RESEARCH IN CONSUMER BEHAVIOR

VOLUME 10

RUSSELL BELK
Editor

RESEARCH IN CONSUMER BEHAVIOR

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RESEARCH IN CONSUMER BEHAVIOR VOLUME 10

RESEARCH IN CONSUMER BEHAVIOR

EDITED BY

RUSSELL W. BELK

University of Utah, Utah, USA

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LIST OF CONTRIBUTORS

Alhassan G. Abdul-Muhmin	Department of Management and Marketing, King Fahd University of Petroleum and Minerals, Dhahran, Saudi Arabia
Stacey Menzel Baker	Department of Management and Marketing, University of Wyoming, Laramie, WY, USA
Russell Belk	University of Utah, DESB, Salt Lake City, UT, USA
Heather E. Bowen	Department of Recreation Management and Policy, New Hampshire University, Durham, NH, USA
Tsong-Sung Chan	Marketing Department, Lingnan University, Hong Kong, PRC
Geng Cui	Marketing Department, Lingnan University, Hong Kong, PRC
Karin M. Ekström	Center for Consumer Science, School of Business, Economics and Law, Göteborg University, Göteborg, Sweden
Deborah J. Evers	Department of Management, Walton College of Business, University of Arkansas, Fayetteville, AR, USA
Jennifer Gillis	Loyola College in Maryland, Center for Social and Community Research, Baltimore, MD, USA

Michael Hui	Marketing Department, Chinese University of Hong Kong, Shatin, New Territories, Hong Kong, PRC
Annamma Joy	John Molson School of Business, Concordia University, Montreal, Quebec, Canada
Susan Schultz Kleine	Department of Marketing, Bowling Green State University, Bowling Green, OH, USA
Robert E. Kleine, III	College of Business, Ohio Northern University, Ada, OH, USA
Debra A. Laverie	College of Business Administration, Area of Marketing, Texas Tech University, Lubbock, TX, USA
Yuan-shuh Lii	Department of International Trade, College of Business, Feng Chia University, Seatwen, Taichung, Taiwan, ROC.
Andrei Mikhailitchenko	Nance College of Business Administration, Cleveland State University, Cleveland, OH, USA
Jeff B. Murray	Department of Marketing and Logistics, Walton College of Business, University of Arkansas, Fayetteville, AR, USA
Mark Peyrot	Loyola College in Maryland, Center for Social and Community Research, Baltimore, MD, USA
Sandra K. Smith Speck	Idaho State University, Department of Marketing, Pocatello, ID, USA
Kelly Tian	Department of Marketing, College of Business and Economics, New Mexico State University, Las Cruces, NM, USA

L. P. Douglas Tseng	School of Business Administration, Portland State University, Portland, OR, USA
Anne M. Velliquette	Department of Marketing and Logistics, Walton College of Business, University of Arkansas, Fayetteville, AR, USA
Thomas W. Whipple	Nance College of Business Administration, Cleveland State University, Cleveland, OH, USA

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ACCULTURATION OF HISPANIC COLLEGE STUDENTS

Sandra K. Smith Speck, Mark Peyrot and Jennifer Gillis

ABSTRACT

The fact that young Hispanic consumers spend even more than others in their age category suggests the strategic importance of a deeper understanding of these consumers. To what extent do they resemble their U.S. non-Hispanic counterparts as opposed to those in Mexico? Has the acculturation process affected their cultural values? What role might watching television have played in that process? In the present study, we investigate these key questions across three segments – U.S. non-Hispanic, U.S. Hispanic, and Mexican college students. Hispanic students fall between the non-Hispanic and Mexican respondents in terms of self-reported levels of religiosity and materialism; they more closely mirror their Mexican peers in higher levels of life satisfaction. There are no significant differences between the groups in terms of quantity of television viewing. Overall, Hispanics seem to be slowly adopting American values, while the acculturation process does not seem to be affecting satisfaction with their lives.

Demographic projections regarding the changing face of the American consumer provide valuable insights for those engaged in identifying and meeting the needs of consumers. One consumer segment for which these

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projections appear to merit particular attention is that of Hispanic youth, the Generation X segment, which some refer to as Generation N (Leland et al., 1999). Almost 20% of children born in the United States today are of Latin American descent (Zbar, 2001). By 2005, this segment will comprise the largest ethnic youth segment in the United States, with their numbers growing to 7 million by 2020, a 62% increase versus a 10% increase in the overall teenage population (Stapinski, 1999). This same author notes that young Hispanic consumers spend even more than others in their age category (total category spending was 141 billion in 1998). Such spending confirms the strategic importance of pursuing a deeper understanding of these consumers (Vence, 2005). To what extent do they resemble their U.S. non-Hispanic counterparts as opposed to their cohort members in Mexico? Has the acculturation process affected their cultural values? What role might television viewing have played in that process?

In the present study, we investigate these key questions across three youth segments: U.S. non-Hispanic, U.S. Hispanic, and Mexican college students. We examine the levels of the cultural values of materialism and religiosity reported by these segments, as well as their satisfaction with their standard of living and with their lives. In addition, we compare the television viewing patterns of these three segments, in particular the quantity of television watched, as well as perceptions of reality regarding television content. Through these analyses, we provide evidence regarding the level of acculturation of one segment of U.S. Hispanic consumers in terms of the extent to which their values reflect those of their Mexican or American cultural roots and the role which television may have played as a consumer socializing agent in that acculturation process.

BACKGROUND

The Acculturation Process

O'Guinn, Lee, and Faber (1986) define acculturation as "the immigrant's adoption of the dominant society's attitudes, values, and behaviors" and consumer acculturation as "a subset of this process comprised of those attitudes, values, and behaviors which collectively comprise what we call buyer behavior" (p. 579). Some researchers suggest that the degree of acculturation may be a more important influence on buying behavior than the country in which a consumer was born (Valencia, 1985; Faber, O'Guinn, & Meyer, 1987; Kara & Kara, 1996; Ueltschy & Krampf, 1997).

A variety of factors influence the length of time that the acculturation process takes for different individuals. Included in this list are length of time in the U.S. (the strength of native values appears to decline for an individual after he/she has lived in this country for 10–20 years), ability to accept change, education, and income level. Also, a concentration of Hispanics in the same area affects the acculturation process (Valdes, 2002). Traditional values tend to be more resilient with a growing number of recent immigrants. Smart and Smart (1995) see the Hispanic culture as being constantly reinforced by new immigrants. In addition, increased communication and easier travel help Hispanics hold on to their native culture (Stapinski, 1999).

Wallendorf and Reilly's (1983) early work on acculturation indicates that Hispanics are, over time, adopting the consumption patterns of other American consumers. Ueltschy and Krampf (1997) refer to a 1993 poll in which most Hispanics aspired to be like mainstream U.S. consumers. Some Hispanics may downplay their own culture in trying to decrease differences between their native and adopted cultures and to fit in (Penaloza, 1994).

Subsequent research suggests that the acculturation of Hispanic consumers is very complex. "Obviously, stereotyping the U.S. Hispanic as being a one-dimensional, in-between Mexico and U.S. consumer is insufficient … in certain cases, the U.S. Hispanic is far more similar to the Mexican consumer than she is to being an 'acculturating' U.S. consumer" (Roberts & Hart, 1997, p. 97). For example, the latter research reveals that traditional scenarios (e.g., depictions of a male-dominated home) in advertising are valued more highly by Hispanic consumers than by the general U.S. population. Similarly, Ueltschy and Krampf (1997) find that low-acculturated consumers prefer advertisements written in Spanish; however, this same study finds they prefer Anglo models over Hispanic models in these ads. Hernandez, Cohen, and Garcia (2000) find that most Hispanic respondents in their study want to hold onto Hispanic culture, while at the same time becoming a part of the society in which they live. This latter evidence reinforces the notion that the process of acculturation is, indeed, complex.

Multiple studies have identified differences within the Hispanic population with regard to the extent to which individual consumers have adopted the culture of the U.S. Deshpande, Hoyer, and Donthu (1986) and True, Barnes, and Gilbert (1993) identify ethnicity as a significant segmentation variable for the Hispanic market, with those who related less strongly with their Hispanic background more similar to non-Hispanic U.S. consumers than to other Hispanics who more strongly related to their ethnicity. Valencia (1989), on the other hand, using a modified Rokeach Value Survey, finds significant differences between non-Hispanic and Hispanic U.S. consumers, but none among Hispanic groups.

Religiosity and Materialism

This study of the acculturation of Hispanic college students focuses on two particular cultural values, religiosity, and materialism, the former traditionally stronger in Mexico and the latter in the United States. There are indications that Hispanics are moving away from their once strong ties with the Catholic Church. Ten years ago, 68% of a Hispanic sample said that they attended the Catholic Church, while in 2001 only 53% said they did so (Gardyn, 2001). In fact, in this same survey, only 26% of Hispanics reported that they were "absolutely committed" to the Christian faith, as compared with 44% of non-Hispanics. The first hypothesis we examine in the present research explores the relative religiosity among the three groups of college students in our sample:

H1. There are significant differences in the degree of religiosity among college-aged Mexican, U.S. Hispanic, and U.S. non-Hispanic consumers; specifically, U.S. Hispanics are less religious than Mexicans and more religious than U.S. non-Hispanics.

The traditional faith-based values of the Mexican tradition influence not only degree of religiosity, but also the culture's perspective on reward for hard work and level of materialism. The traditional American belief regarding the connection between work and rewards is that if one works hard, he/she will be rewarded in this life materially. The traditional belief drawn from Mexican roots is that rewards for hard work may come in the afterlife rather than in this life (Falicov, 2001). Anglo-American values also tend to consider money as an individual reward, enabling self-sufficiency, whereas Hispanics value money as a resource to be shared with an extended family.

This difference in attitudes extends beyond attitudes toward money itself and into the relative value and role of material possessions. For example, while Americans may prefer to use money to spend time alone, for avenues of self-expression, Hispanics tend to value time with their family. Money and material possessions are viewed as a means of enhancing the opportunities for bonding with their family, e.g., watching television together (Falicov, 2001). A 1997 study of the relative levels of materialism among the U.S., China, and Mexico finds that Mexican students surveyed are the least materialistic of the three (Eastman, Fredenberger, Campbell, & Calvert, 1997). Our second hypothesis focuses on the relative materialism of U.S. Hispanics, U.S. non-Hispanics, and Mexican students.

H2. There are significant differences in the levels of materialism among college-aged Mexican, U.S. Hispanic, and U.S. non-Hispanic consumers; specifically, U.S. Hispanics are more materialistic than Mexicans and less materialistic than U.S. non-Hispanics.

Acculturative Stress

Related literature in psychology discusses the concept of acculturative stress, the psychological impact of adapting to a new culture. A review of this literature indicates that the Hispanic immigrant may realize a series of stages in the acculturative process (Smart & Smart, 1995). Initial hope for a better life may be followed by questioning the wisdom of leaving home, especially when dealing with the challenges of adjusting to a new country, new language, and different cultural values. To the degree that one is able to overcome acculturative stress, one eventually remakes his/her life, successfully coping in a new culture. The continual influx of new immigrants, ease of travel, and enhanced communication with their native home mentioned earlier, however, may foster increased acculturation stress (Smart & Smart, 1995).

The literature suggests that higher levels of cultural adaptation, or acculturation, may be reflected in higher levels of life satisfaction. This study compares the satisfaction levels of the three groups of college students to determine if Hispanics are less satisfied than the other two groups, perhaps reflecting acculturative stress.

H3. College-aged U.S. non-Hispanic and Mexican consumers are significantly more satisfied with their lives than U.S. Hispanic consumers.

Television as a Medium for Acculturation

Central to the acculturation process are the cultural values of the native and adopted homelands. How are the cultural values of the United States transmitted to Hispanic consumers? O'Guinn et al. (1986) propose that the mass media [television, in particular] may be especially important as an acculturation tool for immigrants looking for the "path of least resistance" (p. 562). Thus, we expect more television watching among U.S. Hispanics than among Mexicans. On the other hand, Stapinski's (1999) research suggests that young Hispanics are not watching television; so we expect more television watching among U.S. non-Hispanics than among U.S. Hispanics. The present study's fourth hypothesis states these differences in quantity of television viewing among the three groups of college students.

H4a. There is a significant difference in the amount of television watching among college-aged Mexican, U.S. Hispanic, and U.S. non-Hispanic consumers; specifically, U.S. Hispanics watch more television than Mexicans and less television than U.S. non-Hispanics.

In addition, cultivation theory may also contribute to our understanding of the effect that television viewing may have on the acculturation process. According to this theory, the perceived reality of that which television viewers see, along with repeated exposure, strengthens acceptance of the television messages (O'Guinn & Shrum, 1997; Shrum, Wyer, & O'Guinn, 1998). We hypothesize that the less knowledgeable the consumer is regarding the culture purveyed in television content, the greater the perceived realism of that content (which in turn should facilitate acculturation). The study's final hypothesis states the expected differences in the degree to which Hispanic students perceive what they see on television to be real as compared to the other two student groups.

H4b. There is a significant difference in the amount of perceived realism among college-aged Mexican, U.S. Hispanic, and U.S. non-Hispanic consumers; specifically, U.S. Hispanics see television as less realistic than Mexicans and more realistic than U.S. non-Hispanics.

METHODOLOGY

Procedure

Data were collected via pencil-and-paper questionnaires that gathered information on students' self-reports of television viewing, religiosity, materialistic beliefs, and life satisfaction, as well as demographic data. Questionnaires were administered by volunteer business school faculty to students at their universities in the United States and in Mexico. Participants from the United States were divided into two groups, U.S. non-Hispanic and U.S. Hispanic. Hispanics were those who self-identified as Hispanic, Latino/a American, or Mexican American; 88.5% of these reported that the U.S. was their birth country. In this study, as in Deshpande and Stayman (1994) and Ueltschy and Krampf (1997), Hispanic refers primarily to Americans of Mexican descent; most of the U.S. Hispanics were from schools in the Mexican–U.S. border region. The Mexican sample was drawn from business school students at two Mexican universities; the primary inclusion criterion was that they were able to read English.

Measures

Several measures were used to collect data. The reliability of multi-item measures (Cronbach's alpha) is reported in Table 1.

Materialism. The materialism scale was composed of all 31 questions from the 21-item Ger and Belk (1996) scale and the 10-item Richins and Dawson (1992) scale. The former scale was developed using an international sample of college students. These questions were rated with a 5-point scale (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree).

Importance of Personal Faith. Personal faith was measured using the question "rate the importance of your personal faith to you" (Hadaway & Roof, 1978). This question was rated with a 5-point scale (1 = not at all important to 5 = extremely important).

Life Satisfaction. Life satisfaction was also measured via an 11-item scale that has been utilized in previous related research (Sirgy et al., 1998). These questions were rated with a 5-point scale (1 = very dissatisfied to 5 = very satisfied).

Television Viewing. The three questions used for this measure were taken from a previously created measure (Sirgy et al., 1998). The television viewing measure was created by calculating the mean score of the answers given for: (1) hours of television watched yesterday, (2) hours of television usually watched everyday, and (3) average hours of television watched weekly divided by seven (yielding another measure of daily television watching).

Table 1. Reliability of Measures[a].

	Mexican	U.S. Hispanic	U.S. Non-Hispanic	Total Sample
Materialism (31 items)	0.72	0.75	0.76	0.75
Ger and Belk scale (21 items)	0.59	0.68	0.69	0.65
Richins/Dawson scale (10 items)	0.68	0.66	0.70	0.70
Life satisfaction (11 items)	0.89	0.94	0.93	0.92
TV realism (2 items)	0.61	0.88	0.57	0.63
TV viewing (3 items)	0.88	0.61	0.78	0.84
Standard of living (14 items)	0.74	0.85	0.85	0.83

[a]Cell entries are Cronbach's alpha.

These were open-ended questions, allowing participants to enter any number they wished to use as a measure of their time spent watching television. Participants responded with scores ranging from 0 to 18 h.

Television Realism. The television realism measure was adapted from Pollay and Mittal (1993) and Yoon (1995). It was created by computing the mean of the scores of the answers for the questions "television programs are realistic and truthful" and "television commercials are realistic and truthful." These questions were rated on a 5-point scale (1 = never to 5 = always).

Standard of Living. A set of questions regarding respondents' perceived standard of living were included as an additional measure of the effects of monetary resources on the constructs of interest in this study. The 14-item scale used was drawn from Sirgy et al. (1998). Each item asks the respondent to compare their family's situation to that of families they see on television programs and advertising. Thirteen items were rated with a 5-point scale (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree), and one item, an overall rating, was scored with a 7-point scale (1 = terrible to 7 = delighted). The total score was a mean of the 14 items (after reverse scoring as appropriate).

Family Income. Because family income is difficult to compare across countries, the measure used was based on social comparison, i.e., how one's income compared to others (response options were less than average, about average, and above average).

Analysis

Differences in the demographic profiles of the three ethnic groups (Mexican, U.S. Hispanic, U.S. non-Hispanic) were assessed by chi-square and analysis of variance (ANOVA). Differences among the groups in terms of dependent variables were analyzed using analysis of covariance to control for demographic differences among the groups, with *post hoc* contrasts between the groups where there was an overall group difference. Associations among dependent variables were measured by zero-order correlations and partial correlations controlling for age, gender, family income, and standard of living.

FINDINGS

Demographic Variables

Table 2 shows the demographic profile of the sample. The overall sample had an age range of 18–29. Chi-square analysis indicated that ethnic group

Table 2. Demographic Profile of Sample.

		Mexican (173)	U.S. Hispanic (78)	U.S. Non-Hispanic (205)	Total Sample (456)
Age[a]	Mean	20.49	22.62	21.36	21.24
	Standard deviation	1.27	2.46	2.11	2.04
Standard[a] of living	Mean	3.31	2.91	3.10	3.15
	Standard deviation	0.46	0.61	0.59	0.57
Gender[a]	Female	73.3% (126)	75.6% (59)	57.1% (117)	66.4% (302)
Family income[a]	Less than average	3.7% (6)	19.2% (15)	8.9% (18)	8.8% (39)
	About average	32.1% (52)	64.1% (50)	50.5% (102)	46.2% (204)
	Above average	64.2% (104)	16.7% (13)	40.6% (82)	45.0% (199)

[a]Indicates a significant overall difference ($p<0.05$).

(Mexican, U.S. Hispanic, U.S. non-Hispanic) had a statistically significant relationship with gender ($X^2_{(2, N=455)} = 14.60$, $p<0.01$) and income ($X^2_{(4, N=442)} = 55.63$, $p<0.001$). One-way ANOVA indicated that ethnicity had a statistically significant relationship with age ($F_{(2, 455)} = 33.85$, $p<0.001$) and standard of living ($F_{(2, 453)} = 15.86$, $p<0.001$).

A significant association was observed between each of the four demographic variables (age, gender, family income, and standard of living) and at least one of the scales measuring materialism, personal faith, life satisfaction, television viewing, and perceived television realism (results not shown). Because of these significant associations and the fact that the study groups differed on these demographic factors, we controlled for all demographic variables during the analysis of group differences for the five dependent variables.

Ethnicity and Acculturation

Separate analyses of covariance were performed for the measures of materialism, personal faith, life satisfaction, television viewing, and perceived television realism to test the hypotheses regarding how these measures are related to ethnicity (Mexican, U.S. Hispanic, U.S. non-Hispanic). After adjustment for the covariates (age, gender, family income, and standard of living), materialism, personal faith, life satisfaction, and perceived television realism varied significantly among the groups. The adjusted means and standard deviations are displayed in Table 3. For variables with a significant overall difference ($p < 0.05$), groups were compared by *post hoc* contrast. Groups with the same superscript letter are not significantly different from one another; groups without the same letter are significantly different ($p < 0.05$).

H1: Religiosity and Ethnicity. Importance of personal faith was observed to significantly differ across the groups ($F_{(2,429)} = 4.76$, $p < 0.01$), with an overall mean of 3.79. Personal faith was rated significantly higher by the Mexican group when compared to the U.S. non-Hispanic group ($p = 0.003$) with the groups reporting mean scores of 3.98 and 3.62, respectively. The U.S. Hispanic group was intermediate in personal faith and not significantly different from either of the other groups.

H2: Materialism and Ethnicity. There was a significant overall group difference for the combined materialism scale ($F_{(2,418)} = 4.37$, $p < 0.05$), with a sample mean of 85.75. Significant differences were observed for the materialism measure between the U.S. non-Hispanic group and Mexican group ($p = 0.003$), with the U.S. non-Hispanic group showing a significantly higher level of materialism (mean = 87.66) than the Mexican group (mean = 83.49). The U.S. Hispanic group was intermediate in materialism and not significantly different from either of the other groups.

Table 3. Comparison of Group Means.

	Mexican	U.S. Hispanic	U.S. Non-Hispanic	Total
	Mean (SD)	Mean (SD)	Mean (SD)	Mean (SD)
Materialism*	83.49^{b}	$85.84^{a,b}$	87.66^{a}	85.75
($N = 425$)	(13.20)	(13.40)	(12.55)	(12.47)
Importance of personal faith**	3.98^{a}	$3.87^{a,b}$	3.62^{b}	3.79
($N = 436$)	(1.15)	(1.17)	(1.09)	(1.09)
Life satisfaction**	4.07^{a}	4.05^{a}	3.83^{b}	3.96
($N = 439$)	(0.63)	(0.65)	(0.61)	(0.61)
TV realism***	2.99^{a}	2.35^{b}	2.52^{b}	2.66
($N = 438$)	(0.69)	(0.69)	(0.65)	(0.67)
Time watching TV (hours per day)	2.44	2.66	2.56	2.53
($N = 437$)	(1.99)	(2.03)	(1.89)	(1.86)

All mean scores were estimated controlling for age, gender, family income, and standard of living.

*Indicates a significant overall group difference, $p < 0.05$.

**Indicates a significant overall group difference, $p < 0.01$.

***Indicates a significant overall group difference, $p < 0.001$.

A repeated measure analysis of covariance was performed to test if there was an observable pattern in the scores for materialism and importance of personal faith across the groups, controlling for the demographic variables (age, gender, income, and standard of living). This analysis used the z-scores of the importance of personal faith measure, as well as the z-scores for the materialism scale. The materialism measure was reverse coded for this procedure to make it a representation of non-materialistic attitudes; this makes the interaction between the groups and the two scales a test of whether the measures follow the same pattern across the groups. To the degree that groups' religiosity and non-materialism scores are similar, the interaction term will not be significant; the more different the patterns across the groups for religiosity and materialism, the more significant the interaction. z-Scores were used to equalize the metric value of the responses for each scale, eliminating the within-subject effect and making the interaction directly interpretable.

Fig. 1 illustrates the results of this analysis; no within-subjects effect is present, as it was controlled by the use of z-scores. The overall group comparison showed a significant between-subjects effect ($F_{(2,415)} = 6.49$, $p = 0.002$), and *post hoc* tests indicated a significant difference between

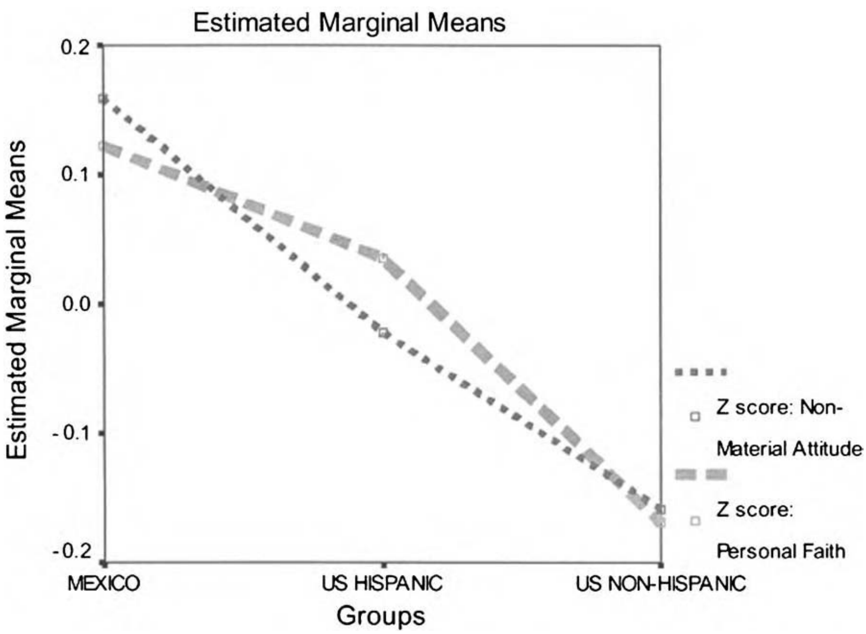

Fig. 1. Plot of Adjusted Group Means.

the Mexican and U.S. non-Hispanic groups ($p < 001$). The U.S. Hispanic group was intermediate and not significantly different from either of the other groups. The interaction of ethnicity and the within-subject measure (personal faith and non-material attitudes) was not significant ($F_{(2,415)} = 0.119$, $p = 0.888$), indicating that religiosity and non-materialism have a similar inter-group pattern.

H3: Life Satisfaction and Ethnicity. The life satisfaction measure showed a significant overall group difference ($F_{(2,432)} = 7.62$, $p < 0.01$), with a total sample mean of 3.96. Significant differences were observed between the U.S. non-Hispanic and U.S. Hispanic groups ($p = 0.012$) and the U.S. non-Hispanic and Mexican groups ($p < 0.001$), with the U.S. Hispanic and Mexican groups reporting significantly higher levels of life satisfaction (means = 4.05 and 4.07, respectively) compared to the U.S. non-Hispanic group (mean = 3.83).

H4: Television Viewership and Ethnicity. There were no significant differences between the groups in quantity of television watched, but there was a significant overall group difference for perceptions regarding television realism ($F_{(2,431)} = 28.48$, $p < 0.001$). Participants in the Mexican group reported a significantly higher level of realism (mean = 2.99) compared to the participants in the U.S. Hispanic group (mean = 2.35, $p < 0.001$) and U.S. non-Hispanic group (mean = 2.52, $p < 0.001$). The two U.S. groups were not significantly different.

Zero-order and partial correlations were obtained for all five measures, with the partial correlations controlling for all demographic variables (see Table 4). As expected based on the analysis reported in Fig. 1, there were significant negative zero-order and partial correlations between materialism and personal faith ($r_{(439)} = -0.23$, $p < 0.001$; faith $r_{(422)} = -0.20$, $p < 0.001$). Significant negative zero-order and partial-order correlations were found between materialism and life satisfaction ($r_{(442)} = -0.35$, $p < 0.001$; $r_{(422)} = -0.32$, $p < 0.001$); greater levels of materialism were associated with lower levels of life satisfaction. Conversely, there were significant positive zero-order and partial correlations between life satisfaction and personal faith ($r_{(453)} = 0.23$, $p < 0.001$; $r_{(433)} = 0.20$, $p < 0.001$). Neither of the television viewing variables was significantly associated with any of the other dependent variables.

DISCUSSION

The process of acculturation is complex. Hence, it is difficult to ascertain the precise effects that various contributing factors have on that process.

Table 4. Correlation Analysis of Measures.

		Zero-Order Correlations				
		Materialism	Importance of Personal Faith	Life Satisfaction	TV Realism	TV Watching (Hours)
Materialism	Correlation		−0.23*	−0.35*	−0.05	0.09
	Significance		0.001	0.001	0.262	0.069
	N		439	442	440	440
Importance of personal faith	Correlation	−0.20*		0.23*	0.00	−0.08
	Significance	0.001		0.001	0.993	0.097
	N	422		453	451	451
Life satisfaction	Correlation	−0.32*	0.20*		0.07	−0.06
	Significance	0.001	0.001		0.119	0.193
	N	422	433		454	454
TV realism	Correlation	−0.05	−0.02	0.03		0.03
	Significance	0.342	0.756	0.558		0.472
	N	422	433	434		453
TV watching (hours)	Correlation	0.07	−0.06	−0.05	0.03	
	Significance	0.171	0.252	0.307	0.515	
	N	422	433	434	434	
Partial Correlations						

Note: Zero-order correlation results are located in the upper right side of the table, while partial correlation results, controlling for age, gender, family income, and standard of living, are located in the lower left side of the table.
*Correlation is significant at the 0.001 level (two-tailed).

The results of the present study, however, provide some insights into the acculturation process of young Hispanic consumers.

Acculturation and Demographic Variables

The demographic variables are not the central variables of interest in this study, but since the ethnic groups were significantly different demographically, we controlled for these factors in our analysis of acculturation. Therefore, the attitudinal and behavioral differences among the ethnic groups are not a result of demographic differences among the samples.

Ethnicity and Acculturation

Religiosity and Materialism. The difference between the Mexican and U.S. non-Hispanic samples is clear; Mexicans are more religious and less materialistic than U.S. non-Hispanics. As hypothesized, the U.S. Hispanic sample's reported levels of personal faith and materialism fall midway between that of the other two groups. Hispanic students reflect a middle ground between the values of their ancestral culture and their adopted homeland. These students appear to be in the process of acculturation, partially adopting the values of the country in which they live, yet maintaining the core values of their family's native culture.

Life Satisfaction. The potential for stress associated with the acculturation process discussed in the literature review suggests that perhaps U.S. Hispanic students would be less satisfied with their lives than Mexican and U.S. non-Hispanic students who may be rooted more solidly in one culture. The results of this study, however, indicate that they are as satisfied with their lives as their Mexican counterparts and more satisfied than U.S. non-Hispanics.

The higher degree of life satisfaction reported by Mexican and U.S. Hispanic students as compared to that of U.S. non-Hispanic students is consistent with the relatively higher levels of personal faith (which is positively correlated with life satisfaction) and lower levels of materialism (which is negatively correlated with life satisfaction). It is difficult to satisfy materialistic desires, and those high in materialism are unlikely to be satisfied with the standard of living achieved. On the other hand, religious desires may be satisfied by the practice of one's personal faith. Thus, religion is intrinsically rewarding while gratification of materialism relies on extrinsic rewards.

Previous research on the cultural values of religiosity, materialism, and life satisfaction has identified similar relationships among these factors (Poloma

& Pendleton, 1990; Keng, Kwon, Tan, & Jochen, 2000). Lower materialism among U.S. Hispanic students than their U.S. non-Hispanic peers could reflect the relative strength of their religiosity. It also could result from their cultural perspective regarding material possessions, within which possessions are seen as contributing to the collective good as opposed to the good of the individual as measured by the materialism scales used in our study.

Television Viewership. The quantity of television watched did not differ significantly between the three ethnic groups, and it was not correlated with any of the other constructs. However, the perceptions regarding the realism of television programming and advertising content were significantly different across these segments, with Mexican students reporting a higher level of perceived realism than either of the other groups.

Study results do not support Stapinski's (1999) observation that young U.S. Hispanics are not watching television; they seem to be watching as much television as their Mexican and U.S. peers. Because Mexican and U.S. non-Hispanic college students watch similar amounts of television, acculturation does not involve transformation in amount of television watching (although there may well be differences in television viewing content). Our results do suggest that there are differences in the perceived realism of television content, with U.S. Hispanic and non-Hispanic students perceiving less realism than Mexican students. This raises the question of whether Mexican television content actually is more realistic, or whether U.S. Hispanics acculturate by becoming more skeptical about television content (or both). Another possibility is that U.S. Hispanic students are more equally exposed to both Hispanic and non-Hispanic media messages; to the degree that these messages conflict with each other, U.S. Hispanic students may find both less realistic.

STUDY LIMITATIONS

The present study examines a small sample of college students, limiting the generalizability of the results. We do not know how the study sample of U.S. Hispanics compares to other young Hispanics who are not college students and/or who differ in socio-economic status. Most respondents in the primary segment of interest, the U.S. Hispanic students, live in the Mexican border region of the United States. Consumers from other Hispanic cultures (Puerto Ricans, Cubans, various South American countries) and living in other regions of the U.S. also should be explored to determine whether the patterns observed here hold for those groups.

There are also limitations in the factors addressed in this study. Our results identify group differences in the perception of television realism, but we do not know whether this is a reflection of deep-seated beliefs, or a function of the specific content to which the groups are exposed. Finally, our study does not link beliefs and values to purchasing decisions made by the different ethnic groups.

THEORETICAL IMPLICATIONS

From a theoretical perspective, these results support the view that cultural values do change, but slowly. The acculturative process documented here reflects those changing values. Overall, it appears that U.S. Hispanic college students reflect a complex amalgamation of Mexican and American cultures. U.S. Hispanics fall midway between Mexican and U.S. non-Hispanic students in religiosity and materialism, are similar to Mexican students in life satisfaction, and similar to U.S. non-Hispanic students in perception of television content. The acculturation process does not necessarily lead to stress or unhappiness, as early work on the process had suggested it did. In addition, it appears that the relative strength of competing cultural values affects the degree to which those values influence the evolution of acculturation. Finally, the quantity of television viewing, in and of itself, does not explain differences in acculturation levels and cultural values held by study participants. This may be a case where the effect lies in the quality of content versus quantity alone.

MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS AND APPLICATIONS

As the numbers of "Generation N" continue to grow, developing marketing strategies which appeal to these consumers will become more important. Davila (2001) pinpoints a problem with marketing research on Hispanics, in general, which is the "reduction of so-called Hispanic traits to culture-bound generalizations" (p. 69). The present study results clearly suggest that successful efforts to communicate with this market segment will recognize both the cultures within which these young people live. Retaining aspects of their root Hispanic culture will be important, as will recognizing that they have, to varying degrees, adopted some of the values of the dominant culture in which they live. For example, Hispanic-targeted messages might rely on religious values to a greater extent than those targeting young non-Hispanics. Conversely, persuasion based on assumptions of underlying materialistic tendencies of the target market will not be as effective when addressing young Hispanics as they may be with other young consumers in the U.S.

Stapinski (1999) has suggested that television may not be the most effective means by which to communicate with Hispanic youth. However, the present study results show no significant difference in the amount of television viewed by the three market segments investigated. Our findings suggest that the difference between Hispanics and non-Hispanics in the U.S. in the impact of television is due to a more subtle difference reflecting the way that television content is perceived. Although young Hispanics watch television, what they see is not perceived as "real," which may reduce the impact that television watching has on consumer perceptions and behaviors.

Others studying young Hispanics suggest that they tend to listen to more radio and read more magazines than young non-Hispanics (Larson, 2003). While our study does not address this hypothesis, these and other alternative media (billboards, bus-wrapping, and stickers) might be used in targeting this segment (Stapinski, 1999). Other marketing strategies specifically aimed at reaching second generation and third generation Hispanics might employ grassroots approaches like mobile marketing – using vehicles for interacting with these consumers where they live (Vence, 2005).

Additional managerial implications may be drawn from the study results if one considers the possibility of reverse acculturation; rather than Hispanics adapting to mainstream culture of the United States, non-Hispanic young people may be beginning to adopt values of the Hispanic culture. Stapinski (1999) reports that in U.S. young people are "putting a premium on refurbished culture … in search of spirituality, strong family ties … things that Latino youth culture already embraces" (p. 66). Crossover product appeals cited in this research include music, dance, beer, fashion, makeup, and mannerisms. As a result of this reverse acculturation, experts suggest that developing marketing strategies which target Hispanic youth may actually attract more than Hispanics (Zbar, 2001).

CONCLUSIONS

As the face of the American consumer continues to change, it is important to understand how cultural values affect the needs and wants of the consumer. Consumers must be seen not only as individuals, but also as members of cultural groups. Other cultural values beyond materialism and religiosity should be included in this research to more broadly understand differences among groups and the dynamics of the acculturation process.

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IDENTIFYING GROCERY COUPON-PRONE CUSTOMERS: A HOUSEHOLD DEMOGRAPHICS PERSPECTIVE

Andrei Mikhailitchenko and Thomas W. Whipple

ABSTRACT

The study is focused on exploring demographic characteristics of the target audience of retail grocery stores whose buyer behavior is most responsive to coupon promotions. The demographic variables considered in the paper are age, employment status, and household size. As a result of a statistical analysis of scanner data, the demographic profile is developed for the coupon-sensitive category of consumers. Managerial recommendations for grocery stores' coupon-promotion tactics are discussed.

INTRODUCTION

Effective use of promotional tools is unlikely without a clear understanding of the target audience's demographic profile. In scholarly literature, the construct 'target audience' is usually referred to as the category defined in terms of brand loyalty (awareness, attitude, and behavior). There are five major target audiences (Brand Loyals, Favorable Brand Switchers, Other-Brand

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Switchers, Other-Brand Loyals, and New Category Users) who differ from each other in terms of advertising and promotion leverage (expected extra or retained sales per advertising dollar invested) (e.g., Jacoby & Chestnut, 1978). Demographic, geographic, and psychographic factors are recognized as additional descriptors used to narrow down or delineate a target audience from one of the five buyer groups for a particular campaign (Rossiter & Percy, 1997).

From a practical perspective, it is difficult to quantify a target audience in terms of brand loyalty. A separate marketing research study is needed to obtain at least an approximate measurement of the sizes of each of five brand loyalty groups for each brand. Large companies with considerable marketing budgets can accomplish this task, but it may become difficult for small- and medium-sized retail stores whose managers cannot identify the distinguishing characteristics between 'favorable' and 'other' brand switchers. At the same time, unlike brand-loyalty parameters, demographic ones are much more easily identifiable and measurable. Therefore, a "demographic portrait" of the audience with the highest promotional leverage can be helpful for medium and small grocery retailers, and their suppliers who use coupon promotions as one of their sales-generating tools. They have opportunities to obtain demographic data on their target audience, but may not have the financial resources, expertise, and managerial tools for segmenting and quantifying audiences in terms of brand loyalty.

This paper's objective is to identify the most significant demographic characteristics of those grocery store customers whose buying behavior is most responsive to coupon-based promotions. The underlying managerial implication is that understanding the demographic differences in promotion sensitivities is helpful for making not only promotion, but also initial stocking, inventory, and pricing decisions (Kalyanam & Putler, 1997).

This study is based on Information Resources, Inc. (IRI) panel scanner data obtained from 24 cities of the United States within 3 years – from 1997 to 1999. These cities are geographically dispersed across the different regions of the U.S. (Table 1). The data set contains more than 6.7 million observations

Table 1. List of the Cities Included in the Sample.

Pittsfield, MA	New York, NY	Kansas City, MO
Eau Claire, WI	Chicago, IL	Boston, MA
Midland, TX	Memphis, TN	San Francisco, CA
Rome, NY	Houston, TX	Tampa, FL
Visalia, CA	Pittsburgh, PA	Minneapolis, MN
Grand Junction, CO	Seattle, WA	Denver, CO
Cedar Rapids, IA	Detroit, MI	Philadelphia, PA
San Pedro, CA	St. Louis, MO	Atlanta, GA

of retail grocery store purchases, including demographic information about consumers in terms of age, gender, income, employment, marital status, residence, and number of household members.

RESEARCH AND MANAGERIAL PROBLEMS

The research problem investigated in the paper can be formulated as exploring the relationship between sensitivity toward coupon promotions and demographic variables.

The managerial problem addressed by the study can be defined as assisting medium- and small-sized grocery shops in identifying what categories of customers are most responsive to coupon promotions.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Demographic factor investigation has a relatively long history in marketing research. From the broad prospective, these factors are incorporated in studies concerning market segmentation (Gupta & Chintagunta, 1994), brand choice models (Guadagni & Little, 1983), retail physical setting arrangement (Ghosh & McLafferty, 1984), and transportation mode choice (Tybout & Hauser, 1981). This group of studies considers broadly defined research issues and contains wide insight into the demographic-related approach to marketing and advertising management. Significant attention is paid to the role of demographic factors in more specific aspects of advertising management: media planning (Cannon & Rashid, 1990), communication objectives setting (Murry, Latovicka, & Bhalla, 1989), target audience identification (Devine, 1994), and creative idea generating (White & Smith, 2001). In most of these studies, a set of demographic variables is used for constructing respective marketing and advertising regression models.

A considerable group of studies explored the effect of promotional strategies. Several researchers (Guadagni & Little, 1983; Neslin, Hendersen, & Quelch, 1985; Bawa & Shoemaker, 1987; Mela, Jedidi, & Bowman, 1998) investigated the effects of manufacturers' promotions and provided evidence that sales promotion can change purchase behavior and alter normal sales patterns. Other authors investigated issues related to modeling buyer behavior response to promotional actions (Delener, 1997), deciding on promotion tactics (Wansink, 2000), and defining inventory transfer objectives in promotional campaigns (Narayana & Raju, 1985).

In addition, there is a wealth of research devoted specifically to identifying the characteristics of "coupon-prone" categories in the population. The period of the most active research in this area is from the end of the 1970s until the end of the 1980s (Levedahl, 1988; Bawa & Shoemaker, 1987; Narasimhan, 1984; Teel, Williams, & Bearden, 1980; Ward & Davis, 1978; Blattberg, Buesing, Peacock, & Sen, 1978). These studies considered such demographic characteristics as income, gender, education, residential area, and age. They explore households' coupon-usage patterns and the relationship between coupon-usage and demographic profiles of consumer clusters. Most analyses were conducted based on either survey data (Bawa & Srinivasan, 1997; Teel et al., 1980) or panel data with several hundred to several thousand observations (Levedahl, 1988; Bawa & Shoemaker, 1987; Narasimhan, 1984; Ward & Davis, 1978).

Significant research was performed within the framework of specific industries and product groups. These industry-oriented studies focused on practical managerial problems, such as promotion of cheese brands in grocery stores (Gould, 1997), deciding on in-store versus out-of-store coupons (Green, 1997), using coupon techniques in Web sales (Korgaonkar, 1999), choosing between on-line and print coupon techniques (Suri, Swaminathan, & Monroe, 2004), and investigating the determinants of direct-mail coupon use (Chiou-wei, 2004). The authors did not consider the same set of demographic characteristics of coupon-prone customers that are investigated in this study (age, employment status, size of household).

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

A review of the literature demonstrated that in those studies where demographic factors were central to the research, the variables are measured at a more aggregated level than retail scanner data. Those studies that are based on store-level scanner data, consider specific industries and investigate a set of promotion tools focused primarily on technical, financial, or product penetration measures such as number of trial purchases, coupon design, and pricing techniques. Demographic aspects of the problem are employed as a supplementary element of the research (e.g., Guadagni & Little, 1983; Gupta, 1988; Kumar & Divakar, 1999). This paper investigates demographic aspects of coupon-promotion sensitivities on the basis of regional-level, retail grocery scanner data.

Theory indicates that there are different degrees of buying behavior response to promotions depending upon the demographic profile of customers.

Age of a customer is recognized as one of the most important demographic characteristics related to the degree of coupon elasticity of demand (Nielsen A.C. Co., 1972; Ward & Davis, 1978; Gallo, Hamm, & Zeller, 1982). The results reported in earlier empirical studies are controversial. Teel et al. (1980) report that coupon users are younger than non-users. Nielsen A.C. Co. (1972) argues that they are more likely to be middle-aged, while Ward and Davis (1978) indicate that coupon users tend to be older or younger, but not middle-aged.

In most of the studies related to age characteristics of promotions' target audience, the elderly consumer category is found to be the most promotion susceptible. Bearden and Mason (1979) and Lumpkin and Festervand (1988) report that elderly shoppers rely on physical search and point-of-purchase information as sources of pre-purchase information and that they potentially expose themselves to point-of-purchase promotion devices. Based on the same theoretical implications, Hanson (1987) reported that 75 percent of the elderly are willing to switch brands and to experiment with promoted products. The proposition that is consistent with the theory is that consumers over age 65 are the most responsive to coupon promotions.

Another demographic dimension to be considered is the job status of the promotion-perceptive group in the population. If the proposition above is true, then the most coupon-sensitive group should be retired as well. However, not all people over 65 are retired and vice versa. Thus, occupation and age are distinct, even within the elderly category, and therefore worthy of separate consideration. Moreover, there are different theoretical implications that underlie the application of these demographic factors in the development of a profile of the promotion-sensitive consumer. In the case of age, the major theoretical justifications are in the behaviorist findings, while in the case of occupation, the main theoretical implication lies within societal studies. Several researchers showed that from an information-processing perspective, retired people have a larger 'share of mind' pre-exposed to studying promotional offers and comparing prices than do the employed population who have more time-constrained life schedules and a different social focus (John & Cole, 1986; Cole & Houston, 1987). Thus, the second proposition is that among all occupation categories, retired people are the most responsive to coupon promotions.

The third demographic characteristic of the coupon-promotion target audience is the number of people in a household. Considerable research exists that investigated the relationship between household size and price elasticity of demand for food products (Gibson, 2002), savings behavior of household members (DeVaney & Chien, 2001), and structure of household expenditures (Wagner & Mokhtari, 2000). The basis of these studies is the concept of household 'demand synergy,' which decreases the price sensitivity of a household with increases in size, other factors kept constant. Thus, households with fewer members are more dynamically oriented toward promotions.

According to the household production function theory, households with a lower opportunity cost of time (usually small households without children and employed adults) are more likely to spend the time needed to redeem coupons and to use the cost savings provided by the coupons (Levedahl, 1988). The third proposition is that there is a negative relationship between household size and coupon-promotion sensitivity of its members.

To summarize, the set of demographic features of a coupon-prone household is hypothesized to be: *2 or fewer member household with retired, 65+ year old head*(*s*). This profile is consistent with the theoretical arguments discussed and with transaction cost analysis. There are various organization and time costs connected with coupon usage (e.g., handling costs of periodically organizing the coupons, cost of looking through magazines, time spent in storing and retrieving the coupons), and as time becomes a scarce resource, the value attached to successive units is higher (Narasimhan, 1984). This relationship is especially true for grocery products, where the 'cost of coupon-usage'/'obtained savings' ratio is especially high.

Handling costs are likely to be higher for households with working members and young children, because these family conditions tend to decrease the amount of leisure time available or to increase the value (in terms of opportunity cost) of the household's time (Bawa & Shoemaker, 1987). The presence of large numbers of people in a household and the household members being employed have a negative impact on the ability to take advantage of deals, since this latter activity is time intensive (Blattberg et al., 1978). These transaction costs are less burdensome for small households consisting of elderly retired people, and thus, grocery coupon usage is more likely to be expected as a part of their utility-maximizing behavior.

HYPOTHESIS FORMULATION

Hypothesis formulation is based not only on the theoretical arguments stated above, but also on features of the database. The important element of the panel scanner database used in this study is that all the observations are based on the household level data. Age and employment status do not refer to a specific customer, but to the two heads of household – male and female – that are represented. This feature of the database imposes certain limitations on the study in terms of hypotheses formulation because all the hypotheses may refer only to households, not to individuals. However, since most advertising and promotion-related studies cited used household data (e.g., Gupta, 1988; Delener, 1997; Kumar & Divakar, 1999), this database design provides an opportunity to conduct research at the same demographic unit level as in the literature. Consequently, the hypotheses are:

H1. Grocery coupon use and age of the head of household have a positive and significant interaction effect on the number of grocery store transactions.

H2. Grocery coupon use and retirement status of the head of household have a positive and significant interaction effect on the number of grocery store transactions.

H3. Grocery coupon use and size of the household have a negative and significant interaction effect on the number of grocery store transactions.

DATA ANALYSIS

The analysis of panel scanner data is often a challenging task characterized by large amounts of noisy data (Balasubramanian, Gupta, Kamakura, & Wedel, 1998). Thus, the process used in this study combines two intertwined tasks: exploration and analysis (Selfridge, Srivastava, & Wilson, 1996). To prevent the data set size from skewing the study findings, the number of variables was reduced to the five (presence/absence of a coupon, age, retirement status, household size, and date) to retain only those data that are meaningful for the analysis. The data set analyzed contains transactions with and without coupon promotions and also observations for 12 quarters (1997–1999). The number of purchase transactions for each category was derived on a longitudinal (quarterly) basis.

A $2 \times 2 \times 2 \times 2$ (Coupon $\times$ Age $\times$ Retirement $\times$ HH Size) analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted on 'the number of purchase transaction' data. The following factors and levels for each factor were inputs to the analysis (Table 2).

Under this design configuration, there are four categorical independent variables, each two levels, with 16 combinations of factor levels, and one dependent continuous variable (number of purchase transactions in each of

Table 2. Factors in $2 \times 2 \times 2 \times 2$ Design.

(1) Presence of coupon	Coupon is present
	Coupon is absent
(2) Age of a household head	65+ years old
	65 or less years old
(3) Retirement status of a household head	Retired
	Non-retired
(4) Household size	1 or 2 members
	More than 2 members

Table 3. ANOVA Results.

Source	F-value	$\Pr > F$
Coupon	5042.08	<0.0001
Age	3123.54	<0.0001
Retirement	3212.64	<0.0001
HH Size	993.26	<0.0001
Coupon × HH Size	680.72	<0.0001
Coupon × Age	2045.62	<0.0001
Coupon × Retirement	2111.89	<0.0001
Coupon × HH Size × Age	1321.65	<0.0001
Coupon × HH Size × Retirement	1330.78	<0.0001
Coupon × Age × Retirement	3384.00	<0.0001
Coupon × HH Size × Age × Retirement	1048.44	<0.0001

12 quarters). A test of the three hypotheses revealed significant results for the two-way interaction effects (coupon × age, coupon × retirement, coupon × HH size) as well as for the three- and four-way interactions between 'coupon' and the other variables (Table 3).

The interpretation of the significant four-way interaction is that households with some particular combination of demographic characteristics (age, retirement status, and size of household) are especially sensitive to coupon promotions in grocery stores. Post hoc tests that contrasted these differences were conducted between proportions of different population groups in coupon-promoted versus non-coupon sales. Z-tests for difference of proportions were performed (Table 4).

The household group with the most significant increase of its relative share in coupon-promoted versus non-coupon sales levels is those with a 65+ year old head, who is retired, with 1–2 people (22.4% versus 16.4%,

Table 4. Proportions of Coupon versus Non-Coupon Sales.

		Households without Retired Heads		Households with at least One Retired Head	
		Share in coupon-promoted sales	Share in non-coupon sales	Share in coupon-promoted sales	Share in non-coupon sales
Households with >2 members	Households without aged 65+ heads	44.85%	50.44%	1.87%	1.84%
		Z = −92.53*		Z = 1.83	
	Households with at least one 65+ year old head	1.57%	1.49%	4.62%	3.66%
		Z = 5.35		Z = 41.47	
Households with 2 or less members	Households without aged 65+ heads	18.11%	19.77%	3.00%	2.74%
		Z = −34.76		Z = 13.26	
	Households with at least one 65+ year old head	3.57%	3.67%	22.43%	16.39%
		Z = −4.79		Z = 132.86	

*Significant at $p < 0.01$.

Z value 132.86, $p < 0.01$). Further analysis indicated that by differentiating between households with one and two 65+ year old heads and households with one and two retired heads, the highest rate of increase of proportion in coupon-promoted versus non-coupon sales is in households with two members, both of whom are 65+ year old and retired (10.9% versus 7.3%, Z value 109.42, $p < 0.01$).

DISCUSSION

The results of the study demonstrated that the relative share of the following households in the number of coupon-redeemed sales is significantly higher than in the number of transactions without coupons: (a) households with 65+ year old heads; (b) households with retired heads; and (c) households with 1–2 members. Significant interaction of these characteristics provides a demographic profile of grocery store customers with the highest coupon-promotion leverage: a 65+ year old head of household, retired, living either alone or with his/her spouse.

From theoretical point of view, the study results support a strong relationship between coupon-promotion sensitivity and socio-demographic variables, such as age, employment status, and household size. This finding complies within recent research results based on the methodology of demographic and psychographic segmentation of the target audience (Morgan & Levy, 2002).

From managerial point of view, the study results reinforce the necessity of directing coupon-promotional efforts to elderly and retired people rather than to younger-age/employed cohorts. Awareness of this demographic profile of the most leveraged target audience can assist managers in increasing the efficiency of grocery store coupon-promotion campaigns. Three major directions for re-designing promotion campaigns in compliance with the specific needs of this target audience seem to be most promising: (1) modifying coupon-featured product mix by adding those goods that are most popular among this category of customers; (2) developing the design of coupon-promotion campaigns in such a way that they become more attractive to people of this age and status (by basing the creative idea of these campaigns on trans-generational or age-free symbols rather than on youth- and health-emphasizing features) (Greco & Swayne, 1992); and (3) using "relationship marketing" tools aimed at specific needs of this category of consumers for maintaining their loyalty toward promotion campaigns (personally notifying them about these campaigns by direct mail or issuing special "senior coupons") (Berry, 1995).

STUDY LIMITATIONS AND IMPLICATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

This study has a few limitations. First, the database includes only information collected in grocery stores. It does not include data from department stores and other retail outlets. Therefore, the results are not generalizable to the entire consumer market. Coupon promotion of non-grocery product categories may reveal different demographic patterns of consumer reaction. Second, the database contains information from 24 cities and towns in the U.S.; it is not nationwide data. In addition, the data set covers a relatively limited period of time (1997–1999). Some of the limitations are imposed by the research design, which is rather straightforward by nature. The design included only three demographic variables, while much more are available in the database (household income, race and education level of the household head, number of children, and home owner/renter status). A more comprehensive statistical model may identify other significant demographic variables influencing coupon-promotion sensitivity, however, the three selected are best supported by the literature.

Implications for future theoretical research should be based on constructing market structure maps from panel scanner data (Ramaswamy & DeSarbo, 1990; Cotterill, 1994; Chintagunta & Vilcassim, 1995; Jensen, 2002). In this study format, this complex goal can be formulated in a more specific manner. It can be re-translated as 'using aggregate household data for making further managerial conclusions and recommendations, applicable in medium- and small-sized retail stores.'

More specifically, the following directions for future research seem to be the most relevant for the scope of data available. First, buyer behavior respond not only to coupon promotions, but also to the other featuring techniques, such as shelf location of a product, can be analyzed from a demographical profile point of view. The database allows one to conduct research on evaluating package sizes, weights, and volumes purchased most by consumers. Such research can assist managers in making better promotion design decisions.

Distinctions of buyer response toward retailer and manufacturer coupons can be investigated as well. Another available insight can be achieved by exploring differences of consumer reaction patterns to promotional campaigns for various product categories (meat, bakery, pets food, hygienic products). Interpretation of these research findings can contribute to more precise market segmentation and promotion campaign designs.

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INSCRIBING THE PERSONAL MYTH: THE ROLE OF TATTOOS IN IDENTIFICATION

Anne M. Velliquette, Jeff B. Murray and Deborah J. Evers

The purpose of this article is to better understand the role of tattooing in identity construction. The study of tattoo consumption opposes traditional forms of consumer research in at least three ways: they are permanent, infinitely customized, and destabilize object/body oppositions. It is for these reasons that they come to represent the way people make meaning of their lives. This meaning-making centrally involves storytelling; the creation and sharing of stories of the self. Seven stories are presented; with each story we discuss the on-going process of identity negotiation by exploring the informant's *personal myth*. A personal myth is a story that brings together a wide range of experiences into a purposeful and convincing whole. Inter-story analyses reveal that for some informants, their personal myths represent a narrative sequence of redemption, moving from bad to good. For others, their personal myths represent a narrative sequence of contamination, moving from good to bad. These life-narrative accounts are especially useful in accounting for life transitions or turning points. It is these transitions that can help us better understand the use of objects as signs in identity negotiation. The article concludes by linking the redemption versus contamination theme to cultural perceptions of the sacred and other meta-narratives of modernity.

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The human body has always been used as a means for expression. Body modification such as tattooing, branding, scarring, piercing, make-up, clothing, hairstyle, and other forms of adornment are ways of signaling identity by marking individual creativity, one's place in society, a special experience, or resistance to cultural practices. Permanent forms of adornment, such as tattoos, provide an interesting case for consumer researchers since it is unclear whether they become part of the body or simply adorn the body. This ambiguity enables tattooing to slip between polarities customarily used to organize experience and understand the distinction between self and body (Taylor, 1995). Given that most theories of consumption objects assume easy acquisition and disposition, and that objects are separate from the body, exploring the consumer's use of tattoos has important implications for the use of consumption as a means to construct identity (Belk, 1988; Joy & Venkatesh, 1994; McCracken, 1988; Thompson & Hirschman, 1995). The purpose of this research is therefore to better understand the role of tattooing, as one form of consumption, on identity construction. This aim builds on a small but promising stream of research that focuses on the role of the body and body adornment on the consumer's on-going task of identity negotiation (Murray, 2002; Schouten, 1991; Thompson & Haytko, 1997; Thompson & Hirschman, 1995).

Tattooing has been studied from a sociological perspective as deviant social behavior (Sanders, 1989), from an anthropological perspective as a mark of civilization (Rubin, 1988), from a cultural perspective as a mediator of class dynamics (Demello, 2000), and from a historical perspective with an emphasis on the various roles that body adornment may play in society (Polhemus & Housk, 1996). In recent years, tattooing has gained wide acceptance and therefore has become palatable for middle-class consumption (Demello, 2000). It has been estimated that 12–20 million Americans have joined the ranks of the tattooed (Blouin, 1996). In 1996, tattoo studios were among the top six growth businesses in the United States (American Business Information, Inc., 1996). In 1960, there were approximately 500 professional tattoo artists operating in the United States and by 1995 that number had increased to over 10,000 (Hardy, 1995). Various forms of popular media culture reflect the recent popularity of tattoos, which further fuels this Renaissance. For example, several well-known companies and products such as The Gap, Ralph Lauren Polo, Calvin Klein, Guess, Absolute Vodka, Kodak, Sony, Snickers, and even Jello-puddings and gelatins feature tattooed models and images in their advertisements. Further, various rock stars, movie stars, sports heroes, and superstar models are tattooed. Finally, Mattel's introduction of a tattooed Barbie doll is a clear sign of middle-class acceptance. This Renaissance has created a new role for tattooing in America, which many cultural observers now refer to as the *new tattoo subculture*. The qualifier "new" conveys the fragmentation of the subculture shifting the focus to localized subject positions that have developed around fashion, lifestyle, and identity. Maffesoli (1996) refers to these subject positions as neotribes or emotional communities. This implies that the term "subculture," and the parent culture against which it is defined, are not coherent and homogeneous formations that can be clearly demarcated (Weinzierl & Muggleton, 2003). Indeed, the new tattoo "subculture" is an overarching label for a very diverse group. This group includes a wide range of subgroups or communities, such as the biker tattoo community, the middle-class elite tattoo community (Demello, 2000), the young punk tattoo community, or other brand communities (Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001) that have grown-up around particular artists or styles of tattooing such as the *modern primitives* (Camphausen, 1997). The new tattoo "subculture" also includes the less involved, non-core consumer who may have a single tattoo on their ankle, hip, lower back, arm, or shoulder but has never seen a tattoo magazine or attended a tattoo conference. The one thing all of these consumers share is the experience of being tattooed.

Interpreting consumers' stories about being tattooed will help us better understand the ways these experiences contribute to the construction of identity. A useful approach to understanding a wide range of images and activities in contemporary culture can be found in the concept *myth* (Barthes, 1972). "Myths" are cultural stories that have gained wide acceptance for their ability to communicate something fundamental about life (Levi-Strauss, 1978). These stories are often deemed sacred since they are able to capture and express a culture's basic psychological, sociological, cosmological, and metaphysical reality. They play a role in preserving a culture's integrity and continuity. In addition, myths are important since they provide a vehicle to enrich personal meaning. This indicates that what myths traditionally have done on the level of culture can also be accomplished on a personal level (Feinstein, 1979; McAdams, 1993). A *personal myth* is a story that brings together a wide range of experiences into a purposeful and convincing whole (McAdams, 1993). It is a patterned integration of our remembered past, perceived present, and anticipated future. From this perspective, each of us attempts to create a heroic story, a compelling aesthetic statement (McAdams, 1993). This personal myth or story is our identity and it is a sacred, dynamic, and continuous project. The body, and the way that it is adorned, is part of one's identity project; individuals use an ensemble of products and brands as sign-systems to embody their personal myths.

The next section discusses the methodological procedures used to collect consumer stories about being tattooed. Following this section, seven stories are presented; with each story we discuss the on-going process of identity negotiation by exploring the informant's creation and management of their personal myth. Finally, in the discussion section, a key theme from the cases will be used to discuss the use of consumption as a means to construct identity.

METHODOLOGICAL PROCEDURES

In order to emphasize in-depth analyses of individual life stories, seven informants were selected. Since breadth of experience will contribute to a more detailed contextualization of the consumer's use of products in identity negotiation, diversity across informants was emphasized. Interviews generally followed the format as suggested by Thompson, Locander, and Pollio (1989). A comfortable setting was chosen and pseudonyms were used to ensure anonymity. Interviews were audio-taped and lasted anywhere from one to just over two hours. Grand tour questions (McCracken, 1988) focused on the meaning of the tattoo design, the experience of being tattooed, perceptions of the body, words the informants used to describe themselves, and other biographical information important for understanding the informant's personal myth. Every effort was made to present a natural front, keep the informant on track without being too directive, demonstrate active listening, and prompt the informant as a way of probing for details (Spradley, 1979). To ensure accuracy, an experienced and trained transcriptionist transcribed each of the seven interviews. The final text totaled 450 typed double-spaced pages.

Analyses proceeded by using a hermeneutical approach as proposed by Thompson (1997). For each phase in the analyses an interpretive group was used to enrich and develop the interpretation (Rowe et al., 1989; Thompson et al., 1989). The interpretive group used a dialogal approach (Rowe et al., 1989) and consisted of the three coauthors of this article. The group would meet once a week; read the transcribed interviews aloud and dialog about potential interpretations. In the first phase of analysis, the interpretive group focused on the temporal sequencing of key events and narrative movement, including the formation of a personal myth, for each informant (Stern, 1995). Each case was then written as a narrative or story paying close attention to contextual complexities. In the second phase of analysis, the interpretive group sought common story lines between narratives. In this phase, the group began the more abstract process of conceptualizing or forming an ethic interpretation. Both phases were useful in conceptualizing the use of consumption as a means to identification.

INTRACASE RESULTS AND ANALYSES

Jewel: Dreaming of Healing

Jewel is a single, 28 year old, Lebanese-American college student studying anthropology, ethnic dance, and Arabic. Jewel's mother was from Louisiana and her father from Lebanon. After her parents divorced when Jewel was very young, she was raised by her mother in Monroe, Louisiana. By the time Jewel was 20; both parents had died of cancer within a year of each other. As a way of coping with these deaths, Jewel turned to art therapy, which eventually led to an interest in body art. Jewel's personal myth is about using art and her creative imagination to transcend and heal the grief she feels from her parents' deaths.

> And that was really when I got into my body art was through that time period when I lost them. My father passed away right after my mom, and so I was questioning it all. I was like, you know, how can I birth this into something positive? I've got to make it okay, and all I could think of was my art. I was in art therapy. I was doing a lot of art and it surfaced onto my body, it just flowed everywhere. I was doing paintings and poetry and getting tattooed. I had to do something. I personally have to do creative things in order to heal pain and it really was part of that. The body art for me was a way to mark something permanently, that permanently shaped me, and say, I can take it and make it beautiful. I can express something that permanently marks me, an experience, and wear it proudly. (Jewel)

Jewel was interviewed in a private area of a coffee shop close to campus. As she entered the shop, the interviewer (first author) was taken back by her striking appearance. Jewel is tall, thin but shapely, with an athletic dancer's physique. She has long black hair, a narrow face, strong jaw line, high cheekbones, olive toned smooth skin, and rich brown eyes. Jewel has a small black tribal tattoo in the shape of a spiral on her forehead which adds to her sensual and exotic appearance. She begins the interview by listing her tattoos. In addition to the small spiral in the center of her forehead, Jewel has a circle of flowers on her upper back between her shoulder blades, a Luna moth design centered on her lower back, an Egyptian water lily band around her left upper arm, a green and black serpent on her right upper arm, a band of flowers around her left ankle, the phases of the moon around her right ankle, and finally, a lotus flower design also on her right ankle.

For Jewel, art and the creative process helped her to understand and interpret her life experiences in a meaningful way. What makes this creative process so intriguing is how she came to decide on the specific designs that are now permanently engraved on her skin. Jewel explains that most of the design ideas came to her in dreams or visions. She perceives these dreams/visions to be her inner voice. Although initially unaware of the significance of each of the images, Jewel would eventually connect their symbolic meaning to the events that were occurring in her life.

> Some of these [referring to her tattoo designs] were actually dreams, recurring dreams I kept having that I just couldn't deny. The most important one was when my mom died I kept having this recurring dream about this green serpent. I had never really put much thought into the symbolism behind the serpent, except that I started having this dream and then it got more intense and more visual and happening more often and it became this connection to my psyche. Somehow, it manifested itself as my subconscious, for whatever reason, this green, harmless, yet serpent-like creature and it would almost come and bring me through a doorway to cross over. It was almost like a window, when it would appear in my dreams. So this dream kept coming and it kept taking me deeper and deeper into, literally into the earth, into myself, symbolically. And at the end of this whole process, the serpent finally took me to my mother, about three years into this series of dreams, and I was writing all this poetry about it and everything, and finally it took me to my mother, deep in the earth and she said, 'I just didn't know how else to come to you, connect with you, but I feel like now that we have a language, I'm going to move on, and we're going to always have this connection,' and I just went, 'oh, okay.' And I went out and had a green serpent tattooed on me, and it's my most intense for sure. It is so much about death, but it is really about rebirth too, and it's a shedding. I began to do all of this research on the symbolism of the serpent [after the recurring dreams] and I got to thinking about the serpent as woman energy, as the feminine force in the universe. This is not an evil serpent creature. It's something real earthy and feminine, something very connected to the earth, yet almost suppressed, or you know, made to the dark side, like death; yet a symbol of rebirth too. I was just researching common mythologies throughout all of human history and have just maintained this really strong bond with that animal or that symbol ever since. And so, I just listened to my inner voice in that way and it manifested itself on me as that. (Jewel)

Jewel's research on the symbolism of the serpent revealed that the serpent or snake is one of the most common dream symbols of transcendence. In *Man and his Symbols* (1964), Carl Jung explains that snakes are universal archetypes. These are collectively assimilated ideas or deeply held patterns of thought. Thus, the cultural imagery or myth of the snake is shared because it is subtly passed on as one becomes acculturated. Jewel believes that the snake was sent as a message to free her from the pain: "Yeah, a message, whether it's from my own soul trying to soothe me or whether it's a message from beyond." According to Jewel, the snake represents primal energy, like the *kundalini* serpent in the Hindu religion.

> It's the Hindu idea, the yogic concept of your chi raising itself through your chakras, or your body, in the form of a snake, the kundalini serpent, this serpent-energy rises up in your soul, your chi energy, it's in each one of us and its powerful energy that can be damaging or it can be like the highest of enlightenment. (Jewel)

Through her dreams, research, and art therapy, Jewel learned how to channel her energy into something positive. The serpent became a symbol of release, liberation, or healing.

Other designs also came to Jewel through her dreams. After the death of her father, she experienced recurring dreams of a lotus blooming. Since Jewel had studied Eastern religions and yoga, she was familiar with the symbolism of the lotus. The lotus rises in the morning from muddy waters to flower and is therefore a symbol of purity or rebirth:

> And this one was when my father died, and it's an Egyptian water lily, which was the psycho-active drug of the Egyptians. And I had a lot of surrealistic dreams in and around my father's death of something, a beautiful symbol of rebirth that would be connected to him and I kept coming up with this lotus blooming and I can't get this image out of my mind, so I've had it tattooed a couple of times on me, just the lotus, the basic lotus design. I'd like to have lotuses all over. (Jewel)

Some of Jewel's tattoos are the result not of dreams but of significant experiences. For example, after the death of her parents, she traveled to Papua New Guinea with the Peace Corps where she bonded with the women of a particular tribe by sharing her stories of dreams and tattoos. These women were all tattooed with spiral designs representing the cycles of life. Upon her return, Jewel tattooed a spiral design on her forehead to mark and remember the experience. Jewel also traveled to Lebanon where she chose a henna-like design of flowers and the letter "O," which represents a passageway to the spiritual world. In another example, around the time of her mother's death, she claimed to have sightings of a very rare Luna moth. Because it grows from a cocoon, the moth symbolizes the soul, transformation, and rebirth; the creation of life from apparent death:

> The thing about my Luna moth was that I actually did have a Luna moth appear at certain times when I was losing my mom that were really coming up for me later. I don't see them very often, yet right around her death, I had some sightings, and they are rare, and they just kept coming up and I kept going, 'God, how beautiful, thank you, what a gift.' I needed something to take me beyond the grief. Some symbol of beauty. I choose to see the symbolism in animals and the things that present themselves to me because that's just what I would like to think. I would like to think that this Luna moth came to me. That this serpent in my dream was a doorway rather than something evil. (Jewel)

For Jewel, tattoos are a way of mapping key experiences and events that take place in her life. When she explains the meaning of her tattoos, she is describing her life story. Since the death of her parents was so important, nearly all of her tattoos relate in some way to the grieving and healing process. Jewel's tattoos serve as a constant reminder of peace or resolve, which has enabled her to move forward with day-to-day living. The tattoo, in this context, marks a life passage and becomes a symbol of healing.

> When I'm naked and I'm looking at myself, I'm looking beyond my physicality into what I have gone through. I see my body art as my road map of my life; my life story is written out for me to always remember. It will always symbolize a time or place I've been or something that I went through, and therefore, it's part of me. It is really all about the timing and the reason. The symbol behind the sign or art itself is all about a time and place. Like we talked earlier, I got most of the tattoos during the death of my parents, and so whenever there's something really intense going on, I have always marked it on me through a tattoo, the experience. (Jewel)

Jewel's personal myth takes on an exotic and transcendental feel. Given the audience, which includes anthropology, ethnic dance and Arabic students, colleagues from the Peace Corp, and coworkers from a part time job at a local food cooperative, this myth is viewed as creative, interesting, and agentic. Thus, social reactions to her tattoos have been very positive and reinforcing. This enables Jewel to view herself as a traveler, embodying her personal myth by marking meaning as she moves through life's passages.

Jack: Working Through Crisis

Jack is a 58-year-old Native American who is widowed with five children. He has a Ph.D. in sociology and currently teaches at a large state university. Jack has a number of elaborate tattoos that fit together forming a continuous artistic pattern over most of his upper body. His personal myth is about using Native American imagery to find distinction as a way of working through an identity crisis.

Jack was interviewed in his office on campus. He is of medium height and weight and appears to be very fit with well-defined shoulders and arms. Jack's skin is dark and weathered with an almost leather-like appearance. He has brown eyes and a round-shaped face and head, which he shaves bald. Jack has all the trappings and style of an older college professor, tattered leather briefcase, corduroy jacket, sweaters, and an office cluttered with books, journals, and papers. With a dash of impatient cynicism, he speaks fast as if still teaching and is interesting to talk to. Jack explains that most of his tattoos are Native American symbols and that he started getting tattoos after his wife died to help him deal with the pain of losing her. He calls this time in his life an "identity crisis."

Jack begins by showing the interviewer two tattoos on his left wrist. The first is of a lizard, which represents the grieving process after his wife died. The second is a Snoopy character, which Jack acquired after his grandson died.

> My wife had died and I'm Native American, you brand yourself when someone you love dies, so I got this lizard thing. The lizard was also a symbol you put on you like medicine. It's a symbol for healing. The Snoopy I got when my grandchild died. It is a real nice way of grieving. This grieving thing is a physical thing you can actually do, at the same time, this is sort of like an ending ceremony. (Jack)

Jack continues the interview by taking off his shirt to display his other tattoos. On his left arm, shoulder, back, and chest he has a number of tattoos that run together creating a collage or mural. First, he has an armband of intertwined coral snakes with a Gordian knot in the center. For Jack, this tattoo represents the uncertainty and complexity of life. Second, he has a turtle design, which represents nature or the earth. Next, an eagle and a red sun, which represents the sky; then a water bird design, representing peace, completes the left shoulder collage. On his right arm, shoulder, back, and chest Jack has a tribal arm band of buffalo skulls, a bear paw, two Alaskan medicine masks, an eagle head, a Plains Indian, a woodpecker design, and an animal that is a combination of a fish and a horse. Again, all of these designs represent various meanings associated with Native American culture.

In terms of social roles and position, Jack has a clear understanding of who he is. He has been a professor for a long time and is recognized and respected for his contribution to academia. Jack is also active and well established in his community; and is close to his kids and family. However, the personal reflection that occurred after the loss of his wife and grandson led to questions about what Jenkins (1996) calls "individual identity" or what Bourdieu (1984) calls "distinction."

> They all have meaning. I don't like one more than the other; a lot of people ask me why did you get so many tattoos? The first thing is you're going to make this big decision; I'm going to be a person with a tattoo. You know you are different from most people. Just bottom line, standing in line at Wal-Mart, I know I'm different. After that, when you start getting the second and third tattoo, it really does become more personalized. It becomes an idea that it is more of a reflection of who you think you are. (Jack)

Jack's first three tattoos (i.e., lizard, Snoppy, and Gordian knot) signify his identity crisis. After the death of his wife and grandson, life appeared unpredictable, uncertain, complicated, and sad. The Gordian knot, in particular, represents a problematic complexity; a time in his life when he faced challenging problems relating to identification. The death of his wife forced a dramatic reflection and reevaluation as to who he was, is, and will become. As he worked through the crisis, Jack turned to his Native American heritage for support. He embraced a Native American *imago* as a main character in his personal myth to push the narrative forward. ''Imagoes'' are archetypal patterns for human thought and action that compose idealized personifications in personal myth (McAdams, 1993, p. 124). Imagoes personify aspects of who you believe you were, who you are now, or who you might be in the future. Jack's Native American tattoos signify nature, earth, sky, and peace; all symbols that represent the antithesis of crisis. He is therefore using artistic expression, the ritual of the tattoo, and the personification of Native American symbolism to work through his identity crisis. This enables Jack to view himself as a healer or caregiver, preserving nature and the domestic traditions that bring people together in family and community. In the below excerpt, Jack reflects on the use of the tattoo for artistic expression.

> I: Do you consider tattooing an art form?
>
> Jack: If I tell them what to do. Their basis [the tattooist] is that it is art, but what they do on my body isn't art until I say it is and that starts with number one. You know this is what we are doing, here's where it goes, and this is how it's gonna look, this is the size and this is the color. Its art once it's on me the way I want it. I don't see them as the artist.
>
> I: So art has to be an expression that is related to you?
>
> Jack: Yes, it's my art, not theirs. Now they may see themselves as artists, but what I see is I'm the artist and I'm doing this on me. They are just putting it on me. This is my painting, not theirs. I'm not their blank canvas. They may do good work, but, I have to have input or it's just another old tattoo. Art is an expression, and it's gonna be something I carry around, so it's gonna be mine. If I want it to express a lot about me, I have to have the input.

Both Jewel and Jack were using artistic expression and the tattoo as an aesthetic resource in the context of coping. Jewel used tattoos to discover a symbolic connection to her parents and Jack used tattoos to reconnect to his Native American heritage. Jack's audience consists primarily of sociology and anthropology students and professors. These are people who study and understand the cultural role of body adornment. This understanding encourages tolerance and acceptance of Jack's tattoos and their meanings. Thus, like Jewel, Jack experiences positive and nurturing social reaction. This enables Jack to view himself as a professor traveler, a sage, expressing, reflecting, and teaching his way out of crisis.

Jenny: Coping with Stigma

Jenny's story illustrates that symbolic consumption, in the context of identity construction, depends not only on the consumer's interpretation but also on the imagined interpretation of others. These interpretations reflect a cultural context, which ties meaning and identity to a historical and structural era. Thus, this case represents a critique of postmodern theories of identity. Consumers cannot always act to construct a desired self using the aesthetic resources of the day. Since identity depends on social recognition, it becomes a negotiated project between what one desires and what society will accept.

Jenny is 44 years old, teaches part-time at a large state university, and is married with two children. When asked to describe herself she responds with "sociologist, teacher, mentor, colleague, mother, wife, niece, middle-class, musician, and alternative culture person." Jenny's personal myth tells the story of a survivor, hanging on to counterculture idealism but needing a persona that blends with the professional woman, juggling career, kids, and marriage.

Jenny is tall with a stocky build; she has long, wavy, thick brown hair, which she wears down, and brown eyes. On the day of the interview she wore very little makeup, a long loose fitting dress and had a comfortable, attractive, natural look, or what could be described informally as a granola/hippie appearance. Jenny was interviewed in a performing arts hall on a quiet day with no performances. She began by showing the interviewer her only two tattoos. The first is on her right wrist and is a treble clef symbol representing her love of music. This tattoo is positioned so that she can easily hide it under her wristwatch. The second tattoo is on the right side of Jenny's back near the shoulder blade and is a large marijuana leaf representing her identification with "alternative culture." This tattoo can also be easily hidden under a shirt. For Jenny, "alternative culture" is the more liberal, anti-establishment, non-mainstream youth counterculture of the 1960s and 1970s. Both these tattoos are solid blue and since they are over 20 years old they appear faded and frayed around the edges.

> I just always wanted one. When I was eighteen, I wanted an expression of my kind of culture feelings, you know. In a way it's kind of like long hair or something. It expresses something to the people that you want to express it to. When I was eighteen, my life was all about the counterculture and even when I got the tattoos [early 20s], I had just begun graduate school, and in graduate school, I still could live that kind of countercultural life. (Jenny)

Note that in the above excerpt Jenny states that she acquired her tattoos to express "something to the people that you want to express it to." Later, she states that when in graduate school, ‘‘I could still live that kind of countercultural life.’’ Thus, the original audience for her tattoos included like-minded peers who were providing positive recognition and support. This reinforcement allowed Jenny to find meaning and identity.

Jenny began thinking about her association with countercultural values in her late teens and acquired her tattoos in her early 20s. This transition from late adolescence to young adulthood is an especially significant phase in the development of identity. Crucial to this phase is to find meaningful answers to ideological questions so that one's identity can be built on a solid foundation (McAdams, 1993). Jenny's commitment to counterculture ideals provides the ideological setting for her personal myth. Her tattoos represent this setting and commitment. It was not until after graduate school, when Jenny began applying for teaching jobs that she started to reflect on her tattoos from a new frame of reference.

> When I was ready to get a job and go out into the professional world, I thought of it then as a real hindrance. I don't feel good about having this big marijuana leaf on my back. To me it's like a professional career is hard enough. I think women first of all have a harder time, and I just think that anything that I add to my appearance of deviance, I worry about that. So I'm not real comfortable with it. I'm not sure that somebody with a bunch of tattoos can get accepted in a professional culture. People look at the university and say, 'The University is kind of cool, it's kind of free,' but I don't think of it as free. I think of it as very stringent in its norms and behavioral expectations. (Jenny)

Jenny's ideological setting has endured over the last 20 years, she still thinks of herself as an ‘‘alternative culture person.’’ What has changed is Jenny's imagined judgment of others as she enters new roles. In the excerpt below, she refers to social interaction with a number of other groups including kids, parents, and students.

> I think of myself as an alternative culture person, but yet, if my kids had a swimming party at their school, and they invited parents, I wouldn't wear a bathing suit around my kids' friends' parents. I wouldn't even want my students to see that you know. I mean there are ones that would see it and say, 'Oh cool.' But for the most part, they would never be able to hear what I said, it would be, 'Oh well, she's just a freak.' You don't really know what things contribute to peoples' impressions of you. I worry about stuff like that.

Note that Jenny does not ask about the actual interpretation others may have of her tattoos. Instead, she imagines their interpretation on the basis of her understanding of culturally prescribed expectations associated with professional roles. Since Jenny's ideological setting consists of the values and beliefs of an anti-establishment counterculture, her perceptions of professional and suburban families tend to be stereotypical and largely negative. In other words, she evaluates herself from the vantage point of her view of mainstream dress and behavior. Since this imagined evaluation is negative, she feels scarred and stigmatized by her tattoos. This indicates that an identity is never purely individual but depends on the recognition, interpretation, and support of others. Since one's social context is constantly evolving and changing, it also indicates that identity construction is ongoing.

Jenny's story is dominated by contradictory imagoes. The first imago personifies the counterculture character: young, free, and rebellious. The second imago personifies the responsible adult, struggling to balance career, motherhood, and marriage. This indicates that as we formulate more mature life stories in adulthood, we begin to realize that ultimately our identities are woven into a historical and social fabric. Thus, something Jenny did not anticipate when she acquired her tattoos was that she would be motivated to change her look on the basis of new, more mainstream, roles. Aesthetic resources such as art, fashion, and music are used not only for intrinsic creative expression but also as resources for impression management and identity work. In addition, the political and oppressive potential of the symbolic should not be ignored. Whereas the symbolism of Jenny's tattoos was at one time liberating, it is now repressive. This implies that objects alone do not carry meaning as some consumer researchers suggest (e.g., McCracken, 1986). Meaning is interpreted by individuals who are coping with particular forms of social reaction inherent to a cultural context. In other words, meaning results from the dialectical interplay between coping individuals and the cultural context which structures the expression.

The cultural context for Jewel and Jack resulted in positive social recognition and support for their use of tattoos to express their stories. Their social positions allowed for freedom and role flexibility when forging identity. Indeed, their audiences were tolerant of a wide range of creative expressions. This was not the case for Jenny. She imagines more critical social recognition, which inhibits the free expression of values and beliefs. This anticipated negative reaction destabilizes her personal myth of being an "alternative culture person." This destabilization forced Jenny to reinterpret and reformulate her identity. She now thinks about her narrative in terms of a tension between her ideological context of counterculture idealism and what she perceives as the more provincial world of middle-class, suburban juggler. Jenny's identity is now structured around the anticipated negative reaction of her audience; her tattoos signify a struggle between her past and her present.

Mike: Surviving a Double-Life

Mike is 36 years old, tall and thin, with medium length wavy blond hair, and blue eyes. He works part time as a political cartoonist for a local newspaper and full time as a flower delivery person. Mike is married with two children and devotes all of his spare time to his family and artistic endeavors, e.g., painting and drawing. He is representative of the underground tattoo artist in that he gave himself most of his tattoos and worked for awhile as a tattoo artist out of his home. Mike's personal myth is about the use of his body to construct a deviant persona of armor, which he later regrets.

Mike settled into his sofa at home for the interview wearing jeans, boots, and a long sleeve flannel shirt open with a t-shirt underneath. He opened the interview by describing his tattoos: a dragon with a woman's name under it, a skull over a pair of dice, a marijuana leaf with the word "dope" below it, the anarchy symbol, two cherries with the date he lost his virginity, the Led Zeppelin design, a nude woman, a rose with a knife blade through it dripping blood, and the grim reaper. The largest tattoo is about ten inches tall and they are all faded and unprofessional crude badge-like images.

Mike talked a lot about his childhood during the interview. He grew up in a rough working-class neighborhood and his parents could not afford luxuries for the family. Mike explained that he often felt insecure, inadequate, and believed that he was never able to quite measure up to his peers. Further, he was usually the youngest and smallest in his class and therefore was frequently teased and picked on. These early experiences set the ideological context for his tattoos. Mike chose to use tattoos to construct a persona that would compensate for what he perceived to be his childhood deficiencies, particularly his size and passive demeanor:

> I think another reason I got my tattoos was a way of compensating for not being a very violent person, not wanting to fight and I grew up in a poor family in a rough neighborhood. Certainly, we were one of the families with lesser income in the school. And yeah, I felt some of that. I wore patches on my clothes occasionally, and of course no child ever wants to do that. I had the experience in seventh grade, there being a student in my class who had flunked a couple of years and for some reason he singled me out to pick on and he picked on me for the entire year and broke a big ole chip out of my jawbone. I do not like violence. I don't like to engage in it. The several times that I have in my life, I thoroughly regretted it. You know, I'd rather scare people with my looks. (Mike)

In the excerpt above, Mike states that he would rather scare people with his looks; if he appears mean enough he would not have to fight. His deviant, tattooed body serves as a warning to others, compensating for his slight build and non-violent values. In this way, Mike uses his tattoos as armor, a persona of toughness that would mask his vulnerabilities: "A way to avoid entanglements is to seem tough. And I wore heavy boots, and my chain wallet and I could look, I guess, pretty scary, with all my tattoos showing." Ironically, Mike embraces a warrior imago to help manage an impression of fear so that he does not have to fight. He is becoming a warrior in order to escape the battle.

In contrast to Jenny, Mike's tattoos were not being used to express who he was, but to create instead, who he was not. Mike's tattoos helped to create a fictional self: "Somebody not to be messed with." Although this image protected him when he was younger, over the years, he began to feel stigmatized by his appearance. As Mike matured and took on new roles, he realized that he no longer needed the protection of a tough deviant persona. Below, he mentions his backyard, neighbors, and kids, all part of a suburban middle-class lifestyle:

> Mike: Sometimes I'm in the backyard and my neighbors will come out and they'll catch a glimpse of me and I know that they know I have tattoos, but the first time they see it, know that takes them back. Maybe they think I am living a double life.
>
> I: Do you feel that way?
>
> Mike: I feel that way sometimes. One time I took our kids to the pool, the city pool, but I went to the pool in the poor section of town, nowhere near where we lived, where no one would even know me.

Using inflexible signs as an aesthetic resource to shape a persona may over time create the feeling of a split identity, or as Mike phrases it, a "double-life." What started out as armor, protecting him in one context, became stigmatizing in another context. Like Jenny, Mike did not anticipate the negative impact the tattoos would have later in life as he struggled to be successful in his new roles as husband, father, and community member. As Mike became aware that his tough persona communicated a negative image, extreme feelings of regret began to surface: "Just becoming aware of other folks' impressions of me when they would see them [the tattoos], of not being what I thought I was. Everybody's number one assumption was I'd been in prison for a long time, people saw you as a thug, an ex-con." Mike has internalized a caregiver imago and other people's negative reactions to his tattoos destabilize this part of his identity. The only way Mike can now manage others' impressions is by covering up and hiding his tattoos:

> I'm pretty much long sleeves, long pants if I don't want to show the tattoos. And that's pretty much what I wear all the time. At every job I've had, I've just covered my tattoos; no matter what the temperature, the conditions, I just tough it out. I blew glass for years

> in the heat here in the south with long sleeves in the summer. The only time I can remember not wearing long sleeves was for a short time while I worked construction when I first moved here and I worked with a really, really, rough bunch. Even with my tattoos, I was the cleanest cut fellow in the bunch, so I did occasionally take my shirt off with that bunch. (Mike)

In conclusion, Mike's identity is characterized by an interesting combination of agentic and communal imagoes. The body has been constructed with all of the signs of the streetwise warrior; yet Mike's values reflect a caring family man, needing to be integrated to middle-class suburbia. Note that the social reaction to his tattoos is negative in both contexts. In the first context, the negative reaction helped him construct a body image, which caused fear and respect. In the second context, the negative reaction also causes fear, but now the fear destabilizes his caregiver role making identity an ongoing negotiation between his self conceptions as a middle-class family man and the perceptions of other families he may interact with. A key expressive strategy in this negotiation is to cover up and hide his tattoos. If successful, Mike is able to hide his warrior self and become a "normal" person. At other times, members of his neighborhood community will "catch a glimpse" of his tattoos and Mike is forced to negotiate, cope, or generally survive the reality of his double-life.

Dylan: Fighting for Freedom

Dylan and the first author met for lunch at the student union. After eating, they settled back in a quiet corner of the cafeteria for the interview. Dylan is 22, medium height and build with long curly hair, which he keeps messy. He is handsome and, like Jewel, his tattoos are noticeable on his neck and hands creating a striking and exotic appearance. Dylan is a musician: "I play music that is what I do, I am a drummer." Unable to support himself only as a drummer, he also works at construction. Dylan's personal myth is the creation of an empowering body project that represents an expression of resistance. In the excerpt below, he discusses his feelings about tattoos. In addition, Dylan mentions his most noticeable tattoos; these include the word "FUN" tattooed in large letters across the front of his neck, and the word "EVERLAST" tattooed across his knuckles.

> Dylan: As time went on, I started thinking more and more about how I feel and why I want to get certain tattoos. I intertwine the tattoos with how I feel about things. It is not a tattoo for me, it is a symbol; like after the tattoo, you are past the tattoo now, it is a new step into life; it is kind of a positive thing. They might really look strange, but it is

> actually an extremely positive thing for me. Every tattoo is either a part of my life where it helps me remember that part of my life, or how I felt then. It is just a really positive thing in the end. You know, like my neck. It just kind of all evolves into that. You know, just FUN. It is to be able to laugh, truly laugh, is the way to be.
>
> I: Live life and have fun?
>
> Dylan: Yeah, because I do not need to be serious all the time. I have my hands done, which is a positive thing too. It is just EVERLAST; you know, 'everlasting,' just sticking with whatever it is that makes you happy.

Dylan started getting tattoos when he was 16 years old. At the time, he had just moved out of his parents' home and in with his friends. Dylan, along with his small group of friends, made a commitment to each other to pursue their dream of playing in a band. As a way of marking their commitment to the dream, and as a way strengthening their bond to each other, they began to get tattoos. In the excerpts below, Dylan discusses his commitment to music and friendship.

> I play music. That is the only thing I really focus on, you know? I do not really think about politics right now, because there is no need. Because I would like to live and I know if I ever really ended up doing anything serious I would just be dead. And I would like to live for awhile, you know. (Dylan)
>
> They all make me remember certain parts of my life. It is just like a friendship thing. Like I have a million tattoos that I want to get. Like I want to get I LOVE ALL MY FRIENDS on my stomach, because it is really a friendship thing and it is a bonding between you and the tattoo guy. (Dylan)

Since many of the tattoos were acquired in the context of friendship, bonding, and shared dreams, Dylan, and his friends, chose to be tattooed with matching images. For example, the band members had the name of their band, "Empire of Shit," tattooed on their legs. Other tattoos that Dylan acquired include a Buddhist demon making the rock-n-roll sign and a Japanese Kodo symbol that represents the Kodo drummers, which he describes as a "disciplined, military-like drumming group with a thunderous sound." Further, many of the tattoos that Dylan has were given to him by friends in his band who were also practicing to become professional, licensed tattoo artists. It is clear that Dylan's reference group became an important grounding or centering force in his life. As a way of committing to this group, as well as a way of capturing and remembering this experience, Dylan used the tattoo as an aesthetic resource. Given that the tattoo is a permanent mark on the body, the meaning that these tattoos represent also became a permanent part of Dylan.

As Dylan began to expand his experience beyond his music primary group, he discovered a very different reaction to his tattoos, particularly when trying to find work. In short, he found the same type of stigmatization and discrimination experienced by Jenny and Mike:

> Dylan: People do not realize the undying discrimination that goes on.
>
> I: Where you have chosen to get them makes a difference?
>
> Dylan: I know, it is kind of like, 'Well, what are you thinking? Of course you are not going to get a job,' but think about it, what is wrong with it? I really do not want to get into this. Like when I lived in Texas, this guy would not let me wait tables. He made me wash dishes and flip burgers. I was getting paid really badly, like under six dollars an hour to do all that. He would not let me wait tables. He would tell me flat out, 'You are too tattooed. This is a family restaurant.' Even though there were tons of weirdoes working there. I called the NAACP and left a message saying that I had been discriminated against; I just do not understand what is wrong.
>
> I: Would you feel differently if they were symbols or images of something more negative?
>
> Dylan: Yeah, it's like I have FUN on my neck, I do not have like FUCK YOU or KILL MOM on my throat or something like that. People think that it is like this biker thing or just like it is this heathen thing. I do not know what the hell they are thinking.

In the above excerpt, Dylan is discussing a job that involves interacting with the public frequently (i.e., waiting tables at a restaurant) and therefore issues of appearance and impression management become important. However, he also discovered discrimination when working construction, which involved little or no social interaction with the public:

> And they can legitimately call and say, 'We do not want him to come out.' And I don't know if they necessarily said that because of my tattoos, I think they might have said, 'Because he is kind of dirty,' or something like that. But then they send out another group of dirt bags to go out to the site, you know. So it is an obvious thing. (Dylan)

Dylan's tattoos created a situation which gave him some direct experience with an important, and often hidden, dimension of society. The discrimination Dylan felt, due to his tattoos, became a vehicle encouraging awareness of domination and social inequality. This discrimination was an unanticipated consequence of acquiring the tattoos. In this case, inflexibility of style is enhanced since the tattoos are positioned in public places on Dylan's body, making them almost impossible to cover up. At first, he tried to ignore the discrimination:

> I just kind of do what I want and I really do not let other things like that get in the way [referring to his experiences of discrimination]. When I was getting tattooed a lot when I was younger, it was like, 'Well, I play rock-n-roll. I am in bands and that is like all I am going to do for the rest of my life.' (Dylan)

In time, he could no longer ignore the discrimination. Rather than trying to cover up his tattoos, or feel stigmatized, Dylan began to acquire more, but this time in the context of social critique. In the excerpt below, he discusses one of his tattoos that originally was intended to signify social criticism.

> Dylan: It is like an upside-down champagne glass [referring to the tattoo on his wrist], it is kind of an anti-rich people thing. The funny thing is, my friend did not make the lines of the champagne pouring out of the bottle too good, so it looks like its foaming. So it is kind of like, 'Let's party!' instead of, 'Fuck the rich.'
>
> I: What brought about these feelings of anti-rich?
>
> Dylan: It is just a complete imbalance of money that is going on. I am not an angry guy, but there is no reason for say like those physical plant guys who haul bricks all day to get paid $6.50 an hour, okay this is like a small example of the world, like this university. The Chancellor makes $230,000. Larry the bricklayer makes $6.50 and hour and is also getting fired in six months. This goes on everywhere. It is just an extreme imbalance.

The meaning of Dylan's tattoos began in the context of social integration. Both the act of acquiring tattoos, as well as the designs, became symbols of bonding and conforming to his primary group. Then, as the cultural context changed for Dylan, he found that his tattoos caused a negative social reaction that was stigmatizing. Dylan began to realize that he was unable to control the meanings associated with his tattoos. As soon as he was outside the context of his primary group, interpretation of his tattoos became unpredictable. Again, meaning arises in the interaction between the individual actor and the social structures that combine to create a context for this actor. Whereas Jenny and Mike struggled to change themselves in order to remove the stigma and adapt to the new context, Dylan believes that the stigma is a form of discrimination and that the structure needs to be changed. Thus, he expresses this belief with the aesthetic resource he feels most familiar and comfortable with; Dylan begins to acquire tattoos as an act of resistance, selecting designs that communicate social critique. Interestingly, when these tattoos are combined with the other tattoos, it creates a rather uninterpretable pastiche of designs and images. The meanings of the individual tattoos do not allow Dylan to critique and change structure. However, continuing to acquire tattoos in the face of discrimination does help him to defend his identity, he simply rejects the audience. Dylan is constructing a body project that helps him to feel free and empowered, and this provides the experience of stopping oppression.

> It's like you have done this extreme; it's a freedom thing. It is totally liberating. It's like, Fuck, I can do whatever I want. I can do this. I can still do whatever I want in

> this society and I am going to be completely covered in art, it makes everything else stop. (Dylan)

In this case, ''everything else'' is the discrimination Dylan experiences in his day-to-day life. Being ''completely covered in art'' gives him the sense that his body project is his own, freeing him from discrimination and therefore making it ''stop.'' Thus, making ''everything else stop'' is a way for Dylan to fight for the freedom to negotiate his identity and confront the oppression of his everyday life.

Rachel: Decorating the Temple

Rachel is a 23-year-old single mother who currently lives at home with her seven-year-old daughter, mother, and father. For the last five years she has managed an exotic boutique that sells funky shoes and clothing, lingerie, novelty gifts, jewelry, body piercing, and adult sex items. Rachel's narrative creates an incredible tension between stability and instability. On the one hand, Rachel's childhood is almost storybook. She grew up in a close-knit Mormon family with an older brother and sister, caring and supportive parents, resources, and time together. As a sign of stability, Rachel was even raised in the same house her mother was raised in. She still talks about her parents as being kind and helpful, contributing child support when Rachel is working. On the other hand, Rachel's life can be described as a chaotic struggle, often plunging her into crisis. She is attracted to what she describes as ''jailhouse,'' ''ghetto,'' or ''bad,'' men; became pregnant at 15; a single mom at 16; has filled her body with tattoos and piercings (including ears, lip, and clitoris), and manages a boutique that is regularly picketed. Rachel's personal myth is about asserting creative control over her body as an inspired expression of salvation from personal crisis. The word ''salvation'' is used in her myth because so many of her tattoos were inspired by sacred beliefs and ideas.

The first author arranged a meeting at a local coffee shop for the interview. Rachel arrives wearing a jean jacket over a black tank camisole that shows off her many tattoos. She has on faded blue jeans and black large soled shoes that make her appear even taller. Rachel is tall with a curvy build and has short brown hair that is asymmetrical with deep red highlights that are thick and chunky. She is enthusiastic, smiles, and pushes her hair behind her ears revealing multiple piercings and ear lobes stretched to hold large silver disks about the size of a dime. Rachel also has a silver dart pierced through the skin just under her lower lip. She was easy to talk to and clearly enjoyed sharing her story.

Rachel began the interview by showing off her tattoos. On her back, between her shoulder blades, she has a large Celtic knot. On her left arm she has a complete sleeve down past her elbow. Rachel refers to this arm as her "feminine sleeve" consisting of her daughter's name, a cupid doll, a rose, a winged heart, the words "Queen of hearts," and a star on her wrist. On her right arm she has a rocker skull embedded in a rose, a heart, a purple rose on her elbow, and another star on her wrist. On her chest, Rachel has three Catholic symbols: praying hands, a sacred heart, and two large swallows. In addition, she has the word "family" tattooed on one side of her chest and "friends" on the other side. Rachel has a large lotus flower on her stomach symbolizing creation and the word "mother" on her lower back. The word "mother" uses an art deco floral design in the style of the Moravian artist Mucha. Finally, on Rachel's leg she has three large chimpanzee heads with the see no evil, hear no evil, and speak no evil faces.

Rachel's story begins at 13 when her sister, unexpectedly, arrives home with a tattoo:

> My older sister is 28, we're pretty close, she has one tattoo and I don't know if she'll ever get anymore. She got hers right at 18, just to do it. This was before I even thought about doing it, you know. I remember when she came home with it and my mom was having a fit and I was just like, 'How did you get a tattoo?' (Rachel)

Two years later, at 15, Rachel fell in love with Kevin, the father of her daughter. Kevin is five years older than Rachel, Scottish, and covered with crude, badge-like tattoos. Rachel was very attracted to his rebellious image and her first tattoo, the Celtic knot, commemorates their relationship and daughter.

> I just thought it was the coolest thing, my bad-boy boyfriend. If my daughter had Kevin's last name it would be McClure. He is pretty true to his family background and traditions and everything and at that point in my life I was still hung up on him and that's basically why I got the Celtic knot, because of him. He was a major part of my life, you know what I mean, and he was pretty heavily tattooed when I met him so that is kind of what got me interested. (Rachel)

Although Rachel's sister opened the door of possibility and Kevin motivated her interest, it was Wendy who taught her that tattoos did not have to be crude; they could be a feminine form of artistic expression.

> Rachel: I never really wanted to get tattoos in the beginning when I met all of those people because they were sort of ghetto, I hate to say jailhouse slickin ya know.
>
> I: Ghetto?
>
> Rachel: Like somebody did them in their basement or something, yeah, totally white trash. But then I met my friend Wendy.

I: Who's this?

Rachel: This is the girl that I went with to get my first tattoo; hers were like really pretty and she had a lot of color, so that's what made me like, 'Wow, I can get tattoos that are gonna be better than theirs.' Mine will be so much nicer so that's how it all kind of started.

Wendy helped Rachel discover a feminine form of expression with tattoos but it was Kevin's lifestyle and persona that was still the most important influence. Specifically, his adherence to a philosophy that was popular among youth in the 1990s called "straight-edge." In the excerpt below, Rachel begins by referring to Kevin's peer group.

Rachel: He was another one of those guys that was friends with Kevin.

I: Can you tell me about that group?

Rachel: Straight-edge boys. Straight-edge is, um, drug-free, like the drug-free youth, they have their own movement. They are all into the same types of things like tattoos. And they kind of force their views on other people by beating them up and stuff, you know, it was like the bad boys so to me that was cool.

I: So you were attracted to that?

Rachel: I didn't like drugs and everything anyways so I just kind of felt like you shouldn't smoke and drink and do things like that to your body but then at the same time they were tattooing their body.

I: Interesting.

Rachel: Yeah, and a lot of the kids were vegan, I'm actually vegan, so that kind of goes along with the whole tattoo community too.

The phrase "straight-edge" was actually coined by Ian MacKaye of the punk rock band Minor Threat in the early 1980s. MacKaye was reacting to the nihilistic tendencies of punk rock and promoted instead a philosophy of "don't drink/don't smoke/don't fuck." While the original philosophy promoted a drug free lifestyle, modern interpretations embrace a vegan activism with increasing involvement in environmental and political issues. During the 1990s, straight-edge became associated by the mainstream with the intolerant views of an aggressive subculture. Interestingly, although Rachel by this time had rejected her Mormon socialization, it may have been this background that made her feel comfortable with some aspects of straight-edge. The Mormon religion teaches that your body is a temple, a precious gift from God. Given that it is the individual's responsibility to care for this gift, one should eat properly, exercise, and abstain from the use of tobacco, alcohol, coffee, tea, and illegal drugs. It is this philosophy of the body, which justified her mother's resistance and negative social reaction to tattoos. From the perspective of Rachel's parents, tattoos desecrate the temple. When comparing this religion to straight-edge, we do not mean to suggest that Mormon's are intolerant and violent; this was something that was specific to some of the members of the straight-edge group. In fact, it was the violence that eventually led to Rachel's breakup with Kevin. Rachel chose to end her relationship with Kevin before he learned of her pregnancy.

Not long after the breakup with Kevin, Rachel found herself in another serious relationship. Unfortunately, this relationship also ended badly. Since this boyfriend was Catholic, Rachel's praying hands, sacred heart, and sparrows all symbolize this relationship. At about the same time, Rachel's pregnancy was beginning to show and she decided to transfer to a special high school for teenage mothers. This was a small school of about 40 students who brought their babies and young children to class. Although this was somewhat isolating, it provided Rachel with the opportunity to learn how to care for her baby and to complete her high school education. This was a low point in Rachel's narrative:

> [Referring to one of her heart tattoos] This one's broken, my broken heart. I got that one after a lot of really rough stuff happened in my life with Kevin and then I also dated another guy and that was a really serious relationship, and it ended really poorly. So it was just like a lot of stuff had gone pretty bad so that's how I felt at the time. (Rachel)

Rachel's narrative describes a struggle to find love and creative freedom. It has been a struggle since, until recently, each time she asserted her independence she would liberate herself into a new form of regulation. For instance, although she loves her parents, the cultural context of a conservative Mormon family was too constraining. When Rachel was old enough to make her own decisions, she therefore liberated herself from the church and developed a new lifestyle with Kevin. Yet, the straight-edge/vegan ideology ended up being just as regulating, ironically in many of the same ways as the Mormon religion. Then, when Rachel broke up with Kevin and liberated herself from straight-edge, she found herself in a special school for pregnant teenagers and mothers with young children. Again, this environment was somewhat confining, removing college as an easy option and restricting her freedom.

Rachel's tattoos represent a form of unregulated creative expression. This can be interpreted as an attempt to reclaim some control of her body. The Mormon religion, straight-edge, veganism, and her special school are all regulating her body. Rachel's tattoos represent a public and artistic way of stating that she is in charge of her body project. The exotic boutique she manages specializes in visceral experiences, both in terms of adornment and sexuality. For Rachel, this environment liberates the body, removing conservative regulations. In this experiential context, Rachel seizes the creative freedom to move from crisis to a more rewarding sense of self and identification. Her plans are to continue working at the boutique, exploring, experiencing, and decorating her body.

Steve: Seeking Loyalty and Purpose

Steve is 38 years old and single. He is divorced and shares custody of his four-year-old daughter. Steve currently works as a medical courier for a university hospital, delivering medicine and supplies to people who were just released. His personal myth reflects a journey to resolve the tension between an idealistic image of his father and the rebellious chaos of his own life. Steve's image of his father appears in his narrative as a warrior imago. This imago is described as a powerful hero, loyal and focused on an important purpose. Since Steve's father left his family when he was 11, this imago represents the ideal father he never had. The warrior imago stands in stark contrast to the reality of his circumstances. For most of his life, Steve rejected authority, created chaos, became an alcoholic, and eventually ended up in jail. He describes the rebellious music of heavy metal bands such as Iron Maidens and Arch Enemy as symbols of this part of his story.

Steve arrives for the interview wearing frayed blue jeans, brown work boots, and a white long-john shirt under a black t-shirt that has the logo of a heavy metal band. He is tall, thin, and unshaven, wears stylish glasses, and has short black hair that he wears spiked. Steve has a hoarse voice, which echoes his rough appearance. He begins the interview by describing his tattoos. Steve has one entire arm covered in what appears to be a continuous mix of color and images. The images on this arm begin with a Samurai on his shoulder and continue down his arm with two more Samurais holding swords. These warriors symbolize loyalty, discipline, dedication, focus, and common purpose. Continuing down the arm is an axe murderer in flames, which he took from a Malice album cover, and a creative wristband of flames. On his other arm, Steve has an Egyptian falcon, an Egyptian eye, a black tribal band around his bicep, and two logos taken from heavy metal albums (Pronge and Blue Oyster Cult). On his chest, he has a large cross decorated with roses that represents the Knight warriors and the crusades. On Steve's legs, he has several large tattoos including an axe, the letter "S" and an eagle icon from the band Saxon, a roman symbol and band logo from an Arch Enemy album, and finally, an 11-point star from another heavy metal band logo that represents the pagan movement.

An important turning point in Steve's narrative was the divorce of his parents. Due to religious differences, his father left the family when he was 11.

> I: What kind of childhood did you have?
>
> Steve: Pretty good middle class childhood but my parents got divorced when I was 11 and I took that really hard. I was a really good student up till probably the end of junior high, then I rebelled you know, I grew my hair long, got into heavy metal, started drinking, and smoked pot. My high school years were kind of lost, I wasn't a happy kid and I didn't apply myself.

In high school, Steve used drinking as a tool for social integration.

> In high school we would try and have a keg everyday and we were throwing kegs for the seniors when I was a sophomore. That's what I liked about drinking, it allowed me to fit in all groups. I was not an athlete but I was a good enough athlete to be on the outskirts of the athletes. I was a partier so I could fit in with the partiers, like whatever, not the mainstream but I was smart enough I could fit in with them. It was just helping me fit in with everything, it was a tool ya know. (Steve)

After high school, Steve desperately wanted to leave home but was running out of options. He decided to enlist in the Navy and was stationed in San Diego for the next three years. Steve acquired his first tattoo at 21; he had just toured an Egyptian exhibit and was impressed by the exotic power, grandeur, and mystery of ancient Egypt. At about the same time, one of his favorite heavy metal bands, Iron Maiden, had just come out with an album using Egyptian imagery and themes. Thus, Steve's first tattoo was an Egyptian falcon. In the next few years he continued to accumulate tattoos; most of these were related, in some way, to the warrior theme. It was a combination of losing his father, the Navy, the exotic intrigue of ancient Egypt, and the agentic power of heavy metal that helped to form the warrior imago. This imago represents loyalty and purpose, things that were, at the time, lacking in Steve's life.

> Just the power of warriors and I think the hero aspect I identified with a lot like the Knights is what I think I really identified with in the beginning. Then the more I looked into the oriental, the Japanese Samurai, I just really identified with the loyalty and the common purpose, and mainly the loyalty to their cause and just the, it's like their main reason for being, just the dedication of it. I really thought that was cool. I really thought today's society was without focus and loyalty. (Steve)

The warrior imago personifies an idealized characterization of masculinity. Storytellers such as Bly (1992), father of what he has called "the expressive men's movement,'' believe that many men have been cut off from their fathers and from an archetypal masculinity celebrated in ancient myth (McAdams, 1993). Echoing Bly's claim, Keen (1992), in *Fire in the Belly* argues that ''dad'' is no longer present to teach his sons how to become men, each man must therefore learn how to define manhood for himself. Drawing on classical tales of male heroism such as the Knights of the Round Table, Bly and Keen challenge men to explore the nuances of their own experience seeking meaning, purpose, and passion. In the excerpt below, Steve recalls an early experience before his dad left the family.

> I remember in boy scouts, my dad, we did some things with knives and my dad made me a bow ax out of wood and I just thought it was so cool and I always wanted to be like a Knight in the old days and storm the castle and wear armor and get the girl. (Steve)

Although the warrior imago was important to Steve as he left the Navy at 23, he had yet to find loyalty and purpose. For the next seven years he worked odd jobs, mainly in bars, and drank heavily; he had lost control of his life. Then at 30, Steve finally hits rock bottom: while being stopped for a DUI, he begins to fight with the police and ends up badly hurt and in jail. Coincidently, the fight begins due to a comment made about his tattoos.

> I got picked up by the police for reckless driving, DUI, and I had the outline of this tattoo and the cops saw it and said something like, ''What, do you like to draw on yourself, punk;'' and I'm just like, ''Fuck you, I feel sorry for your wife cause she has to fuck you every night.'' And then he bounced my head off the cop car and started throwing me around. (Steve)

Steve ended up beaten and after seven days in jail vowed, ''no more.''

With the help of Alcoholics Anonymous (AA), Steve was sober by 32 and began what he hoped would lead to more meaningful work by doing odd jobs in hospitals. One year later he married a woman he met at AA and they had a daughter soon after. Sadly, he was divorced after a year due to ''religious differences.'' Steve's work in hospitals paid off; eventually he was offered a position as a medical courier delivering supplies to the sick. He likes this job and feels that it is important. Steve is currently 38, has stopped creating chaos in his life, is friends with his ex-wife, and is a dedicated and loyal father to his daughter. He has in many ways filled the promise of his warrior imago, dedication, loyalty, and sense of purpose. Steve continues to attend AA meetings three or four times a week and describes his struggle to stay sober as a ''fight,'' a courageous battle of choice and self-understanding.

NARRATING THE TATTOO: REDEMPTION VERSUS CONTAMINATION

It has become common in cultural studies to suggest that the only thing that remains the same is change. Whether we are talking about politics, the economy, computer technology, globalization, or fashion, we continue to be struck by how rapid and unpredictable change can be. Consumer culture reflects this situation; consumers adapt to changes by varying their lifestyle. Consumers downshift, upgrade, change their hair, body, clothes, car, house, career, geographic location, and even family. Concepts like fragmentation, complexity, mutability, and disassociation have become popular when describing the loss of personal anchors needed for identity. Tattoos are an interesting case because they run counter to this theme. The popularity of tattoos reflects a need for stability, predictability, permanence, and identity. For some consumers, it is an attempt to mark the self at its very moment of disappearance. Thus, exploring our informants' use of tattoos helps to better understand the role of consumption as a means to construct identity.

The study of tattoo consumption opposes traditional forms of consumer research in at least three ways. First, most approaches to consumer research assume easy acquisition and disposition of the object. For example, one buys a Benetton sweater, wears it when appropriate, and when it is no longer in fashion, one gives it away, sells it at a garage sale, or stacks it in their closet with their other out-of-style items. Tattoos, on the other hand, are not easily acquired or disposed of. Acquisition involves a painful ritual that may take hours. This ritual itself becomes part of the object since the experience adds meaning and becomes embodied in the tattoo. Most consumers view tattoos as permanent; they can be removed but it is painful, expensive, and scarring. Second, most approaches to consumer research assume homogeneous objects that are then personalized by the consumer. All consumers have access to the same Ford 150, for instance, over time the truck is broken-in, becomes familiar, and eventually cathected with personal meaning. However, every tattoo is unique from the beginning; it is an interaction of the symbol, the artist, the place on the body, and the type of body. Tattoos also may fade over time and appear different as the body changes. Finally, more conventional perspectives assume that objects remain separate from the body. Even food is analyzed as separate from the body since it is quickly metabolized and disposed of (Evers, 2001). Some interesting ideas have been proposed as to how the object becomes part of the subject such as Belk's (1988) *extended self* concept; however, these theories are thought provoking because we still assume that the object is separate from the body. Tattoos actually change the skin and therefore become a permanent part of the body. It is because tattoos are permanent, infinitely customized, and destabilize object/body oppositions that they come to represent the way people make meaning of their lives. This meaning-making centrally involves storytelling; the construction and sharing of stories of the self.

The stories we make and tell about our own lives contribute to our identities. Tattoos often symbolize fundamental beliefs that situate a story within a cultural context. In this way, tattoos contribute to the ideological setting of one's personal myth. The ideological setting provides the backdrop of beliefs and values upon which the plot of a life story can unfold. Since ideological statements may be contested, tattoos often provoke strong social reactions. This is important given that identification depends, in part, on social recognition. For example, if the social reaction to the tattoo is consistent with the individual's interpretation, their personal myth is reinforced and one finds meaning and identification. On the other hand, if the social reaction is negative, the tattoo becomes an initiating event that destabilizes the personal myth. This destabilization process often leads to stigma and shame, demanding a reinterpretation and reformulation of the personal myth. These two situations, identification versus stigma, often lead to very different narrative sequences.

Analyzing across the seven cases to discover common story lines that may help us better understand identity construction, a recurrent thematic trend involves positive versus negative outcomes of having tattoos. For some of the informants, their tattoos symbolize their journey of moving forward or making progress. Jewel, Jack, Rachel, and Steve were able to move their narrative from an emotionally negative or bad scene to an emotionally positive or good outcome. This is a narrative sequence of *redemption*, moving from bad to good (McAdams & Bowman, 2001). Jenny, Mike, and Dylan's tattoos symbolize the reverse movement, from good to bad. This is a *contamination* sequence; an emotionally positive or good experience is spoiled or contaminated by an emotionally negative or bad outcome (McAdams & Bowman, 2001). Thus, for each informant, their tattoos represent patterns of redemption or contamination (see Table 1).

These life-narrative accounts are especially useful in accounting for life transitions or turning points. It is these transitions that can help us better understand identity construction and negotiation. Redemption sequences can be used to chart a progressive understanding of self; the self as growing, learning, or recovering over time. In contrast, contamination sequences express frustrations, decline, or stagnation; the self becomes blocked and is therefore unable to progress.

Table 1. Description of Informants, Personal Myth, and Narrative Sequence.

Pseudonym	Title of Case	Age	Sex	Marital Status	Hometown	Occupation	No. of Years Tattooed
Jewel	Dreaming of healing	28	F	Single	Monroe, Louisiana	Student and waitress	8
Jack	Working through crisis	58	M	Widowed	Spring Valley, Illinois	Professor of criminal justice	5
Jenny	Coping with stigma	44	F	Married	Van Buren, Arkansas	Adjunct professor in sociology	24
Mike	Surviving a double-life	36	M	Married	Midland, Michigan	Artist and delivers flowers	18
Dylan	Fighting for freedom	22	M	Single	Pittsburg, Kansas	Musician, construction worker, and student	6
Rachel	Decorating the temple	23	F	Single mother	West Jordan, Utah	Manager of exotic boutique	8
Steve	Seeking Loyalty and purpose	38	M	Divorced	Salt Lake City, Utah	Medical courier for university hospital	17

Pseudonym	Personal Myth	Narrative Sequence
Jewel	Using art and her creative imagination to transcend and heal the grief she feels from her parents' death	Redemption
Jack	Using Native American imagery to find distinction as a way of working through an identity crisis	Redemption
Jenny	Tells the story of a survivor, hanging on to counterculture idealism, but needing a persona that blends with the professional woman, juggling career, kids, and marriage	Contamination
Mike	Using his body to construct a deviant persona of armor, which later he comes to regret	Contamination
Dylan	The creation of an empowering body project that represents an expression of resistance	Contamination
Rachel	Asserting creative control over her body as an inspired expression of salvation from personal crisis	Redemption
Steve	Reflects a journey to resolve the tension between an idealistic image of his father and the rebellious chaos of his own life	Redemption

All redemption sequences involve, at an earlier point in time, contamination. For Jewel and Jack, contamination resulted from the death of loved ones. These deaths were uncontrollable and they set in motion a redemption sequence of learning and growth. Jewel's story was about using her art and creative imagination to transcend and heal the grief she felt from her parents' deaths. Nearly all of her tattoos, from the circle of flowers, to the Luna moth, to the serpent, are symbols of this journey. Jewel's tattoos are therefore a sign of turning a negative experience into something positive: "I needed something to take me beyond the grief. Some symbol of beauty. When I'm naked and I'm looking at myself, I'm looking beyond my physicality into what I have gone through. I see body art as my road map" (Jewel). Jack's story was about connecting to Native American imagery to work through an identity crisis. This crisis resulted from unsettling changes in his life after the death of his wife. These changes in lifestyle generated deep reflection about who he was; resulting in reevaluation and the discovery of new anchors of identification. Jack's tattoos were an important part of this process: "… when you start getting the second and third tattoo, it really does become more personalized. It becomes an idea that it is more of a reflection of who you think you are" (Jack). Like Jewel, he was able to grow in ways that may not have been possible or predicted before the crisis.

For Rachel and Steve, contamination resulted from self-precipitated recklessness. This recklessness set in motion a different type of redemption sequence involving sacrifice and recovery. Unlike the deaths discussed in the previous paragraph, this type of self-sabotage was controllable. Rachel and Steve struggled to undo the problems and suffering caused by their own actions. In time, they were able to improve or redeem the situation and move forward in a positive way. In both stories, their tattoos became a symbol of this redemption. Rachel's story involved asserting creative control over her body as an inspired expression of salvation from personal crisis; by becoming pregnant so young, Rachel sacrificed college and other opportunities for learning and growth. In addition, by becoming involved with a series of men that were not committed to the relationship, she was continually hurt and taken advantage of. Rachel's tattoos mark her recovery from this situation. Her Celtic knot, feminine sleeve, lotus flower, and "mother" all represent coming to terms with her sacrifice and recovery. Rachel's praying hands, sacred heart, and two large swallows on her chest encode the sequence of early suffering followed by a promised recovery or deliverance to a positive-affect state. Her love for her daughter, stable job, and good relationship with her parents have become positive anchors for identification. Steve's story is about coming to terms with his father leaving at an early age and the ensuing destructive wake of trouble, which was the reality of his life. The initiating event leading to contamination was his parents' divorce, which like the deaths discussed above, was uncontrollable. However, the low point in Steve's life, from which the redemption sequence begins, was the result of his own actions. His tattoos mark both the contamination and the path to redemption. The heavy metal tattoos are symbols of Steve's rebellious life-out-of-control situation. His military experience, inability to hold down a job, and alcoholism, are continually discussed in the context of heavy metal culture and music. His Knight warrior and Samurai tattoos represent what he would like to become: focused, strong, loyal, and filled with purpose. Eventually, Steve completes the journey; his friendship with his ex-wife, relationship with his daughter, AA, and job delivering medical supplies have created positive and meaningful sites for identification.

Whereas redemption sequences help to produce a progressive narrative of self, contamination sequences suggest that progress has stalled, resulting in stagnated life plots (McAdams & Bowman, 2001). Jenny's narrative is a good example of a contamination sequence. Jenny has become fixated on others' interpretation of her tattoo. This has prevented her from moving forward and developing in a way that she would interpret as positive and progressive. The original context of Jenny's marijuana leaf tattoo was affectively positive, marking her solidarity with the counterculture of the 1960s and 1970s. Yet, over time, as Jenny moved into more conservative suburban middle-class roles, her tattoo became stigmatizing, leading to shame and regret: "I don't feel good about having this big marijuana leaf on my back. I just think that anything that I add to my appearance of deviance, I worry about that. I'm not real comfortable with it" (Jenny). Her story illustrates the ways identity is ultimately rooted in forms of social organization and institutions. Although identity exists as a product of imagination, it is also the result of what is consensually validated. Identity exists, therefore, as a complex relationship between a cultural context and how the individual chooses to remember and understand particular events. Jenny's contamination sequence provides an opportunity to study how interpretations of "real" events of the past have come to shape her adaptation to the present. What started out as passionate and exciting ended up frustrating and constraining.

Mike and Dylan's contamination sequences are similar to Jenny's. Mike's tattoos were acquired in the context of armor, helping him construct a tough and scary persona. This seemed to work for Mike, freeing him from the assaults of his classmate bullies. However, over time, this deviant persona became stigmatizing, contaminating his self-conceptions as a middle-class husband and father. Dylan's tattoos were acquired in the context of acting in harmony with his punk rock band. This was positively described as one of the happiest times in his life. Again, we find the same contamination sequence; since tattoos are difficult to dispose of, customized according to the context, and become part of the body, they may become problematic as the individual moves their narrative forward. Dylan's tattoos are so visible they compromise appropriate norms for appearance in nearly every social context. This has made it difficult for him to progress: "He would not let me wait tables. He would tell me flat out, 'You are too tattooed. This is a family restaurant.' I called the NAACP and left a message saying that I had been discriminated against" (Dylan).

CONCLUSION

As our analyses reveal, identity is an ongoing negotiation between the individual who chooses to narrate particular scenes and the culture within which the individual lives. Redemption and contamination sequences, as a common story line across our informants, helped us better understand the long-term consequences of tattoos and their role in the negotiation process. The final step of the hermeneutic circle involves connecting this theme to broader historical and cultural questions. The redemption versus contamination theme links identity negotiation to cultural perceptions of the sacred and other metanarratives of modernity.

Although the importance of the sacred in consumer behavior has been discussed since 1989 (Belk, Wallendorf, & Sherry, 1989), the topic has not been developed in the context of personal myth or identity. Myth and religion often use a redemption story instrumentally to inspire hope. For example, in *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* Joseph Campbell (1972) discusses the *hero myth*: the individual separates from their homeland, travels far, endures hardship, bravely confronts the enemy, acquires meaning or the elixir of life, and journeys back to the homeland as the hero. In so many ways this tells the story of our four informants that fit the redemption category. Our three informants that currently fit the contamination category may one day move forward in meaningful ways, also redeeming themselves. William James (1902/1958) wrote that nearly all world religions begin with an initial sense that something is wrong followed by salvation or deliverance. Judaeo-Christian traditions are replete with redemption stories. The Arabic term "Islam" means *surrender*, as in surrendering to the ultimate will of Allah to be purified and redeemed. In Hinduism and Buddhism, redemption sequences take the form of liberation and freedom (McAdams & Bowman, 2001). Contamination sequences are also rooted in ancient sources such as the myth of Icarus. Icarus was the son of Daedalus. When these two were imprisoned, the father constructed wings and they both were able to escape. Daedalus warned his son not to fly too high; however, intoxicated by the glorious feeling of flight he rose higher and higher. Eventually Icarus flew too close to the Sun melting the wax holding the feathers on his wings; he fell into the sea and drowned (May, 1980). The lessons of the Icarus myth include learning self-control once free of a restriction, remaining open to advice, and learning to be aware of when a situation begins to spiral out of control. One only needs to watch *Behind the Music* on VH1 to hear similar stories of ascent and failure.

Redemption sequences also play an important role in the metanarratives of modernity. From the structural-functionalism of Durkheim (1933) to Habermas' (1984) theory of communicative action we find an embedded assumption of progress. Hegel's dialectic is a good example: thesis–antithesis–synthesis. Many of the more interesting critiques of reason and modernity address directly this theme. For instance, in *The Fall* (1957/1991), Camus argues that believing in redemption is its own contamination. Redemption for Camus is living the lucid life, which means there is no redemption, just existence and what we do with it, what we make of it (Fisher, 2004). Two poststructural theorists, Deleuze and Guattari (1987), suggest something similar by arguing that the discourses of modernity have an orgasmic orientation. These theories are designed to add up to something, they gain momentum and are ultimately dissipated in a redemptive climax. Instead, these theorists propose *plateaus* designed to raise the level of thought to a certain intensity without a clear system of belief or architecture of propositions. Only *nomad thought* or a thousand plateaus that add up to nothing will resist and survive a poststructural critique.

These types of poststructural theories and critiques have not been helpful when analyzing our informants' use of tattoos as one part of their struggle for identity. It is clear that our informants were organizing their storytelling around decidedly modern themes. They are each working through transitions, weaving personal events into unified stories that include not only a tapestry of the past but also anticipations of a better future. The limitation of this research is that one product category is discussed in the context of the informants' personal myths. Clearly, other irrevocable consumption decisions are important in forging one's narrative. Future research should therefore broaden the approach taken here by analyzing those moments in consumer culture when people must contend with irrevocable, or nearly irrevocable, decisions. For example, the decision to go to a particular college, or not to go to college at all, the big commercial wedding, the big mortgage, a downshift in consumption, to move into managed care or a nursing home, are all difficult decisions to change once a commitment has been made. Like tattoos, these types of consumption decisions are often symbolic of life transitions and therefore play an important role in identity negotiation.

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CONSUMER SOCIALIZATION REVISITED

Karin M. Ekström

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this paper is to revitalize consumer socialization as a topic of study by presenting a critical review of the concept. The aim is to advance our current understanding of conceptual issues and to outline issues and directions for future research. Consumer socialization can be better understood by studying its multidisciplinary roots and by critically reviewing its definition and meanings. It is suggested that the scope of consumer socialization be expanded to encompass life-long consumer socialization, different life events and spheres of consumption, dialogs, negotiations, and translations, as well as the socio-cultural context in which socialization occurs. In order to capture the complexity of consumer socialization and to maintain the field of consumer socialization as a vital research area, there is a need to rethink both the theories and the methods used. Researchers are encouraged to expand the use of socio-cultural theories and ethnographic methods. Interdisciplinary research is also recommended, allowing a multifaceted pluralism in the study of consumer socialization.

INTRODUCTION

Consumer socialization has generated a significant amount of research over the years, particularly in marketing. During the 1970s and 1980s the research tended to focus on how children are socialized during childhood and

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adolescence, and the earliest studies dealt with public policy issues regarding the effect of television advertising on children (e.g., John, 1999). In recent years, there has been a decline in the number of studies that focus on consumer socialization in marketing. This may appear to be somewhat surprising, for, even though the effect of television advertising is not as strongly debated today in the United States, this phenomenon continues to be debated in Europe. Also, moral panic concerning the link between food advertising and child obesity is prevalent in the United States and Europe alike. Society is changing continuously as evidenced by changes in, for example, world demographics – such as aging, family structures, and relations in families, migration, and the increasing strength and normalization of the market. Consumer socialization is an important phenomenon to study in order to understand the context in which consumers live in society. Its potential lies in comprehending how consumers relate to culturally determined societal norms and how they adapt to transformations in society. The purpose of this paper is to revitalize the construct of consumer socialization by critically reviewing its definition and meanings and thereby advancing our current understanding of the phenomenon, and by outlining issues and directions for future research on consumer socialization. One reason for the decline in the number of studies lately may be that it is difficult to distinguish consumer socialization from other processes of change and learning. The dominance of positivistic methods might also have impacted our current understanding of the construct. It is argued that a more open mind toward socio-cultural theories and interpretive research methods will help to expand the field of consumer socialization in the future. Also, consumer socialization studies have mainly been confined to children and marketing. There is a need to study adults as well and to make the construct more interdisciplinary. Definitions and meanings of socialization in general, and consumer socialization specifically, are critically reviewed in the first part of the paper. In the second part, the need to expand the scope of consumer socialization is discussed. Recommendations for future research that will advance our current understanding of consumer socialization are given at the end of each section.

DEFINITIONS AND MEANINGS

Multidisciplinary Roots

The most common definition of consumer socialization in consumer behavior literature is that offered by Ward (1974, p. 2): "the process by which young people acquire skills, knowledge, and attitudes relevant to their functioning as consumers in the marketplace.'' As might be expected from a definition in marketing, the emphasis is on the marketplace. Even though the definition encompasses young people, Ward discusses, in the same article, that socialization is a life-long process. In sociology, the focus is on culture and society: ''the process by which we acquire the culture of the society into which we are born – the process by which we acquire our social characteristics and learn the ways of thought and behavior considered appropriate in our society'' (Bilton et al., 1988, p. 12). In social psychology, the emphasis is on the social group: ''learning processes which render a person able to participate satisfactorily in a social group'' (Schneider, 1977, p. 188). Finally, economic issues are of central importance in economic psychology; economic socialization is defined as: ''the whole process by which a child will develop an understanding of the economic world … . Furthermore, it refers to the adult's evolving outlook on the economy as his/her role in life changes in line with various economic events such as getting his/her first job, being unemployed or retiring'' (Roland-Lévy, 2002, p. 17).

These definitions are not significantly different, apart from their having different foci. Different histories and foci have affected the framing of research questions in each discipline. Also, the definitions are rather broad and, as a result, the concept of socialization can be expected to have inherent measurement problems. According to Tallman, Marotz-Baden, and Pindas (1983, p. 22), researchers have had difficulty in finding a definition of socialization ''that is sufficiently precise to be empirically useful while maintaining its appropriateness to the wide range of behaviors, events, and social conditions to which it is commonly applied.'' Also, studies on acquisition of norms, values, and behaviors are not always cast as socialization studies per se (O'Guinn & Faber, 1991), something which adds complexity when trying to categorize previous research. In order to better understand the meaning of socialization in general and consumer socialization in particular, a critical examination of the central aspects of the definitions cited above seems necessary. This examination follows.

To Live in Society and the Marketplace

The basis for all kinds of socialization is to live in society entailing conformity to societal requirements or norms. Moschis (1987, p. 23) writes: ''from a social perspective, an individual can be said to be socialized when he or she has learned to think and feel according to society's expectations.'' Living in society involves being a member of society. Brim (1966, p. 3), who strongly influenced Ward's (1974) definition of socialization, writes: "socialization refers to the process by which persons acquire the knowledge, skills and dispositions that make them more or less able members of their society." Also, Gecas (1981, p. 166) emphasizes the membership component and states: "… identification with the socializer or the socializing group makes one more receptive to their influence and motivated to be socialized in accordance with their standards." Researchers maintain, however, that an individual is not born as a member of society: "he is born with a predisposition towards sociality, and he becomes a member of society" (Berger & Luckmann, 1967, p. 149).

To live in society implies in marketing to function in the marketplace (e.g., Ward, 1974). Thompson and Hirschman (1995) discuss how the marketplace socializes consumer perceptions in a system of desires. The focus in consumer socialization research has been on how people learn to be effective consumers. The meaning of this will be affected by the changes in society. Cultural and technological changes in today's society suggest the need to revisit existing findings about consumer socialization and to address new concerns (John, 1999). The move from a cash to a credit economy involves increased economic competence (Lunt, 1996). Increased deregulation in many markets such as telephone, electricity, and pensions give more alternatives, but at the same time make it more difficult to overlook the alternatives and make the choice process more difficult. There are both tensions and contradictions involving choice (e.g., Gabriel & Lang, 1995). Schwartz (2000) and Schwartz et al. (2002) argue that freedom, autonomy, and self-determination can be excessive and can make people feel worse. Opinions differ whether living in a consumer culture leads to desirable or undesirable consumer socialization of children. Children become consumers at an earlier age than previous generations and come into contact with advertising and brands at home, at school, at the shopping center, on TV, and on the Internet. Today's children learn more about consumption at an early age than did their parents. At the same time, many parents shield their children from economic worries, discussions of family finances and purchases, something which conflicts with educational considerations (Leiser & Ganin, 1996).

A relevant question to ask is whether and to what extent is the responsibility of society, governmental and consumer agencies, schools, or businesses, to teach people to function better as consumers. The answer is likely to differ among individuals and in different cultural contexts. The role of society in the socializing of individuals is discussed by Brim (1966), who advocates a middle course which neither under-socializes nor over-socializes the individual. Society should train members to be responsible, but should also allow for the development of free and creative persons. Different views on market ideologies are likely to affect opinions held on the role society is supposed to have.

> Research on consumer socialization needs to more explicitly discuss what it means to live in the marketplace and how socialization contributes to this.

Social Interaction and Socialization Agents

Socialization also implies social interaction (e.g., Grønhaug & Venkatesh, 1986). Socialization is about learning ideas and skills which make people function in social groups (Tallman et al., 1983). Only changes that have their origin in interaction with other people are products of socialization (Secord & Backman, 1964). Societal changes are likely to affect the way we are socialized. An increased number of dual working parents, increased use of day-care centers and leisure centers, and more leisure activities outside the Western home, may result in consumers becoming socialized in different ways than in previous periods. The home and the public world have become more separated during the development of modern capitalist economies (Lunt, 1996). Social interaction can occur in many different ways than in previous decades, for example, by chatting on the Internet or by having breakfast together with unfamiliar persons in public places. Consumers and audiences interact in different ways in reality shows than in the scripted sitcoms of the 1950s–1980s period. Brembeck (2001) discusses and questions the tendency among public policy makers and parents to view socialization occurring in school and in the family to be good, and socialization taking place in the marketplace to be evil. However, reverse views may also prevail among others who consider the market to be good (rational, competitive) and the family and the school to be facing problems (drugs, sex, and violence).

The interaction between the socialization agent and the person socialized is complex (e.g., Brim, 1966). A person may at first be a socialized person and then become the socialization agent. For example, Moschis (1976) found a positive relationship between the number of consumer-related courses taken at school and the adolescent's propensity to discuss consumption with parents. Another study by Ekström (1995) found that children shared with their parents information that they had acquired at their school regarding new recipes, issues relating to environmental consumption, and information on the damage caused by smoking.

Most research on consumer socialization has focused on the family as the socialization agent (e.g., Carlson & Grossbart, 1988; Foxman, Tansuhaj, & Ekström, 1989; Moschis & Moore, 1979a) or a few socialization agents such as family, friends, or mass media (e.g., Moschis & Churchill, 1978; Moschis & Moore, 1979b). There are also studies on TV as a socialization agent (e.g., O'Guinn & Shrum, 1997), the role played by department stores in consumer socialization (e.g., Hollander & Omura, 1989), and the impact of retailers on children's consumer socialization (e.g., Grossbart, Carlson, & Walsh, 1991; McNeal, 1987). The fact that many socialization agents often are involved simultaneously adds to the complexity. The relative importance of various socialization agents is difficult to determine (O'Guinn & Faber, 1991). A child may learn about environmental behavior in school as well as through home activities such as watching television and using the computer.

> Research on consumer socialization needs to consider new ways of social interaction and the effect it may have on socialization processes. There is also a need to consider the complexity of several socialization agents, their co-existence, and influence in different socio-cultural contexts.

Socialization Processes and Learning

Socialization has often been studied in the context of learning. Cognitive developmental theories (e.g., Piaget, 1970) have frequently been used to describe the consumer socialization process (e.g., Roedder John & Whitney, 1986) and the economic socialization process (e.g., Leiser, Sevón, & Lévy, 1990). These theories assume that a certain stage of maturity must be reached before learning can occur. A child has to reach a certain age to understand and evaluate advertising. Social learning theories (e.g., Bandura, 1977) have also been used to describe the consumer socialization process (e.g., Moschis, 1987). Researchers dealing with consumer socialization (e.g., Churchill & Moschis, 1979; Moschis, 1987; Moschis & Churchill, 1978) have suggested that consumer-learning processes in consumer socialization could be described with a combination of theories such as modeling, reinforcement, and social interaction. McLeod's and Chaffee's (1972) communication typology has been used extensively for describing interaction in consumer socialization studies (e.g., Moschis, 1985; Moschis, Moore, & Smith, 1984).

It should be recognized that learning theories reflect different views on childhood. Cognitive developmental theories tend to consider childhood as a transportation distance from the incomplete to the complete (Johansson, 2003). More recently, researchers in childhood studies have suggested that childhood instead should be viewed as a social construction. Children together with grown-ups participate in creating the good childhood (Olesen, 2003). Qvortrup (1994) distinguishes between human "being" and human "becoming." A child who is looked upon as human "being" is given respect and considered competent. A child who is viewed as human "becoming" is a growing incomplete human being. Lee (2001) does not consider "becoming" as having less status, but rather that it represents the continuous changes we face in life. We are all "becomings," children and adults alike, and are continuously confronted with new situations and faced with challenges and novelties (Lee, 2001). Children are beginning to be seen as equals to adults; for example, children are referred to as actors in the social sciences, as creators in the humanities, and as citizens with democratic rights in the political sciences (Tufte, Kampmann, & Hassel, 2003). Finally, James and Prout (1997) point out that there exists no universal childhood because childhoods are interrelated to other variables like class, gender, or ethnicity. They argue that there are childhoods instead of childhood since each childhood is unique.

Too much research on consumer socialization as well as on economic socialization continues in the tradition of cognitive developmental studies. In economic psychology, Webley and Lea (1993) suggest that researchers should not ask "how do children come to understand the economic world of grown-ups," but rather "how do children solve the economic problems they are faced with." In marketing, O'Donohoe (1994) suggests that research should focus on what consumers do with advertising rather than what advertising does to them. An example of such a study is Ritson and Elliott's (1999) ethnographic study on adolescents' social use of advertising.

There is insufficient research on the actual processes through which consumer socialization occurs. Focus has been on the content of learning rather than on how learning is acquired. One reason could be that the processes are more difficult to capture. Neither the socialization agent nor the person socialized may be aware of the socialization processes. In most cases "socialization takes place indirectly as an unintended, or at least, as an implicit consequence of an ongoing relationship" (Tallman et al., 1983, p. 25). Also, Ward (1974, p. 8) suggests: "It seems that consumer socialization proceeds more through subtle social learning processes, than through purposive and systematic parental training." A distinction between intentional and unintentional socialization is made by Gecas (1981), who refers to Dreeben (1968, p. 168), who studied socialization in public schools and found that "what is learned is not always the same as what is taught." Moschis (1985) distinguishes between parents' direct attempts (purposive training) and indirect attempts (parents mediate their children's interactions with other influence agents) to influence their children's development of consumer behavior.

There is a need to develop consumer socialization studies in marketing that view childhood as a social construction. Both children as well as adults should be looked upon as being active participants in the socialization processes rather than as being passively exposed to external influence. Research on consumer socialization needs to focus more on the actual processes through which socialization occurs. Socio-cultural theories and ethnographic methods including a more in-depth understanding of learning through observation and modeling are expected to increase our understanding of the processes.

The Meanings of Competence Acquired

Socialization involves acquisition of competence. Definitions of consumer socialization include, for example, skills, knowledge, and attitudes (Ward, 1974) or skills, knowledge, values, motives, and roles (Ekström, Tansuhaj, & Foxman, 1987). McNeal (1964), in an early study on consumer socialization of children, distinguishes between cognitive outcomes (e.g., brand and store knowledge) and behavioral outcomes (e.g., shopping and demonstrating purchased products to others). Furthermore, Wilkie (1986) discusses differences between first- and second-order consumer skills. First-order consumer skills are directly relevant and basic for carrying out consumer behaviors, for example, the understanding of prices. Second-order consumer skills are indirect skills related to the social sphere within which consumption is undertaken, for example, what clothes are appropriate for this or that occasion. Research on consumer socialization has emphasized the first-order consumer skills rather than the social second-order skills.

John's (1999) review of 25 years of research on consumer socialization of children reports findings about children's advertising knowledge, transaction knowledge (products, brands, shopping, and pricing), decision-making skills and strategies, purchase requests and negotiation strategies, and consumption motives and values. A majority of the studies on consumer socialization have emphasized utilitarian and goal-oriented outcomes (O'Guinn & Faber, 1991), for example, an adolescent's acquisition of consumer competencies (e.g., Moschis & Moore, 1978a), children's abilities to distinguish television ads from programs and to understand the purpose of commercials (e.g., Robertson & Rossiter, 1974; Ward, Wackman, & Wartella, 1977), a child's development of materialistic orientations (e.g., Moore & Moschis, 1978, 1981), attitudes toward materialism and conspicuous consumption (e.g., Moschis & Churchill, 1978; Ward & Wackman, 1973), and more recently materialism and compulsive consumption (e.g., Rindfleisch, Burroughs, & Denton, 1997). O'Guinn and Faber (1991) are critical of the assumption that socialization agents teach consumers to be effective. A majority of studies have focused on pre-purchase or purchase behavior

(Grønhaug & Venkatesh, 1986) and there is insufficient coverage of the use and consumption of goods. Ekström (1995) found that parents had learned to use technical products, which their children had showed them how to use, for example, a video tape-recorder.

Researchers have previously criticized the fact that the content of learning was not always clearly identified in consumer socialization research (e.g., Aldous & McLeod, 1974; Ward, 1974). The criticism is still relevant, but it should also be emphasized that the measurement and understanding of what the subject has actually learnt is related to whether the study is positivistic or interpretive. While the effect is more heavily emphasized in a positivistic study, the learning processes are stressed in an interpretive study. Furthermore, in a consumer policy program, the goals would be stated explicitly and it would be possible to measure them. In a consumer study, neither the socialization agent(s) nor the person socialized may be aware of any goals, since the goals, if they exist, are often implicit. Also, it may be difficult to determine whether learning is a result of consumer socialization or of other processes of change or learning. Furthermore, the outcome may not always be as expected. For example, a child who is socialized in an environment in which saving is emphasized may react in the opposite way in his/her adult life and become a spendthrift. A child who grows up with a parent having alcoholic problems may never want to touch alcohol. In both cases, the child has been socialized not to incorporate the behaviors in its surroundings. It is difficult to determine whether socialization results in expected or nonexpected behavior.

As well, there is a paucity of contemporary consumer socialization studies regarding negative influence, for example, debt problems, over-consumption, obesity, and addictions. In the late 1970s and early 1980s, an emerging area of research dealt with the "undesirable socialization consequences" of marketing and consumer culture, such as TV advertising to children (e.g., Goldberg & Gorn, 1978). There is also later research in marketing dealing with issues such as antismoking and cigarette advertising (e.g., Pechmann & Ratneshwar, 1994).

Economic socialization differs from consumer socialization in that the former traditionally focuses on economic issues such as spending and saving. However, the distinctions have become blurred over time. Most studies in economic socialization have been on young consumers' understanding of the economy, their attitudes toward money and possessions, and their spending and consumption habits (e.g., Furnham, 1996, 1987; Furnham & Cleare, 1988; Furnham & Jones, 1987; Furnham & Stacey, 1991; Hutchings, Fülöp, & Van den Dries, 2002; Webley, 2005). Webley (2005) emphasizes the importance of not only focusing on children's understanding of the cash economy, but also activities such as swopping, doing chores, and gift-giving.

Social aspects also need to be considered in studies of economic socialization (Lunt & Furnham, 1996). Economic socialization refers to more than competency of social skills; it has to do with orientation to consumer society (Lunt, 1996). Cook (2004) discusses the commodification of childhood and the transformation of the child into an individualized consumer by exploring the children's clothing industry during the early 20th century.

> Consumer socialization studies need to consider what competence means for consumers in different contexts and should not be limited to focusing on utilitarian outcomes and effectiveness. There is a need to feature social as well as market relationships in consumer socialization research. In other words, to show how people use products and services in negotiating relationships with others as well as how the market is incorporating these relationships. Also, it would be beneficial to develop more studies on the role of marketers and advertisers in consumer socialization. Public policy issues deserve more attention. There is a need to examine the circumstances in which consumer socialization results in expected or non-expected behavior and leads to intended or unintended consequences.

Behavioral Relevance

According to Kuhlmann (1983), behavioral relevance is important in order to understand that socialization has in fact occurred. It implies that behavior is affected, but may not occur immediately. Socialization is sometimes anticipatory (e.g., Riesman & Roseborough, 1955). A person may learn something without using this knowledge immediately (Kuhlmann, 1983). Several factors may hinder behavior or the immediate practice of a learned skill, such as lack of opportunity, time, or money. Riesman and Roseborough (1955) describe anticipatory socialization in the context of an experiment conducted by the Kroger Food Foundation. Children, who were allowed to choose items in a supermarket for free, did not choose as many toys, sweets, and ice creams as was expected. Except for watermelon and soft drinks for immediate consumption, they chose goods their mothers would have picked, for example, sacks of flour and meat. Riesman and Roseborough (1955) imply that the children had learned to view themselves as prospective housekeepers. The implications can, however, be questioned. It is possible that the children felt they were being observed or that they felt that they were supposed to behave in a certain way.

Anticipatory socialization is often discussed in terms of what impact childhood socialization may have on adult socialization. In a study of low-literate consumers, Adkins and Ozanne (2005) found different coping strategies used to get the needs met in the marketplace. It would be interesting to find out how early socialization processes affect the choice of coping strategy used. It has earlier been suggested that the absence of early learning may hinder later socialization (e.g., Brim, 1966). In today's society there is an abundance of technological innovations, and it may be advantageous to have acquired some basic technological competence in order to learn things sequentially. For example, a person who knows how to operate a camera might more easily manage a digital camera than someone who has never used a camera. Also, later learning may not be related to what was learned earlier or may conflict with what was learned earlier (eg., Brim, 1966). It may be easier to learn a new skill than to change existing skills. Learning something new may require unlearning something already learned. Finally, it should be mentioned that the focus on anticipatory socialization by a researcher is likely to be greater if the researcher believes that socialization is stronger during childhood than during adulthood. In other words, viewing socialization as a life-long continuous process, as advocated in this paper, places less emphasis on what has been happening in the past than on what is happening today and might happen tomorrow.

> Consumer socialization studies need to consider the effect of early socialization on later socialization; as well, studies need to examine whether and in what situations early socialization is an advantage or a hindrance for later socialization.

Stability and Internalization

Previous researchers have emphasized that stability is important in order to know that socialization has occurred (Chaffee, McLeod, & Atkin, 1971; Kuhlmann, 1983; Moore & Stephens, 1975; Moschis & Moore, 1979b). Stability indicates the presence of continuity over time. One way to test stability would be to check to see if behavior is repeated over time. A behavioral change or repetition in behavior may, however, not indicate socialization, but could be a result of, for example, compliance or yielding. Furthermore, people sometimes behave in a socially approved way because they have learned what consequences to expect for violating social norms and not because of internalization of norms and values (Schneider, 1977).

Internalization is another way to reassure stability and is often described as a crucial component of the socialization process (e.g., Berger & Luckmann, 1967). It is different from other processes of social influence, such as compliance and identification, in that internalization is a more lasting change in cases in which behavior is determined by congruency with the value system of the person influenced (Kelman, 1961). Behavior is neither dependent on the relationship to the influence source nor on the ability of the influence source to observe behavior. Also, Maccoby and Martin (1983) assert that internalization of values without external sanctions (expected reward or punishment) is the ultimate goal of most socialization efforts. They maintain, however, that compliance is frequently the short-term goal of socialization efforts. A consumer purchasing ecologically produced coffee as a result of social pressure is complying, but a consumer purchasing such coffee based on congruency with his/her value system is internalized. It is possible that compliance at times is a pre-condition for socialization, for example, a parent who is resistant to visiting fast-food restaurants may learn to like them after complying to his/her children's wishes to visit the restaurants. Goodnow (1997) is critical of those who consider internalization to be similar across generations as values can represent different levels of commitment for different generations. Furthermore, internalization requires adaptation: "To be self-determining with respect to internalized regulatory processes and structures, one must fully assimilate them; that is, one must accept them as one's own and bring them into a consistent relation to the other needs, processes and values that represent self" (Deci & Ryan, 1991, p. 255). Power relationships in a market economy should not be neglected. If the market is evolving as a central value system, whereby it is commonplace for the most powerful groups to dictate values for others, it can lead to less individual freedom. The notions of market culture and market apparatus to capture the values in discourses and practices of the market are discussed by Peñaloza (2004). Finally, it should be emphasized that stability will generate research reliability, but it is difficult to measure stability considering the continuous changes taking place in socialization processes.

> The relationship between compliance and socialization needs to be explored in greater depth, including whether, in fact, compliance leads to socialization and whether, in certain situations, it is a pre-condition for socialization. Since socialization differs from other forms of change by involving internalization, it would be beneficial for consumer socialization studies to more explicitly consider how to operationalize and study internalization.

EXPANDING THE SCOPE OF CONSUMER SOCIALIZATION

Life-Long Consumer Socialization

Even though definitions of socialization recognize that it is a life-long process – for example, in sociology (e.g., Vernon, 1972), marketing (e.g., Ward, 1974), and economic psychology (Roland-Lévy, 2002) – a majority of research has focused on child socialization. One reason is that socialization is assumed by many researchers to be strongest in childhood. Berger and

Luckmann (1967) call socialization during childhood as primary socialization, and subsequent socialization as secondary socialization. The latter integrates different bodies of knowledge which often build upon learning sequences (Berger & Luckmann, 1967). For example, in order to learn to dive, one must know how to swim. As mentioned earlier in this paper, the contention that consumer socialization is stronger during childhood is criticized and a counter argument made instead that consumer socialization should be looked upon as a continuous process throughout life.

A majority of consumer socialization research has studied children or adolescents (e.g., Carlson & Grossbart, 1988; Churchill & Moschis, 1979; Moschis, 1985; Moschis & Churchill, 1978; Moschis & Moore, 1979b, 1985; Moore & Stephens, 1975; Stampfl, Moschis, & Lawton, 1978). One reason for this prevalent focus might be that public policy questions in the United States dealt with the effects of television advertising on children at the same time as the area of research developed (Ward, Klees, & Wackman, 1990). Also, most studies on economic socialization have also been on young consumers' economic understanding (e.g., Furnham, 1996, 1987; Furnham & Cleare, 1988; Furnham & Jones, 1987; Furnham & Stacey, 1991; Hutchings et al., 2002; Webley, 2005).

Even though researchers have begun to study consumer socialization of the elderly (e.g., Smith, 1990; Smith & Moschis, 1984, 1985, 1987, 1989), there is a lack of studies regarding adult consumer socialization. One reason could be that little change is expected to occur during adulthood (O'Guinn & Faber, 1991). For example, according to cognitive developmental theories (e.g., Piaget, 1970), the highest stage of growth appears during adolescence or early adulthood. Another reason could be that changes are not expected to occur at the same age for all adults, in contrast to many changes during childhood which are supposed to occur at relatively the same age (O'Guinn & Faber, 1991). Brim (1968) states that adults, in contrast to children, select their socialization experiences. However, it needs to be recognized that life situations also differ for children. Children sometimes select their consumption experiences, and should therefore neither be looked upon as passive victims nor as fully competent consumers (Ekström & Brembeck, 2003). Also, transition to adulthood happens over a longer span of years than previously thought (Furstenberg, 2000). Young people pursue education, delay formation of families, and (some) reside with their parents. Furstenberg (2000) suggests that socialization research should focus on how young people construct adult identities.

Adult consumer socialization focuses on consumer activities related to the learning of new roles and behaviors as an adult such as being a spouse or becoming a parent. Deighton and Grayson (1995) recommend that studies of consumer socialization focus on adult transitions, for example, learning to assimilate into a health club or retirement community, or into categories of expertise such as becoming a wine buff or a serious photographer. Furthermore, cognitive or perceived age seem more relevant for describing life style changes than biological age. A grandmother's consumption patterns, for example, culinary practices and the use of information technology, may in certain situations resemble the grandchild's. There is also a need for research to consider that socialization among elderly can involve many changes from adulthood such as decreasing faculties of body and mind, living on severely reduced incomes, fears of being taken advantage of, fears of being robbed and assaulted, and perhaps even fears of regressing to childhood and getting cared for by children. Research on consumer socialization needs to consider these factors and not idealize the elderly. Differences may also exist between different cohorts, for example, the attitude toward credit purchases. Consumer researchers have largely ignored the kind of impact a generation has on socialization of its members (Rindfleisch, 1994).

A concept related to adult socialization is "re-socialization." It was introduced by Riesman and Roseborough (1955) as a process which occurs when an individual has to relearn specific patterns of behavior. The concept can be criticized if considering socialization as a life-long process, as suggested in this article. Re-socialization implies that drastic changes and learning of new roles occur rather than that continuous interaction and learning taking place. The concept is, however, often used in connection with institutionalization. Re-socializing systems such as prisons and mental hospitals serve to correct or make-up for deficiencies in earlier socialization (Wheeler, 1966). Gabel (2005) emphasizes that there is a need to consider the large number of consumers who are institutionalized, food insecure, homeless, impoverished, and disabled, and often depend on surrogate consumers or cannot formally employ surrogate consumers.

> Research on consumer socialization needs to be expanded to encompass all ages, thereby recognizing the fact that life situations and competencies can differ among children and adults in different contexts. There is a need to study transitions that occur into new roles throughout life and in particular during adulthood. Also, there is a need for consumer socialization studies to consider consumers who are institutionalized.

Different Life Events and Spheres of Consumption

Family transitions during grief (Gentry, Kennedy, Paul, & Hill, 1995) and during transfer of possessions (Price, Arnould, & Curasi, 2000; Curasi, Price, & Arnould, 2004) have been studied previously, but not from a socialization perspective. An exception is Gentry and Goodwin (1997), who discuss socialization as a response to consumer transition. In the future, the scope of socialization could be expanded to include positive and negative life events such as consumers' experiences of joy (on occasions such as birthdays or high school graduations), or grief and stress (for example during transfer of possessions or upon the occurrence of disruptions in families). Socialization may also be useful for understanding consumers' relationships to health and environmental issues. In a study on self-conceptions, body images, and self-care practices, Thompson and Hirschman (1995, p. 150) emphasize how socialization inspires a disciplined and normalized body: "… To be thinner, more toned, less gray, and less wrinkled, and to hide a variety of imperfections are acts of self-care that serve to discipline the body that has, without conscious consent, deviated from valued cultural norms of appearance." The emphasis on youthfulness is obvious, as is also the Western ideal of beauty. The internalization of physical attractiveness norms among college students was studied by Martin and Gentry (1994). Again, the role of the market needs to receive more attention in consumer socialization research. Consumer desire is likely to differ not only across cultures and times, depending on socialization and cultural intermediaries such as marketing, media, and advertising, but also on different modernities and modern subjectivities (Belk, Ger, & Askegaard, 2003).

> Studies on consumer socialization would benefit from expanding the scope of study to include different life events and spheres of consumption involving a large spectra of consumption issues, not restricted to merely buying or using products and services, but including social relationships.

Dialogs, Negotiations, and Translations

As noted previously, a majority of consumer socialization research has had a unidirectional view – studying children learning consumption-related matters from their parents (e.g., Carlson & Grossbart, 1988; Moschis & Churchill, 1978; Moschis & Moore, 1979a). It assumes a simple asymmetrical causality model where parents shape their children (Cromwell & Olson, 1975). The view can be criticized, and instead parents and children can be viewed as a social system in which each participant's responses constitute stimuli for the other (Bell, 1968, 1971). White-Riley, Foner, Hess, and Toby (1971, p. 961) state: "… As the parent socializes the child, he almost certainly as a consequence both teaches certain things to himself and also learns from the growing child." Also, Mead (1970) discusses the development of our society into a pre-figurative culture; a culture in which adults learn not only from adults, but also from their children. The rapidly changing pace in our society regarding, for example, technology, information processing, and transportation makes it possible for younger people to experience purchasing and consumption at a rate much faster than that of their elders. The fact that children influence their parents' knowledge, skills, and attitudes related to consumption has been called "reverse socialization" by Ward (1974). Only a few studies have had this focus (e.g., Foxman et al., 1989). Socialization occurs in the course of a relationship, involving learning as well as teaching (e.g., Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Tallman et al., 1983; Ziegler & Child, 1973). Researchers have suggested a reciprocal view of consumer socialization in families (e.g., Ekström et al., 1987), but there is still a lack of studies focusing on both directions of influence that encompass these dialogs. Also, socialization is not always direct. The concept "retroactive socialization" was coined by Riesman and Roseborough (1955), implying that children influence their parents' consumption skills after being influenced by media and/or after interacting with peers. In a study on consumer socialization, Ekström (1995) found that children had influenced their parents regarding environmental issues such as recycling. In a few families, this had happened after the children had discussed environmental issues or participated in an environmental project at school.

Negotiations undertaken in the social context in which a person is socialized also need to be considered. Thompson and Haytko (1997) studied fashion and indicated that the consumer's constructed self-identity is socially negotiated and consists of interpretations of both social affiliations and contradistinctions to other people. Consumers are continuously involved in interpretive dialogs with those in their social spheres as well as the broader socio-cultural history and other spheres of consumer culture (Thompson & Haytko, 1997). Parents and children are continuously negotiating consumer roles. For example, views on upbringing style and communication structure are likely to affect the extent to which a child is allowed to influence his/her own purchases as well as the parent's purchases (e.g., Ekström, 1995).

The negotiations in socialization processes in changing family types need to be recognized in research, for example, relations involving step-parents, step-children, and non-residential parents. Stacey (1990) describes the postmodern family as a locus, not of residence, but of meanings and relationships. Hogg, Curasi, and Maclaran (2004) suggest that researching the wider family context of the empty nest experience might be useful for understanding consumer socialization as the family changes and evolves. In their study, after their children left home, mothers found comfort in objects left behind by their children, for example, by wearing their children's t-shirts. Consumption then becomes a way to maintain the sense of family and social connectedness (Hogg et al., 2004). There is also a need to acknowledge the increased number of children in separated families, who commute and take turns living with the mother and the father. John (1999) suggests that consumer socialization studies should look at the family unit at a more disaggregated level, such as that of father–son or father–daughter communication, one-parent families, or sibling relations. Ekström (1995) found that parents and children sometimes form alliances, for example, when one of the spouses was not interested in something that was going to be purchased. There is a lack of research on intergenerational consumer socialization, for example, grandparents and children learning about consumption from each other.

Dialogs and negotiations occur continuously in socio-cultural contexts in which a person is socialized. Also, cultural and technological changes are interpreted differently depending on the context. Humans, objects, and ideas continuously move around in today's society. Czarniawska and Sevón (1996) point out that diffusion has been replaced by translation as per Latour (1986), and that translation better illustrates the richness of the meaning of the word diffusion. Czarniawska (2001, p. 126) states that "The translation model answers the question about the energy needed if ideas or objects are to move around. It is people, whether regarded as users or as creators, who energize an idea every time they translate it for their own or somebody else's use." The process of translation may help us to better understand change in that it considers watching ideas travel. It is not about reception, rejection, resistance, or acceptance (Czarniawska, 2001), but rather it is about on-going interpretations.

The increase of migration and travel among consumers makes it highly relevant to study translation in new socio-cultural contexts. The process of translation is applied by Peñaloza (1994) when describing the Mexican immigrant's consumer acculturation process, in other words, their use of cultural signs and heuristics from the previous system in the new system. Geographic relocation (Goodwin & Sewall, 1992) has previously been studied utilizing a socialization approach. Vernon (1972) emphasizes that assimilation is re-socialization in that learning a new culture implies forgetting or giving up certain things. However, the criticism raised above regarding re-socialization also applies to assimilation.

> Consumer socialization studies would benefit from considering the dialogs, the negotiations, and the translations, which continuously occur in the social context in which consumers are socialized. In addition, there is a need to consider consumer socialization processes in different families and between different generations.

Socio-Cultural Contexts

The literature review shows that there has been a strong focus on cognitive learning theories, in particular, in studies on consumer socialization. These theories focus on internal processes in the consumer, often seeking laws which rule our behavior. There is a need to expand the use of socio-cultural theories in order to recognize the influence that external processes have on our lives, and to realize that laws may not be possible or even wanted. The continuous changing society involving uncertainty and volatility makes it necessary to consider theories that take change into account. Socio-cultural theories allow us to study changing socialization processes reflecting these changes. In order to understand socialization better, it is necessary to consider both the individual and his/her interaction with the socio-cultural context. Macro-societal structures and micro-practices of everyday life mediate culturally shared meanings and values (de Certeau, 1984; Thompson & Haytko, 1997). We have significant gaps in conceptualization and understanding of the role that social environment and experiences play in consumer socialization (e.g., John, 1999). In research on children's consumer socialization, cognitive developmental theories have been prevalent rather than theories for understanding the role of social environment (e.g., John, 1999). There is a need for more research on how socialization processes differ depending on gender, race, and class and on how and when they differ. Previous research has found that adolescents from higher socio-economic strata are likely to have higher preference for commercial stimuli and to be better able to manage consumer finances than adolescents from lower socio-economic strata (Moschis & Churchill, 1978; Moschis & Moore, 1979b). Is this still the case today? In today's society there appears to be societal pressure on families to allow their children to have the same goods as their peers. Strategies to handle this situation are adopted by parents in families with fewer financial resources (e.g., Hjort, 2004; Middleton, Ashworth, & Walker, 1994). For example, parents buy brand clothes for their children and cut down on something else such as dental care for themselves or home insurance in order to allow their children to be part of consumer society (Hjort, 2004). Households struggle to consume the material necessities and to some degree keep up with the social necessities (Hjort & Ekström, 2006). This reflects changes in consumption, but may also have an effect on processes of socialization within families. There is a lack of research regarding the mechanisms by which consumers in different socio-cultural environments sustain or alter their consumption. For example, why do some children who are raised in affluent/middle class families become voluntary simplifiers? Do the socialization processes differ and if so, how?

Also, the emphasis on a unique identity in today's consumer culture is interesting to reflect upon from a consumer socialization perspective. In order to have a different or unique consumption pattern, the consumer must first understand and master what is typical. However, the typical also depends on the existence of atypical. A majority of consumers seem to adhere to the typical and only a few, often those who have socio-economic mobility, go against this norm. This is not new. Veblen (1899/1994) discussed conspicuous consumption as early as 1899. But of interest today is the fact that today's consumer also seeks status by purposely avoiding symbols of status. There is a need to better understand why the consumer selects the atypical rather than the typical and the socialization processes under which this selection occurs. Ariely and Levav (2000) studied choices in a group context and found that individual choices are also aimed at self-presentation in the form of uniqueness.

The understanding of consumer socialization in different cultures is important to consider (e.g., John, 1999). The development of society over time makes it important to recognize similar and dissimilar consumption norms and ideologies across and within cultures. The blurring of geographical boundaries makes it possible for people to share similar norms across different countries. A teenager in the southern hemisphere may, for example, share the same consumption values as a teenager in the northern hemisphere. Do different or similar socialization processes exist? What are the mechanisms by which different subcultures sustain their consumption through consumer socialization? Flanagan and Sherrod (1998) discuss the need for renewed research on political socialization and youth political development. They question whether ethnic origins are more or less important in defining in-group loyalties and out-group prejudices. Citizenship and nationality might be defined differently in the future as a result of nation-states being challenged by ethnic and religious divisions and by regional economic mergers (Flanagan & Sherrod, 1998).

Peñaloza (2004) proposes multiculturalism in the study of consumer socialization. She moves socialization beyond comparison of differences between ethnic consumer groups and focuses instead on their interrelations in the marketplace. She illustrates how consumers in a multicultural domain, such as Mexican Americans, have the ability to know the codes of more than one group, and to use these abilities for communicating and distinguishing themselves from the members of other cultural groups.

Research on consumer socialization would benefit from employing socio-cultural theories. There is a need to better understand if, how, and why socialization processes differ between different races, classes, and genders. Consumer socialization studies would also benefit from a further understanding of market dynamics and multiculturalism.

Multiple Theories, Methods and Disciplines

In order to understand the role of socio-cultural environments in the development of consumers, different theories and methods are required than those used in traditional consumer socialization research. A majority of previous studies on consumer socialization have relied on surveys (e.g., Carlson & Grossbart, 1988; Foxman et al., 1989; Moschis & Churchill, 1978; Moschis & Moore, 1979b); only a few studies have employed interviews (e.g., Ekström, 1995; Thompson & Hirschman, 1995). In order to better understand the dialogs and negotiations that are involved in consumer socialization processes, there is a need to use interpretive methods which are able to capture dialogs and negotiations, for example, ethnographic methods involving interviews, observations, and narratives. Previously, O'Guinn and Faber (1991, p. 377) advocated ethnography in consumer socialization research: "it is able to reveal important relationships embedded within the delicate nexus of individuals, family and the media with a sensitivity that does not obliterate the very thing it is trying to understand." Goodnow (1997) recommends a socio-cultural perspective for studying the emergence of values across generations, employing methods such as proverbs or stories, and studying everyday routine practices. The interpretive development in childhood studies in Europe offers interesting insights, which can benefit the study of consumer socialization encompassing childhood as well as adulthood socialization.

Furthermore, previous studies on adolescent consumer socialization (e.g., Carlson & Grossbart, 1988; Moschis & Churchill, 1978; Moschis & Moore, 1979b) have often been cross-sectional studies. The lack of longitudinal studies, with the exception of Moschis and Moore (1982), could probably be explained by the resources such studies require. Also, longitudinal designs may be problematic in family research due to attrition.

Research could benefit from more explicit clarification of the underlying epistemology and ontology of consumer socialization in order to make more conscious choices regarding theory and method used and for understanding the consequences of the choices made. The focus has been on theory testing rather than the building of theory and the latter needs to be considered in order to develop this field of study. However, it should be recognized that the definition and meaning of theory is likely to differ among researchers having different perceptions of reality (e.g., Sutton & Staw, 1995).

Since consumer socialization is an area of study of interest to many different disciplines such as marketing, sociology, psychology, anthropology, home economics, and consumer technology, it would be beneficial to have interdisciplinary studies in which researchers with different disciplinary backgrounds collaborate. O'Guinn and Faber (1991, p. 379) write: "no single methodology, or even discipline, is capable of fully explaining the manner in which the media act as socialization agents." A multifaceted pluralism in the study of consumer socialization, involving interpretive research, socio-cultural theories, ethnographic methods, as well as positivistic research, cognitive theories, and surveys is likely to contribute to our understanding of a concept of high relevance to society and society's welfare, namely to live as a consumer in a continuously changing society.

CONCLUSIONS

This article shows how a broadening of scope and methods allows the consumer socialization construct to resonate within and beyond the confines of studies concerning children and marketing. It is maintained that consumer socialization is an important phenomena to study in order to understand the contexts in which the consumer lives. The concept is important for understanding how the consumer relates to shifting consumption norms and ideologies and to cultural as well as technological changes in society. It is suggested that the scope of consumer socialization be expanded to encompass life-long consumer socialization, different life events and spheres of consumption, dialogs, negotiations, and translations as well as the socio-cultural context in which socialization occurs. Several difficulties exist in determining whether consumer socialization has occurred or not. It is hard to know when it begins and when it is completed. Actually, because consumer socialization is a life-long continuous process, it is believed that it can never be concluded. Furthermore, the fact that consumer socialization is often unintentional and something neither the socialization agent nor the person socialized is aware of makes it a difficult phenomenon to study. In order to capture the complexity of consumer socialization and to keep the field of consumer socialization a vital research area, there is a need to rethink both the theories and the methods used. Researchers are encouraged to expand the use of socio-cultural theories and ethnographic methods. Interdisciplinary research is also recommended, allowing a multifaceted pluralism in the study of consumer socialization.

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METAPHORS OF SELF AND SELF-GIFTS IN INTERDEPENDENT CULTURES: NARRATIVES FROM HONG KONG

Annamma Joy, Michael Hui, Tsong-Sung Chan and Geng Cui

ABSTRACT

This study examines subject and self-metaphors in Cantonese in order to understand the impact of self-conceptualization on self-giving in Hong Kong. The bifurcation of the individual in Hong Kong signals the importance of the subject and the relational self in Chinese culture. The word for person (rén) is written as two individuals interacting with each other, so communication between the subject and the relational self has a significant impact on self-giving as evidenced by the most prevalent type of gift – the puritanical one. The mental accounting in this instance reflects the importance given to the consideration of others prior to or simultaneously with rewarding oneself for the successful achievement of a personal goal. Both whimsical and therapeutic gifts are fairly rare and justified in a more elaborate fashion. Indulging oneself by purchasing consumer goods or services for special occasions is acceptable when they are not provided by relevant others, such as close friends or family. Purchasing clothes and shoes for Chinese New Year is not necessarily viewed

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as a self-gift because this occasion is an auspicious one, requiring the wearer to attire herself in new outfits in order to attract good fortune. Finally, the presence of self-gifts in Hong Kong justifies its inclusion in the gift continuum.

According to Mick (1996, p. 103) the self-gift is "a personally symbolic self-communication through special indulgences that tend to be premeditated and highly context bound." In cultures that emphasize the independent subject, there are many instances of giving to oneself (Levy, 1982; Mick, 1996; Sherry & McGrath, 1989). Sherry and McGrath's (1989) research on gift stores suggests that, although individuals experienced some guilt when buying themselves gifts, they nonetheless did so, thereby merging delight and fantasy with guilt. Mick (1986) and Levy (1982) initially found that self-gifts are a kind of indulgence in which a consumer seeks to reward herself for past behavior. Although their focus on reward was limiting, they nevertheless drew attention to the phenomenon of self-giving, and interest in it has since grown (Sherry & McGrath, 1989; Mick & De Moss, 1992).

Unlike gift exchanges between individuals, *s*elf-giving has some unique features that hold specific, private, and even sacred meanings for the individual. Self-giving is simultaneously both symbolic and dialogic because the consumer initiates a communication with herself, for both as giver and receiver (Mick & De Moss, 1990b), she conveys messages between her two selves (p. 328). A self-gift tends to be unique and pre-meditated because some thought has gone into justifying the purchase, although the research in some instances suggests spontaneity. Finally, self-gifts are contextually situated and sometimes based on cultural norms, such as buying oneself a Christmas gift (Mick & De Moss, 1990a,b; Sherry ,1983).

While the study of self-giving has primarily focused on North America, questions were raised about its generalizability to other cultures. Rucker, Freitas, and Dolstra (1996), who studied the impact of ethnicity on self-giving in the U.S., found that Asian Americans were as self-giving as non-Asian Americans but their choices often involved hedonistic experiences, such as watching TV or listening to music, rather than purchasing products or services. Mick (1996) and Sherry, McGrath, and Levy (1995) note the dark side of the self-gift, suggesting that self-indulgence instigated by individually centered ideology may not exist in Eastern cultures. Joy's (2001) study of gift giving in Hong Kong also hints at the possibility of self-giving under certain conditions.

In this study on self-giving in Hong Kong, we show that, despite the Hong Kong Chinese emphasis on the interrelatedness of gift giving, focusing on subject-self metaphors allows us to better understand monadic giving in Hong Kong. Most important we examine the ways in which people construct their inner lives in a dominant system that celebrates interdependence and how that defines their self-giving practices.

In independent cultures like the U.S., individuals regard themselves primarily as unique and different from others, whereas Asians see themselves as connected to others in their social context. Furthermore, their behavior is determined by what they think to be the thoughts, feelings, or actions of others (Markus & Kitayama, 1991). Asians do not strive for autonomy the same way that people in individualist cultures do, but conform instead to the demands and expectations of others (Ahuvia & Wong, 1998; Hong, Morris, Chiu, & Benet-Martinez, 2000). Thus, while individualist cultures promote control of the environment through actions of the agentic self, interdependent cultures underscore adaptation and conformity to their social environment.

Can persons in interdependent cultures behave in a manner to satisfy their own needs without transgressing the collective will or violating norms of interdependence? Putting it in another way, do actions involving the inner self (autonomous self) directly oppose being interdependent? Because people in individualistic systems perceive the other as distinct from the self, the other's behavior is always viewed as that of a separate agent. On the other hand, since the interdependent person perceives others as being interconnected with the self, the behavior of others is also viewed as having been necessarily influenced by a larger social context. In independent cultures, people strive to achieve consistency between their private thoughts and public behaviors, while accommodating others may be viewed as failing to be true to oneself (Markus & Kitayama, 1991). In interdependent cultures, acting in accord with personal opinions may be regarded as selfish and immature, especially if it disrupts social equilibrium (Hernandez & Iyengar, 2001; Johnson, 1974). More recently Hong et al.(2000) suggest that bicultural individuals in Hong Kong tend to switch cultural frames depending on the available cues (American flag/Chinese dragon). They perceive internalized culture as a network of discrete, specific constructs that guide cognition only when it comes to the fore in an individual's mind. Thus, culture is not to be viewed as an integrated general structure, but as a loose network of domain-specific knowledge structures, such as categories and implicit theories (p. 710).

We begin with the existing literature in consumer behavior to determine what is known and then identify what must be known for a thorough understanding of self-giving. We follow the argument presented in the studies of western culture that states the agentic nature of individuals makes self-dialog commonplace and central to defining who we are and how we live our lives. Next we provide methodological details of our study before launching into a discussion of how the self is defined in Hong Kong and how such notions affect self-giving.

CONCEPTUAL FOUNDATIONS OF THE SELF-GIFT IN CONSUMER RESEARCH

As early as 1982, Levy had made the observation that buying things for personal use might have the quality of a gift presented from the "I as subject to the me as object" (p. 542). In 1983, Sherry developed a conceptual model of dyadic gift exchanges, making only a passing reference to monadic giving. In 1986, Mick had also noticed the importance of rewarding oneself for past behavior through appropriate purchases. The idea of monadic giving was later elaborated by Sherry and McGrath (1989) and Sherry, McGrath, and Levy (1995) in their studies on self-giving among customers in gift shops. They used projective techniques to assess various dimensions of the self-gift, including premeditation, singularity, and positive hedonics, and generally emphasized the customers' ambivalence to purchasing objects that were considered indulgent and pleasurable. This ambivalence is in part explained by the gender uncertainties created by feminist ideologies in the workplace as well as by the conflicting values of instant versus deferred gratification taking root in society. While these authors focus on American customers, they provide some indications that cross-cultural differences would exist given the emphasis on individualism in the U.S.

The most comprehensive studies of the self-gift to date were conducted by Mick and De Moss (1990a,b, 1992), Mick, De Moss, and Faber (1992), and Mick (1991, 1996) who in their earlier work had studied self-giving in the U.S. from the angles of consumers, advertisers, and marketing managers. Mick and De Moss had identified important dimensions of the self-gift: communication, exchange, specialness, and hedonics. Communication refers to the conversation of the bifurcated self as "a message to me from me," and highlights the importance of self-dialog in issues of self-esteem, self-identity, and self-definition. Exchange addresses the role of self-gifts in motivating individuals to act in specific ways, notably their self-regulatory function that takes into consideration not only achievement but also various aspects of the self-concept. Specialness marks self-gifts as unique, special, and distinct from other personal acquisitions. Because of its singularity and anticipated impact on self, the hedonics of self-giving dwells on the emotions felt by individuals in gift exchanges with others.

On the basis of a semiotic analysis, Mick and De Moss (1992) identified four types of self-gifts: puritanic reward self-gifts, which rationalize self indulgence through control; romantic, purchased to please oneself; therapeutic self-gifts, purchased to improve misaligned psychological states or poor health; and holiday self-gifts, purchased for special occasions, such as birthdays and religious festivals. Then Mick and De Moss compared each type of self-gift: reward self-gifts were more inspiring and lasting; romantic self-gifts were less practical and more whimsical; therapeutic self-gifts were inspiring, relaxing, and less practical; holiday self-gifts were memorable, lasting, and less inspiring. They found that clothes, restaurant food (non-fast food), recreational products, and travel often served as reward self-gifts, whereas music, fast food, personal care products, and entertainment were acquired as therapy. In another study, Mick (1991) argued that demographic factors, such as age, financial situation, lack of dyadic gift partners, and gender, have an impact on self-giving.

Rucker, Freitas, and Kangas (1996) studied the impact of ethnicity on self-giving among Asian and white students in the U.S. Although some members of both groups expressed ambivalence and guilt about buying self-gifts, both groups largely focused on the positive long- and short-term outcomes of purchasing a self-gift. The sole difference between the two groups was that Asian students ranked experiences, such as watching TV or listening to music, as more important than acquiring objects in terms of self-indulgence. The authors recommend, though, that these ideas be tested on individuals who live in interdependent cultures, such as China and Japan.

Finally, Joy's (2001) study of gift-giving in Hong Kong indicated the possibility of self-giving and its location on the gift continuum. Her interest was sparked by Hong, Liu, and King's (1997) observation that bi-cultural individuals self-directed their own cognition depending on whether they were given cues from American or Chinese culture.

Although all of the above studies explore self-construal, self-communication, and self-giving processes in independent cultures, their authors all call for a systematic study of self-giving in interdependent cultures– precisely the direction we take in this study. Also, while the earlier studies did not rely on metaphorical data to explain various aspects of the self, we use Lakoff and Johnson's (1999) study to first identify self-construal processes and then link them to self-communication and self-giving in Hong Kong. Our research shows that people in Hong Kong primarily act in accordance with the demands and wishes of relevant others (see also Joy, 2001), and furthermore do not view this activity as either a weakness or a lack of self-determination. Indeed, participants were motivated by the pursuit of personal agency – apparent in certain situations (Mandel, 2003). Working with others does not mean giving up the independent self, because cooperating with others is the appropriate way of enhancing and affirming the self. In the process, we also examine the extent to which Mick and De Moss's (1992) typology of the self-gift is applicable in Hong Kong. And finally, we explore the extent to which intergenerational differences affect the act of self-giving. But before we launch into our own study, we provide a brief description of Chinese conceptions of the self.

CHINESE DEFINITIONS OF SELF AND OTHER

Chinese culture emphasizes inter-relatedness as evidenced by the written Mandarin character for person, which accurately conveys the idea of interaction and communication between individuals. A complete person or *rén* is formed only when two bodies exchange hearts or *xîn* (Joy, 2001; King, 1985), so a person not connected to others [*renqing*] is not a human being, only an individual. A child in Hong Kong learns this concept very early in life, because it is bombarded by inputs that emphasize its relationship to others within the cultural context – a massive physical, mental, and social complex.

This social complex has its origins in the teachings of Taoism and Confucian philosophy, which state that all things are interrelated (Tu Wei-Ming, 1994) and that proper ritual and correct behavior (*láih* in Cantonese and *li* in Mandarin) are mandatory in interpersonal relationships. Further, Confucian thought names five important relationships in the socialization of a person and the governance of society: emperor and subject; father and son; older brother and younger brother; husband and wife; and friends (Hsu, 1985). Central to the practice of *láih* is the family, with three of the Confucian relationships resting on the notion that filial piety is mandatory (Zhang & Bond, 1998). Each relationship in turn is reproduced by cultivating principles of filial piety (*hsiao*), benevolence (*renqing*), face (*mianzi* and or *lian*), reciprocity (*bao*), and righteousness (*yi*) (Ho, 1975; Yang, 1994). All these mechanisms ensure the smooth functioning of interactions between individuals at various levels of society, although as we shall see below *mianzi/lian* has attracted the most interest among social scientists.

Face (*mianzi/lian*) is an extremely important consideration in interpersonal relations. Bond (1991) identifies four types of face-enhancing and face-saving activities. Face may be enhanced through one's own abilities in accordance with social norms and by paying compliments and being considerate; face may be saved by avoiding socially inappropriate behavior and by not offending the other's face through insensitive behavior. Saving one's face preserves one's pride as well as the other's face and pride (Cupach & Metts, 1994; Wong & Ahuvia, 1998). In general, a Chinese person is always taught to be inherently connected to others – family, close friends, good friends, or acquaintances – with varying levels of intimacy (Hwang, 1987; Hsu, 1985).

Apart from the relational subject, the notion of *chi*, or inner force, the outcome of which is a form of reflection connected to the self, is also important (Bockover, 1997; Morris, 1994). Yet in studies of Chinese culture very little attention has been paid to how the practice of *chi* affects both collective and personal agency.

METHODOLOGY

Conducted over a six-month period, this study is based on data gathered through observations and interviews from a sample of 24 university students from two universities and 16 entry- to mid-level managers from two different financial and management consulting firms in Hong Kong. The students were equally divided between males and females, ranging in age from 19 to 24, while nine of the managers were male and seven female, ranging in age from 25 to 50. Table 1 provides a list of the participants.

Data collection continued until new interviews produced only minor thematic variations from earlier interviews. Much of the data are textual from interviews although systematic observations were also made.

The interviews were conducted in both English and Cantonese – the latter with the help of two trained research assistants who were also trained ethnographers. In addition, since the other project collaborators spoke both Cantonese and Mandarin, it was possible to examine the various ways in which participants used subject and self-metaphors in Cantonese. The constant discussions with the qualified research assistants and collaborators helped to clarify the themes as they emerged and to obtain meaningful data.

Overall, the student participants were fairly bilingual, while the executives were fluently bilingual. Most of the students came from lower- to middle-class backgrounds. This is based on an assessment of where they lived, the housing complex, father's and/or mother's occupation, and stated amounts of spending on clothes, cellular phones, palm pilots, and pagers. Although

Table 1. List of Participants in Study.

Executives	Students
Justin [35]	Richard [20]
David [40]	Yvonne [19]
Francis [38]	Julie [21]
Victor [32]	Jonathan [24]
Heather [36]	Paul [22]
Jacqueline [28]	Lisa [20]
Rita [35]	Sylvia [19]
Janice [34]	Janice [19]
Ada [33]	Linda [20]
Sam [50]	Erica [24]
Kay [44]	Jordan [22]
Ronny [46]	Julia [20]
Brandon [40]	Peter [20]
Charles [44]	Fred [21]
Wency [25]	Wei [24]
Michael [38]	Patrick [23]
	Vincent [22]
	Chris [21]
	Karanda [22]
	Christine [19]
	John [20]
	Joe [22]
	Amy [23]
	Jenny [21]

some of the executives came from lower- to middle-class backgrounds, their current income and education placed them in the middle- to upper-middle class. The students were best suited to discuss the self-gift because of their age and exposure to western material culture and values. The executives could provide more details about gift-giving in general and self-giving in particular, because of their education, exposure to western values, and income.

We began the student interviews by discussing their university life, career aspirations, and friendships, which then led to a discussion of gift-giving patterns in general and self-giving in particular. This gave us the opportunity to further pursue the concept of the subject and self by using the list developed by Lakoff and Johnson (1999). We began the executive interviews by asking questions about their jobs, families, and obligations to work colleagues and family members. As in the case of the students, the discussion of the self-gift in turn led to a discussion of their inner lives. Each interview was transcribed, translated, and jointly read to ensure deeper understanding.

The follow-up interview was primarily a means to fill in the gaps from the earlier interview. We used a hermeneutic process to analyze the text, moving from a discussion of the part to the whole (Thompson, 1997) within both the specific and entire body of interviews.

We preface our phenomenological analysis of gift giving in Hong Kong with a brief discussion of Lakoff and Johnson's (1999) work on metaphors and inner lives. An examination of the metaphors of self and how they are learned in a cultural context will illuminate and help us integrate the ways in which people think and act in a culture.

CREATING THE NARRATIVE

Subject and Self Metaphors in the U.S.

In their study on the self, Lakoff and Johnson (1999) argue that the body (source domain) serves as the vehicle for understanding the world we live in (target domain) and, more importantly for our purposes, that our inner lives are so complex that they can only be understood through metaphor (p. 267). Metaphor allows us to conceptualize our experiences through mental imagery drawn from sensory-motor domains, which are acquired in early childhood (see also Zaltman, 1997). Lakoff and Johnson (1999) also contend that individualistic cultures, such as the U.S. and to some extent Japan, generally bifurcate people into a subject, the locus of reasoning, will, and consciousness, and a self, the locus of social roles and social histories, which also includes the body (p. 268). The subject is a person with an existence independent of the body, at least metaphorically, while the self, or selves, can be a person, thing, or location. Associated with the subject is the essence of a person – the very thing that makes her unique. Overall, the source domain of the subject-self metaphor contains a subject, or person, and one or more selves, or entities, as well as a generalized relationship between subject and self.

There are four basic types of everyday interactions (with variations) that inform the metaphor of the bifurcated person: manipulation of objects, location in space, social relations, and empathetic projections. Together with the folk theory of essence (described later) that states that the subject can be viewed as a person independent of the body (the subject is the essence of the person), they provide us with an elaborate conceptual system – five categories in all for our inner lives. As noted above, metaphors are learned through language acquisition and usage – a process deeply rooted in cultural socialization.

Subject and Self Metaphors in Hong Kong

Our findings suggest that bifurcated individuals do exist in Hong Kong and their locus of reason and control is not an agentic subject but a relational one subordinate to the consideration of others (Joy, 2001; King, 1985). These individuals generally tend toward an interdependent self-construal and act so that the origin of their behavior derives from the consideration of relevant others. They see themselves as having secondary control of their environment, but because they are inherently connected to others they also strive for social harmony. Their self therefore represents other persons (the relational self), with the generalized relationship in the Chinese context referred to as the subject and relational self.

The overarching focus of the subject-self metaphor in Hong Kong is the relational self, which continuously evaluates and negotiates with the subject. In turn, such self-talk or self-communication affects both self-construal and self-gifts, but this does not negate the presence of an inner independent self – one not totally submerged in relationships. Personal agency and self-determination do occur within particular situations, and we will identify the circumstances under which this happens. We further argue that the relational and independent selves should both be viewed as works in progress and thus amenable to change on an ongoing basis.

Table 2 supplies examples of metaphors for each of the five categories that were drawn from interviews with participants. The rationale is to understand how self-talk and self-communication occur and in turn how this affects self-giving. Without explaining how the self operates in Hong Kong, we cannot do justice to the discussion of self-giving, so we begin by analyzing the social self metaphor based on various social relationships: adversarial, parent–child, friendship, caretaker, and interlocutor. In the following discussion we demonstrate the dominance of the relational self and also draw attention to the presence of the independent self as it occurs.

The Social Self Metaphor in Hong Kong

The social self metaphor, according to Lakoff and Johnson (1999), operates on the premise that we develop our earliest social relationships in the context of the family and then expand them to include others. At this stage, we learn to evaluate our actions in terms of how family and non-family members evaluate us and in terms of what they do. We then use this knowledge about our personal relationships to conceptualize our inner lives and to evaluate the various relationships between the subject and the self. We will

Table 2. Metaphors of Subject and Relational Self Used by Participants.

1.	*Social self metaphor*	
1.1	Subject/self as adversaries	
1.1a	I am torn between doing the right thing and marrying Marina or marrying Eva	Ngo zoi syn zak jing tsey Marina wak Eva si, gem dou kwen wak bet on
1.2	Subject/self as parent–child	
1.2a	I will reward myself when I reach my goal	Dong dat dou muk biu, ngo wui zoeng lae zi gei
1.2b	It is self-appraisal with reward but not at the expense of family	Zi ngo ping ga dik zoeng lae bet jing fong bei ga ting lei jik
1.3	Subject/self as servant	
1.3a	I told myself to prepare for Chinese New Year celebrations ahead of time	Ngo gou sou zi gei jiu zoen zou wae nung lik sen nin dik hing zuk zok tsoet zoen bei
1.3b	I tell myself to be persistent in achieving high goals	
1.4	Self as caretaker	
1.4a	I promised myself a vacation when all the goals have been met	Dong so jay muk biu jyn sing, ngo wui jay jet go ga kei
1.4b	I promised myself a digital camera when I am done with the examinations	Dong hao si jyn git, ngo wui jin tsing dai ga
1.5	Subject/self as interlocutors	
1.5a	I talk things over with myself before I do anything important	Dong jiu zou jet se zung jiu dik si tsing, ngo wui fan fuk si hao
1.6	Subject meeting standards of self	
1.6a	Don’t betray yourself	Bet jiu hei pin zi gei
1.6b	I always question my ability	Ngo soeng soeng wai ji zi gei dik neng lik
2.	The essential self	
2.1	True self does not fit essence	
2.1a	She hides a knife inside her smile	Ta siu lei tsong dou
2.1b	He has a human face but a wild animal’s heart	Ta jen min sau sem
2.1c	Pretend to be a pig in order to eat a tiger	Ta ga zong jy tsoen

Table 2. (*Continued*)

2.2	True self fits essence	
2.2a	Be tough in business but be pleasant at home	Zoi gung zok si jiu jim suk, zoi ga si jiu tsen tsit
2.2b	If you are true to yourself, you would not behave very politely in front of your in laws	Joek nei dey tsen ga biu jin dek hen jay lae mao, nei ho bet si dey zi gei zen set
2.3	True self hides behind external self	
2.3a	Pretend and work hard at it to not reveal the actual facts	Ga zong wo nou lik gung zok hey jim sik si set
3.	The locational self/scattered self	
3.1	Self as container	
3.1a	You should take a good look at yourself	Nei jing goi ngok gun dey doi zi gei
4.	The physical object self	
4.1a	I look like I have lost my head	Ngo set hey zap zung
4.2b	I am day dreaming	Ngo zoi zou bak jet mung
4.2c	I am so scared that my spirit is not attached to my body	Ngo gem dou sep fen ging fong, wen bet fu sen
4.2d	God is not looking after the place	Sen bing bet ziu gu ze go dei fong
5.	The multiple selves metaphor	
5.1a	Sometimes you act like a fool to please the boss while on the other hand you are a bossy superior who demands a lot from your staff	Jay si nei jet fong min ban zok jy tsoen loi tou hou lou ban, ling jet fong min nei koek zou dai lou ban, dey ha suk jiu kau do do
5.1b	In front of my husband I am a sweet wife and I am good daughter in front of my friends	Zoi zoeng fu min tsin, ngo si jet go wen jau dik tai tai; zoi peng jau min tsin, ngo si jet go hou ney ji
5.1c	If I were you, I would leave him	Jy gwo ngo si nei, ngo wui lei hoi ta
5.1d	If I were you, I would feel sad as well	Jy gwo ngo si nei, ngo jik wui gem dou soeng sem

begin with the adversarial relations between the subject and the relational self in Hong Kong.

Subject and Relational Self as Adversaries. When there is inner conflict, the subject relational self is in an adversarial position, as illustrated by the phrase some of our participants used to describe romantic relationships in which they vacillated between satisfying their own desires and those of their relevant others: "I am struggling with myself as to how to proceed in this relationship." Justin (executive) was caught in a romantic dilemma because he wished to marry not his long-term girlfriend, Marina, but his new one, Eva: "I am torn between doing the right thing and marrying Marina or marrying Eva." He could marry Marina, an action that would be deemed right based on how others interpreted his behavior, or he could go against convention and marry Eva, the woman he really loved. If he performed the first action (in line with the concept of the relational subject), he would please everybody but himself, though pleasing others would give him pleasure as well. But if he married for love – an act of independence – not only would be censured by his and Marina's families, but everybody involved would lose face. In his own words this "new and strange thought of putting his own needs before anyone else's" was creating a terrible dilemma for him.

More than one participant faced this problem because they believed that, in matters of the heart, they could act independently of the family. On the other hand, as David (executive) noted, if one loved one's family sufficiently, one would not want to displease or dishonor it. Regardless of how this matter is resolved, it draws attention to the conflict between the relational and the independent self – a point of contention between the younger generation, who are open to western values and culture, and their parents, who are less so.

Subject as Parent and Self as Child. In a parent–child relationship, the parent bears the responsibility for socializing the child to adulthood (Lakoff & Johnson, 1999). Furthermore, the parent always controls the child, even when the latter is pampered, and, conversely, the child always defers to the authority of the parent. Many participants noted that when they wanted to buy themselves gifts for finishing a project (executives) or completing a course (students), they would first consult with their families, even though they were going to spend their own money. Self-gifts were never purchased with family money. In such decisions, the relational subject very much prevails as evidenced by the executive Francis: "I will reward myself when I reach my goal" (Table 2, 1.2a). When probed, he noted that he was going to reward himself by treating both himself and his family to a short vacation. Another executive, Victor, defined self-gift as "self-appraisal with reward," but "not at the expense of family" (Table 2, 1.2b). Victor's strong desire to express himself (independent self) was tempered somewhat by the alignment with the relational self. We therefore distinguish between mature and financially independent executives who are concerned with saving face and students who may still be developing their own identities and thus are more amenable to family pressure.

Subject and Relational Self as Companions: Servant, Caretaker, and Interlocutor. The categories of the self are limited in the Chinese context. In the case of the self-as-servant metaphor, Heather (executive) uttered, "I told myself to prepare for Chinese New Year celebrations ahead of time," suggesting that the self appears as a companion who can be told to act in a specific way by the subject. Since Chinese New Year marks an important family celebration, making plans to accomplish such goals constitutes an act informed by the relational self. In other words, Heather's concern for being with the family makes her take such actions. Another example of this metaphor came from Victor (executive): "I tell myself to be persistent in achieving high goals" (Table 2, 1.3b), implying that a person should work hard at being successful and bringing honor to the family. On the other hand, the desire to act as an independent agent and be successful is also apparent in Victor's comments, which fall in line with his earlier observations about rewarding himself. Thus, in Heather's case, the relational self can be seen more as guiding rather than serving the subject, while in Victor's case the independent and relational selves are equally present.

Caretaking and conversing with one's self are also traits associated with the bifurcated self. In the first instance, the self is the object of care, but, in the case of our participants, this caretaking role was facilitated by the approval of relevant others. When Jacqueline (executive) was questioned about her statement, "I promised myself a holiday when all the work-related goals were met" (Table 2, 1.4a), it became clear that doing her job well is a face-saving device that also brings honor to the family, thereby making both the independent and the relational self equally important. On the other hand, Yvonne's (student) utterance, "I promised myself a camera when I finished my examinations" (Table 2, 1.4b), which we explored in more detail with her, places greater emphasis on the relational self because good grades will bring credit to the family. In sum, self-indulgences should not disrupt harmonious family relations. Because Jacqueline's parents insisted she take a vacation with her friend and Yvonne's sister helped her buy a digital camera, neither woman was perceived as selfish.

The situation where the subject and the self appear as interlocutors also partially applies in the Chinese context. Francis (executive) noted, "I look at all the angles and convince myself before I do anything important." Once again, the context must be understood: the reason why such extensive talking and debating with oneself happens is to ensure that relevant others (colleagues and family) are not hurt or harmed in any way. As painful as self-examination may be, it is undertaken with relevant others in mind.

Subject is Obligated to Meet the Standards of the Relational Self. Finally, in our discussions with David and Patrick on this matter, they each uttered phrases illustrating the notion that the subject is obligated to meet the standards of the relational self. "Don't betray yourself" (Table 2, 1.6a), said David, suggesting he is generally concerned about being true to what he has learned within the culture, while Patrick's statement, "I always question myself" (Table 2, 1.6b), conveys that he is always cognizant of others in his dealings with them. Patrick always questions how his actions will affect others – primarily friends and family, and in both instances, the relational self has the higher priority.

The Essential Self in Hong Kong

According to Lakoff and Johnson (1999), the folk theory of self suggests that every individual is unique and distinct from all others. This notion involves three true selves: the first is incompatible with how we think because the behavior of the self does not fall in line with the essence of the subject; the second is compatible with what and how we think because it fits the essence of the subject; the third hides behind the external self. Three examples will illustrate the first case. Rita (executive) disclosed that a colleague of hers "hides a knife inside her smile," while Richard (student) described a male acquaintance as having "a human face but a wild animal's heart." Both metaphors imply the misalignment of external self with subjective essence. Janice's phrase "pretend to be a pig in order to eat a tiger" suggests the person is pretending to be naïve in order to harm someone or to avoid taking responsibility. In all three instances, participants pointed out that people generally commit only to family or close friends, so the behaviors described above designate actions taken toward members of the out-group.

In the case of true self fits essence, Jacqueline's (executive) advice, "Be tough in business but be pleasant at home," suggests that external actions should be in line with one's internal thoughts. Rita's (executive) statement follows suit: "If you are true to yourself, you cannot behave very politely in front of your in-laws." In both instances the essence of the person and his or her actions are viewed as being compatible with culturally appropriate behavior.

The third situation involves face work because people are taught to give and receive face. Justin's (executive) phrase "pretend and work hard at it (job at hand) to not reveal the actual facts" (Table 2, 2.3a) suggests that if you do not want to lose your or the other's face, pretend to work hard at maintaining that relationship. For various culturally appropriate reasons, manifestations of the inner self are not always preferred actions.

The Locational and Scattered Selves. The locational metaphor is premised on the notion that, when people are in their normal surroundings, they feel in control (Lakoff & Johnson, 1999), implying that a familiar location allows the subject to control the self (container metaphor). The special case where one can step outside of oneself to examine one's actions is often used in Hong Kong. For example, Julie's (student) mother would admonish her by saying "you should take a good look at yourself" (Table 2, 3.1a), suggesting that her daughter had become too selfish and she was encouraging her to consider other people as well.

The Physical Object Self. Manipulating and controlling objects as in "self control is object control" and "self control as object possession" is another basic metaphor for our inner lives (Lakoff & Johnson, 1999). When referred to positively, this type of self-control leads to feelings of exhilaration because it engenders a sense of freedom; when addressed negatively, self-control causes lack of control and fear. It can even be extended to situations where an individual feels possessed by a ghost as illustrated by Ada's (executive) comment "I am so scared that my spirit is not attached to my body." Paul (student) uttered the phrase "god is not looking after the place" to imply that the right spirits were not helping him, an example of the self being taken over by another subject.

The references to spirits, the soul, and god are significant, for the Chinese cultivate the notion that human beings must live in harmony with their ancestors and nature. The living must worship the dead to maintain the scheme of things (calendar ceremonies) and propitiate them in the right locations so that they can provide for the wealth and happiness of the household. Again, the notion of location is important, for god, spirits, and ghosts that are out of place can bring misfortune (Stafford, 2000). In Cantonese the term for good fortune or luck is *fāt chóy* and every attempt is made to reduce bad luck or misfortune. But there is a strong belief that the proper use of rituals and etiquette *laih* in the worship of ancestors and spirits will ensure the flow of good fortune for the family.

The Multiple Selves Metaphor in Hong Kong
According to Lakoff and Johnson (1999, p. 280), multiple selves may be conceptualized as multiple values with each self instantiating the social role associated with the values. A negative outcome occurs when indecisiveness about values is viewed as the subject's indecisiveness about which self to associate with. Sam (executive) said, "sometimes you act like a fool to please the boss, while other times you are a bossy superior who demands a lot from your staff" (Table 2, 5.1a). Here the implication is that the individual vacillates between being subservient and being bossy because he does not like being told what to do. Face considerations are also important as evidenced by Sam's statement and Kay's (executive) description of her two selves: "I am a sweet wife to my husband and a good daughter to my parents" (Table 2, 5.1b). Here, she is referring to personal values that do not contradict each other for each is appropriate within the context.

We have demonstrated that bifurcated individuals exist in Hong Kong and that the relational self takes precedence over self as subject, but this does not negate the importance of personal agency in the actions of individuals. Next we shall demonstrate how communication between the subject and the relational self impacts the process of self-giving. As we shall see, the relational self more often than not dominates in the act of self-giving, which is based on recognizing the achievements of the independent self.

SELF-COMMUNICATION AND SELF-GIFTS

Self-gifts must be understood in the overall context of gift exchanges, self-construals, and self-communication within Chinese culture. A gift for a friend, as a participant observed, is akin to a "hat placed on a commodity," or adding value to a commodity, and in the process of giving, layering an existing relationship. If we extend this idea to the self-gift, the following must be kept in mind: Self-indulgent acts are undertaken only when they do not harm relevant others, so if one layers a relationship, it is only after others have been taken into consideration. Present in the concept of personhood and buttressed by Chinese cultural values, interdependence is the preferred mode of cultural existence and is variously instilled from birth until death. But personal agency, manifest in individual actions and particularly in the act of self-giving, also prevails in Chinese culture. In sum, individuality and independence have their place, but the overriding sense of self is the relational self.

Our data indicate that participants distinguished between buying essential items, such as clothes, and puritanic reward gifts, mostly for working hard. For students and executives alike, reward purchases involved premeditation: one student had been thinking about it for at least three months, and some executives for six.

Parents generally instill an attitude of interdependence in their children and their efforts are sometimes thwarted when their offspring insist on buying gifts for themselves. They justify their purchases as follows: they pay for these items with their own money (money earned through part-time jobs or received as gifts from family members on special occasions, such as Chinese New Year) and they buy themselves reward gifts for doing well in school. Despite the general clash in values, many parents did not see their children's purchases as acts of uncontrolled extravagance or independence because the money did not come out of the family coffer and because scholastic achievements enhanced the family's social status. Some even observed that times had changed and seemed resigned to the fact that their children had been exposed to Western values and culture.

In a limited number of instances, parents condemned these purchases as a waste of money as evidenced by the following statements: "There is no place in the house for useless items" or "There is no place in the cupboard even for useful items such as clothes and shoes." Mrs. Wong, the mother of one of our participants, was interviewed in her home and expressed concern that her daughter Sylvia was spending too much time and money on cosmetics, handbags, and toys. She then showed us Sylvia's bed, which was brimming over with gadgets, personal goods, and toys, leaving almost no space in the apartment for any more consumer goods, the mother lamented.

High-income executives tended to buy and justify expensive reward gifts, such as digital cameras, designer clothing, and dinner with friends at fancy restaurants, by saying these expenditures enhanced their family's stature. Brandon had bought himself a Mercedez Benz as a reward for professional achievement (independent self), adding that the car was to be used not just by him but by the entire family (relational self). Brandon was proud that he had "made it" (his words) at the young age of 40, but the praises of family and friends had made the gift extra special. Another executive, Charles, was made "champion of the year" in his district office, so he felt justified buying himself a Sony digital organizer. But he also took his family on a week's vacation to Thailand as part of his self-gift. While sharing with important others is a central consideration, saving face for oneself (personal achievements of executives) is clearly important as well.

Like the students, the executives saw these gifts as ways of encouraging and rewarding themselves for their professional accomplishments. The married executives also stated that they had bought these items with monies allocated for personal expenditures, but only after they received approval from their wives and, in some cases, their parents. Both students and executives justified the acquisition of expensive and brand-name items by saying that their relevant others never suffered because of their purchases. Two executives elaborated: "I don't feel guilty because I also buy gifts for my family and friends" (Wency); "I take care of other people" and "I make sure that no one is left out" (Michael). Buying a gift to reward accomplishment, observed Michael, was normal in Chinese culture because it brought honor to the family, but his statement does not subvert the fact that being independent and successful (autonomous self) are also important attributes (see also Ger & Belk, 1999 for information on self-gifts in other cultures).

Overall, our participants' attitude to reward gifts generally echoes that of their counterparts in the West, where goals and rewards motivate people to achieve future rewards (Kivetz & Simonson, 2002). But purchasing and consuming luxury items create guilt in the minds of North Americans because, consumers feel guiltiest about the things that provide them the greatest pleasure. Our participants believe they are entitled to luxury goods if they worked hard for them (theme of deserving) (see also Kivetz & Simonson, 2002), but they experience little or no guilt because they were acquired with their family's blessing. Furthermore, since their actions derive from some form of collective agency, they receive greater support for them and consequently believe they have earned the right to indulge themselves.

There is a trade-off between spending money on essential and non-essential luxuries in Hong Kong, but self-control as an expression of personal agency is not the issue here. Instead, a form of collective agency allows for mental accounting of a special kind – a balance between hedonic and essential spending. If others are taken care of financially, indulgences toward oneself and relevant others based on achievement of goals are encouraged. Reward gifts, as Mick (1996, p. 116) says, are perhaps the best example of a sincere attempt to rectify the persistent urge to say no to ourselves in daily life.

Romantic or whimsical self-gifts require greater justification than reward gifts in Hong Kong because people felt guilty about them. Most students derived pleasure from activities, such as listening to music, going to the movies, and playing computer games, because they were inexpensive and could be done with other people. Similarly, most of the businessmen engaged in consumer experiences involving close friends, such as having a massage, drinking beer, or going to a restaurant. When buying a whimsical gift, costs do come into play and trade-offs between purchasing necessary and luxury items have to be considered. Some participants explained that whimsical gifts require greater justification primarily from a self-control perspective, but they admitted that they sometimes bought themselves special gifts just for the pleasure of it. For example, Janice (student) noted that, because she did not have a boyfriend to buy her flowers on Valentine's Day, she bought herself some roses, which she greatly enjoyed. The sense of luxury and specialness associated with such a gift was not lost on her. Perhaps, as Belk (1996, p. 64) argues, such gifts are intended to address higher-order needs of love, self-esteem, and self-actualization, and not basic needs. Pleasing oneself was also linked to purchasing items that would provide pleasure over the long term. An amateur photographer, Ronny (executive), had bought himself an expensive camera to develop his photography skills. On the whole, pleasing oneself with a whimsical self-gift or an imaginative self-indulgence was less common than a reward self-gift, but romantic self-gifts did provide the few individuals who indulged themselves much pleasure.

Our participants rarely purchased therapeutic self-gifts, a phenomenon that contradicts the findings of Mick and De Moss (1990b, 1992), and Baumeister (2002), who posit that emotional distress can undermine one's self-control. These researchers suggest that when people become upset, they tend to engage in negative behaviors, such as eating unhealthily, seeking immediate gratification, or engaging in aggression – all to make themselves feel better. Ultimately, these negative behaviors override self-regulatory goals, such as saving money (Baumeister, 2002, p. 671), but this was not necessarily the case with our Hong Kong students and executives. When they were depressed, most students said they listened to music, slept, spent time with friends, played computer games, or watched television, while the executives went out "for a drink with friends," "for dinner with family," or "relaxed at home to get over minor depression." Shopping – even for themselves – was far from their minds, because they did not think that purchasing goods would make them feel better. A few students and executives did buy items, such as stationary, clothes, and specialty foods, to cheer themselves up. For instance, David (executive) bought himself a fitness package because the source of his depression was his poor health, while Francis (executive) said a short holiday to the mainland was a good way of getting over a career disappointment. Karanda (student), on the other hand, indulged in a less expensive purchase – tasty Japanese snacks to get through a bad day. So while a portion of our data may support Baumgartner's (2002) findings, we found that most of our participants did not generally indulge themselves with consumer goods to improve their mood. We argue that part of the reason could be the presence of relevant others to comfort an individual through an emotional crisis.

Finally, in terms of holiday self-gifts, a distinction must be made between birthday gifts and items bought for rituals, such as Chinese New Year. People do indulge themselves on their birthdays, but the norm is that others give you gifts on your birthday. Some participants (both students and executives) added that when either close family or friends failed to buy them the gifts they wanted, such as chocolates, trips, digital cameras, computer games, handbags, and cell phones, they had no choice but to make these purchases themselves. For example, Jordan (student) accompanied his friends on a trip to Japan as part of his birthday celebration. For occasions like Valentine's Day, some students admitted they bought themselves gifts in order to make themselves feel important. Erica bought herself chocolates, because her boyfriend had forgotten, but she also wanted to save both her and her boyfriend's face in front of their friends.

Students and executives alike acknowledged that they bought themselves gifts during the Christmas season because Christmas is a gift-giving holiday all around the world. Furthermore, major sales are held from Christmas until after Chinese New Year, so it is financially feasible to purchase items during this period. In addition, if our participants had not bought themselves a gift for their birthday, they felt free to pamper themselves and spend more than usual. Julia (student) purchased an expensive designer bag during the Christmas holidays because she did not buy herself a birthday gift. She also noted that she exchanged gifts with her best friend at Christmas because the occasion demanded it. Michael (executive) had bought himself a pair of cuff links and a wallet, which were not too expensive, but just enough to make him happy. Many participants added that their friends accompanied them when they bought themselves birthday gifts, and the opinions and approval of either a family member or close friend helped to justify the purchase.

However, the majority bought themselves new clothes and shoes for Chinese New Year because, when the New Year replaces the Old, all families, particularly children, are expected to wear new clothes. Parents encouraged their children to wear new apparel on such an auspicious occasion, and, as a result, participants did not view this type of purchase as a gift even though they regarded it as special. When questioned further, they admitted to buying clothes with the color red in them, because red is considered auspicious and lucky. In fact, on New Year's Day (Yan, 1996) the younger generation receives money in red packets.

Overall, both groups displayed a similar propensity for certain types of self-gifts, but they both noted that neither their parents nor grandparents would indulge themselves accordingly. The older generation preferred to save than spend, and if they bought things, they were to be used by the entire family, not just by individuals. The exceptions were purchases made by one spouse for another: one parent would buy the other a special gift for a birthday or a special occasion, such as a wedding anniversary.

CONCLUSIONS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

We began this study by asking whether self-giving as a practice exists in an interdependent society like Hong Kong, and if it does, whether it ties in with self-construal and self-communication. Previous research, largely empirical, had provided some directions for our study. Lakoff and Johnson (1999) were surprised at the similarities between the Japanese and American cultural conceptualizations of the self, which raises the question, just how universal are they? First, our research suggests that the subject-self metaphor, while central to our argument, must be modified to reflect the complexities of Chinese culture. Second, we show that agency in Hong Kong is linked to the collective rather than the individual and hence the relational self is more dominant in such a system. Yet there is also evidence to support the existence of the independent self in Hong Kong. Our data show that collective agency and personal agency are not mutually exclusive and that the flexibility of participants in moving between the two entities depends entirely on the situation.

Collective agency assumes a motivation toward activities in which the origin of thought and behavior emanates from a group (Markus & Kitayama, 1991). To the extent that participants felt they had to adjust to their environment – respond and address the needs of others and restrain their own needs and desires – they perceived themselves as having secondary control over the environment. Individual agency, on the other hand, assumes that people will see themselves as the origin of their own behavior and are therefore accountable for their own actions. To the extent that participants felt they could express their internal needs and desires, they perceived themselves as having some control over at least specific situations. In other words, participants expressed a moderate amount of individual self-control over their actions, even though restraint over the inner self was generally viewed as a much higher value than the expression of the inner self in interdependent cultures (Markus & Kitayama, 1991). Together, actions of individuals over a period of time contribute to creating a particular definition of the autobiographical self in Hong Kong – one that emphasizes collective agency without sacrificing personal autonomy.

According to Baumeister (2002) and Kivetz and Simonson (2002), self-control – a behavioral manifestation of the autobiographical self – is premised on the ability to alter one's responses. In the consumer context, self-control is largely viewed in terms of resisting temptations through auto-suggestion, the failure of which leads to impulsive purchases and expenditures. Our participants exercised self-control but it was accounted for at the collective level. Self-regulation of individual needs and desires in favor of group needs or desires is expected of anyone brought up in Chinese families, but this can happen only if self-communication happens. Self-talk or auto-suggestion thus moderates the specific actions of these individuals, leading to a specific type of autobiographical self – one that emphasizes interdependence but is also cognizant of an individual's autonomy in certain circumstances.

Our findings suggest that a continuum of self-giving, especially in the form of a whimsical, therapeutic, or holiday gift, exists in Hong Kong, with the puritanic reward gift prevailing by far. In this regard, an intergenerational difference must be factored in, for even though our participants were between 19 and 24 (students) and 25 and 50 (executives) years old, their parents or grandparents clearly rejected the practice of buying gifts for themselves. The older generation was more inclined to save their money, and generally disapproved of the younger generation's excessive purchases. Frugality is generally associated with the protestant ethic and the western spirit of capitalism, but in Hong Kong, which is certainly capitalistic, although not necessarily protestant, the fluctuating economic conditions might have induced the older generation to save for the future. Yet buying expensive or brand-name goods per se was not the problem: the younger generation's lack of consideration for relevant others (in the eyes of the older participants who were steeped in both Chinese and Western culture) in such undertakings was the critical issue.

Reward gifts for outstanding production or scholastic achievement tended to be extravagant because they brought prestige to both the winners and their families. This type of gift demonstrates to family members, especially to younger siblings, that hard work will be rewarded. Expensive or branded goods are bought on such occasions but not necessarily with money earmarked for family expenditures. Even though the purchase of a Mercedes Benz by one executive could be construed as self-aggrandizement, the emphasis was both on personal pleasure as well as on the recognition of his success by family and friends. It was earned for the family with a great deal of personal effort. The co-existence of the relational self with the independent self suggests that the cultural emphasis on connectedness with relevant others competes (at least in some instances) with an individual's desire for personal expression – at least in terms of reward gifts.

Next, the independent self becomes more important in the purchase of romantic or whimsical gifts. In this situation, our participants experienced guilt and felt that such gift purchases required greater justification. Members of both age segments did not buy many branded goods of a whimsical nature to please themselves, but looked for experiences with little or no financial outlay. Like their western counterparts, these participants exercised self-control and seemed to make a trade-off between purchasing essential and non-essential luxuries when it came to romantic gifts. Yet this could be partially explained by the fact that we sought answers to this issue in a direct manner rather than use projective techniques or other indirect means. Participants might have experienced more guilt for their personal indulgence, the latter being inadmissible given the focus on the relational self. But for those who felt the need for self-indulgence, the purchase of pleasure goods (special items of clothing, accessories and flowers) provided great satisfaction.

However, Hong Kong participants view therapeutic gifts differently. Both Baumeister (2002) and Mick and De Moss (1990) had noted that emotional distress in general caused U.S. consumers to buy goods for stress relief and immediate gratification. Baumeister (2002, p. 674), in particular, argues that people who are emotionally upset may be more likely to cast prudent self-control aside in the hope that purchasing goods or services will make them feel better. Many of our participants actually felt that depression could only be overcome by engaging in activities with family and good friends. Buying consumer goods did not necessarily alleviate their personal pain, but listening to music, playing computer games, or spending a relaxing day with family and friends were all they needed.

Self-gifts for special occasions, such as birthdays, were important, but many participants stated that they had family and friends who gifted them appropriately. But if they had set their heart on an item that was not given on such occasions, they felt justified purchasing the object. Indeed, when it came to birthday gifts, Mick's (1991, 1996) observation that those who are deficient in dyadic gift relationships may be more likely to indulge in self-gifts holds true to some extent. Although all participants had at least one friend they could exchange gifts with, particularly on birthdays, clearly the more exchange partners they had, the less they indulged in self-gifts.

Economic mental accounting seems to occur in the purchase process. When people bought self-gifts that they would normally not buy for themselves, especially for a job well done, price did not seem to be a constraint as long as it did not cause inconvenience to anyone in the family. Further, those who had exercised self-control prior to purchasing a gift were also likely to indulge themselves more (Baumeister, 2002). Some participants had observed that since they had not bought themselves anything for a special occasion, such as a birthday, they spent a bit more on special things for another occasion, such as Christmas. For occasions, such as Chinese New Year, they bought new clothes and shoes, but this was expected of them, and consequently they seldom perceived this as a self-gift.

Overall, self-gifts do not seem contradictory in the Chinese context since the key consideration is to take care of others in addition to oneself. Thus, self indulgence acquires a special form: One could buy oneself luxury objects if (1) relevant others were given gifts prior to or simultaneously with one's own purchase and (2) the money spent did not come out of the family coffer. The simple rule is that it should not cause inconvenience to any one in the family either in the present or in the future. Not surprisingly, many participants saved a lot of money so that they could then indulge themselves without feeling guilty.

TOWARD AN EPISTEMOLOGICAL CRITIQUE

Our Hong Kong data, which bears some similarity to the U.S. and Japanese data (Lakoff & Johnson, 1999), partially answers the question about the universality of the subject-self metaphor. Our research shows that although bifurcation of the self exists in Chinese culture, it assumes a specific form in line with the values of the culture. The philosophical, linguistic, and cultural roots of the relational self run deep, and interdependence occurs on a continuous basis through one's actions. Interrelatedness peaks in the family context where the individual is socialized to become a Chinese person. In addition, since the family is part of a community, the next level of interconnectedness and of networks develops between families in the community, ranging from close to good friends, to acquaintances (Joy, 2001). Our current research suggests the self-gift also falls on this continuum but only after the cultural caveats are considered.

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Overall, this study only scratches the surface of how individuals in a culture develop autobiographical selves and how this varies in both interdependent and independent cultures. We need to pay greater attention to systematically mapping these differences.

More specifically, this research fills an earlier gap identified by various scholars (Joy, 2001; Mick, 1996; Sherry, 1983) in the consideration of various types of self-gifts that exist in interdependent cultures such as China. Since verbal reports on personal indulgence (romantic gift goes against the concept of the relational self more than any other type of self-gift) might be misleading in terms of its occurrence, we need to pursue this line of research using appropriate indirect means. We also need to better understand why the therapeutic gift is not as important in Chinese culture and how it is linked with the emotional support system prevalent in the culture.

Further, we need to expand the sample size to include various age groups and different social classes. Insofar as women are actively and specifically involved in the production of interrelatedness, we need to understand how this affects acts of self-giving in Chinese culture.

Another line of research has to do with the sentiments of the Chinese who live outside of Hong Kong and the People's Republic of China (PRC), particularly those who live in the U.S., Canada, and Australia. Do these patterns hold true in the second and third generations? If so, what measures are taken to emphasize interrelatedness and how is it produced in the new context? Finally, we need to do more research on the PRC to see if gift- and self-giving differ in urban and rural areas and the specific contours they acquire in these different contexts.

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EXPLORING HOW ROLE-IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT STAGE MODERATES PERSON–POSSESSION RELATIONS

Susan Schultz Kleine, Robert E. Kleine III and Debra A. Laverie

ABSTRACT

In this article, we examine how person–possession relations vary across three stages of the role-identity cultivation processes. We explore stage-related variation in the accumulation of role-related consumption stimuli and their self-relevance in a cross-sectional sample of two freely chosen athletic role-identities. Results show that as individuals cultivate an identity they accumulate more role-related possessions, social ties, and media commitments, and evaluation of those elements becomes more positive, yet the impact of those stimuli on self-conception declines. Ultimately, the results suggest that a full understanding of person–possession relations must include consideration of how role-identity cultivation stage moderates relations between people and consumption stimuli.

Consumption symbols anchor our identities in observable evidence (Belk, 1988; McCracken, 1988; Grayson & Shulman, 2000) but those anchors

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change as our identities change (Myers, 1985). To begin to understand *how* self-change moderates our relations with consumption stimuli, Kleine and Kleine (2000) outlined five stages of self-cultivation for freely chosen, ordinary role-identities (e.g., bridge player, cross-country skier, fly fisherman). The five stages include presocialization, discovery, construction, maintenance, and disposition. The authors propose that how people relate to particular consumption stimuli will vary across the stages. That is, role-identity cultivation stage *moderates* relations between people and consumption stimuli.

For example, consider a person learning tennis for the first time. At the urging of friends who play, he acquires a tennis racket, tennis balls, and tennis shoes, learns basic rules of the game, and watches tennis tournaments on television. Although he has the consumption signs of the role signaling to others and to himself that he plays tennis, he does not yet confidently label himself a tennis player. Over time, he comes to enjoy tennis and finds he can play fairly well, at least according to what his friends say. He accumulates more tennis-related gear, products, and media (e.g., magazines, videos) helping him learn more and improve his game. Meanwhile others recognize improvements in his game. This feedback establishes his status as a tennis player in ways more convincing than mere ownership of tennis-related possessions. Now he is really starting to think of himself as a tennis player. That is, he starts to internalize the identity of tennis player and label himself accordingly. As he continues to cultivate his tennis identity he finds ways to integrate tennis into his lifestyle and spend more time with tennis. Tennis becomes important to his identity and if someone asks him to describe himself, "I play tennis" is likely to be mentioned. The tennis player has gone through a developmental process of internalizing a secure self-label describing the role-identity.

What is the role of products, and other consumption stimuli, in the role-cultivation process? To the rookie, tennis "stuff" signifies interest in tennis. According to symbolic self-completion theory (Wicklund & Gollwitzer, 1982), and findings in various identity-acquisition contexts (e.g., Becker, 1960, 1963; Donnelly & Young, 1988; Piliavin & Callero, 1991; Wheaton, 2000), rookies anchor identity claims with material symbols and other external evidence of the role (e.g., use of related media, association with others who play tennis). Having these role-appropriate things supports identity claims in lieu of more enduring evidence (e.g., performance ability). Veterans – individuals who possess performance behaviors and role expertise – are less dependent on external signs of an identity to make the identity claim ("I am a tennis player"). That is, as the tennis player accumulates consumption symbols demonstrating the identity claim, the relative importance of those things for propping up the self-definition gradually decreases. As this example illustrates, stage of identity cultivation *moderates* the relationship between an aspect of the self (an identity) and related possessions and consumption symbols.

In this article, we examine how person–possession relations vary across the three stages of the role-identity cultivation processes. We examine stage-related variation in the accumulation of role-related consumption stimuli, and their self-relevance, in a cross-sectional sample of two freely chosen athletic role-identities. Among other things, the results suggest that while people accumulate role-related possessions, social ties, and media commitments in the course of identity cultivation, and as evaluation of those elements becomes more positive, the impact of those stimuli on self-conception declines. Ultimately, the results suggest that a full understanding of person–possession relations requires considering how role-identity cultivation stage *moderates* relations between people and consumption stimuli.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Self and Consumption: A Symbolic Interactionist Social Identity Perspective

Symbolic interactionist identity theory undergirds our conceptualization. Originating from sociology, this version of identity theory (e.g., Burke & Reitzes, 1981; Hoelter, 1983; Piliavin & Callero, 1991; Stryker, 1980) has been applied to consumer behavior theoretically (Solomon, 1983) and empirically (Kleine, Kleine, & Kernan, 1993; Laverie, Kleine, & Kleine, 2002).[1] This perspective emphasizes how people assemble role-related consumption stimuli to cultivate role-identities.

Social identity theory casts role-identity cultivation not as just an inside out, internally driven process with consumption as the dependent variable (e.g., Piliavin & Callero, 1991). Rather, as Solomon (1983) asserts, and Kleine et al. (1993) support empirically, social stimuli, including possessions spur identity development from the outside-in. To clarify our use of concepts and terminology we explain key features of symbolic interactionist identity theory applied to consumption.

Role-Identity

"Identity," in consumer research, often refers to a person's overall or global self (e.g., Belk, 1988; Schouten, 1991). Symbolic interactionist social identity theory, in contrast, views a person's global self as a portfolio of hierarchically ranked role-identities. Each identity corresponds to a social role (Burke & Reitzes, 1981; Markus, 1977; Rosenberg, 1979; Solomon, 1983; Stryker, 1980; Turner, 1978). A role-identity is a person's individualized version of a social role (e.g., how Ed carries out his role as a cyclist, or how Ellen does her antique collection).

Role–Person Merger

As a person accumulates commitments to a role-identity (e.g., role-enabling possessions), the identity becomes more central to overall self-definition; that is, the person merges with the role (Turner, 1978). *Role–person merger* indicates the importance of a role-identity to a person's overall self-definition (Turner, 1978). For example, the role-identity of tennis player is central to self-definition for strongly committed individuals but not so for those new to the activity.

Greater role–person merger is associated with a number of characteristics (e.g., Becker, 1960, 1963; Burke & Reitzes, 1981; Piliavin & Callero, 1991; Stryker, 1980). One, greater role–person merger means the role-identity factors into a person's self-definition and self-evaluation to a greater extent. Two, the person devotes a greater percentage of time to the activity. Three, the person has more extensive role-related social ties and labels him- or herself as a person who performs the role. Four, the person displays role-appropriate attitudes and behaviors and other role-indicative cues (Turner, 1978). Five, the person uses role-related products and media (Kleine et al., 1993). Six, role-person merger predicts behavioral intentions, behaviors, and the stability of role behavior (e.g., Piliavin & Callero, 1991). These characteristics suggest that role–person merger is a useful way to identify commitment to, and experience with, a particular role-identity.

Signs of Identity Commitment

We associate social roles with particular stereotypical consumption constellations. A *consumption constellation* is "a cluster of complementary products, specific brands, and/or consumption activities associated with a social role." (Solomon & Assael, 1987, p. 191). For example, in Solomon and Buchanan's (1991) study respondents associated the Yuppie (young urban professional) lifestyle stereotype with foreign cars, imported wine, urban sports, gourmet ice cream, luxury appliances, and credit cards. As the example illustrates, consumption constellations demonstrate symbolic and instrumental complementarity (Englis & Solomon, 1995; Solomon, 1988; Solomon & Buchanan, 1991; Solomon & Englis, 1994). Not only are constellation elements necessary to enact a role, but they also signal to others "who I am," inviting reflected appraisals necessary for identity formation (Laverie et al., 2002; Solomon, 1983).

Our study involves people's personal versions of stereotypical consumption constellations. Individualized role-related consumption constellations include: an identity-related product cluster, social commitments, media commitments, and performance behaviors (Kleine et al., 1993; Laverie et al., 2002). A *role-related product cluster* (RRPC) is the set of products instrumentally and symbolically supporting identity enactment for an individual consumer (Kernan & Sommers, 1967). For example, most tennis players assemble tennis equipment, clothing, and accessories. The particular products and brands in the consumption set tend to become more idiosyncratic and less stereotypical with the accumulation of experience and knowledge of the role (Englis & Solomon, 1995; Solomon & Douglas, 1987).

Successful role-identity cultivation requires investing in social commitments. *Social commitments* are the role-related social ties people accumulate as they cultivate the role-identity. Social interactions are essential because they shape and support a person's emerging self-definition-in-role through the mechanism of reflected appraisals (Solomon, 1983).

We tend to associate particular roles with specific media (Solomon & Buchanan, 1991). For example, Yuppies were associated with particular television programs and upscale magazines (Solomon & Buchanan, 1991). Individuals cultivating a role accumulate related *media commitments* (e.g., magazines, newspapers, books, videos). Media extend identity-related social networks, augment identity-related knowledge, and provide additional bases for evaluation of self in role (Richins, 1991; Solomon & Douglas, 1987).

A role-identity consumption constellation also includes accumulated *performance* behaviors. Performance evidence provides "real" proof of an identity claim. This evidence has greater effect on self-image in role and continued pursuit of the role (Laverie et al., 2002) than do possessions and other less-enduring symbols of identity (Wicklund & Gollwitzer, 1982). Accumulating role-related possessions, social ties, media, and performances constitutes evidence of the identity and encourages the reflected appraisal process that leads to internalizing the role-identity.

Internalizing a Role-Identity

People use the available evidence to gradually form self-perceptions (Bem, 1972) of themselves with respect to a role. The evidence is anything observable including one's own identity-relevant behaviors and accumulated consumption constellation elements (possessions, media, social ties). Other people use this same evidence to infer the roles played by another, leading to reflected appraisals that fuel identity internalization (Solomon, 1983). In a series of studies of voluntary blood donation, Piliavin and Callero (1991) found that with repeated donations veteran donors internalized self-perceptions as donors, based on behavioral experience and reflections from others (e.g., donation staff, other donors). Donnelly and Young's (1988) ethnographic studies of climbers and rugby players portrayed that identity-internalization occurred in phases. Becker's (1960, 1963) in-depth observations about role-identity adoption demonstrated that accumulating role-related social ties encouraged identity internalization. Upon forming the self-identification, the role behavior becomes self-sustaining (Becker, 1960; Charng, Piliavin, & Callero, 1988; Donnelly & Young, 1988; Piliavin & Callero, 1991).

Rookies versus Veterans and Self-Completion

Identity internalization has important implications for how people use consumption constellations at different stages of identity development. Symbolic self-completion theory (Wicklund & Gollwitzer, 1982) asserts that people new to a role-identity rely upon more easily obtained symbols of self-definition (e.g., products) because that is all they have. For example, newcomers to rugby, climbing, and windsurfing placed greater emphasis on visible, observable elements of the stereotypical role style (Donnelly & Young, 1988; Wheaton, 2000). Rookie blood donors, who had yet to assemble evidence of a donor self-definition, were more attuned to, and motivated by, external pressures (e.g., social ties, media appeals; Piliavin & Callero, 1991).

In contrast, veterans are less sensitive to external pressures. Having internalized the self-definition, veterans depend less on external stimuli to indicate the identity (Solomon, 1983; Solomon & Douglas, 1987). They have accumulated more enduring, more "real" evidence from which to form their self-perceptions. Enduring evidence includes role-identity knowledge, experiences, procedural expertise, and social ties (Wicklund & Gollwitzer, 1982). For example, Solomon and Douglas (1987) found that experienced female business professionals relied less on business sources about how to dress professionally because they were more knowledgeable about role-appropriate behaviors.

An interesting implication of veterans needing to rely less on externally observable evidence is this: as a person successfully accumulates externally observable consumption constellation elements, the *importance* of those elements for role-identity self-definition falls. That is, as role-identity development progresses through its stages, the relationship between self and role-related consumption changes systematically. This is the basic idea we explore here.

Stages of the Identity Project Life Cycle for Ordinary Consumption Activities

Kleine and Kleine (2000) outlined five stages of role-identity development for freely chosen, ordinary role-identities (e.g., bridge player, cross-country skier, fly fisherman; see Fig. 1): role-identity presocialization, discovery, construction, maintenance, and disposition. The following descriptions of the stages are based on Kleine and Kleine's (2000) stage descriptions, empirical findings in various contexts (blood donor, marijuana smoker, climbers, rugby players, windsurfers), and the results of depth interviews with aerobics participants (Laverie, 1995). The stages apply to the domain of freely chosen, achieved identities, not to ascribed identities (e.g., gender, racial, or ethnic status).

Presocialization
Before taking personal interest in a role-identity activity, people usually have tacit cultural knowledge about it, especially for aspirational roles (Lowery, Englis, Shavitt, & Solomon, 2001). Media and exposure to role-group members convey information, although role images consist of an outsider's "caricatured and stereotypical" conceptions of role-behaviors (Donnelly & Young, 1988, p. 225).

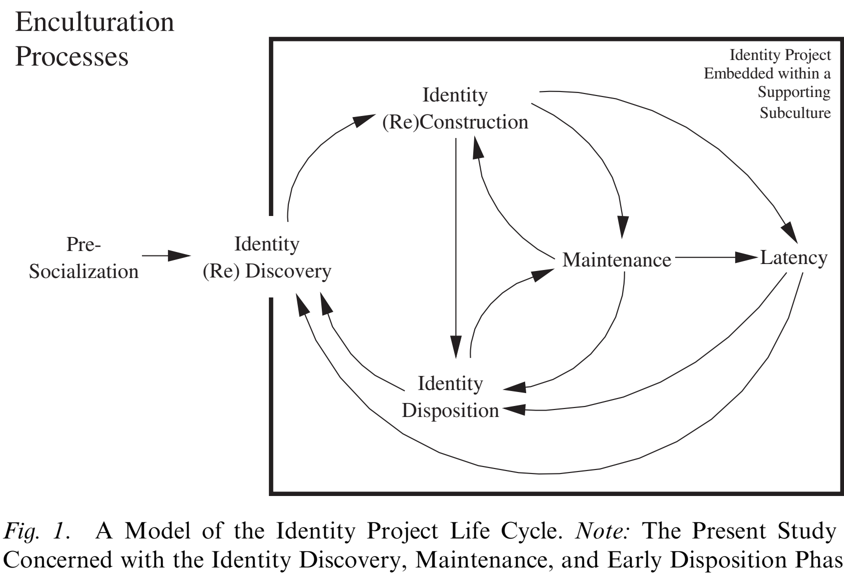

Fig. 1. A Model of the Identity Project Life Cycle. *Note:* The Present Study is Concerned with the Identity Discovery, Maintenance, and Early Disposition Phases Only. *Source:* Reproduced with Permission from Kleine and Kleine (2000).

Identity Discovery

The goal of identity discovery is to assess the potential fit of a new identity with the identities that already comprise one's self-definition. The individual asks himself, ''Should I do this?'' or ''Do people like me do this?'' (Piliavin & Callero, 1991). Invitation, encouragement, or coercion from others usually initiates role exploration (Becker, 1963; Donnelly & Young, 1988; Piliavin & Callero, 1991). The role-identity is not internalized and role–person merger is low. Understanding of the role remains an outsider's perspective (Donnelly & Young, 1988). Limited identity-related social ties and experience force rookies to rely on stereotypical perceptions of role-appropriate behavior for evaluating identity progress (''How am I doing?''). Rookies have yet to develop enduring, genuine indicators of the identity claim and must rely more on external indicators of the role (Donnelly & Young, 1988; Wicklund & Gollwitzer, 1981, 1982; Wheaton, 2000).

Identity Construction

At the identity construction stage the individual actively devotes time, energy, and resources to the identity. A person no longer asks, ''Should I do this?'' but instead ''When, or how should I do this activity?'' (Piliavin & Callero, 1991). The person continues accumulating appropriate possessions, media, and social ties. Adoption of the values, perceptions, and attitudes of the role-related group also begins (Donnelly & Young, 1988). A novice may learn, for example, that overt display of certain role-symbols is not appropriate. Expanding one's identity-supporting social ties provides expanded opportunities to experience identity-confirming (or disconfirming) feedback from others. Positive experiences and feedback (reflected appraisals) facilitate role–person merger development (Becker, 1960; Hoelter, 1983; Piliavin & Callero, 1991) and encourage continued pursuit of the role-identity (Laverie et al., 2002).

Identity Maintenance

In maintenance the role identity is ''me.'' The self-label has been internalized and role–person merger peaks (Becker, 1960, 1963; Piliavin & Callero, 1991). Having developed an insider's perspective (Donnelly & Young, 1988; Piliavin, Evans, & Callero, 1984; Wheaton, 2000), a person can read the subcultural landscape and can recognize behaviors and symbols that characterize expertise. For example, callused and cracked heels are symbols veteran river runners use to infer identity cultivation stage (Fletcher, 1997). Identity veterans continually refine consumption constellations and reconfirm the identity via established social ties. Self-completing behavior is less evident (Wicklund & Gollwitzer, 1981, 1982). Although accumulation of possessions, media, and social ties continues, those stimuli decline in importance to self-definition.

Identity maintenance may endure for a lengthy period of time, lapse into latency, or fall into disposition. Latency involves putting an identity "on the shelf" for a limited time but eventually returning to the identity behaviors. Disposition is a permanent ending of identity enactment.

Identity Disposition

Identity disengagement occurs by choice or external force. Something prompts the question, "Is it time to stop doing this?" or "Is this still me?" (Piliavin & Callero, 1991). Role–person merger falls during disposition. In early disposition the person intends to withdraw, but continues a reduced set of identity behaviors. Advanced disposition is marked by reduction or cessation of identity-related activities. Self-perceptions indicating "I am no longer that type of person" accompany declining reflected appraisals, as does reduced social interaction related to the identity, and fewer role-related material investments. For purposes of this study, the focus is in early disposition involving intentions to engage less frequently in identity-related activities.

Importance to Self

The role-identity cultivation model just described traces the progression of a single role-identity. This progression is contextualized within the portfolio of role-identities comprising the global self. The proposed model does not require that a person ever become highly committed to an identity. For example, one of the authors has been a teapot collector for many years. Asked to describe herself, the author would rarely invoke the teapot collector identity. Nonetheless, this peripheral role-identity influences how family and friends interact with her, especially with regard to gift-giving.[2] References in this paper to "greater role-person merger" or "less role–person merger" mean that the importance to the individual of a given role-identity is greater or lesser than it was at an earlier point in time.

Detecting Role-Identity Cultivation Phase

Asking people for knowledge, performance expertise, or how long they have enacted a particular role is not the best way to identify an individual's current phase of identity cultivation. Intentions for future identity enactment provide a more direct way to identify stages of identity development. Stages are defined by the person's self-perceptions and plans for future cultivation directed toward achieving their identity-ideal. Has the person just begun to explore the identity (discovery)? Is the person actively cultivating the identity, but wishes to cultivate it much more (construction)? Has the person reached a point where she feels comfortable with her level of participation (maintenance)? Or, does the person anticipate declining participation and interest in the role-related activities (decline)?

Consider two cyclists, both fitting the description of the identity construction phase. The role-identity-ideal schema (Kleine et al., 1993) of one includes competing in the rigorous 116-mile Tour de Tucson. The other cyclist is equally committed to a less-demanding goal – a weekly ride with friends down the 10-mile Slippery Elm bike path. Despite their differing goals, each cyclist is at the construction phase in which people strive toward unmet identity ideals. Thus, uncovering a person's intentions for future identity pursuit provides the most direct way to detect stage of identity cultivation.

Role-Identity Cultivation versus Life Cycle Development and Aging

Life cycle or life-stage theories portray universal, age-associated phases of global identity development spanning a lifetime. The role-identity cultivation model involves a single, freely chosen role-identity independent of self-developmental phase or chronological age (e.g., early adulthood).

Identity cultivation may begin at any age, assuming possession of adequate skills. The celebrated folk artist Anna Mary Robertson Moses (a.k.a. Grandma Moses) first explored painting in her 70s. Regionalist artist and portraitist J.P. Olmes began cultivating the artist identity in his 20s. Although 50 years of life experience separate the age when each initiated identity cultivation, we suggest that the structure of the identity cultivation process was similar for each artist. Consider a teenager and middle-aged individual struggling through beginner tennis lessons. Although their physical abilities, resources, and motivations may vary, their respective tennis player identities progress along similar paths.

Age or life stage may be associated with circumstances that inhibit identity progression, such as being unable to access necessary identity-enabling commitments (e.g., possessions, social ties), being unable to fit the new identity into the role-identities already comprising the global self (e.g., overextended parent), or experiencing events that alter the identity-supporting infrastructure. For example, younger and middle-aged adults may fall off the developmental path of a role-identity due to life status changes (Andreasen, 1984) that precipitate the addition, subtraction, or dramatic modification of an existing role-identity (e.g., childbirth, career progression). Older adults, who are "empty nesters," or retired, may have reached a point in life where pursuit of certain activities can begin, resume, or increase. Life status changes can create openings for new identity cultivation or close ongoing efforts. Age or life stage may predict the choice to pursue a particular role, yet the role-identity cultivation process applies regardless of age or life stage.

AN EXPLORATORY STUDY

In a cross-sectional study we examine three of the five identity cultivation stages: discovery, maintenance, and early disposition. As described above, while identity-related possessions and other elements of the identity-supporting infrastructure accumulate as the identity is pursued, the strength of the relationship between infrastructure elements and self-definition may fall. Viewed together, these two effects (quantity accumulated versus strength of relationship to self) provide a more comprehensive profile of how people use consumption for identity cultivation. See Fig. 2 for a pictorial summary of the relationships to be tested.

Definitions and Hypotheses

The consumption constellation elements we examine here include identity-related possession commitments, identity-related social commitments, identity-related media commitments, and identity-related performances.

Possession Commitments

Cultivating a role-identity involves accumulating the related possessions that enable the identity and encourage reflected appraisals leading to role–person

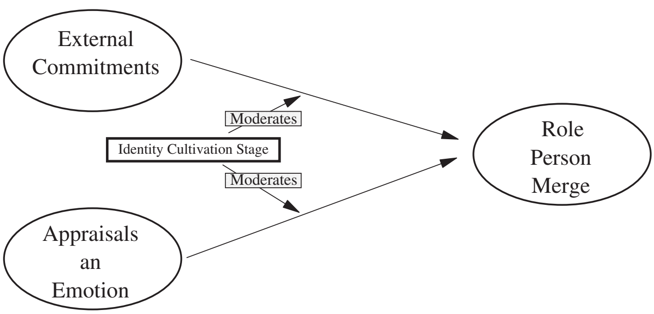

Fig. 2. Pictoral Summary of Nomological Relations Tested.

merger. The accumulated items are central to the identity activity (e.g., tennis racket) or peripheral (e.g., a tennis racket key chain). Material commitment to an identity begins in discovery and increases into the more stable, veteran maintenance stage. A person's inventory of identity-related possessions should remain intact into early disposition when the decision to dispose of the identity is incomplete. Possession attachment (Kleine, Kleine, & Allen, 1995) may inhibit dispossessing the role-related possessions in early disposition, as well. Applying this to a cross-sectional sample, we expect that

H1. The extensiveness of individuals' identity-related possession clusters will be lower for individuals in discovery than maintenance and the same in maintenance versus early disposition.

Social Commitments

Identity-related social commitments (the extensiveness or number of social ties associated with a given social identity) represent accumulated interactional commitment to an identity (Serpe, 1987). Social commitments comprise a symbolic group, such as the collectivity of tennis players known to the individual (e.g., Burke & Reitzes, 1981; Callero, 1985; Callero, Howard, & Piliavin, 1987; Piliavin & Callero, 1991; Stryker, 1980). Social commitments do not have to be members of a specific, formal group (e.g., members of a particular tennis club).

Social ties serve at least two important purposes. First, social ties keep people connected to the role-identity because the loss of them makes it psychologically more costly to quit (Becker, 1960, 1963; Piliavin & Callero, 1991). Social commitments "tie the central-related activity to the fabric of a person's social life" (Piliavin & Callero, 1991, p. 66), as aerobics participant Betty indicates:

> You become friends with people. There are regular people that go all of the time. I know probably like ten people that come all of the time that I say hi to and stuff. People that I was a freshman with and now they're seniors … A couple I have become really good friends with.

Two, social ties shape and support a person's self-definition-in-role (Becker, 1960, 1963; Piliavin & Callero, 1991; Solomon, 1983). Social ties form a social web-supporting identity enactment, a function evident in this quote by aerobics participant Betty:

> Aerobics is fun because you are with other people, you meet people. It is social and everything like that and that is nice. I like meeting new and interesting people. Another thing is it keeps you motivated, if you are supposed to meet a friend there, or you stay motivated from the other people you see in class. This keeps you motivated to keep going, that's why other people are so important.

The more extensive a person's social ties, the more opportunities he or she has to learn about, enact, and receive feedback about his or her identity attempts (Serpe, 1987; Shibutani, 1962; Stryker, 1980). Conversely, declining social ties discourage continued identity pursuit (Kleine & Kleine, 2000; Stokowski & Lee, 1991). Thus, the extent of a person's social relationships affects what he or she can become. People tend to accumulate social commitments increasing from discovery to the more stable maintenance phase when the veteran's identity-related social commitments tend to be established (Piliavin & Callero, 1991). Social ties should also persist into the early disposition phase before full identity disposition occurs. Applying this to a cross-sectional sample, we expect that

H2. Identity-related social ties will be less extensive for individuals in discovery versus maintenance, but remain the same for those in maintenance versus early disposition.

Media Commitments

From a symbolic interactionist perspective, media are extension of identity-related social networks (Englis, Solomon, & Oloffson, 1993; Kleine et al., 1993). Media communications (e.g., magazines, newspapers, books, videos, and so forth) augment a person's identity-related knowledge and provide additional bases for evaluation of self in role (Richins, 1991). Individuals in the discovery stage are likely to explore various role-related media. In contrast, people with more experience in maintenance consume less role-related media. For example, Solomon and Douglas (1987) found that experienced female business professionals relied less on business sources about how to dress professionally because they possessed knowledge about role-appropriate behavior. Aerobics participant Susan describes how media consumption varies by identity stage:

> I used to read everything I could … Now if I see something I will read it, but I don't go looking for stuff. But, if I see something [about aerobics] I will read it because it is interesting to me, but I feel like I know most of the stuff that is important to know.

In early disposition attention is shifted away from identity-related information. This implies that identity-relevant media consumption will decline in extensiveness from discovery to maintenance to early disposition. Applying this to cross-sectional data, we hypothesize that

H3. Identity-relevant media consumption extensiveness will be highest for individuals in discovery, lower for those in maintenance, and again lower between maintenance and early disposition.

Identity-Related Appraisals

Reflected appraisals, often known as the looking glass self, are a person's perception of how identity-relevant others evaluate him or her in role (Laverie et al., 2002; Solomon, 1983). Here, we examine two kinds of appraisals: reflected appraisals of identity-related performance and reflected appraisals of identity-related possessions. Why separate these two types? Possessions and performance behavior are complements that can be cultivated independently and each communicates unique information about one's self in role (Laverie, 1995; Wicklund & Gollwitzer, 1982). Moreover, possessions and performance are used differently by identity rookies and veterans (Donnelly & Young, 1988; Wheaton, 2000; Wicklund & Gollwitzer, 1982). Also, the two kinds of appraisals are empirically discriminant (Laverie, 1995; Laverie et al., 2002).

Positive appraisals encourage identity internalization while negative appraisals discourage it (Burke & Tully, 1977; Callero, 1985; Hoelter, 1983; Kleine et al., 1993; Laverie et al., 2002; Solomon, 1983; Stryker, 1980). To reach the maintenance stage, a person must accumulate positive appraisals so appraisal valence should become more favorable from discovery through maintenance. In disposition, appraisals should become less favorable, however, this decline may be small and insignificant in early disposition. For a cross-sectional sample we hypothesize that

> **H4.** The valence of performance appraisals and possession appraisals will be more favorable for individuals in maintenance compared to discovery, but will be similar between the maintenance and early disposition stages.

Identity-Related Emotions: Pride and Shame

The appraisal process includes both cognitive and emotional responses (Frijda, 1986; Frijda, Kurpers, & Schure, 1989; Lazarus, 1984; Parkinson & Manstead, 1992; Roseman, 1984; Shott, 1979; Smith & Ellsworth, 1985). Following theorizing and empirical work in appraisal theory, we apply the two primary social emotions: pride and shame (Heise, 1979; Laverie, 1995; Scheff, 1990). Pride and shame are signals to the self regarding how well others accept our identity claims and affect how we view ourselves (Rosenberg, 1979; Scheff, 1990; Shott, 1979). More identity-related pride encourages identity pursuit and leads to greater identity importance (Laverie, 1995; Heise, 1979; Stryker, 1980). Identity-related shame has opposite effects. As with appraisals, we distinguish possession-related emotions from performance-related emotions resulting in four types: pride in possessions, pride in performance, shame in possessions, and shame in performance.

We expect that pride will be higher in maintenance than in discovery as people accumulate greater evidence of identity competence and internalize the role. The characteristic lack of experience in discovery may lead to more shame than in maintenance. As the individual disconnects him- or herself from the identity, i.e., "what I was" rather than "what I am" emotional valence changes should occur. However, pride may linger for those in early disposition due to having prior successes to reflect upon. Thus, we may not observe a significant difference in pride between early disposition and the other stages. However, early disposition should be accompanied by a level of shame higher than at maintenance.

To summarize, identity-related pride should increase from discovery to maintenance and then plateau between maintenance and early disposition. Identity-related shame will decrease from discovery to maintenance and from maintenance to early disposition. Applied to a cross-sectional sample, we hypothesize that

H5a. Identity-related pride will be lower for individuals in discovery than in maintenance, and the same for those in maintenance versus early disposition.

H5b. Identity-related shame will be higher for individuals in discovery than in maintenance, and lower for those in maintenance versus early disposition.

Impact on Role–Person Merger

The association between role–person merger and social commitments, appraisals, and emotions indicates their self-relevance at each identity-development stage. People in early identity cultivation are more dependent upon external indicators for supporting emerging identities. As identities mature into maintenance, people rely less upon external indicators for their self-perceptions. For example, Solomon and Douglas (1987) found that more experienced (female) business professionals relied less upon external signs of their professional role to define themselves. Maintenance stage aerobics participant Susan observed:

> When people come in with their hair all done and perfect clothes all of the time, I am just generalizing and this is not judging anybody, but on the average I see them coming to the rec center to meet potential others, they're there to socialize, whereas the people who just come in their t-shirts, in their simple leotards or whatever … they're hard core.

"Hard core" individuals are those with well-established bases of experience and procedural "how to do it" knowledge. Veterans have accumulated more consumption constellation elements, but they also possess knowledge of constellation contents and its appropriate use (Donnelly & Young, 1988; Englis & Solomon, 1995; Lowery et al., 2001; Solomon & Buchanan, 1991; Wheaton, 2000). They are committed, veteran members of the identity-relevant subculture who have internalized self-perceptions in role (Piliavin & Callero, 1991; Wheaton, 2000). The internalized self-perception and knowledge base leads veterans to be less dependent on external identity commitments for self-identification. Thus, we expect the accumulation of external identity commitments to *decrease* in their association with role–person merger across role-identity stages.

H6. The association between role–person merger and the external commitments (possessions, media, and social) will be higher at discovery than maintenance, and higher at maintenance than early disposition.

Using similar reasoning, we expect the same pattern to occur for reflected appraisals and appraisal generated emotions. Appraisals and their emotions originate externally. They should become less important to sustain role-identity self-definitions through the identity stages as people internalize the identities. We propose the following two hypotheses:

H7. The association between role–person merger and the appraisals (performance and possession) will be higher at discovery than maintenance, and higher at maintenance than early disposition.

H8. The association between role–person merger and the identity-related emotions pride and shame will be higher at discovery than maintenance, and higher at maintenance than early disposition.

Summary

This study examines *how* role-identity cultivation stage moderates (1) the accumulation of identity reinforcing infrastructure (possession, social, and media commitments), appraisals, and emotions and (2) the importance of the infrastructure elements, appraisals, and emotions to self-perceptions in role. Generally, we expect that individuals who achieve the maintenance stage will have accumulated more signs of the identity (possessions, social ties, media), more positive reflected appraisals, and more pride/less shame than at discovery. Those in early disposition will tend to maintain the infrastructure, as complete identity disengagement has not occurred.

In contrast, the strength of the relationship between the infrastructure elements and role–person merger will be higher at discovery than at maintenance and early disposition. Empirical support for these expectations would suggest that to understand self and consumption we should include role-identity stage as a key moderator of self-consumption relationships.

METHOD

Overview

Self-administered questionnaires were used to collect cross-sectional data from individuals who participated in one of the two freely chosen role-identity contexts (aerobics and tennis). We chose these contexts for several reasons. In contexts involving physical activities, it is relatively easy for individuals to clearly relate specific symbols to specific activities (e.g., tennis racket goes with tennis). It is easier for respondents to think about such roles as a distinct piece of their global selves, in contrast to family or career identities that permeate daily activities. Respondents at different role-identity stages are more easily identified and reached for study participation. Respondents also tend to enjoy talking about their experiences, yielding higher quality data. Finally, in these contexts it is easier for respondents to distinguish between possessions versus skills and abilities used to perform the activity.

Sample

A self-administered Participant Questionnaire was used to collect data in two athletic identity contexts: aerobics and tennis. Study packets were distributed to aerobics and tennis participants recruited at facilities located in a large Southwestern metro area. Each site was visited multiple times over a period of several weeks. Ninety-nine percent of those offered a study packet accepted. Each packet included a cover letter, a self-administered questionnaire, a postage-paid return envelope, and a raffle entry form as an incentive to participate. The cover letter explained that the questionnaire would ask respondents about things related to playing tennis (or doing aerobics). Respondents completed their questionnaires at home and returned them by mail.

We distributed 468 study packets to tennis players at private and municipal tennis facilities. Players were sampled from introductory lessons, club and city leagues, and tournaments to vary identity development stage. Tennis players returned 318 surveys (a 68 percent response rate); 213

contained data on all measures needed for analysis. Respondents varied from 16 to 77 years old ($\bar{x} = 37$ years, s.d. = 11.7), 60 percent were male, had played tennis for as little as one month up to 60 years ($\bar{x} = 10.7$ years, s.d. = 9.2), played tennis about twice a week, and owned an average of 50 (s.d. = 16.2) tennis identity-related possessions. Example of possessions listed include: tennis rackets, balls, shoes, clothes, water bottles, athletic bags, and other accessories.

For the aerobics sample, we distributed 491 study packets at introductory, intermediate, and advanced level aerobics classes to vary identity stage development. Of the 359 surveys returned (a 73 percent response rate), 329 had data on all measures. Respondents ranged in age from 21 to 66 years ($\bar{x} = 35$, s.d. = 9.7), 83 percent were female, took aerobics classes about twice a week, had pursued aerobics for 10.5 years on an average (s.d. = 8.8; range from one month to 32 years), and owned an average of 33 (s.d. = 11.2) aerobics-related possessions. In the depth interviews conducted with aerobics participants before the survey, participants listed possessions such as shoes, clothes, sports bras, water bottles, dynabands, tubes, weights, shower kits, and duffle bags. Similar possessions were identified by survey respondents.

We combined the tennis and aerobics data to enhance power and reliability. Of the respondents, 15 percent are at the discovery phase of the identity project life cycle, 71 percent at the maintenance stage, and 12 percent at the early disposition stage. This distribution reflects the reality of those cultivating an identity at any given point, more are maintaining the identity than developing or disposing it. Although this uneven distribution of the sample across stages will affect statistical power, we have no reason to believe that it will bias parameter estimates. The mean age in years for discovery is 33 (s.d. = 8.6), for maintenance is 38 (s.d. = 9.1), and for early disposition is 35 (s.d. = 12.6), demonstrating that identity life cycle stage does not necessarily correspond to physical age for reasons discussed above.

Measures

Identical measures were used across the two contexts with appropriate adaptations in directions and prompts. Below we present the items as worded on the "Tennis Player" questionnaire.

Identity Stage

An individual's location within the identity stages – discovery, maintenance, and early disposition – was measured by having respondents select the one statement that best describes her intentions for the future as a tennis participant. Respondents selected one of the following statements: "Tennis is something I am just getting into. In the next few months, I don't know if I will do this activity more than I do now" (discovery); "I have played tennis at the same level of participation for a while. In the next few months I plan on doing this activity as often as I do it now" (maintenance); "I used to play tennis a lot, but I do not participate in it as much as I used to. In the next few months I plan on doing this activity less often than I do now" (early disposition). The measure is based on theory and recommendations from Donnelly and Young (1988), Piliavin and Callero (1991), and Wicklund and Gollwitzer (1981, 1982).

Possessions, Social, and Media Commitments

The hypotheses call for examining the accumulation, or extensiveness, of possession, social, and media commitments as opposed to their specific content or symbolic properties (although the latter would be interesting to explore in the future). Measuring commitment extensiveness has precedence in the social identity literature (Hoelter, 1983; Serpe, 1987).

The following measures of possession, social, and media commitments are adapted from Kleine et al. (1993) and Laverie et al. (2002). For *possession commitments*, we assessed two aspects of possession extensiveness: number of identity-related possessions and number of identity-related product categories. We advanced no hypothesis about product categories, yet including this variable may yield useful information. Number of identity-related product categories was assessed by asking respondents to "list things that you personally have because you play tennis." The sum of identity-related product categories listed indicates product category extensiveness. For each product category listed (e.g., tennis shoes), respondents indicated the number of identity-related possessions owned within that category (e.g., six pairs). Possession set extensiveness (possession commitment) is indicated by summing the number of possessions owned across all categories listed.

To measure *social commitment* extensiveness, respondents reported "the number of people you know on a first name basis from playing tennis." The number of people listed indicates the extensiveness of identity-related social ties (Kleine et al., 1993; Serpe, 1987). A larger number indicates greater accumulation of social ties.

To indicate *media commitment,* respondents were asked to "list any magazines, TV shows, videos, etc., that you pay attention to because they are related to tennis." The various media listed were summed to yield an indicator for media commitments accumulated.

Appraisals

A multi-indicator measure for appraisals was developed and validated via a series of pretests.[3] The adjective pair indicators of appraisal are: notable/ordinary, excellent/poor, spectacular/terrible. A 7-point bipolar scale assessed each appraisal indicator; a higher number indicates more favorable appraisal.

This prompt elicited reflected appraisals of possessions and reflected appraisals of performance: "think about the comments that other people make about your tennis equipment (performance). Use the adjective pairs below to describe what other people that you play tennis with say about your products (performance)."

Pride and Shame

Pride in possessions and pride in performance are each measured with a 3-item scale adapted from Lewis (1971) and tested successfully in a consumption context (Laverie, Kleine, & Kleine, 1993). The indicators for pride are: self-esteem, self-regard, and pride. Shame in possessions and shame in performance were measured with these three items: humiliated, embarrassed, and ashamed. Respondents rated their emotions on a 7-point Likert scale that ranged from very much so (7) to not at all (1).

To elicit the possession-related emotions, respondents were first prompted with, "How do you feel about the products that you use for tennis?" Followed by: "The products I use for tennis make me feel … "The indicators for pride and shame followed. Similarly, after being prompted to think about their performance as a tennis player, participants reacted to: "When I think of myself as a tennis player I feel …" Again, the pride and shame indicators followed.

Role-Person Merger

Role-person merger was measured using a three-item version of Callero's (1985; Callero et al., 1987) scale and similar to the one successfully applied in another consumption context (Kleine et al., 1993). Responses were recorded on a 7-point scale that ranged from strongly agree (7) to strongly disagree (1). Respondents were asked to report "how important tennis is to you" using these items: "Playing tennis is something I rarely even think about" (reverse scored); "Tennis is an important part of who I am;" and "I don't really have any clear feelings about tennis" (reverse scored).

Participation Frequency

To measure participation in tennis, respondents were asked to indicate how often they played tennis by checking one of the following seven items: at least once a year; at least once every six months; at least once a month; at least once a week; at least two times a week; at least three times a week; and at least once a day.

ANALYSIS

Measure Evaluation

Confirmatory factor analysis procedures supported the reliability and validity of the multi-item measures and the appropriateness of collapsing the data across the two contexts. Equivalency of parameter estimates for measurement models estimated from the data for each context was evaluated by a series of nested two-group confirmatory factor analyses. For these analyses, factor variances were specified as free. To identify each multi indicator factor, one factor loading was set equal to 1.0. The two-group CFA was initially estimated with all parameters freely estimated $\chi^2 = 1445.1$, df = 720, $p < 0.0001$; CFI = 0.94; NNFI = 0.92; RMSEA = 0.043). Next, we constrained factor loadings as equal across the two groups and found they do not differ ($\chi^2 = 1456.1$, df = 738, $p < 0.0001$; CFI = 0.94; NFI = 0.92; $\chi_d^2 = 11.6$, df = 18, $p > 0.01$). We then specified that indicator residuals must also be equal across groups. Residual estimates appear equivalent across groups ($\chi^2 = 1498.6$, df = 765, $p < 0.0001$; CFI = 0.94; NNFI = 0.92; $\chi_d^2 = 41.9$, df = 27, $p > 0.01$). Finally, we added the constraint that covariances among the latent factors must be equivalent across groups. Again, we find no evidence that parameter estimates differ across the two groups ($\chi^2 = 1545.9$, $df = 856$, $p < 0.0001$; CFI = 0.94; NNFI = 0.93; $\chi_d^2 = 47.3$, df = 91, $p > 0.01$). In conclusion, there is no statistically significant difference between the fit of the two group models, with no constraints imposed across groups, versus when the model is fit with all parameter estimates constrained as equal across the two groups ($\chi_d^2 = 100.8$, df = 136, $p > 0.01$). Parameter estimates for the measurement models are equal in the two groups. Having no compelling reason to analyze the data from each group separately, we pooled the data for increased power and greater results stability.[4]

Stage Measure Predictive Validity

To obtain some evidence of the identity cultivation stage measure's predictive validity, the average frequency of identity-related behavior was compared across levels of identity stage. Average length of enacting the identity is lowest at discovery, highest in maintenance, and not different from maintenance at early disposition (see Table 1). Participants also reported how long they had been playing tennis or doing aerobics (converted into number of months). As one would expect, average frequency of identity-related behavior is greater at maintenance than discovery, but not early disposition (see Table 1). Finally, role–person merger is lowest at discovery, significantly higher at maintenance and early disposition. Role–person merger is slightly, but not significantly, lower at early disposition than maintenance (Table 1; Fig. 3). Thus, role–person merger fits the pattern expected with this sample.

Hypothesis Test Protocol

Hypotheses examine identity cultivation stage as a moderator of commitment extensiveness, appraisal and emotion valences, and also of identity-relevance. Planned contrasts were applied to assess variation in extensiveness. To test how identity-cultivation stage moderates identity-relevance, regression models were estimated in which the focal construct (e.g., possession commitments), identity stage, and their interaction, were specified as predictors of role–person merger (SAS PROC GLM). In every analysis, the interaction effect was significant ($p<0.05$). This provides evidence that the relationship between each construct (e.g., possession commitment) and role–person merger varies by identity stage. This finding also indicates that association between role–person merger and each characteristic of identity cultivation should be examined within each stage. The association (regression coefficient) between role–person merger and each identity property examined is interpreted as a measure of self-relevance; the stronger the association (larger the regression coefficient) the greater the self- or identity-relevance.

To assess variability of self-relevance across role-identity cultivation stages, the relationship between each predictor construct and role–person merger was estimated for each level of identity stage (SAS PROC REG). These regression coefficients can be interpreted as a measure of strength of identity-relevance; the degree to which role–person merger depends upon each sign of identity cultivation. We followed Pedhazur's (1982, p. 28) recommended procedures for comparing the relative magnitude of regression coefficients across levels of identity cycle stage. See Table 2 for these results.

Table 1. How Behavior Frequency, Possessions, and Media Differ across Groups: Means (Standard Deviations) and Comparison Summary.

Dependent Construct	Identity Cultivation Stage			Comparison Summary*
	Discovery (1)	Maintenance (2)	Early disposition (3)	
Behavior frequency	3.7 (1.9)	5.5 (0.8)	5.1 (1.1)	$1<2\cong3$
How long done?	2.4 (3.39)	11.6 (8.94)	14.1 (7.99)	$1<2\cong3$
Age	33.0 (8.6)	38.0 (9.1)	35.0 (12.6)	$1<2\cong3$
Role-person merger	3.1 (1.80)	6.0 (1.23)	5.9 (0.74)	$1<2\cong3$
Commitments				
Possessions (H1)	12.3 (8.7)	57.1 (49.9)	53.2 (54.6)	$1<2\cong3$
Product categories	5.0 (3.1)	11.0 (4.7)	7.9 (4.9)	$1<2>3$
Social connections (H2)	8.0 (15.1)	22.1 (20.1)	24.8 (24.6)	$1<2\cong3$
Media (H3)	1.5 (1.3)	2.7 (1.7)	2.5 (1.3)	$1<2\cong3$
Reflected appraisals (H4)				
Possessions	3.7 (1.7)	5.2 (1.1)	5.4 (0.9)	$1<2\cong3$
Performance	2.9 (1.0)	5.2 (1.0)	5.2 (1.0)	$1<2\cong3$
Emotions (H5a, H5b)				
Pride possessions	3.6 (2.0)	5.6 (1.2)	5.9 (1.2)	$1<2\cong3$
Pride performance	3.3 (1.6)	6.1 (1.0)	5.6 (0.8)	$1<2\cong3$
Shame possessions	3.1 (1.6)	1.8 (1.0)	2.6 (0.7)	$1>2<3$
Shame performance	3.7 (2.1)	1.9 (1.1)	3.0 (1.0)	$1>2<3$

*Under "comparison summary" a '$<$' or '$>$' indicates a significant difference ($p<0.05$) and '$\cong$' indicates a nonsignificant difference in means.

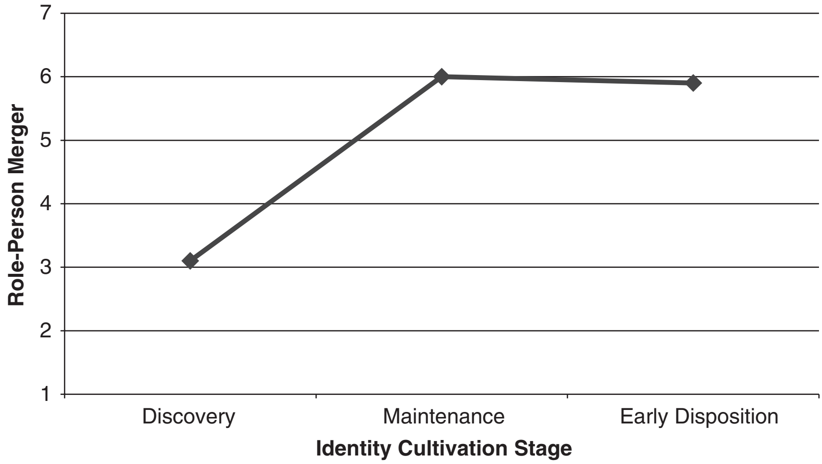

Fig. 3. Role-Person Merger Variation across Role-Identity Cultivation Stage (Means).

RESULTS

External Commitments

Planned contrasts ($p \leqslant 0.05$) reveal that each variety of external commitment – number of identity-related possessions, number of identity-related possession categories, number of identity-related social commitments, and number of media commitments – increases significantly from discovery to maintenance (H1, H2, and H3; see Table 1 and Fig. 4). Contrasts show no significant differences between maintenance and early disposition for number of identity-related possessions, media, or social commitments. However, the reported number of product categories owned is significantly lower at early disposition. Thus, with the exception of product categories, the general pattern is for commitment levels to be significantly greater at maintenance than at discovery. The differences from maintenance to early disposition are non-significant, consistent with early disposers *anticipating* declining involvement. The result pattern supports H1 and H2. H1 proposed that media commitments would decline from discovery to maintenance to early disposition. This was not supported because media commitments increased significantly from discovery to maintenance with no significant

Table 2. How the Identity-Relevance of Commitments, Appraisals, and Emotions Vary across Identity Cultivation Stages: Summary of Regression Analyses.

Predictor	Statistics	Identity Stage			Planned Comparison Summary
		Discovery (1)	Maintenance (2)	Early disposition (3)	
Social (H6)	b (std)	0.05 (0.41)	0.006 (0.10)	0.008 (0.27)	1 > 2 ≅ 3
	s.e.	0.01	0.003	0.004	
	t	3.83	2.03	2.23	
Possessions (H6)	b (std)	0.12 (0.59)	0.004 (0.16)	0.004 (0.32)	1 > 2 ≅ 3
	s.e.	0.02	0.001	0.002	
	t	6.22	3.05	2.66	
Media (H6)	b (std)	0.47 (0.33)	0.13 (0.18)	0.10 (0.19)	1 ≅ 2 ≅ 3
	s.e.	0.18	0.4	0.07	
	t	2.59	3.49	1.48	
Reflected appraisals of possessions (H7)	b (std)	0.55 (0.55)	0.50 (0.42)	−0.02* (−0.03)	1 ≅ 2 > 3
	s.e.	0.10	0.06	0.10	
	t	5.53	9.02	−0.21	
Reflected appraisals of performance (H7)	b (std)	0.78 (0.44)	0.52 (0.42)	0.03* (0.03)	1 > 2 > 3
	s.e.	0.18	0.06	0.13	
	t	4.29	9.05	0.21	
Pride in possessions (H8)	b (std)	0.72 (0.80)	0.56 (0.53)	−0.08* (−0.13)	1 > 2 > 3
	s.e.	0.06	0.04	0.07	
	t	11.43	11.98	−1.02	
Pride in performance	b (std)	0.68 (0.63)	0.63 (0.50)	−0.23 (−0.26)	1 > 2 > 3
	s.e.	0.1	0.06	0.11	
	t	6.9	11.27	−2.13	
Shame in possessions	b (std)	−0.76 (−0.68)	−0.42 (−0.33)	0.18* (0.19)	1 > 2 > 3
	s.e.	0.09	0.06	0.12	
	t	−8.10	−6.84	1.46	
Shame in performance	b (std)	−0.42 (−0.50)	−0.42 (−0.36)	0.05* (0.07)	1 ≅ 2 > 3
	s.e.	0.08	0.06	0.09	
	t	−4.98	−7.51	0.55	

*Indicates a nonsignificant regression coefficient ($p \geqslant 0.05$).

difference between maintenance and early disposition. The media commitment measure evidences a range restriction weakness which may have attenuated power to detect significance in the nominal decline (2.7–2.5, see Table 1) from maintenance to early disposition.

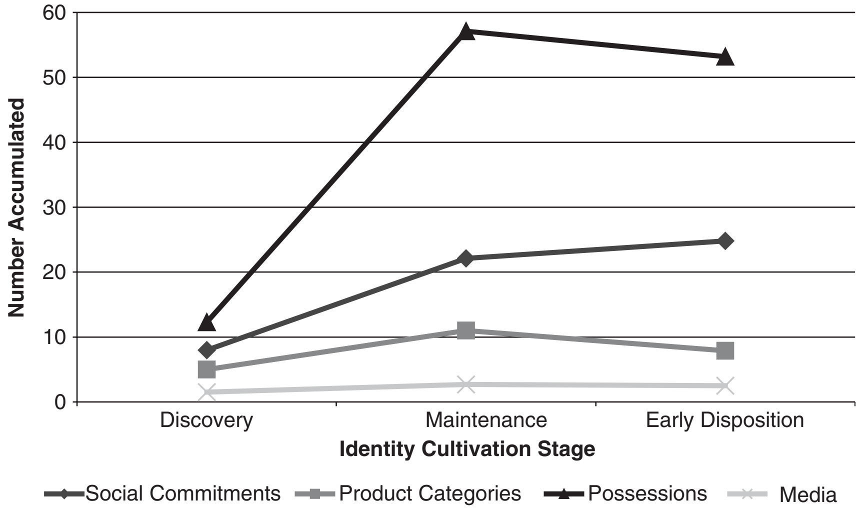

Fig. 4. Social Commitments, Possessions, and Media Variation across Role-Identity Cultivation Stage (Means).

Identity Relevance of the Commitment Variables

Social commitments and identity-relevant possessions are more strongly associated ($p < 0.05$) with role–person merger at the discovery stage than at maintenance ($p < 0.05$; H6; see Table 2 and Fig. 5). Neither evidence variation between the maintenance and early disposition stages. The identity-relevance of media commitments and role–person merger evidences a nominal pattern similar to possessions and social commitments, but does not vary significantly between any of the stages. This null finding may be due to the attenuating effect of range restriction; media consumption is uniformly low (see Table 1). Thus, the general pattern observed with external identity commitments is that, with the exception of media, the association with role–person merger is greatest at discovery. That is, social and possession commitments have their strongest connection to role–person merger early on in identity cultivation, prior to internalizing a stable self-description related to the identity and before formulating enduring evidence of the identity claim.

Appraisals of Possessions and Performance

Planned contrasts show for each appraisal type that the lowest mean occurs at the discovery stage. Appraisals of both possessions and performance rise

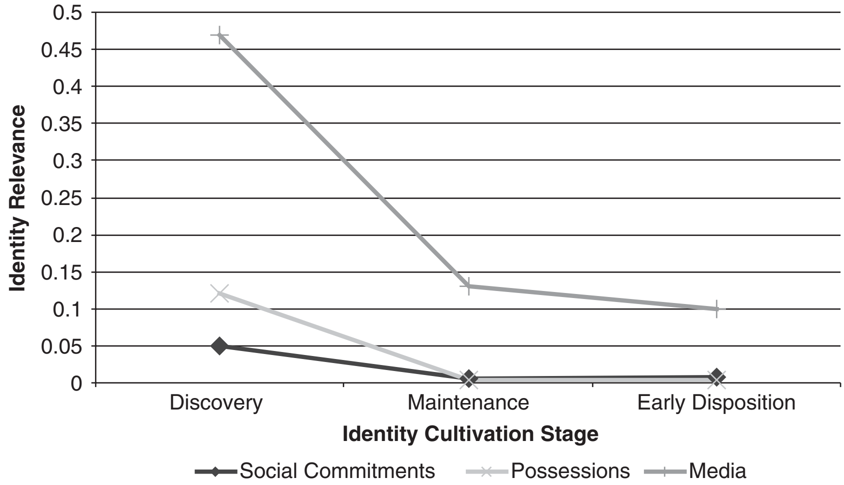

Fig. 5. How Identity Relevance of Identity-Related Social Commitments, Possessions, and Media Varies across Identity Cultivation Stage.

significantly from discovery to maintenance. Appraisals do not differ significantly between maintenance and early disposition. This pattern supports H4 (see Table 1 and Fig. 6).

The identity-relevance of reflected appraisals of possessions and performance generally evidence the predicted monotonic decline across the identity life cycle stages (H7; see Table 2 and Fig. 7). The single exception is a nonsignificant contrast for reflected appraisals of possessions between the discovery and maintenance stages. The general pattern is for appraisals to decline in identity relevance as identity cultivation progresses and the identity internalized.

Emotions Toward Possessions and Performance

The means for pride in possessions, pride in performance, shame in possessions, and shame in performance all vary significantly between discovery and maintenance. Pride is greater and shame lower at maintenance than at discovery (H5; see Table 1 and Fig. 8). Comparing maintenance and early disposition, pride in possessions and performance are unchanged, while both shame in possessions and performance increase. This increase in perceived shame may illuminate why dissociation with the identity occurs.

Identity relevance of pride in possessions, pride in performance, and shame in possessions (H8) is highest at discovery, significantly lower at

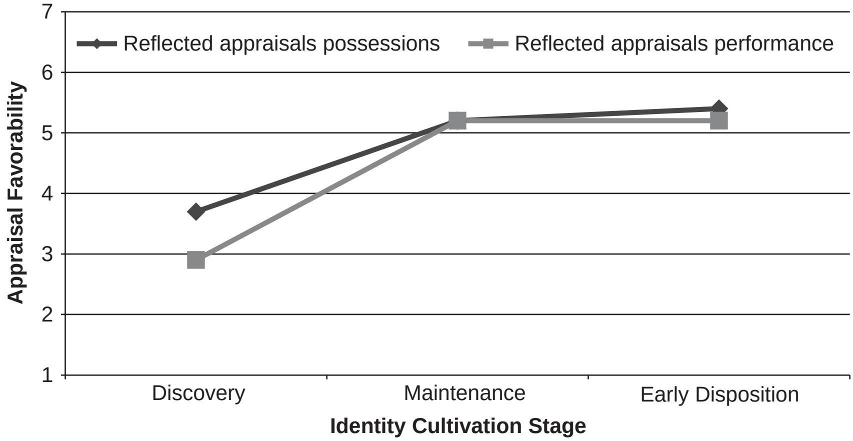

Fig. 6. Possession and Performance Appraisal Variation across Role-Identity Cultivation Stage (Means).

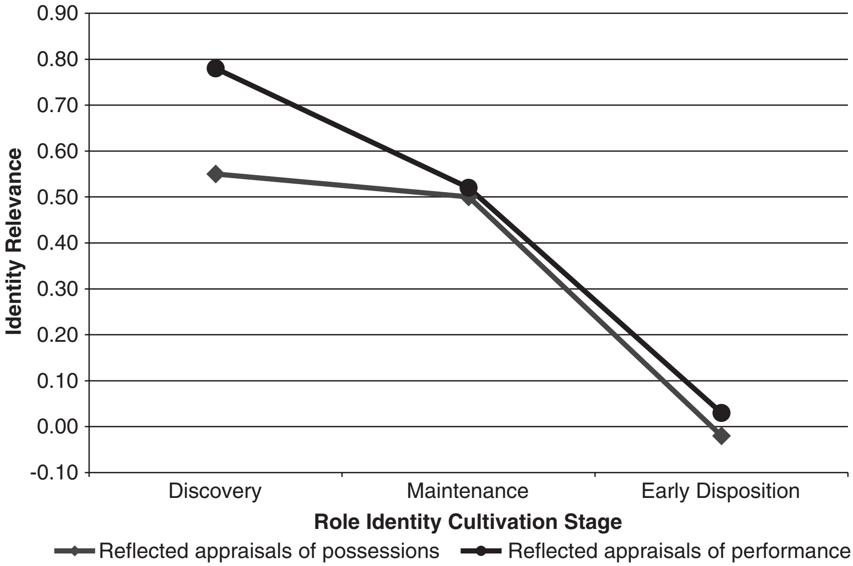

Fig. 7. How Identity Relevance of Possession and Performance Appraisal Vary across Identity Cultivation Stage.

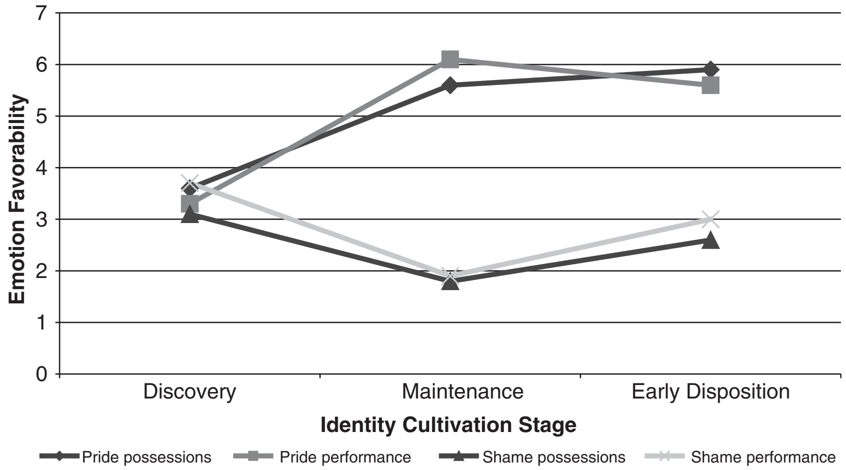

Fig. 8. Pride and Shame of Possessions and Performance Variation across Role-Identity Cultivation Stage (Means).

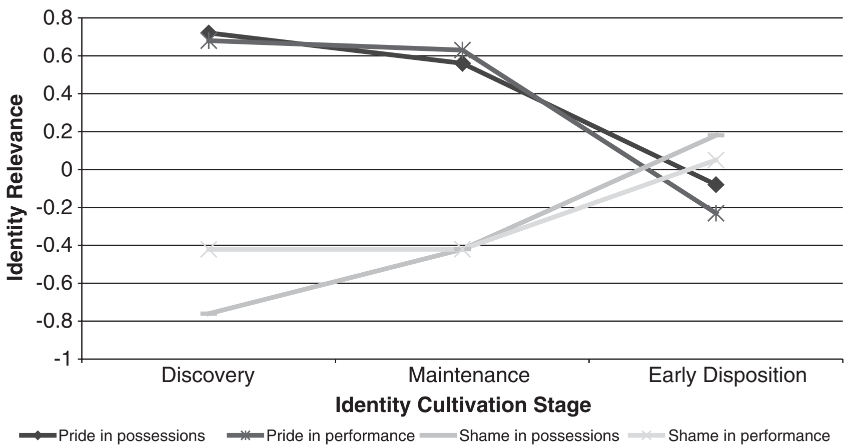

Fig. 9. How Identity Relevance of Possession and Performance Emotions Vary across Identity Cultivation Stage.

maintenance, and significantly lower again at early disposition (see Table 2 and Fig. 9). Shame in performance does not differ between discovery and maintenance, but does differ significantly between maintenance and early disposition. Only pride in performance shows a significant association with role–person merger at early disposition.

DISCUSSION

In this project we explored *how* role-identity cultivation stage moderates (1) the *accumulation* of an identity-reinforcing infrastructure (possession, social, and media commitments), appraisals, and emotions, and (2) the importance of the infrastructure elements, appraisals, and emotions to self-perceptions in role. We examined variations across three stages: role-identity discovery, maintenance, and early disposition in the context of two freely chosen role-identities. On the whole, the data support our expectations.

Accumulation of Commitments, Appraisals, and Emotions

Generally, results showed that individuals reaching the maintenance stage of role-identity cultivation had accumulated more commitments to the identity (possessions, social ties, media), more positive reflected appraisals, and more pride/less shame than at discovery. In early disposition, prior to full role disengagement, respondents tended to have fewer infrastructure elements than at maintenance, but this difference was usually insignificant. Reflected appraisals (possessions and performance related) and pride remained positive into early disposition. However, disposition shame was significantly greater, suggesting that early disposition involves questioning one's self in role and possible embarrassment of declining ability to fulfill identity-related obligations. Thus, external identity commitments, appraisals, and resulting emotions accumulate as an identity is cultivated and reconfirmed. When identity disconfirmation sets in, one's investment in external identity commitments tends to fall nominally but not significantly, and pride lingers. An increase in shame at early disposition is the tell-tale sign of a forthcoming decline in the role-identity.

Importance to Self

The association of the identity-related commitments, appraisals, and emotions with role–person merger yields a different picture. External identity commitments (possession, social, and media commitments) remain significant predictors of role–person merger throughout the role-identity life cycle, at least into maintenance. However, their *importance* to self-definition tends to be strongest at discovery and then to *decline* as self-representation-in-role develops and stabilizes in maturity. Similar results occurred with appraisals and emotions. The importance of appraisals to self-definition was *lower* at maintenance than in discovery. During maintenance, when pride is highest and shame lowest, the emotions have the *weakest* association with role–person merger.

The results suggest that as external commitments (possessions, social, and media), appraisals, and emotions become more supportive (more favorable) of the identity, they also become less important to its maintenance. As the internal representation of self-in-role develops, the external signs and commitments of that self-definition become less potent cues of role-related self-definition.

Generalizability

The results most likely generalize to other freely chosen leisure activity identities, but may also apply to other freely chosen role-identities (e.g., vegetarian, collector, alternative health care consumer). Ascribed role-identities such as gender, racial status, or ethnic identities may not fit the conceptual assertions or empirical results described here.

The proposed identity life cycle stages do not have precise boundaries. Thus, there is most likely some misclassification error in placing respondents in one stage or another. Also, because the sample is cross-sectional we can infer, but cannot be conclusive about, how individuals change from stage to stage. Our findings are consistent with general patterns observed in data collected in very different identity contexts (e.g., Donnelly & Young, 1988) and with a longitudinal study (Piliavin & Callero, 1991). Longitudinal investigation of the relationships would strengthen confidence in the results. Also, experimentation examining cognitive changes across stages could further validate the stage measure.

A significantly larger chunk of the sample fell into the maintenance stage than discovery or early disposition. Any problems this uneven distribution caused are probably captured in attenuated statistical power. For example, had we more power for the early disposition stage a few more significant differences may have been found. Even so, it is difficult to imagine that the general data pattern would change significantly.

The social commitment construct measures capture the sheer weight of accumulated possession sets, media, and social ties. Quantitative measures of social connections are established for measuring accumulation and self-impact of commitments (Hoelter, 1983; Kleine et al., 1993; Laverie et al., 2002). Englis and Solomon (1995) also used an extensiveness measure to capture consumption constellation development. It would be interesting to examine how role-identity stage moderates the qualitative impact external commitments (including brands) have on self.

Finally, the results should not be generalized to material possession attachment variation across identity stages. Attachment is an emotional bond that grows as a history develops between self and object (Kleine et al., 1995). We have examined neither emotional bonds to possessions nor the self-relevance of individual possessions, but instead the use of possession sets to prop up an identity. These results do not indicate when attachment bonds rise or drop.

Identity-Life Cycle Stage: A Key Moderator

Person–Possession Relationships

Consistent with prior studies (Englis & Solomon, 1995; Lowery et al., 2001; Solomon & Douglas, 1987), the results suggest that a person's relationship with particular possessions, brand names, and other symbolic indicators of role-identity will vary from stage to stage. How important and symbolically useful are particular possessions or brands as self-symbols at each stage of identity development? Are person–brand relationships (Fournier, 1998), or brand loyalty and commitment, moderated by identity stage? Does membership or involvement in brand communities (e.g., Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001) fit a role-identity life cycle pattern? How does material possession attachment vary by role-identity stage?

Dispossession

The dispossession of material goods remains an understudied domain of consumer behavior. Identity change precipitates goods dispossession and consumers use dispossession to facilitate identity changes (Belk, Sherry, & Wallendorf, 1988; Gentry, Baker, & Kraft, 1995; McAlexander, 1991; Price, Arnould, & Curasi, 2000; Sayre, 1994; Young & Wallendorf, 1989). It may be useful to understand the changes in external identity commitments, appraisals, and emotions that accompany the dispossession of role-related goods.

Attitude Relationships

In the context of voluntary blood donation, attitudes toward donation have a differential impact on future donation behavior, depending upon whether the donor is a rookie or an experienced veteran (Allen, Karen, & Kleine, 1992; Piliavin & Callero, 1991). Consumers' attitudinal responses to persuasive messages for goods and services may correlate with identity development stage. Should persuasive message arguments be constructed differently, depending upon the target audience's role-identity development stage? The contemporary use of databases to track customers allows for classifying customers into identity developmental stages and to design value offerings accordingly.

Consumer Socialization

Investigations of consumption phenomena in role-identity transitions, role acquisition, and consumer socialization could include role-identity development stage as a variable to enhance understanding of the processes at work. How does the global self-concept accommodate acquisition of new role-identities or the loss of existing ones? Can marketers apply role-identity development to urge target consumers into the self-reinforcing stage of maintenance? Can marketing offerings help preclude identity disposition by facilitating social commitments and positive feedback regarding one's self-in-role? Could marketers with multiple offerings migrate customers from one role-identity to a substitute (e.g., running to cycling)? Such investigations hold promise for illuminating the forces that lead to or de-stabilize a Diderot unity (McCracken, 1988).

Identity Schema across Stages

People have cognitive schemas for role-related consumption constellations (Lowery et al., 2001). Role-identity schemas include actual, stereotypical, and ideal images of a role-identity (Kleine et al., 1993). How do each of these schemas vary across identity stages? When do schemas form or become unsettled? When do actual and ideal schemas converge or become disparate? What changes in schema relationships precedes role-disposition?

The results presented here encourage consumer researchers to pursue questions about how role-identity life cycle stage moderates the relationship between consumption behaviors, possessions, and self-definitions. Framing person–possession relations in the context of self-developmental stages should enhance our understanding of the relationship between consumption and self-conceptions.

NOTES

1. Several strains of identity theory co-exist in the sociological literature. Weigert, Teitge, and Teitge (1986) provide a comprehensive review of identity theory's various flavors.
2. Note how the role-identity ''teapot collector'' implies and reflects ongoing patterns of social interaction. As an aside, it was social interaction (gift receipt) that set the author's teapot-collector identity discovery in motion, in a manner similar to McCracken's (1988) one-thing-leads-to-another Diderot effect. External influences arising through social interaction initiated and perpetuate the teapot collector identity.
3. Details of the appraisal measure development process are available from the authors.

4. To fulfill curiosity, we did analyze data for the two contexts separately. The result patterns from those analyses largely replicate the findings reported for the combined data sets. Reporting the pooled data has the additional benefit of reinforcing that the identity cultivation process is the central focus, and not the specific contexts from which the data were obtained.

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THE ROLE OF ATTRIBUTE ORDER AND NUMBER EFFECTS IN CONSUMERS' MULTIATTRIBUTE PREFERENTIAL DECISIONS

L. P. Douglas Tseng and Yuan-shuh Lii

ABSTRACT

The cognitive composition process of attribute information plays a critical role in heuristic aspects of consumers' multiattribute preferential decisions. This study examines the effects of attribute information order and attribute information amount on consumers' multiattribute preferential decisions under the premise of consumers' limited information processing capacity. An experiment with two separate designs is conducted for testing the different hypotheses. The results support the hypothesis that consumers' multiattribute preferential decisions are influenced by the amount of attribute information received/processed. The attribute information order is found to affect not only the outcomes of consumer decisions but also the amount of attribute information processed. These findings further suggest that consumers may be more inclined to adopt strategies of a noncompensatory heuristic nature when making multiattribute preferential decisions.

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INTRODUCTION

The limited information processing capacity of humans is a concept of fundamental importance to the understanding of consumers' multiattribute preferential decision-making process (Tversky, 1969; Jacoby, 1974; Simon, 1978). Consumers frequently face an environment where information on multiple attributes of decision alternatives needs to be processed under various mental and physical constraints. These constraints limit the consumers' capacity to process information, and hence not all information available to them can be processed and/or processed equally. Consequently, how consumers receive and process the available information can have a significant impact on their decisions.

The purpose of this study is to explore how the composition of attribute information affects consumer decisions. Specifically, this study examines the effects of attribute information amount and attribute information order on consumers' multiattribute preferential decisions under the premise of consumers' limited information processing capacity.

INFORMATION LOAD AND CONSUMER DECISIONS

The concept of limited information processing capacity of humans has been demonstrated in research on memory capacity (Miller, 1956; Simon, 1974; Broadbent, 1975; Shiffrin, 1976; Bettman, 1979a, b; Newell & Simon, 1972), attention capacity (Kahneman & Tversky, 1973; Lynch & Srull, 1982) and other areas of cognitive information processing activities (see Bettman, 1979b for a review). As consumers do not have firm and stable preferences for most of the decisions they make, a typical consumer multiattribute preferential decision process can be characterized as an inherently constructive process (Gregory, Lichtenstein, & Slovic, 1993; Bettman, Luce, & Payne, 1998). A direct consequence of the information processing capacity limitation to such a constructive decision process is the heuristic nature of consumers' decisions.

Due to their limited information processing capacity, consumers seldom use strategies prescribed by the traditional rational decision theory (e.g., the compensatory weighted adding strategy) in their decision-making process (Simon, 1955; Bettman, 1979b; Bettman, et. al., 1998). Instead, consumers typically adopt simple rules or heuristics to simplify the decision-making process. As information load or task complexity increases, people are more inclined to adopt these decision heuristics that demand less cognitive effort

(Payne, 1976; Payne & Braunstein, 1978; Lussier & Olshavsky, 1979; Wahlers, 1982; Payne, Bettman, & Johnson, 1990; Simonson & Tversky, 1992; Swait, 2001).

Depending on the particular decision heuristic used, the overall quantity of information as well as the amount of information for each attribute/alternative processed by consumers can vary greatly (Bettman et al., 1998). Decisions and the prediction of decisions can thus be influenced by the amount of information processed or presented (e.g., Einhorn & Hogarth, 1981; Payne, Bettman, & Johnson, 1988; Malhotra, 1982).

Among the simplifying strategies that consumers may adopt for making their decisions, a small group of them, called "compensatory multiattribute heuristics", requires the processing of information of all attributes in a compensatory manner (i.e., the value of the different attributes are explicitly traded-off with each other). However, owing to the capacity limitation, only a limited amount of information on each attribute is actually processed when these strategies are used (Tseng & Stern, 1994). Examples of these strategies include: the "equal weight" strategy (Dawes, 1979), the "additive difference" strategy (Tversky, 1969), and the "majority rule" (also known as "maximizing number of attributes with greater attractiveness rule") strategy (May, 1954; Montgomery & Svenson, 1976; Svenson, 1979).

Most of the decision heuristics used by consumers are "noncompensatory heuristics" in which values on the attributes are not explicitly traded-off with one another. A common characteristic among them is the selective nature of information processing (Hogarth, 1980; Payne, 1982; Payne, et. al., 1988). The limitation on information processing capacity and the selectivity of information processing in these noncompensatory heuristics can be conceptualized as a stopping mechanism that can be triggered when a threshold or thresholds of certain mental or physical criteria is reached. When this stopping mechanism is triggered during the cognitive evaluation process, it causes the evaluation to cease (Aschenbrenner, Albert, & Schmalhofer, 1984; Tseng, 1988). Consequently, not all attributes are considered when a decision is made and not all attributes can be traded-off with one another.

Depending on whether the stopping mechanism is contingent upon certain types of ordering of attributes, these strategies can be either "prioritized" or "nonprioritized" noncompensatory heuristics (Tseng & Stern, 1994). The former is characterized by a process that requires an evaluation of decision alternatives, one attribute at a time, according to some specific predetermined ordering of these attributes (e.g., attribute ordering based on the relative importance of each attribute). Examples of this type of strategies include the lexicographic family of strategies (Fishburn, 1974), the sequential elimination family of strategies (Wright, 1975; Bettman, 1979b), and the elimination by aspect strategy (Tversky, 1972).

On the other hand, when using the ‘‘nonprioritized noncompensatory heuristics’’, in the process of evaluating decision alternatives, the ordering of attributes is typically not determined *a priori* based on certain specific criteria. Satisfying strategy (Simon, 1955), conjunctive strategy (Coombs, 1964; Dawes, 1964), and disjunctive strategy (Dawes, 1964) are examples of these strategies.

As consumers are more likely to use noncompensatory heuristics when making multiattribute decisions, they typically process only a subset of attribute information (Klein, 1983). More specifically, Streufert (1970) suggested a limit of less than 10 items/attributes on the span of perceptual dimensionality, beyond which an individual's information processing ability decreases. Olson and Jacoby (1972) found that consumers typically used only three to seven attributes (out of 12–15 available) to make a purchase decision. Wilkie and Weinreich (1972) reported similar results and noted that the use of all seven available attributes actually resulted in lower choice predictability.

Sheluga, Jaccard, and Jacoby (1979) have further suggested that choice predictions based on self-selected subsets of information are significantly more accurate than predictions based on all information. They also found that predicted choices were more accurate when based on self-selected information than choices based on forced exposure to the entire set of product alternatives. These general findings have also been supported in several other studies (e.g., Hansen, 1969; Jacoby, Chestnut, Weigl, & Fisher, 1976; Jacoby & Chestnut, 1977; Jacoby, Szybillo, & Busato-Schach, 1977).

Given the information processing limitation, the first hypothesis to be examined in this study is:

H1. When making multiattribute preferential decisions, consumers do not always consider all available attributes, and the number of attributes used affects their decisions.

This hypothesis stipulates the heuristic nature of multiattribute consumers decisions. More specifically, if consumers adopt ‘‘noncompensatory heuristics’’ (prioritized or nonprioritized) as their decision strategies, the stopping mechanisms, when triggered, may limit the amount of attributes used. With different stopping mechanisms and different threshold levels, different numbers of attributes may be used, and hence different decision outcomes may occur. If, however (heuristic or nonheuristic), compensatory strategies are adopted, characteristics described in H1 may not be observed.

THE EFFECTS OF ATTRIBUTE INFORMATION ORDER

Hogarth (1980) has further proposed that, due to the information processing capacity limitation, consumers may have to process information not only selectively but also sequentially. While few studies have directly examined the sequentiality of information processing and the impact of information sequence on multiattribute decisions, many related studies have suggested various information order effects on a number of cognitive activities.

Research on learning and attitude, for example, suggests two types of information order effects: the ''primacy effect'' (Lund, 1925; Lunchins, 1957a, b) and the ''recency effect'' (Hovland & Mandell, 1952; Lunchins, 1957b, 1958; Lana, 1963, 1964; Insko, 1964). Both effects indicate that consumers' learning and impressions may be influenced by the information receiving order such that attitudes are dominated by information that is most vividly retained in the short-term memory. Depending on the circumstances, either information received first or last in a series may dominate the result of the learning and/or impression.

According to Leach (1974), if a person is specially instructed to combine all known information about an object or person, the recency effect may be eliminated while the primacy effect may still prevail. A study conducted by Haugtvedt and Wegener (1994) indicated that a primacy effect will occur when the situation involves high personal relevance, whereas a recency effect will take place when the situation contains low personal relevance.

Similarly, research on judgment heuristics has suggested another form of information order effect: anchoring and adjustment heuristic (Kahneman & Tversky, 1972, 1973; Tversky & Kahneman, 1971, 1973, 1974). This judgment heuristic suggests that a natural starting point, typically the information first evaluated, is used as an anchor for the first approximation in the judgment process. The judgment is then adjusted to accommodate the implications of additional information. Since the adjustment process is typically incomplete, the judgment tends to be biased toward the anchor value. Consequently, with this heuristic, a potential influence of the order of information on decision making exists. The anchoring and adjustment heuristic has been demonstrated to influence consumers' price judgments

(Biswas, Wilson, & Licata, 1993; Kalyanaram & Winer, 1995; Donoho & Swenson, 1996), industrial buying decisions (Puto, 1987), as well as decisions of real estate agents (Northcraft & Neal, 1987).

Other researchers have found that different elements of a decision process can be influenced by a halo or dominance effect (Thorndike, 1920; Wilkie & Pessemier, 1973; Beckwith & Lehmann, 1975; Bass & Talarzyk, 1972), an initial judgment effect (Wyer, Srull, & Gordon, 1984; Loken, 1984; Carlston, 1980) and first searched attributes (Sheluga, et al., 1979). Although these studies did not directly focus on the information composition process and decision outcomes, they all seem to agree that evaluations of a subset of information processed earlier may cause biases in the subsequent information processing. As a result, this influence of initial judgment necessitates the existence of an information sequence effect on certain aspects of the decision process when information is not processed simultaneously.

In addition, studies on the effects of information format have shown that consumers acquire information in a manner consistent with the form of the display (e.g., Slovic, 1972; Bettman & Kakkar, 1977; Jarvenpaa, 1989), and that different formats of product information presentation have a significant impact on decision quality (Widing & Talarzyk, 1993). Consequently, if the information is displayed in a sequential manner, the order of the information displayed may have an impact on how consumers process the information. Kardes and his colleagues (Kardes & Kalyanaram, 1992; Kardes, Kalyanaram, Chandrashekaran, & Dornoff, 1993) have demonstrated that the sequential presentation of information leads to higher emphasis on the information presented first in consumers' information acquisition and processing (i.e., more extensive learning and greater likelihood for inclusion in the consideration set of these "pioneers"). Kumar and Gaeth (1991) found that the presentation order of attribute information influenced the magnitude of attribute importance weights in a conjoint analysis task.

With the exception of the "recency effect", most of the order effects previously discussed (e.g., primacy effect, the effect of anchoring and adjustment heuristic, halo effect, dominance effect, initial judgment effect) seem to suggest that the information presented/processed first tend to be more influential on human cognitive activities. While few studies have directly examined the effect of attribute order on consumers' multiattribute preferential decisions, based on those cognitive order effects, it would not be unreasonable to expect that the attributes presented/processed first could have more impact on the outcomes of consumer decisions. Consequently, with different attributes being presented/processed first, we can hypothesize that the outcomes of the decisions may be different.

H2. Consumers' decisions will vary with changes in the order of attribute information used or provided.

One way attribute order can affect consumers' decisions is due to humans' limited information processing capacity. As previously discussed, with capacity limitation, consumers typically process only a subset of attributes when making multiattribute decisions. The order in which attributes are received can thus influence which attributes are actually processed. With different subsets of attributes being processed, different decision outcomes may occur. This type of attribute order effect may not be present when the number of attributes is small – since all or most of the attributes will be used in making the decision. As the number of attributes increase, overlaps among attributes that are actually processed under different attribute orders may decrease; the effect of attribute order should thus be more significant. In other words, we can hypothesize that:

H3. The effect of attribute order on consumers' decisions is more significant when the number of available attributes is large, and less significant when the number of attributes is small.

The relationship described in this hypothesis should be most apparent when a consumer adopts certain nonprioritized noncompensatory heuristics (e.g., satisfying strategy, conjunctive and disjunctive strategies) in which attributes are typically processed in the order received. However, if a prioritized noncompensatory heuristic is adopted, the attribute processing sequence is typically first (re-)arranged/determined by the consumer prior to evaluating decision alternatives. In this situation, the attribute order presented to the consumer may not be the same as the attribute order that is actually processed. As a result, depending on factors such as the size of the consumer's processing capacity, the specific strategy used and the degree of differences between decision alternatives on each attribute, the type of attribute order effect due to information processing capacity described here may or may not be as obvious.

On the other hand, if a compensatory (heuristic or nonheuristic) strategy is adopted, since all attributes should be explicitly "traded-off" with one another, the attribute order effect due to the information processing capacity limitation should be minimum. Consequently, the relationship described in H3 should not be observable.

To better understand the nature of attribute order effect on consumers' multiattribute preferential decisions, in conjunction with Hypotheses 2 and 3

(H2 and H3), an additional aspect investigated in this study is the impact of attribute order on the amount of attribute information used.

H4. Attribute order influences the number of attributes consumers use in their multiattribute preferential decisions.

This hypothesis is consistent with the basic premise of limited information processing capacity and the heuristic nature of consumers' decisions in that it prescribes that not all attributes will be processed by consumers when making their decisions. If supported, this hypothesis could further suggest that consumers are more likely to use noncompensatory decision heuristics as their decision strategies. With different attribute orders, to reach the same threshold level(s) for triggering the stopping mechanism, different numbers of attributes may have to be evaluated/processed.

RESEARCH DESIGN

An experiment was conducted to examine the effects of attribute order and attribute number on consumers' multiattribute preferential decisions. Two separate experimental designs, with two sets of measurements, for two distinct dependent variables were used for testing the different hypotheses in this study.

The first experimental design is a factorial design that features three levels of "attribute-order" factor and three levels of "attribute-number" factor for testing the first three hypotheses (H1–H3). The attribute-order factor manipulates the sequence of attributes to be used and the attribute-number factor manipulates the amount of attributes to be used. The levels of each factor are defined as follows:

Attribute-Order Factor

FDO: Fixed-Descending-Order level. Attributes are given to the subjects in a descending order based on subjects' attribute importance ratings (from the most to the least important) obtained from pre-experiment measurements.

FAO: Fixed-Ascending-Order level. Attributes are given to the subjects in an ascending order based on subjects' attribute importance ratings (from the least to the most important) obtained from pre-experiment measurements.

FO: Free-Order level. Subjects are instructed to use attribute information in any order they desire.

Attribute-Number Factor

FSN: Fixed-Small-Number level. Subjects are required to use a small number of attributes that is fixed for all participants. This number was set at three.

FAD: Fixed-All-Dimension level. Subjects are required to explicitly evaluate all attributes that are available. This number was set at twelve.

FN: Free-Number level. Subjects are instructed to use as many attributes as they desire (among the twelve attributes available).

Two hundred seventy-nine subjects were recruited from undergraduate marketing classes for this experiment. They were randomly assigned to the nine treatment conditions (with thirty-one subjects in each group). To ensure realism, a set of three university-owned one-bedroom apartments were selected for the experiment. Twelve attributes of varying importance, for this type of apartment, were first identified (See appendix A). These apartments were carefully selected so that they differed from each other in terms of the 12 preidentified attributes, and yet none was necessarily superior to the others. To reduce unnecessary confounding effects, the three apartments were also selected in such a way that they were highly similar to each other in aspects other than those 12 preidentified attributes.

Subjects were first asked to participate in a pre-experimental measurement session. In this session the importance of each of the 12 attributes was measured to determine the three levels of attribute-order factor. Tversky's (1967) range-adjusted importance ratings were used for this purpose.

To desensitize the subjects, the actual experiment was conducted eight-to-nine days after the pre-experiment measurement session. During the experiment, subjects were provided with the attribute descriptions of the three apartments along with corresponding instructions in accordance with the treatment conditions that they were assigned to. They were asked to choose the most preferred apartment among the three apartments. The apartment choice was used as the measurement of the dependent variable (i.e., the preferential decision) in this factorial design.

To further explore the effects of attribute order on consumer decisions, an additional measurement for a separate dependent variable was taken during the same experiment. In addition to the apartment choice, the actual number of the attributes used by the subjects assigned to the three attribute-order groups under the Free-Number (FN) condition was counted during their apartment evaluation process. Although it is still part of the same experiment, with this attribute-number count, a separate experimental design was structured for examining Hypothesis 4 (H4).

This second experimental design features a three-level completely randomized one-factor after-only multi-group design structure. In this design, with the attribute-order factor (as previously described) as the independent variable, the attribute-number count constitutes the measurement of the dependent variable (i.e., the number of attributes used).

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

The GSK (Grizzle, Starmer, & Koch, 1969) linear-model approach to the analysis of categorical data was used to analyze the choice data from the three-by-three factorial design. It involves estimating and testing appropriate hypotheses concerning linear and/or log-linear functions of the cell probabilities in complex categorical data layouts. It typically uses the general weighted-least-squares procedures for estimations and the Neyman (1949) modified chi-square statistic for hypothesis testing.

In addition to the analysis of the main effects of attribute order and attribute number, five planned contrasts were made to provide additional insights. These five planned contrasts comprise all the paired-comparisons for the attribute-order factor (i.e., FO–FDO, FO–FAO and FDO–FAO) along with two paired-comparisons for the attribute number effect (FN–FAD and FSN–FAD). Tukey's error rate per family was adopted for these planned contrasts. The results of these GSK analyses are summarized in Table 1.

Hypothesis 1 (H1) is supported by the significance of the attribute-number main effect as well as the results from the two planned contrasts for the attribute number effect. Specifically, the significance of the attribute-number

Table 1. GSK Analysis Results ($N = 279$).

Factor	Effect/Contrast	DF	$\chi2$	Prob.
Order factor	Main	4	18.13	0.0012
Number factor	Main	4	60.57	0.0001
Order $\times$ factor	Interaction	8	12.69	0.1231
Order factor	FO–FDO	1	0.05	0.8262
	FO–FAO	1	6.74	0.0094
	FDO–FAO	1	5.61	0.0178
Number factor	FN–FAD	1	10.58	0.0011
	FSN–FAD	1	39.90	0.0001

main effect ($\chi^2 = 60.57$, $p < 0.01$) indicates that there is an overall attribute number effect on consumer decisions. This finding is further exemplified by the result of the FSN–FAD contrast ($\chi^2 = 39.9$, $p < 0.01$) where subjects who were required to use all twelve attributes differed significantly in their choices from those who were required to use only three attributes.

The result of the FN–FAD contrast shows that there is a significant difference in subjects' choices between those who were required to use all attributes and those who were free to use any number of attributes ($\chi^2 = 10.58$, $p < 0.01$). This result clearly suggests that consumers do not necessarily use all the attributes available when making their decisions.

These findings are generally consistent with studies of information processing and decision heuristics in supporting the general notions of the selectivity of consumer information processing and the heuristic nature of consumer decisions. They seem to also suggest that consumers tend to use noncompensatory heuristics more than (heuristic or nonheuristic) compensatory strategies in making multiattribute decisions.

Hypothesis 2 (H2) is generally supported by the test result of the attribute order main effect ($\chi^2 = 18.13$, $p < 0.01$). There are significant differences in subjects' apartment choice that can be attributable to the differences in the attribute orders the subjects received. Similarly, the significant differences observed in both the FDO–FAO ($\chi^2 = 5.61$, $p < 0.02$) contrast and the FO–FAO ($\chi^2 = 6.74$, $p < 0.01$) contrast also suggest the existence of an attribute order effect on consumer decisions. Furthermore, along with the result from the FO–FAO contrast, the lack of significance of the FO–FDO contrast ($\chi^2 = 0.05$, $p > 0.80$), while not a direct evidence, appears to indicate that when consumers are free to use attribute information, they are likely to begin with the more important attributes.

These findings have demonstrated that there was an attribute order effect on consumers' multiattribute decisions such that, with different attribute orders received/processed, the outcomes of consumers' decisions might be different. These findings are generally consistent with those from studies of other cognitive order effects such as the primacy effect and the effect of anchoring and adjustment heuristic. At the same time, the combination of the significance of the FO–FAO contrast and the lack of significance of FO–FDO contrast, while not a direct evidence, seems to reveal a decision pattern that is more consistent with those exhibited when prioritized noncompensatory heuristics are used.

By testing the attribute order and number interaction effect, Hypothesis 3 (H3) was intended to examine how the effect of attribute order on consumer decisions can be influenced by the amount of attribute information received.

The lack of significance in this test result ($\chi^2 = 12.69$, $p > 0.10$) does not provide an evidence of such influence. Indirectly, however, this result does not seem to favor the nonprioritized noncompensatory heuristics as the strategies used by subjects in this study for their decisions.

Finally, for examining Hypothesis 4 (H4), a simple one-way ANOVA along with the associated post-hoc multiple comparisons was used to analyze the data from the after-only multi-group design. The test result from the one-way ANOVA ($F = 33.91$, $p < 0.01$) indicates that attribute order does have an impact on the number of attributes consumers actually used in making their decisions.

To further explore the nature of this relationship, Dunn's test was used to perform the post-hoc multiple comparisons. Table 2 summarizes the results from these post-hoc paired comparisons. Under the 0.017 (0.05/3) alpha level, all of them are significant. Consequently, it is apparent that the amount of attribute information used by each order group differs from any other order groups.

An examination of the Group means (i.e., the average numbers of attributes used) shows that, among the three-order groups, the mean of the FO group was the smallest and the mean of the FAO group was the largest (9.0645 for the FAO group, 7.2903 for the FDO group and 4.8387 for the FO group). It appears that when subjects were free to use any number of attributes in any order, they typically only used a small number of the most important attributes when making their decisions (i.e., compared to the total of 12 attributes, the average of 4.8387 attributes is a small number). When the group was requested to evaluate attributes in an ascending order (i.e., from the least important one to the most important one), they seemed to have evaluated more attributes for making the same decision, as compared to those who were asked to evaluate attributes in a descending order or those who could determine their own attribute usage orders.

These findings not only suggest that attribute order affects the amount of attribute information processed, but also provides additional insights in how attribute information order influences consumers' decisions. Consistent with the findings from the analyses for the factorial design, the findings here

Table 2. ANOVA Results of the Post-hoc Multiple Comparisons.

Effect/Contrast	DF	F	Prob.
FO–FDO	1	22.63	0.0001
FO–FAO	1	67.25	0.0001
FDO–FAO	1	11.85	0.0009

have demonstrated that: (a) consumers do not always use all attribute information when making multiattribute decisions and (b) attribute order affects consumer information processing. Similarly, the behavior pattern displayed here also appears to be consistent with those exhibited by consumers using noncompensatory heuristics as their decision strategies when making multiattribute decisions.

An additional insight can be found by examining the FO–FDO contrast in both experimental designs simultaneously. While the test result of this contrast in the after-only multi-group design shows a significant difference in the number of attributes subjects actually used when making their apartment decision, the test result of this contrast from the factorial design fails to show a significant difference in their choices of apartment in the same experiment. Along with the information of the mean attribute numbers for the two-order groups (i.e., FO and FDO), this discrepancy reveals that, while subjects in the FDO group might have processed more attribute information as they were given more specific attribute-order instructions, their decision outcomes were not different from those in the FO group. One possible explanation for this discrepancy is that, again, more people tend to adopt strategies of a prioritized noncompensatory heuristic nature for making multiattribute preferential decisions, and that their decisions tend to be dominated by a few important attributes even if information on more attributes is processed.

CONCLUSIONS

Findings from this study have clearly indicated that, similar to other human cognitive activities, consumers' multiattribute preferential decisions are influenced by the amount of attribute information received/processed. Similarly, the attribute information order is demonstrated to have an effect on not only the outcomes of consumer decisions but also the amount of attribute information processed when these decisions are made. These findings also seem to suggest that consumers are more likely to adopt strategies of a noncompensatory heuristic nature (especially the "prioritized" ones) when making multiattribute preferential decisions.

These attribute order and number effects may be of interest to applied researchers in the field of marketing and marketing communications. Advertisers may desire to predict differential consumer responses to advertising messages featuring highly salient or important product attributes in efficacious sequences and numbers. For instance, advertising copywriters may be able to craft advertisements in such a way that the order and number of important product attributes varies for each target group, depending on projected impact on the choice decision. Similarly, in business marketing situations, sales representatives may be able to structure their appeals to different market segments in which the order and number of product attributes have different impacts.

Another implication of this study is the importance of considering the effects of attribute order and number in multiattribute decision modeling. In the compositional approach, for instance, the explanatory ability as well as the predictive power of the model is largely determined by the selection of the composition rule. As indicated in this study, consumers may not use all information available simultaneously and consumers may use different orders and numbers of attribute information in making decisions. More importantly, the order and number factors do have an impact on consumers' decisions. Without considering the attribute order and number effects and the possible variations of numbers and orders of attributes used by people, the model may not be representative of the true cognitive evaluation and composition rule or process. The explanatory and diagnostic abilities of the model may thus be questionable.

In the decompositional modeling approach, the consequences can be even more significant. In addition to problems associated with the representativeness of the functional structure of the model (to the true cognitive composition process), without considering the attribute order and number factors, problems may exist not only in the prediction of overall values/attitudes of decision alternatives but also in the estimation of parameters for each attribute (and/or attribute level). As the estimates of the parameters for each attribute (and/or attribute level) are typically interpreted as the relative importance of the attribute (and/or value/worth of the attribute level), these interpretations can be confusing and possibly even deceptive.

A need for further research in this regard is therefore a model that considers the fact that consumers may not use all information available simultaneously and that there are order and number effects on multiattribute decisions. This model should include the possibility for different combinations of orders and numbers of attributes that may be used by consumers.

Finally, although some discussions regarding the mental activities associated with the attribute order and attribute number effects on consumer decisions are provided in this study from the perspectives of both information processing and decision theories, more insights are still needed to better understand the underlying cognitive or mental process for these effects. Follow-up studies using measurement techniques such as process tracing may prove to be fruitful for this purpose.

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APPENDIX A: PRE-EXPERIMENT MEASUREMENT RESULTS OF THE SALIENCE OF THE 12 ATTRIBUTES

Attribute	Rank	Importance Rating	Salience Rating	Salience Z	Order
Rent	2.20	93.02	90.46	0.92	1
Size	3.69	82.17	82.97	0.55	2
Heater/air conditioner	7.04	63.22	77.89	0.37	3
Appliances	5.21	72.94	73.63	0.19	4
Living area	5.57	70.97	73.30	0.17	5
Carpet condition	7.27	63.42	72.08	0.13	6
Newness	6.72	66.81	72.56	0.15	7
Utilities coverage	6.53	63.45	68.14	0.00	8
Storage space	7.55	61.02	68.57	−0.06	9
Distance	7.53	56.33	55.13	−0.49	10
Swimming pool	9.78	43.72	49.03	−0.86	11
Furniture	9.27	38.29	41.18	−1.08	12

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AN EXPERIMENTAL STUDY OF THE ACCURACY OF CONSUMERS' SELF-REPORTS OF THEIR INFORMATION ACQUISITION PROCESSES☆

Alhassan G. Abdul-Muhmin

ABSTRACT

There has been a long-standing concern and controversy in the consumer behavior and related literature about the accuracy of consumers' self-reports of their mental processes. While some researchers have found such reports to be susceptible to a number of inaccuracies, others have found them to be reasonably accurate. This study contributes to the debate by comparing consumers' self-reports of their information acquisition processes in decision making with process-tracing measures of the same processes, and doing so within the context of research design recommendations suggested by Ericsson and Simon (1980, 1984, 1993) for collecting valid retrospective self-reports. Data for the study were collected in a decision-making experiment in which a custom-made computer software was used to administer two decision tasks and to unobtrusively

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measure subjects' information acquisition patterns (process-tracing measures). Self-report measures were collected by means of a questionnaire administered after subjects completed both tasks. Descriptive discriminant analysis (with self-report measures as dependent and scores on process-tracing measures as independent variables) shows that subjects were able to accurately report their information acquisition patterns. For both decision tasks, the majority of subjects who were classified by the discriminant functions as using a particular information acquisition strategy actually reported using such a strategy. Implications of the findings are outlined and discussed.

INTRODUCTION

In the behavioral sciences, researchers often rely on subjects' self-reports (alternatively called verbal reports) either as a sole or supplementary methodology in their applied research and theory-building efforts. Almost three decades ago, Jacoby suggested that close to 90% of all empirical studies on consumer behavior relied primarily or entirely on some form of self-report as a data collection method (Jacoby, 1978, p. 89). These reports are often collected either through personal interviews with respondents or through self-administered questionnaires, and typically require respondents to recall past consumption and other events, report on their current psychological states (e.g. attitudes, satisfaction, etc.) or provide socio-demographic data.

Self-reports have also been used to study the mental processes involved when consumers make judgments and choices among available product alternatives. In this regard, two main strategies have been employed – the techniques of concurrent and retrospective verbalizations (Ericsson & Simon, 1980, 1984, 1993). In concurrent verbalization, respondents are asked to "think aloud" while they make a decision, usually in an experimental setting, but also possible in field studies like in-store decision making. Using this strategy, self-reports are collected at the same time as the decision task is performed (e.g. Payne, 1976; Svenson, 1979). In retrospective verbalizations, subjects report on their mental processes after they have completed the decision task. Typically, they are asked to complete a questionnaire that queries them on relevant aspects of the decision. A modified form of retrospective verbalization is the prompted verbalization (Russo & Rosen, 1975) in which after a decision task, a subject is shown the eye-fixation sequences of his/her decision and asked to recapitulate the mental processes that took place during each stage in the sequence.

There has been a long-standing concern and controversy in the consumer behavior and related literature about the ability of consumers to accurately report on such past behaviors and mental processes, and thus, the validity of self-report data. On one side is the anti-introspectionist camp that argues that people in general lack self-insight, do not have access to their higher-level mental processes, and so are incapable of producing valid reports of such mental processes. On the other, the pro-introspectionist camp argues against the wholesale chastisement of all self-report data, presenting evidence in support of people's ability to tap into, and report the contents of their mental processes. On both sides of the controversy can be found masses of evidence that support the relevant positions. Indeed, the literature on both sides is so huge and spans such a wide variety of behavioral science disciplines that only a selected review will be attempted in a later section of this paper. However, a critical review reveals that with a few important exceptions, the contributions have mostly addressed the methodological issue of whether researchers can consider subjects' self-reports of their mental processes as valid data that can be used in applied or theory-testing research efforts.

There is, however, also a substantive aspect to the controversy, namely, understanding the mental processes by which self-reports get produced and what internal and external conditions influence this process. In particular, through an understanding of the factors that affect protocol generation, it is possible to delineate situations under which self-reports provide valid data and situations under which they do not, thereby reconciling the two opposing views in the controversy. Such a theory of protocol generation has been proposed by Ericsson and Simon (1980) and further detailed in Ericsson and Simon (1984, 1993). It identifies the mental processes involved when subjects generate concurrent and retrospective protocols, what factors are likely to affect the validity of such reports, how research should be designed to obtain valid self-reports, and how such reports should be validly analyzed.

The present study examines the validity of consumers' self-reports of their mental processes within the context of Ericsson and Simon's recommendations on the design of research to collect valid retrospective self-reports. The approach adopted has been to design a study in which subjects make two decisions, and then retrospectively report in broad terms information pertaining to their mental processes that is likely to still be in short-term memory (STM) at the time of eliciting the reports. These reports are then compared with unobtrusive "objective" measures of the same mental processes to determine the level of accuracy of the self-reports. Due to the absence of a control group with opposite conditions as those suggested by Ericsson and Simon (1980, 1984, 1993), the present study does not constitute a true test of their theory of retrospective protocol generation. However, it does present an initial appraisal of the theory's soundness or otherwise and a basis upon which future studies can be built. The rest of the paper is organized as follows. First, I selectively review the literature on both sides of the validity-of-self-report-data controversy. Then I describe an experiment that was conducted to achieve the study's objective, discussing how validity of the self-reports was ascertained. Next I present results of the experiments. A final section outlines their implications for research on retrospective self-reports of consumers' mental processes.

RESEARCH ON THE ACCURACY OF SELF-REPORTS

Researchers in the behavioral sciences have raised concerns about the quality of self-report data for almost as long as the methodology has been employed. These concerns have been advanced both from theoretical points of view and from empirical demonstrations of discrepancies between what people say and what they actually do. In an important and widely cited paper, Nisbett and Wilson (1977) reviewed evidence from a number of psychological studies on retrospective self-reports and concluded that people are often unconscious of their own higher-level cognitive processes and so are often incapable of reporting them accurately. In their view, when people attempt to report on their cognitive processes, they base such reports on *a priori*, implicit causal theories rather than on the basis of any true introspection. For this reason, Nisbett and Wilson argue, retrospective self-reports are often incomplete due to forgetting and fabrication. They are also prone to inference and rationalization rather than being based on reports of actual outputs from cognitive processes. For concurrent (or think-aloud) protocols, Russo, Johnson, and Stephens (1989) found evidence that these are subject to biases resulting from reactivity (the requirement to "think-aloud" affects execution of the primary task) and nonveridicality (the inability of a think-aloud protocol to reflect the underlying process).

Several empirical studies in a wide variety of behavioral science disciplines have also found (in some cases) profound differences between people's self-reports and (a) their actual behavior or (b) other more "objective" measures of variables on which self-report data is collected. For example, in the organizational behavior literature, discrepancies have been found between self-report and objective measures of employee performance (Bommer, Johnson, Rich, Podsakoff, & Mackenzie, 1995), absenteeism (Johns, 1994; Harrison & Shaffer, 1994; Mueller, Wakefield, Price, Curry, & McCloskey, 1987), and staff burnout (Lawson & O'Brien, 1994). In the marketing and consumer behavior literature, research using pantry studies (e.g. Lipstein, 1975 cited in Peterson & Kerin, 1981) and in-store observation (e.g. Brittin & Zinn, 1977 cited in Peterson & Kerin, 1981) to validate subjects' self-reports of products they consume have generally found these reports to be inaccurate.

Studies in which consumers' self-reports of their product knowledge have been compared with objective measures of such knowledge (e.g. Brucks, 1985; Selnes & Gronhaug, 1986) have also concluded that the two measures are not substitutable because consumers generally over- or underestimate their product knowledge in self-reports. Similarly, some studies of consumer judgment and choice in which subjective attribute weights have been compared with more "objective" weights derived from regression have found a lack of convergence between the two sets of weights (Billings & Marcus, 1983; Einhorn, Kleinmuntz, & Kleinmuntz, 1979). Other studies have reported a tendency for the self-reports to overestimate the importance of minor attributes and to underestimate subjects' reliance on a few major attributes in their decisions (Abelson & Levi, 1985 cited in Harte & Koele, 1995). Russo et al. (1989) found evidence of reactivity and nonveridicality for concurrent verbal protocols and of forgetting and fabrication for retrospective protocols.

Despite this mass of evidence suggesting the invalidity of self-reports, a number of researchers have found results that suggest the contrary (e.g. Wright & Rip, 1981; Reilly & Doherty, 1989; Russo & Dosher, 1983; Weitz & Wright, 1979; Harte & Koele, 1995). In a study conducted within the self-insight tradition, Reilly and Doherty (1989) concluded that people have far better insight into their mental processes than hitherto believed. Subjects in their study were able to correctly identify their own decision policies when these were presented in the form of Usefulness Indices. According to the authors, in the past researchers have found little correspondence between subjective and "objectively" determined weights only because people are unable to adequately express their self-insight by the subjective weighting procedures that have been commonly used. The authors specifically juxtaposed their findings with Nisbett and Wilson's (1977) indictment of self-reports, arguing for the contrary view that people indeed have significant insight into their own mental processes.

Further evidence in support of this position can be found in Russo and Dosher (1983). Although this study was not designed specifically to test the validity of self-report data, some of the results contribute to the debate. In this study, the authors collected both eye-fixation records of subjects' decision processes and prompted retrospective self-reports (Russo & Rosen, 1975) of those same processes. A subsequent classification of subjects' decision strategies using information from both methods produced highly consistent results. In a series of judgment studies, Harte and Koele (1995) collected both concurrent and retrospective protocols. These were subsequently used to determine "verbal protocol" and "subjective" weights that were then compared with weights derived from multiple regression. The authors found high correlations among all three sets of weights, indicating veridicality of the retrospective protocols and nonreactivity of the concurrent protocols. Weitz and Wright (1979) have shown how retrospective protocols can be used to validly gain insight into consumers' product evaluation processes.

Wright and Rip's (1981) study is particularly interesting because it was designed specifically with Nisbett and Wilson's position and arguments in mind. In one of two experiments, Wright and Rip (1981) found subjects' self-reports of the importance of various attributes in their judgments to be more accurate than the same reports by observers who knew the subjects intimately and therefore could be expected to hold fairly accurate theories of their decision processes. In a second experiment, the level of accuracy in subjects' self-reports exceeded what would obtain if they merely engaged in impression-management efforts, and again exceeded those of external observers. Overall the authors concluded that to achieve such accuracy levels subjects must have had access to valid private memories rather than alternative retrieval-based methods as suggested by Nisbett and Wilson (1977).

In sum, the current state of knowledge about the validity or otherwise of self-report data points to the conclusion that, like most other methodologies, self-reports may be subject to some invalidities under some data collection conditions. However, as has been argued by some researchers (e.g. Spector, 1994; Howard, 1994; Harrison & Shaffer, 1994), there are several research questions for which the only plausible methodology is self-reports. Therefore, the challenge is for researchers to identify conditions under which self-report data are valid and the conditions under which they are not. The literature on how to deal with potential biases in survey research is an attempt in this direction (e.g. Sudman & Bradburn, 1982). In the area of consumer judgment and choice (which is of interest to the present paper), Ericsson and Simon (1980, 1984, 1993) have attempted such a framework in their theory of protocol generation.

Ericsson and Simon's theory identifies the conditions under which both concurrent and retrospective protocols can be expected to generate veridical and valid data on their relevant primary processes. However, of interest to the present paper are their propositions regarding retrospective protocols. According to the authors, the errors of omissions due to forgetting and fabrication for which retrospective protocols have been indicted arise when subjects are asked to report information that is too specific, is not available in STM, or cannot be completely retrieved from long-term memory (LTM). As such, the key to obtaining valid retrospective protocols lies in designing data collection procedures that require experimental subjects to: (a) produce general rather than specific reports and (b) to report information contained in STM. In the words of Ericsson and Simon (1980), "When clear probes are used for specific retrospective memory and when reports are requested immediately after the last trial(s), informative verbal reports can usually be obtained …" (p. 243).

The present study tests Ericsson and Simon's propositions within the context of a consumer decision-making situation. The study examines the validity of consumers' self-reports of their information acquisition processes in decision making by comparing such reports with "objective", unobtrusive process-tracing measures of the same processes. As indicated in the introduction, due to the absence of a control group with opposite conditions as those suggested by Ericsson and Simon (1980, 1984, 1993), the present study does not constitute a true test of their theory of retrospective protocol generation. Rather it is an attempt to investigate whether if a study is designed to fulfil the spirit of their recommendations, valid retrospective self-reports can be produced.

METHOD

Data for the study were collected by means of an experiment in which subjects made two sets of decisions – one involving short-listing suppliers of computer network systems (hereafter referred to as "Session 1") and the other involving selection of vacation destinations (hereafter referred to as "Session 2"). The data were collected as part of a larger study details of which can be found in (references withheld to facilitate blind review). A custom-made computer software was used to administer the decision tasks and to unobtrusively monitor subjects' information search patterns.[1]

Sample

The sample consisted of 125 students, mostly undergraduate, recruited from three business educational institutions in Norway. Almost half of the respondents (61) were female. The use of student respondents was deemed desirable in view of the use of computers in the data collection. By using subjects who are generally familiar with computers, differences in ability to effectively complete the decisions were controlled. Moreover, an academic environment provided the best logistical support (i.e. computers) necessary for the experiment. All subjects participated in the study voluntarily.

Decision Tasks

In Session 1, subjects were asked to assume that they were purchasing officers of a large company, and were responsible for short-listing suppliers of a new computer network system for the company. The choice of this decision task was inspired by Crow, Olshavsky, and Summers (1980). Subjects were told that they had to make a short list of three from a pool of six suppliers, and that experts' evaluations of the six suppliers on six relevant attributes were available to enable them make informed decisions. Suppliers were identified by letters while attributes were identified by numerals, with each numeral representing a specific attribute description. The descriptions were available from the computer upon request, and subjects were also provided with a hard copy of the descriptions.

The decision task for Session 2 involved selection of destinations to visit during a vacation. Subjects made choices from a set of 10 fictitious Asian cities described along a set of 10 attributes. In this session, subjects were asked to assume that they had won a competition organized by their local travel agency and had been offered a vacation in Asia. They could select a specific number of cities to visit from a pool of 10 to which the travel agency organizes charter tours. They were asked to assume that a close friend who had visited them had evaluated each city on a set of 10 attributes, and they were to use the evaluations in making their decisions. A list of the 10 attributes was provided on paper, in addition to the display that could be requested from the computer.

For both sessions, a subject could obtain the evaluation of an alternative (suppliers or cities) on an attribute only by specifically requesting the computer to provide the required information. The information was not displayed automatically. Neither was it organized in matrix form.[2] For each of the two decisions, the software kept track of which specific pieces of information a subject requested, the order in which information was requested, and the time spent on each piece of information. From this basic information it was possible to also calculate the proportion of available information examined by each subject, the proportion of different transition types (Payne, 1976; Jacoby, Chestnut, Weigl, & Fisher, 1976) in each subject's search matrix, and the total time spent on the decision.

Experimental Procedure

For logistical reasons, all 125 subjects could not participate in the experiment at the same time. As such, the data were collected sequentially over a period of three months. Sixty-five subjects performed the decision tasks individually using a computer in the author's department over the three-month period. The remaining 60 respondents performed the tasks in four group sessions, usually at the central computer terminal room of the relevant institution. Description of the experimental procedure that follows is based on respondents who performed the decision tasks in group sessions. All experiments were conducted by the author, and efforts were made to conduct all sessions in as much the same way as possible.[3]

Upon arrival at the computer terminal room, subjects were reminded that they were going to take part in an experiment involving decision making. They were informed that they would be performing two decision tasks. The experimenter then briefly explained to them the nature of the tasks and the software used in the data collection. Emphasis was placed on the interactive nature of the software, and the importance of reading instructions on the screen at all times. Subjects were then handed a list of the attributes used in constructing the stimuli and extra sheets of paper on which to take notes if they decided to organize their thoughts.[4] They were then told they could spend as much or as little time on the decision as they desired, but that once they started the process, it was of utmost importance for the study that they concentrated on completing the task. After subjects completed their decisions, they were asked to fill out a questionnaire of which they had not been told in advance. In the questionnaire they were asked, among other things, to report how they acquired information prior to making a decision.

Measures of Information Acquisition Patterns

Self-Report Measures

Self-report measures were obtained through a self-administered questionnaire distributed after subjects completed both decision tasks. Among other things, subjects were asked to indicate the dominant strategy they used in

Table 1. Self-Report Measure of Subjects' Information Acquisition Patterns.

Which of the following statements best describes how you searched for information prior to making your decision? (*Select only one statement*).

A I first selected a city ("supplier" for Session 1) and looked at its ratings on each of the factors. Then I selected another city ("supplier" for Session 1), then a third, and so forth.
B I first selected a factor and compared all the cities ("suppliers" for Session 1) on this factor. Then I selected a second factor, then a third, and so forth.
C I didn't follow any systematic pattern in searching for information, i.e. I asked for information at random.
D Other (Please specify)
………
………

acquiring information by choosing one of four alternative descriptions of possible information acquisition strategies. The relevant question and accompanying answer alternatives are reproduced in Table 1.

Answer alternative (a) is a description of the Choice by Processing Brands (CPB), or alternative-based processing strategy. Alternative (b) describes a Choice by Processing Attributes (CPA), or attribute-based processing strategy,[5] and answer alternative (c) is a catch-all category, and was meant for those who used strategies that could not be classified into any of the first two. The open-ended alternative was intended to elicit any further comments from respondents.

Process-Tracing Measures

Process-tracing measures of subjects' information acquisition patterns were unobtrusively captured by the computer in the form of detailed records of sequences in which subjects acquired information pieces. From this data, the technique of analysis of transitions (Payne, 1976; Jacoby et al., 1976, p. 310) was used to determine the proportions of Type I (same brand, same attribute), Type II (same brand, different attribute), Type III (different brand, same attribute), and Type IV (different brand, different attribute) transitions in each subject's search matrix.[6] Type I transitions are usually very rare and indicate a return to the same piece of information previously accessed. The proportion of Type II and Type III transitions indicate the extent of CPB and CPA processing, respectively. Proportion of Type IV transitions captures the extent of random processing as well as "shifts" necessary to execute a CPB or CPA strategy.[7] All four transition types are continuous variables with values between 0 and 1, and for each subject their sum

Table 2. Means and Standard Deviations for Proportions of Different Transition Types.

Group (Self-Report)	Type I	Type II	Type III	Type IV
Session 1				
Entire sample	0.1650	0.6803	0.4136	0.3378
	(1.1755)	(1.1638)	(1.1951)	(1.1575)
"CPB" group	0.1366	0.8085	0.2567	0.2956
	(1.0748)	(1.0318)	(1.0957)	(1.0572)
"CPA" group	0.3153	0.5340	0.8103	0.4870
	(1.6406)	(1.6287)	(1.5825)	(1.6103)
"RANDOM" group	0.0157	0.4586	0.2586	0.2671
	(0.0270)	(0.4422)	(0.4450)	(0.3476)
"OTHER" group	0.0000	0.3433	0.4322	0.2244
	(0.0000)	(0.3630)	(0.3535)	(0.1032)
Session 2				
Entire sample	0.0208	0.5363	0.2998	0.1432
	(0.0520)	(0.3594)	(0.3534)	(0.0760)
"CPB" group	0.0172	0.7183	0.1320	0.1325
	(0.0159)	(0.2723)	(0.2497)	(0.0778)
"CPA" group	0.0112	0.2305	0.6183	0.1400
	(0.0278)	(0.3116)	(0.3254)	(0.0582)
"RANDOM" group	0.1975	0.4200	0.1200	0.2625
	(0.2133)	(0.3175)	(0.1192)	(0.1601)
"OTHER" group	0.0131	0.6823	0.1377	0.1669
	(0.0225)	(0.1869)	(0.1760)	(0.0542)

Note: Standard deviations are in parenthesis.

equals 1. Table 2 presents means and standard deviations for each transition type for both sessions of the experiment. The statistics are presented for the entire group as well as for each of the four self-report categories.

ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

Comparison between the self-report and process-tracing measures was done by performing descriptive discriminant analysis on the data using the DISCRIMINANT procedure in SPSS/PC+. The dependent variable in the analysis was the self-report measure and the discriminating variables were the proportions of Types I, II, III, and IV transitions in each subject's search matrix.[8] Separate discriminant functions were estimated for each session, and the results will likewise be presented separately for each session.

Results for Session 1

Tables 3a–c show the results for Session 1. For this session three discriminant functions were estimated, but only one was significant [chi-square (12 d.f.) = 48.171; $p<0.001$]. This function accounts for almost 87% of the variance among the self-report subject categories. In Table 3a (which shows the discriminant function-variables correlations for all three functions), the significant discriminant function is Function 1.

The discriminant function–variable correlations depicted in Table 3a show that Function 1 is defined primarily by the proportions of Type II and III transitions in subjects' search matrices. Specifically, the proportion of Type II transitions (extent of CPB or alternative-based processing) has a positive impact on the discriminant score while the proportion of Type III transitions (extent of CPA or attribute-based processing) has a negative impact on the score. The correlations also show that the extent of CPA processing has a much larger impact on the discriminant scores than the extent of CPB processing.

Table 3b shows the mean scores of each self-report category (group) on all three discriminant functions. The relevant figures are those for Function 1 (the only significant function). The group mean scores show clearly that subjects in Group 1 (i.e. those who reported using a CPB strategy) have an average

Table 3a. Correlations between Discriminating Variables and Canonical Discriminant Functions (Session 1).

Variable	Function 1	Function 2	Function 3
Proportion of Type I transitions	−0.07257	0.30625	−0.13211
Proportion of Type II transitions	0.18816	0.30186	−0.17214
Proportion of Type III transitions	−0.28657	0.33693	0.01535
Proportion of Type IV transitions	−0.08878	0.21695	−0.14174

Table 3b. Group Means on Canonical Discriminant Functions (Session 1).

Group (Self-Report)	Function 1	Function 2	Function 3
1: CPB	0.51366	0.04430	0.00113
2: CPA	−0.96890	0.16987	−0.03308
3: RANDOM	−0.31112	−0.63644	−0.35264
4: OTHER	−0.52344	−0.41578	0.37573

Table 3c. Cross-Classification of Predicted and Actual Group Membership (Session 1).

Actual Group Membership (Self-Reports)	Number of Cases	Predicted Group Membership			
		Group 1 (CPB)	Group 2 (CPA)	Group 3 (RANDOM)	Group 4 (OTHER)
Group 1: CPB	70	54 (77.1%)	10 (14.3%)	5 (7.1%)	1 (1.4%)
Group 2: CPA	30	4 (13.3%)	16 (53.3%)	4 (13.3%)	6 (20.0%)
Group 3: RANDOM	7	3 (42.9%)	2 (28.6%)	2 (28.6%)	0 (0.0%)
Group 4: OTHER	9	2 (22.2%)	3 (33.3%)	3 (33.3%)	1 (11.1%)
Ungrouped cases	9	1 (11.1%)	8 (88.9%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)

Note: Percentage of grouped cases correctly classified (hit rate): 62.93.

discriminant score of 0.51366 on Function 1 while those in Group 2 (i.e. subjects who reported using a CPA strategy) have an average score of −0.96890. In other words, subjects who report using a CPB (or CPA) processing strategy generally have relatively high proportions of Type II (or Type III) transitions in their search matrices. This indicates high degree of correspondence between the self-report categories and the expected scores on the discriminant functions.

Finally, Table 3c shows the classification results when the discriminant scores are used to classify subjects into the four self-report categories. We note in particular that 77% of subjects who are predicted by the discriminant functions to use a CPB acquisition strategy actually report using that strategy. Further, 53% of those predicted to use a CPA strategy actually report using that strategy. The overall hit rate for the subjects for which there are valid self-report measures is about 63%. This indicates that, in general, there is reasonably good correspondence between the self-report measures of information acquisition strategies and the classifications of subjects' process-tracing measures.

Results for Session 2

Three discriminant functions were estimated for Session 2, two of which are statistically significant at $p<0.001$. Together these two functions (labeled

Function 1 and Function 2 in Table 4a) account for 98% of the variance in the dependent variable. Function 1 accounts for 52% of the variance [chi-square (9 d.f.) = 127.426; $p<0.001$], while Function 2 accounts for 46% [chi-square (4 d.f.) = 62.301; $p<0.001$]. Table 4a shows the discriminant function–variables correlations for all three functions estimated for this session.

The results indicate that Function 1 is again defined primarily by the proportions of Type II and III transitions in subjects' search matrices. The correlations between each of these two variables and Function 1 are the highest among the four correlations for that function. These two correlations are also almost at opposite ends of a continuum – the one for Type II transitions being high and negative and that for Type III transitions high and positive. Again, the substantive interpretation is that positive scores on Function 1 will be indicative of a high proportion of Type III transitions in a subject's search matrix, and therefore use of a CPA strategy. Negative scores indicate a high proportion of Type II transitions and greater use of a CPB strategy. Function 2 on the other hand is primarily defined by scores on the proportion of Type I transitions (i.e. same brand, same attribute transitions).

Group means on the discriminant functions are depicted in Table 4b. The figures show that the mean discriminant score of subjects in Group 1 (subjects who report using a CPB acquisition strategy) is −0.53682, indicating a predominant proportion of Type II transitions among this group, and therefore, use of the CPB strategy. Similarly, the mean discriminant score of 1.14464 for Group 2 (subjects who report using a CPA strategy) implies a high proportion of Type III transitions in these subjects' search patterns, and therefore, more widespread use of the CPA strategy among this group.

The conclusions above are corroborated by the classification results in Table 4c. This table shows that 62% of subjects who are classified by the discriminant functions as using a CPB acquisition strategy actually report using that strategy, while 73% of those predicted to use a CPA strategy actually report using that strategy. The overall hit rate for the classification

Table 4a. Correlations between Discriminating Variables and Canonical Discriminant Functions (Session 2).

Variable	Function 1	Function 2	Function 3
Proportion of Type I transitions	−0.43645	0.89527	0.08951
Proportion of Type II transitions	−0.82864	−0.47776	0.29173
Proportion of Type III transitions	0.96105	0.26841	−0.06586
Proportion of Type IV transitions	−0.12917	0.34710	−0.92889

Table 4b. Group Means on Canonical Discriminant Functions (Session 2).

Group (Self-Report)	Function 1	Function 2	Function 3
1: CPB	−0.53682	−0.36890	0.09479
2: CPA	1.14464	0.29510	−0.00111
3: RANDOM	−1.80925	3.99448	0.01770
4: OTHER	−0.53441	−0.42876	−0.43585

Table 4c. Cross-Classification of Predicted and Actual Group Membership (Session 2).

Actual Group Membership (Self-Reports)	Number of Cases	Predicted Group Membership			
		Group 1 (CPB)	Group 2 (CPA)	Group 3 (RANDOM)	Group 4 (OTHER)
Group 1: CPB	61	38 (62.3%)	7 (11.5%)	0 (0%)	16 (26.2%)
Group 2: CPA	41	5 (12.2%)	30 (73.2%)	1 (2.4%)	5 (12.2%)
Group 3: RANDOM	4	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	3 (75.0%)	1 (25.0%)
Group 4: OTHER	13	4 (30.8%)	1 (7.7%)	0 (0%)	8 (61.5%)
Ungrouped cases	6	1 (16.7%)	5 (83.3%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)

Note: Percentage of grouped cases correctly classified (hit rate): 66.39.

results of this session is 66%, indicating that, in general, there was reasonably good correspondence between the self-report measures of information acquisition strategies and the classifications of subjects' process-tracing measures based on the proportions of Type II and III transitions.

Additional Analyses and Results

Taken individually or together, the results for Session 1 and 2 of the study lead to the conclusion that subjects' self-reports of their information acquisition patterns were reasonably accurate. The hit rates in the confusion matrices show a reasonably good correspondence between the self-report measures and discriminant function classifications. A closer look at these matrices reveals that, of the subjects who provided self-reports of their information acquisition strategies (116 for Session 1 and 119 for Session 2), a relatively small percentage report using strategies other than CPB and CPA (16% for Session 1 and 17% for Session 2). An even smaller percentage report using the RANDOM strategy. Thus, a relevant issue is whether the inclusion of the RANDOM and OTHER categories in the analysis affected the clarity of the results; specifically whether this biased the hit rates downward. To investigate this, the analysis was performed using only subjects who reported using a CPB or CPA strategy.[9] For this two-group analysis, only one significant discriminant function for each was estimated for both sessions. In the results for both sessions, the dominance of the proportion of Type II and III transitions in each discriminant function becomes even more pronounced. The mean group discriminant scores show clearer distinctions between the CPB and CPA groups for both sessions, and the hit rates improve to 83% and 84% for Session 1 and Session 2, respectively.

Although not directly relevant to the objectives of the study, a cross tabulation was also performed to investigate whether or not subjects' information acquisition strategies varied across the two decision tasks. The results show that, in general, subjects tended to use the same acquisition strategies in both sessions of the experiment. Seventy-eight percent of subjects who were classified, by the process-tracing measures as using a CPB strategy in Session 1 were also classified as using this strategy in Session 2 while 15% switched to a CPA strategy. Similarly, 76% of subjects who used a CPA strategy in Session 1 used the same strategy in Session 2, with 16% switching to a CPB strategy.

SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION

This study examined the validity of consumers' self-reports of their information acquisition processes in decision making by comparing such reports with unobtrusive, "objective" process-tracing measures of the same processes. It was conducted within the context of research design recommendations suggested by Ericsson and Simon's (1980, 1984, 1993) theory of protocol generation. The study employed an experimental design in which subjects made two decisions that were administered by a computer. The computer also unobtrusively captured subjects' information search patterns (process-tracing measures). Self-report measures were collected after subjects made their decisions by asking them to complete a questionnaire of which they had not been told in advance. Discriminant analysis was then used to determine the extent to which classification of subjects based on their process-tracing scores matched classifications based on their self-reports. Overall, the results indicate that subjects' retrospective self-reports of their information acquisition processes were reasonably accurate. In both experimental sessions, the majority of subjects who were classified by the discriminant functions as using a particular information acquisition strategy actually report using such a strategy (i.e., there were high hit rates in the classification analysis).[10] A number of conclusions and implications (both substantive and methodological) can be drawn from the results. I address first the substantive implications.

The first and obvious substantive implication is that the results seem to confirm the reasonableness of Ericsson and Simon's (1980, 1984, 1993) predictions that valid retrospective self-reports can be obtained if subjects are required to produce general rather than specific reports and to report the contents of STM. In the present study, subjects filled out the self-report questionnaires immediately after they completed the last of the two decision tasks. As such, information about their mental processes could be expected to still be in STM. Moreover, they also provided broad descriptions of their acquisition strategies by selecting among a set of pre-determined alternatives. Thus, the study met the two major conditions stipulated in the theory of retrospective protocol generation. It should be noted, however, that since the experimental design did not include a control group with opposite conditions as those contained in the present study, the present results can be viewed only as preliminary support for the theory. They indicate that the theory can be held to be a reasonable theory of retrospective protocol generation until future studies prove otherwise.

The design of the present study also contained two additional aspects beyond those suggested in Ericsson and Simon's theory that could have improved the accuracy of subjects' self-reports. These are the inclusion of a prompted recall in the form of pre-determined response alternatives from which subjects could select, and formulation of response alternatives to preclude any incentive for socially desirable responses. The former could have contributed to improving recall and the latter to discouraging fabrication, the two important threats to the validity of retrospective protocols. This suggests that the theory of protocol generation could be broadened to include these two factors and, indeed any other factors that contribute to improving recall and discouraging fabrication of responses.

A second major substantive implication of the results derives from the fact, in itself, that subjects were able to accurately report on their information acquisition processes even though they did not know in advance that this was of concern to the study. Following Ericsson and Simon's (1980) suggestions as to how subjects might arrive at such general descriptions of their mental processes (p. 221), there are two possible ways in which our subjects could have generated their reports. They might have remembered some parts, or even complete segments of their information acquisition processes during the decisions, which they then generalized to the entire decision process and reported accordingly. Alternatively, they might have been aware of the general information acquisition strategies they used, and so simply recalled and reported them directly.

The first explanation does not fully account for the level of correspondence between the self-reports and process-tracing measures observed for the majority of subjects in the present study. If subjects were merely generalizing from isolated segments to the entire decision process, then one might expect the availability and representativeness biases popularized by Tversky and Kahneman (1974) to take hold and lead to inaccuracies in the reporting. This is probably the case for subjects whose self-reports did not correspond with their classification by the process-tracing measures. For the majority of subjects, however, we might have to accept the second explanation, and conclude that these were quite aware of their information acquisition strategies, and so simply recalled and reported them from memory. This could further imply that people have preferred processing strategies that they employ across decision situations. Indeed, results of the supplementary cross-tabulation analysis of process-tracing measures provide evidence in support of this.

From a methodological standpoint, results of the present study are comforting to researchers who need to study consumers' decision processes in situations where logistical or practical considerations dictate the inappropriateness of using the more "objective" process-tracing methods that have been suggested in the literature. Consumers' decision processes are now often studied using process-tracing techniques like eye-tracking studies and the information display board (IDB) – both manual and computerized. These techniques enable researchers to objectively monitor subjects' information search behavior, and so are normally preferred to self-reports. However, process-tracing techniques have a number of drawbacks that limit their use in all consumer decision contexts.

First, they often require substantial resources to implement. Eye-movement studies require the installation of eye-tracking cameras. Manual IDB studies are obtrusive to the extent that they require the researcher's presence to monitor certain aspects of the study (e.g. the time spent on different information pieces). Programming skills are required to implement a computerized IDB study, if the study's objectives are such that existing software cannot easily be adapted to the task. In comparison, self-report data are comparatively easier and cost-efficient to collect. Second, the very nature of process-tracing methods requires that research using these approaches usually has to be designed in such a way that realism is sacrificed. Mounting eye cameras to subjects or asking them to think aloud while making a decision all introduce elements of artificiality into the study, in addition to the potential for reactivity. Computerized IDBs often are designed such that there is a pre-programmed way the subject should relate to the decision environment. As such, process-tracing techniques are not very suitable for field studies, such as studying actual in-store decision processes. Under these conditions, the only other available research alternatives are direct observation or reliance on consumers' self-reports. Clearly, where the subject of the study is consumer information acquisition, observation cannot provide the needed data. The researcher then might have to use consumers' own self-reports of their decision processes, and will genuinely be concerned about the extent to which s/he can rely on those reports. The present results show that, when research is designed with conditions similar to those employed in the present study reasonably valid self-reports can be obtained.

As with any study, the present one has its weaknesses which future studies of the kind might consider strengthening. The first is the lack of a control group in our attempt to test Ericsson and Simon's (1980, 1984, 1993) stipulated conditions for obtaining valid retrospective protocols. Future studies should consider including a control group in which retrospective protocols are collected under conditions opposite to those suggested in the theory of protocol generation. Second, the present study relied on a single benchmark (computer records of information search patterns) for assessing the accuracy of self-report measures. A multi-method approach in which two or more benchmarks are used would provide more conclusive evidence. Future studies of this kind might consider including additional "objective" measures of the decision processes (such as think-aloud protocols) against which the self-report measures could be compared. Finally, care should be taken in generalizing the present results beyond the study's context. It is important to note that the study examined consumers' ability to accurately report the order in which they acquired *external* information in a decision context. It is however, well known from models of consumer decision making (see e.g. Bettman, Johnson, & Payne, 1991) that internal search is an important aspect of consumers' decision processes. Furthermore, only external information of a specific nature was examined, namely, information search patterns. The study does not examine correspondence between self-reports and process-tracing measures of specific alternatives and attributes consulted, which attributes played what roles in the final decisions, how carefully available alternatives were evaluated or any such information that is of potential interest to consumer behavior researchers. It is plausible that, for some of these other types of information memory, judgmental, social desirability, and other biases could influence the level of correspondence between self-reports and process-tracing measures.

NOTES

1. Details of the specific needs and an overview of the software can be found in Abdul-Muhmin (1994).

2. Subjects had to type in alternative-attribute combinations for required evaluations to be displayed on the screen. For example, if the subject wanted the evaluation of supplier G on attribute 5, s/he had to type in G at a first prompt and 5 at a second prompt for the evaluation to be displayed. In addition to helping overcome the problems of structuring information in matrix form (see e.g. Brucks, 1985 for a discussion), this format also imposed an information acquisition cost which is not entirely unrealistic in real-life decisions.

3. Subsequent analyses revealed that differences in session membership did not result in any differences on the variables of interest to the study.

4. Subjects could also request a display of the attribute-list from the computer. The list on paper was to help them make easy reference to the attribute-list without having to request a display from the computer anytime they wanted to take a second look.

5. The terminology used in here is from Bettman (1979).

6. "Analysis of transitions" works by conceptualizing the movement from one acquired value of information (n) to the next ($n+1$) as a transition. Since any information value in an alternative-by-attribute matrix can be described as a row–column (alternative–attribute) coordinate, the transition from any nth to $n+1$th value can be one of four types – same alternative, same attribute; same alternative, different attribute; different alternative, same attribute; different alternative, different attribute. This results in the four transition types used in the analysis. If a subject requests N information values before making a decision, there are a total of $N-1$ transitions in the subject's search matrix. For each subject, these $N-1$ transitions were classified into each of the four categories above in order to determine the total number of each transition type in the matrix. This figure was then divided by $N-1$ to determine the proportion of each transition type. See Hofacker (1984) for an alternative approach to analyzing process tracing data.

7. The idea of a shift can be illustrated with an example. Given a decision task with 10 brands (A … J) and 10 attributes (1 … 10), a subject who uses a pure CPB strategy might begin search by examining information in the following sequence: A1, A2, …, A10. At A10, the subject decides to next examine brand B on all attributes, so s/he continues with B1, B2, …, B10. The transition from A10 to B1 is of Type IV, but it is not a random transition. Rather it is a shift necessary to complete a CPB strategy. If the subject searches the entire matrix in our example there will be nine such transitions. In general, where there are x alternatives and y attributes, there will be $x-1$ such transitions for a pure CPB strategy and $y-1$ for a pure CPA strategy.

8. Each of these is a continuous variable between 0 and 1.

9. Indeed, detailed examination of the completed questionnaires and search statistics of subjects who checked alternative D in Table 1 indicates that almost all of them checked this alternative in order to make use of the space provided so they can describe their search patterns in more detail. For example, one subject who checked this alternative for Session 2 explained that he selected only 6 of the 10 attributes and examined the alternatives on these attributes. In other words, he used a CPB strategy but only with a subset of the attributes and wanted to explain this aspect of his strategy.

10. It is important to note that this approach assumes that the process-tracing measures are relatively error-free and so serve as a standard against which accuracy of the self-reports can be ascertained. I believe this to be the case because, the computer simply recorded what information pieces each subject consulted, the order in which the information was consulted, and the time spent on each information piece. From the order of information search, the proportion of transition types were then computed by the simple procedure of taking any movement from one information piece to another and classifying it into one of the four categories. As such, there is little potential for error either in the record kept by the computer or in the classification into categories. Having said that, it should also be noted that the transitions themselves are micro-level measures that were then used as indicators of macro-level choice strategies. As such there is potential for error in the translation process. However, the translation was done by using the proportion of each transition type in each subject's matrix to construct the discriminant functions and to group respondents into CPB, CPA, RANDOM and OTHER categories. The groupings were based on similarities and differences among subjects in their scores on the discriminant functions, a procedure in which the groupings are executed to minimize (maximize) intra-group (inter-group) differences. They were not based on subjective criteria. Any errors in such a classification process will be due to inaccuracies in computations rather than memory, social desirability, or other biases as could be the case for the self-reports. Consequently, all other things being equal, the process-tracing measures are likely to be better measure than the self-reports.

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ON THE SYMBOLIC MEANINGS OF SOUVENIRS FOR CHILDREN

Stacey Menzel Baker, Susan Schultz Kleine and Heather E. Bowen

ABSTRACT

This paper explores the symbolic meanings that children of elementary school age attach to souvenirs from different types of vacation destinations. Data from interviews and pictorial projectives illustrate the meaning of souvenirs for children, including how children skillfully use souvenirs in their everyday lives and how they interpret souvenirs as symbols of people, places, and experiences. More specifically, the interview data reveal the meanings attached to souvenirs which are possessed, including how souvenirs are clearly distinguished from other objects which are possessed and how they are used for their contemplation and action value, for their communicative properties, and to provide continuity across time and place. In addition, the data from pictorial projectives reveal the latent motives of souvenir acquisition as well as how different types of places lead to different types of souvenir choices. Thus, the paper demonstrates the many layers of meaning associated with souvenirs in both acquisition and consumption processes and provides evidence that the meanings between children, places, and objects are inextricably linked.

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When people travel to the Grand Canyon, Paris, the Bahamas, Disneyland, or anywhere in between, they are likely to seek tangible reminders of their interactions with these places. Tourists want to "put their hands on" something that gives the travel experience realism and proves that the bearer has been there (Stewart, 1984). Gordon (1986, p. 135) explains:

> As an actual object, it [the souvenir] concretizes or makes tangible what was otherwise only an intangible state. Its physical presence helps locate, define, and freeze in time a fleeting, transitory experience, and bring back into ordinary experience something of the quality of an extraordinary experience.

Thus, the function of a souvenir is to capture the essence of this extraordinary experience and bring sacred qualities of the tourist place back to the tourist's home. The souvenir provides the narrative for an individual's experience (Stewart, 1984). Like the Star Trek transporter, the souvenir mentally beams the tourist from one location to another; it helps the tourist cross the boundary from the extraordinary back to the ordinary and vice versa. It is the re-entry fee into everyday life (Belk, 1997; Gordon, 1986; van Gennep, 1960).

Souvenirs, like other possessions, may become special and significant to a person via self-extension (Belk, 1988), or when they help tell a part of a person's life story (Kleine, Kleine, & Allen, 1995). However, souvenirs may carry additional sources of meaning. One additional source of souvenir meaning may be the emotions and self-meanings associated with a particular *place* (Belk, 1992; Low & Altman, 1992). Yet another source of meaning stems from collective cultural meaning; a particular souvenir (e.g., miniature Statue of Liberty or Mickey Mouse ears) may be culturally understood to represent its associated place. All of these sources of symbolic meaning give rise to the many-layered meanings of a souvenir.

What about children who acquire souvenirs? Because of the person/object, person/place, and place/object meanings captured by souvenirs, they offer a potent opportunity for a child to attach individual and/or collective meanings to a material object. Souvenirs offer researchers the opportunity to observe why children acquire, and how they relate to, this kind of symbolic good. For example, to a child, is a souvenir something to acquire and have? Something to use and play with? Or do children also associate symbolic, self-related meanings with souvenirs, similar to how an adult might? Do children attribute contemplative value to souvenirs? Do children understand, for example, that something acquired today may evoke nostalgia years from now?

The purpose of this research is to discover the symbolic meanings children assign to acquired souvenir objects and to explore their understanding and knowledge underlying souvenir acquisition. Our focus is on children's souvenir choices for three primary reasons. First, and most importantly, we want to begin to understand the basis of the meanings that children attach to souvenirs and determine if souvenirs are a special class of possession with distinctive features. Second, we want to understand what motivates children to acquire objects on their vacations. And, finally, we want to understand the role that these objects play in the everyday lives of these child consumers.

The paper begins by reviewing relevant theoretical frameworks. After the research methodology used to discover the nature of the relationship between children, souvenirs, and vacation destinations is explained, the results of interviews and pictorial projectives from a sample of 22 children (ages 8–13 years old) are presented. The discussion includes conclusions about children's symbolic use of souvenir possessions and offers some ideas for future research.

SOUVENIRS: THEORETICAL ACCOUNTS OF SYMBOLIC MEANING

The symbolic meaning of a good is not inherent in the material object itself; such meaning is a perception held by a particular person for a particular contextualized object (Kleine & Kernan, 1991). A person may perceive a symbolic meaning for any particular object (e.g., souvenirs, places, experiences, events). Individuals' object meanings are socially constructed through shared meanings, personal or vicarious experiences, and rituals associated with particular places and/or goods.

Layers of Meaning for Souvenirs

The complexity of meanings which child tourists assign to souvenirs can be understood in terms of a triad of three theoretical frameworks: the person/object relationship, the person/place relationship, and the object/place relationship. Together these three connections form the basis for the meaning of a souvenir.

Person/Object Relationships

Similar to other material goods, the souvenir often achieves sacred importance to an individual owing to its potency for recalling memorable travel and vacation events and experiences (Belk, 1992). MacCannell (1976, p. 147) calls souvenirs status signs, marks of group affiliation, identity badges, and mementos of rites of passage, "found in every corner of daily life and embedded in every system of information." As noted by Littrell et al. (1994, p. 3), "Tourists use their souvenirs to reminisce, differentiate the self from or integrate with others, bolster feelings of confidence, express creativity, and enhance aesthetic pleasure," all personal projects of identity development and maintenance. Thus, souvenirs, like other special possession objects, are used to help *construct* personal identity, not simply to preserve it (Belk, 1992).

Souvenirs are often selected because of what they say about the person. Tourists at the same site may select different objects, depending upon the meanings with which they wish to identify themselves (Gordon, 1986). Graburn (1989) notes that it is the tourist's chosen style of tourism (historical, ethnic, ecological, recreational, environmental, or hunting and gathering environmental), which determines the type of souvenir which will be brought home. For example, the "ecological" tourist will bring home pictures and postcards; the "hunting and gathering" tourist will bring home rocks and seashells; and the "ethnic" tourist will bring arts and crafts. The implication is that these particular souvenirs *reflect and define the tourist him/herself*, rather than simply the place she/he visited.

Adults also routinely use certain possessions symbolically to preserve a sense of self-continuity via a possession's meanings that are connected to people and events in a person's past (Belk, 1990; Kleine et al., 1995). Possessions provide physical evidence of prior experiences and meanings (Grayson & Shulman, 2000). In essence, some souvenir purchases reflect a kind of *anticipatory nostalgia*, a feeling that someday in the future the souvenir object will be useful as a meaningful symbol of a past trip or event.

What about children and souvenirs? We know of no research that examines this particular issue. However, we may infer some things based on what has been established about children, possessions, and the development of an understanding of symbolic meaning.

The behavior of children as young as toddlers shows that possessions are not just utilitarian devices. In general, possessions provide the child with an emerging sense of control and self-effectance over his or her environment (Furby, 1978, 1980) and helps him or her secure a sense of identity (Csikszentmihalyi & Rochberg-Halton, 1981; Furby, 1980). In addition, the ability to recognize *symbolic* meanings for material objects forms in childhood. Even very young children form symbolic attachments to favorite objects (e.g., Csikszentmihalyi & Rochberg-Halton, 1981; Furby, 1978, 1980). The 7–12 year old age period is particularly interesting with regard to the development of material values and symbolic meaning (John, 1999).

Children as young as elementary school age have the ability to recognize and decode abstract consumption symbolism (Belk, Bahn, & Mayer, 1982; Belk, Mayer, & Driscoll, 1984). As children move through the elementary years, they move into the stage of abstract reasoning (John, 1999) and develop a greater variety of meanings for their possessions (Furby, 1978). At least by fifth grade, they recognize the social meaning of possessions, for example, by displaying one's achievement to others (Baker & Gentry, 1996). Presumably, these same inferences apply to souvenirs.

During the elementary school years children also develop role-taking ability (John, 1999). This ability to see one's behavior the way another person does suggests that a child may have the ability to picture how he or she will view a souvenir in the future, tying in with the idea of anticipatory nostalgia mentioned above.

Through what mechanism might children learn about souvenir purchasing? Parents are the primary socializing agent influencing a child's learning about consumption (John, 1999). Moreover, parents socialize children via various family rituals. For example, Belk (1979) observed that parents act as socialization agents via gift giving to their children. Other family rituals, such as birthday parties, teach children ritual how-to's, including the use of specific goods and services for use in a ritual setting (Otnes & McGrath, 1994). Applying these observations to souvenirs, we note that family vacations and trips often include ritual behaviors that may include souvenir purchasing.

Person/Place Relationships

A well-rounded representation of the meaning of souvenirs includes the connection between the person and the place a souvenir represents. According to Low and Altman (1992, p. 5), place is "space that has been given meaning through personal, group, or cultural processes." The symbolic meaning of place is often based on a person having actually visited a location, but also an individual may possess a special shared meaning learned from others for a place before going there. Thus, the meaning of a particular place is layered with personal and collective associations.

Familiar places are satisfying because they permit control, mastery, creativity, serenity, or security and provide opportunities for defining one's self and connecting the self with others (Low & Altman, 1992). On another, larger level, public places draw attention to community or cultural symbols and meanings and permit us to link with one another and to create cultural meanings, leading to individual, group, or cultural esteem and pride (Milligan, 1998).

To children, special, familiar places afford security, social affiliation, creative expression, and exploration opportunities; thus, places support healthy self-development in children (Chawla, 1992). Children form healthy attachments to places as they learn to balance the maintenance of the familiar with the developmental pull to expand their world outside of the home, into the neighboring community and beyond. Identification with special places offers children a sense of continuity with places of the past or people, past and present; such opportunities are critical to emotional well-being (Cooper Marcus, 1992). Natural places are especially potent environments for place identification to occur (Cooper Marcus, 1992). Place attachment typically has been examined by evaluating the relationship of a person to a particular, intimately familiar place. It is an empirical question as to whether tourist places would elicit similar types of attachment.

Object/Place Relationships

The object/place relationship is one in which a particular souvenir (object) represents, symbolizes, and/or makes tangible a particular place. For example, O'Guinn and Belk (1989) found that souvenirs acquired at Heritage Village, home of the PTL ministry, were symbols of the site and its leaders. Several other studies document the importance of souvenirs as representations of places visited (e.g., Gordon, 1986; Graburn, 1989; MacCannell, 1976; Stewart, 1984).

The perception of what a souvenir stands for may be shared with others. We share culturally based perceptions that certain objects are typical souvenirs from particular places (e.g., you bring home a shell or sand from a beach, a t-shirt from one of the Hard Rock cafés, or a teddy bear from an amusement park). People visiting some travel destinations have more choices than others. For example, a visitor to the Grand Canyon National Park can choose from a wide variety of items ranging from inexpensive souvenirs to costly Native American style pottery or artwork.

The perceived connection between a place and an object may be personal, as well. A visitor to San Francisco could bring home a piece of pottery and another could bring home a Christmas ornament. In addition, visitors to Heritage Village bought handbags, cosmetics, and items they could have purchased anywhere, but they bought them because of their origin in this sacred retail site (O'Guinn & Belk, 1989). Though none of these items has any *collective* meaning specific to the destination, it does demonstrate an association between the object and the place. However, the issue of object/place connection lies in how the souvenir stands for the place in question, not how it stands for the tourist. Souvenirs are the markers of the site which they are meant to bring to mind, and they help people keep society in order within one's consciousness (MacCannell, 1976).

To summarize, our understanding of the meaning of souvenirs as consumption objects is based on research with adult subjects. We undertook the present study to explore children's meanings for souvenirs they possess and their understandings about purchasing them. The study's methodology is described next.

METHODOLOGY

Through the use of interviews and pictorial projectives, we provide evidence that the meaning children assign to souvenirs comes from a variety of sources. Because of the complexity of souvenir meanings and paucity of research about the meaning of consumption for children (John, 1999), we employed two different exploratory methods. We anticipated that the two techniques together would give us a richer understanding of souvenir meaning than either method would on its own. Semi-structured interviews bring to light the autobiographical and other meanings that children have for souvenirs they possess. Pictorial projectives elicit meanings for imagined souvenir acquisitions; the responses lead to observations about the children's general knowledge and understanding about souvenir acquisition.

Sample

Twenty-two children between the ages of 8 and 13, who could recall experiences from their previous vacations, comprised our convenience sample. Empirical findings show that by second grade children's understanding of consumption symbolism is significant, and by sixth grade the ability to make inferences about people based on their possessions is nearly fully developed (Belk et al., 1982). This suggests that the sample includes children who have an increased ability to think abstractly about, and understand symbolic meanings of possessions, whose knowledge-processing skills are increasing, and who have formed/are learning fairly sophisticated scripts about acquisition behaviors (John, 1999). Thus, our sample includes children whose relationship to possessions can be symbolic as well as instrumental and who are in a stage where adult-like person/object relations begin to emerge.

The children were selected through a snowball technique, starting with children who were known by the interviewer. In fact, the knowledge that their friends had participated in this study was a big incentive for subsequent children to participate. The children were also compensated for participation through sincere appreciation expressed by the interviewer and from feeling special for having an adult's undivided attention for over an hour.

Both the child and his/her parents were told that the study was about his/her vacations and the things they may have acquired while on a trip. Parents were also told that the child would be asked about things she/he might collect; however, the data on collecting not specifically related to souvenirs are not used in this particular interpretation, other than to highlight the children's general acquisitive nature.

Each child and one parent or guardian signed a participant release form. The study was conducted during the summer months and many of the children had just returned from a vacation or were soon going on one. The children, who are all from the south central United States, had taken multiple trips within their state and most had traveled out of state and for reasons other than to visit family. Only one informant, the youngest child, did not know what a souvenir was. He was told that it was "something that you get on a trip and take home with you that you can touch."

More detailed information on the children, who represent a convenience sample, is provided in Table 1. As Table 1 shows, an equal number of males and females participated. Most were Caucasian, from middle-class families, and between the ages of 10 and 12. All of the children recalled recent trips, but a few could not remember or did not get any souvenirs. The table includes a brief description of each child's most recent trip. Destinations included locations around the continental United States including theme parks, beaches, various cities, national parks, camp grounds, or a ranch. Even when the purpose of a trip was to visit family, tourist behavior, such as souvenir buying, was often part of the trip experience.

Interviews

The children were interviewed for 30–45 minutes. To establish rapport, as well as to preserve the child's anonymity, the interviewer asked the children to choose a fictitious name. Many found this to be an interesting "game" and giggled with the interviewer as they chose their names and explained the reasoning behind their names. Each interview began with a grand tour question that encouraged the child to tell a little about him/herself, including with whom she/he lives and what she/he likes to do for fun with his/her friends (McCracken, 1988). From there, the interviewer worked from a semi-structured interview protocol; however, probes were used to achieve an

Table 1. Description of Informants.

Imaginary Name	Age	Sex	Description
Sara (13)	13	F	Lives with mother and a sister; her father and step-mother live nearby; has her own room at both homes; likes to swim and watch movies; collects hat boxes, dolls, and snow globes; recent vacations to Alabama and a nearby ranch, does not remember getting any souvenirs
Crystal (1)	12	F	Lives with mother and younger sister; parents recently divorced; has her own room; her mother owns and operates a pet store; she collects animal objects and both her parents have animal things, though they do not collect them, however, both parents are collectors of other things; recent trips to Arizona, where she took pictures, and Las Vegas, where she bought stuffed animals
Kelli (2)	12	F	Lives with parents and 20-year-old sister; has her own room; takes dancing, tennis, and cheerleading; collects rocks and pins, all of which are packed away; recent trip to a water park, where she bought a mug and a t-shirt; frequently vacations in Colorado, where she gets mugs, t-shirts, and rocks
Renee (6)	12	F	Lives with parents; middle child with brothers; likes to swim and play softball; collects sea shells and softball dolls; last vacation in Louisiana to visit family and attend a beauty pageant; brought souvenirs from the pageant
Paige (21)	12	F	Lives with parents, younger sister, younger brother, and pets; collects precious moments and sunflower things; recent vacation to a water park, where she bought a t-shirt
Taylor (4)	11	F	Lives with parents and an elder brother; has her own room; likes to play with her dog and the computer; collects cherished teddies; recent trip to Ohio to visit family, got a Hard Rock t-shirt
Michelle (8)	11	F	Lives with parents, an elder brother, and an elder sister; shares room with sister; plays sports and loves the computer; collects rocks; her sister and mother both collect; recent trip to New Jersey to visit family
Christina (9)	11	F	Lives with parents and two younger sisters; likes to read and play on the computer; collects coins, but her parents do not collect anything; recent trip to Connecticut and brought home pictures; also been to DC and Virginia, and got charms and shells at the beach

Table 1. (*Continued*)

Imaginary Name	Age	Sex	Description
Tiffany (18)	11	F	Lives with parents, one sister, and three brothers; is the middle child; has her own room; goes to camp every year and brings back souvenirs; collects bumper stickers, stickers, rocks, and bottles; recent trip to San Antonio, where she bought clothes, but no souvenirs
Kristen (19)	11	F	Lives with parents and younger twin brothers; likes to play sports; she collects coins (so does her father), rocks, goose bump books, and buttons; likes to buy jewelry on vacations; recent trip to New Mexico, where she bought a pin for her shirt
Amanda (14)	10	F	Lives with parents and an elder brother; has an elder sister that lives away from home; raised in her parents sporting goods business; loves animals; collects t-shirts from places she has been; recent vacation to Girl Scout Camp, brought home a t-shirt and good memories
Rob (3)	12	M	Lives with parents, an elder sister, and younger brother; has his own room; swims and plays baseball; collects antique key chains; recent trip to Arizona to visit family and to San Diego and Disneyland, bought t-shirts and stuffed animals
Robert (10)	11	M	Lives with parents and an elder sister; has his own room; likes to build models; collects rocks; recent trip to South Padre, where he got a marionette; also been to Nashville and got a Hard Rock Café t-shirt
Tim (12)	11	M	Lives with parents and an elder sister; has his own room; plays Nintendo and watches TV a lot; recent skiing trip to New Mexico and did not get any souvenirs; another recent trip to a beach and took some pictures and got a pressed penny
Chris (16)	11	M	Lives with parents, two elder sisters, and two younger brothers; has his own room; likes to play Nintendo; collects baseball cards and coins; recent trip to Cancun, where he bought t-shirts from Hard Rock Café and Planet Hollywood
Johnny (17)	11	M	Lives with parents and younger sister and all of them collect things; has his own room; collects Garfield things, key chains, pins on vacations, and dogs; last "big" vacation to Canada and Glacier Park in Montana, where he bought a pin, a compass, and a knife and found a fossil

Table 1. (*Continued*)

Imaginary Name	Age	Sex	Description
John Garrett (20)	11	M	Lives with parents, an elder sister, and younger brother; active in sports; collects pencils; recent vacation to Virginia to see family, where he bought postcards and pencils
Jacob (5)	10	M	Lives with mom and sister; parents divorced, but father lives nearby; has his own room; collects many things including native American artifacts, marbles, bottle caps, baseball cards, stamps, and stuffed animals; recent trip to San Antonio to visit family; and to a water park; does not really like to get souvenirs
Wesley (11)	10	M	Lives with parents, a younger sister, and several pets; has his own room; likes to look at baseball cards and play with friends and ride his bike; collects baseball cards and rocks; recent trip to Dallas and got a pressed penny
Eric (15)	10	M	Lives with parents and three elder brothers; collects things he finds (e.g., rocks, feathers, etc.); recent vacation to Disney World, where he bought a Goofy hat, Goofy pez machine, and Goofy soccer shirt
Brett (22)	10	M	Lives with parents, two elder sisters, and pets; plays basketball; collects cards, marbles, and pencils; recent vacation to a water park, where he bought a pencil
Cody (7)	8	M	Lives with parents, an elder brother, and an elder sister ("Renee" – #6); used to be home schooled, but his mother has suffered from a rare illness for the last two years; he likes to play and run around a creek; collects little cars, bugs, grasshoppers, and butterflies; had to explain what a souvenir was; last vacation "somewhere" to visit family

Note: Numbers in parentheses are for identification purposes and refer to the order in which interviews were conducted.

in-depth understanding of topics as they emerged from the discussion (McCracken, 1988; Thompson, Locander, & Pollio, 1989).

The interview questions focused on recent vacations and any souvenirs the child may have brought home with him/her. The focus was on why the child had chosen a particular souvenir, where that souvenir now was, and what that object now meant to them. The children were also asked about the kinds of things they might like to collect and why; however, the data are discussed in the present paper only to the extent to which some souvenirs were acquired to be part of a collection.

One interview was conducted in a church, but the remaining interviews were conducted at the child's home so that she/he could interact with his/her things to aid his/her recall. Some children were quiet and shy and others were almost like "miniature adults" in telling about their things [interviewer fieldnotes].

Pictorial Projectives

After the interview was completed, the children were given four pictorial projectives, designed to help elicit narrative responses from the children and used to discern the children's views of the world and their motivations (Rappaport, 1942). Pictorial projectives have been successfully applied in other studies attempting to determine the latent motives of consumers, including ritual grooming (Rook, 1985), gift exchange (McGrath, Sherry, & Levy, 1993), and comparing oneself to models in advertisements (Martin & Kennedy, 1994). In addition, Martin and Kennedy (1994) demonstrate effective use of this technique with children of similar ages to those in the present study.

Each child was given the same four drawings of different types of potential vacation settings: camping in the mountains or hills, a city street, a beach, and an amusement park. These settings were familiar to the children (Rappaport, 1942), as their home state includes all four types of destinations, three of which are within a two-hour drive. Below the picture on each sheet was the same statement and questions: "You are on a vacation at this place. What kind of souvenir would you want if you went to a place like this? What makes this a good thing to get?" The bottom half of each page was blank for the child to write a response. The task took between 10 and 20 min for each child to complete. The children were not given any prompts during this process; however, one child did ask that the researcher write his responses for him.

RESULTS: ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION OF INTERVIEWS

Analysis consisted of organizing the data through a series of operations (Spiggle, 1994), and began with each of the authors reading all of the interview transcripts to understand the meaning of souvenirs for children.

After the first reading, the authors identified specific examples of the children's experiences with souvenirs that they believed told part of the "story" of the relationship between the children, the places, and the souvenirs. This resulted in a one-page description of each child's account and an exhaustive list of themes of interest similar across informants. Third, the authors discussed and examined their understanding of the data and determined global themes or categories that would summarize the data. To ensure a thorough and in-depth coverage of the data, the global themes were worked and reworked by comparisons between children and exploring the dimensions of these themes. Next, verbatim comments from the interviews were identified to illustrate the global themes. Thus, using the operational procedures outlined by Spiggle (1994), five global themes emerged from the data and are discussed below.

Defining "Appropriate" Souvenirs

All of the children had a wide variety and a great amount of material possessions. They exhibited the ability to distinguish between the meanings of different objects. The children categorized their objects based upon whether the items were souvenirs, collections, or "stuff." Several children say, "Souvenirs are souvenirs" and, in many cases associate souvenirs with the tourist place or with the experiences had there. In addition, acquiring souvenirs is part of the experience of being "on vacation" for many kids. That is, it is just "one of the things you do when you take a trip," as this conversation with Johnny (age 11) demonstrates:

> J: We went to this place in Montana. Glacier Park. Then, ah well, I bought some souvenirs.
>
> I: Really?
>
> J: Yeah. At Ft. McLeod I got some pins and a little pocketknife. And at Glacier Park I got a kind of little pocketknife as well with a sheath. And we made this little pit stop by this canyon and I bought a little fossil there.

In contrast, they believe collections are added to over long periods of time and collecting implies that you actively acquire similar items. Christina (age 11) considers her shells as souvenirs and not a collection.

> I don't really call it a shell collection with just the couple of shells that I have .... To me, it's latched to something that over a long period of time it's added to. I've gotten most of my shells from just two different occasions.

Similarly, Paige (age 12) usually gets a rock when she goes to a park. While she has assembled numerous rocks, she considers them as trip mementos, not collection items.

> I think they are just like to bring home and have a souvenir to remember it by, but I do not COLLECT them.

These children have collections of hat boxes, pencils (670 of them), marbles (300–400 of them), McDonald's toys, t-shirts, stuffed animals, figurines, baseball cards, bottle caps, tea sets, porcelain dolls (15 of them), snow globes, rocks, and seashells. The children consider themselves to be collectors, except for one boy who, by his own definition, is not collecting anything at present, though he has a large sports card collection. Another boy, Eric (age 10), collects things, but he says, "Not many people I know collect that much I've found." The rest of the children seem to be aware of and influenced by other people, including friends and/or family, who collect. An observer might perceive that a particular souvenir is part of a collection. However, the children tended to have rules for distinguishing souvenir objects used for collection purposes from those souvenirs used for recalling a place.

The children also make a distinction between "stuff" and souvenirs that have special meanings attached to them. Tiffany (age 11), who had returned the week before from a vacation to a nearby city and amusement parks, reveals a distinction.

> I didn't really bring home any souvenirs, but I did get some clothes from a shopping trip …. Oh, but we did get some pictures, maybe those could be our souvenirs.

Several other children mentioned that clothes bought on vacations are not really souvenirs. They are able to distinguish between an object used as a souvenir versus an object that was merely purchased and has no special meaning or place identification. Kristen (age 11) explains the differences between some of her pieces of jewelry.

> I: Do you consider your necklaces or your rings souvenirs or just gifts you buy yourself?
>
> K: It depends. Some say, some have like a symbol that I know, like a shell on it. One time I got shell earrings so I knew – I thought of Galveston when I wear them.
>
> I: So some of them are souvenirs?
>
> K: Yeah. And some are just fun to get.

The children demonstrated their beliefs that there is a relationship between a souvenir and the place from where it was acquired. Sara (age 13), who was one of the few children who did not seem to care about getting souvenirs, clearly understands that a souvenir is tied to its associated place.

> I don't think I'm a real like attachable person to like vacations, so I usually don't do that [bring something home].

Taylor (age 11), who had just returned from visiting her grandmother in Ohio, talked to the interviewer about her souvenirs from her trip.

> Taylor (age 11): I brought home a Hard Rock t-shirt.
>
> I: A Hard Rock Café t-shirt?
>
> T: And a gigotech.
>
> I: Okay. And what made that t-shirt or that gigotech, either one or both, why was that special to you?
>
> T: Well my Grandma gave me the gigotech. I don't know why I got the Hard Rock shirt, because Hard Rock is such a good place to get souvenirs.

Several other children mentioned Hard Rock Café or Planet Hollywood as *places* associated with getting souvenirs. Other children mentioned that if they did not go to certain types of places, they were less likely to get souvenirs. For example, Christina (age 11) had just returned from Connecticut where she and her family had visited. She said they "didn't bring home any thing other than photographs because we didn't go to a lot of tourist attractions." This suggests that the children make a definite association between souvenir objects and the places they are acquired. Thus, if a child traveler does not go to *tourist* attractions, then *most* types of souvenirs are not likely to be acquired; however, photographs may still be taken and considered as souvenirs.

To acquire a souvenir, the children would have to consider the place to be a tourist attraction. Jacob (age 10) and Chris (age 11) say that they would not want to get souvenirs from places they go to a lot (e.g., the mall in a nearby city). These places would no longer be tourist attractions to them. This belief is consistent with Stewart's (1984) inference that people do not need souvenirs for repeatable experiences. However, in contrast, other children talk about places they go every year and bring back souvenirs. For example, Tiffany (age 11) goes to camp every year and always brings back souvenirs. Similarly, Brett (age 10) goes to a state park every year and also brings home souvenirs. Thus, these children clearly perceive their annual trips as visits to a tourist attraction. Thus, the perception of being a *tourist* may be more important than whether one perceives the experience is repeatable in determining whether a souvenir will be desired or purchased. There is something about these places of annual visits that distinguish them from ordinary places kids visit (e.g., the mall). Something extraordinary about the place seems to help define associated objects as souvenirs.

Children sometimes mix the sacred and profane (see Belk, Wallendorf, & Sherry, 1989 for a review). For example, some children will purchase a seashell and use it for similar purposes as one that is found. That is, they mix discovered shells with commodities, like the purchased shell, using both to symbolize a sacred experience. For example, Wesley (age 10), Kristen (age 11), and Amanda (age 10), all like to get shells or rocks when they go on some trips, but they find some and buy others and then they mix them together. They have other rules for acquisition and souvenir preferences based upon color, size, or texture, but the means of acquisition does not appear to be a major influence on children's definition of what is an "appropriate" souvenir.

Using the Souvenir for its Action Value

The children wanted many of the souvenirs they have, because they were able to *do* something with them, and many souvenirs fulfilled that need. They used their souvenirs for discovering, learning, demonstrating achievement, playing, exchanging, and wearing. Robert (age 11) enjoys collecting rocks because that helps him "discover the differences between places." Similarly, Jacob (age 10) bought a Kachina doll on a trip, because his Dad had been at some Indian cliffs and brought him a war shield, so now he is interested in Native American artifacts. Thus, for Robert and Jacob, acquiring these souvenirs helped them learn more about the meaning of objects and how these objects related to the places they were acquired.

Souvenirs can also be used to demonstrate achievement in accomplishing things that are collectively understood as unique or special. Many of the children revealed how finding a full sand dollar is special, because unbroken ones are hard to find. Jacob (age 10) relates his excitement with finding an arrowhead, which is difficult.

> In the morning when I got up he said, '[Jacob] this lady came to me last night and said if you want to find some arrowheads to go down the nature trail.' Well, I believed it because I was little and I said, 'Okay Daddy, can we go down the nature trail.' He said, 'Yeah, that's what I was planning to do this morning.' So, I remembered what he said and remembered that the way down had some flat rocks. And, so I looked down on the rock and the rock was like a bluish color and I could see this outline of a gray and white arrowhead. And I was like whoa! And, I had been looking for arrowheads other places that weekend but I hadn't found any, but I finally found one.

"To have a souvenir of the exotic is to possess both a specimen and a trophy" (Stewart, 1984, p. 147). Sand dollars and arrowheads are used as evidence of the children's abilities and competence and increase their status in the eyes of others. To demonstrate achievement, however, this type of souvenir has to be related to the *place* in which it was found and it also has what the object signifies must be evident to others.

The children, particularly the boys, seemed most appreciative of souvenirs with which they could play. Brett (age 10) enjoyed playing with a whip he got from a camp, but, "it got thrown away, in the trash, cause I popped my sister with it." John Garrett (age 11) relates how he enjoys the realism of one of his souvenirs:

J: We went to the Science Museum. That's when I got the lizard.

I: Oh, you got a lizard from there? And why did you choose this lizard?

J: Because it's pretty cool.

I: Oh really? How does it work?

J: You squeeze him.

I: You squeeze him? It's pretty neat. It looks kind of real.

J: That's what my Mom thought. I threw it at her and she went 'Ahhhhhh'!!!

As the following conversation reveals, Robert (age 11) also enjoys playing with the souvenir from his trip:

I: Can you tell me about your trip to South Padre?

R: Well, it wasn't the best weather for it so I was kind of cold. But me and my Dad still had fun. And my sister and Mom they stayed mostly in the hot tub. We stayed in a condo. And, we went to Mexico one day and I got a little marionette.

[later]

I: Did you say you named it?

R: Yes, I named it Pedro.

I: Pedro? He's cute. He's what? About a foot tall? And you can kind of move him around?

R: I'm not good at it.

I: Well it probably takes practice. [later] What about this marionette makes it special to you? I mean why did you decide to buy this?

R: I thought it was really neat and I had never seen one in real life. I'd seen one on TV and stuff and I always wanted one.

I: Oh.

R: And so and I guess part of it is I'm into acting and you know this is kind of like changing my voice and things and can make it sound.

I: And what do you think about when you see this in your room?

R: I just think about our trip.

I: Do you?

R: And I hope we go again.

Robert has personalized his souvenir by naming it, but his souvenir, like Brett and John Garrett's, seems to reflect who he is and what the souvenir will *do*, as opposed to where he was when the souvenir was acquired.

Another action behavior seen only in the boys was their desire to trade or exchange their souvenirs with their friends. When Brett (age 10) looks for souvenirs, he likes to find pencils because, "they are just kind of cool and besides people trade you a lot for them." Thus, the trade, or exchange, is the action to which he looks forward.

Compared to the girls in our sample, the boys were clearly more action-oriented in their use of souvenirs. The girls tended to focus more on the contemplation value of souvenirs. Similar findings appear with adult samples concerning special or valued possessions (Csikszentmihalyi & Rochberg-Halton, 1981; Dittmar, 1992). For example, Dittmar's (1992, pp. 126–136) results reveal that men and women prefer different objects and relate to them differently. The men in her sample valued action-oriented possessions for their instrumental value, while the women preferred more sentimental objects that served relational and connecting purposes. For the children, wearing apparel souvenirs may be an exception. Both girls and boys had t-shirts and caps for the expressed purpose of wearing them. Though the t-shirt meets functional needs, the communicative properties of the t-shirt are also important, as revealed in the next theme.

Using the Souvenir for its Communicative Properties

Similar to adults, children use souvenirs for their communicative value to self and others. Souvenirs are self-gifts (Mick & DeMoss, 1990), which the children view as symbolic because they are useful for self-communication. When the children were asked why they had chosen particular souvenirs, they all responded by saying that they liked these things. Rob (age 12) bought a Goofy doll and a Goofy shirt last year at Disneyland because "I like Goofy and I think he's funny." This particular Goofy has the number "15" on it, because that was Rob's soccer number. Though other people would not recognize it, Rob knows that the 15 personalizes Goofy and makes it his.

Souvenir acquisitions also seem to help these children work through and determine their taste and preferences. Jacob (age 10) recently returned home from an art show where he had bought animal pieces to make a necklace that said "save the planet." This was his own idea and the animals "caught his attention because they had movable parts." Thus, as Belk (1992) suggests, the souvenirs help these children *construct* their identities. Identity construction is an essential purpose for adult's special possessions (Belk, 1992; Kleine et al., 1995). Here, we find evidence that souvenirs serve similar self-developmental purposes for children.

The children speak about souvenirs almost as if they can hear them talking to them. Chris (age 11) likes his Hard Rock Café and Planet Hollywood t-shirts because they say "Cancun" on them. Sara (age 13) says she usually likes to get t-shirts because she likes them to say where she's been. As the children talk about them, it is apparent that the souvenirs remind them of whom they are and where they have been. A conversation with Kelli (age 12) demonstrates this point:

K: My last vacation was probably to a water park. It's really fun. We go there with my aunt and uncle. That's just a yearly trip that we take during the summer.

I: What kinds of things do you do there?

K: We go on the rides. They have a bunch of water rides. And we just spend a lot of time together and have fun.

I: Do you usually buy souvenirs when you go to places like this?

K: Sometimes, yeah, you can buy mugs. You can buy different shirts. They have a gift shop there in the park so we can go there and get different stuff.

I: Do you know where those things are now?

K: I'm not sure.

I: You don't know for sure? When you buy a t-shirt or a mug, those are the two things that I noticed that you said you might look at or you might buy, what attracts you to that kind of thing? What makes you want that?

K: It's just something to tell you that, like, I've been there and I know what it's like and so if you have any questions you can ask me, like, if it's fun or something. It's just something to be proud of that you'd wear.

I: How did you decide what souvenir to get?

K: Ummm.

I: Is there anything that pulls you one direction or the other.

K: Not really. I just wanted something little just to show everybody that I went there for the summer or something so I got it.

The conversation with Kelli demonstrates that souvenirs are used not only to communicate with oneself, but also used to communicate to others about where you have been or what you have accomplished. Many of the children provide evidence for this point. Rob (age 12) thinks other people like to look at the shirts he gets from places he has been. Taylor (age 11) likes to wear her Hard Rock t-shirt because then everybody knows that she has been to Hard Rock (in Ohio). Taylor also has a t-shirt from Planet Hollywood in Phoenix. Someone asked Amanda (age 10) about a t-shirt once, so now she likes to collect t-shirts from all kinds of places.

By wearing their t-shirts, the children are sharing their experiences with others. The t-shirts seem to be a sign of status. When the name of the place is stamped on it, people recognize that they have been there. Pins also are acquired to enhance status, as this conversation with Kelli (age 12) demonstrates:

K: Whenever I go on trips I just like to pick one out. Sometimes like back in Colorado I like to collect pins also.

I: Writing pens?

K: No, like pins you put on your shirt. And we collect those and we put them on our ski jackets when we go skiing so we can show that we've been to those places like Keystone and Breckenridge and all those places in Colorado.

I: So, do you display them anywhere or where do you keep them?

K: I have them in my jewelry box. I just keep them there until we go skiing. Then, I put them on my jacket.

As long as other people recognize what the t-shirt and pin mean, these souvenirs would link the wearer to a place. That linkage is used as a signal about who that person is and the object seems to be more about the place than the person. However, when other people do not recognize the linkage between the person and the souvenir, such as with animal beads or the reference to number 15, then the object seems to be more about the person than the place. Jung also made such a distinction when he noted the difference between a sign, a relatively known thing, and a symbol, a relatively unknown thing that would mean more to the person (Turner, 1967, p. 26).

Using the Souvenir to Provide Continuity across Time and Place

Even at this age, children have a sense of how souvenirs provide continuity across time and place. They realize that souvenirs can be mementos that elicit nostalgia and recollection of autobiographical experiences. This suggests that the children clearly value souvenirs for their contemplation value. The contemplation value of souvenirs is reflected in their ability to help an individual achieve a deeper understanding of him- or herself through conscious reflection (Csikszentmihalyi & Rochberg-Halton, 1981) and to preserve a sense of self-continuity (Belk, 1990; Kleine et al., 1995).

Several of the children talked about how their souvenirs were able to transport them back to previous times. For example, Christina (age 11) bought a key for her charm bracelet on a trip to Virginia Beach and now she thinks about the trip when she looks at the key. Similarly, Brett (age 10) went to a state park and got a shirt with the park's name on it because "it shows that I have been there" and it "reminds me of where I have traveled."

The children seem to need that tangible reminder to understand the totality of their experiences. Those souvenirs that they see or touch on a regular basis and/or those which are part of something in addition to the experience (e.g., collectibles) seem to have more readily accessible memories; however, two of the children said that *memories*, which are intangible, also could be souvenirs. In addition, though they do not necessarily know where their souvenirs are, they know what they *were* and what they represented, as this conversation with Chris (age 11) demonstrates:

C: We went to Destin, Florida two years ago. It was fun.

I: What did you do while you were there?

C: Me and my Dad went snorkeling and we swam.

I: At the beach?

C: Yeah.

I: Did you bring home any souvenirs from there?

C: Uh-huh. We bought some jars filled with Destin sand and they had little fish shells in them.

I: Do you know where that is?

C: No. I don't know.

This tangible reminder links Chris to his past experiences, even though he does not currently know where the souvenir is.

After acquiring a souvenir, the children may make judgments about how long they will keep it. If they get bored with the souvenir or begin to consider it as junk, they get rid of it and move on. However, if a child perceives the souvenir might be worth something in the future (e.g., maintaining a positive memory or monetary value), he or she will hold on to the item. For example, Tiffany (age 11) says it is important to keep pictures "because they help you remember important moments, ones you won't remember 20 years from now without the picture." This reflects that some souvenirs are cherished possessions with stronger indexicality (Grayson & Shulman, 2000); other souvenirs are not cherished because they are readily discarded as unimportant or boring.

Some children also seem to use their souvenirs to link them to other people, similar to how adults use certain special possessions to make tangible a relationship (Kleine et al., 1995). Souvenirs facilitate memories the children made with their family, and, at the same time they may facilitate memories of other special people in their lives. Wesley's (age 11) Great Grandfather used to feed gorillas, so when Wesley went to a zoo, he spent a "few hours" with his Dad watching the gorillas and he bought a stuffed gorilla. Now, when he plays with his gorilla, he thinks of his grandfather and his experience at the zoo. He is relating the experiences of his grandfather to this souvenir and he seems nostalgic for the experiences of his grandfather (or maybe just his grandfather's stories). Baker and Kennedy (1994) refer to feeling nostalgic and associating objects with the experiences of someone else as simulated nostalgia. Wesley seems to be transferring his grandfather's experiences into this souvenir and using the souvenir to help relive this time in his mind.

Acquiring Souvenirs as Part of Rituals or for Collections

These children understand the consumption rituals surrounding vacations, including the routine acquisition of souvenirs. These rituals provide continuity across vacation experiences. When Kristen (age 11) goes on vacations, she usually looks for necklaces.

K: Usually I look at the necklaces. I've got a bunch of those and rings.

I: Rings? Like jewelry?

K: Yeah.

I: Do you consider your necklaces souvenirs or just gifts you buy for yourself?

K: It depends. Some have like a symbol that I know, like a shell on it. One time I got shell earrings so I knew – I think of [nearby beach] when I wear them.

Clearly, some of Kristen's necklaces are connected to previous experiences and other times. Her buying of necklaces also reflects a ritualistic acquisition strategy of looking for necklaces. Wesley (age 10) also has a ritualistic acquisition strategy. He went to a zoo on one vacation and "got a penny that you put in a machine and prints the [zoo's name] on it." Now, Wesley always looks for penny pressers in other amusement places, because he wants more of those. He currently has four pressed pennies.

Kristen and Wesley do not consider their necklaces or pressed pennies to be collections, but John Garrett (age 11) has a ritualistic acquisition strategy of buying pencils on his vacation, because he collects pencils. John Garrett now has "over 670 of them." He has collected these pencils for two years, but has not collected all of them because he started his collection with his grandfather's collection, which contained "about 530 of them and so some are real old."

The children also use different acquisition strategies, depending upon the type of place they visit, as Kristen (age 11) explains:

> K: I have a bunch of t-shirts and hats that I got [on various vacations] .... I like getting t-shirts.
>
> I: And, what kind of t-shirts do you have? Can you tell me about any of them?
>
> K: Ah. One I got has a kind of a lizard coming out of the pocket. And then another one I've got, it's really neat, it's a house and it's snowing and it's got mountains in the background that are in New Mexico. I like that shirt.
>
> I: What about when you go to [a beach]? Do you get t-shirts there too?
>
> K: Usually I get shells. Like one time I got a whole bunch of shells.

Thus, Kristen distinguishes between types of places by associating them with different acquisition strategies and defining "appropriate" souvenirs differently.

For the most part, unless a souvenir is part of a ritualistic acquisition strategy or collecting, the purchase of a *particular* type of souvenir does not seem to be planned in advance. Crystal (age 12) got a boot with flowers in it from her last trip to Arizona.

> I like the boot because it goes with our house. Besides, if it's over $10, I won't get it unless it's something I could put in my house and something I could show everybody to show off. I wouldn't want it to fall apart too fast.

Crystal had not planned to buy this boot, but she did think about how long the boot would last and how the boot related to other objects in her home. Renee (age 12) had not planned on collecting shells, but she went to the beach on a vacation and started picking up seashells, so now she collects them. By having the collection, Renee seems to be extending that vacation into her future.

As Otnes and McGrath (1994) suggest, these rituals are an important venue for learning about certain consumption norms and expectations. The informants, particularly the older ones, tend to believe that spending money frivolously on a vacation is okay, but not for "every day." The informants are living the "childishness" often used to describe adult's souvenir buying (Gordon, 1986). It is okay to buy junk, but only when one is on vacation. Moreover, these children, with the exception of the youngest child, have learned to attach memories to tangible objects, which they can possess, rather than imprinting the memories in their minds without the aid of the tangible souvenir. Such consumption rituals are likely to become part of their repertoire of post-liminal rites like those observed at Heritage Village and described by O'Guinn and Belk (1989).

A characteristic that makes souvenirs *cherished* is if they are associated with behaviors such as ritual behaviors or collecting. For example, during the interview process at times it was difficult to keep children talking deeply about their souvenirs, because all they wanted to do was talk more about their collections. Their collections seemed more *magical* (Belk, Wallendorf, Sherry, & Holbrook, 1991). John Garrett (age 11) provides an exception as he says his pencils, which he identifies as a collection, are not that special – "they are just from where I go and what I do." John Garrett's interpretation may be tied to the fact that the collection was passed down from his grandfather. This finding empirically demonstrates Stewart's (1984) suggestion that souvenirs are magical because they bring the past to the present; however, it is a "failed magic." Souvenirs can only be a sample of one's experiences and not an example as a collection is. That is, a souvenir only reflects one point in time in a person's life, but a collection represents the culmination of a person's experiences. Thus, it seems that a souvenir cannot be *sacred* or *magical* unless it is associated with rituals, a collection, or intensely personal experiences or meanings, such as a pilgrimage (Belk et al., 1989).

RESULTS: ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION OF THE PICTORIAL PROJECTIVES

The purpose of the pictorial projective methodology was to elicit narratives that would reveal motives, knowledge, and understanding about souvenir acquisition. To analyze the pictorial projectives (please see Exhibit 1 through 4 for example), content analysis procedures prescribed by Kassarjian (1977) and Kolbe and Burnett (1991) were followed. This procedure provided a means by which to compare systematically, across vacation destinations and types of souvenirs, the motives for acquisition. The

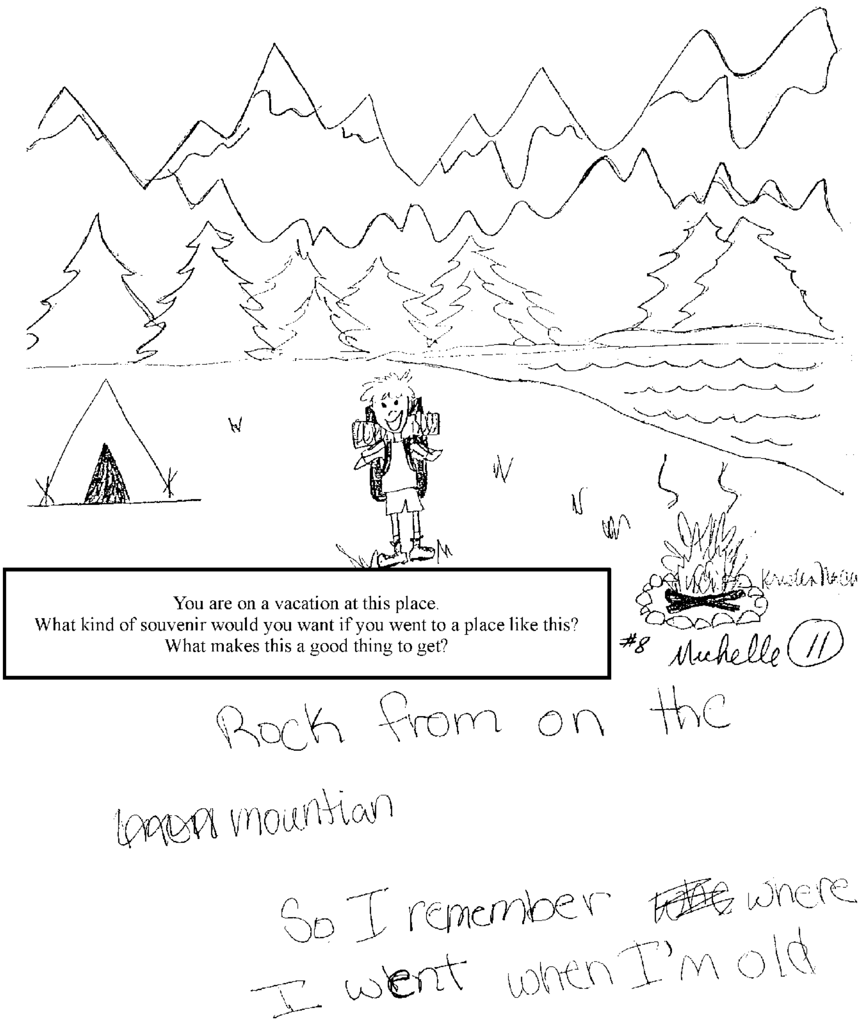

Exhibit 1.

content analysis categories were initially developed, pre-tested, and refined by two of the authors. The authors began by listing each of the souvenir objects listed on the 88 pictorial projectives (22 children $\times$ 4 different pictorial projectives). Some children listed more than one souvenir on each picture, resulting in a total of 123 souvenir objects.

After this list was developed, the authors developed content codes to describe associations with each of the 123 objects. The first step was to code each *object* ($n = 123$) with respect to age of the child, gender, and type of place represented in the picture (amusement park, beach, city, or camp). That is, the *object*, as opposed to the child, was used as the unit of analysis.

Judgments were then made about what the appropriate content categories were for understanding the latent motives for acquisition and the meaning of each souvenir object. Working independently, two of the authors made judgments on the type of action the child would take to acquire the object (take or buy), for whom the souvenir would be acquired (self or others), and whether the child associated this picture with their previous experiences (yes or no). Then, the relationship between the object and child was determined by identifying if (a) the object is the start or part of a collection; (b) the acquisition strategy is "typical" of vacation experiences or indicative of a ritual; or (c) the object is a transitory, necessary part of the experience.

Each souvenir object also was classified into the souvenir typology, initially conceptualized by Gordon (1986) and further refined based upon these empirical results. This typology includes pictorial images (e.g., snapshots, photographs, postcards), pieces-of-the rock (e.g., part of the whole such as shells or sand), cultural icons (e.g., manufactured objects which are replicas or representations of the culture such as a miniature Statue of Liberty or sombrero), generic markers (e.g., souvenirs that make reference to a particular place because they are inscribed with words, but if it were not for the place's name, it could be representative of anywhere), and other (e.g., things that tend to have more to do with the person than the place or vacation experience).

The final content category identified the latent motives for acquiring the particular souvenir (remembering, communicating, having, adding, necessary part of experience, finding, using, and long lasting). Multiple motives were allowed. The most motives associated with any one object were three; however, most objects only had one motive association. The two authors arrived at a 94 percent agreement for 772 codes. Discrepancies were resolved and content descriptions were refined.

Subsequently, two independent individuals were recruited and trained to code the pictures. To establish intercoder reliability, comparisons were made between these individuals and the authors' original codes (Kassarjian, 1977; Kolbe & Burnett, 1991). Based upon 772 judgments, reliabilities for the three-coder pairs were 0.92, 0.89, and 0.88, all exceeding Kassarjian's (1977) recommended threshold of 0.85 for content analysis. Discrepancies between the three coding pairs were resolved and then the results were analyzed and interpreted.

As Table 2 shows, the children mentioned 123 souvenir objects. Items included t-shirts (22.0 percent of objects mentioned), rocks (17.9 percent), shells (17.1 percent), photographs (4.1 percent), stuffed animals (4.1 percent), postcards (3.3 percent), hats (2.4 percent), hotel soap (2.4 percent), candy (1.6 percent), earrings (1.6 percent), hotel stationery (1.6 percent), key chains (1.6 percent), and numerous other items. The average number of objects mentioned per child was 5.6, with half listing exactly one per location and two children (Kristen and Tiffany, both age 11) mentioning 13 and 11 objects across the four pictorial projectives.

To understand what these objects mean in relation to the child and to the place depicted, the content categories were analyzed. Interestingly, females mentioned 55 percent of these objects, even though the number of boys and girls participating in the study was equal. Some places also elicited a greater number of objects than others. The beach scene elicited the largest number of souvenirs (26.8 percent of objects), followed by the amusement park (25.2 percent), the city (25.2 percent), and the camp (22.8 percent).

These objects would be bought (50.0 percent) or taken (50.0 percent). Males and females were not likely to differ on method of acquisition; however, the type of place affected whether taking or buying would be an appropriate action [X^2 (3, 1) = 49.17, $p < 0.001$]. Not surprisingly, the majority of souvenirs from the amusement park and city would be purchased and from the beach (e.g., Exhibit 3) and camp would be taken. Only three souvenirs were to be acquired for someone other than the respondent. That is, most of the souvenirs were self-gifts (Mick & DeMoss, 1990).

Twenty-two percent of the objects mentioned were associated with previous experiences that the children had at similar types of places. Younger children were less likely than older children to associate the object and place with their previous experiences [X^2 (8,1) = 16.86, $p < 0.05$]. This suggests that the older children are beginning to understand the complex and symbolic relationship between objects, places, and their previous experiences. The children in our sample are in a developmental stage where they have developed the ability to form abstractions from concrete occurrences (John, 1999).

Table 2. Souvenir Objects Associated with Places in Pictorial Projectives.

Souvenir Object	Times Mentioned	Percentage
T-shirt	27	22.0
Rock	22	17.9
Shell	21	17.1
Photograph	5	4.1
Stuffed animal	5	4.1
Postcard	4	3.3
Hat	3	2.4
Hotel soap	3	2.4
Candy	2	1.6
Earrings	2	1.6
Hotel stationery	2	1.6
Key chain	2	1.6
Animal-shaped bead	1	0.8
Cartoon character	1	0.8
Cheap rose light	1	0.8
Clam	1	0.8
Cup	1	0.8
Drink umbrella	1	0.8
Fish	1	0.8
Fossil	1	0.8
Hotel pen	1	0.8
Hotel towel	1	0.8
Model airplane	1	0.8
Pen	1	0.8
Pencil	1	0.8
Pennant	1	0.8
Pocket knife	1	0.8
Roller coaster cart	1	0.8
Sand	1	0.8
See-through leaf	1	0.8
Shampoo	1	0.8
Snow globe	1	0.8
Softball doll	1	0.8
Squashed penny	1	0.8
Stick	1	0.8
Towel	1	0.8
Toy	1	0.8
Total	123	

Note: The 22 child informants projected the type(s) of souvenir they would like to acquire at four different types of generic vacation destinations: mountains, beach, amusement park, and city. Some children listed multiple objects for each vacation place.

The object was related to the child by determining if the souvenir was to be part of a collection (13.9 percent of the objects); was typical of a ritualistic buying strategy, such as always buying t-shirts when on vacation (4.9 percent); or was just a necessary part of the experience (81.1 percent). This demonstrates that the vast majority of objects would be acquired because buying a souvenir is one of the things you *do* when on a vacation (e.g., Exhibit 2). Thus, the souvenir is almost like evidence in a trial; it is evidence that you have been there. It "authenticates the experience of the viewer" (Stewart, 1984, p. 134).

Exhibit 2.

As Table 3 illustrates, the type of vacation destination or place has a significant relationship with the type of souvenir object the child will want to get [X^2 (12,1) = 85.47, $p<0.001$]. When the objects were classified into the typology of souvenirs, most objects listed were classified as a piece-of-the rock (36.6 percent), followed by generic markers (30.9 percent), cultural icons (18.7 percent), pictorial images (8.1 percent), and other things, which had to do more with the person than the place (5.7 percent).

Most souvenirs classified as generic markers come from an amusement park or city. Similarly, most cultural icons come from an amusement park or city. Pieces-of-the-rock come from beaches and camps, while pictorial images are associated with camps for most. It may be that the children associate the out-of-doors camp environment with picture taking to capture part of the essence of the place and experience. From an adult perspective, it may seem to be unremarkable that rocks come from camps, shells from

Table 3. Type of Souvenir by Place.

Type of Souvenir	Description	All Places	Amusement Park	Beach	City	Camp
Piece-of-the-Rock	A natural part of the whole (e.g., rocks, shells, sand)	36.6		55.6		44.4
Generic marker	Inscription references a particular place, but could be representative of anything (e.g., key chains)	30.9	39.5	15.8	42.1	2.6
Cultural icon	Manufactured or handmade object that replicates culture (e.g., sombrero)	18.7	47.8	4.3	39.1	8.7
Pictorial image	Images of place (e.g., postcards, snapshots, sketches)	8.1	30.0		20.0	50.0
Other	Things that have more to do with the person than the place or vacation experience (e.g., collectibles)	5.7	28.6	14.3	57.1	

Note: Report reflects percentage of 123 objects mentioned on pictorial projectives. Typology of souvenirs modified, but originally based upon Gordon (1986).

beaches, stuffed animals from amusement parks, and t-shirts from places that have shopping opportunities; however, it is notable that the children have developed knowledge about what kinds of things are available at different places. As John (1999) describes, children in the age range of our sample have already formed relatively sophisticated shopping scripts. That is, they understand how to acquire goods and from where to acquire them. Our data are consistent with relatively sophisticated children who have already begun learning the rules about what one can acquire and from where.

A significant relationship between souvenir type and use connection to the object (ritual, collecting, or part of the experience) demonstrates that children have different uses for different types of objects [X^2 $(8,1) = 21.70$,

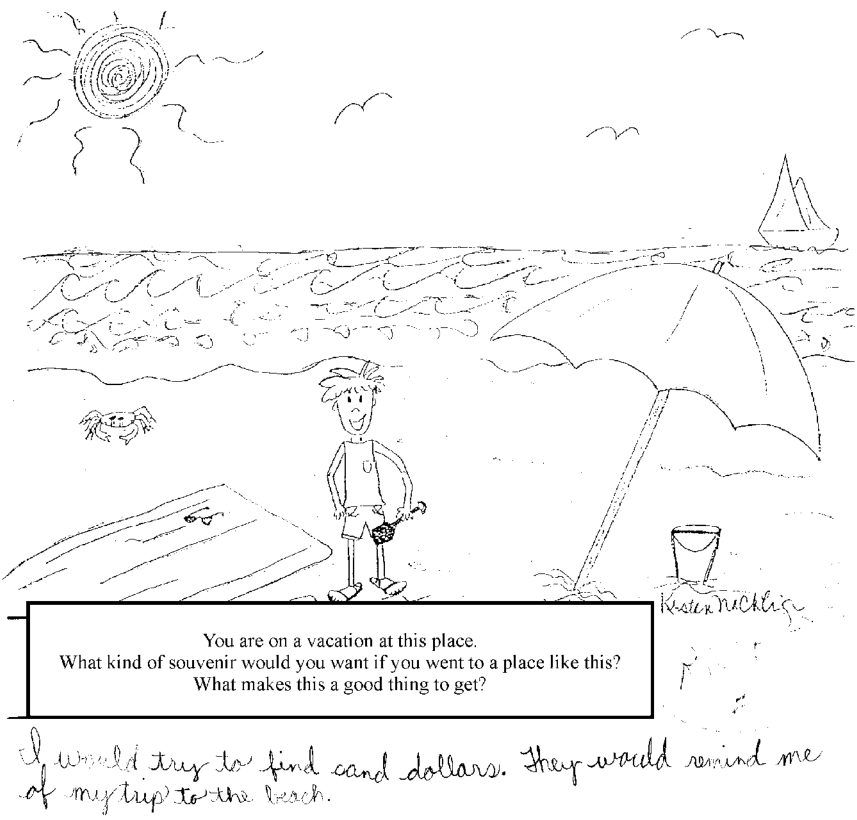

Exhibit 3.

$p<0.01$]. Souvenir objects classified as a *piece-of-the-rock* (e.g., shells from the beach or rocks from the camp) or *generic markers* (e.g., t-shirts with a place name) were more likely to be a part of a collection or a typical pattern of acquiring souvenirs on vacations than the other types of souvenirs. The majority of *generic markers* (e.g., t-shirts with a place name), *pieces-of-the-rock* (e.g., shells), and *cultural icons* (e.g., replicas of the site) were seen as just part of the experience. It seems that children need the objects inscribed with the place name, that replicate the culture, or that provide an image of the place, because acquiring a souvenir is something that you *do* on vacation to tangibilize the experience and make it real. This shows how expectations for what the souvenir will *do* affect the type of souvenir desired. Their tourism style including ritual acts, collecting, or doing as part of the experience, affects what is acquired. Graburn (1989) also notes the effects of tourism style (e.g., hunting and gathering tourist versus ecological tourist, etc.) on the type of objects acquired. The children seem to know that certain objects come from certain locations and what one does or can do varies from one type of location to another. This suggests that the children's knowledge base includes travel scripts or schemas.

Table 4 describes the significant relationship between souvenir type and motivation [X^2 (28,1) = 68.19, $p<0.001$]. The two most predominant motives for acquisition across all objects are (1) to acquire an object that serves

Table 4. Type of Souvenir by Motive.

Motive	All Souvenirs	Piece-of-the-Rock	Generic Marker	Cultural Icon	Pictorial Image	Other
To remember	30.9	11.1	50.0	30.4	50.0	28.6
To possess or have	30.8	31.1	15.8	26.1	30.0	69.2
To add to or start a collection	17.0	31.1	7.9			
To get as part of the experience	12.2	15.6	2.6	4.3	10.0	
To use	12.2		2.6	17.4		
To communicate with others	8.9	4.4	15.8	4.3		
To find or discover	5.7	4.4	2.6			
To get because it will last	2.2					2.2
Missing values		2.6	17.4	10.0		

Note: Report reflects percentage of 123 objects mentioned on pictorial projectives. Missing values reflect that we were unable to infer motives on some stimuli.

as a reminder of the event (e.g., Exhibits 1 and 3) and (2) to get something to possess (e.g., Exhibit 2). As John (1999) discusses, these children have the ability to imagine themselves in their future roles and imagine how they will view the souvenir. Thus, the children are evidencing the ability to anticipate the future memento value of the souvenir item.

Pictorial images and cultural icons (e.g., replicas of the place) are important to children because they facilitate the memory of the event and they give them something tangible to have. The children enjoy acquiring pieces of the rock (e.g., seashells) because the part of the environment they take with them is something they can have and something with which they can begin, or add to a collection. Generic markers (e.g., t-shirts) are important to the children because they help them remember, communicate their experiences with others, and give them something to take home. They are motivated to acquire a piece of the rock because such an acquisition is a necessary part of the trip experience and also helps them discover something interesting about the place. The kids are most likely to use or play with cultural icons (e.g., Exhibit 4).

A significant relationship exists between the child's sex and motive for acquisition [X^2 (7,1) $= 30.68$, $p < 0.001$]. Females want souvenirs to remember or to add to a collection, whereas males are more focused on acquiring souvenirs to use, to discover or learn something, or because getting something is a necessary part of the experience (e.g., Exhibit 1 versus Exhibit 4). These results are consistent with research that shows similar gender differences in adults' meaning for special possessions (Csikszentmihalyi & Rochberg-Halton, 1981; Dittmar, 1992).

In addition, the objects that younger kids desire are less likely to be associated with previous experiences or knowledge [X^2 (28,1) $= 16.86$, $p < 0.05$]. In fact, consistent with their developmental stage (John, 1999) kids seem to start being motivated to acquire souvenirs for nostalgic purposes, or based on previous association, between the ages of 11 and 13.

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this project was to explore the symbolic meanings children assign to souvenirs and children's motives and knowledge about souvenir acquisition. Twenty-two children, mostly between 10 and 12 years of age, participated in semi-structured interviews and responded to pictorial projectives. Consistent with research using adult samples (e.g., Belk et al., 1982), the children associated symbolic meanings with souvenirs. Souvenirs were not just things to have, use, or play with, but often represented a

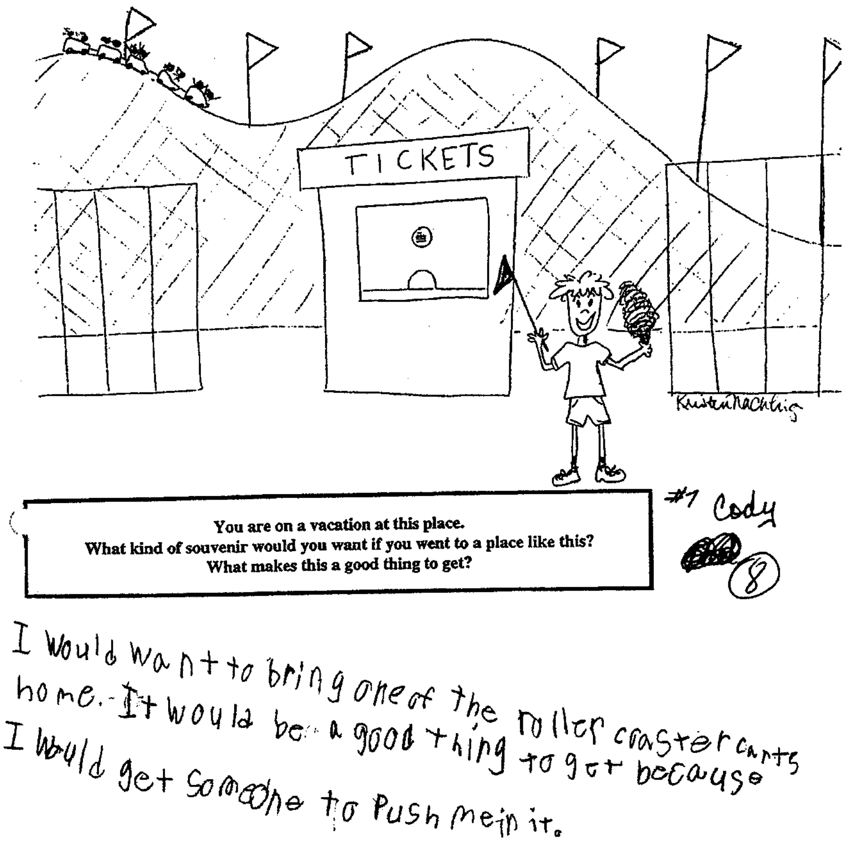

Exhibit 4.

special place, a memorable experience, or self-definitional associations. Being part of a self-narrative gives a souvenir personal meaning (Stewart, 1984); the narrative of one's tourist experience includes meanings related to the place, the person, and the particular souvenir object and what it will be used for (e.g., to add to a collection).

The Definition of Souvenirs to Children

The children in our sample had ideas about what makes an object a souvenir. A souvenir is related to a special place one has visited and tangibilizes that experience; it does not belong in the category of profane "stuff," but may carry deeper meaning due to person or place associations. The souvenir comes not from visiting just anywhere, but is associated with a special place that may carry extraordinary meaning. To many of the children, a souvenir is not an everyday thing, but a special possession object that carries autobiographical associations and aids boundary crossings from the ordinary back to the extraordinary. Certain souvenirs acquired sacred meaning to the children due to the object's association with vacation rituals or because the souvenir was to be added to a collection of similar objects (e.g., a shell collection).

The child's self-perception of being a *tourist* when he or she visits a particular place appears to influence whether the child believes a souvenir should be purchased. A souvenir could be something that was either found or bought; it was more important to acquire something from the place and the means of acquisition was irrelevant. Also, the children appeared comfortable mixing the found (e.g., beach sand) with the purchased (e.g., jar to hold the sand) to create a meaningful memento of their trip.

In general, the children's responses revealed that they have developed an understanding of what a souvenir is and what type of souvenir one is supposed to acquire at a particular type of place. The children understand souvenir acquisition to be a part of the vacation script or trip schema. These knowledge structures would be an interesting avenue of exploration in future research.

Layers of Meaning

Typically, scholars have studied either person–place meanings or person–object meanings. This study demonstrates that for souvenirs, the meaning of the object is understood in the context of the person/object/place meanings, which are inextricably linked.

Societies collect tourist attractions and individuals collect souvenirs (MacCannell, 1984). With adults, a souvenir brings larger, collective meanings of place home to the individual level, permitting one's own personal meanings to be mixed with the collective (Stewart, 1984). We found that children also assembled collective and personal meanings into a single object. Both person–place and person–object meanings become intertwined in the souvenir.

Our child participants associated certain kinds of objects with certain places. Prototypical souvenir–place associations include t-shirts from the city, shells from the beach, rocks from camp, or stuffed animals from amusement parks. While these associations may be unremarkable from an adult perspective, it is notable that children also knew this place–object associations.

Action and Contemplation Value

Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton (1981) observed that relative to adults, children tend to value possessions for their action potential. Our results suggest, however, that children revere souvenirs for *both* their action and contemplation value. Perhaps, this is because children are capable of understanding that objects may have multiple functional and symbolic uses. While the boys' souvenir meanings were more action oriented (for learning, discovering, playing, or trading) and the girls' more contemplation oriented (as mementos and experience markers), both genders had souvenirs for both purposes. These observations are consistent with research about gender differences and possessions with adults (e.g., Dittmar, 1992).

Communicative Value

The children we interviewed tended to use souvenirs for their communicative value to self. The children nearly always acquired souvenirs for themselves to possess, not for gift giving purposes. Self-gift souvenirs spoke to the child about "who I am." When a child is on vacation there may be an increased focus on the self and "my" experience (i.e., the vacation may be perceived as a self-gift). Or, it may be that, in general, children have a greater focus on self-cultivation (Csikszentmihalyi & Rochberg-Halton, 1981). Also, children may perceive it to be the role of parents or grandparents, not children, to be the givers of souvenirs.

Children also used souvenirs to discover personal tastes and preferences for identity construction purposes. Also, souvenirs often aided mental transport back to travel experiences and served as tangible reminders of where the child has been, or what the child did or saw there, thus serving autobiographical memory (Stewart, 1984). "When one puts his hands on a souvenir, he is not only remembering he was there, but 'proving' it" (Gordon, 1986, p. 137).

Souvenir items were sometimes used to communicate symbolically to others. Items such as t-shirts were used as conspicuous signals indicating where the child had been or things the child had done. Public places like beaches, campgrounds, amusement parks, or city tourist attractions are associated with souvenirs that have cultural meaning and understanding among people. Society recognizes that when a person wears clothing displaying the name of a place, for example, that person has actually been there (Milligan, 1998). Children appear to have learned these uses of souvenirs.

Anticipatory Nostalgia

The children who participated in this study evidenced the ability to project themselves into the future and saw the souvenir as a "Star Trek Transporter." That is, children understand how their extraordinary experience can be saved and relived through the souvenir possession. Nostalgia is frequently reflected in special possessions of adults (e.g., Belk, 1988; Kleine et al., 1995); here we see a clear demonstration that children in the elementary years are *anticipating* feeling nostalgic about these special times in the future. The children believe that one day they will want to go back to these special times and that souvenirs can help take them there. Not surprisingly, Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton (1981) found adults tended to be more past oriented, while children tended to be more future oriented and becoming oriented in relationship to their possessions. Our findings suggest that children comprehend the emotion of nostalgia and realize they have some control over their feelings through the use of certain possession objects.

Future Research

Of interest is how children learn what they believe about souvenirs. Opportunities exist to explore family-based meanings, how family identity is cultivated via trips and vacations, and how children are socialized into family rituals and pilgrimages to special family locations. How do children learn what defines a souvenir and develop rules and norms about acquiring souvenirs from different kinds of places? Studies with children from less-affluent income groups or who have rarely traveled, along with cross-cultural studies could illuminate cultural/subcultural norms influencing children's socialization about souvenirs.

Research about children and special places (e.g., Chawla, 1992; Cooper Marcus, 1992) tends to focus on close to home, familiar places. Further investigation into how children form relationships to distant places they visit infrequently could be of interest in understanding children's relationships to places. Opportunities exist for further exploration into children's meanings for various types of places, ranging from cultural icons and historic places (e.g., Valley Forge, Lincoln Memorial, Statue of Liberty), natural places (e.g., Grand Canyon, White Mountains), or constructed places (e.g., Disneyland, Sea World). A typology of children's vacation destinations and their meanings would be a possible contribution.

Gender, age, and developmental differences among children regarding souvenir meanings deserve greater exploration. While gender differences in orientation to possessions objects are consistently observed, boys and girls exhibit both contemplation and action orientations toward souvenirs and special possessions. Additionally, the idea of anticipatory nostalgia could be further explored. When do children start understanding the memento value of a good and are able to imagine themselves years ahead looking back?

A great deal of children's understanding about souvenirs, their purposes, meanings, and rules for use and acquisition, appear to be learned during childhood. Souvenirs offer a potent opportunity to investigate a range of questions about relationships between children, objects, and meaningful places and to understand consumer socialization and meaning formation.

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CONSUMPTION AND THE MEANING OF LIFE

Kelly Tian and Russell Belk

ABSTRACT

Through an analysis of data from depth interviews with modern American consumers, we examine whether and how individuals quest for life's meaning through consumption. Our analysis identifies three worldviews that are differently related to the experience of transcendence through consumption. A rationalist worldview is revealed as being unrelated to such a pursuit. It contrasts two magical worldviews held by most informants in which consumption objects are infused with supernatural and metaphysical beliefs that animate life's meaning for them. Our discussion highlights how recognition of magical worldviews contributes to consumer theory, methods, and concepts of investigation.

The currently popular Apple iPod has a shuffle feature that plays the many songs the players hold in random order. Yet many iPod owners are convinced that the device is somehow sentient and either plays the song their mood calls for or else becomes a trickster that counter-programs against their musical desires (Levy, 2005). Apple insists that shuffle plays songs in random order. But this has not stopped those who insist on believing in the ghost in the machine, or even more grandly believing that gods have somehow taken over the circuitry and programming of their iPod. These

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consumers' beliefs may seem to reflect extreme anthropomorphism, but we find that such a magical worldview is not unusual among American consumers. Broadly speaking, this paper is about the myriad ways that contemporary American consumer culture is infused with metaphysical and supernatural beliefs. More specifically, we sought to understand how consumption is used to seek, reveal, or fabricate the meaning of life.

According to one definition, "consumer culture involves a quest for meaning in life primarily through consumption .... With our logo-laden clothing and shopping bags, we ... roam the shopping mall in search of an identity and in search of meaning in life" (Belk, 2006). If consumers do seek meaning in life through consumption, it should not surprise us. Consumer goods, services, and spectacles are as ubiquitous in America today as were the religious icons, cathedrals, and rituals of medieval Europe. If consumer goods have become equally wondrous, it is little wonder that they are the objects with which we seek to conjure a purposeful existence.

Commenting on Americans' existential quests, Roof (1999) argues that the Vietnam War was a watershed event precipitating a loss of faith in institutions, including religious institutions. This loss of faith has led to a nation of seekers who draw on eclectic sources of meaning including bits and pieces of Buddhism, Hinduism, New Age spirituality, angels, magic, Judaica, the Bible, meditation, and more. Others suggest there is a crisis of meaning in the contemporary West that has led to a search for meaning in new venues including automobiles, spectator sports, celebrity cults, computers, and televised programming (e.g., Carroll, 1998; Miller, 2004). In each case there is an implicit or explicit hope that these beliefs, practices, goods, and services are the keys to the good life, a life well lived, a life of meaning and purpose. It is understandable then that Belk, Wallendorf, and Sherry (1988) found that sacredness pervades our consumption.

A further impetus to seeking existential meaning through consumption is found in the continued presence of the occult and magic in contemporary beliefs, long after they are thought to have been driven away by the Enlightenment (Apikos, 1992; Burton & Grandy, 2004). Ancient practices of astrology, numerology, prophesy, telepathy, and spirit beliefs have persisted through the ages and have been recently supplemented by the new mysticism of electronic sorcery (e.g., Cobb, 1998). The persistence of the occult and magic, in their many guises, suggests that we have a deep-seated desire for the miraculous that is no longer satisfied by stories of miracles from world religions. The world of commerce is eager to supply the grand spectacles, brand mystique, and magical appeals that promise answers. Still, as we shall see, the consumers' search for meaning in the marketplace goes far beyond merely being enchanted by marketers.

Although there is not a large consumer literature on metaphysical and supernatural consumption meanings, there is considerable variety to the consumption objects that studies have concluded may be touched by such meanings. Belk et al. (1988) found sacred meanings attached to many types of consumption, including collecting, antiques, home furnishings, souvenirs, gifts, brands, places, and songs. They also outlined properties and rituals of sacralization that make certain consumer goods numinous. These parallel the magical properties and rituals for making magic detected by Mauss (1975). But while Mauss maintained that only a magician can make magic, once the sacred is separated from religion, others become sacred meaning makers including marketers, gift-givers, and consumers themselves. This may also require a separation from the mythology that Malinowski (1948) found so important to performing magic. Or more likely, it requires an embedding in a new mythology like that of consumerism, brands, or the personal and family mythologies of the consumer.

Another relevant line of inquiry examines objects of extreme devotion through which consumers find deep meaning. As if reaffirming Malinowski's (1948) link between magic and myth, consumer objects of special devotion are often embellished by modern mythologies jointly constructed by marketers and fans (Holt, 2004; Muñiz & Schau, 2005; Thompson, 2004). In such mythologies brands sometimes participate in heroic journeys. For example, the creation myth of the first Apple computers emerging from Steven Jobs' parents' garage, Jobs' apotheosis, his fall from grace and period of exile, and his resurrection as savior of Apple on the eve of its rumored demise, all contribute to the overall mythology surrounding him and the Macintosh computer. This sustains the loyal cult of Macintosh, providing members with meaning that transcends corporate capitalism (Belk & Tumbat, 2005).

Consumption has also been treated as explicitly magical. Belk (1991) outlines a number of possessions seen by their owners as magical, including among others jewelry, perfume, clothing, homes, medicines, and photographs. Arnould and Price (1993) found magical transformative experiences revealed by clients of commercial river rafting trips. Rook (1987) reported that impulsive shoppers take an anthropomorphic view of consumption objects, such that a piece of clothing magically "calls their name" as they pass it in the store.

These areas of extant research suggest that consumers' quest for a deep, meaningful, and enlivened relationship with consumption objects. We seek through consumption what we might otherwise seek through religion.

Moreover, we pursue a very personal level of insight as seekers of revelation about our lives, our futures, and our relationships with others and with the larger universe. In our research, we sought to understand how consumers seek existential answers through consumption. With this goal in mind, we investigated how consumers invoke the supernatural or metaphysical. We find that most consumers possess a magical worldview that manifests in seeking transcendence through consumption.

METHOD

The broad domain of alternative conceptions of "chance" events is an entrée to the study of metaphysically and supernaturally experienced aspects of consumption. Our theoretical sampling method involved the selection of three phenomena that oppose concepts of modern science. We examined the use of luck charms to magically conjure a rare beneficial outcome or avoid a rare undesirable one. This practice opposes the notion of luck, as a chance accident that randomly and uncontrollably befalls someone. Experiences of synchronicity, meaningful coincidences experienced as personally relevant and divinely guided, were also elicited because they oppose the modern notion of coincidence as a probabilistically understandable and meaningless outcome (Burton & Grandy, 2004). Finally, belief in *psi* phenomena of extrasensory knowing opposes the scientific notion that these are a form of "hyperbolization."

We conducted interviews with 19 adults residing in the southwestern U.S., whom we recruited through a newsletter of a non-religious-affiliated children's school. There was no attempt to screen participants on the basis of their beliefs in magic, divine guidance, meaningful coincidences, or psi phenomena. Rather, we deemed variation in beliefs useful to developing understanding. Participants also varied with respect to age, ethnicity, education, and occupation. All interviews were conducted at a location near the school.

After completing a brief questionnaire, the interview began with a grand tour discussion about family, life history, religious background, and family attitudes toward chance. To elicit consumer stories, we first asked general questions such as "What is the most fortunate (and unfortunate) thing that has ever happened to you?" These were followed by various techniques designed to promote retrieval and elaboration of stories with a specific focus on one of the three study contexts. These included a "walk-through" technique in which we asked for additional story details about a coincidence obtained from the questionnaire and prompting informants for further stories of coincidence by offering examples drawn from Internet. This discussion was followed by specific questioning about the good luck charms they had listed in the questionnaire. In the final phase, we used a film-elicitation technique to elicit broader life views of "chance" events. Participants viewed three brief film clips, each depicting dialogs between two actors taking opposing sides on whether "chance" is meaningful or meaningless: *Serendipity*, *Sleepless in Seattle*, and *Signs*. The different film dialogues discussed the possibility of "chance" events to offer direction in life, reveal magic, or convey the support of a higher power.

In our analysis of 475 pages of transcripts, we identified one negative case in which the participant did not infuse consumption objects with magical or supernatural beliefs. By comparing this person to the others we identified alternative worldviews. After grouping participants according to their worldviews, we made comparisons both within and between these groups. After separate analyses of the data, we conferred, refined, and combined our two analyses. We frame our findings to highlight the role of worldviews in shaping experiences of the metaphysical and supernatural in consumption contexts.

WORLDVIEWS AND TRANSCENDENCE THROUGH CONSUMPTION

Rational and Magical Worldviews

In recounting their life histories and consumer experiences, our participants exhibited three worldviews through which they attempt to understand the meaning of life and life's events: rationalism, determinism, and partial determinism. Rationalism is the worldview into which most academics are socialized. It is contrasted with the other "magical worldviews" (Burton & Grandy, 2004). In Table 1 we summarize the worldviews, and highlight their differences in terms of their answers to several existential questions: What determines my life's events? Should I seek control over my life, or are events and lots in life fated? Is the cosmos living and intelligent, or dead and unintelligent? Does my life and its events have meaning in relationship to the cosmos? Am I known by a sympathetic, caring cosmos? Are inexplicable rare events "chance," and thus meaningless accidents or are they meaningful? As our analysis reveals, these views suggest whether and how we seek transcendence through consumption.

We describe these general worldviews and their effects on consumption by presenting exemplar consumer cases. In Table 2 we offer interview comments reflecting the worldviews of our cases, and in Tables 3 and 4 we

Table 1. Rational and Magical Worldviews.

Existential Concerns	Rational Worldview	Magical Worldviews	
		Determinism	Partial Determinism
What is the ultimate determiner of life's events?	Laws of nature.	God or supernatural being; laws of nature and deviations from these are subsumed in God's plan.	Laws of nature; God or supernatural being; self as magician.
Are events and "lots" in life fated?	Fate is inconsistent with a belief in free will.	Belief in fate precludes free will.	Fate and free will co-exist.
Is the cosmos dead or living?	The cosmos is dead and unintelligent. Its workings are understood as mechanical.	The cosmos is living and intelligent. Its workings are experienced as magical.	The cosmos is living and intelligent. Its workings are experienced as magical.
Does my life have meaning in relation to the cosmos?	The cosmos is impersonal and uncaring. Its relationships are unsympathetic, brute forces of nature that can be mechanically modeled.	The cosmos is personal and caring. Its relationships are sympathetic, comprehended through emotion and personal meanings.	The cosmos is alternately personal and caring and impersonal and uncaring.
Are rare, scientifically inexplicable events meaningful?	Such events are "chance" accidents; they occur for no rhyme or reason.	Everything happens for a reason.	Some things happen for a reason, others by chance.

Is the material world dead or living?	The material world is dead and unintelligent, with its workings understood by a dissection of parts.	The material world is living, intelligent, and mysteriously reflects a unified world.	The material world is alternately living and intelligent or dead and unintelligent depending on assessments of rational explanations and probability of occurrence.
What are the boundaries of the mind?	The mind is self-contained in the body and receives incoming sense data. It is not mingled with the physical world.	The boundary between mind and matter is blurred. Mind and matter interpenetrate to the point of unity.	The boundary between mind and matter is blurred. Mind and matter interpenetrate to the point of unity.
View of transcendence	No transcendence is sought; awe-inspiring inexplicable events lead to further cause and effect inquiry.	Transcendence is achieved through religion or consumption experiences.	Transcendence is achieved through consumption experiences.

Table 2. Rational and Magical Worldview as Expressed by Participants[a].

Beth's rationalism	*Candy's partial determinism*	*Randy's partial determinism*	*Anna's partial determinism*
Some things are just random. I'm on a lot of list serves for various things [disease and health problems] … And there are basically two groups of people … There's the group that believes that everything happens for a reason … The other group of people are people who just think these random things happen you know, there's no explanation … then you just have to deal with it. And I belong to that latter, more secular category of people … I mean fate means to presuppose some kind of prime mover behind everything … so I think it kind of is inconsistent with a belief that there is chance and free will … you basically have to choose one or the other … [re. Oxford] I don't believe that there was some kind of external moving force because there are many things that you apply for that you don't get. As you get more experience with grants and how application processes work, obviously there was something in the application that I submitted. (2.1)	We were always told we may not go to church every Sunday … but … we were all baptized, we all had our first communion, we all were confirmed, because … you need all those things to go on … to get married by the [Catholic] Church … I think I believe in … that there is a fate. There are things that are meant to be or supposed to happen and that happen. But also that you make your own. Like you could either sit back and let everything happen, or there could be things that you do that alter how it goes…. You do things to like either, I don't know, I guess you, you have to put it all into play. Cause it's not like you're given a straight line of what you're going to do. … Like you have to determine where you're going. Fate just pushes you to where you're suppose to … (2.3)	When I got inside the church, looking at things from the inside … my views have really changed … I still believe … But there's a lot of stuff that goes on in there that it's more like a business than anything else. I didn't like that. It sort of ran me off …. I think it's like everybody's like, you're going to be presented with these opportunities that can change your life and you can either take them or not and like depending on that like there's. I don't think fate is something like it's going to happen no matter what. But I think like, you'll be presented with the opportunities and then, you can either take them or not, and then your life will go accordingly … I think that like there's God who says "This is your path, stay on it, don't get off, come back." And it's like he'll put you back and he has a reason. (2.5)	I worked in oncology … cancer patients. Twenty died my first month …. It just makes you realize there's some truth to there's life being given and life being taken away, and you can't explain how. It's that not knowing how that makes you believe. Lack of understanding makes you believe someone else is in control …. I've seen older patients walk away and younger patients die of the same disease. … Because, I believe that you know, I don't believe miracles are just in the Bible. I don't believe that just happened way back there and they're not here and now. … our experiences are guided but the external relations, that you make your own decisions … But the thing that when laid out before you, you don't really have a choice, you don't know who you're going to pass on the street, you know, that that is sort of predetermined and it's your reaction to it. (2.7)

Tina's determinism	*Simon's partial determinism*	*Jeremy's partial determinism*	*Mary's partial determinism*
I view my life like that, like things happen for a reason, so I believe it [pregnancy while on birth control pills] happened for a reason … I'm like I'm that .1 percent …. I kind of felt like I was kind of being saved, but like um for some weird reason. Maybe there was pre-hand knowledge that I was going to have a kid. Maybe it was like OK, we can't send her to Korea or Kuwait because she's going to have a kid … So luckily the six years I was in the military I didn't have to leave my kids … I think our life is predetermined before we came here. … I think that when we are born or before we are born it was "OK you're going to be born to this family, you're going to have very strong family relationships, you're going to be a teacher and you're going to like serve people." I believe that's how it was made for me. So that's why I use the "we" because maybe that's how it was before I was even conceived. (2.2)	I will always survive and be taken care of as long as I do good things. I don't make the right decision, and there may be some days that are wrong, but I believe good things happen to those who give and do good things. So I can see myself as being a good person, and I'll be taken care of. … just because I don't go to church doesn't mean I'm not a good person … I believe … that you are destined in life, this is not what you have to do or you're going to do, but you have choices. And sometimes they're bigger doors and you always have a chance to open that door. And some are small openings and it's, you've got to either do it or don't. … I believe you know that there's a lot of things that are destined for individuals but you do have your own choices. And sometimes the choice, you may not make is the right one, but in the end, things work out for people. (2.4)	I think religion is a wonderful thing, it's just one certain type of religion can't always describe everything. So if you were purely Catholic, or purely Christian, or purely Islamic, or something of that nature, in my opinion, it doesn't describe what really is going on at all times. And so that's why I would just, that's why I just buy into no single religion because I do believe in God, … , but I don't believe in certain portions of that. … I don't believe that everything was created by God, I believe in Darwinism, I think that, it makes sense, and I think I like to believe in biology and facts, and that makes sense to me, that's one logical thing, than it just all being created at once. Or like the big bang, which is a theory that, of science, and I believe in things like that too, because those are researched and they're actually researched in a way that I can understand them, it's not just, well this happened. (2.6)	Things happen for a reason. I mean there is still some randomness, but and choice, and but, ultimately I think things kind of all end up at the same place the way they are meant to be. … I guess there's some kind of guidance there, I'm not sure what but. … I think it's kind of like a puzzle. Like you can either start with the edges or you can start in the middle and but, the puzzle pieces kind of meet in the end either way. … Like I believe in destiny … but at the same time there's like little things that happen in my life that, that it's hard to believe that it's meaning is what's intended to be. … I mean in the whole balance of things, good things will happen and bad things will happen. That's guaranteed in life … I kind of have my own notion … like I'll get what I deserve …. I don't really believe in one god or one goddess. I just believe there's something greater. (2.8)

[a]Magical world reviews are held by participants holding beliefs in determinism (Tina) and partial determinism. Partial determinists may be further distinguished by those who follow formal Western Religion (Candy, Randy, and Anna) and those who eclectically borrow to form their spiritual beliefs (Simon, Jeremy, and Mary).

Table 3. Consumer Cases: Partial Determinists (Western Religion Followers).

Candy	*Randy*	*Anna*
[The cross necklace] was a gift from my Dad. I've had several, like over my lifetime, but I've always had something, … I think they, I don't know, but I have so much faith in this … Like I don't, I may not go to church everyday, or every Sunday, and that kind of thing, but I have so much faith in like that kind of thing. Just having it around my neck is kind of comforting. (3.1) Like the cross [necklace] or anything religious is going to just be with your higher being. That's going to be who determines … But what about things that have absolutely, have really no, like, "Who ruled the lucky numbers and says they're going to, if you believe in it, that they're going to give something to you?" (3.2) [The lucky guitar pick] That is from … a musician … he had written a couple of songs that had gotten like recognition. But, he's like "I wrote those songs with that," so I'm like "Oh yeah, I'll keep it." So I've had that … for at least 10 years. (3.3) We had been like dealing with disciplining our children and stuff … you know, I think like "I'm not doing this right, I'm not doing that." So we had been arguing that morning about like "Well you need to do this, and you don't need to do that," … and then so like when I was looking at the books [from a list for a project] a book was there … *The Rights and Wrongs of Disciplining Your Children*, and it was just like, I hadn't thought about it since this morning, …. But it wasn't like there was a big stack of discipline (books), it was just one in the books I was looking at. Do you know what I'm saying? So I'm like "Oh, this is perfect. Did somebody hear me say I need this book?" Do you know what I'm saying? "Did somebody hear me say 'Please give me a book that can help me with my children'?" (3.4)	I was like 11 … and I still have it [backpack], I still use it. I just need to have it … or something bad will happen if it's gone. (3.6) I carry my voter registration card with me because, I like put it in my wallet around the time of the last election and then Bush won. So I was like, I don't want him loosing so I better keep it in there. (3.7) … we took it real seriously, cause basketball was like your life. And there were always bad signs of stuff. … we would always like eat at Burger King before every game … we went to Burger King, and were like "Don't get pickles" you know because for some reason, you were like the only one who special ordered your burger [when we lost]. And we won. So like from then on … we never had pickles. (3.8) My old [Nike] sneakers from basketball … I just refuse to get rid of them … the shoes I wore during my senior year. (3.9) I've started to collect … like old school books from the [19]20's and 30's …. I saw it on TV around on that Antiques Road Show … that show on PBS where it's like people bring in their (antiques) … and it was like this Huck Finn, it was like gold laced, and it was like the gold letters, and I was like "I really want to get that book." … I'm into the whole, I like Huck Finn, Mark Twain, the whole thing … So, I go there [the co-op book store] … I told the guy "Call me if you get this book." He called me like an hour later and somebody had brought it in … in mint shape … he's like "You're not going to believe this, somebody, just brought that same exact book, the same edition, a first edition." ... And the guy's like (televised antique appraiser) "This book's quite valuable." And I was	I probably started collecting charms when I was really young, probably 10 or 12. I didn't have the bracelet until I was 15 …. A pair of ballet shoes, I was a ballet dancer. A pair of tap shoes which I got that was the last charm I got. The charm that says "I love you" my Mom made me for Valentine's Day one year. A crown, that was my first one because my Mom's English and so being an English lady was always engrained when I was growing up … So it has like little different pieces of my life … it's in a jewelry box and I wear it when I have something big to do, speaking or you know. (3.12) Growing up I had a keychain collection ... I had hundreds … I inherited it from a friend who was moving … so my first key chain was about the 100th … When I got this one from the World Cup that was really significant. My son is a very big soccer player. And so, that has the like dual meaning. Some day I hope that he'll be there, the World Cup and I'll get another. … so that has meaning beyond the fact that we're friends … one of my friends had brought [it] back from the World Cup in 1998. And I really like that, I really thought that was neat. Because I had never been to France, and I thought "Ah, this has been to France." (3.13) We were competitive swimmers, all of us. And I had one swimsuit that I wore out. And I won the city competition that year, and I was just sure it was the suit, so …. It just became the one. And I wouldn't wear it to practice, I just wore it in competition … I even had the chance to get another one, a new one, and I didn't want it. It was ratty, the symbol had come off and I mean otherwise, it didn't break or fall apart or anything, but yeah (3.14)

A friend of mine … his name is Shane ... he was named after that movie, that old cowboy movie …. And I don't know if I was talking about him or if I was looking at something from him, like a letter, or something, and then on the TV it said the advertisement for that movie …. And I was thinking about him. Until I met him I never even knew about that movie, you know … I was thinking about looking up some stuff or I had something of his or that was of his or something and then that thing came on the TV. (3.5)	like "Man if I could go to "Co-op's" and get that book cheap" … That was weird …. I went and got it. … It was kind of a rare book …. I always have thought, I don't really believe in just wild coincidences, I think there's like God like working it kind of … like there's a greater cause or something greater at work. (3.10) A few weeks ago … I'm like "I'm wondering what he [Uncle in Japan} is doing, I need to talk to him" and I went to check my e-mail and he had e-mailed me to tell me he's getting married … I was like that was so weird. It's like, I talk to him literally maybe once or twice every three or four years. So I was like I need to call, but he had e-mailed me earlier that day (3.11)	We were working on heart failure. The new orders, charge orders. And I was working something totally different, another heart related project, and I was on this website, and I thought "Hey this is an interesting link" and it went to this document that I had been trying to find. It's just like a 60 page summary of all the recommendations on heart failure, and based on that we have changed our entire program at the hospital. And I thought "Ga-leaigh," I made so many copies of that cause I never want to lose that again. …(3.15)

Table 4. Consumer Cases: Partial Determinists (Eclectic Borrowers).

Simon	*Jeremy*	*Mary*
People joke a lot, I mean that's the ball [Quantum Raven Bowling Ball], and now I use that ball, I mean I have other ones, but I always, whenever I'm struggling I always use that ball and it always finds its way for me to bowl better. And I don't know what it is. And I still have it. … and he's "Man, you still have that frickin ball" and I'm like "Yeah, yeah, it's my favorite ball" … Almost 9 out of 10 people who bought this ball said this is the worst bowling ball they ever bought in their entire life. … There's a guy that I work with that bought one too when I bought one, and he got rid of his a long time ago. He hated it, wanted to throw it in the trash … And I still have mine …. So it's more to me than, bowling sometimes is more to me than just bowling. It's a life enjoyment … it's something that always came back to me, made something good out of my life. (4.1)	I think mainly how it [horoscopes] works, is you look at it and say "oh well I'm going to have a five star day," and it's sort of brighter because you think you're going to have it, so maybe that's what gets her [my mother] started on her happiness. (4.5)	… Basically there's nine, eight or nine sections of the room, including the middle part. And um, there's one for money and wealth, one for who you're known as, like what you want to be seen as, and there's two love sections, there's your creativity section, and also with the creativity, it's like children, like focused on play, and then there's the helpful people and travel section of your room, there's knowledge, family, and um like the center of your room is what grounds the room together. And then, there's one more, oh, career. … Um like every part of the room, there's an element that rules it, like in the love section there's fire, so you want candles there, you wouldn't want like a fish tank there. … I think there's energy in everything … In my money and wealth section … I have a little treasure box there … there's a section devoted to things you want to be … what people see you as. I guess, what would it be, like ah, … I have my, I love Hello Kitty [a brand]. I love Hello Kitty so I have a bunch of Hello Kitty stuff. … I think that the other people who buy Hello Kitty things are, have similar needs as me … even like on "The Real World," like on MTV, one of the girls has Hello Kitty, and she like has like some problems. Like Hello Kitty is so cute and adorable, it's like the polar opposite of what you feel most of the time [when you're manic] …. I have like a Hello Kitty TV, and my old car has Hello Kitty stuff in it, and I have too many to count … my son, I'll put him in Hello Kitty pajamas. (4.8)
Now these bowling tournaments when I started bowling, I had these ah, the first day of my qualifying I always had these ah they were like ah, black and, I still have them. … they're a dark pair of dress socks and I ended up bowling really good in the tournament and every since then I just always had to wear those socks and make sure they were clean, ready for the next tournament. I still have them … any tournament I was bowling in I would wear them … Because I had bowled really good in a tournament that these were the ones, were why.. .They were black but they were ah, they were ah, they had a Polo on them, they were black and blue but had the horse on it, was like yellow. So it was weird I had never seen socks like that before. So I was always into wearing different things like this. (4.2)	I think, there're a lot of things that happen without reason. I mean, people get ill all the time or get, stand after they've been paralyzed their whole life, walk when they were told they would never walk again by the smartest people, the smartest people on the planet. I mean, it's maybe it's not a miracle, but maybe it's just more your own personal strength inside that determines that. But something that cannot be described by anyone without someone just bullshitting their way through it. If it honestly cannot be answered by someone who researches it, everything else, I think something like that can be a form of miracle. (4.6)	
	Everything on that list was given to me when I was in the hospital … That was my Grandma. She gave it [lucky rabbit's foot] to me … I have probably 8 of them [$2 bills] that were given to me in the hospital …. My aunt gave me six of them, my brother gave me one, and then a friend of my brother's gave me one …. That pouch, my aunt sent, the rabbit's foot was in it too, it wasn't inside it, it was just along side of it. She sent me a packet of all, my aunt had cancer when she was real young. And so she sent me a pouch of everything that she had that um was lucky for her when she had cancer … It's very significant to me now. And ah, and	

I had this jersey, and as long as that thing fit me I wore it you know, until the letters came off of it…. So, I still do have it … It was my favorite player. He was ah, it was Emit Smith, he was a running back for the Cowboys. And he was one of my favorite players. Yeah, I used to wear it on Sundays, when I was watching with my Dad. There were times when I'd forget to wear it and they'd lose. And I thought, well they lost because I wasn't wearing the jersey. So I'd feel that way sometimes. (4.3)

I'll pick it up, make a wish, and if it doesn't come true … there'd be things that I'd ask for and things would happen, and if something happened I would save it. And If I picked it up and nothing happened, then I'd get rid of it. (4.4)

so that pouch is filled with a lot of things …. I mean it's a velvet like, just a little zipper pouch … Yeah, she wrote me a letter in there that like explained what it was, and what they meant to her and my uncle, and I read that letter probably once, every time get in a bad situation … I don't know necessarily if it's the biggest good luck charm out there, but that brings me a lot of happiness … the first thing it talks about, it explains what each one is, each of the things that are in the pouch is, um, and then it goes on to explain what they, how, like what point of her illness she was in when she got them, and each one, it almost seemed like every time she was getting worse, she'd get a lucky charm and get better. Because I mean, cancer is something that's horrific, and she fought it quite, she got over it, so it's, I mean it's something that, that letter really is important to me. And then the things inside of it are just as important. And just the fact that like, I have everything. I mentioned they haven't really even moved. (4.7)

They're really old keys that they used to use like, um, you know, in the Secret Garden, she uses a little skeletal key to open the gate. Allison in Wonderland, she uses the key to open the door to wonderland … It's like keys are so significant. Like you couldn't really open your door without a key. (4.9)

My best friend's sister passed away … there's this one song by the Hot Chili Peppers again that reminds me of her. Like if I, if I go, she has a five year old, … she was a mom and she left her daughter, we had some similarities … she was kind of like me and I was like her. … My son can stress me out, you know, and like there's a really long stretch of road that I drive on to my house, … a couple of times, this song would come on and at a time where I'm thinking who cares, he's driving me nuts, and the song comes on and I think how fortunate I am and how fortunate he is to have that, he still has his mom here. (4.10) provide examples involving specific instances of transcendence through consumption. Of our informants, only Beth held a rational worldview. We first contrast Beth's rationalist view and its impact on her consumption experiences with that of Tina, whose "pure" magical worldview entailed a belief that all life events are supernaturally determined (i.e., determinism). We then present six cases from the remaining pool of informants who exhibited a magical worldview of partial determinism. These partial determinists believed that supernaturally fated lots and outcomes coexist with chance events and free choice. Together they highlight the different ways consumption objects are engaged to seek meaning in life and manage the boundaries between science, religion, and "magic" (the term used to refer to spiritual rituals of non-dominant cultures; During, 2004).

Consumer Cases

Beth's Rationalistic Worldview. Beth is a 36-year-old history professor, socialized by her profession into a rationalist worldview (Table 2, 2.1). This worldview supplanted her Jewish upbringing, against which she rebelled early in life. Beth claims "I don't believe in God personally" and rejects the notion of "fate," as it presupposes a supernatural guiding power in life that she thinks is inconsistent with her belief in chance and free will (Table 2, 2.1). She attempts to control life events by discerning patterns of cause and effect and she consistently interprets her life outcomes in such terms or in terms of chance. Two consumption contexts exemplify this view: medical treatment for her and her son and college for her. In seeking explanations for her rare form of cancer and her son's premature birth, Beth turns to science and medicine in researching the effects of various treatments. She considers their occurrence as "just random," rejecting, for example, the notion that she has been "picked out by God" to have a special needs child. She expresses feelings of anger at people who treat such chance events as meaningful as this implies that those who are impaired or who do not recover have not prayed hard enough, have not lived well enough, or are in some way less favored by a higher power.

Beth attempts to cope with negative outcomes of chance, which she sees as being "just random" and outside the domain of the explicable and hence controllable. In order to cope with her son's developmental issues, she says she learned to adopt a more relaxed parenting style that emphasizes enjoyment rather than competitive achievements. Yet, she rejects the notion that she was directed to this altered path. Likewise, Beth interprets rare positive life outcomes such as her opportunity to attend Oxford as due to causal effects or chance (Table 2, 2.1). She worked hard, achieved a good record, and sought out the opportunity. She sees anything beyond this that affected her admittance as simply chance.

Beth's rationalist worldview is reflected in the absence of consumption experiences fused with metaphysical or supernatural meaning. Her only good luck charm – a miniature stuffed shark that she carried to her dissertation defense as a symbol of the aggressive character she felt she would need – has a "scientized" explanation, even if seemingly totemic in nature. For her it reflects cognitive psychology's experimentally tested predictions of the positive effects of visualization techniques on performance, including public-speaking performances (e.g., Ayres & Hopf, 1992). She reports "knocking on wood" to ward off "the evil eye," yet acknowledges "I don't really believe in that." Similarly, she says that the mezuzah on her home's exterior is a reflection of her Jewish identity rather than a belief in its apotropaic powers of protection.

She interprets the few consumption-related coincidences that have captured her attention (e.g., unexpectedly finding a "lost" friend at an "out of the way theater" in Europe) as perhaps interesting but meaningless and as not requiring supernatural explanations. Consistent with her view of the cosmos as unintelligent, Beth offers no experiences in which material objects strike her as animated, as offering "signs" to guide her life's decisions, or as anticipated through pre-cognition. This holds as well for her experiences with complex technological products, like the computer and Internet. She interprets unsolicited "pop-up" screens that have displayed timely information not uncovered in her earlier purposive searches on a given research topic as due to "selective perception" – the empirically supported cognitive psychology theory that once a topic becomes personally salient, we are more apt to notice information related to it (Cooper, 1981; Klemmack, Ballweg, & Lane, 1975). From Beth's rationalist view, once her research was underway, she had a better sense of the terms surrounding the topic, so that although the information had likely "popped up" earlier, she did not recognize its importance at that time, giving the false sense later that it emerged as an "answer" to her needs.

Consistent with her view of the material world as inanimate, she reveals no special relationships with brands or products. Even though Beth used the Internet to locate and initiate a relationship with the man who became her husband and to meet and befriend a woman with the same cancer diagnosis, she sees cyberspace and her computer as completely non-miraculous. Beth's mind–matter distinction is reflected in her lack of kinetically fueled luck charms, her discounting of deity-like "knowing" capabilities on the part of her computer, and in her conception of gift exchanges. Regarding the "perfect gift" she offers: "My husband went on the Internet and saw this 19th century portrait of [the politician] that I was doing research on and he gave it to me for my birthday." This gift for Beth resulted from the effort her partner expended in discovering her interests, and then conducting research to locate a gift related to her interests.

Tina's Magical, Deterministic Worldview. A striking contrast to Beth is Tina, age 28, a former Army medic and current pre-medical student who received her spiritual instruction from the Mormon Church. In elaborating on her comment "I think honestly that, … our life is predetermined before we came here," Tina claims that fate determines all outcomes and events (Table 3, 3.2). These outcomes cover her present life span, from her family of birth to the conception and birth of her children. She sees her life events as occurring both owing to genetic inheritance of personality predispositions and outcomes that were personally "uncontrollable" and instead under the control of other forces (e.g., being sent by her military employer to a peace zone versus a war zone). Her view of a supernaturally guided predetermined life also includes domains where modern social science would suggest that people can exert control, such as the strength of her family relationships, her choice of occupation, and her choice of a marriage partner (Table 2, 2.2). To Tina, rare chance events are not accidents but rather meaningful and intended outcomes that are interwoven into a grander design for her life and for the world at large. Events in dreams and horoscopes, as part of her unified world, are meaningful and prophetic.

Tina's magical, deterministic worldview is reflected in a host of consumption experiences fused with metaphysical or supernatural meaning. Notably, however, the use of luck charms or talismans is not among these. Pure determinism, with its supposition of a complete ordering of life, precludes the need for luck charms to alter chance outcomes to favor the rare beneficial event or to preempt the rare harmful event. Tina spoke of only one luck charm, which she claimed for a time during her early childhood – a raggedy Ann doll that she had used to bring her luck in sports, but later discarded. In discussing it, she added that she discourages her daughters from wishing upon or placing faith in such charms. Notable omissions from Tina's possessions, in comparison with other participants with ties to formal religion, were charms bearing images of guardian angels or saints, even though many Mormons wear pins of the angel Moroni (McDannell, 1995). Her interpretations of rare consumer outcomes were, likewise consistent with her magical worldview that all is planned. Tina interpreted her second pregnancy while on birth control pills that claimed to be 99.9 percent effective, as a divinely orchestrated outcome: "I kind of felt like I was kind of being saved … Maybe there was pre-hand knowledge that I was going to have a kid. Maybe it was like 'OK we can't send her to Korea or Kuwait because she's going to have a kid and we don't want to separate her.'" She maintained her divine, meaningful interpretation, despite subsequently learning that there was a defect in the pharmaceutical and that it was removed from the market.

Although Tina viewed her life as predetermined, she also expressed a desire to see ahead to the plan that she believed had been set for her. She expressed the belief that "if you're careful enough … there are little signs here and there that will tell you what you should be doing." Material consumption objects became animated in moments of struggling with decisions such that "a sentence in a book you are reading" or "words off a cereal box" could be a "sign" or a "clue." This animation extended to a belief that objects appeared to cooperate in a grander plan. For example, Tina's Honda automobile malfunctioned on the day she had planned to embark on an extended journey to marry her daughter's father. For her this was a part of her life's pre-written narrative and the car was an accomplice in a fated relationship with another person she met the day she was unable to travel. The mind–matter boundary is blurred for Tina as is evidenced in her discussion of consumption objects as representations of family members: "Carrying like pictures of our family is like, if we die, we'll at least die with our family nearby." Her interpretation of the perfect gift her husband gave her offers a further demonstration of how the mind–matter boundary is blurred in her worldview. In contrast to Beth's rational explanations for her perfect gift, Tina's perfect gift defies rational explanation for her:

> Growing up, I played the piano, so I always wanted a piano … a grand piano … So my whole life I always told myself I was going to buy one … nobody knew. I never told my family. It was just one of those personal things, you know, haven't you ever told yourself 'One day I'm going to buy one of those things?' That's how it was … And this past Christmas, I received one from my husband … So that was kind of, he never knew that though … It was really weird.

Thus, Tina sees her husband's gift choice as magical, suggesting either extrasensory knowing on his part or divine intervention, delivering the "meant to be" outcome.

Magical, Partial-Deterministic Worldviews (Followers of Western Religion). Three cases demonstrate how various life circumstances combine with beliefs shaped by Western religion to give rise to one version of the magical worldview of partial determinism. They further demonstrate the different ways that people use their consumption practices to reconcile coexisting beliefs in science, religion, and magic.

Candy exhibits the least attempt to maintain boundaries to mark the domains of science, religion, and magic. She is a 28-year-old student and mother of two pre-school children. Candy says she is a Catholic (Table 2, 2.3), but does not attend church on the grounds that other events, even mundane ones like cleaning house, always seem to take priority in her "fast-moving" life. For Candy, life's events result from a combination of fate and free will. Fate is deemed to offer "a push in the right direction," requiring that she still make choices (Table 2, 2.3). She juxtaposes these influences when describing both her youth and career path. For instance, her childhood, marked by her parents' divorce when she was four, posed a fated event over which she had no control, yet came with the life-shaping choice of deciding with which parent she would live.

Candy generally experiences the cosmos as caring and sympathetic. She perceives that her "higher being" is willing to offer comfort if honored through faith, which she demonstrates by displaying religious artifacts (Table 3, 3.1), like the guardian angel images in her daughters' rooms. At times she experiences the cosmos as unsympathetic and uncaring, such that "you just have to get through it." Although Candy expresses a belief that some things happen for a reason (i.e., are guided by God), and others by chance, she seeks control over both through the same means – luck charms (Table 3, 3.2, 3.3). Although she is clear that in the case of religious artifacts she is engaging them to call upon a "higher being," she admits to a lack of understanding about the source of magical power for her secular luck charms, like her smashed penny and guitar pick (Table 3, 3.2, 3.3).

Candy's world is living and intelligent, and speaks to her through material objects. This is exemplified in her story of a book that magically appeared to offer a timely answer to a domestic problem (Table 3, 3.4). With objects seemingly "responding to her requests" and offering guidance, the boundary between mind and matter is blurred for Candy. This blurring is also evidenced in her *psi* experiences that occur in relationships with technological goods. Technological goods, like televisions, episodically break from their inanimate state to reveal knowledge about her life (Table 3, 3.5), reflecting experiences that have been labeled "haunted media" (Sconce, 2000). The simultaneous correspondence of her mental thoughts with constructions in the physical environment (e.g., the book, the televised advertisement) is experienced by Candy as magical rather than mere coincidences, and in some instances influence her consumer choices.

Randy is a 24-year-old pre-school teacher and a former Protestant preacher. He rejected the institution of the church, after his "insider's" experience exposed him to the financially driven nature of its decision making (Table 2, 2.5). Yet, he maintains a belief in God and Biblical doctrines. At the same time, his preparation to enter a Ph.D. program in early childhood education has sensitized Randy to concepts of science. Thus, in comparison to Candy, Randy's more studied approach to Christianity's doctrine of providence and the role of individual choice, as well as scientific notions of cause and effect, have led him to more clearly demarcate the domains of magic, supernaturally arranged fate, and free will.

In his choice and use of luck charms, Randy seems to have engaged the principles of science in his practice of magic: he has attempted to rule out religion, God, and science as alternative explanations for the effectiveness of his magic charms, thereby lending support or "evidence" to their operating through pure magic. A God-inhabited cosmos renders the material world living and intelligent, able to speak its meanings to Randy. However to maintain consistency with Protestant Christian doctrine that views object fetishes, conjuring practices, and kineticism as aspects of the occult (Burton & Grandy, 2004; During, 2004), Randy has severed God, as magical creator and prime mover, from his attempts to control rare beneficial or harmful events that fall outside rational explanation. Randy's luck charms consist of secular objects. Here, he differs from Candy, who in professing a Catholic religion that embraces object fetishes (Lears, 2003), does not experience conflict from engaging religious artifacts to protect her. In excluding the role of God's supernatural powers from his use of charms, Randy seems to be honoring the scientific concept of chance while subverting its meaning by attempting to control it. Unlike Beth's use of the "aggressive shark" to promote assertiveness during her dissertation defense, Randy's luck charms are not tied to visualization techniques taught and practiced in sports psychology (e.g., Table 3, 3.8), the effects of which have been empirically demonstrated (e.g., Kearns & Crossman, 1992). Rather, Randy's luck charms hearken back to more ancient occult practices of endowing objects with magic. Contagion, whereby powers are passed through contact, is seen when his acquisition of a voter's registration card coincided with a "win" for Randy's preferred candidate. The card was in contact with "luck" itself and thus he retains it so that it can further disseminate this power (Table 3, 3.7). Mirror attraction, whereby like attracts like, is found in Randy's placing faith in objects that have been reliable in the past, like his backpack and basketball shoes, that he believes will keep bad things from happening to him (Table 3, 3.6, 3.9).

Randy, likewise assigns boundaries to God's work so that the domain of scientific explanation is not challenged. In interpreting rare coincidences tied to consumption experiences, Randy believes God orchestrates these only in the sense of providing divine guidance. Decision making is left to free choice and is informed in part by his understanding of cause and effect relationships, which are deciphered through his life experiences. In contrast to Candy, Randy rejects the idea that God sends answers in the form of "signs." Rather he offers the modern rational explanation that in such experiences some objects' symbolism is ambiguous enough to allow people to project their desired meanings onto them (Barthes, 1957, 1972): "I think if you're looking for a sign, you'll probably find one. You could make a sign out of anything … It's like if you want to believe in something you'll make excuses to believe in it." Although from Randy's view point, free will in decision making sometimes leads to "mistakes," these are met with caring and sympathy by a God-inhabited cosmos: "If there was no God and I was doing it by myself, we'd be homeless by now 'cause I've made so many mistakes.'" Most of Randy's reported synchronistic experiences validate his chosen life projects rather than offer answers to a specific problem. The story of obtaining the Huck Finn book for his collection of educational books (Table 3, 3.10) reinforces his career path as an early childhood educator, which he initially rejected. It also seems to him to validate his decision to pursue his Ph.D. in education. Perceiving the world as sympathetic and caring, Randy reports *psi* experiences, particularly pre-cognition involving the communicative content of technological goods like his computer (Table 3, 3.11).

Anna's scientific training is more extensive than Randy's. Even so, unlike Randy, she remains active in the Protestant church and has been since her youth. As a 33-year-old oncology nurse and nurse educator, Anna reconciles her joint beliefs in magic, religion, and science (Table 2, 2.7) differently from Candy's integration and Randy's separation of bounded domains. Anna, having experienced science as an explanation of formerly inexplicable phenomena, sees the magic/religion versus science boundary as permeable, with some of the magical or religious phenomena being explainable by science. Anna does not consider apparent exceptions to laws of nature in her work (e.g., the aborted fetus that lives, the elderly patient who is revived by treatments that have failed to save younger patients) to be random chance events, but rather the results of supernatural intervention or miracles (Table 2, 2.7). Despite her awareness of research that attempts to explain these exceptional events (e.g., why older rather than younger people respond better to heart treatments), she continues to regard them as miracles. Still, Anna does not privilege the supernatural as subsuming science, as does Tina in her deterministic worldview. Instead, Anna seems able to reconcile that God's miracles may have a medical explanation.

Anna's comfort with moving from the domain of the magical to the domain of the rational, is manifest in her luck charm practices that are more highly scientized than are Randy's. Outside the realm of life, health, and death, where she has placed the supernatural as the default explanation for things that are scientifically inexplicable, Anna does recognize "chance." Like Randy, she denies the concept its scientific meaning by attempting to control chance outcomes through the use of luck charms from the secular world (Table 3, 3.13). Anna's charms are almost exclusively related to achievement (success in sports, professional accomplishments, and leisure goals such as travel; Table 3, 3.12, 3.13, 3.14). Her charm bracelet, a form of commercialized magic, conjures successes in prior performance roles throughout her life, and thus is worn when Anna "has something big to do" like "[public] speaking" (Table 3, 3.12). Her lucky key chain from the World Cup held in France enables her to envision visiting France in the future and seeing her son participate in the World Cup. Both objects are also long time possessions, with a demonstrated history of effective magic. Thus, Anna's explanations of her luck charms' efficacy confounds the rational and the magical. This confounding allows a suspension of attribution, which can be later rendered either magical or rational. Similarly, in Anna's interpretation of an awe-striking Internet experience in which she unexpectedly found a document for which she had been questing, she likewise commits to neither a scientific nor a supernatural explanation (Table 3, 3.15). Here too, she suspends attribution even while conveying an animosity toward selective attention to information as an uncorrected bias in the diagnosis of symptoms and the prescription of patient treatments.

Magical, Partial-Deterministic Worldview of Simon, Jeremy, and Mary (Eclectic Borrowers). Relative to partial determinists with ties to formal Western religion, eclectic borrowers were somewhat more likely to speak of a justice-related this-worldly getting-as-you-give in discussing their broader worldviews (e.g., Table 2, 2.4, 2.8). Their views suggest a generally sympathetic cosmos that participates in a mutual spirit of generosity that Lewis Hyde (1983) calls "the spirit of the gift." This heightened awareness of a sympathetic cosmos distinctly shaped the experience of the supernatural and metaphysical through consumption practices for this group. As one manifestation, the luck objects of these eclectic borrowers often involved greater attention to ritual (e.g., Table 4, 4.2, 4.3, 4.8). Mary divided portions of her room to reflect different aspects of her life, and then she moved objects into these areas in an effort to attract the fulfillment of desires (Table 4, 4.8). This practice mimics more ancient beliefs tied to Confucianism, whereby every action on earth is mirrored in the heavens. More generally, our eclectic borrowers endowed some of their luck charms with magic through a more distanced process of contagion that drew from the commercial world (i.e., a projective form of contagion). Look-alike possessions, including branded goods displayed by television celebrities and characters who possess desirable qualities were acquired as luck charms (Table 4, 4.3, 4.8, 4.9). Mary used a ‘‘Hello-Kitty’’ charm to attract a desired happier self to counter her manic side. Heightened awareness of a sympathetic cosmos is also reflected in this group's regard for broadcasts of musical recordings, which they deemed as delivering timely messages, guidance, and comfort. While Mary said the music on her radio became enlivened to remind her of the importance of parenting (Table 4, 4.10), music ‘‘spoke’’ to Simon on matters of relationships, and it conjured luck for Jeremy when bowling.

As other noteworthy distinctions, eclectic borrowers seem less concerned with mixing sacred and secular domains. Simon who wishes on lucky coins (Table 4, 4.4) also reports praying to his deceased Grandfather for help in winning a bowling tournament. Jeremy offers a scientific explanation for prophecy (Table 4, 4.5), but also speaks of unexplained recoveries from illnesses as ‘‘miracles.’’ He further considers his lucky rabbit's foot, 2-dollar bills, and a potpourri of trinkets as being instrumental to his recovery from a rare, normally lethal disease (Table 4, 4.6, 4.7). Like Jeremy, Mary augments prescription drug remedies for her manic condition with luck charms that she calls upon to attract balance (e.g., her Hello-Kitty collection, Table 4, 4.8). Finally, our eclectic borrowers more often mentioned membership in experiential consumption or brand communities (e.g., Simon's Dallas Cowboy affiliation and Sun Lane Bowling culture, and Mary's Hello-Kitty), and also seemed to be more sensitive to brands in choosing luck charms (e.g., Table 4, 4.1, 4.2, 4.3, 4.8).

DISCUSSION

Our inquiry into how modern Western consumers seek meaning in life reveals that for most, the existential quest involves infusing God and magic in everyday consumer experiences. While our findings offer specific insights that extend lines of inquiry on consumption magic, objects of extreme devotion, and animated objects, the broader contribution lies in illuminating how these quests and experiences are unified for individuals by their magical worldviews. Participation in consumption subcultures, where a select object is the focal point of experienced magic or religious-like transcendence (e.g., white water rafting, Arnould & Price, 1993; Star Trek media objects, Kozinets, 2001; Apple Newtons, Muñiz & Schau, 2005), is perhaps not solely a function of the object's qualities or rituals, but also involves the consumer's broader existential quest, which infuses a host of consumption activities with metaphysical meaning. Magic and supernatural aspects of consumption pervade our everyday lives. Although our models of consumer behavior are moving away from the view of consumers as Cartesian automata, they have not yet moved far enough to embrace this pervasive metaphysical milieu.

Because the worldviews are differently related to consumer choices and choice outcome evaluations, their recognition may offer insights into responses to specific marketplace incidents and offerings. For example, in dealing with product failures, rationalists might be expected to seek understanding of the cause of failure, and exert effort toward remedying the problem. By contrast, a determinist might take an attitude of "it was meant to be," and a partial determinist might see it as God's retribution or a reflection of failing to carry luck charms. Similarly, reactions to withdrawals of valued products from the marketplace might differ according to worldviews. It appears plausible that those loyal to the Apple Newton after Apple dropped it from its product line (Muñiz & Schau, 2005), were partial determinists, capable of arguing their loyalty on rational grounds while also believing in the resurrection of the dead product.

Future research might also examine whether rational and magical worldviews are linked to reactions to secular magic, considered as the "smoke and mirror tricks" of entertainment (During, 2004), but likely attributable to many product claims as well. Magical appeals in advertisements have become commonplace. Not only are these used in conjunction with products that have chosen either a brand name or product positioning tied to magical transformations of consumers or their possessions (e.g., Dreamworks, Wonderbra, and Turtle Wax Color Magic Plus), they have also been employed to promote such products as Snicker's bars, Citroen cars, Cannon Car Mats, electronics, and skin care products (http://www.visit4info.com). Other ads present rationalist themes denouncing magic, such as one for IBM E-Business Solutions, with the tag line: "There are no magic business solutions. Call IBM business consultants."

Our consumer cases suggest that future research on consumers' responses to magical advertising appeals would benefit from an approach that recognizes identity projects of a broader sort than previously considered (e.g., Mick & Buhl, 1992). This broader view should consider worldviews affected by life projects such as parenting, illness, and occupations that socialize us into either magical or scientific views. Various resulting worldviews likely mediate the impact of marketing stimuli (e.g., Mick & Buhl, 1992), magical belief systems involving products (e.g., Thompson, 2004), and attributions concerning consumption events (e.g., Muñiz & Schau, 2005).

Prior to inquiries into the relatedness of magical worldviews and reactions to the secular magic of advertising, we believe it will be useful to more carefully examine and deconstruct, how select practices of magic are shaped by modern Western culture. The conventional view of luck charms in America is to see them as trivial (During, 2004), and primarily for fun or play. This view is not unlike current views of the secular magic of advertising (Williams, 1980). However, our informants reveal a serious reverence toward these objects, despite their sometimes comical forms. Object choices for luck charms and the wishes for which they were engaged appeared instrumental in marking the domains of religion and magic as well as magic and science. Notably, the eclectic borrowers were less likely to use luck charms in a manner to mark such boundaries, suggesting that future inquiry may examine whether this group is more likely to respond to secular magic of the market than those whose magical worldviews derive from formal Western religion.

Our findings also offer insights for research method design. It became apparent as we talked with informants that our pre-interview survey querying consumers on their "religious affiliation" was out of sync with consumers' experiences of spirituality, for some merged religion with magic and science. This is consistent with treatments of contemporary American religion by Miller (2004) and Roof (1999), but it differs from consumer research treatments of religion (e.g., LaBarbera, 1987; Hirschman, 1982). Further, a phenomenological approach to research suggests augmenting the study of rationalist oriented concepts with those drawn from the perspective of consumers possessing different, magical, worldviews. In this vein, insights into the effectiveness of different types of visualization techniques might be informed by the study of magical processes of mirror attraction and the contagion of luck. The spontaneous designation of a "perfect" choice might be elaborated by the study of meaningful coincidences. And "selective perception" might be more fully understood when coupled with studies of consumers' experiences of pre-cognition.

Magical worldviews were revealed to manifest in a variety of supernatural and metaphysical experiences tied to consumer choices and choice outcome interpretations. "From the earliest times it has been a central function of religious explanation to assure people … that little if anything in the world is truly accidental" (Humphrey, 1999, p. 35). We find that while some people may have lost faith in religious institutions to guide their quests for life's meaning (Roof, 1999), they perceive that a living, sympathetic, personally caring world still speaks its purpose to them through consumption.

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