal annual income bracket ($50,000 or more) drank beer in the previous week, compared to 50% in the lowest bracket ($0-9,999). Similarly, males in the top bracket were more likely to drink wine (50%) and spirits (21%) than those in the lowest bracket (14% and 11% respectively). The trend in both wine and beer consumption was a little different for females, where consumption rates tended to peak in the $40,000-49,999 bracket, and then decline again in the top bracket. The inability of these figures to provide a comprehensive account of alcohol consumption in Australia lies in their failure to provide the average quantities consumed by drinkers. They only represent the proportion of members of each income category who consume a particular alcoholic beverage, and as such they do not give the complete picture of beer consumption by drinkers of different social backgrounds.

**Beer Marketing**

Selling beer to Australians used to be considered an exceptionally simple task, but social changes have seen it become a much more complex activity (Burbury 1998b). The actual process of beer consumption has changed for consumers over the last couple of decades. In particular, Mackay (1989) reports a change in emphasis from the physical characteristics of beer to its product symbolism. The focus used to be on demonstrating knowledge of the physical characteristics of a good beer, with the visible aspects of different brands used to differentiate between them. The proliferation of packaged beer brands, suggested to have been the result of marketers’ attempts to segment a declining market (Burbury 1998a), has reduced the emphasis on physical characteristics of the beverage itself, concentrating drinkers’ attention on the branding and packaging of various product offerings (Shoebridge 1997). The outcome is that consumers are adopting a different approach to brand selection. For example, Burbury (1998a) likens selling beer in the 1990s to selling fashion, recognising the increasingly fickle nature of the modern beer drinker.

Mackay (1989) suggests that a result of this change in approach has been a decline in brand loyalty, as drinkers frequently switch between brands according to imagery and other variables such as price. Beer brands and labels in Australia are now badges that are appropriated and discarded by drinkers in their efforts to communicate their status to others (Burbury 1998a; Mackay 1989). This task is made increasingly
complex by the difficulties the consumer faces when attempting to choose between the 100 tap beers and over 200 bottled beers that are now on the Australian market (Burbury 1998a). In the meantime, cultural imperatives continue to convince the drinker that consumption choices should be based upon the ability to detect subtle differences in flavour and aroma between brands (see Khermouch 1997; Australian Liquor Retailer 1996). This leaves the drinker in the position of using one set of decision criteria while believing firmly in another. (See Appendix M for a current Australian beer advertisement that illustrates this point.)

Brand loyalty in the Australian beer market does not follow trends found in other product markets. For example, CUB found that by over-promoting their Fosters brand they effectively destroyed brand loyalty (Jarrett 1998; Mackay 1989). Australian beer drinkers like to feel that they have an affiliation with a brand, and this feeling is soured if the drinker feels that millions of other people are consuming the same brand (Mackay 1989). As well as attempting to generate brand loyalty, brands need to seek new customers on a regular basis to avoid being categorised as the beverage of a certain segment, and thus dying out with this group. Bedwell (1992) discusses the example of Tooth’s KB, which went from an enormous market share (around 70%) in NSW in the 1970s, to being an insignificant brand (less than 1% market share) in the 1990s. This task of simultaneously retaining and attracting drinkers is made more difficult by drinkers’ desire to feel somehow unique in their consumption choices. A growing trend is for marketers to minimise mass promotion of their new brands, instead allowing those consumers who are specifically seeking individuality to “discover” new brands (Burbury 1998a). Mass promotion is reserved for the core brands that have general appeal, with tens of millions of dollars spent annually by each of the two major brewers on a range of advertising campaigns designed to consolidate their core brands (Burbury 1998a). Within academic circles there remain conflicting views as to whether advertising is capable of influencing the consumption of alcoholic drinks (Garretson and Burton 1998).

**Beer Advertising**

The ways in which beer is promoted provide indicators of its cultural meanings. Caillat and Mueller (1996) note that advertisements for alcohol communicate attitudes to drinking within a culture, particularly attitudes concerning appropriate times and
places for alcohol consumption. This section examines Australian beer advertising to gain insight into the cultural relevance of beer as a consumption product within Australian culture. Initially, an international study of beer advertising is profiled, followed by an analysis of some of the beer advertisements that have been screened on Australian television over the last thirty years. These two analyses are then compared to identify the cultural meaning of beer in Australian culture.

Domzal and Kernan (1992) conducted an international study of beer advertisements to identify the relevant meaning exemplars contained within the advertisements. Meaning exemplars are the common elements of meaning found across the majority of advertisements for each product type. They represent the signs (the dominant elements of the advertisement, consisting of signifiers and signifieds) and structure (the ways in which these meanings relate to one another within the advertisement) of typical advertisements in the particular product area (Domzal and Kernan 1992). While Australia was not included in the sample, the results of this study provide a comparison point for the following analysis of Australian beer advertisements. The four exemplars found by Domzal and Kernan to apply to beer advertising were nutrition, dynamism, activity, and status. Briefly, nutrition refers to ingredients and brewing style, dynamism is the physical characteristics of the beer (e.g., foamy), activity relates to the social environment in which beer is consumed, and status refers to the use of premium brands to segment the beer market. They concluded that consumers world-wide have established a deep-seated understanding of the product category of beer. They suggest that the comprehension of beer as a product category is socially acquired via direct or observed consumption, but knowledge of particular brands is derived almost entirely from the efforts of advertisers.

Domzal and Kernan (1992) found that the 61 beer advertisements from the seven countries sampled largely followed a prescribed sequence of events. They frequently attempted to associate the brand with one of either two notable features, quality or uniqueness. The beer container itself, whether it be a bottle, can or glass, was usually the predominant visual feature of the advertisement. The personality of the brand was inferred by those pictured drinking it, rather than explicitly stated. Other common themes included beer as a reward, and beer drinking as a sociable pastime. The way in which the beer is brewed was often mentioned in the advertisements, with the manufacturing process described as a traditional art form, “never as a science which can
be copied or improved” (Domzal and Kernan 1992, p. 53). (See Appendix M.) Advertisements usually depicted group consumption scenes, involving considerable noise and movement. This feature was also noted by Caillat and Mueller (1996) and Parker (1998) in their studies of American and British beer advertisements. In addition, some brands were found to be promoted on the basis of exclusivity, while other brands were targeted specifically at blue-collar workers.

Overall, Domzal and Kernan (1992) found that although advertisements for beer are many and varied across a range of countries, the themes employed are usually within the parameters of the commonly accepted meanings of beer. In other words, advertisers rarely attempt to attach completely new meanings to the product, preferring the relative safety of tried and tested meanings (similar results were also found by Parker 1998 and Caillat and Mueller 1996 in smaller scale comparative studies). Domzal and Kernan suggest that this tendency is representative of the difficulties associated with assigning new meanings to existing products. They therefore recommend that marketers be careful to accurately represent the core cultural meanings associated with the product category, prior to establishing the individual personality of the particular brand.

Australian beer marketers have experienced just such a constraint, resulting in very consistent beer advertising themes over recent decades. They have found that radical advertising campaigns have failed, forcing them to revert to campaigns that are only slightly different from their traditional approaches to the market (Burbury 1998b; Mackay 1989). In order to compare the themes identified in Domzal and Kernan’s study with the content of Australian beer advertisements, the video archives of CUB and Lion Nathan were accessed to obtain a range of Australian beer advertisements that span more than thirty years. The oldest advertisement was a black and white ad that was not date-marked, although the brewery management estimated that it was produced in the 1960s. Unfortunately, many of the other archived advertisements were also not date-marked. However, most the advertisements examined were produced and aired within the last five to ten years. In total, 72 advertisements were examined to identify common themes.

As the advertisements were viewed, the major and minor themes present were recorded. Once all the advertisements had been viewed, the various themes were
documented and analysed for frequency and extent of representation. The dominant themes were found to be extremes in temperature, hard work, the physical characteristics of the product or its packaging, mateship/socialising, sport, and pubs. Each of these points is addressed below.

Many Australian beer advertisements draw a distinct contrast between hot and cold temperatures. The environment and the drinker are usually depicted as very hot, compared to the icy cold beer. This often includes outback scenes, where the heat rising from the ground provides the backdrop for the sweaty farmer/bushman who is in dire need of a cold beverage (e.g., a Fosters Light advertisement that depicts a farmer who cannot call his sheepdog as he has lost his whistle in the dry, dusty conditions). Another variation is the dripping factory worker, miner, or tradesman who has obviously been working in a very hot environment. Tooheys Draft and VB advertisements have long used these types of images. Beer is thus depicted as the perfect solution to the physical effort of strenuous work, as well as to the arid conditions of the Australian continent.

These scenes of hard work in beer advertisements extend to include sport. The cricketer (e.g., Swan Gold and Tooheys Draught advertisements), footballer (e.g., Carlton Draught, Emu Export, VB, and Tooheys Draught advertisements), fisherman (e.g., VB and Tooheys Red advertisements), skier (e.g., Fosters Light Ice advertisements), parachutist (e.g., Fosters Light Ice advertisements), kayaker (e.g., Fosters Light Ice advertisements), and boxer (e.g., Diamond Draft advertisements) have each been portrayed in different Australian beer advertisements. They all appear to require the cooling refreshment that only beer can provide. The inclusion of a sport theme in advertisements serves to simultaneously communicate the social function of beer, as well as the reward for hard work theme. Most of these sports involve extensive interaction with others, or they are at least depicted as such in the advertisements in which they are profiled. Other mateship scenes are also very common, such as males socialising in pubs, at parties, and in front of television sets (although they are usually viewing sport at the time).

The pub is another popular theme in Australian beer advertisements, although more so among the brands targeted at older drinkers. There is a friendly ambience to the pub as depicted in the advertisements. Everyone is smiling, and there is a throb of happy voices in the background (e.g., Carlton Draught, Tooheys Blue, Tooheys Draught, and
Emu Export advertisements). Recently launched brands tend to focus more on non-pub drinking, particularly at parties (e.g., Hahn Ice and Carlton Cold advertisements). This reflects the tendency for younger drinkers to consume beer in a greater range of locations than older drinkers. Where pubs are depicted, they are often dimly lit, with a predominantly male clientele. The barmaid is usually the only female present, and she is never drinking beer herself (e.g., the Tooheys Blue advertisement that features a blonde busty barmaid who is dressed in a low-cut top and is called “love” by the patrons). Where any other females are present (usually only in advertisements depicting parties rather than pub scenes), they may be holding a glass or bottle of beer, but they do not actually drink from it (e.g., the Matilda Bay advertisement that shows middle class men and women spending a sunny afternoon drinking by the side of a river).

Close-up images of the glass or bottle are another common theme (e.g., Crown Lager, Emu Draft, and Swan Gold advertisements). In the older advertisements, the focus is on the head of the beer flowing down the side of the over-filled glass. In more recent advertisements, the bottle takes priority. Labels are strategically held so that the brand name is evident while the drinker raises the bottle to his mouth. Seen in profile, the drinker tilts back his head and appears to take in large quantities of the beverage (e.g., Fosters Light Ice advertisements). Cans are rarely promoted in the more current television advertisements. Some recent advertisements do not feature any people, instead focusing entirely on the product and its packaging. This approach is less frequent than the traditional portrayal of mates congregated to drink beer, and it tends to be confined to shorter advertising campaigns that are aimed at younger or more affluent target markets (e.g., the Carlton Cold advertisements that show beer flowing through icy pipes).

Humour is another favoured appeal used in beer advertisements aimed at younger drinkers. The main characters in the advertisement are often laughing at others, or occasionally at themselves (e.g., the Tooheys Red advertisements that depict German tourists experiencing problems ordering a round of beers because of language difficulties). They often undertake extraordinary sporting feats, which are amusing in their extremeness (e.g., the Fosters Light Ice advertisements). In the majority of advertisements examined, the only people present were Anglo-Saxon males who appeared to be either working or middle class. Over time, the males depicted in beer advertisements have become better dressed, with the historical focus on the working
class drinker changing to also favour the suited middle class male. However, some brands continue to depict only working class males, as their product is specifically targeted to this market (e.g., Emu Draft).

In a relatively small number of advertisements, the physical qualities of the beer are discussed. Here the suggestion is made that the brand being promoted is superior to its competitors due to a more advanced or “pure” brewing system. An interesting change in recent advertisements targeted at younger drinkers is a tag line that the brand being promoted is “easy to drink” (e.g., Carlton Cold, Hahn Ice, and Red Dog). Older advertisements show beer being consumed quickly and in large quantities, indicating that it is easy to imbibe. The advertisements for new products seem to need to tell younger drinkers that the different brewing methods employed result in a beverage that is easier to consume. The existence of both these direct and implied assurances about drinkability would suggest that perhaps beer consumption is not necessarily the comfortable pastime that is commonly assumed in Australian culture.

Each of these themes is somehow related to the others, and some advertisements manage to combine numerous themes in a single commercial. For example, a Fosters Light Ice advertisement shows two men skiing together, taking on dizzy heights in their skiing adventure. One comes crashing down through the roof of a pub and lands standing at the bar. He asks for a Fosters Light Ice, from which the viewer sees him drink thirstily in profile, with the label clearly apparent. He then asks the barman to get another, and looks to the ceiling anticipating the arrival of his mate. This advertisement includes the themes of mateship, sport, the pub, Anglo-Saxon males, humour, profiling the bottle, and extreme exertion coupled with icy beer in an icy environment. Another example of a multi-theme advertisement is a Tooheys Draught advertisement that depicts a group of Anglo-Saxon males in a pub watching a football game on the television suspended above the bar. One of the drinkers envisages himself actually playing in the game and kicking the winning goal. The advertisement therefore combines sport spectating, sport participation, a pub scene, mates, and physical exertion.

These themes identified in Australian beer advertisements are consistent with the preceding analysis of Australian culture. The pub and sport themes of the advertisements cross easily into real Australian lifestyles. The focus on Anglo-Saxon
Australians is also typical of the way in which Aboriginals and migrants have been neglected in depictions of Australian culture. The representation of drinkers as males reflects the dominance of the male stereotype and the almost non-existent female stereotype. Also, the heavy use of leisure scenes is parallel to the Australian emphasis on leisure time over work time.

Of Domzal and Kernan’s (1992) four meaning exemplars (nutrition, dynamism, activity, and status), activity and status are especially pertinent in Australian beer advertisements. Activity relates to social interaction with friends, while status refers to the association with a particular type of drinker. Nutrition (including quality of ingredients) and dynamism (the effervescent nature of beer) are also relevant, although they are less frequently represented.

The focus in Australian advertisements on beer packaging (mainly bottles) is also consistent with Domzal and Kernan’s findings, although the social aspects of beer consumption are dominant in Australian advertisements while the container was found to be the primary feature of the international advertisements. Other similarities between the two studies include reference to the brewing process, beer being positioned as a reward for effort, the communication of brand personality through the selection of appropriate drinkers in the advertisements, and the specific targeting of different social classes via different scenes and actors.

The primacy of the social environment in Australian beer advertisements is not surprising given the social role of beer consumption in Australian culture. As noted earlier, the emphasis on mateship and solidarity (Feather 1986; Morse and Marks 1985) promotes a drinking culture in which communal beer consumption among males is expected and necessary for social integration (Horne 1988; King 1978). These cultural requirements are translated into the male-dominated group images that form the basis of so many Australian beer advertisements.

Compared to the international advertisements, the Australian advertisements exhibit a high incidence of sport themes and humour appeals. These elements were not specifically noted as salient in the Domzal and Kernan study, but are very characteristic of the Australian advertisements. While activity as a category was frequently apparent in the international ads, the particular emphasis on sporting activities is especially
pronounced in the Australian advertisements. Humour has also been identified as a common theme in British beer advertisements by Caillat and Mueller (1996). This similarity between Australian and British advertising themes is not surprising given Australia’s settlement history. The cultural similarities deriving from a common heritage appear to have translated into a preference for similar advertising themes.

To conclude, Australian beer advertisements share similarities with those of other countries. There are, however, some distinct differences that can be attributed to the nature of Australian culture. In order for advertisements to be effective, Domzal and Kernan emphasise the importance of using culturally appropriate messages and themes. Australian brewers have recognised this, and have largely constrained their advertising messages to those that employ cultural meanings that are widely accepted as relating to beer consumption. As a result, Australian beer advertisements exhibit a heavy focus on social consumption, beer as a reward for hard work, humour appeals, sporting images, and all-male drinking scenes. Future research could compare these themes to those found in other Australian advertisements to provide a more detailed picture of Australian culture as communicated through advertising. Also, analyses of advertisements that cross product boundaries could further investigate the gap between McCracken’s (1990) belief in the power of advertising to create new cultural meanings and Domzal and Kernan’s finding that advertisers typically comply with accepted meanings in their attempts to create effective advertisements.

**Summary**

Australian culture is deemed to be in a phase of rapid social change. Consumption has always been an important part of white-Australian culture, but it has begun to take on heightened significance in an era of increasing social stratification. As such, it is now seen to be important to communicate with others through the use of consumption goods in order to convey one’s social standing.

The role of beer in Australian culture has also experienced a degree of transition. Once used primarily for social integration, the consumption of beer is now also employed in attempts to achieve individual differentiation. The multitude of brands on the market facilitates the use of beer consumption as a point of distinction, a process that is inherently more difficult than the previous objective of integration with
generalised others. Brand selection is now a more complex task, as brands have specific age, gender, and class associations that are very important to consumers. Also, as the beer market has adopted the fashion cycles found in other markets, the consumption decision becomes more difficult as the relevant decision parameters change constantly.

The role of the pub has been particularly influenced by recent developments in Australian culture. A new orientation to moderation has seen per capita consumption levels decrease across the board, with the exception of younger age groups who are now drinking more than ever. Drinking is occurring in a wider range of locations, decreasing the emphasis on the pub. In order to attract drinkers back, many pubs have undergone a radical transformation in style and ambience. There is now a clear distinction between different types of pubs, with some retaining the traditional form that remains the preference of older, male drinkers. Other publicans are adopting a more modern style that is conducive to younger drinkers of both sexes. These changes reflect the growing diversity in beer drinkers which has seen more females consuming beer, particularly in the younger age groups. However, this increase in female beer consumption is commencing from a very low base.

In the following chapter, the methodological options that are available and appropriate to the research task of this thesis are discussed, and the approaches selected for data collection and analysis are detailed.
CHAPTER FOUR - METHODOLOGY

Overview

This study employed the grounded theory method to investigate the cultural meaning embedded in the consumption of beer in Australian culture. According to the requirements of grounded theory, a specific social process was selected for analysis, data were collected according to emerging interpretations, the literature review was conducted mainly after data were collected, and the central themes were allowed to emerge from the data rather than being forced to fit a preconceived theoretical framework (Glaser and Strauss 1967).

The general topic for this research project was selected prior to the determination of the most appropriate research methodology. The objective was to gain an improved understanding of the relationship between culture and consumer behaviour from the close examination of one particular type of consumption activity. The investigation of beer consumption within the Australian culture was chosen as the cultural phenomenon of interest. Grounded theory presented itself as a useful methodology for addressing the requirements of the research task. The choice of a grounded approach in this thesis is an acknowledgment that the relationships between the concepts of culture and consumer behaviour can be more effectively analysed using research techniques designed to explore human behaviour and motivations in the situations in which they occur (Kools, McCarthy, Durham, and Robrecht 1996). It also reflects the acceptance of the continually changing nature of the social and cultural environments by focusing on the generation of new theories rather than taking the more reactive stance of verification (Glaser and Strauss 1967).

Participant observations, non-participant observations, and interviews were used to gather data relating to beer consumption with the purpose of generating a grounded theory to explain the social and cultural processes at work. Over the course of three years, 115 people were interviewed and observed in over 23 pubs and clubs in three Australian states (Western Australia, New South Wales, and Victoria). These interviews comprised the ethnographic component of the research and were most critical to the emerging interpretation. Other interviews were conducted to obtain information
pertaining to Australian culture in general. These interviews provided background information to enhance the researcher's understanding of Australian culture as perceived by its members. These interviews were conducted in schools and retirement villages, as these locations provided a degree of access to informants that was not available in less structured environments. Approximately 300 children and seniors were interviewed in these contexts. This number is large primarily due to the interviewing of students in class contexts. The ethnographic interviews and observations conducted in drinking venues provided direct insight into the cultural process of beer consumption, while the interviews in schools and retirement villages provided a more general understanding of Australian culture and the role of beer in this culture.

At this point it is important to note that this study employed ethnographic methods, rather than constituting an ethnography in itself. As the phenomenon of beer consumption was studied in numerous locations over the course of three years, rather than at individual locations for extended periods, the prolonged engagement criteria of an ethnography was not met. Instead, this study represents an ethnographic study in that the ethnographic techniques of participant observation, non-participant observation, and interviewing were employed. Also, as per the previous discussion on the characteristics of ethnographic studies, the emphasis of this study is on viewing the world through the eyes of culture members and uncovering the relationships between culture and behaviour.

As the data were collected, the interview and observation transcripts were converted to a thick description of the beer consumption process in the form of five myths that were found to surround beer consumption in Australia. According to Strauss (1995), the generation of thick description is part of the process of constructing and testing grounded theories. Instead of aiming for an objective interpretation of a phenomenon, thick description entails the construction of a reality that the reader is able to understand and believe (Thompson 1990). Thick description is recommended for cultural studies, as it accommodates the need to generate findings about an abstract concept (Roth and Moorman 1988). There are, however, widely differing opinions regarding the function of thick description. These range from the output being purely descriptive (Marcus 1986; Triandis 1980; Glaser and Strauss 1967), to having explanatory power and an ability to contribute to theory-building (Strauss 1995; Glesne and Peshkin 1992; Manning 1987).
The thick description provided in chapter 5 forms the basis of the theoretical propositions presented in chapter 6. The result is an interpretation of the role of beer consumption in Australia from the particular viewpoint of the researcher. In line with postmodern thinking, it is acknowledged that the nature of the interpretation is inherently subjective and constructed (Denzin and Lincoln 1994). However, thick transcription is used to enable informants’ voices to be heard, permitting the reader a degree of latitude in analysis (see Arnould and Wallendorf 1994).

In recognition of the rare use of the grounded theory method in the consumer behaviour literature, this methodology section includes a detailed description of the combination of methods employed in this study.

**Introduction**

As discussed in chapter 2, the task of examining the relationship between culture and consumer behaviour is problematic. An increasingly popular approach is to study the relationship between culture and behaviour incrementally through the analysis of specific behavioural scenarios (Firat and Venkatesh 1995; Geertz 1975). In consumer behaviour, this suggests the intense examination of the consumption of a particular product, seeking insight into the cultural influences present in the process (Roth and Moorman 1988). The relationship between the self-concept and consumption has also been suggested to require the examination of consumption-related settings (Sirgy 1982). The very nature of such activity-specific research means that the results will be descriptive and interpretive (Manning 1987; Marcus 1986; Triandis 1980).

**Selection of Approach**

There are many examples of quantitative and qualitative approaches to the study of both consumer behaviour and culture (e.g., Englis and Solomon 1995; Schouten and McAlexander 1995; Hofstede 1984; and Geertz 1975 respectively). The selection of one approach over another is often determined by the nature of the research project and the abilities and preferences of the researcher (Annells 1996; Holbrook 1995a; Becker and Geer 1958). When deciding between a quantitative or qualitative approach for the collection and analysis of data, the objective is to make a choice that maximises the quality and relevance of the output. Of greatest importance to this study was the ability of the
chosen methodology to provide a high level of insight into the cultural inputs of the consumption behaviours of individuals. As discussed in chapter 2, the impact of culture on consumption patterns is usually too complex and abstract for informants to explain concisely (Arnould and Wallendorf 1994; Wallendorf 1993; Kluckhohn 1962). It is largely a subconscious and unarticulated process that requires more subtle means of exploration (Rook 1988).

Specifically, this study required a methodology that could: (a) explore beneath consumers' conscious attributions regarding their consumption choices; (b) identify the nature and role of the cultural meaning stored in products; and (c) integrate the individual's sense of self with the consumption behaviours demonstrated. As a result of these requirements, qualitative methods were employed in this study. As discussed in chapter 2, qualitative research methods are capable of delivering a level of analysis that is conducive to explicating relationships (Huberman and Miles 1994). However, as no method is value-free or free from limitations (Holbrook 1995a; Denzin and Lincoln 1994; Belk et al. 1988), it is recognised that these methods bring their own set of limitations to the research process.

At some stage of a research project, the researcher must choose between: (a) initially adopting or generating a theoretical framework with which to analyse and interpret a specific phenomenon; and (b) allowing an understanding of the phenomenon to emerge through data analysis and a literature search that is performed mainly after data have been collected, a procedure known as grounded theory generation (Johnson 1990). Both methods are legitimate approaches to the qualitative objective of explicating relationships (Huberman and Miles 1994). The first option represents logical deduction theory building (Annells 1996), and is the alternative more commonly employed in consumer studies, as indicated by the methodology sections of most consumer behaviour journal articles. The second option, the inductive method of theory building, appears to be less frequently adopted in consumer behaviour.

The option of grounded theory generation was selected for use in this study. The combination of ethnographic and grounded theory methods provided a useful and productive approach for the explication of the concepts of interest. Ethnographic methods were employed in the data collection phase, specifically those interviews and observations conducted in drinking situations. Other interviews conducted in non-
drinking contexts yielded additional qualitative data that provided further input to the interpretation of the beer-drinking process and its relationship to Australian culture. The data obtained from interviews and observations were then analysed according to the principles of the grounded theory method.

**The Grounded Theory Method**

The grounded theory method was initially developed as a response to the perceived lack of new theories being generated in sociology (Goulding 1998; Locke 1996). Firmly believing in the inadequacies of logical deduction as applied in sociology, Glaser and Strauss (1967) sought to redress the emphasis on the verification of existing theories by constructing a methodology that could guide qualitative researchers through the theory development process. By doing so, they bridged the gap between empirical data and theory generation (Hammersley 1989). They proposed formalised procedures, such as theoretical sampling and coding, to provide structure to theory generation (Barnes 1996; Rust 1993). The aim of the method is to not only produce interpretations that can explain social phenomenon, but also provide information of value to those engaged in the behaviour under study (Glaser and Strauss 1967; Annells 1996). In particular, grounded theory aims to identify the main concerns of social actors, along with the various strategies that can be employed in the resolution of these concerns (Glaser 1992). In the process, grounded theory can be viewed as a potential instigator for change as it explains their own behaviours to social actors, giving them a degree of control that they did not previously possess (Wuest 1995; Hammersley 1989). One of the major strengths of grounded theory is said to be that it recognises the complexity of the social world, and works to make sense of it to both analysts and lay-people (Glaser 1992; Wells 1995). Grounded theory has been argued to have considerable potential as a postmodern research method (Annells 1996; Wuest 1995), largely due to its emphasis on the socially constructed nature of reality (Goulding 1998).

Grounded theory was originally based on the proposition that data generated in a social environment can be used to construct social theories (Robrecht 1995), which was in turn founded on the contention that constancies exist in the social world (Huberman and Miles 1994). The method also operates according to the assumption that it is essential for the researcher to first gain familiarity with the specific setting(s) in which behaviour occurs in order to generate useful concepts and theories for social actors and theorists alike.
(Huberman and Miles 1994). As a naturalistic research method, grounded theory commences with a general research objective (Melia 1996). More precise research questions are allowed to gradually emerge from the broad research area through on-going immersion in data relevant to the chosen social phenomenon (Wuest 1995; Glaser 1992).

Grounded theory relates specifically to the analysis phase of research, although it can refer to data collection as well (Glaser 1992). In fact, Glaser (1992) has argued that the grounded theory method of analysis can be applied to any data, not just that collected qualitatively. Rather than being limited to a particular discipline or form of data collection, grounded theory has been found useful across multiple research areas. It has been effectively and widely employed in the social sciences since its inception in the mid-1960s (Wells 1995), including several consumption studies. Areas of application relating to consumption include the analysis of women’s clothing in the workplace (Kimle and Damhorst 1997), the consumption of technological products (Mick and Fournier 1998), and the symbolic meaning found in advertisements (Phillips 1997; Hirschman and Thompson 1997). These studies explicitly acknowledge the use of a grounded approach. It is likely that many consumer research studies have employed grounded theory methods without explicitly labelling them as such (see for example Schouton and McAlexander 1995; Celsi et al. 1993). According to Calder (1977), many exploratory studies employing qualitative methods are effectively using the grounded theory method.

Grounded theory relies on the close examination of empirical data prior to focused reading in the literature (Glaser and Strauss 1967; Goulding 1998; Locke 1996). By reversing the usual order of literature review and data collection, grounded theory seeks to adapt previous findings to the specific characteristics of the phenomena under study (Hirschman and Thompson 1997). The objective is to prevent contamination of the analysis with preconceived theories, aiming instead for a fresh perspective on the phenomenon that is tainted as little as possible by previous research (Locke 1996). Also, by commencing with the phenomenon or behaviour rather than theories, there is less chance that the research outcomes will be theoretically removed from the needs of the subject under study (Thompson 1997). Goulding (1998) suggests that the literature be treated as another informant, rather than a dominant contributor to the emerging interpretations. The extent to which researchers should avoid all relevant material prior to the analysis of the data is a point of contention among grounded theorists, particularly the two founding fathers.
Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss were the originators of the grounded theory method. Subsequent to the publication of their first book on the subject in 1967 (*The Discovery of Grounded Theory*), they adopted different applications of the grounded theory method. While Strauss and Corbin (1990) permit some depth of reading in the early stages, Glaser (1992) is adamant that researchers should actively avoid all such contamination until the core category has been identified from the data. Given that many researchers focus their attentions in areas in which they have already accumulated some expertise, it is unrealistic to assume that they approach the phenomenon of interest as a clean slate (Kools et al. 1996). Instead, it is now considered more appropriate to recognise the prior knowledge of researchers, while employing an iterative process of literature review and data collection and analysis (Goulding 1998; Hirschman and Thompson 1997; Glesne and Peshkin 1992).

In another area of disagreement, Glaser remains committed to an approach focusing on total emergence (see Glaser 1992), while Strauss came to favour a dimensional approach that pre-suggests possible influences on behaviour (see Strauss and Corbin 1990). Also, Glaser sees the primary purpose of grounded theory as exploration, to be followed later with verificational studies. By comparison, Strauss and Corbin view grounded theory as a combination of hypothesis generation and verification. Strauss and Corbin allow for variations in interpretations according to the characteristics of the researcher, while Glaser seeks a correct interpretation that exists independent of the researcher. Glaser thus retains a more positivist stance on the last point, while the adapted method offered by Strauss and Corbin represents a move to a more postmodern position.

Other users of the grounded theory method are divided in their preferences for the varying approaches proffered by its originators. Some favour the traditional approach advocated by Glaser, while others embrace the version proposed by Strauss and Corbin. To date there is no consensus among grounded theorists as to which yields the superior interpretation of social phenomena (Kools et al. 1996). This conflict between proponents, however, need not preclude the use of grounded theory as a viable research methodology. In fact, the conflict reflects the diversity of potential applications of the general concept of grounded theory. This conflict has resulted in the application of adapted versions of grounded theory, not all of which are entirely congruent with the
method as it was originally presented by Glaser and Strauss (Goulding 1998). The divergence in approaches between proponents offers consumer researchers a greater range of specific research and analysis techniques that can be employed to meet the requirements of different research tasks and the skills of different researchers. In its current form, grounded theory is thus very flexible in application. While this can be attributed to a lack of maturity, as apparent in the continuing disagreement among users of the method, this flexibility remains a distinct advantage to its users in their efforts to explicate a broad range of behaviours.

Grounded theory procedures centre around the identification of categories that are derived from the data via the constant comparative method (Glaser and Strauss 1967; Hammersley 1989). The constant comparative method requires the constant comparison between incidents found in the data and emerging theoretical concepts (Barnes 1996). The analyst compares the contents of one interview or observation episode with another in an effort to identify underlying themes. These themes can include both commonalities and contradictions (Wells 1995). The objective is to explicitly note similarities and differences in the data, which are then used to derive theoretical categories that can help explain the phenomenon under investigation (Glaser and Strauss 1967; Glaser 1992). The analysis phase continues throughout data collection, as the analyst determines the next appropriate interviewee, location, or line of discussion on the basis of the theoretical understandings emerging from prior interviews and observations (Glaser and Strauss 1967; Locke 1996). The constant comparative method is the primary vehicle employed in the grounded theory method because of its ability to generate the categories and principles behind the social behaviour of interest (Hammersley 1989).

According to its instigators, the core or primary category of a grounded theory should account for the major concern of the social actors in the activity under study (Glaser 1992). Once categories have been established, the next task is to identify the properties of these categories until saturation is achieved. These categories and properties represent the theoretical analysis of the phenomenon, conveying the basic social processes at work behind the observed behaviours (Glaser and Strauss 1967). Strauss and Corbin (1990, pp. 63-72) give the example of a manager/maître d’ working in a restaurant. They suggest the core category pertaining to this position may be that of
“food orchestrator”, and the associated properties could be watching, monitoring, assisting, and information passing.

As the generation of theoretical concepts is the objective, rather than establishing the validity of these concepts, the inductive process does not require representative data in the statistical sense (Glaser and Strauss 1967). Instead, saturation of the data is sought. This entails engaging in comparison until no new information regarding the category is obtained (Strauss and Corbin 1990). Part of this process involves intentionally accessing those informants who can shed light on the phenomenon of interest (Goulding 1998), and seeking out contradictions to the emerging interpretation (Strauss and Corbin 1990).

The ways in which grounded theory has been employed in consumer research have not corresponded entirely with the procedures outlined above. For example, rather than explicitly deriving categories and properties, Mick and Fournier (1998), Hirschman and Thompson (1997), and Kimle and Damhorst (1997) have produced descriptive accounts of the strategies employed by consumers to cope with the social processes under examination. By doing so, these researchers have addressed the primary concerns of the social actors studied, and have provided an understanding of the phenomenon of interest. However, this approach does not meet all the requirements of the grounded theory method as it is described by Glaser and Strauss (1967).

When borrowing methods from other disciplines, Strauss (1995) argues that theorists do not need to justify the assumptions inherent in the borrowed procedures. Instead, the researcher can employ the methods where they are relevant to the research problem at hand. Consumer researchers using the grounded theory method can thus progress the application of the method, rather than addressing the unresolved aspects of its design (Hammersley 1989). The method has three primary advantages to consumer researchers: (a) it was designed for use in the discipline of sociology, and is therefore suited to the analysis of macro influences on human behaviour; (b) it is appropriate for the in situ analysis of behaviours, which has been found to be important in consumer research (Belk et al. 1988); and (c) grounded theory has the capacity to generate theories of behaviour, rather than ceasing at the point of description (Barnes 1996; Kools et al. 1996; Wuest 1995). Each of these three advantages was of particular relevance to this study, making grounded theory an appropriate choice of methodology.
Grounded Theory and Ethnography

Grounded theory and ethnographic methods are compatible, as ethnographic studies can provide the thick description that is very useful data for grounded theory analysis (Glaser and Strauss 1967). Ethnographies are particularly good input data for grounded theory analysis due to the following similarities in the characteristics between the two methods:

- Sample selection is emergent in both ethnographic studies and grounded theory (Wells 1995; Belk et al. 1988).
- Both attempt to obtain emic descriptions of behaviour (Barnes 1996; Arnould and Wallendorf 1994).
- As a naturalistic form of inquiry, ethnographic studies entail observing and analysing behaviour in naturally occurring conditions (Belk et al. 1988; Longabaugh 1980). Grounded theory similarly performs best with data generated in natural settings (Robrecht 1995).
- Both have been derived from the symbolic interactionist perspective (Goulding 1998, Annells 1996; Maynard and Clayman 1991).
- Both often rely on participant observations (Wells 1995; Arnould and Wallendorf 1994).

These similarities indicate that ethnographic methods offer a method of data collection conducive to inductive theory building. A useful way of conceptualising the relationship between ethnographic studies and grounded theory is that grounded theory can formalise and extend the limited theoretical component of ethnographic analyses. Grounded theory takes descriptions of phenomena one step further by deriving theories that provide meaning to the behaviour under study (Goulding 1998).

The compatibility of grounded theory and ethnographic studies, however, is not complete. While ethnographic research focuses on the relevance of culture to a specific behaviour or outcome, grounded theory (in theory) holds no such preconceptions (Barnes 1996). In more recent years, however, users of grounded theory have argued that it remains a useful and relevant method for analysing data that have been collected with the importance of specific variables in mind. Strauss and Corbin (1990) refer specifically to the suitability of a grounded theory method to studies where the primary variables have already been identified. Similarly, De Vault (1995) has pointed to the
importance of actively searching for the effects of such factors as gender and ethnicity, due to the tendency for the socialisation process to require people to play down the effects of these variables. In this study, culture was the macro variable that was nominated to be of interest prior to the commencement of data collection and analysis. While such an application of the grounded theory method would not be considered appropriate by Glaser (1992), Strauss and Corbin (1990) and other grounded theorists would agree with such an application (De Vault 1995 and Wuest 1995).

One of the key dilemmas surrounding both grounded theory and ethnographic research is that of generalisability (Goulding 1998; Johnson 1990). The ability to draw etic conclusions from data generated via ethnographic and grounded theory methods has long been contentious. Etic refers to a cultural description taken from the perspective of the researcher, where the aim is to identify universal phenomena (Berry 1980; Triandis 1980). Once again, Glaser and Strauss part ways. Glaser (1992) appears to favour the more confined treatment of results, while Strauss and Corbin (1990) seem more amenable to the transfer of interpretations from one context to another. Others are undecided, as is made evident by some grounded theorists noting that localised interpretations are inappropriate for employment in other settings unless further research validates the extension, while simultaneously assuming that their findings are relevant in other contexts (see for example Hammersley 1989 and Annells 1996). De Vault (1995) suggests that a way of overcoming this dilemma is to focus on the generalisation of the social relationships underlying the behaviours observed, rather than attempting to transfer the particular social experiences involved.

Similarly, the use of ethnographic methods in consumer research has been characterised by the co-existence of declarations of the location-specific nature of the interpretation and the inclination to assume that results are generalisable across contexts. According to Arnould and Wallendorf (1994, p. 485),

Ethnography not only establishes the context and subject significance (*emic*) of experience for particular groups of persons, but also seeks to convey the comparative and interpreted (*etic*) cultural significance of this experience.

This refers to the ability of ethnographic techniques to generate data that explicates the localised phenomenon of interest while providing possible insights into broader theoretical frameworks. Others point to the specificity of the data generated via
ethnographic techniques, and caution against assuming that this data may be representative of broader behaviours (Johnson 1990).

The reconciliation reached by some ethnographers is similar to that reached by some grounded theorists. Instead of generalising the specifics of the behaviours studied, researchers point to the basic human behaviours demonstrated and apply these to other groups that have not been directly represented in the research (e.g., Brady 1992). Arnould and Wallendorf (1994) espouse the benefits of ethnography for revealing general consumption motivations, discussing how ethnography provides access to the symbolic meaning embedded in products. This is a valuable attribute considering the often subconscious usage of these meanings by consumers (McCracken 1990b). While such an interpretation would result from the investigation of certain groups of informants, it becomes useful in understanding broader consumption behaviours.

In line with earlier statements concerning the lack of onus on disciplines borrowing methodologies from elsewhere, the issue of generalisability will not be resolved here. The analysis of beer consumption to follow in chapter 5 provides the localised detail required by an ethnographic, grounded study, while chapter 6 draws conclusions that are assumed to be at least partially relevant to broader social relationships.

**Product Selection**

Chapter 3 highlighted the links between beer consumption and Australian culture, noting in particular the strong association between beer and leisure in Australia. Beer as a product category was thus considered a particularly suitable product for a study of the ways in which culture and consumption are conjoined. Although it is readily accepted that beer consumption is an Australian national pastime, a comprehensive understanding of the relationship between beer consumption and Australian culture is lacking. In particular, there is an opportunity for a formal study of the creation, maintenance, and transference of cultural meaning that occurs through the process of drinking beer. Early interviews confirmed that beer as a product category is strongly symbolically linked to Australians’ conceptions of their culture, their lifestyles, and their national stereotypes. Even young children readily identified beer as a product heavily associated with Australian culture. It became apparent throughout data
collection that beer is an integral part of the Australian lifestyle, through both its consumption and non-consumption.

Sample

As the topic under consideration is the social and cultural processes at work in beer consumption in Australian, it was important for data collection to occur across multiple segments of beer-drinkers. There is a lack of emphasis on representative sampling in a quantitative sense in both ethnographic and grounded theory research (Huberman and Miles 1994; Berry 1980; Glaser and Strauss 1967). Sampling is emergent in nature, with informants chosen on the basis of insights gleaned from previous informants (Belk et al. 1988; Glaser and Strauss 1967). Purposive, judgement, selective, or theoretical sampling methods are considered legitimate, even ideal (Johnson 1990; Wallendorf and Belk 1989; Hammersley 1989). The optimal point at which to cease data collection in both methods is when further sampling provides only redundancy, which occurs when no new insights are obtained and core concepts are saturated (Wallendorf and Belk 1989; Glaser and Strauss 1967).

An implication of using both ethnographic methods and the grounded theory method is the inability to stipulate a priori the size of the sample due to the emergent nature of the research design (Johnson 1990; Belk et al. 1988; Hammersley 1989; Lincoln and Guba 1985). However, initial locations for data collection and types of subjects to be interviewed and observed can be specified in advance (Strauss and Corbin 1990). Thus while the sample design for this research was constructed incrementally over the three years of data collection, prior to commencing data collection it was decided that coverage would include a range of time periods and locations to ensure that a maximum range of behaviours was included in the analysis. Data collection was programmed to cover both sides of the continent, and several age, socio-economic, and cultural subgroups. For example, efforts were made to ensure that the range of ages of informants was very broad across the sample, and that both “big city” residents and those living in smaller regional areas were incorporated into the sample population.

Within states, the specific suburbs and towns selected for interviewing and observation were intentionally manipulated to increase the exposure to informants from varying social classes. Approximately half of the drinking venues in which interviews
and observations took place were estimated by the researcher to be located in working-
class areas, while the other half were in middle-class areas. In order to access the range
of informants and behaviours of interest and to achieve saturation, a total of 64 interviews
was conducted, involving 115 informants in drinking contexts. While the sample design
provided a broad range of responses, informants were by no means randomly selected or
statistically representative of the entire Australian population.

In some instances, key informants were located and recruited. Key informants are
trustworthy and observant individuals who have a good understanding of the (sub)culture
of interest, and are willing to share this understanding with the researcher (Johnson 1990).
They are an important element of sample selection, as if they are well chosen they can
provide considerable insight into the behaviour of interest (Dean and Whyte 1958). They
are able to "translate" any jargon used, and can often offer explanations for the behaviours
of others (Fontana and Frey 1994). De Vault (1995) recommends paying particular
attention to those who work in the social settings of interest to facilitate the emerging
interpretation. In this study, five brewery representatives from the two major brewers
operating in Australia were interviewed, and nine bartenders were utilised as key
informants. Bartenders, in particular, were typically very experienced observers of those
consuming alcohol, particularly beer. It appeared relatively simple for them to describe the
types of people who drank specific brands of beer, as well as other types of alcoholic
beverages. They characteristically had a good understanding of the role of beer
consumption in the lives of their patrons. Through their contributions they provided a
degree of continuity to the study, as they had usually formed relationships with patrons and
had observed their behaviours over extended periods of time. As interviews and
observations were conducted over many drinking locations, it was not possible to engage
in persistent long-term observation at individual sites. Bartenders were able to overcome
this deficiency by adding an historical dimension by describing the drinking habits of
specific individuals over weeks, months, and in some cases, years.

While private beer drinking is an important element of the role of beer
consumption in Australian culture, relatively few interviews or observations were
conducted in homes or other private locations. This was so for three reasons. First, private
contexts were much more difficult to access without a total reliance on personal friends
and family, a sample bias that was not considered acceptable for this study. Second,
financial resources were not available to enable the recruitment of those not readily
accessible for interviewing. Third, in order to keep the study to a manageable size it was necessary to draw some parameters around the scope of the research. As a result, the primary focus was on beer consumed in licensed premises. Drinking venues, such as pubs and clubs, provided excellent contact with beer consumers in a public context with unconstrained access. However, information concerning beer consumption in private contexts was also obtained by encouraging informants to discuss their own and others’ consumption behaviours in private situations, and through secondary research in the form of ABS reports.

The table below shows the breakdown of informants interviewed in drinking contexts according to several criteria, including gender, age, interview location, and state of residence. All informants belonged to more than one grouping, hence the totals are not a simple summation of the columns. It is important to note that best estimates have been used, as many interviews in drinking locations did not have the same number of participants throughout the course of the interview, due to informants wandering in and out of group interviews. The table makes apparent the emphasis on interviews conducted in public drinking contexts that was noted above.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Number of respondents</th>
<th>Number of interviews</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Males</td>
<td>99</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Females</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public bar patrons</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saloon bar patrons</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leagues clubs</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sports venues</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private homes</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regional centres/towns</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bar tenders</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seniors</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Western Australia</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New South Wales</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Victoria</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>115</strong></td>
<td><strong>64</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In addition to interviews conducted with beer drinkers in public and private drinking contexts, other interviews were conducted with school children and retirees in non-drinking contexts. These groups provided a relatively captive sample for interviewing, particularly school children who were over-represented compared to
retirees. In all instances of dealing with both school children and retirees, permission was obtained from appropriate personnel prior to interviewing. In almost all cases access was given with no requirement for an institutional representative to be present. Four primary schools were visited, three of which were in Western Australia and one in New South Wales. Ten secondary schools were visited, six in Western Australia, two in New South Wales, and two in Victoria. Of the two retirement villages that were visited, one was in Western Australia and one in New South Wales. Throughout the course of these interviews, 91 primary school children, 196 secondary school children, and 11 retirement village residents were asked their impressions of Australian culture and the role of beer within this culture. These interviews were run concurrently with data collection in drinking venues, and provided a broader context in which to place emerging interpretations.

The interviews with secondary school students were especially useful, as many were experimenting with alcohol, and with beer in particular. Due to their “amateur” status, these drinkers were more conscious of their decision-making processes relating to beer consumption, and the socialisation effects at work in their attitudes to beer consumption were more apparent.

Due to time and financial constraints, not all groups of interest could be accessed. Examples of segments that were under-represented were the very wealthy and migrants (both groups being less likely to frequent pubs), indigenous Australians, and residents of the Outback (i.e., farming and agricultural communities). The latter tend to be particularly heavy beer drinkers compared to other Australians (Health Department of Western Australia 1995). However, as these groups are relatively small sections of the Australian community (ABS 1999; ABS 1997e), it is anticipated that their under-representation will not be overly detrimental to the resulting interpretation.

Another possible point of sample bias worthy of mention emanates from the characteristics of the researcher. It is argued that the gender of the researcher influences the results obtained, as gender affects the ease of entree and the levels of trust that emerge (Fontana and Frey 1994). As a lone female traversing the pubs and clubs of Australia, there were some potential informants who generated wariness and caution, causing evasive reactions on the part of the researcher. For example, tattooed males with heavy facial hair circling the pool tables of pubs in more crime-stricken areas were avoided. In such
locations, informants with mainstream appearances were usually chosen over more intimidating alternatives. Adler and Adler (1994) acknowledge the differences in sampling that inevitably occur when the researcher is female. However, their suggestion of employing bi-gender research teams to reduce the impact was neither possible nor desirable in this study. Fontana and Frey (1994) actually offer some advantages that can stem from being a female researcher, such as invisibility and a perception of being harmless.

Overall, the sampling problems encountered in this research were considered consistent with those experienced in other qualitative studies, and were deemed acceptable.

Data Collection Techniques

As discussed in chapter 2, the variety of qualitative data collection methods available include observation, participation, interviews, focus groups, and the analysis of documentary records. All of these methods were used in this research. In combination they were: (1) capable of generating the desired information; (2) suitable to a lone researcher; (3) appropriate to the preferred disclosure methods of informants; and (4) feasible given limited financial resources. Each method is listed below, with a brief discussion of its relative attributes and how it was implemented. (The University of Western Australia Ethics Committee approved the data collection and storage methods used in this research.)

**Interviews**

The interview is a valued qualitative research method (Haley 1996), and one that is extensively used across subject areas (Fontana and Frey 1994). Depth interviews have been found to be particularly useful for examining cultural meaning and changes in meanings over time (Manning and Cullum-Swan 1994), as interviews provide informants with the opportunity to articulate the values and beliefs motivating their behaviours (Arnould and Wallendorf 1994). Depth interviews are valued for their ability to access subconscious and unconscious motivations (Dichter 1964). This characteristic of depth interviews was very important to this study, as interviews provided the context to explore the connections Australians have (both consciously and unconsciously) with beer consumption. Throughout the interview process, informants were encouraged to explain the “meaning” of beer as a product category, the importance of beer consumption to the
social and cultural environment in which they live, and how it is in any way connected with their self-concepts.

Given the unconscious nature of enculturation, one interviewing style used was to draw out perceptions of right and wrong, thus enabling an interpretation of Australian culture as assimilated by the particular respondent (Goodenough 1980). Statements including the words “ought” or “should” were of key interest, as they indicate much about the cultural values absorbed by the individual (Kluckhohn 1967; Valentine and Evans 1993). Informants were encouraged to talk at length about subjects of interest to them within the broad parameters of culture and consumption, and probing questions were used to access ideas of correct and incorrect beer consumption behaviours. Informants were invited to discuss at length their own feelings about beer consumption, and their perceptions of the feelings of others. Informants’ choices of subject material were specifically noted, as much can be gleaned from the situations that informants choose to recall, and the associations that they make (Manning and Cullum-Swan 1994). Similarly, informant omissions were of particular interest (as per Arnould and Wallendorf 1994). The contradictions that were often apparent between stated beliefs and observed behaviours were also actively examined for meaning.

Warnings are often given regarding taking informants’ statements literally. Arnould and Wallendorf (1994) discuss the selectivity of memory and the selectivity of reporting of behaviour, suggesting that verbal accounts should be perceived as efforts by informants to give meaning to their behaviour. As such, they provide emic representations rather than objective accounts. Dean and Whyte (1958) have cautioned against the assumption that the informant firmly holds some belief that can be accessed with skill and perseverance. They advise the researcher to concede that statements made by informants are a product of their individual perceptual filtering systems and emotional states of mind. Furthermore, they noted that informants communicate according to their language skills and willingness to convey the desired information in that particular instance. Dean and Whyte also discussed the situational nature of informants’ disclosures, recommending that researchers take note of the characteristics of the social situation in which the interview is conducted. The focus is therefore on interpreting the meaning behind the conversation, rather than on the exact spoken words. Arnould and Wallendorf (1994) suggest looking for overgeneralisations, metaphoric glosses, and claims of uniqueness when interviewing informants. They explain glosses to be accounts of behaviours provided by informants that
speak more about cultural significance and symbolic meaning than they do about real events. Such an approach acknowledges that informants’ accounts may be designed to communicate a desired image, as opposed to representing an accurate chronicle of events and motivations from the informant’s perspective (Wallendorf and Belk 1989).

Heeding these warnings and suggestions, interviews were oriented around gaining an understanding of informants’ feelings towards specific beer products, brands, and consumption situations. Notice was taken of the social surroundings and the apparent mood and intoxication level of the informant. Topics were discussed in numerous ways in order to delve into the meaning behind beer consumption for informants, and emerging themes were noted and explored wherever possible or appropriate. It was kept in mind at all times that it was a representation of the informant that was being conveyed, which resulted in an awareness of the image-management that was to a greater or lesser extent part of each informant’s response. For example, posturing was more pronounced where video equipment was used than where note-taking was the method of retention.

It is posited that interview results can be enhanced by the approach taken by the interviewer. Fontana and Frey (1994, p. 371) recommend that the interviewer “‘come down’ to the level of informants and engage in a ‘real’ conversation with ‘give and take’ and empathetic understanding.” This approach is suggested to have the effect of encouraging informants to be more relaxed and open (Wuest 1995). Over progressive interviews it was found that adopting a conversation mode with informants was more productive than making a clear distinction between interviewer and interviewee. Informants appeared to be more natural in their manner, and less concerned with giving the “right” response. As a result, it was concluded that the quality of the rapport established was greater where the interview was less structured and more discursive. However, such an approach was not always possible or appropriate. For example, some informants were more comfortable in the role of interviewee rather than conversation partner. Most informants appeared to find the interview process inherently enjoyable, and readily gave descriptions of their own personal usage patterns and accounts of those of others.

Fontana and Frey (1994, p. 371) nominate several areas for consideration when planning interviews. Examples include the varying of techniques for different informants
(e.g., children versus the elderly) and the dress and body language of the interviewer. They posit that these elements can alter the results of the interview, and therefore require attention before and during data collection and analysis. In accordance with these recommendations, interviews were varied to accommodate the characteristics of informants. For example, the elderly and children required more structured interviews relative to other age groups. In different research venues the clothing codes were significantly different, requiring a considered clothing choice prior to arrival at the research location. This manipulation of physical appearance was beneficial from two perspectives. First, it was possible to better blend with the surrounding consumption environment, enabling unobtrusive observation activities. Second, informants appeared to be more relaxed when communicating with someone who appeared to be more similar than different to themselves.

Gender issues quickly became apparent in the interviewing process and adjustments in engagement style were made accordingly. Males reacted very differently when approached compared to females, and it was necessary to cater for these differences in order to gain effective access to both genders. In this case it was a female researcher instigating a conversation, and the result was that males typically reacted more favourably and with less suspicion. Females appeared to appreciate the more formal investigative approach whereby an introduction was made and a brief description of the research topic provided. By comparison, males responded better to a light-hearted request for a “casual chat about a few things for a research project.” Males were more likely to agree to an interview if they were on their own, while females preferred to be accompanied. In general, it was found that women were less likely to comply with interview requests, resulting in an under-representation of female relative to male informants (only 16 of the 115 respondents were female). This is not an unusual result in qualitative research, as Adler and Adler (1994) have noted the tendency of female respondents to be more cautious and resistant when talking to unknown researchers. Subsequent observation and interview data indicated that for a female to be approached by another female in a public drinking area when each is unknown to the other is deemed to be somehow improper. Approaches made to males, however, met more closely with acceptable mating behaviour in drinking contexts. It is important to note, however, that the lower representation of females also reflects the fewer number of females frequenting pubs and clubs compared to males.
The establishment of rapport with informants was a high priority, as rapport with interviewees is considered essential for generating trust and productive communication (Fontana and Frey 1994; Heider 1988). From the informant’s point of view, the researcher was requesting a time investment with a complete stranger, a request that was not long tolerated unless a personal relationship of some nature was promptly generated. This was particularly relevant to those interviewed in pubs, as interviewing encroached directly upon a particularly “sacred” form of leisure. The establishment of rapport did not prove to be a difficult task in most cases, although women did generally tend to be more resistant. Belk et al. (1988) and Valentine and Evans (1993) also note the relative ease with which rapport can be quickly achieved in the interviewing process. However, once rapport has been established it can be quite fragile (Fontana and Frey 1994). In several instances the informant was asked to pose for a photo at the conclusion of the interview, but this request was rarely accommodated. Once the informant had refused to be photographed, there was a notable difference in demeanour. Obviously the request represented an invasion of privacy, and any rapport that had been established quickly evaporated.

**Observation**

The ways in which members of a group spend their time and money can be very illuminating in terms of the group’s values, and these activities can be productively explored with the use of observational data (Kluckhohn 1967). Through observation the researcher can study a phenomenon that has not been altered by the presence of a known researcher, and as such, observation has the potential to offer a different interpretation to data collected via other means (Adler and Adler 1994). There are often considerable differences between what people say they do and what they actually do (Arnould and Wallendorf 1994; Piirto 1991), and it is therefore suggested that researchers should not rely solely on interview data when seeking to explicate a consumption phenomenon (Barnes 1996; Huberman and Miles 1994; Wallendorf and Belk 1989). The argument is that through the observation of consumption behaviours it is possible to gain insights into the operating motivational influences (Rust 1993; Dichter 1964).

According to Piirto (1991, p. 6), “Ethnographic observation provides unparalleled insights into how products, brands, and services fit into people’s lives.” She proposes that observation has the ability to fill in the gaps of understanding remaining after the use of other research methods (see also Heath 1997; Rust 1993). Adler and Adler (1994, p. 389)
also discuss the benefits of incorporating observation into a research process, stating that observation is:

Freed from subjects’ whimsical shifts in opinion, self-evaluation, self-deception, manipulation of self-presentation, embarrassment, and outright dishonesty.

While interviewing provides an emic perspective (i.e., it provides an interpretation of the unique outlook of the informant), observation through its access to actual behaviours can permit an etic interpretation (Arnould and Wallendorf 1994). Observation also supplies an opportunity to attribute new meanings to established behaviours, or to better understand evolving behavioural patterns (Adler and Adler 1994). The need to infer the nature of a culture rather than relying on its direct observation has been discussed in chapter 2. However, observation plays a key role in providing researchers with the raw materials from which inferences are drawn (Adler and Adler 1994; Rust 1993; Manning 1987; Becker and Geer 1958). Verbal accounts alone cannot be expected to elucidate behaviour resulting from conformity values, as the common urge to be accepted ensures that taught responses ensue (Kluckhohn 1967). In other words, not only are consumers taught to conform in their consumption behaviours, but they are taught to justify such behaviour in ways that discount the importance of conformity pressures. Add to this the tendency of informants to deceive researchers where they consider it appropriate (Denzin and Lincoln 1994; Hudson and Ozanne 1988; Nachman 1984), and there results a convincing argument for combining observation with other forms of data collection.

Both grounded theory and ethnographic research rely heavily on observation techniques, particularly participant observation (Glaser and Strauss 1967; Heath 1997; Sarantakos 1993). Participant observation was the primary technique employed in this study, and involves combining observation, interviews, and participation (Belk 1990). Typically, a drinking venue was examined from the outside for advertising signage and to determine the style of venue. Once inside, unobtrusive observations were conducted to “get a feel” for the drinking location and its patrons. Those drinkers present were studied, and those to be approached for interviews chosen. Selected drinkers were then observed prior to the request for interview being made. Observation was found to be a very valuable tool in the process of exploring consumers’ behaviours and motivations, and complemented data obtained through individual and group interviews.
Focus Groups

While market research organisations have long understood the value of focus group interviewing (Calder 1977), this technique has not been as accepted by academic researchers (Saegert and Fennell 1991; Rook 1988). Group interviewing enables interaction amongst participants, thus generating different results from one-on-one interviewing methods (Fontana and Frey 1994). It provides another element in the armory of qualitative research methods that can add insight and understanding to the cultural component of human behaviour (Haley 1996). While not technically an ethnographic tool, focus groups are recognised to favourably enhance interpretations obtained via ethnographic means (Fontana and Frey 1994; Piirto 1991). Fontana and Frey (1994) list the advantages of focus groups as providing new perspectives, generating background information for questionnaire design, and supplying a source of triangulation.

Perhaps one reason why group interviews are employed less frequently in academic research is that they are more difficult to arrange and administer. Also, where organisations commission focus groups, participants are paid for their attendance, an option not as readily available in academic research. Fontana and Frey (1994, p. 365) outline the difficulties associated with moderating group discussions on a topic. They highlight the need to draw out all participants to maximise coverage and to prevent more vocal individuals from dominating proceedings. They nominate “group-think” as a possible negative outcome. The focus groups employed in this research were initially a second preference to one-on-one interviews, and the majority of interviews conducted in drinking locations were single-informant interviews (35 interviews). A further 17 interviews were conducted with two informants, 3 interviews were with three informants, 8 were with four informants, and one interview was comprised of five informants. In interviews with more than one informant, care was taken to ensure contribution from all group members, and the group context was utilised wherever possible to generate stimulated (and sometimes heated) discussion on the issues raised.

Group sizes were much larger for those interviews conducted with school children. In efforts to locate and access younger informants, it was often necessary to accommodate the needs of those controlling their availability for interviews, namely school principals. As a result it was sometimes necessary to conduct group interviews of up to 30 students.
Documentary Analysis

Documentary analysis is another qualitative technique available to the researcher (Punch 1986), one that can provide background and detail to the research topic. Historical materials provide an additional source of data, and can supply a perspective that is beyond the scope of informants to provide (Venkatesh 1995; Wallendorf and Belk 1989). As reported in chapter 3, archived files of beer advertisements were studied to trace themes used in beer advertising in Australia over the last thirty years. These themes have been used as a comparison point for the changes that have occurred in Australian culture and the role of beer consumption in these changes. Also incorporated into the interpretation are relevant reports of alcohol consumption and other cultural activities (e.g., leisure, sport) generated by the Australian Bureau of Statistics, also cited in chapter 3.

In summary, this study combined in-depth interviews, focus groups, and observation. A targeted analysis of secondary data in the form of statistical reports and television advertisements was also undertaken. The use of a combination of techniques was favoured on the recommendation of many experienced researchers, including Denzin and Lincoln (1994), Arnould and Wallendorf (1994), Adler and Adler (1994), Hormuth (1990), and Belk et al. (1988).

Trustworthiness Issues

Numerous techniques (discussed in chapter 2) have been suggested to increase the trustworthiness of data obtained via qualitative research methods. The inappropriateness of the traditional methods of reliability and validity for the assessment of grounded theory is one point upon which proponents of grounded theory appear to agree (e.g., Strauss and Corbin 1990; Glaser 1992; Wells 1995; Hammersley 1989). In their earliest work on grounded theory, Glaser and Strauss (1967, p. 235) were particularly adamant about the importance of keeping grounded theories free of the restricting forces of scientific methods of assessment: "Undue emphasis on being ‘scientific’ is simply not reasonable in light of our need for discovery and exploration amid very considerable structural changes." They argued that environments exhibiting rapid social change could not feasibly be subjected to the same requirements as those applied to the more constant physical world. Instead, Strauss and Corbin (1990) recommend making the procedures employed during data collection and analysis explicit to readers, enabling them to decide for themselves the quality of the interpretation. One way of achieving this is through thick description, a
technique that has been offered as an alternative to the perceived need for trustworthiness criteria (Belk 1990; Thompson 1990). Due to the advantages of thick description in assuring the reader of the quality of the interpretation, this procedure has been employed throughout the results reported in chapter 5.

The competing perspectives on the applicability of trustworthiness criteria were considered in the formulation of the research design for this study. The imperfections inherent in the range of trustworthiness criteria as addressed in the CaP perspective are readily acknowledged. However, some were selected for application due to their perceived usefulness in generating a believable interpretation of beer consumption for the audience of this research. Holt (1991) states that one possible benefit of trustworthiness criteria is their perceived ability to convince the reader of the credibility of the interpretation. This is especially the case where the objective of the criteria is to encourage a greater depth of understanding of the phenomenon of interest (Denzin and Lincoln 1994), and where the criteria provide a means of satisfying readers of the quality of the work (Lincoln and Guba 1985). Some of the trustworthiness criteria referred to earlier can assist in explaining the processes used along the path of theory generation, and thus have relevance to studies employing the grounded theory method.

Examples of those trustworthiness criteria employed in this study for the purposes of ensuring the quality of the work and communicating this quality to readers include the use of multiple sites, multiple methods, purposive sampling, and member checking. However, other techniques, such as multiple researchers, peer debriefing, and auditing, were avoided due to their shared implicit assumption of an objective reality, as well as their impracticality for a PhD thesis.

Member checking was employed in this study in a general fashion. Lincoln and Guba (1985) recommend member checking (i.e., where respondents are asked to comment on the results derived from their input) as a method of exposing the intentionality behind behaviour, and regard the use of the technique as a strong indicator of authenticity. They warn, however, against accommodating all criticisms made by informants, advocating the consideration of all comments with the intention of identifying those that can add to the emerging understanding of the phenomenon. They suggest that to accommodate all criticisms would result in an account that has been averaged to the point where it is meaningless to all. Such a stance towards the interpretations of informants is troublesome
to Wuest (1995), who notes that where disagreement exists it is the researcher who has final control over the published results. She suggests that the use of grounded theory can assist in overcoming such disagreements, as it is well suited to the examination of multiple truths and the integration of diverse perspectives. The resulting interpretation thus represents a negotiation between researcher and informants, rather than existing as a one-way process.

The form of member checking advocated by Belk et al. (1988) involves going back to informants after analysis and obtaining their impressions of the credibility of the interpretation. However, it is acknowledged that informants’ awareness of the social world is always partial (Wallendorf and Belk 1989; Manning 1987), and informants are not always reliable verifiers as they are less able to view their behaviours in the light of other comparison groups and relevant theories (Belk 1990). As a result, member checking was employed here in its more relaxed form, where members of the same “stakeholding groups from whom data were originally collected” were consulted (Lincoln and Guba 1985, p. 314), rather than the original informants (this approach is also advocated by Wuest 1995). Informants were often given the reported viewpoints of other informants and asked if they “sounded right”. Similarly, the evolving interpretations were periodically raised with informants to observe their reactions. This was a useful tool for stimulating discussion and drawing out similarities and differences in attitudes. This form of member checking provided a constant input into emerging interpretations, as found by Wallendorf and Belk (1989).

**Apparatus**

Observation notes were recorded either on notepaper, dictaphone, or video camera. Video and/or audio recording equipment were used in most interviews with informants. Occasionally it was necessary to commit conversations to memory to be written up afterwards. Video is recognised as being very helpful in ethnographic research (Piirto 1991), although some are concerned that the presence of the ethnographer and the recording equipment are enough to alter the behaviour under observation (Rose 1990; Heider 1988; Marcus 1986). Belk et al. (1988) and Heath (1997) reported that despite these reservations, they did not encounter significant data collection problems associated with the use of recording equipment. Informants were said to become habituated to the presence of the equipment, just as they did to the
presence of the interviewer. Belk et al. (1988) acknowledge that the video recorder does appear to sometimes create an unnatural or staged dimension, a phenomenon that was also noted throughout this research. The necessary evils associated with the use of recording equipment were borne in this study because a much more accurate transcription of the events could be made. Audio and video recordings provide a method of retention that is as close to the original phenomenon as is possible (Adler and Adler 1994; Longabaugh 1980), thus providing the best material for subsequent coding and analysis (Hudson and Ozanne 1988).

Extensive note-taking at the time of data collection was found to be very useful, as respondents often told as much through omission as they did through inclusion. Particularly where audio or note-taking equipment was used in isolation, it became very important to detail the visual aspects of the interview/encounter, such as respondents’ estimated ages, dress codes, nervous habits, eye contact levels, and posturing.

**Data Collection**

The emergent nature of sampling in grounded theory and ethnographic research means that data collection and analysis occur concurrently, and cannot be arbitrarily separated (Glaser 1992; Glaser and Strauss 1967; Belk et al. 1988). As interviews and observation notes were transcribed and coded, the constant comparative method was used to glean meaning from the data and progressively construct an interpretation of the behaviour under study.

Although the relationship between culture and consumption was initially decided upon as a research focus, data collection largely preceded the review of relevant literature. In this way, preconceptions were kept to a minimum, enabling a more “unblinkered” interpretation of the phenomenon under study (Melia 1996). While inherently more difficult (Wells 1995), this approach has the potential to yield new insights into established modes of behaviour (Glaser and Strauss 1967; Goulding 1998). It is also very gratifying to develop an interpretation from the data that specifically suits the social action under study, and then to discover theories in the literature that provide a startling sense of fit with the emerging interpretation.
The following discussion of the data collection phase of this study is divided into two sections to reflect the two very different forms of interviews that were conducted. Initially, the processes employed in the ethnographic component of the data collection are discussed, involving both interviewing and observations. Second, the ways in which school children and retirees were engaged during interviews are outlined.

*Data Collection in Drinking Contexts*

When interviewing those in drinking contexts, a set of discussion topics was held in reserve to prompt (if necessary) the discussion of beer consumption in Australian culture. These topics included the following:

1. Type of beverage (alcohol or non-alcohol) selected by the drinker, and why.
2. Brand selected and why.
3. The role of beer in Australian life.
4. Types of people who drink various categories and brands of alcoholic beverages.
5. Places where and times when alcohol is consumed.
6. Recall of beer advertising.

These issues were used merely as an *aide-memoire* (Jary and Jary 1991), and informants were encouraged to draw in a wide range of topics during interviews. Due to the nature of data collection (that is, encroaching on the leisure time of informants while they were engaged in a particularly sacred activity), it was necessary to be sensitive to drinkers’ desires to discuss certain topics at length while brushing over others. For example, occasionally informants were particularly interested in recalling and de-constructing beer advertising, but did not feel comfortable commenting at length on their own beer consumption behaviours.

Interactions with pub patrons provided an understanding of the language and etiquette of the drinking scene. The analysis of early interview transcripts and observation notes enabled the refinement of interview questions to ensure that appropriate “local” terminology was used to enhance interaction with informants. This knowledge was employed in subsequent interviews to enable faster and more effective rapport with informants, as it was necessary to learn the best way to act to blend in and obtain consent for interviews. Unfortunately, lone females are not very common in the
pub scene, so it was almost impossible in most situations to blend in and appear completely “normal”.

It was found over the course of interviews that more insightful information was often obtained by asking informants to discuss the consumption motivations of their family members, friends, and acquaintances. Informants typically gave more unguarded and more detailed responses to questions relating to the forces operating on the consumption decisions of others, rather than when considering the motivations behind their own behaviours (McGraw, Sherry, and Levy 1993). In particular, it was often beneficial to employ this form of projective technique to access informants’ feelings regarding proper and improper beer consumption.

Observations conducted in drinking contexts focused on interactions between drinkers, the ways in which beverages were selected and consumed, and the particular forms of alcohol chosen by different types of consumers. The demographic characteristics of drinkers in different locations were noted, as estimated from appearance, clothing, and demeanour.

Data Collection in Non-Drinking Contexts

The discussions held with informants in non-drinking contexts covered a broader range of topics, as the objective was to explore Australian culture as it is experienced by some of its members, with a particular interest in the role of beer in this culture. The topics raised included:

1. Images associated with the word “Australia”.
2. Descriptions of a typical Australian male and female.
3. Products associated with the Australian way of life.
4. Food and beverages consumed by Australians, with a specific focus on beer.
5. Usage of leisure and holiday time.

As was anticipated, beer was the one product that was mentioned most frequently as being heavily associated with the Australian lifestyle. It was not unusual for beer to be somehow incorporated into informants’ responses to each of the topics listed. It became apparent that beer permeates Australian culture to such an extent that it is relevant to many different cultural facets.
Data Analysis

Manning (1987) suggests adopting “binocular” vision when exploring behaviour with which one has familiarity, in other words maintaining a perspective that is empathetic yet removed from the group under study. In this study, conscious efforts were made to perceive the data through “new eyes and new ears” (as recommended by Wallendorf and Belk 1989, p.71), meaning that an effort was made to become aware of those things that are usually taken for granted. In this instance it was not difficult to use “new eyes” for the specifics of beer consumption behaviours, as the researcher had rarely visited pubs in a culture-member capacity. Also, as a non-beer drinker it was necessary to learn most aspects of the consumption process from a very low-knowledge position.

The application of binocular vision can be difficult to achieve where the phenomenon under study is highly familiar to the researcher (Wallendorf and Belk 1989). The discussions with respondents in non-drinking contexts focused on what it is to be Australian, and how these norms and values are manifest in consumption behaviours. As a member of the broader Australian culture, the researcher already had preconceptions regarding these topics. As a result, a conscious effort was made to apply new eyes and ears to data pertaining to Australian culture. In particular, the general importance of beer consumption to Australians was already suspected, so it was necessary to attempt to analyse the data pertaining to the role of beer consumption in Australia with the use of binocular vision.

Interview transcripts and observation notes were imported into NUD*IST (Non-numerical Unstructured Data Information Searching Indexing and Theorising [Qualitative Solutions and Research 1997]) for coding. Coding is a process of dismantling data with the intention of reconstructing them in new, more theoretically enlightening ways (Strauss and Corbin 1990; Goulding 1998). Glaser and Strauss (1967) argued that coding adds legitimacy to the final product in the eyes of the reader, as it provides some form of explanation for the theory that emerges. The coding function of NUD*IST is conducive to the analysis of data by the grounded theory method (Carroll 1997). In fact, according to one of the founders of grounded theory, the development of the NUD*IST software was partially influenced by the rationale of the grounded theory method (Strauss 1995). Just as
grounded theory bases interpretations on hierarchical codes assigned to the data, NUD*IST encourages users to conceptualise relationships between variables through the categorising of data (Huberman and Miles 1994).

Interview transcriptions and observation notes were laboriously coded by line-unit, the highest level of coding possible within NUD*IST. The result was over 300,000 lines of coded data. Strauss and Corbin (1990) recommend a line-by-line approach, as they perceive this to be the best method of generating categories quickly and effectively. This coding was then examined at node intersections to establish relationships between concepts, nodes being the locations at which all coded data pertaining to a particular concept or category are stored within NUD*IST (Qualitative Solutions and Research 1997). Appendix N contains the definition and hierarchical position of each node generated from the interview and observation data.

Analysis proceeded by searching for themes in informants' discussions. Levy (1981) suggests that by asking subjects to give anecdotes about the way in which certain products feature in their lives, it is possible to identify and interpret the symbolic meaning of these products. He argues that this technique offers the opportunity to "observe how the individual consumer's character, personality, and life-style help explain the nature of the product " (1981, p. 50). Levy (1981) also recommends Levi-Strauss' (1963) myth approach, where a universal mode of thought is tracked throughout the subject's consumption story, and those elements are actively sought that transcend the local culture. In other words, similarities in themes amongst subjects' stories are located and brought to light. In this way universal commonalities between the responses of individuals can be identified. Thompson (1997) discusses the importance of consumers' stories to understanding the relationship between the individual and society, and between consumption and the self-concept. He notes that stories encompass consumers’ goals, perceptions, and expectations, thus providing insight into the hopes individuals place in consumption.

In line with Levy's (1981) discussions of consumer myths, the stories or explanations people provided about their consumption preferences and activities were analysed for indications of the role beer consumption plays in their lives. Of particular interest were the common elements in informants’ descriptions of how their product choices factor into their perceptions of being a member of the Australian culture. Also,
the ways in which beer consumption parallels the society in which it occurs were closely examined. For example, the class, age, and gender differences apparent in the way in which the product is purchased and consumed were explored in detail, and the emerging interpretations of these relationships were then communicated to informants to gauge their relevance to those being studied (as per Barnes 1996).

**Interpretation**

In the writing up stage of an ethnographic study, the researcher attempts to make the details of the informants’ lives vivid to the reader (Rhedding-Jones 1996; Geertz 1975). Atkinson (1992) suggests that the workings of the culture in which the informants exist should be made apparent throughout the narrative. In the writing up of grounded theory, this detail is subsumed under the categories and properties that have been obtained from analysing the data, although clarity remains a primary objective (Wells 1995).

Atkinson (1992) notes that an account of social reality becomes more meaningless to the informant as it becomes more intelligible to other readers, an outcome that is due to the inevitable simplifications and generalisations. He suggests that the process of communicating findings from the field by necessity renders them less complex and more uniform than they are experienced by the informant. As a result, the constructed nature of the written document is accepted as an unavoidable characteristic of the final product (Glesne and Peshkin 1992). While it is impossible to completely overcome this dilemma, some recommend the frequent incorporation of informants’ voices as an effective method of conveying reality as it is experienced by the social actor (Glaser and Strauss 1967; Wuest 1995). Thick transcription has been used extensively throughout the results chapter to increase the reader’s understanding of the informants’ viewpoints.

There were two stages to the writing up of this research. In the first instance, a description of the ways in which beer is consumed in the lives of everyday Australians was constructed. The cultural significance of beer consumption was classified into the five cultural beer myths that were identified throughout data collection and analysis. The second stage comprised the categories and properties that were derived from the application of the grounded theory method of analysis. This thesis has been structured
such that the ethnographic study of beer consumption in the form of the five myths is delivered in chapter 5, while the grounded theory analysis, including links to the literature, is contained within chapter 6.

Methodological Limitations

The potential methodological limitations to this study can be categorised as those pertaining to the nature of the researcher and the types of data collection techniques employed. Both of these categories include limitations that may be considered critical to some but insignificant to others. Whether they are perceived as significant limitations depends very much upon the philosophical leanings of the research audience.

Researcher

The personal characteristics of the researcher may be regarded as a limitation to those who favour the existence of a single reality that can only be identified once the nature of the researcher is taken into account. Writing cannot help but be a product of the writer’s self, regardless of attempts to contain the output to objective analyses (Richardson 1994; Manning and Cullum-Swan 1994). The results to follow are just one reading of the phenomenon of Australian beer consumption, potentially one of many.

Examples of the ways in which the personal characteristics of the researcher impacted upon the results became readily apparent throughout data collection. It was quite evident that reactions from respondents were at least partially determined by their own perceptions of the researcher’s age and gender. For instance, many of the elderly respondents appeared to take on the role of parent or teacher, and some of the male pub patrons assumed some kind of romantic interest was the cause of the approach made towards them. Any researcher involved in any research project faces some modification of informants’ responses according to those physical personal attributes that cannot be altered. Thus, the proposition that this research is biased because it is the product of a researcher who possesses certain demographic and psychographic characteristics that may impact upon the interpretation of the phenomenon under investigation is acknowledged in the sense that all research is prone to some degree of subjectivity.
At the time of data collection, the researcher was self-described as a white, Australian, late-twenties, middle class, non-beer-drinking, non-smoking, tertiary educated, married female. Numerous preconceptions came along with these characteristics (Glesne and Peshkin 1992). Even when examined from a postmodern perspective, this self-disclosure can be construed as a real limitation to this research, as these characteristics limited exposure to certain groups of Australians (such as the tattooed males described in the sample section of this chapter). Even when the existence of multiple realities is accepted and the assumption of an objective reality relinquished, there remain limitations that derive from the inability of the researcher to access all desired informants.

The researcher-related limitations can thus be summarised as: (1) reactions from respondents resulting from the personal characteristics of the researcher, (2) the subjectivity of the analysis, and (3) limited access to some types of informants.

**Data Collection**

It has been suggested that qualitative research is best performed by a team of researchers (Adler and Adler 1994; Belk et al. 1988). It is claimed that group research provides the ability to use others as a sounding board for emerging interpretations, and can thus speed up the processes of data collection and analysis (Glaser and Strauss 1967). The other advantages of multiple researchers include the ability to generate different data from the same informant when interviewed by different researchers, and the ability to overcome the biases inherent in the personal characteristics of individual researchers (Adler and Adler 1994; Wallendorf and Belk 1989). Thus, the use of a single researcher may be construed by some as a limitation to this project. However, just as any individual researcher brings particular characteristics to the research task, so a group of individuals brings a group of characteristics to the research task. Lincoln and Guba (1985) discuss the extra communication requirements necessary to ensure consistency in approach when research is conducted by a group of researchers, and Holt (1991) notes that using multiple researchers by no means ensures a better interpretation of the data. However, regardless of the desirability or otherwise of a team of qualitative researchers, the nature of a doctoral thesis is such that data collection and analysis for this study were necessarily performed by one individual.
Another possible limitation is the limited length of time spent in the field in each location. Due to the need to access Australians from a variety of geographical areas, it was not possible to spend long periods of time at individual locations. As a result, this study represents an ethnographic analysis of beer consumption rather than an ethnography of beer consumption. It is feasible that a study that used prolonged engagements at individual consumption sites may have produced different findings than those presented here.

Western Australian residents were over-represented in the non-drinking context interviews due to this state being the home base of the researcher. Several Australian states and territories were neglected altogether, as the time and expense requirements involved in covering all states and territories were outside the scope of this project. The limitations relating to data collection can thus be summarised as: (1) a lone researcher, (2) the limited time spent at individual drinking locations, and (3) an over-representation of Western Australian informants. These limitations are joined by those covered in the sample discussion, particularly the inability to access certain types of informants such as the very wealthy, residents of rural areas, and female drinkers.

The following chapter presents an ethnographic description of beer consumption in Australia. The methodological approach detailed above was employed to generate this description.
CHAPTER 5 - RESULTS

In chapter 3 it was noted that Australians engage in numerous consumption activities that are representative of their underlying value systems, many of which are performed during times set aside for leisure activities. These activities serve to communicate existing cultural values and to reflect and accommodate cultural change. Beer consumption in Australia is a cultural ritual that signals core cultural values, some of which are currently in a state of flux. Included in the multitude of beliefs and symbolic meanings surrounding beer consumption rituals are numerous myths. Analysis of the interview and observation data generated by this study has yielded five cultural myths that are central to the role of beer consumption in Australia. These myths include the All-Australian Myth (all Australians drink beer), the Taste Myth (taste is the primary reason for drinking beer), the Advertising Myth (advertising is ineffective in influencing beer consumption), the Pleasure Myth (beer consumption is a totally enjoyable activity), and the Control Myth (consumers are completely in control of their own beer consumption decisions and behaviours).

These five myths are inter-related, each serving to consolidate the effects of the others. Informants were generally convinced of the reality of these myths, offering consistent rationalisations for their existence. However, many were able to appreciate the mythical nature of some of their beliefs after considering the issues throughout the course of an interview, illustrating the subconscious rather than unconscious nature of most of these beliefs. The five myths form a protective layer for drinkers, sheltering them in the familiar and comfortable symbolism of beer that permits satisfying social interaction. They serve to support general beliefs about Australian culture, particularly those pertaining to its perceived differences to other cultures. As well as contributing to the understanding of Australian beer consumption, the identification of these myths assists in the attainment of a better understanding of what it is to be an Australian.

Rather than attempting to make quotes grammatically correct for the reader’s comfort, direct transcriptions have been used in most instances. Informants often rambled or stalled, both of which are relevant to the interpretation of their statements, and readers are able to achieve greater empathy with the informants where their extracts are verbatim. In some places deletions or additions were necessary to enable comprehension where the meaning is not readily apparent from the verbatim extract.
The profiles of informants, as noted next to their extracts, have been abbreviated according to the following key:

Gender: M = male, F = female, Ms = two or more males, Fs = two or more females
Age: C = child, Ad = adolescent, A = adult, S = senior
State: NSW = New South Wales, VIC = Victoria, WA = Western Australia
Interview location: D = drinking context, ND = non-drinking context
Brewery representative = spokesperson for one of the two major breweries operating in Australia (confidentiality of identity has been requested).

Those interviews denoted by “ND” (non-drinking contexts) constitute those where alcohol was not being consumed at the time of the interview. They include interviews held with Australians of all ages wherever alcohol was absent.

The All-Australian Beverage Myth

Interviews with Australians of all ages and walks of life provided consistent evidence of a strong bond between beer consumption and Australian culture. Informants were very comfortable with this close association between the Australian way of life and an alcoholic beverage, and the naturalness of this association was implicitly assumed and rarely questioned. Many informants were openly passionate about beer as an integral element of the Australian way of life:

Drinking beer is an Australian way of life. I love beer, I love it (M, S, NSW, D).

Researcher: What part does beer drinking play in Australian lifestyles?
Male: I think that is a redundant question. I think the whole lifestyle of Australians is based around beer drinking to a certain extent. The idea of going to the pub, it has become an icon of Australian society that people go to the pub to have a beer. It is portrayed in movies, it is portrayed as part of the Australian ethos, a big part (M, A, NSW, D).

Discussions with informants indicated that beer is an important part of the life of all Australians, regardless of age, gender, or any other differentiating characteristics. At this level of discussion it was rarely mentioned that the consumption of beer is in fact usually limited to certain types of Australians. Instead, the overwhelming impression is of a nation of beer drinkers, with no distinctions made between the consumption patterns of different groups within the Australian culture:

A typical Australian is someone who sits down and drinks beer (F, Ad, WA, ND).
I would say that most Australians drink beer (M, A, WA, D).

Researcher: What do Australians drink a lot of?
Male: Well I think a good majority of them drink beer (M, S, WA, D).

Researcher: What things that you buy do you associate with being Australian?
Female: Beer (F, C, WA, ND)

By attributing beer consumption to Australians in general, informants were creating a common bond in the form of a consumption good. The assumption that the typical Australian is a white male provides one explanation for the existence of the myth that all Australians drink beer. When asked to describe a typical Australian, the responses of many informants indicated that they hold quite consistent stereotypes that fail to reflect the diversity of the Australian population. Even females appeared comfortable describing the typical Australian as a male. For example, the following quotes taken from interviews with females illustrate the tendency to associate Australianness with masculinity:

Researcher: Tell me about typical Australians.
Female: Surfies, stubbies, beer, big beer bellies. They wear those shorts and they wear thongs.
Researcher: Are you talking about males?
Female: Yes (F, Ad, NSW, ND).

Researcher: What do Australians drink?
Female 1: Beer.
Female 2: Beer.
Researcher: Do you all drink beer?
Female 1: No (laughing). Like I think a lot of people drink beer. I know my whole family drinks beer, like Dad and my brother. They always have beer like whenever they come inside.
Researcher: Does Mum have that too?
Female 1: No. Like she has wine (F, Ad, WA, ND).

This last quote is particularly telling. The informant is saying that her whole family consumes beer, although it turns out that only her father and brother drink beer while she and her mother do not. She is subconsciously interpreting Australians as males, a tendency that was found among informants from a wide range of social backgrounds.

The notion that all Australians drink beer is so ingrained that few question this "knowledge" in the light of other accepted cultural "facts". In particular, the view that all Australians drink beer is held concurrently with the belief that beer is a male
beverage. Australians hold these conflicting understandings of the mythical role of beer in Australian culture and its actual consumption with no apparent discomfort. Despite the pervasive assumption that all Australians drink beer, the ABS statistics cited in chapter 3 demonstrate that actual consumption is quite different. Not only is consumption dominated by males, but it is also affected by other social variables, such as age and social class, that weigh heavily in the determination of usage patterns. Thus while beer is perceived as a ubiquitous beverage in Australia, it is, in fact, consumed by specific types of Australians.

There is another definition of an Australian that does not generally include beer consumption, and that is the blond-haired, blue-eyed beach dweller:

Australian stereotypes are people, say yobbos, with beer stomachs. And then there is also the stereotype of like, tall and blonde hair and blue eyes, living at the beach, sort of Australian as well (M, Ad, NSW, ND).

This newer stereotype reflects a gradual recognition that Australia is in fact a nation of suburb-dwellers, rather than bush-dwellers. The beach is the interim or fall-back position on the way to a more urban self-perception, as Australians do not seem to be able to bring themselves to believe in a business-suited stereotype just yet. Perhaps this is because such a stereotype would provide no differentiation between Australians and those living in other Western countries.

The juxtaposition of the two stereotypes (the beer-drinking yobbo and the fair-haired surfie) is often assumed to be related to age differences; the older Australian being ascribed the beer-gut stereotype and the younger Australian being associated with the surfie image:

Along the beach and the coast there is a lot of surf lifesavers and all that. Always out on the water and tanned all that. The older generation might be overweight with a beer gut or something like that (M, Ad, NSW, ND).

The disparity between these stereotypes causes some degree of cognitive dissonance amongst Australians as they try to reconcile their affiliation with one or the other:

Researcher: what makes you two Australian?
Female: I suppose we drink beer, but neither of us are like blond-haired, blue-eyed (F, A, WA, D).

In other words, it is easier to define an Australian by beer consumption than by physical characteristics. Beer consumption is seen to be more uniform than physical appearance, despite the fact that it is predominantly a male beverage. The assumption is that any
differences that may exist between different types of Australians can be over-ridden by
the perceived uniformity in beer consumption.

In essence, beer has become the trademark of the Australian, the identifying
badge that signals heritage. This illustrates the important psychological function of beer
in Australian culture. Rather than just a source of physical refreshment, it is an icon that
bonds individuals. The following extract illustrates the fundamental position that beer
plays in self-definition and physical recognition:

Researcher: Let’s say you are travelling around Europe and you run into
someone. How would you know if they were Australian?
Male: Well, they wouldn’t have an Australian flag on the back of their car.
But they would have a can of beer and they would have a beer T-shirt on as
well (M, A, WA (country), D).

Australians like to communicate their culture and nationality via their beer
consumption. It is a pastime of which they are proud, perceiving it (rightly or wrongly)
to be one of the most distinguishing features of the Australian culture.

Once they had discussed Australians in general, informants were specifically
asked about their understandings of a typical Australian male and a typical Australian
female. Australians of all ages have well-formed and consistent stereotypes of the
Australian male, which frequently include some reference to beer:

Researcher: If you had to describe a typical Australian male, how would
you do it?
Female: He is a beer drinker (F, A, WA(country), D).

Researcher: Can you describe for me a typical Australian male?
Male: It is difficult to say. A lot of them like a glass of beer (M, S, NSW,
D).

Researcher: Tell me about the typical Australian man, what is he like?
Male 1: Fat
Male 2: He likes to cook barbies (barbecues).
Male 3: He likes beer.
Male 1: The footy (Ms, Ad, WA, ND).

Many descriptions were rather unflattering, and beer consumption was often
included in denigratory remarks. It appears to be commonly understood that excessive
beer consumption is an appropriate descriptor for an unattractive male:
Researcher: What is the male Australian stereotype?

Researcher: What is a typical Australian man like?
Female: Undies and thongs, singlets, and he’s got a great big podge because he’s been eating lots of sausages and goes to footy matches and drinks beer (F, C, WA, ND).

References such as these to the Australian “beer gut” were frequent. Despite suggestions in the literature that the beer gut can be considered an Australian status symbol, most informants indicated that the presence of a beer gut is comical and undesirable. It was often possible to detect, however, some degree of warmth among older males when discussing the beer gut, suggestive of feelings of fondness and familiarity. While a beer gut is largely undesirable, it does have the benefit of communicating one’s membership of the Australian culture, especially among older Australians:

Researcher: How does beer fit into people’s lives in Australia?
Male: Well, we have got to have our beer guts. Well otherwise, what would you do without a beer gut? You wouldn’t look Australian (M, S, VIC, D).

It was interesting, although not surprising, that most informants found it much more difficult to generalise about Australian females. The nature of Australia’s settlement, as discussed in chapter 3, has resulted in the emergence of strong male stereotype with only a weak female equivalent. Informants were therefore much more hesitant in discussing their interpretations of a typical Australian female:

There’s not really any image of an Australian woman because, well like most guys drink beer, so you can’t really imagine a big fat lady drinking beer or something (M, C, WA, ND).

Researcher: Tell me about a typical Australian female.
Male: A typical one?
Female: There isn’t one.
Researcher: Why is it harder to describe a typical Australian female than it is to describe a typical Australian male?
Female: Because they don’t all drink beer (M&F, A, WA(Country), D).

These quotes illustrate a hesitancy to stereotype the Australian female. This contrasts greatly with the ease and comfort with which most informants provided details of the typical Australian male. The Australian female is seen to be much more diverse, rendering the generalisation of her features much more problematic. She lacks a
defining consumption behaviour to match that of beer consumption for Australian males, making her description considerably more difficult.

**Beer Consumption as a Social Phenomenon**

In effect, the choice of alcohol to consume is pre-made for many Australians. Social conditioning has ensured that only a relatively small number of alternatives are considered, with the decision between these options largely pre-programmed according to age, gender, class, and context. The following quote reflects the extent to which this conditioning impacts upon expectations of appropriate alcohol consumption:


It is thus apparent that from a young age Australians learn that different types of people (should) drink certain types of alcoholic beverages.

The discussion to follow examines Australian beer consumption specifically in relation to the variables of gender and social class. The differences in beer consumption among members of different age groups is discussed later in the section detailing the Taste Myth.

**Beer Consumption as a Gendered Construction**

Rather than a popular pastime that is available to everyone, beer consumption can be interpreted as a gendered construction. The role of beer in Australian society is so completely linked to males that females and beer appear to be polar opposites. This is applicable even to younger Australians, who have become somewhat accustomed to the presence of beer-drinking females (BDFs) in pubs. The all-but-complete separation between females and beer consumption in the minds of Australians provides interesting insights when coupled with the powerful association between beer and Australian culture. This association is clearly mythical, serving to generate a sense of uniformity that does not exist. Rather than all Australians being devoted beer drinkers, it is Australian males who primarily exhibit this behaviour. Australian females share in the myth, also stating that most Australians drink beer. Through this common belief females can feel part of the Australian culture, despite their general aversion to the consumption of the product itself.
Paradoxically, one of the most important symbolic functions of beer in Australian culture is to communicate the differences between males and females. Australians are exposed early to the male symbolism of beer, and they come to know unquestioningly that beer is a male beverage. They have obtained this “knowledge” through a variety of sources, including their families, their peers, and the media:

**Female:** Beer is a man’s drink.
**Researcher:** Why do men drink beer?
**Female:** I think it is something that - it is probably the advertising when they are young or the old sip of dad’s beer when you are young (F, A, NSW, D).

**Researcher:** Why is there a difference between what males and females drink?
**Female:** Probably the trends. Like most girls and most boys have got like separate things, like what they should be drinking. That is what society says and what their friends think (F, Ad, VIC, ND).

**Researcher:** Why is there that differentiation between who drinks what?
**Male:** Society. I mean you know ever since you have been a little kid, you know, you see men drink beer and women drink wine or scotch and Coke, or whatever. When you are little it is all over the place. Your dad has a beer and your mum has a wine (M, A, NSW, D).

While they are often confronted with contradictions to the rule that states that beer is a male beverage (such as in the case of female beer drinkers), consumers are usually able to gloss over such variations and retain their belief in the gender-specific symbolism of beer. They reduce the cognitive dissonance resulting from observed female beer consumption by stereotyping BDFs in such a way as to disassociate their behaviour from that of a “proper” Australian female. It is apparent when speaking to both younger and older Australians that BDFs are often perceived to be an “ugly” minority. Given this stereotyping, it is not surprising that females largely conform to the requirement to avoid beer. Instead, wine is the form of alcohol most strongly associated with females, and it is also perceived as appropriate for both males and females belonging to higher socio-economic groupings. Australians of all ages and backgrounds volunteered wine as a favoured beverage of Australian females. Where males were mentioned as wine drinkers, it was usually in conjunction with a reference to red wine and relative wealth. Red wine is perceived as more masculine than white wine, and therefore more appropriate for male consumption. It is also considered to be more expensive, and therefore more appropriate for males and females of the upper classes.
Given the macho image of beer, and the "un-macho" image of certain other types of alcohol, the individual's control over choice of alcoholic beverage becomes questionable. Certainly consumers may choose any alternative that is available, but they must then accept the social consequences of these choices. The result is that the vast majority of male drinkers conform to societal expectations, safe in the accepted symbolism of beer, and to a lesser extent spirits:

If you see a guy drinking champagne he will get ragged (taunted) (M, Ad, WA, ND).

Researcher: So do you know any males who don't like beer?
Male: No, see well, we don't knock around with that sort of company. There are people around, you get young males that don't drink at all. Anybody we know will have a beer (M, S, NSW, D).

Male: If I sit here and drink little glasses of wine, it all sounds pretty silly to me, quite honestly. Your mates would get stuck into you if you stand in a pub drinking wine. I would feel rather silly.
Researcher: Why do you think that is?
Male: I don't know. I honestly don't know. Australian make-up (M, A, NSW, D).

Thus while a male can choose to drink champagne, or other forms of alcohol besides beer, he does so at the risk of persecution from others. Similarly, the decision to avoid beer consumption altogether is likely to result in stigma or alienation. As discussed in chapter 2, most humans value social interaction, so the risk of alienation and ridicule is an effective motivating force. The symbolism attached to various alcoholic beverages can therefore be seen not just as an information bank for consumers to use at their discretion, but a powerful determinant of their behaviours.

The implicit assumptions concerning gender attributions became readily apparent in the course of interviews:

Researcher: If the men drink beer when they come home to relax, why don't women come home and relax and have a beer?
Male: Probably because alcohol is more of a male drink, it is an attitude. For a female it is not sort of socially acceptable (M, Ad, WA, ND).

This interview extract is particularly telling in the phrase "it is an attitude". The informant is describing societal assumptions concerning gender roles in alcohol consumption as accepted, in-built attitudes. These attitudes are widely held and consistent, providing very clear directives to consumers in their consumption decisions. As such, the power of individuals over their own consumption activities is largely
confined to conformance within the range of socially-sanctioned alternatives. The apparent preference of females for wine over beer is contrived by the social environment in which they live and consume, as from an early age Australians learn of the social relationship between females and wine. Similarly, they learn that beer is inherently masculine, and thus females tend to avoid its consumption.

The association between females and wine is strong, but certainly not as entrenched as the perceived relationship between males and beer. In the following quote it is possible to identify the competing rationalisations for the significant incidence of wine consumption among females (see chapter 3 for rates of incidence):

_Male 1:_ Most women would drink wine.  
_Researcher:_ Why do they drink wine instead?  
_Male 1:_ Just a custom.  
_Female:_ More feminine.  
_Male 2:_ Women like the taste better than a beer (Ms&Fs, Ad, NSW, ND).

Each teenage informant in the extract above offers a different explanation of the tendency of females to prefer wine to beer. The first informant recognises the primacy of social forces, while the other two refer to the two major justifications that their conditioning has taught them: femininity and the Taste Myth. Both of these interpretations relate to the basic assumption that beer is inherently masculine due to its symbolism and flavour. The Taste Myth is discussed in greater detail shortly.

While Australian males are perceived as more earthy and rugged, Australian females are expected to be refined and genteel. In line with these interpretations, certain beverages are allocated to each gender on the basis of their perceived “fit”. Beer is regarded as a high volume, quickly consumed beverage. It is therefore considered appropriate for replenishing fluids lost after hard physical labour, such as that associated with traditional male employment. Wine is a concentrated beverage that is consumed in smaller quantities and at a slower pace. It is thus considered appropriate for the more restrained consumption that is associated with females. When comparing beer and wine without considering the symbolic meaning contained in both, it is difficult to understand why beer is innately more masculine and wine more feminine. Beer is larger in volume than wine, and it usually has a lower alcohol content. If anything, this makes beer closer in physical characteristics to soft drink, which has both male and female connotations. There is nothing inherently masculine about beer, other than the symbolism with which it has been endowed. Similarly, the physical characteristics of wine as a concentrated,
more alcoholic beverage do not necessarily provide evidence for a female association. These associations have been taught through the process of consumer socialisation, and in Australian culture these associations are an important means of communicating cultural values relating to the appropriate role of each sex.

*Attitudes Towards Female Beer Consumption*

Both the primary and secondary data sources indicate that gender segregation is obvious in beer consumption. As discussed in chapter 3, the ABS statistics and the beer advertisements analysed point to the dominance of male consumption within the product category of beer. Similarly, the interview and observation data show beer consumption to be a primarily male domain. While this polarisation also occurs across many other types of consumer goods, the extent of segregation is remarkable for a product that has the same utilitarian function for both males and females. The masculine association of beer is based more on deep-rooted cultural beliefs than any physical or functional explanations. The extent of this conditioning is evident in the attitudes held towards female beer consumption:

*Male:* I don’t really like girls drinking beer. (M, A, NSW, D).

*Researcher:* Tell me about how Australian women and beer fit together.

*Male 1:* They don’t fit at all.

*Male 2:* Women shouldn’t drink beer.

*Researcher:* So you object to women drinking beer?

*Male 1:* No, I don’t object. But I don’t think it matches (Ms, A, WA, D).

The pervasiveness of this male association is complete. Even those females who drink beer acknowledge that it is a male’s beverage, as is apparent from the following extract from a drinking situation in which both the males and females present were consuming beer:

*Male:* In Australia I think males tend to think that beer is a male drink.

*Female 1:* Yes. Traditionally I think that beer is associated with males.

*Female 2:* I tend to agree with that (Ms&Fs, A, WA, D).

Although many male informants gave lip service to the acceptability of female beer consumption, further discussion usually revealed that although it is “okay” for females to drink beer, it is not ideal. Other beverages are seen to be more appropriate for females, such as wine, sherry, and soft drinks. While wine is deemed appropriate for males in certain contexts (such as with meals), it is not acceptable in the pub.
environment. Spirits and liqueurs are appropriate for consumption by both genders, but according to cultural “rules”, females tend to “prefer” some spirits (such as gin, Baileys, Cointreau, and vodka), while other types of spirits are classified as being in the male domain (such as scotch, bourbon, and cognac).

The social forces operating on consumers become apparent in the following quote, where the volume of alcohol consumed by females is expressed as a function of marital status:

*Researcher:* Do women drink as much as men do?
*Female:* She could drink as much, but being a women she don’t wish to do that.
*Researcher:* Why would that be?
*Male:* Well, it all depends on the circumstances of her marriage, or whether she is a single woman, or whatever. I would say that a single woman wouldn’t drink as much beer as a married woman. Because a married woman knows that her fellow is there, her husband. And when she starts getting a bit tipsy, “Come on love, that’s enough.” But a single woman, well she has got to be able to control herself and look after herself (M, S, NSW, D).

There is an implicit contradiction between the terms “could” and “wish”. Supposedly the female being discussed “could” drink as much beer as a male, but the fact of being a female inherently means that she will not “wish” to. The obvious conclusion is that although females are free to choose beer as a beverage, it does not make “logical” sense for them to do so. The free choice that is perceived to exist is thus actually constrained by gender roles as they are culturally specified. The next extracts exemplify this perception of free choice among female drinkers:

I think it is a stereotype that women can’t drink beer. My mum doesn’t like it (F, Ad, NSW, ND).

*Researcher:* The first thing that you said to me was that you don’t drink beer, why is that?
*Female:* I don’t like it (F, A, NSW, D).

*Researcher:* Why don’t women drink much beer?
*Male:* They have a different taste (M, Ad, VIC, ND).

Rather than refraining from beer consumption because it is inappropriate for females to engage in such behaviour, the females discussed in the quotes above are perceived to avoid beer because of a uniform dislike of the taste. The incidences of females disliking the taste of beer and males liking the taste are too high to be a realistic reason for gender differences in consumption. It is improbable that such a high ratio of females would
dislike a particular taste, while their male counterparts find it extremely pleasant. This phenomenon has been labelled the Taste Myth, which is the next myth to be addressed in this chapter. By perceiving the gender differences in beer consumption to be the result of free choice and taste preferences, the gender-specified nature of beer consumption is obscured from view.

The following quotes illustrate how alcohol consumption fills different social functions for males and females:

You drink six a day after work, and then on Saturday you might drink fifteen or sixteen schooners (M, A, NSW, D).

I don't really drink like during the week. We might have a glass of wine with dinner once or twice a week, and then probably only on Saturday nights (F, A, NSW, D).

Males interviewed in drinking contexts commonly stated that drinking was a daily occurrence, whereas females tended to describe a pattern of drinking that exhibits an emphasis on social occasions. Females are more likely to drink as a meal-accompaniment, their consumption behaviour thus more closely resembling the European drinking patterns described in chapter 3. However, even at social events, the capacity of females to drink alcohol is constrained by their nurturing roles:

Researcher: So beer goes with barbecues?
Male 1: Yes.
Male 2: Oh yes, definitely.
Male 1: What is a barbie without a beer?
Researcher: What are the women drinking at barbecues?
Male 2: Some drink beer and some drink wine, some would drink soft drink. Depends on who is driving home.
Researcher: Is the female more likely to drive home, or is the male more likely to drive home?
Male 1: Oh no, the female.
Male 2: The female, usually.
Researcher: Why would that be?
Male 1: Oh, the blokes get together and they seem to get into the grog and have a good time (Ms, A, NSW, D).

It is apparent that the wishes of females to consume alcohol are socially subordinate to those of the male. This is not, however, perceived as a hardship or sacrifice for females. They appear to understand and accept their role as the mandatory sober spouse who is required to ensure the safe return home of the inebriated partner. Males are perceived to be more in need of a physical release. Also, male-to-male relationships appear to be
more dependent on alcohol, whereas females appear to be more capable of conducting relationships in a state of sobriety.

*The Potency Myth*

There is a tendency to equate beer with strength and masculinity, causing some to assume that beer has a higher alcohol content than most other alcoholic beverages. This appears to be justified by the perception of beer as a strong, powerful drink for strong, powerful males. This belief has been labelled the potency myth, which is subsumed within the All-Australian Myth. As the potency myth is primarily a condition necessary to the existence of the All-Australian Myth, it is only discussed here in passing, and will be confined to a lower-case label. The potency myth combines with the Taste Myth to reinforce the perceived masculinity of beer, which in turn reinforces the role of beer consumption in Australian culture. Paradoxically, the potency myth continues to co-exist with the increasing popularity of low-alcohol beers. The existence of the potency myth is apparent in the following quotes that illustrate the general misconception that beer is potent relative to other forms of alcohol:

I would say beer is stronger than spirits myself, like on occasions I might go out once a fortnight and I will have five beers, a couple of bourbons and go home. I prefer beer than bourbon (M, A, NSW(country), D).

Males tend to drink something that is stronger. Like they might drink more beer than women do. Women go more for the wines and spirits (F, Ad, VIC, ND).

*Researcher:* Why does daddy drink beer more than mummy does?
*Female:* Beer is more for men. It is stronger than wine (F, C, WA, ND).

It is interesting to note that children have a more uniform perception of beer as a stronger alcoholic beverage than wine. In the absence of concrete knowledge about alcohol contents, they rely purely on the product symbolism that they sense from the world around them. The consumption patterns that they observe and the advertising to which they are exposed give the indication that beer is a masculine, and therefore powerful, beverage. As is apparent from the first quote, some adults hold similar misconceptions.

Australians like to view themselves as physically strong and agile. As the exemplar beverage for the Australian population, beer must also share this perceived
strength. The potency myth thus serves two important functions in Australian culture: it assists in the perpetuation of the rugged male image, and it provides males with an instant method of communicating their unreproachable masculinity. In terms of the latter function, the potency myth provides justification for beer consumption as an important rite of passage for males in Australian culture. In short, the men are sorted out from the boys via their consumption capabilities. The myth also serves to discourage consumption among females, effectively maintaining beer consumption as a primarily male domain.

Despite the continuing male dominance of beer consumption, increased representation in senior positions in the workplace is gradually granting females a more equal place at the bar. The younger BDF has a different working relationship with her male peers, and is more likely to join them in after-work socialising at the pub. This has assisted in gradually changing the perception of the pub as a male domain for relaxing after a hard day at work. However, while increasing female access to drinking locations has resulted in increased female patronage, most still choose beverages other than beer when visiting pubs. Females who choose to consume alcoholic beverages other than beer find themselves in the position of having to make choices that suit the drinking location yet maintain their femininity. To avoid the masculine connotations of beer, they seek acceptable alternatives, and these alternatives differ across age segments:

*Researcher:* What sort of beer do you think women your age drink mainly?
*Male 1:* You see a lot our age drinking Carlton Cold and Hahn Ice. But usually Sub Zero, Two Dogs and that. They are much more spirit or soft drink, like you know, a liqueur. They go for those much more.

*Researcher:* What about older women?
*Male 1:* My mum and that, they drink spirits. They don’t drink beer.
*Male 2:* Wine, brandies (Ms, Ad, NSW, D).

As females have begun to attend the same social functions as their male counterparts (e.g., sport and university parties), they have found that they are limited in their alcohol consumption by sheer availability. Some of the female informants pointed out that while beer is readily available at most informal gatherings, more traditional female beverages can be difficult to obtain. However, there still appears to be a long way to go before beer consumption by females is considered socially acceptable.

The perceived potency of beer means that in the minds of consumers there would logically have to be repercussions if females attempt to consume this powerful
beverage. In the minds of many informants, the BDF either becomes more masculine in personal attributes or loses control over her behaviour as a result of the strength of the beverage that overpowers her:

The girls that drink beer appear to get drunk (M, A, NSW(country), D).

*Researcher:* Do you think there is any difference between women who drink beer and women who don’t?
*Male:* I don’t know. I don’t like women drinking too much beer. I don’t like drunk women. It is all right saying that, being a male. Would you like your man falling over every woman around the place? I don’t like women doing that (M, A, WA(country), D).

This second quote brings to light the assumption that the BDF will be drunk and flirtatious. These behaviours are thought to be brought about by the mind-altering effects of beer that cannot be adequately controlled by the physically weaker female. The potency myth thus introduces a custodial role for males, who are perceived to have a greater ability to remain in control of their behaviour when intoxicated. There is a related assumption that the BDF can be marked as a sexual conquest:

*Researcher:* Can women at barbecues stand there with a tin?
*Male 1:* Oh, probably yes. If she has one or two that’s okay. If she has more than that, well you would probably say “you beauty”.
*Male 2:* All this bullshit about the women. They can’t. If you really like someone, you are pretty glad they can’t. Their body can’t take it anyhow. Can’t take the same things (Ms, A, NSW, D).

This assumption that beer makes females more susceptible to sexual advances from strangers is based on the perception that beer is a powerful beverage that renders its female drinkers incapable of maintaining usual behavioural standards. Such an assumption is interesting in the light of the significantly higher alcohol content of most wines compared to most beers. Also suggested in the quote is that a female in whom a male is romantically interested (as opposed to sexually interested) should not be a beer drinker. This statement is justified by the stated belief that it is not possible for females to excessively consume beer anyway.

For some reason, drunk females are considered to be more socially unacceptable than drunk males. This attitude was found to be common to both male and female informants. Even worse than a drunk female is a drunk and emotional female. In line with the potency myth, it is assumed that the drunk female is less capable of keeping her emotional responses in check:
It is not nice to see a drunk man or a drunk woman. It is more embarrassing to see a drunk woman, I guess, if they are extremely emotional (F, A, WA(country), D).

While a drunk female is viewed as unattractive and embarrassing, the drunk male elicits completely different connotations. Rather than being pathetic, he is comical and plain good fun:

*Male:* If I had just turned up at a party and other people had been there for a couple of hours and there were some girls, regardless of what they had been drinking and they were pretty out of it, it would probably be a bit off-putting I guess. It depends on what the situation is.

*Researcher:* If the guys were pretty out of it would that be off-putting as well?

*Male:* No. I would laugh at that (M, A, NSW, D).

A response to the perceived potency of beer is to assume that females who do choose to consume beer would be more likely to choose low-alcohol beer, a misconception that was even found among brewery representatives:

Women tend to drink light beer (M, Ad, WA, ND).

Females are more likely to drink beers with lighter alcohol (Brewery representative).

While such an assumption can be understood in terms of the need to rationalise the reality of females consuming symbolically male beverages, it leads to a false result. As noted in chapter 3, more Australian females drink full-strength beer than low-alcohol beer. This contradiction between assumed female preferences and actual consumption choices is apparent in the following quote, where females are simultaneously credited with a preference for light beers and high-alcohol imported brands:

Women tend to drink a lot more light beers, they drink a lot more boutique beers. Things like the Coronas, the Crown Lagers, Tooheys Dry. Not so much the VBs or the heavier sort of beers. They are very much more particular about the type of beer that they drink. I think it is a case of they don’t want to be associated with a male drinking habit (M, A, WA, D).

A full-strength product like Corona is deemed to be a lighter beer by virtue of its imported status. Similarly, Crown Lager has the same alcohol content as VB, but its image as portrayed in advertising campaigns is more up-market, leading to the assumption that it is not as “heavy” as VB. Therefore, rather than the alcohol content operating as a guide to consumption attributions according to gender, it is primarily the meanings of the brand in the market place that are employed in the process of determining culturally appropriate beverages for male and female consumers.
The consumption of full-strength beer by females suggests that the association with a male drinking habit is exactly what BDFs seek. If they are flouting social norms by drinking beer in the first place, it is through the consumption of full-strength beers that they can best communicate their desire to be perceived as equal in social standing to their male peers:

*Researcher:* Would you drink beer if no other female you knew did?
*Female:* I would always drink beer, be one of the fellas (F, A, NSW, D).

But BDFs can be thwarted in their attempts to convey their equality, as they are often judged instead to be pitiful. Even self-confessed BDFs can be disparaging of other BDFs. They can use a variety of characteristics, such as age and social class, to differentiate themselves from those BDFs whom they judge to be less acceptable. The female quoted below endows younger BDFs with positive attributes, but is less kind to their predecessors. Some BDFs are apparently more equal than others:

*Researcher:* Tell me about Australian women who drink beer.
*Female:* You have still got your sort of late 40s, early 50s women who have never been married and prop up a bar every night and are the object of ridicule from the men at the bar. Then you get women like us who are just sitting here having a good time, having a good chat. Women have realised that there is room for equality, and they have got just as much right as men these days, and they are not going to be outdone (F, A, NSW, D).

Despite discussing equality among males and females, the informant above reverts back to gender stereotypes when referring to older BDFs. She views them through the eyes of male drinkers, unconsciously allocating males the authority to judge the propriety of beer drinking by females. The term “prop up the bar” brings connotations of heavy drinking and lack of physical control, both of which appeared to be distasteful to the informant. Such behaviours by males of the same age in the same bar remained unremarked upon, indicating that these behaviours have a legitimacy in the male domain that has yet to be achieved in the female domain. The specific mention of the spinster status of the older BDF is particularly interesting. The way this was expressed by the informant indicated that there is something pathetic and undesirable about these females. They lack status because they lack husbands, their worth thus undermined by their perceived inability to attract the opposite sex.

*Changing Perceptions of BDFs*
It is apparent that consumption attributions differ according to the age of the BDF. Of the few females who were found to be drinking beer in the pubs and clubs visited, the large majority was estimated to be younger than 30 years of age. As a result, pub-goers are slowly becoming accustomed to the sight of younger females drinking beer, although they are not yet acclimatised to older BDFs:

Researcher: So is beer just for blokes or can women drink it?
Male: Definitely women. A lot of women drink it.
Researcher: Is that okay that they drink it?
Male: They can drink whatever they like.
Later in the interview:
Researcher: What about an older woman drinking beer?
Male: I would think that was a bit strange (M, A, VIC, D).

Female 1: In their old age, less females would drink beer, I reckon.
Researcher: Why would that be?
Female 2: I guess they were brought up that they would view it as a man’s drink. (Ms&Fs, Ad, VIC, ND)

It is therefore not surprising that the pubs attracting female beer drinkers are typically those that generally attract younger drinkers. The traditional old-style pub is much less likely to house female drinkers.

The younger generation of females has experienced the higher levels of education previously dominated by males, and as a result has shared in the alcohol consumption rituals associated with a student lifestyle:

A lot of parties that you go to they had this beer. Like when you are this age they have beer and that is it. So through that I started drinking a lot of beer (F, A(university student), NSW, D).

I think a lot of university students drink beer and you assume they are educated, they are intelligent people. They probably don’t have a lot of money at the time. It doesn’t necessarily mean that they are not from a high socio-economic background though (F, A, WA(country), D).

Where there is a “reason” for females drinking beer, such as a student lifestyle, the BDF does not necessarily share the attributions automatically allocated to other BDFs. There is a perceived legitimacy in such consumption, a legitimacy that a lack of financial well-being does not share in other circumstances. Through her comments, the second informant acknowledges the underlying expectation that BDFs are from low socioeconomic backgrounds. The university student is exempt from these usual attributions due to her temporary financial situation, and the specific nature of her lifestyle.
Finally, there are those who profess to hold “un-negative” (as opposed to positive) views of BDFs. However, there is usually a qualification inserted somewhere in the conversation:

I mean, if I see a woman out drinking a glass of beer, I don’t think it is bad. But you think, “that is like a real Aussie woman” (F, Ad, NSW, ND).

As noted previously, a “real” Aussie (Australian) is actually a male Aussie. This informant is thus suggesting a lack of femininity in the BDF, although she is reluctant to state this explicitly.

Not all informants interviewed shared the stereotyped impressions of BDFs that have been described above. However, those who said they were comfortable around BDFs were still aware of the attributions usually made by the majority:

Researcher: Tell me please about your impressions of women who drink beer.
Male 1: I actually think it is good, because I actually hate stereotypes. I always hope that if I have a beer, everybody is having a beer (Ms, A, NSW, D).

This informant is conscious of the stereotypes surrounding BDFs, and structures his response around a proclaimed dislike of such stereotypes. To him, the social bonding function of beer consumption can now extend to females, providing a legitimate motivation for consumption by both genders. He went on to explain how his view of BDFs differed from the perspectives of others because he had grown up with sisters who consumed beer on a regular basis. He was thus able to resist assigning unfavourable attributions to BDFs due to his regular exposure to female beer consumption in the home.

Physical Justifications

Physical reasons were often given to explain the relative lack of beer consumption by females. Wine is the more commonly accepted female beverage, even though the alcohol content of wine is usually significantly greater than that of beer. Despite the higher concentration of pure alcohol, wine consumption is not generally perceived to be as detrimental to the health of females as is beer consumption. Beer is perceived as an inherently masculine beverage that is simply not suitable for female consumption. Physical justifications have evolved as a mechanism to protect the
masculinity of beer, although these justifications will face a growing challenge in the form of the increasing reality of the BDF. The most common physical justifications were the volume of the beverage and the bitter taste of beer. These justifications are discussed below.

**Volume**

The following extract demonstrates the use of the volume rationalisation by those explaining why beer is inappropriate for females:

*Researcher:* Why is it that beer is a man’s drink?
*Male 1:* I think it is just a bit rough. It is a rough old drink. There is nothing smooth about beer.
*Researcher:* It tastes rough?
*Male 1:* It tastes like there is sand in it.
*Male 2:* It is the volume as well. I mean, there is a quantity involved as well.
*Researcher:* So women can’t stomach it, or...?
*Male 2:* Well, just women’s bladders aren’t up to it yet. They are just not up to it.
*Male 1:* My wife can’t sit in a trail for 10 to 15 minutes. Can you imagine some women who have had half a dozen kids?
*Researcher:* So is beer unfeminine or just inappropriate?
*Male 1:* I would just say it is just personal taste (Ms, A, NSW, D).

Beer is described by this informant as a “rough” beverage that causes digestion problems for females. Specifically, explanations of restricted stomach and bladder capacity are given to account for the tendency of females to avoid beer. This illustrates the assumption that to drink beer properly means to consume large amounts of the substance, resulting in capacity problems for female drinkers. It is interesting to note that after going into considerable detail about the significance of the volume and texture of beer, the Taste Myth was invoked right at the end of the quote. The contradiction involved was not apparent to the informant. To informants, taste preferences and physical justifications are part of the same equation that makes female beer consumption inappropriate, or even unnatural.

While the justification of volume may hold some logical attraction due to the differences in average body sizes and compositions between males and females, what is often ignored is the fact that males can also experience difficulty coping with the volume of beer that is required to be consumed in Australian culture:

Diamond Draught claims to be less filling. Now I know there is nothing worse than every time you sit down and drink beer you are up to the toilet every five minutes. (M, Ad, NSW, D).
Bartender: Some people stick with beers all night, but the major would have like beer for three-quarters of the evening, and like the next quarter just have scotch or something like that.

Researcher: Why do they change?

Bartender: I don’t know. I think beer is bloating (F, A(bartender), NSW, D).

Bloating is therefore not a condition exclusive to females. Many males share the bloating experience, and choose to move to spirits once the bloating feeling sets in. It is thus more likely to be the seasoned drinkers who can prolong the length of time between bathroom visits, not specifically the male drinker versus the female drinker. This suggests that other forces are more relevant to gender segregation in alcohol consumption than volume capacity.

Bitterness

In efforts to explain the divergence between male and female beer consumption, females were frequently described as having a preference for sweeter substances over bitter substances. Although this justification was very prevalent among informants, after some discussion they could quite easily perceive its inadequacy as a useful explanation of beer avoidance by females. The extract below illustrates how quickly people will back away from this rationalisation:

Male: Women like sort of sweet things, Boronia and milk, or Tia Maria and milk.

Researcher: But a lot of wines, for instance, aren’t sweet.

Male: No, they are not. It is to the individual palate. It is not something you can sort of segregate into like a section (M, A, NSW, D).

After initially generalising that females have a natural inclination towards sweeter alcoholic beverages, the informant states that it is not possible to segregate males and females on the basis of palate. This is an example of the often blind acceptance of cultural guides that was noted among informants. While they were happy generalising on subjects that are culturally “obvious”, they were much more cautious when discussing issues not characterised by common cultural understandings, thus requiring individual interpretation.

The following extract from a discussion with a brewery representative combines all of the physical justifications discussed above. He recognises the symbolic meaning associated with beer, although it appears to be an afterthought and secondary to the physical justifications offered:
Why don’t women drink beer? One thing is the nature of the product itself. Beers tend to be naturally bitter, and women tend to have sweeter palates. I have never asked if there is a biological, scientific reason for that. Also, the bloating aspect. Women seem to bloat quicker than men, and blokes are probably more comfortable farting more often than women. I guess within that as well is the weight consciousness. Men haven’t tended in the past to be as conscious of that. And then there is the beer gut. They’re probably the main reasons. And then of course there is the image of beer that has always been fairly masculine (Brewery representative).

Even among industry members, the Taste Myth takes precedence over other contributing factors. This is interesting given the increasing inclusion of females in their marketing programs. If the taste of beer is fundamentally unpalatable to females, it is difficult to see the point of attempting to increase their consumption of the beverage. The answer lies in the symbolic function of beer consumption that is of greater importance to drinkers than its taste. As females come to desire the symbolic meaning that is available via beer consumption, their consumption patterns will change to more closely resemble those of current beer drinkers - namely males.

Throughout interviews with informants, it became apparent that gender issues are of great significance to beer consumption in Australia. It appears that the relationship between beer consumption and masculinity is still entrenched, yet decreasingly so. As space precludes an exhaustive discussion here of the stereotypes accruing to BDFs and the ways in which the nature and role of the BDF is changing, an extension of this discussion can be found in Appendix O.

Social Class

There exist expectations that Australians belonging to different social classes will drink different varieties and quantities of alcohol:

They (the working classes) like to spend all day drinking beer, while we just have wine with dinner (F, A, WA, D).

These expectations, however, are not often explicitly stated. The quote above came from an interview with a social acquaintance, and as such she was prepared to divulge feelings that unknown informants would not be comfortable sharing. Very few informants raised the topic of social class unprompted, and among those few who did spontaneously mention social class, school children attending private schools were heavily represented. These informants were much more likely to offer social class membership as a reason for variations in alcohol consumption than other informants.
Among adult informants and students attending public schools, the existence of differences in class status appeared to be either below their level of consciousness or a taboo topic of discussion.

The following extracts are from interviews with private school students who discussed the class connotations of different forms of alcohol:

A lot of people tend to drink wine, whereas people like truck drivers and bikies sit there and drink beer (F, Ad, WA, ND).

Real rich guys drink lots of red wines. Because when you are rich the wine is sort of like the really expensive thing, and so even if you don't like it you generally drink it. People don't expect you to have ten beers around the table with your expensive old man, so they expect you to have old red wine. (M, Ad, WA, ND).

Beer was depicted by these informants as a more down-market beverage, while wine (particularly red wine) was generally considered to be for members of the middle and upper classes. In the first quote, the informant's interpretation that many people drink wine while beer is appropriate for the likes of truck drivers and bikies reflects her upbringing in a high socio-economic family where beer is rarely consumed. The second informant expresses his understanding that forms of alcohol such as red wine are appropriate for more affluent drinkers. His social conditioning has already made him very aware that wealth is associated with forms of alcohol other than beer.

The conception of beer brand choice as socially engineered is unpopular in a country that prides itself on a lack of class distinction. There was a general lack of (acknowledged) recognition among informants that social class has any relationship to differences in the types or brands of beer consumed. As a perceived "universal" beverage among Australians, beer as a product category is not seen to experience the same degree of social stratification that is evident among different types of alcohol. The following extract from an interview with a brewery representative indicates the extent to which social class is considered irrelevant to beer consumption, even among marketers:

A particular beer appeals to a certain type of person, and that certain type of person is not defined by the blue collar or white collarness of their jobs. Like your VB drinker for instance, he is someone who has got his shit together. He knows where he is going, he knows what he wants to do. The marketing guys have got all these terms for it, and that can just as easily be a senior manager of a firm or it can be a tradesmen. Like, there is not a distinction any more (brewery representative).
Thus brand selection is considered to be more based on personality type than social status. This belief offers an alternative means by which to segment beer drinkers, one that does not encroach on the sensitive territory of social class.

In their efforts to employ the imagery of beer brands to their advantage, drinkers can consume those brands that reflect their aspirational (as opposed to actual) selves. These aspirational selves can include a higher standing on the social ladder than is currently held:

*Researcher:* Who is the target market for Crown Lager?
*Brewery representative:* A bit more mature, obviously. And we do that by associating with the premium golf tournaments. It is 35+ white collar, discerning beer drinkers, professionals. But that’s not necessarily drinking it by the way, that’s just who we aim it towards and that’s who our advertising aims it towards. But because we’ve got this remarkable increase in growth we had a look back. But in fact that is the blue-collar worker’s premium beer. So it’s really interesting. There is this huge volume in the blue-collar sector (brewery representative).

Such attempts to utilise the symbolic meaning of beer to communicate information about desired social position reveal some level of social awareness amongst drinkers. By using brand symbolism in this way, they indicate their understanding of the relationship between beer brand and social standing as it will be interpreted by others.

The allocation of individuals to different social classes is recognised among theorists as one of the ways in which the social environment impacts upon consumption (Bourdieu 1984). Whether they are consciously aware of it or not, Australians are born into a social system that communicates to them at a very young age the rights and wrongs of beer consumption according to social class. However, instead of relating differences in alcohol consumption to social class, informants usually pointed to differences in taste as the primary cause of consumption choices. Another reason offered was affordability, which was considered to be a more acceptable cause for differences in consumption than social class membership:

> There are lots of reasons why the lower classes drink beer and we drink wine. We can afford it and they can’t. I think it is all about money, and how that chooses what you drink and where you sit at the cricket. I don’t equate money with class, necessarily. I think everyone is the same, they just have different access to money. I don’t think people are born into classes that determine their choices (F, A, WA, D).

This quote illustrates the Australian tendency to down-play the existence of rigid social categories into which people are born. There is a disinclination to interpret consumption
behaviour in the light of class membership, with most informants preferring to ascribe choices to individual preferences.

Despite a general hesitation among informants to acknowledge social class differences in consumption, the one area in which class was mentioned in relation to beer consumption was when describing the images associated with a particular brand of beer. The imported brand Carona was frequently described as being consumed by members of the upper class:

Researcher: Who drinks Caronas?
Female: snobs.
Male: upper class snobs (M&F, A, NSW, D).

Researcher: So who drinks Corona?
Male 1: Carona is imported isn't it?
Male 2: Well upper class usually.
Researcher: Can you tell me the first thing that comes to your mind?
Male 2: Hob-nobs, yes, yuppies. People who are bores, who are usually rich (Ms, A, NSW, D)

By comparison, comments about particular brands being especially suitable for lower or middle class consumers were rare. Once again, personality characteristics were more likely to be offered as the primary differences between drinkers of different brands than social class membership.

The female preference for wine is often interpreted as a justification for categorising females as inherently higher in social class than their male counter-parts. This conceptualisation of females as being inherently higher class in their preferences and behaviours is played out in the attributions directed towards wine as a consumption good:

Researcher: Why is that, why is wine the women’s drink and beer is the men’s drink?
Male: More classy. Women dress better and they care about what they look like and stuff (M, A, NSW, ND).

Female: Women are more into finer things. Like wine is more finer in a glass, more finer than a beer glass. More of a luxury, wine (F, Ad, NSW, ND).

Interview data indicated that the Australian female is expected to be much more refined than the Australian male. She is expected to refrain from the profanities in which her male counterpart indulges, to keep her body slim and attractive, and to refrain from
excessive consumption of all kinds. As she is considered to be more sophisticated, her consumption patterns are expected to demonstrate constraint and finesse. Wine consumption is more closely aligned to this cultural expectation of the role of the female in Australian society.

**Conclusion**

The All-Australian Myth encourages a general belief that beer is universally enjoyed by Australians. Perhaps a better interpretation is that beer as a product category achieves universality in terms of its perceived coverage of the Australian population, rather than in its actual coverage. As such, beer is a cultural icon that unites Australians in spirit, if not in body. The ABS statistics provided in chapter 3 illustrate that the assumed universality of beer consumption is mythical. Beer consumption is a male-dominated activity in Australia, and class differences in consumption also exist. Despite this segmentation, the All-Australian Myth permits a sense of bonding amongst Australians on the basis of a consumption behaviour. At a superficial level it enables Australians to conceive of themselves as a uniform population, engendering a feeling of belonging and of commonality. A close analysis, however, also suggests that beer plays a very important function in the demarcation between the sexes and members of different social classes. The All-Australian Myth serves to cloud this symbolic function of beer in Australian culture. The myth offers a sense of oneness, while actual beer consumption represents and reflects the boundaries between groups of Australians.

**The Taste Myth**

The second major myth surrounding beer consumption is the importance of taste. This myth has two aspects. First, taste is used as a justification for drinking beer as opposed to other alcoholic beverages. Second, taste is employed as the primary source of differentiation among the varying brands of beer on the market. Both of these aspects of taste are discussed below.

**Taste as a Justification for Selection of Beverage**

Despite the emphasis placed by beer drinkers on taste, it became readily apparent throughout data collection and analysis that other motivating factors had considerably more influence over consumption decisions. There are many indicators
that much more is involved in the decision to drink beer rather than other alcoholic beverages than a simple taste appreciation. For example, beer offers symbolic benefits to the consumer over and above the utilitarian function of thirst relief:

Beer has an emotional layer that is different to other drinks, all this parochialism, badge stuff that happens (Brewery representative).

Despite the brewery representatives understanding that the symbolic meaning of beer is the primary reason for consumption, beer drinkers interviewed were uniform in their insistence that taste is the most important reason for consuming beer. For some, passion about beer is at a level normally reserved for religion or politics, and this strength of feeling comes from the substantial symbolism attached to beer consumption in Australia. There is often conflict, however, between the symbolism desired and the individual’s taste preferences. The following extract from a discussion with a male drinker at a NSW country leagues club illustrates the drinker’s paradox. Drinkers feel socially compelled to enjoy drinking beer, and adopt taste as a justification for this compulsion. However, it is often the case that upon first and subsequent samplings of beer, they do not enjoy it at all:

*Male:* You drink for the taste of it. You have a few beers, unwind, unstress, whatever. That is where your alcohol comes in. But if you can’t stand the taste you are not going to drink it.
*Researcher:* Do you remember the first time you drank beer?
*Male:* Yes
*Researcher:* Did you like the taste?
*Male:* No, at sixteen years of age, no I didn’t (M, A, NSW(country), D).

Thus, after stating that people will not drink beer if they do not like its taste, he acknowledges that initially he did not enjoy beer, but had continued to consume the beverage regardless. Motivations other than taste are clearly at work. Beer consumption offers a form of social bonding that is much more important to drinkers than its taste, and the Taste Myth provides a much more socially acceptable rationale for bonding behaviour than the need to bond itself.

**Social Contexts**

Rather than individual taste preferences determining when and where beer should be consumed, it is often the case that the social context impacts significantly on consumption decisions. Social forces dictate which beverages are appropriate for different types of consumers in specific contexts, effectively determining taste
preferences. Just as there are appropriate alcoholic beverages for males and females, there are socially sanctioned alcoholic alternatives for certain situations. Wine is the more formal beverage, particularly fitting for sit-down meals and special occasions. Beer is the every-day product, suitable for consumption wherever people congregate informally. Informants felt that the taste of beer makes it more appropriate for the types of foods consumed in each context. The anomaly in the argument that a beer tastes better with a steak at a barbecue and a glass of red wine “goes better” with a cut of red meat at a dinner party was far from obvious to informants. The social consumption requirements over-ride the taste of the beverage so completely that in the minds of consumers the association of certain types of alcohol and certain social contexts is natural and unquestioned.

While beer retains its general dominance of the Australian alcohol consumption scene, the plateau in the growth of beer consumption and the significant increases in wine consumption reported in chapter 3 indicate changing social conditions. Beer is still the obvious choice at informal gatherings, although other forms of alcohol are becoming more acceptable across a broader range of activities. The choice of alcohol type is thus dependent on the social environment in which the beverage is to be consumed, as opposed to the taste preferences of the individual. The following quotes illustrate the importance of social context to the selection of alcoholic beverage:

I think if you went out and really saw Australian culture it is now, I think there would be a lot of people drinking a lot more wine, a lot more European type spirits and all that sort of thing. But I think it (beer) is pretty fundamental at parties and all that sort of thing. I mean beer is always part of social gatherings. Christmas, parties, any sorts of things, it is a pretty important thing (M, A, NSW, D).

Female 1: It is much more sociable to drink wine with your dinner. Female 2: I guess at the bar you drink with your mates, you know, have a beer and a casual chat. Whereas having dinner in the restaurant is sort of a bit more of a step up.

Female 1: You get people coming in before going out. Groups of ten or twelve young people, and a lot of them just drink beer. Just mainly beer. They would never have a bottle of wine, actually (Fs, A(bartenders), NSW, D).

At lunch time I would rather have wine. After work I would rather have a beer. If I am eating I would much rather have a wine. I think wine is just naturally associated with food (M, A, VIC, D).
The socially structured nature of taste preferences becomes particularly apparent where deviations from the cultural norms occur in specific contexts. For example, the following quote is from an interview with an adult male living and working in Kalgoorlie in Western Australia. He points out that wine consumption among females (an Australian cultural norm) is much less common in this heavy beer-drinking mining town, although he is at a loss to explain why:

Male: I have not seen a woman drink a wine in this town over a bar.
Researcher: Why is that do you think?
Male: Don’t know, couldn’t tell you. Couldn’t answer that one. (M, A, WA(country), D).

The same informant went on to explain how his own preference for spirits was subordinated to his need to conform to the social expectation of beer consumption among Kalgoorlie drinkers:

Male: When I was in Perth I used to drink scotch.
Researcher: So why not here?
Male: Don’t know. Probably because most people drink beer (M, A, WA(country), D).

The power of social forces is apparent in consumers’ attempts to conform to social expectations. Newcomers arriving in Kalgoorlie alter their consumption of alcoholic beverages to reflect the new social environment. According to informants in Kalgoorlie pubs, wine and spirits are no longer symbolic of femininity or class status, but of “the big smoke”, and are therefore avoided by both males and females. This illustrates the existence of reasons for beverage consumption other than individual taste preferences.

In the following extract, another Kalgoorlie informant explains how females drink different things in different places:

Being from England a lot of women drink beer and also through a straw. Here a lot of women, like I say if you are from Perth, they drink wine. Here (Kalgoorlie) they drink spirits or drink beer, and they drink it out of glass bottles, or the glass. Or they will pour a bottle in their glass. It makes no difference really (M, A, WA(country), D).

Although he says “it makes no difference really,” it is interesting that he is aware of the usage variations and is able to be quite specific about them. Such variations have social relevance, illustrating the tendency of consumers to vary their consumption behaviours according to the social environment. Australian females living in cities largely conform to the expectation that they will avoid beer. This avoidance behaviour is widespread and well-entrenched. However, in different environments this rule is readily flouted to
facilitate social blending in the new context. Thus females who move to Kalgoorlie are expected to (and do) alter their behaviour to fit in with the local culture.

**Taste as a Justification for Selection of Brand**

The choice of beer brand reflects too much about the self to be taken lightly. Through their consumption of specific brands of beer, drinkers indicate aspects of their selves to themselves and others, making brand selection very important to the individual. Beer drinkers are aware of the common tendency to make attributions based on brand consumption, and as a result the anticipated attributions of others impinge upon their decision-making. So many stereotyped attributions are made on the basis of brand selection that one must be very careful to make the “correct” choice. By correct is meant the brand perceived to be appropriate to one’s actual or ideal age, gender, personality, social class category, and situational context. In this way drinkers can increase the likelihood that their consumption choices will be found acceptable by their peers, whose good opinion they value.

The following quotes are indicative of the attributions that are made based on the brand of beer consumed. With such positive and negative associations accruing to the drinker of a particular brand, it becomes necessary to ensure that one attracts the right kinds of attributions in order to communicate the desired self-image:

*Researcher:* What sort of person do you imagine drinks Fosters?

*Male 1:* Losers

*Male 2:* Die-hard Australians, Ford fans.

*Male 3:* The type of person you are not really bothered with (Ms, A, NSW, D).

*Researcher:* Tell me what types of beer different types of people drink.

*Male:* Well, VB, Emu Export, Fosters, and all that are drunk by middle class. Middle upper class people like Matilda Bay and all that stuff. The yuppies drink Corona and Redback Lager. People below the poverty line would drink casks (of wine) (M, Ad, WA, ND).

*Researcher:* Who drinks Tooheys Blue?

*Female:* Working class people

*Researcher:* Who drinks Hahn Ice?

*Female:* Businessmen (F, Ad, WA, ND).

*Researcher:* What type of person drinks a Cascade?

*Male:* An up-market trendy person (M, A, NSW, D).
These extracts signal the extensiveness of product-related attributions. Consumers are very active in assigning meaning to others based upon their consumption choices, although an important point is that the meanings assigned are already resident in the products through cultural determination. The tendency for Australian drinkers to consume specific brands according to the cultural meanings they possess suggests taste is much less significant in the consumption process than is typically assumed.

Despite the existence of only two dominant brewers in Australia, many drinkers seem to remain parochial about their favourite brand(s). They perceive significant distinctions among brands, and will argue passionately that there are notable taste differences between them:

Researcher: Can you tell the difference between beers?
Male: I could be drunk and I would still know the difference between what I drink and other beers (M, S, NSW, D)

According to the brewery representatives interviewed, both major breweries conduct regular consumer taste tests that show that within beer categories (e.g., low-alcohol beers, dark beers), the majority of drinkers cannot distinguish between brands. Both blind and labelled taste tests are conducted, producing very different results. This indicates that drinkers are not as discerning as they imagine. Their inability to distinguish between their favoured brand and other brands in blind taste tests contradicts the insistence of taste-dominance as a consumption motivation. Such a conclusion is offensive to ardent drinkers, who cannot entertain the possibility of a lack of differentiation amongst beer brands. They are either convinced of the differences in taste, or are unwilling or unable to concede the possibility of other motivations. For example, a barman reported in front of a middle-aged customer (who also happened to be a friend of his), that while he knew that his friend drank one particular brand of beer, he had intentionally served him another to see if he was able to detect the substitution. He wasn’t. The friend was mortified at being exposed, especially in such a public arena (several other pub patrons were standing nearby, listening). His immediate reaction was to cast suspicion on the barman’s credibility:

Comment to the barman: You are a retard. You are a crawler.

A representative from one brewery explained that some beer brands on the market are in fact the same product in different packaging, although their consumption patterns would tend to indicate otherwise:
Tooheys Draught and New are exactly the same beer. One is on tap, and one in a pack. It is amazing how many people who drink New in the pub but buy a VB to take home (Brewery representative).

In some instances, a little colouring is added to provide a point of differentiation between different brands that come out of the same tank. Vastly different prices are then charged, and packaging is designed to indicate the symbolic differences between the brands. As a brewery representative stated:

They think they can tell the difference, but they can’t. They will tell you that one beer is crap and another tastes wonderful, when in fact they come out of the same tank. They just have no idea (Brewery representative).

Although taste was proclaimed by almost all respondents to be the most important choice criteria when choosing among brands, the breweries perceive the decision process differently:

Packaging and advertising and POS material are main factors in affecting choice (Brewery representative).

The breweries are therefore under no misconception that consumers can actually discern any real taste differences among brands within a beer category, nor that taste preferences are strong enough to counter the factors of image and price. Instead, they focus their efforts on those factors that they know influence sales; advertising, price, and packaging.

The myth of taste dominance serves to draw attention away from the employment of beer consumption as a social tool. Once consumers have become convinced of the expertise required in correct beer consumption, they can take advantage of the Taste Myth by communicating information about themselves through product and brand choices. By making the “correct” choice, consumers can communicate their good taste, which is assumed to be based on individual skill in differentiating between alternatives on the basis of taste perceptions. Should the Taste Myth cease to exist, such consumption choices would become meaningless from a symbolic perspective. In other words, if the lack of consumer ability to differentiate among brands is recognised it would not be possible to convey good taste under the guise of brand selections. Without this myth to guide behaviour, it would become undirected and unintelligible to others.
Drinkers feel compelled to conform to the image-management requirement that they should be able to discern the subtle differences between beer brands, enabling them to decide which has the superior taste. It is on this basis that they claim their choices are made. Gentle delving, however, can quickly demonstrate the constructed nature of this preference:

*Researcher:* Can you tell me what sort of beer you are drinking?
*Male:* Tooheys New

*Researcher:* Can you tell me why you chose that particular one?
*Male:* It is the best beer in Australia

*Researcher:* Is it the taste or because you can buy it everywhere, or some other reason?
*Male:* It's the taste.

*Researcher:* So if I gave you two glasses of beer and told you to guess which one is New, could you pick it?
*Male:* No. Oh, I probably could. Yes. This is not a trick question, is it? (M, A, NSW, D).

*Researcher:* Are you all drinking VB?
*Male:* I guess so

*Researcher:* So that jug you have just bought, what was that?
*Male:* Just asked for a jug of beer.

*Researcher:* Does it taste any different from what you were drinking before?
*Male:* No

S: So if you asked for a jug of beer they probably gave you a Swan as that’s what’s on tap.
*Male:* Probably, yes.

*Researcher:* And that tastes the same as VB?
*Male:* No, not the same. It tastes a bit different. You can tell the difference. But after a while you don’t notice (A, M, WA, D).

*Researcher:* So do you think there is a lot of taste difference between beers?
*Male:* Yes, very definitely

*Researcher:* So if someone gave you lots of different glasses of beer, could you pick the one that is Carlton Cold (his previously stated favourite brand)?
*Male:* No (M, A, NSW, D).

Such inconsistencies were quite normal in interviews. Informants were keen to appear knowledgable about brands and to be loyal to their stated favourite(s). Once it became apparent that there may be more to the story, they made completely contradictory statements with little or no sign of distress or confusion. A more common reaction was mild displeasure at someone who refused to “play the game” of taste-dominance.

The Taste Myth is further evidenced in the swings in sales that result from price fluctuations. Some beers are markedly more price sensitive than others, an example being Emu Draft. The primacy of taste is questionable when some brands command
higher prices with less price elasticity while others will have huge demand fluctuations with price variations. A better-fitting explanation lies in the high image-management function of brands, which results in some being consumed regardless of cost due to their ability to communicate status information. When drinking in front of others, it becomes important to choose the brand of beer that sends the desired message to observers. Other brands that are consumed in the home are much more price sensitive, as they are much less critical to image management due to their private consumption:

There are lots of beers that are out there that are price fighters, that are really good economical beers, and they taste good. So they keep it in the cupboard and they drink it at home because it is right for the budget. But when they go out they might buy a Matilda Bay. It is interesting how they distinguish what they drink at home and what they take to a party, because it is saying something about the label (Brewery representative).

Such differences in behaviour that derive from stereotyping tendencies once again demonstrate that taste is not the all-important factor, as is assumed by drinkers.

Another indication of the relative unimportance of taste is the advent of the fashion cycles that now occur in beer consumption. Brands can quickly fall in and out of popularity, indicating the primacy of their image-management function over and above their taste characteristics:

It's like Redback. We did have it, then it didn't sell anymore. It wasn't popular anymore (M, A(bartender), NSW, D).

Consumers switch brands to control the image they convey, rather than to reflect individual taste preferences. It is unlikely that the increase the breweries note in switching behaviour can be attributed to more frequent changes in individual taste preferences. Instead, it is more probable that changes in the popularity of a brand reflect its ability, relative to other brands, to successfully communicate desired images.

Reasons for brand switching, other than taste, are evident in the decline in popularity of the Fosters brand. Australians are renowned for supporting the under-dog and for cutting down "tall poppies" (Mackay 1993). This is apparent in the sales history of Fosters Lager. Fosters experienced a significant decline in domestic consumption after successfully exporting the product overseas:

Australians are really funny. They just as soon as it goes up in lights ... they step back. I don’t think Australians like the limelight too much (Brewery representative).
While informants often asserted that Fosters is deficient in taste, this does not adequately explain why a once popular brand could be displaced so quickly and so completely. Another explanation is implied, one that relies on concepts of fashion and image management. Once Fosters lost its “Australianness” to Australian drinkers they boycotted the product. The new symbolism was incongruent with the symbolism sought by the Australian drinker, the result being that a once successful brand experienced a drastic decline in sales due to its new international image.

Most beer drinkers interviewed were reluctant to acknowledge the lack of differentiation among many brands. A perception of significant differentiation is necessary to provide a rationalisation for the selection of one particular brand over others. To recognise a lack of difference would go against the social and cultural conditioning to which drinkers have long been exposed. Only a small minority of informants was prepared to acknowledge that they could perceive no difference between beer brands within the same beer category. However, this was often the case where the informant was either senior in years or intoxicated and therefore less inhibited. Sober informants were much less likely to admit a lack of taste differential between brands. The following informant appeared to be quite “merry” when approached for an interview:

*Researcher:* What sort of beer do you drink?
*Male:* Emu Export or just tap beer, draught, whatever, it doesn’t really matter. Tastes all the same.
*Researcher:* So how do you choose?
*Male:* I don’t know. That is too tricky for me. I just follow everyone else. I am a sheep (M, A, WA, D).

This informant is acknowledging his need to monitor and mimic the consumption behaviours of others in order to behave appropriately in the social context. Sober informants were less likely to make such revealing statements. Instead, they appeared determined to maintain the façade of personal taste preferences required by the Taste Myth. Even among those who did report a similarity among brands, there was a tendency to qualify such statements in some way. The following informant nominates a difference in the physical outcome of consumption to justify his commitment to a particular brand after he acknowledges that they fundamentally taste the same:

*Researcher:* Do all beers taste the same?
*Male:* Well, they are all sort of got that same sort of taste. But, see if I went on to another beer now, if I went on to say light, or went on to a different
sort of beer, in the morning I would wake up with a headache (M, A, NSW, D).

Older drinkers are less concerned with the image-management function of beer brands, and thus have less reason to cling to the Taste Myth. The following informant acknowledges his inability to detect differences among brands through his statement that there is no real difference between them:

There is not a great deal of difference between any of the beers, really. But the breweries control what you drink (M, S, NSW, D).

However, it is relevant to note that he did not phrase his statement in terms of his own inabilities to differentiate among brands. Instead, he makes statements that include reference to the generalised other in the form of “you”.

The relative irrelevance of taste preferences is also apparent in drinking rituals that encourage conformance. For example, the ritual of shouting serves to reinforce the tendency to choose the same brand as one’s peers, as drinkers often prefer to order the same brand for everyone when taking their turn in a shout. Such behaviour contrasts with the serving of tea and coffee, where different product preferences (tea and coffee) and different predilections for additives (milk and sugar) are accommodated. In beer consumption there is a greater need for conformance:

I drink the brand that I drink because all my mates drink it. When they shout they shout VB, Reds, or Golds (M, A, WA, D).

I am usually a VB drinker, but Steve had a New tonight, so it was easy just to ask for two News at the bar, and it was simple to ask for (M, A, NSW, D).

The comparative difficulty of ordering a VB and a New as opposed to two News is relatively insignificant. Perhaps the concern is the unacknowledged similarity between these brands, which could lead to an embarrassing inability to differentiate between the two beverages upon returning to the table. Then there is also the mateship factor. By forsaking his preference for his friend’s, the informant communicates his bond with his fellow drinker.

Packaging

Packaging is an important ingredient in the brewer’s marketing mix, representing an additional variable of importance to consumption decisions other than taste. Consumers use packaging to both understand and communicate the symbolic
meanings possessed by the brand. The communication function of packaging is apparent in the hierarchy that exists among beer packaging forms. For example, informants were universal in their preference for tap beer and bottled beer over canned beer. Cans were frequently explained to be inferior, although few could offer any concrete justifications for this assessment and different informants often provided contradictory rationalisations:

Researcher: So what do you drink?
Male: Depends. If you are in a pub I will drink what comes out of a tap. I don’t know why, no idea (M, A, VIC, D).

There is just something about a pub. If you get it on tap for some reason it has just got ... nicer in some ways (M, A, NSW, D).

Male: Glass is best.
Researcher: Why would that be?
Male: Draught beer off tap. Off the tap is the best. It is the only way, it is the best way. If you are going to drink it not in a pub, drink out of bottles. It is colder (M, A, NSW, D).

Researcher: Why do people drink cans?
Brewery representative: Colder, I think. They can get them colder.

I wouldn’t walk into a pub and have a bottle of beer or a can of beer. I don’t even like canned beer anyway. I have drunk it, don’t get me wrong. I prefer a schooner (M, A, NSW, D).

Consumers accept the social “fact” that canned beer is inherently inferior without question, just as they do for many other beer “facts”. The lower ranking of cans is evident in the context in which they are primarily consumed. Cans are reserved for private home consumption, while bottled beer is deemed more appropriate for public drinking. The slightly lower cost of cans gives them an advantage in non-social contexts, where image management is not as critical.

Appearances are everything in beer consumption. Where the content of the bottle and the can are the same, totally different attributions can be made on the basis of packaging and presentation. By supplying these differences, brewers generate a degree of differentiation that creates opportunities for new drinkers to enter the market, opportunities that are not available from the taste of the product alone:

A few years ago there was no way women would drink VB or Tooheys, regardless of whether it was a schooner glass or not. They just wouldn’t drink VB or Tooheys because that was a bloke’s drink. Whereas now you are getting products like Cold, products like Ice, there is now Diamond...
Draught, Tooheys Red. When Tooheys Red came out it was naturally brewed, so if they have a rational reason, they can drink a beer. They can explain to their friends that “Well hang on, this is new, this is different. This isn’t VB, or it is not Tooheys Draught, or something like that.” Then it is a lot easier for them to drink it. Especially if the girls weren’t beer drinkers previously, they think “A clear bottle looks great. This is really good and it’s cool. Like everybody is drinking it so I can drink it and not feel that there is any kind of stigma attached to it” (Brewery representative).

BDFs thus seek “rational” reasons for their decisions to choose beer, or at least reasons that can provide a legitimate rationalisation for their consumption activities to others. New brewing and packaging styles have provided suitable justifications by introducing new imagery to the beer market. Rather than being explicitly female, these new brands are perceived to be considerably more up-market, and therefore more appropriate for a self-respecting female:

*Researcher:* Do girls drink the same brands as males, or do they drink different brands?
*Female:* Most girls I know drink like beer from a bottle instead of ordering a schooner. Like most guys will just order a schooner of anything, like beer is beer. Like girls, like “No, I am not too keen on something from the tap,” like it has to be from the bottle.
*Researcher:* Why is that? What makes a difference?
*Female:* It is more expensive. That makes a difference. I think a lot of girls think that.
*Researcher:* As a guy, would you rather see a girl drinking out of a bottle or out of a schooner glass?
*Male:* Probably out of a bottle.
*Researcher:* How about the stubbie bottles, would that be okay or not?
*Male:* Not really.
*Female:* That’s different.
*Male:* It doesn’t look right.
*Female:* It is kind of more classy to drink out of a long neck bottle.
*Male:* It is just the class thing with girls drinking beer. (M&F, A, NSW, D).

By selecting the appropriate packaging, BDFs can circumvent some of the traditional contempt levied against females who choose to drink beer. Of all the female informants interviewed and observed, few were prepared to drink beer from a glass or a can. By doing so they would defeat the purpose of drinking the beverage in the first instance. They would be unable to communicate brand information to observers, thus leaving themselves open to the more undesirable attributions that accrue to females consuming brands considered particularly masculine or unsophisticated. These types of attributions are just as negative among females as among males, as is evident from the following discussion with a BDF:
Female: I must say one day when I was on Hamilton Island there was some outrigger races and Lisa Curry was in it. When she finished the race, she got out of the boat and someone handed her a can of beer and she was standing there drinking out of a can of beer. I found that really strange. I don’t know why it offended me, but it did.

Researcher: If you had seen a guy do that, would you have felt strange too?
Female: Absolutely not (F, A, WA(country), D).

The stigma of the can for BDFs is two-fold. First, it is associated with lower class drinkers, and second, it has even stronger male connotations than other forms of packaging. The clear bottle serves to reduce the “macho-ness” of beer, and to offer a distinction that is interpreted as more sophisticated:

Researcher: What sort of beer would women drink?
Male: I don’t know. Hahn Ice. Nice clear label, they would drink that.
Researcher: Why?
Male: Because it is a boutique beer, it looks good (M, A, WA, D).

The shortening of the conceptual distance between beer and wine with the advent of the boutique beer market partially explains the increasing consumption of beer by females. A boutique or premium beer now shares a degree of cognitive space with wine:

Male: I noticed back in the late eighties a lot more women drinking beer, and I think it has carried on to a certain point.
Researcher: Why do you think that started then?
Male: I think it was the boutique brewing industry that let’s say gave beer drinking some sort of respectability. Up until then I think it was just a man’s drink. You have always had the old girls in the pubs and clubs drinking their shandies and stuff like that. But I think people are now more aware of beer. It became more like a wine (M, A, NSW, D).

Boutique beers are often sold in clear bottles (as opposed to the opaque stubbie), and are more expensive than their down-market counterparts. Other than these cosmetic differences, there is little if any difference between many of the boutique brands and more mainstream brands. The symbolism of the boutique beer derives from carefully constructed advertising campaigns, and pricing and packaging strategies:

Researcher: So does that define boutique, if they come from a small brewery?
Brewery representative: Pretty much so.
Researcher: Is there much difference in ingredients?
Brewery representative: Not really, only price- and imagery-wise.

This account communicates the primacy of image management in the beer consumption process, a motivation that dominates taste considerations for many drinkers.
Age

The existence and nature of the Taste Myth is suggested in the analysis of the differences in beer consumption among drinkers of different ages. As suggested in chapter 3, beer consumption is segmented by age, as well as by gender and social class. The commencement of beer consumption is a rite of passage, signalling the progression from childhood to adulthood. The time at which an individual begins to drink beer does not necessarily correspond with the legal age limit, which is 18 years of age in Australia. Those too young to legally purchase and consume beer find alternative methods of obtaining the desired beverage:

*Researcher:* Is getting beer when you are under-age a hard thing to do?

*Male:* Depends on what sort of people that are in your family and the sort of people that you know. I mean if you have older brothers or older sisters or whatever. Or friends who are out of their teens (M, Ad, NSW, ND).

Younger drinkers are among the few who find it more acceptable, as well as necessary, to drink at home:

You find people drink heaps more when they are at home because it costs too much in a pub. You can’t afford it (M, Ad, NSW, ND).

They often prefer the home environment, as beer purchased from a retail outlet is less expensive than beer bought over the pub counter. Also, they are safe from the evictions that can occur if they attempt to drink in public drinking places. To this group, the adult and masculine symbolism of beer is very attractive, making them willing to forego the desire to drink in public drinking venues in order to gain access to those social experiences and symbolic meanings that are very important to them. These experiences and meanings are much more important than any enjoyment that they may derive from the taste of the beer.

Different beer categories and brands have connotations of younger or older drinkers, or somewhere in between:

You have got Gold and you have got the heavy stuff, but because we are young I guess we drink the heavy stuff instead of Gold, because you know how there is that stereo-type for adults. Gold for adults and heavy for young guys, that is why we drink it (M, A, WA, D).

Due to these associations between brands and specific age groups, a brand that does not revamp its image risks dying along with its supporters:
Certain brands have got old as brands. Younger consumers are just not interested in all that (Brewery representative).

Only the older people really drink Resches, Tooheys Old (F, A(bartender), NSW, D).

Older people stick to their old beers (M, A(bartender), NSW.country, D).

There are different stereotypes of drinkers according to age, and different age groups tend to be disparaging of the consumption patterns of the “others”. Younger Australians view older drinkers as heavy beer consumers who show no imagination in their brand choice, while older drinkers perceive younger drinkers to be ignorant and irresponsible in their consumption behaviours. The following quotes provide an example of each perspective:

*Researcher:* What is your typical Australian like?
*Female:* Older Australians, drunk.
*Researcher:* What are they drunk on?
*Female:* Beer. They like to drink alcohol (F, Ad, WA, ND).

*Researcher:* What brands do kids drink?
*Male 1:* They wouldn’t know Resches from Tooheys.
*Male 2:* They wouldn’t know. If it is there, they will drink it.
*Male 1:* In my view an eighteen year old boy will drink anything that is in front of him (Ms, S, NSW, D).

Drinkers of different age groups are attributed (by others and themselves) different consumption motivations. Younger drinkers were often described in the interviews as being after the “beer buzz”, the mind-altering effects. The following quotes express the desire of the younger drinker to achieve inebriation:

*Researcher:* If you walked into a bar and there is a guy sitting there with lets say a stubbie of beer, does it tell you things about that man?
*Female 1:* Yes
*Female 2:* Depends if he is my age or my dad’s age.
*Researcher:* If he was your age?
*Female 2:* Probably it is the cheapest and has got the highest alcohol volume.
*Researcher:* How about older men?
*Female 2:* They sort of go for the taste or whatever (Fs, C, WA, ND).

I remember like when I was, I had first turned eighteen, and I was working at the Union Hotel up the road. All my friends used to drink up there as well, a big group of guys used to drink there. And they always ran out of money by the end of the night, and they would do anything to get another beer. Like just scrape money off the floor and ask everyone for money. It was pretty depressing, but they were that age and they just needed another
beer before they went, and they didn’t care what it was, what size it was.
Just another beer (F, A(bartender), NSW, D).

Image management for younger drinkers requires large-scale consumption, a requirement that becomes less pressing in later years. Older drinkers continue to enjoy the physical effects of beer consumption, although they feel less compulsion to progress to the stage of drunkenness. Older drinkers are perceived to have achieved a greater degree of self-assurance, and are therefore attributed the more legitimate motives of taste enjoyment and socialising.

The nature of the consumption process alters over the consumer’s life span, with peer pressure and intoxication dominating in the early years of beer consumption. For younger drinkers, the presence of others is particularly necessary to achieve the objectives of symbolic communication, as well as to enable social interaction. Older drinkers are less interested in intoxication, and many were found to be content to drink alone in a pub. No longer pre-occupied with “fitting in”, older drinkers can relax and take advantage of the other benefits of beer consumption. This variation in drinking motivations and behaviours over time points to the relative insignificance of taste in determining consumption behaviours compared to social imperatives. Drinkers of different ages select different brands to reflect their social affiliations, rather than making choices on the basis of individual taste preferences. For both older and younger drinkers, beer consumption is both a means to an end and an end in itself. It provides the desired mind-altering effects, as well as signifying the group membership that is so important for drinkers of all ages. This interpretation of beer consumption motivations differing between age groups is in line with the tendency of older consumers to have more stable self-concepts, as discussed in chapter 2. However, the ability to relax is relative, as older drinkers are still aware of the need to consume beer as a product category, even if they do not feel the same pressure to consume particular brands.

There is emphasis among beer drinkers on consuming beer “correctly”. But what is correct differs by age group because the image management task varies. Different age groups share the common objective of communicating their bond with others, but younger drinkers require a further function of beer consumption. They are seeking to express their individuality, while also engaging in consumption behaviours that establish them within cultural and subcultural norms. Older drinkers are not as concerned with communicating their individual uniqueness, and as a result are content
consuming the same brands for long periods of time, as long as they are the same brands as their peers. Younger drinkers are perpetually seeking the new and the different that will enable them to express their conformity to the requirement to be an individual. They feel the need to be aware of the various product offerings in the market place, and to demonstrate knowledge of those that are especially relevant to their reference group(s). Like the brand choices of other segments, their consumption decisions are supposed to be based upon a rational analysis of the relative attributes of alternative brands. Although they are usually hesitant to acknowledge it, included in this analysis of competing brands is consideration of the symbolic meaning communicated by each. Younger drinkers scan this symbolism in efforts to locate the brand most capable of generating an image that will be deemed favourable to those observing their beer consumption behaviours. As reflected in their more stable consumption patterns, older drinkers do not appear to experience the same degree of insecurity and anxiety that exists behind the consumption choices of younger drinkers.

The varying motivations of the different age groups call for different forms of marketing communications. Older drinkers prefer the beer symbolism they have seen depicted in advertising for decades (described in chapter 3), primarily the reward and mateship themes. From the marketer’s perspective, the older drinker represents both a challenge and a god-send. Very low switching behaviour compared to other age groups means that a converted drinker is a drinker for a long period of time, although the conversion task itself is much more difficult:

Once you are forty-five, and my father is a perfect example, he is forty-six, he will never switch. He just won’t switch. He just won’t switch, unless they put the price right up. He’s a Tooheys Draught drinker. But with the younger drinkers, now you are getting beer drinkers that have far more brands in the preference set than in the past (Brewery representative).

Researcher: If you see new brands being advertised, or you see friends drinking other things, do you try it? Or do you always stick to the one?
Male: Always stick to the one.

Researcher: So how long would it be since you have tasted another brand of beer?
Male: A couple of years (M, A, NSW, D).

Younger drinkers are more aware of advertising as a persuasion method, and are less accepting of traditional messages. It is relatively easy to alienate them from the brand being promoted by failing to address their heightened requirements for symbolic
meaning. In particular, there is the fashion element of consumption that now needs to be considered, which calls for the constant updating of advertising themes and styles as younger consumers seek greater variety in their consumption experiences:

Younger people would be more likely to change brands than the older people (M, A (bar manager), VIC, D).

Younger drinkers actually want to change their preferred brand(s) regularly, a very different scenario from the older drinker. The importance of advertising imagery is critical, and much of this imagery is connected to the Taste Myth, as illustrated by the frequent use of the discerning drinker as the focus of many advertisements. Younger drinkers actively employ advertising as an information tool in the decision-making process, although the information they are seeking from beer advertising is primarily symbolic. They are constantly searching for symbolism that can be put to work in the formation of their own self-identities, again supporting the proposition that younger people have weaker self-concepts.

One way of explaining the role of taste is that the communicated symbolism of taste is much more relevant than the actual taste as experienced by the consumer. In other words, the ability to demonstrate taste appreciation is much more important than personal perceptions of taste. The relationship between a chosen brand and the communication of the self-concept, however, remains invisible to most consumers. They justify both loyalty to a brand and switching behaviour by pointing to the taste factor. The following two quotes show how both younger and older drinkers employ taste in their explanations of their brand choice, although the resulting behaviour is very different:

You get acclimatised. You get used to drinking a certain thing (M, S, NSW, D).

If you stick to one beer, it is the same flavour over and over (M, A, NSW, D).

The first extract demonstrates the use of taste to provide a justification for the continual consumption of the same brand, while in the second quote taste is used to provide a reason for changing brands regularly. Constant use of the same brand fulfils the image management and social functions required of beer consumption by older drinkers. Perpetual switching provides younger drinkers with a mechanism to display individuality and market knowledge. In both instances, taste is secondary to these communication objectives.
At this point it is important to note that this interpretation of the differences in beer consumption behaviours between different age groups is based as much on observations as on interview data. Younger drinkers were more likely to regularly glance at other drinkers, and demonstrated considerably more bravado in their interactions with each other and with the researcher. At the same time, they were also more likely to become embarrassed when discussing their consumption preferences, often looking into their drinks as they spoke. It was the younger informants who more frequently asked what others had said in response to the research questions before making their own response. These behaviours were interpreted as symptoms of feelings of self-doubt and insecurity relating to their beer consumption activities. By comparison, older drinkers in general appeared to be more relaxed when observed drinking, and more comfortable while being interviewed. They spent less time watching what was going on around them, and maintained eye contact more readily during interviews. Older drinkers thus exhibited greater self-confidence in the beer-drinking process.

**Conclusion**

The Taste Myth is critical to the role of beer in Australian culture. By emphasising the importance of taste, drinkers demonstrate the priority that is placed on free choice in beer consumption. The Taste Myth serves to enable the drinker to communicate the consumption skills that are necessary in beer consumption, and to justify choices as individual that would otherwise appear to be based on conformity. The Taste Myth also disguises the negative feelings underlying consumption by downplaying social requirements that can be in conflict with individual desires. For example, the myth that beer has a flavour that is inherently pleasant to Australian males means that the requirement to drink beer in Australian culture is viewed as a self-determined activity rather than a cultural imperative. It is likely that the Taste Myth is relevant to the consumption of numerous other products, especially those products where the ability to choose between competing alternatives on the basis of individual preference rather than pressure to conform is a matter of particular pride.

Instead of directly discussing the insecurities and inadequacies that can be experienced in the beer consumption process, informants almost always invoked the
Taste Myth to explain their behaviours. In modern society it is acceptable to defend one's consumption decisions on the irrefutable justification of taste, as others do not tend to question consumption choices when taste is the perceived motivation. This, of course, applies only where the taste being demonstrated is that which is culturally accepted. Taste is apparently beyond question or reproach, but the derivation of taste is rarely considered. Consumers fail to see or acknowledge the extent to which their individual tastes have been socially determined, such an interpretation being inconsistent with the widely accepted assumption of free choice in Western consumer societies.

Although some informants acknowledged the acquired nature of the taste for beer, this has the positive connotations associated with a mature palate, rather than the less acceptable interpretation of a socially compelled acclimatisation. Throughout interviews, informants stressed that their beer consumption decisions are motivated by personal taste, although when describing the consumption decisions of others they were much more likely to acknowledge social forces in some way. This difference in behavioural explanations between self and others is indicative of the existence of powerful requirements for image management. Consumers are more comfortable acknowledging that conformity exists behind many (even most) consumption decisions when they are attributing motivations to the behaviours of others and not to themselves. The inconsistency in this approach does not normally register with those making the attributions, illustrating the extent and unconscious nature of the defence mechanisms that are built into consumers.

The Advertising Myth

Closely related to the Taste Myth is the Advertising Myth, which states that advertising is unable to influence beer consumption. The importance of beer consumption in Australian culture and the wide acceptance of the Taste Myth create an environment conducive to the Advertising Myth. This myth encourages drinkers to discount the influence of advertising and the media, causing them to believe firmly in their autonomy and free choice. Advertising cannot be granted influential status without endangering the “natural” association between beer and Australians, thus placing in question the crucial justification of taste. As a result, many beer drinkers are adamant that advertising has little or no influence over their consumption decisions. It is vitally
important to drinkers that the legitimate justification of taste be attributed to their consumption choices. The use of advertising in the decision-making process is viewed as markedly inferior to the reliance on personal ability to identify better-tasting products from the range of beers available:

*Researcher:* Why do you drink those brands? Is it because you like the taste or the advertising...?
*Male:* The taste. It has got nothing to do with the advertising. It’s just the taste (M, A, WA, D).

*Researcher:* Does beer advertising have any effect on you at all?
*Male:* No. No. I think the advertising is very good, but no (M, A, NSW, D).

These were typical responses to any suggestion that advertising may play a role in informants’ personal brand choices. After a little delving, however, many informants conceded that advertising may play some part in brand choice, although this was usually limited to the gathering of information about brands recently released onto the market. They were thus willing to acknowledge advertising as a source of information regarding the availability of new brands or beer styles. In such instances there is a degree of perceived legitimacy in the use of advertising, as there is only limited opportunity to learn about these new brands in other more acceptable ways, such as taste sampling and the observation of the drinking behaviours of others. The following quotes indicate the grudging acceptance of advertising as a source of product information:

*Male:* You look at the bar and the one that gets you first, or the one you know or the one whatever. The one you know is not the result of advertising.

*Later in the interview:*
*Researcher:* So if you saw a new ad for a new beer, you wouldn’t think, “Oh, I might try that next time I am in a pub”?
*Male:* Yes, maybe for a brand new one. The ad will draw you to it, if there is something, if there is a reason to switch from something you might be drinking anyway. If it is just that it is different, that is okay. If it is a new company, say it is not a brewery that we haven’t heard of before, we will try that. (M, A, NSW, D).

*Researcher:* Does advertising affect what you drink?
*Male:* No.
*Researcher:* So if you saw an ad for a brand new beer would it make you change or try it even?
*Male:* Okay, take the Hahn Ice. I have tried that because of the advertising (M, A, WA, D).
Many informants could attest to the power of advertising, although they were only prepared to make this admission at the aggregate level. Here is an example of an informant who justified his own brand selections on the basis of taste, but was more than willing to attribute less “honourable” motivations to others:

*Researcher:* Can you tell me what sort of beer you are drinking?
*Male:* Guinness
*Researcher:* Why?
*Male:* Because it tastes great.

*Later in the interview:*
*Researcher:* Why do you think most people buy a particular brand of beer?
*Male:* Because it is advertised, mostly because it is advertised or it is a location-based thing. Because all my friends drink Tooheys I will drink Tooheys, or all my friends drink Fosters so I will drink Fosters. (M, A, WA, D).

Such an attitude was quite common. While drinkers attributed advertising with little influence over their own consumption decisions, they readily nominated advertising as a primary source of information for other drinkers:

*Researcher:* Do you have any thoughts on why people choose a particular brand?
*Male:* Well, a lot is to do with advertising I suppose (M, A, NSW(country), D).

I have to be truthful and say that advertising affects what people drink (M, A, NSW, D).

Beers like Carlton Cold and Hahn Ice which have come out which have absolutely no redeeming facts in terms of taste, but sell very well. They have actually said this beer is clean, this beer is good, this beer is whatever. That is not true. It is rubbish, absolute rubbish. But it is all image and it sells (M, A, VIC, D).

The last informant had been vehement about the taste superiority of his favoured brand just moments before. It was very important to him that his own consumption choices be perceived as intelligent and rational, or in other words, based on his ability to detect differences between brands and to identify those with the “best” flavour. He tried to achieve this objective while simultaneously arguing the importance of advertising to the broader beer market, and appeared quite comfortable with his position that his consumption choices are based on one set of criteria while the choices of others are based on less socially-acceptable factors.
Drinkers’ needs to convince others and themselves of their immunity to advertising illustrates the importance of image management to consumers. As an “illegitimate” guide to behaviour, advertising falls outside the accepted range of information sources for the image management task. Drinkers cling to the requirement for independent individuality, a requirement that inhibits them from acknowledging their own conforming behaviour. Despite consumers’ reluctance to attribute any influence to the persuasive pull of advertising, those in a position to observe beer consumption on a large scale are not as susceptible to the Advertising Myth. In particular, those working in pubs were convinced of the effectiveness of advertising on the average drinker. They noted a direct correlation between sales of specific brands and the associated marketing activities:

*Researcher:* What do you think is the most popular beer out of all the beers you serve over the counter?
*Male:* Probably VB. It is the advertising. It makes a difference (M, A(bar manager), NSW, D).

*Male:* VB is probably the most popular packaged beer right across Australia.
*Researcher:* Why is that?
*Male:* Well, Carlton United Brewery is the biggest brewery in Australia and VB is their most heavily promoted packaged beer. That is probably the reason (M, A(bar manager), VIC, D).

Some informants acknowledged that although they did not consciously employ advertising in their decision-making processes, it was possible that messages had entered their subconscious minds via the beer advertisements they had been exposed to for most of their lives:

I wouldn’t say I am overly influenced by advertising on a whole. Or not consciously, anyway (M, A, VIC, D).

Subconsciously you are sometimes affected by ads. Sometimes you start singing songs that are off ads for advertising beer or Coke or whatever. Like the Tooheys ad has become part of our culture (M, Ad, NSW, D).

Informants who acknowledged the conditioning effects of advertising were more likely to be younger in age. Older informants were more assured of their ability to make consumption choices without resorting to the use of advertising as an information source.

In order to be effective at inducing drinkers to switch brands, advertisements need to offer the drinker a benefit over and above the advantages they perceive in their
existing brand. As drinkers like to view their consumption decisions as rational, they will seek logical reasons to justify changes in their behaviour. The favoured rationale for switching behaviour is superior taste, where one beer is forsaken for another because of the discovery of a better tasting beer. As a result, many advertisements discuss the flavour of the beer being promoted (see the analysis of Australian beer advertisements in chapter 3). This enables the drinker to attribute the behavioural change to the superior taste of the newly acquired product, rather than to the effects of its advertising.

Both the Advertising Myth and the Taste Myth can be illustrated by the changes that occur in demand for a brand of beer resulting from a change in advertising theme. If an advertising campaign can significantly increase demand without any associated alterations in product composition or pricing (as is asserted by the brewers), advertising is more important and taste is less important than is acknowledged by drinkers. However, the effectiveness of advertising is a double-edged sword. Popular brands have witnessed significant decreases in sales as a result of a change in advertising theme. Consumers have very definite views on the symbolism of beer, which are violated at the expense of the marketer. A misguided advertising campaign can just as effectively extinguish demand as stimulate it, as Tooheys have found to their detriment over the past decade. By moving away from their “working class man” theme for their mainstay product, they have effectively alienated those drinkers who associate strongly with the “reward after a hard day’s work” symbolism of beer consumption. In the following quote, a representative from the brewery that manufactures Tooheys products discusses how a variation in advertising theme resulted in an exodus away from his company’s product:

People didn’t like what we were doing with their brands, so they were shifting. So that gave them momentum (Brewery representative).

CUB, on the other hand, have persisted with their equivalent “I’ve got it now” campaign for VB for many years, and as a result have gained market share at the expense of Tooheys. This outcome contradicts the notion that consumers ignore beer advertising. It also suggests that symbolism is much more important to beer drinkers than taste, as they are prepared to move away from a brand that they have supposedly been enjoying just because the advertising imagery has been altered. After the change in theme, the Tooheys brand apparently communicated different messages that no longer suited the desired image of many of its drinkers. The implication for marketers is that
while they can influence demand, such influence is usually only achieved by staying within the boundaries of commonly accepted cultural meanings for the specific product category, as noted in Domzal and Kernan’s (1992) study described in chapter 3.

According to drinkers, taste is the only “real” reason for selecting one beer over another, with the occasional exceptions of price discounting and the unavailability of a favoured brand. In such an account, advertising plays an insignificant role in beer consumption decisions. Those working in the industry, however, readily acknowledge the power of advertising over market share. The budgets set aside for the development and implementation of advertising campaigns are testimony to their belief in the ability of marketing communications to influence the consumption decisions of beer drinkers.

**Advertising Themes**

Through the media and other socialising forces, consumers learn which beverages are appropriate for specific types of people. Advertising communicates product meaning, indicating how observers can assign attributions to others based on their consumption of different alcohol categories and brands. It thus facilitates the drinker’s impression management and stereotyping activities. The following quote from a brewery representative describes the practice of consuming a brand of beer for the symbolism it conveys to others:

> The Carlton Cold ad is white collar, on the edge sort of stuff, for young discerning drinkers that want to be associated with that white-collar yuppie image. The can in the hand, or bottle in that case, is really important for them because what that represents is what they represent (Brewery representative).

Such a close association between the advertising imagery employed and the socially recognised symbolism of the brand emphasises the importance of advertising to the communication of meaning in the beer market.

One perceptive informant was able to articulate the tendency of consumers to use advertising as a behavioural guide, although this insight occurred only after extensive discussion regarding the motivations of the average person to consume beer:

> To a certain extent, people, as with all advertising, try to, by purchasing the product, adopt the perceived socio-economic group or the perceived advantages of using that product (M, A, NSW, D).
This informant is acknowledging the influence of advertising over product and brand choices by describing how drinkers attempt to align themselves with the images portrayed in advertisements. This is particularly important in the instance of beer advertisements, as beer is a highly communicative product, capable of concisely conveying the nature of the drinker. As a result, drinkers and non-drinkers monitor beer advertisements to obtain guidance for their consumption and attribution activities. They seek information that will enhance their own use of the product and/or their ability to socially categorise others according to their usage patterns. These activities exist in conjunction with the strong belief that consumption occurs as a result of individual preferences, not “group think”.

Beer advertising has attempted to strengthen the bond that Australians (particularly males) feel with beer. This bonding is fostered by the use of appropriate advertising imagery. It is perceived that blue-collar workers have a particularly close affiliation, as is evidenced by the incidence of scenes of sweaty, tired men turning to the comfort and matey environment of the local pub for a rejuvenating beer:

*Researcher:* What things do you see in beer ads?
*Female:* Beer is like for very muscly guys with no shirts on, doing hard work, coming home to have a beer.
*Male:* Sweating while they work (M&F, Ad, WA, ND).

The scene of the labourer savouring a frosty glass of beer is appealing to males across the social strata. It communicates the Australian ideal of the rugged individual battling the elements in his efforts to earn a living. Even business-suited executives find this image attractive. It enables them to partake in the historical imagery of Australia as a formidable environment that requires skill, strength, and resourcefulness for survival. This theme provides a common bond, although the majority of Australian workers face neither hard physical exertion nor a harsh outback environment.

The tendency of Australians to associate themselves with the Outback rather than the city (as discussed in chapter 3) has resulted in bush images holding a special place in beer advertising. The Outback offers a metaphor for ruggedness and hard work, appropriate meaning exemplars for beer. The mateship theme works particularly well with such images, as the drinkers congregating at the pub represent a united front against the harsh elements. Together the workers are capable of extracting a living out of the unyielding environment, and a cooling beer provides the sustenance required to
get the job done. Of course, such imagery precludes the presence of females, a feature of beer advertising of which younger Australians are aware:

_Researcher:_ What ads use country images?
_Female:_ Beer ads do, there are men working hard all day and they have to have their cans of beer in the pub. They are all men, there are no women in them. (F, Ad, WA, ND).

Many gender assumptions concerning alcohol consumption are apparent in media portrayals of consumption scenes. The imagery employed is usually thick with masculine references, indicating an emphasis on an essentially male target market:

_Male:_ For a lot of women spirits have a better image than beer. Rather than like have a big rough beer sort of thing.
_Researcher:_ Why is that?
_Male:_ Well when was the last time you saw a woman scull a beer? All the adverts for VB promote it as a big rough beer so you know it is a tough guy’s drink (M, A, NSW, D)

_Researcher:_ Which beer ads do you think are directed at women?
_Male:_ Not very many.
_Researcher:_ Any at all?
_Male:_ With women, can’t think of it. None really, no (M, A, NSW, D).

_Researcher:_ So why do you think men drink more beer and women drink more wine?
_Male:_ It is manly, I suppose.
_Researcher:_ What makes it manly?
_Male:_ The way it is advertised. You always see the man drinking it, not the woman (M, Ad, VIC, ND).

Where females do physically appear in beer advertisements, they typically serve a decorative function:

_Researcher:_ Do you see females in ads very regularly?
_Male:_ Only if they are not really well clad. I would say their biggest customers are still men, and they don’t want to upset the men. I mean not to say I would get pissed off to see a girl drinking beer on a commercial, but it would not make me buy it either though. Some people might get offended by it so they don’t run the risk and screen it. That would put the drink down with the guys. Like you know they go with the boys on the drink, whereas they couldn’t do that if it was for females as well. (M, A, NSW, D).

The breweries consider it too dangerous to depict females actively partaking in beer consumption. Males drink beer to communicate their masculinity, and while they have been able to maintain this association between beer and masculinity in the face of increasing numbers of BDFs, to explicitly associate beer with females in an
advertisement is seen to guarantee a loss in sales. The experience of one Australian brewer has powerfully illustrated the refusal of drinkers to purchase or consume a brand once it has been imbued with female symbolism. A representative from Lion Nathan shared the experiences of his organisation when attempting to explicitly target the female market some time ago:

There was a period in the 1980s where three notable products, one was Swan Gold which overtly targeted women as a low calorie beer, low alcohol, which was a complete flop until it was repositioned on a more healthy lifestyle, but again men in gyms and stuff like that. But when it was launched as a quite overtly female beer we couldn’t sell a drop. Then once it was repositioned it went to the leading beer in the State (Brewery representative).

Paradoxically, beer advertisements that primarily feature males can still sometimes be interpreted as being directed at females:

Researcher: Can you think of any beer advertising that is directed towards women?  
Male: Well, there is one that is the light one. I think it is called Diamond Draught or something. They say it is light, not lighter in calories, lighter in you know, flavour (M, A, NSW, D).

This is particularly revealing, as the beer advertisement in question features no females, and in fact depicts a thirsty sumo wrestler. However, the physical characteristics of the brand as discussed in the advertisement lead to an automatic association with females. As a result, many drinkers have assumed that it is a female brand and have avoided it accordingly:

With Diamond, women were tag-alongs. It certainly wasn’t dictated to them. But it had all those attributes that girls like to associate with. But I don’t think it went well because as much as guys have that in the back of their head, they don’t want to be told it. And they don’t want their mates to see them drinking a beer that has been effectively advertised as low alcohol, low carbohydrates, low calorie. So that bombed (Brewery representative).

Australians enjoy the matey symbolism of beer, and have often resisted marketers’ attempts to deviate from the standard advertising formula. They particularly dislike having their sacred pastime of beer drinking explicitly associated with unpleasant outcomes, such as ill-health, drink-driving penalties, and obesity. As a result, only implicit references to the negative outcomes associated with the consumption of full-strength beer have been effective in advertisements for lower alcohol varieties.
It is apparent that beer marketers need to be very careful when trying to incorporate modern lifestyle themes into their advertising. The need to preserve historical beer advertising themes has meant that advertisements usually lag behind the reality of modern Australia, as beer marketers find themselves compelled to confine their advertising themes to images that do not fully reflect the nature of the social environment in which drinkers consume. This conservatism shows a degree of caution on the behalf of brewers, as they are careful to cater to the symbolic preferences of males to the extent that they under-represent actual drinking behaviour by females. Even in their marketing to younger drinkers, they are careful to avoid direct associations with females.

Brewers are left with the dilemma of seeking to increase beer sales to females, while at the same time needing to avoid direct female associations with their brands. To the small proportion of females who currently drink beer, this is not a major problem. They are prepared to tolerate the masculine symbolism of beer in order to access the related meanings that interest them, such as equality and assertiveness. Males, on the other hand, are not prepared to risk the symbolism that is associated with the consumption of a beer brand that has female connotations. The following quote contrasts the differing responses to female images in beer advertising among informants of different genders:

*Researcher:* It doesn’t put you off that they are not addressing you in the beer ads?
*Female:* I don’t really think about it actually.
*Researcher:* Boys, if you saw a beer that was promoted largely to women, would you feel comfortable drinking it?
*Male:* No (Ms&Fs, A, WA(country), D).

There is apparently much less stigma associated with being a masculine female than a feminine male in Australian culture. This conclusion is consistent with Settle and Alreck’s (1987) findings that females are much more likely to accept masculine symbolism in products than are males to accept feminine symbolism.

Younger drinkers have different advertising preferences to older drinkers, and they constitute a partial exception to some of the conclusions drawn above. Reared in the advertising age, they are well aware of the objectives and techniques of advertising, and as such advertising is viewed almost as cheating in the image management game. Rather than readily accepting the symbolism portrayed in advertisements, younger
consumers are suspicious of the genuineness of such symbolism due to the acknowledged source of the information. How can they be sure that accurate symbolic information is being communicated when they suspect the advertiser of saying anything to sell the product? Instead, they rely more heavily on other sources, such as peers and even the Internet. As stated by one brewery representative, advertising is almost a turn-off for many younger consumers:

The 18 to 25s just aren’t as interested in all that working hard imagery of the original beer advertising. It is so hard because they are such an advertising-literate bunch. They almost want you not to advertise and they will make their own choice (Brewery representative).

This is not to say that advertising to this group is ineffective. Younger drinkers will monitor advertising to use in conjunction with the more legitimate information that they can derive from other sources. The breweries recognise that younger drinkers will use advertising material to enhance the interpretations they make based on observing the consumption behaviours of their peers. Different themes are sometimes successfully directed towards younger consumers, including party scenes (e.g., Matilda Bay advertisements), sporting scenarios (e.g., Fosters Light advertisements), and occasionally lone drinkers (e.g., Carlton Cold advertisements). Perhaps this signals the commencement of the waning of the classic mateship and reward themes, such as the “I’ve got it now” VB advertisement that has proven so popular for decades.

**Conclusion**

As discussed in chapter 3, millions of dollars are spent by the breweries on advertising each year. It is unlikely that they would make this investment without the understanding that some benefit accrues from the exercise. Consumers, however, are generally reluctant to acknowledge the influence of advertising on their consumption decisions, as this is an acknowledgement of weakness. With the increasing relevance of the role of consumer in the individual's life, the need to portray oneself as a savvy consumer has increased in importance. To some degree it is acceptable to use advertising as a guide to the availability of new products on the market, as was evident by the willingness of some informants to acknowledge the use of advertising for this purpose. To admit to the persuasive power of advertising, however, is completely different. It is inconceivable to individuals that their consumption behaviours may be the result of the power of advertising over their decision making. Despite these
protestations, informants frequently referred to the symbolism in beer advertising to justify, for example, their perceptions of the masculinity of beer. They have therefore absorbed the symbolism despite their claims of immunity from advertisers’ spells. Advertising does play a role in perceptions of beer as a product category and how it relates to Australian culture. The myth of advertising ineffectiveness, however, serves to reinforce consumers’ perceptions of their own control over their consumption behaviours. In doing so, the Advertising Myth reinforces the Taste Myth, as by emphasising the ineffectiveness of advertising it effectively consolidates the perception of the dominance of taste over consumption choices.

The Pleasure Myth

Beer consumption in Australia has connotations of a physically, psychologically, and socially pleasant pastime. The notion that beer consumption can be unpleasant was rarely raised by informants. Social requirements dictate that beer consumption is perceived as an inherently enjoyable activity to which drinkers are naturally and irresistibly drawn. Beer advertisements depict happy, congenial drinkers, content in their chosen leisure pursuits. A closer analysis of beer consumption behaviours suggests that a different interpretation may at times be appropriate. Instead of being an entirely pleasant experience, the beer consumption process can be fraught with confusion, anxiety, and physical discomfort. Confusion and anxiety can occur as drinkers struggle to acquire or maintain their knowledge of competing brands and their symbolic meanings, and attempt to employ these meanings in such a way as to communicate the desired image to others. Examples of physical discomfort include the need to overcome one’s initial taste preferences in order to conform to group expectations, and the requirement to consume large quantities of beer at certain stages of life, often resulting in uncomfortable bloating and hangovers. The following quotes illustrate the perceived need to consume beer in large quantities, often leading to negative physical side-effects:

Darling, I used to get shit-faced every night. In the end I got sick of waking up and saying, “Shit I must have had a good night last night because my head is bad this morning” (M, A, NSW, D).

Male 1: There wouldn't be one person at any bar who drinks nine schooners a week.
Male 2: They do nine a night. (Ms, A, NSW, D).
The two male informants in the second quote were incredulous that anyone could drink only small amounts of beer, particularly when patronising bars. As far as they were concerned, it is “the done thing” to drink considerable amounts on a daily basis. They could not contemplate another existence in which beer consumption played a lesser role. The consumption of large amounts of beer was a solid part of their self-images.

Beer drinkers are effusive about their physical and social reasons for beer consumption. They will talk at length about taste, refreshment, and the association with spending time with selected others. However, behind their comments lies the possibility of a different motivation. Most importantly, there is an underlying anxiety about “fitting in”. Beer consumption is a ticket to social acceptance, but only if performed in the appropriate manner. As a result, many drinkers constantly monitor the external environment for signs of meaning. They are intensely interested in the symbolic meaning of beer as a product category, and the more specific meanings of individual brands. This meaning is integral to their perceptions of their gender and their culture, and to a lesser extent their age and social class categories. It is the means by which they can attain a degree of commonality with relevant others.

Rather than always being a social activity in which consumers can drop their usual social reservations and relax, beer consumption can be laden with cognitive and emotional effort. Initially, many male drinkers must overcome their dislike of the taste to prove their worthiness to the title of “man”. Then they must choose appropriate brands to consume in appropriate quantities, in appropriate places, at appropriate times. An error in such choices can have negative social consequences, so care is taken to observe the consumption behaviours of others for guidance:

They come in and say, “What is that you’re drinking? If you are drinking it, it must be alright. Give us one.” (M, A(bar manager), VIC, D).

In this instance, drinkers are following the lead of the bar owner, assuming that his extensive experience in pub environments places him in a superior position to choose brands appropriately. Similarly, advertising and other forms of promotion are monitored for symbolic information.

The drinker must choose an appropriate level of consumption, a level that among Australian males has been higher rather than lower:
They are very social the Australians, looking at beer in a social aspect. But I feel that every time an Australian touches a beer one is not enough, there is no light-hearted drinking in Australia. Every session is a heavy session (M, A (English migrant), NSW, D).

Researcher: So what constitutes a big night, how many beers are a big night?
Male 1: Twenty.
Male 2: Oh about a dozen I suppose, depends on how fast you drink (Ms, A, NSW, D).

To choose a consumption level that is too low can attract unwanted ridicule from others, and excessive consumption makes one socially unacceptable. It is therefore important for drinkers to learn the levels that are required by the social environment, and that can be tolerated by the individual. Once a drinker has become adept at such choices as consumption level and brand selection, the consumption process can take on a more relaxed tone. However, this is never to the extent where the drinker is immune to the social requirements of beer consumption. Monitoring can become less intense and more selective, allowing the drinker the perception of self-determination in consumption choices. This is more evident among older drinkers, who are more experienced beer consumers.

Peer pressure is sensed by many drinkers to be a motivating force behind their consumption decisions, although it usually took some time for informants to feel adequately comfortable to share this in interviews. Disclosure usually occurred after informants had expressed their adherence to the Taste Myth, allowing them to then consider and identify other less acknowledged and less acceptable motivations. However, these were typically expressed as being secondary to taste. Examples of peer-based motivations include a desire to conform and a fear of ridicule. Taste is subordinated to the desire to conform to the behavioural norms enacted by the relevant reference groups:

Researcher: Did you initially enjoy the taste?
Male: No.
Researcher: What made you persevere?
Male: As everybody else does, just because they are perceived as people who enjoy a beer. And I suppose when you are young, you drink anyway because it seems like the thing to do whatever, and you do just get a taste. But now I enjoy the taste (M, A, VIC, D).

Male: I think your first sip of beer is always what is in dad’s fridge.
Researcher: So when you moved on, what shaped your change?
Male: No, I think it was probably what everybody else is having (M, A, NSW, D).

Researcher: When you first tasted beer, did you like it?
Male: No, not really.
Researcher: Why not?
Male: Because I wasn’t used to it at the time.
Researcher: So what made you persevere and keep drinking it?
Male: I don’t know
Researcher: Does it have anything to do with your mates?
Male: No. If it is there and it is cold and it tastes nice.
Researcher: But you didn’t think it tasted nice to begin with. Why did you drink it then?
Male: I don’t know, I just thought everyone else does, and after a while you get to like it (M, Ad, NSW, ND).

The last informant was very reluctant to acknowledge the influence of social factors on his consumption choices. As a very young drinker (sixteen years of age), he struggles with his fragile self-concept. He is very aware that he is supposed to like beer, and that to admit otherwise may cast doubts on his social eligibility. When faced with the contradiction between his personal preferences and his actual behaviour, he became defensive. Unable to maintain the argument of taste preference, he eventually acknowledged the social pressures that he senses, but feels that he should not experience. Many informants appeared to be in the same quandary. They are aware of feelings of inadequacy and confusion, but are convinced that they are alone in these feelings. The result is that it becomes vitally important for them to hide the existence of these feelings from others. In order to achieve this, they build up a façade of confidence that they attempt to reinforce through appropriate consumption choices. Drinking beer is a ready-made symbol that can be employed to bolster self-image.

The effort to overcome a natural initial dislike of beer is not perceived as a sacrifice or hardship to the many drinkers who are faced with this situation. Instead, it is assumed that their palates were initially “immature”, requiring repeated exposure to the substance to “correct” the situation. Eventually the substance is considered to have a favourable taste, and consumption becomes habitual. However, habit is another taboo word for beer drinkers. Their drinking hours are considered sacred, and as such cannot be lowered to the profane level of ordinary habit. Take, for example, the following extract from an interview with a senior male at a pub in a particularly low socioeconomic suburb in Sydney:
Researcher: So why do you drink that brand?
Male: Have been drinking it for years.... Get used to drinking it, I guess, like eating bread. You eat it not because you like it but you are used to buying and eating it. That sort of thing.
Researcher: So do you drink the same brands out of habit?
Male: No, no. I don’t think it’s habit (M, S, NSW, D).

The informant above is happy enough to admit that taste is not the critical factor in ongoing consumption, an understandable response given his senior status. However, he baulks at attributing his consumption decisions to habit. Such an admission constitutes what is considered irrational decision-making, and as such is avoided.

Drinkers are very aware of the beer consumption behaviours of their peers, and they constantly compare these behaviours to their own. Beer consumption thus induces a state of high self-monitoring, where drinkers continually observe and assess their own alcohol consumption behaviours and how they are interpreted by others. The high image-management content of beer consumption ensures that peer pressure is a constant presence to ensure conformity to group expectations. The individual drinker readily forsakes his own consumption preferences to those of the group in order to achieve a sense of belonging. For all intents and purposes, the group consumption preferences are the individual’s consumption preferences, as over time personal preferences become formed around subconsciously absorbed social requirements. This finding supports the CaP perspective as described in chapter 2, as it becomes no longer possible to differentiate between the drinker’s preferences and those of the larger group. In other words, an acknowledgement of the existence of the Pleasure Myth contributes to the argument that drinkers’ preferences have been largely socially prescribed.

Social bonding is a very important motivation behind beer consumption, one that adds a degree of tension to the consumption process. Drinkers must consume the right beverages, in the right places, in the right way, and at the right time in order to effectively bond with desired others. This process is part of the task of image management, and it is through appropriate image maintenance that an individual can join or remain part of a social group. Individuals are more than happy to relinquish even strong personal preferences in order to increase the likelihood of social acceptance. The decision process between brands can be stressful in itself, but once consumers feel that they have achieved a consumption pattern considered appropriate by themselves and others, they can achieve some degree of relaxation in the safety of the recognised
symbolism of the brand. What remains is to ensure that changes in meanings are noted and accommodated as required, which is an ongoing task.

While changes in brand symbolism used to be infrequent, there is now a greater need for the continual monitoring of symbolism as new brands regularly enter the marketplace. The increasing range of beers available provides a constant challenge to the drinker. He can never totally relax. He must be ever vigilant, monitoring the changing symbolism of established brands, as well as gauging the meanings of new brands. By taking a new brand into his preference set, the drinker requires the assurance that others will approve of the brand and assign positive meanings to his consumption choice. Waiting until others are observed drinking the brand is one method of reducing the social risk associated with switching behaviour. The drinker must constantly observe the consumption choices of those whom he assumes have correctly interpreted the meanings of different brands. In addition, to fulfil the requirements of a savvy drinker he must continually monitor marketing communications. Thus the complexity of image management is increasing with the increasing rate of introduction of new brands.

For many, image management requirements mean that it is no longer acceptable to drink the one brand in all social situations. Drinkers must put their self-image on the line more frequently by making more consumption choices more often:

*Brewery representative:* Repertoire drinking is interesting. There's a beer I drink in a restaurant, a beer I drink in a cafe, beer I drink at a party, another for a dinner party.

*Researcher:* Ten years ago they didn't have different occasions?

*Brewery representative:* Um, well, I think the different occasions were less sophisticated like barbecue. Dinner parties were wine anyway. And now they drink beer. Certainly cafes, restaurants, and casual dining are a lot more prevalent than they were.

The increasing range of beer varieties can be interpreted as an advantage to the consumer, enabling greater choice and allowing a closer match between personal taste preferences and products available. Alternatively, it can be interpreted as a source of heightened anxiety, compelling the consumer to monitor a much broader range of brands for symbolic meanings to permit appropriate choices to be made. The result is that the decision process for the consumer is made much more difficult. As beer is primarily consumed in an effort to manage image rather than for taste enjoyment, the introduction of numerous new brands means that the image management task becomes inherently more difficult without the associated benefits of enhanced taste enjoyment.
that are assumed to occur. As a result, drinkers (with the partial exception of older
drinkers) are compelled to remain permanently watchful, timing their brand changes to
send appropriate signals to their peers:

*Researcher:* So what makes you try another brand of beer?
*Male:* Somebody might be here drinking it and say out of curiosity I will try
one of those (M, S, NSW, D).

A lot of guys, they do what their mates do. If their mates change to Tooheys
Blue well they will all have Tooheys Blue for a while. Then the leader might
say I am sick of this Toohey’s Blue, I am going back to the real thing and
next thing you see they all do it (M, A, VIC, D).

Nobody wants to be thought of as not being with it, or being out of it, or
being a bit of a dork. You know, not willing to try anything else. So if
everyone is drinking VB, well I will drink VB. Or if people are going across
to Cold then I will try it. It is kind of like getting up on the dance floor first.
You don’t want to be the first one up there, but you don’t want to be the
only one not up there as well (Brewery representative).

Brands are now promoted on the basis of taste, brewing style, social bonding,
and reward for work, among other themes. In such an environment, the success of
brands such as VB, which have been promoted with traditional advertising themes,
becomes understandable. Drinkers often prefer the relative safety of established and
familiar symbolism, which reduces much of the need for the constant monitoring of
symbolic information. For younger drinkers, however, this safety net is largely
unavailable. They feel compelled to change brands regularly, although they perceive the
source of this compulsion to be internal to themselves, rather than externally driven.
They perpetually walk the fine line between conforming adequately and conforming
excessively, and the surveillance effort required to perform this constant monitoring is a
drain on their resources. There can be less capacity remaining for enjoying the
consumption process when cognitive and emotional effort is committed to locating,
assimilating, and communicating product symbolism. While consumer researchers have
long acknowledged this tendency to monitor the consumption behaviours of self and
others, the anxiety that can accompany this process is rarely mentioned. Rather than
being a relaxed event, beer consumption for both males and females requires a degree of
alertness and vigilance that inhibits relaxation and mental ease, two outcomes that are
commonly associated with beer consumption.
An important part of the image management process is to stave off feelings of insecurity and inadequacy. The existence of these feelings is apparent in the difficulties experienced by drinkers in coming to terms with low alcohol beer. The choice between high, medium, and low alcohol varieties has been a difficult one for many drinkers, due to their implicit understanding of the attribution activities of others. The introduction of low-alcohol brands initially threatened to weaken the potency myth. In order to neutralise this threat, these beers quickly earned the stigma of failing as “real beer”, particularly on the all-important criterion of taste. This attribution was a reaction to the close association drinkers perceive between taste and potency. To many drinkers, a real beer by definition is a full-strength beer, rendering the new low-alcohol varieties to a level on the acceptance ladder well below traditional beer. A natural progression is the belief that low-alcohol beers are deficient in taste. Drinkers are faced with approach-avoidance conflict in their desire for the benefits of low alcohol beer (such as being able to legally drive after a drinking session) and their wish to conform to the image management requirement to consume large amounts of “real” beer when interacting with others in a social context.

The initial stigma associated with low alcohol beer provided a significant deterrent to many, pressing the brewers to provide a more attractive alternative by launching low alcohol brands with taste and packaging similar to that of full-strength beer. The result has been that such products have achieved a level of acceptability beyond that of their “white tin” predecessors:

Around 1990/91, when we were doing the research, they would sit there and they would like hold the can entirely, or they would put it on the table and they would stand away from their beer. I guess that was why Tooheys Blue came out. It tastes different, it is brewed differently, but it is a low alcohol beer and it is in a dark blue can. There is real image (Brewery representative).

“Real image” is the attraction to beer drinkers. They are seeking brands with clear communication abilities. Brewers have reacted to image management requirements by changing packaging to enable broader consumption. Instead of being perceived as a “wimp’s” beer, Tooheys Blue is now associated with those who enjoy a quality beer but prefer to retain mental control for some particular reason, be it driving or the desire to drink for extended periods:

Researcher: How do you choose the occasion when you are going to drink Tooheys or when you are going to drink VB?
Male: Well, if I go out I drink VB. But if I have a barbecue or something
like that, it is always Tooheys Blue.

Researcher: Why would you choose those two occasions to drink those two beers?

Male: Well you don’t make such a fool of yourself to start off with. You have got to pace yourself, and you don’t feel so bad the next day (M, A, NSW(country), D).

Conclusion

The enlargement of preference sets among beer drinkers is indicative of the changing forces at play in consumer markets. For many drinkers, it is no longer acceptable to engage in consistent, unchanging consumption. To be socially acceptable it is increasingly necessary to manage one’s image via greater variation in consumption over shorter periods of time. The beer drinker feels pressure to consume different brands at different times and locations. The result is the need for the individual to make more consumption decisions. If this is an inherently pleasant process for the consumer, as is assumed in the bulk of the literature, then such changes are unproblematic. If, however, the result is increasing anxiety among consumers, then the assumption of the contented consumer happily choosing among alternatives to create self-satisfying versions of the self needs to be reconsidered.

On the surface, the younger drinker revels in the range of options available in the beer market. However, an alternative interpretation offered here is that instead of enjoying the process of choosing between a rapidly increasing range of alternatives to creatively construct a range of self-concepts, younger drinkers can experience considerable anxiety and self-doubt in the beer consumption process. Older drinkers are more comfortable in their consumption modes, largely immune to the pressures to constantly update their consumption choices in line with the perpetually changing symbolism of new brands. Younger drinkers are much more susceptible to such pressures, as they have yet to find a perception of self with which they can feel comfortable.

Consumers are required to be confident in their consumption decisions, communicating an image of capability and certainty. Beer consumption behaviours do not typically include any socially permitted latitude of unpleasantness, requiring instead that only pleasant outcomes be associated with such consumption activities. This expectation is so ingrained in consumers that they can fail to recognise or acknowledge
any negative feelings to which they are exposed during consumption. It is not the intention here to suggest that beer consumption is a totally unpleasant consumption experience. This is obviously untrue in any holistic sense, and it became obvious throughout data collection that most beer drinkers find it an enjoyable pastime. However, the Pleasure Myth suggests that negative feelings do exist. Instead of being an entirely pleasant experience, beer consumption can actually involve cognitive and physical discomfort for the drinker. Drinkers, however, are usually unable to concede the existence of these negative feelings, their conditioning largely preventing them from recognising their existence.

The Control Myth

The four myths discussed so far combine to produce the Control Myth. By believing in the previous four myths, drinkers can be assured that they are completely in control of their own beer consumption activities. The All-Australian Myth suggests that all Australians are welcome to partake in beer consumption, thus concealing the gender and class constraints on consumption. The Taste Myth proposes that the consumption of beer is based on taste, with no other impediments except financial resources. The Advertising Myth decries the effectiveness of advertising, implying that consumption decisions are based on individual choice alone. The Pleasure Myth magnifies the positive feelings associated with beer consumption, offering a legitimate reason for beer consumption and thereby suppressing any realisation of the lack of control individuals have over their own consumption choices.

Rather than behaving according to the personal beliefs and preferences that they understand to drive their consumption choices, consumers instead exhibit the drinking patterns that are socially decreed. The nature of the system is such that consumers perceive free choice and individuality in their consumption choices, usually failing to recognise their social programming (as per the CaP discussion in chapter 2). Social pressures are accepted as intrinsic characteristics of the social environment in which drinkers have been raised, and as such they receive little consideration or analysis. Instead, they are typically relegated in status to extant forces that cannot compete with the individual agency that consumers imagine themselves to possess. The majority of drinking behaviours observed and reported conformed to cultural expectations, despite informants perceiving a significant degree of free choice in their behaviours. While
performing standardised consumption activities, drinkers consider themselves to be substantially different from those with whom they interact.

While decision-making at the brand level is not as socially constructed as at the product category level, there exist definite social guides concerning the appropriateness of specific brands of beer to certain types of individuals. Once again, brand is chosen according to age, class, gender, and context characteristics, rather than purely on the basis of taste preferences. However, the interview data showed that consumers in general do not like to interpret their own behaviours as being socially determined. They much prefer the alternative conclusion that they are masters of their own consumption decisions, unaffected by any external variables that they do not intentionally allow to factor into their decision-making processes. Beer drinkers are no exception, in fact the need to believe in the individuality of consumption decisions appears to be heightened.

As beer consumption is so critical to image management among certain groups in Australian culture, it is very important to drinkers that they are seen to communicate their individuality rather than their conformance through their consumption choices. However, the choice of beer brand is primarily a symbol of group membership, with the demonstration of uniqueness a far second priority. Most drinkers consume the same brand as many thousands of others, genuinely believing that they are providing evidence of their individuality through the consumption of a mass-produced product. Despite this belief, they appear to gain great comfort from consuming in the same way as others, and this appears to be fundamentally more important than the need to be truly unique in taste and behaviour. The following discussion highlights the pre-determined nature of much beer consumption, providing examples of conforming behaviours that are largely invisible to the consumer.

**Image Management**

Social pressures are manifest in expectations of specific alcohol consumption behaviours. In order to be a “real” Australian male it becomes necessary at some time or another to engage specifically in beer consumption. Paradoxically, an inherent understanding of the necessity of drinking beer co-exists with the perception of consumption freedom. The pressure to drink may commence well before the attainment
of the legal drinking age. The earlier a male begins to consume beer, the sooner he can begin to communicate his emerging masculinity and maturity:

*Male 1:* I think if you want to be an Aussie man you have to drink beer. *Researcher:* Where did you get that perception from? *Male 1:* Because every Aussie man drinks beer. It is just what you have always known. *Male 2:* You have seen your father do it, you have seen your uncles do it, your grandfather all that sort of thing. Yes, you grow up with it (Ms, A, NSW, D).

Beer drinking is not an optional activity, but a compulsory one in the likely event that a male wishes to be accepted in Australian culture. There is something immediately suspicious about a male who does not drink beer:

I know a guy who doesn’t drink beer and he is a bit of a loser. He never touches it (M, A, WA, D).

Not only does the “genuine” Australian male have to drink beer, but he is pressured to consume large quantities of the beverage. To conform to this requirement is to communicate one’s manliness to one’s peers, and to society in general. Consistent with the literature examined in chapter 3, the interview data indicate that to fail to consume adequately casts doubt on one’s cultural hereditary and sexual orientation.

Beer serves as a widely understood badge or symbol that instantly signifies one’s suitability to a particular social and cultural environment, with different brands being appropriate for different environments. The greater the amount of beer that is consumed, the greater the amount of symbolism that can be accessed. The proviso, of course, is that one must be capable of retaining one’s composure throughout the drinking process. The following quote illustrates the difficult position of the drinker. He must drink large quantities while judging his consumption levels to avoid the status of an alcoholic and the stigma that accrues to addiction:

Beer is something that you just drink, ah it is an addiction. But that doesn’t mean to say that you are, what is the word, an alcoholic. You are *nearly* an alcoholic (M, S, NSW D).

As has been argued throughout this chapter, the choice of beer brand is representative of a drinker’s characteristics as he wishes to communicate these to himself and to others. For this reason, brand choice is an exercise in image management. Rather than being based on taste preferences, brand choice is very much
about communicating the right messages to the right people. A variety of purposes can thus be served through brand selection. Drinkers can communicate their masculinity (or equality in the case of females), their bond with others, and their membership of specific social groups. While these communication and image management activities are commonly considered to be within the control of drinkers, for all intents and purposes they feel compelled to engage in these communication activities. They are a necessary component of life as a consumer.

Although many informants of all ages and backgrounds were able to describe their perception of the typical consumers of a range of beer brands with relative ease, they were often obviously uncomfortable doing so, frequently arguing that they were not capable of making such generalisations. They did not like to believe that they actually classify others according to their consumption choices, some protesting that “you can’t judge a book by its cover”. However, after further discussion they usually went on to provide attributions that were surprisingly consistent across informants. The following extract provides an example of this process:

Researcher: If I said the name of a beer to you, could you try and generalise for me the sort of people that might drink that brand?
Male: I don’t think so. It is not an easy one because each person has different taste buds.
Researcher: Let’s start with what type of person would drink Guinness, for instance.
Male: Guinness, a person who likes to sit back, relax and be sociable.
Researcher: How about Corona?
Male: Corona is more sort of a business drink (M, A, NSW, D).

Thus while attributions are invoked frequently, the process can be below the level of conscious awareness. It was often not until informants attempted to describe the typical consumers of different types of beer that they realised how proficient they could be at this activity. This ability to stereotype according to beer brand becomes a necessary social skill for the drinker, as others will be judging him according to his consumption, just as he is (consciously or unconsciously) judging them.

The Social Context

Alcohol and socialising are implicitly conjoined in Australian culture. It is virtually unthinkable for drinkers that a social gathering could occur between friends without the presence of alcohol. Informants were unable to contemplate a social event that did not include the consumption of some form of alcohol. The relationship between
alcohol and socialising is particularly strong where food is consumed, and hosts generally feel compelled to serve alcohol with a meal. As the informant below states, “it is very hard to get away from the alcohol side of it.” The social conditioning of alcohol consumption is thus readily apparent:

*Researcher:* Tell me about your normal drinking behaviour.
*Female:* Gosh, very social. We have lots of social events, so I guess they revolve around food and alcohol.
*Researcher:* In that order?
*Female:* Yes, I love to cook, so to me the food is more important. But it is very difficult to get away from the alcohol side of it.
*Researcher:* Would people think you were strange if you invited them over to dinner and then didn’t serve any alcohol?
*Female:* Yes, definitely. All our friends drink (F, A, WA(country), D).

Mass conformity becomes apparent in the cultural “fact” that different social functions require the presence of different types of alcohol. The following informants explain how beer is most strongly associated with barbecues and parties, while wine is considered appropriate for more formal occasions:

At a restaurant you are getting together and having a chat with friends and all that sort of thing, but you are not going to go out and get blind or anything. Whereas if you are at a barbecue or a party and you are drinking beer, it is more of a time that you are probably going to get drunk and it shows a different side of it (Ms, A, NSW, D).

*Female:* Drinking beer is more barbecues, not at a wedding or a function or something like a restaurant.
*Male:* It is posher to drink wine (M&F, A, WA(country), D).

*Female 1:* Beer goes more with a barbecue.
*Female 2:* I pretty much always drink beer, unless I am having a meal, then I will drink wine. If I have gone out for dinner with somebody, then I will drink wine.
*Researcher:* What times are ideal for drinking beer?
*Female 2:* Night time, maybe. Yes, after work. If I am going out with somebody for a meal I prefer to drink wine, but if I am just going out to socialise I will drink beer (Fs, A, NSW, D).

My dad only drinks beer when there is a barbecue on (F, Ad, WA, ND).

Across these quotes it is possible to detect the requirement that informants feel to drink different types of alcohol in different contexts. The degree of conformity to this social requirement indicates the lack of control that individuals can have over their own consumption behaviours. As has been noted previously, an Australian male does not typically disregard the conventions surrounding alcohol consumption, as the social
consequences are significant. However, the social construction of beer consumption is seldom freely acknowledged by drinkers. Consuming beer is such a “natural” part of their social lives that most do not pay much conscious attention to their own drinking motivations. The need to drink beer to fit in is an accepted part of the society in which beer drinkers exist.

Beer is a consumption good that is culturally specified as being consumed properly when in the presence of others:

*Researcher:* When do people drink beer?
*Male:* Mostly with other people I think. It is just connected with being social, you know (M, Ad, NSW, ND).

“Well, you go out for friendship (M, A, NSW, D).

The second informant is subconsciously recognising the group factors impinging upon his consumption choices. He likes beer for the simple reason that everyone else does. His own personal tastes are all but irrelevant in the face of the cultural and social influences to which he is exposed on a daily basis. Where drinkers’ tastes are subordinated to those of the broader culture, it is difficult to argue for the independence of individuals. As taste is the crux of individual choice, where individuals’ tastes are subordinated to those of the group the individual’s control over consumption is correspondingly reduced.

**Drinking Locations**

The cultural determination of beer consumption is particularly apparent in the expectation that drinkers will only consume large quantities when socialising, not when alone. It is more or less automatic to consume beer in social environments, while it is much less acceptable when at home alone, a cultural norm that also applies to other forms of alcohol. Cultural conditioning ensures a favourable attitude to social drinking, and a suspicious, condescending attitude to private drinking. It is “right” to consume beer when socialising. It is “wrong” to consume significant amounts of beer in private:

*Male:* I wouldn’t drink at home unless I am dying.
*Researcher:* Why would you drink a fair amount of beer out, but not a thing at home?
*Male:* Well, you go out for friendship (M, A, NSW, D).
This informant has internalised the culturally-specified parameters for beer consumption, and thus resists any deviation from these norms. Beer is perceived to be appropriate primarily for social interactions, thus precluding heavy private consumption for most drinkers. This is example of the social constraints facing the beer drinker that impinge upon his control over his consumption behaviour.

Beer consumption is so strongly associated with relationships with others that it becomes necessary to offer justifications for any amounts consumed in the home. The common defences mounted included hot weather, watching sport on television, and "only having a couple":

Researcher: Is beer a social thing, or is it equally okay to drink it at home on your own?
Male: No, I don't drink it on my own.
Researcher: Don't drink it on your own?
Male: No, only one or two cans if it is warm weather (M, A, WA(country), D).

Researcher: Is it okay to drink at home on your own?
Male 1: You can have a couple.
Male 2: You don't sit at home by yourself and drink a case.
Researcher: Why not? Why do you only get smashed in front of other people?
Male 1: Because you usually find it is boring getting pissed by yourself.
Male 2: A beer or two after work is alright, but just sitting home getting drunk by yourself is not real good.
Male 3: There is a big difference between getting drunk for a laugh with your friends and getting pissed for the sake of getting pissed by yourself.
Male 2: People tell us we drink too much, but if we were to sit at home and drink by ourselves that is a full blown alcoholic. That is not social drinking (Ms, A, NSW, D).

The young male drinkers in the latter quote have well-formed understandings of the differences between social and private beer consumption. Although they do not question the cultural requirements that they are describing, they are convinced of the propriety of drinking in one context and the impropriety of drinking in another. BDFs have also been conditioned to obey the same usage code:

Female: I would never come home and just get pissed by myself.
Researcher: Would you come home and have a beer?
Female: Some days when it is hot, but not really often, only occasionally. But hardly ever actually by myself (F, A, WA(country), D).
There is an apparent concern that drinking in isolation will lead to excessive, uncontrolled consumption. The social environment is perceived as a regulator of alcohol intake, moderating the drinking activities of the consumer:

**Researcher:** Is it okay to drink at home on your own?

*Male 1:* No.

*Male 2:* No. You go silly.

**Researcher:** But you can go silly in public?

*Male 2:* No, you are in a nice environment, you don’t go silly (M, A, WA(country), D).

Despite these comments, the social environment can encourage greater consumption than would occur without social pressure. Shouting rituals, for example, can greatly increase individual consumption rates. The belief in the propriety of public venues relative to the home environment effectively reduces the range of consumption alternatives available to most beer drinkers. Their ability to determine their own consumption behaviours is thus significantly reduced.

**Conclusion**

The parameters of beer consumption are culturally defined. Australian culture is a powerful determinant of the types of people who consume different forms and volumes of alcohol, and different brands of beer. The volume of beer consumed, the fashion in which it is consumed, and the places in which it is consumed are all taught to consumers long before they are in a position to make their own beer consumption decisions. The extent of this conditioning is largely imperceptible to consumers, and they generally believe in their ability to make individual consumption decisions regardless of the influences of social forces. They prefer an interpretation that assigns the primary decision-making power in the consumption process to the individual. The result is the Control Myth, which views beer consumption as an optional activity in which consumers engage at their own will, in any way in which they choose.

The five myths that have been described in this chapter are highly inter-related. For example, the Taste Myth is critical to the other four myths. The All-Australian Myth is justified on the basis that the taste of beer is naturally pleasant to Australians. The Advertising Myth exists because consumers are loath to attribute their own consumption decisions to an external force, such as advertising, rather than to the internal force of individual taste. Similarly, the Pleasure Myth is derived directly from
the Taste Myth, as drinkers assume that they make beer consumption decisions according to the pleasure they gain from their beer consumption. The Taste Myth thus successfully erects a façade around the negative feelings associated with beer consumption, as the assumption is that only pleasurable feelings can derive from consumption decisions based upon an enjoyment of taste. Similarly, the Control Myth is reinforced by the Taste Myth, as choice justifications based on taste are perceived to be autonomous and free from external control. The Control Myth also provides the underlying rationale for the other myths, as they all serve to reassure the drinker of his autonomy and freedom from external pressures. The interdependence of the five myths illustrates the intricate and complex web of cultural meaning that surrounds beer consumption in the Australian context.

In the following chapter, the five myths will be discussed in the light of the grounded theory that emerged from the analysis of the beer consumption process. The conditions relevant to beer consumption in the Australian context are identified and contextualised in terms of the core category and its associated properties that have been derived from the data.
CHAPTER 6 – CONCLUSIONS

Introduction

In this chapter a grounded theory of Australian beer consumption is provided, the tensions involved in beer consumption and the invoked resolution mechanisms are described, links are made between the findings and the literature reviewed in chapter 2, the limitations of the research are discussed, and directions for future research are proposed.

The objective of the first part of this chapter is to describe the grounded theory of beer consumption that has been generated by this research. The section is brief compared to more detailed grounded theories, as much of the background and illustrative discussion has been provided in chapter 5. Glaser and Strauss (1967) defined grounded theories as those that produce explanations of phenomena that include the identification of core categories and their associated properties. Through the inductive theory generation processes employed in this study, the primary concern of those drinking beer was found to be image management. This concern is proposed to constitute the core category relevant to beer consumption in Australia. Image management in this context refers to the activities undertaken by drinkers that communicate their membership of specific groups, that develop and reinforce their self-concepts, and that maximise the outcomes of the stereotyping activities of others to enhance self-esteem. The process of image management thus entails the three primary behaviours of monitoring, analysing, and communicating. These behaviours comprise the properties of the core category of image management. The main purposes of image management activities among beer drinkers are to promote a satisfactory sense of self, and to stave off feelings of inadequacy and insecurity. This process of image management involves consumers experiencing both positive and negative feelings during the course of their image management activities.

Due to the substantive nature of this research (i.e., it is focused on the consumption of a specific product), any links that are made to general consumer behaviour are only suggestive, and require further research to assess their generalisability. Also, as this interpretation pertains to social phenomena it is subject to
multiple realities, and is therefore not necessarily representative of the conclusions that would be drawn by another researcher, nor by informants themselves. Instead, it reflects the particular viewpoint of this particular researcher after immersion in the consumption area for an extended period of time.

The Core Category – Image Management

Beer consumption in Australia is an important mechanism by which Australians communicate important aspects of themselves to others. By adequately managing their images through beer consumption or beer avoidance, Australians can facilitate their interactions with others, enabling the satisfying relationships they desire. Image management is an accurate term for the primary category of beer consumption, as the process of beer consumption in Australia is truly a managerial task. Informants described in detail the ways in which they manage their consumption decisions and consumption activities in order to achieve the self-images they desire. However, it is apparent that much of this function occurs below the level of complete consciousness, with informants subconsciously working towards the attainment of a self-image they have been conditioned to desire by the culture(s) and subcultures to which they belong.

Drinkers engage in image management throughout the beer consumption process, including their brand choices, location choices, posturing while consuming, and discussions with others regarding beer as a product category. The existence and importance of image management to beer consumption is evident in the different interpretations made by informants of their own behaviours compared to those of others. While they used the taste and refreshment of beer to explain their own motivations and behaviours, they were willing to attribute image management as a primary source of motivation for others. Instances of these differences in attributions are noted in chapter 5.

The relevance of image management as a core category is also apparent in that each of the five myths described in the previous chapter can be explained in terms of their contribution to the task of image management. The All-Australian Myth explains how the communication of one’s nationality can be achieved by beer consumption. It also explains how males can communicate their masculinity and females can communicate their social equality through beer consumption, although females can also
communicate their femininity through their non-consumption of beer. Similarly, those belonging to higher social classes can demonstrate their separation from the working classes through their non-consumption, or their selection of specific beer brands. Image management is a critical component of the Taste Myth, as the existence of this myth relies on drinkers’ needs to demonstrate discernment skills in order to adequately manage their images to others. Similarly, the Advertising Myth is based on the desire to communicate decision-making abilities that are independent of the persuasive influence of advertising. The Pleasure Myth requires drinkers to convince themselves and others of their ability to appreciate beer, and thus refute the possible charge by self or others that they are conforming rather than acting individually. In the same vein, the Control Myth prevents drinkers from recognising external forces over their consumption decisions, thus preserving their perception of autonomy and enabling the maintenance of a positive self-image.

Properties

There are three primary properties that exist under the core category of image management. These properties represent the attributes or characteristics of the category (Glaser and Strauss 1967, Strauss and Corbin 1990). They include monitoring the internal and external environments, analysing the data obtained through decoding and stereotyping efforts, and communicating with others through consumption behaviours. Each of these properties is part of the image management task faced by beer drinkers. It is likely that they are relevant to many other consumption activities that involve a high degree of image management. There are several characteristics that are relevant to these properties, including age, gender, and the nature of the consumption context (specifically its complexity as a symbolic environment). The relationships between each of the properties and these characteristics are detailed below.

Monitoring

The property of monitoring has two main components, self-monitoring and environmental monitoring. In order for drinkers to manage their images through beer consumption or non-consumption, it is necessary for them to be aware of their own behaviours and the perceptions that others hold of these behaviours. The self-monitoring discussion in chapter 2 provides a framework within which to appreciate this process. Drinkers need to monitor others’ reactions to their choice of beer brand and
the volume of beer consumed, feeding these reactions into their decision-making processes. The informants interviewed often mentioned how they were aware of the consumption decisions of their peers. It was apparent that many engage in a constant comparison between their own consumption behaviours and those of others. By ensuring that their own consumption choices remain within the acceptable parameters of their social grouping(s), drinkers can feel much more comfortable with their consumption choices.

As the image management task becomes more difficult with the increasing number of new brands being introduced to the market, consumers become more uncertain in their consumption decisions. This fosters the lack of confidence that is conducive to a state of high self-monitoring, as described by Hormuth (1990) and Sampson (1978). Part of the process of self-monitoring involves constantly monitoring symbolic meaning in the environment (i.e., external monitoring) in order to enhance role performance in different contexts, a behaviour that can be driven by the need to manage image rather than by the enjoyment that is assumed to be derived from the process. It is thus apparent that self-monitoring and external monitoring are highly related.

Monitoring the external environment requires drinkers to be vigilant in their efforts to obtain input data to be employed in their decision-making processes. In order to interact in Australian culture it is vital for drinkers to understand the cultural meanings resident in different product offerings, which requires familiarity with the general product usage parameters as specified by the broader culture, as well as specific subcultures. This process is typically passive, in that drinkers display only the tendency to register existing meaning, rather than actively attempting to construct new meanings for beer brands. To understand the cultural meaning of beer as a product category and the various brands available, drinkers need to monitor the drinking patterns of peers and aspirational groups, seeking to understand their attitudes towards beer as demonstrated by their comments and behaviours. The process of external monitoring also includes perpetually scanning beer advertisements and product placements to gain exposure to the possible symbolic meanings held in different brands. The beer advertisement themes discussed in chapter 3 are examples of the information that consumers need to analyse and absorb to facilitate their beer consumption decisions.
In terms of the characteristics that impact upon self-monitoring, age is a very important variable. Younger drinkers spend much more cognitive and emotional effort on self-monitoring, a tendency that may be explained by their weaker self-concepts at this stage of their lives (as per Belk 1988a). Beer consumption is a tool they use to facilitate image management, and they engage in significant levels of self-monitoring to evaluate their proficiency at this task. Female beer drinkers also are more likely to be high-self-monitors, a condition that is necessary to enable them to negotiate their way through the complex web of gender issues that pertain to beer consumption. Self-monitoring varies greatly in different contexts, with public drinking more likely to require intensive self-monitoring than private consumption. Public drinking typically occurs in complex symbolic environments that require more monitoring effort from the drinker to ensure compliance to the relevant behavioural norms.

Younger drinkers and female drinkers were also more likely to engage in extensive external monitoring, although all drinkers exhibited some degree of external monitoring behaviour. Younger drinkers were more active in their monitoring of beer advertisements, and were better able to recall advertising themes for a wide range of beer products. Female drinkers were particularly interested in the masculine, powerful symbolism of beer in advertisements, as well as the cultural meaning relating to Australian lifestyles. External monitoring amongst all drinkers is more important in public contexts, as there is a higher degree of symbolic complexity in public drinking locations that requires more cognitive investment from the drinker. However, the home as the location in which the consumer is exposed to the important media form of television is also an important location for monitoring the cultural meaning of beer and the various brands on the market.

**Analysing**

The property of analysing also has two components, these being decoding and stereotyping activities. Decoding, as discussed in chapter 2, is a necessary part of the meaning transfer process, one the consumer must undertake to assist in the process of production. The “correct” consumption of beer in Australian culture obligates drinkers to constantly decode the meanings of beer as a product category, and the more specific meanings located in the numerous brands on the market. This decoding function is necessary to enhance role performance and to ensure social acceptance. Drinkers are not
typically consciously aware of their own decoding activities in regards to beer. The assumption tends to be that the meanings in the products are fixed and only in need of learning. They do not recognise the interpretive element in this learning process, believing that their understandings of the meanings of the brands are the same as everyone else’s.

While the CaK literature suggests that differences in the interpretation of symbolic meaning can be attributed to the ability of the individual to assign meanings independently, the results of this study suggest that decoding results are different between consumers primarily as a result of: (1) different decoding skills, (2) varying levels of exposure to the product, and (3) the often unconscious nature of the decoding process. This unconscious aspect of decoding results in consumers absorbing meanings without counter-argument. They accept meanings rather than actively attempting to alter them in any way, as any such alterations reduce the likelihood that they are assigning the same meanings to brands as the members of the groups to which they wish to belong. They want to get the meaning “right” much more than they want to place their own meanings on products. The assumption among drinkers is that the meanings of brands are pre-determined, leaving them only the task of registering this meaning and deciding whether it is consistent with the self-image to which they have been taught to aspire. Females appear at first glance to be exceptions, as through their consumption of beer they are changing the definition of beer as a male product, albeit slowly and with some assistance from beer marketers. However, they still try to extract similar meanings from the consumption of beer as those decoded by males, such as assertiveness, independence, and equality. As beer is a product capable of communicating much about the drinker, consumers are not tempted to play with its symbolic meanings. The role of beer is too important to the self-concept for the drinker to risk any experimentation. Thus differences in decoding can be viewed as effectively outside the direct influence of the consumer.

Decoding activities are more intense among younger consumers. Quite young children demonstrated an understanding of the cultural meanings of beer, an understanding that they have obtained through social contact and the media. They are very interested in learning the meanings of different products and brands, eager for information that will enable them to interact effectively in the world of adults. Consumers in the oldest age brackets still engage in decoding activities, although to a
lesser extent. They see less relevance in stocking-piling this type of information, as it is less critical to their interactions with others. Their more solid self-concepts enable them to conduct social relationships that are less reliant on image management.

As per Belk et al. (1982, 1984) and Hyatt (1992), stereotyping represents another form of analysis that assists consumers in their efforts to make sense of the world and their role within it. The process of stereotyping is reliant on the existence of commonly accepted cultural meanings, as these meanings provide the input to stereotyping activities. Evident in stereotyping activities are drinkers’ assumptions concerning appropriate behaviour for both others and themselves. These assumptions are built on the interpretations that the individual makes of the culturally-specified requirements for different types of people, interpretations that can be somewhat idiosyncratic due to the differences in information processing styles among individuals. Australians are capable, if not entirely desirous, of making detailed stereotypes of others based on their beer consumption behaviours. The requirement for stereotyping skills for social survival induces a state of high self-monitoring, as consumers become implicitly aware of the stereotyping activities of others. Image management becomes more complex as consumers subconsciously recognise the need to maintain consumption behaviours that will convey their desired images to others. The knowledge that their consumption choices will determine how others view them means that consumers are aware of the need to make the “right” choice. This recognition of the stereotyping function is apparent in the differences in beer consumption patterns between those drinking in public and private contexts, as discussed in chapter 5.

Once again, stereotyping is more intense among younger Australians. Younger informants were much more likely to assign personal characteristics to an unknown other on the basis of beer consumption, although older drinkers did exhibit stereotyping behaviours to a lesser extent. There appeared to be no major differences between males and females on this point.

Communication

Throughout the course of this study it became apparent that the CaK interpretation that consumers possess considerable latitude in their choices of products to consume does not apply well to beer consumption in public contexts in Australia. As
beer consumption is such an important method of social communication, individuals do not have much scope in their beer consumption behaviours – at least not if they desire social acceptance. As discussed in chapter 2, the CaP perspective argues that communication via product selection and use is now a compulsory element of modern living. For all intents and purposes, consumers have no choice but to engage in consumption that communicates with others. This entails the selection of specific products that are used in specific ways. This lack of control at the macro level is disguised by relative control at the level of individual transactions. For example, drinkers are much less capable of deciding for themselves whether beer consumption will be part of their lifestyle than they are of deciding whether to drink a beer at a specific point in time.

Some products are much more communicative than others, and beer in the Australian context is a particularly communicative product as it has the capacity to provide considerable information to those observing the consumption process. Through their beer consumption (or non-consumption), individuals communicate with others and with themselves regarding a wide range of factors. These factors include gender, age, social class, and (sub)cultural membership. Characteristics such as branding and packaging facilitate the communication process, enabling products to be ever more concise in their communication capabilities. As discussed in chapter 5, the introduction of new packaging styles has enabled increased penetration into the female beer market, access that has been made possible by the different messages that are communicated by the new styles.

Product communication is often facilitated by the performance of rituals that assist in conveying product meanings to participants and observers. These rituals are well demarcated in beer consumption, as has been described in chapters 3 and 5. Through the ritual of pub attendance, many male drinkers communicate their bonding with other males and their difference from females. By engaging in shouting rituals drinkers communicate their belief in egalitarianism, and by consuming large volumes in a single sitting (binge rituals) they communicate their strength and masculinity. Where females participate in these rituals they communicate their assertiveness and desire for equality.
As the monitoring and analysing tasks are adopted most extensively by younger drinkers, so the communication function is more important to these drinkers. As they attempt to build appropriate self-concepts they find it necessary to allocate considerable cognitive and emotional energy to the communication process. By intensively monitoring and analysing cultural meaning, they hope to maximise the success of their efforts at image communication.

**Tensions**

As consumers work towards image management through the processes of monitoring, analysing, and communicating, they experience numerous tensions. These tensions must be resolved in order for individuals to achieve their image management objectives. Many of these tensions are paradoxical, with no clear avenue of resolution available to the consumer. Thus it is often the case that it is impossible for individuals to find a position that is entirely culturally “comfortable”. Instead, they adopt strategies that enable them to cope with the ambiguity of the situation. These strategies take the form of the five myths that have been identified in the previous chapter. Three of the primary tensions experienced by Australian beer drinkers are discussed below.

**Conformity Versus Individuality**

Beer drinkers are faced with the contradictory requirements to conform to socially acceptable beer consumption behaviours and to exhibit personal individuality. Through the consumption of mass-produced brands, drinkers are able to communicate their membership to various social groups, thus fulfilling the conformity requirement. The individuality requirement is, by comparison, very difficult for drinkers to achieve. The risks associated with “incorrect” consumption are high for most drinkers, leaving them in the position of waiting for others to lead any changes to other brands. The result of the desire to conform is that for the vast majority of beer drinkers there is effectively no individuality in their consumption patterns. They drink the same brands as others, in much the same ways.

In order to overcome this lack of individuality in consumption, beer drinkers invoke the Taste Myth. By believing that their consumption decisions are based on their own individual tastes, they can disregard the overwhelming conformity of their consumption choices. Similarly, the Control Myth assures drinkers that they are in
complete control of their own consumption, preventing them from acknowledging the conforming nature of their choices. The Pleasure Myth is also relevant to overcoming this tension, as conforming behaviour often requires drinkers to pretend taste preferences that they do not feel, at least initially.

**The Savvy Consumer Versus The Relaxed Consumer**

The interview and observation data suggest that in Australian culture individuals are expected to be savvy alcohol consumers. In other words, they should demonstrate competency as consumers. To be a savvy beer drinker, as defined in Australian culture, requires comprehensive brand knowledge, which in turn requires extensive environmental monitoring, decoding, and stereotyping. To have others recognise one as a savvy consumer also requires adept skills at communication through product symbolism. Thus, in order to be a savvy drinker, an individual must invest significant effort in image management. However, at the same time drinkers are expected to convey the relaxed and happy demeanour that is supposed to accompany beer consumption. This means that drinkers must engage in high levels of internal and external monitoring while appearing to refrain from doing so. In essence, they must communicate the appearance of being a savvy consumer, while also communicating a level of confidence that indicates that they feel no need to be considered a savvy consumer.

This is a self-perpetuating cycle, as many drinkers do not feel comfortable unless they perceive that others are stereotyping them favourably, meaning that they must maintain their efforts to convey their desired images. They are thus deprived of a relaxed existence, as to be relaxed requires being considered savvy, and to be considered savvy necessitates a vigilant stance. Similarly, the expectation that beer consumption should be pleasurable (and in particular, mentally and emotionally non-taxing) is in conflict with the cultural requirement for communication. As discussed in the CaP perspective, the high self-monitoring required in the necessary task of communicating via consumption in modern society increases the work required of the drinker in the consumption process, and hence inhibits the attainment of complete relaxation.
Another facet of this tension is the requirement for drinkers to drink heavily enough to be socially acceptable, while also demonstrating the self-control essential for image management. This is especially difficult for younger drinkers who are still in the process of experimenting with their own tolerance thresholds, and who are unsure as to the consumption volume requirements of specific subcultures. This group appears to be the least relaxed in beer consumption despite their high per capita consumption levels. They are very preoccupied with managing their images in front of their peers, a need that overtakes any desire for relaxed consumption.

The coping mechanisms employed to overcome the savvy/relaxed tension include the Taste Myth, the Pleasure Myth, the Advertising Myth, and the Control Myth. The Pleasure Myth assists in convincing drinkers that environmental monitoring (such as scanning advertisements for meaning) is part of the enjoyable process of beer consumption. Similarly, the Control Myth prevents drinkers from appreciating the need to study beer advertisements for meaning, as they are content in their belief of their own autonomy. Their conviction that they are completely in control of their own behaviour means that these advertisements can be viewed as sources of entertainment, rather than work. The vigilance that is required to monitor the external environment thus becomes accepted as natural, rather than forced on the consumer. The Control Myth also serves to reduce any internal conflict that may occur as a result of the need to communicate non-verbally with others. As this task is also presumed to be completely under the consumer’s control, it is categorised as an optional activity in which drinkers just happen to choose to engage. In this way, the tension between cultural requirements and individual desires is again reduced.

Drinkers can be unaware that they are engaging in self-monitoring. It is such an entrenched part of their lives that they do not comprehend its existence. Of those few who can appreciate even some of their own self-monitoring behaviours, they appear to account for these behaviours by believing that they possess inadequacies that need to be overcome. The need for high self-monitoring behaviours is attributed to their own weaknesses, rather than any basic tension within the cultural system. These individuals cling to the Taste Myth, hoping that one day they too will have the innate good taste that they assume those around them possess. A CaP interpretation is that as taste is learned, it is more likely to be the case that these individuals are less skilled at monitoring and decoding than others, rather than being simply deficient in good taste.
**Price Versus Image**

Drinkers can be faced with a disparity between the brands that they would like to consume and the brands that they are financially capable of consuming. Informants to this study were often convinced that the more expensive brands are better able to convey the symbolism that they would like to communicate to others. The assumption is that these brands are superior in taste and quality, and that by consuming these brands they can convince others of their good taste and social acceptability.

The coping strategies employed for the other tensions listed above are not generally required for this tension. As financial constraint is a more legitimate reason for consumption choices in Australian culture than most other possible reasons, drinkers were quite comfortable stating their preferred brands while acknowledging their inability to afford them. In this way they have achieved the objective of communicating the brands they would like to consume, thus exhibiting their good taste. The financial impediment then detracts from perceptions of one’s social standing, but this is less important than being assumed to be deficient in taste.

**Theoretical Conclusions**

Chapter 5 outlined an ethnographic study of beer consumption in Australia. The first part of this chapter has detailed a grounded theory of Australian beer consumption in terms of the core category of image management and its associated properties. Also, the specific tensions experienced by beer drinkers have been outlined, along with the coping mechanisms that are commonly employed to reduce these tensions to manageable levels. There remains the task of linking the research results to the literature reviewed in chapter 2. The major theoretical conclusions of this study are discussed below, some of which are expressed purely in terms of beer consumption, while others are suggested to be relevant to a broader range of consumption behaviours.

**Consumption and the Self-Concept**

As indicated in the literature representing both the CaK and CaP perspectives, consumption is used extensively in self-concept construction and maintenance. What is not always recognised is that the nature of the self-concept desired and the parameters
for product usage to achieve this self-concept are highly specified by the cultural environment. This study supports the CaP proposition that the communication of the self-concept via consumption is a mandatory requirement for social survival in modern society (as per Hormuth 1990), and that it is unquestioningly accepted as such by consumers. Through its connection with the self-concept, consumption is an essential component of image management, and the human desire for image management ensures that consumption takes a primary role in modern life. As suggested by Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton (1981) and Belk (1998a), where self-concepts are relatively weak (such as in the young and where traditional sources of identity are unavailable), consumption takes on an even greater role in the image management task.

The findings of this research also provide support for McCracken (1987, 1990a, 1990b) and Douglas and Isherwood’s (1979) theories of the importance of product symbolism to consumption, and Belk (1989) and Solomon’s (1983) theories of the self-concept as a key element in this relationship between symbolism and consumption. Most importantly, this study of beer consumption in the Australian context supports the CaP argument that consumers can be driven to levels and forms of consumption that are culturally prescribed as suitable to their culturally defined self-concepts (as per Firat 1991).

Consumption Anxiety

In the consumer behaviour literature, consumption is generally perceived to occur in the context of a consumer in a positive frame of mind. While the symbolic function of products can certainly produce positive outcomes for consumers (for example, the positive feelings associated with belonging to a desired social group), what is often neglected is the incidence of negative feelings and experiences in consumption. The results of this study suggest that consumption behaviours relating to highly symbolic products can involve underlying levels of stress and anxiety for the consumer. Through the analysis of beer consumption it has been possible to gain an appreciation of the motivations, values, and feelings that people bring to their consumption activities. Beer consumption is an activity that is strongly associated with pleasure, leisure, and relaxation in the minds of Australians. However, with relative ease it is possible to penetrate the proclaimed consumer enjoyment to observe a readily apparent element of discomfort. This discomfort can be caused by numerous negative feelings, including
insecurity and inadequacy. These negative feelings need to be recognised along with all the positive feelings that are normally associated with many consumption activities.

Holbrook and Hirschman (1982) suggested some time ago that existing consumer theories are inadequate to focus on the emotional or feeling aspects of consumption. While consumer behaviour theories have included a consideration of affect, this has not typically enabled consumer researchers to obtain a deep understanding of consumption experiences. One way of differentiating between affect and feelings is to consider affect as consumers’ sentiments about products (Woodside and Bearden 1977), while feelings can be seen as the way products impact upon consumers’ emotions and self-conceptions. This distinction is subtle, but it is very important when attempting to draw more attention to the area of feelings in the consumer behaviour literature.

Since Holbrook and Hirschman’s call for more emphasis on feelings, successive research efforts have primarily focused on the positive feelings and emotions resulting from consumption. By focusing on the positive aspects of consumption, consumer researchers have provided a degree of legitimacy for marketing activities. A greater appreciation of the unpleasant aspects of consumption may have several benefits. For example, it could result in an increasing acceptance among consumers that feelings of stress, tension, and inadequacy may be quite normal consumer responses relating to a wide range of consumption behaviours. This recognition alone may go a long way towards alleviating many of these negative feelings, providing liberation through understanding. Also, the responsibilities of marketers in their interactions with consumers may become clearer to marketers, consumers, and regulatory bodies alike.

An important implication from this research is that consumers may assume responsibility for their failure to achieve happiness from consumption, attributing negative feelings to their own image management inabilities rather than to any inherent deficiencies in the system. While the experience of negative feelings in the process of image management is assumed here to be part of the human condition, and by no means solely attributable to the actions of individual marketers or marketers in general, it is likely that marketing activities can serve to exacerbate such feelings. An awareness of the stereotyping activities of others leads to consumption anxiety among individuals, a situation that is exacerbated by the ever-increasing product ranges available in the
marketplace and the constant stream of promotional messages to which consumers are exposed.

As noted by Firat (1987a), consumers now have more choice among individual brands, although the total number of suppliers in many industries has decreased. The CaP perspective holds that rather than making the definition and communication of the self easier, such increased variety at the symbolic level has increased uncertainty about how to perform the image-management functions for which products are purchased and consumed. In short, as product differentiation becomes based primarily on symbolism rather than functional differences, the work imposed on the consumer in the performance of image-management becomes greater and greater. The result is consumers who can experience anxiety in their attempts to conform to an appropriate degree. Rather than exposing the liberated consumer, this study indicated that Australian beer consumers are very much under the influence of societal expectations, thus showing themselves to be modern (as opposed to postmodern) consumers. They are modern according to the description of modern consumers that is provided by the postmodern literature (see Firat and Venkatesh 1995).

Irrational Consumption

Initially viewed as a utility maximiser, then a symbolism maximiser, the consumer now deserves a third look. Consumer behaviour theorists have criticised economists for their “rational man” assumptions, but they have fallen into the same trap by assuming a symbolic rationalism. Researchers such as McCracken (1990b) and Hirschman and Thompson (1997) posit that consumers deliberately consider symbolism in their consumption decisions, and make informed choices about which “self” they wish to communicate at a particular point in time. In other words, a cognitive learning process is involved. This process is said to include a conscious consideration of which products (and their related symbolic meanings) are necessary to achieve this end. Arguments of rational symbolism are thus based on the concept that consumers have a conscious mission to improve their lives through consumption. This mission involves intentionally and willingly monitoring symbolic meaning in an effort to create, develop, or maintain the concept of self that they have decided is appropriate or beneficial.
This study supports an alternative viewpoint that any such mission is culturally programmed and rarely recognised by consumers. Rather than consciously and freely selecting self-concepts, consumers struggle to construct a concept of self that is socially acceptable, often on the defensive rather than in control of the process. Consumers have assimilated the (sub)cultural requirements for individuals fitting certain profiles, such as a middle-class adolescent male. (For example, Australian beer advertising has left Australian males in no doubt as to the requirement to consumer beer to fit the accepted image of their gender.) As such, consumers' choices of self to communicate are more culturally programmed than is recognised in the literature. This finding is in line with Bourdieu's (1984) discussions of the importance of social position to individuals' perceptions of appropriate and inappropriate consumption.

It is not just consumer researchers who have assumed the existence of consumption rationality, as consumers themselves are also convinced of the logic of their own behaviour. It was apparent throughout the study that beer drinkers presume that there are rational and functional reasons for their own consumption behaviours. Most of the beer drinkers interviewed preferred the interpretation that their consumption decisions are based on pure, rational taste. They were typically uncomfortable acknowledging social forces and cultural imperatives in their beer consumption choices. The Taste Myth and the Control Myth prevail, convincing drinkers that their consumption decisions are self-determined and in their own interests.

It could be argued that the attributions that drinkers make and the stereotypes that they employ to make sense of the consumption behaviours of others should alert them to the forces governing their own beer consumption. For instance, if it is possible to define a brand in terms of the nature of its typical drinkers, then it is highly likely that some kind of social force is operating to induce those types of people to consume that type of beer. However, the conditioning experienced by drinkers has taught them to consider such convergences in taste as natural and normal. This finding supports Bourdieu's (1984) work on the socially constructed nature of taste.

**Consumers as Pawns**

Rather than existing as a formal theoretical framework within the literature, the CaP perspective was derived from the literature only after the dominant consumption
theories were found to be inadequate to explain the data obtained from the field. It became necessary to search very broadly to locate theories that could account for the behaviours and feelings of informants. Themes from the postmodernism literature were found to provide the best sense of "fit" with the data, particularly the sceptical postmodernist stance as described by Firat and Venkatesh (1995). The CaP perspective thus emerged from these postmodernist underpinnings. The major finding of this research is that the CaP perspective, as it is described in chapter 2, has explanatory power for beer consumption behaviours in Australia. In other words, Australian beer drinkers are effectively dominated by the cultural environment, of which products and marketing institutions are an increasingly significant part. Drinkers' consumption desires are largely culturally programmed, leaving them reactive rather than proactive in the consumption process.

In line with the theorising of Firat and other postmodern consumer researchers (Firat and Dholakia 1998; Firat and Venkatesh 1995; Firat 1991; Venkatesh et al. 1993), the CaP perspective allows the interpretation that the consumer is primarily a product of the world of consumption. Instead of the world revolving around the consumer, the consumer has an important function to perform in the perpetuation of the prevailing order. In such a scenario the consumer has little real choice, while falsely perceiving a significant degree of control in the consumption process. In particular, the cultural requirement for image management greatly reduces free choice, relegating drinkers to the position of consuming on demand to produce appropriate images, which are in turn culturally specified. The implication for the meaning transfer process is that drinkers usually only attempt to decode and assign product meanings as they have been culturally defined, far from willing or able to assign meanings to products that are culturally inappropriate. This has implications for the CaK interpretation that individuals have control of cultural meaning, thus giving them a vital role in cultural change (as per Wallendorf 1993; Wallendorf and Arnould 1991; McCracken 1990b). Where consumers are constrained in their decoding activities in the ways found here, their ability to exert cultural change is correspondingly reduced. This supports the CaP argument that the modern individual has little, if any, control over the changes occurring in the cultural environment.

Similarly, individual advertisers cannot typically alter the accepted symbolism in products. In aggregate, marketers have reinforced the symbolic meanings of many
product categories to the extent that individual advertisers are largely incapable of radically changing these meanings, at least in the short term. Once cultural meanings have been successfully assigned, they can be very difficult to change without considerable cost and effort. In the Australian beer market, generations of beer marketers have associated the beverage with a masculine target market, making it very difficult to instigate significant changes in target market and advertising themes.

In conclusion, despite ongoing assumptions of the primacy of the individual consumer in modern market economies, the results of this study suggest that the truly idiosyncratic component of consumption (at least in the case of beer consumption) is too minor to be consequential. As per Roth and Moorman (1988), discrepancies in behaviours are more likely to be the result of differing interpretations of the relevant norms, and/or different abilities to perform the culturally required behaviours. In the case of beer consumption, variations in consumption patterns tend to converge around the key variables of gender in the first instance, and then by age and social class. Instances of individuals who exhibited behaviours that were contrary to the cultural requirements of each of these classifications were rare amongst informants to this study.

Summary

The Consumer as King interpretation that currently dominates the consumer behaviour literature holds that the cultural environment is but one contributing element to the consumption behaviours of consumers. The individual characteristics of consumers are represented as the dominating influence in consumption decisions. This perspective endows consumers with significant control over their self-construction projects as achieved through consumption. This process is assumed to be inherently enjoyable and rewarding from the consumer's perspective, an assumption that is based on the presumed control that the individual wields over the self-construction process.

An alternative interpretation is that much of the self-construction process is subconscious and socially determined. Instead of being enjoyable it may be more of a reactive process, with consumers perpetually on the defensive. The subconscious understanding that consumers have of the attribution process compels them to be high self-monitors in order to pre-empt the attributions of others. This results in harried consumers who are constantly attempting to predict the attributions of others accruing
from their own consumption activities. The macro forces of culture and society thus weigh heavily in the consumption process, despite their invisibility to consumers. Such an interpretation of consumption motivations is not readily visible in the mainstream consumer behaviour literature. Instead, the consumer is typically portrayed as a fortunate individual who is spoiled for choice in a world of a high relative income and an ever-increasing range of goods and services from which to choose. Marketers are therefore viewed to be in a defensive position where they are required to make constant effort to understand consumers in order to meet their needs and therefore ensure their own survival.

This analysis of Australian beer consumption provides support for the Consumer as Pawn perspective. While less common in the literature, this perspective presents a convincing argument for the increasing alienation of the consumer in society. It provides an alternative interpretation of the consumer, that of the culturally-programmed individual who exists in a constant state of balancing the competing demands of different subcultures, and who is greatly influenced by the marketing institutions that comprise a significant component of the cultural environment. From this orientation, the consumer is viewed not as a purely utility- and symbolism-maximising entity, but as an individual who can be anxious, insecure, and confused. In other words, it is acknowledged that consumers can be on the “consumption defensive” rather than the “consumption offensive”. This perspective is not intended to replace existing conceptions of consumers, but instead to provide an alternative interpretation that may be particularly relevant to certain consumers and to the consumption of certain products.

Limitations

The main limitation to this study is the reliance on data generated from drinkers to interpret the level of consumer autonomy in the process of beer consumption. The Consumer as Pawn perspective has been favoured largely on the basis of interviews with and observations of drinkers, suggesting that a sample including a greater number of adult non-drinkers may have provided an alternative interpretation. While the data collected from school students and retirees added a broader understanding of the role of beer consumption in Australian life that supported the Consumer as Pawn conclusion, it
is possible that a sample comprised predominantly of non-drinkers may have provided more support for the Consumer as King perspective.

Another limitation is the emphasis on beer drinking in the public domain. This focus limits the generalisability of the findings relative to research that more evenly incorporates both public and private consumption. Although a small number of informants were interviewed in private drinking contexts and informants in public drinking contexts were encouraged to discuss their private drinking behaviours, it is possible that this interpretation is different to one that would emerge from a study focused primarily on private drinking. Also, it is likely that those who drink regularly in the public domain consume more on a per capita basis than those who do not frequent public drinking venues, indicating that the data employed in this study have been obtained from a heavy-drinking component of the population. It is possible that lighter drinkers may be more representative of the CaK perspective than the CaP perspective.

Another limitation is the lack of access to specific groups of consumers, namely residents of remote areas, the very wealthy, migrants, and those with intimidating appearances. These groups would have added greater depth to the analysis. Also, due to the purposive sampling that is required of both grounded theory and ethnographic research, it is likely that the sample employed here would be different in both size and composition to one generated by other sampling methods. Purposive or theoretical sampling requires judgements to be made concerning the suitability of potential informants, and these judgements may result in the recruitment of informants who may hold different views to the average consumer. The results of this study are therefore not as generalisable as those generated through random sampling.

The personal characteristics of the researcher and the requirement for a lone researcher may also be construed as limitations to this study. It is probable that a group of researchers or an individual researcher possessing dissimilar personal characteristics would have produced a different account of Australian beer consumption than is offered here. In order to determine the variations in interpretations that are possible, follow-up studies performed by other researchers are required.

Both ethnographic methods and grounded theory suffer from disagreements among proponents concerning the extent to which the generalisation of findings is
possible. As has been stated earlier, it is not the intention here to resolve these methodological dilemmas. The difficulties associated with generalisability are accepted, and the interpretations offered are acknowledged to be tentative and exploratory. The findings are discussed primarily in terms of beer consumption in the Australian context, although the possibility of generalisation to other products and other contexts is raised as a subject for future study.

**Future Research Directions**

The key areas of divergence between the CaP and CaK perspectives provide numerous possibilities for further research. There is the opportunity to generally explore the relevance of each perspective to various forms of consumption. For example, the selection of a highly symbolic product in this study leaves the issue of less symbolic products and their relationship to the two perspectives unexplored.

Also, the study of negative feelings in consumption is under-researched and under-theorised, and there exists immense potential for further research in this area. Specific areas of future research into negative feelings could include: (a) the differences in the negative feelings experienced between various Australian subcultures, such as age and gender; (b) the relative importance of some feelings over others in various types of consumption activities; (c) an analysis of the coping mechanisms employed by consumers when confronting negative feelings; and (d) the significance of specific feelings in different cultures (for example, exploring whether feelings of inadequacy and envy are more heightened in some cultures than in others).

In terms of sampling issues, the parameters of this research indicate that studies accessing specific segments that were neglected in this study could expand the interpretation. For example, concentrated research on beer consumption in the remote areas of the Australian Outback or among the very wealthy has the potential to yield interesting insights in addition to those derived in this research. It is likely that there are different social pressures operating on these consumers than on those informants who informed this research. Also, beer drinkers could be divided into segments according to consumption levels (i.e., light, medium, and heavy drinkers), with differences in beer consumption rituals examined according to consumption status.
As suggested in the limitations section, there is the opportunity for a similar study to be conducted by other researchers to yield differing interpretations that could add to our understanding of beer consumption in Australia. In particular, studies performed by a team of researchers could generate additional insights of interest. Also, specific research into the consumption of other forms of alcohol, such as wine and spirits, could provide a more detailed picture of alcohol consumption in Australia. Finally, there is the opportunity to provide a comparison of Australian beer consumption and beer consumption in other cultures by engaging in cross-cultural research.

Perhaps the most important opportunity for future research lies in taking up the call for research that seeks to liberate consumers from the consumption imperative. Although the consumer has been depicted in these conclusions as the pawn in the chess game of consumption, this is not to say that such a state of play must persist. It may be possible to attain a degree of liberation for consumers through the provision of information concerning their own behaviours. According to Dichter (1964), the individual can experience a reduction in anxiety through the attainment of relevant knowledge. This suggests that a possible direction for consumer research aimed at improving the position of consumers is the provision of information that facilitates our understanding of human consumption motivations and the range of feelings that can result from the consumption process.

By conducting research in consumers' interests, it may be possible to alert them to other possible means of personal satisfaction and self-determination, thus reducing the emphasis on consumption for the achievement of these goals. Where the consumer has more real choices among courses of action to achieve self-fulfilment, the autonomy of the consumer is increased. Further research is required to explore these alternative opportunities, a task that has already been commenced by work such as Etzioni’s (1998) discussion of voluntary simplicity in consumption and Firat and Dholakia’s (1998) suggestion of lifestyle communities. These are but two possible avenues for the liberation of the consumer from total dependence on the marketplace, with much more research required to generate other potential forms of consumer liberation, or perhaps even rebellion.
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## Key Points of Differentiation Between the Consumer as King and Consumer as Pawn Perspectives

1. **Subject’s reality**  
   - Attainable  
   - Unattainable

2. **Self-concept**  
   - Chosen by individual  
   - Pre-determined by (sub)culture

3. **Self-concept formation via consumption**  
   - Optional and enjoyable  
   - Necessary and may be difficult and frustrating

4. **Stereotyping**  
   - Can be used to advantage  
   - Forces self-presentation consumption behaviours

5. **Culture**  
   - Optional guide  
   - Inescapable

6. **Advertising**  
   - Enjoyable and useful  
   - Frustrating and omnipresent

7. **Cultural meaning**  
   - Consumer has control over product meanings  
   - Consumer has little or no control over product meanings

8. **Products**  
   - Governed by individuals, range determined by consumers  
   - Govern individuals, range determined by producers and wealthy consumers

9. **Rationality**  
   - Consumption is functionally and/or symbolically rational  
   - Consumption is often irrational, especially at the macro level

10. **Consumer Latitude**  
    - Great  
    - Minimal
APPENDIX B

Illustration

Source: The West Australian, Friday March 5, 1999.

This cartoon illustrates the concern that consumers can have with consuming products in combinations that are understood to be socially appropriate.
APPENDIX C

Illustration

Source: The West Australian, Wednesday April 7, 1999.

This cartoon demonstrates the importance of body image. Cathy explains how a divergence between her body weight and the cultural ideal affects her quality of life.
This cartoon also demonstrates the importance of body image. Cathy feels compelled to attempt to improve her body image by exercising, but finds public exercising too embarrassing because of her perception that her current physical form is socially unacceptable.
APPENDIX E

Illustration


In this cartoon, the central character is exhibiting high levels of anxiety that are induced by the purchase process. Although Ray is described as being cool under pressure in his job as a fighter pilot, we see him become highly stressed while attempting to carry out his Christmas shopping.
APPENDIX F

Illustration


This cartoon depicts two businessmen who are aware that their social worth is at least partially assessed by others according to their consumption behaviours. In losing their gold Frequent Flyer card status, they have reduced their ability to communicate their desired images to others. One of the two characters is looking furtively over his shoulder, hoping that no-one can see them having to resort to the automated check-in procedure rather than enjoying the personalised service of the gold card counter. Their red faces clearly communicate their embarrassment at having to consume a low-status form of air travel.
APPENDIX G

Illustration


In this cartoon, Cathy’s guest is trying to impress his host by stating his position on a number of consumption issues. His final effort involves disclosing the brand of underwear he wears in the hope of making a good impression.
APPENDIX H

Illustration


This cartoon illustrates our dependence on individualistic, passive, and private products. Cathy uses her personal car and telephone to make a purchase, and then curls up in front of her personal VCR in her own apartment while her microwave oven heats a drink that she will consume on her own.
APPENDIX I

Illustration

Source: reproduced from a greeting card designed by ARTPOST, Box 661 NY.

This cartoon depicts a female searching for meaning in life through consumption. Past consumption has failed to bring happiness, but this outcome does not prevent her from engaging in continuing consumption in an ongoing search for self-actualisation.
In this cartoon, Cathy exemplifies the consumer who spends her life accumulating possessions that are under-utilised due to a lack of time and energy to enjoy them.
In this illustration, the first helicopter is delivering a barbecue while the second is carrying a crate of Carlton United Brewery’s beer. The caption reads “Aussie Survival Pack”, communicating the priority placed on these two consumption objects in Australian culture.
Hofstede’s Dimensions of Culture

The individualism dimension measures the inclination of a culture to favour consideration of the individual over that of the group (Hofstede 1984, Hofstede 1993). It is the tendency of individuals to primarily look after themselves and their immediate families (Franke et al. 1991). The inverse is the integration of people into cohesive groups, a tendency termed collectivism.

Power distance reflects how a society rates the need for hierarchical structures in all facets of life (Franke et al. 1991). It measures the inequality people feel between each other in their social, legal, political, and work environments. It is the degree of inequality considered normal, and while some level of inequality permeates all societies, some are more inequitable than others (Hofstede 1993).

The masculinity/femininity dimension describes the extent to which the male and female roles within the society are polarised (Franke et al. 1991, Hofstede and Bond 1988). In some cultures the roles of the sexes are much more similar, resulting in the society engendering a more caring attitude towards others. Emphasis is placed on values such as care for the weak, quality of life, and maintaining close personal relationships. In other cultures a much greater sex-role distinction exists (Hofstede 1993). Such cultures experience high scores for the masculinity dimension, indicating an assertive and competitive orientation.

Uncertainty avoidance refers to the level of discomfort experienced by members of a particular culture when faced with unstructured, unusual, or ambiguous situations (Franke et al. 1991). Countries with low uncertainty avoidance scores tend to be more entrepreneurial in nature, and are more tolerant of uncertain circumstances or outcomes. A high uncertainty avoidance rating indicates a rigid society with a strong deference to the law, tradition, and customs, and an aversion to risk taking. People in these societies prefer to have clear guidelines to indicate how they should behave in given situations (Hofstede 1984).
Confucian dynamism reflects the Confucian teachings that are ingrained in many Asian countries and cultures. There are two poles to this variable. The first ('higher') pole refers to a long-term perspective, thrift, and financial conservatism (Hofstede and Bond 1988). It also includes an acceptance of hierarchy, without excessive emphasis on tradition and social obligations. The opposite ('lower') end of this dimension focuses on the short-term, and is oriented towards the past and present. Tradition plays a much greater role, and emphasis is placed on the fulfilment of social obligations (Hofstede and Bond 1988).
APPENDIX M

Illustration


This advertisement illustrates the emphasis that is placed on taste and brewing style in Australian beer advertisements. There is no recognition of the symbolic importance of beer among drinkers.
APPENDIX N

Node Descriptions

**************************************************************
(1) /Demographics
*** Definition:
Demographic characteristics of respondents.
**************************************************************
(1 1) /Demographics/age
*** Definition:
Age of respondents
**************************************************************
(1 1 1) /Demographics/age/child
*** Definition:
Respondent is estimated to be younger than 13 years of age
**************************************************************
(1 1 2) /Demographics/age/teenager
*** Definition:
Respondent is estimated to be between 13 and 20 years of age
**************************************************************
(1 1 3) /Demographics/age/adult
*** Definition:
Respondent is estimated to be between 20 and 55 years of age
**************************************************************
(1 1 4) /Demographics/age/senior
*** Definition:
Respondent is estimated to be over 55 years of age
**************************************************************
(1 1 5) /Demographics/age/Unknown
*** Definition:
Approximate age of respondent unknown
**************************************************************
(1 2) /Demographics/Gender
*** Definition:
Gender of respondent
**************************************************************
(1 2 1) /Demographics/Gender/Male
*** Definition:
Male respondent
**************************************************************
(1 2 2) /Demographics/Gender/Female
*** Definition:
Female respondent
**************************************************************
(1 2 3) /Demographics/Gender/Unknown
*** Definition:
Sex of respondent is unknown
(1 2 4) /Demographics/Gender/Combination
*** Definition:
A group of male(s) and female(s) is being interviewed

(1 3) /Demographics/Class
*** Definition:
Estimated affluence and social class of respondent

(1 3 1) /Demographics/Class/Low
*** Definition:
Low socioeconomic respondent - estimated

(1 3 2) /Demographics/Class/Medium
*** Definition:
Medium socioeconomic respondent - estimated

(1 3 3) /Demographics/Class/High
*** Definition:
High socioeconomic respondent - estimated

(1 3 4) /Demographics/Class/Unknown
*** Definition:
Socioeconomic status of respondent unknown

(1 3 5) /Demographics/Class/Occupation
*** Definition:
Stated occupation of respondent

(1 3 5 1) /Demographics/Class/Occupation/Bartender
*** Definition:
Respondents is a bar tender/manager

(1 4) /Demographics/Nationality
*** Definition:
The self-acclaimed nationality of the respondent

(1 4 1) /Demographics/Nationality/Australian
*** Definition:
Australian respondent - self-described or estimated

(1 4 1 1) /Demographics/Nationality/Australian/Aboriginal
*** Definition:
Aboriginal respondent

(1 4 2) /Demographics/Nationality/Ethnic
*** Definition:
Ethnic respondent - self-described

(1 4 2 1) /Demographics/Nationality/Ethnic/English
*** Definition:
Comments made by English respondents
New Zealander respondent

Discussion with respondents from specific Australian states

Respondents interviewed in NSW

Respondents interviewed in WA

Respondents interviewed in Perth

Respondents interviewed in Kalgoorlie

Respondents interviewed in Victoria

Interviews taking place in a pub environment

Interviews conducted in schools

Interviews in retirement villages

Interviews taking place in sporting grounds

Interviews conducted in people's homes
(2) /Alcohol
*** Definition:
Types of alcohol other than beer

(2 1) /Alcohol/Beer
*** Definition:
Comments generally about beer

(2 1 1) /Alcohol/Beer/Demographics
*** Definition:
Comments about the demographic characteristics of those who consume beer

(2 1 1 1) /Alcohol/Beer/Demographics/Class
*** Definition:
Discussions about what type of beer consumption behaviour is appropriate for what classes of consumers

(2 1 1 1 1) /Alcohol/Beer/Demographics/Class/High
*** Definition:
Discussions of beer consumption activities undertaken by consumers from higher classes

(2 1 1 1 2) /Alcohol/Beer/Demographics/Class/Middle
*** Definition:
Discussions of beer consumption undertaken by middle class consumers

(2 1 1 1 3) /Alcohol/Beer/Demographics/Class/Low
*** Definition:
Discussions of beer consumption activities undertaken by lower class consumers

(2 1 1 2) /Alcohol/Beer/Demographics/Nationality
*** Definition:
Discussions about how or why certain nationalities drink beer

(2 1 1 2 1) /Alcohol/Beer/Demographics/Nationality/English
*** Definition:
Discussions about British consumption of beer

(2 1 1 3) /Alcohol/Beer/Demographics/Age
*** Definition:
Discussions about what type of beer drinking is appropriate for what age groups

(2 1 1 3 1) /Alcohol/Beer/Demographics/Age/Teenage
*** Definition:
Discussions about teenagers drinking beer

(2 1 1 3 2) /Alcohol/Beer/Demographics/Age/Adult
*** Definition:
Discussions about adults drinking beer
(2 1 1 3 3) /Alcohol/Beer/Demographics/Age/Children
*** Definition:
Discussions about children drinking beer

(2 1 1 3 4) /Alcohol/Beer/Demographics/Age/Seniors
*** Definition:
Discussions about seniors drinking beer

(2 1 1 4) /Alcohol/Beer/Demographics/Gender
*** Definition:
Discussions about what type of beer drinking behaviour is appropriate for males and females

(2 1 1 4 1) /Alcohol/Beer/Demographics/Gender/males
*** Definition:
Discussions about what sort of beer consumption activities are undertaken by males.

(2 1 1 4 2) /Alcohol/Beer/Demographics/Gender/females
*** Definition:
Discussions about beer consumption undertaken by females.

(2 1 2) /Alcohol/Beer/brands
*** Definition:
Descriptions of beer brands and the types of people who consume them

(2 1 2 1) /Alcohol/Beer/brands/Brand names
*** Definition:
Specific brands of beer

(2 1 2 1 1) /Alcohol/Beer/brands/Brand names/Australian
*** Definition:
Discussions about Australian beers

(2 1 2 1 1 1) /Alcohol/Beer/brands/Brand names/Australian/Tooheys
*** Definition:
Discussions about the Tooheys company or Tooheys beers

(2 1 2 1 1 1 1) /Alcohol/Beer/brands/Brand names/Australian/Tooheys/Hahn Ice
*** Definition:
Discussions about Hahn Ice, an imported Tooheys beer

(2 1 2 1 1 1 2) /Alcohol/Beer/brands/Brand names/Australian/Tooheys/Old
*** Definition:
Discussions about Tooheys Old

(2 1 2 1 1 1 3) /Alcohol/Beer/brands/Brand names/Australian/Tooheys/Red
*** Definition:
Discussions about Tooheys Red
Discussions about Tooheys Blue - low alcohol

Discussions about Tooheys Dry

Discussions about Tooheys Draught

Discussions about Tooheys New

Discussions about Tooheys Gold

Discussions about Tooheys Light

Discussions about CUB or CUB beers

Discussions about Carlton Cold

Discussions about Emu beers

Discussions about Emu Export

Discussions about Emu Bitter

Discussions about Matilda Bay

Discussion about Swan Brewery or Swan Beers
(2121151)  /Alcohol/Beer/brands/Brand names/Australian/Swan/Gold
*** Definition:
Discussions about Swan Gold

(2121152)  /Alcohol/Beer/brands/Brand names/Australian/Swan/Draught
*** Definition:
Discussions about Swan Draught

(212116)  /Alcohol/Beer/brands/Brand names/Australian/VB
*** Definition:
Discussions about VB

(212117)  /Alcohol/Beer/brands/Brand names/Australian/Fosters
*** Definition:
Discussions about Fosters

(212118)  /Alcohol/Beer/brands/Brand names/Australian/Redback
*** Definition:
Discussions about Redback

(212119)  /Alcohol/Beer/brands/Brand names/Australian/Cascade
*** Definition:
Discussions about Cascade

(21212)  /Alcohol/Beer/brands/Brand names/Imported
*** Definition:
Discussions about imported beers

(212121)  /Alcohol/Beer/brands/Brand names/Imported/Corona
*** Definition:
Discussions about Corona

(212122)  /Alcohol/Beer/brands/Brand names/Imported/Guinness
*** Definition:
Discussions about Guinness

(212123)  /Alcohol/Beer/brands/Brand names/Imported/Heinekin
*** Definition:
Discussions about Heinekin

(212124)  /Alcohol/Beer/brands/Brand names/Imported/Kronenberg
*** Definition:
Discussions about Kronenberg

(212125)  /Alcohol/Beer/brands/Brand names/Imported/Carlsberg
*** Definition:
Discussions about Carlsberg
(2 1 2 1 2 6) /Alcohol/Beer/brands/Brand names/Imported/Budweiser
*** Definition:
Discussions about Budweiser

(2 1 2 1 3) /Alcohol/Beer/brands/Brand names/Unknown
*** Definition:
Derivation of beer unknown at time of node construction

(2 1 2 1 3 1) /Alcohol/Beer/brands/Brand names/Unknown/Coopers
*** Definition:
Discussions about Coopers

(2 1 2 1 3 1 1) /Alcohol/Beer/brands/Brand names/Unknown/Coopers/Pale Ale
*** Definition:
Discussions about Cooper's Pale Ale

(2 1 2 1 3 3) /Alcohol/Beer/brands/Brand names/Unknown/XXXX
*** Definition:
Discussions about XXXX

(2 1 2 1 3 4) /Alcohol/Beer/brands/Brand names/Unknown/KB
*** Definition:
Discussions about KB

(2 1 2 1 3 5) /Alcohol/Beer/brands/Brand names/Unknown/Crown
*** Definition:
Discussions about Crown (CUB)

(2 1 2 1 3 6) /Alcohol/Beer/brands/Brand names/Unknown/Regis
*** Definition:
Discussions about Regis

(2 1 2 1 3 7) /Alcohol/Beer/brands/Brand names/Unknown/Resches
*** Definition:
Discussions about Resches

(2 1 2 1 3 8) /Alcohol/Beer/brands/Brand names/Unknown/Pilsener
*** Definition:
Discussions about Pilsener

(2 1 2 1 3 9) /Alcohol/Beer/brands/Brand names/Unknown/Millers
*** Definition:
Discussions about Millers

(2 1 2 1 3 1 0) /Alcohol/Beer/brands/Brand names/Unknown/Diamond
*** Definition:
Discussions about Diamond - CUB

(2 1 2 1 3 1 1) /Alcohol/Beer/brands/Brand names/Unknown/Tooths Old
*** Definition:
Discussions about Tooths Old
(21214) /Alcohol/Beer/brands/Brand names/Packaging
*** Definition:
Discussions about the packing of beer

(2122) /Alcohol/Beer/brands/Choice
*** Definition:
Reasons given by respondents for their choice of beer brand

(21221) /Alcohol/Beer/brands/Choice/Switching
*** Definition:
Switching behaviour between brands

(2123) /Alcohol/Beer/brands/Alcohol level
*** Definition:
Discussions about the alcohol content of certain beers

(21231) /Alcohol/Beer/brands/Alcohol level/Low alcohol
*** Definition:
Discussions about low alcohol beers

(212311) /Alcohol/Beer/brands/Alcohol level/Low alcohol/Driving
*** Definition:
Discussions about driving and drinking beer, and how it relates to selection of alcohol volume within beer brands

(21232) /Alcohol/Beer/brands/Alcohol level/Full strength
*** Definition:
Discussions of full strength beers

(21233) /Alcohol/Beer/brands/Alcohol level/Medium strength
*** Definition:
Discussions of medium strength beers

(2124) /Alcohol/Beer/brands/Attributions
*** Definition:
Assessments by respondents as to what sort of people drink what sort of beer

(2125) /Alcohol/Beer/brands/Advertising
*** Definition:
Comments about beer ads and how advertising affects choice of brand

(21251) /Alcohol/Beer/brands/Advertising/WOM
*** Definition:
Discussions about WOM communications concerning beer

(213) /Alcohol/Beer/volume
*** Definition:
Discussions of the volume of beer consumed by individuals and groups
(2 1 3 1) /Alcohol/Beer/volume/Drunk
*** Definition:
Discussions about the excess consumption of beer - value judgements are expressed. Discussions about people who are drunk.

(2 1 3 2) /Alcohol/Beer/volume/Heavy drinkers
*** Definition:
Comments about large intakes of beer

(2 1 3 3) /Alcohol/Beer/volume/Light drinkers
*** Definition:
Comments about a moderate to light consumption of beer

(2 1 4) /Alcohol/Beer/Taste
*** Definition:
Discussions about the taste of beer, and how taste factors into the decision-making process.

(2 1 4 1) /Alcohol/Beer/Taste/Pleasant
*** Definition:
Comments about the pleasant aspects of the taste of beer

(2 1 4 2) /Alcohol/Beer/Taste/Unpleasant
*** Definition:
Comments about the unpleasant aspects of the taste of beer.

(2 1 6) /Alcohol/Beer/Pubs
*** Definition:
Discussion of the consumption of beer in pubs

(2 1 7) /Alcohol/Beer/Addiction
*** Definition:
Discussions about or by those addicted to beer

(2 1 7 1) /Alcohol/Beer/Addiction/Beer Guts
*** Definition:
Comments about beer guts or beer bellies

(2 1 8) /Alcohol/Beer/Cn_patterns
*** Definition:
Discussions about consumption patterns associated with beer consumption.

(2 1 8 1) /Alcohol/Beer/Cn_patterns/Rituals
*** Definition:
Discussions about rituals associated with beer consumption

(2 1 8 2) /Alcohol/Beer/Cn_patterns/Where
*** Definition:
Discussions about where beer is consumed
(2 18 3) /Alcohol/Beer/Cn_patterns/When
*** Definition:
Comments about when beer is consumed.

(2 18 4) /Alcohol/Beer/Cn_patterns/Sculling
*** Definition:
Comments about sculling practices

(2 18 5) /Alcohol/Beer/Cn_patterns/Shouting
*** Definition:
Comments about shouting practices

(2 19) /Alcohol/Beer/Cost
*** Definition:
Comments about the price of beer

(2 110) /Alcohol/Beer/Role
*** Definition:
Role of beer and the consumption of beer in our society

(2 111) /Alcohol/Beer/Image
*** Definition:
Image of beer to consumers, and how this image is interpreted.

(2 2) /Alcohol/Wine
*** Definition:
Discussions of the consumption of wine

(2 3) /Alcohol/Spirits
*** Definition:
Discussions of the consumption of spirits

(2 4) /Alcohol/Addiction
*** Definition:
Discussions about addiction to alcohol in general

(2 5) /Alcohol/Driving
*** Definition:
Discussions about drink driving

(2 6) /Alcohol/Choice
*** Definition:
Discussions about choices between different types of alcohol and other beverages.

(2 6 1) /Alcohol/Choice/Beer
*** Definition:
Reasons for choosing beer over other beverages

(2 6 2) /Alcohol/Choice/Wine
*** Definition:
Reasons for choosing wine over other beverages
(2 6 3) /Alcohol/Choice/Spirits
*** Definition:
Reasons for choosing spirits over other beverages

(2 6 4) /Alcohol/Choice/Soft drinks
*** Definition:
Reasons given for choosing soft drinks over other beverages, usually in an alcohol consuming context.

(2 6 5) /Alcohol/Choice/Peer pressure
*** Definition:
Discussions about peer pressure to consume alcohol in general, beer, and specific brands of beer.

(2 7) /Alcohol/Role
*** Definition:
Role of alcohol and the consumption of alcohol in our society

(2 8) /Alcohol/Health
*** Definition:
How alcohol is related to health (positive and negative connotations).

(2 9) /Alcohol/Work
*** Definition:
Discussions of work and how it relates to alcohol consumption.

(3) /Products
*** Definition:
Discussions of all products other than alcohol

(3 1) /Products/Cars
*** Definition:
Discussions of car types and brands

(3 2) /Products/Food
*** Definition:
Discussions of food types and brands

(3 3) /Products/Softdrinks
*** Definition:
Discussions of brands of soft drinks

(3 4) /Products/Clothes
*** Definition:
Discussions of brands of clothes

(3 5) /Products/Australian
*** Definition:
Products that are strongly associated with being Australian
(3 6) /Products/Symbols
*** Definition:
How product symbolism is created and interpreted

(3 7) /Products/Attributions
*** Definition:
Assumptions that are made about others based on their consumption of goods and services

(3 8) /Products/Possessions
*** Definition:
Discussions about possessions

(3 9) /Products/Advertising
*** Definition:
Discussions about advertising and how it affects individuals and society.

(4) /Culture
*** Definition:
Discussions of Australian culture

(4 1) /Culture/Comparisons
*** Definition:
Comparisons between Australia and other cultures

(4 1 1) /Culture/Comparisons/America
*** Definition:
Specific comparisons of Australia and America. Includes comments about the Americanisation of Australia.

(4 2) /Culture/Leisure
*** Definition:
Discussions of what Australians do in their leisure time

(4 2 1) /Culture/Leisure/BBQs
*** Definition:
Discussions about BBQs

(4 2 2) /Culture/Leisure/TV
*** Definition:
Discussions about how TV is used in Australian culture and favourite TV shows.

(4 2 3) /Culture/Leisure/Holidays
*** Definition:
Discussions of what Australians do in their holidays.

(4 2 4) /Culture/Leisure/Sport
*** Definition:
Discussions of Australians participating in and observing sport
(4 2 4 1) /Culture/Leisure/Sport/Females
*** Definition:
Discussions about women's sports.

(4 2 4 2) /Culture/Leisure/Sport/Males
*** Definition:
Discussions about men's sports

(4 2 5) /Culture/Leisure/Gambling
*** Definition:
Discussions about gambling.

(4 2 6) /Culture/Leisure/Drugs
*** Definition:
Discussions about the use of drugs.

(4 2 7) /Culture/Leisure/Smoking
*** Definition:
Discussions about smoking.

(4 2 7 1) /Culture/Leisure/Smoking/+Drink
*** Definition:
Discussions about how smoking and drinking go together.

(4 3) /Culture/People
*** Definition:
Descriptions of Australians, and discussions of their attributes and feelings.

(4 3 1) /Culture/People/Stereotypes
*** Definition:
Discussions about stereotypical Australians.

(4 3 1 1) /Culture/People/Stereotypes/men
*** Definition:
Discussions about stereotypes of Australian men

(4 3 1 2) /Culture/People/Stereotypes/women
*** Definition:
Discussions about stereotypes of Australian women.

(4 3 1 3) /Culture/People/Stereotypes/Elle McPherson
*** Definition:
Responses to the Elle McPherson example.

(4 3 2) /Culture/People/Demographics
*** Definition:
demographic characteristics of Australians.

(4 3 2 1) /Culture/People/Demographics/Gender
*** Definition:
Discussions about how the issue of gender is dealt with by Australians.
(4 3 3) /Culture/People/Types
*** Definition:
Classifications of Australians.

(4 3 3 1) /Culture/People/Types/Bush
*** Definition:
Discussions about Australians who live in the bush, other than farmers.

(4 3 3 2) /Culture/People/Types/Aboriginals
*** Definition:
Discussions about aboriginals.

(4 3 3 3) /Culture/People/Types/Farmers
*** Definition:
Discussions about farmers.

(4 3 3 4) /Culture/People/Types/Migrants
*** Definition:
Discussions about migrants.

(4 3 4) /Culture/People/Values
*** Definition:
Australian values as explicitly stated or derived from conversations.

(4 3 5) /Culture/People/Self-image
*** Definition:
Respondents comments about themselves or Australians in general.

(4 3 5 1) /Culture/People/Self-image/Lazy
*** Definition:
Discussions of Australians being lazy

(4 3 5 2) /Culture/People/Self-image/Accent
*** Definition:
Comments about the Australian accent and language, especially slang.

(4 3 6) /Culture/People/Families
*** Definition:
Comments about families and family members.

(4 3 6 1) /Culture/People/Families/Mother
*** Definition:
Comments about the role of the mother in the family.

(4 3 6 2) /Culture/People/Families/Father
*** Definition:
Comments about the role of the father in the family.

(4 3 6 3) /Culture/People/Families/Children
*** Definition:
Comments about the role of children in the family.
(4 3 6 4) /Culture/People/Families/Grand parents
*** Definition:
Comments about the role of grandparents in Australian families.

(4 3 6 5) /Culture/People/Families/Aunts-uncles
*** Definition:
Comments about the roles of aunts and uncles.

(4 3 6 6) /Culture/People/Families/Interaction
*** Definition:
Dynamics between family members.

(4 3 6 6 1) /Culture/People/Families/Interaction/Work eg
*** Definition:
Example given as to whether the respondent would rather be the working partner in a family, or the house-bound partner.

(4 3 7) /Culture/People/Lifestyle
*** Definition:
Discussions about the Australian lifestyle.

(4 4) /Culture/Food
*** Definition:
Discussions about Australian diets and food.

(4 4 1) /Culture/Food/Beverages
*** Definition:
Discussions about beverages consumed by Australians.

(4 5) /Culture/Australia
*** Definition:
Comments about Australia as a place.

(4 5 1) /Culture/Australia/Positive
*** Definition:
Positive comments made about Australia.

(4 5 2) /Culture/Australia/Negative
*** Definition:
Negative comments made about Australia.

(4 5 3) /Culture/Australia/Bush
*** Definition:
Discussions about the Australian bush.

(4 5 4) /Culture/Australia/Govt
*** Definition:
Discussions about the Australian Government.
(4 6) /Culture/Religion
*** Definition:
Discussions about religion, and how it fits into the Australian way of life.

(4 7) /Culture/Class
*** Definition:
Discussions about class structures in Australia.
APPENDIX O

Beer Drinking Females – Stereotypes and Changing Roles

Stereotypes

Australians of all ages and backgrounds are accustomed to attributing certain characteristics to drinkers according to the beverages they consume. They adjust these attributions according to the gender of the drinker. This is largely a subconscious and unacknowledged process, with few giving thought to the reasons behind the attributions they have been taught to perform. The following quotes illustrate the attributions that are commonly allocated to BDFs. In the main, stereotypes of BDFs are consistent among age groups and locations, indicating that these stereotypes are well-formed and widely disseminated:

Researcher: What sort of girls drink beer?
Male: Tough girls (M, A, NSW, D).

Researcher: What do you think about women drinking beer?
Male 1: You look for the tats (tattoos).
Male 2: I must say, yes I do react (Ms, A, NSW, D).

The BDF is assumed to be less feminine, possessing instead masculine behavioural and physical characteristics. This is not surprising given the strong association between beer and males. The stereotyped masculine characteristics of beer accrue to those females who choose to consume this product.

Beer is recognised as the working class beverage, although males of all classes can consume beer, albeit in different quantities and contexts. The working class association is exaggerated in the case of BDFs. A BDF unknown to the observer is usually categorised as belonging to a lower socio-economic classification than a female drinking more acceptable alcoholic beverages:

You would be tempted to think a girl drinking wine is a slightly higher class than one drinking beer (M, Ad, NSW, D).

Researcher: If you came in and saw a woman drinking beer versus a woman drinking wine, would you assume different things about them, or not?
Male: I would probably assume there is a different social background (M, A, VIC, D).
The girl who drinks the beer would drive the panel van (F, Ad, WA, ND).

The last quote provides evidence of product constellations that indicate gender and social class. In this instance, the informant has mentally associated a female who drinks beer with the type of person who would own a panel van. The ownership of such a vehicle brings forth connotations of tradesmen and blue-collar workers. The BDF is thus automatically categorised in a less socially favourable light compared to females who conform to societal consumption expectations. Of course, the attributions assigned to the BDF are only unfavourable and socially costly in the event that associations with members of the lower classes are perceived to be negative. There appeared to be no doubt in the minds of most informants, however, that such associations are best avoided. However, the increasing consumption of beer among females suggests that some favourable attributions must accrue to the BDF. According to BDFs interviewed, these positive outcomes can include a greater perceived equality with males and the ability to stimulate reactions from those observing their beer consumption. A female considering choosing beer must weigh up the social costs with the perceived benefits to be obtained.

The male teenage informants quoted below had been commenting that they tend to assume that a BDF comes from a lower social class, but they go on to explain that such attributions do not automatically accrue to a male drinker:

_Researcher:_ But if you drink beer, is she going to assume that you are lower class because you drink beer?

_Male:_ No, it works the other way. You expect guys to drink beer (M, Ad, NSW, D).

The attributions that are deemed favourable for males are thus altered to become unfavourable when applied to females. The observation of a male drinking beer does not typically result in an immediate analysis of social class membership. Other variables such as clothing and posture would be combined with alcohol consumption to indicate class. For females, the consumption of beer is such a strong signifier that other variables are not as important in the “reading” of social status.

As well as being masculine and lower class, the BDF is also perceived to have psychological differences from the average female. She is considered unpleasant to be around, and can be assumed incapable of maintaining the façade of happiness that society requires. Outsiders may conclude that she has deep-rooted social problems that are made apparent by her consumption choices:
Women who drink beer are more obnoxious. Women who drink beer are more loud. That is my gut reaction (M, A, WA(country), D).

The question pops up in your head, “Why is this chick drinking beer? Has she got some kind of social problem, she is trying to drown her sorrows quick smart, or what?” It is not a good image, I suppose, as far as women are concerned. I know it is stereotypical, but that is just the way you are brought up to look at it. You get this beer image which just isn’t female (M, A, NSW, D).

In addition, the BDF is perceived to have a physical appearance that fails to conform to societal standards of beauty. There is something inherently unattractive about female beer consumption, or so common understanding dictates:

**Researcher:** Are the women who drink beer different from women who don’t drink beer?
**Female 1:** Some are.
**Male 1:** Yes.
**Researcher:** In what way?
**Male 1:** Daggier.
**Female 2:** Fatter (Ms&Fs, Ad, WA, ND).

**Researcher:** Are there any differences between women who drink beer and women who don’t?
**Male:** I think so, yes. They are usually a little bit fatter, a bit more butch, and they don’t carry themselves very well. Beer sort of makes them a bit untidier quicker (M, A, NSW, D).

The perception of the BDF is that she lacks self-control. Although many other alcoholic beverages consumed by females have higher alcohol contents than beer, there is a perception that females who drink beer are more likely to lose control, or become “messy”. At this point it is important to note that this discussion is centred around informants’ impressions of BDFs. Those BDFs observed drinking beer in pub environments were not notably different from other female pub patrons. The perceptions of BDFs described by informants are interpretations based more upon social expectations of product usage than unbiased observations.

**The Changing Nature and Role of the BDF**

The accepted masculinity of beer symbolism offers the opportunity to study the forces of social change currently operating in Australia through the analysis of female beer consumption. The transition in the social roles of males and females in Australian culture can be witnessed in beer drinking patterns, and female beer consumption represents the cutting edge of the changing role of beer as a widely used social tool.
In line with social changes, beer consumption patterns are changing towards more female consumption, although the majority of females continue to avoid beer. As noted earlier, Australian pubs are experiencing a distinct change in clientele. The daytime male retirees are a constant presence in the suburban pub, but the after-hours and weekend crowds have changed to include more females. Some females are thus choosing to accept the social risks of beer consumption in order to take advantage of the symbolic meaning on offer:

I think a lot of women will drink beer to make a statement (Brewery representative).

I go out and I sit down, and it is like “what do you want?” and it is like a beer, and everyone else is having wine or something like that, and you are sort of one of the boys. That is it, you know what I mean? (F, A, WA, D).

While acknowledging that beer is a male drink, this second informant enjoys aligning herself with her male friends, almost “against” her female friends. Beer can thus be used by BDFs as a form of rebellion. It provides shock value, possibly giving them the upper hand over non-BDFs and conservative males who struggle with the concept of a female choosing to drink beer in a social environment where she has the choice to do otherwise.

Australians are in the process of overcoming the conflict between their conditioned responses and the new “reality” in which they live and consume. Previous chapters have noted how such periods of change cause confusion and discomfort to consumers, as consumption decisions are made more difficult by a rapidly changing cultural environment. The symbolic content of products such as beer is very high, necessitating close alignment between consumption choices and image management objectives. A changing environment results in a more complex image management process. The environmental monitoring function becomes inherently more difficult, as consumers are required to stay abreast of new social meanings and their manifestations in consumer goods. The employment of the meaning stored in products becomes more hazardous, as there is less certainty of others “reading” the same meaning in a time of change. For example, females want to drink beer to express their equality, and to enhance their efforts to “fit in” with the males with whom they now work and socialise. To do so risks achieving the opposite result - to be considered alien by their own sex and pathetic by the opposite sex. Female consumers are therefore in a difficult position,
although male consumers share this confusion and awkwardness to some extent. The security of old meanings is being weakened, leaving both males and females more uncertain in their attribution efforts:

_Researcher:_ What sort of women drink beer?
_Male:_ I don’t know.
_Researcher:_ No gut feel on that one?
_Male:_ No gut feel on that one. That is a dangerous political topic (M, A, NSW, D).

Throughout the interviews, it became apparent that as roles change, drinkers battle with the formation of new attribution codes, often resulting in confusion and discomfort. In the following extract, the informant is attempting to explain his attitudes towards BDFs. His body language indicated that he was uncomfortable in his attempts to provide an explanation that he thought would sound reasonable to both himself and the researcher:

_Researcher:_ Are women who drink beer exactly the same as women who don’t drink beer?
_Male:_ Yes.
_Researcher:_ You can tell me what you really think, it’s alright.
_Male:_ It is better if they don’t.
_Researcher:_ Why would that be?
_Male:_ Then they can drive us to the airport (laughing uncomfortably).
_Researcher:_ Any other reason why?
_Male:_ Doesn’t cost us very much (M, A, WA, D).

In this extract the informant seems to search for responses that sound rational, and that can explain away an attitude that is based on attributions that he fears will sound irrational. He comes up with answers that he delivers with a laugh, trying to conceal his discomfort with the topic under discussion. This scenario occurred over and over again. Informants struggled to rationalise their feelings that have been conditioned over the course of their lives, feelings that somehow do not completely tally with the rapidly changing world around them.

It became readily apparent that the process of cultural change leaves some consumers behaving in ways that do not correspond with their held beliefs:

My mum does drink beer at home, but she wouldn’t do it in public. My mum says women aren’t supposed to drink beer. I don’t think that personally, but I just think because my mum always says if you drink in a pub then all the people will look down on you (F, Ad, NSW, ND).
This teenage informant is in a "do as I say, not as I do" quandary. Her mother exhibits one pattern of behaviour, at the same time warning her daughter from doing the same for fear of derisory responses from peers. For the mother there is an ongoing battle between the social "knowledge" that females shouldn't drink beer, and the fact that she herself likes to consume the beverage on occasion. Both public and private consumption behaviours thus have relevance to an interpretation of the role of beer consumption in Australian culture. The fact that beer consumption can be hidden and cautioned among female drinkers says much of its role in Australian culture. The effects of consumer socialisation are apparent, with females perpetuating the gender roles assigned to them in the ways they socialise their children. They do so in the belief that they are protecting their daughters from potential social dangers. The message is that drinkers need to be careful in their consumption choices, as poor decisions may have implications that are considered socially unpleasant.

Although many older males still fondly remember the "good old days" when females were excluded from the public bar, younger males find the presence of females to be a major motive for attending pubs. The perspective of the older Australian male is represented below:

I remember the days when women were definitely not allowed in the bar. We went there to get drunk, talk dirty talk, swear, and watch the dirty movies. Or movies, rather. No dirty movies in those days. We certainly didn't want women around. I would much prefer to go to a public bar, where the females tend not to be. We talk differently among ourselves, the same as females talk differently among themselves (M, S, NSW, D).

Here females are described as unwelcome interruptions to the important tasks of beer consumption and male bonding. It is interesting to note the retracted reference to dirty movies. This informant has the impression that what went on in the saloon bar was somehow too rough and dirty to be appropriate for female eyes and ears. Part of this imagery is the tough, masculine symbolism of beer. In his efforts to convey his feelings, he initially exaggerated the sordid nature of this area of the pub. This reflects his attitude towards what he perceives as the natural demarcation between the consumption patterns of males and females.

The informant above expressed a dislike for the presence of females on the grounds that males talk and behave differently when in mixed company. To the
informant below, these behavioural changes are specifically described as negative and destructive:

If there is any trouble in a hotel you can bet someone has brought a woman in. Someone has played up to her and someone has got jealous, bit of an argument, and it is on. Men don’t argue with themselves. Men don’t argue with another man about that sort of thing (M, S, NSW, D).

Females are thus perceived by older drinkers to be extraneous to the drinking process. Where they intrude into the pub they bring negative consequences in the form of conflict among drinkers, conflict that constitutes a disruption to the process of beer consumption. This task is best performed in an all-male environment where the critical function of male-to-male bonding can be most effectively achieved. For these drinkers, it is necessary to maintain a masculine association with beer consumption in order to perpetuate the exclusion of females from the male domain of the pub. The advent of the BDF poses significant threats to this established method of male bonding and interaction. The trend towards increasing equality in social contexts, such as pubs, has meant that males are finding that they must find other forums in which to connect exclusively with their male peers (a difficult task, as the purely male venue is fast disappearing), or they must include females in these activities.

But the change towards female consumption is decidedly in its early stages. Although some females are drinking beer, they often follow male guidance as to which brands are most appropriate for them to consume. This often involves mimicking the consumption decisions of males, as opposed to making independent choices:

**Researcher:** Where do females get their idea of which brand they should try?

**Female:** My male friends normally like tell me, “Oh, try this” (F, A, NSW, D).

**Male:** Women are more on the side of depending on what their boyfriend drinks.

**Researcher:** So they will drink what their partner drinks?

**Male:** Virtually I reckon they would, yes. I don’t know many women that would drink a different type of beer than what their menfolk do (M, A, NSW(country), D).

**Researcher:** If women are going to drink beer, what sort do they drink?

**Male:** Basically, whatever the bloke they are drinking with (M, A, WA(country), D)

Therefore, even though females are drinking beer in greater numbers, the males are often the opinion leaders in their consumption decisions. Part of the reason is that there
are few female opinion leaders to follow, especially in the form of role models in advertisements. The imitation of male consumption choices would also contribute to an explanation of the tendency of BDFs to drink high alcohol varieties. Males typically drink full-strength beers, hence the BDFs following their lead are doing the same.

Australian brewers have been lethargic in meeting the beer consumption needs of female consumers to date. While products such as alcoholic sodas have been launched in recognition of a demand for alcoholic beverages that are appropriate for female consumption in environments such as pubs, the relatively small volumes of beer traditionally consumed by females have resulted in a lack of focus on female consumption patterns in the market research conducted by the breweries:

Very little research is conducted of women (Brewery representative).

We haven’t done a lot of analysis into the female/male split (Brewery representative).

Both of the major breweries represented by the above quotes indicated in interviews that they are aware of an escalating need to study female consumption behaviour. Females’ motivations and attitudes to beer consumption are poorly understood, leaving a knowledge gap concerning a growing proportion of the breweries’ target market. This situation is slowly being redressed as the need to grow sales volumes through the targeting of female consumers is becoming increasingly recognised. However, they are commencing from a very low knowledge base.

Although females are entering the alcohol consumption domains of males, they still hold somewhat different roles within these domains. Theirs is a more short-term participation, a phase that they are aware must be curtailed at some point in the not-too-distant future:

Researcher: Do the guys want girls who can keep up with them, drinking-wise?
Female: Maybe not exactly keep up with them, but they want someone who will like probably get pretty drunk with them, like they don’t want someone sitting there really straight while they are rolling on the floor like.
Researcher: How about older guys who are married with families and stuff? Do they want a wife who can drink as much as them, or not?
Female: Probably not.
Male: No.
Female: Girls can be stupid when they are young, but once they grow up they have to be responsible.
Researcher: What about guys?
Female: They can be stupid all the time (M&F, A, NSW, D).

Females are increasingly able to join males in their beer consumption activities in their younger years, but they are still expected to conform to wife and mother roles in due course. These roles do not include beer consumption, or at least not in the pub environment. The in-roads into the male bastion of the pub are thus limited, being currently confined to younger age categories. Females have yet to earn full entry rights into the world of beer consumption in Australian culture.