

**EXPLORING HOW ROLE-IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT STAGE MODERATES
PERSON-POSSESSION RELATIONS**

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ABSTRACT

Person-possession relations are an important key to understanding consumers and their behaviors. Yet, self-possession relations are rarely examined with reference to the dynamic, self-cultivation processes within which they arise. In this paper, we examine person-possession relations in the larger context of role-identity cultivation processes. An empirical study examines how selected behavioral, cognitive, and emotive characteristics of identity-cultivation vary across three phases of the role-identity cultivation process. The study also contrasts the magnitude of identity-related items (e.g., number of possessions) a person accumulates with the relationship of those items to self-definition across identity stages. We find, for example, that a person's identification with a particular role-identity is more strongly associated with role-related possessions early on in the identity project. At a later stage in the identity project, as the person internalizes the role-related self-definition, role-related possessions become less strongly related to self-definition. The results suggest that investigators who study person-possession relationships may wish to take into account role-identity life cycle stage as a moderator of the relationships under study.

EXPLORING HOW ROLE-IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT STAGE MODERATES PERSON-POSSESSION RELATIONS

Person-possession relations are an important key to understanding consumers and their behaviors. Self-cultivation drives the formation of person-possession relations (Belk 1988; Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton 1981; Kleine, Kleine, and Allen 1995; McCracken 1988). Yet, in order for a person to cultivate a particular aspect of his or her life, the person requires more than just possessions. For instance, a person would not run out one afternoon and purchase a tennis racket (for the first time) and then instantly become a tennis player. It would be more likely that the person would acquire a set of tennis-related possessions (e.g., racket, balls, shoes). Over time, he would also accumulate an inventory of tennis-related knowledge, performance behaviors, social ties, and positive reflected images of himself in the role of tennis player before coming to define himself confidently as a tennis player (Becker, 1960; 1963; Donnelly and Young 1988; Kleine, Kleine, and Kernan 1993; Piliavin and Callero 1991; Solomon 1983). Each of these sets of items, accumulated while cultivating the tennis player identity, is part of a multi-faceted personal infrastructure that supports the person's emergent self-definition as a tennis player.

Those who eventually form a sustained commitment to a role-identity will evidence a self-definition with respect to that role (e.g., tennis player). That is, the role-identity will come to define the person, and to some degree, the role will merge with the person's self-definition (Turner 1978). Thus, greater role-person merger should be associated with

greater accumulation of possessions and other elements of the identity supporting infrastructure. However, the relative importance of a person's tennis related possessions for symbolizing the self-definition may follow a different pattern (Wicklund and Gollwitzer 1982). That is, while the quantity of accumulated possessions goes up as the identity becomes merged with the global self, the relative importance of possessions as supporting signs of the emerging role-identity may decline.

To understand the tennis player's relationship with his tennis related possessions, it may be useful to consider how that relationship varies with changes in role-person merger. In a predictive sense, a larger set of tennis related possessions may indicate identity progression, yet the relative importance of those possessions to the person's self-definition as a tennis player may decrease as he accumulates additional signs of the identity. If reasonable, these assertions would lead one to conclude that stage of role-identity progression may moderate person-possession relations. This possibility has not been previously examined in the person-possession literature.

In this paper, we examine how person-possession relations vary across three stages of the role-identity cultivation processes. We explore how elements of an identity-supporting infrastructure along with selected behavioral, cognitive, and emotive characteristics of identity-cultivation vary across phases of role-identity cultivation. We examine how these factors vary in magnitude and in the strength of their association with consumers' self-definitions across stages of identity cultivation. We tested the hypotheses using a large sample survey in the context of two freely chosen athletic role-identities. In so doing, we outline an approach that we hope may inspire investigators to consider

identity development stage as a possible moderating variable in studies of person-
possession relations.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Self-Concept and Consumption: A Social Identity Perspective

Symbolic interactionist identity theory provides the basis of the conceptualization applied here. Originating from sociology, this version of identity theory (e.g., Burke and Reitzes 1981; Hoelter 1983; Pilivain and Callero 1991; Stryker 1980) has been applied to consumer behavior both theoretically (Solomon 1983) and empirically (Kleine, et al. 1993).¹ Identity theorists invoke terms -- such as “self” and “identity” -- that are familiar to consumer researchers. Applied in the context of identity theory, these constructs have meanings that are somewhat more specific and different from their conventional use in other literatures familiar to consumer researchers. To clarify our use of terminology and provide background, we explain distinctive features of symbolic interactionist identity theory.

Multifaceted Self-Concept. Social identity theory abides by a multifaceted perspective of the self-concept (Burke and Reitzes 1981; Markus 1977; Rosenberg 1979;

¹ Several strains of identity theory co-exist in the sociological literature. Weitge, Weitge, and Tiegert (1986) provide a comprehensive review of identity theory’s various flavors.

Solomon 1983; Stryker 1980; Turner 1978). The global self-concept includes a portfolio of role-identities that vary in their significance to the overall self-concept. A *role-identity* is a person's individualized version of a social role. A productive way to understand how people use consumption for self-cultivation is to examine one part of the self at a time (Kleine, et al. 1993). By comparison, in the consumer research literature, the term identity more often describes a person's overall sense of self (e.g., Belk 1988; Schouten 1991).

Role-Person Merger. Role-person merger is the extent to which a role-identity is integrated with a person's overall self-definition (Turner 1978). The greater the role-person merger, the more the role-identity factors into a person's self-definition and self-evaluations, and the more time the person spends in-role. Greater role-person merger is associated with more extensive social ties related to the role along with self-labeling as a person who performs the role (e.g., Becker 1960; 1963; Burke and Reitzes 1981; Piliavin and Callero 1991; Stryker 1980). Role-person merger is associated with the display of role-appropriate attitudes and behaviors and appropriate role-indicative cues (Turner 1978). Especially pertinent to consumer research is the observation that greater role-person merger is also associated with increased use of role-related media and ownership of more role-related products (Kleine, et al. 1993). Additionally, role-person merger predicts behavioral intentions, behaviors, and the stability of behavior (e.g., Piliavin and Callero 1991).

Unit of Analysis. A role-identity is the unit of analysis around which role-related consumption activities and possessions are organized (Kernan and Sommers 1967; Kleine, et al. 1993). Each role is associated with a characteristic set of behaviors, a set of identity

symbolizing and enabling possessions, other consumption stimuli (e.g., media), and social commitments that individuals accumulate over time (Kleine, et al. 1993). As a person pursues a particular identity, the individual forms behavioral, psychological, and social commitments to a particular role-identity (e.g., tennis player). The role-identity and the person's overall self-definition become increasingly coincident; that is, the person merges with the role (Turner 1978).

Partitioning a person's global self according to his or her role-identities is conceptually equivalent to grouping people (and their consumption) according to their ongoing patterns of social interactions. Grouping consumers according to role-identities rather than by empirical grouping procedures appears to be a more useful approach for gaining understanding of consumers (Solomon and Englis 1997).

How possessions (and consumption activities) relate to the emerging self-definition systematically changes over time (Kleine and Kleine 2000). According to symbolic self-completion theory (Wicklund and Gollwitzer 1982), individuals lacking important symbols of a particular self-definition will display more easily obtained, alternative symbols of self-definition. That is, a person who is self-symbolizing in early stages of identity acquisition will rely more heavily on possessions or other readily displayed symbols as markers of identity progress.

As the person gains competence and enduring evidence of his or her abilities in the role, he internalizes a self-description of someone who performs that role (Piliavin and Callero 1991). The person accumulates role-identity supporting knowledge, experiences, and social ties, giving him or her more enduring evidence that the role is self-defining

(Wicklund and Gollwitzer 1982). Possessions, while remaining functionally necessary to carry out the role, become decreasingly necessary for evaluating self-in-role, as identification with the role stabilizes. That is, as a person's collection of possessions increases, the impact of those possessions on self-definition may decrease. Thus, we assert that stage of role identity development is a variable that may refine our understanding of person (self)-possession relations.

Stages of the Identity Project Life Cycle for Ordinary Consumption Activities

Role-person merger develops in stages. Piliavin and Callero (1991) demonstrate that to best understand and predict repeated, ongoing patterns of behavior, the researcher should explore how stage of role-identity development moderates other variable relationships (e.g., attitude to behavior; Charng, Piliavin, and Callero 1988). Generalizing from a series of studies in the voluntary blood donation context, Piliavin and Callero (1991) concluded that external pressures have greater influence on a rookie's donation behavior than on an experienced donor's behavior. The veteran donors were motivated to donate again because of an internalized commitment to donation that was accompanied by a well-formed self-perception as a donor. Allen, Machleit, and Kleine (1992) found that the degree to which attitudes and emotional reactions to blood donation predicted blood donors' behavior depended upon their donor experience category. Becker's (1960; 1963) in-depth observations about the adoption of a deviant identity (marijuana smoker) led him to conclude that role-identity development occurs in stages. Becker emphasized the

importance of positive experiences, the development of social ties related to the role-identity, and the internalization of a self-defining commitment to role behavior leading to the formation of stable behavioral patterns. Finally, in their ethnographic investigations of the sports subcultures of climbers and rugby players, Donnelly and Young (1988) found identity-internalization and confirmation to be necessary for individuals to develop sustained behavioral commitment to those avocations. Thus, empirical evidence accumulated through various contexts and methods consistently shows that, in contexts of freely chosen role-identities, self-definitions develop over time via role-related development stages.

Kleine and Kleine (2000) outlined five stages of role-identity development for freely chosen, ordinary role-identities (e.g., bridge player, cross-country skier, fly fisherman): role-identity presocialization, discovery, construction, maintenance, and disposition. This conceptualization applies to those identities that are achieved (freely chosen and freely forfeited) as opposed to ascribed identities (e.g., gender, racial, or ethnic status). The following conceptual descriptions of each stage were formed based on prior empirical findings in contexts of statistically atypical role-identities (e.g., blood donor, marijuana smoker, climbers), Kleine and Kleine's (2000) stage descriptions, and the results of depth interviews (author 1995) in the context of aerobics participation.

The identity cultivation model described traces the path of a single role-identity. This single role-identity is understood to exist within a portfolio of role-identities that, collectively, define the global self. The proposed identity cultivation model does not require that individuals become "very" or even "highly" committed to an identity in the

sense that the identity dominates self-definition of “who I am.” A role-identity may be cultivated over many years yet always remain on the periphery of an individual’s global self-concept.² One of the authors is a teapot collector, for example. This role-identity has persisted at a low-level of importance for many years. Asked to describe herself, the author would invoke a number of other identities (e.g., college professor, mother, spouse) but rarely the ‘teapot collector’ identity. Never the less, this peripheral role-identity influences how family and friends interact with the author, especially with regard to gift-giving occasions.³ Hence, references in this paper to ‘greater role-person merger ’ or ‘less role-person merger ’ should be interpreted to mean that the importance of the role-identity to the individual is greater or less than it was at another point in time.

Presocialization. Prior to beginning the first stage of identity discovery, an

² How the set of role-identities that comprise the global self-concept adjust to accommodate an increase or decrease in the importance of a particular role-identity -- and the consequences for consumption, behavioral, and cognitive patterns associated with those other role-identities – is an interesting issue that is beyond the scope of this paper.

³ Note how the role-identity “teapot collector” implies and reflects ongoing patterns of social interaction. As an aside, it was social interaction (gift receipt) that set the author’s teapot-collector identity discovery in motion, in a manner similar to McCracken’s (1988) one-thing-leads-to-another Diderot effect. External influences arising through social interaction initiated and perpetuate the teapot collector identity.

individual may have developed tacit cultural knowledge and some exposure to the role. This “presocialization” phase (Donnelly and Young 1988) may include media exposure or interaction with members of the particular role-related group (e.g., climbers). This pre-development step may involve “caricatured and stereotypical” images of the role, along with misconceptions about role-behaviors (Donnelly and Young 1988, p. 225).

Identity Discovery. Identity discovery occurs when the individual begins to explore a particular role-identity. The goal is to assess identity fit—i.e, to determine how well the role would complement or extend other identities that comprise the person’s self-definition. The individual asks himself, “Should I do this?” or ”Do people like me do this?” (Piliavin and Callero 1991). Role exploration is most often initiated by invitation, encouragement, or coercion from others (Becker 1963; Donnelly and Young 1988; Piliavin and Callero 1991). The individual’s understanding of the identity remains an “outsider’s” perspective (Donnelly and Young 1988). Limited identity-related social networks imply a greater reliance on one’s own relatively naïve perceptions of what to do and how to do it. To assess identity progress (“How am I doing?”), the individual’s self-conception in-role relies more on external, tangible possessions and other more readily available displays of the emerging role (Donnelly and Young 1988; Wicklund and Gollwitzer 1981; 1982). While role-person merger is lower than at other stages, possessions may take on added significance to self-definition because a person has little else to rely upon as evidence that he or she is progressing in the identity. The person may place greater weight on others’ reactions to his or her identity performances due to uncertainty about self-in-role.

Identity Construction. Identity construction occurs when the individual actively chooses to devote time and energy to the pursuit of the identity. The person accumulates the set of possessions perceived to be necessary or appropriate for pursuing the identity. The expanding network of identity-supporting social ties provides more identity confirming (or disconfirming) feedback from others—i.e., the individual is socialized into the role-identity by the relevant group. The person begins to adopt the values, perceptions, and attitudes of the role-related group (Donnelly and Young 1988). He may learn, for example, that a novice’s tendency to overtly display certain role-symbols is not appropriate. Positive experiences and feedback (reflected appraisals; Solomon 1983) encourages role-person merger development (Becker 1960; Hoelter 1983; Piliavin and Callero 1991) and encourage pursuit of the role-identity. The identity emerges when the person makes the transition from perceiving the role as external to himself to internalizing the role (“I am this kind of person”). The individual no longer asks, “Should I do this?” but instead asks “When, or how should I do this activity?” (Piliavin and Callero 1991).

This stage may last for a considerable amount of time, depending upon when he or she reaches a point of being satisfied with him or herself in role. The person continues to accumulate enduring, performance based evidence of role competence, but may aspire to more.

Identity Maintenance. Identity maintenance is a period of refinement and ongoing reconfirmation. Identity-supporting social ties are well-established. Role-person merger is evident in that the person’s self-description includes the identity and role-person merger peaks. The person comes to label him or herself as someone who does the related activity

and the role-identity reflects “me” as a relatively secure self-label (e.g., Becker 1960; 1963; Piliavin and Callero 1991). The individual’s understanding of the identity assumes a more refined “insider’s” perspective (Donnelly and Young 1988) and is integrated with other knowledge structures in the global self-concept. The person understands which behaviors and possession displays are appropriate and which are inappropriate. The self-image of the person at this stage has achieved a state of relative identity maturity (not necessarily related to aging), reflecting the identity-related possessions and skills accumulated. The person is now an identity veteran (Piliavin, Evans, and Callero 1984). The possession cluster and behaviors related to the identity may be continually refined and may continue to increase in number. The strength of the association between role-person merger and external evidence of the role such as possession may be lower than the association during the earlier discovery stage because self-descriptions of self-in-role have become internalized and stable. Less self-completing behavior (Wicklund and Gollwitzer 1981; 1982) and more self-labeling should be evident (Becker 1960; Piliavin and Callero 1991). Therefore, while the individual may continue to accumulate more possessions and other symbols of the identity, particular symbols may fall in their importance to self-definition.

Identity maintenance may endure for a lengthy period of time or lapse into latency or disposition. Latency is a brief or extended period of not being involved in enacting the identity. At some time the person reinvigorates their commitment to the identity behaviors. Disposition is a relatively permanent ending of identity enactment.

Identity Disposition – Temporary or Permanent. In early disposition the person

intends to, or does enact the activity less frequently. Disposition progresses to the point when the person ceases to enact, or intends to decrease or end, identity-related activities and consumption behaviors. This disengagement may be by choice or by external force. The person may ask himself, “Is it time to stop doing this?” or “Is this still me?” (Piliavin and Callero 1991). Identity-related social connections, possessions, and media usage may decline in number and are less associated with role-person merger. Evaluations (reflected appraisals) may become more negative. Decreasing ability to enact the identity for individual or external reasons, may lead to these more negative self-evaluations. Eventually, disengagement may lead to identity disposition in which the individual purges the identity from his or her self-concept. Alternatively, disengagement may result in a temporary (brief or extended) period of identity latency, followed by a later return to the identity, rather than a permanent disposition. Prior empirical work on role-identity development ignores this disposition stage. We assert that this stage be included because it may predict the disposition of possessions (an understudied area of consumer behavior) and transitions to other role-identities that replace the dispossessed identity.

Different Paths

Role-identity development may follow different paths through the identity life cycle stages. An individual may fall into disposition at any time, in any stage, as its identity-supporting microstructure falls away, or for other reasons. A person may begin cultivating certain identities at about any age. Also, a relatively young person’s life circumstances

may shift, leading to a declining ability to enact the identity. For example, younger adults may fall off the developmental path of a role-identity due to life status changes (Andreasen 1984) that precipitate the addition, subtraction, or dramatic modification of an existing role-identity (e.g., childbirth, career progression) during an age span when role overload is common. Older adults who are “empty nesters,” or past retirement, may have reached a point in life where pursuit of certain activities can begin, resume, or increase. Life-status changes can create openings for new identity cultivation or close on-going efforts. Thus, we do not expect a strong correlation (if any) between age and activity stage. This is in contrast to studies of person-possession relations that examine age-related life stages (Czikszenmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton 1981; Gentry, Baker, and Kraft 1995).

Identity Trajectory

Identity pursuit is an intentional process (Charng, et al. 1988; Piliavin and Callero 1991). Intentions for future identity enactment provide a way to identify stages of identity development. Stages are defined not by knowledge or performance expertise, but by the person's self-perceptions and plans for future cultivation. Has the person just begun to explore the identity (discovery)? Is the person actively cultivating the identity, but wishes to cultivate it much more (construction)? Has the person reached a point where she feels comfortable with her level of participation (maintenance)? Or, does the person anticipate declining participation and interest in the role -related activities (decline)? In contrast to an external definition of identity stage (e.g., amount of years spent cultivating the identity or level of knowledge and behavioral expertise), this approach allows for the person's

intentional identity trajectory to define the progress of his self-perceptions and emerging self-definition. It allows for two people to be at the same stage of identity cultivation intention and to be equally satisfied with their identity progress, but to vary in terms of knowledge or behavioral expertise. The person's success at matching her own behaviors with her identity-ideal schema will determine future cultivation of the identity (Kleine, et al. 1993).

AN EXPLORATORY STUDY

We are aware of no studies in the social sciences or in the consumer behavior literature that have examined how person possession relations vary across stages of role-identity cultivation. Most of the existing evidence of identity stages comes from investigations into statistically unusual identities, such as blood donor (Piliavin and Callero 1991), or “deviant” identities, such as marijuana smoker (Becker 1960). Defining consumption broadly, we consider voluntary blood donation and marijuana smoking as consumption behaviors or consumption systems (Boyd and Levy 1963). This study emphasizes consumption related role-identities that are more common or ordinary and which involve a possession cluster for their enactment.

More common consumption related role-identities involve identity disposition that occurs through voluntary or inevitable distancing. This is in contrast to sudden, discontinuous separation from the identity supporting infrastructure as may happen with major life changes (e.g., geographic relocation) or involuntary, catastrophic possession loss (Sayre 1994).

For purposes of this cross-sectional study, we will examine three of the five identity cultivation stages: discovery, maintenance, and disposition. These three stages should be associated with the lowest and highest points of means or strength of association between role-identity symbols and role-person merger. The magnitude of association between identity characteristic symbols (e.g., possessions) and role-person merger provides an indication of self-relevance. As described above, while identity-related possessions and other elements of the identity supporting infrastructure accumulate in size as the identity is pursued, the strength of the relationship between infrastructure elements and self-definition may fall. Viewed together, these two effects (quantity accumulated versus strength of relationship to self) provide a more comprehensive profile of identity cultivation activities.

Social Communicational Factors Related to Role-Identity Stages

Role-identity cultivation is not just an inside out, internally driven process in which consumption behavior is the dependent variable (e.g., Piliavin and Callero 1991). Rather, as Solomon (1983) asserts, and Kleine, et al. (1993) support empirically, stimuli, including possessions, are “social stimuli” that influence identity development from the outside-in. Drawing from symbolic interactionist social identity theory (e.g., Callero 1985; Hoelter 1983; Piliavin and Callero 1991; Solomon 1983; Stryker 1980) and consumer research, Kleine, et al. (1993) categorize external, social influences into three categories: identity-

related possessions (identity-related product clusters), identity-related social commitments, and identity-related media.

Possession Commitments. A set of role-related possessions (e.g., tennis equipment and clothing) is functionally and symbolically necessary to enact a particular role. Possessions are also used as supporting elements to prop up an identity in a symbolic sense (Belk 1988; Solomon 1983; Wicklund and Gollwitzer 1982). Cultivating a role-identity involves accumulating possessions perceived appropriate for the identity. Accumulated possessions represent commitments to the identity. Recognizing that identity-related possessions are accumulated throughout the course of identity development, it seems reasonable that the extensiveness of one's material commitment to a role-identity should vary across identity life cycle stages. We expect that the number of identity-related product categories and the number of identity-related possessions a person reports having will increase between discovery and maintenance. Depending on exactly where in the disposition stage an individual is located, the number of possessions and product categories may remain the same (early disposition) or be significantly lower (later disposition) than at maintenance.

Social Commitments. Identity-related social commitments (the extensiveness or number of social relationships associated with a given social identity) represent accumulated interactional commitment to an identity (e.g., Serpe 1987). Social experiences must shape and support a person's self-definition-in-role. Social commitments are interactional involvements that "tie the central related activity to the fabric of a person's social life (Piliavin and Callero 1991, p. 66). Social commitments do not have to

be members of a specific, formal group (e.g., members of a particular tennis club). Social commitments comprise a symbolic group, such as the known collectivity of tennis players known to the individual (e.g., Burke and Reitzes 1981; Callero 1985; Callero, et al. 1987; Piliavin and Callero 1991; Stryker 1980).

The more extensive a person's social ties, the more opportunities he or she has to learn about, enact, and receive feedback about his or her identity attempts (Shibutani 1962). Social ties form a web of symbolic communications that support the identity enactment. Thus, the extent of a person's social relationships affect what he or she can become. Moreover, these social ties represent psychological commitment to the role-identity because the loss of them makes it psychologically more costly to quit (Becker 1960; 1963; Piliavin and Callero 1991). The absence, or declining extensiveness, of a role-identity supporting network will inhibit identity cultivation or discourage continued identity pursuit (Kleine and Kleine 2000; Stokowski and Lee 1991). Therefore, as an identity develops, a person's social ties should increase between discovery and maintenance. In short, social ties of some kind are very important, often necessary, components to identity cultivation.

Media Commitments. Media communications related to an identity (e.g., magazines, newspapers, books, videos, and so forth) augment a person's identity-related knowledge and provide additional bases for evaluation of self in role (Richins 1991). From a symbolic interactionist perspective, media can be viewed as an extension of a person's identity-related social network (Englis, Solomon, and Oloffson 1993; Kleine, et al. 1993). The use of media should vary by identity stage as the identity develops.

Individuals in the discovery stage are likely to be sampling media, and be motivated to attend to and be influenced by a greater variety of media. Individuals in maintenance, with their larger repertoire of experience enacting identity-related activities, may have less need for media commitments. Similarly, maintenance individuals may reduce identity-relevant media consumption to include only those media perceived most appropriate. This implies that identity-relevant media consumption may plateau or decline as individuals progress from the discovery to maintenance stage. Individuals in the decline stage should exhibit fewer media commitments than those in maintenance.

Lag effects. Commitments are tangible symbols of identity enactment. McCracken's (1988) Diderot effect, for example, illustrates one scenario in which possession acquisition can precipitate a change in self-definition. Conversely, at disposition, one's inventory of identity related possessions lingers on unless intentional acts are undertaken to get rid of them. Person-possession attachment (Kleine, Kleine, and Allen 1995) may inhibit fully dispossessing the possession set. Social relationships, a dynamic over which one does not have complete control, may similarly persist even though a person anticipates transitioning out of an identity.

Identity-Related Appraisals

A key mechanism by which social stimuli (social, possessions, and media commitments) influence identity development is through reflected appraisals (our perception of how identity-relevant others evaluate us in role; often known as the "looking

glass self.” Solomon (1983) articulated the theoretical relationship between the looking glass self, possessions, and self-definition, yet little empirical attention has been granted the appraisal process with respect to possessions (Author, Author, Author 2000).

Reflected appraisals capture the qualitative effect of social interaction on identity development (Hoelter 1983; Solomon 1983). Appraisal information, some of which is obtained via possession display, leads a person to continue or discontinue pursuit of a particular social identity.

Appraisals involve assessment of both identity-related performance behavior (e.g., how well I play tennis) and of identity-related possessions. Observable performance behaviors comprise enduring symbols of one’s identity competence. Possessions, more easily acquired than behavioral experience, comprise less enduring but more readily displayed symbols of the role-identity. Thus, possessions and performance behavior can be cultivated independently by the role -performer to communicate about one’s self in role (Author 1995; Author, et al. 2000; Wicklund and Gollwitzer 1982). We examine two kinds of appraisal: reflected appraisals of performance and reflected appraisals of possessions. These two kinds of appraisal are empirically discriminant (Author 1995; Author, et al. 2000).

Those role-identities for which we receive more favorable appraisals become the role-identities upon which we build our self-definitions (Burke and Tully 1977; Callero 1985; Hoelter 1983; Kleine, et al. 1993; Stryker 1980). If we do not receive favorable appraisals, the likelihood that identity pursuit will continue is substantially lower. As a result, more favorable appraisals lead to greater role-person merger.

We expect that appraisal valence will vary across identity life cycle stages. Because appraisals are a primary influence on whether a person chooses to continue to pursue an identity, appraisal valence should become more favorable from discovery through maintenance, remaining the same or declining in favorability at disposition.

Identity-Related Emotions: Pride and Shame

The appraisal process includes both cognitive and emotional responses (Frijda 1986; Frijda, Kurpers, and Schure 1989; Parkinson and Manstead 1992; Roseman 1984; Shott 1979; Smith and Ellsworth 1985). Appraisals yield certain emotional reactions (Lazarus 1984). Following theorizing and empirical work in appraisal theory, we apply the two primary social emotions: pride and shame (Author 1995; Heise 1979; Scheff 1991). Pride and shame are signals to the self regarding how well others accept our identity claims and how well we view ourselves with respect to a particular identity (Rosenberg 1979; Scheff 1991; Shott 1979). The more pride a person experiences with respect to identity performances and possessions, the more he or she is encouraged to pursue the identity, and the more important it becomes (Author 1995; Heise 1979; Stryker 1980). Shame has the opposite effect on role-person merger. As with appraisals, a complete understanding of the contribution made by emotions requires that we distinguish possession-related emotions from performance-related emotions resulting in four types: pride in possessions, pride in performance, shame in possessions, and shame in performance.

Compared to people in the discovery stage, people in the maintenance stage probably experience more pride and less shame. Change in the valence of the emotions should occur as the individual disconnects him or her self from the identity, i.e., “what I was” rather than “what I am.” We expect that pride will be higher in maintenance than in discovery as the person accumulates greater evidence of identity competence and internalizes a self-conception of self-in-role. Pride may linger for those in disposition; thus, we may or may not observe a significant difference in pride between disposition and the other stages. During discovery a lack of knowledge and experience may lead to more embarrassment and shame than in maintenance. Disposition should be accompanied by a level of shame higher than that at maintenance.

Impact on Role-Person Merger

Role-identities that are more merged with a person’s global self-concept involve activities into which we invest more of ourselves and devote more of our resources; they involve more social ties; and we would feel a greater loss if we had to give them up (Burke and Reitzes 1981, Callero 1985; Kleine, et al. 1993; Serpe 1987; Stryker and Serpe 1982). The relationship between social commitments, appraisals, and emotions with role-person merger thus provides a way to assess their self-relevance at each identity-development stage.

Identity-related social ties, possessions, and media are external commitments that an individual must accumulate and cultivate in order to progress through the identity life

cycle. Because role-identities are, by definition, social objects, individuals define and cultivate roles by accumulating social commitments and other signs of identity progress, such as appraisals, and their resulting feelings of pride or shame. Such commitments and feedback provide the individual with the opportunity to answer questions such as “How am I doing?” “Should I keep doing this?” “ Is this ‘me’?” Positive experiences are necessary for an identity to merge with the person, and for that identity to occupy a more central place in the person’s life and how he or she expends time and energy (Becker 1960; 1963; Piliavin and Callero 1991). Thus, a fundamental relationship in the symbolic interactionist view of the self is that external identity commitments (social, material possession, and media commitments) and feedback from the social realm comprise a supporting communication network that supports self-definition with respect to the role-identity (Kleine, et al. 1993).

Applying the concepts of symbolic self-completion, and findings from the blood donation identity context (Charng, et al. 1988; Piliavin and Callero 1991), we expect external identity commitments, appraisals, and emotions to decrease in their association with role-person merger across role-identity stages. Piliavin and Callero (1991) found that experienced donors were less vulnerable to external appeals or pressures to donate blood. Experienced blood donors formed an internal picture of themselves as someone who donated blood and were psychologically resistant to external evaluations and appeals. Veteran donors were more inner-directed in their decisions to donate. Their views of themselves were internally well formed and were less dependent than self-definitions of rookie donors on external information. In addition, individuals who are early in the

identity life cycle are more likely to direct their attention to external indicators of their identity-related status than identity-mature individuals (Wicklund and Gollwitzer 1982). This suggests that, in the maintenance stage, role-person merger (as an indicator of self-definition in role) may become less associated with external commitments and feedback from others than in the discovery stage. Upon disposition, identity commitments become even less associated with self-definition, or the association strength may level off (depending upon whether an individual is in an early or later phase of disposition).

We expect that the association between appraisals and role-person merger will vary by identity stage. Reflected appraisals of performance and reflected appraisals of possessions will vary in their association with role-person merger across the identity life cycle stages. Similar assertions to those described above for external commitments apply to appraisals.

The association of the emotions with role-person merger will also vary by stage. While emotions will continue to be generated by the appraisal process throughout the identity project life cycle, their connection with role-person merger may be lower at maintenance than at discovery.

Summary

This study examines role-identity cultivation stage as a moderator of identity related commitments, appraisals, and emotions. It is anticipated that these variables will vary across the stages both in terms of magnitude and in terms of their association with

role-person merger. Generally, we expect that individuals at the maintenance stage will have accumulated more signs of the identity (possessions, social ties, media), more positive reflected appraisals for the looking glass self, and more pride/less shame than at discovery. In contrast, the strength of the relationship between the variables that comprise the identity-supporting infrastructure and role-person merger (as an indicator of self-definition development) will be higher at discovery than at maintenance or disposition.

METHOD

Overview

Self-administered questionnaires were used to collect data from individuals who participated in one of two freely chosen role-identity contexts (aerobics and tennis). We chose these contexts for several reasons. In contexts involving physical activities, we have found that it is relatively easy for individuals to clearly relate specific symbols to specific activities (e.g., tennis racket goes with tennis). Respondents find it relatively easy to think about such roles as a distinct piece of their global selves, in contrast to family or career related identities that may permeate a person's daily activities. Respondents at different role-identity stages are easily identified and reached for study participation. They also tend to enjoy talking about their experiences, yielding higher quality data. Finally, respondents in these contexts readily distinguish between the possessions they use for the activity and their skills and abilities to perform the activity.

Sample

A self-administered questionnaire was used to collect data in two athletic identity contexts: aerobics and tennis. Respondents were recruited from facilities where they played tennis or took aerobics classes. To very stage of identity development, we purposively sampled across classes or leagues with different skill level expectations. After completing the questionnaire at home, respondents returned it by mail, yielding 510 respondents in the relevant stages (a 70% response rate). Respondents range from 16 to 77 years of age, and have cultivated the identity for as little as one month up to 60 years. Fifteen percent of respondents are at the discovery phase of the identity project life cycle, 71% at the maintenance stage, and 12% at the disposition stage. The mean age in years (standard deviations) for discovery is 33 (8.6), for maintenance is 38 (9.1), and for disposition is 35 (12.6). Please note that identity life cycle stage does not necessarily correspond to physical age for reasons discussed above.

Measures

Identical measures were used across the two contexts. The directions and prompts were adapted for the aerobics or tennis activity, as needed. Below we present the items as worded on the “tennis player” questionnaire.

Identity stage. An individual’s location within the identity stages – discovery, maintenance, and disposition -- was measured by having respondents select the one

statement that best describes her intentions for the future as a tennis participant.

Respondents selected one of the following statements: “Tennis is something I am just getting into. In the next few months, I don’t know if I will do this activity more than I do now” (discovery); “I have played tennis at the same level of participation for a while. In the next few months I plan on doing this activity as often as I do it now” (maintenance); “I used to play tennis a lot, but I do not participate in it as much as I used to. In the next few months I plan on doing this activity less often than I do now” (disposition). The measure is based on theory and recommendations from Donnelly and Young (1988), Piliavin and Callero (1991), and Wicklund and Gollwitzer (1981; 1982).

Possessions, media, and social commitments. We assessed two aspects of identity related possession set extensiveness: number of identity related product categories and number of identity related possessions. These measures are adapted from Kleine, et al. (1993). The number of identity-related product categories was assessed by asking respondents to “list things that you personally have because you play tennis.” The sum of the number of identity related product categories listed forms our indicator of product category extensiveness. For each product category listed (e.g., tennis shoes), respondents indicated the number of identity related possessions owned within that category (e.g., 6 pairs). Possession set extensiveness is indicated by summing the number of possessions owned across all categories listed.

To indicate media commitments extensiveness, respondents were asked to list “any magazines, TV shows, videos, etc., that you pay attention to because they are related to tennis.” The various media listed were summed to yield an indicator for media connection

extensiveness.

To measure social commitment extensiveness, respondents reported the number of “people you know on a first name basis from playing tennis.” The number of people listed indicates the extensiveness of identity-related social ties (Kleine, et al. 1993; Serpe 1987). A larger number indicates greater extensiveness.

Appraisals. Because single-item measures prevail in the reflected appraisal literature, a multi-indicator measure for appraisals was developed and validated via a series of pretests.⁴ The adjective pair indicators of appraisal are: notable/ordinary, excellent/poor, spectacular/terrible. A 7-point bipolar scale assessed each appraisal type; a higher number indicates more favorable appraisals.

To elicit reflected appraisals of possessions and reflected appraisals of performance respondents were asked to “think about the comments that other people make about your tennis equipment (performance). Use the adjective pairs below to describe what other people that you play tennis with say about your products (performance).”

Pride and Shame. Pride in possessions and pride in performance are each measured with a 3-item scale tested successfully in a consumption context (Laverie, Kleine, and Kleine 1993). The indicators for pride are: self-esteem, self-regard, and pride. Shame in possessions and shame in performance were measured with these three items: humiliated, embarrassed, and ashamed (Laverie, et al. 1993; Lewis 1971). Respondents

⁴ Details of the appraisal measure development process are available from the authors.

rated their emotions on a 7-point Likert scale that ranged from very much so (7) to not at all (1).

To elicit the possession related emotions, respondents were first prompted with, “How do you feel about the products that you use for tennis?” Followed by: “The products I use for tennis make me feel. . . .” The indicators for pride and shame followed. Similarly, after being prompted to think about their performance as a tennis player, participants reacted to: “When I think of myself as a tennis player I feel. . . .” Again, the pride and shame indicators followed.

Role-Person Merger. Role-person merger was measured using a three-item version of Callero’s (1985; Callero, et al. 1987) scale and similar to the one successfully applied in another consumption context (Kleine, et al. 1993). Responses were recorded on a 7-point scale that ranged from strongly agree (7) to strongly disagree (1). Respondents were asked to report “how important tennis is to you” using these items: 1) Playing tennis is something I rarely even think about (reverse scored), 2) Tennis is an important part of who I am, and 3) I don’t really have any clear feelings about tennis (reverse scored).

Participation Frequency. To measure frequency of participation in tennis, respondents were asked to indicate how often they played tennis by checking one of the following seven items: at least once a year; at least once every six months; at least once a month; at least once a week; at least two times a week; at least three times a week; at least once a day.

ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

Measure Evaluation

Confirmatory factor analysis procedures supported the reliability and validity of the multi-item measures and the appropriateness of collapsing the data across the two contexts. Equivalency of parameter estimates for measurement models estimated from the data for each context was evaluated by a series of nested two-group confirmatory factor analyses. For these analyses, factor variances were specified as free. To identify each multi indicator factor, one factor loading was set equal to 1.0. The two-group CFA was initially estimated with all parameters freely estimated ($\chi^2 = 1445.1$, $df=720$, $p < .0001$; CFI=.94; NNFI =.92; RMSEA=.043). Next, we constrained factor loadings as equal across the two groups and found they do not differ ($\chi^2 = 1456.1$, $df=738$, $p < .0001$; CFI=.94; NFI = .92; $\chi^2_{d=11.6}$, $df=18$, $p > .01$). We then specified that indicator residuals must also be equal across groups. Residual estimates appear equivalent across groups ($\chi^2 = 1498.6$, $df=765$, $p < .0001$; CFI=.94; NNFI = .92; $\chi^2_{d=41.9}$, $df=27$, $p > .01$). Finally, we added the constraint that covariances among the latent factors must be equivalent across groups. Again, we find no evidence that parameter estimates differ across the two groups ($\chi^2 = 1545.9$, $df=856$, $p < .0001$; CFI=.94; NNFI = .93; $\chi^2_{d=47.3}$, $df=91$, $p > .01$). In conclusion, there is no statistically significant difference between the fit of the two group model, with no constraints imposed across groups, versus when the model is fit with all parameter estimates constrained as equal across the two groups ($\chi^2_{d=100.8}$, $df=136$, $p > .01$). Parameter estimates for the measurement models are equal in the two groups.

Having no compelling reason to analyze the data from each group separately, we pooled the data for increased power and greater results stability.⁵

Stage Measure Predictive Validity

Average frequency of identity related behavior was compared across levels of identity stage. Average length of enacting the identity is lowest at discovery, highest in maintenance, and not different from maintenance at disposition (see Table 1). Participants also reported how long they had been playing tennis or doing aerobics (converted to number of months). As one would expect, average frequency of identity-related behavior is greater at maintenance than discovery, but not disposition (see Table 1). Finally, role-person merger is lowest at discovery, significantly higher at maintenance and disposition. Role-person merger is somewhat lower at disposition than maintenance, but not significantly so (Table 1). Thus, role-person merger fits the pattern expected with a sample of individuals all of whom are still enacting the role-identity.

⁵ To fulfill curiosity, we did analyze data for the two contexts separately. The result patterns from those analyses largely replicate the findings reported for the combined data sets. Reporting the pooled data has the additional benefit of reinforcing that the identity cultivation process is the central focus, and not the specific contexts from which the data were obtained.

Association with Role-Person Merger by Stage

Examining how the magnitude of identity-relevant variables provides a descriptive overview of individuals' experiential state in each of the stages. We also examine how these variables associate with role-person merger to reveal how their importance to self-definition varies across the identity life cycle stages.

We first tested to see whether the relationship between each construct and role-person merger varies by identity stage. Regression models were estimated in which the focal construct (e.g., possession commitments), identity stage, and their interaction were specified as predictors of role-person merger (SAS PROC GLM). In every case, the interaction effect was significant ($p < .05$). This provides evidence that the relationship between each construct (e.g., possession commitment) and role-person merger does vary by identity stage. It also indicates that the relationships should be examined within each stage. Thus, to explore variability across stages, the relationship between each predictor construct and role-person merger was then estimated for each level of stage (SAS PROC REG). These regression coefficients can be interpreted as a measure of strength of association between role-person merger and each predictor variable, or the degree to which role-person merger depends upon each sign of identity cultivation. Procedures outlined by Pedhazur (1982, p. 28) were followed to compare the relative magnitude of the regression coefficients across levels of identity cycle stage. See Table 2 for these results.

External Commitments. The associations between social commitments and role-person merger are strongest at the discovery stage (see Table 2). The identity relevance of social commitments is significantly lower in maintenance. Number of possessions is significantly lower at maintenance compared to discovery. The association between media commitments and role-person merger does not vary significantly between stages, possibly due to the attenuating effect of range restriction. Thus, the general pattern we observe with external identity commitments is that, with the exception of media, their association with role-person merger is greatest at discovery. That is, social and possession commitments have their strongest connection to role-person merger early on in the identity project stages, prior to a person internalizing a stable self-description related to the identity.

Planned contrasts ($p \leq .05$) reveal that the number of identity related social commitments, product categories, and possessions, increases significantly from discovery to maintenance (see Table 1). At the disposition stage, number of identity related social commitments does not differ significantly from the maintenance stage. Similarly, the total number of identity related possessions and identity related media consumption are higher at maintenance than discovery, but remain at the same level from maintenance to disposition. In contrast, the reported number of product categories owned is significantly lower at disposition. Media extensiveness does not change significantly from stage to stage, perhaps owing to range restriction. Thus, with the exception of media, the general pattern with respect to external commitments is for commitment levels to be significantly greater at maintenance than at discovery and for the difference from maintenance to

disposition to be nonsignificant. This suggests that our respondents in the disposition phase may be in early disposition during which maintenance factors linger. Because these individuals are still playing tennis, perhaps they represent a group anticipating declining involvement, representing an early phase of the disposition stage.

Appraisals of possessions and performance. The association between reflected appraisals and role-person merger does not increase through the identity life cycle stages. In fact, appraisals are most strongly associated with role-person merger in the discovery stage, the stage when appraisal valence is least positive (see Table 2).

Planned contrasts show that appraisals vary significantly in magnitude across the identity stages (see Table 1). For each appraisal type, the lowest mean occurs at the discovery stage. The means tend to rise through maintenance and then plateau. Specifically, reflected appraisals of products rise significantly from discovery to maintenance; appraisals do not differ significantly between maintenance and disposition. A similar pattern is observed for reflected appraisals of performance.

Emotions Toward Possessions and Performance. The means for pride in possessions, pride in performance, shame in possessions, and shame in performance vary significantly across the four identity groups. As Table 1 shows, pride in possessions increases significantly from discovery to maintenance; disposition pride is not different from maintenance pride. The same pattern is observed with pride in performance. In contrast, the mean for shame in possessions is highest at discovery, is significantly lower at maintenance, and is significantly higher than maintenance shame at disposition. Shame in performance shows the same mean pattern. While individuals in the disposition stage do

not experience a decline in pride, they do report experiencing greater shame than those in the maintenance stage.

In contrast, the association between role-person merger and pride in possessions is highest at discovery and significantly lower at maintenance. The association is not significant for those in disposition. Pride in performance, pride in possessions, shame in possessions, and shame in performance follow a similar pattern in their association with role-person merger. The association with role-person merger and the emotions always strongest at the discovery stage, even though the emotions tend to become more positive through maintenance, and more negative (more shame) during disposition.

DISCUSSION

This project sought to examine two issues: one, whether person-possession relations, as indicated by various identity related variables through which individuals cultivate and maintain self-definitions, differ in magnitude across identity life cycle stages and two, whether those same variables differ in their impact on self-definitions across identity stages. On the whole, our expectations have been supported by the data.

Understanding these issues requires placing consumption within its self-developmental context. Viewed in this way, focus of attention shifts from single possessions or brands to possession sets comprised of products that symbolically and functionally facilitate identity enactment. Identity enactment is viewed as on going characteristic activity patterns that involves certain interaction patterns within an enduring social network.

External Commitments and Self-Definition

The results show that, as identities develop, the accumulation of identity -related social commitments, identity-related possessions owned, and identity related product categories owned tend to increase through maintenance, and then decline at disposition. Media commitments did not vary significantly, possibly attenuated by range restriction. Thus, external identity commitments that provide support necessary to cultivate an identity increase in magnitude as the identity is cultivated and reconfirmed. When identity disconfirmation sets in, the extensiveness of the identity support variables tends to drop.

Examining the association of the identity-related variables with self-definition (role-person merger) gives us a very different picture. The relative importance to self-definition (role-person merger) of most of those same variables is highest at the beginning stage of discovery and then plateaus or declines through maintenance. External identity commitments are part-and-parcel of identity related interactions, and they remain significant predictors of role-person merger throughout the role-identity life cycle, at least into maintenance. However, their impact upon self-definitions tends to decline as the individual's internal self-representation-in-role develops and stabilizes. At the same time that these predictors of role-person merger become more supportive (more favorable) of the identity, they also become less important to its maintenance. Consistent with Piliavin and Callero's (e.g., 1991) findings in the blood donation context, it appears that as the internal representation of self-in-role develops, the external signs and commitments of self-

definition become less relevant to one's self-definition or behavior.

Reflected-appraisals of identity-related possessions and performance also varied across life cycle stages. The general pattern we observed showed that valences of appraisals are lower at discovery and are highest in maintenance. For individuals in our sample who were categorized in the disposition phase, appraisals remained relatively positive. Because our sample was taken from individuals who had not yet stopped participating in tennis or aerobics, it appears that we captured individuals in the early stages of disposition, before complete role-identity disruption occurs.

In contrast to the appraisals being highest at maintenance, we observed that the association between appraisals and role-person merger was lower at maintenance than in discovery. That is, at the same time that appraisals are most positively valenced, the "looking glass self" resulting from those appraisals was least associated with the importance of the identity to the person's overall self-concept.

The identity-related emotions of pride and shame in possessions and in performance also tended to become more positive when the identity is more well-developed. During disposition, shame in possessions and in performance is greater. This is consistent with identity disposition being a time of questioning one's self-in-role. Individuals at the disposition stage may perceive that they are not living up to role-relevant others' expectations; as participation declines, or enthusiasm lessens for the activity, individuals may experience embarrassment and shame about not fulfilling their role-identity related obligations to others. Identities are cultivated through social interaction; those social commitments must be renegotiated upon a significant lowering of

commitment to the role-identity.

The strength of the association between the emotions and role-person merger follows a pattern similar to that observed with appraisals and external identity commitments. That is, during maintenance, when pride is the highest and shame at its lowest, the emotions have the weakest association with role-person merger .

There is a striking similarity to the data pattern we observed and findings in the context of voluntary blood donation. Charng, et al (1988), for example, applied both identity-related and attitudinal variables to predict behavioral intentions and behavior. Their results showed that the ability to predict future donation behavior peaked at their second stage of blood donor identity formation and then *decreased*. They speculated that, as individuals develop stable self-definitions as donors, they also develop a sense of perceived expertise or self-control over the identity behaviors. Moreover, part of the reason that individuals report increasingly favorable appraisals and emotions is because they develop a self-protective bias through which they are more attuned to positive feedback and filter out negative appraisals.

Identity-related variables predicted intentions and behavior throughout the donor life cycle, yet an internalization process occurred that appeared to take over in regulating future donation behavior. Charng, et al. (1988) were predicting intentions and behavior. We are examining role-person merger. Yet, we speculate that the same basic process may be reflected in our data. As a person becomes more confident of him or her self in role, the person does not need to rely as much upon externally available cues of identity that arise through social interaction. This internalization process results in a picture of one's

self as competent-in-role. This self-perceived competence may render external identity commitments and externally available feedback and resulting emotions less potent cues of self-definition. This idea is generally consistent with Wicklund and Gollwitzer's (1982) symbolic self-completion theory. Additionally, identity veterans, even those who are "retired" from the role-identity, have available a wider array of options for self-symbolizing--including the ability to reminisce about enduring symbols and other symbols that are unavailable to rookies. Possessions continue as functionally necessary. However, to the person more invested, possessions are not as important for self-definition. Most likely, the individual relies on more enduring symbols of the identity when reinforcement is needed. The relation between people and their possessions varies, according to the extent to which internal representations of self-in-role have formed.

Altogether, these findings demonstrate that we accumulate external commitments - - such as social commitments, material possession commitments, and media commitments -- in order to cultivate the role-identity and to obtain the necessary appraisals and resulting emotions that encourage identity development. The findings also suggest that mere ownership of possessions does not imply self-relevance. Time and self-cultivation is necessary before a particular possession becomes part of "me" (Kleine, et al.1995). Identity cultivation variables appear to carry their greatest weight on role-person merger in the earlier stages of identity development prior to the person obtaining more enduring symbols of the identity. As a positive perception of self-in-role forms into the maintenance stage, external feedback (appraisals) and external commitments have less of an influence on the internalized self-perception and its relative importance to the person's overall self-

concept. That is, as role-person merger rises, an internalized sense of competence means that external reinforcement is less important to continued activity. Individuals evidencing more role-person merger have built self-supporting cognitions; ways of perceiving themselves that reinforce, rather than detract from, the desired self-definition.

The result pattern also suggests that studying only the favorableness of influences on self-definition may provide imbalanced conclusions. An individual's accumulation of role-identity related commitments and possessions provides limited diagnostic value for understanding the self-relevance of consumption. Detecting the relative impact of such variables on self-definition is necessary for a more complete understanding. The results show role-identity life cycle stage to be an interesting moderator of person-possession and other relationships in consumer research.

Generalizability

The results are most likely generalizable to other leisure activity identities, but may also apply to other freely chosen role-identities (e.g., vegetarian, collector, alternative health care consumer). Role-identities such as gender, racial status, or ethnic identities that generally are not freely chosen may not fit the conceptual arguments or empirical results described here.

It should be noted that the proposed identity life-cycle stages do not have precise boundaries. Thus, there is most likely some misclassification error in placing respondents in one stage or another. Also, because the sample is cross-sectional we can infer, but

cannot be conclusive about, how individuals change from stage to stage. Thus, while a longitudinal exploration would enhance our confidence about role-identity development, our findings are consistent with general patterns observed in data collected in very different identity contexts (e.g., Donnelly and Young 1988) and with a longitudinal study (Piliavin and Callero 1991). Experimentation that examines cognitive changes across stages could also be used to further validate the stage measure.

Identity-Life Cycle Stage: A Key Moderator

Person-possession relationships. The role of possessions and other identity-related related commitments in cultivating or dispossessing a role-identity varies across the identity life-cycle stages. This finding helps begin defining the boundaries of when a possession is self-definitional. The results suggest that a person's relationship with particular possessions, brand names, and other symbolic indicators of role-identity will vary from stage to stage. How important and symbolically useful are particular possessions or brands as self-symbols at each stage of identity development? Are person-brand relationships (Fournier 1998), or brand loyalty and commitment moderated by identity stage?

Dispossession of material goods is an understudied topic of consumer behavior. Identity change precipitates goods dispossession and consumers use dispossession to facilitate identity changes (Belk, Sherry, and Wallendorf 1988). It may be useful to understand the changes in external identity commitments, appraisals, and emotions that

accompany the dispossession of role-related goods.

Attitude relationships. In the context of voluntary blood donation, attitudes toward donation have a differential impact on future donation behavior, depending upon whether the donor is a rookie or an experienced veteran (Allen, et al.1992; Piliavin and Callero 1991). Consumers' attitudinal responses to persuasive messages may correlate with identity development stage. Should persuasive message arguments be constructed differently, depending upon the target audience's role -identity development stage? The contemporary use of data-bases to track customers allows for the gathering of information to classify customers into identity developmental stages and to design value offerings accordingly.

Consumer Socialization. Investigations of consumption phenomena in role-identity transitions, role acquisition, and consumer socialization could include role -identity development stage as a variable to enhance understanding of the processes at work. As consumers use consumption to facilitate role change, how does the global self-concept accommodate the acquisition of a new role-identity or the loss of an existing one? Can marketers apply role-identity development to urge target consumers through the developmental stages into the more self-reinforcing stage of maintenance through product availability, special offerings, or communications? Can marketing offerings help preclude identity disposition by facilitating social commitments, and positive feedback regarding one's self-in-role? Service providers may have, through face-to-face contact with the customer, especially good opportunities to help customers with identity project. Such investigations hold promise for illuminating the forces that lead to or de -stabilize a Diderot

unity (McCracken 1988).

Identity Schema Development Across Identity Development Stages

Here we examined factors related to role-person merger and its development. Another way to explore the relationship between consumption, possessions, and self-definitions would be to examine how schemas (Markus 1977) representing the role-identity change from identity life cycle stage to stage. As role-identities develop, people form internalized representations of self-in-role. These identity-schemas include actual, stereotypical, and ideal pictures of the role and how it relates to the individual (Kleine, et al. 1993). Schemas may form during the pre-socialization and discovery stages of identity development, become refined during maintenance, only to become unsettled upon disposition. Does the actual and ideal role-identity schema gradually converge from discovery through maintenance and then become more disparate at disposition? Do actual role-identity schemas become more well-integrated within the global self definition as a person moves through the stages? Exploring these and other schema-related questions would enhance our understanding of the self-consumption relationship.

CONCLUSIONS

The results presented here encourage consumer psychologists to pursue questions about how role-identity life cycle stage moderates the relationship between consumption behaviors, possessions, and self-definitions. The effects of past, role-identity related

behavior leads to current self-perceptions and the self-definitions. Framing person-possession relations in the context of self-developmental stages should enhance our understanding of the self-consumption relationship.

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TABLE 1**How Behavior Frequency, Possessions, and Media Differ Across Groups:
Means, (Standard Deviations), and Comparison Summary**

Dependent Construct	Identity cultivation stage			Comparison summary
	Discovery (1)	Maintenance (2)	Disposition (3)	
Behavior Frequency	3.7 ^a (1.9)	5.5 ^c (0.8)	5.1 ^c (1.1)	1<2≅3
How Long Done?	2.4 ^a (3.39)	11.6 ^b (8.94)	14.1 ^b (7.99)	1<2≅3
Age	33 (8.6)	38 (9.1)	35 (12.6)	1<2≅3
Role-Person Merger	3.1 ^a (1.80)	6.0 ^b (1.23)	5.9 ^b (0.74)	1<2≅3
Social Connections	8.0 ^a (15.1)	22.1 ^c (20.1)	24.8 ^{b,c} (24.6)	1<2≅3
Product Categories	5.0 ^a (3.1) ^a	11.0 ^c (4.7)	7.9 ^b (4.9)	1<2>3
Possessions	12.3 ^a (8.7)	57.1 ^c (49.9)	53.2 ^{b,c} (54.6)	1<2≅3
Media	1.5 ^a (1.3)	2.7 ^b (1.7)	2.5 ^b (1.3)	1<2≅3
Reflected appraisals possessions	3.7 ^a (1.7)	5.2 ^b (1.1)	5.4 ^b (.9)	1<2≅3
Reflected appraisals performance	2.9 ^a (1.0)	5.2 ^c (1.0)	5.2 ^{b,c} (1.0)	1<2≅3
Pride possessions	3.6 ^a (2.0)	5.6 ^b (1.2)	5.9 ^b (1.2)	1<2≅3
Pride performance	3.3 ^a (1.6)	6.1 ^c (1.0)	5.6 ^{b,c} (.8)	1<2≅3
Shame possessions	3.1 ^a (1.6)	1.8 ^b (1.0)	2.6 ^c (.7)	1>2<3
Shame performance	3.7 ^a (2.1)	1.9 ^b (1.1)	3.0 ^c (1.0)	1>2<3

TABLE 2

**How the Identity-Relevance of Commitments, Appraisals, and Emotions Vary across Identity Cultivation Stages:
Summary of Regression Analyses**

Predictor	Statistics	Identity stage			Planned comparison summary
		Discovery (1)	Maintenance (2)	Disposition (3)	
Social	b (std)	.05 ^a (.41)	.006 ^b (.10)	.008 ^b (.27)	1>2≅3
	s.e.	.01	.003	.004	
	t	3.83	2.03	2.23	
Possessions	b (std)	.12 ^a (.59)	.004 ^b (.16)	.004 ^b (.32)	1>2≅3
	s.e.	.02	.001	.002	
	t	6.22	3.05	2.66	
Media	b (std)	.47 ^a (.33)	.13 ^a (.18)	.10 ^a (.19)	1≅2≅3
	s.e.	.18	0.4	.07	
	t	2.59	3.49	1.48	
Reflected appraisals of possessions	b (std)	0.55 ^a (.55)	0.50 ^a (.42)	-0.02* ^b (-.03)	1≅2>3
	s.e.	0.10	0.06	0.10	
	t	5.53	9.02	-0.21	
Reflected appraisals of performance	b (std)	0.78 ^a (.44)	0.52 ^b (.42)	0.03* ^c (.03)	1>2>3
	s.e.	0.18	0.06	0.13	
	t	4.29	9.05	0.21	
Pride in possessions	b (std)	0.72 ^a (.80)	0.56 ^b (.53)	-0.08* ^c (-.13)	1>2>3
	s.e.	0.06	0.04	0.07	
	t	11.43	11.98	-1.02	
Pride in performance	b (std)	0.68 ^a (.63)	0.63 ^b (.50)	-0.23 ^c (-.26)	1>2>3
	s.e.	0.1	0.06	0.11	

	t	6.9	11.27	-2.13	
Shame in possessions	b (std)	-0.76 ^a (-.68)	-0.42 ^b (-.33)	0.18* ^c (.19)	1>2>3
	s.e.	0.09	0.06	0.12	
	t	-8.10	-6.84	1.46	
Shame in performance	b (std)	-0.42 ^a (-.50)	-0.42 ^a (-.36)	0.05* ^b (.07)	1≅2>3
	s.e.	0.08	0.06	0.09	
	t	-4.98	-7.51	0.55	