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"These Are A Few of My Favorite Things" Toward an Explication of Attachment as a Consumer Behavior Construct

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ABSTRACT

It is no revelation that consumers possess objects to which they are strongly and weakly attached. However, what attachment is and where it comes from is incompletely understood. This paper presents an initial effort to formalize attachment as a consumer behavior construct. We combine insights from the self-development literature and recent studies about possession attachment to advance a working definition of attachment. The results of an exploratory study are presented. The findings support the proposed definition and dimensions -- integration, individuation, and temporal orientation -- of attachment.

INTRODUCTION

Most of us are familiar with Rodger's and Hammerstein's 1959 collaboration on *The Sound of Music*, in which the effervescent Maria proclaims to her von Trapp charges:

> Raindrops on roses and whiskers on kittens,
> Bright-copper kettles and warm woolen mittens;
> Brown paper packages tied up in strings,
> These are a few of my favorite things.

Maria was extolling the virtues of those simple yet ethereal associations that make life joyous, that give meaning to her existence far beyond the conventional boundaries. And each of us -- albeit in less poetic ways -- has his/her own set of favorite things. To an observer these may appear banausic, even venal; but we cling to them because they have great and deep meaning for us. We keep and care for certain *material* possessions in special ways, sometimes long after their instrumental value has passed. These "most cherished" possessions represent things which are important for one reason or another; things which we would be loath to give up; things which would be difficult to replace -- in short, *things to which we have become strongly attached.*

We surround ourselves with valued material possessions as a matter of our lives taking course. A sense of linkage to the concrete and observable world external to ourselves permits us to obtain a sense of stability and continuity in an otherwise less stable existence. Material objects can help us establish self-not self boundaries (e.g., Belk 1987; Prelinger 1959) and a sense of control over our environment (e.g., Vinsel, Brown, Altman, and Foss 1981).

As remembrances of valued other persons or events, certain material possessions help us look back upon past selves which we wish to cultivate, i.e., material possessions are used as symbols of what we are, what we have been, and what we are attempting to become. Possessions are used as symbols in a self-developmental process of becoming a unique identity while at the same time connecting with others and participating in one's culture through shared meaning. Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton (1981) refer to such self-developmental processes as "self-cultivation".

There is little argument that attachments to material possessions reflect self-cultivation processes; i.e., agreement exists as to *why* we form attachments. In spite of the fact that attaching is a universal human process that is carried out through the entire life cycle, relatively little is understood about precisely what this thing we call attachment is. That attachment is a common human experience is clear. What is not well understood is what attachment is and where it comes from.

To explicate these questions it is useful to construe attachment as a person-material possession association; i.e., a property which reflects the self-cultivation tasks which certain material objects facilitate. We explore this notion herein by discussing pertinent insights from previous studies, by presenting a working definition of attachment (which suggests certain properties it might possess), and by considering the results of an exploratory study. We conclude with some implications for continued investigation of attachment as a consumer behavior construct worthy of further systematic exploration.

BACKGROUND

Several previous studies provide a base from which to draw ideas about attachment as a property of person-material object associations. As noted above, there is agreement that some of an individual's material possessions represent an extension of the self into the external material world. Belk (1987), for example, has demonstrated that individuals identify more or less with things, i.e., we feel more connected to certain items and less so to others. In studies where subjects have been asked to identify favorite or most cherished material possessions (e.g., Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton 1981; Myers 1985; Olson 1985; Prentice 1987; Wallendorf and Arnould 1988), the assumption is made that such items are more a part of the self than items which are not listed by the subjects. Thus, it is reasonable to suggest that persons possess some items to which they are more attached and others to which they are less attached. An individual typically possesses both strong and weak attachments.

Attachment seems to reflect both social structure and individual processes. Within a culture, for example, certain material objects may be repeatedly identified as valued possessions. Wallendorf and Arnould (1988) demonstrated this in a cross-cultural study in which favorite possessions of

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Southwestern American subjects were compared to those of Nigerians. Social structure in the form of gender roles also appears to be influencing the cherished household possessions of the Chicago residents in the study reported by Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton (1981). The authors observed that adult females expressed their gender role in household possessions far more than did male subjects.

Attachments also reflect developmental progression of the individual. A consistent theme across studies is that valued possessions are associated with two basic self-development tasks -- the differentiation of self from others and the integration of self with others, i.e., individuation and integration. Since valued objects reflect self-cultivation, it makes sense that the fundamental processes of individuation and integration would be reflected in attachments to material possessions. That this is so has been suggested by a number of favorite possession studies (e.g., Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton 1981; Myers 1985; Olson 1985; Wallendorf and Arnould 1988).

Myers (1985) draws upon Erikson's theorizing about the autonomy needs of the adolescent which she felt were reflected in her subjects' retrospections about favorite possessions from that period in their lives. Olson's (1985) categorization scheme for classifying artifacts in the homes of couples suggests that the "relational" and/or "integrative" orientations of persons can be reflected in valued household possessions. The classification scheme suggests a person's desire to cultivate relationships or connections with others ("ancestral" and "fraternal" artifacts) as well as the remembrance of important events or stages ("historical" or "developmental" artifacts). Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton (1981) directly identify differentiation and integration as a fundamental dialectic process which they observed to be reflected in valued household possessions. Therefore, there is substantial evidence that individuation and integration are reflected in certain possessions with which persons closely associate themselves, i.e., with objects of strong attachment.

Integration represents implementation of the "*social self*" (Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton 1981). This relational side of an individual is the self which needs to be connected, joined, held, kept, associated, paired, and/or involved with others; also the self which fears being isolated, separated, remote or abandoned (Kegan 1982). This is the self that is reflected in strong attachments to things which remind an individual of a valued association with another in the past (e.g., letters from an old friend) or facilitate the anticipation of an important relationship planned for the future (e.g., an engagement ring).

Conversely, the individuating or "*idiotic*" self (Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton 1981) is the self which desires to be differentiated, autonomous, separate, unique, self-contained, self-sufficient, self-determinant, knowledgeable of its own value, likes and dislikes, essentially in touch with the self-control and self-chosenness of its present and future; also the self which fears being completely taken over (Kegan 1982). This is the self which is reflected in strong attachments to things that remind an individual of past achievements (e.g., high school athletic trophies) or that facilitate working toward future accomplishments (e.g., leather brief case).

Persons are regularly negotiating both life tasks to some degree. The well adjusted adult has the ability to connect with or open the self up to others while at the same time maintaining self-containment and autonomy (e.g., Hogan, Jones and Cheek 1985; Kegan 1982; Vinsel, et al. 1981). The dialectic produces a constant psychic tension which results in motivation toward self-related goals (Kegan 1982).

Another theme across studies relates to the continuity establishing function of self-cultivation, i.e., the carrying of past selves into the present, the maintenance of present selves, or the anticipation of future selves. What we have labeled a temporal orientation is reflected in the study reported by Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton. They suggest that older adult subjects tended to be looking back to a lifetime of experiences (e.g., their children growing up and family events). Olson found that younger married couples used valued possessions to help them establish a history that had not yet been formed and to anticipate their future together. He also suggests that attachment possessions of unmarried couples reflect less of a future orientation than the artifacts of married couples.

The self is literally changing from situation to situation. Thus, concrete objects help us make those transitions by permitting us to carry past selves into the present, to maintain present selves or to make the transition into the future. Thus, we expect that strong attachment, as a property of association to favorite possessions, will reflect these three dimensions of self-cultivation: individuation, integration and a temporal orientation.

WHAT IS ATTACHMENT?

We propose the following working definition of attachment. *Attachment is a multidimensional property of material object possession which represents the degree of linkage perceived by an individual between him/her self and a particular object.* This perceived linkage is reflected in the three orthogonal dimensions of individuation, integration, and temporal orientation. Attachment is not a property of either the individual or the object, per se, but rather represents an intersection or joining of the two.

Attachment has relative strength. An attachment to a specific object can be relatively strong or weak. Stronger attachments are associated with objects which are perceived as more a part of the extended self. These are the objects into which an individual is likely to invest a greater degree of psychic or emotional energy (Belk 1987).

Attachment is defined as perceived by the individual in question. The degree of attachment is reflected in thoughts, feelings and behaviors toward a *particular* object. Differences in these thoughts, feelings and behaviors should be evident between strong and weak attachments. We would expect, for

example, that the person's thoughts about a strong attachment object would reflect its self-cultivation faculty while thoughts of a weak attachment object would more often reflect its utilitarian value. We might also hypothesize that the person would experience different feelings toward an object of strong attachment (e.g., happiness, sentimentality, pride) than an object of weak attachment (e.g., anger, frustration, or nothing at all).

Degree of attachment to a specific object can change over time (Myers 1985). Throughout a person's life, s/he will develop new attachments and dispose of old ones as the self develops. Increasing attachment strength may reflect a becoming self while decreasing strength may reflect detachment from an old, unwanted or unneeded, self.

Attachment is a multidimensional concept. It reflects the three fundamental dimensions: individuation, integration and temporal orientation. Together, these dimensions represent basic self-definitional, maintenance, and stability purposes.

Attachment formation is not deliberate. Although it is reasonable to assume that we seek to form attachments, in general individuals do not deliberately seek to form an attachment to a particular object. Rather, attachment arises from association with a consumption experience (defined broadly) which has meaning for the individuating or integrating self cultivation processes. Once it is formed, however, a strong attachment is something which a person seeks to maintain, at least for a time. This should be reflected in the person's manner of keeping and caring for the object and intention to keep the object for a long time or "forever".

Attachments serve self-presentational functions. Self- presentation, the reader will note, can refer to symbolic display to others *or* to the self in an intrapsychic process of self-reflection or self-enjoyment. Therefore, it is likely that strong attachments would be kept in a fashion such that the object can be displayed to others (e.g., an athletic trophy on the shelf) or to the self (e.g., photographs kept in a drawer for easy access when wanted).

Attachment is associated with an individual's valence toward the specific object to which s/he is strongly or weakly attached. We would expect that strong attachment would be associated with a sense of liking while weaker attachment would be associated with a sense of dislike or neutral feelings. It may be that weaker attachments reflect either objects which are strictly utilitarian (and thus not strongly liked or disliked) or objects which are associated with disliked old selves and consumption experiences (and thus negatively evaluated). Attachment is correlated with, but logically precedes attitude.

AN EXPLORATORY STUDY

Prior studies exploring person-object attachments have employed post hoc procedures to distill order from their data. The preceding conceptual development provides a foundation from which the following *a priori* hypotheses are derived.

Hypotheses

We proposed Individuation, Integration, and Temporal Orientation as three orthogonal dimensions of attachment. If these indeed are dimensions of attachment, then one would expect them to be evidenced more frequently for possessions with which individuals have strong attachment than for weak-attachment possessions. We propose Hypothesis 1:

H_1 The integration and individuation dimensions will be manifested more frequently, jointly or independently, for possessions with which individuals' have strong rather than weak attachment.

The proposed Temporal Orientation dimension of attachment suggests that objects to which individuals are strongly attached provide a linkage with the past, present, and/or anticipated future. We advance this hypothesis:

H_2 Evidence of maintaining a linkage with the past, the present, and/or future will be evidenced more frequently for possessions with which individuals have strong rather than weak attachment.

In our discussion of attachment properties we suggested that strong attachment possessions will be more positively valenced than weak attachment possessions. Thus, H_3:

H_3 Strong attachment possessions will be more positively valenced than weak attachment possessions.

We also suggest that the possession related emotions (e.g., joy, sadness) individuals experience for strong attachment possessions will differ from those emotions experienced for weak attachment possessions. Hypothesis 4 is advanced:

H_4 Individuals' possession related emotions for strong attachment possessions will differ from those experienced for weak attachment possessions.

How an individual behaves toward a possession should differ according to the strength of his/her attachment to the object. We advance the following hypotheses:

H_{5a} Strong attachment possessions are more frequently kept in a protected or safe place or are taken care of in order that they are not lost, stolen, or damaged in some way more frequently than weak attachment possessions.

H_{5b} Strong attachment possessions are more frequently purposefully kept where they can be seen by others than weak attachment possessions.

H_{5c} Strong attachment possessions are more frequently purposefully kept where the individual can see them or can get to them readily when s/he wants them than are weak attachment possessions.

H_{5d} Weak attachment possessions receive special caring or display less frequently than strong attachment possessions.

Finally, because receiving an object as a gift may serve to connect the recipient to the giver, we expect that strong attachment possessions are received as gifts more often. Thus:

H_6 Strong attachment possessions will have been received as a gift more often than weak attachment possessions.

Method

Our methodology differs from that of previous attachment studies in two significant ways. First, we employed a self-administered questionnaire. Prior studies have collected data through personal interviews. Second, as our interest is in attachment, per se, our subjects were asked to identify possessions with which they have strong attachment *and* possessions with which they have weak attachment. Prior studies have focused exclusively on "favorite" or "most cherished" possessions -- i.e., on strong attachment.

The ten-page questionnaire, which subjects were encouraged to complete at home, contained several tasks. Subjects first read general orienting instructions ("Think about the things you possess. Think about your favorite possessions -- the items you cherish the most -- and about your least favorite possessions -- the items you wouldn't mind parting with") and then indicated their gender. They were then asked to generate a list (length unspecified) of strong attachment possessions. Strong attachment was operationalized with this statement: "List the material objects you have which would be EXTREMELY HARD TO PART WITH, if for some reason you had to." They were given twenty blank lines and instructed to list only one item per line. Subjects then repeated the task listing "objects which you would find EXTREMELY EASY TO PART WITH" (i.e., low attachment possessions).

The third task was different. We asked subjects to refer back to their list of things which would be extremely hard to part with and to copy item #1 from that list on a line provided them. Subjects were then asked to indicate these six things: 1) *Why* would you find the item so hard to part with?; 2) How did you come to have the object? (self purchased; received it as a gift and if so, from whom; other); 3) How long have you possessed and how long do you intend to keep the object?; 4) Where do you keep the object and why?; 5) What feelings do you experience when thinking about the object?; and finally 6) How is the object related to who you are?

On the next five pages of the questionnaire, subjects were asked to respond to the same questions for five other objects -- the second and third possessions on their strong attachment list and the first three possessions on their weak attachment list. All together, they responded for each of six objects. Subjects then responded to five seven-point semantic differential scales for each of the six objects. The five bipolar adjectives scales were: good-bad, negative-positive, admirable-deplorable, unpleasant-pleasant, and worthless-valuable. The composite of these scales forms our valence measure. (Note: Lower values indicated more positive attitudes.)

Because the study is exploratory, with the emphasis on construct development, questionnaires were distributed to a convenience sample of 105 students at a Midwestern university. Ninety five usable questionnaires were obtained (63 females, 32 males).

Data Preparation

Two protocols were selected from each subject's questionnaire for analysis: the protocols for the first possession on the "hard to part with" and "easy to part with" lists. Two trained judges, naive to the study's purpose and hypotheses, coded each protocol as described in this section. (A third judge's coding efforts were discarded as he failed to follow directions.)

The judges were provided definitions of individuation and integration and instructed to code each protocol, based on its Gestalt, into one of four mutually exclusive categories: 1) integration evidenced; 2) individuation evidenced; 3) both integration and individuation evidenced; or 4) no evidence of either integration or individuation. Agreement between the two judges was 70.0% across the 189 decisions. Disagreements were settled through discussion with two of the authors.

The judges then coded each protocol into one of seven categories which reflected our proposed temporal orientation dimension. The seven mutually exclusive categories included:

1. *A Past/Has Been Self.* A past self which has been or is being let go; a self which is no longer needed, wanted, or desired; a part of a person's past which s/he wants to forget or be rid of.

2. *A Past/Present (Kept) Self.* A past self which is being held on to or maintained; a self being carried on into the present; a desirable or necessary self; a part of a person's past which s/he wants to keep; events or persons to be remembered.

3. *A Past/Present/Future Self.* A past self being held on to but also being explicitly carried on into the future; a past self being part of future aspirations or plans.

4. *A Present Self.* A current self; who I am now, what I am.

5. *A Present/Future Self.* A present self deliberately being carried into the future; what I intend to keep being; a self which is desirable which I do not wish to let go.

6. *A Future Self.* An aspired to self; a wanted self; a self I intend/plan/wish to be.

7. *None of the above.* Little or no reflection of past, present, or future selves; not related to the self.

Inter-judge agreement on this task was a disappointing 44.0%. Discussion with the judges revealed that the disagreement centered around a single problem in which one of the judges sometimes read beyond the information given by the respondent -- i.e., coding based upon a priori assumptions about the object rather than what the subject *expressly* stated about the object. Two of the authors resolved the discrepancies accordingly.

Finally, each protocol was coded according to the subject's response to the question about where the object was kept and why it was kept there. Four nonmutually exclusive categories were used:

1. Evidence that the object is kept in a safe place or protected in some way;

2. Evidence that the object is purposefully kept where others can see it;

3. Evidence that the object is purposefully kept where the subject can see it or can get to it easily when desired;

4. None of the above; little or no evidence of special caring or display.

Inter-coder agreement on this task was 78%.

Next, the five-item valence measure was subjected to preliminary scale analysis. Factor analysis supported the assumption of unidimensionality. However, the "worthless-valuable" scale was eliminated because of its non-significant factor loading. Coefficient alpha for the remaining four items was $\alpha = 0.95$. The remaining four items were summed to produce our possession valence measure.

The questionnaire item which asked subjects how they came to have the object provided three possible "yes-no" responses. These were coded as: 1) bought myself; 2) received as a gift; and 3) other. The "other" category was typically used for objects for which the question had no relevance such as photographs or found objects.

Finally, the emotions subjects reported experiencing when they thought about the possession were aggregated into a master list.

Results

With H_1 we proposed that evidence of our proposed individuation and integration dimensions would occur more frequently in strong attachment possession protocols than in weak attachment possession protocols. Both inspection of Table 1 and our significant chi-square test ($x^2_{(3)}=143.12$, $p=0.000$) indicate support for H_1. Post-hoc one-sample chi-square tests confirm that evidence of the individuation ($x^2_{(1)}=25.0$, $p=0.000$), integration ($x^2_{(1)}=19.93$, $p=0.000$), and the two in combination ($x^2_{(1)}=22$, $p=0.000$) occurs more frequently for strong than for weak attachment possessions. The finding of *both* individuation and integration within the same protocol provides support for their orthogonality. Finally, whereas 97.9% of the strong attachment possession protocols evidenced these proposed dimensions, 87.2% of the weak attachment possession protocols evidenced *neither* dimension. Thus, H_1 is supported -- we have evidence for our proposed integration and individuation dimensions of attachment.

Hypothesis H_2 predicted that strong attachment possession protocols would evidence our proposed temporal orientation dimension more frequently than the weak attachment protocols. An overall chi-square test for the independence of frequency of aspects of the temporal orientation dimension between strong and weak attachment protocols was conducted. As the data in Table 2 reveal, several cells had expected frequencies less than five. Thus, the chi-square test was conducted with categories 1,5,6, and 7 collapsed. The significant chi-square ($x^2_{(3)}=117.65$, $p=0.000$) supports H_2. Post hoc one-sample chi-square tests revealed that high attachment possessions more frequently evidenced linkage with the past/present ($x^2_{(1)}=29.64$, $p=0.000$), past/present/future ($x^2_{(1)}=17.73$, $p=0.000$), and present ($x^2_{(1)}=12.02$, $p=0.000$) than low attachment protocols. Finally, 77.4% of the weak attachment protocols reflected *no* evidence of our proposed temporal orientation dimension whereas only 5.2% of the strong attachment protocols reflected no evidence of this dimension. Thus, we have encouraging evidence for our proposed temporal orientation dimension.

Our third hypothesis proposed that strong attachment possessions would be more positively valenced than weak attachment possessions. The significant t-statistic for the difference between the valence of the strong ($\bar{X} = 5.0$, $s = 1.99$) and weak ($\bar{X} = 16.4$, $s = 5.87$) attachment possessions ($t = 17.51$, $p<0.001$; Note: t for unequal variances) strongly supports H_3.

To analyze the difference between subjects' feelings about strong and weak attachments we simply composed a list of all emotions listed by the subjects. Our hypothesis was that the strong attachment and weak attachment lists would not overlap. Indeed, examination of the abbreviated lists presented in Table 3 support this assumption. A total of 83 different emotions was reported by our subjects for strong attachment possessions. Sixty-five different emotions were reported, in total, for low attachment possessions. Only six emotions -- good, memories, sad, warmth, comfort, and past experiences -- appeared

TABLE 1
Incidence of Individuation and Integration in Protocols

Property	Strong Attachment	Weak Attachment
Integration	26.3%	0.0%
Individuation	48.4%	12.8%
Both	23.2%	0.0%
Neither	2.1%	87.2%
Total	100.0% (n=95)	100.0% (n=94)

TABLE 2
Temporal Orientation Incidence

Temporal Orientation	Strong Attachment	Weak Attachment
1. Past	0.0%	5.4%
2. Past/Present	43.2%	4.3%
3. Past/Present/Future	13.7%	0.0%
4. Present	36.8%	11.8%
5. Present/Future	1.0%	0.0%
6. Future	0.0%	1.1%
7. None	5.3%	77.4%
Total	100.0% (n=95)	100.0% (n=94)

on both the strong and weak possession attachment lists. Although we cannot offer a statistical test of this hypothesis, we submit that the small amount of overlap provides strong support for H_4.

The reader will also note that strong attachment feelings were generally positive with the exception of the "sadness" response. Clearly negative feeling reactions were associated with many of the weak attachments. About 35% of the sample reported they felt "nothing" about the weak attachment possession. A reading of the protocols revealed that these weak attachments tended to be items regarded by the subject as purely utilitarian in purpose. The balance of the "weak" attachment responses were clearly negative. Many represented a dislike of present circumstances (e.g., school books, or frustrating old car) or old selves that were no longer liked (e.g., disgust "that I ever liked the music on those old records").

The next series of hypotheses predicted how individuals behave toward possessions with which they have strong or weak attachment. The significant chi-square ($x^2_{(1)}=7.36$, $p<0.01$) supports H_{5a} -- strong attachment possessions are more frequently kept in a protected or safe place than are weak attachment possessions (see Table 4). Because of expected cell frequencies smaller than five, neither H_{5b} nor H_{5c} could be tested. We are unable statistically to support our claim in H_{5d} that weak attachment possessions receive special caring or display less frequently than strong attachment possessions ($x^2_{(1)}=1.80$, $p<0.15$), however the data are directionally consistent.

Finally, H_6, which predicts the greater incidence of strong attachment possessions as gifts, was tested in two steps. First, an overall chi-square test of difference between strong and weak attachments was conducted ($x^2_{(2)}=27.8$, $p<0.000$). Then, an individual test of difference between the number of strong and weak attachment possessions which had been received as gifts revealed support for H_6 ($x^2_{(1)}=13.16$, $p=0.000$). This finding is in accordance with previous findings about gift-giving.

IMPLICATIONS

The results of our exploratory study encourage us that attachment can be treated as a construct which is definable and measurable. We found that subjects' thoughts about strong attachment possessions, as opposed to weak attachment possessions, more frequently manifested the proposed dimensions of integration, individuation and temporal orientation. Strong attachment objects were associated with different (and more positive) emotions and were more likely to be specially cared for and/or displayed than weak attachment objects. Thus, we are encouraged to

TABLE 3
Feelings About Attachment Objects*

Strong Attachments				Weak Attachments			
	Frequency				Frequency		
Feelings	Total	Male	Female	Feelings	Total	Male	Female
happiness, happy	27	6	21	nothing	34	12	22
love	20	3	17	boredom, monotony	10	1	9
memories	15	8	7	frustration	5	2	3
warm,warmth	8	2	6	work	5	3	2
pride,proud	8	2	6	negative,bad,yuk	4	1	3
security	7	0	7	disgust	4	1	3
sad,sadness	6	3	3	wasted money, time	3	0	3
comfort	5	1	4	hassled	2	0	2
excitement	5	2	3	annoyance	2	1	1
good feelings	5	2	3	stress,worry	2	1	1
joy	5	1	5	impatience	2	0	2
care,caring	4	0	4	dread,apprehension	2	0	2
fun	4	2	2	guilt,remorse	2	0	2
satisfied	4	2	2				
accomplishment	3	1	2				
mine,only mine	3	1	2				
nostalgia	3	0	3				
pleasure	3	0	3				
appreciation	2	1	1				
freedom	2	1	1				
liking	2	0	2				
peace	2	0	2				
relaxation	2	2	0				

*The feelings listed are in response to the question "What feelings do you experience when you think about the object?" Recorded in the table are those feeling responses which were listed by at least two subjects. Many subjects listed more than one word in response to the open-ended question.

TABLE 4
Keeping and Displaying of Possession

How Kept	Strong Attachment	Weak Attachment
1. Protected	21.1%	2.1%
2. Displayed to others	2.1%	5.4%
3. Displayed to self	5.3%	1.1%
4. None	65.3%	91.4%
5. Both 1 and 2	0.0%	0.0%
6. Both 1 and 3	1.0%	0.0%
7. Both 2 and 3	4.2%	0.0%
8. 1, 2, and 3	1.0%	0.0%
Total	100.0% (n=95)	100.0% (n=94)

pursue the idea of attachment as a consumer behavior construct.

The formalization of attachment as a consumer behavior construct is the first step toward the development of a measure of attachment. We recognize the potential disadvantages of attempting to quantify such a thing as attachment (e.g., a certain degree of information loss), however, we feel this is offset by the generalizable insights to be gained through exploration of the relationships between attachment and traditional consumer behavior constructs (e.g., attitude or involvement).

For example, we believe attachment is conceptually distinct from involvement on at least four accounts. First, attachment, as opposed to involvement, is directly associated with fundamental self-developmental processes that span the entire life cycle. Second, attachment's temporal element has no counterpart in involvement. Attachments often have to do with memories and previous self-definitional experiences as well as current or anticipated ones. Involvement concerns the present only. Third, attachment concerns the usage phase of consumption. Involvement is more relevant to acquisition activities. Finally, an individual's affect regarding an attachment object can range from very positive to very negative. Negative valence (a sense of avoidance) is associated with weak attachment objects associated with past undesired selves. Low involvement is not logically associated with negative valence.

There are other ways in which involvement and attachment might differ. However, our point here is that since involvement has been conceptualized and measured in a more traditional fashion (as in Zaichkowsky 1985), explication of attachment as a construct would permit theoretically interesting cross-construct comparisons.

We have also found support for the use of self-administered questionnaires in this context. These permit data collection with larger samples than are possible with the personal interview method used in prior explorations of valued possessions.

We have raised more questions about attachment than we have attempted to answer. Perhaps some day, if we are sufficiently lucky, we will have a comprehensive understanding of the role of attachment in consumption behavior.

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