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Elizabeth C. Hirschman, Rutgers University

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The present research utilized a reader-response approach to explore the preferences consumers have for motion pictures and television shows. Analytical emphasis was placed upon the semiotic features contained within consumers’ favorite films and programs, especially those of an archetypic and/or mythic nature. It was found that consumers typically intertwined aspects of their autobiographical narratives with story structures and archetypic figures drawn from their favorite mass media texts. Among these were the figures of the Low Born Hero, the Corrupted Hero, the Warrior, the Good Father and Utopia. Preferred motion picture and television narratives were also used to overcome implicit oppositions consumers encountered in life, such as the Real versus the Ideal, the Self versus Others and Choice versus Chance.

INTRODUCTION

Recently, consumer researchers have directed increased attention toward the ways in which the mass media affect consumers’ everyday lives (Holbrook 1999; O’Guinn and Shrum 1997; Ritson and Elliott 1999). In particular, the reader-response approach (Eco 1981) has been identified as having large potential for enhancing our comprehension of how mass media products, such as motion pictures and television shows, are incorporated into consumers’ self identities and social interactions. (Drotner 1994; Mick and Buhl 1992; Moores 1991; Radway 1988, 1984; Scott 1994a). As Holbrook (1999) and McQuarrie and Mick (1999) propose, while quantitative and text interpretive methods of assessing mass media influence are undoubtedly valuable, they are no substitute for the rich insights that can be gained by talking directly to consumers about their media preferences and desires.

Holbrook (1999, p. 154), for example, concludes after presenting a highly detailed quantitative analysis of motion picture preferences that, “There may well be other movie characteristics not included here that tend to enhance both popular appeal and expert judgments... These factors would include the character of a movie’s storyline... the development of certain themes or motifs... the design of a film’s semiotic structure and semiological signification, e.g., binary oppositions vs. subtle graduations, myths or archetypes, metaphorical meanings, [and] consumption symbolism.”

The present research utilized a reader response approach to explore the preferences consumers have for motion pictures and television shows. Following from Holbrook’s (1999) proposals, analytical emphasis was placed upon the semiotic features (Mick 1986; Holbrook and Grayson 1986) contained within consumers’ favorite films and programs, especially those of an archetypic and/or mythic nature (see e.g., Scott 1994b; Stern 1995). While consumer researchers have examined the archetypic and mythic content of these mass media offerings previously (Hirschman 1987; 2000; Holbrook and Grayson 1986), they have not done so using consumer-based data. As already noted, consumers’ notions concerning their own preferences are a key (perhaps the key) element in understanding of those preferences.

Mass media narratives such as motion pictures and television shows may serve as carriers of contemporary cultural archetypes, according to Gibbs (1994), and Moores (1993). Filmmakers, scriptwriters and even advertising copywriters (see Randazzo 1995; Scott 1994b; Stern 1988) draw upon the pre-existing stock of these cultural images to construct their narratives.

Additionally, both Dyer (1982, 1986) and McCracken (1989) have proposed that actors and actresses could be used to personify social categories in a culture. For example, Eco (1966) argues that during the 1960’s actor Sean Connery came to signify the warrior character James Bond, just as Dyer (1986) claims that Marilyn Monroe iconically represented the seductive goddess archetype during the 1950’s and 1960’s. Dyer (1986, p. 16-17) proposes that, “Stars represent typical ways of behaving, feeling and thinking in contemporary society, ways that have been socially, culturally and historically constructed... Stars are embodiments of the social categories in which people are placed and through which we make our lives...” Thus, film and television narratives may be texts which carry archetypal meanings with which consumers can implicitly identify (Randazzo 1995; Stern 1988).

THE STUDY

The present study explores the possibility that consumers’ preferred motion pictures and television shows are chosen based upon archetypic personification, which assists the consumer in composing his/her autobiographical narrative. Archetypes may provide the shared cognitive and social context (Ritson and Elliott 1999; Zaltman 2000) through which mass media products such as motion pictures and television shows are given meaning in the consumer’s life and used in his/her project of identity construction (see also; Gibbs 1994).

METHOD

Data for the study were generated by means of phenomenological interviews with 24 volunteer participants who were assured of anonymity. The participants were of diverse gender, ethnicity, age and religious affiliation. The interviewer used a six-question protocol to initiate and guide the discussion. Dialogue centered around the consumer’s favorite films, television shows, actors and actresses.

Each interview was conducted in the participant’s place of residence with only the participant and the researcher present. The interviews began by asking the participant to simply “tell the story” of his/her favorite film. All participants were eager to do this, and often continued their initial narrative rendition for half an hour with little or no assistance by the researcher. Because of the involving and seemingly enjoyable nature of the task, participants continued through the subsequent questions and discussion enthusiastically, responding to each of the general questions in a lengthy and detailed manner. Interviews took a minimum of 1 1/2 hours, some went as long as 3 hours.

Interpretive Procedures and Logic of Analysis

The analysis of the verbatim interview transcripts involved an iterative, part-to-whole reading strategy through which I worked toward a holistic understanding of each person’s transcript, while also making note of common themes, especially those of an

1These questions were: What is your favorite motion picture? Can you tell me what it was about? What are some of your other favorite movies? Who are your favorite movie actors and actresses? What do you think about —; What does s/he mean to you? (Repeat for television shows).
archetypal and autobiographical nature, across the set of transcripts. In this process, earlier readings of a transcript were used to inform later readings and, reciprocally, later readings allowed me to recognize and explore patterns not noted in the initial analysis. The archetypal categories were compared with those developed previously by Campbell, Eliade and Jung during their extensive studies of comparative mythology. Additional metaphorical concepts were also discerned which related to recent findings on cognitive categorization (e.g. Gibbs 1994; Lakoff and Johnson 1999; Zaltman 2000) and celebrity meaning transfer (Dyer 1986; McCracken 1986) and were classified into groupings for further analysis.

Following from Bruner (1990, 1986, 1987), I was interested in learning how these 24 consumers, coming from different age cohorts, ethnic backgrounds, and sexual identities, incorporated the narratives presented by motion pictures and television shows into autobiographical narratives of selfhood. By focusing attention on their favorite texts, I hoped to gain insight into how these stories were interwoven with their own life themes and life projects (Mick and Buhl 1992). I found that respondents were especially prone to narrate particular experiences in their lives, often where there had been a breach between the real and the ideal, or the self and society.

ARCHETYPE, AUTOBIOGRAPHY AND BI-POLAR MEDIATION

To Jung, every archetype coexisted with its shadow/opposite and through the deployment of these opposites in narratives, people were able to define patterns of meaning-in-the-world. One task of a narrative, whether a widely-shared myth such as the Biblical story of creation, or a small-scale exposition, such as an episode of a television series, is to enable us to work through these oppositions—to bring them into balance. For example, consumers may use television or motion picture narratives to bring evil into balance with good or to bring personal achievement into balance with helping others (Gibbs 1994). In a particular situation, the consumer may seek out a narrative which frames a set of characters in such a way as to construct a satisfying explanatory outcome.

Across the set of interviews, three primary oppositional themes were identified: the Ideal versus the Real, the Self versus Others and Choice versus Chance. These are consistent with the autobiographical themes identified by Riessman (1993) in her ethnographic work and by consumer researchers such as Thompson (1996) and Wallendorf and Arnould (1991) in their studies on working women and Thanksgiving rituals, respectively. I demonstrate and extend them now using material from the motion picture/television show interviews.

THE IDEAL VERSUS THE REAL

Predating Plato’s conception (1959) of Ideal Forms by several thousand years, the epic Sumerian myth of Gilgamesh also proposed the existence of a perfect, idealized world which contrasted with the flawed reality occupied by humans: “There was the Garden of the Gods; all around him stood bushes bearing gems. Seeing it, Gilgamesh went down at once, for there was fruit of carnelian on the vine, beautiful to look at; lapis lazuli leaves hung thick with fruit, sweet to see. Instead of thorns and thistles, there were hematite and rare stones, agate and pearls from the sea” (Gilgamesh, Leeming, 1990 p. 288).

The perfection, richness and beauty which Gilgamesh beheld in the land of the gods is archetypically equivalent to consumers’ descriptions of utopian scenes in motion pictures such as Easter Parade and White Christmas. Rose, a 66 year old woman, recalls the musicals of her childhood, which featured Ginger Rogers and Fred Astaire, and represented the same beauty and perfection: “I used to like to watch Fred Astaire dance with Ginger Rogers and imagine I was dancing with him in those beautiful gowns...I was a very quiet girl and those movies always made me forget myself...I loved the singing and dancing and the beautiful costumes, the make believe world. You forgot your real world; you forgot what was happening in your own life...It was make believe, but it made you forget and it made you happy.”

Becky, a 26 year old eighth grade math and geography teacher, found the same utopian realm in The Wizard of Oz, “It’s a fantasy. It’s just so wonderful that there’s such a wonderful place in this world, or not even in this world–just a place where you can go to. Like in Dorothy’s song, where there’s no troubles, no sorrows, somewhere over the rainbow.” Although the archetype of utopia remains constant across these consumers, its autobiographical expression is personalized and unique. For each of us, different ‘perfect worlds’ will be found in the mass media narratives we find most resonant.

The Real versus Ideal theme expresses itself through deviation from perfection. We come to know what is perfect by encountering what is imperfect; we come to know what is good by having knowledge of what is evil; without contrast, there is no meaning (Eliade 1991). Thus, consumers told of deviations from perfection, of wrongs, of errors, of flaws in order to make more clearly defined their sense of rightness.


Basically there’s a man and his name is Eric Draven. He’s going to get married. And that day his fiancée, who was going to be his wife the next day, gets raped and killed by a band of men that go around on devil’s night, which is October 30th, and they loot, raid and steal, and pillage, plunder, light things on fire, blow things up and rape women in the process...They were running like a crack joint in the apartment building where she lives. And she was hindering their business, so they had to come and take care of her. So when she’s getting raped, the boyfriend comes in and tries to stop it, but they both get killed, and he gets thrown out of the window and shot. One year later a crow lands on his grave, because supposedly when the person’s soul comes back, the person comes back to life. And what happens is he comes back to life and he avenges those who were killed and killed his wife and killed him. So, justice is served.

In this film, a terrible injustice has occurred, a major flaw in the normal course-of-life has appeared and requires an equally emphatic response to move back to a balanced state. Thus, the murdered man destroys those who acted first as destroyers—it’s, as sources of imperfection.

Interviewees also believed that balance between the Real and the Ideal could be achieved by the death/sacrifice of a good (perfect) person which served to atone for a moral deficiency. Leeming (1990) terms this the martyr myth and it is a structural form underlying many “dying god” texts and the source of the notion that “out of something bad, something good may come.” As Leeming (1990, p. 147) notes, “the dying god or his surrogate is often a scapegoat; one who dies for the good of society, who somehow takes on the burden of society’s shortcomings or sins.” We see this structure in Vickie’s (32) retelling of West Side Story.

And Maria is running in the street looking for Tony and they finally see each other and they go running towards each other
and that’s when Maria’s brother’s best friend comes out and shoots Tony. And it’s very, very sad. They sing a beautiful song together, “Somewhere”, and they hope that they’ll meet each other in another life, and he dies in her arms. The two gangs are standing there in the background...and then both gangs come together to carry Tony away. And that’s the end... And it moved me a lot, seeing two people who cared so much about each other and how one got killed at such an early age and how the two gangs came together. After something bad happens, something good comes of it. Unfortunately something bad has to happen first, before something good happens.

The contrast between the Real and the Ideal can manifest itself also in specific pairs of archetypes, for example the Destructive Goddess and the Nurturant Goddess. The Destructive Goddess is the negative, violent aspect of the anima, the female principle (Jung 1959); it can destroy life, especially male life. Iconic forms of the Destructive Goddess include Lilith, Jezebel, Medusa, the evil Queen in Snow White, witches, Ann Bancroft’s character Mrs. Robinson in the Graduate, and Marlene Dietrich in The Blue Angel.

By contrast, the helpful, good aspect of the anima is represented by the Nurturant Goddess archetype and includes maternal icons such as Donna Reed and Betty Crocker (Randazzo 1995). In this form, the female principle represents all that is fertile, nurturant, loving and kind (see e.g., Jung 1959, Leeming 1990). One participant, for instance, saw actress Jane Seymour as representing this archetype.

Characters who begin as one aspect of the bipolar Real/Ideal archetype may be transformed into the other aspect over the course of the narrative. Lisa, 22, describes two female characters who underwent just such a transformation. The first is a teenage character, Kelly, on the television program, Beverly Hills 90210: “Kelly was the rich girl, and her mother was doing drugs.... She drove around in her red BMW convertible, and flaunted her money.... And she just bought whatever she wanted. She was a real spoiled brat, and she thought she was better than anybody else. But somehow her character grew, and now she’s totally different...Now she’s like all straight-laced and she’s a good girl, and she does everything by the rules and she doesn’t flaunt her money...She’s generous and likes to help people.” Analogously, Lisa describes how the Julia Robert’s character in the film Pretty Woman was transformed from a hardened prostitute into a “good” woman: “She turned herself around from a prostitute into a beautiful, respected woman, and they fell in love.”

In general, the motion picture and television show narratives which consumers described as their favorites were those in which the imperfect Real was moved towards the perfect Ideal over the course of the story. (Although there were exceptions; one woman described the poignant tragedy of Leaving Las Vegas as evidence that sometimes “things just don’t work out in the end; love doesn’t always fix everything.”) However, the majority preferred happy endings which provided them with the psychological buoyancy and optimism to keep their own travails in perspective. Mike, a 36 year old man, saw an important “message for living” in Frank Capra’s It’s a Wonderful Life, a melodrama starring actor Jimmy Stewart.

The effect that it has had on me is based on my life; life has a lot of ups and downs. Being that I’m 36, I’ve gone through a lot of ups and downs...You’re never riding high or you’re never low all the time, but you have a lot of peaks and valleys and this movie... gave me a frame of reference to say don’t just look at what’s going on currently, don’t look at your life in the last day, the last week, the last month, the last year; look at all the positive things that you’ve experienced throughout your life and how things can be even better in the future. And being that I’m self-employed, I always have to be motivated to do well in my business...I think it’s a great, great story... that maybe you should look at your whole life and what impact you’ve had to help others and how maybe others have helped you.

Mike’s comments bring us to the second theme discerned across the interviews: fulfilling the self versus caring for others.

THE SELF VERSUS OTHERS

The Good Mother and Good Father archetypes (Bierlein 1994; Randazzo 1995) represent the fully matured psyche which places the needs of others ahead of one’s own. Often young people will envision themselves as the central focus of their autobiographical narrative; all of their emotional, mental, and physical energies are directed toward achieving personal goals. For example, one young man’s autobiographical narrative was largely self-directed, aimed toward guiding him to be “the best that I can be”.

Conversely, Sam, a middle-aged man who had family responsibilities, directed his self-narrative toward the Nurturant Parent motif (Lakoff and Johnson 1999). His admiration was directed toward those who risk themselves to help needy others; whose goals are concerned more with ‘giving back’ rather than ‘getting ahead’. Many of the women interviewed by Thompson (1996) exhibited this same self/others tension. This tension is perhaps especially pronounced for contemporary women, because the Good Mother/Nurturant Goddess archetype, which for so long prevailed as the female cultural ideal, has evolved into a more animus-pervaded androgyny which encourages women to set and fulfill personal goals beyond those of family care and nurturance. Women are now precariously balanced (or “juggling” as Thompson (1996) phrases it) between self-serv ing quests and other-serving obligations.

Among the consumers I interviewed, these same tensions were also apparent. For example, Janet, 25 and unmarried, commented upon the character played by Susan Sarandon in Pretty Baby. In the film, Sarandon played a prostitute with two children. Given the opportunity to marry a wealthy man and leave prostitution, she does so, taking her young son with her. But she abandons her older child, a daughter, leaving her to become a prostitute. Janet comments, “She played a hooker with children in a brothel in the South... You hated her because she was not doing the right thing by her child, but you could still understand that she had to live her own life and take care of herself.”

While looking out for oneself is the initial stage in psychological development, the second one is reciprocity for which the community or family is the symbolic archetype. In this stage, the tension between self and others is brought into balance by a system of mutual support in which community members share resources, benefiting the collective whole. Lisa, age 22 and unmarried, described her favorite television show as representing the community archetype. “What I liked about Laverne and Shirley was that they were two independent women and they didn’t have to rely on anybody else...I guess that’s when the whole feminist movement was going on...I was just a little girl and it was good to see women being strong like that...And no matter what went wrong, they always had each other and they could always depend on each other...I guess it was like their little family.” Lisa describes a balanced structure which blends aspects of self-serving versus other-serving behavior. Laverne and Shirley are each seeking freedom from the prior restraints placed upon women by working
and living apart from their families; but they have also formed a mutual-aid community which supports each woman in her search for selfhood.

Charles, age 21 and unmarried, belongs to a similar mutual-support community composed of both men and women. His favorite television show is *Friends*, which depicts a slightly older, mixed-gender group who are working at “first” jobs and living in an urban apartment building. To Charles, the show has both positive and negative aspects as an archetypal model for his own group’s future behavior.

Every now and then I get kind of depressed considering they are all 28, 26, 27 and they are still all single. I’m thinking they are great people. It would be nice to live like that, but by that time, personally, I would like to be in a relationship and have kids or something. At the same time, I like it because it almost mirrors my group of friends. There are 3 men and 3 women in my little group of friends. A lot of times we look at [the show] and think about it. If I do end up 28 or in a couple of years when we graduate from college, I’d like to have that common bond with my friends. They definitely care a lot for each other. “I’ll be there for you” is their theme song. They can always do things with each other and without each other as well. They always have fun when they are together, which is something I hope I have with my friends as well.

Charles views his future self down the road and realizes that eventually he will want to move away from the Community archetype toward the Nurturant Parent archetype. He does not want to remain indefinitely in a state of extended adolescence, but rather sees the time approaching when he will want to be a provider of resources to his children, rather than merely a sharer of resources with his friends (Gilmour 1997).

Mike, age 36 and married with children, has progressed in his autobiographical narrative towards the Nurturant Parent archetype. His favorite motion picture, *It’s a Wonderful Life*, tells the story of George Bailey (Jimmy Stewart), a man whose generosity and pattern of putting others’ needs ahead of his own make him an iconic exemplar.

In the first part of the movie he and his younger brother were ... sledding down a slope, and the sled tipped over and his younger brother fell into a big pile of water, like a hole with ice, and George saved his life. But because George saved his brother’s life, he lost the hearing in one of his ears....[Later] George’s father suffers a heart attack, I believe, and dies. George had plans at that time; he just got married, he was ready to go on his honeymoon with his wife, but they needed him to stay to save the Building and Loan because many people depended on him to help. So he gave up his honeymoon with his wife. And the whole movie symbolizes how he gave up a lot of his own goals and his own aspirations. He had to help his brother, his younger brother, who went to college. George didn’t have the ability to go to college, because he had to help with the Building and Loan and help his mom. So the whole movie showed how he gave up and sacrificed his life to help so many other people, and he was constantly doing that.

George Bailey is a contemporary representation of the Nurturant Parent archetype. He is a “good man”: one who can always be counted upon to assist others. George’s life also resembles the Dying God narrative pattern—for example, a significant part of him ‘died’, i.e., he lost half his hearing, in saving his brother’s life. And he has sacrificed other emotional/psychic aspects of himself (for instance, a honeymoon, a college education) in order to rescue the town and its people from dying economically.

Mike’s retelling of *It’s a Wonderful Life* suggests that much of what happens to its protagonist, George Bailey, is caused by events that were beyond his control; for example, his brother’s near-drowning, his father’s fatal heart attack. Faced with these uncontrollable negative occurrences, George must choose either to forego his own desires and set things right again, or to pursue his own interests and walk away from the consequences of the destructive events. This narrative structure reveals a third archetypal tension described by the interviewees—that between Choice and Chance, to which we now turn.

**CHOICE AND CHANCE**

One young man, Julio’s, account of the film *Cool Runnings* describes with poignance the plight of the Jamaican bobsled team who, having conquered extraordinary obstacles to reach the finals in the Olympics, lose their victory to a broken screw. Julio also describes the tragic helplessness of the protagonist in *Carlito’s Way* who, despite sincere efforts to ‘go straight’, is dragged back into a life of crime and ultimately to his death. Similarly, Stern’s (1995) re-analysis of Wallendorf and Arnold’s (1992) Thanksgiving data showed how consumers’ tales could turn on unexpectedly fortuitous or destructive events that helped/hindered their holiday plans.

The consumers I interviewed described the same bipolar conflict between Choice and Chance in recounting their favorite films and television shows. Charles, age 20, tells about *Melrose Place*:

One of the characters they have now is Jane Mancini...She started out as Michael Mancini’s wife, ... they got divorced. She was pretty much a normal average housewife type woman, but she turned psychotic once he divorced her and she got raped by one of her boyfriends. She tends to go for guys who will somehow take advantage of her. It turned out she killed the guy who raped her. Now she’s discovered she’s adopted and she’s looking for her mother...Then there is her sister, Sydney. She is completely jealous of anything Jane ever had or did. When she first came on the show Jane and Michael were divorced and Sydney went right away for Michael. She had always had a thing for her sister’s ex-husband... She’s always getting into trouble. She used to be a prostitute...She joined a cult ... She’s always doing the wrong thing...She’s cunning, but still she is always getting into trouble.

Charles’ description of the two sisters, Jane and Sydney, displays a mixture of planned and unplanned events which move the story along. Sydney, for instance, purposely set out to have sex with her sister’s husband, but Jane’s psychotic response to her own divorce was not “chosen”. The presence of randomness in mass media narratives helps people deal with apparent injustices in the course of their own or others’ lives: i.e., when bad things happen to good people or when wickedness profits, one can assign it to the archetype of Happenstance/chance.

However, the lack of planning, of not at least attempting to control one’s destiny, is generally understood as consistently leading to negative results (Leeming 1990). Tom, age 21, finds a lesson-for-life in the film *Clerks*.

It’s basically a film based around a day in the life of a clerk of a convenience store and what happens in his life. I think one of the reasons I like it is because I related so much to the person. I mean, I have a lot of friends who aren’t moving in the same direction that I am in college, and now have these dead-end...
clerk type jobs. It’s pretty interesting to see the movie, because it’s very true to life. It’s a very good study into the lives of people who are kind of middle-class growing up, but then they kind of piss their life away working these bad jobs, living at home, never getting a career together, whereas their parents have something going for themselves. It’s pretty interesting to see that.

Later in his interview, Tom recounts instances of setting goals for himself and then succeeding through trial and error in reaching them (in essence, a heroic quest). Much like Julio, Tom constructs his personal narrative as an attempt to balance planning for the future against anticipating the random, often negative, occurrences of life. His autobiographical philosophy is expressed well in his closing comments on Clerks.

I. What happens at the end of the movie? It just goes on?
T. Yeah, basically at the end of the movie he’s still a clerk. It’s very true to life.
Nothing great happens. He doesn’t like inherit a million dollars or anything. The only thing he realized is that there’s this girl, and he realized that she’s the one for him. It’s no big deal really. But you never know what will happen. It’s left very open ended, very true to life.

DISCUSSION

This research has explored the incorporation of archetypic figures in consumers’ recounted descriptions of their favorite motion pictures and television shows. The narratives generated during discussion of these mass media preferences exhibited many autobiographical details, suggesting that consumers used archetypic imagery and mythic narrative structure, such as utopia, in viewing their own lives and social interactions.

The primary archetypic categories and story structures put forward by these consumers are shown in the Table. The patterns suggest that the type of heroic identification may shift over the life course. Young adults, both male and female, may identify with motion picture and television show characters who are struggling to establish personal identities and overcome obstacles to self-development and fulfillment, just as they themselves are doing. Older persons, who have established families and found their niches in the community, may turn to archetypic figures that portray nurturing others, protecting the community from harm, or safeguarding moral and ethical standards.

While obviously preliminary and exploratory, these findings suggest that mass media products may be chosen and valued not merely upon features such as “star power”, special effects imagery, or even critical acclaim, but rather because they contain story lines and archetypic meanings which resonate with the consumer’s own life experiences and concerns. As such, they may serve as vehicles of self-observation and self-projection: we come to see how we are now and how we could be in the future.

Motion pictures and television shows preferred by consumers also enabled them to grapple with certain cleavages between what they desired their lives to be and what life actually offered. One’s inner imaginings do not always correspond to external reality, one’s self-set goals may be impinged upon by obligations to others, and one’s plans for the future may be interrupted by unforeseen events. By ‘living through’ conflicts between the Ideal and the Real, the Self and Others, and Choice and Chance as presented in their favorite films and programs, consumers may be able to better come to grips with these issues in their own lives.

It would be very interesting to see if similar patterns are found in consumers’ experiences of sporting events (e.g., football, baseball, stock car racing), recreational activities (e.g., hiking, hunting, fishing) and even their perceptions of and preferences for political
candidates. These types of consumption also unfold over time, having elements of struggle, morality, chance, corruption, and the opportunity for heroic behaviors recognized by these informants.

The present study also suggests that we should perhaps heed the suggestions of Zaltman (2000) that most of consumers’ cognitions occur on an unconscious level; if Jung and more recently Lakoff and Johnson (1999) are correct, then consumers’ preferences for deeply metaphorical, image-laden products such as motion pictures and television shows may be formed not out of attribute-based, conscious thought, but rather at a much more fundamental cognitive/emotional level. Among the interviews I conducted, it was usually during the retelling of their favorite film or television program that consumers began to interject bits and pieces of their own autobiographical experience. Perhaps, as Bruner (1987) suggests, we tell our own story through the stories we have learned and which deeply moved us. Finally, the interplay between consumers’ preferred cinematic and televised narratives and their own autobiographical constructions may also assist in Sherry’s (2000) project of “re-enchanting” their world. Fictional heroes, utopias and struggles can, and do, assist us in leading our own lives in a more meaningful fashion.

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