Meaning and Value in the Context of Scandinavian Interior Design

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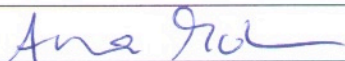HANDELSHØJSKOLEN

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Abstract

This Master's thesis investigates the meaning and value types that female consumers from Denmark and Germany attach to their home and their furniture as well as smaller home objects. The study is embedded in the context of the currently flourishing Scandinavian interior design, and has the purpose to research the associated and valued characteristics from the consumers' perspective. For those reasons, the theoretical framework is composed of literature from Consumer Behavior, Sociology, Psychology and Design, and highlights the inseparability of the phenomena meaning and value, as well as the influencing role of the furniture design elements. As furniture consumption is hedonic and decision-criteria influenced by culture, this study aims at exploring differences and similarities between Germans and Danes in relation to lifestyle and the cultural context.

In order to gain consumer insights for this study, the data was collected with the qualitative focus group method. For the purpose of comparison, two focus group interviews, each homogeneous in their nationality, were conducted. The coded and interpreted data revealed that the women primarily assign symbolic meanings to their home and furnishing, such as representing social ties to family and friends, reflecting the personality and taste of the inhabitant and being a sign of memories. The main values that the subjects derive primarily from the intrinsic attributes of their furniture are experiential, self-oriented and encompass among others the appreciation of aesthetics, quality and acknowledgement from others. Finally, the study shows that the Danish culture influences Danish women to assign high importance to their home and furniture and that they value Scandinavian furniture designs more than German women, as those designs can be claimed part of their national identity.

The results complement existing theories and provide valuable information for future and present furniture and interior designers and companies in general and in particular for Scandinavians. The findings suggest that design practitioners should take the meanings and values as a starting point for product design and that an aesthetic look and feel is the crucial element for value prediction. Finally, it is recommended that Scandinavian designers should, next to their traditional functionality design approach, account for comfort and price. Lastly, this thesis presents possibilities for further research such as expanding the geographic scope or adopting a business perspective on value creation.

Acknowledgements

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Copenhagen, 17th May 2016   Anna-Christin Mohn

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List of Abbreviations

&	et (and)
App.	Appendix
approx.	approximately
ca.	circa
e.g.	example gratia (example given)
et al.	et alii / alie (and others)
etc.	et cetera (and so on; and more)
FG1	Focus Group with German women
FG2	Focus Group with Danish women
Fig.	Figure
i.e.	id est (this means; that is)
ibid.	ibidem (in the same place)
n.d.	no date
WTP	Willingness to pay
WWII	World War II
vs.	versus (against)

1. Introduction

Individuals have always decorated their home, but today there can be observed an increased interest in furniture consumption and interior design, and likewise a growing importance of the home (Postrel, 2003; Dezeen, 2014). Furnishing the home with functional, but at the same time aesthetic and durable furniture or decorating it in an individual and creative way, has for many consumers become an inherent part of expressing their style and personality (Csikszentmihalyi & Rochberg-Halton, 1981; Otto, 2015). Moreover, *"homes are as much about memories and aspirations as they are about walls and shades of paint"* (Friedman, 2015). Some experts even claim that especially among urban consumers between 20 and 40 years, design furniture has substituted the old status symbol to possess a representative car (Otto, 2015). People design their domestic environment – their home – and thereby create personal meaning, which they invest in the furniture and home objects, but also the meaning they derive from arranging these in a meaningful way that matches their needs and self (Csikszentmihalyi & Rochberg-Halton, 1982; Heskett, 2002; Belk, 1988). When assembling home objects, consumers interact with these by using them or merely looking at them, which results in value creation. Thus, consumers attach meanings to their furniture and derive various values from them (Richins, 1994). Concluding, furnishing and decorating the home is a fairly emotional issue (Kristensen & Grønhaug, 2006).

This trend is for instance manifested in the large amount of home decoration magazines, coffee table books, blogs, social media or interior stores, which on the one hand serve as inspiration, and on the other hand foster the urge to invest effort in creating a beautiful home, which is appealing to both the inhabitant and others (Fallan, 2012; Otto, 2015). Currently, the Scandinavian interior and furniture design style, especially Danish design brands, are more popular than ever – also among consumers outside the Nordics (e.g. in Germany, USA, Asia) (Wulff Mortensen, 2016). Established during the 1950-1960's, Scandinavian design is again experiencing flourishing times, including both the revival of iconic designs such as the chairs from Arne Jacobsen or Hans J. Wegner, as well as new interior brands that emerged within the last 15 years. Especially these younger brands, such as HAY, Muuto or FermLiving seem to hit the modern tastes or zeitgeist of what consumers demand and long for today (Mather, 2015). Byrge, co-founder of Muuto, states,

"the understated, authentic, long-lasting, democratic, and social elements are a good fit with the times we live in". However, the new designers build on the traditional approaches from their ancestors: *"the key principles then [i.e. in the 1950-1960's] were simplicity, minimalism, pragmatism, honesty, democracy and functionality, and those are still the qualities that many of us look for in quality product design"* (Bason, 2016).

Fallan (2012) attributes this success among other factors to the increased general interest in the Nordics. Scandinavia booms, not only in terms of interior design or the happiest people in the world (Pullella, 2016), but also in combination with other factors, which can be seen as part of the so-called 'New Nordic' movement (Heppenstall, 2016). This is for instance represented by the New Nordic Cuisine, coined by the Danish star restaurant Noma, arts and culture, such as the TV series 'The Bridge' or fashion brands such as Samsøe Samsøe. Together with the interior design they convey a coherent, modern picture of Scandinavia and the Nordic way of life (Fallan, 2012; Hucal, 2016; Kubicki, 2016).

1.1 Problem Statement & Relevance

The motivation for this thesis arose from the observable consumer interest in furniture and interior design and the parallel expansion of the 'new' interior design companies, as well as the revival of 50s designs, specifically from Scandinavia. The Danish furniture designer Louise Campbell (2016) for instance perceives 'New Nordic Design' as a *"refreshing renewal"* and states, *"We have inherited the thrill of rational thinking, the joy of detail, and the strive for good craftsmanship from our predecessors. But times are different; technology, speed and the state of mind have changed. […] To put this metaphorically: The Scandinavian designer of today has one foot in an airplane and the other solidly planted in the Nordic nature".* According to this quote, Scandinavian design is currently experiencing a new era, which aims to combine the traditional approach to Scandinavian design with new perspectives.

It has been shown, that communicating meanings and providing value for consumers through design, can be a competitive advantage for design and interior companies (Bloch, 1995; Austin & Devin, 2010; Heskett, 2009). Therefore they need to understand which values consumers derive from designed furniture and home objects and why they do so.

Moreover, the companies are able to imbue their products with intended meanings, which they wish to transfer to the consumer. However, each consumer attaches different types of meaning to furniture (Richins, 1994), which makes it difficult to generalize the meanings and incorporate them in their product designs (Blijlevens et al., 2009). Due to these aspects, meaning and value need to be studied from the consumers' perspective (Woodruff, 1997). Since value is hard to measure in quantitative ways (Menger, 1976), it is required to investigate it with qualitative research, where consumers can express their opinions and attitudes verbally (Bryman & Bell, 2011).

There is a considerable amount of research on meaning and value of objects, but the concepts remain characterized by complexity and many added layers from various research fields. While the meanings of furniture and home objects have for instance been studied by the sociologists Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton (1981) and various frameworks been proposed for consumer value (e.g. Holbrook, 1999), none of the studies was embedded in the context of Scandinavian interior and furniture design. Despite the existence of hundreds of home decoration magazines and design coffee table books featuring stories and pictures of interior design or well-known designers, little academic literature is available about the concept of Scandinavian design (Fallan, 2012). Thus, the existing connotations and descriptions of it are somewhat hard to grasp and sometimes lack proof from research.

The Business Historian and CBS professor Per H. Hansen (2006), who investigated the phenomenon of Danish design, argues that the popularity of the furniture designs from the 1960s was not merely due to its beauty, functionality and simplicity but had two other reasons. Firstly, Danish design succeeded beyond the Danish borders due to *"the creation of powerful narratives, or stories, that framed the way consumers made sense of this furniture".* Secondly, Hansen justifies the success coming *"through the calculated development of a network of individuals and organizations [referred to as 'fashion system' by Grant McCracken, 1996] whose goals was to promote and legitimize these narratives".* In line with Holt, Hansen notes that the narratives of Danish design furniture was appealing to those consumers, who wanted to show their *"good taste and individuality through the ownership of 'authentic' artisan objects."* Taken these considerations, it would be interesting to see whether consumers today continue valuing Scandinavian for these

reasons. Therefore, this study has the purpose to study the consumers' associations with Scandinavian furniture design today.

Inspired by the fact, that people attach meaning to furniture and receive value from possessing them in different ways and for different reasons (e.g. Richins, 1994), this study aims at investigating the role of furniture and the home in two different countries, namely in Germany and Denmark. While these are neighboring countries and in both of them the above outlined trend can be noticed, they differ in two ways that are relevant for this study: firstly, their cultures differ and secondly Denmark is part of the Scandinavian design wave, while Germany is hit by this wave. Therefore, the study aims to highlight similarities and differences between German and Danish consumers. All in all, the research goal is to find out how consumers express feelings towards their home and furniture, as well as towards Scandinavian furniture design.

1.2 Research Questions

This study aims at investigating the phenomena meaning and value in regard to home and furniture among Danish and German consumers. The aim is to explore the underlying mental models of the consumers, specifically it shall be explored which factors, both tangible and intangible, are important to them at home and in regard to furniture and why. Hence, the research tries to identify the meanings that consumers attach to their homes and their furniture and which values they derive from the meaning attachment, in consideration of different lifestyles and cultural backgrounds. In order to arrive at that goal, it needs to be studied how consumers put words on their attitudes, opinions and feelings towards these. In addition, Scandinavian design is incorporated in the study by inquiring the consumers' associations to and valued attributes of it. Specifically the following research question and sub-questions shall be investigated in the present thesis.

Which types of meaning and value do consumers attach to their home and to their furniture as well as other home objects?

    a) *Do the consumers' lifestyle and cultural background influence the meanings and values of their home, furniture and other home objects?*

    b) *Which characteristics of Scandinavian furniture design do consumers assign value to?*

1.3 Delimitations & Definitions

The focus of this thesis is to investigate the meaning and value of furniture from the consumers' perspective. Hence, the business perspective is only considered for making managerial implications. The terms consumer, user, individual, person or subject are used interchangeably throughout the study, while all of them refer to a person that consumes physical products for personal use at home (Oxford University Press, 2016b). The consumption of services is left aside, despite its acknowledged importance (Polaine et al., 2013). Furthermore, the study is limited to the possession of furniture and home objects, disregarding the value people might derive from non-possession or possessing as few things as possible.

John Heskett (2002) claims, *"Design is to design a design to produce design".* These words show, how many grammatical meanings the term 'design' has. The first is a field, the second one the practice of creating (meaningful) forms and structures, the third is a concept and the fourth indicates a finished product. As the aim is to explore physical design products, in specific furniture, this study incorporates the fields interior and furniture design, ignoring disciplines and concepts such as innovation, strategic design, creative processes, or design thinking (Design 2020 Vision Committee, 2011). This means that this thesis only focuses on the relevant bit of the wide design landscape. Since the environment for the study is the domestic, private homes of consumers, public spaces such as hotels, restaurants, stores or offices are excluded. Thus, in the present case interior design refers to residential furniture design. In addition, when speaking of furniture, this includes designed products, which are used for furnishing the home, for instance chairs, tables, sofas, shelves or lamps (Heskett, 2002), while the term 'home object' is used for smaller items such as tableware, vases, candle holders or décor. Other terms to describe furniture and home objects are product, possession, thing, interior object, decorative item or furnishings. Electronic products are disregarded due to the fact that they often fulfill purely functional purposes (e.g. a fridge) or are used for entertainment (e.g. TV), hence cannot be compared to furniture and home objects.

The geographical scope of the study is limited to Denmark and Germany, specifically to the cities Copenhagen and Hamburg, which represent the location for the empirical study. Concluding, other countries or cities are ignored in the cultural comparison. Lastly, tools

for measuring value for the consumer, such as the VALS or AIO (Kahle, 1983; Woodruff & Gardial, 1996), are beyond the study focus, as they intend to categorize consumers into predetermined psychographic segments according to their values and lifestyle.

1.4 Structure of the Thesis

The present thesis is structured into seven chapters, out of which the first one is comprised by this introduction. The theory review is presented initially, followed by describing the method and data collection for this research. Thereafter, the findings and insights are presented and interpreted in the analysis chapter. The research process and collected data are then critically discussed and the research questions answered. On the basis of the results, managerial implications are presented. Limitations and suggestions for further research finally complete the thesis. The overall structure and involved processes are depicted in the following graphic (Fig. 1).
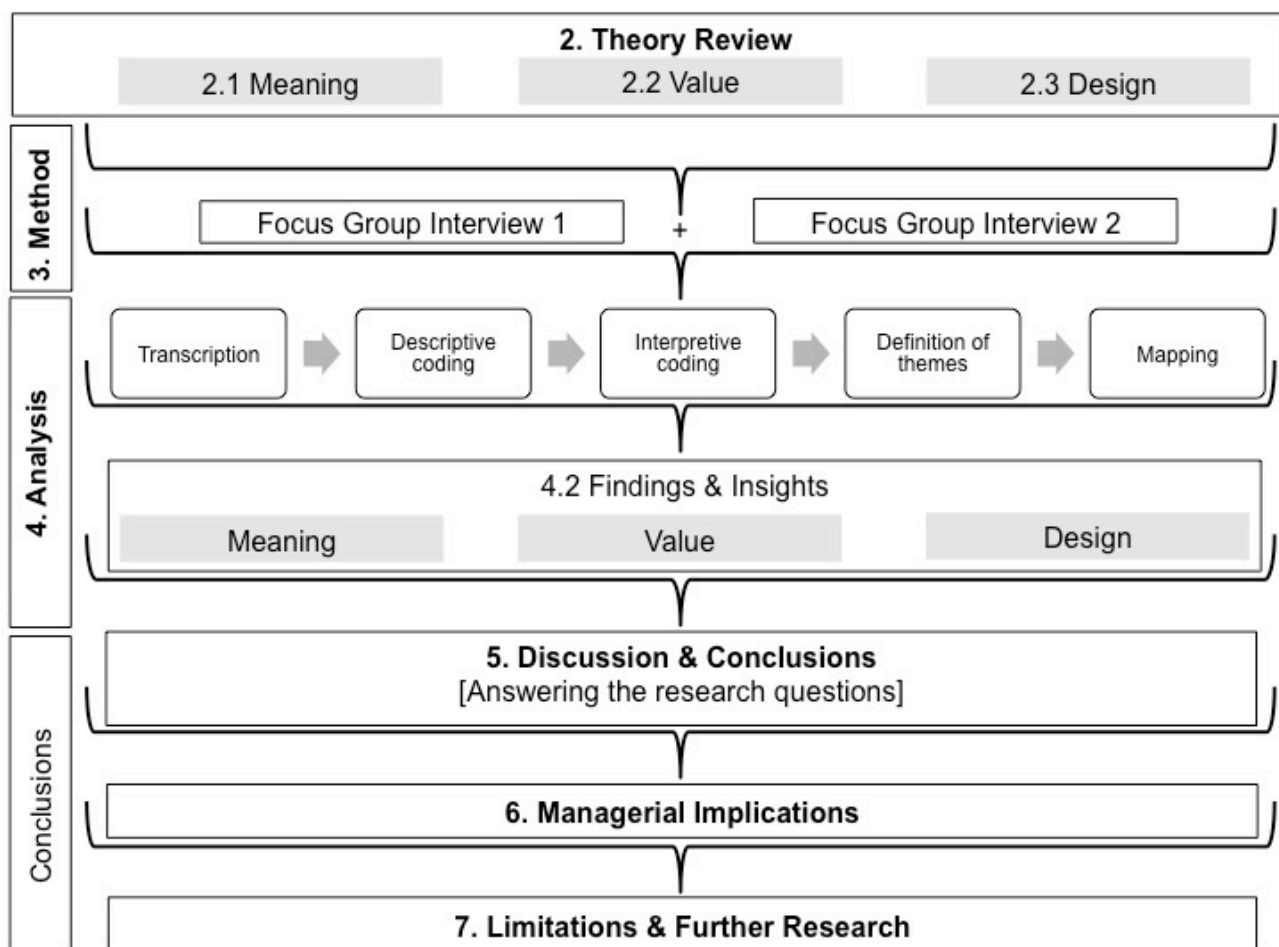
Figure 1: Thesis structure and research process (Source: own illustration).

2. Theory Review

This chapter establishes the theoretical framework and aims at highlighting the meaning that individuals attach to their homes and furniture and which types of values people derive from surrounding themselves with those selected objects. The theory review is structured into three integrative blocks: (2.1) Meaning, highlighting the meaning of home, furniture and home objects, (2.2) Value, with a focus on consumer value types, and (2.3) Design, which emphasizes the role of design in regard to meaning and value and presents characteristics of Scandinavian furniture design. While theory from Consumer Behavior alone cannot ensure a thorough understanding of the consumer, this review additionally builds upon the disciplines Sociology, Psychology and Design. The literature review shall provide the fundamentals for the empirical research.

2.1 Meaning

The first theory block elaborates upon the meaning of home in general and in specific to objects, respectively furniture and home objects. As will be shown in the first chapter, the home is a special space (Csikszentmihalyi & Rochberg-Halton, 1981), which involves a number of phenomena from Consumer Behavior, namely decision-making processes, culture, the creation of the home, the meaning of objects, self and identity and lifestyle and taste. Therefore, these are elaborated in the following sections – both in general and in specific to furniture and home objects.

2.1.1 Home

This chapter highlights the home, which builds the setting of research for this thesis. Many authors have made an attempt to define home and what they all have in common is to describe it as a special space that has symbolic meaning and high emotional value for its inhabitants (e.g. ibid.; Seamon, 1979; Woodward, 2007; Kristensen, 2011). In most cases, the home comes in the form of a house or an apartment, which is owned or rented by inhabitants who live there permanently (Oxford University Press, 2016). Some authors like Bachelard (1958) use the term 'house' to refer to 'home'. However, this thesis distinguishes between these two terms and sees 'house' as the type of dwelling or location of someone's home, and 'home' as a more abstract space, which every individual defines for herself. As Kristensen and Grønhaug (2006) claim, *"a home is more than a physical*

shelter, [because it has connotations with identity, control and intimacy] and must also be seen in a broader social and cultural context".

Bachelard (1958) understands the home as a place of memories, dreams and security, which should foster imagination. As a result, memories of one's childhood home could for some people be the ultimate guide for daydreams of the own home. In *'The House as Symbol of Self'* Cooper (1976) defines home as a self-constructed universe, in which the identity merges with the interior that shall symbolize the identity, i.e. the true self, while the exterior of the house represents the social self. This is in line with Madigan and Munro (1996), who describe the home as an expressive space in relation to individual's aspirations. Belk (1988) concludes that the *"house is a symbolic body for the family"* and *"furnishing and decoration alter the family's body",* for instance by establishing comfortable spaces where the family members can gather (Friedman, 2015). Dining or living rooms primarily serve as 'social and cultural icons' as well as 'functional spaces' (ibid.), where the dining table represents a 'uniting symbol' and *"even when it's not being used, [it] sends a clear message about the institution of family"* (ibid.). Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton (1981) define home as *"a world in which a person can create a material environment that embodies what he or she considers significant."* The authors (ibid.) use the term 'significant' synonymous for meaningful and continue, "*In this sense, the home becomes the most powerful sign of the self of the inhabitant […] [and] provides space for action and interaction in which one can develop, maintain, and change one's identity."* The concepts of self and identity are addressed later in this chapter.

2.1.2 Consumer Behavior

This part introduces the research discipline that forms the fundament for this study of the meanings of home and furniture from the consumer perspective. According to Østergaard and Jantzen (2000), there are four approaches, which have developed historically into co-existence, to study consumers and consumption: Buyer Behavior, Consumer Behavior, Consumer Research and Consumption Studies. Buyer Behavior focuses on observable behavior and how buying takes place. Consumer Behavior, as a cognitive perspective, argues that individuals process information rationally and studied how and why consumers buy. An interpretive turn came with Consumer Research that focuses on the consumer's feelings and emotions. Building on the former approaches, which perceive the consumer

as an individual, Consumption Studies differ by seeing the consumer as a 'tribe member', who engages in consumption as a social act and exchange of meanings (ibid.). This approach considers socio-cultural factors, necessary for understanding consumer behavior and emotions involved in the context of home (Kristensen & Grønhaug, 2006).

Today, the notion of Hirschman and Holbrook (1982) has been widely adapted, as it argues that consumers derive hedonic value from the experience with products. Hedonism, defined as "*the expression of perceived consumer behavior*", therefore represents a key element in the further understanding of the types of consumer values (e.g. Holbrook, 1999). As the observable-focused Buyer Behavior can be judged as too limited, the thesis draws upon the combination of the three youngest approaches, which allows for a holistic comprehension of consumers in the context of furniture consumption. In the following, the research approach will be referred to as 'Consumer Behavior'. Schiffman et al. (2008) define Consumer Behavior as, "*the behavior that the consumers display in searching for purchasing, using, evaluating and disposing of products and services that they expect will satisfy their needs.*" The sociologists (ibid.) generalize, that behavior is consistent with attitudes, that are "*learned predisposition to behave in a consistently favourable or unfavourable way with respect to a given object*", consisting of cognition (think), affect (feel) and connotation (do). As the consumption of furniture is based on decision-making and internal processes, these are elaborated upon next.

2.1.3 Decision-making Processes

In this section the basics of consumer decision-making and judgment as well as influencing factors are presented. This information is needed for comprehending the later chapters on the meaning and value types of furniture and which role the furniture design elements play in the evaluation.

Speaking of a 'Consumer Decision Journey', consumers typically go through a pre, during and post phase, where they interact with a variety of tangible and intangible product attributes, in this case designed interior objects (Woodruff, 1997; Edelman, 2010). Decision-making for furniture acquisition involves internal brain processes such as attention, perception, emotions, feelings, preference, liking, wanting, memory and sense stimulation (Ramsøy, 2014), which can be defined as follows:

Attention is *"the mechanism responsible for selecting the information that gains preferential status above other available information"* (Plassmann et al., 2012) and primarily results from visual stimuli (Milosavljevic et al., 2011). An attention-raising product design is therefore crucial, since consumers are becoming increasingly selective (Plassmann et al., 2012). **Perception** is defined as *"the process by which an individual selects, organizes and interprets stimuli into a meaningful and coherent picture of the world"* (Schiffman et al., 2008). Zeithaml (1988) makes a distinction between stimuli, which she calls intrinsic cues that are inherent in the product (e.g. material) and extrinsic cues that are product-related but not part of the product itself (e.g. price, brand). Consumers perceive these cues to make judgments about a product. **Emotions**, which are typically unconscious, are treated along with **feelings** that by contrast are conscious (Ramsøy, 2014). Hoyer and Stokburger-Sauer (2012) argue, that furniture consumption involves cognitive and affective, i.e. rational and emotional, judgments that are additionally increasingly motivated by personal values and tastes.

According to Ramsøy (2014), **preference,** which can be divided into **liking** and **wanting,** is understood as *the* motivational phenomenon behind product choice, due to its relation to predicted quality and value (e.g. Kristensen & Gabrielsen, 2004). **Liking** is conscious in nature (e.g. "I like this chair") and can be referred to as a hedonic and deliberate experience. **Wanting**, by contrast, is an unconscious response, resulting in strong purchase motivation (Ramsøy, 2014). **Memory** is the individual's capacity to make use of learned and stored information in a consumption situation, for instance for repurchase (ibid.). Memory and preference are enhanced by the often unconscious stimulation of the human **five senses** – sight, hearing, taste, smell and touch (ibid.; Chartrand et al., 2008).

In the pre-phase the consumer predicts value as a stimuli-response (e.g. Woodruff, 1997). This anticipation of value or experience that a product may provide is believed to be the 'actual driving force' for product acquisition (ibid.; Plassman et al. 2012; Ramsøy, 2014). In the during- and post-phase, the 'true value' is realized from interacting with and experiencing the product and comparing that to the predicted value (Ramsøy, 2014; Holbrook, 1999). Finally, through learning positive product attributes and experiences, these are memorized (Ramsøy, 2014). In addition to these processes, the cultural context determines consumer choices and behaviors, as introduced in the following section.

2.1.4 Culture & Cultural Differences

This chapter highlights the importance of culture for the meaning of home and for furniture acquisition. Consumption choices and behaviors take place within a specific context, which from a Consumer Behavior perspective is consonantly referred to as culture or consumer culture (e.g. Kluckhohn & Strodtbeck, 1961; McCracken, 1986; Arnould, 2006). Several authors conceptualize culture as a 'lens' through which individuals see the world (Tylor, 1958; Hofstede, 1980; Strauss and Quinn, 1997; Bock, 1994; McCracken, 1986). In that sense, culture consists of shared understandings of things, beliefs, values, norms and rules, which are socially learned by a group of people (ibid.). Geertz (1973) equates culture with a system of meaning: *"culture […] [is] a historically transmitted pattern of meanings embodied in symbols […]."* In line with Geertz, McCracken (1986) states, *"In short, culture constitutes the world by supplying it with meaning."* Overby et al. (2005) add that, *"culture influences the meaning that consumers form about the value of a product […]."* With that, the authors refer to the meaning attributed to product attributes, consequences or desired end-states (ibid.). The meanings may moreover differ according to the cultural context (Seth et al., 2000), i.e. country or geographical region. Kozinets (2001) argues that consumers, within cultural systems, consume products to construct their identity and form relationships with others. Furthermore, one can speak of 'cultural identity' to express the belonging of an individual to a cultural group (Ennaji, 2005). Consumers are hence social individuals that are part of cultures, sub-cultures or communities with shared meanings. Compressing the outlined theories, culture strongly impacts consumer behavior and choices for products (Allen & Ng, 1999).

Cultural Differences

The significance of the home depends on an individual's life situation and differs across cultures and geographical locations (Seth et al., 2000; Heskett, 2002). This includes factors such as rented or owned homes (ibid., 2005). While in Spain people assumingly spend a lot of time on the streets, in Denmark, people spend a lot of time at home due to the colder weather. Thus, it could be argued that the importance of the home increases geographically from south to north. In Sweden for instance, Murphy (2015) explains that the home is *"where the family resides, the most basic unit of social organization, bound together by warmth and care, and the primary locus where essential needs can be satisfied. An individual can find comfort in the home and seek refuge there in times of*

trouble […]. It is both an intimate place and the point from which interactions with the wider world are launched." The used terms could also apply to Danish homes. In Denmark, people even established the term 'hygge', that has become part of Danish culture and is used to describe everything that is related to coziness. In essence, hygge is very positively connoted and means to create a warm, comfortable atmosphere or intimacy and serenely enjoy time with family or friends (Hvidt, 2002). For example, the interior style of someone's home or a dinner with friends can be hyggelig. Concluding, Scandinavia gives a good example, where the home and the creation of a warm atmosphere play a crucial role in people's lives. Due to that, furniture and interior products are essentially important to create the home, as outlined in the following chapter.

2.1.5 Creating the Home

According to Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton (1981), the home, is a means to express and enhance values, attitudes, self, personality, individuality and sometimes status. This can be seen as the fundamental reasons, why people invest 'psychic energy', specifically time, effort and money in creating a personalized home. Due to that, individuals are in most cases highly emotionally involved, when it comes to creating their homes (Kristensen & Grønhaug, 2006). Woodward (2007) highlights the role of furniture and other home items, since they are used to create the home, which without them would be empty. Concerning the choice of furniture and furnishing the home, various studies found an evident gender difference (Kamptner, 1995; Csikszentmihalyi & Rochberg-Halton, 1981). In most Western families, women are responsible for creating the home, and *"maintaining a harmonious emotional center"* for the family (ibid.).

McCracken (2005) proposes, that consumers, i.e. women, generally see the biggest task in establishing 'homeyness', i.e. feeling at home, and notes that, *"homeyness supplies the template for the construction of an environment and a family"* and for the construction of a system of relations. In regard to that, Madigan and Munro (1996) claim, that making visitors feel *"welcome, comfortable and relaxed"* highly important to homeowners – even more *"than individualist notions of style and expression"*. In addition, McCracken (2005) identified further symbolic properties of homeyness, for instance 'authentic' (i.e. apparent that someone lives there) and 'informal' (i.e. a place where people can be themselves).

Consumers try to set up homeyness, often equated with coziness, through the arrangement of furniture, the use of warm colors, natural materials and decorative elements (McCracken, 2005). Objects with personal significance, as well as the mix of different interior styles in a beautiful but humble way, are considered as homey, whereas symmetry, balance and order are often inconsistent with people's idea of homeyness (ibid.). Besides arranging furniture for the purpose of homeyness, Bonnes et al. (1987) view the arrangement of furniture related to the psychological need for optimization of the environment depending on what is most valued by someone. Consequently, the arrangement can enhance personal well-being (Lim, 2016). Rearrangement and redecoration are thus both means of atmosphere creation and optimization according to one's needs and personality (Bonnes et al., 1987; Belk, 1988). However, not only visible and tangible objects are means of creating a homey space, but also the intangible, referring to the meanings of furniture and home objects, which are put into focus later in this theory block. Finally, the objective of the creation of homeyness is the involvement of a person or persons to become part of and take on symbolic properties of the home (McCracken, 2005). This can be considered as a kind of meaning transfer (ibid., 1986) where the result could be that the individual feels at home, comfortable, cozy or relaxed (ibid., 2005). Summing up, the study conducted by the German interior retailer Otto (2015) can be used to describe the key associations with home, namely 'emotional safety', 'self-determination', 'haven' and 'nest for togetherness and family'.

2.1.6 Self & Identity

As the previous sections have shown, the phenomenon meaning is closely tied to the concepts of self and identity (Belk, 1988). Therefore these are presented next to allow a better understanding of the meaning of furniture and home objects. Thorstein Veblen (1899/1994), the founding father of person-object relationships, argues that people display products to communicate status. Later theorists demonstrated however, that meanings and the self-concept of individuals are a much more complex affair. James (1890), who first studied people's self, defines it as *"the sum total of all that he can call his […]."* This definition was adopted by Russell W. Belk (1988), who defines possessions as things one refers to as 'mine' with a tendency to believe 'the product is me'. Hence, a person is the sum of her possessions and possessions are a crucial element of an individual's sense of self (ibid.). Put differently, the states of having, doing and being define who we are: *"we*

are what we have" (Van Esterik, 1986) and what we consume (Fromm, 1976). Consumers use products as vehicles for expressing their self and identity (Hestad, 2013) and in some cases the mere possession of an object suffices to cultivate the identity and self-image (Dittmar, 1992; Woodward, 2007).

Identity is a construct that refers to people's sense of self in a social context (Woodward, 2007). Consumer Behavior research suggests, that individuals use possessions to create and reflect or express an identity as 'objectified self' (Goffman, 1959; Belk, 1988; McCracken, 1986). With reference to McCracken (1986), people desire and dream of products that can perform as self and identity shapers. Therefore, consumers choose products and brands, which they often perceive as personalities that they can identify with to manage their sense of self (Belk, 1988; Jordan, 1997; Govers & Schoormans, 2005; Woodward, 2007). In line with that, Campbell (1987) notes that people do not desire those objects for merely possessing them, but for acquiring *"dreams and the pleasurable dramas which they have already enjoyed in imagination".* This is in line with Bachelard's (1958) home description as a space for dreams and reaffirms the importance of pleasure and hedonism in modern consumerism, where experiences provide means to fulfill the consumer's dreams and cultivate identity (Woodward, 2007; Hirschman & Holbrook, 1982). Possessions are thus symbols of the self and through shared symbols one can signal group membership (Belk, 1988; Boorstin, 1973). Thus, identity does not only operate on an individual level, but also on a collective level involving family, subcultures and national identities (Belk, 1988). As Wallendorf and Arnould (1988) state, *"we use objects as markers to denote our characters for others; we also use objects as markers to remind ourselves of who we are."* Hence, objects convey the self-concept to oneself as well as to others in the socio-cultural context (Woodward, 2007).

Belk's Concept 'Extended Self'
Substantially different to prior self-concept studies, Belk (1988) has coined the term 'extended self', proposing that one's inner self can literally be extended into the outer environment. This idea suggests that possessions are not only seen as part of the self but also as instruments to create, enhance and maintain the self in a social context (e.g. family, community) (ibid.). Belk defines the major categories of extended-self being: body, internal processes, ideas, experiences, persons, places and things. The three latter are

usually the ones that most clearly extend the self, as a person can feel attached to them (ibid.). Furniture for example can become part of the self, through knowing, which comes with habituation (ibid.). Based on Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton (1981), Belk (1988) argues that possessions often capture (good) memories and become reminders of the past and therefore tell, *"who we are [and] where we have come from and perhaps where we are going"*. This idea is crucial in regard to the meanings of furniture, as noted in the subsequent chapter.

2.1.7 Meanings of Objects

Since people use furniture and home objects to create their homes, this section presents the literature on the meanings that consumers attach to objects in general and specifically of furniture and home objects. Mihalyi Csikszentmihalyi and Eugene Rochberg-Halton (1981) are cited extensively, since their theory about the meaning of the home and furniture can be transferred to Western culture in general and therefore be applied in this study. It is attempted to convey an understanding of meaning sources and different types of meaning. Recurring terms are 'symbolic' or 'cultural meaning'. For the latter, McCracken's (1986) model 'The Movement of Cultural Meaning' is introduced. It is worth mentioning, that *"talk about 'the meaning' of something tends to mystify the fact that this phrase is always a shorthand way of referring to cultural meanings"* (Strauss & Quinn, 1997). Therefore, the used terms meaning and cultural meaning express the same idea.

2.1.7.1 Symbolic Meaning & Attachment

Grounded in semiotics (Saussure, 1916; Eco, 1988) – the study of signs and symbols as elements of communication within society – the idea of symbolic meaning is captured in this section. Dewey (1954) claims, that a product-person relationship leads to meaning. People actively seek out relationships with products, develop an emotional bond with some of them and as a result feel attached to them (Savaş, 2004; Woodward, 2007). Objects are consequently claimed to be meaningful to someone or to carry meaning and one can speak of consumers who give, attach or assign meaning to an object (e.g. Miller, 1998; McCracken, 1986). The terms are used interchangeably in this study.

Douglas and Isherwood (1979) claim, *"consumer goods have a significance that goes beyond their utilitarian character and commercial value. This significance rests largely in*

their ability to carry and communicate cultural meaning." Viewing goods as social communication systems, is also advocated by Levy (1959), who states that, *"people buy products not only for what they can do, but also for what they mean."* Levy (1959) further claims, *"products are systems of symbols",* which together with the former quote means, that products can have symbolic meaning. According to McCracken (2005), *"every product […] is made up of its physical properties, functional features and cultural meanings."* This implies, that furniture and home objects can have symbolic meaning for home inhabitants.

What an object means to someone depends, according to Strauss and Quinn (1997) on an *"interpretation evoked in a person by an object or event at a given time",* which includes *"an identification of it and expectations regarding it, and, often, a feeling about it and motivation to respond to it."* This definition suggests that meaning is a response to stimuli, here a piece of furniture. Attachment is a positive emotional response towards a product and can last over a long period of time, even if a product is lost or stops working (Savaş, 2004). Products that the consumer feels attached to are usually taken good care of and intended to be kept for a long time (ibid.). Schifferstein et al. (2004) assert that attachment is a positive function of the length of ownership. In general, the more an object is incorporated into one's extended self, *"the more care and attention it tends to receive"* (Belk, 1988). Moreover, Wallendorf and Arnould (1988) identified that women usually feel strongly attached to their furniture and home objects. Lastly, the opposite of attachment is 'detachment' (Savaş, 2004), which is disregarded due to the limited scope of this thesis.

2.1.7.2 McCracken's Model 'The Movement of Cultural Meaning'
This section introduces 'The Movement of Cultural Meaning' model developed by Grant McCracken (1986) to show where meaning originates and how it ends up in the individual consumer (Fig. 2). The model suggests that cultural meaning moves *"in a trajectory at two points of transfer: world to good and good to individual"* and that meaning resides at three locations, namely the culturally constituted world, the consumer good and the individual consumer. Meaning is 'drawn out of' and transferred between these locations by the following instruments: advertisement, fashion system and consumer rituals (ibid.).

As mentioned previously, McCracken (1986) claims, that culture and its members construct or 'constitute' the world. Consumer goods are both created and creating this world. According to his model, this culturally constituted world is the original location of cultural meaning. In order to become resident in consumer goods, the first meaning transfer occurs from 'world to good' with the help of advertising and the fashion system. The consumer is informed about the meanings in advertising and
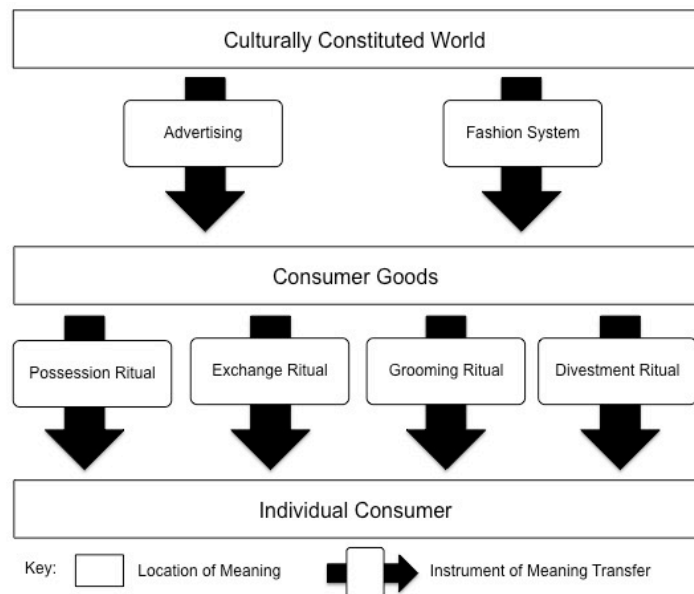
Figure 2: 'The Movement of Cultural Meaning' (Source: own illustration based on McCracken, 1986).

if the good and the created ad are coherent, the transfer can take place. The fashion system for instance takes *"new styles of […] home furnishings and associates them with established cultural categories and principles […]."* The agents would be product designers (e.g. interior designers) or fashion journalists. Next to these instruments, Arnould et al. (2005) suggest adding 'reference groups' that exert interpersonal influence on the individual. These are groups whose' *"presumed perspectives, attitudes, or behaviors are used by an individual as the basis for his or her perspectives, attitudes, or behaviors"* (ibid.). These 'others' can be family, friends, colleagues, community, country, world, cosmos, Mother Nature, deity or an inaccessible 'inner self' (ibid.; Holbrook, 1999). Once transferred, meaning resides in the consumer good, in this case in the interior design object (McCracken, 1986).

The meaning transfer from 'good to consumer' is facilitated by a number of rituals: *"exchange, possession, grooming and divestment rituals"* (ibid.). Based on Turner (1969) and Munn (1973), McCracken (1986) defines rituals as *"a kind of social [or symbolic] action devoted to the manipulation of cultural meaning for the purpose of collective and individual communication and categorization."* Exchange rituals are characterized by a gift-giver, who functions as an agent of meaning transfer. The chosen gift often possesses meaningful properties, which the gift-giver *"wishes to see transferred to the gift-receiver".*

Furthermore, the type of gift, the wrapping, the event or the location of giving can enhance the meaning of an object (Sahlins, 1972; Belk, 1979; McCracken, 1986). Possession rituals allow the individual to claim possession by discussing, comparing, reflecting, showing-off or taking pictures of possessions, which then means that the person not only owns the object but also possesses it. An example is the 'personalization' of the home by adapting it to one's needs (McCracken, 1986; Kristensen & Grønhaug, 2006). If the ritual (i.e. transfer) was successful, consumers can use the good to *"discriminate between […] 'cultural categories' [such] as class, status, gender, age, occupation, and lifestyle"* (ibid.).

Grooming occurs when a consumer 'coaxes' out the meaningful properties of an object. For example perishable properties – *"properties likely to fade when possessed by the consumer"*– can be given a fresh look by grooming (ibid.). The fourth ritual is divestment, either in the form of clearing the meaning of a product associated with a previous owner or emptying its meaning before giving it away or selling it. Both forms have the purpose of avoiding that a product's meaning is transferred, obscured, confused or lost, when being exchanged (ibid.; Douglas, 1996). One example could be a chair bought on a flea market, which is cleaned and painted before usage. Finally, the application of various rituals has added value to the products and the cultural meaning has arrived in the life of the individual (ibid.). According to the model, cultural meaning in the home is expressed through the organization and arrangement of furniture, which transform the home into a personal and meaningful nest (Kristensen, 2011; Crowley, 1999).

2.1.7.3 Public & Private Meaning

This chapter discusses public and private meaning. According to Solomon (1983) and Richins (1994), *"products are consumed both for their social meaning [public] […] and for their private meaning".* Richins (1994) distinguishes public and private meaning of possessions, which she believes to derive from either shared experiences or individual experiences with objects. She (ibid.) suggests that public meanings are related to subjective, shared meanings that the people from a society at large assign to objects that they do not own. In consensus with McCracken's (1986) framework, Richins (1994) claims, *"although the public meanings of some goods may be stable over time, the meanings of others are dynamic, reflecting changes in popular perceptions and culture."* The public meanings, which are often communicated in advertising and other media, e.g. interior

magazines, can also influence consumer's aspirations, fantasies and desires (ibid., Hirschman & Holbrook, 1882).

Private meanings are what an object or possession means for an individual person (Richins, 1994). While public meanings, on the one hand, influence people's desire to possess things in order to communicate something about themselves to other people, private meanings on the other hand influence the individual's feelings about things they already possess (ibid.). Such subjective, private meanings not necessarily have to be different from public meanings, but are by contrast very personal by nature, where the history that an individual shares with an object dominates. Private meanings of possessions stem from both public meanings and personal experiences with an object and Richins (1994) confirms that culture also impacts private meanings, for example for home decoration. Others expect the home to be decorated in a way, *"that meaningfully represents the character of its inhabitants."* Due to that, people carefully select, buy and arrange furnishings and display them to visitors. Consequently, the objects and the home *"become imbued with private meanings associated with […] person-object-interactions"* (ibid.).

Private meanings are idiosyncratic, that is differing from person to person, depending on interests, values and experiences (Richins, 1994; Woodward, 2007). Thus, people give meaning in different ways (McDonagh et al. 2004) and it is *"likely that [they] more actively cultivate private meanings for some types of possessions than for others"* (Richins, 1994). Experiences with unique and customized objects, such as handcrafted furniture, are according to Richins (1994) for instance most likely leading to the creation of private meaning.

Based on theorists such as Douglas and Isherwood (1979), Belk (1988) and Wallendorf and Arnould (1988), Richins (1994) identified six categories of meaning sources, which can all influence both public and private meanings. These are 'utilitarian value', 'enjoyment', 'representations of interpersonal ties', 'identity and self-expression', 'financial aspects' and 'appearance'. Lastly, Richins (1994) argues that, *"consumers own objects for the value they provide"*, which is further demonstrated in the second theory block, where it is highlighted that furniture is primarily consumed beyond utility reasons (Solomon, 1983).

2.1.7.4 Meanings of Furniture & Home Objects

This section elaborates upon the meaning of furniture and home objects. In a study about the meaning of all kind of home objects, Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton (1981) discovered valuable consumer insights, which support their theory that people attach psychological meaning to their household objects, and in turn derive value from them. The authors argue, that *"meaning, not material possessions, is the ultimate goal in [people's] lives"* (ibid.). They found, that *"even purely functional things [such as plates], serve to socialize a person to a certain habit or way of life and are representative signs of that way of life"*, which can be meaningful to someone. Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton (1981) conclude that, *"both object's physical characteristics and the values attributed to it in the culture at large seem to play a determining role"* for the types of meaning people attach to home objects. Based on theorists like Douglas and Isherwood (1979), the research duo claims that the meaning of cherished possessions is realized in the transaction, i.e. psychic activities or communicative signs, between person and object. Resulting from their findings, the sociologists define 11 different meaning classes, divided into non-person codes and person codes. 'Memories', 'associations', 'experiences', 'intrinsic qualities of object', 'style', 'utilitarian' and 'personal values' constitute non-person categories, while 'self', 'family', 'kin' and 'nonfamily' are person codes. These meaning types are not exclusive, i.e. objects can have more than one meaning for the consumer (Csikszentmihalyi & Rochberg-Halton, 1981).

Complementing the fact, that women are usually the ones creating the home, Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton (1981) found age to be determinant for the meaning of home objects. Which objects are meaningful to someone and for which reasons, depends on the stage of life cycle someone is in. One of their findings was to distinguish the relationship between people and objects along two dimensions: from action object to contemplation objects, and from self to others. They showed, that women value contemplation and relationships with others, therefore they often name furniture, which are primarily 'signs of integration'. This preference for signs of integration tends to increase with age (ibid.). Conforming with that, Kamptner (1995) argues, that women tend to attach meaning to their home objects, firstly for kin- and friendship (social), followed by identity (self) and then enjoyment (aesthetic and experiences). As Csikszentmihalyi and

Rochberg-Halton (1981) claim, all home objects that people possess, use and surround themselves with, might *"quite accurately reflect aspects of the owner's personality"*.

During the investigation about which home object categories are 'special', i.e. significant, meaningful or highly valued, to people and why, Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton (1981) found that furniture, visual art and photographs were most frequently mentioned. Furniture is primarily selected, as it embodies memories associated with people and events and for being signs of the self: *"things are cherished […] for the information they convey about the owner and […] her ties to others"* (ibid.). Based on that, Wallendorf and Arnould (1988) examined the case of 'favorite' objects, demonstrating many parallels. Being reminded of someone often occurs, when another person hand-crafted the object, passed it on as a heirloom, or gave it as a gift. Several studies therefore emphasize the importance of gift-giving, through which individuals pursue the maintenance of social relationships and the transfer of meaning (ibid.; McCracken, 1986; Csikszentmihalyi & Rochberg-Halton, 1981). At the same time, home objects can be meaningful, when representing present experiences and future dreams (ibid.). Overall, attachment to a 'favorite' object results from the *"shared history between the person and the object"*, which develops after years of usage or possession, and corresponds to 'private meaning' (Wallendorf & Arnould, 1988; Richins, 1994). Through that mutual transfer of meaning and emotion (McCracken, 1986), objects become 'decommodified' (Kopytoff, 1986) and turned into *"unique icons for individual self-expression"* (Wallendorf & Arnould, 1988).

In sum, the meaning types described in the former sections are fundamental for the analysis of the empirical data. Finally, the theoretical framework on meaning is completed with a discourse on lifestyle and taste, following below.

2.1.8 Lifestyle & Taste

In his work *Distinction*, Pierre Bourdieu (1984) declares the home as a 'space of lifestyles'. Derived from this, consuming interior products, often referred to as 'lifestyle products' depicted in inspirational and idealizing 'lifestyle magazines' (Kristensen, 2011), is related to someone's lifestyle. Lifestyle is the way someone lives and reflects attitudes and values (Oxford University Press, 2016b). As lifestyle is similarly a question of tastes and

preferences, and tastes in turn related to perception, judgment and aesthetics (e.g. Holbrook, 1999), these concepts are elaborated together in this chapter.

2.1.8.1 Lifestyle

Lifestyle is a recurring concept in consumer culture and consumption that was among others studied by Veblen (1994), Bourdieu (1984) or Featherstone (1987). According to Veblen's (1994) theory of 'conspicuous consumption', people adopt certain 'schemes' of lifestyles, either with the purpose of distinction from social classes one sees as inferior or the desire for 'emulation' of identified superior ones. Various authors confirm, that the display and use of products is beyond functionality aspects an index of fashion, tastes, wealth, prestige and status (Weber, 1921/1972; Baudrillard, 1970/1998).

In contrast to these views, the sociologist Mike Featherstone (1987) argues that lifestyle encompasses consumption habits, leisure activities and everyday practices. Lifestyle is for instance manifested in clothes, eating habits, home decoration or sports, which together are indicators for taste, sense of style, individuality or preferences (ibid.; Goffman, 1951). Featherstone (1987) states, that "*rather than unreflexively adopting a lifestyle […] [modern individuals] make lifestyle a life project and display their individuality and sense of style in the particularity of the assemblage of goods, practices, experiences, appearance and bodily dispositions they design together into a lifestyle*". In other words, lifestyle patterns influence which types of products are assembled and the lifestyle is reinforced through the possession and use of these carefully chosen products. As there exist many cultural groups, people from different groups tend to have different lifestyles and tastes, while individuals within the same group can share a common taste (Bourdieu, 1984; Gronow, 1997; Lash, 1994). Concluding from that, individuals or families with different lifestyles tend to live in different dwellings and furnish their homes according to their tastes and preferences.

2.1.8.2 Taste & Aesthetics

As mentioned above, lifestyle encompasses tastes. Here, taste is not referring to the gastronomic sensory taste of human beings, but to taste as an individual's aesthetic preference (Gronow, 1997), i.e. *"the expression of liking [and] disliking*" (Kristensen, 1997). The discourse on taste and its contradictory theories are outlined in the following.

Traditionally, taste was viewed as the result of innate, individualistic choices of human intellect, as personal and beyond reasoning (Kant, 1790). Bourdieu (1984) rejects Kant's notion by claiming that only the taste of upper social classes is legitimate. He (ibid.) adds that the aesthetic organization of presenting the home through using goods is a means to express taste, as the key resource for social differentiation or integration. As taste implies that something is good and beautiful, 'good taste' is non-discussable and does not need rules (ibid.). An old definition says, *"taste is the power or faculty of distinguishing beauty from deformity and is shown in the preference a rightly constituted mind gives to one object above another"* (Duveen, 1911). In line with that, Bourdieu (1984) argues that, one who has taste can distinguish ugly from beautiful, bad from good and understands what constitutes quality. Opposed to that idea, Frondizi (1971) views taste as relative and subjective in nature and that *"there is no arguing in matters of taste"* and that *"beauty is in the eye of the beholder"*.

Moving into mass production and hedonic consumption (1980s), the idea to link taste to social status could not sufficiently explain the phenomenon anymore, as aesthetics have found their way into people's everyday lives (Lloyd Jones, 1991; Schulze, 1992). The central tenet of Hirschman and Holbrook (1982) is, that hedonic consumption involves aesthetics and personal tastes and these *"guide our decisions in choosing our neighborhoods, decorating our homes […]"*, add Schmitt and Simonson (1997). Hence, aesthetics and taste are inextricably linked. In Consumer Behavior, taste as an aesthetic preference, is often perceived in terms of bad or good taste, but in a different sense than proposed by Bourdieu (1984). By the added term 'good', taste becomes positively connoted, because aesthetics are also considered positive. With reference to Holbrook (2005), 'good taste' can be understood as *"prescribed by professional experts in a particular cultural field"*. Proposing that good taste is exclusive to experts, Holbrook (2005) views the 'ordinary' consumer to possess 'little taste', thus not every consumer can have good taste. Douglas (1996) points out, that different aesthetic styles can only be compared within a limited social environment, implying that a person's tastes is meaningful only in relation to another one's taste from the same social context (Woodward, 2007).

On the one hand, taste is very subjective, but on the other hand there is *"a general agreement in society that some aesthetic objects are 'better' than others",* such as

'masterpieces' in furniture design (Hoyer & Stokburger-Sauer, 2012). Bloch (1995) notes, that people with a sense for aesthetics have more *"sophisticated preferences regarding the design of things"*. Moreover, he argues that individual taste is driven by design preferences, which forms an important factor for the choice of furniture. In sum, cultural, social and personal influence the taste for design (ibid.). In addition, Hoyer and Stokburger-Sauer (2012) claim that, *"a consumer's aesthetic taste is a main driver of hedonic value while his or her knowledge is a main driver of utilitarian value."*

Finally, Postrel (2003) notes, that 'in the age of look and feel', the *"aesthetic imperative overturns the simplistic dichotomy between 'rebellion' and 'conformity', or 'individual' and 'mass'."* She argues for 'selective conformity', which is a mix of standing out and conforming, a mix of meaning and pleasure, and of group affiliation and individual taste. This implies a higher variety and coexistence of styles that are equally accepted (ibid.). In line with the outlined notions, this study adopts the idea that people differ in terms of lifestyle and tastes and that there is no one best way to furnish a home. Instead multiple ideas of 'good taste' and aesthetics are allowed in furnishing the home according to one's idea of life.

2.1.9 Part Summary I: Meaning as the Source for Value

Until this point, the reader has learned, that people attach meaning to objects, especially in their homes. In return, they obtain value from possessing certain furniture or home objects. Richins (1994) and other theorists suggest that the meaning of people's possessions is the source for value (Baudrillard, 1998; Csikszentmihalyi & Rochberg-Halton, 1981; Douglas & Isherwood, 1979; McCracken, 1986). Richins (ibid.) brings in two main arguments for justifying this assertion. Firstly, it is the communicative power of possessions to communicate information about the individual and their social relationships in a socio-cultural system (Douglas & Isherwood, 1979). Secondly, objects contribute to creating and reflecting an individual's identity and self (Belk, 1988; McCracken, 1986; 2005). McCracken (2005) notes, that drawing meanings out of the meaning-loaded possessions is thus a prerequisite for receiving value: *"The product has delivered value because it has delivered meaning"* (McCracken, 2005). Concluding, meaning and value are two inextricably related concepts that can be viewed as the main reasons for consumption. Due to that, the next theory block deals with value that consumers derive from objects.

2.2 Value

This theory block summarizes existing value concepts, definitions and frameworks from relevant research fields. Originally studied by philosophers under the so-called 'Axiology' (e.g. Frondizi, 1971), value was also studied by consumer behaviorists or sociologists. Particularly 'consumer value', which is an intangible, psychological value, has been identified as the most relevant concept for this thesis, as it explores value from the consumer's perspective (e.g. Holbrook, 1999; Woodruff & Gardial 1996). As Carl Menger (1976) underlines, value is a relative concept that can be measured but not in absolute terms. Therefore, attention is put on which types of consumer values exist, rather than measuring how much value an object has for the consumer. In addition to presenting the different approaches to consumer value, the framework 'Typology on Consumer Value' developed by Morris B. Holbrook (1999), is introduced. Finally, one definition of consumer value is proposed as a basis for the empirical research.

2.2.1 Conceptualizing Consumer Value

Consumer value is a complex concept for which multiple definitions and frameworks have been proposed by various research fields (e.g. Gale, 1994; Woodruff & Gardial, 1996; Woodruff, 1997; Holbrook, 1999; Woodall, 2003; Lai 1995; Boztepe, 2007). As there is no such definition, that combines all viewpoints, it often causes confusion, also because there exist many terms to describe the phenomenon. While the terms consumer, customer or user value are often used interchangeably (e.g. Holbrook, 1999; Woodall, 2003; Boztepe, 2007), the term 'consumer value' is used in this thesis. In the attempt to provide an overview of the myriads of theories on consumer value, key definitions are gathered in Appendix 1.

The different disciplines that have delivered theory on consumer value differ in a number of definition criteria. One of them views value as either cognitive (i.e. instrumental, rational, utilitarian) (Babin & Harris, 2009; Gutman 1982) or affective (i.e. non-instrumental, emotional, hedonic) (Holbrook, 1994) or a combination of both, i.e. cognitive-affective in nature (Babin et al., 1994). Moreover, some literature focuses on the pre or during purchase stage (i.e. expected perceived value), while others consider only the post-purchase stage (i.e. perceived value) (Lai, 1995).

In order to establish some clarity, Graeber (2001) identified four approaches towards consumer value that Susan Boztepe (2007)[1] later adapted and extended, which shall serve as a frame for this chapter: (1) values in the sociological sense, as conceptions of what is ultimately good, proper, or desirable in human life, (2) value in an economic sense, as a person's willingness to pay (WTP) in return for benefits (value as exchange and use), (3) value in the linguistic, semiotic sense, as meaning and meaningful difference (value as sign) and (4) value as action (value as experience). To comprehend consumer value, it is first necessary to distinguish the singular term 'value' from the plural term 'values' (Taylor, 1961; Rokeach, 1994). This corresponds to Graeber's (2001) first category.

2.2.1.1 Personal Values

The term 'values' in plural refers to rules, criteria, norms, ideals and enduring believes, which serve as guides for actions, within so-called 'value systems' that are shaped by cultural, social and personal experiences of individuals (Rokeach, 1973). According to Rokeach (1973), values can either take on the form of being instrumental or terminal, and that value systems have the goal to shape the self in both, self-oriented and other-oriented ways. In contrast, Holbrook (1994; 1999) claims, that 'value' in its singular form refers to an evaluative or preferential judgment of some object by some subject. This valuation also involves comparison, choice making and preference. Values, as defined by Rokeach (1973), hence build the basis for such judgments.

2.2.1.2 Exchange & Use Value

The theories on value as exchange and use commonly view value deriving from the trade-off between benefits and sacrifices. From a traditional economic perspective, consumers derive value from the utility of a product. Especially the economist Karl Marx (1887/1990) argues that the value of a product ('commodity') is measured in terms of the amount of labor invested in producing it. He distinguishes between exchange value, i.e. labor as an index of value, and use value. The latter is, independent of labor, related to the utility of a good and due to physical properties (ibid.). The outcome for the consumer is essentially utilitarian, and therefore individuals would always choose the option that maximizes the value (Machina, 1987). According to Zeithaml (1988) and Gale (1994), exchange value occurs, when individuals are willing to make a monetary sacrifice (i.e. price, costs, time,

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[1] Boztepe's (2007) added notions on consumer value are shown in parentheses.

effort) in order to receive something in return (i.e. benefits, mostly utilitarian). Money is thus serving as a fundamental index of value (Boztepe, 2007).

The presented theories fall short, as one needs to consider the vast amount of products that are not necessarily fulfilling utilitarian functions, but are valued for other reasons (e.g. Csikszentmihalyi & Rochberg-Halton, 1981). The third approach attempts to replace the 'value as exchange and use' approach, by integrating socio-cultural aspects.

2.2.1.3 Sign Value

In opposition to the above-introduced utilitarian value, theorists such as Levy (1959), Baudrillard (1998) or Solomon (1983) take signs and symbols into account. As outlined previously, Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton (1981) have demonstrated that furniture and home objects are predominantly valued for their symbolic meanings attached by the consumer. Hence, objects are in many cases *"not valued for what they do, or what they are made of, but for what they signify",* as Boztepe (2007) writes. Both exchange and use value as well as sign value can be criticized, because the first argues for the source of value to reside in the object, while the latter sees it in the symbolic system. The fourth value category combines these two approaches, and represents advocates, who believe that value emerges from experiences (Frondizi, 1971; Holbrook, 1999).

2.2.1.4 Experience Value

According to the experiential approach, value arises from the interaction between an object and a subject within a socio-cultural context (Holbrook, 1999). With Woodall's (2003) words, value is *"can reside, coincidentally, in the subject, the object, and at the point of interaction between these two."* With reference to Abbott (1955) or Pine and Gilmore (1998), people don't desire products, but the experiences that these provide. In that regard, Hirschman and Holbrook (1982) claim that consumers derive hedonic value from consumption experiences, in which 'fantasies, feelings and fun' play a key role. In line with that, hedonic products can provide more experiential and emotional value for consumers than utilitarian products (Hoyer & Stokburger-Sauer, 2012; Babin et al., 1994). Experience value encompasses both use value and sign value, because experiences are operative (active) and reflective (passive) in nature (Dewey, 1966; Margolin, 2002). Advocating for the 'experience value' approach, Holbrook (1999) developed an integrative

framework for consumer value, which is outlined in the following chapter.

2.2.2 Holbrook's Framework 'Typology of Consumer Value'

This section elaborates upon Holbrook's (1999) 'Typology of Consumer Value' model. Based on the experiential approach and his own definition of consumer value – *"the evaluation of some object by some subject"* (Holbrook & Corfman, 1985; Holbrook, 1986; Holbrook 1994), Holbrook (1999) proposed different types of consumer values. He assumes 'multidimensionality', as *"value can only be understood by comparing it with other types of value, to which it is closely or not-so-closely related."* For example, quality could only be comprehended in comparison with beauty, and beauty with quality (ibid.).

2.2.2.1 Nature of Consumer Value

In terms of nature, Holbrook (1999) defines consumer value as an *"interactive relativistic preference experience."* The four elements of his definition – **(1)** interactivity, **(2)** relativism, **(3)** preference and **(4)** consumption experience – are interconnected and in combination constitute consumer value. In order to comprehend the nature of consumer value, each of them is explained separately below.

The first element implies, that value is constituted in the interaction between a subject and an object. This perspective finds itself in the position between subjectivism and objectivism, which correspond to the above-introduced 'value as exchange and use' and 'value as sign' approaches. According to objectivism (e.g. Osborne, 1933; Levitt, 1960; Marx, 1990), value is inherent in the object before any interaction with a subject. Subjectivists refute that theory and propose that value resides in the brain of the individual and *"depends entirely on the nature of subjective experience"* (Menger, 1976; Holbrook, 1999; Frondizi, 1971). With Menger's (1976) words, *"value does not exist outside the consciousness of men."* In between these two angles, the Interactionists stress, that value depends on the characteristics of an object but cannot occur without a subject appreciating these attributes or using it (Woodruff & Gardial, 1996; Frondizi, 1971; Holbrook, 1999).

With 'relativistic', Holbrook (1999) means that consumer value is comparative, personal and situational. Value is comparative, because it involves the relative preference for different objects by the same subject, i.e. an intrapersonal comparison (Lamont, 1955)

(e.g. "I like grey sofas better than green sofas"). The value does thus change, if the set of objects changes (Gale, 1994; Woodruff & Gardial, 1996). Furthermore, value is personal, as it varies across people. Hence, individuals perceive value differently (Sinha & DeSarbo, 1998). Lastly, perceived consumer value is situational, meaning that a judgment is context specific, including circumstances, time frame and location (Taylor, 1961; Woodruff & Gardial, 1996; Holbrook and Corfman, 1985).

Another crucial characteristic of consumer value is that it is preferential, i.e. incorporates a preference judgment. As highlighted before, preference plays an important role in consumers' evaluation of objects such as furniture (Moore, 1957; Hall, 1961). Concluding, consumer value is the outcome of an evaluative or preferential judgment. Finally, Holbrook (1999) claims, that consumer value is an experience. In line with Woodruff and Gardial (1996) and Hirschman and Holbrook (1982) he (ibid.) means that, *"consumer value resides not in the product purchased, not in the brand chosen, not in the object possessed, but rather in the consumption experience(s) derived from therefrom."*

2.2.2.2 Consumer Value Types

Based on the conceptualization of consumer value nature, Holbrook (1999) defines three dimensions, namely **(1)** extrinsic vs. intrinsic value, **(2)** self-oriented vs. other-oriented value; and **(3)** active vs. reactive value, into which he categorizes eight identified consumer value types. Figure 3 shows the framework with the dimensions and corresponding value types, which are elaborated upon in the following chapter.

		Extrinsic	Intrinsic
Self-oriented	Active	**Efficiency** (output/input, convenience)	**Play** (fun)
	Reactive	**Excellence** (quality)	**Aesthetics** (beauty)
Other-oriented	Active	**Status** (success, impression management)	**Ethics** (virtue, justice, morality)
	Reactive	**Esteem** (reputation, materialism, possessions)	**Spirituality** (faith, ecstasy, rapture, sacredness, magic)

Figure 3: 'Typology of Consumer Value' (Source: own illustration based on Holbrook, 1999).

Extrinsic (instrumental) value refers to functionality and utility serving as a means to accomplish a goal or end (Holbrook, 1999; Gutman, 1982; Bond, 1983). An example of a home object would be a bottle opener, that is not valued for itself, but for its ability to open a bottle. **Intrinsic** (terminal) value occurs when a *"consumption experience [i.e. a product] is appreciated as an end in itself – for its own sake […]"* because of its qualities (Holbrook, 1999; Lewis, 1946; Taylor, 1961). The **self- and other-orientation** dimension corresponds to the above-introduced definitions made by Rokeach (1973) and colleagues. Self-orientation is the capacity of a product to contribute to an individual's own sake, including the benefits for the person (e.g. a woolen blanket keeps one warm). Other-orientation, by contrast, is concerned with consumption experiences that are valued for the feedback from others and the effect it has on others (Holbrook, 1999). The final dimension distinguishes **active and reactive** value. Active value on the one hand is when a subject does something to or with an object, e.g. using or moving it (ibid.; Diesing, 1962). On the other hand, value is reactive, i.e. passive, when an object acts manipulates a subject, evoking a response in the consumer (Holbrook, 1999; Hall, 1961). Reactive value can for instance result from appreciation or admiration of an object (e.g. a painting). Together, the three dimensions constitute the grid for the eight consumer value types, which Holbrook illustrates with key examples, shown in parenthesis (Fig. 3). Despite the wide acceptance of the framework, Holbrook acknowledges possible overlaps between the types and that other dimensions or value types could exist. As Boztepe (2007) notes, they *"are not mutually exclusive, and the same experience with a product can impart different categories of value simultaneously and to varying degrees."* As the next step, the extrinsic value types are explained, followed by the intrinsic ones.

<u>Extrinsic Value Types</u>
According to the framework, the extrinsic value types are efficiency, excellence, status and esteem (Holbrook, 1999), while the first two generally focus on fulfilling some kind of utility and the latter social significance (Boztepe, 2007).

The first type, **'efficiency',** *"results from the active use of a product or consumption experience as a means to achieve some self-oriented purpose"* (Holbrook, 1999; Bond, 1983). Efficiency is mostly measured as an output/input ratio, where time represents the most valued input for consumers. Hence, convenience is a key example for this value

type. **'Excellence'** is by contrast to efficiency, a reactive valuation of an object or experience in order to achieve some self-oriented objectives without actually using the object (Holbrook, 1999). The given example is quality, which is perceived subjectively and precedes perceived value (Huber et al., 2001). According to Lewin (1936), perceived quality can de defined as the consumer's judgment about a product's excellence or superiority, which is indicated via intrinsic and extrinsic attributes (Woodall, 2003; Boztepe, 2007). Various authors converge in viewing quality as the ultimate source of satisfaction (Abbott, 1955; Holbrook & Corfman, 1985; Zeithaml; 1988; Woodall, 2003), but also as a determinant for 'quality of life' (Oliver, 1999). Moreover, consumers relate quality to price or costs (i.e. trade-off), as Sinha and DeSarbo (1998) sum up: *"value is quality that the consumers can afford"*.

'Status' is the third extrinsic type that differs from the two others in that it implies that consumers often consume products or consumption experiences towards an other-oriented end with the aim to receive favorable response from or impress others (Holbrook, 1999; Solomon, 1982). According to Nozick (1981), for status-directed value individuals adjust their consumption so that it affects those who they want to influence. Agreeing with Goffman (1959), Holbrook (1999) summarizes that, consumer do this, *"in part, as a set of symbols intended to construct a persona that achieves success in the form of status in the eyes of others."* The other-oriented counterpart to status is **'esteem'**, which results from a reactive appreciation, i.e. a passive ownership of possessions, of one's own consumption or lifestyle as a means to create a public image (ibid.; Goffman, 1967). Esteem value shows strong links to Veblen's (1994) previously mentioned lifestyle and taste theory 'conspicuous consumption', which claims that people value and display products for communicating status or wealth to differentiate themselves within a social nexus. Despite the strong similarity between status and esteem, the main difference is the way individuals represent their self. While (active) status pursues the goal of influencing others to *"get ahead"*, (reactive) esteem on the other side seeks conformity to *"get along"* (Slama & Wolfe, 1997).

Intrinsic Value Types
In contrast to the extrinsic consumer value types, intrinsic values do not focus on what a product can do in terms of functionality or utility. The four types on the right hand side are

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play, aesthetics, ethics and spirituality. Boztepe (2007) suggests labeling play and aesthetics with 'emotional' values, and ethics and spirituality as 'spiritual' values.

The first intrinsic value type, namely **'play'**, depicted in the upper right corner, involves engaging in leisure activities (i.e. not work) that are valued for the fun of it (Holbrook, 1999; Bond, 1983). In comparison to 'efficiency', which is also self-oriented, but the difference lies in the distinction between instrumentality and fun, or work and leisure. Thus, the benefits for the consumer come from affective experiences, which are always context and location dependent, and include meaning and emotions (Desmet & Hekkert, 2007). **'Aesthetics'** is also a self-oriented, but reactive value (Holbrook, 1999; Hampshire, 1982). Aesthetic value moves away from utilitarian concerns (Rader, 1979) and emphasizes beauty as an example. Aesthetic value primarily results from an emotional response to a product and can be acquired through the experience of beauty, often found in arts and product design (Postrel, 2003). A furniture design can for instance be pleasing for the eye, and be valued for its own sake as an end in itself (Holbrook, 1999).

On the other-oriented side Holbrook (1999) has placed **'ethics'**, that embraces virtue, justice and morality as examples, and **'spirituality'**, exemplified with faith, ecstasy, sacredness and magic. For this study, these two types are not further considered, as they are believed to be irrelevant in the study of furniture and home objects. Therefore, the other six types shall be incorporated in the later analysis. To sum up, the preceding review on consumer value theories demonstrates the complexity accompanied with it. Based on the presented theories, mainly on Holbrook (1999), this thesis defines consumer value as: *"an interactive, contextual, personal, and perceptive construct, which involves a cognitive-affective judgment of the quality of intrinsic and extrinsic attributes of furniture and home objects, and results from a trade-off between sacrifices and benefits at any stage of the decision-process."*

2.2.3 Part Summary II: Linking Meaning, Value & Design

In the two presented theory blocks, it was emphasized that consumers attach meaning to objects, especially to the ones they assemble in their homes, and derive different value types from them. Besides depending on the context and personal preferences, one crucial factor is the design of products, which enables consumers to value an object. In order to

enable the interpretation of their uses and meanings, it is required *"that products have sufficient visible cues to signal their potential value to users"* (Boztepe, 2007). Believing Cagan and Vogel (2002), design, meaning the profession or act of designing, contributes in creating certain product properties, or so-called cues, such as aesthetics, emotional appeal or quality. Specifically in furniture design, designers and companies imbue their objects with value via forms, materials, prices, symbols etc. (Heskett, 2002; Buchanan, 1985). Consumers rely on both extrinsic and intrinsic cues when evaluating a product and forming quality opinions both pre- and post-purchase (Frondizi, 1971; Zeithaml, 1988). Nevertheless, Zeithaml (1988) advocates that individuals primarily lean on intrinsic cues. In regard to that, Boztepe (2007) notes that, *"the cues that motivate a customer's initial purchase of a product may differ from the criteria that connote value during use."* The last theory block therefore introduces design as closely linked to meaning, value, aesthetics and quality, and deals with furniture design, as well as the case of Scandinavian furniture design.

2.3 Design

The last chapter of the theory review addresses design in general and furniture design in specific, with the example of Scandinavian furniture design. First, design is defined and related to meaning, value and aesthetics, followed by outlining fundamental product design elements and principles, which influence the consumer's decision-making process as well as enhance value creation. Finally, a historical overview and the key features of Scandinavian furniture design are presented. As mentioned in the introduction, the design literature relevant for this study focuses on furniture and interior design (field), designing meanings and value (practice) and design as a finished product. Taken that limitation and the fact that design originates from art (Heskett, 2002), its relationships to the prior concepts meaning, value and aesthetics are shown next.

2.3.1 Design in Relation to Meaning, Value & Aesthetics

This chapter attempts to show the role of design in relation to the prior concepts meaning, value and aesthetics. John Heskett (2002), who delivered remarkable design theories from both user and designer perspective, defines design *" […] as the human capacity to shape and make our environment in ways without precedent in nature, to serve our needs and give meaning to our lives."* He indicates that only humans have the capacity to design,

which enables them to construct their habitat and shape the world, and suggests that design affects everyone in daily life by determining and improving the quality of life (ibid.)

2.3.1.1 Design & Meaning

By stating, that design gives meaning to people's lives, Heskett (2002) argues that meaning, what he calls 'significance', in design is created at the interface between the designer's intentions and the user's needs and perceptions. With that he refers to the human capacity to imbue objects with personal meaning, as suggested earlier by Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton (1981). However, designers and producers do not always envision the same meaning as consumers (Heskett, 2002). McCracken (1986) therefore suggests, that designers need to make the intended product qualities self-evident to allow the meaning transfer. Krippendorff (1989) claims, *"design is making sense of things"* and that objects are not perceived as pure forms, but always seen in a cognitive and social context. Heskett (2002) distinguishes between utility and significance of objects, where the latter one refers to the meanings, which vary over time, space and culture, hence are not constantly fix. He bases this notion on viewing culture as *"shared values of a community"* and argues, that design changes these cultural values, *"manifested in interpretations and meanings of designed objects".* In sum, designed objects like furniture can, beyond the tangible form and utility purpose, become symbols of believes and aspirations for both a single person or shared by social groups, as shown in the prior theory blocks.

2.3.1.2 Design & Value

When arguing for the human capacity to imbue objects with meaning, Heskett's (2002) notion similarly implies that design adds value to people's life, as meaning is the source for value (Richins, 1994). Other endorsers for that idea are Cagan and Vogel (2002) claiming, *"great products provide significant value for the user."* Simon (1996) claims that, *"everyone designs who devices courses of action aimed at changing existing situations into preferred ones."* This entails that not only designers and marketers create value by designing, but also the consumers themselves design their lives and homes, and thereby also create value (Kristensen, 2011). In line with Feldman and Hornik (1981), Kristensen (2011) claims, that consumers, being creative and novelty seeking beings, create value at home in a life-long process by constantly modifying, redecorating, and designing their homes

and thereby improving their well-being and quality of life. These notions point out the importance, design has for users and is in line with Peter Drucker's (1985) statement on the connection between design, quality and value: *"Quality in a product […] is not what the supplier puts in. It is what the customer gets out and is willing to pay. […] Customers pay only for what is of use to them and gives them value. Nothing else constitutes quality."* In a study about the valuation of design in relation to price, Kristensen and colleagues (Kristensen et al., 2002; Kristensen & Gabrielsen, 2003) found a positive correlation between design competence and the appreciation of design value: The higher the competence, the higher the WTP for a designed object and vice versa.

Summing up, the value of design is a complex construct, which is constantly co-created between designer/company and consumer, shifting away from shaping forms towards designing products that enable experience, and provide meaning and value for consumers (Prahalad & Ramaswamy 2004; Verganti, 2011; Kristensen, 2011). In this respect, aesthetics embrace a key factor in design for providing value (Postrel, 2003).

2.3.1.3 Design & Aesthetics

Consumers demand functionality and usability, but not sufficing, they increasingly demand aesthetically appealing and pleasing products (Jordan, 2000; Postrel, 2003). Therefore, aesthetics, i.e. the appearance, look and feel play a crucial role in product design (ibid.; Creusen & Schoormans, 2005). Especially in everyday objects, such as furniture, consumers take aesthetic design for granted, and since consumers are highly visual, tactile, emotional and social creatures, they prefer products that account for these factors (Postrel, 2003). Norman (2004) claims, *"we can demand that everyday objects be both smart and pretty."*

Aesthetics are a major factor in the first impression of a product (Bloch, 1995) and instrumental for attention and liking (Schindler & Holbrook, 1994), hence a determining factor in decision-making processes (e.g. Veryzer & Hutchinson, 1998). Since aesthetics tend to elicit positive responses in consumers, aesthetic furniture design can result in immediate desire to obtain a product (Norman, 2004), higher WTP (Kristensen et al., 2002) or strong urge for care taking (Bloch, 1995). Moreover, Norman (2004) advocates that consumers believe that *"attractive things work better"* and therefore aesthetics can

influence inferences about quality or functional performance of the product, argue Creusen and Schoormans (2005). Similar is the so-called 'halo effect' (Thorndike, 1920), which put simply is: If the consumer likes one property of the product, e.g. the aesthetic appearance, she is influenced by her overall impression and consequently infers that the whole product is good (Long-Crowell, 2015).

Reber et al. (2004) propose that aesthetic pleasure is a function of the perceiver's processing dynamic: *"The more fluently perceivers can process an object, the more positive their aesthetic response."* The authors equate aesthetic pleasure with beauty, defined as *"a pleasurable subjective experience […]"*, and claim that perception is influenced by objective product features and the frequency of exposure to these stimuli (ibid.). Referring to the latter, this theory adopts the idea that repeated observation of an object enhances liking, and likewise preference, referred to as 'mere-exposure-effect' (Zajonc, 1968). All in all, Reber et al. (2004) propose another answer towards the dispute weather beauty is inherent in an object or lying *"in the eye of the beholder"*, by stating that *"beauty appears to be 'in the interaction' between the stimulus and the beholder's cognitive and affective processes"* (i.e. 'processing fluency'). Likewise, this relates to 'aesthetic consumer value' defined by Holbrook (1999).

2.3.2 Furniture Design

This part addresses the design elements and principles applied in furniture design practice, which mainly subconsciously influence the consumer's emotions, perception or evaluation of a piece of furniture (e.g. Creusen & Schoormans, 2005; Wilson & Challis, 2004). Designed furniture primarily stimulates the visual and haptic senses of consumers. For instance, people tend to associate certain materials, such as wood with quality (Toivonen, 2011). Nonetheless, the available budget can represent a restraining factor in decision-making (Huber et al., 2001).

2.3.2.1 Design Elements in Furniture Design

Product and furniture designs consist of a number of design elements, or product appearance attributes, which together build the finished product. The main elements used in design are line, color, shape, form and texture (App. 2)[2]. How they are employed

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[2] See Appendix 2 for definitions, examples of manifestation and stimulated senses for each design element.

usually depends on the furniture style or design movement (e.g. Scandinavian design). When talking about designs, consumers express their perceptions of these design elements in words (e.g. modern). In a study, Blijlevens et al. (2009) identified three universal classes of descriptions, namely 'Modernity' (modern, old-fashioned, classical, oldish, sleek, futuristic, kitsch, retro), 'Simplicity' (simple, functional, plain, boring, unusual, minimalistic) and 'Playfulness' (playful, funny). These terms are relevant for the later empirical inquiry about associations to Scandinavian furniture design.

Wilson and Challis (2004) state, that color is the first element that attracts attention and Baker (2004) claims, that *"color is often the most memorable"* of an object. How color is perceived and which meaning it has to someone, is however inherently subjective, gender- as well as culture-dependent (Kristensen et al., 2000). Moreover, color is a key element used in product and interior design, in order to create a certain mood or atmosphere, which is why colors are often associated with warm or cold (Hatchdesign.ca, 2016). Regarding the shape, consumers prefer symmetric over asymmetric shapes, since they contain less information that needs to be processed (Garner, 1974; Reber et al., 2004). In regard to form, several studies show that prototypical forms, that is the degree to which an item is an example of its category, are preferred by consumers, also because they foster aesthetic evaluation (e.g. Martindale & Moore, 1988). In sum, the success of a designed object not only depends on the combination of the elements, but also on the application of design principles (Lovett, 1999), which are introduced below.

2.3.2.2 Design Principles

This section elaborates on a selection of design paradigms to enable the suggestions of managerial implications. One paradigm, that has become popular in design vocabulary, is 'form follows function' attributed to Louis Sullivan (1896), which claimed that the function of a product must be signaled in its form. The functionality-paradigm has been widely adopted, for instance by the Bauhaus movement that additionally advocated the elimination of ornamental decoration. However, the principle is criticized for omitting the concepts meaning, dreams, aspirations, tastes, emotion and aesthetics. Therefore, critics propose reformulating it for example into: 'form follows meaning' (Krippendorff, 1993), 'form follows and leads emotion' (Postrel, 2003) or 'form follows fiction' (Heskett, 2002).

Besides that, the German designer Dieter Rams formulated the 'ten commandments' of what he considers as 'good design' (Vitsoe, 2016). With his idea of 'less but better', Rams was an advocate of minimalism that combines functionality with aesthetics – an approach that has been inspiring designers until today (Richter, 2016). For Rams, 'good design'[3] is innovative, useful, aesthetic, understandable, unobtrusive, honest, long-lasting, thorough, environmentally-friendly and simple. Yet, according to Williams and Frances King (2016), good design also communicates and engages individuals in a conversation. Younger design principles used today can for instance be attributed to Veryzer and Hutchinson (1998) who argue for 'unity' and 'prototypicality', as the two major principles that were found to positively affect aesthetic valuation. Unity can be understood as the harmonic connection of the elements to represent a unified form. In addition, Creusen and Schoormans (2005) suggest proportion, symmetry, complexity and color.

The outlined design principles serve as inspiration and guidelines in many design fields, but nowadays designs are often judged as 'good', when they fit the needs and context or delight the senses of consumers (Postrel, 2003). Based on the provided background knowledge about the role of design in people's lives and the criteria of furniture design, the coming section takes a closer look on furniture design from Scandinavia.

2.3.3 Scandinavian Furniture Design

This section introduces the reader to the history of Scandinavian furniture and interior design, including important streams and figures as well as its key characteristics ascribed by human beings.

The term 'Scandinavian design' was coined during the Modernism movement in the 1950's and until today has been representing the design movement from the Nordic countries Denmark, Sweden and Norway as well as Finland and Iceland (Fallan, 2012; Skjerven, 2003). Even though the five countries only share the same geographical location, 'Scandinavian design' was early communicated as one concept, or brand, and became internationally known through design fairs and a number of outstanding figures, such as the Dane Arne Jacobsen, the Fin Alvar Aalto or the Swede Bruno Mathsson (Hestad, 2013; Remlov, 1954). Especially Denmark, which today is worldwide perceived as a

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[3] See Appendix 3 for further explanations of Rams' 10 principles of 'good design'.

country with a strong 'design DNA' or as a 'design nation' for furniture design, has delivered plenty of iconic designs (Bason, 2016; 2015). 'Danish design' can therefore be understood as a sub-brand of Scandinavian design, which implies that they share the same key characteristics (Kristensen, 2001; Mitchell, n.d.; Linneballe, 2006).

Since then, Scandinavian furniture design has been associated with functionality, simplicity, minimalism and craftsmanship or other connotations such as light, nature-related, detail-oriented and democratic (Fallan, 2012; Mitchel, n.d.; Murphy, 2015; Hucal, 2016; Capetillo, 2008). Furthermore, it is claimed to be dominated by *"straight lines, clear angles, simple curves"* (Murphy, 2015). In addition to these connotations, Opie (1989) states that Scandinavian design shares *"quality, humanity and restraint combined with a sympathetic respect for the natural materials and a concern for their 'proper' use by the designer and their consumer"*. Other assigned values are durability and honesty, which similarly correspond to Rams' 'good design' principles (Hestad, 2013).

As mentioned above, Scandinavian design is characterized by a strong influence of architects, designers and cabinetmakers from the 'Golden Age' during the 1950s and 60's. Influenced by the Modernism principles of the Bauhaus School (1919-1933), the designers focused on simple lines, minimalistic forms, functionality and the elimination of ornaments, but interpreted them in their own way (Murphy, 2015; Droste, 2013). If one furniture piece had to be chosen to represent Danish design from that period, it would be chairs, for example from Hans J. Wegner (Linnebale, 2006; Capetillo, 2008). In general, Scandinavian designers pursued the idea to create beautiful and functional everyday objects, which should be available and affordable for everyone (Hucal, 2016). For instance the Swedish furnishing store IKEA became known for taking the 'welfare state' that advocated reducing social inequalities, as a fundamental basis (Fallan, 2012; Murphy, 2015). The reason why Scandinavian design became so popular after WWII could be the *"tendency to equate Scandinavian design as a reflection of Scandinavian society"* (Fallan, 2012). Thus, *"Scandinavia's focus on the home and family, assertions of democratic principles, and emphasis on traditional craftsmanship fit in well with consumerist ideals of the postwar period"* (Hucal, 2016).

During the 1970s and 80s, the strong focus on functionality had the consequence that Scandinavian design struggled and the focus shifted to other countries, such as Italy or Britain, which moved toward products, that were supposed to change the perception of the homes and society. For the first time, the concept of 'cultural meaning' was considered in designing products that allow consumers to attach meaning, and thereby disrupting the understanding of 'good design' (Verganti, 2011; McCracken, 1986). The Scandinavian designers needed to understand that pure craftsmanship alone cannot satisfy increasingly selective and demanding consumers anymore. Therefore, they had to start loading their products emotionally, i.e. through story telling and marketing efforts, in order to allow meaning and value creation for the consumers (Austin, 2013). Scandinavian design slowly worked its way up again during the 1990s, while the current popularity, as outlined in the preceding Introduction, has developed in a steep curve during the past 15 years.

In sum, this historical development has contributed to what Scandinavian design is today: a mixture of old iconic designs from the 1950-70s, that are still highly demanded or serving as role models for younger designers, and brands from the new generation, such as HAY, which interpret Scandinavian design in a modern way. The designs that prevail and are observable in stores and media today embrace a lot of wood (e.g. light oak), steel (e.g. copper), stone (e.g. concrete), organic forms and natural colors (e.g. white, pastels).

2.4 Summary of the Theory Review

This chapter summarizes the preceding theory review, which shall build the guide and frame for the subsequent empirical study. Split into the three blocks Meaning, Value and Design, the review presents the existing theories and models for identified meaning and consumer value types and links these to furniture design and the home context. It highlights the inseparability of meaning and value, which hints the challenge to clearly demarcate the types, as these overlap and vary across consumers and contexts (Holbrook, 1999; Richins, 1994). In that regard, the design of a furniture piece represents a key influencer for emotional response, decision-making and evaluation of quality and value (e.g. Creusen & Schoormans, 2005).

In the first block on 'Meaning', the presented literature can be summarized in that consumers acquire and surround themselves with furniture and home objects, to which

they assign meaning (e.g. Krippendorff, 1989), and use these to create the home (Woodward, 2007). The meanings of the home and furniture originate from the cultural context (McCracken, 1996). In Western cultures, it is primarily women who create the home with the main goal to establish homeyness (ibid., 2005) and welcome 'others' (Madigan & Munro; 1996). The home constitutes a space of safety and dreams (Otto, 2015; Bachelard, 1958), where individuals express their personality (Belk, 1988) through the type and arrangement of furniture (Bonnes et al., 1987). Thus, women use furniture and home objects to form and maintain their self- and identity concepts (Belk, 1988). Studies found, that the main reasons why women are attached to household objects are because they symbolize interpersonal relationships, memories, self, experiences or aesthetics (Kamptner 1995, Csikszentmihalyi & Rochberg-Halton, 1981). Finally, lifestyle, taste and aesthetics, and their subjective and contextual nature, are important determinants for the interior styling as well as the meaning attachment to furniture in hedonic consumption (Schmitt & Simonson, 1997; Bloch, 1995; Hirschman & Holbrook, 1982).

The second column on 'Value' highlights the diverging theories on consumer value, which is a consequence of meaning assignment (Richins, 1994; McCracken, 2005). Graeber (2001) identified four theory categories that are personal values, exchange and use value, sign value and experience value. The experiential approach, which incorporates the exchange, use and symbolic value, forms the base for Holbrook's (1999) 'Typology of Consumer Value' framework. According to Holbrook, consumer value is an *"interactive relativistic preference experience."* Based on that, he (ibid.) proposes eight types of consumer value, out of which value in the form of efficiency, excellence, status, esteem, play and aesthetics are identified as relevant for this thesis. These types are categorized along three dimensions, being extrinsic vs. intrinsic, self- vs. other-oriented and active vs. reactive (ibid.). Like the overlap of meaning types, the value types are not mutually exclusive, which represents a challenge to explore all value types existing in the interaction between an individual and a piece of furniture.

The third block on 'Design' highlights literature from the furniture and product design landscape. Heskett (2002) emphasizes that design gives meaning to people's lives. Hence, designed furniture and home objects enrich people's lives and can enhance the

quality of life (Kristensen, 2011). The design of furniture is for instance manifested in colors, forms or texture or the appliance of design principles (e.g. Veryzer & Hutchinson, 1998). Postrel (2003) stresses, that consumers demand functional *and* aesthetic products and studies found that aesthetics are elementary for liking a furniture or home object (e.g. Schindler & Holbrook, 1993), as they make consumers predict more value than ordinary designed products (Norman, 2004; Creusen & Schoormans, 2005). Finally, when engaging in conversations, consumers generally describe furniture or home objects in the dimensions of 'Modernity', 'Simplicity' or 'Playfulness' (Blijlevens et al., 2009).

Lastly, the literature review introduced Scandinavian furniture design that is among other terms broadly associated with functionality, simplicity, clear lines, minimalism or craftsmanship (Fallan, 2012; Mitchel, n.d.; Hucal, 2016; Capetillo, 2008). Furthermore, it is described as a design with clear lines, lightness, nature-related and user-centered (Murphy, 2015; Opie, 1989). Another aspect is its focus on making design available and affordable for everyone (Fallan, 2012; Murphy, 2015). Influential furniture designers from the 1950s and 60s, such as Arne Jacobsen, laid the foundation for these qualities, and today the new generation of brands such as HAY interpret Scandinavian design in their own way by combining traditional Scandinavian fundamental with the consideration of modern aesthetics, that hit the zeitgeist (Droste, 2013). Finally, Denmark takes on a key position in the Scandinavian furniture design style (e.g. Kristensen, 2001).

Given the theoretical framework, the below outlined study aims at adding theory by exploring the meaning and value of home and furniture from the perspective of two different nationalities, namely from the view of Danish and German women. It can be expected that the study uncovers similarities and differences, which are most likely ascribable to the cultural context and identities. However, the expected differences are assumingly lower as if Denmark was compared with a country or culture that lies geographically further away. Moreover, it is presumed that the Danish women show a high involvement in Scandinavian furniture design, due to the fact that they are Scandinavians and are most likely familiar with it.

3. Method

This chapter presents the empirical research method from a theoretical and practical perspective and delivers a description of the set-up and data collection for the research purpose. Firstly, the research approach is outlined, followed by arguing for the choice of research method. Secondly, the chosen research method is introduced theoretically in order to form a guide for the conduction and enable reflections about the process and results. In the following, the research design and the data collection of the conducted research method is detailed. All in all, this section builds the basis for the subsequent analysis and discussion.

3.1 Research Approach

In this section, the approach to the study is outlined, forming a frame for the research method and analysis. Embedded in interpretivism, the study aims at understanding motives of human behavior, the meaning of social interactions and of objects in the context of cultural value of the home and furniture. Interpretivism is an alternative to positivism and assumes that empirical data is open to multiple interpretations, which can vary depending on the interpreter or framework used (Moisander & Valtonen, 2012).

According to Bryman and Bell (2011), the approach to a research can either be deductive or inductive. A deductive approach is theory driven and aims at testing and confirming hypotheses by collecting data and revise theory afterwards from broad to specific. Deduction is mostly connected to a positivistic approach, implying that it is primarily applied in quantitative research. An inductive approach, by contrast, is data driven, identifies gaps in the theory and based on a research question gathers findings and insights to analyze patterns and compare it to existing theory. Induction envoys with interpretivism and draws from specific observation or insights to broad conclusions, concepts, patterns and theory, and includes implications (ibid.). For this thesis, an inductive approach is applied.

Primarily, but not exclusively, applied in qualitative research, the dominant research methods are focus groups, in-depth interviews or ethnographic observations (Bryman & Bell, 2011). In order to learn as much as possible about the subjects, qualitative research was preferred over quantitative methods for the data collection of this study, since these

are known to deliver results for unquantifiable and intangible topics such as behaviors, values and lifestyle (Moisander & Valtonen, 2012). In contrast to quantitative research, qualitative methods are appreciated for their delivery of data about why people believe or do certain things, which cannot be measured or expressed in hard figures. Furthermore, qualitative methods allow a holistic and deep understanding of people's underlying mental models and cultural meaning (ibid.). Due to the complexity of meaning and value of furniture, the choice of methods for investigating the phenomena, should according to Boztepe (2007) be 'open-ended' and exploratory. Based on this, only qualitative research was conducted. In sum, this study applies an interpretive, inductive approach with qualitative research. In the coming section, the applied method is outlined with the goal to guide the research process.

3.2 Theoretical Research Design

This section describes the chosen qualitative research method and how it is structured and conducted in the ideal way. According to Bryman and Bell (2011), *"a research design provides a framework for collection and analysis of data."* The aim of the research design is to choose and apply the right methods in the right way in order to get the best possible data for answering the research question (Blumberg et al., 2008).

In order to understand the types of meaning and value that consumers attach to their furniture, qualitative methods have been identified as most useful to acquire consumer insights allowing for an interpretive perspective (Moisander & Valtonen, 2012). According to Klepic (2014), *"Consumer insights research gets under the skin and inside the consumer's head to find the 'why' of a purchase, to understand what happened, and to project what could occur in the future".* As learned from the theory review, furnishing the home must not only be studied in relation to individual's self but also in relation to others in a social context. Individual interviews are likely to deliver insights, however group interviews are deemed more effective to find answers to the research question. Therefore, the focus group interview method was chosen and applied for this thesis, as it allows for understanding why people feel the way they do (Bryman & Bell, 2011). The choice can additionally be supported by the fact that the method is considered as the *"backbone of contemporary qualitative research"* (Gordon, 1999), and is the most applied technique in qualitative research within the fields of Sociology, Ethnography and Consumption Studies

(Moisander & Valtonen, 2012). In the next section, the focus group interview method with its characteristics, advantages, pitfalls and limitations is outlined.

3.2.1 Focus Group Interviews

The focus group method is a special form of interview with several people at the same time about a specific topic and is seen as a combination of group interview and focused interview (Bryman & Bell, 2011). Focus groups allow researchers to study people in a relatively natural discussion and learn about believes, attitudes and perceptions. Moreover, researchers can investigate how participants collectively make sense of a specific topic and construct meaning in a group, rather than simply as individuals in one-to-one interviews (Moisander & Valtonen, 2012).

Bryman and Bell (2011) advocate conducting the interview with a minimum of four and maximum of 12 participants, so that a lively discussion and interaction can take place. Preferably conducted on weekends or in the evening, the location and atmosphere should be informal, ideally also serving some snacks and drinks, and quiet so that the invited participants can find comfort (Gordon, 1999). Hence, a group big enough, yet not too big is optimal, because it enables participants to probe each other's opinions and likewise dig deeper into a topic. For the recruitment, Toft Knudsen (2015) suggests to first define the criteria, which the people should fulfill, and then invite potential candidates ca. two weeks in advance. Common demographic or psychographic criteria are gender, age, occupation or attitudes and interests (Bryman & Bell, 2011). According to most researchers, focus group interviews are most efficiently held when the group of participants is relatively homogenous (Fern, 2001; Kitzinger, 1995). Morgan (1997) emphasizes, that people find it easier to share their opinion and experiences with others that they perceive as similar to themselves. Nonetheless, the participants should not know each other, as this can influence the group dynamic or intimidate group members to speak up (Gordon, 1999).

A good focus group helps the researcher to answer the research questions (Bryman & Bell, 2011). Therefore it is crucial to ask the right questions and keep in mind that the participants are not experts. Literature proposes to use a prior prepared question guide with general as well as in-depth questions that must be open, avoiding yes or no answers, and easy to understand questions in order to encourage the interviewees to share their

opinions. The moderator should open the discussion with a few general questions, so that the participants can warm-up and find their role within the group. Towards the end, the questions should become more specific in order to get valuable statements to support the research (ibid.).

The moderator plays a crucial role in facilitating the focus group and influencing the outcome (Kvale, 1996). On the one hand it is the moderator's role to lead the discussion by asking questions and follow-up on comments and on the other hand to participate in the discussion, however without influencing the other's opinions. The moderator is mostly listening and awaiting the right moments to ask in-depth. Speaking of 'psychodynamic groups', Gordon (1999) supports this task, since it is more authentic and facilitates group synergy and dynamic. Thus, instead of being observant, the moderator must find the balance between leading and participating and hence let the interviewees discuss freely and only intervene when necessary (Bryman & Bell, 2011). He also needs to make sure, that all members equally join the discussion. Another good practice is summarizing long statements, which demonstrates active listening and facilitates further comments. In sum, the moderator must be liberal, flexible, controlling and leading at the same time. Guba and Lincoln (1985) claim, that a research can in fact only be as good as the researcher herself, including personal traits as well as the ability to take the right decisions and behaviors in the preparation, collection and analysis phases. In order to be able to fulfill these requirements, Bryman and Bell (2011) argue for getting help from an assistant, who takes notes of verbal and non-verbal information. Finally, it is necessary to record the interview with the participants' consent in order to enable the transcribing, which is needed for the coding and analysis (ibid.). Lastly, the participants should be compensated with money, a gift or voucher (ibid.).

Benefits & Limitations
The focus group method has benefits and limitations, which are presented in this part (Bryman & Bell, 2011). In general, the method has the benefits of being less artificial than other methods, since it emphasizes social interaction and discussion, which participants know from daily life (Wilkinson, 1998). Another advantage is the economy of time and money, since the average interview duration is 1.5 hours and it is relatively cheap in comparison to quantitative methods.

Despite the benefits in contrast to other qualitative and quantitative methods, the technique also has drawbacks and limitations. A drawback during the process is for instance, the risk that people don't show up, which is why experts recommend having someone in the backhand (Bryman & Bell, 2011). Moreover, the moderator has less control on the outcome than in individual interviews and needs to find the balance, as described above (ibid.). One phenomenon that often occurs is 'Groupthink', coined by Irving Janis (1972), as the interviewees aim for harmony and consensus within the group, which results in disregarding one's own opinion and adapting to the group. This can happen, if there is one dominant speaker, who restrains the others from expressing their opinion. This forces the interviewer to observe the activities carefully. One way to deal with this problem is to ask the group members to take notes on paper, so that once it is their turn, they don't forget about their standpoint (Peterson & Barron, 2007).

Experts like Bryman and Bell (2011) therefore emphasize the importance of conducting at least two focus groups, since each discussion can develop into another direction. Thus, it would be risky to arrive at conclusions with the opinions of one focus group, as the outcome could have been influenced by the group dynamics. However, there will always remain some uncertainty about the group dynamics and if two focus groups deliver very different results, it is recommended to conduct additional focus groups (ibid.). As a rule, the research should continue until no new information is found and recurring patterns can be identified, i.e. comes to halt when 'saturation' is achieved (King & Horrocks, 2010; Bryman 2001). In comparison to other methods, the data gathered from group interviews is difficult to organize and analyze, including the time consuming transcription. Another shortcoming is that the interpretation of the transcripts highly depends on the interpreter. Finally, the technique is often criticized along qualitative criteria, which are discussed in the coming chapter (Bryman & Bell, 2011; Madsbjerg & Rasmussen, 2014).

3.2.2 Quality Assessment of the Qualitative Data

Assessing the quality of collected research data can be challenging in regard to which criteria and strategies to apply in order to ensure their achievement. In quantitative research, the quality is commonly evaluated in terms of validity and reliability (Bryman & Bell, 2011; King & Horrocks, 2010). Validity is concerned with the determination *"whether a particular form of measurement actually measures the variable it claims to"*, while reliability

is used to judge, *"how accurately any variable is measured"* (King & Horrocks, 2010). Various researchers agree that reliability is automatically given, if validity was achieved and that both criteria may allow generalizability (Guba & Lincoln, 1985; Patton, 2001; Bryman & Bell, 2011).

In qualitative research however, there is no such general agreement on quality criteria, and validity and reliability are criticized for inaccurately reflecting the quality of qualitative data sets. Guba and Lincoln (1985; 1994) represent one of the most influential research couple, which posits 'trustworthiness' as an alternative criterion. This criterion is to be reached after conduction and has become widely accepted in coexistence to validity and reliability (ibid.). Later, they (ibid., 1994) developed criteria of 'authenticity' regarding the effect of the research on the participants, which have however not been as influential (Bryman & Bell, 2011) and are therefore not pursued further.

3.2.2.1 Trustworthiness

Guba and Lincoln (1985) suggest the use of 'trustworthiness' in four means: credibility (substituting validity/internal validity), transferability (substituting generalizability/external validity), dependability (substituting reliability), and conformability (paralleling objectivity/neutrality). 'Credibility' refers to the extent to which the researcher's interpretation and the truth of the findings is endorsed by the people involved in the research. 'Transferability' is described as the ability of the researcher to demonstrate that the findings could be applied in other contexts. Regarding 'dependability', King and Horrocks (2010) notice that, *"qualitative research generally assumes that real-world settings inevitably change, and replication is thus unachievable."* Guba and Lincoln (1994) therefore argue, that qualitative researchers need to show that they have accounted for the instability of both the studied context as well as the introduced instability during the research process. Thus, 'dependability' shall show that the findings are consistent and could be repeated by another researcher. The fourth dimension of trustworthiness is 'conformability', which is concerned with the degree of neutrality or objectivity of the researcher. It is claimed, that the findings should emerge from the data, hence be shaped by the respondents, and not by possible bias or predisposition of the researcher (ibid.).

3.2.2.2 Strategies to Ensure Quality Criteria

There exist a large number of strategies for the qualitative research process, which are believed to reach the above-introduced criteria (King & Horrocks, 2010). Some of the techniques suggested by Guba and Lincoln (1981; 1984), were selected for elaboration.

Member Checks

Member checks represent a method to get feedback from research participants to test if the data has been analyzed and interpreted correctly. Guba and Lincoln (1985) view this as one of the most important techniques to achieve credibility. A big advantage of member checks is that it allows interviewees to challenge wrong interpretations. At the same time, there are two main drawbacks (Morse, 1994). Firstly, member checking assumes a fixed truth of reality, but from an interpretive perspective there is no such truth, as understanding is co-produced. Secondly, the technique can cause conflicts between the researcher and member. Ashworth (2003) argues that member checks should therefore be seen as a further stage of data collection instead of guarantees for confirming results.

External Audits

External audits are a technique for dependability, which engage an independent researcher, who was not involved in the research process, to examine the research process and the results. The purpose is to evaluate whether the researcher did the data collection accurately or whether the data, interpretations and conclusions are too much shaped by the individual view of the researcher (Guba & Lincoln, 1985). While this technique can deliver valuable feedback for a researcher, it has similar disadvantages in common with member checks. One way to avoid these is to select a colleague or expert, who has detailed knowledge of the investigated phenomenon (King & Horrocks, 2010).

Thick Description & Audit Trail

In order to ensure conformability, Guba and Lincoln (1985) recommend providing as many details as possible for the reader to comprehend how and why the researcher arrived at conclusions, referred to as 'thick description'. King & Horrocks (2010) argue that, *"thick description can never be a guarantee of the quality of analysis on its own, since the researcher, of necessity, must be selective in what they choose to present […]."* All the documents produced during a research process (e.g. transcribed interviews) constitute a so-called 'audit trail' (King & Horrocks, 2010; Guba & Lincoln, 1985).

Triangulation

Many researchers promote 'triangulation', which Guba and Lincoln (1985) view as a means to establish credibility and conformability. Triangulation involves using multiple research methods and data sources, which shall facilitate a holistic understanding of a phenomenon, as it is believed that a single research method cannot suffice (Guba & Lincoln, 1985; Patton, 2001; Denzin, 1978). In qualitative research, triangulation is usually done to ensure data richness and comprehension (Denzin, 1978). Besides the methodological and data triangulation, Denzin (1978) identified two other means of triangulation that refer to the data analysis, which is the use of multiple analysts, or 'theory triangulation', characterized by applying multiple theoretical perspectives for the analysis.

Saturation

'Saturation' represents another quality indicator consisting of 'data saturation' and 'theoretical saturation' (Bryman, 2001). Since an inductive approach implies developing theory through the collection, analysis and adequate interpretation of data, it is suggested to collect data until 'theoretical saturation' is achieved (Bryman, 2001). Moreover, qualitative research is expected to deliver 'data saturation', i.e. collecting and analyzing data until the point where no new insights emerge, to ensure the credibility of the conducted research (Francis et al., 2010). Therefore, Frambach et al. (2013) propose to spent sufficient time on data collection and analysis. Yet, Corbin and Strauss (2008) argue that complete saturation is never achieved, for instance because researchers may run out of time or money.

3.3 Research Design

Taken this background knowledge about the focus group method and which factors to consider throughout the process, two interviews were conducted for this study. In this chapter, the design of the conducted focus groups is outlined. The preparation phase comprised the development of the question guide, the sampling, the organization of the locations, the recruitment of the interviewees, the determination of the research language and preparation of research material. The preparation started approx. four weeks in advance in order to ensure well-prepared questions, increase the participation rate and make sure that things run smoothly during the sessions. The overall goal was to adhere to the proposed set-up, rules and advice. Next, the listed elements are described separately.

3.3.1 Question guide

A question guide was developed with the aim of asking the right type of questions in the interviews (Elliot & Associates, 2005). Due to that, the questions were formulated as open questions from broad to specific, and generally followed the rules suggested by Bryman and Bell (2011). The questions covered the following topics:

- Decision-making criteria for furniture acquisition; designer and brand importance
- Good life; home associations
- Meaning and value of furniture
- Lifestyle, taste, style
- Self-expression and social relationships
- Scandinavian furniture design
- Future dreams

The final question guide (App. 4) comprised a total of 21 formulated questions, which were ordered in a way to serve as a structure for the interviews sessions as well as to help the moderator leading the discussion. It was designed to enable the application of a 'semi-structured approach, which has the advantages of allowing both the interviewees to come up with new directions as well as allowing the interviewer to adapt the question order or wording according to the comments (Cohen & Crabtree, 2006; Bryman & Bell, 2011). This explains the large amount of questions, out of which not all were inquired in the actual interviews.

3.3.2 Sampling

The sampling for focus groups is crucial, as the right composition of people influences its failure or success (Morgan, 1997). For this reason, the participants should be selected carefully to ensure the usefulness of the results (ibid.). Thus, it is not the sample size that counts but the adequacy of it (O'Reilly & Parker 2012). In order to avoid random sampling, specific participant characteristics were defined for the purpose of this study, representing the requirements to participate in the focus groups. These are described and justified below.

The defined criteria were mainly of demographic nature, namely gender, age, relationship status and nationality. The participants should be female, between 25 and 35 years old, preferably in a relationship or have their own family and either have the German or the

Danish nationality. Additionally, the participants should live in an urban area or city and optionally possess high interest in interior design, furniture and lifestyle products.

It is argued to exclusively recruit women, due to the previously emphasized gender importance in the construction of the home (e.g. Benett et al., 1999), which claims that women take care of furnishing and aesthetic choices (Madigan and Munro, 1996). Based on these arguments, it is believed that women are in most cases highly involved in the topic of research, which would facilitate the collection of valuable insights.

The age frame of 25-35 was chosen due to the assumption, that at that point most women have an income, hence have more money at their disposal for furniture than for instance in the early 20's during their education or studies. Another aspect of consideration was that women around the age of 30 tend to settle down to family life and consequently place more importance on creating the home for the family (Otto, 2015).

The relationship status was another condition of participation, which means that females in a relationship with a partner were preferred over singles. This is substantiated by the assumption that women in a relationship around 30 are in a life stage, where they, together with a partner, start making future plans together. Additionally, the women should either live together with the partner or family or plan to move together in the near future. An ideal, but optional recruitment factor was children.

The last requirement for the purpose of comparison was that the participants either had to be Danish or German. Moreover, they should live in or around Copenhagen or Hamburg, since these cities were chosen as a research location that can easily be accessed. Moreover, the cities were chosen, since they have many inhabitants with the above outlined criteria and that they constitute an environment, that they constitute and environment where the Scandinavian furniture design boom is noticeable.

3.3.3 Recruiting & Location

Subsequently, the recruiting process and organization of location are described. The interview location in Hamburg was an apartment in the central neighborhood Eimsbüttel and the same type was arranged in the hip area Vesterbro in Copenhagen. The kitchens

proved to be a good place to accommodate the participants and allowed to serve drinks and food in order to make people feel comfortable, as suggested by Gordon (1999).

To ensure the success of the interviews and keep it manageable, the aim was to follow the by Bryman and Bell (2011) advised group size. Therefore, 13 people were invited for the German focus group, whereof six participated as interviewees and one as assistant, while the researcher was the moderator. For the Danish group, eight women were recruited and again six of them participated. Most of the participants were found in the private network of the researcher and contacted via Facebook, email or word-of-mouth. The recruitment via these media showed to be the easiest way to access potential subjects across geographically distances. It was made sure that the interviewees did not know each other prior to the interview, as the pre-existing relationships could falsify the process (ibid.). The invitations were sent with approx. 2.5 weeks notice to ensure a high rate of cooperation. A few days before the appointment, a reminder was sent and the participants were given the task to bring a picture of one of their furniture or home object (no electric devices), which is special or valuable to them. This task had the purpose to encourage participants to share the story about their attachment in the interview session.

3.3.4 Research Language

Another aspect was to decide which language, as a fundamental tool of communication, should be used during the focus groups (Bryman & Bell, 2011). The language of this research paper is English, but neither the German researcher and participants nor the Danish participants have English as their mother tongue. However, people can express their ideas and opinions best in their mother tongue and feel more comfortable to speak up. Therefore the German focus group was conducted in German, which required the translation of the English interview guide. The difficulty was to ensure that the right terms and words are used (Xian, 2008). The Danish participants were inquired in English, despite the awareness for the cross-cultural language barriers for both the German moderator and the Danish participants (Temple & Young, 2004). Employing English as the research language was not only due to limited Danish skills of the researcher, but also facilitated the later analysis.

3.3.5 Materials

In order to positively influence the research results, a number of materials were used. To enable the later transcribing, a phone and laptop were used for voice and video recording. In addition, food and drinks were provided for the interviewees, as a means of establishing an informal atmosphere (Gordon, 1999). Moreover, sticky notes and pens were provided for the respondents to take notes and indirectly help the researcher to avoid the risk of 'Groupthink'. Another prop employed in connection to stimulate associations with Scandinavian furniture design, was a collage of printed Scandinavian designs (Fig. 4). The choice for chairs was grounded in the fact that they are one of the main representatives of Scandinavian furniture design (Capetillo, 2008). Salt and pepper mills should represent the category of small home objects, which fulfill a function but are also decorative. Additionally, the interviewees themselves brought a picture of their chosen 'special' furniture. Lastly, the materials were complete with the incentive in the form of chocolate.

Figure 4: Collage of Scandinavian designs (Source: see References).

3.4 Data Collection

In this chapter the process of data collection of the conducted focus groups is described and positive aspects are highlighted. The first step before arrival of the interviewees was to establish a cozy atmosphere, prepare the drinks and food and get the picture collage ready to be used towards the end of the discussion. The German participants were, sorted after age, Marieke (35), Silvia (30), Lena (28), Bilge (28), Johanna (28) and Mimi (26). They all live in Hamburg and are except for one in a relationship. Marieke is married and has a one-year old daughter. In Denmark the participating women were Julie (31), Malene (31), Mia (28), Mette (26), Anna (26) and Maria (25). All of them live in Copenhagen, besides Julie, who like Malene has a young family, while the others live with their boyfriends. Once the participants had arrived on time, the focus group interview followed the below listed structure, which was developed beforehand in the preparation phase:

1. Arrival and welcoming
2. Informing about purpose, rules and recording
3. Introduction and warm-up
4. Discussion
5. Wrap-up and acknowledgement

In anticipation of some worried women about speaking English, the Danish members were comforted before starting the discussion, by encouraging them to help each other out with English terms or to simply use the Danish terms. An introduction round was done to quickly get to know each other and to break the ice. Each woman was asked to introduce herself and to describe her living situation, including information about the neighborhood, the type of apartment and the interior style. This gave the other group members and the moderator a rough idea of what the respondent lives like and likes in regard to home and furniture. As the next step, the moderator kicked off the discussion round, following a semi-structured approach, including remarking the questions and intervening if necessary (Bryman & Bell, 2011). The questions were asked as defined in the guide (App. 4). Throughout the whole sessions, the assistant took notes on verbal statements and field notes from the observation of non-verbal information. In the beginning the group members were mostly addressing and facing the moderator, but after short time, the members started acting on each other's comments and adding different perspectives. This interaction is according to Kitzinger (1995) crucial to establish their views to the world, here towards the home and furniture, but also to ask each other questions. Moreover, the women were predominantly agreeing with each other, expressed in affirmative gestures.

While discussing the importance of the home and the meaning and value of furniture for the individuals, the moderator asked the participants to share their story about the 'special' furniture they had taken a picture of. This method proofed very successful in revealing personal, underlying connections and emotional bonds between the women and the object. Another positive aspect was that each individual shared something unique and personal, which in comparison to other more general questions was important to explore the meaning and value types attached to furniture. In addition, the collage of Scandinavian designs was deployed and shown to the group to enhance the brainstorming for describing Scandinavian furniture design. Especially the German women appreciated this visual support to find terms and words for their associations. In sum, the participants primarily shared their own standpoints and illustrated these with stories, while additionally telling

stories about or experiences with friends or family. Thereby, they could always contribute to the discussion. In the German group they even developed ideas together, when talking about future dreams of their ideal home.

Both focus groups lasted approximately 140 minutes, which is within the suggested time frame (Bryman & Bell, 2011). At the end, the participants received the chocolates, and they communicated that they enjoyed the session. This confirmed the moderator's impression, that the good mood during the sessions was a sign of enjoyment. After the participants had left, the moderator and assistant discussed the freshly gathered data and agreed that the Danish focus group was a little more harmonic than the German one, which is probably ascribable to the higher involvement in design. The data collection was finished after the two research enriching focus groups.

4. Analysis

In this chapter, the findings and insights from the two conducted focus groups are presented and analyzed. Firstly, it is described how the interview data was coded and secondly, the findings and insights are presented in textual and visual form.

4.1 Coding Method & Analysis Process

The analysis of the qualitative data was inspired by King and Horrocks' (2010) 'thematic analysis' process, which suggests the transcription and coding of the material. The transcription was a means to organize the recorded material and convert it into written text, which facilitates the analysis process and familiarity with the data (ibid.). Each participant received a label in the form of abbreviating the name (e.g. Ma) and the German focus group is referred to as FG1 and the Danish as FG2 (Elliot & Associates, 2005). The transcription ignored natural pauses and invaluable words were cleaned up. Verbally stressed words or emotional responses such as laughing, were highlighted in order to reproduce their emotions and facilitate the interpretation of their statements.

After having transcribed, the analysis followed the three steps to further synthesize the data, as suggested by King and Horrocks (2010): descriptive coding, interpretive coding and definition of themes. A fourth step was undertaken, by depicting the interpretive codes and themes in a map (Christensen & Olson, 2002). All in all, the process underwent

constant refining and iteration, to ensure codes and themes that best represent the findings and insights. The steps as depicted in Figure 5 are described in the following.

Descriptive coding		Interpretive coding		Definition of themes		Mapping

Figure 5: Coding and visualization process (Source: own illustration based on King & Horrocks, 2010; Christensen & Olson, 2002).

The first step consisted of reading through the documents and highlighting all statements that could be valuable. Afterwards, descriptive codes, i.e. labels that do not yet interpret the meaning, were assigned to the transcriptions (App. 5). In the second step, recurring patterns and concepts were identified, which allowed the grouping of the descriptive codes, into interpretive codes (King & Horrocks, 2010). Moreover, King and Horrocks (2010) note that, *"the same descriptive theme [i.e. code/label] can feed into more than one interpretive theme."* When assigning the interpretive labels, the aim was to cover the underlying mental models including *"both affective and cognitive meaning"*, e.g. attitudes, emotions, values, symbols, goals, memories and cognitions (Christensen & Olson, 2002).

In the third stage, the interpretive labels were grouped and abstracted into 'overarching themes' (King & Horrocks, 2010). The authors (ibid.) define themes as, *"recurrent and distinctive features of participants accounts, characterized particular perceptions and or experiences, which the researcher sees as relevant to the research question"*. The three overarching themes are identical to the theory blocks, namely Meaning, Value and Design, under which the interpretive codes are assembled (App. 6). In order to ensure a deep understanding of the results, the consumers' individual mental models were combined into a so-called aggregate 'consensus map' (Christensen & Olson, 2002) that visualizes the linkages between the overarching themes as well as among the interpretive codes, which can relate to more than one theme. Finally, King and Horrocks (2010) propose structuring the presentation of the results according to the themes and illustrate the presentation with quotes, to make it readable and credible, and turning it into a 'narrative' that delivers arguments to answer the research question (e.g. Braun & Clarke, 2006). As a prerequisite, relevant quotes from the German transcription were translated into English, which was intended to be done thoroughly and might include some kind of sense-making (Xian, 2008). The findings and insight from the focus group interviews are presented next.

4.2 Findings & Insights

This chapter presents and interprets the findings and key insights according to the three themes and interpretive codes (App. 6) by linking back to the theoretical framework, with the purpose to deliver information to answer the research questions and translate insights into managerial implications (Madsbjerg & Rasmussen, 2014). The data is presented as a whole by showing what the groups have in common, while highlighting relevant differences. The findings and insights are illustrated and substantiated with direct quotes (App. 5) and the linkages are visually depicted in the consensus map in Appendix 7.

4.2.1 Theme I: Meaning

This chapter elaborates upon the findings and insights on the meanings that German and Danish women attach to their home and to their furniture and home objects.

Meanings of Home

According to the results, the home represents a space to which individuals are emotionally connected and have personal associations, as a quote from a Danish woman illustrates, *"Home is where your heart is"* (FG2, M). In general, the interviewees associate home with family, personality-expression and future dreams. It is pictured as a haven or *"nest"* (FG1, Ma; e.g. Crowley, 1999), which enables retreating from the outside world and be safe and familiar with its characteristics: *"[It] starts with the smell, when you enter the door"* (FG1, J). Furthermore, the home provides an informal space for self-determination, as suggested by Kristensen and Grønhaug (2006). As one participant states, *"The home is more than just the apartment as the location of residence, but also means that one has arrived and settled in the sense of being surrounded by family, friends, work or whatever might be important to someone."* (FG1, Ma).

Not only is the home equated to family, but also generally seen as a place of togetherness. In order to establish a homey feeling, the women place high importance on creating coziness (McCracken, 2005), for instance with *"candles"* (FG1, Mi): *"For me it's nice to have some surrounding that I really love to be in and that I love to invite people in to"* (FG2, Me). The data shows that, on the one hand the home is an intimate space for its inhabitant, but on the other hand it shall communicate with others, hence it involves both the self and social relationships to others (Belk, 1988). As two women underline, guests

should *"feel welcome"* (FG1, Ma) and homey: "*To me it's not really important that the people think I have nice furniture, but just that they like where I live and that they feel at home when they visit."* (FG2, Mi). These quotes align with Madigan and Munro (1996). Nevertheless, women are *"happy to hear that others like [their] home"* (FG1, L) and that one can see the *"time"* and *"thoughts"* put into creating a personalized home (FG2, Me; FG2, M; Csikszentmihalyi & Rochberg-Halton, 1981), which links to theme II.

Another finding is the importance assigned to expressing their personality and identity. In line with Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton (1981), the home should communicate something about the inhabitant(s). As one respondent states, *"If I lived somewhere completely white and clinical, it wouldn't be me. It wouldn't be home"* (FG2, Me), which shows that the home interior is embraced in one's self and claimed to be 'me' (Belk, 1988). Thus, in the German and Danish culture, someone's home is expected to look *"authentic"* and *"personal"*, and not like in the examples from magazines or the *"IKEA catalogue"* (FG1, Ma; FG2, M; Richins, 1994). In regard to that, most women don't want to live like *"everyone else"* (FG2, Me), emphasizing their wish for distinction. Nonetheless, the women mentioned using magazines of blogs for inspiration (Kristensen, 2011).

Additionally, home is tied to dreams, as one states, *"For me it's like dreaming about how I want to create my more established home"* (FG2, An). Thus, the women see the home as a "base" (FG1, Mi) or *"center of one's life"* (FG1, Ma), from where one can dream of the future (Murphy, 2015) and engage in activities or interactions with others (Csikszentmihalyi & Rochberg-Halton, 1981). Besides that, it was found that dreams about the future ideal home, are often influenced by the parent's home and the childhood, as suggested by Bachelard (1958). The type of dwelling or location can for instance be named as examples. Generally, the women agree that their ideal home is a house or apartment, which is spacious enough for a family, centrally located in a preferred neighborhood, but still close to nature and that the furnishing should be *"a mix of old and new"* furniture (FG2, Me) following the idea of possessing *"few but good"* quality pieces that one has carefully selected (FG2, M; FG1, Mi). In conclusion, where and how they want to live in the future shall match their whole concept of self (Belk, 1988).

Regarding the importance of the home, the study reveals that the creation of the own home becomes more and more important in the life stage (Csikszentmihalyi & Rochberg-Halton, 1981), where moving together and creating a family becomes important. As one of the women, who lives in a shared apartment and plans to move together with her boyfriend, notes, *"the closer [the own apartment] approaches, [the interest in furnishing] becomes more and more important. So that I even have a box under my bed, with [interior] things that I want to have in my own apartment at some point."* (FG1, Mi). Therefore, also the meaning of furnishing increases once it comes to creating an *"established"* home (FG2, An). In addition, the respondents made sense together in that they identified the influence of culture on the extent of importance that people with the same cultural background assign to their home (e.g. Seth et al., 2000). In regard to that, the Danish women confirm that the Danish *"hygge"* culture (FG2, Me) and weather reinforce the significance of a *"nice"* home, since they spend a lot of time in it and it thereby becomes an additional means of self-expression. *"England"* (FG1, S; FG2, Me) was for instance mentioned as an example for cultural differences, where the home seems to be less important than for Danish or German women. This finding can be supported with Richins' (1994) confirmation of cultural influence on meaning creation in regard to furnishing. Another finding is, that the majority of the Danish participants own their apartment, whereas the German ones on the contrary typically rent theirs and only in their dreams imagine a condo apartment or house. Thus, the Danish women could have more reasons to invest 'psychic effort' into their home, which would increase the attachment to and meaning of it (Csikszentmihalyi & Rochberg-Halton, 1981).

Meanings of Furniture and Home Objects

The research reveals that furniture and home objects are mainly of symbolic meaning for the women. The familiarity and long company with the furniture make it possible to create a home independent from the location: *"I have learned, that I can create the homey feeling myself [by surrounding myself with familiar furniture]"* (FG1, Ma). Therefore the women stressed that having their own furniture around them matters a lot to them. Thus, when claiming, that the home reflects their personality and identity, they actually refer to certain objects or the combination of these. As one group member illustrates, *"that you can see, ok this is where I live. And it's part of me. And you can see that it is me living there and not Anna"* (FG2, Me). The statement underlines that possessions are symbols of the self

(Belk, 1988). Another interviewee states, *"I am organized and structured and I think my home reflects that, because everything is stored"* (FG2, M). Thus, the arrangement of furniture often unconsciously reflects the personality, as it is done according to someone's needs and wish for optimization (Bonnes et al., 1987). In the discussion, furniture was often compared to clothes (*"I think it's like fashion"* FG2, Mi), which are also used to extend the self (Belk, 1988) and communicate something to others (Douglas & Isherwood, 1996). Since clothes are however even more visible to others, it was found that they still seem to be a more important vehicle for self-expression than furniture, especially for the women who are not yet living in an *"established"* (FG2, An) home such as the students.

A recurring finding was that women tend to accumulate a *"mix"* of new and old things, which they acquire themselves or receive from others, in order to add a personal touch to the home. Therefore, different, ideally unique, things are collected throughout the course of life. That is also why the women showed difficulties in categorizing their own interior style into predefined styles, since they mix different styles (e.g. FG1, L; e.g. Postrel, 2003). They literally *"pick out"* (FG2, J) or *"find"* (FG1, Mi) things and combine these. *"Flea markets"* (FG1, S) and *"second-hand shops"* were repeatedly mentioned as a good place to find things, as the words of a Danish woman underline, *"the frame is actually an old window, which my boyfriend and I found in the second-hand shop"* (FG2, An).

The sharing of the photos of a meaningful home object, unfolded that the majority of the women chose a furniture piece (e.g. table, chair, closet), while the rest chose smaller, decorative home items (e.g. vase, jewelry box, picture), as also found in Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton's study (1981). They all have in common the shared history and experiences between the individual and the object. A quote from one woman, who has moved several times with her old closet, supports this: *"The closet and I, we are a team"* (FG1, S). Furthermore, expressions such as *"I love them"* (FG2, Ma) show the emotional connection towards the products. Hence, the meanings assigned to the chosen things are 'private', i.e. personal and subjective (Richins, 1994).

Moreover, it was identified that the key reason for being meaningful to the women was that the objects represent memories of people or occasions: *"we bought [the chairs] when we got married"* (FG2, J). In this case the chairs reflect an important event or phase in life.

This is accompanied by the fact, that they have had the 'special' object for a longer time and also intend keeping it *"forever"* (FG1, S; Wallendorf & Arnould, 1988). Another common characteristic is to display the object in the central part of the home. In that sense, the women agree on being attached to objects, because of liking the appearance, independent of being an 'action' or 'contemplation' object (Csikszentmihalyi & Rochberg-Halton, 1981). This insight relates to 'aesthetic value' (Holbrook, 1999), elaborated in theme II. The attachment is further enhanced if the furniture is customized or handcrafted, as the story of the dining table of a German woman shows (FG1, Ma; Richins, 1994) or if it is personalized for example through rituals such as painting (FG2, Mi; McCracken, 1986).

The commonest cherished furniture was the dining table, which besides the individual stories behind it, was selected due to being a sign of social relationships with friends or family. This can be substantiated with the quote, *"It stands for so many good evenings and moments […] and that we cook a lot and invite friends for diner. Therefore it is a very central object."* (FG1, L). Another woman adds, *"always when it's not being used, I realize that we […] should invite guests."* (FG1, Ma). Hence, the dining table serves as a reminder to maintain social relationships. It is a 'uniting symbol', but at the same time has a functional meaning (Friedman, 2015), when it is for instance turned into an *"office"* desk (FG1, L). The statement, *"The table lives with us and already has some marks, but that's ok"* (FG1, L), demonstrates that it is seen as a constituting part of the home and is there to be used. Here, the meaning is transferred from the table to the individual and through the marks it becomes decommodified (e.g. Kopytoff, 1986; Wallendorf & Arnould, 1988).

Based on the findings, it can be generalized, that furniture is often 'signs of integration' (Csikszentmihalyi & Rochberg-Halton, 1981), or represent the personal history and experiences of the individual: *"maybe the lamp wouldn't hang [in my apartment now] if I hadn't been to Copenhagen"* (FG1, Mi). The data shows that the special items always have more than one meaning (Richins, 1994), which is illustrated with the story about a vase (FG1, Mi): It is special to her, because it was a gift from her sister, who possesses the same vase. Hence, it is a reminder of the close relationship between the two sisters, and a sign of 'interpersonal ties' (Wallendorf & Arnould, 1988). Moreover, the vase can be used for flowers and is therefore also meaningful for its 'utility' (Richins, 1994). Lastly, the

woman (FG1, Mi) states, *"the [vase] is the beginning of what I am looking forward to"*, which can be interpreted as a symbol for future plans (Belk, 1988).

As in the vase-example, gift giving was a recurring theme, from which it can be generalized, that the object always serves for reminding the gift-receiver of the gift-giver. Moreover, the women expect the gift-giver to give a present that fits to their personality, as for instance a German woman, who got an old jewelry box to her birthday, expressed: *"It was the first present from my mother, where I thought, ok now you have really understood who I am"* (FG1, J). Gifting is an 'exchange ritual' where the transferred meaning is fostered by the occasion of giving: *"[My grandfather] surprised me […] with that chair"* (FG2, M; Sahlins, 1972; McCracken, 1986). An additional example for receiving the object from someone, is inheriting it, referred to as 'heirloom': *"I just like the idea that it has been in my grandmother's apartment. So, it also has a personal value to me"* (FG2, Mi; Richins, 1994). Research also found that the special objects are taken good care of, for instance by employing 'grooming rituals' (McCracken, 1986): *"Every two years I sand it off"* (FG1, Ma).

Regarding lifestyle and taste, the results demonstrate that the women find it hard to generalize these for the wider population, due to its subjective and socially-varying nature: *"I think it's difficult to say good and bad taste. Because to me, it's very subjective about what your aesthetics are" (FG2, M).* For home styling, the Danish women agree that good taste could be defined as a successful combination of personal taste and trends, as one Dane describes, *"Some have a very individual taste and some just follow the trends. And then that's very trendy, but it's also your personal taste"* (FG2, Mi). The argument that lifestyle and taste can only be compared among people within the same social context or *"milieus"* (FG1, M), is also suggested by Douglas (1996), and one German woman argues that taste is formed by how someone grew up or which family values were passed on. Since the Danish women made sense together of what 'bad taste' is for them, it is likely that all group members have relatively similar backgrounds and lifestyles, for instance that they live in Copenhagen. In addition, the respondents view technology and change in room purpose and usage as an inherent part of a 'modern lifestyle': *"Today office, sleeping and child's room are mostly in one"* (FG1, Ma) or *"I think today the kitchen has become the central part of the house"* (FG2, Me). In conclusion, a finding is that furniture and home objects reflect one's way of life and taste.

4.2.2 Theme II: Value

The findings for the values that the women derive from their furniture and home objects are outlined in this chapter. Theme II is closely related to theme I, as already stressed in the blocks of the theory review. As the data shows, furniture and home objects provide different consumer value types that can be categorized into Holbrook's (1999) dimensions.

The first important insight that one needs to know to understand the value types, is that liking is a crucial factor in furniture consumption. This is substantiated by the fact, that the term *"I like"* was widely used in the interviews, emphasizing the importance of emotions and hedonism. The statement, *"I buy them because I like them and then I make them fit"* (FG2, Me), demonstrates that liking is the key driver for predicting hedonic value (Hoyer & Stokburger-Sauer, 2012). Hence, the data reveals a correspondence to the 'experience value' approach, which views the point of value formation in the interaction between the individual and the object within a socio-cultural context (Holbrook, 1999).

The experiential approach draws among others upon the above elaborated 'sign value' (e.g. Levy, 1959) that is embraced in what Holbrook (1999) calls 'play value'. This is found in many respects within the interviews, as for instance the statements on relaxing or enjoying leisure time with friends or family show. In addition, the data shows that 'aesthetic value' is dominating, as most of the illustrated furniture examples are valued for their own sake (Holbrook, 1999), meaning that the women derive pleasure from the appealing look, referring to perceived intrinsic product attributes and the inferred meanings (e.g. Holbrook, 1999; Frondizi, 1971). According to one of the mothers, who is attached to her Wegner Y-chairs, *"we don't use them in the everyday life, […], but we see them all the time"*. She emphasizes, *"I think it's absolutely eye candy* [or] *art"* (FG2, J). This shows, that even if an object is not actively used, it still provides reactive value by being beautiful to look at (Dittmar, 1992; Holbrook, 1999). Thus, an everyday object like furniture can turn into a decorative art piece, which is then uncoupled from its original meaning (here to sit on it).

Furthermore, the study identified 'exchange' and 'use' value (e.g. Marx, 1990). It was found that consumers, except for the students, do not necessarily pursue spending as few money as possible for furniture, but pursue value maximization. One Danish woman describes her attitude: *"To me it has a lot to do with the whole value for money thing, when*

I buy furniture. Because if its cheap, I don't care that much. But otherwise it has to have some kind of value, either that you are able to sell it again or that you have it for a long time." (FG2, M). Speaking of *"value for money"*, the quote shows that price and quality are often seen in relation when assessing the value of furniture (Zeithaml, 1988; Sinha & DeSarbo, 1998). This is in line with Holbrook's (1999) understanding of 'excellence value'. Overall, the appreciation of high quality was identified as a recurring pattern across all three themes. As mentioned previously, the dining table gives, next to it's symbolic meaning, a good example of providing 'use value': *"it's so practical, because you can put the wings out at each end. […] So it can fit almost 16 people"* (FG2, Mi). Hence, the dining table can be categorized as 'efficiency value', since it is instrumental (Holbrook, 1999).

Finally, the inquiry whether the women want to communicate or express something to others, led to a discussion about other-oriented values, i.e. 'status' and 'esteem' (ibid.). The consumers provided the insight, that they first of all consume furniture for themselves and believe that the consideration of other's judgments plays only a secondary, unconscious role. As stated above, they rather want to create a cozy home, than showing-off with status symbols such as expensive designer furniture: *"In a sense I don't really care what people think, because if I like it, that is what matters. But then again if you put a lot of time into it, then of course it's nice, when people say 'That's really nice!' […] Of course you like that acknowledgement"* (FG2, Me). This quote can be interpreted as a 'possession ritual' and shows that individuals appreciate the acknowledgement for their taste or style from others (McCracken, 1986; Krippendorff, 1989; Holbrook, 1999). In sum, the study reveals a key insight, namely that self-oriented outweigh other-oriented consumer value types in furniture and home objects. The study does not reveal any relevant difference between the German and Danish women.

4.2.3 Theme III: Design
This section deals with the findings and insights about decision-criteria for furniture acquisition and associations assigned to Scandinavian furniture design.

Furniture Design and Decision-making
As demonstrated in the prior themes, the driving force behind furniture acquisition is the meanings assigned to it and values predicted or experienced with it (Woodruff, 1997). The

main influencing criteria were found to be aesthetics (look and feel), quality (durability), functionality (practicality), comfort (coziness) and price (value for money), which vary in importance depending on the context, type of furniture or individual preferences, taste and lifestyle.

The functionality criterion was primarily mentioned in regard to practicality, for instance to use the available space in the apartment most efficiently. However, functionality is not the dominating reason for furniture purchases and can be interpreted as taken for granted. More importantly, as stressed before, an aesthetic appearance is key for liking and drives wanting (Ramsøy, 2014). A German woman describes her view: *"It must of course be appealing. That's essential."* (FG1, L). Hence, women were found to make aesthetic choices based on their emotional response towards visible and haptic intrinsic product properties such as color or material: *"It must always feel good"* (FG1, Ma). Wood was for instance repeatedly mentioned in conversations about quality and the majority of the special objects were made of wood (e.g. the dining tables). In relation to that, it can be theorized that women rather rely on intrinsic than on extrinsic cues such as the designer or brand name, with the exception of affordability and price as restricting factors. This insight can be substantiated with a quote, *"For me it's more about what I like and what feels good […]. Who actually designed the furniture, is not really a factor for me."* (FG1, B). Another woman explains it similarly, *"one of my favorite chairs is some unknown designer I don't know, but I really like it. And I like the color and the materials. I have no idea who it is […]"* (FG2, Me). From that it can be deduced that the designer or brand name is ranged lower on the scale of decision-criteria than the design elements inherent in the furniture.

Another criterion that was identified next to an appealing or *"cool"* (FG2, M) look and functionality is *"comfort"* (FG1, Ma) that strongly links to the goal of creating a cozy home. In some of the cases the women illustrated that they felt attracted by the appearance of an object, for instance in a magazine, but were disappointed of the little comfort it provided in real life. Thus, comfort seems to challenge the focus on appearance. Moreover, kids can have an influence on the choice and usage of furniture, as one of the mothers notes, *"I don't have a white sofa"* (FG2, Me). In that case the practicality and usability become equally important to aesthetics.

As outlined above, this study found that quality in terms of durability and value for money is another key criterion that was additionally found to increase in importance in the life stage transition between student to young couple/family (Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton, 1981). The dream to have high quality furniture in the imagined future home was expressed by the majority of women. This means that there is an attitude change, which results in being more concerned with furniture decisions and quality of furniture, illustrated with the quote: *"My boyfriend and I have been living together for one year, and that was for both of us the point, where we threw out a lot of furniture that we had during our studies [such as the IKEA bed]. We decided, that the new furniture should last longer […] at least for the next 20 years or so"* (FG1, L). Hence, when aging, women become more critical and wish to replace lower quality furniture with more durable things. Besides, the repeated talk about IKEA in both groups indicates that it is a fix component in conversations about furniture. In addition, the study reveals that decisions for bigger or more expensive furniture are mostly done together with the partner and that the designs should be durable timeless or *"classic"* (FG2, Ma). This is different from small, decorative items, which are primarily bought by women, who are thereby stronger influenced by trends.

Lastly, the data reveals the difference that the German women are more price-concerned than the Danish women. Especially during the discussion about designer and brand importance, the Danes showed less concern for the price of design furniture than the Germans. This could be ascribed to their greater design knowledge cultural background as citizens of a 'Design nation' (Bason, 2015).

Scandinavian Furniture Design

According to the data sets, the primary associations with Scandinavian furniture design, are minimalistic, nature-related, wood, light, clarity, simple, clean lines, no ornaments, functional and unostentatious colors (black, white, grey, pastel, matt). These descriptions correspond partly to the 'Simplicity' category defined by Blijlevens et al. (2009). Furthermore, both interviews included repeated talk about *"Danish design",* which substantiates the position of Denmark as a significant player in Scandinavian interior design (e.g. Bason, 2016). While the associations of the German women are limited to *"Danish design"* and *"Sweden"* (FG1, Mi; S; Ma), the Danish women stress the difference between Denmark, Sweden, Finland and Norway, as the next quote underlines, *"even*

though it's Scandinavia, it is very different from country to country." (FG2, Ma). In comparison to Danish design, the Danes view Swedish design as *"romantic"* (FG2, Mi) and Finnish design as *"playful"* (FG2, Me). The fact that Iceland is not mentioned at all, could explain that neither Germans nor Danes see it as a typical agent of Scandinavian design. Despite the fact that Danes have more knowledge to be able to differentiate between the style of each country, they converge with the Germans in distinguishing the old and new generation of furniture designers, often exemplified with Danish designers or brands such as *"Arne Jacobsen"* or *"HAY"* (FG1, Ma; FG2, M). It became however clear, that IKEA is not seen as part of these, due to it's lack of aesthetics: *"It's not art"* (FG2, J). Merging these views, it is extracted that German and Danish women mainly equate Scandinavian furniture design with designs from Denmark or Sweden.

At the same time the opinions diverge in various manners. The Germans perceive Scandinavian furniture as *"cold"* and miss the *"coziness"* factor (FG1, Ma; B). The Danes by contrast assign positive attributes such as *"quality"*, *"craftsmanship"* or *"humbleness"*, as the woman notes, *"I don't know if it's only for Denmark or for the entire Scandinavia, but there is some slight bit of humbleness." (FG2, M).* Referring to craftsmanship, one of the Danish women highlights the aspect that it is a *"Danish tradition"* to build chairs in *"one piece"*, as for instance the Y-chair by Wegner (FG2, J). Based on the proposed 'unity' design principle (Veryzer & Hutchinson, 1998), it can be argued that the perception of seeing Scandinavian furniture as one piece positively affects the aesthetic response.

Another found insight is that the Germans evaluate Scandinavian design as *"aesthetic"* but *"pricey"* (FG1, J; L), which the Danes did not criticize. This doesn't mean, that the Danish women are not restricted by a budget, but it shows that they seem to appreciate it more or simply don't question its price. In fact, almost all of the Danish participants describe their interior style as *"Scandinavian"* or *"Nordic"* and possess *"a lot of [...] Danish design"* (e.g. FG2, J), which in turn allows them to experience and evaluate the quality. Also it indicates a preference for Danish brands and some kind of *"pride"* (FG2, M). As Danish women are surrounded by Scandinavian design on a daily basis – both in- and outside their home – that exposure seems to influence their valuation. This can be explained with the 'mere-exposure-effect', which leads to enhanced liking and preference and results in more aesthetic value (Reber et al., 2004) and a higher WTP (Kristensen et al., 2002). A quote

from a German woman might deliver a reasonable description for these cultural differences: *"What I also associate with [Scandinavia] is that design is a natural part of life. […] [In Germany] we are slightly missing the formation of an own identity"* (FG1, Ma). Hence, Danish design can be seen as a part of the national identity of the Danish women, which seems to be a determinant in the importance of the price decision criterion. Lastly, both nationalities agree that the Scandinavian interior style is currently omnipresent in magazines, blogs or interior stores, which they however perceive as an overload or *"mainstream"* (FG2, Me). Nonetheless, a Danish woman emphasizes, *"I think there are many ways of having the Scandinavian interior design"* FG2, Me), which indicates the goal to maintain the personal touch of the home.

All in all, the preceding sections presented the most relevant findings and insights for the research purpose. This means that the transcribed interviews contain further interesting information, which was only disregarded due to the scope of this study. The final results are discussed next.

5. Discussion & Conclusions

This chapter discusses the procedure of the empirical research and the quality of the results. The discussion is based on the findings and insights, as well as the presented theory on focus group interviews and criteria to assess their quality. Finally, this chapter presents answers to the research questions and draws general conclusions.

5.1 Quality Assessment

Overall, the two conducted focus groups can be evaluated as positive in regard to the procedure and results. The participants' willingness to freely share their standpoints as well as the interactive setting allowed the researcher to gather valuable insights into the individual and shared understandings of homes and furniture. Furthermore, it can be stated that the research topic is suitable for focus group interviews, as it is neither too difficult nor to intimate. Despite these aspects, there are some limitations that could have influenced the results, as discussed with suggestions for improvement in the following.

Firstly, the research procedure can be criticized since the moderator knew most of the participants beforehand, which could have influenced or biased their answers (Gordon,

1999). To ensure an optimal sampling, more resources would need to be dedicated. Another constraint was that the participants did not make use of the provided sticky notes, which sometimes resulted in 'Groupthink' (Janis, 1972). In addition, the moderator lacked control, when inquiring the Danish members about their associations with Scandinavia, as these immediately conversed about Scandinavian design. This is most likely due to the prior talk about furniture and design, which made it hard to switch back to a general level. Moreover, the question guide can be challenged for including some questions that were difficult or asked at a wrong point. For instance in the German group, the question 'What is a good life for you?' was asked too early, at a point where the respondents were not entirely warmed up. In the Danish group the question was therefore posed after the decision criteria question, which proved to be easier and encouraged the discussion. Additional difficulties were noticed with 'What is good taste for you?' and 'How do you understand the term modern lifestyle?' as these questions were more general and abstract in comparison to the others, where participants could share personal stories. Furthermore, the collage of the printed Scandinavian design chairs and salt and pepper mills can, despite its usefulness, be criticized for not depicting the form, size and materials true to scale and only showing two product categories. Therefore, the ideal scenario would be to use a variety of 3D designs, which the participants could touch and interact with.

Despite the fact that it worked out well for the Danish participants to express themselves in English, it needs to be acknowledged, that not using their mother language represented a barrier and disadvantage (Temple & Young, 2004). It was observed that the women sometimes held back spontaneous comments, which can be confirmed by the feedback that the moderator received after the interview: *"Sometimes I didn't say, what I would have said if it was in Danish"* (FG2, J). Concluding, even more insights could have been collected, if the interview was conducted in Danish. While the German women did not face this language barrier, the researcher however had to deal with it in the translation of the statements for analysis purposes. Thus, it needs to be considered that the meanings and nuances of the original German term could have got lost and thereby slightly falsified the results. An example would be the term 'sich wohlfühlen', which can only approx. be translated with 'to feel well, comfortable, homey'.

Assessing the data quality with the 'trustworthiness' criteria (Guba & Lincoln, 1985), it can be stated that credibility is partially achieved, since the respondents were not involved in the analysis and interpretation of the findings. Nonetheless, transferability is given, as most of the findings could be applied in other contexts, for instance in other Western culture countries. Furthermore, the study could be repeated, which meets dependability. Finally, conformability was achieved, due to the objectivity of the researcher and the fact that the findings and insights were shaped by the interviewees.

Regarding the strategies to ensure rich data (ibid.), some of the suggested strategies were applied, while others had to be disregarded due to the limited resources of this study. Member checks and external audits were not done, while thick description constituted a big part in the presentation of the findings and insights. The study can however be criticized for only having employed one type of qualitative method, namely focus group interviews, which means that methodological or data triangulation (Denzin, 1978) was not achieved. Therefore, it is proposed to complement the method with in-depth interviews in people's homes or making observations of the everyday life of families. This would allow the researcher to deepen the understanding of the meaning and value types prevalent in the home. Despite the not ensured triangulation (Guba & Lincoln, 1985), it is argued that saturation is partly achieved, seen in relation to the given time frame and available resources. Thus, the amount of two focus groups was considered sufficient to identify recurring patterns and develop an understanding of the factors that are important to Danish and German women. However, the study does not represent the whole population of Denmark and Germany.

5.2 Answers to the Research Questions

This section presents the answers to the main research question as well as to the two sub-questions by referring to the presented and pre-interpreted findings and insights.

> ### *Which types of meaning and value do consumers attach to their home and to their furniture as well as other home objects?*

The study unveils that the German and Danish women attach different types of meanings to their home in general and to their furniture and home objects in specific, and the results are similar to the ones found by Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton (1981) or Kamptner (1995). The study shows that a piece of furniture is meaningful or 'special' to the

individuals for more than one reason at a time. As suggested by various authors (e.g. McCracken, 2005; Csikszentmihalyi & Rochberg-Halton, 1981), all products can carry symbolic meaning and it was found that this strongly applies to furniture and home objects. In line with Richins' (1994) distinction between public and private meanings, the study shows that private meanings dominate within home context, which is evidenced with the interviewee's focus on the personal and shared stories with their furniture. Besides that, it was found that the women's desire to possess certain furniture is among other factors influenced by public meanings that are for example communicated in interior magazines. Thus, it cannot be confirmed that some meaning types are more important than others, but they often incorporate a combination of personal and social types.

Firstly, the women attach meaning to furniture that are reminders or symbols of interpersonal ties or social relationships to family members or friends. Connected to that, women associate their interior with memories of occasions or events as well as the shared history and experiences. This primarily includes heirlooms, gifts or objects that one collects or has had for a longer time. In addition, research reveals that furniture carries meaning being a sign of self, i.e. expresses personality and identity (Belk, 1988). Secondly, furniture is meaningful to the women due to the emotional response to intrinsic attributes, especially the aesthetic appearance, uniqueness and quality, which are similarly reflecting individuality. Finally, meaningful home objects can next to memories of the past and present, symbolize future dreams.

Like the identified meanings, the consumer value types that Danish and German women derive from the possession of furniture and home objects, are not mutually exclusive. As outlined in the analysis, the identified value types primarily embrace 'sign value' (e.g. Csikszentmihalyi & Rochberg-Halton, 1981) as well as 'experience value' (e.g. Holbrook, 1999). In addition, the 'exchange' and 'use' value (e.g. Zeithaml, 1988) was identified to be less important in relation to the two other value categories. According to Holbrook's (1999) framework, the study found that self-oriented consumer value types dominate within the homes of the German and Danish women. This does however not void the importance of social relationships that are reflected in the home and furniture. Accordingly, the study delivers information that 'aesthetic value', being reactive and terminal (ibid.), occupies a great part in furniture or home object valuation, as this value can be derived at any time,

even if the women do not actively interact with the object. Additionally 'play value' was identified. Thus, the data demonstrates the dominance of emotional or hedonic value that consumers get from their homes and respectively from their furniture. Next to that, the women frequently experience 'excellence value' in the form of quality or value for money. Moreover, 'efficiency value' which corresponds to 'use value' was detected in regard to the functionality that furniture provides for its user.

Despite the prevailing self-orientation, 'esteem value', as a other-oriented, reactive type, was filtered from the data, but only in a moderate extent. While the respondents appreciate positive feedback from others on their home or furniture, it was found that this is not the main value driver behind furniture acquisition, which shows the dominance of self-orientation. Besides that, the study does not confirm the existence of 'status value', due to the fact that the interviewees possess furniture because they like it and not because they aim to influence others or impress them. Yet, it is a value type that needs to be considered, but does not apply to the inquired participants. In sum, the study delivers valuable consumer insights to determine the meaning and value types that are present in the homes of Danish and German women around the age of 30. However, as will be answered in the first sub-question, the lifestyle and socio-cultural background are additional factors for assessing the meaning and value types holistically.

a) *Do the consumers' lifestyle and cultural background influence the meanings and values of their home, furniture and other home objects?*

Based on the answer to the main research question, the study provides information that the lifestyle and cultural background have an influence on the meanings and values of home and furniture. According to McCracken (1986), Overby et al. (2005) and Richins (1994), culture forms the origin of meaning and influences the meaning and value that consumers assign to products. Moreover, Seth et al. (2000) argue that the meanings and values vary across cultural contexts and Heskett (2005) suggests that it affects the importance of the home for the individuals. Based on that, this study found that the Danish culture of spending a lot of time at home goes in line with a high meaning, i.e. importance of the home for the Danish women. This implies that their cultural background simultaneously impacts the meanings and values attached to their furniture and home objects. This importance is manifested and the high number of Danes who own their

apartment and are willing to incur expenditures for expensive design furniture. Also for the German women, the study provides evidence that the home is important in the German culture, they are however more price concerned than the Danes. Besides that, research could not identify strong differences between Germany and Denmark. This means, that the study cannot confirm that the home and furniture is more meaningful and valuable for Danes than for Germans. Hence, the prior assumption that the relatively small geographical distance between the countries would likely lead to small difference in the influence of culture, can be confirmed.

Besides the influence of the cultural background, the data shows that a person's lifestyle also impacts the meaning and value of home and furniture. The lifestyle reflects personal values, tastes, preferences and aesthetics (e.g. Featherstone, 1987; Holbrook, 1999), which are formed by the cultural context and build the basis for making judgments and evaluating furniture and home objects (Rokeach, 1973; Holbrook, 1999). As shown in the analysis, the women thrive to create a personalized home according to their tastes, where they can express their personality and individuality. Due to that, it was found that they actively choose and pick out the products that they like, rather than passively adopting dictated interior styles or trends. This represents a means of actively designing their lifestyle, as suggested by Featherstone's (1987). Hence, the chosen objects shall match the lifestyle, but the lifestyle also influences which products are acquired. Therefore, it can be described as mutual relationship. Finally, the interviewee's lifestyles are also manifested in the location and dwelling where they live, which signals membership to a certain lifestyle community, but also differentiation (Bourdieu, 1984). As the study shows, furniture and home objects are part of the women's lifestyle and thereby represent an additional instrument for self-expression next to clothes. However, it remains less visible and thereby more intimate.

Also, the study shows that the life stage is an influencing factor on the meaning and value of home and furniture assigned by the females. Hence, the presumed increase in meaning assigned to home and furniture around the age of 30, when being in a relationship and building a family, can be confirmed. In conclusion, the study shows that the way someone lives and in which cultural context someone grows up and lives, impacts the meanings assigned to home and furniture.

b) ***Which characteristics of Scandinavian furniture design do consumers assign value to?***

The inquiry about associations with Scandinavian furniture design delivered useful insights, which can be linked to the general decision criteria for furniture acquisition, to answer the question. Firstly, both nationalities value aesthetic design in terms of visual and haptic attributes, which Scandinavian designs deliver in being simple, minimalistic or one piece. Moreover, the data shows that many of the mentioned meaningful or valued home objects are made of wood, which could indicate that it is the preferred material for furniture. As wood is similarly one of the primary associations with Scandinavian furniture, it can be inferred that consumers assign value to Scandinavian designs that are made of wood. In connection to wood as a natural material, the study reveals that women dream of homes, where closeness to nature is an integrative part. This can be matched with the association of nature-relatedness, which thereby represents a further cherished characteristic of Scandinavian furniture design. Furthermore, the general functionality criterion was also assigned to the products from Scandinavia, forming another valued attribute. Finally, the German and Danish women repeatedly emphasize durability, which further relates to quality as well as timeless or classic appearance, and can be linked to the associations of the classic design icons from the Scandinavian designers of the 1950s. However, the interview results show that the Danish women assign more value to the quality of Scandinavian design, than the Germans, which is evidenced with the association of craftsmanship as well as the fact that the Danes have more experiences with the designs. Correspondingly, Overby et al. (2005) claim that the same product is assigned different values by consumers in different contexts. Despite these positive attributes that can satisfy consumers' needs and decision-criteria, Scandinavian design is criticized for sometimes lacking comfort, which is strongly related to the importance assigned to coziness. Lastly, the study shows that the women do not value Scandinavian designs for its low price or affordability, which was especially stressed by the price-focused Germans.

In conclusion, the identified valued characteristics of Scandinavian furniture design represent valuable insights that can be translated into implications for furniture designers and companies. Moreover, the insights on meaning and value types, as well as the consideration of lifestyles and culture, deliver useful information for the business side. Therefore, some derived implications are presented next.

6. Managerial Implications

On the basis of the theory review and the findings and insights of the study, this chapter discusses a number of managerial implications. The implications are addressing furniture and interior designers and companies in general, as well as designers and companies of Scandinavian furniture.

Understanding what the home and furniture mean to consumers and which values they receive from them is crucial information for design practitioners to create value for both sides. Nonetheless, the study shows that the large variety of meanings and values and their subjective and contextual nature continues being a challenge. In order to design meaningful and valued products, it is suggested to adopt a user-centered approach (Boztepe, 2007) and design furniture and home products that evoke emotions, enable experiences (e.g. Prahalad & Ramaswamy 2004; Kristensen, 2011) and are aesthetically pleasing (Postrel, 2003). Furthermore, the study has implications for designing products that allow consumers to associate them with people, places, events and occasions, i.e. memories, as well as encourage interaction with others form the social context, in order to foster the symbolic meanings (Csikszentmihalyi & Rochberg-Halton, 1981).

In order to achieve these implications, design practitioners can apply a number of proposed strategies. First, they need to find out which intrinsic and extrinsic product attributes consumers perceive and use for appraising the quality and value of the designed furniture. Thereby, designers should consider the insight that intrinsic cues, especially the ones that stimulate the visual and haptic senses, are of greater importance to consumers than extrinsic cues. They could do so by collecting consumer feedback and then decide which design elements and symbols to put into the design. As McCracken (1986) argues, the intended meanings must be self-evident to be transferred to the user. Another strategy to design products that are valued beyond utilitarian reasons is the appliance of design principles, as suggested by Rams, who advocates for combining functionality with aesthetics (Vitsoe, 2016). Moreover, the study bonds with critics of Sullivan's 'form follows function' principle and proposes an additional formulation being: 'form follows aesthetics, functionality and comfort'. By applying this principle, designers would account for the factors that are valued by German and Danish women. In addition, designing a 'unity'

piece (Veryzer & Hutchinson, 1998) should be the goal of designers, in order to enhance aesthetic response and value.

A strategy to enhance the formation of memories would be to use materials that can get marks of use (van Hinter, 1997). This would also contribute to the consumer's goal of self-expression, since the marks would over the years convert the object into a unique product. In addition, companies should develop customizable products in order to enable personality and individuality expression. Besides that, offering customizable designs is a way to adapt and follow changing lifestyles and can be a competitive advantage.

Next to the presented strategies that are advice for all kind of furniture and product designers, the study delivers data to make some additional implications for Scandinavian design companies and designers. First, they are advised to continue using wood as the primary material, as this is often meaningful and valued by women. Furthermore, the user-centeredness needs to be moved back into focus, so that the design elements are balanced with other factors such as comfort. Finally, as an extrinsic cue, some of the Scandinavian interior design companies should reconsider their pricing strategy, which should communicate quality through a price that is not too low but at the same time not too high, as this represents an important decision criteria for Germans. This means, that the cultural context also has to be considered by designers.

All in all, the outlined managerial implications represent possibilities that need to be complemented with additional means, which must be delivered by the designers. However, interior design firms need to acknowledge the fact that the individual consumer creates value by designing the lifestyle and home (Kristensen, 2011). Hence, there will always remain a last bit that is not under control of design practitioners.

7. Limitations & Further Research

The study has some limitations that open up opportunities for further research, which are suggested as follows. This study was limited to investigating the homes and furniture meanings and values from the perspective of German and Danish women who live in Hamburg or Copenhagen. Further research is needed to investigate the research topic on a broader scale that incorporates different age groups as well as other geographical

locations, in order to account for different social contexts and lifestyles. In connection to this, it would be interesting to direct the study focus to the life stages and compare the changing decision-criteria and meanings and values assigned to home and its interior. The research could also take men as research subjects instead or in addition to women, or investigate the difference between men and women. Moreover, this research was limited to the context of residential interior design and specifically Scandinavian interior design. Future studies could involve other interior styles or comparisons with other key players such as Italy. Additionally, researcher could explore the differences between the Scandinavian countries and work out whether they can be consolidated under one brand.

As the study shows, the self-oriented value types dominate in the context of home. However, the fast changes in technology and increasing self-expression in the digital world, offer possibilities to explore the increase in importance of other-oriented value types. In regard to that, comparative research between clothes and furniture could deliver valuable insights for the reasons why furniture are increasingly used as complementary indicators of individuality, self and identity.

Another possibility for further research is not taking Consumer Behavior as the primary research discipline, but constituting a theoretical frame with branding and marketing literature, such as the 'Customer Based Brand Equity' model from Kevin L. Keller (1993). Hence, the studied phenomena would be investigated from the business perspective. Research could investigate the design strategies of different Scandinavian interior companies and figure out which factors lead to successful value creation for both company and consumer. That could include qualitative and quantitative methods, for example making tests with certain brands or measuring brain activities of consumers. This could deliver insights and allow companies to refine their brand and design strategies.

All in all, this study provides valuable insights with the possibility to deepen the understanding with further research, for instance as outlined above. Yet, the study of meaning and value from the consumer perspective will remain complex, which can only be decoded with further research contributions. Finally, the future will show whether the booming Scandinavian style is just a trend or here to stay.

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Figure 4: Collage of Scandinavian designs

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Appendix

Appendix 1: Table with 'Consumer Value' Definitions

(Source: own illustration)

Author	Definition
Zeithaml 1988	"Perceived value is the consumer's overall assessment of the utility of a product based on perceptions of what is received and what is given." Zeithaml's definition derives from four elements: "Value is low price"; "Value is whatever I want from a product"; "Value is the quality I get for the price I pay"; "Value is what I get for what I give"
Gale 1994	"Customer value is market-perceived quality adjusted for the relative price of your product."
Holbrook 1994, 1999	"I define consumer value as an interactive relativistic preference experience."
Butz & Godstein 1996	"By customer value, we mean the emotional bond established between a customer and a producer after the customer has used a salient product or service produced by that supplier and found the product to provide an added value."
Woodruff & Gardial 1996	"Customer value is not inherent in products or services themselves; rather it is experienced by customers as a consequence of using the supplier's products and services for their own purposes."
Woodruff 1997	"Customer value is a customer's perceived preference for and evaluation of those product attributes, attribute performances, and consequences arising from use that facilitate (or block) achieving the customer's goals and purposes in use situations."
Sinha & DeSarbo 1998	"Value is quality that the consumers can afford."
Lapierre 2000	"Customer-perceived value can, therefore, be defined as the difference between the benefits and the sacrifices (e.g. monetary and non-monetary) perceived by customers, in terms of their expectations, i.e. needs and wants."
Van Der Haar et al. 2001	"The customer value concept assesses the value a product offers to a customer, taking all its tangible and intangible features into account."
Afuah 2002	"The value that a customer attaches to the characteristics is a function of the extent to which they contribute to the customer's utility or pleasure."
Woodall 2003	"Value for the customer is any demand-side, personal perception of advantage arising out of a customer's association with an organisation's offering, and can occur as reduction in sacrifice; presence of benefit (attributes or outcomes); the resultant of any weighed combination of sacrifice and benefit (rationally or intuitively); or an aggregation, over time, of any or all of these."
Overby, Woodruff & Gardial 2005	"Consumer value is (1) perceived by consumers; (2) attached to a product/service in the context of use situations; and (3) a worth trade off between what a consumer receives from a seller and what s/he gives up."

Appendix 2: Design Elements in Product & Furniture Design.

(Source: own illustration based on given references)

Design element	Description	Manifestation (examples)	Sense
Line	Line is the first element, which is applied to divide space, create shapes of forms (Hatchdesign.ca, 2016).	horizontal, vertical, curving, diagonal	vision
Color	Color is visually and subjectively perceived in terms of hue (green, blue, yellow, red), chroma (density) and value (lightness, darkness) (e.g. Radeloff, 1989). Color is together with form and shape the most important visual element.	green, blue, yellow, red, light-grey, dark-brown, forrest-green	vision
Shape	A shape is a self contained defined area of geometric or organic form (Lovett, 1999).	symmetric, asymmetric, round, squared, oval	vision
Form	A form is a 3D object that is visually perceived by the consumer and this salient feature allows for recognition of designs and brands (Hobolt Jensen & Kristensen, 2000).	geometric, organic, simple, coplex, large, small	vision, touch
Texture	Texture is the surface quality of a shape (Lovett, 1999). It often depends on the natural constitution of the material used (e.g. wood, fabric, steel).	rough, smooth, soft, hard, glossy	touch, vision

Appendix 3: The 10 Principles of 'Good design' by Dieter Rams

(Source: own illustration based on Vitsoe, 2016)

	Good Design is...	Explanation
1	innovative	based on technological innovation and constantly changing culture
2	makes a product useful	not only functional, but also psychological and aesthetic
3	aesthetic	*"The aesthetic quality of a product is integral to its usefulness because products we use every day affect our person and our well-being. But only well-executed objects can be beautiful."*
4	makes a product understandable	is self-explanatory
5	unobtrusive	products are like tools, neither decorative nor works of art, but neutral allowing for user's self-expression
6	honest	does not manipulate the consumer with promises that cannot be kept
7	long-lasting	durable, avoids being fashionable
8	thorough down to the last detail	care and accuracy
9	environmentally-friendly	conservation of resources and minimization of pollution
10	as little design as possible	back to purity and simplicity

Appendix 4: Questions Guides

FG 1: Focus Group Interview with German women (20/03/2016)

Moderator: Anna (A)
Assistenz: Marieke (M)

Teilnehmer
- Silvia (S)
- Marieke (Ma)
- Lena (L)
- Mimi (Mi)
- Bilge (B)
- Johanna (J)

Sprache: Deutsch
Ort: Hamburg, Deutschland
Setting: Kaffee und Kuchen
Material: Post-its, Kugelschreiber, iPhone & Laptop zum Aufnehmen, Collage Stühle und Salz & Pfeffer, Fotos der ausgewählten Möbelstücke (bringen die Teilnehmer mit)

Ablauf / Dauer (1,5 - 2 Std.)

1. Ankommen, Small Talk, Kaffee und Kuchen verteilen
2. Kurze Einführung (Beweggrund, Ablauf und Regeln, Aufnahme für mich)
3. Vorstellungsrunde
4. Fragen / Diskussion
5. Wrap-up und Dankeschön

Fragen / Diskussion

Vorstellrunde
Bitte stell dich kurz vor und erzähl uns ein bisschen von deiner aktuellen Lebenssituation (Name, Alter, Beruf, Status). Wie und wo wohnst du? Beschreibe dein zuhause und deinen Wohnstil, sodass wir anderen es uns vorstellen können. Welchen Stil hast du, was ist dir wichtig?

Warm-up
1. Was bedeutet für dich im Allgemeinen ein „Gutes Leben"?
   (Werte, Einstellung, Ziele, Wünsche...)

Möbel / Design
2. Was ist dir beim Kauf eines neuen Möbelstücks wichtig?
   (Funktionalität, Aussehen/Ästhetik, Design, Material, Qualität, Preis, Marke, Designer Name...?)

3. Was bedeutet es dir ein Möbelstück zu besitzen, das von einer bekannten Marke oder Designer ist?

Zu Hause / Stellenwert / Bedeutung
4. Was bedeutet dir dein Zu Hause? Was verbindest du mit „Zu Hause"?
   (Rückzugsort, sich eine eigene Welt schaffen...)

5. Welchen Stellenwert hat das Einrichten deiner Wohnung für dich?

6. Was bedeuten dir deine Möbel?

7. Welche bestimmten Möbelstücke oder Einrichtungsgegenstände in deinem zu Hause haben einen besonderen Wert für dich und warum?
   → Du hattest ja die Aufgabe ein Foto von einem Lieblingsmöbelstück oder Einrichtungsgegenstand mitzubringen. Welchen Wert hat der Gegenstand für dich? *(Emotional, symbolisch, materiell, sozial, ästhetisch...?)* Erzähl uns ein bisschen darüber und warum du genau diesen gewählt hast. *(Woher, wo steht es, Wert,...)*

Lifestyle / Persönlichkeit/ Soziale Beziehungen
8. Was ist „Guter Geschmack" für dich?

9. Was verstehst du unter einem „Modernen Lifestyle"?

10. Welche Dinge siehst du als Teil deines Lifestyles?

11. Reflektiert dein Einrichtungsstil oder bestimmte Möbelstücke DICH? In wie fern?
    (Selbstausdruck, Persönlichkeit, Lifestyle, Identität)

12. Wer oder was dient dir als Inspirationsquelle beim Einrichten?
    (Freunde, Trends, Zeitschriften etc.)

13. Stell dir vor, du bekommst heute Abend Gäste: Welche Vorbereitungen triffst du normalerweise und warum?

14. Was soll deine Wohnung anderen (z.B. Freunden oder Familie) gegenüber ausdrücken oder kommunizieren?
    (guter Stil, Geschmack, Individualität, Zugehörigkeit, Status...)

Skandinavisches Design

15. Was verbindest du mit Skandinavien?

16. Stichwort „Skandinavisches Design": Welche Begriffe fallen dir dazu ein?

17. Und speziell zu Skandinavischem Möbel und Einrichtungsdesign? Welche Adjektive oder andere Wörter kommen dir in den Kopf?
    → Stühle und Salz-Pfeffer-Mühlen zeigen

18. Was verstehst du unter „Simplicity" oder „Schlichtheit"?

19. Was verstehst du unter „Minimalismus"?

20. In den letzten Jahren ist der Skandinavische Einrichtungsstil auch in Deutschland immer verbreiteter und beliebter geworden. Auch bei dir? Magst du den Skandinavischen Einrichtungsstil? Wenn ja, warum? Wenn nein, warum nicht?

Zukunft/ Träume

21. Und nun noch eine abschließende Frage: Wenn Geld keine Rolle spielen würde, wie würdest du dir dein perfektes zu Hause in der Zukunft vorstellen? (Art, Stil, Möbel, mit wem, Zukunftsträume)

FG2: Focus Group Interview with Danish women (30/03/2016)

Moderator: Anna (A)

Participants (Danish)
- Mette (Me)
- Maria (M)
- Julie (J)
- Malene (Ma)
- Mia (Mi)
- Anna (An)

Language: English
Location: Copenhagen, Denmark
Setting: informal, snacks and wine in the evening
Material: Phone for voice recording and laptop for video recording, Post-its, Pens, Collage chairs and salt & pepper mills, photos of the special objects (brought by interviewees)

Process / duration (1,5 - 2 hours)

1. Arrival and welcoming
2. Introduction to topic, purpose and rules, inform participants about recoding for internal purposes
3. Introduction round
4. Discussion
5. Wrap-up and acknowledgement (chocolate)

Questions / Discussion

Introduction and Warm-up
Please introduce yourself and tell us a little about your current living situation (name, age, occupation). How and where do you live? How does your home look like? What style do you have? What is special about it?

Decision criteria furniture and design
1. Which criteria are important to you, when buying a new piece of furniture?
   (Functionality, Appearance, Design, Material, Quality, Price, Brand, Designer name...)

2. What does it mean to you, to possess furniture from a known brand or designer?

Home / Meaning / Value
3. What do you associate with a "good life"?
   (values, attitudes, wishes etc.)

4. What does your home mean to you? What do you associate with „home"? *(Place for retirement, create own world, relax, protected...)*

5. How important is the furnishing of your apartment or house for you?

6. What does the furniture and other home objects mean to you?

7. You had the little task to bring a photo of a piece of furniture, which is special to you or valued by you. Could you please show it around and tell the story about it, why you chose this one and where it is from, where it is standing etc.?
   (emotional, symbolic, social, aesthetic value / meaning)

Lifestyle / Self / Social Interaction
8. What is "good taste" for you?

9. How do you understand the term "modern lifestyle"?

10. Which things are part of your lifestyle?

11. Does your interior style or your furniture reflect / represent your self? In how far?
    (Personality, self-expression, lifestyle, identity, individuality)

12. Who or what serves you as inspirational sources?
    (Friends, magazines, blogs, trends etc.)

13. Imagine you are having guests tonight. What do you usually do for preparation? Why?

XXX

14. What should your home tell others or communicate to others (family & friends)?
    (what is important to them, good taste, style, individuality, belonging, status…)

Scandinavian Design
15. What do you associate with Scandinavia (in general)?

16. Scandinavian Design: which terms come to your mind?

17. And in specific Scandinavian furniture or interior design? Which words would you out on that? → Show pictures of chairs and salt & pepper mills

18. What is "simplicity" for you?

19. How do you understand "minimalism"?

20. In the last years, the Scandinavian design has experienced flourishing times with new brands like HAY, Ferm Living, Muuto & Co and revivals of the design icons from the 50s. Do you like the Nordic style? Why? Why not?

Future / Dreams
21. Last question: If money or budget didn't play a role, how would you imagine your perfect home in the future?
    (Type, where, style, with whom, future dreams, etc.)

Appendix 5: Transcribed Interviews (coded)

Please find the transcribed focus group interviews on the provided **USB** thumb drive.

The information is based on the recorded interview sessions.

FG1   Focus Group Interview with German women (German)
FG2   Focus Group Interview with Danish women (English)

Appendix 6: List with Overarching Themes and Interpretive Codes

(Source: own illustration)

Themes	Meaning		Value	Design	
	Home	**Furniture & home objects**	**Value types of furniture & home objects**	**Furniture design & decision criteria**	**Scandinavian furniture design**
Interpretive labels*	haven, safety	symbolic meaning	liking	comfort	functionality
	base, center of one's life	private meaning	exchange value (value for money, re-selling)	functionality, practicality	quality
	emotions, feelings	symbol of interpersonal ties and social relationships (family & friends)	use value (utility, convenience, functionality)	quality (durability, value for money)	minimalism
	family, nest	sign of self / identity (expression, extension, interests, occupation)	sign value --> see symbolic meanings	aesthetics (look & feel)	simplicity
	feeling at home, homey	sign of memories (heirloom, gift, collection, occasion, had it for a long time)	experience value / hedonic / emotional (interaction, enjoyment, sensory pleasure)	uniqueness	unostentatious colors (black, white, pastel, matt)
	coziness	sign of shared history & experiences	aesthetic value (appearance, look & feel, beauty, art)	classic design	light
	comfort, relax	sign of personal history & experiences	play value (leisure, enjoyment, relax)	designer, brand	craftsmanship
	psychic effort (thoughts, time, money)	intrinsic product attributes (craft, uniqueness, physical description, material)	excellence value (quality, durability)	price, affordability	no ornaments
	reflects personality and identity	style, individuality	efficiency value (practicality, usability)	life cycle stage	modern
	authenticity, personalization	Modern lifestyle: change in room usage (e.g. kitchen)	esteem value (acknowledgement from others)	trends	nature-relatedness
	furniture arrangement	represent present experiences	status value (impression of others)	preferences, taste & lifestyle	humbleness
	future dreams (space, nature, house, central location)	symbol of future dreams			materials (e.g. wood)
	cultural differences & influence	dining table			unity (one piece), aesthetic
	familiarity	contemplation & action objects			Danish design (e.g. A. Jacobsen)
	self-determination	furniture = sign of integration			clean
	public meaning (inspiration sources)	comparison to clothes			Nordic
	intimacy	mix of furniture (old and new)			IKEA
	informality	social communication systems			affordability, price
	life cycle stage (settled)	utility = use value			mainstream, availability
	acknowledgement from others	cultural meaning transfer, rituals (gift-giving, maintenance)			
	redecorate, change	lifestyle, taste, style, individuality, trends			

*Random order.

Appendix 7: Consensus Map

(Source: own illustration based on Appendix 6 and Christensen & Olson, 2002)