

Consumption and Self-Schema Changes Throughout the Identity Project Life Cycle

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ABSTRACT

How does a person use consumption to cultivate a specific social identity (e.g., biker, skydiver, bird watcher)? How might consumption assist -- or inhibit -- an individual's efforts to dispose of, or reconstruct, an identity? We present a conceptual model of the identity project life cycle as it pertains to consumption. The model integrates sociological and psychological perspectives to portray the evolution of a specific social identity through the phases of pre-socialization, (re)discovery, (re)construction, maintenance, latency, and disposition. We offer propositions for studying how changes in self-schemata and consumption accompany the phases of the identity project life cycle.

INTRODUCTION

We cultivate and preserve our identities via symbolic use of possessions (e.g., Belk 1988; Solomon 1982). Not only do people use consumption for *acquiring or maintaining* an aspect of self-concept, they also use it to facilitate other kinds of identity change, namely, for temporarily or permanently *laying aside* an aspect of identity (e.g., Belk, Sherry, and Wallendorf 1988; Kleine, Kleine, and Allen 1995; McAlexander 1991; Young 1991). Additionally, having put aside a particular piece of identity for a time, an individual may attempt to *rebuild* that aspect of self-concept. Identity projects continually evolve over time (Kegan 1982) through stages of acquisition, maintenance, latency or disposition, and possible reconstruction. At each of these stages, a person's cognitive representations of "self"-- the person's self-schemata -- may change.

Some consumer socialization researchers limit socialization processes to children (e.g., Ward 1974). Other consumer researchers expand the socialization concept to include adults and examine the role of media as socializing agents (Faber and O'Guinn 1988). A more holistic view of consumption socialization is evident in Celsi, Rose, and Leigh's (1993) and Schouten and McAlexander's (1995) portrayals of factors related to acquisition and maintenance of a part of one's self (e.g., skydiver, biker). This paper extends and complements those efforts to understand consumption socialization among adults. Specifically, we sketch the beginnings of a conceptual model of the identity project life cycle. The model portrays the identity project as consisting of these basic steps: pre-socialization, identity (re)discovery, identity (re)construction, identity maintenance, identity latency, and identity disposal. Within the model are several sub-phases: the rookie start (acquiring a new identity), identity disengagement (disengaging from an existing identity), and identity renewal (re-engaging an old identity that had been put aside). The model directs attention to consumption that influences the identity latency, identity disposition,

and identity reconstruction phases, all of which are neglected modes of consumption behavior in consumer research. The model also provides the bases for a number of propositions about how identity schemas and consumption evolve through the various stages of an identity project.

BACKGROUND

Inside-Out and Outside-In Influences

Cultivating an aspect of identity is not just an inside-out, internally driven process in which consumption behavior is the dependent variable (e.g., Piliavin, Callero, and Evans 1984). As Solomon (1983) argues, social influences, including possessions, are “social stimuli” -- part of the social structure that influences identity development from the outside-in. Yet, throughout the identity project cycle the relative importance of the identity to the person’s self-structure changes, and internal self-schemata (Markus 1977) reflect changes in how the person sees him or herself. Thus, internal representations and external social influences work in concert to affect consumption behavior.

Social Identities and Identity-Related Schemas

People may attempt to change their entire identity (e.g., Schouten 1991), but more often than not, adult self-cultivation only involves a *piece* of the self, labeled a *social identity* here (Stryker 1980). Each of a person’s social identities corresponds to an internal representation, in the form of a set of three identity-related schemas (discussed below), and an external social network, labeled *social connections*, in which the identity is performed and cultivated (Kleine, Kleine, and Kernan 1993). All of a person’s social identities are hierarchically organized to comprise the overall, or global self-concept. *Identity importance* describes the relative ranking

of a particular social identity in an individual's hierarchically organized self-concept. More important identities are evoked more often and across various situations, and have a greater impact on the person's overall self (Callero 1985; Stryker 1980). An identity, as construed here, links the person to society. As social identities provide a locus which organizes the use of identity-enabling consumer goods and services, all social identities are of interest to consumer researchers.

The **self-schemas** referred to are similar to Markus' (1977) self-schemata, but we conceptualize each self-schema as being tied to a particular social identity within an individual's global self-concept. We further construe the schemas to contain knowledge used to guide having and doing as it pertains to a particular societal role or personal identity. Empirical evidence applying this social identity approach demonstrates that there are three schemas associated with each identity: a role schema, an identity schema, and an identity-ideal schema (Kleine, et al. 1993). The *role schema* contains shared representations, such as norms and cultural stereotypes about "doing" a particular social role; this includes tacit knowledge about the "typical" person in that role and knowledge of the constellation of products that symbolize and enable that role (e.g., Kernan and Sommers 1967; Solomon 1988). An individual's *identity schema* represents one's understanding of him or herself with respect to a particular role and is thus more personalized and often more realistic. The identity schema includes representation of an identity-related product cluster (the actual possessions the person has related to the identity). The person's *identity-ideal schema* corresponds to how the person would like to become as one who enacts that role. According to empirical results (Kleine, et al. 1993), a person's identity schema ("how I am as a bicyclist") is guided by the identity-ideal ("how I would like to be as a bicyclist") and the role schema ("how the typical bicyclist goes about cycling"). The role schema also guides the

identity-ideal schema. The identity schema has the most direct impact upon identity-related possessions (the possessions I own because I am, am trying to be, or was, a cyclist). Below we explore how the content of the three schemas, and their relative influences on consumption behavior, may change as the related social identity evolves through identity project life cycle stages.

Identity change is accompanied by *external* changes in one's social networks (Stryker 1980) and in use and display of possessions. One's *social commitments* (social network contacts related to an identity) provide the opportunity to learn about, enact, and receive feedback about, one's identity attempts. These social connections can cause entry into a particular identity (Piliavin, et al. 1984). Consequently, a person can be dragged into, pulled out of, or kept from leaving, an identity from the outside. From this perspective, our social networks affect who we are as much as internal drives do. The cycling of a particular identity in a person's self-concept is affected by, and reflected in, changes in the person's external social network.

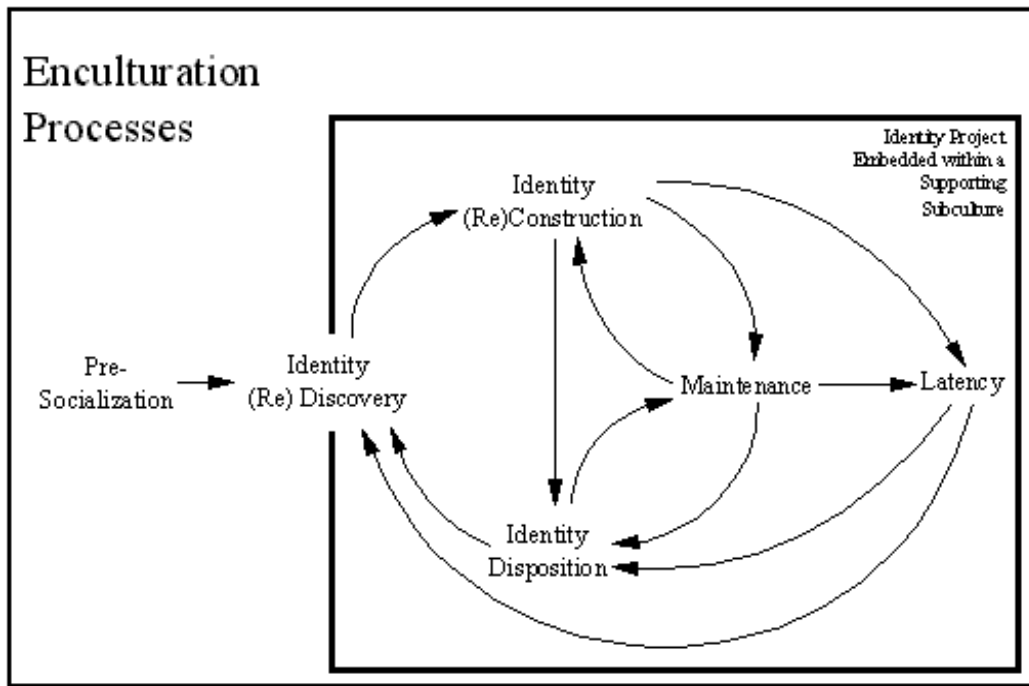
AN INITIAL SKETCH OF THE IDENTITY PROJECT LIFE CYCLE

The Figure portrays the four basic stages of identity cycling: *discovery*, *construction*, *maintenance*, and *disposition*. Additionally, the model highlights the possibility that a social identity may enter a period of *latency* during which identity activities are temporarily suspended and then resumed. The model captures the evolutionary aspect of social identity development in that a person may be continually refining, modifying, improving, expanding, and/or contracting the identity (Kegan 1982). In this paper we emphasize three sub-phases of the cycling process: *rookie acquisition*, *disengagement*, and *latency renewal*. The three identity schemas (role identity, identity, and identity ideal), plus identity importance, provide a conceptual framework

useful for characterizing key phenomena of the identity project life cycle process.

FIGURE

A Model of the Identity Project Life Cycle



Identity Project Life Cycle Sub-Phases Emphasized in this Article

Sub-Phase	Constituent Elements
Rookie start	Pre-socialization → discovery → construction → maintenance
Disengagement	Latency → disposition
Latency renewal	Latency → re-entry → rediscovery → reconstruction → maintenance

The Rookie Start

“Rookie” describes individuals who have little or no experience with the products or activities associated with a particular role (Pilivian, et al. 1984). The rookie start resembles the conventional adoption process model (e.g., Robertson 1971), but complements that model in

several ways. First, the unit of analysis is a social identity instead of a specific (isolated) product or behavior. Second, instead of the adoption process model's core psychological processes, the social identity model emphasizes both the inside-out (i.e., the three identity schemas) and outside-in (i.e., social structural) factors that influence identity change and subsequent product or behavior adoption. An identity derives from immersion in, and changes in, social structural factors, such as social connections. This distinguishes the rookie start from other approaches that place a theoretical premium on individual free-will, leaving under-examined the functions that social-structural factors may exert on identity acquisition or disposition. Third, identity development is not conceptualized as a linear process, but as an iterative evolutionary process.

Pre-socialization. Identity pre-socialization results from the enculturation process experienced by members of a particular cultural group. Presocialization may take place long before one becomes actively interested in, or capable of pursuing, an identity. Through enculturation, individuals learn the role schemas for the social roles common in a society and the stereotypical consumption patterns that facilitate and symbolize the social role (Solomon 1988). These role schemas define what comes to mind when one thinks of a particular role such as new parent, bicyclist, or cellist. Although the tacit knowledge captured by role-schemas is considered "common knowledge", the exact contents of the role schema may vary according to such key social structural variables as age, gender, social class, geographic location, etc.

Each individual in a society has a vast repertoire of role schemas. These role schemas yield familiarity with role-related product clusters and consumer behaviors that far exceeds the number of roles personally experienced. It is important to recognize that at this phase role schemas represent an *outsider's* understanding, or stereotype of, a role and 'a type of person I am not.' Hence, this proposition:

P1: During the pre-socialization phase, a role-schema represents an outsider's understanding or stereotype of a role and "a type of person I am not".

Discovery. Role discovery occurs when a person evaluates a social role to explore the question, "is this a type of person I'd like to become?" For example, "might I want to become a bicyclist?" Discovery ends when the person makes an implicit or explicit decision/commitment to pursue developing the identity ("I'll get a bike and try this out"). Role exploration may be initiated by: life status changes (Andreasen 1984), contact with a person having that role-identity, or in conjunction with a "partner in crime" ("Hey, neither of us have done this before, but it sounds interesting. Let's give it a try!"). The role schema may include the concept that the activity (e.g., cycling) is "something I always wanted to do" (e.g., Celsi, et al. 1993).

Applying empirical findings in the context of acquiring the identity of blood donor (Callero 1985; Piliavin, et al. 1984), plus the basic tenets of symbolic interactionist theory (Solomon 1983), we suspect that most identity exploration stems from an outside-in influence. Contact with a person actively engaged in the role-identity in question is often a key predictor of exploration. Contact with this bridge person(s) is important for a number of reasons. The bridge person provides an identity-related social connection (Kleine, et al. 1993) that can offer an "insider's" perspective on the identity. At minimum, the bridge person can detail or illustrate the requisite possession and behavioral competencies characteristic of the identity. Note that identity exploration resides at the threshold of society and the identity-supporting social connections (see Figure). This reflects how a bridge person can provide the role-explorer a link to the subculture comprised of other people with that identity (Piliavin, et al. 1984). The bridge person's most important service is to provide the role-explorer opportunities to experience, first-hand, consumption and other behaviors associated with the identity.

P2: Most freely chosen identity discovery results from an external influence, such as a bridge person who influences the development of the individual's social commitments and role-schema.

The individual assesses role-fit during discovery. Role-fit is determined by evaluating how the role would complement or extend the other identities that comprise an individual's current and anticipated self-structure. The budding bicyclist may evaluate fit with her family and work-related identities. Role-fit evaluation yields a perception of whether the role is "for me" now, or in the future. We propose also that individuals employ the role schema to evaluate role-fit. If asked at this point to describe the products, services, and behaviors characteristic of those who pursue this role, individuals' responses are guided by the role schema as the identity or identity-ideal schemas do not yet exist (Donnelly and Young 1988). The role schema provides the basis from which identity discovery, evaluation, and development begin. Hence:

P3: The role-schema guides individuals' early exploration of role-related activities. First hand experience enacting a role affords a foundation on which to build an identity schema. If, after exploration, the individual decides 'this isn't for me,' we propose that a schema containing summary information of the trial experience will remain with the individual. If experiences during exploration yield a perception of role-person fit, the individual will likely continue pursuing the role to the identity construction stage. The discovery-to-construction transition (see Figure) may be intentional or a non-event. The person may simply keep pursuing role-related behaviors due to being pulled along by social influences (Piliavin, et al. 1984). Our budding bicyclist may continue weekly rides with friends, for example.

Identity Construction. The individual in identity construction accumulates experiences with role-related products and behavioral patterns. Identity construction occurs in the context of a

social network which provides identity confirming or disconfirming feedback (e.g., Hoelter 1984; Kleine, et al. 1993). At this stage, our bicyclist will likely be accumulating the set of possessions and skills deemed appropriate for pursuing role-related activities. As the individual lacks an identity schema, the role schema guides these early efforts (Donnelly and Young 1988). Because the role schema is an “outsider’s” perspective, it may guide the individual to select products that may be out of step with contemporary identity subculture practices. A consequence may be that the individual engages in symbolic self-completing consumption behaviors (Wicklund and Golwitzer 1982) that yield different effects on identity insiders and outsiders. To identity insiders, such behavior brands the individual as a rookie. Yet, because the consumption behavior converges with the role stereotype, outsiders may perceive the rookie as an identity veteran. In contrast, because role veterans often evidence consumption patterns that differ from the role stereotype, outsiders may mis-perceive veterans as rookies. Identity veterans sometimes take advantage of this confusion to get identity rookies to perform “grunge work” associated with the activity (Donnelly and Young 1988).

P4: During identity construction, the role schema continues to guide identity performance, including possession use and display. The resulting identity performance may be judged one way (e.g., as positive, appropriate) by outsiders who perceive a role-stereotype, but differently (e.g., as “rookie” or “pretender” behavior) by insiders who possess an identity schema.

Personal experiences enacting role-related behaviors and consumption are summarized into an identity schema. This identity schema reflects the individual’s emerging sense of “how *I* enact this role,” including what products to use, how to use those products, and from where and how to acquire those products. The individual also begins crafting a sense of “how I’d like to be

as this type of person,” the identity-ideal.

P5: During identity construction, the identity-schema becomes more elaborate including knowledge about what products/brands to use, how to use those products, and from where and how to acquire them.

This divergence of the identity and role schemas that takes place during identity construction implies these propositions:

P6: As identity construction commences, individuals will shift from evaluating possessions and behaviors in terms of *role-appropriateness* towards evaluating possessions and behaviors in terms of *identity-appropriateness*.

P7: During identity construction, the identity-ideal schema, including desired products/brands, begins to develop.

P8: During the construction phase, the identity and identity-ideal schemas will become more important guides as individuals evaluate the appropriateness of possessions and behaviors for their identity pursuit. The role schema will become less important.

A critical juncture occurs when the individual makes the transition from perceiving the role as external to themselves (“a type of person I’m not”) to internalizing the role (“I am this kind of person”). Identity has emerged. The global self structure may change during identity emergence. As the importance of the identity in acquisition rises, existing identities and their associated consumption patterns, may be altered. For example, the ascendance of the “parent” identity (or any other resource intensive identity) within the self-concept causes individuals to re-evaluate and adjust pursuit of other identities in their self concept. Such adjustments imply important modifications in consumption patterns.

Maintenance. While identity construction is a period of change, maintenance is a period

of refinement. Identity supporting social networks are well-established. The identity and identity-ideal schemas have achieved a state of relative maturity, reflecting the identity related possessions and skills accumulated by the individual. The identity is now integrated into the individual's self-concept. The individual is now an identity veteran.

The identity and identity-ideal schemas guide an individual's actions in an iterative manner. The possession cluster will undergo refinement. Possessions may be replaced with products deemed appropriate according to the individual's current identity and identity-ideal schemas. For example, a photographer with an identity-ideal schema that projects an increase in the number of frames he exposes may consider upgrading to more rugged 'pro' gear, the same gear that he previously considered "unnecessary for a weekender."

As the individual accumulates more experience at the identity, the identity schema becomes more precisely defined; the individual gains an increasingly refined understanding of "how I am as this type of person." The person's perception of the identity-related product cluster becomes more refined, as well. For example, the photographer gains a more definite understanding of what types of equipment and accessories are best for him, based on his personal understanding of the identity, as reflected in his identity-schema.

P9: During maintenance, the identity-schema becomes more elaborate and precisely defined, including enhanced understanding of the identity-related product cluster.

Similarly, individuals' identity-ideal will also become more developed, constrained perhaps by individuals' understandings of their own repertoire of skills and resources pertinent to the identity. The social-structural matrix in which the individual pursues the identity imposes constraints on the individual's identity ideal. Other identities in the individual's self-concept are also potential constraints.

Periodically, the individual in maintenance may be spurred to ‘do something different,’ precipitating transition out of maintenance into identity-reconstruction. The instigating factor may be intra-identity or extra-identity. A photo seminar, is an example of an intra-identity factor that may induce the individual to radically modify his photographer identity-ideal. This modification in the identity-ideal may lead the individual to reconstruct the identity in response to this revised identity-ideal.

P10: An intra-identity factor, such as new information about performing the role, that leads to a significant change in the identity-ideal, will precipitate identity reconstruction.

Identity reconstruction may involve expanding or replacing part of the existing possession cluster, as represented in the identity and identity-ideal schemas.

Extra-identity factors, such as those accompanying life status changes (e.g., retirement, divorce; Andreason 1984) may precipitate reconstruction of a specific piece of the self, as well. The personal resources previously allocated to the shifting or departing identity now can be reallocated to re-immense one’s self in the social structure, behaviors, and product cluster of an ‘old’ identity.

P11: Extra-identity factors, such as those that occur during role transitions, may make room for new role identities to emerge or may precipitate reconstruction of select social identities present in the self-concept system.

These changes can be observed through changes in identity importance, in the identity and identity-ideal schemas, and in identity-related consumption behaviors.

Maintenance-reconstruction cycles (see Figure) may repeat at varying intervals over an individual’s life span. We propose that each cycle will induce changes in the identity and ideal

schemas. These changes will be evidenced in their effects on the possessions and behaviors considered identity-appropriate.

Identity Disengagement

Intra- and extra-identity factors may also initiate identity disengagement, or the process of reducing the importance of an identity in the self-concept. We distinguish two types of identity disengagement: latency and disposition. The person's intent distinguishes them.

Identity Latency. Latency describes a phase in which the individual ceases to enact identity related activities or consumption behaviors and/or the frequency with which they do so is materially reduced. A key attribute of identity latency is that the individual *intends to continue* pursuing the identity. We theorize there are two types of identity latency: cyclical and circumstantial. Cyclical latency describes identities that rise and fall in importance on a periodic basis. Bicycling, like many sports-based identities, is often seasonal. The identity assumes maximum importance during warm weather months. With cooler weather, identity-related activities diminish in frequency. Many of the facilitating possessions may be placed in a dormant stage until the cycle begins again. Although the identity is in latency, elements of the supporting social structure may persist. The cyclist may continue to consume cycling-related media, for example. Or, a cycling club may meet in the winter to focus on spring renewal.

Circumstantial latency describes latency precipitated by intra- or extra-identity changes. An injury that prevents an individual from cycling (intra-identity) or other temporary changes such as new parenthood (extra-identity) that prevent cycling illustrate such changes. A geographic re-location that extracts the individual from the social-structural matrix that supported their identity pursuits also illustrates a circumstantial factor that may precipitate

identity latency. A latency phase of extended duration may lapse into disposition if the individual concludes “I will never be this type of person again.”

Identity Disposition. Identity disposition describes the situation where an individual intends to purge an identity from his/her self-concept. The same factors that maintain an identity also act as barriers that inhibit disposing of that identity. One’s identity-related social network may discourage “quitting.” One’s assortment of identity-related possessions must be disposed of (e.g., a smoker ridding herself of smoking related possessions). Thus, identity-related possessions may also serve as a barrier to identity disposition, such as the legal, practical, or emotional difficulty of altering possession ownership after a divorce (McAlexander 1991).

P12: Identity-related possessions and social connections may act as mobility barriers that prevent or slow identity disposition.

An important feature of identity disposition is that the residual identity-related schemas will persist as part of the individual’s life story; they become part of “what I have been, but am not now.” How the schemas will look after identity disposition remains an empirical question. It seems reasonable to propose that the identity schema for a dispossessed identity will contain an element of “someone I was, but am no longer.” The circumstances precipitating the disposition may affect the emotional overtones associated with the schema. The identity schema may carry a flavor of nostalgia or shame, for example. The identity ideal schema may fuel regret if significant identity-development objectives remain unattained. The identity-schema might include dispositions of resignation, remorse, or frustration, or perhaps even relief to be freed from pursuing an unrealistic identity. Moreover, one can dispose of external representations of one’s identity (i.e., identity-related possessions). The possessions’ emotional associations will reflect their relationship to a disposed identity (Kleine, Kleine, and Allen 1995).

P13: Possessions associated with a dispossessed identity will reflect the emotions (e.g., sadness, shame, or nostalgia) associated with the dispossessed identity's schemas.

An interesting disposition scenario, largely overlooked by consumer researchers, occurs when an individual retrieves a dispossessed identity. Consider, for example, a woman who decides she is "done with" having kids. A common consequence of such a decision is to rid the house of all that "unnecessary" baby paraphernalia. Consider the identity-development task this woman now faces on learning she is pregnant with another child. She retains the identity and identity-ideal schemas of the mother identity, yet those schemas reflect the belief that she was done having children. And the woman must reassemble the requisite identity-enabling possessions.

We propose that identity re-exploration, as occurs after identity disposition, follows the structure of the latency emergence path described below with an important difference. Unlike the individual emerging from latency, the person re-exploring after identity disposition may not have an intact identity-enabling possession cluster. Yet, unlike the rookie, this person has an old and faded, but existing identity-schema that may guide consumption choices. Post-disposition identity re-acquisition requires further study.

Latency Renewal

Latency renewal describes the process through which an individual re-engages a latent identity. Identity renewal is interesting because, unlike an individual following the rookie path, the individual possesses developed identity and identity-ideal schemas. The person was once a veteran. The person has identity experience and probably has a considerable inventory of identity-enabling possessions. The individual re-engaging an identity after an extended latency period presents an especially interesting scenario, discussed next.

Latency exit/identity re-entry. Consider, for example, an individual who activates a long latent identity of bicyclist. Just as cyclical or circumstantial factors may precipitate a latency phase, we propose that intra- and extra-identity cyclical and circumstantial factors may also spur the end of a latency phase. For example, assume the individual put cycling into latency because he moved and thus lost contact with the social network of other cyclists that supported that identity. Subsequently he replaced it with a “runner” identity. Now, coincident with a physical injury that suddenly inhibits him from running, he has a conversation with an acquaintance and is invited to go cycling, an activity that won’t aggravate the injury.

Re-discovery and the Rip vanWinkle effect. This invitation affords the individual an opportunity to re-try the long latent identity. On approaching this re-trial, we propose that the individual will draw upon, and be guided by, the long latent identity schema. The individual will also draw upon his existing cycling-identity related possession cluster. This stands in contrast to the rookie start in which the individual lacks the relevant products and also lacks identity and identity-ideal schemas. Product styles may have evolved dramatically over the intervening latent phase. New products may have rendered old-standards obsolete by contemporary standards (e.g., the way “clipless” pedal systems have replaced metal toe-clips.). Brand meanings have changed, new techniques have emerged. A person emerging from extended latency resembles Rip vanWinkle, awakening from his extended sleep. Like the trial phase for the rookie, re-trial is a time to explore one’s interest in reconstructing the identity. Social-structural factors may ease or inhibit the individual’s progress from re-discovery to re-construction.

P14: Unlike a rookie start, re-exploring an identity is done by applying an “old” latent identity-schema, including use of “old” identity-related possessions. Like the rookie, however, the individual in re-exploration does not initially possess a

current understanding of current sub-cultural norms.

Identity re-construction. Reconstruction involves modifying the individual's existing role and identity schemas to bring them up to date with contemporary sub-cultural norms and practices. As other elements of the individual's self concept may have changed dramatically during the latency stage, we propose that identity re-construction will also reflect and accommodate other identities in the self concept. An implication is that the way the individual pursues the re-constructed identity may differ dramatically from how the identity was pursued previously. The long-distance touring cyclist may find half-day club rides more appealing, for example. A new identity ideal schema begins to develop.

P15: Reconstruction of the formerly latent identity and identity-ideal schemas will lead the individual to change their identity related possession clusters so as to bring it closer to prevailing sub-cultural norms.

How the identity and identity-ideal schemas, or the associated possession clusters, adapt under reconstruction requires empirical exploration.

Maintenance. We theorize that the maintenance phase, as experienced after latency emergence, is functionally similar to maintenance as described above.

Disengagement. We have little reason to think that disengagement and dispossession of the re-explored identity will operate differently than under initial exploration, with one exception. It seems that the emotions one experiences upon deciding to disengage from an identity might reflect its "tried again" state.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The preliminary model portrays the cycling of a social identity through the phases of (re)discovery, (re)construction, maintenance, disposition, and possible latency. Corresponding to

each phase are changes in related self-schemata and consumption patterns. By drawing together symbolic interactionist identity-theory (Stryker 1980), with the concept of self-schemata from social cognition theory, the model portrays mid-range theorizing that joins sociological and psychological approaches. Consumption is used to cultivate the self, but this is influenced by both internal and external, social structural forces; thus identity cultivation via consumption is an outside-in and inside-out process.

How the model presented in this paper relates to expert/novice distinctions in cognitive social psychology, or to adoption models, is an empirical question. The various identity-related schemas discussed here provide a promising alternative conceptualization of expertise. Also in need of empirical investigation is the relative importance of internal factors (e.g., emotions) vs. external factors (e.g., social connections) that motivate identity evolution.

Empirical investigation is also needed to portray how the various identity-schemas actually do change through each stage of the identity life project and how those changes correspond with shifts in consumption patterns. Are the stages invariant across identities and persons? Does the process differ depending upon a person's accumulated experience with identity acquisition, in general? What happens to dispossessed identities, their schemas, and identity-related possessions? The proposed identity project life cycle model offers a conceptual framework useful for initiating exploration of these and other questions.

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