

Value-in-disposition: Exploring how consumers derive value from disposition of possessions

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Abstract

This study explores value-in-disposition: the reflective ways consumers use disposition process and prospects to enhance the value obtained from their possessions. Data from in-depth interviews and student essays highlight disposition as a process of reevaluation of possessions and emphasize the significance of transferable value. The study elucidates the ways disposition conduits turn possessions into gifts, sacrifices, or commodities through which consumers transfer and create value by forming new relations and maintaining and strengthening their social connections. A darker side of disposition also emerges. In controlling the flow of their possessions, consumers reproduce a social order that favors and accentuates their own position. Finally, the study identifies various value enhancement and protection strategies through which consumers deal with nontransferable value and negotiate disposition. In doing so, it shows that the disposition process can trigger attachment to objects.

Keywords

Disposition, transferable value, value, value-in-disposition, object attachment

Consumer researchers have identified two main processes through which consumers derive value from their possessions. Value-in-exchange frames value as embedded in objects and realized during acquisition (Bagozzi, 1975). Value-in-use portrays value as interactively created through consumers' usage (Peñaloza and Venkatesh, 2006; Prahalad and Ramaswamy, 2004). Recently, Peñaloza and Venkatesh (2006) have proposed to integrate exchange and use perspectives to study consumer value. Continuing in this vein and based on the idea that value is created “when a good

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or service is consumed” (Gummesson, 1998: 247), this study explores the relation between disposition and value.

Researchers have framed disposition in various ways: a site of residual value (Parasuraman and Grewal, 2000); the end of consumption and objects’ life (Hanson, 1980); or a physical/psychological separation from possessions (Roster, 2001). However, during disposition, objects also “circulate in different regimes of value in space and time” (Appadurai, 1986: 4). Moreover, consumers reflect on value and consumption (Gregson and Crewe, 2003), deliberately undertaking activities to construct, enhance, and maintain value. This study focuses on disposition’s potential for value transfer and creation.

Using in-depth interviews and student essays, this research explores how disposition processes and prospects shape the ways consumers derive value from their possessions. As ordinary consumption experiences cultivate meanings focal to consumers (Fournier, 1998) and provide critical understanding of consumer behavior (Miller, 1995), disposition of ordinary (i.e. nonspecial) possessions is examined. The findings reveal transferability of value as significant for successful disposition. Various disposition conduits emerge as “means of value realization” (Graeber, 2001) that move objects between value regimes and form value-bearing relations around them. A darker side of disposition also emerges: in selecting specific conduits to transfer their possessions’ value, consumers highlight their distinction (Marcoux, 2009; Mauss, 1990) and reproduce a social order that favors their own position. The findings also underline three practices—converting, brutal use, and gradual garbaging—through which consumers negotiate an object’s impending disposition to protect and enhance its value. Finally, the results elucidate how disposition process can trigger inability to dispose and reveal another dimension of object attachment that cannot be explained by hoarding behavior (Cherrier and Ponnor, 2010) or special possession attachment (Kleine et al., 1995).

Thus, exploring the relation between value and disposition, this study provides new insights on disposition, value, and object attachment.

Value

Value has received researchers’ attention from disciplines ranging from philosophy to sociology, economics, anthropology, and marketing. A complete review of value literature is beyond the scope of this research, which focuses on how people derive value from objects as conceptualized in consumer research and/or cultural anthropology (Appadurai, 1986; Arvidsson, 2011; Baudrillard, 2000; Belk, 1996; Cherrier, 2009; Eiss, 2008; Graeber, 2001, 2011; Holbrook, 1999; Kopytoff, 1986; Mauss, 1990; Richins, 1994; Simmel, 1978; Thompson, 1979). In this literature, value emerges as consumers interact with and “absorb objects into their lives” (Parsons, 2008: 393) to use them for various purposes (Holbrook, 1999; Richins, 1994). Value, rather than being intrinsic to goods, is shaped by how consumers perceive and use objects (Gregson and Crewe, 2003; Parsons, 2008; Thompson, 1979). Thus, functionality, symbolic meanings, and object placement are important value sources: the value of a dress differs when sold in a car boot sale, a charity shop, or a vintage store (Gregson and Crewe, 2003).

Holbrook (1999) defines consumer value as the interactive, experiential, and subjective relation with goods and identifies its dimensions like efficiency, spirituality, or esthetics. Aesthetic value emerges as consumers experience beauty and pleasure through form, design, or style as in an art painting, a fashionable dress, or an antique clock (Holbrook, 1999; Wagner, 1999). Consumers derive linking (or relational) value from an object/brand/practice when it helps them connect to

other people as a part of a caring, sharing community (Arvidsson, 2011; Cova, 1997). Moral value is enhanced as consumers act in goodness and “do the right thing” by being just and/or enhancing others’ welfare (Holbrook, 1999; Smith, 1999). This differs from linking value, where the focus is connecting with others, rather than being ethical. Spiritual value resembles moral value but involves finding one’s “true” self or connecting to a spiritual other (e.g. God, the universe) through a transcendental experience (Holbrook, 1999).

Although consumer value literature highlights the multidimensional and context-dependent nature of value (Holbrook, 1999; Woodruff and Gardial, 1996), macro theories developed by the cultural anthropologists, focusing on exchange and circulation of objects, could better explain how value is created beyond objects’ uses or initial acquisition. This literature explores the transformative and circular nature of value (Eiss, 2008; Graeber, 2001). In his famous work, Appadurai (1986) suggests tracing things in motion and develops his value theory around the notion of commodity. He extends Marx’s idea that commodity value is created as use value is produced and transferred through exchange by combining it with Simmel’s idea that exchange of sacrifice is the source of economic value. For Appadurai, exchange is the main source of value as objects move between “different regimes of value in space and time” (1986: 4) and accumulate biographies (Kopytoff, 1986). I describe value regimes as socially and historically defined contexts of valuation and consider ideologies and sign systems (e.g. environmentalism and art) as such when they are used in assessing and constructing an object’s value. Value regimes allow objects to move across cultural boundaries, among parties with nonsimilar interests or standards of valuation. In Appadurai’s theory, every exchange is open to individuals’ own value claims and manipulations to enhance their personal interests. Consumers can divert exchanged objects from their socially defined paths through creative work such as domestic display or collecting (Thompson, 1979). Thus, value (of objects and people) is temporally and culturally constructed through paths and diversions and the social relations, power contests, and value regimes associated with them.

This perspective insinuates that value construction and diversion tactics can be observed during disposition, when consumers (re)mobilize their possessions and associate with other people. Building on this idea, this study asks how disposition constitutes and is constituted by consumers’ value perceptions. It aims to reveal the processes through which value is used and created as ordinary objects move between different contexts.

Value and disposition

Previous studies have noticed that “value-in-disposition exists” (Mundt and Houston, 2010: 258). Peñaloza and Mish (2011) found that a product’s value is linked to its perceived disposability, while others approached value-in-disposition as “redemption value”—the residual benefit at the end of object’s life (Parasuraman and Grewal, 2000). While these studies acknowledge the potential significance of disposition for construction of value perceptions, they bypass how disposition process can actually enhance value for consumers.

Consumers can maintain social relations and identities by resisting disposition (Cherrier and Ponnor, 2010). However, such resistance eventually leads to accumulation—a practice associated with consumerism and waste of resources (Coulter and Ligas, 2003; Harrell and McConocha, 1992)—and devaluates objects by reconstructing them as excess. Disposition conduits (e.g. charities, kinship relations, and recycling facilities) can reevaluate these objects and extend their social life (Appadurai, 1986; Cherrier, 2009) by “moving them along” (Gregson et al., 2007). Practices like transformation or reuse undertaken during disposition can (re)associate objects with regimes

of art, craft, or fashion (Gregson and Crewe, 2003; Parsons, 2008) by reinstating their use and aesthetic value. Objects disposed through re-commodification conduits (e.g. yard sales and e-bay) become stocks that provide monetary value (Denegri-Knott and Molesworth, 2009). In both cases, the life of the object is prolonged and its status is enhanced while consumers manifest their competence as skillful artisans or clever bargainers. Donating can create linking, moral value, and spiritual value by strengthening the bonds between consumers, enhancing the welfare of people in need, and increasing consumers' inner satisfaction (e.g. Harrell and McConocha, 1992). Donating to charities can also provide monetary value when practiced for tax reduction rather than altruistic purposes (Harrell and McConocha, 1992).

Disposition can also create value by sacralizing objects and consumers through gift-like exchanges and sacrifices. Gifts create solidarity of goodwill and social indebtedness (Belk and Coon, 1993) by tying people together in a cycle of reciprocity that "articulates dominant institutions" (Mauss, 1990: ix). Their exchange or bestowment invokes norms of reciprocity (Mauss, 1990; Sahlins, 1972). When offered with care and good intentions, gifts embody and transfer an extension of the giver (Belk and Coon, 1993; Sherry et al., 1993). Previous research also identifies a darker side to gifts where they create imbalanced relations and make the recipient feel indebted or even subjugated (Godelier, 1999; Marcoux, 2009; Sherry et al., 1993). Yet, disposition literature mostly depicts gifting as a constructive practice, which creates bonds between consumers and liberates them from the norms of consumerism (Cherrier, 2009; Kozinets, 2002; Price et al., 2000; Stevenson and Kates, 1999).

Sacrifice—an offering whose partial or complete destruction releases spiritual energy (Hubert and Mauss, 1981)—has been associated with both loss and gain of value (Belk, 1996; Belk et al., 2003; Cherrier, 2009; Kozinets, 2002; Mauss, 1990; Simmel, 1978). The value lost through a sacrifice is usually less than the value obtained in return (Cappellini, 2009; Cherrier, 2009; Simmel, 1978). People sacrifice to fend off evil spirits, to show gratitude for good fortune, or to curry the favor of a deity (Mauss, 1990). Consumption research depicts sacrifice as a precondition for consuming (Belk et al., 2003; Cherrier, 2009): by sacrificing money, time, bodily/mental power, or giving up other market offerings, consumers can afford objects of desire or consumption experiences. Sacrifice can communicate love and affection (Belk and Coon, 1993) and strengthen familial relations (Cappellini, 2009). Disposition research depicts sacrifice of material objects as a venue toward the sacred, self-transformation, and new lifestyles (Cherrier, 2009; Kozinets, 2002).

Consumer researchers have associated gift giving and sacrifice with conduits outside of the profane marketplace. Passing their cherished possessions on to suitable heirs (i.e. appropriate guardians within or outside the family) through gift-like market exchanges or during traditional gifting contexts like marriage or childbirth, consumers define the family, reinforce intergenerational connections, and obtain symbolic immortality (Price et al., 2000). An important implication is that high value attached to an object complicates its disposal: consumers are attached to possessions that they value greatly. This result, however, does not explain consumers' attachment to ordinary objects without high value, a phenomenon I hope to shed some light in this study.

Ordinary possessions can become gifts and sacrifices, when disposed of through the conduits that enhance interpersonal connections and social welfare, emancipate consumers from the constraining forces of society, and challenge norms of accumulation and materialism (Cherrier, 2009; Herrmann, 1996; Kozinets, 2002). Disposition helps consumers with terminal illness to negotiate death and derive spiritual and linking value by distributing their possessions (Kates, 2001; Stevenson and Kates, 1999) among family and close friends as "last gifts." Disposition conduits driven by market logic can host gift-like exchanges when the monetary return is symbolic rather

than profit oriented. Garage sales, for instance, can enhance linking value by creating a sense of “we” between buyers and sellers (Herrmann, 1996; Lastovicka and Fernández, 2005). Objects also become sacrifices when they are destroyed or disposed through conduits without direct reciprocity (Cherrier, 2009; Kozinets, 2002; Mauss, 1990). Practiced this way, disposition creates spiritual and linking value by reconnecting consumers with the sacred and emancipating them from the market forces (Cherrier, 2009). Destruction of possessions can create linking and spiritual value by replenishing one’s power in society (Mauss, 1990), facilitating self-transformation (Kozinets, 2002), and renewing the self (Norris, 2004). Mauss’s (1990) observations on potlatch illustrate that sacrificing material wealth protects one’s place in the social hierarchy. Exploring disposition of female clothing in India, Norris (2004) notes that sacrificing the emotional value of cherished clothes in return for new objects or monetary value is crucial for continuous self-renewal within one’s social network. Similarly, wasting and sacrificing food (through trashing) create linking value by helping consumers to construct and maintain social and familial relations (Evans, 2012).

Despite these insights and the growing body of research on disposition, there is still much to learn about how consumers derive value from disposition of ordinary possessions, which are too “transient,” “invisible,” and of “limited value” (Tuan, 1980). Similarly, little is known about how disposition reflects back on and relates to an object’s consumption in constructing its value. This study asks how disposition processes and prospects shape the ways consumers derive value from their possessions.

Methods

This study explores disposition of ordinary possessions using interviews and student essays to obtain a deep understanding of consumers’ experiences. In-depth interviews were conducted with 19 middle and upper middle class consumers living in Ankara, the capital of Turkey, and lasted between 50 and 170 min. The interview sample included four males and 15 females heterogeneous in age, education, marital status, and household composition (Table 1). Since women are the main disposition agents in households (Herrmann, 1996; Phillips and Seago, 2011), richness of data from a female-dominated sample mitigated the gender bias.

Interviews started with general questions about the informants’ lives. Informants were asked how they dispose of their ordinary possessions: when such possessions became disposable, when/how their value were assessed, and what factors (e.g. consumption processes or others’ comments) were influential. These inquiries provided insights about how consumers formed value perceptions. Another line of questions inquired how/when each disposition conduit was used. Attention was paid to cases where informants interacted with others during disposing to learn the effects of these encounters. Since satisfaction is an emotional response to value delivery (Day and Crask, 2000), informants were asked to relate satisfactory/dissatisfactory disposition experiences. Informants also described cases when they were hesitant to dispose of their ordinary possessions.

Another data set came from undergraduate students of a private university in Ankara, Turkey. It represents the views and valuation practices of a consumer group, who are to become adults and whose fashion-/technology-oriented consumption are important identity markers. The sample consisted of 62 essays (half page to three pages long), written by the Graphic Design, Communication, and Management students, with a younger population (those in their early 20s) and balanced gender distribution (41% males and 59% females). Participation was voluntary for bonus points. As disposition is a reflective practice (Gregson et al., 2007), students were asked to contemplate how they evaluated their objects for disposition and what influenced their value. Students

Table 1. Informant demographics for the interviews.

Name	Gender/age	Education/work	Household
Ahu	F/30	College/full-time	Married, no kids
Berrin	F/41	College/full-time	Married, two kids
Buket	F/34	PhD/full-time	Newlywed, no kids
Cenk	M/32	PhD/full-time	Married, two kids
Feray	F/30	College/full-time	Married, one kid
Ferda	F/29	PhD/full-time	Married, no kids
Filiz	F/51	Primary school/housewife	Married, three kids (empty nest)
Giray	M/35	College/full-time	Single, living with parents
Hale	F/40	College/full-time	Single, living with parents
Jale	F/42	College/full-time	Divorced, no kids
Melek	F/29	College/full-time	Newlywed, no kids
Melis	F/33	College/full-time	Single, living with parents
Mesut	M/37	Junior college/full-time	Married, one kid
Miray	F/47	Open university/full-time	Married, two kids
Neslihan	F/45	Open university/full-time	Single, living with parents
Sanem	F/29	PhD/full-time	Newlywed, no kids
Sevim	F/58	High school/housewife	Divorced, two kids
Talat	M/43	College/full-time	Married, no kids
Yeliz	F/41	College/full-time	Married, one kid

M: male; F: female.

Note. Informant names are pseudonyms to protect confidentiality.

also wrote about if/how their possessions' usage and acquisition influenced their disposal and hard-to-dispose ordinary possessions.

All interviews were tape-recorded, transcribed, and open-coded to form initial categories and emergent themes. Additional analyses allowed abstraction by modifying the initial categories and revealing relations between them (Miles and Huberman, 1994). Essays were coded and analyzed similarly. Through a narrative analysis approach, the texts were reinterpreted as informants' stories (Riessman, 1993) embedded in the broader sociocultural world of meanings (Thompson, 1997). A hermeneutical and iterative process (Thompson, 1997) across and within data sources was applied. Interviews and essays were compared within and among each other to expose convergent and divergent themes and form a comprehensive interpretation of the whole data set. The following section will discuss the results of these analyses.

Findings

The findings suggest that disposition process can reevaluate objects and enhance use, relational, monetary, spiritual, and moral value. The transferability of the object's value and its movement are crucial in this process:

I try to reevaluate them, think of the ways they can be useful. Use them more or pass them onto others ... sell if they are sellable ... (Miray, F/47, interview)

As Miray's quote suggests, disposition is about managing the flow of an object's transferable value among consumers or between consumption contexts. The path of the object is shaped by its perceived value, availability of partners to transfer this value, the predicted value of this transfer, and consumers' skills and capabilities. Occasionally, disposition requires dealing with objects with low transferable value. The garbage bin emerges as an important conduit to deal with such objects:

If I cannot or don't want to translate it, like underwear. That's rubbish. It goes to the bin. (Melek, F/29, interview)

For most participants, objects like underwear or socks and objects with poor materiality have low or no transferable value, since their circulation—even within family—is usually socially risky and unhygienic. Moreover, the proliferation of goods and increasing access to marketplace make it difficult to pass along or sell them as “who would want them used when their 1st hand is so affordable?” For such objects, the garbage bin creates moral value by helping consumers “do the right thing” and safely move them lest their disposition causes shame or offense.

The following two sections will illustrate how disposition can transfer and create value by facilitating exchanges among consumers (Appadurai, 1986) and how predicted disposition can modify consumption to enhance the value obtained from an object. In the first part of the findings, I will elucidate various disposition conduits, which turn objects into gifts, sacrifices, and commodities to accentuate and transfer their value. Then, I will highlight different value-enhancement strategies that recontextualize objects and negotiate their predicted disposition. Finally, I will describe how predicted disposition can hinder actual disposition and encourage attachment to ordinary objects.

Disposition: strategies of value transfer and creation

Most objects considered for disposal still encapsulate some transferable value, which is not only accumulated or residual (Goodwin and Ball, 1999; Parasuraman and Grewal, 2000) but also potential and imagined. Successful transfer of this value through disposition is crucial for realizing an object's value:

Giving my possessions to someone who could not have it otherwise . . . It feels like I use them to the fullest. (Cevdet, M, essay)

Disposition boosts use and moral value for Cevdet by moving his possessions to people in need and improving their welfare. Similarly, specific disposition conduits enhance value-in-disposition by turning objects into gifts, sacrifices, and commodities.

Gifting and sacrificing. Disposition can construct old, unused, or unwanted possessions as gifts and sacrifices to highlight their transferable value and form value-bearing relations around them. Objects move into the realm of gifts and sacrifices when informants act with altruistic intentions to enhance others' welfare and nurture relationships while reflecting on the recipient's needs and consequences of their disposition. Thus, awareness of a disadvantaged other becomes crucial to highlight an object's transferable value. Consider Yeliz, who plans to dispose of her cherished necklaces to help a friend in need:

I have been collecting them since college . . . My friend has this stall in the bazaar. She asked if I would sell some of them. I would not . . . but, I mean, if she could ask me that, she must really need the money right? I will choose some and give them to her. (Yeliz, F/41, interview)

Although Yeliz's necklaces are collection pieces, which makes their transfer risky for her collection's unity, realization of her friend's difficulties accentuates their transferable value. By destroying the necklaces' value as collection pieces, Yeliz can transform them into sacrifices (Hubert and Mauss, 1981) that can enhance her friend's welfare and their friendship. In their disposal, the necklaces' lost collection value reemerges as monetary (for her friend), moral, and relational value.

As willing but concerned members of the consumer culture, most participants use disposition to construct their possessions as gifts that can heal society:

There are people out there, who have nothing. Very poor, deprived. It is our duty to help . . . I am careful with my possessions and pass them on . . . They thank me, smile gratefully . . . I feel incredibly happy. (Nermin, F, essay)

Like Nermin, most informants, who are concerned about the income inequality in society but unwilling to change their own consumption, feel they need to give something back to society. Disposition helps these consumers to gift their possessions to a deprived other and reconstructs their consumption as an answer to a social crisis. By transferring her possessions' use value to people in need, Nermin obtains spiritual value ("I feel happy"), moral value ("it is our duty to help"), and linking value ("they thank me").

Disposers' altruistic intentions toward (actual or imagined) recipients can turn disposed objects into gifts and sacrifices, creating value-in-disposition even through seemingly wasteful disposition conduits. Cenk left his old couch on the street to catch the eye of "collectors"—well organized, informal recycling agents in Turkey—instead of looking for appropriate recipients:

I left it on the street. There is a sector. Every night, they collect plastic bottles, cans, glass . . . they sell it to recycling places. I cannot take them there, don't need to. They do it for me. (Cenk, M/32, interview)

Recent shifts in the Turkish economy, infrastructure changes, and new recycling legislations have created collectors who dig around the garbage bins, categorize, and select "valuable" stuff like papers, iron, plastic, or glass for recycling. Such transformation agents revive objects that border on rubbish. Like Cherrier's (2009) spiritually enlightened consumers who use public places to gift their possessions to strangers, Cenk views the street as a conduit that ensures value transfer for some of his possessions. This implies that the street or garbage bin can actually move objects into new contexts. Nevra imagines that throwing her possessions into garbage bin is more like gifting than wasting:

I do not recycle. I throw things into the bin . . . Collectors come every night, it's their job. How are they going to make a living if we recycle or donate everything? (Nevra, F, essay)

Nevra occasionally forgoes donating or recycling to throw objects (especially glass bottles, electronics, or paper) into the garbage bin as a gift to help collectors "keep their jobs and feed their families". She even criticizes people who accumulate things to "make use of everything to not send them to the trash" for not caring about others and avoiding to share their material wealth. For her, throwing away, which usually moves objects into the category of rubbish, actually enhances an

object's transferable value by associating it with new value regimes. Objects disposed of in this way gain moral and linking value as they continue their life by supporting other people without endangering the environment. This finding questions the assumption that throwing away or deserting objects leads to wasting and value destruction (Harrell and McConocha, 1992; Phillips and Segó, 2011).

Another finding implies that spontaneity can transform disposed objects into gifts since it leaves little room for preplanning and calculation of interest that characterize most market exchanges. Being members of the middle class, most informants have concerns about selling their ordinary possessions with low market value unless the sale develops spontaneously:

I was putting my old table and chairs on the street when a college student saw me and wanted to buy them . . . they insisted on paying. So, I sold them . . . for not much but I was happy to help the students. They were grateful. My furniture was revaluated, the cash was a bonus. (Sevim, F/58, interview)

Compared to those informants, who define themselves as skillful bargainers and use re-commoditization to acquire new objects, Sevim feels she has "no competence in trade". Spontaneous appearance of a buyer boosted the furniture's transferable value, while the low monetary return turned the reselling process into a gift exchange (Herrmann, 1996). The sale transferred the furniture to those in need and created more (monetary, linking, and moral) value than Sevim had anticipated: the furniture was reused, students saved money, and Sevim felt happy for enhancing the students' welfare.

Altruistic intentions cannot guarantee successful transfer or creation of value if the involved parties disagree on the object's value. The participants admit that they expect some reciprocity—usually in the form of displaying gratefulness—as a sign that "each side . . . experiences an equivalence of value" (Bell, 1991: 158). Mostly, discrepancies between consumers' assessments of the object during disposition reflect back on its perceived value and consumption:

If they don't like it . . . then that thing becomes worthless for me . . . I feel "so I was not diligent enough with it." Thank God, it never happened . . . (Yeliz, F/41, interview)

Yeliz, who frequently donates her possessions, carefully observes the recipient's reactions to assess the success of the value transfer and to reflect on her consumption and ability to anticipate others' needs. The rejection of an object by the intended disposition conduit prevents its reconstruction as a gift, blemishes Yeliz's consumption, and decreases the value she obtains from it. Some participants, however, attribute such failures to recipients' inappropriateness and modify their disposition conduits. Filiz usually donates her possessions to the poor based on two beliefs: wastefulness creates bad karma and God favors those who help others. Appearance of a seemingly poor stranger highlighted the transferable value of her husband's clothes, facilitating their disposal:

A woman came to our door . . . she seemed poor so I gave her some of my husband's shirts . . . Later, I found them in the garbage-bin. I felt so bad seeing them there, belittled . . . We now always donate to this clinic, where doctors help really poor people . . . When we go there doctors welcome us, treat us with sincerity. (Filiz, F/51, interview)

Filiz, who had no intentions of disposing of her husband's shirts, sacrificed their remaining use value to help a stranger in need and to derive moral and relational value in return. Having no prior knowledge of the recipient, Filiz referred to the stranger's appearance to assume they would

appreciate her gift. The value transfer, however, failed when the recipient, whose social status was supposedly below her own, challenged her value estimates (Appadurai, 1986) by trashing her sacrifice. Filiz, who occasionally referred to this “untrustworthy deceptive stranger” to underline the difficulty of finding a deserving recipient, decided to switch to a safer disposition conduit. She transferred the desirable attributes associated with doctors (i.e. helpfulness and reliability) to construct the local clinic as a medium for reaching the genuinely disadvantaged. Objects disposed through the clinic become gifts that create spiritual, moral, and linking value by helping Filiz connect with the doctors and the poor; abide by the God’s will; help others; and prevent waste.

Other informants select recipients among close relations (like friends or family), whose lives and consumption habits they are familiar with. However, this strategy can fail once the recipient actually starts using the disposed object like Buket’s jacket:

It was a nice jacket . . . relatively unused, just staying in the closet . . . My cousin is good at mixing and matching . . . I thought she would know how to use it . . . When I saw it on her though . . . the way she put it on was weird . . . I felt sorry for her, she thought it looked nice but . . . I thought “I wish someone told her” . . . I felt bad . . . I won’t give her such things again. (Buket, F/34, interview)

Buket’s skillful cousin was a convenient and appropriate recipient for her underutilized jacket with high transferable value. The jacket could have brought more value when gifted to her cousin than kept unused since the former path could have restored its use value, reconstructed her insufficient consumption as value enhancing (i.e. the jacket was pristine due to her under consumption), and improved her familial relations. While Buket’s cousin appreciated her gift, displayed her gratitude, and used it, Buket’s value-in-disposition diminished as its “appropriate consumption” style (Appadurai, 1986)—apparently an important condition for its revaluation—was not transferred with the jacket. In the end, Buket excluded her cousin from specific future disposition exchanges.

Buket’s story reveals another finding: participants’ desire to control how the disposed object should be used influences the selection of disposition conduits. That is, value-in-disposition usually emerges when participants manage to move the object together with its perceived value and consumption style. Consider how Berrin matches her objects with the right recipients:

I pass them onto people who are appropriate for it . . . I consider how it should be used and, of course, who can make the most of it. (Berrin, F/41, interview)

To ensure value transfer, some informants carefully investigate potential recipients and/or prevent certain people from accessing certain objects:

You observe . . . Their clothes, houses, lifestyles . . . Do they have a car? Where do they live? Ask them questions . . . if they have a car, the wife does not work . . . then they do not actually need anything I could offer. (Hale, F/40, interview)

Hale, who likes passing her objects onto people in need, uses culturally constructed signs of social class and well-being to determine who should relate to her possessions. On the other hand, Ece excludes specific people from accessing her branded clothes based on her assumptions about the appropriate usage contexts and others’ consumption styles/practices:

If they are of good brands, I try to give them to people who can really appreciate them . . . I cannot give them to our housekeeper. I mean, when can she wear them or to where? (Ece, F, essay)

In controlling who relates to their possessions through disposition, informants like Ece are more concerned with preserving and transferring their objects' value than with protecting the social boundaries as Norris (2004) suggests. Yet, their efforts to move and transfer value during disposition operate on and reproduce asymmetric social relations. This echoes previous research on the dark side of gift giving (Godelier, 1999; Mauss, 1990; Sherry et al., 1993): the disposer usually claims power and superior position over the recipients, who become indebted and humbled by the gift. While some participants relish this power imbalance, others are disturbed by it and choose institutional conduits to partly relinquish their control over disposition process:

I cannot do it. Even with relatively new objects, I cannot ask them if they want it. I don't like that power imbalance. I let charities handle it. (Sanem, F/29, interview)

For Sanem, direct confrontations with the poor negate value-in-disposition by highlighting the disposer's advantageous position. To bypass the anxiety and reciprocity expectations of the gift exchange (Marcoux, 2009), participants use indirect disposition paths like charities, which turn objects into "modern gifts" (Godbout and Caillé, 1998) that move between strangers and distribute value across social classes.

To sum, as disposition moves objects between consumers and consumption contexts as gifts and sacrifices, consumers obtain moral, spiritual, and relational value without necessarily experiencing self-transformation or changing lifestyles. Within these value stories also emerges a darker side of seemingly selfless disposition. In their quest for enhancing value (Graeber, 2011), consumers can actually enact and highlight the differences between members of society, boost power imbalance, and reproduce the social order. The disposition path for an object is constituted by its perceived value, existence of recipients to honor this value, and consumers' awareness of others' needs as well as through "struggles for preeminence" (Appadurai, 1986: 19). Thus, consumers replenish their power and position in society not only by disposing of certain objects (Mauss, 1990) but also by controlling who is worthy of them. While some participants use disposition to relish such power, some try to negate this imbalance through impersonal and formal disposition channels.

Re-commoditizing. Selling emerges as a preferable disposition conduit when the object is expensive or its transferable value is significantly affected from the changes in technology and fashion like automobile, jewelry, or electronics. Early disposition of these objects is legitimized as they become stocks (Denegri-Knott and Molesworth, 2009), whose value can be transferred to others in return for monetary value:

A one-month old phone. You sell it and upgrade to a better model . . . like exchanging it for a better one . . . Selling your possessions requires skills. Being able to market something of yours, it's nice. (Mesut, M/37, interview)

Mesut's arguments imply that selling enhances objects' "liquidity" (Bardhi et al., 2012): consumers use possessions for functionality and easily depart from them to commit to specific value regimes (e.g. fashion) and consumption culture. Other than providing monetary value, re-commoditization also helps negotiating two "meta practices of consumption": waste creation and object accumulation (Gregson et al., 2007).

As selling requires planning and strategizing (Denegri-Knott and Molesworth, 2009; Lastovicka and Fernández, 2005) as well as understanding and promoting an object's commodity value,

consumers are willing to resell possessions when they can obtain satisfactory monetary value in return. Thus, re-commoditizing cannot transfer or create value for all objects:

It is not worth selling clothes. You won't get much, it is inconvenient. They are more useful if you give them to people in need. (Semih, M, essay)

As Semih denotes, the monetary value obtained from selling objects like clothes cannot exceed the linking and moral value they provide when donated or given to others. Such value contemplations and comparisons prevent certain objects from becoming stocks and divert them toward other conduits.

The findings presented above show that, in addition to knowing which objects can be moved along through which channels (Gregson et al., 2007), disposition is also about reflecting on the transferability of the object's value. This requires carefully assessing its history and potential futures; one's own consumption practices; shifts in the social and one's position in it; and the consumption practices of potential recipients. This way, disposition reevaluates objects by forming desirable actual or imagined relations around them that transfer and "translate their value" (Hetherington, 2004). In disposing their possessions through conduits that turn them into gift, sacrifice, or commodity, consumers negotiate what Kopytoff (1986) calls "uncertainties of valuation" and exert control over their possessions' reclassification and reuse, to derive use, relational, monetary, moral, or spiritual value.

Negotiating disposition: enhancing and protecting value

The previous section explicated how disposition facilitates value creation by accentuating and mobilizing an object's transferable value to form desirable relations around it. Disposition can also inspire consumers to adjust an object's consumption to enhance and protect its value. This section shows how consumers negotiate disposition and deal with an object's nontransferable value while revealing disposition-induced mechanisms that increase attachment to ordinary possessions.

Enhancing value. While disposition creates value by transferring an object's value and establishing desirable relations around it, disposition prospects can trigger value-enhancement strategies that move objects into the new realms of consumption (and production). These strategies construct participants as moral, creative, and thrifty while enhancing the object's utility, esthetic, spiritual, and/or moral value.

One strategy to enhance value is applying conversions through esthetic manipulation and creative recontextualization (Appadurai, 1986: 28) to reconnect the objects to new realms of production and consumption. Participants, who are mostly graphic design students and/or skilled in crafts, recognize the potential value in some objects and use their competence to resist their disposal. For Miray, material conversion is a way to manifest and imbue an object with her own creative self:

An old, worn-out sweater, you cannot give it to anyone. I un-knit it and use the wool to knit something new. I spend time and put my labor. I watch TV shows, ask mother and friends for ideas . . . I like making use of things. (Miray, F/47, interview)

Miray occasionally deals with objects with low transferable value that she cannot pass along or donate. Having grown up with a resourceful, thrifty mother and participated in sewing, glass

painting, and knitting courses, Miray accumulated enough competence to use her bodily, cognitive, and emotional labor as “nonmonetary sacrifice” (Wang et al., 2004) to boost the esthetic and use value of objects that she would otherwise dispose of. Converting also creates moral and linking value by helping Miray to manifest her skills, prevent waste, and link with her mother, mentor, and friends.

The type of object converted and the range of conversion are contingent upon consumers’ skills. Mert holds back specific objects for his art while disposing of the rest:

Old jeans, shirts, they become raw materials for my art . . . You need to have the eye to know which items can be used like that and which should be passed on. (Mert, M, essay)

Mert, who likes to donate his possessions, refrains from disposing when an object aligns with his artistic style and strikes him as potential raw material for his art projects. In becoming a part of an artistic process, these seemingly worthless objects obtain esthetic and use value while providing spiritual (by boosting his sense of artistic competence) and moral value (by helping him reduce wasting) for Mert. Consumers, who lack the competence or aspiration for a creative/artistic identity, cannot use material conversion to negotiate disposition. Instead, they mostly describe these conversions as inconvenient, time consuming, and exhausting—effectively denying any value they could provide.

Consumers can also negotiate disposition by adjusting their consumption to boost the use value they derive from their possessions. Two strategies, which I call “brutal use” and “gradual garbaging,” allow “using the object till the end” before it is discarded without guilt or wastefulness. Brutal use is especially helpful when the predicted disposition looms over objects with low transferable value like Ferda’s car:

It was already second-hand, wasn’t worth much . . . But, it was a car, you know, still working. I felt I needed to use it however I liked, kill it so I would deserve the new one. (Ferda, F/29, interview)

Ferda’s car, with low past and current market value, would not bring enough monetary value through re-commodification, while throwing away or just passing on the still-working car seemed wasteful. Ferda negotiated her car’s lingering nontransferable use value and low monetary value by brutally using it to facilitate its impending disposal. Brutal use turned Ferda into a thrifty (if not diligent) consumer who does not dispose of her possessions wastefully or prematurely, while boosting the use value the car provides.

Student essays involve stories of careless use of books, which end up with low transferable value when their market demand/price is too low or there are no recipients. Participants, who cannot find appropriate recipients or buyers for them, brutally use these books (e.g. mark them, make drawings on them, use them to sit on or as coasters) to direct them toward the garbage bin. Although brutal use is a “sabotage,” which legitimizes disposition by deteriorating objects’ materiality (Gregson et al., 2009), it also boosts the value obtained from objects and prevents any lingering value from haunting consumers. Yet, participants who take pride in their diligent consumption cannot brutally use objects. Yeliz, for example, stores her unused but pristine encyclopedia with the hope of finding suitable recipients.

Disposition prospects can also trigger a more permanent regulation of consumption: gradual garbaging or slow and systematic consumption of objects. Different from most reuse strategies, in gradual garbaging, consumers use objects in the same ways but across hierarchically ranked consumption spheres, as Giray does:

We use things as much as possible not waste . . . I give clothes to my father and charities. Giving is meaningful if the receiver is using them . . . So, I categorize clothes as business, casual, and for repairs . . . Those I cannot give to anyone go one step down until they cannot be used anymore. (Giray, M/35, interview)

Given his moral principles and family's teachings, Giray derives relational and moral value from his possessions through optimal use. When he cannot circulate his clothes between his relatives or charities, he uses them to the fullest by gradually garbaging them across different consumption contexts.

Gradual garbaging is also used for objects whose disposal could be socially risky or inappropriate:

Swimsuits quickly get old. They are private, I cannot give them to anyone. I can still wear them . . . at beaches where there are tourists that you will never see again or at the pool in winter when it is not crowded. (Melis, F/33, interview)

Private objects like swimsuits or underwear embody low transferable value: offering them to others could be offensive and unhygienic; selling them is unimaginable; and trashing them would be wasteful. Melis solves this conflict by reorganizing her consumption to negotiate her swimsuits' disposition. She starts wearing them at relatively trendy places, then moves them to isolated beaches, and eventually throws them away. Like brutal use, gradual garbaging cannot be used by everyone or for every object, since it requires the existence of hierarchically ranked consumption contexts for the object.

The strategies mentioned above divert objects from their disposition path (Appadurai, 1986) by enhancing the value obtained from them. Conversions prolong consumers' ownership of their possessions by recontextualizing them and enhancing their perceived moral, esthetic, and use value. Strategies like brutal use and gradual garbaging, however, prepare objects for disposal by enhancing the use value obtained from them while associating consumers with frugal and thrifty consumption practices. Consumers apply these strategies depending on the object, their competences, and the normative—that is, what they usually do or consider appropriate and acceptable—(Gregson et al., 2007) in their lives.

Protecting value. Predicted disposition can trigger attachment to an ordinary object, when consumers perceive its disposition as challenging to their own value assessments and consumption processes. Keeping the object back from disposition can negate this challenge and protect the object's perceived value.

Most participants hold on to objects with what they consider ambiguous (even if transferable) value. An object gains ambiguous value when consumers have conflicting value assessments about it or predict discrepancy between others' and their own evaluations. Having been exposed to her parents' mocking about its color and model, Buket's coat now embodies ambiguous value:

I like that coat, it is functional. But, wearing it is uncomfortable with my parents saying things . . . So, when this saleslady came to me and said she liked it, I was like struck by lightning. She felt and could use it like me. I told her to take it. She didn't, I was so sad. I missed the perfect opportunity to divest it . . . (Buket, F/34, interview)

As the lingering use value of Buket's coat is tainted with its depreciated esthetic and emotional value (Richins, 1994), she wants to transfer it to someone who shares her positive value

assessments. However, objects with ambiguous value hold few value-enhancing disposition opportunities. Having missed her spontaneous chance with the saleslady, Buket holds on to her coat lest its lingering value is wasted through an inappropriate transfer. Disposition process can encourage attachment to objects with ambiguous value by highlighting potential value discrepancies associated with them and constructing keeping as a way to negotiate these inconsistencies.

Consumers who fail to engage in “timely and appropriate disposing” (Gregson et al., 2007) can also hold their possessions back from disposition. Consider Talat, who eventually replaced his cell phones due to his friends’ mocking:

They only call and text, good enough for me. But, phones have everything now, camera, navigator . . . So, no one would want them. I cannot pass them along or sell them . . . No trashing since they work. The local recycling facility, which raises money for charities, might accept them . . . But, I keep them for now. (Talat, M/43, interview)

Talat was happy using his old-fashioned phones if not for the social pressure from his friends. His longitudinal consumption and delayed replacement—albeit increasing the use value he obtained—have turned the phones out-of-date and decreased their transferable value. Any movement of Talat’s phones—even to recycling, which scrutinizes objects for their recyclability—can reveal value assessments incompatible with his own. Talat’s desire to shield his own value assessments and conceal his cell phones’ ultimate “worthlessness” for others creates a type of attachment to them.

Stories of such hard-to-dispose ordinary objects appear frequently in the data. Participants, albeit quite willing to dispose of these objects, end up developing attachment to them. Kleine et al. (1995) find that such attachments usually develop during acquisition (i.e. through gifting or associations to others). However, the findings above suggest that perceived ambiguity or nontransferability of value, constructed during actual or imagined disposition, can also nurture attachment to ordinary objects.

Existence of value enhancement and protection strategies implies that an object’s value does not always diminish by “. . . just using it or letting it sit and become old” (Engeström and Blackler, 2005: 323). Strategic manipulation of consumption can prevent waste of any lingering value and decrease the anxiety and guilt of disposition. Diverting objects from undesirable disposition paths and moving them into new contexts of consumption and production construct consumers as thrifty and nonwasteful—creating moral, spiritual, esthetic, and use value. Keeping preserves consumers value assessments by holding the object in a temporary status quo. Accordingly, predicted disposition becomes constitutive of the value obtained from objects.

Discussion and conclusions

This study unpacks value-in-disposition by highlighting various disposition processes as (gift, sacrificial, and monetary) exchanges, which build desirable relations around disposed objects to construct, enhance, or transfer value. While not providing an exhaustive typology of disposition, the results underline the importance of an object’s movement in value creation and maintenance, while drawing attention to transferability of value (not just its type/amount) in shaping consumers’ social and material relations. The study complicates the connection between acquisition, usage, and disposition processes by presenting the predicted and/or actual disposition—when an object’s life story (i.e. traces of its acquisition, consumption, and owners) and potentialities (e.g. suitability

to disposition conduits and potential owners/uses) reflect back on consumers—as constitutive of an object's consumption and its perceived value. Value is found to emerge from the reflective ways consumers disown or resist disowning possessions, in addition to acquiring, using (Woodruff and Gardial, 1996) or just disowning them (Boztepe, 2006).

This research narrated a story of value-in-movement by introducing various disposition conduits as “media of value” or means of realization of value (Graeber, 2001), through which objects move into the realm of gifts, sacrifices, thrift, and craft/art—without necessarily turning into excess (Gregson et al., 2007) or rubbish (Thompson, 1979). Disposition enhances linking value by forming meaningful relations around objects and creating a caring-sharing community or “ethics” (Arvidsson, 2011; Hetherington, 2004); moral value by preventing waste, integrating consumers to broader meaning systems, and highlighting the consequences of their actions for others (Graeber, 2011); and spiritual value by increasing consumers' happiness, strengthening their commitment to God or religious/spiritual beliefs, and reinforcing their creative artistic selves. While material conversions undertaken during disposition enhance an object's esthetic and use value, consumers can obtain monetary value through re-commodification. Thus, consumers can derive value-in-disposition on an everyday basis without necessarily adopting new lifestyles or experiencing a self-transformation as previous research suggests (Cherrier, 2009; Kozinets, 2002).

A key implication is that an object's value is dynamic, shaped by consumers' commitments to different and usually conflicting value regimes (e.g. altruism vs. frugality) and constructed beyond the dyadic relation between objects and consumers (Fournier, 1998) through the inclusion of imagined or actual value partners and their value estimates. The same object can move through different conduits depending on the type and perceived transferability of its value and consumers' competence, aspirations, beliefs, normative consumption practices, and social network. Consumers reflect and act not only on their own competences and consumption, the object's potential uses, and appropriateness of disposition media (Gregson et al., 2007) but also on their social network and the needs and social positions of themselves and others in a very specific present. So, value, rather than being produced by an abstract system of needs (Baudrillard, 2000), embodies assessment of relations, norms, needs, and practices constructed in a specific context in the present.

These results challenge the assumptions about disposition conduits. The literature describes practices like careful use, reuse, and repair as value-enhancing disposition (Cappellini, 2009; Cooper, 2005; Gregson et al., 2009), while associating throwing away and trashing with value destruction, wasting, and un-sustainability (Evans, 2012; Phillips and Segó, 2011). The current study reveals that throwing away can create more value than seemingly thrifty or altruistic disposition conduits by preventing objects from “reflecting negatively on consumers” (Gregson et al., 2007: 196), eliminating offensive disposal, and assisting consumers to connect with and help imagined others. From a sustainability perspective, this implies that consumers' value priorities, infrastructural variables, and sociocultural connotations attached to disposition practices can encourage or constrain sustainable behavior. Similarly, this study challenges the view that consumers want to prevent their possessions from becoming rubbish (Gregson et al., 2007) by highlighting two practices—gradual garbaging and brutal use—they strategically use to trash their objects. Future research could explore disposition to reveal other strategies of systematic garbaging.

This study also reveals a darker side of seemingly altruistic disposition. The mechanisms that allow gifts and sacrifices to strengthen social ties can work to differentiate the disposers from the recipients, putting the latter in a position of debt and inferiority (Godelier, 1999; Marcoux, 2009; Mauss, 1990). While indirect and institutional channels of disposition help negate this power imbalance, most participants want disposition process to legitimize and honor their own

consumption and value assessments, which, as Appadurai (1986) suggests, requires continuity and transfer of the disposed object's meanings and uses. For this, consumers refer to their assumptions about the "others" and direct their possessions to safe conduits. So, in their quest to lengthen objects' lives, construct a moral self, and connect with others—or, in their pursuit of value (Graeber, 2001)—consumers promote "me versus others" and reproduce a social order that accentuates and nurtures their own position in society. This result has two main implications. The power and social order are established not only through defining or appropriating value (Appadurai, 1986; Graeber, 2001) or in differentiating between the valuable and valueless (Thompson, 2003) but also in determining who receives each. Moreover, successful disposition, rather than separating the object from its value (Hetherington, 2004), transfers the object's perceived value into its next life.

The results also underscore a dimension of inability to dispose that cannot be explained by hoarding behavior (Cherrier and Ponnor, 2010; Phillips and Segó, 2011) or special possession attachment (Kleine et al., 1995). Consumers hold on to ordinary objects that they cannot move through the intended disposition conduits. Moreover, disposition juxtapose things and people, opening the former to the scrutiny of the latter (Gregson, 2007). The desire to avoid others' value assessments that could conflict with the disposer's perceptions and consumption can trigger attachment—especially to objects with ambiguous or nontransferable value. Thus, inability to dispose is sometimes the reason rather than a consequence of object attachment. Future research could explore disposition to reveal other dimensions of object attachment.

This study have focused on disposition practices of middle and upper middle class consumers, who hold certain financial and social position in society and have concerns like helping others, keeping up with technology, cleanliness, and environmental pollution. Other groups might voice different concerns. Future research could focus on the poor, who may place greater emphasis on monetary value, length of usage, or capturing use value for themselves when disposing of objects.

Exploring the relation between value and disposition, this study underlined the importance of movement for value creation and asserted that disposition can enhance value by forming value-bearing relations around disposed objects. It showed that disposition prospects can reflect back on an object's consumption, move the object into new contexts, and even facilitate object attachment. Overall, the results have important implications for disposition, value, and inability to dispose.

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