An Investigation Into Individuals’ Repeated Attempts At Behavior Change

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Recent research has shown that individuals make repeated attempts at behavior change prior to actually being successful. For example, typically individuals try to change their dieting behaviors on 4 to 5 occasions prior to actually being successful (Polivy and Herman 2002). Many of the dark side of consumer behavior areas identified by Mick (1996), such as smoking, drug use, shopping, and gambling, are behaviors that individuals try to change on a repeated basis. As consumer researchers, however, we do not have a clear understanding of how people interpret behavior change failures and persist in their efforts to change their behaviors after such failures. This research employs a longitudinal study of individuals trying to diet in order to understand how people change behaviors over time. The results have important implications for both consumer behavior and public policy.

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We then develop a multi-stage model representing the international match-making process. Searching stage is characterized by clients viewing hundreds of mail-order bride agencies’ websites and deciding the way he wants to connect with those potential brides. Clients can either choose to buy addresses or catalogs and magazines from agencies. Based on the photo and figure information (weight, height, or age), men get to know a bit about their future brides. In this process, women typically receive only very limited information about the man, mostly from what he chooses to tell her in the letters or emails. In the virtual contact stage, upon obtaining addresses, the client can start to write to women. The duration of pen-pal relationships lasts differently from client to client. In the rendezvous stage, mail-order bride agencies become travel and tour agencies. After a brief contact period, the client decides whether to take the next step of meeting prospective brides in person. In the bringing-home stage, it is often not the bride but rather the groom who makes the decision.

Following introduction of the above multi-stage framework, we plan to seek a theoretical explanation for commodification of women. We will conduct an interpretive study, via in-depth interviews and additional content analyses of websites, to account for consumption patterns evident in the mail-order bride industry. Visits with both women and men would allow us to hear their stories, stereotypes, expectations, emotions and satisfaction (or lack thereof). Coupled with our content analysis of mail order bride websites, we then will use themes and terms generated from the qualitative research to determine patterns of perceptions of and motives for mail order bride service participation from both the seller and the consumer perspectives. We expect to develop a theoretical model and related propositions for future empirical research on this global consumption phenomenon of social and human significance.

References

(Full list of references is available upon request.)

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Recent research has shown that individuals make repeated attempts at behavior change prior to actually being successful. For example, typically individuals try to change their dieting behaviors on 4 to 5 occasions prior to actually being successful (Polivy and Herman 2002). Many of the dark side of consumer behavior areas identified by Mick (1996), such as smoking, drug use, shopping, and gambling, are behaviors that individuals try to change on a repeated basis. As consumer researchers, however, we do not have a clear understanding of how people interpret behavior change failures and persist in their efforts to change their behaviors after such failures.

In an effort to understand these behavior change attempts, this dissertation replicates and extends the Theory of Trying (Bagozzi and Warshaw 1990), to include feedback loops from the outcomes of behavior change attempts to attitudes towards trying to change again. The main objective of this research is to address the question of how individuals interpret behavior change failure and persist post-failure. These feedback loops include several factors (i.e. attributions, self-esteem, and hope) to aid in understanding how an individual interprets behavior change outcomes and uses those interpretations as inputs into attitudes towards trying in the future.

Theoretical Model
The theoretical model is based on the model developed in the Theory of Trying (Bagozzi and Warshaw 1990). The theory of trying is employed in this context because it includes two variables that seem very relevant to repeated attempts at changing behaviors (i.e. the frequency and recency of prior attempts at changing behaviors). However, the model proposed by Bagozzi and Warshaw (1990) ends at trying to change behaviors. While the authors do suggest that the outcomes of these behavior change attempts feedback into attitudes, they do not explore the nature of the feedback. In order to explore the nature of the feedback from outcomes to attitudes, this paper employs three constructs–attributions for outcomes, self-esteem, and hope. Each of these factors will now be briefly discussed.

Attribution Theory. Weiner’s (1974) theory of attributions posits that there are three dimensions to attributions– locus, stability, and controllability–that assist individuals in understanding the causes of their behaviors and behavioral outcomes. In the model, specific hypotheses, consistent with prior literature on attributions and the self-serving bias, have been developed that explicate how outcomes for success and failure are attributed along each dimension. These attributions also act as input to attitudes towards trying again and as such, hypotheses have been developed to examine several combinations of dimensions that will have the most impact on attitudes.

Self-Esteem. Self-esteem is defined as in individual’s subjective appraisal of him or herself (Sedikides and Gregg 2003), which can be influenced by both goal achievement and goal failure (Crocker et al. 2003). As such, individuals in this study are expected to have lower levels of self-esteem post-failure rather than post-success at trying to change behaviors. Hypotheses were also developed and tested to capture the complexity of the interplay between self-esteem and attributions. Finally, an individual’s self-esteem is also hypothesized to have a direct effect on that individual’s attitudes towards trying to change in the future.

Hope. MacInnis and de Mello (2005) define hope as a positive emotion attached to a goal. There are three important dimensions to hope: goal congruency (i.e. the extent to which an environment is conducive to fulfilling a specific goal), certainty (i.e. the level of confidence an individual has in being able to achieve his or her goal), and importance of the goal. All three of these dimensions should be affected by the individual’s success or failure at trying to change behaviors, such that failure at trying to change behaviors should lower an individual’s level of hope. Hope is also hypothesized to affect the ways in which individuals understand and attribute the causes of their