Possessions and the Extended Self

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Our possessions are a major contributor to and reflection of our identities. A variety of evidence is presented supporting this simple and compelling premise. Related streams of research are identified and drawn upon in developing this concept and implications are derived for consumer behavior. Because the construct of extended self involves consumer behavior rather than buyer behavior, it appears to be a much richer construct than previous formulations positing a relationship between self-concept and consumer brand choice.

Hollow hands clasp ludicrous possessions because they are links in the chain of life. If it breaks, they are truly lost.—Dichter 1964

W e cannot hope to understand consumer behavior without first gaining some understanding of the meanings that consumers attach to possessions. A key to understanding what possessions mean is recognizing that, knowingly or unknowingly, intentionally or unintentionally, we regard our possessions as parts of ourselves. As Tuan argues, "Our fragile sense of self needs support, and this we get by having and possessing things because, to a large degree, we are what we have and possess" (1980, p. 472). That we are what we have (e.g., Van Esterick 1986; Feirstein 1986; Rosenbaum 1972) is perhaps the most basic and powerful fact of consumer behavior.

The premise that we regard our possessions as parts of ourselves is not new. William James (1890, pp. 291–292), who laid the foundations for modern conceptions of self, held that:

> a man's Self is the sum total of all that he CAN call his, not only his body and his psychic powers, but his clothes and his house, his wife and children, his ancestors and friends, his reputation and works, his lands, and yacht and bank-account. All these things give him the same emotions. If they wax and prosper, he feels triumphant; if they dwindle and die away, he feels cast down,—not necessarily in the same degree for each thing, but in much the same way for all.[1]

If we define possessions as things we call ours, James was saying that we are the sum of our possessions.

The purpose of this article is to examine the relationship between possessions and sense of self. It is based not only on the premise that this relationship is of importance to understanding consumer behavior, but also on the premise that understanding the extended self will help us learn how consumer behavior contributes to our broader existence as human beings (Belk 1987a). The first section considers various evidences that possessions are an important component of sense of self. The most direct form of evidence is found in the nature of self-perceptions. Additional, especially striking evidence is found in the diminished sense of self when possessions are unintentionally lost or stolen. More evidence of the role of possessions in sense of self comes from anthropological studies of the way possessions are treated ritually and after death. Because extended self is such a broad topic, several unreviewed areas of evidence on the extent and nature of the relationship between possessions and sense of self also are identified. In so doing, the scope of the present treatment is also defined.

The question of what functions the extended self serves is addressed in the second section, which begins with a brief review of the basic states of our existence: having, doing, and being. These states are relevant to the question of how we define who we are. Next, the functions of possessions in human development are considered. Four stages are identified: (1) the infant distinguishes self from environment, (2) the infant distinguishes self from others, (3) possessions help adolescents and adults manage their identities, and (4) possessions help the old achieve a sense of continuity and preparation for death. Finally, the role of possessions in creating or maintaining a sense of past is considered.

The third section examines several processes involved in self-extension. One process is the initial incorporation of objects into our extended selves. A number of incorporation processes are discussed, not all of which involve possession in the sense of individual ownership. A particular process of self-extension

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[1]James called his text an encyclopedia of psychology and quotes Herr Horwicz's *Psychologische Analysen* (no date or publisher given) as a source of many of his ideas on self.

that is considered in some detail is contamination. In contamination, both good and bad aspects of objects are seen to attach to us through physical contact or proximity. A final process theorized is the maintenance of multiple levels of the self, such as viewing our family, city, and nation to be a part of who we are.

The fourth section of this article focuses on a number of special categories of possessions that are commonly incorporated into the sense of self. These categories are collections, money, pets, other people, and body parts. In each case, research is reviewed supporting the contention that this category of objects is a part of the extended self and is therefore treated differently from objects not considered to be a part of self.

The final section discusses implications of the extended self formulation for consumer research. The areas of implications outlined include gift-giving, vicarious consumption (generally through other family members), care of possessions, organ donation, product disposition, and the contribution of extended self to defining meaning in life. The latter topic elevates the focus of consumer behavior research to a level of greater significance than satisfaction with product performance. Following the final section, the formulation of the extended self is reviewed briefly and conclusions are offered.

EVIDENCES

Possessions in Self-Perception Research

The term extended self has not been applied previously to the conception of self-plus-possessions, but Rochberg-Halton (1984, p. 335) comes close:

> Valued material possessions . . . act as signs of the self that are essential in their own right for its continued cultivation, and hence the world of meaning that we create for oursleves, and that creates our selves, extends literally into the objective surroundings.

One difference in the present view is that the extended self is seen not to be limited to external objects and personal possessions, but also includes persons, places, and group possessions as well as such possessions as body parts and vital organs. The notion of extended self is a superficially masculine and Western metaphor comprising not only that which is seen as "me" (the self), but also that which is seen as "mine." As James (1890, p. 291) notes, the two concepts are interwoven in the way we think of our selves:

> The Empirical Self of each of us is all that he is tempted to call by the name of me. But it is clear that between what a man calls me and what he simply calls mine the line is difficult to draw. We feel and act about certain things that are ours very much as we feel and act about ourselves. Our fame, our children, the work of our hands, may be as dear to us as our bodies are, and arouse the same feelings and the same acts of reprisal if attacked. And our bodies themselves, are they simply

ours, or are they us? Certainly men have been ready to disown their very bodies and to regard them as mere vestures, or even as prisons of clay from which they should some day be glad to escape.

Although prior theories and research on consumer self-concept (see Sirgy 1982 for a review) are moderately supportive of the contention that possessions are incorporated into self-concept, this research probably considerably underestimates the extent to which this is true. One reason is that prior research methods generally attempt to find a correspondence between perceived characteristics of these objects and perceived characteristics of the self. But, one can hold an object like the Statue of Liberty to be a part of one's identity without having to hold a self-concept composed of characteristics attributed to this statue. Second, as argued by Belk (1984b), the focus of these studies on *brand* images prior to acquisition is too limited. Both nonbrand images (e.g., cigarette smoker, wine connoisseur) and post-acquisition object bonding (e.g., with one's pet) may contribute strongly to the sense of self. Third, as argued by Belk (1984b) and Solomon and Assael (1988), rather than a single product or brand representing all of one's self-concept, only a complete ensemble of consumption objects may be able to represent the diverse and possibly incongruous aspects of the total self. For all of these reasons, the present focus on extended self is substantially different than prior consumer self-concept research. For research applications within the perspective advocated here, see Belk (1987b, 1988) and Belk and Austin (1986).

This more expansive view of the extended self can be examined in light of several prior conceptualizations and studies focusing on distal elements of the self. McClelland (1951) suggested that external objects become viewed as part of self when we are able to exercise power or control over them, just as we might control an arm or a leg. In the case of tools, instruments, and weapons, envisioning the basis for the extended self metaphor is easy. The greater the control we exercise, the more closely allied with self the object should become. This principle led McClelland to hypothesize the following hierarchy of most to least closely self-allied object categories: (1) me, my "free will," (2) my body, my conscience, (3) my belongings, (4) my friends, and (5) strangers, physical universe. The predicted closer alignment of self to belongings than to friends recognizes the "free will" of people (friends) that is lacking in most belongings.

Prelinger (1959) tested James's premise that possessions are viewed as parts of self and McClelland's hypothesis that control dictates the strength of this linkage. He had subjects sort 160 items onto a four-position (zero to three) continuum of not-self to self. The items were selected so that each of eight conceptual categories was represented by 20 items. These categories and the mean "self" scores for the items within them were in descending order:

1. Body parts (e.g., the skin, the genital organs), 2.98;

2. Psychological or intraorganismic processes (e.g., the conscience, an itching on the sole of the foot), 2.46;

3. Personal identifying characteristics and attributes (e.g., age, occupation), 2.22;

4. Possessions and productions (e.g., watch, perspiration, toilet articles), 1.57;

5. Abstract ideas (e.g., the morals of society, the law), 1.36;

6. Other people (e.g., the people in your hometown, father), 1.10;

7. Objects within the close physical environment (e.g., dirt on the hands, furniture in this room), 0.64;

8. Distant physical environment (e.g., the adjoining room, the moon), 0.19.

Although it is unfortunate that Prelinger grouped some autonomic bodily productions with possessions, these findings still support James's contention that possessions are seen as part of self. They also suggest an ordering of the "selfness" of these object categories that is parallel to the hierarchy suggested by McClelland. To test McClelland's control hypothesis more directly, Prelinger had five judges separate the 160 items into three groups: those that are predominantly under the control of people, those that primarily control or affect people, and those that are predominantly neutral in both regards. The first two categories both received high mean "self" scores (over 1.8) from subjects, while the neutral items clearly received "non-self" scores (mean less than 0.2). These findings suggest that besides control over objects, control *by* objects may also contribute to an item being viewed as part of self. That is, we may impose our identities on possessions and possessions may impose their identities on us.

Interestingly, control also has been suggested to be the critical determinant of feelings of possession (Furby 1978; Tuan 1984). If both hypotheses are correct, the more we believe we possess or are possessed by an object, the more a part of self it becomes. It is telling that the categories of extended self just noted correspond quite closely to the areas in which Ellis (1985, pp. 115–117) found evidence of human possessiveness (no hierarchical ordering was reported): (1) one's body, (2) personal space, (3) ingestibles, (4) territory, (5) domicile, (6) copulatory partners, (7) offspring, (8) friends, (9) tools, and (10) objects of aesthetic appeal, play and amusement, pets and mementos. Nuttin (1987) finds that even the letters in our names are viewed possessively. Apparently, in claiming that something is "mine," we also come to believe

that the object is "me." McCarthy (1984) concludes that such objects act as reminders and confirmers of our identities, and that our identities may reside in objects more than they do in individuals.

Allport (1937) hypothesized that the process of gaining an identity, and in so doing gaining self-esteem, progresses from infancy by extending self via a continuously expanding set of things regarded as one's own. This hypothesis was tested by Dixon and Street (1975) who conducted an approximate replication of Prelingers' study among 6- to 16-year-olds. They found essentially the same rank ordering of item categories regarded as "self," but found only two categories for which this tendency changed significantly with age: other people and possessions. In both cases, older children were more likely than younger children to categorize such objects as being part of self ("you"). In a three-generational study of favorite possessions, Rochberg-Halton (1984, 1986; Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton 1981) found that as we age the possessions that people cite as "special" tend increasingly to be those that symbolize other people (e.g., gifts from people, photographs of people). Their interpretation of these findings suggests an age-related widening of the boundaries of self (Rochberg-Halton 1984, p. 352). These findings also may suggest that possessions are regarded not only as a part of self, but also as instrumental to the development of self. Other work on the role that special possessions play in easing life transitions also suggests that possessions can be instrumental to maintenance of self-concept (e.g., McCracken 1987a).

A study by Belk (1987b, 1988; Belk and Austin 1986) examines the self-defining role of places, public monuments, experiences, time periods, television programs, motion pictures, and public figures, in addition to the sort of objects, persons, and traits studied in prior research. Of the additional extended self categories considered, places and experiences tend to be seen as most clearly a part of extended self. Added to the previously noted findings then, we may summarize the major categories of extended self as body, internal processes, ideas, and experiences, and those persons, places, and things to which one feels attached.

Of these categories, the last three appear to be the most clearly *extended*. However, given the difficulties in separating mind and body in philosophies and psychologies of the self (e.g., Campbell 1984; Englehardt 1973; Tuner 1984), objects in all of these categories will be treated as potential parts of the extended self. In conversations in English (although less true in some other languages such as Japanese), it is clear that some objects in the former categories are treated as both a part of extended self and a part of essential unextended self. For instance, saying I *have* a dark tan or *my* body is tan (possessive and extended uses) is more usual than saying I *am* a tan body (a nonpossessive and an unextended usage). However, saying I *am*

tired (unextended) is more common than saying my body is tired (extended). Even greater complications in making distinctions between extended and unextended selves are found with asomatognostics who cannot apprehend the existence of parts of their bodies (Litwinski 1956; Sacks 1985), amputees who develop phantom limbs (Plugge 1970), and recent treatments of beliefs as possessions (Abelson 1986; Abelson and Prentice forthcoming). From the present perspective, the issue is an empirically resolvable one that depends upon perceptions. For instance, Belk and Austin (1986) found the following mean scores for various body parts on a four-point scale of "selfness," where four is the highest possible score: eyes 3.5, hair 3.2, heart 3.1, legs 3.1, hands 3.1, fingers 3.0, genitals 3.0, skin 3.0, nose 2.7, knees 2.7, chin 2.6, kidneys 2.6, liver 2.6, and throat 2.5. For this sample, it seems best to conclude that none of these body parts is necessarily an inherent part of unextended self, but that eyes, hair, and heart are more likely to be treated in this way than are kidneys, liver, and throat. The study also found some evidence of sex and age differences in the incorporation of body parts into sense of self. Furthermore, it is likely that those who have undergone such elective body alterations as plastic surgery and tattooing are likely to view the affected body parts as being more a part of self (e.g., Sanders 1988).

Loss of Possessions

If possessions are viewed as part of self, it follows that an unintentional loss of possessions should be regarded as a loss or lessening of self. Goffman (1961) provides a thorough review of the evidence of deliberate lessening of self brought about in such institutions as mental hospitals, homes for the aged, prisons, concentration camps, military training camps, boarding schools, and monasteries. One of the first steps in receiving new members into these institutions is to systematically deprive them of all personal possessions including clothing, money, and even names. Their bodies may be standardized to some degree, as with military haircuts, and their behaviors and conversations may be severely restricted. They are reissued standard wardrobes and minimal possessions to aid in rebuilding a new standardized identity. The result of this systematic substitution of standardized "identity kits" for former possessions is an elimination of uniqueness (Snyder and Fromkin 1981) and a corresponding and often traumatic lessening of the individual's sense of self. Although the new, more standardized possessions that are substituted may eventually restore some sense of self, the new self should necessarily be less unique and involve more of a shared group identity. Furthermore, the individual typically becomes a user of these new objects rather than an owner of them. Because control is restricted and the organization remains the owner, identity is

seen to be bestowed by the organization. The present focus would suggest that those who have less of their extended selves stripped from them may adjust more readily to such situations.

Another instance in which nonvoluntary loss of possessions may bring about a diminished sense of self is when possessions are lost to theft or casualty. In the case of burglary victims, Rosenblatt, Walsh, and Jackson (1976) suggest that a process of grief and mourning may follow the discovery of theft, just as one might grieve and mourn the death of a loved one who had been a part of one's life. What is lost in both cases may be a part of self. As the college student victim of a bicycle theft accuses the unknown thief, she reveals the identity invested in the bike (Donner 1985, p. 31):

> It hurts to think that someone else is selling something that for me is more precious than money . . . Everyone who owns a bike has their own story that makes their bike more than just machinery to them. And you ripped it off. You stole a piece of my life. You didn't just steal a chunk of metal to sell . . . You walked off with my memories.

The present author conducted a small-scale test of this hypothesis using data from interviews with a nonrepresentative sample of 20 burglary victims who were asked in open-ended questions to recall their initial thoughts and feelings upon discovering the loss. Following anger and rage, the most commonly reported reactions were feelings of invasion and violation. In fact, eight of the 11 females in the sample spontaneously suggested that it was as though they had been violated, polluted, or raped. There are similar reports in Maguire's (1980) study of British burglary victims, although only 12 percent of the females in his study suggested such a feeling. Additional confirmation of this feeling of personal violation is found in studies by Korosec-Serfaty (1985) and Paap (1981).

There are also reports of feelings of loss of a part of self among victims of natural disasters. McLeod (1984) found that those who lost possessions to a mudslide went through a process of grief similar to that in losing a loved one—moving from denial to anger, to depression, and finally to acceptance (often after many months). The author joined several other researchers in conducting depth interviews with flood victims during the summer of 1986, and found that after six weeks most victims were still in the early stages of grief and often could not talk about the disaster or cried while attempting to do so. Fieldnotes from one such interview include this account:

> The losses that concerned (the flood victim) most were those of his record collection, . . . a first edition book collection, . . . the tools that his father—the cabinet maker—had used, . . . the ceiling and paneling of the basements that he had installed with the help and advice of his father, and (upstairs), the hutch, lowboy, and stereo cabinet that his father had made.

Clearly what is mourned here is a loss of self. Similar findings were obtained in the Buffalo Creek flood (Erikson 1976). As Georg Simmel observes, "material property is, so to speak, an extension of the ego, and any interference with our property is, for this reason, felt to be a violation of the person" (1950, p. 322). The flood victim also illustrates how the labor of the individual (in this case the victim's recently deceased father) adheres in the objects produced. In this sense, the loss of possessions was also a further loss of his father's extended self that remained in his father's creations.

Besides the more direct loss of self when personal possessions are lost to theft or casualty, the vulnerability revealed in such losses may damage the sense of self derived from the attachments to home and neighborhood. Home (e.g., Cooper 1974; Duncan 1976; Duncan and Duncan 1976) and neighborhood (e.g., Bakker and Bakker-Rabdau 1973; Gerson, Stueve, and Fischer 1977) have been suggested to be strong sources of personal identity. As with more personal possessions, home and neighborhood have been hypothesized to contribute to sense of self to the degree that a person feels control over them (Bakker and Bakker-Rabdau 1973; Edney 1975). This may explain why Brown (1982) found that burglary victims report less sense of community, less feeling of privacy, and less pride in their house's appearance than do their nonburglarized neighbors. The same phenomenon has been observed in those displaced by slum clearance, even when they were relocated to "better" housing (Fried 1963). In the words of Peter Marris, "They identify with the neighborhood: it is part of them, and to hear it condemned as a slum is a condemnation of themselves too" (1986, p. 55).

Besides loss of possessions to theft or casualty, others have maintained that whenever the functions and property of individuals are taken over by institutions, such as government and schools, there is a regrettable loss of self (Dietze 1963; Wiggins 1974). Although the intent of these institutions is presumably not to lessen others' sense of selves, Wiggins (1974) suggests that there are instances in which a person's possessions are damaged with the intent of diminishing the owner. He gives as one example a child who destroys the property of a larger child or of an inviolable sibling in an effort to more effectively direct aggression at this person. Vandalism may be motivated similarly with the targets being society, those who seem to be more fortunate, or public institutions (e.g., Chester 1976; Fisher and Baron 1982).

The trauma that may attend involuntary loss of possessions normally is not present in voluntary disposition of possessions. Indeed, La Branche (1973) observes that when possessions are recognized as inconsistent with our images of self, we gladly neglect or dispose of them. But, when the disposition is forced, as by economic circumstances, the parting likely brings sorrow. As one elderly respondent pawn-

ing possessions to make it through the winter reflects (Cottle 1981, p. 18):

> I stand in those lines with my suitcase full of things to practically give away; I stand in that hock shop, and I tell myself that my entire life is being sold . . . Don't make me hock my life away, I beg you.

Of course, there is a more utilitarian explanation of the feelings of resentment at the loss of possessions. In this more utilitarian view, we merely regret the loss of valued possessions because of the benefits they provide rather than from any feelings of self derived from or mingled with these objects. James (1890, p. 293) challenges the sufficiency of this view:

> although it is true that a part of our depression at the loss of possessions is due to our feeling that we must now go without certain goods that we expected the possessions to bring in their train, yet in every case there remains, over and above this, a sense of the shrinkage of our personality, a partial conversion of ourselves to nothingness, which is a psychological phenomenon by itself.

Extreme examples of this partial annihilation of self are cited by Beaglehole (1932) and Rigby and Rigby (1949) in accounts of art collectors who have gone to such great lengths as suicide to avoid facing the forced breakup of their collections. Less extreme examples are found in the simple nostalgic regret at the disposal of wornout clothing and similar items that have been associated with pleasant memories of one's past (e.g., Lurie 1981, p. 33; Rooney 1984, pp. 3–4).

If involuntary loss of possessions causes a loss of self, one of the primary reactions following such loss should be an attempt at self-restoration. This phenomenon has been observed in psychoanalysis and has led to the hypothesis that, along with body loss, object loss is the fountainhead of creativity (Niederland 1967; Niederland and Sholevar 1981). Body loss refers to some real or imagined physical deformity or bodily imperfection that detracts from sense of self. Object loss normally refers to the death of a close family member, but is also used by Niederland to refer to the traumatic loss of possessions. In body and object loss, the creation of art, craft, concept, or writing is seen as an attempt to extend the self in new ways that make up for the loss and restore the self to wholeness. That is, periods of creativity may follow the loss of one's possessions.

Niederland and Sholevar (1981) also suggest that for many young American males, the automobile is a part of their extended selves and their ego ideals. This view is supported by consumer self-concept research (e.g., Bloch 1982; Grubb and Hupp 1968; Jacobson and Kossoff 1963). The processes of creating and nurturing extended self through an automobile may be seen in customizing (personalizing) the car and in lavishing great care on its maintenance. When such a car is damaged, the owners react as if their own bodies

have been injured. Consider the sense of personal injury described by Bellow (1975, p. 36) after a treasured car was assaulted:

> Someone had done to my car as rats, I had heard, did when they raced through warehouses by the thousands and tore open sacks of flour for the hell of it. I felt a similar rip at my heart . . . I had allowed the car to become an extension of my own self . . . , so that an attack on it was an attack on myself. It was a moment terribly fertile in reactions.

Furthermore, the possessors of such damaged treasures are anxious to either restore the auto to its former perfection or replace it with a more perfect substitute. These reactions reflect the desire to restore the damaged sense of (extended) self caused by the injury to the automobile.

Investing Self in Objects

The idea that we make things a part of self by creating or altering them appears to be a universal human belief. Anthropologists generally agree that the maker of an object, the user of land, and the cultivator of a plant are regarded as being entitled to the product of their labor (e.g., Herskovits 1952; Lewinski 1913). Locke (1690) made this the foundation for his views on property and government, explaining the "natural basis" for private property in three steps: (1) we own ourselves (see Wikse 1977), (2) therefore we own our labor (what we direct our bodies to do), and (3) therefore we own what we produce from our labor out of the unowned materials of nature. Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton (1981) provide a more psychological explanation in suggesting that we invest "psychic energy" in an object to which we have directed our efforts, time, and attention. This energy and its products are regarded as a part of self because they have grown or emerged from the self. The same principle has been suggested to apply to objects that are forcefully appropriated from others (Veblen 1898). After the development of money payment for labor, purchasing objects offers another means for investing self (in this case more symbolically) in possessions.

Beaglehole (1932) reviews other anthropological evidence of the link between possessions and self. The almost literal incorporation of objects into self and self into objects is shown in various practices of traditional peoples. These practices include licking new possessions, burying the umbilical cord on tribal land, inserting removed foreskin beneath the bark of a personal tree, eating or taking the name of conquered enemies, burying ancestors on sacred tribal land, and claiming ownership of new land or artifacts by touching them, naming them for a part of the person's body, leaving a lock of hair on them, or shedding blood on them. Another example, perhaps repugnant to Western observers, is the drinking of the urine of Vedic priests to partake of the psychogenic

properties of the *Amanita muscaria* mushroom that these priests ritually consume (Wasson 1972). Each of these practices suggests the desire to tap into the life force of nature or other people by symbolically merging with these forces.

In addition, the association of people and possessions is shown in the practice of burying the dead with their possessions. This practice began at least 60,000 years ago (Maringer 1960) and perhaps more than 100,000 years ago (Leaky 1981). Alekshin (1983) compared the grave goods of men and women in Europe and found evidence that suggests women only began to experience inferior status in the third millennium B.C. (i.e., the number and quality of their grave goods did not differ until then). Rathje and McGuire (1982) have performed similar analyses of grave goods of the Maya. That anthropologists assume that possessions tell us about their possessors is itself evidence of the tendency to see possessions as symbols of self. The inference process is not unlike that of police detectives who attempt to construct an identity for unknown corpses by using the corpses' possessions (Pogrebin, Poole, and Regoli 1986).

In more recent traditional societies, using the clothing or possessions of the dead is often a taboo. Until outlawed 100 years ago in India, the wife, as "property" of a deceased husband, was expected to join him in death (Bordewich 1986). Such notions of possession surviving even death suggest a strong association between self and possessions. To the extent that other people can be viewed as possessions (this point will be pursued in a subsequent section), mourning for dead loved ones also may be interpreted as grieving for a loss of self. The prior possessions of the deceased can be powerful remains of the dead person's extended self. These remains are often the focus of normal and pathological mourning (Volkan 1974). The same association is shown in sympathetic magic in which malevolence is directed at a person through their clothing, hair or nail clippings, or other belongings (Clodd 1920). Evidence of the power of possessions to capture the extended self is also shown in the angry destruction of objects left behind by the Shah of Iran and Ferdinand Marcos in the Philippines after they were deposed (Goldstein 1987).

Contemporary consumption also shows that the feeling of identity invested in material objects can be extraordinarily high. For instance, Ames (1984, pp. 30–31) records feelings attached to a 19th century purchase of a parlor organ:

> Buying a prominent object like a parlor organ might initiate a new chapter in a set of lives, not only by providing a new way to use time but also a new tool to measure time. In later years the object would serve to remind its owners of the day it first entered their home and of the time that had passed since then. It would not only structure their present but also their perceptions of their own past.

They knew from experience that purchasing a major object could be a significant and momentous occasion in itself, a time of heightened positive emotions and feelings of well-being and importance . . . a major purchase would transform them in their own eyes and in the eyes of others. They would become worth more . . . and acquire greater status. By so doing they would receive more respect and deference from others which would, in turn, make them feel better about themselves. Buying a parlor organ would make them something they were not before.

One of the modern equivalents of the parlor organ in terms of impact on extended self is the automobile, especially for males (e.g., Myers 1985; Weiland 1955). The owner of an expensive Porsche describes his attachment in this way (Stein 1985, p. 30):

> Sometimes I test myself. We have an ancient, battered Peugeot, and I drive it for a week. It rarely breaks, and it gets great mileage. But when I pull up next to a beautiful woman, I am still the geek with the glasses.
>
> Then I get back into the Porsche. It roars and tugs to get moving. It accelerates even going uphill at 80. It leadeth trashy women . . . to make pouting looks at me at stoplights. It makes me feel like a tomcat on the prowl. . . .
>
> Nothing else in my life compares—except driving along Sunset at night in the 928, with the sodium-vapor lamps reflecting off the wine-red finish, with the air inside reeking of tan glove-leather upholstery and the . . . Blaupunkt playing the Shirelles so loud it makes my hair vibrate. And with the girls I will never see again pulling up next to me, giving the car a once-over, and looking at me as if I were a cool guy, not a worried, overextended 40-year-old schnook writer.

As these examples suggest, the degree to which self may become extended into possessions can be great. In extreme cases, we again may note McCarthy's (1984) contention that identity sometimes may lie more in extended self than in unextended self.

Relevant Perspectives and Domain

The preceding discussion has presented eclectic evidence supporting the proposition that we regard our possessions as parts of our selves. As this article develops a deeper theoretical understanding of this phenomenon, it will continue to draw upon a broad base of literature from psychology, consumer research, psychoanalytic theory, material and popular culture studies, feminist studies, history, medicine, anthropology, and sociology. These areas and particular studies within them deal with constructs that are useful in advancing the arguments and explanations of the following sections. A number of other areas of inquiry as well as omitted subfields from these areas just noted are potentially relevant to the study of extended self, but have been excluded either because of space considerations or because of the areas' perspectives being less compatible with the present theoretical emphasis or with the focus on consumer behavior. Future research seeking a broader perspective would benefit from consulting the additional literatures in Marxism and neoMarxism, critical theory, folklore, political philosophy, environmental psychology, macromarketing, semiotics, impression management, and collective memory. The literature on property, ownership, and possession also provides a wealth of relevant material (see Rudmin, Belk, and Furby 1987).

The scope of this artical also is delimited by its predominant focus on societies that hold an individualistic concept of self. As Belk (1984c) suggests, there are times and places in world history during which the operative notion of self is more collective than individual. For a series of excellent discussions of the emergence of the individual self, see Campbell (1987), Carrithers, Collins, and Lukes (1985), and Macfarlane (1978). The present discussion addresses collective selves in a section dealing with levels of the self, but the primary focus is on the individual. Most of the present formulation also applies in instances of collective conceptualizations of the self, but collective self involves additional concepts not addressed here—for instance, group rituals for fusing a new object into collective identity. Thus, an adequate theoretical formulation of collective extended self must await further work. In the following section on the functions of extended self, social functions of this construct largely are ignored.

FUNCTIONS OF EXTENDED SELF

Having, Doing, and Being

Objects in our possession literally can extend self, as when a tool or weapon allows us to do things of which we would otherwise be incapable. Possessions can also symbolically extend self, as when a uniform or trophy allows us to convince ourselves (and perhaps others) that we can be a different person than we would be without them. Tanay (1976) suggests that handguns represent a symbolic penis for their owners. However, Kates and Varzos (1987) challenge this interpretation and instead emphasize the real rather than symbolic power given by guns. This sense of enhancement of personal power is what made the six-gun the "equalizer" in American Western lore. Tanay's symbolic interpretation focuses on the sense of *being* presumably provided by such a weapon, whereas this alternative interpretation maintains that it is what one can *do* with a gun that contributes to sense of self. Thus, having possessions can contribute to our capabilities for doing and being. The relationships among having, doing, and being are strong and have been most fully explored by existential psychologist and philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre.

In his major work, *Being and Nothingness,* Sartre (1943) suggests that doing is merely a transitional

state or a manifestation of the more fundamental desires to have or to be. Further, Sartre maintains that the only reason we want to have something is to enlarge our sense of self and that the only way we can know who we are is by observing what we have. In other words, having and being are distinct but inseparable. When an object becomes a possession, what were once self and not-self are synthesized and having and being merge. Thus, according to Sartre, possessions are all-important to knowing who we are. People seek, express, confirm, and ascertain a sense of being through what they have.

Other people also affect relationships among having, doing, and being, according to Sartre. Besides others sometimes serving in an object capacity as possessions, others are an important mirror through which we see ourselves. These others first come to associate possessions and possessor and then, depending upon which is known best, either come to infer the traits of the person from the nature of the possessions or the nature of the possessions from the traits of the person (Belk 1978). Belk, Bahn, and Mayer (1982) and Holman (1981) review abundant buyer behavior literature supporting this veiw. However, as Douglas and Isherwood (1979, p. 72) remind us, to think that a single item can successfully inform others about us is equivalent to thinking that a single word from a poem can convey the meaning it creates in the context of the poem.

Sartre's view that having and being are the central modes of existence contrasts with Karl Marx's view that doing, and particularly working, is central to existence and self-worth. The problem with having, in Marx's view, is that it produces a false path to happiness through "commodity fetishism" (Marx 1978). In commodity fetishism, consumers worship goods and believe that goods have magical powers to bring happiness, provoking a pervasive and ongoing expectation that happiness lies in the next purchase or "I would be happy if I could just have. . . ." Marx suggests instead that real happiness is achieved through doing meaningful and properly rewarded work (Marx 1967). Accordingly, the perspective advocated by Marxists is that we should live to work rather than work to live (Dyke 1981). This is also the major basis for the Marxist objection to capitalism. When the capitalist owns the products of a worker's labor, the worker has been alienated from that which s/he has created. The worker has been robbed of a part of self. The capitalist, in Marx's view, is seen not only as an exploiter of labor, but also as a thief of the worker's very self (Marx 1964).

Fromm (1976) instead advocates being as the preeminent form of existence. Like Marx, Fromm attacks "radical hedonism," or concentration on having, as being unrewarding. He suggests that this view promotes a having mode of existence that views things, experience, time, and life itself as possessions to be acquired and retained. In the alternate being mode of existence that Fromm proposes, this orientation to have is rejected in favor of an opposing orientation to share, to give, and to sacrifice. The outcome of practicing this being mode of existence, according to Fromm, is to realize one's identity without the threat of losing it, a threat that is inherent in the having mode—for which he asks "If I am what I have and if what I have is lost, who then am I?" (1976, p. 76).

The views of Sartre, Marx, and Fromm on having, doing, and being present significant questions that are not necessary or possible to resolve here. All acknowledge, however, that having possessions functions to create and to maintain a sense of self-definition and that having, doing, and being are integrally related.

Mastery of Possessions and Human Development

Self Versus Environment. The functions that possessions fulfill in our lives are not constant over our life spans. According to Freudian and other psychoanalytic theories (e.g., Erikson 1959), the infant begins life being unable to distinguish self from the environment, including mother. As Ausubel, Sullivan, and Ives (1980) point out, this may be seen as a perceptual problem in distinguishing figure from ground. Others suggest that the distinction soon emerges as a result of the contingency and kinesthetic feedback produced by the infant's actions (Lewis and Brooks 1978; Seligman 1975). That is, as the infant's motor skills develop, those objects that can be controlled come to be seen as self and those objects that cannot be controlled come to be seen as environment. According to Isaacs (1933, p. 226), the mother's caregiving also produces the first sentiments of ownership:

> In the case of the infant at the breast, *to have* is literally and simply to take into oneself, into one's mouth. The nipple is only *here* at all when it is in my mouth, when it is (in feeling) a part of *me*. And to bite and swallow a thing is for long the only sure way of retaining it. . . . This is the ultimate form of ownership, from which all others are derived.

Even though the infant's mother provides care, nourishment, and security, her lack of perfect responsiveness to the infant's desires makes it likely that she is the first object that the infant regards as not self. The separation from mother also has led others to suggest that the "security blanket" serves as a transitional object helping the child to feel the security of the mother through an object that symbolizes her (e.g., Furby and Wilke 1982; Weisberg and Russell 1971; Winicott 1953). Bowlby (1969) suggests that such material objects often aid in identity formation when children recognize their independence and separateness from their mothers.

If the early changes in person-object relationships may be described as moving from being one with the

environment to having objects that aid the transition to a world where self is distinct from the environment, then the next changes may be characterized as moving from having transition objects to doing things with or to the environment. This motivation is labeled "competence" or "mastery" motivation (White 1959). Furby (1980) expanded this concept by suggesting that we develop a stronger sense of self by learning to actively control objects in our environment rather than feeling controlled by them. Furby and Wilke (1982) presented evidence showing that until six months of age the child may be most interested in simply controlling an object, whereas by twelve months the child is more interested in practicing emerging skills (e.g., with blocks). In both cases, producing some intended effect by doing something with an object is the goal.

Self Versus Others. Data from Kline and France (1899, pp. 446–447) and Isaacs (1935) suggest that the relationship between a person and an object is never as simple as a person-thing bond, because other people often seek to control these objects:

> a great part of the value of those things which little children want to own is far from intrinsic. It arises directly from the fact that others have or want the object. And thus we enter the open field of rivalry. Not to have what others have, or to have less than they, is to feel shut out from the love and regard of the person giving. It is to be treated as not loveworthy (Isaacs 1935, p. 74).

In this sense, relationships with objects are never two-way (person-thing), but always three-way (person-thing-person). This brings forth a *meum et tuum* concern with object ownership (Beaglehole 1932).

The rivalry aspects of possessions seem clear among young children. Piaget (1932) reported that 8- to 12-month-old children often display violent rage when a toy is taken from them and given to another child. Mueller (1978) and Mueller and Brenner (1977) found that between 80 and 90 percent of social interactions of children up to two years of age are focused on physical objects; the authors did not report what proportions of these interactions involved conflicts. Furby's (1982) examination of this issue revealed that for 18- to 21-month-olds, more than 85 percent of their object-oriented interactions with peers involved conflict about retaining possession instead of sharing or giving. Horney (1964) suggested that such competitiveness, along with other evidence of lack of affection from parents or peers, leads the child to compensate as an adult through neurotic strivings for power, prestige, and possessions. Although this may not be a complete explanation of these adult traits, it seems a more plausible basis for adult orientations toward possessions than are explanations via Freudian oral and anal fixations (Belk 1982a).

Although receiving material objects may convey a sense of love and worth to the child (substituting ma-

terial resources for love resources is difficult according to research by Foa and Foa 1974 and perceptual findings by Brinberg—Brinberg and Castell 1982; Brinberg and Wood 1983), from the parents' points of view, control of their children's material possessions offers a means of bringing about desired behaviors. Whiting (1960) provides a succinct model of this sort of resource mediated socialization:

1. Parents can use resources to reinforce behavior in three ways—
   a. Giving (e.g., a "treat" for being "good"),
   b. Withholding (e.g., no dessert until vegetables are eaten),
   c. Depriving (e.g., no more television viewing—something already "possessed"—until the child "behaves");

2. Resources involved must be—
   a. Scarce (i.e., not freely available to the child),
   b. Valued (at the time) by the child,
   c. Controlled by the parent;

3. Anticipations of resource availability in the future can also be modified to mediate behavior through—
   a. Threats to withhold or deprive resources,
   b. Promises to give resources.

The way parents use such resource mediated behavioral modification not only affects behaviors—those concerning possessions as well as other ones—but also creates new attitudes toward the possessions used as reinforcements. For example, if sweets are withheld or deprived or if threats to do so are made, these actions may enhance the value of sweets, encourage the delay of gratifications until unpleasant tasks are completed, or instill an attitude that good performance should be followed by indulgence. The potential effects of such socialization on adult material lifestyles are envisioned easily.

Adolescence and Adulthood. Erikson (1959) suggested that adolescents predictably undergo an "identity crisis." One hypothesis is that adolescents at this stage increasingly seek identity through acquiring and accumulating selected consumption objects. Montemayor and Eisen's (1977) study, which asked teenagers to describe who they are, found that this is true in early teenage years when respondents cited possessions, name, and location as part of who they are. However, in later teenage years, they found that respondents were more likely to cite skills (e.g., athletic, artistic) and traits (e.g., expressions of moral character, self-sufficiency). A study of 8- to 30-year-old Chicagoans (Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton 1981) found that this generation is more likely than its parents and grandparents to cite as favorite possessions those that reflect skills (e.g., athletic equipment) or objects which they can manipulate or

control (e.g., musical instruments, stereo, pets). Material possessions such as clothing and automobiles are seen as an important source of prestige during high school (Snyder 1972), but there is probably some tendency to ascribe such prestige to one's family rather than to one's self as an individual. These findings suggest that only certain types of possessions are valued as extensions of self during adolescence and that self-definition through doing things may be preferred to self-definition through having things.

During preretirement adulthood, Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton (1981) found that emphasis shifts from defining oneself by what one does to defining self through what one has. Furby (1978) found that 40- to 50-year-olds are the most likely of all age groups to cite social power and status as reasons to own personal possessions. Csikszentmihalyi (1982, pp. 5–6) explains:

> A person who owns a nice home, a new car, good furniture, the latest appliances, is recognized by others as having passed the test of personhood in our society . . . the objects we possess and consume are . . . wanted because . . . they tell us things about ourselves that we need to hear in order to keep our selves from falling apart. This information includes the social recognition that follows upon the display of status symbols, but it includes also the much more private feedback provided by special household objects that objectify a person's past, present, and future, as well as his or her close relationships.

Olson (1981, 1985) found that young couples cite as favorite objects in the home those that reflect their future plans and goals, but older couples cite objects that relate to their experiences together. Cameron (1977) conducted a series of experiments suggesting that having children is a key life event that causes the parents to become less self-focused and more focused on their children. Feibleman (1975) notes the emergence of a tendency of parents by late middle age to live vicariously through their children. At this point, children represent an extension of self, but not to the exclusion of material possessions. In fact, Belk (1985) found parents to be more materialistic and possessive than their children and their own parents. Because of accumulated possessions, well-developed skills, possession of both a past and a future, and parenthood, the middle years of life also are likely to involve the most extended concept of self.

Old Age. If the young are future-oriented, the old are past-oriented. Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton (1981) found that for their Chicago sample, such possessions as photographs, athletic trophies, and mementos are most treasured by grandparents. The reason most often cited for possessions being treasured by this group is that possessions have the ability to symbolize others, often because they are gifts from these important others. Sherman and Newman (1977) found that postretirement-age persons who possess such remembrances are happier than those who do not. McCracken (1987a) suggests that homes for the aged would do well to consider the identity deprivation that occurs when these people are made to discard possessions. Places that are especially relevant to one's past have also been found to be particularly valued by the old because of the memories that places can stir (Howell 1983; Lowenthal 1975). In contrast, the young tend to value places according to the activities these places facilitate (Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton 1981; Hart 1979).

During old age, the sense of one's own mortality also becomes more and more undeniable. With decreasing future years, declining skills and abilities, and a shrinking network of old friends, sense of self possibly contracts as well. However, this is not necessarily the case. Many people seek to assure that their selves will extend beyond their deaths. Lifton (1973) suggests five ways through which this extension may be attempted: (1) through one's children, (2) through belief in a life after death, (3) through one's works (e.g., artistic, literary, scholarly), (4) through identification with nature (which will continue), and (5) through experiential transcendence (e.g., absorption in music may allow one to transcend the world of here and now and symbolically be reborn).

A sixth way, which is not mentioned, is to have one's possessions (especially those in collections one has created) "live on" through heirs or museums (Rigby and Rigby 1949). Based on interviews with persons ages 62 to 85, interviews with their friends, relatives, and acquaintances, and an analysis of letters, mementos, and conversations of the dying and their survivors, Unruh (1983) found evidence of the widespread use of this strategy. He detected first a solidification of identity through creating letters, journals, memos, and poems that were meant to be left behind. Second, artifacts including photographs, scrapbooks, souvenirs, and jewelry were accumulated. And third, these artifacts were distributed to persons who were believed to be willing to care for them, and in so doing honor and remember the donor. This distribution was accomplished through predeath gifts and wills and testaments. Western society seldom elevates reverence for ancestors to the level of Far Eastern cultures such as Japan and China, but Western society does revere its heroes' and villains' possessions, as illustrated by pilgrimages to Elvis Presley's Graceland mansion and William Randolf Hearst's castle (Maines 1978).

Possessions and the Sense of Past

Integral to a sense of who we are is a sense of our past. Possessions are a convenient means of storing the memories and feelings that attach our sense of past. A souvenir may make tangible some otherwise intangible travel experience. An heirloom may record and recall family heritage just as a historic monument may help to create a sense of a nation's past.

Overall, Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton (1981) found that the three types of possessions that the 315 Chicago families most frequently cite as treasured are furniture, visual art (including that created by family and friends), and photographs. In each case, the most frequently given explanation for valuing these objects is the memories they call forth of other people, occasions, and relationships. These reasons overshadow functional explanations for attachments to furniture and aesthetic reasons for valuing art objects and photographs. As one of their informants explains (Rochberg-Halton 1984, p. 171):

> This [painting] is my great, great grandfather. I've had it since childhood. It's more than just a portrait—it's a person! I'd grab it right away in a fire. [Without it] my life would be lessened. I'd go on living, but it would deplete my secure "lump." It would mean that I wouldn't be able to hand it down to my children. The kids already say, "I'm gonna inherit this and that." . . . It's part of the continuity of who I am, where I came from, where I'm going.

Older respondents are especially likely to link such objects to past experiences. One explanation is that our attachment to memory-evoking possessions grows as we accumulate experiences from our past and reduce the stock of pleasurable experiences likely to occur in our futures. Also, as Kastenbaum (1977) observes, "the older person scans the past for evidence that he once was competent, once was loved, once commanded respect." Gifts received from others are one such evidence of love from significant others (Belk 1982c; Wallendorf and Arnold 1988).

Thus, cherished possessions are not likely to be a random assortment of items that recall our pasts. Just as we pose family photographs to capture the "good" (happy) moments of our lives and then selectively edit the best of these into albums (Chalfen 1987; Milgram 1976; Sontag 1973), we are also likely to treasure most those possessions associated with pleasant memories. These possessions are likely to include objects such as newspaper clippings and trophies representing past accomplishments, mementos of past romances, and souvenirs of enjoyable travel experiences, and to exclude others such as belongings of estranged former spouses, poor report cards, and gifts from suitors who later rejected us.

Note that social institutions such as museums follow a similar process in selectively retaining aesthetic, scientific, and historical cultural artifacts. Mukerji (1978) makes a distinction between goods that are initially produced as art works and are acquired and retained based on presumably aesthetic judgments, and goods that are initially produced for more utilitarian purposes but are later regarded as worthy of preservation. Although the retention criteria are somewhat different for the two classes of objects, in both cases the decisions to retain the object rather than reject it determine the picture of our cultural past that is available to future generations. Obviously, we are more likely to chronicle our cultures' successes than their failures.

The desire to know one's individual past can explain the retention of personal memorabilia, just as the desire to remember family heritage can explain retention of family heirlooms and the desire to appreciate national history can explain museum patronage and visits to historic sites. However, what can explain the desire to acquire and collect antiques and antiquities from another time, place, and family? Clearly, it is not a claimable sense of past that is achieved at any except the broadest level of identity.

Part of the answer lies in the desire to identify with an era, place, or person to which we believe a desirable set of traits or values adheres. At a national level, neoclassical architecture seems to have this objective. At a more personal level, owning artifacts that once belonged to a famous historical figure seems to share this objective (Rigby and Rigby 1949; Wallendorf and Belk 1987). In each case, there seems to be a desire to bask in the glory of the past in the hope that some of it will magically rub off—a form of positive contamination (Levi-Strauss 1963). This nostalgic desire to gain the glory of the superstar or of a mythical golden age of the past shares something in common with the tendency McCracken (1988) describes as depositing and retrieving cultural meaning in places where it is unlikely to be disturbed by contradictions present in reality (e.g., Davis 1979).

Another reason for the accumulation of antiquities that are found or acquired rather than inherited or claimed on the basis of a more direct linkage to the extended self is that antiques are rare and therefore potentially serve as symbols of status or "status markers" (Douglas and Isherwood 1979). Other motives might be found in the amusement of collecting curiosities, aesthetic preference for antiques over currently produced artifacts, and a preference for handcrafted works over current mass-produced works. However, each of these additional explanations relies on something of the extended self of the previous owner, artist, or craftsperson adhering to the work. Just as we seek to extend our selves by incorporating or owning certain objects, we may still seek the sympathetic magic (contagion) of possessions that retain a part of the extended self of valued others. This is also true with gifts received from loved ones. Note that we also abhor the art forgery or reproduction precisely because it lacks the personal mana of its creator that is present in the original (e.g., Battin 1979; Belk 1986a; Lessing 1965). Furthermore, we may prefer the handcrafted item to the mass-produced item largely because it took longer to create—i.e., more of others' selves were invested in it (Stewart 1984). Fieldwork with owners of antiques and handmade furniture supports this motivation (Wallendorf and Belk 1987). Thus, we are symbolically larger and more powerful if we possess such a laboriously crafted

antique. In so doing, we appropriate part of the self of the object's creator, even if this creator is anonymous.

Finally, fascination with things past also involves nostalgia. Stewart (1984) describes nostalgia as a sadness without an object, and Kant describes it as a longing for one's childhood (Kant 1798; Starobinski 1966, p. 94). Davis (1979, p. 31) notes the relevance of such longing to the self:

> nostalgia (like long-term memory, like reminiscence, like daydreaming) is deeply implicated in our sense of who we are, what we are about, and (though possibly with much less inner clarity) whither we go. In short, nostalgia is . . . a readily accessible psychological lens . . . for the never ending work of constructing, maintaining, and reconstructing our identities.

McCracken (1986) described how individuals and cultures, through idealized and nostalgic visions of the "golden age" of a misty past, use the past to maintain values that never existed. With such an unassailable image of the past, antiques from that era become powerful symbols by which we may listen to the past and hear it confer its imagined virtues upon us.

Thus, the functions that possessions play in the extended self involve the creation, enhancement, and preservation of a sense of identity. Possessions help us at all ages to know who we are. However, this does not imply that we are always active in selecting the possessions that we see as a part of our selves. As the next section discusses, passive receipt of objects into the extended self also occurs.

PROCESSES OF SELF-EXTENSION

Ways of Incorporating Possessions into the Extended Self

Sartre (1943) suggests three primary ways through which we learn to regard an object as a part of self. One way is through appropriating or controlling an object for our own personal use; this view is similar to McClelland's (1951) hypotheses about power and control. Sartre also holds that we can appropriate intangible or nonownable objects by overcoming, conquering, or mastering them. For instance, a mountain climber in reaching a peak has asserted control of the mountain and the panorama it affords. Similarly, it is only through learning to ride a first bicycle, manipulating a new computer system, driving a first car, or successfully negotiating rapids in a new kayak that these objects really become parts of the extended self. This is an important point, for it provides an explanation of how nondurable products or services and public property or events may become viewed as possessions and thereby potentially contribute to sense of self. For instance, as we master getting around in a formerly unfamiliar subway system, our mobility literally increases and our self figuratively extends to include the subway system.

Sartre also sees giving possessions to others as a means of extending self—a special form of control. A gift continues to be associated with the giver so that the giver's identity is extended to include the recipient. At the same time, giving (as well as destroying) objects is an affirmation of self in Sartre's view, because this act of doing clearly shows the control one has of these possessions. However, gift recipients may, despite increasing the objects in their control, lose some sense of self through their lack of control in choosing the gift. They are then encumbered by this partial imposition of the giver's identity and must acknowledge the giver's mastery by accepting the gift (e.g., Codere 1950; Dillon 1968). In contrast, the possessive gift recipient would like to receive rare gifts that are a part of the giver's extended self and thereby symbolize the recipient's hold on the giver's self (Katz 1976). Because most gifts are received from loved ones, gift receipt should generally be found to be regarded as a positive extension of self. This would seem to explain the high frequency with which gifts are cited as favorite possessions in the United States and other countries (Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton 1981; Wallendorf and Arnould 1988).

A second way of having an object and incorporating it into self is by creating it; this view echoes anthropological findings and Locke's (1690) political philosophy. Whether the thing created is a material object or an abstract thought, the creator retains an identity in the object for as long as it retains a mark or some other association with the person who brought it into existence. This identity is codified through copyrights, patents, and scientific citations that preserve associations between people and their mental creations.

Sartre feels that buying an object is merely another form of creating the object, and that even the latent buying power of money contributes to sense of self. "Stop before a showcase with money in your pocket; the objects displayed are already more than half yours" (Sartre 1943, p.753). "That which exists for me through the medium of money, that which I can pay for, i.e., which money can buy, that am I, the possessor of money" (Marx 1975, p. 377). In such a sense, we may suppose that money enlarges the sense of self because it enlarges imaginable possibilities of all that we might have and do. Money also gives us the power to selectively acquire or reject purchasable objects, thereby more selectively shaping our extended selves.

The third way in which objects become a part of self is by knowing them. Whether the object known is a person, place, or thing, Sartre maintains that the relationship in knowing the object is inspired by a carnal and sexual desire to have the object. It is no accident, in Sartre's view, that sexual relations have often been described as knowing or having another person, as it is our intimate knowledge of the other person that allows us to consider the person ours and a part of self.

Likewise, as Beaglehole (1932) observed, our intimate knowledge of a community, store, or book makes them not only "ours" but also part of self. But, like sexual knowledge, such knowing cannot be passionless and distanced if the object is to become a part of the extended self. As Dixon explains, "To know without desire is an offense against the known, to treat the known as object and victim" (1973, p. 4). Only when the object is known passionately does it become subject rather than object.

All three means outlined by Sartre to make objects a part of extended self (control/mastery, creation, and knowledge) are active and intentional ways of self-extension. Clothing (Solomon 1986a), housing (Jager 1983), and automobiles are all acquired as a "second skin" in which others may see us. Objects such as land to the farmer, handcrafted pieces to the craftsperson, and artworks to the artist may become a part of extended self, because we have intentionally worked upon or created these things, investing both energy and self in them. And, objects like a parlor organ and household furnishings may become a part of us through the knowing that comes with habituation— they have become a part of our familiar interior landscapes, have been the setting for numerous special as well as ordinary occurrences in our lives, and often have received the same amount of care and attention that we lavish upon ourselves and immediate family members. During their tenure with us, a great many memories are likely to have accreted in these objects. All of these forms of self-extension are largely active and intentional. But, an additional means of self-extension exists that may or may not be active and intentional: contamination.

Contamination

Cannibalism is the most extreme instance in which consumers attempt to incorporate the traits of another through contamination. That this is not an entirely extinct practice is shown, at least metaphorically, in the recent kidnapping, slaughter, and ritual feasting of the University of Texas mascot bull, Bevo, by rival athletes and students at Texas A & M University. Apart from cannibalism, rape is the most extreme instance in which one person may be said to contaminate another. The concern here is not with the medical sense of germ contamination and spread of disease, but with the symbolic contamination involved in involuntarily incorporating another into one's extended self (see Rozin, Millman, and Nemeroff 1986). As Douglas (1966) argues, germ theory may be merely a rationalization of our disgust at unwanted symbolic contamination by others. Goffman (1971, pp. 44–47) suggests six modes of interpersonal contamination:

1. Violation of one's personal space (e.g., Sommer 1971; Lyman and Scott 1967);

2. Touching and bodily contact;

3. Glancing, looking, and staring;

4. Noise pollution;

5. Talking to/addressing one; and

6. Bodily excreta—
   a. Corporeal excreta (spittle, snot, perspiration, food particles, blood, semen, vomit, urine, and fecal matter—and stains of these);
   b. Odor (e.g., flatus, tainted breath, body smells);
   c. Body heat (e.g., on toilet seats);
   d. Markings left by the body (e.g., plate leavings—leftover food).

An important omission in this list of modes of interpersonal contamination is the acquisition of possessions of another person that have been intimately associated with that person. Burying the dead with their possessions (grave goods) is one example of avoiding such contamination. O'Reilly et al. (1984) found that secondhand clothing worn close to its former owner (e.g., underwear) does not sell and apparently enjoys a similar taboo against reuse to avoid contamination. Lurie (1981, p. 24) suggests that when adolescent girls exchange clothing they share not only friendship, but also identities—they become soulmates. This is an instance of positive contamination rather than the more commonly recognized negative contaminations.

Because food so obviously is incorporated into self, sharing food is a symbolic way of sharing group identity. The neighborly cup of coffee, holiday meals, the dinner party, and the more traditional feast, are all examples of bonding through food (e.g., Farb and Armelagos 1980; Caplow et al. 1982). The Christian sacrament of communion (symbolically partaking of the body and blood of Christ) is a similar way of symbolically sharing an identity. However, even within such rituals, there is a social prohibition against eating the plate leavings of others (although Goffman 1971, p. 55, notes that this prohibition may be lifted for others with whom we are most intimate, including spouse, parents, and children—those who are seen as a part of extended self). This prohibition is strongest when the leaver has made a personal imprint on the food or on a utensil—teeth marks or lipstick, for instance. Utensils qualify for the prohibition because, like toothbrushes, they are incorporated into another through the mouth. Chewed food is disgusting for the same reason, and also potentially has been contaminated by the spittle of the chewer, just as a comb is disgusting because it potentially has been contaminated by the hair and body oils of its owner.

Douglas (1966, p. 160) notes that an important criterion for disgust at contamination by others' intimate possessions is the possessions' abilities to con-

vey their owners' original identities. Rubbish is not disgusting unless it is disturbed enough to reveal the hair, food, or wrappings that compose it. Similarly, the bones of the dead are not disgusting if they are unrecognizable dust or ashes. For this reason, crematoria are careful to screen the ashes of the dead before giving them to relatives who presumably would be disgusted by any recognizable remains. Sympathetic magic depends upon the nails, hair, sweat, blood, or other parts of the body remaining recognizable. As with cannibalism and other taboo-breaking rituals, sympathetic magic may depend upon the violation of inherent norms of purity for its power. Perhaps the same is true in sexual intimacy; because it violates norms of how we treat most others in the world, such intimacy may gain the power of a strong bonding ritual.

If disgust at others' possessions depends on their recognizability as parts of these others' selves, disgust at one's own possessions and productions may depend upon their unrecognizability as a part of one's own self. As Allport (1955, p. 43) explains:

> Think first of swallowing the saliva in your mouth, or do so. Then imagine expectorating it into a tumbler and drinking it! What seemed natural and "mine" suddenly becomes disgusting and alien. Or picture yourself sucking blood from a prick in your finger; then imagine sucking blood from a bandage around your finger! What I perceive as separate from my body becomes, in the twinkling of an eye, cold and foregin.

The same principle may apply to visiting one's former residence. If it retains most of its former character, including the changes the visitor once made to it, it may be a source of delight. But if it has been substantially altered by subsequent residents, it may seem cold, foreign, or even disgusting. Neighborhoods and cities in which one formerly resided may seem warm or cold partly for these reasons.

Maintaining Multiple Levels of Self

As previously noted, some possessions are more central to self than are others. The possessions central to self may be visualized in concentric layers around the core self, and will differ over individuals, over time, and over cultures that create shared symbolic meanings for different goods. However, there is another sense in which the individual has a hierarchical arrangement of levels of self, because we exist not only as individuals, but also as collectivities. We often define family, group, subculture, nation, and human selves through various consumption objects. The particular number of such levels of self is an open question—Rapoport (1981) suggests that there are four levels of self, Atkin (1981) seven, and Feldman (1979) 11. For purposes of the present discussion, only four levels of self—individual, family, community, and group—need be identified.

Regardless of the number of levels, a primary distinction in the levels of self construct is between an individual versus collective conception of self. As Boorstin (1973) suggests, one of the key ways of expressing and defining group membership is through shared consumption symbols. Such symbols help identify group membership and define the group self. Although we may be more individualistic and have more separable and independent group memberships than was true before societal specialization, division of labor, and movement of production from the household to the office or factory (Belk 1984c), we clearly still define ourselves through group identity at various levels.

Just as an individual may use personal possessions such as jewelry, automobile, make-up, and clothing to help define an individual sense of self (e.g., Solomon 1986a), a family is most apt to use distinct family possessions to define a family self for its members. The key consumption object in this case is the home—both the dwelling and its furnishings. Jager (1983, p. 56) asks,

> How is it that a kitchen table we once admired in a shop window can later become the stable, silent foundation of family meals and conversations with friends? How can a house lose its status as a confronted object to become a virtual foundation of our life? All these questions lead us back to the body.

Two points are important here. The first is that the house is a symbolic body for the family. Just as clothing alters the individual's body, furnishings and decorations alter the family's body. The second important point is that the expressive imagery of the house that is definitional of the family is only fully acquired during consumption. At the point of acquisition, only a portion of the ultimate meaning of these objects is present (Kron 1981; Saile 1985).

Just as individuals with different unextended core selves are likely to incorporate different objects into their extended selves, families with different core selves are likely to embrace different objects in their extended selves. Research has found support for the common sense expectation that families with different lifestyles and from different social classes tend to live in different types of homes decorated in different fashions. For instance, Weisner and Weibel (1981) found significant differences in decor, including different apparent degrees of materialism, evident in the homes of families classified into four lifestyle groups. Research by Duncan and Duncan (1976) suggests that a self-expressive house is more important to lower social classes and to those who are more mobile. McCracken (1987b) found that "homeyness' is the expressive attribute that the lower social classes seek most in a home, but the antithetical attribute of "status" is what the more socially mobile higher classes seek most.

Other researchers (e.g., Cooper 1972, 1974; Tuan 1978) have suggested that the interior decor of the

house represents, for the family, something akin to true self, while the exterior appearance of the house represents something akin to social self (as seen by others). McCracken (1987b) also found differences in the perceived expressiveness of various rooms of the home and detected a tendency to use room decor to "embrace" oneself with successive layers of furnishings. These views of interior and exterior also can correspond to the analogy of the body.

Perhaps the degree of internalization of owned land is especially intense for family farmers. As Steinbeck (1939, p.50) wrote of the U.S. dustbowl farmers:

> If a man owns a little property that property is him, it's part of him and it's like him. If he owns property only so he can walk on it and handle it and be sad when it isn't doing well, and feel fine when the rain falls on it, that property is him, and in some way he's bigger because he owns it.

A part of what the ownership of farm land means to such families is self-sufficiency and possibly the linkage to prior generations of the family who worked the land (the sense of past aspect of extended self). There also may be a strong symbolism of family nurturance expressed in the plant and animal husbandry of the farm (Berg 1975). Perhaps all these factors combine to make it especially traumatic for farm families to become dispossessed (Farmer 1986).

The community level of self is also a part of the explanation of the feelings of displaced farm families. Rural communities are associated with a strong sense of Gemeinschaft in which community identity dominates the Gesellschaft individual identity thought to be more typical of city life (Tonnies 1957). However, even urbanites can feel a strong sense of community within neighborhoods. Edney (1972) found a relationship between suburban territorial markers such as fences, hedges, and flower borders and willingness to defend one's neighborhood. Brown and Werner (1985) found that such markers as well as holiday decorations on homes tend to predict attachment to community as well as deter property crimes for homes displaying such symbols of community. Greenbaum and Greenbaum (1965) found more residence personalization in the neighborhood homes of those Slavic-Americans who had a stronger sense of subcultural identity. And, Ley and Cybriwsky (1974) found that graffiti is a means of establishing and expressing ethnic, neighborhood, and gang identity in inner-city Philadelphia.

Just as clothing, accent, grooming, and jewelry can distinguish an individual from others and express an individual sense of being, they can also indicate group identity and express belonging to a group. Formal uniforms are an obvious example, but informal "uniforms" also exist for social groups (either small scale or symbolic—e.g., yuppies, preppies, Sloane Rangers, Bon Chic, Bon Genre—Belk 1986b). Tattooing, ear piercing, hair style, and ownership of various styles of bicycles, motorcycles, or automobiles are also means of group identification, as are musical knowledge and preference, bar, club, and entertainment attendance, support of specific cultural arts, and knowledge and preference for sports teams (e.g., Cialdini et al. 1976; Lynes 1980). The relative variability of such consumption tastes within groups should tell us something about the degree to which group members rely upon the group for an identity.

One test of these ideas was performed by Wicklund and Gollwitzer (1982). They predicted that MBA students who are more insecure about their job prospects would tend to adopt more of the consumption patterns of a stereotypical businessperson—high status watch, "business shoes," short hair, lack of facial hair, and other high status accessories such as attaché cases and expensive pens. Among students who are committed to a business career, the study found a stronger adoption of these stereotypical businessperson symbols by students with poorer job prospects. Also, those who are more committed to a business career and who are in the poor prospects group are more likely to own such symbols than are those students less committed to a business career. Similar findings regarding business suit ownership by business students have been obtained by Solomon and Anand (1985). The authors note the correspondence of such possessions to magic amulets and totemic emblems in more traditional societies.

However, symbols of group identity need not be individually owned products. They can also be such things as landmarks (natural or man-made), places, leaders, media "stars," inventions, institutions, sports teams, scientists, and public monuments (e.g., Geist 1978). In the United States, one has only to recall the sense of loss experienced when the space shuttle Challenger exploded to realize how deeply related such symbols can be on an aggregate level sense of self. It is also perhaps the sense of extended self that causes pride rather than anger or envy at the extravagant consumption of political and media stars (Leach 1986). That is, because these stars are a part of group extended self (with the group in this case being the nation or generation), we are proud of their consumption and find it fitting rather than shameful.

Proshansky (1978) suggests that the degree to which one identifies with city landmarks and shared consumption objects within a given city depends upon the condition of the city and one's period of likely residence there. The first hypothesis finds some support in the tendency detected by Cialdini et al. (1976) to identify with and wear or display the colors of winning (but not losing) sports teams. Proshansky's latter hypothesis suggests stronger identification with local shared consumption objects by older residents and those with lesser geographic mobility. This expectation is supported in a study by Belk (1988). Similarly, Hansen and Altman (1976) found that college students who decorate their dormitory rooms to

a greater degree and with more personally symbolic items are less likely to drop out of college than are those who do not personalize their rooms.

Recognition that a part of one's extended self can be shared, or at least perceived to be shared, with others helps to explain acts of civic responsibility, patriotism, and charity. This explanation suggests that such acts of apparent altruism are based on aggrandizing a broader level of self than that confined to the individual's body and mind. Such nonreciprocal altruism can be seen as acts that benefit the broader communities incorporated within extended self. Even acts of self-sacrifice for a group with which one strongly identifies can be seen as helping this broader self live indefinitely, giving the individual a sort of immortality. Although such acts are unusual, their occurrence gives some credence to John Donne's (1623, p. 795) words:

> No man is an island, entire of itself; every man is a piece of the continent, a part of the main. If a clod be washed away by the sea, Europe is the less, as well as if a promontory were, as well as if a manor of thy friend's or thine own were. Any man's death diminishes me because I am involved in mankind, and therefore never send to know for whom the bell tolls; it tolls for thee.

SPECIAL CASES OF EXTENDED SELF

The basic ways in which objects can become a part of extended self have already been discussed. In this section, several unique areas of consumer behavior that are affected by such self-extension are considered: collections, money, pets, other people, and body parts.

Collections

As Belk (1982b) notes, humans and animals once primarily assembled collections of necessities for future security, but today humans more often assemble collections of nonnecessities for distinction and self-definition. Collections of this sort may be initiated by gifts or other unintended acquisitions (this was often found to be the case in the study by Belk et al. 1988), but the cultivation of a collection is a purposeful self-defining act. Rigby and Rigby (1949, p. 35) note:

> From the small boy to the connoisseur, the joy of standing before one's accumulated pile and being able to say 'this belongs to me' is the culmination of that feeling that begins with ownership of the first item . . . they become us.

Stewart (1984, p. 159) similarly concludes that the way to most effectively disparage a collection is not to charge that it is inauthentic, but rather to say "it is not you."

Stewart (1984) also observes that creating one's extended self through devoted development of a collection is the ultimate in self-definition by means of hav-

ing rather than by the less tangible means of doing or being. Collecting has become a significant activity in our consumer society as it has become more widely affordable through the discretionary time and money available to the general population rather than just to the wealthy elite (Mason 1981). Marchand's (1985) analysis of advertisements suggests that the merchandising of ensembles of cosmetics, clothing accessories, and furniture in the 1920s helped stimulate the passion for collecting. However, contemporary collections more often are specialized to allow the collector an ability to gain control and uniqueness within self-prescribed boundaries (Treas and Brannen 1976). Thus, one might be a collector of knickknacks in the form of a favored ("totemic") animal, of salt and pepper shakers, or of golden oak furniture. As with more widespread collections of family photographs, record albums, and clothing items such as shoes or hats, both the items included and the order imposed on them are expressive of one's identity. We may not be able to control much of the world about us, but the collection, whether of dolls, "depression glass," or automobiles, allows us total control of a "little world." Furthermore, collecting legitimizes acquisitiveness. As Clifford (1985, p. 238) notes, "An excessive, sometimes even rapacious, need to *have* is transformed into rule-governed meaningful desire." Goldberg and Lewis (1978, p. 64) go further in suggesting that "Many collectors who are inhibited and uncomfortable in social interaction, surround themselves with favored objects upon which they project humanlike qualities. They practically talk to these objects; they find comfort in being with them and regard them as friends." In this sense, collections may be seen as transition objects or security blankets for adults.

Because of the purposefulness and the commitment of time and energy spent in developing a collection, it is natural that a collection may be seen as more a part of one's self than are isolated consumption items. The desire of collectors for closure in completing or filling gaps in a collection (Saarinen 1958; Wiseman 1974) may be seen as a form of symbolic self-enhancement. The stamp collection that lacks a few entries is often seen as having a cavernous gap that cries out to be filled. What is likely felt is a lack of self-completion, which is perceived to be gained through completion of the collection. (Although, ironically, completion of a collection is also feared because the quest then is through, unless, as often happens, one redefines the collecting focus as completion nears.) The symbolic self-completion thesis of Wicklund and Gollwitzer (1982) suggests that when one experiences low self-esteem, the addition of objects to one's collection may be viewed as compensatory in restoring a more complete sense of self. Devotion to the collection can also provide a sense of purpose and worth (see Benjamin 1955). It is also reasonable to think of many collections as compul-

sions and to think of active collectors as addicts. For instance, a collector of Mickey Mouse toys and dolls described how he would scrimp and save to acquire new items each week (Wallendorf and Belk 1987). He called these acquisitions his "Mickey fix" and recalled having frequently spent gas and rent money to make these purchases. Thus, there can be unhealthy aspects to some obsessive collecting, even though it is done in the intended service of self-enhancement.

Money and Extension of Self

For some people, money is too abstract, invisible, or "commiditized" (Kopytoff 1986) to become a part of extended self. If the desire is to extend self through having, then using the money to buy more tangible, visible would-be extensions of self is more likely for such people. Money is seen as profane and must be transformed into "sacred" material goods (Belk and Wallendorf 1988; Graves 1965, pp. 21–22). But, for others, money itself is regarded as an extension of self and, in this capacity, becomes an end rather than a means to doing or having other things.

Wiseman (1974) notes that the Cinderella story conveys a popular fantasy of transforming oneself through the power of money. In the fantasy, "this other 'rich me' would not merely have more money, but would be changed fundamentally, would be stronger, less fearful, more charming, wiser, less vulnerable, and so on. Money is endowed with magical powers" (Wiseman 1974, p. 10). Money is thought to bring love, fame, and respect. Money is commonly seen as a symbol of success and power (Rubenstein 1981).

Like other parts of extended self, when consumers believe strongly enough in money as part of extended self, their well-being is linked to the well-being of their money. Psychoanalyst Fingert (1952) reports a male patient who was reluctant to pay analysis fees because the patient feared he would be losing a part of his own body. Knight (1968) notes the comparable sentiment expressed when people say they feel naked without their pocketbooks. And one study found a positive correlation between the sexual potency of businessmen and the level of the Dow Jones Industrial Average (New Yorker 1975). This appears to be another case of viewing money as an unconscious symbol of masculinity and power (Lindgren 1980).

Goldberg and Lewis (1978) note that discussion of money and income is a strong taboo in modern Western society. Wiseman (1974) and Yamauchi and Templer (1982) observe that we know more about contemporary sexual behavior of people than we do about their money dealings. Knight (1968, p. 83) reflects that "It is as if they (psychiatric patients in this case) equated money with their in-most being."

Consistent evidence shows that those with higher incomes report higher levels of self-esteem, subjective happiness, and satisfaction in life (e.g., Diener 1984), although increases in income that do not raise one above comparison to others appear to have little effect (Duncan 1975). Some evidence also exists that we tend to judge those with higher incomes as being better adjusted, happier, and healthier (Luft 1957).

Nevertheless, there are clearly pathologies associated with extreme uses of money in the service of enhancing extended self. The most commonly analyzed is miserliness in which a person attempts to substitute money for love and happiness (e.g., Bergler 1959; Jones 1948; Krueger 1986). Goldberg and Lewis (1978) treat miserliness as a vain attempt to collect security, while more Freudian psychologists see it as anal retentiveness (e.g., Borneman 1976; Ferenczi 1914). Prodigal spending of money to enhance self is instead linked to oral aggression (Bergler 1959; Klein 1957). Bergler (1959) also sees compulsive bargain hunting as an attempt to restore a sense of personal adequacy among oral personality types. Compulsive gambling is seen as another pathological use of money to seek an illusive happier self (Bergler 1959; Furnham and Lewis 1986; Goldberg and Lewis 1978).

Pets as Extended Self

Secord (1968) noted that pets are often seen as a part of the pet owner's self to the extent that the attitude is "love me, love my dog." Veevers (1985) reports evidence of the opposite inference: "hate me, hate my dog." That is, others' treatment of pets is seen to reflect their regard for the owners, just as others' treatment of young children is seen to reflect their regard for the parents. Pets also are regarded commonly as representative of self and studies show that we attempt to infer characteristics of people from their pets (Foote 1956; Heiman 1967). Some relationship between personality and choice of pets does, in fact, exist (Kidd and Kidd 1980). Others have observed that, like people, pets are regarded as family members (e.g., Cain 1985; Friedmann and Thomas 1985; Hickrod and Schmitt 1982; Rochberg-Halton 1985; Wallendorf and Belk 1987). In this regard, it is significant that we name our pets, feed and care for them, photograph them, spend money on them, groom them, talk to them, protect them, sleep and play with them, and mourn their death (Hickrod and Schmitt 1982; Meer 1984). Carmack (1985), Cowles (1985), and Keddie (1977) found that in some cases of pet death the mourning is similar to that which occurs due to the loss of a home or the loss of a limb. Just as cannibalism is taboo, eating a pet, or even an animal that is likely to be thought of as a pet in a particular culture, is taboo. Thus, in the West we eat pigs, but not dogs, while in ancient Polynesia—where pigs were pets—just the opposite was true (Titcomb 1969). Researchers such as Levinson (1972) and Robin and Bensel (1985) found that pets are so instrumental to self-identity that they are often useful as transition objects (surrogate parents) for children and as surrogate children for adults.

These observations and popular treatments suggest that pets can be therapeutic in expanding the self of children, hospital patients, and the elderly. Although this is the contention of many (e.g., Fogle 1981), recent results suggest that pet ownership does not always have healthy effects. Tuan (1984) contends that much pet ownership, as well as pet-like relationships with plants and people, represents a cruel desire to impose control over them and command them. Evidence from interviews by the author suggests that U.S. males may prefer dogs to cats because of dogs' greater responsiveness to commands. Although Horn and Meer (1984) found that pet owners report feeling better than do nonowners of pets, Martinez and Kidd (1980) found that male nonowners had greater feelings of well-being than male owners of pets. Cameron and Matson (1972) found that pet owners have lower ego strength than nonowners. Cameron and colleagues (Cameron et al. 1966; Cameron and Matson 1972) also found that pet owners like people less than do nonowners, and report liking their pets more than they like people. Such findings suggest that although pets, like other objects that become part of extended self, may be beneficial, they can also become harmful fetishes if too much of one's self and one's world is invested in them. However, it is unclear whether pet ownership brings about such self-image problems or results from them.

Other People

This section does not refer to slavery, although that is surely one historical instance of the tendency to treat people as possessions and extensions of self, almost in the manner that a tool extends self. Rather, the focus here is on the symbolic extension of self that James (1890, see quotation on p. 1) saw in "his wife and children, his ancestors and friends." There is evidence that some people tend to choose potential mates as they might choose pets, seeking someone who will reflect favorably on them (Snyder, Berscheid, and Glick 1985). Some homosexual males refer to "wearing" an attractive companion to a party or public event. The general tendency to claim casual acquaintances as close friends and drop prominent names in conversations (and thereby enhance perceptions of one's popularity and status) has been dubbed "pronoia" (Goldner 1982). As Bateson (1982, p. 3) observes:

> People these days are fond of pointing out that you are what you eat. That proposition is true enough, but there is another which I think is a good deal more profound, namely, that you are the company you keep. Your identity, your self, depends upon the people and things that compose your associations. And perhaps even more important, your knowledge of yourself and your development as a person are both predicated on those same associations.

Clearly, our laws allow us to regard our children, biological or adopted, as possessions (Derdeyn 1979). The embryo also legally is treated as property in cases of in vitro fertilization (Albury 1984). And as Lifton (1973) notes, children and grandchildren may be as close as the average person gets to immortality. Such a living legacy is often a strongly desired extension of self. Smith (1983) notes that we take this sort of possessive attitude toward children when we make boastful claims about them and when we "give them away" in marriage. The same extended self notion enters arguments about abortion (Paul and Paul 1979). Children also are treated as possessions in divorce proceedings (Hobart 1975).

The incorporation of others into extended self can involve a demeaning objectification of these other persons. Tournier (1957) describes the inability to relate to people that causes some of us to treat others as things rather than as human beings. Similarly, Dworkin (1981) documents the laws that allowed men to treat women as chattel property until the 19th century. She argues that men still treat women as objects in pornography, prostitution, and rape. Although these latter objectifications of women by men are unlikely to add to extended sense of self, and certainly not for women, more normal relationships between people may extend the sense of self of both participants.

If other people are a part of our extended selves, it follows that there should be a sense of self-loss during divorce and at the death of a spouse, child, or close friend. This is consistently observed to be the case, although after the individual has regained a new sense of self following a divorce (i.e., if sufficient time has elapsed), grieving for a former spouse who dies is mild in comparison to grieving for a current spouse who dies (Doka 1986). In most all other instances, however, the loss of a child or spouse is felt as a loss of self. As a widow relates, "It's as if my inside had been torn out and left a horrible wound there . . . as if half of myself was missing" (Parkes 1972, p. 97).

Jealousy at the emotional or sexual infidelity of a spouse or lover also reflects a great ego wounding and a fear of total loss of this part of self (Clanton and Smith 1977). Most recent treatments see jealousy as possessiveness applied to people and emphasize that it is an egoistic and unhealthy emotion (e.g., Berscheid and Fei 1977; Davis 1949; Jones 1948). Several studies also have linked jealousy to a social and cultural pattern that emphasizes competition and private ownership of property (Mazur 1977; Whitehurst 1977).

Another evidence of the incorporation of other persons into one's extended self is the sense of personal injury when a close friend or relative is injured. This is certainly the case when such a person is raped, for example (Burgess and Holmstrom 1976). Brownmiller (1975) and Kutash, Kutash, and Schlesinger (1978) note that rape is an assault (with intent to in-

jure another person) and a robbery-like property crime (with intent to get another's property—in this case by "having" her). Thus, the rapist sees the victim as "both a hated person and desired property" (Brownmiller 1975, p. 201). From the rape victim's perspective, there is also a violation of self due to the unwanted incorporation of the rapist into self. Thus, although the rapist may perceive an extended sense of self, the rape victim and those who include this victim within their senses of self feel traumatic losses of self.

Body Parts

As noted in the self-perception research (e.g., All-port 1937; McClelland 1951; Prelinger 1959), body parts are among the most central parts of the extended self. In psychoanalytic terms, such self-extension is called cathexis. Cathexis involves the charging of an object, activity, or idea with emotional energy by the individual. The concept most commonly has been applied to body parts and it is known, for instance, that women generally tend to cathect body parts to a greater degree than men and that such cathexis reflects self-acceptance (Rook 1985; Secourd and Jourard 1953). Rook (1985) found that when a body part is more highly cathected, there is greater use of grooming products to care for this part of the body. Csikszentimihalyi and Rochberg-Halton (1981) proposed the seemingly identical concept of psychic energy investment to describe the process of identification with possessions of any type. Because we are permanently attached to our body parts, these body parts are expected to be more strongly cathected than material possessions that can be more easily acquired and discarded.

Because body parts are normally central to conceptions of self, the loss of body parts is tantamount to losing one's identity and one's very being. Indeed, the loss of a limb often is viewed by those from whom it has been severed in just this way (e.g., Parker 1982; Schilder 1950). One is literally and symbolically afraid of being less of a person following an amputation.

SOME IMPLICATIONS OF EXTENDED SELF FOR CONSUMER RESEARCH

In addition to the general implication that the domain of consumer behavior is enriched and enlarged by the extended self formulation (e.g., research is needed into each of the preceding "special cases" and into the processes of self-extension), consumer research into a number of important neglected areas of consumer behavior may be opened by this formulation. Six neglected areas that can benefit from the extended self construct are: (1) James's vision that we vicariously consume through other family members, (2) gift-giving, which has received only limited attention from consumer researchers, (3) care of durable possessions, which has been almost totally neglected, (4) organ donation research, (5) product disposition and disuse, and (6) the role of extended self in generating meaning in life, arguably the most significant implication of the extended self.

Vicarious Consumption

Veblen (1899) saw wives and children playing a decorative and expressive role for turn of the century nouveau riche. In this view, clothing and bejeweling one's wife is not unlike decorating one's house—it is an advertisement for self. Similarly, Veblen noted that one can vicariously consume through one's dependents, so that consumption that enhances their extended selves enhances one's own extended self, of which they are a part. Although today's families are less patriarchal than those of Veblen's day, the tendency to vicariously consume through those who are a part of extended self perhaps is not dissimilar. We gain in self-esteem from the ego enhancing consumption of these people. If our friend lives in an extravagant house or drives an extravagant car, we feel just a bit more extravagant ourselves. Such vicarious consumption differes from Solomon's (1986b) "surrogate consumers" who are really surrogate information gatherers and buyers rather than consumers.

If one's spouse is seen as an extension of self, it would seem to follow that the success of a spouse should raise one's self-esteem in much the same way as personal success. Weathers (1978) found that college senior women, especially those who are married, tend to perceive a shared sense of prestige when husbands succeed. However, this is much less true for those who plan to go to graduate school and is not true at all for those who are committed to their own professional careers. In addition, Macke, Bohrnstedt, and Bernstein (1979) found that for housewives, the husband's success is associated with higher personal self-esteem (apparently largely due to increased household income), but for professional women (and for those husbands' successes that do not impact income), the husband's success can actually be associated with lower self-esteem. These findings suggest a complex situation in which a spouse can be both an extension of one's self and a rival. The rivalry aspects of a relationship can cause one's spouse's success relative to the other to have a negative effect on sense of self. Given the declining prevalence of the traditional workhusband/housewife household, we might anticipate that extension of self via spouse may be a declining phenomenon and the social comparison rivalry aspects may be increasingly common (see Bremer and Vogl 1984; Davis and Robinson 1988).

Gift-Giving

The incorporation of one's children into extended self allows an explanation for apparently altruistic

acts of generosity and kindness toward these children. Existing economic and anthropological theories have a difficult time dealing with such altruism, and tend to explain it as a long-term exchange process such as that envisioned in Trivers' (1971) notion of reciprocal altruism. In this view and related exchange theoretical views, the only reason we help or act generously toward another human being is because this helps ensure our own welfare. If we help another, we can feel more confident that this other will help us if and when we are in need. In the case of children, they continue to be seen as sources of financial and emotional support in the event of catastrophe or difficulty. However, this pessimistic view of human behavior is not needed when the notion of extended self including other people is recognized. The explanation is simply that we give to our children and certain others because making them happy makes that part of us that includes them happy. The smile on our child's face puts a heart-felt smile on our own face. This explanation may still involve egoism rather than purely other-focused altruism, but it is less cynical and more compatible with traditional notions of humanitarianism based on empathy.

Similarly, it is expected that gift-giving is more self-gratifying to the extent that the recipient is a part of the giver's extended self. When this is not the case, gift-giving is expected to be done only grudgingly or only in accordance with rules of reciprocity. For giving to others incorporated within one's extended self, however, reciprocal gifts from a highly cathected recipient should not be required for continued giving. Because some degree of rivalry was noted to occur with a spouse or partner and because reciprocal giving is a ritual that helps bring friends within one's extended self, such nonreciprocal giving is most likely for gifts to relatives such as parents to whom self-extension is fixed by more permanent means (see Cheal 1986, 1987). Research on such issues may help to extricate consumer research from the narrow perspective that consumer behavior involves exchange as a sole means of product and service acquisition.

Care of Possessions

A relationship should exist between incorporation of an object into one's extended self and the care and maintenance of the object. In one study (Belk 1987b, 1988), the more strongly homeowners cathected their dwellings, the more frequently or recently they reported mowing the grass, remodeling the house, painting the interior, and dusting. Homeowners cathected their dwellings more strongly when the dwelling was built and acquired more recently and was in better condition.

A similar pattern was obtained in the same study for car care by 19- to 28-year-old male car owners (findings for females were not significant here, as was expected—e.g., Bloch 1982). Reported frequency of

washing, waxing, and changing the oil in one's car is significantly correlated with centrality of the vehicle to one's extended self. As with houses, cars that are newer, more recently acquired, and in better condition also are cathected more highly. Similar findings have been obtained by Richins and Bloch (1986) who report lesser involvement with automobiles after their newness "wears off."

Young females in the same study reported greater bathing or showering frequency when they had higher body part cathexis scores (findings were nonsignificant for males, as expected, since females cathect body parts to a greater degree than do males; Secord and Jourard 1953). Generally then, the more an object is cathected into one's extended self, the more care and attention it tends to receive. Inasmuch as consumer research has done little to investigate consumption (as opposed to purchase or information acquisition), notions of extended self may be especially useful in suggesting promising directions for such research.

Organ Donation

The donation of blood and kidneys and promises to allow one's other organs to be "harvested" upon death are voluntary decisions that seem likely to be affected by cathexis of the particular body parts involved. Pessemier, Bemmaor, and Hanssens (1977) found that those who rate their general body image as less important are more willing to donate body organs. For specific body organs sought in cadaver donations, Fulton, Fulton, and Simmons (1977) reported that those organs generally seen as more central to identity are less likely to be approved for removal by surviving relatives. Among live potential donors, Wilms et al. (1987) found that people are less willing to donate organs seen as more sacred, emotional, mysterious, and not well understood. In the United States, where their research was conducted, the more sacrosanct organs are the eyes, brain, and heart, which are most often vetoed when the family approves other organs for transplantation. In contrast, Thukral and Cummins (1987) suggest that Buddhists may find it a high honor to donate their eyes, because they believe that this allows them to live on after death.

Other evidence shows that transplantation of important body organs can be psychologically traumatic for the donor and the recipient. For donors, the fear is that a significant part of one's self will be lost (Simmons, Klein, and Simmons 1977). Barnett et al. (1987) cite such fears as a reason why they found that organ donation appeals stressing benefits to self (e.g., people will think of you as a good and caring person) are more successful than altruistic appeals to help others (the traditionally cited reason for organ donations—e.g., Cleveland 1975; Fellner and Marshall 1981; McIntyre et al. 1987). For transplant recipients,

the fear is twofold. First, recipients fear a loss of self because their defective organs must be removed and discarded. Research using the Draw-a-Person test finds that transplant recipients draw more distorted and smaller figures than others do (often with body parts missing), reflecting a loss of self-esteem, insecurity, anxiety, and poor body image (Chaturvedi and Pant 1984). Second, there is a fear of contaminating self with the organ of another person. Transplanted organs from an opposite sex sibling often lead to fears of becoming a homosexual (Basch 1973; Castelnuovo-Tedesco 1973). Similarly, blacks express fears of contamination by receiving organs from whites (Callender et al. 1982). In some cases, the organ recipient expects to acquire the donor's traits and skills (such as artistic and language skills or altruism). Generally, however, the trauma of acquiring body organs from another person brings about a depression that is attributable at least partly to difficulty in psychologically accepting the organ that drugs have helped the body to physiologically accept (e.g., Biorck and Magnusson 1968; Castelnuovo-Tedesco 1971; Klein and Simmons 1977).

From the point of view of understanding willingness to donate body organs, a further consideration derives from the fact that persons and groups also may be seen as a part of one's extended self (refer to sections on levels of self and people as possessions). For example, one should be more willing to donate body organs to those seen as more central to one's extended self. This expectation is supported by investigations of various family members approached to donate a kidney, in that those with closer relationships to the patient in need of the kidney are more willing to submit to testing and ultimately to donate their own kidneys (Simmons, Bush, and Klein 1977). Those who cathect community to a greater degree are expected to be more willing to donate body organs to others within their community. This expectation is borne out for blood donations (Titmus 1970) as well as for donations of tissue organs (Belk and Austin 1986; Prottas 1983). Thus, although cathexis of body organs and other persons are not necessarily antithetical to one another, they are thought to create opposite barriers and incentives to organ donation. Belk and Austin (1986) also found that those who are more materialistic (i.e., who attach more importance to possessions—Belk 1984a, p. 291) see body organs as more central to their identities and are less willing to part with them.

Product Disposition and Disuse

Consumer behavior has done little to investigate the disposition and disuse of durable possessions (see Belk, Sherry, and Wallendorf 1988 for an exception and a review of extant literature). Korosec-Serfaty (1984) found that in France people tend to "irrationally" hang onto possessions because "they might come in handy some day," and in fact eventually lose track of the accumulated possessions in their attics. La Branche (1973) suggested that such retention of possessions is due to "the fear of annihilation of our current histories." That is, material possessions forming parts of our extended selves seem to form an anchor for our identities that reduces our fear that these identities will somehow be washed away. We may speculate that the stronger the individual's unextended or core self, the less the need to acquire, save, and care for a number of possessions forming a part of the extended self.

Conversely, one of the points in our lives when we should be inclined to discard possessions that form a part of extended self is when the unextended self has grown in strength and extent so that the buffer of extended self becomes less necessary. Such times are likely when key life stages and rites of passage have occurred, such as school graduations, new jobs, marriage, moving residences, and retirement. Another instance when consumers should shed or neglect possessions is when possessions no longer fit consumers' ideal self-images. This can occur either because the ideal self-image has changed or because the images of the objects formerly incorporated in extended self have changed. As La Branche (1973) noted, we are our own historians. So, another factor in the retention or discarding of possessions that no longer fit our view of ourselves is their fit with our perceptions of our entire personal history. Possessions may show where we have come from and thereby remain valuable as a point of contrast to present extended self. As with the other areas of consumer implications noted in this section, much work remains to be done regarding disposition, retention, and object neglect.

Extended Self and Meaning in Life

The preceding subsection should not be taken to suggest that possessions are merely a crutch to shore up weak or sagging personalities. The possessions incorporated in extended self serve valuable functions to healthy personalities. One such function is acting as an objective manifestation of the self. As Douglas and Isherwood (1979) noted, such possessions are "good for thinking." Possessions help us manipulate our possibilities and present the self in a way that garners feedback from others who are reluctant to respond so openly to the unextended self.

The possessions in our extended self also give us a personal archive or museum that allows us to reflect on our histories and how we have changed. Through heirlooms, the family is able to build a similar archive and allow individual family members to gain a sense of permanence and place in the world that extends beyond their own lives and accomplishments. Communities, nations, and other group levels of self are similarly constituted via monuments, buildings, books, music, and other created works. The associa-

tion of these artifacts with various group levels of self provides a sense of community essential to group harmony, spirit, and cooperation. In addition, natural wonders can be incorporated into extended self such that we enhance feelings of immortality and having a place in the world. This is not to suggest that extending self into material possessions has only positive effects. Research on materialism suggests some of the negative consequences of relying on possessions to provide meaning in life. But the construct of extended self also suggests that possessions can make a positive contribution to our identities.

Research involving levels of extended self seems likely to provide a more macro perspective that relates consumer behavior to a broader portion of human life (Belk 1987a). By considering the role of consumption in providing meaning in life, we may develop a stronger vision of the significance of consumer research. Consumption is a central facet of contemporary life, but it has seldom been considered from this broader perspective. The construct of extended self offers some promise for cultivating such a broadened appreciation of the potential significance of consumer research.

CONCLUSIONS

This article began by suggesting that we are what we have and that this may be the most basic and powerful fact of consumer behavior. A number of lines of evidence were presented in support of this contention. The limited research that has addressed directly the "things" that are viewed to comprise self generally has found that possessions follow body parts and mind in their centrality to self. Evidence supporting the general premise that possessions contribute to sense of self is found in a broad array of investigations, including reactions to the loss of possessions, treatment of grave goods, self-perception, and theories of property rights.

In considering the functions of extended self, discussion was directed toward the relative roles that having, doing, and being play in our lives and identities. It seems an inescapable fact of modern life that we learn, define, and remind ourselves of who we are by our possessions. Developmental evidence suggests that this identification with our things begins quite early in life as the infant learns to distinguish self from environment and then from others who may envy our possessions. Emphasis on material possessions tends to decrease with age, but remains high throughout life as we seek to express ourselves through possessions and use material possessions to seek happiness, remind ourselves of experiences, accomplishments, and other people in our lives, and even create a sense of immortality after death. Our accumulation of possessions provides a sense of past and tells us who we are, where we have come from, and perhaps where we are going.

Self-extension occurs through control and mastery of an object, through creation of an object, through knowledge of an object, and through contamination via proximity and habituation to an object. The extended self operates not only on an individual level, but also on a collective level involving family, group, subcultural, and national identities. These additional levels of self were posited to account for certain behaviors that might be seen as selfless in the narrower individual sense of self.

In addition to the use of commonly purchased consumer goods as possessions comprising extended self, several frequently used but seldom researched types of possessions were considered: collections, money, other people, pets, and body parts. In each case, there is evidence of a relationship between these possessions and one's sense of self. Implications were then derived involving gift-giving, vicarious consumption, care of possessions, organ donation, product disposition and disuse, and the role of extended self in creating meaning in life.

A broad array of evidence and theory, drawing on a variety of fields of investigation, support the importance of extended self as a central construct that can explain a variety of consumer and human behaviors. The construct offers a way to account for gift-giving without necessarily resorting to the cynical premises of the exchange paradigm, and also offers perspectives on the relatively unexplored consumption areas of pets, care and maintenance of consumption goods, product loss and disposition, organ donation, sharing, collective consumption of objects, and collection of consumption objects. It raises important issues concerning the role of possessions at each stage of the life course. And, it offers a more promising way of considering the symbolic importance of consumption in our lives than does prior product and self-concept research. In light of the scope and importance of such issues, their relative neglect in consumer behavior research, and the diverse and compelling evidence supporting the role that extended self may play in shedding light on these issues, the concept of possessions as extended self has much to offer the quest for an understanding of consumer behavior.

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