Exploring the Co-Evolution of Possession Constellations, Self, and Identity

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The intersection of possession constellations (Solomon and Assael 1987), self, and identity provides a common thread linking seemingly diverse topics in consumer research. Representative topics include: self-extension (Belk 1988), possession attachment (Ball and Tasaki 1992; Kleine, Kleine, and Allen 1995; Wallendorf and Arnould 1988), possession value (Richins 1994), authenticity (Grayson and Martinec 2004); identity salience effects (Reed 2004); identity schemas (Kleine, Kleine, and Kerman 1993), Diderot effects (McCracken 1988), possession collections (Baker and Martin 2000); brand communities (McAlexander, Schouten, and Koenig 2002; Muniz and O’Guinn 2001); disposition (Lastovicka and Fernandez 2004; McAlexander 1991; Price, Arnould, and Curasi 2000); involuntary possession loss (Sayre 1994), and anti-constellations (Hogg and Mitchell 1997). At a macro level, this intersection provides the organizing construct through which everyday consumption can be understood. Assembling scholars interested in different facets of the possession constellation-self-identity link can stimulate further research on the topic.

The roundtable session’s objective was to bring together scholars spanning disciplinary and methodological boundaries to stimulate interest in research at the intersection of possessions and self-identity. Twenty-eight scholars, representing the full spectrum of theoretical perspectives and disciplinary backgrounds participated.

The roundtable’s agenda was to explore: (1) persisting mysteries and gaps in knowledge about how possession constellations, self, and identity co-evolve; (2) obstacles to research progress in this area including conceptual, methodological, and substantive issues; and (3) opportunities and potential new directions for research.

Topics discussed included:

• the malleability of self
• differing conceptions of identity
• possessions as indicators of, or assisting to alleviate identity conflict
• how possessions simultaneously determine and reflect identity
• how an item one no longer possesses may continue to affect and be part of an identity
• methodological considerations related to priming identities in experimental settings
• product anti-constellations
• role of possessions in navigating family identities
• cultural differences in opportunities for self-expression
• faith as a possession
• the dangers of confounding the proliferation or inventory of possessions with the importance of possessions to individuals or society
• whether the identity-related role of possessions varies cross-culturally
• the importance of mundane or “invisible” possessions; how objects of low involvement are essential for identity cultivation and enactment
• effects of possession loss on identity
• that little is known about how intentionally removing a possession impacts routine or identity

REFERENCES


McCracken, Grant (1988), Culture and Consumption, Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press.


