Heirlooms As a Passage Mechanism For Achievement-Based Values

Daniel Grossman, University of Cincinnati, USA
Ryan Rahinel, University of Cincinnati, USA

Four studies demonstrate objects tied to memories of achievement (vs. enjoyment) are more likely to become heirlooms. Process evidence suggests that this happens because of an underlying motivation to establish accomplishments as a core family value in hopes it inspires future generations to strive for achievements in their own right.

[to cite]:

[url]:
http://www.acrwebsite.org/volumes/1024764/volumes/v45/NA-45

[copyright notice]:
This work is copyrighted by The Association for Consumer Research. For permission to copy or use this work in whole or in part, please contact the Copyright Clearance Center at http://www.copyright.com/.
Heirlooms as a Passage Mechanism for Achievement-Based Values
Daniel Grossman, University of Cincinnati, USA
Ryan Rahinel, University of Cincinnati, USA

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Drawing from the literature, we define heirlooms as objects that have been successively bequeathed within families from an older generation to a younger generation (Curasi, Price, & Arnould, 2004; Bradford, 2009). Heirlooms are often created out of objects that are associated with positive memories in the original owner’s life (Price, Arnould & Curasi, 2000; Bradford, 2009). This research asks whether specific subtypes of positive associations are stronger catalysts for heirloom creation than others.

We find objects tied to memories of achievement (vs. enjoyment) are more likely to be chosen to become heirlooms. Process evidence suggests that this happens because of an underlying motivation to establish accomplishments as a core family value in hopes that it inspires future generations to aspire for achievements in their own right. In this regard, such heirlooms appear to be less about creators ensuring their legacies are never forgotten, but more about creators leveraging their achievements to motivate the creation of a larger, collective legacy by their broader families.

Study 1 is a single-celled within-subject design that sought to use stories of actual heirlooms to ascertain the original associations of such objects. We surveyed participants by having them list real heirlooms within their own families and posed several questions about them tapping into the heirloom’s memory associations. A paired t-test revealed that heirloom stories were more strongly associated with themes of achievement (M = 6.22, SD = .93), than themes of enjoyment (M = 5.37, SD = 1.72; t(49) = 1.67, p = .001). Providing further evidence of this effect, participants believed that the original owner of the heirloom associated the item more with an accomplishment he/she was proud of (M = 5.34, SD = 1.49) than an event s/he found fun or enjoyable (M = 4.70, SD = 1.75; t(49) = 2.23, p = .030). This pattern of results provides preliminary evidence that heirlooms are more associated with accomplishments and achievements than events or memories that are enjoyable or fun.

The purpose of study 2 was to test the effect from a creator’s (rather than receiver’s) point of view. This experiment is a between-subject a 2 (object association: achievement vs. enjoyment) x 2 (gift purpose: heirloom vs. donation) design, in that participants were either asked to read a short passage about a pair of sunglasses that they associated with an achievement-based memory (running a marathon) vs an enjoyment-based memory (an unforgettable cruise), and then participants were asked to imagine that they were looking for an item to pass down to a child as a family heirloom vs looking for item to give their best friend as a going-away gift before he/she moves away. A 2 X 2 ANOVA on how suitable the sunglasses would be for the gift purpose yielded a significant interaction between object association and gift purpose (F(1, 136) = 4.38, p = .038), which we decomposed with planned contrasts. Confirming our main prediction, participants were more likely to consider using the sunglasses as an heirloom when they were associated with achievement (M = 3.76) than enjoyment (M = 2.65; t(67) = -2.46, p = .016). This pattern did not hold when considering the sunglasses for a donation to a charity auction (M = 2.05; t(65) = -60, p = .552). This pattern of results confirms our core prediction, as participants were more likely to consider making a given object an heirloom when the object was associated with a momentous achievement as compared to an enjoyable event. Notably, this occurred despite the events and object being equally positive and important to the original possessor.

In the study 3 we build on these findings by considering the underlying motivational process for this effect. We repeat the procedure of study 2 (using a new control condition) and then add five groups of mediator items representing five different potential mediators that previous qualitative work suggests could be driving our effect.

-Mediator items Group 1: The Expressing Love Hypothesis. Represents that giving away these sunglasses in this situation would express their love to the recipient.

-Mediator items Group 2: The Safe Home Hypothesis. Represents that giving away these sunglasses in this situation would insure a safe home for the special object.

-Mediator items Group 3: The Personal Legacy Hypothesis. Represents that giving away these sunglasses in this situation would enhance the owner’s personal legacy and help them achieve symbolic immortality.

-Mediator items Group 4: The Familial Values Hypothesis. Represents that giving these sunglasses in this situation would influence the recipient to achieve more in his/her own right.

-Mediator items Group 5: The Encourage to Achieve Hypothesis. Represents that giving these sunglasses in this situation would help facilitate their familial values to the recipient.

We successfully replicate our effects from study 2. Using Hayes’s PROCESS macro we find serial mediation of our effect in the heirloom condition with mediator items Group 4 and Group 5 (LLCI = .7463, ULCI = 1.8965), and find that mediator items Groups 1, 2, and 3 do not mediate our effect. This provides evidence that consumers find objects associated memories of achievement (vs enjoyment) as more suitable heirlooms not because they always want to be remembered and want to live on symbolically for generations (personal legacy / symbolic immortality), not because they want to find a safe home for the item (insure good for the special object), not simply to express their love to the recipient… But rather because they want the recipient to know their own family’s legacy of successes in hopes that it will influence the recipient to strive to achieve more in his/her own right.

These findings illustrates that objects associated with memories of achievement are more likely to be chosen as a family heirloom than objects associated with enjoyment and identify which processes suggested by the literature are responsible the effect. Such findings have implications for both firms wishing to extend the life of the objects they produce and heirloom recipients now able to connect with the underlying motives of the original possessing ancestors.

REFERENCES