An Integrative Review of Material Possession Attachment

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Material possession attachment reflects a vital and ubiquitous way people valuate goods. A significant body of literature provides a foundation for describing what material possession attachment is. Yet there remains more to investigate about how possession attachment involves acquisition, consumption, and disposition behaviors, how it compares to place, brand, or consumption experience bonds, whether marketing activities influence possession attachment, and how having attachments affects consumer well-being. An integrative review of the attachment literature is needed to provide interested scholars a baseline from which to deepen and broaden our understanding of how people valuate goods.

Definition and Boundaries of Material Possession Attachment
Material possession attachment is a multi-faceted property of the relationship between a specific individual or group of individuals and a specific, material object that an individual has psychologically appropriated, decommodified, and singularized through person-object interaction. Nine characteristics portray attachment: (1) attachment forms with specific material objects, not product categories or brands; (2) attachment possessions must be psychologically appropriated; (3) attachments are self-extensions; (4) attachments are decommodified and singularized; (5) attachment requires a personal history between person and possession; (6) attachment has the property of strength; (7) attachment is multi-faceted; (8) attachment is emotionally complex; and (9) attachments evolve over time as the meaning of the self changes. Attachment is conceptually distinct from: general trait materialism, product category involvement, and evaluative affect toward the possession.

The Value of Material Possession Attachments
The value of material possession attachment includes benefits and costs. Scholars have identified various non-mutually exclusive kinds of value falling into two basic categories: self-definitional and self-continuity/change meaning. Self-definitional attachments serve autobiographical, magical, contemplative, action, self-boundary regulation, and self-cultivation values. Self-continuity/self-change value is reflected in the self-maintenance and adaptive functions of attachments.
On the cost side, attachments bear opportunity costs in terms of investment of personal resources. Furthermore, they may unreasonably constrain one's options for self meaning making. How possession attachment correlates with personal or collective happiness and life satisfaction is wide open for empirical investigation.

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Possession Attachment Typologies and Method Issues

Numerous opportunities exist to enhance how we classify and study possession attachments. Factors limiting the comparability of existing typologies include: that the typologies may capture different domains (e.g., "favorite" versus "most meaningful" possessions); different typologies are not always based on the same perspective (i.e., investigator's versus respondent's); and unknown effects of different times and places of data collection. Measurement scales need additional empirical attention. Scholars should continue using a wide variety of familiar and new (to attachment research) methods to optimize our understanding of possession attachment.

Age, Life Stage, and Gender Differences in Possession Attachment

Research to date on age, life cycle, and gender differences has been mostly descriptive. Age studies tend to find that older people relate to their special possessions differently than younger people, reflecting stage-of-life and other developmental issues. Gender studies universally find the predictable differences that men versus women are more likely to own certain special possessions. The meanings of those possessions tend to differ predictably, as well--autonomy seeking for men and affiliation seeking for women. Describing individual differences in attachments is one way to suggest that possession attachments have adaptive and self-developmental value. However, advancing the current literature on benefits and costs of cherished possessions requires a deeper look. Scholars must seek to develop a fuller understanding of the role of possessions throughout the life cycle and in relation to various role identities characterizing the individual.

Comparing Possession Attachment to Place, Brand, and Experience Attachments

Research *explicitly* relating types of attachments would help to clarify boundaries of possession attachments, enhance understanding of the origins of possession attachment meaning and value, discourage inappropriate conflation of different types (e.g., brand versus material possession attachment), and encourage cross-fertilization across the related literatures. To encourage attachment scholars to broaden their scope, we compare definitions and characterizations of material possession attachment with those for place, brand, and consumption experience bonds.

Place Attachment - The literatures on place and possession attachment do not overlap significantly yet they reflect remarkable similar descriptions of the two kinds of attachment. Place attachment can be defined as the emotional bond formed by an individual to a physical site due to the meaning given to the site through interactional processes (Milligan 1998). Place attachment shares the following characteristics with possession attachment: place attachment forms with specific, psychologically, decommodified and singularized places; it is a kind of self-extension; its formation requires personal history between self and place; it has degree of strength (strong to weak), is multi-faceted (cognitive, emotive, and behavioral), emotionally complex, and dynamic. Place and possession attachment also each serve similar basic functions: identity-definition (autonomous selves and affiliated selves) and self-continuity/change (e.g., self-adaptation to new places). Place attachment influences well-being and healthy self-development in both children and adults whereas disruption of place attachments leads to the psychological and emotional costs of having them. Several studies demonstrate the inextricable connection between the two types of attachments. Scholars should consider using both literatures in their work on possession and place attachments.

Brand Relationships - Based on the literature to date, brand bonds and possession attachments should be regarded as related, but distinct phenomena. Brands (as perceptions) and tangible possessions differ in irreplaceability and potential for carrying indexical value. Brand relationships are characterized as analogous to interpersonal bonds, an analogy that has yet to be successfully applied to possessions of attachment. Although the literature shows each type of bond serves similar self-definitional purposes, it remains unclear how intangible brands apply to self-preservation or self-adaptation in the way that tangible possession attachments

do. Most research about brand relationships ultimately serves commercial purposes while possession attachment research is oriented toward understanding the effects of bonding with possessions on consumer well-being. Scholars should carefully pause to consider key differences between the two person-object bonds but also how attachment possession meaning may involve brand meanings. How brand relationships affect consumer well-being is another area in need of investigation.

Experience Attachment - An understanding of attachment to experience would add clarity to material possession attachment. Experiences are singularized through participation or observation and become irreplaceable. Experiences important for self-definition, self-expression, or self-transcendence invite experience preservation consumption (e.g., through material possessions), another topic in need of scholarly investigation. Experience attachment, such as to sky diving or white water rafting, represents a personal, psychological bond to situations (past, present, or future) that deliver desired symbolic benefits, and is both affective and cognitive in nature. It is emotionally complex and involves psychological appropriation, as well as self-definition, intra-personal, and interpersonal dimensions. The literature on optimal stimulation level (OSL), hedonic consumption, and flow provide important bases for developing an understanding of this construct, which is ripe for future research.

Summary - A few attachment investigations implicitly study more than one type of person-object bond. Yet studies *explicitly* acknowledging and seeking to understand relationships among different types of attachments are uncommon. These different types of self-extensions share much in common; they deliver self-descriptive, self-change/continuity, and self-transendence benefits. Yet these attachments differ in terms of tangibility, permanence, transferability, indexicality, and irreplaceability. Also, each type of attachment is most relevant at different stages of consumption. Likewise, each type bears different degrees of commercial interest and may have different implications for consumer satisfaction and well-being. More empirical investigations are needed to compare types of self-extensions to enhance our understanding of possession attachment. Careful scholarship will involve consideration of similarities and differences among attachments as well as potential interactions and linkages among them. Numerous opportunities exist for clarifying similarities, differences and connections among possession, place, brand, or experience bonds to enhance our understanding of all types of attachments.

Possession Attachment: Status of the Literature and Future Research

The literature on material possession attachment provides a general, descriptive portrayal of people's bonds with material possessions. Integrating the literature leads to a clear definition, a reasonable understanding of the boundaries of the concept, and a good sense of the self-descriptive and self-continuity/change benefits possession attachments provide. The literature also portrays descriptions of age, life stage, and gender differences in attachments. Remaining, however, are significant opportunities to deepen our understanding of the role of possessions in life stage development and role-identity development. Also, we know that possessions do not need to be expensive, rare, or exotic to become objects of attachment. The most mundane, ordinary possessions serve attachment functions well. Scholarship has yet to identify properties of ordinary possessions that encourage or discourage attachment.

The literature portrays numerous benefits of possession attachments, yet the costs of having them remains poorly understood and empirical investigations directed at analyzing the downsides of attachment are rare. Also under-investigated are shared possession attachments and group processes involved in attaching and detaching from material possessions. Deconstructing layers of possession, place, brand, or experience meanings affecting possession attachment and understanding the role of each attachment type in the consumption cycle offer additional opportunities for scholars. Longitudinal studies examining the dynamic nature of possession attachment are also sorely needed to deepen our theoretical understanding of attachment and its affects on well-being. Ultimately, overcoming artificial boundaries between attachment literatures, use of creative methodologies to investigate attachment, and moving beyond basic description to delve deeper into more

complex issues surrounding attachment are key to advancing scholarship about the value of material possessions.

Keywords: Possessions, Possession Attachment, Place Attachment, Brand Relationships, Consumer Well-Being, Consumption Experience, Materialism, Possession Meaning, Self-Concept, Symbolic Consumer Behavior.

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A challenge facing scholars of attachment is defining the concept and its boundaries. Few reports of "special," "important," "cherished," or "favorite" possessions offer conceptual definitions of the phenomenon under study. What is material possession attachment? What are its boundaries? Is material possession attachment part of a larger class of self-extensions that are essentially the same? Can we equate, for example, material possession attachment with place attachment or with person-brand relations? Assembling answers to such questions should assist scholars in advancing the literature on consumers' attachment to, and valuation of, material goods.

In this paper we integrate literature related to possession attachment to (1) offer a conceptual definition of material possession attachment; (2) specify its boundaries; (3) discuss the value (benefits and costs) of having possession attachments; (4) summarize age, gender, and life stage differences in material possession attachments; (5) discuss methodological issues related to studying possession attachment; and (6) relate possession attachment to place attachment, person-brand relations, and experience attachment. As these sections unfold, questions for future research will be posed, reflecting our primary purpose to create a resource for scholars pursuing questions about attachment and consumers' valuation of goods and services.

BOUNDARIES OF MATERIAL POSSESSION ATTACHMENT

Most reports of scholarly investigations of special, favorite, important, or cherished material possessions provide only operational definitions of the phenomenon under study. To advance the study of material possession attachment, we offer a conceptual definition of attachment and its boundaries that we believe effectively reflects the relevant literature to date.

What Attachment Is

Material possession attachment is a multi-faceted property of the relationship between an individual or group of individuals and a specific material object that has been psychologically appropriated, decommodified, and singularized through person-object interaction. Nine characteristics further characterize material possession attachment and help distinguish it from related concepts.

Specific material object - Material possession attachment forms with specific material possessions, not with product classes or brands. The material objects are acquired through exchange, received as gifts, self-produced, or found. Most often attachment possessions are ordinary objects that have special meaning formed through experiences involving the object.

Individuals and their personal possessions have received the most scholarly attention although pairs or groups of people (e.g., families or subcultural members) become attached to particular shared possessions (Belk 1988; 1992a; 1992b; Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton 1981; Olson 1985).

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Psychologically Appropriated Material Object - Attachment does not require legal or physical possession (Belk 1992a; Furby 1978), only psychological appropriation; that is, a sense the object is "mine[1]". Through consumption people extract cultural meaning from, give meaning to, and claim goods as theirs (McCracken 1988). Examples of psychological appropriation include students taking possession of "their" chair in a classroom for the term; lost, stolen, or destroyed valued possessions still perceived by the owner to be "mine"; jointly held possessions perceived to be "ours" (Olson 1985); or singular culturally shared possessions, such as the Statue of Liberty (Belk 1987). Psychological appropriation is necessary but not sufficient for material possession attachment to form.

A Type of Self-Extension - Belk (1988) portrays how we extend ourselves into things such as people, places, experiences, ideas, beliefs (see also Abelson 1986), and material possession objects. Conceptually, self-extension encompasses objects perceived to be "mine," including but not limited to possession attachments. Only one study reports investigating the empirical relationship between self-extension and material possession attachment (Sivadas and Venkatesh 1995). Study results were inconclusive, calling for more empirical work investigating the attachment/self-extension relationship. We believe the literature portrays material possession attachment as a type of self-extension among other types (e.g., brand bonds, place attachments).

Decommodified, Singular Possessions - We construct meanings for material objects in ways similar to how we construct meanings for people; over time we get to know them as individuals (Kopytoff 1986). Self-extension processes decommodify, singularize, and personalize particular material objects symbolizing autobiographical meanings (Belk 1988). Perceived singularity often is associated with an unwillingness to sell the possession for market value (Belk 1991a). A singular, irreplaceable possession becomes nonsubsitutable. It "is one that a consumer resists replacing, even with an exact replica, because the consumer feels that the replica cannot sustain the same meaning as the original" (Grayson and Shulman 2000, p. 17). A young child's baby blanket is one well-known example (Winnicott 1953) of no subsitutability; Grayson and Shulman (2000) discuss adult examples. An unanswered empirical question is whether possessions must be irreplaceable to become attachments.

In *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance* Pirsig (1974) wonderfully illustrates possession personalization and decommodification:

> But over the miles, and I think most cyclists will agree with this, you pick up certain feelings about an individual machine that are unique for that one individual machine and no other. A friend who owns a cycle of the same make, model and even same year brought it over for repair, and when I test rode it afterward it was hard to believe it had come from the same factory years ago. You could see that long ago it had settled into its own kind of feel and ride and sound, completely different from mine. Not worse, but different.

[1] An object regarded as "mine" does not mean the object effectively symbolizes "me". Although psychologically appropriated, the object is not necessarily a symbol of "who I am," "who I was," or "who I want to be." Individuals psychologically appropriate and extend themselves into things besides material possessions; e.g., places, brands, experiences, ideas. Although psychological appropriation is necessary, it is not sufficient for material possession attachment. That is, just because something is "mine" does not mean that it is "me."

> I suppose you could call that a personality. Each machine has its own, unique personality which probably could be defined as the intuitive sum total of everything you know and feel about it. This personality constantly changes, usually for the worse, but sometimes surprisingly for the better, and it is this personality that is the real object of motorcycle maintenance. (p. 44)

Personal History Between Person and Material Possession –Pirsig's description also illustrates why possessions do not become decommodified and singularized without personal history between self and object. Over time, particular goods become irreplaceable via possession rituals (e.g., using, displaying, cleaning, storing, discussing, comparing) that extract meaning from, and give meaning to, the goods (McCracken 1988). A toddler becomes attached to a special object (e.g., baby blanket, stuffed animal) over many, many repeated uses. Adult possessions may become "contaminated" through constant or habitual use and dependency (e.g., one's "faithful" wristwatch or constantly worn piece of jewelry) endowing it with personal meaning connecting self and object (Belk 1988; Watson 1992).

The requirement of a personal history between person and possession is one of the strongest themes in the special possession literature. (We will also find the same theme in the place attachment literature, to be discussed below). However, the intriguing possibility of something we might call anticipatory self-extension is suggested by Ball and Tasaki's (1992) results. In their study of material possession attachment, teen and young adult respondents expressed self-identification with strongly desired (but not yet acquired) goods. The sentiment respondents expressed seemed to be that "*if* I had it, it *would* be me" and was tied to a particular age group or life stage. This interesting result pattern deserves further attention. It relates to consumer desire (Belk, Ger, and Askegaard 2003), age and life stage consumption differences, and the possibility that marketers may have some pre-purchase influence on what goods or brands become self-extensions.

Attachment Has Strength - Although we use language such as "who I am" and "who I am not," or what is "me" and "not me," to discuss attachments, attachment is really a matter of degree. Attachment to a possession can be relatively strong or weak. Generally, strong attachment possessions include those regarded as "most difficult to part with and most cherished," "attached to," or "irreplaceable." Strong attachments are more central to the proximal self (Belk 1988) whereas weak attachments do not reflect the self as much or at all (Kleine, Kleine, and Allen 1995). The strength of attachment may be indicated by behavioral tendencies such as unwillingness to sell possessions for market value or to discard objects after their functional use is gone (Belk 1991b).

Attachment is Multi-Faceted - Attachment is a multi-faceted, relatively complex concept. Belk (1988) portrays the extended self (including attachments) as being comprised of different layers from the private inner self-core to the outermost collective layer. Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton (1981) assert that special possession objects (including possession attachments) vary in their symbolic purposes and identify various motivations for attachments, suggesting multi-faceted person-possession ties. Working with social psychologists' distinction between the public (interpersonal) and private (intra-personal) sides of the self (Greenwald and Breckler 1985), Ball and Tasaki (1992) assert that possessions most useful for cognitively rehearsing elements of either self aspect will be attachments. Kleine, Kleine, and Allen (1995) and Schultz, Kleine, and Kernan (1989) define attachment to have facets of affiliation, autonomy, and past, present, and future temporal orientations. Each self is associated with different kinds of possession attachments that reflect particular self-developmental tasks. The portrayal of attachment as multi-faceted is another strong theme in the literature.

In contrast to multi-faceted conceptualizations, attachment measurement scales proposed to date represent the construct as a unidimensional construct. Ball and Tasaki's (1992) nine-item Likert scale to measure attachment

captures the public and private self-cognitions leading to attachments (see Table 1 for scale items). Ball and Tasaki demonstrate support for a separate, unidimensional measure of "emotional significance" capturing the degree of emotional attachment a possession holds. Sivadas and Venkatesh (1995; see Table 1 for scale items) provide confirmatory factor analysis support for the unidimensionality of their "possession attachment" and "self-extension" measures. However, results failed to support discrimination between the two scales, requiring further investigation into their validity.

TABLE 1
Measures of Possession Attachment, Emotional Significance of Possessions, and Self-Extension

Possession Attachment Scale (Ball and Tasaki 1992)
If someone ridiculed my ___, I would feel irritated.
My ___ reminds me of who I am.
If I were describing myself, my ___ would likely be something I would mention.
If someone destroyed my ___, I would feel a little bit personally attacked.
If I lost my ___, I would feel like I had lost a little bit of myself.
I don't really have too many feelings about my ___ (reversed scored).
If someone praised my ___, I would feel somewhat praised myself.
Probably, people who know me might sometimes think of my ___ when they think of me.
If I didn't have my ___, I would feel a little bit less like myself.

Possession Attachment (Sivadas and Venkatesh 1995)
I have no feelings for my ____.
I am emotionally attached to my ___.
I am sentimental about my ___.
My ___ reminds me of memories and experiences.

Incorporation Into the Extended Self (Sivadas and Venakatesh 1995)
My ___ helps me achieve the identity I want to have.
My ___ helps me narrow the gap between what I am and what I try to be.
My ___ is central to my identity.
My ___ is part of who I am.
If my ___ is stolen from me I will feel as if my identity has been snatched from me.

Emotional Significance Scale (Ball and Tasaki 1992)
My ___ reminds me of important people in my life.
My ___ reminds me of important things I've done or places I've been.
If I lost my ___, another one like it wouldn't be as meaningful.

The contrast between multi-faceted conceptualizations and unidimensional measurement scales probably reflects the challenge of capturing a rich concept such as attachment in measurement scale format. (Most studies of special possessions do not use measurement scale techniques.) Confidence in a unidimensional conceptualization of attachment requires additional validation, presenting opportunities for interested scholars. Based on the literature, we conclude attachment should continue to be regarded as a multi-faceted construct.

Attachment is Emotionally Complex - Attachment possessions, laden with personal, deeply emotional meanings are "extraordinary, mysterious, and emotion evoking rather than merely functional" (Belk 1992a, p. 45). Attachment is emotional in experience quality, recorded in a cognitive-emotive understanding of the possession's symbolic, autobiographical, personalized meaning formed via a history between self and object. The emotional quality of various possession attachment types is another area ripe for scholarly investigation.

Attachment is Dynamic - The meaning associated with a possession and the intensity of attachment to it does not remain static but evolves as the person's self evolves and the autobiographical function of the object changes (Myers 1985). Myers (1985, p. 6) observed in her study of adults' retrospection of childhood attachments that "emotionally significant possessions are a sign of and participant in a person's growth and change" (Myers 1985, p. 6). Kamptner's (1989; 1991) seminal studies of life stage meanings of possessions shows systematic shifts in self accompany changes in attachment meanings.

Attachment being dynamic does not preclude particular possessions, such as heirlooms, from assuming relatively static meaning. Heirlooms, for example, symbolize deep meanings of family and self-continuity that are passed from one generation to the next (Curasi 1999; McCracken 1988; Price, Arnould, and Curasi 2000). An unusual case of heirloom meaning is McCracken's (1988) informant "Lois Roget," the self-appointed keeper of a home filled with generations' worth of family possessions. This "curatorial consumption" pattern "gives her important comforts, continuities, and securities that are generally now absent from the modern world. But it also works to constrain and coerce her existence in ways that most of us would find intolerable" (p. 44). McCracken suggests that in contrast to Mrs. Roget's situation, modern conditions usually lead people to mold and shape the meanings of household possessions to fit our identities.

Attachment itself, and the meanings of attachment possessions, tend to be dynamic in order to manage the relentless conflict between desiring self-continuity and needing self-change (Kleine, Kleine, and Allen 1995). Considering this dynamic process from the point of view of the object itself, Kopytoff (1986) portrays how things have biographies, just as people do. A branded good at its inception is a commodity that has a socio-cultural meaning captured by its brand name (McCracken 1988). During its life cycle, a possession may be exchanged (sold, given), consumed, or decommodified, or recommodified repeatedly. Appadurai (1986) characterizes a possession's biography as a "total trajectory" from production through exchange and distribution to consumption and beyond. He says these "commodities in motion" "...move in and out of commodity state" and "...such movements can be slow or fast, reversible or terminal, normative or deviant." (p. 13). Thus, commodity is a phase in an object's life cycle which implies that being an attachment is another phase. How attachment meanings change constantly is a fascinating area for scholarly investigation.

What Attachment Is Not

Scholars assert that attachment is conceptually distinct from materialism (Wallendorf and Arnould 1988), product involvement (Ball and Tasaki 1992; Schultz, Kleine, and Kernan 1989), attitude or affect toward the object (Schultz, Kleine, and Kernan 1989), and self-extension (Sivadas and Venkatesh 1995). Empirical demonstration of the relationship between attachment and related constructs has been limited.

General Trait Materialism - Trait materialism is a tendency to invest one's self in material goods (Belk 1985), while possession attachment reflects the relationship between a specific person and a specific object. Both Wallendorf and Arnould (1988) and Ball and Tasaki (1992) found empirical evidence that possession attachment was discriminant from materialism.

Product Category Involvement - People experience attachments to possessions in relation to particular possession objects, not product categories or brands. For example, becoming attached to a specific car or photograph collection does not require enduring involvement (Bloch 1983) with the respective product categories (Ball and Tasaki 1992). Likewise, attachment to a specific instance of a good does not generalize to the product category or brand. However, empirical demonstrations of the relationship between product category

involvement, enduring involvement, and attachment would enhance understanding of the boundaries of each construct.

Evaluative Affect - Attachment is not the same as attitude or evaluative affect (Kleine, Kleine, and Allen 1995; Schultz, Kleine, and Kernan 1989). Emotionally charged attachments often elicit mixed feelings such as warmth, happiness, and sadness. Schultz, Kleine, and Kernan (1989) found that possessions of stronger attachment tended to be associated with a different set of emotions than were possessions of least attachment. Moreover, emotions associated with stronger attachments were not always positive nor were negative feelings always associated with weak attachments. The literature suggests that reducing attachment to liking of the object trivializes its self-identification significance and ignores examples of disliked objects of attachment.

Special Possessions - Studies about "special possessions" or "possession meaning" probably include, but encompass something broader than, the domain of possession attachment (e.g., Belk 1992b; Mehta and Belk 1991; Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton 1981; Dittmar 1992; Furby 1991; Sayre 1994). Special possessions are not necessarily self-reflective or in service of self-developmental purposes. Sometimes special possessions are simply functional (Richins 1994).

Kamptner (1989) observed different possessions were elicited by varying prompts such as asking for "most favorite possessions," "most cherished possessions," "most important possessions," "possessions I would take in a fire," and so forth. Grayson and Shulman (2000) showed that cherished possessions are not necessarily irreplaceable and vice versa. Further investigation is needed about how different prompts elicit different possessions that reflect attachment, irreplaceability, self-extension, and so forth.

Summary: Definition and Boundaries of Material Possession Attachment

Material possession attachment is a multi-faceted property of the relationship between a specific individual or group of individuals and a specific, material object that an individual has psychologically appropriated, decommodified, and singularized through person-object interaction. Nine characteristics portray attachment: (1) attachment forms with specific material objects, not product categories or brands; (2) attachment possessions must be psychologically appropriated; (3) attachments are self-extensions; (4) attachments are decommodified and singularized; (5) attachment requires a personal history between person and possession; (6) attachment has the property of strength; (7) attachment is multi-faceted; (8) attachment is emotionally complex; and (9) attachments evolve over time as the meaning of the self changes. Attachment is conceptually distinct from: general trait materialism, product category involvement, and evaluative affect toward the possession. Needing empirical attention is establishing differences among possessions elicited by prompts such as “special,” “favorite,” “cherished,” or “most important.”

VALUE OF MATERIAL POSSESSION ATTACHMENT

In this section we review the literature about the value of material possession attachment. The benefits and costs of attachment flow from goods’ singular capacity to carry and store meanings (McCracken 1988). Goods have the property of *indexicality*, as they provide tangible, palpable proof of life events (Grayson and Shulman 2000). "Retaining a possession that is incontrovertibly and physically linked to a memorable past event helps to verify for (a person) that the event has occurred" (Grayson and Shulman 2000, p. 8). Belk (1991a) describes goods as “magical vessels” of meaning connecting us to deeper, less understood, and unarticulated aspects of life (e.g., religion, magic, science). Flowing from this unique meaning-carrying capacity are the various benefits

and costs of possession attachments scholars have identified. To efficiently portray these overlapping benefits of attachments, we organize them into two meta-themes: self-definitional value and self-continuity/change value.

Self-Definitional Value

Having a tangible referent "out there" helps a person grasp "me" and provides opportunities for schema rehearsal about "who I am", "who I was", or "who I am becoming" (Ball and Tasaki 1992). Although scholars explain self-definitional value in different ways, each explanation reflects either the autonomy or affiliation seeking motives driving self-development (Kleine, Kleine, and Allen 1995).

Autobiographical Value - Viewed as an autobiography, a person's self concept is a narrative construction told and retold based on selected life events (McAdams 1993; Singer and Salovey 1993). Special possessions, such as clothing, are among the cues that evoke autobiographical memory rehearsal (Kleine 2000). Autobiographical rehearsal is self-comforting and presents opportunities for self-encouragement or confrontation and resolution of life issues, as numerous examples in literature and poetry portray (Singer and Salovey 1993). According to McAdams (1993), underpinning autobiographical narratives are the paradoxical themes of autonomy versus affiliation seeking and self-continuity versus self-change management. These same themes are found in personal accounts of possession meaning and describe self-developmental purposes of different kinds of attachments (Kleine, Kleine, and Allen 1995; Kleine 2000; Schultz, Kleine, and Kernan 1989).

Story-telling Value - Possession attachments not only mark life events, but also mark time and help tell personal stories of search, self-discovery, growth, and achievement. In fact, though most discussions of material possession attachment focus on particular objects, individuals may also be attached to *sets* of objects that reflect role identities (product constellations; Solomon 1988; Solomon and Assael 1987; Solomon and Buchanan 1991; Solomon and Douglas 1987) or reflect ritualistic behavior (e.g., collections; Belk 1995). Examples include collections of photographs, souvenirs, trophies and other items telling the story of autobiographical events. For self-perceived collectors of particular material objects (e.g., stamps, Coca-Cola memorabilia, Depression glass), attachment has an added layer. While the collector feels attached to the pieces in the collection (though not necessarily *every* piece), the whole collection represents something distinct from its parts (Belk 1995; Belk, Wallendorf, Sherry, and Holbrook 1991). Not just the individual pieces, but the entire collection tells the story of the experiences through which the collection was assembled (Belk, Wallendorf, Sherry, and Holbrook 1991). Further study on attachments to collections, constellations of possessions, and the interrelationships among related possessions would enhance understanding of possession attachment and its story telling value.

Contemplation Value: Who am I? - Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton (1981) categorize special possessions into *action objects* and *contemplation objects*. Contemplation value refers to using objects "for achievement of selfhood based on conscious reflection" (Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton 1981; p. 96). The authors suggest that older people find contemplation more valuable than younger people do. They suggest that qualities of particular types of objects (e.g., photographs and stereos suited to mood manipulation) lend themselves to contemplative use. Tourists (including children) often purchase souvenirs for their anticipated contemplation value (Baker, Kleine, and Bowen, 2004).

Action value: What I can do - The *action value* of special possessions involves "the development of self-control through unique acts" (Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton 1981; p. 96). Action value involves the possession's potential for enabling a sense of personal competence and control (Furby 1991). Children and

youth especially value objects (e.g., musical instruments, pets, sports equipment, stuffed animals) requiring physical manipulation to release their meaning (Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton 1981; Myers 1985).

Self-Boundary Regulation - Material possessions considered "me" or "not me" designate self-boundaries, both corporal and temporal (Belk 1988; Dittmar 1989; 1992; McCracken 1988). Possessions extend self-boundaries back into the past (Belk 1991a; Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton 1981) or forward into the future (Gentry, Baker, and Kraft 1995; Joy and Dholakia 1991; Kamptner 1989; Price, Arnould, and Curasi 2000).

Sometimes consumers consciously *avoid* particular possessions to define "not me" boundaries. Freitas, Kaiser, Chandler, Hall, Kim, and Hammidi (1997) found young adults consciously rejected particular clothing items defining "definitely not me." Similarly, consumers define "not me" by rejecting "anti-constellations" to avoid being associated with the corresponding stereotype (Hogg and Mitchell 1997). Interested scholars have many opportunities to study the boundary regulation purposes of possessions.

Self-Cultivation and Self-Development - Emotionally significant possessions reflect and influence a person's growth and development (Bih 1992; Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton 1981; Kamptner 1989; 1991; Myers 1985). Myers (1985) found the specific attachment possessions cited by study participants to vary widely, yet the *reasons* for attachment were very similar at each life cycle stage.

Voluntary or involuntary disruption of attachments evidences their self-cultivation value (Milligan 1998). Victims of a California firestorm felt loss of their pasts, neighborhoods, routines, hobbies, and workplaces—things defining who they were. These losses led victims to renegotiate meanings of possessions surviving the disaster, and to reconsider and rebuild their identities (Sayre 1994). For earthquake victims in Japan and the United States, unexpected disruption of the possession component of their extended selves led to feelings of self loss (Ikeuchi, Fujihara, and Dohi 1999). The fact that possession loss leads to self-disruption suggests the importance of possessions for autobiographical and emotional purposes.

Attachment possessions are not just memorabilia that permit nostalgic reflection, "emotionally significant possessions appear to reflect and influence the individual's growth, in a dynamic process" (Myers 1985 p. 4). Reciprocity exists between self and possession in this dynamic self-cultivation process (Bih 1992).

Affiliation Value - Many of our deepest attachments to possessions flow from past or present relationships the possessions represent. Possession attachments often designate "who I am connected with" or "how we are connected", an understanding of one's self as necessary to self-development as defining the autonomous me (Kleine, Kleine, and Allen 1995). Possession attachments symbolize affiliation value in a variety of ways. For example, gift receipt more often is associated with strong attachments than weak attachments. Attachment forms because the gift stands for an important or valued relationship, even when the recipient dislikes the gift (Kleine, Kleine, and Allen 1995). Heirlooms that become attachments reflect familial associations defining who a person is (Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton 1981; McCracken 1988; Price, Arnould, and Curasi 2000). Frequently, items such as photographs, jewelry, and other possessions appear on cherished possession lists representing relationships with others.

Attachment and special possession studies traditionally focus on individuals. However, a growing body of work has explored the affiliation value of *shared* attachments (e.g., McCracken 1989). Olson (1985) explored how material artifacts in the home influences dyadic communication between co-habitating relationship partners. Artifacts of young married couples reflected future-orientations and shared values, while those of older married

couples reflected past-orientations and substituted for verbal communication. Possessions of unmarried couples were individual artifacts reflecting present-orientations and independence within the relationship.

Belk's (1992b) study of the possessions of Mormon families who migrated to the western U.S. also reflects families' shared meanings of possessions. The diary accounts Belk examined revealed a search for, and reinforcement of, communal meanings via particular possessions. A sense of caring for one another during a potentially life-threatening transition characterized their meanings. Possessions were also used to negotiate balance between group isolation and worldliness on a collective level.

Mehta and Belk's (1991) exploration of possessions of Indian immigrants to the U.S. versus Indians residing in India also addresses the issue of group identity and its assembly/reassembly and enhancement via possessions. Indian immigrants preserved collective identities through consumption rituals such as celebration of Indian holidays, eating Indian foods, or wearing Indian clothing. Possession artifacts used in the rituals were particularly potent for maintaining appearances and self-perceptions of being Indian.

Bih (1992) and Joy and Dholakia (1991) also explored how objects were used for adapting to a new culture. The Chinese students Bih (1992) interviewed used objects to connect with their home culture strongly values family ties. Similarly, the Indian professionals Joy and Dholakia (1991) interviewed used possessions to situate themselves in relationship networks. Possessions used for cultural adaptation may become attachments reflecting affiliative value.

Self Continuity/Self-Change Value

Using possession meanings to negotiate the dialectic tension between self-continuity and self-change is the second meta-theme in the literature. On one hand, attachment possessions bring past meanings into the present and maintain present meanings. Possessions also help us project ourselves into the future, even beyond death (McCracken 1988; Price, Arnould, and Curasi 2000). We also cling to goods that capture unrealized ideal selves by using the goods for leverage toward imagined future conditions (McCracken 1988).

Adaptive Value - Possession attachments help people cope with and adjust to change. The sacred meaning of special possessions flows from their role in various kinds of personal journeys (Belk 1997). Well-known is the adaptive role of a young child's baby blanket or other comfort items (Winnicott 1953; see also Gulerce 1991 for a contrasting view). However, adults also keep or dispose of attachment possessions to aid life transitions, such as divorcing (McAlexander 1991), losing a loved one (Gentry, Kennedy, Paul, and Hill 1995), or anticipating one's death (Gentry, Baker, and Kraft 1995; Pavia 1993; Price, Arnould, and Curasi 2000).

Possessions are potent facilitators of late-life adaptation (Kamptner 1989; Rubenstein 1987; 1989; Sherman and Newman 1977-78). Attachment possessions serve as "lighting rods for memories" and "restate to oneself the core aspects of one's identity and life accomplishments..." (Rubenstein and Parmalee 1992; p. 154). Similarly, in a depth study of elderly people, Kamptner (1989) found that

> Personal possessions appear to play a salient and meaningful role in many of the developmental tasks and challenges that old age may bring. One's belongings may enhance mastery and control in the face of losses; they may act as mood modulators; they may assist individuals in maintaining and preserving their identities in the face of events that erode their sense of self; they may trigger and enhance the life review process; and they may represent ties or bonds with others at a time of life when social losses tend to be greater (p. 182).

Several studies reflect the adaptive value of possessions. In a study of elderly nursing home residents, Sherman and Newman (1977-78) found a significant, positive relationship between residents' life satisfaction scores and having cherished possessions. Respondents most often listed photographs, religious items, symbolic jewelry, and consumer items as cherished possessions. Wapner, Demick, and Redondo (1990) found that cherished possessions provided historical continuity, comfort, and a sense of belongingness for a sample of nursing home residents. More well-adapted residents tended to have cherished possessions. Adaptation was indicated by measures of individual control, stress, response to conflicts, use of phone calls and letters, visitation to friends and relatives, and support of residents and staff. The most common cherished possessions in Wapner, Demick, and Redondo's (1990) study included musical instruments, silverware, tools, or cameras because of their action potential. In contrast, Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton's (1981) living-at-home older respondents tended to cherish possessions for their contemplation value. Do nursing home residents relate differently to cherished possessions compared to elderly people living in private homes?

Possessions not only help elderly people adapt to new living environments, they also influence others' perceptions of those elderly. Millard and Smith (1981) measured medical school students' perceptions of photographs showing elderly hospital patients either surrounded by possessions or devoid of possessions. Results suggested that elderly patients surrounded by personal belongings, get well cards, photographs, and so forth, were perceived more positively and evaluated as feeling better, more effective, less dependent, and more socially capable. The authors suggest that hospital staff may regard and treat elderly patients better if they were permitted to display personal possessions.

Self-Preservation - Elderly adults preserve themselves by passing along possessions to younger family members. Divestment rituals transfer possessions and their meanings from one generation to the next (Curasi 1999; McCracken 1988; Price, Arnould, and Curasi 2000). Scholars also have examined how non-elderly people facing death relate to their possessions. For example, Pavia's (1993) study of HIV-infected informants showed that as the illness progressed, loss of possessions was secondary to losses of jobs, homes, health, and relationships. Echoing Furby's (1978) belief that bonding with possessions stems from the perceived control we have over them, Pavia found the worst part of possession loss was the decreasing ability to have or keep possessions, and consequent inability to maintain one's former self relationships (see also Stevenson and Kates 1999).

Gentry, Baker, and Kraft (1995) describe how people at different life stages have different types of attachments, particularly when faced with death. Younger people facing death want possessions "now" due to feeling there is no tomorrow; whereas, dying adults do not want possessions because the possessions represent the ability to be productive which is no longer meaningful.

The Costs of Attachments

Kamptner believes that "an individual's belongings are an important and perhaps necessary part of the self (at least in Western cultures)…" (1989, p. 192). The importance of meaningful possessions may lie in a unique ability to carry meaning verbal language does not (McCracken 1988). McCracken (1988) concludes although some consumers engaging in "consumption pathologies" (e.g., defining one's self in terms of material things only), normally "the individual uses goods in an unproblematic manner to constitute crucial parts of the self and world" (p. 88).

On the other hand, there are economic and psychic costs associated with having and using material possession

attachments. Attachment represents commitment of one's resources and self that could be invested in other things (Belk 1988; 1992a; Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton 1981). Relying heavily upon material goods for self-construction may restrict the range of meanings from which the self can be built. Self-cultivation becomes limited to the domain of the marketplace, "removing the 'infinitely rich lived world' from experience and replacing it with a poverty of meanings within prevailing material factivity dictated by the opaque contingencies of the market." (Kilbourne 1991, p. 454). That is, a person's pool of experiences is reduced by the objects into which one extends one's self. Kilbourne views this as limiting the developmental potential of individuals.

Perhaps the ultimate issue is how investing one's self in material attachments affects well-being, life satisfaction, and happiness (Belk 1992a). What are the opportunity costs of investing one's self into material attachments? How do possession attachments encourage or constrain attainment of self-potential, family and cultural preservation, and so forth? Do particular kinds of attachments (e.g., adaptive) serve more useful purposes than other kinds (e.g., clinging to the past)? Are material attachments substitutes for something else more desirable, or are they singular (and necessary) in their effects on self-development and life satisfaction? Is it better to have more or fewer possessions of attachment? What cross-cultural differences relating to degree of economic development or cultural values exist?

Summary: The Value of Material Possession Attachments

The value of material possession attachment includes benefits and costs. Scholars have identified various non-mutually exclusive kinds of value falling into two basic categories: self-definitional and self-continuity/change. Self-definitional attachments serve autobiographical, magical, contemplative, action, self-boundary regulation, and self-cultivation values. Self-continuity/self-change value is reflected in the temporal continuity and adaptive functions of attachments.

On the cost side, attachments bear opportunity costs in terms of investment of personal resources. Furthermore, they may unreasonably constrain one's options for self meaning making. How possession attachment correlates with personal or collective happiness and life satisfaction is wide open for empirical investigation.

POSSESSION ATTACHMENT: TYPOLOGIES AND METHOD ISSUES

Scholars have developed several typologies of special possession categories or meaning content. Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton (1981) identified 41 categories of objects (e.g., furniture, musical instruments, candlesticks) and classified these into two groups: action objects and contemplation objects. Kampter (1989) and Wapner, Remick, and Redondo (1990) employed Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton's (1981) typology. For other examples of special possession typologies, refer to Furby (1978), Sherman and Newman (1977-78), or Dittmar (1992).

Integrating special possession typologies presents three challenges. One, different prompts used across studies to elicit respondents' special possessions probably capture different domains of possessions. Prompts asking for "special," "most favorite," "most cherished," "irreplaceable," "most important," or "most likely to rescue in a fire" elicit different possessions from the same respondents (Kampter 1989). Two, study conclusions depend upon whether possession categories are based on the investigator's interpretation of shared meanings of the possessions (e.g., photographs generally mean such-and-such) or upon individuals' expressed meanings for those possessions. Three, where and when data is collected may impact the typology in ways not yet

understood. For example, do participants respond differently, depending upon which role-identity "hat" they wear when responding? Does the location of the interview (e.g., in the home) influence the special possessions selected or meanings expressed by respondents? Scholars using existing or developing new typologies should carefully consider these issues to deepen our understanding of special possessions.

Measurement scale development and validation also needs empirical attention. Ball and Tasaki's (1992) attachment measure is the sole example in published literature of a measure (see Table 1) with reasonable empirical support. The utility of measurement scales for use with larger samples and ability to directly evaluate construct validity warrants additional scholarly attention to measurement scale development and validation.

To advance understanding of possession attachment, scholars should consider creative use of various methods. Photography (Millard and Smith 1981; Wallendorf and Arnould 1988), three-dimensional stereographic images (Holbrook 1997); object sorting (Belk 1987), projective methods (Baker, Kleine, and Bowen 2004; Belk 1986), and q-methodology (Kleine, Kleine, and Allen 1995) illustrate the use of methods designed to enhance responding and elicit participants' subjective meanings. Continued use of multiple methods will enhance understanding of material possession attachment. As Belk (1992a, p. 55) notes,

> The blend of qualitative and quantitative work that has characterized object attachment research to date seems a promising combination that should be continued. The qualitative work is best able to explicate the feelings and meanings of object attachments, while the quantitative work is best able to detect broad patterns of object attachments and their relationships to such key variables as media exposure, happiness, and changes in political and economic structures.

Summary: Possession Attachment Typologies and Method Issues

Numerous opportunities exist to enhance how we classify and study possession attachments. Factors limiting comparability of existing typologies include: the typologies may capture different domains (e.g., favorite versus most meaningful possessions); different typologies are not always based on the same perspective (i.e., investigator's versus respondent's); and unknown effects on results of different times and places of data collection. Methods including photography, three-dimensional stereographic images, object sorting, projective methods, and Q-methodology offer opportunities for method development. Measurement scales also need additional empirical attention. Continued use of multiple methods will enhance understanding of possession attachment.

AGE, LIFE STAGE, AND GENDER DIFFERENCES IN MATERIAL POSSESSION ATTACHMENT

Age, life stage, and gender are the individual differences in attachment most often studied. Generally, age, life stage or gender differences are found in the specific possessions people identify *and* sometimes in their articulated meanings for those possessions.

Age and Life Stage Differences

Older Adults - Studies portray older people as no more or less attached to their favorite things than younger people. However, some scholars have observed age and life stage variations in special possessions and the reasons for possession favoriteness. According to Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton (1981) and Wallendorf and Arnould (1988), older Americans' favorite possessions represented familial and other

interpersonal ties more often than possessions of younger respondents. In Niger, older adults' favorite possessions also indicated age-related status differences (Wallendorf and Arnould 1988).

Kamptner's (1989; 1991) seminal studies investigating the developmental implications of special possessions showed that older subjects use material possessions to negotiate life reviews and to extend themselves temporally into the future by giving special possessions to younger family members. More recently Price, Arnould, and Curasi (2000) confirmed this adaptive, kin-keeping role of possessions in old age. Gentry, Baker, and Kraft (1995) and Pavia (1993) observe that similar processes may apply to younger adults facing death, suggesting that it is not age, per se, but life stage that influences cherished possession disposition.

Children - The literature reflects at least two views of how children relate to special possessions. The traditional and most familiar view, first associated with Winnicott (1953), suggests that young children (up to about six years old) use inanimate objects for transitioning toward independence and self-hood. Myers' (1985) adult participants identified blankets, stuffed toys, and dolls as their earliest possession attachments serving comfort and security functions. In Winnicott's view, having these transitional objects is universal among healthy children, implying material possession attachment is necessary for healthy psychological development of the autonomous self.

Gulerce (1991) proposes an alternate view of the developmental functions of children's possession attachments. This "transformational model" regards transitional possessions not as extensions of primary caregivers, but as *extensions of self*. In contrast to Winnicott's view, Gulerce's cross-cultural and cross-socioeconomic status research shows that transitional object attachment is *not* universal, but "subject to sociocultural influences" (p. 201). Children's self-development cycles through periods of autonomy-seeking and affiliation-seeking as opposed to a unidirectional drive toward independence. A similar pattern was observed in Myers' (1985) and Kleine, Kleine, and Allen's (1995) studies of adults' possession attachments. How children form possession attachments and the kinds of attachments formed have implications for lifelong relationships to material possessions (Gulerce 1991).

Myers' (1985) adult participants recalled special possessions from elementary school years representing the ability to do things. The adolescent period was characterized by possessions representing autonomy and self-reliance balanced with maintaining affiliative ties. Recollections of special possessions from young adulthood reflected independence and autonomy seeking while maintaining closeness and intimacy with others. No doubt, the meaning and function of attachment possessions changes through the life cycle and in ways captured by theories about child development (Myers 1985).

Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton (1981) characterized children's special possessions as tending toward more action and future-oriented use. Complementing those findings, Baker, Kleine, and Bowen (2004) found children (ages 8-13) were already beginning to form contemplative, symbolic meanings for souvenirs they anticipated would serve as mementos marking special places.

Most of the studies of age and life stage related attachments are descriptive in nature. Considerable opportunity exists to investigate the age and life stage developmental implications of cherished possessions to fill in the picture of material possession attachment through the human life cycle.

Gender Differences

Gender Differences in the Possessions Themselves - Pioneering "special possessions" scholars tended to show that men's and women's special possession differ based on the possessions themselves. That is, men and women tend to possess different kinds of objects; therefore, objects of attachment also reflect gender differences. Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton (1981) observed significant gender differences in 12 of 41 categories of "special" possessions. Participants were interviewed in their homes, where gender roles were likely salient. Women were significantly more likely to identify sculptures, photographs, plants, plates, glass, and textiles than men, reflecting women's expressive, home-oriented roles. Men more often identified televisions, stereos, tools, sports equipment, vehicles, and yard equipment, reflecting men's action-oriented roles. Similarly, Kamptner (1989) found that among elderly adults, men listed motor vehicles, homes, and small appliances most often; females identified homes, dishware-silverware, and jewelry most often.

Gender Differences in the Reasons for Possession Specialness - Different scholars put their own spin on gender distinctions, yet the theme of men as autonomy seekers and women as affiliation keepers is universal in the gender studies. "Women and men pay attention to different things in the environment and may even value the same things but for different reasons" (Kamptner 1989, p. 189).

Elderly women in Kamptner's (1989) study identified interpersonal-familial associations for most important possessions significantly more often than did elderly men. She observed a similar pattern in meanings respondents gave for possessions they would rescue in a fire. Wapner, Demick and Redondo (1990) found that elderly women had significantly more cherished possessions, and those possessions were more often associated with self-other relationships. Also, women were less likely to attribute utilitarian meaning and more likely to attribute comfort functions to special possessions than were men. Similar patterns occurred in Sherman and Newman's (1977-78) study of nursing home residents.

Wallendorf and Arnould (1988) found that both U.S. and Nigerian women identified favorite possessions as "made for them or given to them by others, antiques or heirlooms that tie them to previous generations, and representational items (e.g., photos), depicting their children, spouses, and grandchildren" (p. 539). For example, U.S. women tended to identify handicrafts, antiques, and representational items (e.g., photographs) as favorite possessions. Nigerian women named silver jewelry and other objects that symbolized their connections to other women. U.S. male respondents identified art pieces, functional items, and plants and other living things. Nigerian men identified religious books, charms, swords, and horses that symbolized a "real or desired authority over persons or the spiritual world" (p. 539).

Dittmar (1989) conducted correspondence analysis between types of "most important" objects and the reasons given for their importance to adult respondents. Both male and female respondents identified instrumental and use-related reasons for choosing "most important" things. However, men tended to cite instrumental, use-related, and self-expressive reasons significantly more often. Women more often cited emotional and relational reasons. The results parallel and extend Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton's (1981) conclusion that men cherished self-referent objects of action and women preferred objects of contemplation.

Analyzing diaries of Mormon families who migrated to the western U.S. in the late 1800's, Belk (1992b) found that more women than men reflected deep possession attachments and meanings. Belk interprets this as possible evidence of women's orientation toward continuity with former home and family versus the masculine perspective of journey representing separation and challenge. As Belk notes, the diary accounts also may reflect the social desirability of expressing the "correct" gender role.

Belk and Wallendorf (1997) found that achievement in women's special collections occurred when the collections provided connections to other people. Achievement for men occurred when their collections represented control and mastery over the environment.

For many cherished possessions, such as men's sports card collections, the possessions serve *both* instrumental (to trade for money or enhance the value of their possessions) *and* expressive functions (signifying relationships and evoking nostalgia) (Baker and Martin 2000). When both instrumental and expressive functions are coded into possession meanings rather than treated as mutually exclusive, results may not reveal gender differences of any significance (Kleine, Kleine, and Allen 1995). As Dittmar (1992) observes, although gender differences in special possessions are real, *men and women have more in common than not* when it comes to reasons for attachments.

Additionally, age or life cycle stage appears to be more strongly related than gender to differences in possessions and their meanings, in studies examining all three variables. To achieve deeper understanding of gender and material possession attachment, scholars must move beyond descriptions of gender differences toward explaining how gender identity influences, and is influenced by material possession attachment.

Summary: Age, Life Stage, and Gender Differences in Possession Attachment

Research to date on age, life cycle, and gender differences has been mostly descriptive. Age studies find older people relating to special possessions differently than younger people, reflecting stage-of-life and developmental issues. Gender studies universally find predictable differences that men versus women are more likely to own certain special possessions. The meanings of those possessions tend to differ predictably as well--autonomy seeking for men and affiliation seeking for women.

Describing individual differences in attachments is one way to suggest that possession attachments have adaptive and self-developmental value. However, advancing the current literature on benefits and costs of cherished possessions requires a deeper look. Scholars must seek to develop a fuller understanding of the role possessions play throughout the life cycle and in relation to various role identities characterizing the individual.

COMPARING POSSESSION ATTACHMENT WITH PLACE, BRAND, AND EXPERIENCE ATTACHMENTS

How does material possession attachment compare to attachments with places, brands, or consumption experiences? Research explicitly relating types of attachments would help clarify boundaries of possession attachments, enhance understanding of the origins of possession attachment meaning and value, discourage inappropriate conflation of different types (e.g., brand versus material possession attachment), and encourage cross-fertilization across the related literatures. To encourage attachment scholars to broaden their scope, we compare definitions and characterizations of material possession attachment with those for place, brand, and consumption experience bonds.

Comparing Place Attachment and Possession Attachment

The place attachment literature, dating back to the 1960s, is remarkably interdisciplinary involving anthropologists, psychologists, sociologists, social psychologists, folklorists, environmental and architecture scholars, and others (Low and Altman 1992; Giulani and Feldman 1993). Likewise, a variety of interpretive and

confirmatory methods characterize place attachment inquiry.

The literatures on material possession and place attachments generally do not overlap yet each reflect remarkably similar descriptions of the two attachment phenomena. We will not report a thorough review of the place attachment literature as reviews can be found elsewhere (e.g., Low and Altman 1992; Giulani and Feldman 1993). However, Belk (1992a) observed that attention to place attachments "reveals the narrow partitions that have been employed in seeking to understand our bonds to the material environment" (p. 37). With this in mind, we identify parallels observed in the possession and place attachment literatures.

Definition and Characterization of Place Attachment - To what kinds of places do people become attached? Places of attachment vary widely in terms of size, scope, tangibility, and direct experience (Low and Altman 1992). Adults and children alike form emotional bonds various places such as natural landscapes (e.g., the Grand Canyon), sacred cites (e.g., Jerusalem, Stonehenge), types of architecture (e.g., cathedral), living spaces, neighborhood spaces (e.g., city park, bicycle trail), and so on.

A challenge in comparing scholarship on possession and place attachments is the absence of a single definition of place attachment. However, across the place attachment literature is a strong theme of person-place bonding that develops over time via repeated interactions with place (Low and Altman 1992; Milligan 1998; Williams, Patterson, Roggenbuck, and Watson 1992). Milligan (1998) offers a representative definition: place attachment is *the emotional bond formed by an individual to a physical site due to the meaning given to the site through interactional processes*. Leading to this emotional bond with place are personalization processes that make a place or space "me" or "mine," "we" or "ours" (Low and Altman 1992; Cooper Marcus 1992). "Places are...repositories and contexts within which interpersonal, community, and cultural relationships occur, and it is to those social relationships, not just to place qua place, to which people are attached" (Low and Altman 1992, p. 7). Emotional bonds and their meanings form the basis of place attachment. This concept of emotional bonding runs through both the place and possession attachment literatures.
What else does place attachment have in common with material possession attachment? The following characteristics are found in both literatures:

1. Place attachment forms with *specific places* (e.g., the Grand Canyon, the woods behind my house, my room), not with categories of places (e.g., all rafting rivers) or brands of places (e.g., all Six Flags amusement parks).
2. The place must be *psychologically appropriated*; self-regulation of personal and shared spaces lead to feelings of mastery, control, and appropriation (e.g., Cooper Marcus 1992; Chawla 1992; Harris, Brown, and Werner 1996).
3. Place attachments are *self-extensions* (Belk 1988).
4. Attachment to place results from *decommodification and singularization*; place attachments are spaces with low perceived substitutability (Milligan 1998), similar to possession irreplaceability. Singularization occurs through rituals of manipulating, remodeling, decorating, and otherwise personalizing spaces (Cooper Marcus 1992).
5. Attachment to place requires a *personal, interactional history* with the place (Bricker and Kerstetter 2000; Moore and Graefe 1994; Williams, Patterson, Roggenbuck, and Watson 1992). For example, among the strongest place attachments are bonds formed with places where people were raised and remained most of their lives (Hay 1998; Rowles 1990). Satisfying, repeated consumption experiences, such as outdoor recreational activities, also lead to stronger place attachments (Moore and Graefe 1994;

Stokols and Shumaker 1981). Bricker and Kerstetter (2000) found that place activity (e.g., recreational) involvement and centrality of the activity to people's lives led to stronger place attachment.

6. Place attachment has *degree of strength*, ranging from strong to weak. This is sometimes expressed as "rootedness" (Harris, Werner, and Brown 1996; McAndrew 1998) "place dependence" and /or "place identity" (Bricker and Kerstetter 2000; Moore and Graefe 1994). Several place attachment measurement scales have been developed and tested: Bricker and Kerstetter (2000), and Moore and Graefe (1994); Harris, Werner, and Brown (1996); and McAndrew (1998).
7. Place attachment is *multi-faceted*, involving behavior, cognition, and affect (Brown and Perkins 1992; Low and Altman 1992). Scholars have identified multiple dimensions of place attachment. For example, investigators of attachment to recreational settings find place attachment is comprised of two dimensions: place dependence and place identity (Bricker and Kerstetter 2000; Moore and Graefe 1994; Stokols and Shumaker 1981).
8. Place attachment is *emotionally complex* (Low 1992). Place attachments are emotional bonds often reflecting mixed feelings. For example, place attachments may include ambivalent or negative feelings, such as feelings of drudgery accompanying place care (Brown and Perkins 1992).
9. Place attachments *evolve over time* as the meaning of the self changes. "Transformations in place attachment occur whenever the people, places, or psychological processes change over time" (Brown and Perkins 1992, p. 284). Disruptions of place attachment illustrate how changes in place lead to changes in self (Brown and Perkins 1992; Harris Brown, and Werner 1996; Harris, Werner, and Brown 1996; Milligan 1998; Sayre 1994; Wapner, Demick, and Redondo 1990).

Value of Place Attachments - The benefits of place attachments parallel those for possessions. According to Brown and Perkins (1992), place attachments serve two basic functions: identity-definition and self-continuity/change.

Place attachments and identity-definition. Place attachment contributes to self-definition, self-continuity, self-stability (Low and Altman 1992), and communal aspects of identity (Brown and Perkins 1992) for both children and adults (Cooper Marcus 1992). Places serve as psychic anchors (Cooper Marcus 1992) telling personal stories of individuals, families, or other groups.

Similar to how possessions are used for defining self-boundaries, places with identification value also define "me" (Korpella 1989). Healthy self-development in children is affected by having place attachments through which children learn self-regulation (Spencer and Woolley 2000). Chawla (1992) and Cooper-Marcus (1992) identify ages 6 through 12 years as an important stage when place attachments form affecting self-development. During this phase children explore safety and independence, regulate privacy, and experience nurturance from the natural world via places. Adults carry out similar processes to regulate privacy and balance the dialectic between public and private selves leading to greater attachment to place (Harris, Brown, and Werner 1996).

Places are settings for experiences defining a person's likes, preferences, and autobiography. Places also permit self-transcendence via sacred space. Place attachment to the home is stronger when a person is able to regulate his or her privacy in the setting, allowing feelings of control and enhanced family functioning (Harris, Brown, and Werner 1996).

Place attachment has a social, affiliative component, similar to possession attachment. Mesch and Manor (1998) found that the majority of urban residents expressed stronger place attachment when they had more close friends and neighbors living nearby. Rowles (1990) describes the sense of "social insidedness" that forms with

a place where a person feels they are part of a caring community, leading to greater place attachment. Milligan (1998) describes the social construction of place meaning leading to a collective sense of place attachment.

Place attachment and self-continuity/change. Attachment is a life course phenomenon (Low 1992) in ways similar to possession attachment. Dislocation disrupts self-continuity (Fried 1963; 2000) and fragments spatial and group identity. Group identity may also be disrupted by reconstruction of homes and sacred spaces (Fried 1963). Although one's sense of place attachment becomes disrupted by relocations at different points in the life span, people naturally establish roots to new locations and establish new place bonds.

The adaptive function of possessions is highlighted in Rubenstein's (1987; 1989; Rubenstein and Parmalee 1992) studies of nursing home and adult care facility residents and how they adapted to impersonal institutional environments devoid of personal identity. Similarly studies of possession use by elderly people to adapt to senior living quarters are also about self-transitions and adaptation to new *places* (Kamptner 1989; McCracken 1988; Millard and Smith 1981; Price, Arnould, and Curasi 2000; Sherman and Newman 1977-78; Wapner, Demick, and Redondo 1990). Such studies about place adaptation involving possessions demonstrate the inextricable link between place and possession attachment.

Place Attachment Benefits Versus Costs - The place attachment literature generally portrays person-place bonds positively. Place attachment has been linked to physical health (Stokols, Shumaker, and Martinez 1983) and psychological well-being (Brown and Perkins 1993). The well-being and healthy development of children is affected by the formation of place attachments (Chawla 1992; Cooper Marcus 1992). Place attachments provide opportunities for children to learn self-regulation and to grow their social and cognitive worlds (Spencer and Woolley 2000).

The *disruption* of strong place attachments delivers the negative or cost side of place attachment. Disruptions lead to stress, coping with loss, the formation of new place attachments, and renegotiation of self (Brown and Perkins 1992). Disruption of stronger place attachments may inhibit adaptation to new places (Fried 2000; Harris, Werner, and Brown 1996). McAndrew (1998) found that stronger place attachment led to greater difficulty when people had to relocate to a new place. Relocation leads to grief of loss which is intensified when the disrupted individuals have fewer satisfactory choices for relocation (Stokols and Shumaker 1982). Giulani and Feldman (1993) consider that whether place attachments are more beneficial than costly depends upon cultural values.

Linking Place and Possession Attachment - McCracken (1988) illustrates beautifully the inextricable link between possessions and place attachments in the home. The case of McCracken's informant "Lois Roget", the keeper of multiple generations' worth of deeply meaningful family heirlooms and possessions charged with historical significance. "Her objects are so densely vested with the memory of human beings, and the human beings so densely vested with the memory of these grand old pieces of furniture, that the two appear as different moments in a historical process that endlessly converts ancestors into objects and objects into descendents" (McCracken 1988; p. 53). The furniture pieces' meanings are tied to meanings of the place in which they are kept.

Rubenstein's (1987; 1989) studies with older adults provide some of the best illustrations of possession-place attachment. His work shows the home is not only a "central staging ground for being and doing by older adults, it also acts as a repository for cherished personal possessions" (1992, p. 153) He adds that "**at first glance, the relationship between place attachment and highly valued belongings may be obscure, but in our view it is**

of vital significance" (1992, p. 153, emphasis added). Rubenstein views possession rituals as part of personalizing the home, connecting people to places. He suggests as older adults' spatial functioning decreases, the role of cherished possessions as identity markers and connectors to home may increase.

Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton's (1981) study of the meaning of household possessions also examines inseparable place and possession meanings. Disruptions of person-place bonds often involve possessions tied with the place. Burglary, natural disasters, voluntary relocation, or family changes (e.g., death, divorce, leaving home) all involve violation of the extended self via both place and possessions (Brown and Perkins 1992; Dittmar 1992). Place disruption parallels possession dispossession and its process of emotionally distancing one's self from possessions (Sayre 1994; Roster 2001; Young and Wallendorf 1989).

Joy and Dholakia's (1991) study of home and possessions of Indian professionals in Canada reflects coping with place disruption. Possessions were used to mark transience, to create an environment reflecting homeland, and to help children socialize into Indian culture. Explicitly examining both place and possessions helped reveal how possessions were used to cope with place disruption and manage individual and family self-definitions.

Place and possession attachment converge in Vinsel, Brown, Altman, and Foss's (1981) study about university residence hall rooms and how students' possession displays were intertwined with adaptation to a new place. Students whose possession displays reflected adaptation were more likely to remain in school; those who did not display adaptation via possessions were more likely to drop out of school.

Souvenirs also illustrate the inextricable connection between place and possession. For example, a child's Mickey Mouse replica, purchased during a family trip to Disneyland, captures inseparable layers of individual and collective meanings, as well as possession and place attachment. Moreover, souvenirs and other possessions signify bonds to places, thus compounding place and material possession attachments (Baker, Kleine, and Bowen 2004).

Collective possessions such as monuments and other local, regional, or national shared places extend our selves and involve both place and possession attachment (Belk 1992a). Is the Statue of Liberty or the Eiffel Tower a place or a collective possession? Scholars should acknowledge when they are studying both kinds of attachment and take advantage of advances in both literatures.

Goods versus Places?- The definitions and characterizations of place and possession attachments are highly similar yet there remain distinctions between the two scholars have yet to examine. What are the implications of being attached to a portable possession versus an immovable place? Does it matter that many places have longevity that most goods or objects do not? What are the parallels between attachments to custom made versus mass produced possessions and places? What about differences between the values of privately possessed versus shared possessions and places? These and many other questions present scholars with opportunities to examine attachments to goods versus places.

Summary: Place Attachment and Possession Attachment - The literatures on place and possession attachment do not overlap significantly yet they reflect remarkably similar descriptions of the two kinds of attachment. Place attachment can be defined as *the emotional bond formed by an individual to a physical site due to the meaning given to the site through interactional processes* (Milligan 1998). Place attachment shares the following characteristics with possession attachment: place attachment forms with specific, psychologically, decommodified and singularized places; it is a kind of self-extension; its formation requires personal history

between self and place; it has degree of strength (strong to weak), is multi-faceted (cognitive, emotive, and behavioral), emotionally complex, and dynamic. Place and possession attachment also each serve similar basic functions: identity-definition (autonomous selves and affiliated selves) and self-continuity/change (e.g., self-adaptation to new places). Place attachment influences well-being and healthy self-development in both children and adults whereas disruption of place attachments leads to the psychological and emotional costs of having them. A number of studies demonstrate the inextricable connection between the two types of attachments. Scholars would do well to use both literatures in their work on possession and place attachments and to examine the shared and unique benefits or costs of both types of attachments.

Comparing Brand Relations and Possession Attachment

How do person-brand relations and material possession attachments compare? Is it appropriate to generalize concepts and empirical results about possession attachment to brand relationships and vice versa? The literature provides some clues to address these questions.

Defining and Characterizing Brand Relationships - Brand relationships are emotional bonds with brands formed on the basis of brand relationship quality (Fournier 1998). Brand relationships may encompass more than a strong love for the brand. For example, Keller's (2003, p. 93) "brand resonance" includes the dimensions of "attitudinal attachment" (a love for the brand and sense that it is something special) and "sense of community" (affiliation with other people associated with the brand; see also Muniz and O'Guinn 2001). People also form "self-brand connections" with brands they find useful for narrating life stories (Escalas 1996; Escalas and Bettman 2000).

Exactly with whom or with what a brand relationship forms remains ambiguous. Bonds form with anthropomorphized brands, the companies producing the brands (Fournier 1998), and/or other people associated with the brand (Keller 2003; Muniz and O'Guinn 2001; Schouten and McAlexander 1995). Which object (perception, producer, others users, or some combination of those) defines a specific person-brand bond may be difficult to establish. Thus, when scholars refer to brand relationships, brand bonds, or brand attachments it may be unclear exactly to what they are referring.

Key Distinctions Between Bonds With Brands and Possessions - Brands differ from tangible possessions with respect to indexicality and irreplaceability. A *brand* is a "**collection of perceptions** held in the mind of the consumer" (Fournier 1998, p. 345; see also Keller 2003, p. 4; emphasis added). Being perceptions, brands cannot hold indexical value the same way tangible material goods do (Grayson and Shulman 2000). Also, possession irreplaceability (Grayson and Shulman 2000) takes on a different meaning with brands. Consumers transfer brand meaning from one instance of a product to another. Establishing brands as irreplaceable with other brands is the ultimate goal of many marketing activities. In contrast, the singular meanings of irreplaceable attachment possessions, by definition, cannot be transferred to another instance of the good. For example, a cherished set of Callaway golf clubs became attachments because a father gave them to his son who used them for father-son golf outings. When the clubs were stolen and replaced with another set of Callaway clubs, brand meaning transferred immediately to the new clubs. However, the personal, indexical meanings of the originals were not readily transferred to the new set. From the marketer's viewpoint, replacement is to be encouraged, in direct contrast to the club owner's desire to keep the irreplaceable, original clubs.

The analogy characterizing brand relationships and possession attachments differ. Marketers' intentions when they create and communicate about brands, and the way consumers form meanings for brands, indicate that brand relationships parallel interpersonal bonds (Fournier 1998). Yet this analogy has yet to be successfully

applied to understand possession attachment. The possession attachment literature suggests special possessions often are used to establish, preserve, or adapt to interpersonal relationships, but does not portray attachments with possessions as like relationships with other people. Given key differences involving indexicality, irreplaceability, and characterization of each attachment type, we conclude that brand relationship is qualitatively different from material possession attachment.

Similarities Between Brands Relationships and Possession Attachments – The literature explicitly about brand relationships (not necessarily the vast literature on brand loyalty), shows that brand relations involve psychological appropriation of specific brands, self-extension, and possibly a personal history between self and brand (Escalas 1996; Escalas and Bettman 2000; Fournier 1998). Fournier refers to "stronger" and "weaker" brand relations while Escalas and Bettman (2000) discuss the strength characteristic of self-brand connections. Person-brand relations are also multifaceted and emotionally complex in Fournier's (1998) conceptualization which identifies six dimensions of brand relationship quality. Fournier also portrays the dynamic, often cyclical nature of person-brand relationships. These characteristics are similar to those describing material possession attachment.

Similar to possession and place attachments, brand relationships may be formed via perceived collective or shared ownership of the brand (e.g., brand communities, Muniz and O'Guinn 2000). For example, groups may appropriate a brand name and reframe its meaning to fit group agendas (e.g., Ritson, Elliot, and Eccles 1996), enhancing the group's sense of community leading to stronger brand bonding (Keller 2003). Possible questions of interest to scholars studying collective brand attachments are: What are the characteristics of brands lending them to appropriation by specific sub-cultures? What are the values and consequences of such brand relationships for the brand managers and other user segments?

Similar to possession attachment, brands of stronger bonding are used for self-definitional purposes: to negotiate identity and resolve life issues, to relate autobiographical stories, to define "me" and "not me", to connect with others, for contemplation and action, and to actualize possible selves (e.g., Aaker 1997; Escalas and Bettman 2000; Fournier 1998; Sirgy 1982). Brands serve self-stabilizing (continuity enhanced by repeated use of meaningful brands) as well as self-change, becoming functions.

The value of person-brand bonds for self-preservation remains less than clear. Being intangible, brands cannot be exchanged between individuals in the same way that possessions such as heirlooms or gifts can be. However, consumers bond with "inherited" brands; brands that a mother or grandmother always used, for example. Yet questions about how brands are involved in heirloom giving and receiving along with other questions about the role of brands in self-preservation remain unanswered.

The self-adaptive value of brand relationships also could be better understood. How might consumers use brands for adjusting to different life stages, personal loss, or new places and circumstances? For example, systematic differences in how woman at three different life stages related to brands in Fournier's (1998) study suggest developmental issues might be involved in person-brand bonding. Also in Fournier's study, negotiating the status of being divorced emerged in another informant's brand relationships. Additionally, brands may aid adaptation to new living locations: e.g., do familiar retail brands (e.g., supermarkets, restaurants, clothing stores) help families adjust to new places? The use of brands for self-adaptation is wide open for scholarly investigation.

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Relevance to the Consumption Cycle - Brand relationships and possession attachments apply differently at each phase of the consumption cycle (acquisition, use, and disposition). Much of the research about brand bonding is aimed at learning how marketers can influence consumers' acquisition (or re-acquisition) choices. For example, research shows that marketing activities directly influence consumers' mindsets (Keller 2003), advertisements may encourage self-brand connections (Escalas and Bettman 2000), and marketer created brand personalities lead consumers to identify with and buy particular brands (Aaker 1997). In contrast, advertising and other activities designed to influence acquisition do not appear to directly affect the formation of possession attachment. Possession attachment forms in post-acquisition use; its formation requires personal meanings to form between person and possession, and these meanings are not necessarily marketer influenced. Possession attachment, unlike brand bonding, also has interesting implications for disposition of specific possessions (e.g., Price, Arnould, and Curasi 2003; Roster 2001; Young and Wallendorf 1989).

McCracken's (1986) meaning transfer model provides one approach to unraveling how brand, possession, and place meanings intersect in one special possession object (Fournier 1998). Holt (1997), Ritson and Elliot (1999), Ritson, Elliot, and Eccles (1996), Muniz and O'Guinn (2001), and Kozinets (2001) illustrate how marketers and consumers contribute to the social construction of multi-layered object meanings. Analyzing a possession's autobiography (Kopytoff 1986) also may provide clues for deconstructing layers of possession, place, brand, or experience meanings.

Summary: Brand Relationships and Possession Attachments - Based on the literature to date, brand bonds and possession attachments should not be regarded as the same phenomenon. Brands (as perceptions) and tangible possessions differ in terms of irreplaceability and their potential for carrying indexical value. Brand relationships are characterized as analogous to interpersonal bonds, an analogy that has yet to be successfully applied to possessions of attachment. Although the literature shows each type of bond serves similar self-definitional purposes, it remains unclear how intangible brands apply to self-preservation or self-adaptation in the way that tangible possession attachments do. Most research about brand relationships ultimately serves commercial purposes while possession attachment research is oriented toward understanding the effects of bonding with possessions on consumer well-being. Scholars should carefully pause before combining research about possession attachments and brand bonds to consider key differences between the two person-object bonds.

Experience Attachment and Possession Attachment

Confounding our understanding of possession attachment is the possibility that personal meanings held for special possessions may be based upon singular experiences the possessions represent. Solomon (1986) illustrates how a special piece of clothing may represent personal, experience-based meanings. A significant number of respondents attributed their feelings about cherished pairs of Levi's jeans to specific (most often romantic) experiences. Special possessions representing singular experiences are found throughout the attachment literature discussed above. Where does the value of such attachment possessions reside? Would it enhance our understanding of possession attachment if viewed from the perspective of attachment to experiences?

Definition and Characterization of Experience Attachment - Experience emphasizes process elements including "affect, narrative, and ritual understandings" (Arnould and Price 1993). An *experience* is how participation or observation affects a person in terms of how the person feels (Hirschman and Holbrook 1982; Holbrook and Hirschman 1982) or what the person knows about the thing being participated in or observed (Bitner, Booms,

and Tetreault 1990). Experiences are "emotionally involving," require "substantial mental activity," and include multiple "symbolic elements," rather than tangible features (Hirschman and Holbrook 1982, pp. 96-97).

Shopping (Bloch, Sherrell, and Ridgway 1986), gift exchange experiences (Sherry and McGrath 1989), collecting experiences (e.g., Belk, et al. 1991), sky diving (Celsi, Rose, and Leigh 1993), white water rafting (Arnould and Price 1993), use of computer-mediated environments (Hoffman and Novak 1996), and sports card show participation (Baker and Martin 2000) illustrate experiences people seek repeatedly, and become attached to, for symbolic benefits. Thus, a working definition (which future research should develop further) of e*xperience attachment* might indicate that it represents *a personal, psychological bond to situations that deliver sought after symbolic benefits*.

Similarities to Possession Attachment - Marketing and consumer behavior scholars have not routinely examined consumption experiences in terms of attachment. However, several parallels exist with material possession attachment. Similar to possession attachments, experience bonds probably involve psychological appropriation ("my experience", "it's me"), and consequently, self-extension (Arnould and Price 1993). The literature also suggests that experiences of attachment are singularized through personal experience ("when I rafted down the Little Colorado") and become irreplaceable, inviting experience preservation consumption (e.g., photos, souvenirs). It seems logical that a person's bond with a particular experience can range in strength or intensity of experience (feelings, flow, optimal stimulation level) and is emotionally complex (Arnould and Price 1993; Hirschman and Holbrook 1982). Cherished experiences reflect both self-definitional, intra-personal meanings and connections with others sharing the experiences (Arnould and Price 1993; Celsi et al.1993; Deighton 1992; Schouten and McAlexander 1995). Special experiences support self-change, self-renewal, and self-continuity (Arnould and Price 1993). Future research should examine whether experience bonds are multi-faceted and how they change over time or correlate with life stage or self-developmental processes.

Theoretical Perspectives - At least three lines of scholarship inform understanding of experience attachment: optimal stimulation level, hedonic consumption, and flow. The concept of optimal stimulation level (OSL; Berlyne 1960) partly identifies the symbolic value special experiences deliver. Empirical evidence shows that individuals participate in experiences, such as gambling or decision making under risk, to manage their OSL (Raju 1980; Steenkamp and Baumgartner 1992). Many opportunities exist for scholars to study how various consumption experiences lead to OSL and experience attachment.

Scholarship about hedonic consumption highlights how consumers seek experiences for the "fantasies, feelings, and fun" they deliver (Hirschman and Holbrook 1982; Holbrook and Hirschman 1982). "Hedonic consumption designates those facets of consumer behavior relating to the multisensory, fantasy and emotive aspects of one's experience with products" (p. 92). Sky diving (Celsi, Rose, and Leigh 1993) and white water rafting (Arnould and Price 1993) illustrate experiences consumers seek repeatedly for their hedonic value. Special experiences are sought to obtain the feelings evoked by them or because the experiences help tell autobiographical stories (Arnould and Price 1993), similar to many possession and place attachments.

The concept of flow also informs our understanding of experience attachment. Flow happens when "what we feel, what we wish, and what we think are in harmony"; it is what athletes refer to as "being in the zone" (Csikszentmihalyi 1997, p. 27). To achieve flow an individual must have clear goals, become immersed in an activity, pay attention to what is happening, and learn to enjoy the immediate experience (Csikszentmihalyi 1990, pp. 208-213). Flow requires *active participation* (as opposed to passive observation; Csikszentmihalyi

1997), as illustrated with white water rafters (Arnould and Wallendorf 1993) and sky divers (Celsi, Rose, and Leigh 1993).

The Role of Material Possessions in Experiences - Material possessions often play a role in achieving optimum stimulation level, feelings, or flow. For example, Celsi, Rose, and Leigh (1993) found sky divers had special enabling possessions, such as color coordinated parachute gear. If a sky diver identifies a jump suit as a cherished possession, it remains unclear where the locus of attachment lies: with the possession or the experience (or both). Understanding how people are drawn to experiences leading to OSL, sought after emotions, or flow may involve biological and motivational underpinnings related to the action or contemplation value of possessions. To what extent do attachment experiences involve, or possibly lead to, the formation of possession, place, or brand bonds?

Tangible possessions provide evidence of key experiences, such as with some collections, souvenirs, or flea market purchases. Consumers obtain flow, OSL, and hedonic value from the experiences to which they are attached. The process of collecting, involving hunting, evaluating, and gathering material things, takes precedence for many collectors over the collectibles in driving many collectors' behaviors (Baker 1996). The journey and discovery of the collectible objects leads to bonding with the collecting experience. Similarly, Sherry and McGrath (1989) observe that for some consumers shopping in gift stores, the thrill of the gift exchange experience may be more important than the goods obtained. Also, Baker and Martin (2000) found that sports cards dealers/collectors often participated in weekend sports card shows, not so much because they wanted more sports cards, but because they loved the act of exchanging cards. In these, and similar cases, people seek to repeat the ritual experience. They form an emotional and cognitive bonding to the behaviors involved. Each experience, while following a general ritualized script involving possession acquisition, is unique and irreplaceable. Could experience attachment be involved in such situations?

Little research has studied experience consumption from an attachment perspective. Can or should the experiential and symbolic paradigms be explored separately, as could be the case when studying collecting, versus collections? Or are the experiential and symbolic dimensions inextricably linked, as in the case of many souvenir objects (Baker, Kleine, and Bowen 2004)? As the culture of experience, as opposed to materialism, grows many questions will remain in terms of why and how some experiences come to be the "chosen" experience for setting goals and building skills so that flow, happiness, or life satisfaction may be sought.

Summary: Experience Attachment - An understanding of attachment to experience is important to provide clarity about the boundaries of material possession attachment. Experiences are singularized through participation or observation and become irreplaceable. Experiences important for self-definition, self-expression, or self-transcendence invite experience preservation consumption (e.g., through material possessions), another topic in need of scholarly investigation. Experience attachment, such as to sky diving or white water rafting, represents a personal, psychological bond to situations (past, present, or future) that deliver desired symbolic benefits, and is both affective and cognitive in nature. It is emotionally complex and involves psychological appropriation, as well as self-definition, intra-personal, and interpersonal dimensions. The literature on optimal stimulation level (OSL), hedonic consumption, and flow provide important bases for developing an understanding of this construct, which is ripe for future research.

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Summary: Comparing Possession Attachment To Place, Brand, and Experience Attachments

Bonds to possessions, places, brands, and experiences share at least one organizing characteristic: they are each a type of self-extension (Belk 1988). Each type provides symbolic benefits delivering self-descriptive and self-change/continuity value. Some types of self-extensions appear to serve these purposes better than others and in different ways. Scholars should remain mindful of the similarities, differences, and linkages among attachments. A few attachment investigations implicitly study more than one type of person-object bond. Yet studies *explicitly* acknowledging and seeking to understand relationships among different types of attachments are uncommon. The tangibility of possessions and places, the portability of possessions, the transferability of brands, the inherent uniqueness of intangible experiences, or the permanence of many places give rise to their unique meanings as self-extensions. These different self-extensions vary in their relevance at each stage of the consumption cycle and bear different degrees of commercial interest and relevance to consumer satisfaction and well-being. Numerous opportunities exist for clarifying similarities, differences and connections among possession, place, brand, or experience bonds to enhance our understanding of all types of self-extensions.

POSSESSION ATTACHMENT: STATUS OF THE LITERATURE AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

The literature on material possession attachment provides a general, descriptive portrayal of people's bonds with material possessions. Integrating the literature leads to a clear definition, specifying the concept's boundaries, and a reasonable sense of self-descriptive and self-continuity/change benefits possession attachments provide. The literature also provides descriptions of age, life stage, and gender differences in attachments. However, significant opportunities remain to deepen our understanding of the role of possessions in life stage development and role-identity development. Also, the complex emotional character of possession attachment deserves further empirical attention.

We know that possessions do not need to be expensive, rare, or exotic to become objects of attachment. The most mundane, ordinary possessions serve attachment functions well. Scholarship has yet to identify properties of ordinary possessions that encourage or discourage attachment.

The literature portrays numerous benefits of possession attachments, yet the costs of having them remains poorly understood. Although the costs of materialism have been studied, empirical investigations to identify downsides of attachment, per se, are rare. Also under-investigated are shared possession attachments and group processes involved in attaching and detaching from material possessions. Additionally, few studies examine attachment and disposition, including processes of emotional and psychological detachment.

Comparing possession attachment to place, brand, and experience bonds opens the door for a more comprehensive portrayal of possession attachment. These different types of self-extensions share much in common. Yet differences involving tangibility, permanence, transferability, indexicality, and irreplaceability distinguish them. Careful scholarship will involve consideration of similarities and differences among self-extensions as well as potential interactions and linkages. Deconstructing layers of place, brand, or experience meanings feeding possession attachment and understanding the role of each attachment type in the consumption cycle offer intriguing opportunities for scholars.

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Scholars should seek to understand how attachment types carry different degrees of commercial interest and connection to self-satisfaction and well-being. Longitudinal studies examining the dynamic nature of possession attachment also are sorely needed to deepen our theoretical understanding of attachment, its affects on well-being, and its potential implications for marketing decisions. Ultimately, overcoming artificial boundaries between attachment literatures, use of creative methodologies to investigate attachment, and moving beyond basic description to delve deeper into more complex issues surrounding attachment are key to advancing scholarship about attachment.

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