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FOR WHOM THE CONSUMER RETORTS: CONSUMER IDENTITY, CULTURAL

CONDITIONS, AND THE RAMIFICATION AND RE-INTEGRATION OF THE MARKET

THROUGH CO-OPTATION

A Dissertation

by

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ABSTRACT

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Co-optation theory has evolved such that the cultural friction between consumer agency and the market provides an eternal source of marketing opportunities for marketers to culturally rejuvenate their businesses. The relevant literature studying consumer identity, however, precludes docile consumers from the analyses and theorization process. Given the theoretical incompleteness, this dissertation first expounds the nature of consumer agency by studying consumer cultural conditions cultivated and entrenched since modern epoch. Consumers' varied levels of ability to signify and their urge for distinctiveness are two cultural conditions that can capture the quintessence of consumer agency. Second, this study delves into the possibility that consumers overcome the given cultural quality, employ different (re)presentations of consumer culture for their identity projects, and consequently contribute to the market dynamics.

Ethnographic data collected from the context of X Games help explicate the elements of consumer cultural quality based on emerging themes of ability to signify and urge for distinctiveness. The themes of the construct of ability to signify demonstrate that dialectical negotiation of identity contributes much less than postulated in the literature to the performance of consumer identity project in terms of true presentation of idiosyncratic self-identity. In

addition, consumers in the context tend to be iconoclastic, narcissistic, and naturalistic distinction-makers with their new currency for distinction: cool.

The consumer-market dynamics impeccably operates based upon interactions and mutual facilitations among four theoretically and empirically distinct groups of consumers: pragmatic, stigmatized, distinction-oriented, and self-normalizing consumers. The historic conflict between consumers and the market steeped in Hegelian dialectics is again contested in the dynamics due to the switch of modes(arts) of being(consumption) made by individual consumers who respectively participate in the system through presentation and representation. Accordingly, a new perspective of consumers as cyborgs, based on posthumanism, is discussed. Some theoretical considerations of gender and race issues in such dynamics are also proposed.

DEDICATION

To the love of my life, Yunjoo Kim and my two angels, Seoyoung and Junmin.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

It is not true that someone who does not tell you what to do does not teach you. My lifetime

mentor, Dr. A. Fuat Firat knows the power of silence, patience, and trust, which are his teaching

materials and methods. Nothing can be more grateful than the feeling that I will be more

confident and capable as a result of his lifetime lessons. I am deeply indebted to him for his

precious and timeless insights and inspirations given to me. I would have been nothing without

him.

I hardly run across a man with wit, humor, intelligence, passion, and charisma. Fortunately, I

have known at least one such person. Dr. Michael S. Minor gave me one of the most important

assets for researchers and teachers, to wholeheartedly love what we do. He is truly a role model

for PhD students as he always displays his enthusiasm in the profession. His aura will always be

around my mind.

I have been fortunate in another aspect of my life as well because I now know what a true

friendship should be like. Compassion and encouragement are what Dr. Mohammadali

Zolfagharian uses to gulvanize me to improve myself. As a colleague and a friend, his kind

words and caring always motivated me to move on. Equally importantly, his acute critique has

enabled me to see what I would not be able to see otherwise.

The meaning of PhD to me has changed as I interact with Dr. Cory M. Wimberly. He taught me a very, perhaps the most, important thing for any PhD. Presence of wrong philosophy hurts more than does absence of philosophy. He also enlightened me to realize that philosophy without the understanding of a more humane sphere of life is a hollow illusion.

I am sincerely thankful to my committee members for their "beautiful minds."

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PROLOGUE

"The Matrix is a system, Neo. That system is our enemy. But when you're inside, you look around, what do you see? Businessmen, teachers, lawyers, carpenters. The very minds of the people we are trying to save. But until we do, these people are still a part of that system and that makes them our enemy. You have to understand, most of these people are not ready to be unplugged. And many of them are so inured, so hopelessly dependent on the system, that they will fight to protect it," said Morpheus (The Matrix 1999).

No, I am not inured. Are you? How do we know whether we are or not? If we are claiming that we are not, what does the claim bring to us? Is it wrong to be inured? This sort of debate is to be concluded one way or the other. First, one is inured because s/he wants to be or cannot help it. Second, one is not inured because he or she doesn't want to be or can manipulate the things that make him or her inured.

Too simplistic? Yes, certainly it is, but what else can we argue with? Isn't it at least better than a wholesale simplification of the case as though everybody can and wants to be different? I, as a consumer, sometimes want to or have to conform to the system, don't I? In the meantime, however, I am just tired of the culturally and ideologically limiting influences of the market.

Do we defy the market influence or just revise and/or protect our identity, which is supposed to be authentic? Do we contribute to the system as we react or try to subvert the authority? I am not a Burning Man participant or a hippie either, but the intensity I feel when I am doing something that I like to do for myself, as a sole and foremost entity in the universe, may well exceed that of those people.

What about you? Have you ever made something for yourself and/or your loved ones, instead of buying something from the market? On that particular day, didn't you buy any genetically modified food, go to McDonalds, or at least dream of any product you had seen in an advertisement? As a matter of fact, that is how I live through an ordinary day.

It doesn't seem to matter whether or not we are inured and whether we can react or not. What does matter is how and when we choose to be or not to be in the system. Our status as a participant in the system does not remain the same for long. Instead, it seems to switch from listener to voicer as we accept or turn down the proposals by the market.

A leap? Yes it is, if you deny yourself moving around different statuses, but it should not be a leap as we closely look into ourselves mirrored through a muddling and yet self-refreshing system, the market. We all know we should stay in the system to make our living, but when, why and how do we trespass beyond the systematic boundary? Who leads the trespassing, and why? Are we all ready to be "unplugged?"

The following detailed and substantive study will hopefully lead the "trespassing" beyond the conventional yet stagnant perspectives on contemporary consumers.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The more the system becomes concentrated, the more it expels whole social groups. The more it becomes hierarchized according to the law of value (sign or commodity) the more it excludes whoever resists this law (Baudrillard 1975, p. 135).

Power must be analysed as something which circulates, or rather as something which only functions in the form of a chain. It is never localized here or there, never in anybody's hands, never appropriated as a commodity or piece of wealth. Power is employed and exercised through a net-like organization. And not only do individuals circulate between its threads; they are always in the position of simultaneously undergoing and exercising this power. They are not only its inert or consenting target; they are always also the elements of its circulation. In other words, individuals are the vehicles of power, not its points of application (Foucault 1980, p. 98).

....But against the triumphant abstraction, against the irreversible monopolization, the demand arises that nothing can be given without being returned, nothing is ever won without something being lost, nothing is ever produced without something being destroyed, nothing is ever spoken without being answered. In short, what haunts the system is the symbolic demand (Baudrillard 1975, p. 147).

Domain Description

The discourse of power[1] has been incessantly promulgated by philosophers, sociologists, and consumer culture theorists (e.g., Foucault 1977, 1980; Giddens 1981; Holt 2002; Kozinets 2001, 2002; Thompson 2004; Thompson and Coskuner-Balli 2007; Thompson and Tian 2008). Power always operates as a historically omnipresent and resilient force, and it affects the

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[1] Power in Foucault's (1977, 1980) sense encompasses every and any manipulation imposed and/or exercised through institutionalization and systemization of the things that can be translated into and contribute to sociopolitical influence.

transformation of the market (e.g., Giesler 2008). The relevance and significance of this discourse begets increasing and intensifying attention from consumer culture theorists, who study consumption as a holistic array of human experiences, activities, desires, and fantasies. Most importantly, consumers' reactions to the purportedly normalizing influence of the market are of special interest (e.g., Firat and Venkatesh 1995; Foucault 1977). The market, for this study, refers to the institutionalized system in which commodification and consumerization are all-pervading. Commodification is conducted to preclude and/or distort substantive elements of any cultural material so that it can be translated into economic value completely free from any obligation (e.g., Venkatesh, Penaloza, and Firat 2006). Consumerization involves the practices to preclude individuals from production process. Consequently, consumers and their consumption praxis have been completely detached from production of meanings and values by the market, and this is the reason consumers seem to retort against the market. Although the number of theorists examining the discourse of power in the market is limited, the depth and intensity of the studies exceed many other consumer culture theories of interest today. This is because of the overarching (macro) nature of the theories dealing with power and also due to the role of these theories as a denominator in explaining the globalization phenomenon in the market. Globally successful marketers tend to incorporate the ideas, themes, and subcultures of consumers in different cultural contexts and geographical regions into their brand images, product features, and advertisements (e.g., Thompson and Arsel 2004). This is an overt practice in the market to be culturally superordinate to consumers.

The marketers' appropriation of consumers' cultural faculty fostered the development of a newly evolving theoretical perspective: co-optation theory (Thompson and Coskuner-Balli 2007). The theory attempts to explain the culturally interdependent relationship between

companies and consumers. Nonetheless, the theory of co-optation[2] has not properly responded to

the increased attention to consumer agency from the consumer culture field. This is because the

concept simply seems to base its theoretical lens on a liberatory standpoint—a liberatory

perspective on consumers should recognize each individual consumer's subjectivity, agency, and

power—as intended by consumer culture theorists (e.g., Arnould and Thompson 2005). The

theory of co-optation posits that:

> *....through their defiance of hegemonic cultural codes, rebellious countercultures threaten to destabilize taken-for-granted modes of understanding and fundamentally breach the fragile consensus through which hegemony of the dominant classes is sustained. To contain and neutralize this threat, the dominant culture responds by converting these expressions of countercultural opposition into commodified forms that can be repositioned within dominant frameworks of meaning and denuded of their transgressive sociopolitical significations (Thompson and Coskuner-Balli 2007, p. 137).*

Despite their explanatory power regarding cultural emulation by marketers, applications and

extensions of the theory in consumer research (e.g., Kozinets 2002) exclude gullible consumers

who can be easily subjugated. Those consumers are different from agentic consumers who

conceive, devise, and perform cultural resistance to the market because agentic consumers have

different qualities in terms of their symbolic capacity and pursuit of distinct identity (Kozinets

and Handelman 2004). In other words, the theory generally appears to be humanitarian and

liberatory in that it recognizes the cultural, communal, experiential, identity-related, and

ideological struggles of consumers who try to be agential. This standpoint, nevertheless, is quite

incompatible with the discourse of power in Foucauldian perspective in that, for Foucault, any

social structure or institution is a schematic boundary that has historically developed to regulate

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[2] Drawn from Hebdige (1979) and Heath and Potter (2004), co-optation generally connotes the resistance management mechanism of the market. Cult, fetishism, hereticality, and subcultures are allegedly destined to be absorbed by the market that constantly exploits the symbolic ideas from the subversive and yet creative consumer(s) and (re)commodifies them.

and train the members. By studying marginalized consumers, subject to a continuous and additional discipline, the theory fails to include or ignores other consumers—consumers who are indifferent toward and/or unable to afford the pursuit of cultural autonomy in the market system—in the analyses. The focus of the theory on cultural rebels might be understood as if the theoretical basis of co-optation theory is celebrating liberation. This problematic connotation of the theoretical perspective of co-optation theory can be remedied when the theory embraces the overlooked consumers who still serve for the best of the market system. All consumers must be viewed as critical constituents of the market system. This imperative parallels the Foucauldian standpoint that has particularly been espoused by co-optation theorists (e.g., Thompson and Coskuner-Balli 2007; Thompson and Tian 2008).

Given this theoretical outlook, the present dissertation first pursues theoretical wholeness and soundness by questioning and correcting a key assumption of co-optation theory, which implicitly posits, and tends to draw general conclusions based on an even distribution of contemporary consumers' interest in and/or capability of resisting market hegemony. Although it is not an assumption of the theory but simply the current theoretical focus, in order to provide a more complete understanding of consumers' resistance and the subsequent co-optation, it is required to include all types of consumers into the theoretical perspective to further develop the theory. The inclusion of various types of consumers is particularly important because co-optation theorists do not attempt to examine the implications of the theory for different consumer groups even though they tend to recognize that there are individual differences in terms of consumers' cultural autonomy in the market. For example, Holt (2002, p. 87) addressed the issue that there are culturally confident "artistic consumers" at one extreme and consumers struggling with "semiotic vertigo" at the other extreme. Consumers with different qualities will act differently in

the market system. The different qualities may be determined with consumers' different levels of *ability to signify* and *urge for distinctiveness*. These constructs as the foci of this dissertation are discussed in a detailed manner in later sections and defined as follows: (1) *ability to signify* is defined as the self-efficacy to choose to value symbols and individuated meanings more than practical, marketized, and socially constructed signs available in the consumption domain and subsequently (re)create and practice idiosyncratic identity through signification; (2) urge for distinctiveness is defined as an individual predisposition to be a differently defined agent in diverse consumption contexts which many others with similar identities also inhabit. It is important to study the interpersonal differences in those constructs applicable to the entire pool of consumers to advance co-optation theory as well as the understanding of the evolution of the market.

Second, recognizing multiple levels of individual consumers' symbolic capabilities and interests in cultural subjectivity (e.g., Holt 2002) facilitates greater insights into different consumers' cultural vicissitude in their day-to-day lives. The recognition will also help in explaining how consumers cope with two critical consumer cultural conditions: (1) consumers' ability to signify meanings in the market and (2) the historically developed consumers' urge for distinctiveness. These conditions dictate consumers' associations with a variety of manifestations of consumer culture significant to their identity projects. Consumer identity project is a process and practice through and by which consumers' cultural bricolage of self is enacted and embodied in negotiation with the market (e.g., Belk 1988; Holt 2002; McCracken 1986). Identity project has become the imperative for contemporary individuals as "reflexive modernization" idealizes education, welfare, and civil rights, which result in loss of solidarity and much emphasis on individualization (Bauman 1991, Giddens 1991, and Beck 1994). By the same token, such

questions as "What to do? How to act? Who to be? (Giddents 1991, p. 70)" rise as lifetime projects to be worked on by everyone living in the current socio-politico-cultural context, known as late-modernity. Different ways and nuances all individuals answer those questions are eventually viewed as consumer behaviors, roles, and lifestyles. It should be clearly noted that the nature of identity project today is purely symbolic (e.g., Ahuvia 2005; Belk 1988) rather than physical, ethnic, and cultural (country-specific). Also, it is claimed that an identity project executed outside of consumer culture is neither precedented nor conceivable (Cherrier and Murray 2007). In short, this study deals with consumers' pursuit of symbolic identity, their ability to advance their identity projects through signification, and the market's appropriation of the symbolic products of identity projects. The two focal constructs of this dissertation are further discussed and defined in chapter four.

Third, this dissertation investigates the means and processes with and through which consumers manipulate their given cultural conditions differently. The investigation also facilitates the understanding of different reasons and ways through which consumers simulate diverse consumer cultures (which show different levels of resistance to the market hegemony) in order to react or conform to the autocratic market system. The exploration of a range of consumers' ongoing cultural ambidextrousness will lead to a counterproposal to co-optation theory's general conclusion that the market is nourished solely by rebellious consumers and transformed simply through the appropriation of the cultural counterforce. Consumers' cultural quality seems more complex and dynamic than what the theory of co-optation suggests when it is evaluated and analyzed with the proposed consumer cultural conditions. Consequently, the suggested simplistic logic of cultural transformation of the market also appears to be contestable rather than theoretically solid. Therefore, this study provides a synthetical perspective in order to

interlace the view of the market, as a culture-absorbent system, with varied characteristics of consumer cultures today, to explain the outcomes of the consumers' heterogeneous identity projects.

Ongoing Finality: Problem Recognition

Co-optation theory marginalizes the conforming consumers as it emphasizes the roles of "counterculturalists." The preclusion and marginalization of culturally "obedient" consumers in analyzing the friction between consumers and the market is questionable as to whether the theory factionalizes a consumer's various consumption patterns oscillating between one and another or profiles the consumer body as a whole. (cf. Giesler 2008; Thompson and Coskuner-Balli 2007, Thompson and Tian 2008). Neither case explores the possibility that an individual consumer, as an essential of the market system, can act multiple roles. Moreover, as co-optation theory shares certain elements and conditions with postmodernism (Thompson and Coskuner-Balli 2007), such as fragmentation and reversal of production and consumption, recognition of the intrapersonal plurality in consumers' cultural quality is theoretically important (cf. Lyotard 1984). The theory expounds the permanent tension (power relation) between defiant consumers and the market by introducing the paradoxical nature of the "mutual-appropriation[3]" between consumers and the market. Nonetheless, the proposed status of the theory as a grand (generalized) theory is detrimental to its theoretical contribution. In other words, the theory of co-optation is not viewed as "the denouement" for all the cultural episodes in different markets because it fails to recognize the ordinary (conforming) consumers' roles in the market.

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[3] A mutual-appropriation means that the market utilizes, materializes, and commercializes consumers' ideas, symbols, and (sub) cultures, and that the consumers themselves eventually enjoy and benefit from the co-optation, even though they were initially opposed to the marketers' appropriation of consumers' property.

Co-optation theory explains that the market is not expected to sustain itself without the consumers who usually serve as a source of novel and stimulating marketing ideas (Heath and Potter 2004). It is often observed that consumers who tend to accept the co-opted marketing ideas sometimes become cultural rebels as needed. Some consumers change their roles from "listeners" to "voicers," or vice versa, and the market needs all of them to function. Thus, it is important to look into why and when consumers switch from "insurgents" to "dupes," or vice versa. Heath and Potter (2004) address the unpredictable and constantly alternating narrative as an identity project in which consumers are predictable only in distinction-oriented principle not in forms or presentations. Correspondingly, Lury's (1999) notion of prosthetic culture clearly explains how and why this is ever needed and possible. According to Lury, a prosthetic culture takes form when "the subject as individual passes beyond the mirror stage of self-knowledge, of reflection of the self, into that of self-extension, what Barthes calls 'the advent of myself as other'"(p. 3). She continues to argue that prosthetic culture cultivates hyper-individuality by which individual identity is reformulated with multiple personalities and the relevant images. Acquiring multiple personalities often causes loss of identity through constant experimentation of individuality.

The theoretical foundation of consumers' cultural resistance is the ongoing identity project as discussed in co-optation literature. This contemporary identity project requires consumers to experiment and practice different identities and to deviate from the given cultural and natural conditions (Lury 1999). Studying consumers who appear to be rebellious at a certain point in time only covers a part of consumers' transformative actions in the market. Considering the nature of identity projects today, it is, thus, timely and important to study the mechanisms and dynamics by which a consumer can perform multiple roles in the market system.

Incorporating the notion of consumer cultural conditions (ability to signify and urge for distinctiveness) into the analysis of consumers' cultural anomaly against the given cultural conditions will facilitate the understanding of marketplace evolution. Once consumers' role switch are explored and exemplified, the relevance and boundary of previous research on co-optation phenomena will be clarified. This dissertation intends to integrate this new perspective that incorporates semiotically less able or willing consumers to culturally convert to agentic consumers when their ideologies and world-views conflict with their current position in the market (Cherrier and Murray 2007). The semiotically less developed consumers are individuals who rely on icons and symbols (mass-marketized and/or branded products and service) rather than indexes (cultural materials imbued with individual meanings) in their consumption-based meaning generation (Grayson and Shulman 2000; Grayson and Martinec; Mick 1986).

It has been argued that the market quickly appropriates any creative and culturally provocative resistance against the market (Frank 1997; Holt 2002; Slater and Tonkiss 2001). Notably, sometimes this power to appropriate is restrained or postponed in favor of reconciliation with prompt and yet well counter-maneuvered resistance (e.g., Thompson and Tian 2008). Some have argued that the resisting force, however, has no choice other than the market to act on, reside in, and be creatively rebellious within (e.g., Kozinets 2002). The theory of co-optation simplifies the discourse of power as it only stresses the mutually beneficial relationship between consumers and the market. Nevertheless, the simplification is inconclusive because the changes in power relation in the market are ceaseless. The power in the market moves in many different directions that the tentative findings of co-optation theory have not identified. The theory tends to conclude with a dialectical product from the consumer-market confrontation. The power not only circulates between consumers and the market as discussed in

the co-optation literature, but also involves consumers' selective self-empowerment and disempowerment[4] in daily life, which will provide a unique, multidirectional perspective of contemporary consumption phenomena. Consumer empowerment generally denotes the increasing possibility (due to information and option rich environment) for consumers to engage in the power relations that have precluded and even marginalized individuals (McGregor 2005). This is akin to the concept of "controlled decontrol" in Wouters (1986), which postulates that the "freedom and restriction" as well as "expression and continence" are ever present in social life. Disempowerment is a significant element of consumer agency, which has not been examined in the aforementioned literature. For example, it is unlikely that an "anti-Nike" consumer, who is against the brand's sweatshops and "cultural brainwashing" of children in many developing countries, will refuse to have lunch in all of the family restaurants that are accused of similar misdeeds. Therefore, to provide a more complete understanding of the relationship between consumer agency, as a variable rather than a predetermined quality of consumers, and the market system, it is necessary for co-optation theory to include different types of power management by consumers. The unexpected or less studied aspects of consumer culture and cultural changes in the market are, as a result, expected to emerge. This endeavor is increasingly needed to explain consumers' culturally diverse tastes and practices witnessed more frequently and widely than ever. Moreover, this challenge is essential to explicate the convergent evolution of the consumer cultures in spatially remote cultures (globalization in terms of culture), which is hard to

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[4] The proposed concept of selective (dis)empowerment explains the situation in which consumers choose to resist global corporation, mass culture, and (or) global brands but also consume some of them in day-to-day life. Empowerment takes place at the moment a consumer chooses to resist to any of mass-marketized goods and services (e.g., Starbucks), and disempowerment occurs as he or she opts to consume some of them (e.g., visiting Disney World).

accomplish otherwise. The next chapter will explain the chronological development of co-optation theory followed by the directions of the dissertation.

CHAPTER II

BACKGROUND AND EXPECTED CONTRIBUTIONS

Specifications and Relationships of Focal Constructs

Consumer resistance in the discussions and contexts of co-optation as the culture of business today is neither purely reactive nor emancipatory (Hoy 2005). Businesses utilize co-optation to provide consumers with all different possibilities, especially in relation to their identity project, whereas consumers tend to reactively resist the market and its cultural offerings. Co-optation is not necessarily a business strategy that aims to suppress any cultural alternative proposed and practiced by consumers. Rather, it feeds on the multiplicity offered by consumers who engage with cultural counteracts (Firat and Venkatesh 1995). In Foucault's standpoint, resistance is an appendage of power, which vitalizes and sustains the power observably in commercial power relations (Foucault 1980). Therefore, resistance does not need to emphasize its emancipatory nature because power already presupposes freedom. In other words, the attitudinal aspect of consumer resistance is emancipatory, whereas the expression of the attitude is seen to be mostly reactive, albeit not. The confrontational tendency of consumers, as pivotal components of the market system, benefits cultural plurality and expansion of the market. Consumer resistance is, thus, localized, temporal, and individual voices that seek to construe and subsequently express self through cultural critique, which is also subject to co-optation (Kozinets 2002). That is, from marketers' point of view, there is no consumer resistance made to threaten them. All that is

claimed to be resistance is instead an eternal momentum of new forms of power relations in the market. Similarly, for Foucault, resistance is possible only in the sense that dispersed and disjunct resistance to a normative entity facilitates a formulation of the other normative point to be resisted (Foucault 1980, 2003).

Subcultures and countercultures as resistant forms of consumers' cultural orientations are the cases of less isolated and disjointed resistance (cf. Deleuze and Guattari 1983). Compared to other individual forms and presentations of consumers' cultural resistance, which can hardly be individually recognized, subcultures and countercultures are what have been widely observed and explained (Kates 2002, 2004; Kozinets 2001; Schouten and McAlexander 1995). The two distinct forms of consumer culture, however, bear a significant difference. Subculture is a compromise through which two or more opposing values are transformed into a new cultural manifestation (Cohen 1972). Thus, subcultures are more aligned with emancipatory resistance than reactive because the transformation is neither limited by the conflicting values nor against any particular one. For example, gay subculture is not a product of a conflict between certain values or an opposition to a convention either. The only reason subcultures seem oppositional to anything is because it is fairly novel, easily interpretable, and different from mainstream (e.g., Kates 2002). There are plural possibilities for subcultures to release the tension that subculturalists experience. On the other hand, countercultures have clear ideological impositions (i.e., corporate capitalism, brands, and mass-media) to contest. In particular, corporate capitalism, as a characteristic of contemporary marketplace based on hierarchy and bureaucracy, is one of the main points for countercultures to resist because of its constant and inexorable pursuit of profit that tends to control and regulate individuality. Therefore, their resistance tends to be

reactive to certain values that represent points of departure and shape the nature and quality of resistance (e.g., Heath and Potter 2004).

The "reactive" and "emancipatory" should not, nonetheless, be confused with "totally against" or "purely distinctive." Although consumers have developed the urge for distinctiveness, the distinctiveness accompanies conformity. Conformity in this sense is not a blind compliance with normative, cultural, and ideological conventions but an affirmation that distinctiveness is compelling (Deleuze 1983). That is, consumers' pursuit of distinctiveness is to conform to the market dynamics (represented by co-optation) that converts differences into the cultural energy, which, as a whole, rejuvenates the market (Frank 1997a, 1997c). Without the distinctiveness provided by individuals, subcultures, and countercultures, it must be difficult to marketers to provide new cultural values to which consumers conform. Distinctiveness and conformity, as such, are just different sides of a coin. Moreover, distinctiveness can never be claimed outside of the dominant value system. According to Foucault (1980), one of the most effective ways to create and express difference is to conform to physical, methodological, or ideological elements of the dominant. The cases of fashion, brand, and lifestyle may confirm this notion. In order to generate distinctiveness from the marketized meanings and experiences in terms of their identity, consumers also have to import some elements of the market to their identity projects. While a pure distinctiveness is less appreciated and useful for marketers due to the long processing time to convert it to marketable items (e.g., Heath and Potter 2004), a complete conformity is truly against the system that incessantly demands counterforce.

Theoretical Evolution: Escalation of Problem Recognition

We need to examine the historical background of the exponential growth in the attention to co-optation by corporations and consumers' reaction to marketers' cultural and ideological impositions. This examination will help in understanding and further developing the evolutionary yet theoretically limited perspectives in the consumer agency literature. Also, revisiting the theoretical development will facilitate our understanding of what the historical transitions in consumer cultural studies suggest and contribute to the field. As this dissertation traces the transitions in the research stream, the newly required aspects and perspectives as well as research questions relevant to co-optation theory are constantly sought. The sequence of the historical transitions in the literature has been as follows: (1) recognition of the importance of cultural and emotional elements of consumption; (2) reification of the cultural elements in consumption through examinations of meanings of consumption; (3) increased attention to the emergence of "co-optable" consumption activities; (4) identification of various types of co-optation, concluding in the commensal relationships between consumers and the market.

The emergence of co-optation theory was led by Holbrook and Hirschman (1982) whose work coincidentally echoed the logic of the sign (see Baudrillard 1975, 1981, 1983). Their contention is that the symbolic aspect of consumption is as significant as reason and logic (functions) for any scientific inquiry. As such scholars came to regard consumers' pursuit of cultural and symbolic meanings as key drivers of contemporary consumption, consumer researchers (e.g., Levy 1981) began to appreciate the emergent but understudied cultural aspects of consumption. As consumers were considered to be autotelic (e.g., Maffesoli 1996) in that they pursued idiosyncrasy from the hedonic and symbolic domain of life , the market's dominance

over consumers, in terms of cultural creation and transfer of meanings, began to erode (cf. McCracken 1986, 1988).

The view that consumers are no longer terminis or endpoint of the market-generated meanings, but the very epicenter of the existential and experiential meaning-generation has led to two valuable improvements in consumer culture theories: (1) research that more closely and substantially delved into the culturally created meanings and the relevant narratives and stories were enhanced by the resulting ontological and epistemological extensions (e.g., Hudson and Ozanne 1988; Murray and Ozanne 1991), and (2) the realization of multiple realities by consumer research field (e.g., Murray, Ozanne, and Shapiro 1994) facilitated the reflective understanding of the meaning of consumption in terms of cultural and symbolic manifestations. The homogenized and top-down meaning-transmission structure (cf. McCracken 1986) became less relevant. Correspondingly, contexts, as well as the individuated consumption practices reflected on lifestyles (e.g., Holt 1997) for an idiosyncratic meaning generation process, became much more significant to consumer research.

Through more culturally enriched approaches, critical theory in particular, the elucidation of the new perspective on consumer agency rectified the mechanical views of consumer behavior based on rationalized and totalizing marketing logic (e.g., Hentrick and Lozada 1994). The corporeal, emotional, and even ideological objectivity of possessions (which represents the paradox amid rational consumers and their nostalgia for cultural embeddedness in possessions) was immensely reduced because the objectivity was replaced with cultural, symbolic, and hedonic elements of consumption (see Belk 1988). Consumer research further extended itself to a sort of religious or spiritual locale as it sacralized mundane consumptions by anointing some of them (e.g., *Star Trek* fan club's consumption of the TV show in Kozinets 2001) and

distinguishing the profane from the sacralized (Belk, Wallendorf, and Sherry 1989). In line with the newly introduced theoretical lenses, such as symbolism and emancipatory standpoint, Schouten (1991) argued that the symbolic aspect of consumption functioned as a guide for individual quests for identity when consumers underwent identity reconstruction utilizing various images and fantasies. Culture, identity, symbol, fun, and experience provided significant insights, by explaining consumers' orientation toward cultural emancipation, for consumer research and catalyzed a considerable improvement in understanding consumers and consumption. These progressive perspectives stress that consumption pertains more to cultural phenomena than reason and/or rationale as mechanical and/or calculative practice. This emphasis on culture culminated as Firat and Venkatesh (1995) enlightened the expanded realm and cultural progression of consumer research as well as the more frequently observed and questioned socio-politico-philosophical stance for consumer research in the postmodern epoch, such as the recognition of consumers as producers of symbols. The imperative was to substitute metanarratives with more substantive and veridical construals of consumption in conjunction with culture in order to comprehend the critical and symbolic values. The view that nullified consumers' cultural enthusiasm and competency as to their own meaning generation rituals in consumption, and that placed consumers at the very end of the cultural and symbolic meaning generation process was consistently defied in the first phase of consumer cultural studies.

The second generation of the theoretical move engendered quite noteworthy attempts to tackle the conventionally obscured (for reason and logic) but "real and alive" stories of consumption (e.g., Arnould and Price 1993; Belk and Coon 1993; Belk and Costa 1998; Holt 1995, 1997, 1998; Kozinets 2001, 2002; Oswald 1999; Peñaloza 2001; Thompson and Haytko 1997; Thompson and Tambyah 1999). The commonality found in the literature listed was that, in

all contexts studied, consumers strived to act upon their own will regardless of the systematic influence of the market. In other words, consumers were seen no longer culturally reluctant or unwillingly bound to imposed meanings and values as witnessed in modernity (albeit their cultural capability) but expressive and even culturally adventurous. Consumers were seen to embellish their lives with their own experiences, affects, fantasies, romances, fashions, avocations, and spectacles for their identity (re)construction on daily basis (e.g., Schouten 1991; Thompson, Locander, and Pollio 1989, 1990). As more consumers gradually detached themselves from the traditionally and socio-politically structured and unified reality for their naturalistic identity management absent in modernity (e.g., Giddens 1991), some extreme choices (i.e., extreme sports, bodily ornaments, coming out, graffiti, vandalism, and Burning Man) became available. Some defiant consumers chose to employ those choices in order to deal with the paradoxical situation: the economic affluence and cultural deprivation simultaneously accumulated in modernity. Not only through couched resistance but through face-to-face confrontations with the market as well (i.e., anti-corporate capitalism, boycott, and consumer activism), mutinous consumers encumbered the smooth permeation of the marketized, commodified, stereotyped, homogenized, globalized, and beautified marketing ideas for their authentic identity in danger of extinction (e.g., Holt 2002; Kozinets and Handelman 2004; Thompson and Arsel 2004). These culturally hyperactive consumers, however, did not expect the market to be able to quickly stabilize the cultural anxiety by offering newly marketized values, similar in shape but disparate in nature. Such expectations came to pass as the theoretical outlook in the third phase of the consumer cultural research stream.

It turns out that the more extreme and vivid a counterculture is, the higher the odds to be sublimated and absorbed by the mass culture presented and promoted by the market (Heath and

Potter 2004). The market appears to be culturally much more versatile and absorbent than the expectation by autonomous consumers because there is virtually no cultural counteraction to the corporate capitalism and to the market that can remain intact. Writers on consumer culture (e.g., Frank 1997a, Heath and Potter 2004; Hebdige 1979; Slater and Tonkiss 2001; Lury 2001) often present the following as examples of resilient marketing tactics. Hippie culture has been transformed into more or less a fashion trend, and the fundamental ethos of gays and lesbians has also been modified to a projection of an exotic sexual fantasy in many TV shows and movies. Graffiti and tattooing have become genres of contemporary art. Hip hop has been processed and reborn as a branding tool (i.e., Fubu® and Tommy Hilfiger®). Extreme sports, such as skateboarding, inline-skating, snowmobiling, snowboarding, and aerial skiing are now sponsored by the mainstream ESPN. The organic food industry provides "the motto" for the vigilant marketers, and the philosophy of natural health also feeds the market (Thompson and Troester 2002).

The third phase of consumer cultural research, especially the studies of co-optation theory, leaves just a little room for the dissenting consumers. It is still uncertain if consumers can go further in freeing themselves from the market? Moreover, it is unclear how and why consumers confront the monolithic market system, if it is ever rational and conceivable. Although the theory progressed in terms of the recognition of consumers' cultural discomfort with the market, the essence of the theory is not theoretically revealed but "still and stale" between consumers and the market. This is because the theory focused simply on the very extreme of consumption phenomena concerned only with "culturally gifted and talented" consumers at a specific point of time (cf. Holt 2002). Then, the theory can only explain superficially many distinct cultural resistances (as consumers' identity projects and the marketers'

dexterous appropriation of the projects occur almost simultaneously) against the market. Instead, co-optation theory would have to explore the changes in consumers' cultural roles in daily consumption practices and lifestyles as representations of their internal struggle with cultural conditions, which is deemed the fundamental issue at hand as the objectives of this dissertation.

The theory of co-optation claims that consumers do not easily submit themselves to the market; instead, they quickly respond to the co-optation just as the market does to countercultures (Thompson and Coskuner-Balli 2007). Power always flows downward, upward, or both through many different conduits: ideology, culture, identity, and mythology, and this is the most valuable theoretical verification of the Foucaulian teaching by co-optation theory (e.g., Thompson and Coskuner-Balli 2007; Thompson and Tian 2008). As shown in the literature (e.g., Holt 2002), the ceaseless fight for hegemony does not conclude but constantly renders newer versions of friction from both sides. For example, the organic food industry provoked consumers to form community-supported agriculture as a "countervailing response" to the co-optation, as Thompson and Coskuner-Balli (2007) reported. The nature of deep-seated distrust or antagonism of some agentic consumers toward the market and the market's culturally opportunistic practices (co-optation) never changed even in the fourth phase of the research stream. The only difference evident in the new phase is the newly introduced contexts of co-optation, such as ESPN zone (Kozinets et al., 2004) and MP3 downloading (Giesler 2008). The recognition and acknowledgement of the different arenas of theoretical application, in fact, broaden the domain of knowledge about co-optation phenomena that may have been limited due to methodological and/or procedural hurdles.

The expansion of the theoretical realm, nevertheless, leaves us with at least two essential questions unanswered: (1) What would be the systematic outcome of the conflict between

consumers and the market other than symbiosis? (2) Does the epistemological extension necessarily mean that the theory (should) generalize(s) as pointed out in Chapter 1?

According to the literature espousing the constant co-optation and the consequent consumer resistance as the upshot of the theory in any contexts (e.g., Giesler 2008; Holt 2002; Kozinets et al 2004; Thompson and Coskuner-Balli 2007; Thompson and Tian 2008), negotiation, compromise, reconcilement, cooperation, and rapprochement are accomplished through the historical recognition of consumers' extant and tangible presentations of unique identities. As recently evidenced by Giesler (2008), the literature representing the fourth phase of the research stream presumes and concludes that consumer resistance is characterized as "the source" for the dynamics of the market, and the market refreshes itself as it overcomes the temporary, limited, and localized resistance by consumers (e.g., Kozinets 2002; Peñaloza 2001). Nevertheless, this theoretically limited and repeated conclusion had long been circulated even before the consumer agency and co-optation literature started to resonate with the contextually heterogeneous but fundamentally parallel upshots of the tension in the marketplace. The concept of "symbiosis" (Schouten and McAlexander 1995) may well epitomize the longer than two decades of evolution and discussions concerning the love-hate relationship between consumers and the market. Consumer resistance represented by subcultures, countercultures, and hip cultures, as supplementary idea sources and rehabilitative opportunities for marketers, eventually helps marketers in (re)producing and (re)providing better designed communication, cultural artifacts, brands, and even "mainstream cultures" for consumers.

All in all, despite the significant expansion in terms of its contextual latitude, co-optation theory still narrowcasts to an insufficient number of subscribers (consumers with high ability to signify and urge for distinctiveness only) with a limited number of repertories (socio-culturally

noticeable macro contexts are the ones concerned with co-optation theory). Ordinary consumers' internal negotiation as to the decision pertinent to their own agency level is observed (independent of macro consumer activism *per se*) in micro settings, such as at home, work, and on the street. This has to be examined for further contribution of co-optation theory to the field of consumer research.

Futuristic Transition: Potential Contribution

Studies on consumer agency and co-optation phenomena have sought to discover the product(s) of the tension between consumers and the market. As a result, the studies succeeded in the articulation of different contexts in which the tension accrues and temporarily evaporates as the symbiotic relationship between consumers and the market evolves as a tentative solution. Nonetheless, the consumers who do not directly contribute to the tension but still participate in the market system have been excluded from the literature. In other words, consumers with lower or different levels of ability to react to co-optation of the market and urge for distinctiveness have been left out and consequently understudied. This indeed seems detrimental to the theory because it neglects the multiplicity of consumers' ability and the urge that creates different types and levels of consumer agency fostering different modes of being as consumers (Hong 2008). The studies dealing with co-optation hitherto appear to narrate the "stigmatized[5]" consumers only, even though they recount the elements and conditions of postmodernism that accentuate plurality, variability, and idiosyncrasy rather than a unified world-view. Reconsideration of the multiplicity of consumers' roles in the market and the subsequent incorporation of the

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[5] Individuals are stigmatized by the following as they are unwilling to submit themselves to authority, science, social system, and predominant ideology. Intriguingly enough, individuals are also stigmatized when they behave as if there is absolutely no choice but conformity. Thus, it is seen that consumers tend to play between the two different types of stigmatizations (cf. Thompson 2004).

multiplicity into the theory will enrich the research on culture and consumption in terms of scope and profoundness. Studying various levels of consumer agency and the consequent cultural representations will extend the theoretical latitude, and as a result, the theories are expected to provide a better understanding of the phenomena relevant to co-optation.

Specifically, this dissertation will provide a new perspective that takes the complete pool of consumers into consideration to explain systematic changes in their roles in the market. The changes include the situation in which a consumer may conform to and resist the market in different domains of consumption activities. Combined together, the two proposals (inclusion of gullible consumers in theorization and explication of consumer role switching) holistically look into inter-personal differences and intra-personal variations. For example, a consumer who has participated in the Buy Nothing Day (defiant practice) may drink Coca-Cola everyday (conformative practice).

In order to facilitate its theoretical development, this dissertation will focus on aparticular venue – the extreme sports event - where the dynamics of consumer-market conflicts are pronounced. Extreme sports events are the contexts where supposedly subversive consumers (the performers and fanatics) are expected to conform to the market as they face the mainstream broadcasting by ESPN and fulfill their basics needs, such as foods, accommodations, and other daily commodities. On the contrary, consumers who are usually conformists can become the rebellious ones as they interact with other progressive consumers and performers. Such transposition of cultural quality of consumers in specific locations and contexts are observed in the HOG (Harley Owners Group) (Schouten and McAlexander 1995) and Burning Man event (Kozinets 2002). Interactions with other participants can help a consumer immerse in the context of a newly developed cultural quality. These cultural switches of consumers conflict with their

given cultural conditions (ability to signify and urge for distinctiveness), normally producing a consistent mode of being as a consumer. In addition, the special ambience generated by the plethora of cultural influx and efflux from and to the intermixture of "dupes and rebels" and "subcultures and mainstreams" creates a culturally and theoretically fertile site.

Studies of different types of co-optation in different macro contexts (e.g., Giesler 2008) may not fully aid the theories investigating consumer agency. Therefore, by examining co-optation phenomena and the subsequent cultural innovations in the marketplace, this dissertation will illuminate consumers' internal (micro) management of cultural conditions in response to the hegemonic marketing practices. Examination of the varied levels of consumer agency, dictated by ability to signify and urge for distinctiveness, will also provide insights for further understanding of distinct expressions of consumer culture and evolution of the market (from macro perspectives) as outcomes of consumer's self-(dis)empowerment process. This dissertation is, consequently, an extended alternative to the generalizing pattern of co-optation theory as it puts more emphasis on the dynamics of consumers' cultural struggle rather than the static views of consumer agency.

The potential contributions of this dissertation to the literature are as follows: 1) it advances the discussion on the observed incompleteness of co-optation theory by incorporating the consumers so far excluded from the theory-building into the analysis; 2) it will also illuminate the consumer cultural conditions by which the extent and intensity of an individual consumer's resistance to the market influence is restricted or amplified; 3) it will help, as it incorporates those consumers in the analysis, in understanding the nature of micro and individual level reactions (different types of consumer culture) to the market system, compared to the salient countercultures or consumer activism; 4) it will disclose the reasons and ways through

which individual consumers show some exceptional resistance to or compliance with the market (role switching), regardless of the given cultural conditions (ability to signify and urge for distinctiveness), and 5) it will present the anticipatory cultural ramification and re-integration of the market. More specifically, if consumers' role switching is possible, the culturally differentiated (ramified) markets should converge on a certain logic that de-differentiates the distinct types of markets for consumers with different cultural qualities.

Theoretical Overview of the Study

Consumer agency and the discourse of power have become the foci of interest in consumer research. Co-optation theory has evolved as the most prominent theoretical approach to address consumer agency-related phenomena. However, consumer research literature that uses this theory concentrates only on the dynamics between agentic consumers and the market. While this is a valid endeavor to explain the roles of consumers in the contemporary market in which individual identity project is performed, the explanation is incomplete because it leaves out less agentic consumers. In order to understand consumer agency, we need to look at recent cultural discourses that articulate subjectivity and cultural dynamics of the identity project. It is also important to understand the central roles of postmodernism and semiology for consumer culture. As a critique of modernism, postmodernism enables us to better appreciate the historical spectrum in which the current state of identity discourse has been formulated. Semiology offers an essential understanding of how the market system has been culturally reigning. These theoretical backgrounds provide us with two key components of consumer agency in a symbolic world: the *urge for distinctiveness* from modern capitalist culture and ideology, as well as the *ability to signify* as a counterforce to the semiologic influence of corporate capitalism. Using

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these two constructs, we can understand different modes of being (i.e., roles) consumers employ in the market for their identity projects. Although the understanding of consumers' modes of being explains a particular manifestation of a consumer's identity project, each consumer is not always and necessarily playing a single role in all consumption situations. These new perspectives described in Figure 1 will explain the reason different markets become similar to each other.

A literature review is presented in chapter three in order to develop the proposed framework. The fourth chapter presents the proposed framework in detail. The fifth chapter explains and justifies the methodology and the relevant processes and strategies of choice in terms of sample, data collection, and data interpretations.

FIGURE 1. Theoretical Flow

Baudrillard, Barthes, & Saussure

Foucault, The Frankfurt School & Durkheim

Bourdieu & Ricoeur

Consumer Culture

Identity Project

Increasing Importance of Identity in Modernity

Less agentic Consumers

Consumer Agency Discourse of Power

Agentic Consumers

Theory of Co-optation

Urge for Distinctiveness

Symbolic Nature of Consumption

Ability to Signify

1st order themes

Different Modes of Being in the Market

Switching the Modes

2nd order themes

Convergent Evolution of Consumer Culture

Post-structuralism, Deconstructionism & Postmodernism: Derrida, Foucault & Lyotard

CHAPTER III

LITERATURE REVIEW

Culture and Modernity

It is indispensable to discuss culture in general in order to understand the debate on the

cultural supremacy between consumers and the market, which helps in explaining the evolution

of varied consumer cultures of our time (e.g., Featherstone 1990; Frank 1997a; Holt 2002).

Discussion of culture is also essential for the purposes of this dissertation focusing on the

understudied area of co-optation. This is because the inclusion of the culturally and symbolically

less able (low ability to signify) and interested (low urge for distinctiveness) consumers in the

analysis involves the understanding of subcultural and countercultural phenomena. The overview

of the theories and critiques of contemporary culture will, moreover, facilitate the succeeding

discussion of consumer culture as the epistemological background of co-optation theory and this

dissertation.

Anthropologists in earlier stages of cultural studies (e.g., Kroeber 1948; White 2007)

define and recognize culture as general customs of human beings. They understand and see

culture as a collective system by, of, and for human beings (*Homo sapiens*) to acclimatize to

different environments, and the acclimatization process is expected to tame barbarian human

instincts (e.g., Dixon 1923). In their arguments, culture as an overarching system involves

economic, socio-political, and ideological domains of mankind. In contrast, a limited yet more

specific view of culture gained wide attention from the field, as Boas (1911) suggested the

relative significance and applicability of culture, which emphasizes different meanings, practices,

and systems of different cultures. This view became the epistemological and methodological

basis of cultural relativism prevalent amongst North American anthropologists (e.g., Heyer 1948).

This relative stance is also supported by Geertz (1973), who understands culture as a specific and

defined system of texts applied by and to a particular group of people in a distinct period of their

history. His view of culture as text posits that each culture is totally expressive and semiotic so

that any specific culture requires decoding and/or interpretation. The two different views of

culture (general and specific), however, share an important aspect. One anthropological school of

thought emphasizes general signs, symbols, and beliefs of human beings in order to understand

culture, whereas the other scholars of culture stress distinguished symbolic systems as cultures of

different people. The latter is more pertinent to this study because it, in part, aims to explicate

particular meanings of varied expressions of consumer culture.

Etymologically, culture commonly means cultivation, development, improvement,

domestication, education, training, institutions, and the intellectual side of civilization (Oxford

English Dictionary). These characteristics and the following interpretations of culture prevalent

in modern society, however, obstruct the more contemporary accounts that emphasize the

meaning of culture in close relation to symbols. This obstacle virtually parallels the critiques of

modernism and corporate capitalism.

The emphasis on the intellectual side of culture in modernity has been problematized and

reconsidered due to the pseudo-individualization that prospered in modernity. That is, as

Baumeister (1986) pointed out, individuals were freed from their fixed social statuses and

interpersonal obligations in the medieval feudal (pre-modern) system. However, the mythic and

symbolic aspects of their lives were still suppressed by and for the logic of modernization and separated from (re)production (Friedman 1994). A critique of the same nature is echoed in the marketing field as well. In their critique of modernism, Firat and Venkatesh (1995) also contended:

> ....modernism has come to represent a limiting view of the individual (or consumer) as merely a cognitive agent. By privileging science and technology over cultural and symbolic representations, it has become suspicious of pluralism looking askance at alternate or contradictory viewpoints (p. 240).

In a coherent response to Firat and Venkatesh (1995), Slater and Tonkiss (2001, p. 151) noted, "The materialistic, self-serving, standardized individual of the industrial and market society ('civilization') battles with the idealist, organic, authentic individual of romantic and artistic mythology." As such, for cultural thinkers, including philosophers and sociologists, culture has long been a topic of a constant anxiety because of its bipolar orientation in terms of interpretation and practice (material/symbolic, standardizing/particularizing, rational/emotional, monosemy/polysemy, and the like).

Cultural Critiques

This section precedes discussions of contemporary consumer culture. This is because the cultural critiques drawn from philosophy and sociology generally concur with each other in that presentation of idiosyncratic identity through symbolic differentiation of self becomes an imperative throughout modern history. In abstracted and interpretive discussions of influential thinkers, an integration of their arguments is presented to grasp the nature and history of the consumer culture today.

Incommensurability of Historic Viewpoints

Marxists, Foucauldians, and semiologists share the theoretical perspective that they regard the market as an intervening, regulating, and oppressing entity. Those analyses of the market distinctively relate to the present study in respective ways. First, Marxist point of view, in particular, addresses that the capitalist market constantly creates and provokes class distinctions through which the capital is accumulated or sought. The corollary of the Marxists' class struggle is the planned consumerism by which individuals are assigned to different lives to which they have to adapt. At the expense of their labor, consumers continuously go after commodities produced in the market as a device that connects production to consumption.

Second, Foucauldian perspective, especially the notion of bio-power that further programs the disciplined and normalized docile bodies (population), questions Marxist analysis, as Foucault distrusts the existence of "the solution (revolution)." Nonetheless, Foucault, in line with Marx, recognizes the external but very immediate power relations that shape and structure all socio-politico-economical entities, including the market. For Marx, the primary external causes are the static social configuration of labor and hierarchical classification of individuals. The most prominent commonality between Marx and Foucault is, thus, that the market is not the center of their analyses and discourses. For both, the market is the arena in which more fundamental issues can be reflected and analyzed. The underlying historicity of the market well characterizes their views of the market as a product of other issues rather than a "producer" of questions and problems at hand.

Third, the semiological analysis of the market also corresponds with the other two perspectives in that the market is simply one of the points of application of linguistic and symbolic fixations that serve for the dominant party and mainstream culture. However, the

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semiological application is still interrelated with other points of application, such as politics and

aesthetics, which also bear a great deal of historicity.

These face-level overlaps among the three possibly irreconcilable perspectives urge this

study to be situated in the most pertinent one. This study utilizes Foucauldian notion of power

relation because: (1) it has shown the most appropriate explanations about the market dynamics

in terms of the ongoing interdependent relationship (co-optation) between the market and

consumers (e.g., Thompson and Tambyah 1999; Thompson and Tian 2008); (2) the Marxist

perspective is clearly inconsistent with Foucauldian standpoint as Marx sees the class struggle in

the market as a totally negative facet of human life and the only solution to it is revolution

(Foucault tends to associate class struggle, as a form of power relations, more with racism), and

(3) the semiological analyses do not necessarily facilitate the discourse of power in the market as

they can only explain the relatively static rather than dynamic relationship between the market

and consumers. Semiology concerns each class (race for Foucault) and the respective members'

linguistic, aesthetic, and experiential presentations and appreciations and thus provides the basis

of understanding a member's possible dynamic (re)positioning of self in relation to the market.

Marxists' analysis of society appears to be representing the consumers as conformists

who have been culturally atrophied or indifferent. The dichotomized view of class does not

facilitate the understanding of consumers as agents that can freely navigate all possibilities as to

their life choices and the ways to engage in the commodity fetishism. In particular, Marxists'

pathological and pessimistic view of the capitalist market does not relate to the Foucauldian view

of society. The problematized dichotomy between bourgeois and proletariat also contrasts with

Foucault who sees all social beings and institutions are historically and systematically structured

and configured in order to serve multiplicity (Foucault 1980, 2003). The markets bewildering

power to shape and regulate consumers' ideology and identity does not operate to permanently dominate them in the same way. Instead, the nature of the power always begets counterforce, and the power is adjusted and modified to the productive antagonism that refreshes the market. This sustainable mechanism of the market, in terms of power, is what has been suspected by Marxists as they proposed the possibility of challenging the system. For Foucault (1980), "the dissents" would not be a source of any revolutionary social transformation but instead a catalyst for multiple forms of partnership between consumers and the market. The "insurgent" consumers take part in the market system as they unintendedly provide countercultural or subcultural elements to be commodified, marketized, or transformed into unpredictable substances.

In sum, consumers, including the antagonistic ones, are constituents of the market as a system, which appreciates the roles of each participant as co-creator of meanings and values, and orchestrates any possible cacophony between the market and culturally creative consumers. Consequently, the market, for this study, refers to a system that supplies cultural substances for consumer identity project in various forms as it dexterously interweaves conventions with novelties, dominances with resistances, and mainstream with the marginalized. Those interwoven bipolarities are presented to consumers as new cultural materials, which only temporarily influence consumers' identity project. The temporariness of the cultural dominance of the market is the only continuous observation of the discourse of power in the market as some liberal consumers always interfere with the power relations in the market.

Historic Accounts Related to Consumer Culture

Marx

Marxists' perspective illuminates the birth of conforming class: typical consumers. In Marx's analysis, both classes, with or without capital, conform to the hegemonic mechanism of commodification that makes individuals less and less agentic (Marx 1990). For Marxists, capitalism, distinguished from all historical modes of (re)production, foregrounds the superordination of the market to all in human life. As a result, the values that have come to exist in the market system are exchange and surplus value, which do not contribute much to humanity because people have to constantly seek self-interest to position themselves competitively in the class struggle (e.g., Williams 1980; Williamson 1993). Marx's account explains that the exchange of one's labor for commodities in the market gradually impedes and ultimately eliminates the appreciation of human (cultural) substances in the goods and the exchange processes. Marx also contends the dichotomization of production and consumption and the consequential market-mediation are the most noteworthy characteristics of the capitalists' market system. In the course of the dichotomization, intrinsic culture becomes illusory and detrimental to the system that serves the ruling class because, as Marx sees it, the human praxis in the market has to be rational in order to pursue favorable (profitable) exchanges. From a cultural perspective, the corollary of the Marxists' view is that human relationships, true individuality, and selfhood, as bases of culture, are extinguished or subsumed by the production of commodities, which is the irrational consequence of "exploitation" (see Marx 1959). The loss or suspension of such values accelerates the mystification of the market as a place where consumers believe the insurmountable power is present. Conformity became taken for granted.

In line with Veblenians contention, commodities become the means that differentiate one from others; hence, modern citizens are converted into consumers (conformists). The conversion purportedly satisfies both human and social needs. One's identity as a consumer simultaneously intensifies the urge for distinctiveness and obstructs the presentation of symbolic acumen of the individual due to normative boundaries of consumption (Langman 1992). This is one of the reasons that consumers' conform to the inconvenient reality: market society.

Weber

Implications drawn from Weber also further the emergence of conforming individuals as Weberian perspectives question the rationale with which the market system (the flagship of the modernization project) puts an ever more emphasis on rationality. Weber refutes that rationality is the only value sought in society. It is not the "exploitation" that makes society "disenchanted[6]" but rationalization that includes and promotes monetarization and quantification for the efficient production (Weber 1978). The planning, caculability, productivity, and efficiency rendered alienated individuals with less power to pursue their own lifestyles. Unlike Marx, Weber (1947) does not believe that capitalism is a failure or will fail one day due to its contradictory functionality; rather, he sees that it succeeds with its institutions and bureaucratic operations underneath which individuality (labor) is characterized (specialized) for the sake of productivity. Nonetheless, the impersonality due to the division of labor eventually appears to entail the dearth of relational, emotional, aesthetic, and symbolic culture that buttresses free-will and agency. Thus, individuals became stationary subjects fixed to respective classes, localities, vocations, and given responsibilities to contribute to the social goals by conforming to the logic of modern

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[6] Weber explains disenchantement as a situation in which rational, logical, and ultimately scientific information and practice outvalue traditional and general understandings of phenomena in society.

market. According to Weber (1958), the monetary system is the sole mechanism through which individuals can rationalize (objectify) their subjectivities with the aid of goods as the reification of such rationalization. The consequence of rationalization in the market is quite equivalent to that of Marx: "care for external goods" (Weber 1958, p. 183). Weber sees that purchase and consumption have become synonyms of utilitarianism. Rational and utilitarian individuals were expected to consume products (commodities) as given in the market to enhance the predictability and productivity. Another correspondence between Marx and Weber is that they both see the individuality cultivated by modernization result in a false individualization by which individuals are culturally (symbolically) deprived. A true identity is "endangered" due to the rationalized self concept, and thus is sought more extensively and intensively. This later formulates the nucleus of consumer culture.

The Frankfurt School

The Frankfurt School informs us about the critiques of cultural standardization or homogenization in modernity that gave birth to the general public as consumers. Horkheimer and Adorno (2002) reproach the mass-production of culture in modern life. They claim that "culture industry" blocks the inflow of true needs of consumers, such as freedom (agency) and creativeness, into the market system. The docile citizens as consumers of mass-cultural commodities are required to comply with the systems of the market that lubricate the smooth penetrations of the manufactured needs into their "lifeworld[7]." They also argue that culture in modernity still reflects society, but the reflected image of society in the culture is a standardized

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[7] Lifeworld in philosophy means the real (true) world free from explanation, theorization, analyses, interpretation, and presentation. Thus, it is full of human substances that must be dropped, distorted, manipulated, and mostly rationalized for the aforementioned practices. If these negative situations are avoided, social actors can better cooperate with each other through mutual understandings based on cultural meanings (e.g., Habermas 1984, 1987).

and commodified one without the members' ideologies, genuine beliefs, aesthetic tastes, and artistic preferences. This notion is quite cohesive with Geertz's (1973) understanding of culture, which implies that symbolic, rather than pre-encoded and fixed, connotations and interpretations are prerequisites for identity. Their main contention is that modern consumers choose "bread and circuses" instead of their own freedom, agency, and subjectivity (Horkheimer and Adorno 2002). The Frankfurt School's account appears to align with Foucauldian perspective in that all individuals are structured by and positioned in society for the immediate reality engineering the available lifestyles (Fromm 1941). However, the account diverges from Foucault as the reality does not carry possibilities for redirecting, reengineering, or multiplying the very reality (i.e., tradition, hierarchy, sexuality, and ultimately power relations). For them, this view is deemed unavoidable due to the market system's well-maneuvered anti-emancipation or anti-enlightenment practices represented by entertainment and advertising industries (Horkheimer and Adorno 2002). More specifically, Adorno (1973) asserts that enlightenment would facilitate pluralism and multiplicity in terms of culture, which demands symbolic dimension of culture in position and at work. The Frankfurt School recognizes the rigidness of socio-historic-economical framework (including the market system) to which individuals (consumers) conform as well as the possibilities for new ways to play a role in the framework. In particular, *The Authoritarian Personality*[8] hints counter-conformity (departure from given language, religion, race, history, and culture), which later becomes the basis of countercultures (see Adorno, Frenkel-Brunswik, and Levinson 1993). Nonetheless, those possibilities, for them, are still in principle, not in practice.

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[8] People with this personality tend to pursue and follow conformity, normality, security, status quo, and stereotypical values.

Habermas

Habermas (1984, 1987), as a descendent of the Frankfurt School, approaches more or less the same issue in a distinct way. Implications from his arguments give prominence to the possibility of having a "co-created" discourse through ideal speech situation[9]. The situation, considered in the discourses about the market, suggests a potential breakthrough whereby consumers may assert their desires, preferences, and lifestyles that may not be coherent to the culture of mass-production and consumption. In his critique, coherent to the tenet of critical theory, he questions whether the communicative competency of human beings has to be hierarchized for the modern rationality represented by democracy, institutions (including the market), and organizations. The very problem he tackles is that the actors in the lifeworld have lost their communicative forms of solidarity (i.e., traditional signs and symbols) as the monolithic social entities interfere in the communication among lifeworld participants. As a result, individuals are distanced from developing and organizing discourses about their lives. He also argues that the differences between the evolving systems (proliferation and maturation of the market and bureaucracy) and lifeworld represent the amount of cultural (symbolic) substances lost in the course of coordinating actions by media, which conduct most of the legitimate communicative actions in the market system. In a nutshell, relating Habermas to the discourse of consumption, conformity to corporate capitalism arises from communicative inequality rather than symbolic, aesthetic, or ideological incapability of consumers. Thus, his analysis also implicates consumer agency that has been "jammed." For him, modern rationalization is executed in the communicative domain precedent to the political-economic

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[9] In the ideal speech situation, everyone can assert and question others' assertions about their lives that may compose a new discourse relevant to the participants' lives.

domain; nevertheless, the result of the rationalization adds to the critiques of Marx, Weber, and other Frankfurt School scholars.

Durkheim

Durkheim's (1984) critique of modern society is annexed to the other critiques concerning the fading dimension of humanity in modernity: the symbolic culture. He contends that true individuality and idiosyncrasy need to be sacrificed in order to maintain the freedom and equality. Consequently, individuals become subordinate to the "greater goods," one of which is the stable market system in which consumers must comply with the norms (pricing mechanism). The distinguished aspect of his theory is to query the "cult of the individual," which connotes the improper interpretation of the relationship between "organic solidarity" and a true "individualism." According to his analysis, as the division of labor is deepened, true individuality depreciates to mechanical individuality; therefore, consumer interdependence intensifies. This intensification of mutual dependence among the members of society seems to be solidarity. Nonetheless, Durkheim warns that this misinterpretation and misrepresentation of solidarity rather creates a pathological situation, namely, subordination of subjects to a system that constantly divides labor. Durkheim continues to argue that the subordinated individuals are required to abandon or at least belittle customs, religious beliefs, and traditional morales, which are the elements of the symbolic rather than the mechanical culture. As the foci of Durkheim's critique, the failure of true individualization and the following pursuit of false individuality (through the cult of the individual) resonate with the other thinkers' viewpoints in that conformity becomes the true and only representation of normality and norms.

Different critiques concur in that modern history has led us to a situation in which self-identity is pursued mainly in the market through consumption, and the pursuit of uncontrolled

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identity is interfered, suspended, or prohibited. Nevertheless, the critiques of such situation provide us with possibilities of overcoming the given condition. Individuals become classified in terms of their cultural qualities that may or may not enable them to confront the situation (based on the ability to signify and urge for distinctiveness) (e.g., Holt 2002).

Alternative Perspectives

The cultural critiques of modernity evidently stress two symptomatic consequences of modern capitalist principles and practices: loss of mythic, mystic, and substantive culture (disenchantment) and mechanical individuality as a result of the division of labor and dissolution of human (cultural) relationships. The following alternative perspectives emerge as the basis upon which new social orders, lifestyles, and ideologies can be materialized. Such changes appear to enable individuals (consumers) to play various roles not limited to conformity and subordination. Given the cultural critiques, Foucault (1977) characterizes the modernization phenomenon using the notion of "normalization." The characteristic explains that human lives are subject to discipline and training and are constantly monitored by modern institutions (i.e., market, education system, medical system and the like) that more implicitly than explicitly demand individual conformity to the dominant ideology (i.e., capitalism). Foucault (1980) argues that the failure of normalization is prevented and further corrected through the immanent power relations incessantly operating in the institutions.

The diagnoses of modernity and capitalism have provoked other cultural researchers as well. Foucault (1980) and Derrida (1970) coincidently criticize the modernists' emphasis on the transcendental truth and single reality dependent on a limited number of means and conduits to reach them (i.e., science, rationality, and institutionalization). Lyotard's (1984) negative view of

metanarrative also proposes that, in postmodernity, multiple orders and multiple realities be welcomed and promoted in order to recognize more human elements including experiences, relationships between human and objects, aesthetics and so forth (Arnould and Price 1993; Belk 1988; Sherry 1993, 1995). When recognized, those human elements become resources with which individuals reinterpret the power relations in the market that has been consumerizing (normalizing). The role (conforming) that consumerized individuals have played for the market system is not the only one that is true and real.

From a different perspective, Jameson (1984, 1991) critically explains the theoretically serialized transition from modernity to postmodernity. Jameson (1984) claims that postmodernism is the ultimate form of modernism because all phenomena that other theorists call postmodern can be explained solely by the cultural control of modernism over individuals. Jameson (1991), in his later work, continues to explicate that it is nothing but the homogenizing culture in late capitalism that hinders the naturalistic and normative values (mainly relational and emotional values) in human life. The implication from Jameson's work is that the norms of conformity operate not in the politico-economical but in cultural domain of life in which consumerism as "the culture" has evolved.

These discussions of cultural degradation in terms of the multiplicity and plurality in the culture of modern epoch can be elucidated through semiotics in linguistic traditions as well. For instance, Derrida's (1976) deconstructionism notes that there is no permanent cohesion between a signifier and the signified; rather, the relationship between the two is transformative. This practically means - in line with the critiques of modernism and the subsequent discussions of postmodernism - that the modern values imposed on individuals are not always expected to denote the same. Thus, his main idea is to be aware of other possibilities outside of the

historically created structures. Similarly, structuralists, such as Barthes (1972), supplement the discussion of the symbolic domain of culture, as he explains the modernists' purposeful manipulations of the relationship between a signifier and the signified (i.e., the relationship between wine and health). The possibility of dissociating a signifier and the signified and reconstructing the relationship between the two implies that consumers no longer have to comply with the meanings and connotations of the signs in the market. Clues are given to consumers as active agents.

Baudrillard

Baudriallard explains how semiological analyses of the relationship between commodities and consumers help understand the different modes and methods for consumers to act in the market system. In particular, for Baudriallard, the indistinguishability of three different values (functional, exchange, and sign value) promoted by corporate capitalists is of special interest. Baudrillard's (1970, 1975, 1981) analyses of postmodern society codifies the increasing recognitions and discourses of cultural and semiotic endeavors for a further understanding of humanity in a transitional stage. He argues that the momentum of capitalism is not production (Marxists' point of view) but consumption and finds cultural domination of capitalism is caused by the "commodity fetishism," which disrupts the appreciation of symbolic values in consumption (Baudrillard 1981; Keller 1989). That is, the emphasis on functional, exchange, and sign value (i.e., the indication of a Yankees cap of fandom) over symbolic value (i.e., the meaning of a Yankees cap as a reminder of someone's father) in consumption practices denotes the successful cultural manipulation of capitalism. Symbolic values of an object carry interpersonal relationships and identity claims as a subject imprints life experiences and values on an object. Sign value of an object is only appreciated and utilized through exchange of

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commodities that imply culturally assigned values to the object (Baudriallard 1981). Implications

from *For a Critique of the Political Economy of the Sign* connote that consumers will take

different actions dependent upon their choices from the four different values sought in the market.

He carries on his critique by addressing the point that "today consumption – if this term

has a meaning other than that given by vulgar economics – defines precisely the stage where the

commodity is immediately produced as a sign, as sign value, and where signs (culture) are

produced as commodities" (Baudrillard 1981, p. 147). He also addresses the inseparable

relationship between consumption and signs: "Consumption is the virtual totality of all objects

and messages presently constituted in a more or less coherent discourse. Consumption, insofar as

it is meaningful, is a systematic act of the manipulation of signs" (Baudrillard 1970). He suggests

here the possibility of plural meanings that can be drawn from the same sign (commodity), which

may also presage the birth of "non-conforming class." The development of his discussion on

sign system reaches its pinnacle as he further claims that the reality people experience is nothing

but a simulation of reality (Baudrillard 1983, 1994). The images (signs and symbols) from

modernity, especially from media, and the emphasis on exchange value of commodities confuse

the public about the presence of a reality. This analysis is an extension of his notion of consumer

society, dealing with the manipulated signs; because the signs, which he calls simulacra,

represent the commodities proliferating the exchange values the most.

These alternative philosophical and theoretical standpoints by postmodern thinkers

ultimately refute the analytical outcome that corporate capitalist-driven consumption is at the

central position of cultural discourses. That is, the most plausible way to confront the hegemony

of the market, as a modern institution, is to recoup the individuated meanings in social actions,

and this is realized through symbolic consumption practices (manipulation of the signs): one of

the few socio-cultural actions available for individuals in the market. For individuals, production, as the other possible socio-cultural action, is materialized through consumption. The divide between consumption and production is no longer valid as symbolic values are created through consumption. In addition, as mentioned earlier, the prominence of the symbolic dimension (characterized mostly by consumption) of culture accords with the contemporary anthropologists' interpretations and understanding of culture. This symbol-driven nature of culture also represents the transition of humanity from a modern capitalists' society to a new time and space in which symbolic meanings are valued as much as the material (functional value), the visible (exchange value), and the signs. Symbolic competency classifies consumers into different realities in relation to the market system. Some live with functional values only; the others manipulate the market-created signs and subsequently pursue symbolic values.

Culture in postmodernity, henceforth for this dissertation, is interpreted with 3Psincluding (a) symbolic *products* from individual meaning generation as opposed to commodified signs by the market; (b) symbolic production *processes* incorporating individuated cultural elements, in contrast to the preclusion of such in modern mass manufacturing; and (c) symbolic *projection* of meanings, as emancipatory expressions of individuality, vis-à-vis the unifying "grand future" that modernity projected.

Consumption as *Sine Qua Non* of Culture

Culture in postmodernism places more emphasis on aesthetics, artistry, imagination, semiotics, and ideology (Featherstone 1991; Featherstone 1995; Friedman 1994; McCracken 1988). In marketing, culture is understood as a concept created and structured not solely by modernized production and institutionalization, but via symbolic consumption as one of the

required human practices in postmodernity (e.g., Holbrook and Grayson 1986; Mick 1986). As a result, for recent marketing scholars, cultural sphere of life is reorganized around consumption (e.g., Holt 2004; Üstüner and Holt 2007).

In accordance with Murray and Ozanne's (1991) recognition of the "dark aspects" of contemporary consumption, such as experiences, symbols, and fluidic images, culture is anthropologically defined as "an historically transmitted pattern of meanings embodied in symbols, as system of inherited conceptions expressed in symbolic forms by means of which people communicate, perpetuate, and develop their knowledge about and attitudes toward life" (Geertz 1973, p. 89). For Geertz, culture is specific allocations and distributions of accessible images, texts, and symbols by a certain group of people (Geertz 1984). In correspondence, Nelson, Treichler and Grossberg (1992, p. 4) explain that culture's "history includes not only static and elitist equations of culture with the achievements of civilization but also broader notions that encompass all symbolic activity, as well as references to culture as an active effort at nurturing and preservation."As the recognition of symbolic substances in defining culture is of significance, Barthes (1972) also emphasizes the importance of substantiating the relationships among the substances because they are not separable from each other; instead, they are bonded together to embody the projected symbolic meanings. The study of culture encompasses studies of all possible relationships amongst the elements in our lives (Williams 1965). Culture is no longer a simple product and/or apparatus of modernization but an ever more complex system of humanity that helps us in reading signs, as Baudrillard (1975) and Hawkes (1977) claimed. By the same token, a distinct perspective that underlines the interdependence, interconnectedness, and boundarylessness of culture evolves (Rosaldo 1988):

> *The view of an authentic culture as an autonomous internally coherent universe*
> *no longer seems tenable in a postcolonial world. Neither 'we' nor 'they' are as*

self-contained and homogeneous as we/they once appeared. All of us inhabit an interdependent late 20th-century world, which is at once marked by borrowing and lending across porous cultural boundaries, and saturated with inequality, power, and domination (p. 87).

Culture in postmodernity fosters and nourishes playfulness, creativity, aesthetization, and human relationships (Firat and Dholakia 1998). All of those are mostly embedded in and presented by consumer products (Marx sees them as reification of commodity fetishism) to be consumed in the market. Consumption of such goods has become an exhibition of one's status in society in terms of ideology, class, and intellect (Bataille 1991; Veblen 2007 [1989]). Jameson (1983) also asserts that consumption is the culture of today and tomorrow, and each consumer today is an institution that produces culture just as did the institutions in the past. Therefore, culture and consumption today show quasi-identicalness to each other, or they are at least mutually inclusive to a great extent.

As discussed, in postmodernity, culture organizes and is organized by consumption (Jameson 1984). Consumption is also produced, educated, and promoted through the reflection of image, romance, beauty, nostalgia, and ideology on advertisements (Williamson 1986). Featherstone (1991) explains that these cultural elements are represented and interpreted through the sign system in which individuality and differences are manifested. The agential rather than subjectal pursuit and praxis of distinction as Bourdieu's (1984) term have led consumer culture, or culture of consumption, to center on identity project (e.g., Arnould and Thompson 2005). Consumption of is the means to make distinction, and the distinction as a style of existing is only communicated by decoding the sign (Douglas and Isherwood 1980).

Consumer culture is a critical element of contemporary life when the individual status as a consumer replaces citizenship (e.g., Baudrillard 1970; Hardt and Negri 2000; Jameson 1991). Slater and Tonkiss (2001, p. 165) accord with Jameson (1984, 1991) in describing culture as "a

means at once to increase sales and profits and at the same time to integrate modern citizens as consumers into capitalist order through forms of escapism and amusement that both keep them content and allow them to recuperate their mental and physical energies for more labor." Culture in marketing, however, dovetails itself with more specific and refined elements of life in close association with consumption and production of meanings (Üstüner and Holt 2007). In this view, consumer culture is not a standard of economic or normative excellence but instead an intermediary for efficient symbolic communication. Consumers as agents utilize consumer culture in order to present their "personal styles."

Consequently, consumer culture has supplemented and almost substituted for the disenchanted praxis and projections of culture in modern times by reinstating individual identity in daily life through consumption. The identity project, however, requires materialistic and "competitive consumption[10]" in order to incessantly make distinctions (cf. Bourdieu 1984). Although consumption through "signifying" involves not only "what to consume" but also "how to consume" (Featherstone 1990), the materials as instruments for significance[11] (see Barthes 1978 for significance) are always on demand.

Consumer Culture and Identity

Consumer culture is "a specific form of material culture" (Lury 1996, p. 3). In this sense, "material" is not necessarily the visible and tangible products consumed by eating, drinking, and using up those tangible goods but a more inclusive and general vocabulary that encompasses the consumption and production of images, signs, experiences, and meanings in particular. Signs and

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[10] Competitive consumption is a consumer's tendency to constantly upgrade one's spending on culturally differentiated products and services in order to make more clear distinctions at the expense of disposable income for other basic living expenses (Heath and Porter 2004).

[11] Significance is a process in which a subject who executes a signification is deconstructed and placed in the texts s/he creates.

meanings are indissociatively linked to each other; the former is the embodied forms of the latter (Harman 1981). In line with Lury's (1996) conceptualization of consumer culture, Strathern (1994) argues that consumption in consumer culture is more or less a conversing process in which changes occur not only in forms but also in the peculiar meanings. This conversion is also expected to dismantle the relationship between possession and self-identity because the meanings are transposed and metathesized in the process of consumption and production of meanings (Strathern 1994). Self-identity becomes a possession rather than a complex of possessions (Lury 1996). Therefore, consumer culture is understood as a material culture that cultivates multiple possessive identities.

The identity-orientation of consumer culture is also reasoned by consumers' response to the loss of meanings, values, trust, and human relationships in modernity (Giddens 1991). Cultural theories explain that unification, homogenization, and totalization of modern culture, which made identities "detextured" and translucent, entail a consumers' repercussion with redefinition, reformulation, and multiplication of identity (e.g., Deleuze and Guattari 1987; Firat and Venkatesh 1993). Together with the identity as a possession, the perceived necessity of multiple identities intensifies the identity-orientation of consumer culture (e.g., Gergen 1991).

In relation to the intensification of identity-orientation, consumer culture theorists elucidate (Arnould and Thompson 2005):

> *Consumer culture theory is organized around a core set of theoretical questions related to the relationships among consumers' personal and collective identities; the cultures created and embodied in the lived worlds of consumers; underlying experiences, processes and structures; and the nature and dynamics of the sociological categories through and across which these consumer culture dynamics are enacted and inflected (p. 870).*

Evidently, identity issues have become the foremost interest and theoretical flagship of consumer culture theory, and the rest of the interests in consumer culture are seen to buttress consumers' "identity project management" as well as the theoretical understanding of consumer culture.

In their analysis and typology of consumer culture theory, Arnould and Thompson (2005) contend that the realm of the theory is constituted with four distinct categories of study. The typology is certainly meaningful and helpful when explaining the domain" of the theory. The categorization is, nonetheless, seen to deserve a great deal of attention for a systematic understanding of the history and the process of consumer culture. Theoretical domains have their own centers and peripheries (for example, studying customer loyalty would be the center for customer relationship management literature, and customer satisfaction or development of customer loyalty program would be supportive components of the main focus), and the former should never be sacrificed in terms of its weight just to include the latter in the domain. In the consumer culturetheory, the difference in weights of the center and the periphery of the theoretical realm appears to be quite considerable. Consumer identity project is the center of theory, and the other categories (market place cultures, the sociohistoric patterning of consumption, and mass-mediated marketplace ideologies and consumers' interpretive strategies) can be seen as either the consequences or the inseparable backgrounds of the identity project. For example, studies categorized into *market place cultures* commonly find and synthesize the themes including identity transformation, (re)construction, concealment, expression, and authenticity in communities and subcultures (e.g., Belk and Costa 1998; Bonsu and Belk 2003; Kozinets 2001; Kozinets 2002; Schouten and McAlexander 1995). Authenticity sought in consumer culture is, in general, the opposite of imitation and/or cliché and, historically, a

fetished and preoccupied concept in modernity (Grayson and Martinec 2004; Jacknis 1990; Lowenthal 1992).

Similarly, the other category called *sociohistoric patterning of consumption* analyzes the very constituents of identity, such as class, gender discourse, family, and ethnicities (e.g., Belk 1992; Bristor and Fischer 1993; Holt 1997, 1998; Thompson 1996; Thompson and Haytko 1997; Wallendorf and Arnould 1991). These studies tend to consider the fixed "givens" to be the factors contributing to different consumption activities, styles, and patterns. Again, this view seems to undervalue the identity project amid the predetermined pool of socio-culturally intervening elements. The varied consumption patterns rather appear to be the result of consumers' emulation and simulation in terms of their identities, conventionally coherent to those fundamental elements of one's life. By the same token, the last category dealing with marketplace ideologies also explains that consumer identity is understood as the impetus of the cultural antagonism and/or pursuit of ideological autonomy as opposed to corporate-led capitalist society and the relentless globalization of certain ideologies, particularly the ones represented by brands (e.g., Coulter, Price, and Feick 2003; Holt 2002; Kozinets and Handelman 2004; Thompson and Arsel 2004).

The evidences substantiating the fact that identity project is at the core of the theory-building in consumer culture domain also propose the possibility of understanding and explaining the relevant phenomena by putting a multitude of discourses and narratives of identity project up-front when studying various consumer cultures. This practice still requires some articulated discussions and incorporations of the three other aforementioned categories into consumer culture theory. This emphasis on identity issues is, furthermore, deemed significant in order to ease such concern that "…the resulting diversity of investigative contexts makes it easy

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to lose sight of the theoretical forest and to classify these studies on the basis of their topical

setting…" (Arnould and Thompson 2005, p. 870). It must be noted that putting the contexts

forward (e.g., Starbucks, ESPN Zone, and Rodeo) instead of the core subject of the theory may

obfuscate the quintessence of the theory.

All in all, consumer culture is described and codified within and by the elements, praxis,

and history of identity projects that must be interpreted and explained with various cultural

ingredients. The pursuit of multiple sovereign identities (as opposed to the culturally

manipulated and controlled identity), the following cultural manifestation, redefinition, and

protection/protest for identity are found to be the "haunting theme" of consumer cultural studies.

Therefore, as this dissertation delves into co-optation of counterculture and subculture in the

consumer and business cultural spheres, consumer identity has to be regarded as the denominator

of the following discussions as to co-optation and its subjects, consequences, and further

implications.

Subculture: Reconciliatory Contrivance of Cultural Rebels

Consumers' cultural competency crystallizes into their identity projects. These projects

are executed in three dissimilar cultural means of expression: subculture, counterculture, and

uncharacterized (ordinary) consumption activities (e.g., Frank 1997a; Heath and Potter 2004;

Hebdige 1979). Co-optation theory explains that the outcomes of these identity projects are

attractive (co-optable) to marketers (Thompson and Coskuner-Balli 2007).

Subcultures are explained as a compromise of a discord that takes place between two or

more hegemonic yet contradictory or less commensurable sets of values (sometimes powers).

For example, parental values and needs for adolescent autonomy create tension and give birth to

various forms of youth culture (Cohen 1972). Taking some other examples, punk is understood as a transfigured cultural resistance of musicians juggling with two contrasting meanings embedded in musical life: the hippie ethos appropriated by the market hegemony and the destined need of "distancing" from the mainstream (Heath and Porter 2004). Gang subculture is likewise a manifestation of the intermixed obscure psyches representing opposite substances of lifestyle, which contrast sobriety, ambition, and conformity to hedonism and defiance of authority (Cohen 1955). Using exemplary conventions of subculture, Hebdige (1979) claims that subcultures do not necessarily target a specific culture of dominance but try to intervene in a particular moment of history and have a better position in the relevant contexts (i.e., gender discourse, consumption, and lifestyle) by presenting novel ways to part take in the sensed reality. This "specificity" is a continual requirement for subculture (Hebdige 1979, p. 84). Subculturalists, therefore, reorganize the cultural conditions of history for their own lifestyles.

More specifically, the concept of subculture "is concerned with agency and action belonging to a subset or social group that is distinct from but related to the dominant culture" (Blackman 2005, p. 2). Distance, defiance, and distinction - as values that subcultures implicitly transmit and communicate from their core to their exterior - signify that the *raison d'etre* of subcultures is also identity project management (e.g., Belk and Costa 1998; Schouten and McAlexander 1995). The manipulation of politics of subjectivity is attempted through transformative resistance to generalized and inflicted subjectivity (Malbon 1998). The pursuit of "endangered" authenticity is another symptom by which the focus of subcultures is again confirmed (e.g., Belk and Costa 1998; Schouten and McAlexander 1995). Nevertheless, the pursuit of authenticity by creating values and meanings of lived experiences, such as mountain men and bikers, does not guarantee the obtainment or possession of authenticity. Rather,

authenticity is embodied through a constant exploration as the seekers of authenticity encounter "authenticity extinction" (cf. Holt 2002, p. 86). This ongoing search for authenticity eventually benefits the contemporary culture of business that takes advantage of virtually every possible outcome of such exploration (Featherstone 1991; Frank 1997a).

"Mods," "Teddy-Boys," and "Skinheads" all have respective rituals through which consumer groups grant themselves some cultural textures publicizing their valued lifestyles and consumption patterns (Clarke, Hall, Jefferson, and Roberts 1990). The rituals are developed as the members of the subcultures decompose the paradigmatic symbolic meanings of mainstream cultures and redefine them for the particular ethos of their subculture (e.g., Hall 1980). This "de-articulation and re-articulation[12]" process is often and widely espoused by subcultures as they strive to establish their conventions (Kozinets 2001). The process tends to be impregnated with more culturally enriched and historically unprecedented symbolic meanings with which businesses refresh themselves and thus are culturally reborn (Mahoney 1997).

The identity-laden nature of subcultures does not preclude the historic significance of collective identity (e.g., Bouchet 1994; Costa and Bamossy 1995; Hebdige 1979; Holt 1997; Kozinets 2001, 2002; Schouten and McAlexander 1995). In particular, Hebdige (1979) explains that commitment, norms, and traditions of subcultures hedge out different cultural groups and solidify the cultural adherence among the members of subculture. The collective identity is communicated within the subculture and transmitted to the outside in the forms of exotic cultural substances without the original contents appreciated (Kozinets 2001). Subcultural identity is

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[12] According to Hall (1980, p. 53), articulation is "the form of the connection that can make a unity of two different elements, under certain conditions. It is a linkage which is not necessary, determined, absolute or essential for all time…. The so-called 'unity' of a discourse is really the articulation of different, distinct elements which can be rearticulated in different ways."

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developed and practiced by communally neutralizing and/or negating the *Other* (Barthes 1972).

The members, therefore, become conformists to the subculture and non-conformists to the other

socio-cultural groups (Muniz and O'Guinn 2001). The shared and mutually-experienced identity

of the subculture propels the emanations of the newly created culture of differential consumption,

lifestyle, and valued signs to the external cultural sphere to render spontaneous distinction

readily recognizable by the public (Kozinets 2002). Subsequently, cultural marketers simplify

the full-fledged meaning generation process in order to marketize the subculture (Frank 1997b).

Subcultures are seen as illusory and seemingly hollow: "subcultures were produced by

subcultural theorists, not the other way around" (Redhead 1990, p. 25). Reversely, mainstream

cultures are visible only to the members of subcultures who wish to distance themselves from the

purportedly dominant values and structures (Hebdige 1979). Subcultures almost always are

processed, beautified, and sublimated by media prior to the initial contact with the public; thus,

they are more exotic than actual in terms of their symbolic meanings (Hebdige 1979). These

claims emphasize the semiotic rather than material aspects of subcultures. That is, subcultures

produce signs to be decoded by the members and non-members appreciating the cultural

potential. Hawkes (1977) clarifies that a subculture is more or less a symbolic bricolage that

evolves around and cultivates cultural improvisations in response to the specific time and spatial

contexts. However, the unplanned, spontaneous, naturalistic, and coarse characteristics of

subcultures deliver more immanent and indigenous values to the members (e.g., Belk and Costa

1998). These values are again new "hips" for businesses in search for perennial sources of new

repertoires for marketization (Featherstone 1990; Heath and Potter 2004).

Subcultures are conceived to be neo-tribes as they demonstrate characteristics parallel to

those of neo-tribes. Neo-tribalism is "characterized by fluidity, occasional gathering and

dispersal" (Maffesoli 1996, p. 76). Despite their ephemeral, instant, and sometimes stigmatized

outlook, subcultures appear to possess a rigid backbone upon which their quest for cultural

freedom from the market is actualized (Kozinets 2002). Their collective identity construction and

sharing, traditions of cultural kinship, and the process of (de)coding are considered their spinal

structures that support the repositioning and retextualization of the given cultural conditions in a

specific time (e.g., Blackman 2005; Hesmondhalgh 2005). The analogy between neo-tribes and

subcultures springs from the necessity and existence of identity-orientation in the two possibly

distinguishable forms of "hypercommunity[13]" (Bennett 1999). Subcultures develop originality in

semiotic, semantic, and ideological areas of culture in order to project a collective self-image that

mirrors individual self-identity (Hall 1976). In relation to the identity-orientation emphasized in

postmodern consumer culture, Blackman (2005) postulates:

> *The postmodern subcultural theory of neo-tribe is closely linked to theories of*
> *consumption and lifestyle that posit the centrality of choice and individualism*
> *as key factors in identity formation. The idea is that neo-tribes confirm our*
> *sense of identity and individuals take pleasure in the hybridity of consumerism*
> *(p. 12).*

Subcultures explained by instability, fluidity, and choice circumscribe the concepts of

"multiphrenia (fragmented and/or decentered self that creates conflict and confusion in terms of

values and lifestyles)" and reflexivity of identity that foster constant reorganization and

renovation of identity (Beck, Giddens, and Lash 1994; Gergen 1991). Subcultures are

accordingly neo-tribalized cultures (cf. Thompson and Troester 2002) of consumption providing

marketing opportunities for firms in the forms of the systematic production and reengineering of

identity. In this sense, the system of identity-communication is of more interest to marketers than

are cultural resources.

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[13] Kozinets (2002) conceptualizes hypercommunity as the phenomenon of a well-organized, short-lived but caring
and sharing community whose explicit attraction to participants is its promise of an intense but temporary
community experience.

The distinction, as the basis of identity, made by and for subcultures is neither easily explained nor perceived correctly. Ward (2003) explains that it is because of the "invisibly objectified and embodied" language, artifacts, and communication media that can only be interpreted and utilized by insiders. Without "subcultural capital" vis-à-vis Bourdieu's cultural capital, participation, observation, and understanding of a subculture are either impossible or at least incomplete (Thornton 1995). Subcultural capital regulates the code of conduct, indicates cultural assignments for members, and constantly reminds the lived identity shared among members (e.g., Jackson 2004). As media abstract and revamp the subculture, this obscure nature of subcultural capital, however, is often visualized and materialized in a style (Thornton 1995). The understanding of subculture by outsiders is, therefore, superficial and too straightforward. The observable "style" as a corresponding representative of a subculture would be annexed with unoriginal and artificial projection of the subculture due to marketers' interference and modification. The style invented and decorated by media is conceived as "mutations and extensions of existing codes rather than as the pure expression of creative drives…." (Hebdige 1979, p. 131). Stylistic ground of subcultures (cf. Kozinets 2001) reflects and connotes the fated trajectory of the cultural reconcilement toward Althusser's (2001) "teeth-gritting harmony." In other words, subcultural styles not only digest the overriding culture and ideology but also advocate the oppositions, resistances, and contradictions in its representation. Thus, subcultural stylization enables the members and their meanings of subcultures of consumption to better situate in different socio-cultural contexts with less or no emphasis on the "specificity" of subculture (Thompson and Troester 2002). The cultural omnivores, marketers, are the "surrogate moms" of subcultural styles.

In sum, subcultures have been followed by co-optation-oriented businesses due to their originality and provocativeness, indicative of their high urge for distinctiveness and high ability to signify. Although this particular consumer quality is the theoretical focus of co-optation, members of subcultures still show their acquiescence to conventions as they reconcile their values with normative expectations from the mainstream. This, in turn, supports the argument that rebels are also conformists.

Counterculture: Praxis of Self-empowerment

Counterculture is a direct and unreserved reaction to homogenization, totalization, conformity requirement, and isomorphism of the perceived cultures in charge of identity production, mythic orientation, sign system, and consumer ideology (Holt 2002; Kozinets and Handelman 2004; Thompson 2004; Thomson and Arsel 2004; Thompson and Tian 2008). However, this counter-conformity pursued by countercultures paradoxically subsumes conformity within the counterculture. The practically same identity project conducted by members of a counterculture may qualify as conformity or counter-conformity, dependent upon the entity to which they are presenting their identity (cf. Bouchet 1994). It is not the nature of identity project but the rejection (acceptance) of the larger and dominant cultural group that (dis)qualifies (counter)conformity. Far from dialectics, counterculture, therefore, is merely an irritant to mainstream. From the discussions in the previous section, subcultures' synthetic nature that stems from two or more contradictory or less compatible values and ideologies differentiates itself from counterculture. However, their respective presented cultural methods for identity projects and facades are quite interchangeable and perhaps undistinguishable. For example, subcultural and countercultural theorists and authors (e.g., Frank 1997a; Heath and Potter 2004;

Hebdige 1979) develop their discourses using more or less the same episodes in modern history (especially those in 60s): hippie, punk, mods, teddy boys, and grunge look.

Counterculturalists are also high in the urge for distinctiveness, and their high ability to signify is shown as they act for their aspirations and group ethos. Distinction is obviously presented and proclaimed by countercultures, and is their motto (Heath and Potter 2004). In comparison, distinction is not the focal objective of subcultures; rather, it is felt, perceived, and assumed by non-members (e.g., Ward 2003). Subcultures strive to maintain cultural sovereignty by constantly performing identity project instead of being obsessed with distinction, but the opposite motivates countercultures (Frank 1997a). Cohen (1972) contends that the cultural autonomy of subcultures within and with mainstream cultures is naturally accomplished as they compromise between hegemonic and subaltern values. For countercultures, however, distinction becomes the antonym for conformity, work-ethic, iconic brands, right wing traditions, bureaucracy, consumerism, and some imposed value systems. Countercultures also regard distinction as the synonym for absolute subjectivity, identity, independence, and counter-subjugation (Frank 1997a). These countercultural myths are deemed to be the "upside-down" logic of countercultures. The myths degrade countercultural manifesto by putting the distinction up-front because it appears to be a negation for the sake of negation and "transgression for the sake of transgression" (Heath and Potter 2004, p. 96). The difference between the two forms of consumer culture is, however, only theoretically palpable because, once co-opted, the marketized styles of the two would appear to be new cultural elements of a similar kind without representing the source.

Another characteristic of counterculture is that it wrestles with relatively macro and broader socio-cultural impositions (e.g., Birch 1999). The members of countercultures bear

oppositions to institutions, politics, social systems, and even globalization movement (e.g., Kozinets and Handelman 2004). Lasn's (1999) conception of "cultural jamming" is one of the most prominent expressions of countercultural movement that leads the van in "subvertising." Brands, advertising, media and the resultant consumerism and commercialism are the publicly announced and periodically printed (e.g., *Adbusters* and *Baffler*) adversaries of countercultures (e.g., Klein 1999). These are the monolithic entities sprung from modern institutionalization, influencing current consumer cultural outlook, which are seldom contested or directly confronted by subcultures. Subcultures, rather, internalize those forces and refract or distort them in their consumption rituals and lifestyles (e.g., Holt 1997).

In sum, countercultures are insurgent (centrifugal) forces of cultural struggle for power, and subcultures are negotiated (centripetal) representations of the cultural incompatibility. That is, countercultures emulate the market hegemony as they try to relocate their cultural arena outside of the market (cf. Ozanne and Murray 1995). In relation to this notion, Heath and Potter (2004, p. 150) also claim that "each time a new symbol of rebellion gets 'co-opted' by the market system, countercultural rebels are forced to go further and further to prove their alternative credentials, to set themselves apart from the despised masses." In contrast, subcultures evolve within the market, stay in the market, and simulate the market in their conventions and for their ethos. Therefore, countercultures can be seen as an extreme and negatively specialized form of subculture claiming their cultural potential only outside the market system. Paradoxically, this outward stride of counterculture is to "get inside" the production process through which meanings and values are created.

Despite the socio-political differences between subculture and counterculture, the cultural destination of the two, exemplified mostly by the 60s cultural vortex, such as mods, hippies, and

beats, is that they are "a commercial template for our times, a historical prototype for the construction of cultural machines that transform alienation and despair into consent" (Frank 1997a, p. 235). The market is to valorize the cultural inflation by sub/countercultures through co-optation. The cultural sphere of the market composed of consumer culture and business culture as well as historical, political, and economical influences are delineated in Figure 2.

Co-optation as Business Culture

As reviewed and discussed in earlier sections, consumers' identity project is located at the epicenter of consumer culture (Figure 2) that is mainly composed of three cultural presentations: subculture, counterculture, and the uncharacterized day-to-day consumption (conforming to the market). Nevertheless, the three differently manifested consumer cultures are interconnected with and reflective of one another. That is, as our lives and "the reality" saturates with fragmentation, one can freely navigate a myriad of moments, times, and spaces of his/her life, which still collectively represent the person (Firat and Venkatesh 1995; Lifton 1993). The diminishing requirements for unity, consistency, and/or wholeness encourage consumers to pursue a multitude of lifestyles, which is unreasonable otherwise (Hannerz 1992). Thus, consumers' selective adjustment of modes of being is frequently observed. The stress on the ongoing identity project of consumer culture today (as the denominator of the varied consumer cultural presentations) ultimately requires consumers to be able to switch their modes of being in order to reflexively redefine and reconstruct their identities (e.g., Giddens 1991; 1992). In other words, subculturalists and counterculturalists do not always defy the dominant culture comprising: media, brands, advertisements and the like. Heath and Potter (2004, p. 166) confirm that "….countercultural rebels are merely hypocrites, since they are also conformists - they are

simply conforming to a different set of rules." The opposite case (conformists to

sub(counter)culturalists) is also witnessed when there are specific (fragmented) moments for

consumers to convert. Religious, moral, or spiritual disparity between the given and ideological

reality often causes such conversion (Kozinets and Handelman 2004). The increasing

fragmentation in consumer culture is, however, the most prominent drive that precipitates the

"internal proliferation" of consumer identity (e.g., Thompson and Troester 2002).

Business culture is the beneficiary of consumers' cultural reconfiguration of consumption

activities in their identity projects. Co-optation or the necessity of it, based on Bataille (1991),

has long been present in order to address the cultural entropy (cf. Hong 2008) due to *la part*

maudite, the accursed share, which means the exhaustion of energy for economic excess

followed by cultural outrages in consumption. He argues that the economic surplus is translated

into symptoms of disorder: carnivalesque (cf. Bakhtin 1984), which appears to presage varied

and unprecedented types of consumption phenomena. Marketers' (capitalists') pursuit of

quantity and control results in a situation in which they have to retrieve the intended economic

growth by converting the carnivalesque, (i.e., subcultures and countercultures) to marketable

goods and services. Featherstone (1990), in the same vein, proposes:

> .…*we need to investigate: (1) the persistence within consumer culture of elements of the pre-industrial carnivalesque tradition; (2) the transformation and displacement of the carnivalesque, into media images, design, advertising, rock videos, the cinema; (3) the persistence and transformation of elements of the carnivalesque within certain sites of consumption: holiday resorts, sports stadia, theme parks, department stores and shopping centers; (4) its displacement and incorporation into conspicuous consumption by states and corporations, either in the form of 'prestige' spectacles for wider publics, and/or privileged upper management and officialdom (p. 14).*

The appropriation of cultural counterproposals by consumers has been palpable in philosophy

and sociology as well (e.g., Bataille 1988; Featherstone 1990). Slater and Tonkiss (2001, p. 168)

describe the youth culture:

> *In each case of youth culture, the very products of commercial capitalism were turned into an embodied commentary on, and generally a critique of, contemporary society. At the same time, each rebellious reappropriation of commercial products did indeed take a material and stylized form that could also be reappropriated by capitalism (p. 168).*

The ineluctable logic of co-optation is frequently described such that "Rebellion is not a

threat to the system, it is the system" (Heath and Potter 2004, p. 175). This is because

rebelliousness is one of the most preferable alternative characteristics of an individual to make

distinction. The need for noble sources of marketing is also recognized in advertising, as Ogilvy

(2004, p. 20) notes, "Our business needs massive transfusions of talent. And talent, I believe, is

most likely to be found among nonconformists, dissenters, and rebels." Nevertheless, co-optation

does not cater the original values to the consumers of the co-opted images, brands, spectacles,

experiences, and meanings. Rather, the delivered values are distorted and modified. In

accordance, Frank (1997a) states:

> *According to the standard binary narrative, the cascade of pseudo-hip culture-products that inundated the marketplace in the sixties were indicators not of the counterculture's consumer-friendly nature but evidence of the 'corporate state's hostility. They were tools with which the Establishment hoped to buy off and absorb its opposition, emblems of dissent that were quickly translated into harmless consumer commodities, emptied of content, and sold to their very originations as substitutes for the real thing (p. 16).*

Co-optation, hence, always takes some form of abstraction and sublimation in order to

commodify the subversive forces and consumerize the users of the commodified cultures,

including some members of the counterculture. The relationship between consumer culture and

business culture is then, as described in Figure 2, a mutual "give and take." Frank (1997c, p. 44)

notes, "What's happened is not co-optation or appropriation, but a simple and direct confluence of interest." Through co-optation, the number of ways to stylize one's life is increased. The production of mass-marketed cultures coincides with the consumption of new countercultures, just as the production of countercultural values eventually facilitates the consumption of the commodified version of countercultures. Consumer and business cultures consume and produce each other. This concurrence creates an ever going process in which any co-optation of a counterculture tends to instigate another counteraction (e.g., Thompson and Coskuner-Balli 2007).

The fourth chapter explains the close relationship between cultural conditions consumers face and the cyclic cultural sphere of the market as the proposed framework of this study.

FIGURE 2. *Cyclic Cultural Sphere of the Market*

Countercultures'
intended relocation

History
Political Economy

Simultaneous
Consumption &
Production of
Experiences,
Aesthetics,
Values,
Meanings, &
Ideologies

Consumer Culture

Counterculture   **Identity
Project**   Subculture

Reflection

Day-to-day
consumption
practices

Reflection

Business Culture:
Appropriation
Sublimation
Abstraction
Consumerization
Commodification
Imposition

Marketable
cultural sources

New counteractions

Co-optation of
Resistance

CHAPTER IV

PROPOSED FRAMEWORK

Definitions of Focal Constructs

Throughout the history of modernity, consumer identity project has become central to consumers as modern citizens. One of the most prominent means for a consumer to perform the identity project is to create enough cultural distance from others or to affiliate with a culturally unique group (e.g., Belk and Costa 1998; Celsi, Rose, and Leigh 1993; Kates 2002; Kozinets 2001, 2002; Muniz and O'Guinn 2001; Schouten and McAlexander 1995). Consumer culture has emerged as a product from the consumers' negotiation process dealing with a cultural condition, namely, the urge for distinctiveness and corporate capitalism. This urge, developed in modernity, pairs with another cultural condition, ability to signify, by which different shades of consumer culture are specifically manifested. The importance of the ability is elevated due to marketers' co-optation of consumers' lived experiences and presentations of values in lifeworld. In other words, co-optation as a business culture ultimately nullifies the authenticity of the performed identity projects. Therefore, the two constructs are important in understanding the semiotic schema of consumer culture, which is the proposed framework of this study.

Ability to Signify

The concept of the ability to signify is one of the most significant elements of the cultural condition in philosophers' and consumer researchers' treatment of the symbolic domain of consumer culture (e.g., Baudrillard 1975, 1981, 1983; Barthes 1972; Belk 1988; Firat and Venkatesh 1995; Firat, Dholakia, and Venkatesh 1995; Holbrook and Hirschman 1982; Holbrook and Grayson 1986; Holt 1997; Levy 1959, 1981; Mick 1986; Mick, Burroughs, Hetzel, and Brannen 2004; Schouten 1991). The ability to signify is defined, for the purpose of this study, as the self-efficacy to choose to value signs and individuated meanings more than practical, marketized, and socially constructed symbols available in the consumption domain and subsequently (re)create and practice idiosyncratic identity through signification. It is also a counterbalance to corporate capitalism's control over individual identities. For example, one may continue to drive a Ford Bronco, despite its fuel inefficiency and outdated aesthetics, because the consumer manages his or her identity project with the experiences, emotions, and meanings shared and developed with the car. It should be, however, noted that the consumer still utilizes a marketized item (the vehicle) that does not necessarily complete his/her identity project but simply serves as a medium between the "sender and receiver" of the symbolic communication. The sender of the symbolic message is not entirely responsible for a correct decoding of the message because it is often simply viewed and appropriated as a potentially new or unique style that popularizes the idiosyncratic identity project (cf. Hebdige 1979). The constant development of individual meanings with the car, regardless of the technological advancements and attractive commercials of automobile companies, indicate the consumer's ability to signify. However, the difference between signs and symbols is seldom discussed in the consumer research literature. In order to support the theoretical definition of the construct of ability to signify (rather than

symbolize), it is critical to recognize the fundamental differences between sign and symbol as well as the semiotic and cultural discussions of each construct.

Although symbolization seems akin to signification, it should be noted first that the nature of the former is different from the latter. The incorrect interchangeability between the two originates from the fact that both are culturally and contextually created, observed, inferred, and interpreted (Pandya and Venkatesh 1992). Nevertheless, as Leach (1976) explains, a symbol usually represents an entity as a whole, not a part of it, whereas a sign is only accountable for a fraction of the entity. Individual identity projects are not necessarily confined to a sole and invariable identity but to transformative, adaptive, and essentially reflexive identity (e.g., Bonsu and Belk 2003; Giddens 1991; Gergen 1991; Oswald 1999; Schouten 1991). Thus, signification is the appropriate concept to be incorporated when the focus is on multiple roles (personas) of consumers. For the purpose of this study, signification is accordingly defined as the imbuement of individuated (as opposed to mass-marketized) meaning(s) upon consumer goods and/or experiences available in the market so that they can become constituents of one's identity.

As continued in Leach (1976), symbolization usually involves a process in which one links two culturally and socially well-defined things together (e.g., the linkage between Eiffel tower and Paris), whereas signification relates to a more "arbitrary" linkage (imbuement of meanings) between a defined and/or established concept (entity) and a less or non-defined one (e.g., the linkage between a Ford Mustang and someone's first date). Consequently, signification encompasses symbolization in terms of its complex meaning-production-process and wider range of utilizable cultural elements. A consumer may claim an awkward way of wearing a neck-tie "me"; likewise, one can call a vehicle "me." The former case is closer to signification due to its higher arbitrariness and originality as well as low imitability. In contrast, the latter case clearly

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represents symbolization because the meaning, value, and other cultural connotations of the vehicle are already shared among others to a great extent. Although identities can be (re)constructed either way, a marketization-free and idiosyncratic identity requires signification.

A theoretical justification of the difference between signification and symbolization continues as Peirce (1998) also explains signification through an analysis of the relationships and distinctions among icon, index, and symbol. Icons refer to a physical and observable relationship between a signifier and the signified (i.e., a portrait and the model). A symbol shows a historically, socio-culturally, and politically structured and imposed relationship between a signifier and the signified (i.e., a wobbly scene in a movie for a flashback). Indexes mean a more arbitrary, yet learned, agreed, or acceptable association between a signifier and the signified (i.e., sheets being removed from a calendar to mean time passing). The icon/index/symbol triad, however, quite often shows indistinguishability among the components (i.e., a photograph has all three characteristics). Based on Peirce's distinction, Grayson and Martinec (2004) argue that indexicality rather than iconicity connotes and pertains to authenticity, which is the essential topic of the identity project (e.g., Arnould and Thompson 2005; Holt 2002). That is, an iconic authenticity is merely a reproduction of the indexical authenticity (Peterson 1997). Consequently, indexicalization is more pertinent to the definition of ability to signify in resistant consumption settings than is symbolization, for the former is arbitrary, creative, authentic, unconventional, and frequently defiant toward the established relationship between a signifier and the signified. Although symbolization and iconicity are both constituents of semiotics, they are culturally inferior forms of signification when projecting one's identity. Therefore, in this dissertation, the construct of ability to signify captures the characteristics of indexicality. Symbolization is again differentiated from signification in terms of arbitrariness and creativity. These characteristics

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overlap with those of agentic consumers; thus, one's ability to signify is expected to contribute to the understanding of the conflict between him or her and the market, as well as the ensuing consequences.

Another semiological discussion buttresses the criticality of ability to signify when studying consumer agency because the cultural sovereignty is expressed through incompliance with the meanings constructed through the market system. Barthes' (1972) and Saussure (2000) concur in that the "arbitrariness" is indispensable to signification and that semiology is not simply a part of linguistics. The coherent relationship between a signifier (a chair: the word) and the signified (the mental image, meaning constellation, and concept of a chair) is actually mediated by a referent (the actual object called a chair). However, Saussure (2000) posits that a sign can preclude the referent; thus, the signifier and the signified become more adherent to each other. Accordingly, any notion of reality inconsistent with this linguistic relationship is negated. In contrast, Barthes (1972) as a "pre-post-structuralist" postulates different orders of signification. The first-order signification is quite correspondent with Saussure's standpoint and Peirce's (1998) iconicity to a certain degree because it simply indicates a solidified relationship between a signifier and the signified. For example, a picture of a Mercedes automobile simply means the Mercedes as an automobile. The second-order signification means virtually infinite connotations of the signifier. For instance, a picture of a Mercedes may connote wealth, safety, success, sexuality, German engineering, luxury, and so on. These connotations, however, should be experienced and learned through cultural values (myths). In third-order signification, Barthes (1972) stresses the individuated meanings of signs, different from the meanings produced and interpreted through the myths in second-order signification. The myths are the presentations of "reality" suggested by a dominant ideology, such as capitalism and the following market system.

For example, the same Mercedes may mean someone's memory of the senior prom or honeymoon. Of course, this is the very critique of deconstructionists (e.g., Derrida 1976) and post-structuralists (e.g., Deleuze and Guatarri 1983, 1987). They equally underscore the importance of difference, variability, and plurality. This repudiation of the fixation between the commodified and the socially constructed meanings speaks for the agentic consumers' beliefs and practices. Accordingly, signification is the quality that enables consumers to be(come) culturally independent of the market. Third-order signification is the most germane to this study.

The post-structural convention is also reflected in consumer research literature. Sherry and Camargo's (1987) study describes the use of loanwords in Japanese promotions of various products. Although the meanings and values of the English words are designed to symbolically indicate superiority, exoticness, and world-level, Japanese adoption of the English words show reinterpretation, transmutation, and localization of the words. These results clearly show the cultural autonomy of consumers. In her series of studies, Stern (1993, 1995, 1996) also argues that understanding consumption as text (e.g., Hirschman and Holbrook 1992; Thompson, Stern, and Arnould 1998) changes the one-way, structured, rigid, gendered, and culturally stultified interpretation of consumption to culturally playful, subversive, and plural discourse. Stern (1996) continues to claim that this standpoint of post-structuralists and deconstructionists facilitates the understanding of consumer agency and serves as an "agent provocateur" (p. 145) to question the field of consumer research. Therefore, the presence of consumers' re-interpretation, modification, contextualization, and recreation of cultural meanings from marketized texts is deemed a quality of consumers today. This consumer quality, nonetheless, shows an individual unevenness (Holt 2002); thus, it is a cultural condition consumers continuously confront.

Interpersonal difference in the ability to signify is recognized in post-structural analyses in consumer research. For example, Thompson and Hirschman (1995), in relation to postmodern consumers' quality, posit:

> *The postmodern consumer is proposed to stand above the constraints of culture, the ties of history, and the material reality of the body. From our reading of these consumers' interviews, however, their self-understandings were structured by long-standing cultural narratives regarding the meanings of the body. For these consumers, these narratives held profound significance for their sense of personal history and understanding of the social world. In contrast to the "unencumbered self" romanticized in treatises on postmodern consumption, many traditional cultural narratives were woven into these consumers' self-conceptions and exerted an enduring influence on their everyday consumption activities (p. 151).*

The individual level of cohesion to history and tradition is seen as the "grading scale" for the differed level of ability to signify. As defined earlier, ability to signify is based on a consumer's self-efficacy to pursue unconventional yet personally created meanings of consumption. The extent to which the consumer is imprisoned in the traditionally and socially imposed meanings corresponds to his or her ability to signify. In close association with this view, Holt (1997), in his analysis of post-structural lifestyles, recognizes the growing possibilities of semiotic transformation of lifestyle in collectivities and notes:

> *Individuals are creative and industrious enough to individualize their consumption and even construct innovative ways of consuming, but, when they do so, they are always working with the existing frameworks of tastes in which they have been socialized (p. 344).*

Interpersonal difference in the ability to signify indicates how much the consumer resists, or clings to the socially constructed meanings. This clearly shows the double-sided nature of counter-conformity, which is always interwoven with a conformity requirement. Wielding consumer agency through signification is never a true creation of new cultural meanings; rather, it should be seen and understood as either "mix-match" or "layered" look of consumption

(cultural bricolage). How much of the bricolage the consumer fills with his or her own signification will dictate the level of ability to signify. This classified or differentiated view of consumers and consumption is continued in Holt's (1998) analysis of consumption patterns in terms of cultural capital (see Bourdieu 1984). His finding suggests that consumers' differed cultural capital eventually produces varied qualities of consumers (different levels of the ability to signify) because, unlike conformists, highly agentic consumers with different habitus plastically manage their lives with regard to aesthetics, idealism, self-actualization, cosmopolitanism, and critical interpretation of cultural texts. The conformity-orientation of consumers and the elements of cultural capital are the bases of qualitative operationalization of the construct. The access to different meanings and values in life through education and knowledge is also the source of ability to signify. When aesthetical, ethical, and/or ideological incompatibility is perceived, socially constructed meanings can be redefined through creative styles and cultural bricolage by self-empowered consumers who show high ability to signify (cf. Foucault 1980).

Asserted Index versus Assigned Symbol

An identity project involves negotiation in terms of social status, ethnicity, and style (e.g., Bouchet 1995). Identity (re)construction requires negotiation, which involves power relations. Consumers' identities tend to be determined by their perceived power to refuse or accept predetermined meanings and values inscribed on items and experiences in the market (Holt 1998; Kates 2002; Thornton 1995). Discourse about power and identity appears in anthropological discussions of racial and ethnic issues (Bouchet 1995). The notion of assigned and asserted identity is greatly related to the negotiable nature of consumer identity (e.g., Zolfagharian and Jordan 2007). An ethnic group in a host culture may be able to assert their identity when the

external socio-politico-economical power relation is perceived to be malleable rather than calcified. In opposite cases, the identity of the same ethnic group is less negotiable and thus predetermined by the external power relation. In most cases, however, the identity is one that is settled between the assigned and the asserted identities. The influence of the power relation can neither be ignored nor completely governed but is always compromised. The choice of identity is free only when this nature of the power relation is recognized.

Consumers' identities do parallel the notion of assigned/asserted identity in anthropological discourses. Through symbolic signification, consumers comply with the identities the market assigns. When consumers choose to "engineer" consumer cultural power relations for aesthetical, ethical, and ideological reconfiguration of the given reality, they may appear to reject the assigned identities and assert their idiosyncratic identities. The engineering requires the ability to signify, which promotes indexical signification. Consumers can manage their identity project by choosing either the asserted or an assigned identity; however, a pure form of either identity is not preferred and/or prevented in contemporary identity discourse. An entirely assigned identity cannot offer much distinctiveness, which is constantly sought by consumers today. A totally asserted identity yields either a rejection from the mass, or misunderstanding of the identity. Therefore, consumers have to balance the level of each aspect of identity as they proceed with their identity projects.

The indexical meanings created by highly agentic consumers to assert their identities are absorbed by the market and transformed to assigned meanings that the general body of consumers has to consider for their identity project. In the course of the transformation, the asserted (indexical) meanings and values are simplified, visualized, and stylized by marketers in order to easily attach the meanings to marketized items and experiences. Marketers commoditize

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the indexical meanings as they selectively utilize the most attractive aspects of the assertions made by consumers. The assignment of consumer identity starts with this "reverse-engineering" of the indexical meanings and values. Once it turns out to be successful, the assignment can become an imposition that almost regulates consumer identity in general. It is evident that the process ultimately invigorates the market as a system in which even insubordinate consumers play a very important role in generating culturally provocative diversity (Frank 1997a).

Urge for Distinctiveness

When consumption as an imperative of culture and a prerequisite for contemporary individuality is widely acknowledged (e.g., Baudrillard 1970; Holt 2004; Jameson 1991), differentiation of oneself from others also becomes critical. The homogenization of consumers in modernity renders a distinct identity widely sought. For the emphasis of distinction in the culture of consumption, Firat and Venkatesh (1995) explain:

> *Consumption for Barthes is embedded within systems of signification, of making and maintaining distinctions….that is, distinction through symbolic differentiation is what underlies the cultural system (p. 249).*

This distinction-orientation of current consumer culture accounts for only a part of the ever-present prominence of the identity project in consumer culture as identification and conformity also constitute a jigsaw puzzle-like portrayal of consumer culture. Not all consumers can freely conduct and administer their own identity projects regardless of "free-floating (see Baudrillard 1983)" identity resources (signifiers) in the market. Arnould and Thompson (2005) further explicate:

> *The corollary premise is that the marketplace has become a preeminent source of mythic and symbolic resources through which people, including those who lack resources to participate in the market as full-fledged consumers, construct narratives of identity (p. 871).*

This subsumption of distinction under consumer identity projects, which manifests as part of consumer culture, necessitates variant levels of consumers' urge for distinctiveness. For example, the need for uniqueness scale explains that consumers show different degrees of interest in distinguishing themselves from other consumers in terms of opinion and preferences that manifest autonomy and counter-conformity (Snyder and Fromkin 1977; Tian, Bearden, and Hunter 2001). Recognizing this variability, the urge for distinctiveness is defined as an individual predisposition to be a differently defined agent in diverse consumption contexts, which many others with similar identities also inhabit.

The cultural and symbolic elements of the urge for distinctiveness stem mainly from the discussions in *Distinction* by Pierre Bourdieu (1984). For Bourdieu, the social reality, dictating the class structure, is attributable to four distinct capitals: economic, cultural, educational, and symbolic. In particular, the cultural capital makes distinctions based on differentiated tastes and styles. That is, a socially distinctive group of individuals (consumers) with a different level of cultural capital creates "unclichéd cultural errands and chores (habitus)". The symbolic capital, since the discussion pertains to social classification, denotes sources of power, such as prestige and honor, and interferes with the operations of other types of capital. The urge for distinctiveness, therefore, can be qualitatively operationalized in relation to consumers' cultural and symbolic capital that promotes classified, privileged, discriminated, unique, and highly-stylized consumption praxis.

The arbitrary and ideological elements of distinctiveness connote the omnipresent tension between self and social identity (Bauman 1991; Elliott 1998; Grubb and Growthwohl 1967; Thompson and Haytko 1997). The individualized construal and presentation of identity sometimes conflict with normative expectations and axiological orientations in a particular

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society because an unexpected, extreme or too unique identity causes refusal and tension (e.g., Bauman 1991). An identity discourse is a double-edged sword due to its simultaneous connotations of conformity and counter-conformity (e.g., Thompson and Haytko 1997). A distinction should be arbitrary enough in order to generate a culturally and symbolically significant difference; at the same time, it must comply with the socially legitimated and accepted ideologies, values, and conventions.

In accordance with the double-fold nature of identity, Brewer (1991) provides a clearer psychological approach, the optimal distinctiveness theory, which portrays the tension between self and social identity as adequately balanced in a series of negotiation processes. *Oneself as Another* by Paul Ricoeur (1995) posits the characteristics of self and social identity in a contemporary worldview. In the optimistic view, the tension between selfhood and otherness as well as self and social can be successfully resolved with responsibility for and appreciation of the other. The acceptance of responsibility functions as a legitimization process of an identity.

The distinctiveness is established and practiced through creativeness, counter-popularity, and similarity-avoidance (Tian, Bearden, and Hunter 2001). Vignoles, Chryssochoou, and Breakwell (2002) schematize the sources of distinctiveness as follows. Difference is individual differences in terms of personality traits, attitudes, and physical characteristics. Separateness is a psychological distance or separation from others. Lastly, position indicates a distinctiveness in one's place within social relationships, including kinship ties, friendships, roles, and social status.

Writers of consumer culture also regard distinctiveness as an unavoidable qualification of the contemporary consumer. For example, Frank (1997c, p. 34) mentions, "consumerism is no longer about 'conformity' but about 'difference'." Distinction as a means of identity

(re)construction entails constant "othering," which denotes an incessant individual endeavor to make distinction (Hetada 1998). In their study of counterculture, Heath and Potter also claim:

> *They want to fit in, to be accepted. But how many adults act this way? Most people spend the big money not on things that help them to fit in, but on things that allow them to stand out from the crowd. They spend their money on goods that confer distinction (p. 103).*

These analytical stances are equivalent to that of Barthes (1972) and Bourdieu (1984) in that distinction is the essence of consumerism. In *The Conquest of Cool*, Frank (1997a) also postulates that the nature of cool, which is one of the mottos for countercultures, is distinctiveness.

In consumer culture research, the concept of distinctiveness is often translated into the pursuit of authenticity through counter-conforming consumption praxis (Holt 2002), even though there are other means for distinctiveness in the discussed literature. In their study of youth culture, Kjeldgaard and Askegaard (2006) observe consumption of particular objects for authentication and a rejection of the mainstream, and find that individual uniqueness is a commonly found theme of authenticity. Authenticity in a cross-cultural or cross-ethnical setting also fosters differentiated consumption choices (Askegaard, Arnould, and Kjeldgaard 2005; Bouchet 1995). Distinction as a method for an authenticated identity is frequently discussed in studies of consumption with respect to ideology, brand, gender, and rituals (e.g., Bonsu and Belk 2003; Holt 1997, 2002; Kates 2002, 2004; Kozinets 2001, 2002; Kozinets et al. 2004; Muniz and O'Guinn 2001; Thompson and Arsel 2004). These various contexts, in which distinctiveness is sought, support the definition of the urge for distinctiveness to highlight the presence of the urge in different consumption settings.

Beyond Need for Uniqueness

The need for uniqueness concept (Snyder and Fromkin 1977; Tian et al. 2001), which is widely adopted and used as a definitive construct explaining human tendency to pursue difference, is less pertinent to the purposes of this dissertation. There are theoretical, methodological, and practical issues that differentiate the construct from the urge for distinctiveness.

First, although the recognition of the dispositional aspect of the construct is compatible with the construct of urge for distinctiveness, the discussion of normative issues for the need for uniqueness instantiate the differences between the two. In their study, Tian et al. (2001) specifically addressed that individual need for uniqueness is maneuvered, contrived, and pursued within the normative boundary to which the individual is socio-culturally confined (e.g., Nail 1986). As a result, according to their conceptualization, the need for uniqueness can be applied only to a specific context in which the normative violation can be minimized. The context of choice had to be consumption of different goods in the market, and this is the presupposition that buttresses the usability of the construct. The possibility for consumers to seek uniqueness from "unmarketized" and/or "marketing-free" means is overlooked or put aside without an explanation. Consequentially, only the face-value or "primitive" level of difference is conceptualized to make the construct the case. On the contrary, urge for distinctiveness is not a contingent construct that vacillates entirely depending on different normative contexts. Rather, it is a deep-rooted condition that necessitates plastic manifestation of the urge and the following agential justification in negotiation with the contexts. In this case, the context plays a less important role for consumers as agents. Urge for distinctiveness also incorporates different contexts, such as aesthetics, ideology, gender, and experience, which are prominent components

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of culture and possibly marketing-free. Although the construct of need for uniqueness recognizes the cultural and symbolic elements of uniqueness, it "materializes" itself, as it contextualizes itself to acquisition, utilization, and disposition of consumer goods (e.g., Belk 1988), rather than opening up for different possibilities and contexts to explain the need. The scale items clearly show the limitation of the construct; for example, asking whether consumers seek unusual products and sartorial expressions only accounts for one aspect of difference. The urge for distinctiveness, instead of focusing on the material distinction acquired from the market, liberates the methods, contexts, and conduits to present distinctiveness from the market and the marketized "stuff." The possibility of different means of distinction ensures the pertinence of the construct to the study.

Second, the goal-directed and/or motivational aspect of need for uniqueness is somewhat contradictory to the dispositional perspective of the construct. If it is dispositional, the link between the disposition and the motivation to develop a self-image has to be clarified. In other words, the question that arises is whether one can upwardly manipulate his or her disposition in order to accomplish the goal. This standpoint is not congruent with one that this study posits. The urge for distinctiveness is both the objective and the consequence. The urge has become a "given" throughout the modern discourse of identity that constantly requires individuals to seek idiosyncrasy (Gouldner 1979). That is, while the need for uniqueness entails different consequences, such as (un)successful expression of self and creation of distance from others, the urge for distinctiveness is indeed itself a consequence. When the urge is sensed, it is culturally expressed and practiced in a variety of consumption styles, patterns, contexts, and activities rather than simply reflected on the material possessions. As the focus of this study is more

relevant to the former, the use of need for uniqueness does limit the scope and richness of the cultural elements sought to explain consumer identity project.

Lastly, practically speaking, the need for uniqueness is incapable of explaining other ways to communicate distinctiveness. For example, fanaticism (e.g., Smith et al. 2007) is certainly a new form of distinction management, but the need for uniqueness may explain the phenomenon only if the fans tend to buy goods to maintain their status. The other example would be the gender issue (e.g., Kates 2002, 2004), which has emerged as a provocative topic in consumer culture area. Nonetheless, the need for uniqueness can by no means be associated with the purely cultural and ideological manifestations of difference. When the aim of this study is to reveal the dynamics in the market, appreciating many different ways to address one's identity project, the need for uniqueness does not have much to offer.

Proposed Framework: The Semiotic Schema of Consumer Culture

The proposed difference in consumer-faced cultural conditions, namely, urge for distinctiveness and ability to signify are deemed to produce distinguishable modes of being of consumers that formulate varied types of consumer culture. Distinct demonstrations of current consumer culture are understood as adaptation to and/or divergence from the given cultural conditions perceived by the individual consumers performing identity projects through signification. The complexity and multiplicity of consumer culture are also related to dynamic positions of being in a variety of manifestations of consumer culture rather than a position demanding absoluteness, consistency, or permanence. Figure 3 illustrates the general themes of consumer culture and further portends a multitude of emerging themes from the dynamics (Hong 2008).

FIGURE 3. Dynamics of Consumers' Role in the Market

Urge for Distinctiveness

Low   High

	Shared Identity Market-aided Identity	Subculture Counterculture

High

Ability
to
Signify

②   ③

Self-empowerment   Resistance

①   ④

Self-disempowerment

Low

Conformity   Experiential
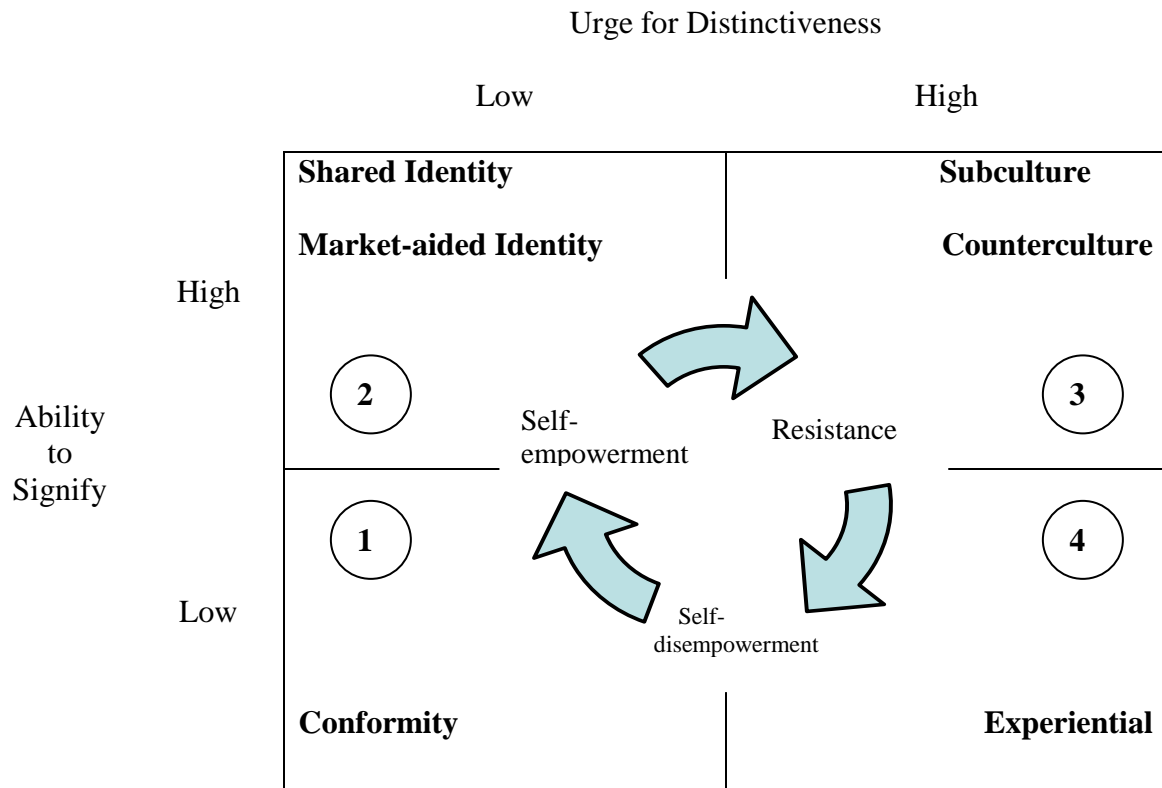
Notes: (1) The origin of the coordinate axes does not mean an absolute absence of the
          ability or the urge; rather, the classification is always relative.
       (2) Movements upward and to the right indicate self-empowerment;
           movements downward and to the left means disempowerment.
       (3) The arrows do not indicate passage of time.

Interpersonal and Intrapersonal Variations

As the two main constructs of this study are found to be conditions rather than simply
perceived limitations, each consumer mainly resides in a respective quadrant, which generally
describes the specific types and presentations of consumer culture in which the individual
normally participate. This invariable perspective of consumers' modes of being emerges as a
static representation of consumer identity, especially when consumers' cultural management of

identity project is discussed. Nevertheless, the perspective is still significant to the understanding

of consumer culture because it offers us a fundamental groundwork of current consumer culture

and its manifestations. It is required to understand the basis of consumer culture when explaining

atypical consumption practices by a consumer who is supposed to behave in a certain way.

Without a clear understanding of the basic mechanism drawn from theories, every cultural

expression through consumption would have to be interpreted and comprehended separately. In

other words, the consumption praxis by a consumer that deviates from the ordinary cannot be

noticed and subsequently studied even though the deviation is theoretically of interest and

significance. Moreover, the explanations as to why and how consumers possibly switch their

modes of being by moving to another quadrant would not be sought if the basic framework does

not exist. Therefore, this study specifically seeks to explain how, why, and when the conditions

are ignored or overcome. Delineating consumers' invariable cultural quality is a prerequisite to

provide answers to these questions. Moreover, a concurrent study of intrapersonal variation will

facilitate the understanding of consumers' variable cultural quality.

The focus of this empirical study is twofold. First, interpersonal variations in terms of

cultural manifestations of identity project will be examined. Second, intrapersonal variations are

studied in order to address such theoretically unusual yet widely recognized phenomena as

"downshifting or simple living" (e.g., Schor 1998). The rationale for pursuing two different types

of cultural variations is that one can never explain certain aspects of cultural dynamics of

consumption in the market that the other could. Interpersonal variation can help identify and

categorize consumers in terms of their lifestyles, values, and worldviews. However, only with

interpersonal variations, it is difficult to explicate some extraordinary cases, which are now

emerging as more ordinary than ever before. For example, one with low ability to signify and

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low urge for distinctiveness may choose a simplified diet, which is incongruent with the conventional expectation and historical observation of the consumers of that sort. Consumers can firstly be categorized by the interpersonal variations dependent upon the ability to signify and the urge for distinctiveness. The abnormalities, then, can be explained by intrapersonal variations, which generally spring from consumers' ideology, aesthetic preference, interpersonal relationship, and consumption context. Since the understanding of interpersonal variations is expected to provide a basis for the proper observation of consumer culture today, the combination of the variable and invariable consumer quality will be helpful for consumer researchers to avoid rootless interpretations and pursue a more eclectic grip of current consumer culture. The intrapersonal variations, meanwhile, may show us different possibilities for consumers to shape and reshape their lives in close relation to consumption praxis. Without studying intrapersonal variations, the frequently discussed notion of identity project, which involves multiple identities and identity reconstruction as well as disposition, may remain obscure.

General Themes

The first quadrant denotes that consumers with low ability to signify and low urge for distinctiveness tend to conform to the market. This is expected from the findings of the Burning Man project (Kozinets 2002) and the discussions of the powerful influence of modernization. Even for consumers with high ability to signify and urge for distinctiveness, conformity is eventually the way to coexist with the market hegemony because resistance can never be permanent or universal.

The second quadrant explains the possibility of shared(communal)-identity (e.g., Maffesoli 1996; Ricoeur 1995) in collective (tribal) settings due to the consumers' low urge for

distinctiveness and high ability to signify. This is also indicative of market-aided identity projects because those neo-tribes or collectivities reside within the boundary of market hegemony presenting brands as contrivances for consumers' identity projects (Muniz and O'Guinn 2001). Shared-identity can also be observed when the members of consumer groups constantly separate themselves from the users of other brands, qualifying as a "reverse-representation" of their cohesion with each other (Muniz and O'Guinn 2001). The eternal paradox of identity project, namely, the dual meaning of conformity is also palpable in this context. The current state of technology aids the proliferation of shared-identity, especially in online settings. With a relatively low urge for distinctiveness, the members of online communities promote themselves to disclose their identities and utilize others' in their own identity projects (e.g, Schau and Gilly 2003). The accumulation of individual ability to signify is the momentum by which the community members' objective to manage their unique identity is accomplished. Nonetheless, the market-aided identity project is first different from conformity in that the members of the collectivities create ethos and conventions fundamentally dissimilar from what the market intends to propose. Macintosh users and Harley owners may embrace a part of mass-marketized meanings, yet the rest of their identity, shared with other members, is co-created and possibly marketing-free (e.g., Schau, Gilly, and Wolfinbarger 2009). Second, these neo-tribes have to be distinguished from subcultures and countercultures. The presence of brands at the center of group dynamics distinguishes the former from the latter.

The third quadrant is indeed the venue for co-optation as the consumers with high ability to signify and high urge for distinctiveness attempt to devise culturally unique ways (subcultures and countercultures) to pursue authentic identity (although never possible) as opposed to the popularized, mass-produced, or market-aided identity. This extreme case manifests

unconventional consumption phenomena, such as bodily ornaments and plastic surgery, to be co-opted (e.g., (Bengtsson, Ostberg, and Kjeldgaard 2005; Kjeldgaard and Bengtsson 2005). The physical appearance of the members of subcultures and countercultures is the point from which differentiated identities evolve. We can easily distinguish a hippie from a non-hippie and a fanatical skateboarder from the others simply by observing their outfits. Nevertheless, their unique clothing, hair styles, and accessories are just attractive and easy enough to be commercialized by marketers. Thus, the last resort for them is to manipulate their bodies. Bodily images have become central to a consumer's identity project as body has become "reflexively mobilized" for the identity the consumer practices and promotes (Giddens 1991). The re-definition and distortion of their bodies, however, merely redirect the marketers' focus of co-optation to "cultivation and reconstruction" of bodies through diet, cosmetic surgery, tattooing, piercing, and fitness (e.g., Askegaard, Gertsen, and Langer 2002). The "body-industry," including the risk of injury and rehabilitation in extreme sports culture, has become one of the most profitable areas of business (Palmer 2002).

Consumers in the fourth quadrant tend to pursue experiential consumption in thematized commercial spaces, such as theme parks, retail spectacles (i.e., IKEA and ESPN zone), and other tourist attractions, due to their low ability to signify and high urge for distinctiveness. The experiences and images in those places are ready-made signs presented by marketers with which the consumer with low ability to signify can still perform their identity projects. Joining the experiential consumption venues is a quasi-signification that does not require high ability to signify. The hyperreality and simulacra in those places substitute the consumers' low ability to signify due to the characteristics of sign: manipulated, adjusted, modified, and (re)appropriated (Baudrillard 1983; Firat and Venkatesh 1993, 1995). The signs in the hyperreal places cannot

authenticate one's identity, but they are still different enough from real-world signs to distinguish one from those who have not experienced the hyperreality.

The emerging themes (not limited to the general ones), using a discovery-oriented approach (Glaser and Strauss 1967) to the consumer culture dynamics, will facilitate the understanding of theoretically exceptional movements of consumers along the quadrants. The movements involve consumers' self-empowerment for the resistance to the market as well as the selective disempowerment. The underlying logic upon which consumers switch their roles (originally conditioned by the different levels of ability to signify and urge for distinctiveness) is expected to compose the emergent themes. The logic may be quite comparable to the notion of "downshifting" that encapsulates the significance of self-expression and anti-consumerism (Schor 1998). Downshifting entails shifts from material, conformity, invariability, and mass-production to integrity, resistance, multiplicity, and personalization of identity. Building upon this notion, Cherrier and Murray (2007, p. 1) contend that although identity project has to be executed inside consumer culture, its "normative background is not fixed, but rather fluid, and can be deconstructed when it no longer operates within the realm of consumer's world-view." The schema of consumer culture determined by cultural conditions is also expected to be vacillating as consumers shift from one to the other forms (different quadrants in Figure 3) of consumer culture. For example, in Cherrier and Murray's (2007) study, consumers abandon their long-treasured consumption praxis in order to confront institutions, bureaucracy, environmental degradation, and ultimately the market. These are clear instances of consumer self-empowerment. Nonetheless, consumers still find themselves not completely freed from the market hegemony, when they face temptations from the city and Wal-Mart as well as the destructive catharsis potent in shopping. They may have to disempower themselves when confronting such stimuli.

More tangential themes are anticipated to evolve if consumers can locate themselves in any type of consumer culture (quadrant). Those themes may suggest a different perspective of co-optation. That is, the cyclic cultural relationship between consumers and the market (Figure 2) may also be present in other quadrants than the third because a consumer can be highly agential and sometimes acquiescent. Even if some persist in the same quadrants (roles) in the market, the movements of consumers would still create enough interactions between different types of consumers for their future role switching. Co-optations taking place in varied consumer cultural manifestations may eventually connote a re-integration of consumers into a new type of individualism, just as seen through corporate capitalism in modernity, and new types of co-optation as well (e.g., Hong 2009). The new types of co-optation may take place not between consumers and the market, but among different markets. Thus, markets are expected to become more and more akin to the other in terms of their cultural orientations and qualities. Isomorphism in successful business models is evident. For example, to survive global competition, marketers from different markets are compelled to focus on certain dimensions of consumer culture: youth culture, feminine values, technology-savvy, well-being, sexuality, gift-giving, cool, and so on. It is necessary to explain how and why Wal-Mart (a market fostering conformists) has to understand and implement those elements from highbrow (creative and resistant) consumer culture in their business. Similarly, it is ironic to see many tattoo shops, custom-made skateboard shops, and indie rock bands should have their websites or print fliers to advertise their products and events, such as "buy one tattoo and get another free."

The next chapter will explain the methodological issues including research background, recruitment and sampling, supporting literature relevant to the methodologies chosen, and lastly the interpretation strategy.

CHAPTER V

METHODOLOGY

Data Needs

The specific data necessary for the study are threefold. First, each consumer's different

levels of ability to signify and urge for distinctiveness are qualitatively determined by the data

addressing their cultural agency and creativity as well as their perceptions on distinctiveness.

Second, the data that describe consumers' cultural expressions and practices of their identity

projects in daily life as well as in some special occasions (i.e., participation in X-Games) are also

indispensible. Third, the data that depict consumers' self-empowerment and disempowerment,

which help portray their cultural roles, contributing to the marketplace dynamics, are required.

The focal constructs of the study (ability to signify and the urge for distinctiveness)

require the following information from consumers in order to categorize them into the respective

cultural dimensions (see Figure 1): (1) the information necessary to evaluate each consumer's

ability to signify are creativity, personalization, locus of control, self-expression, access to

cultural variety, and peculiar possessions; (2) the information required to understand each

consumer's urge for distinctiveness involve discussions of discomfort from similarity, pursuit of

authenticity, need for social classification, and conformity proneness. In addition, in order to

understand how consumers with different cultural qualities carry out their consumption activities,

given cultural qualities in the market, discussions of day-to-day consumption, their brand uses,

avocations, and different attitudes towards current market system are facilitated. This type of information is also needed to look into any potential deviation from the taxonomized consumption patterns of each segment of consumers, which will add to the current understanding of consumer culture.

Nature of Data

Qualitative data are more suitable for research examining idiosyncratic meanings and values that consumers produce because the data help unearth symbolic connotations and cultural manifestations of the consumption phenomena (Spiggle 1994). The prominent characteristics of qualitative data are "abundance and messiness" (McCracken 1988, p. 25). Because this study aims to reveal the underlying logic (consumers' role) of marketplace dynamics and the subsequent market evolution, qualitative data as fertile and thick representations of consumers' cultural praxis are required. Particularly, in order to acquire the necessary information, in-depth interviews are chosen as the primary data collection method that will provide the semantic, semiotic, and ideological elements of consumption for this study of consumers' roles in the marketplace dynamics.

The technical orientation of the data collection is quasi-ethnographic due to the fact that the time restriction of the in-depth ethnographic interviews and participant observation is unavoidable. Nevertheless, an ethnographic data collection technique (in-depth interview) is appropriate for this study because ethnography not only facilitates the understanding of context specific and individuated cultural patterns and themes but also grants plural perspectives on the social and macro implications of the collected data (e.g., Arnould and Wallendorf 1994; Denzin 1989). As such, the nature and characteristics of the data necessary for this study show a fit with

the ethnographic data collection method in the qualitative research vein. The next section will verify that the selected research context fits the objectives of the study.

Research Background

The annual X Games event is selected as the research context. The choice of this context is to "engage our emotions and senses" with its spectacles and excitements, to "stimulate discovery" from the "expectation-free" ambiance, and to "describe and compare" with other contexts (Arnould, Price, and Moisio 2006). The counter-mainstream-sports ethos of extreme sports represents the subcultural or countercultural values that underpin the events (Quester, Beverland, and Farrelly 2006). It is also frequently quoted that the followers of extreme sports are defying not only gravity but also social standards. In their study of subcultures, such as surfing, skating, and snowboarding, Quester, Beverland, and Farrelly (2006) find freedom the most prominent value shared among the participants of the subcultures. This freedom not only simply denotes the "miles-away from ordinary" but also signifies creativity and true individuality sought in other subcultures (e.g., Arnould and Price 1993; Kate 2002, 2004; Schouten and McAlexander 1995). This deliberate "distancing" from mainstream culture, establishment, social structure, and hegemonic brands ultimately brings much attention and value to the extreme sports event, as a culturally and theoretically rich context for this study of co-optation and the subsequent changes in consumer culture and the market. The co-optation that has already taken place in the event boosts the potential of the X Games to be one of the most suitable contexts for this dissertation studying consumer identity in relation to co-optation. ESPN's wide coverage of the event indicates mainstream cultures' emulation of the cultural deviance exhibited by extreme sports.

The X Games' emphasis on creativity, cultural freedom, and anti-corporatism is apparent in their special interests in indie-rock-bands and XGE (X Games environmentally). Those rock bands are allowed to play live music throughout the event and many wish to convert the opportunity to a contract with mainstream labels. The event uses environment-friendly fuels and recycled paper; however, this does not mean that the spectators refrain from consuming what they normally consume at any other sports events. The event is still a carnivalesque-like paradoxical consumption festival through which authenticity becomes commercialized; resistance to the market is intermingled with or even acclimatized to profit-driven practices; and consumers act multiple roles as they face subcultures/mainstream cultures, conformists/rebels, and co-optation/countervailing forces.

The history of X Games is inseparable from ESPN's commercialization of the action sports since 1993. ESPN's efforts eventually promoted one of the events of snowboarding (freestyle) to the Winter Olympic Games in 2002. Nonetheless, criticisms of the corruption of the original spirit of the sports are also present. For example, the *New York Times* once reported the unexpected and illegitimate proliferation of "X-ification" in resorts and even Winter Olympic Games. Albeit the constant contest against the X Games' status from the inside and outside, the event intensifies and accelerates the cultural fusion between the market and defiant consumers through sponsorships. For example, Mountain Dew is a committed sponsor that tries to build its brand image in connection with the extremeness. This may be viewed as a representation of consumers' multiple modes of being in the marketplace. The performers and spectators drinking Mountain Dew, driving a recent model from Jeep (another sponsor), and even considering the service in US Navy (a sponsor as well) are inconsistent in terms of their presented images. A convergent evolution of consumer culture may be a suitable name for the expansion of

acceptance of the extreme sports. The next section covers the technical and procedural issues of data collection.

Multiplicity of Data Collection

This study employs a multi-sited and multi-layered approach, often used in consumer culture theory literature (e.g., Giesler 2006; Kjeldgaard and Askegaard 2006; Kozinets 2001, 2002; Kozinets and Handelman 2004; Schau and Gilly 2003). A multi-sited data collection facilitates the understanding of the similarities, differences, and confluence between the local and global in terms of consumers' cultural presentations of their identity projects. A multi-sited ethnography helps avoid a limited view of subjects and their cultural conditions in a single setting (Ekstrom 2006). The multi-sited data collection was executed in two X Games events throughout a one year span. A summer X Games event and the following winter X Games event were visited in order to aggregate rich data sources. During the six months term between the two events, members of a local skateboard team were also interviewed in order to draw theoretically insightful contrast and commonality.

A multi-layered approach is employed to obtain different types of data that supplement each other with culturally varied manifestations of subjectivity (e.g., Arnould and Wallendorf 1994). The multi-layered approach that advocates multiple ways to collect data, including interviews, auto-driving, videotaping, and photographs can further ensure the advantages of qualitative data (i.e., diversity and thickness: Bahl and Milne 2006). The multi-layered approach for this study involves ethnographic in-depth interview (primary data source), participant observation, videotaping, and photographs. Participant observation is valued as it grants naturalistic encounters (e.g., McCracken 1989) with the culturally multi-talented consumers and

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their cultural struggles in consumption praxis. Participant observation also enables researchers to peek in "behind the scenes" (Arnould and Wallendorf 1994), as the observation is not confined to the events location but extended to the external contexts of the events, such as shops, restaurants, and accommodations for the performers and spectators. All data collected from the multi-site and multi-layered approach were then imported to the software, QSR NVivo 8 to ensure a systematic coding and interpretation process.

In-depth Interview

Ethnographic interviews, as the primary data source, were conducted at two different levels (local and global) of locations. At the global locations (Summer and Winter X-games), potential informants were approached and asked an initial (qualifying) question if they are actually "doers" of any kind of extreme sports, such as skateboarding, snowboarding, BMX, snowmobile, motor-cross, and skiing. After this determination, if the person agreed to participate in the interview, a brief explanation of the research along with the IRB information was given to the informant before beginning the interview. The interviews were conducted usually on a bench or a stand at the summer X-games locations and in a cafeteria at the winter X-games locations. The members of a local skateboard team were recruited through a local skateboard shop owner, who also participated in an interview. The interviews with the local athletes were conducted in a conference room at a local university or at a local skate park. Due to the potential dilution with youth culture, interviews with younger members (under 18) were avoided.

The interviews were initiated with "grand-tour" questions about the informant's biography and lifestyle (McCracken 1988). The interviewer's role was just to provide the mood and context in which the informants can engage in auto(self)-probing. Enough rapport between the interviewees and the researcher was constantly sought and built to probe further elicitation of

their "lifeworld" and "lived experiences" (e.g., Thompson 1998; Thompson, Locander, and

Pollio 1989). Nonetheless, due to the design of this study to focus on two cultural constructs, the

interviews were semi-structured (see Appendix A for interview protocol). The first part of the

interviews was structured to judge informants' different levels of ability to signify and urge for

distinctiveness. Distinct manifestations of consumer culture were expected to emerge as the

interviews continued. The rest of the interview employed an emic approach with less structured,

categorical, or procedural imposition of meanings and values on the interviews (Arnould and

Wallendorf 1994). This approach is generally expected to generate distortion-free data, which is

also necessary for revealing the emergent themes. As a result, thirty extreme sports participants

were interviewed. The duration of interviews ranged from 20 to 120 minutes. As a rule of thumb,

the number of interviews was determined by whether the data reached preferable levels of

diversity (saturation) and thickness and thus had discontinued revealing additional theoretically

distinctive themes. The interviews, which were all transcribed, yielded a total of 935 double-

spaced pages of texts. The email addresses of the informants were requested for follow-up. The

profiles of informants are presented in Table 1.

Observation

Observations were recorded using fieldnotes, videotapes, and photographs in order to

easily utilize them for the following analyses and interpretations. Overall, 581 photographs were

taken, and approximately 172 minutes, including interviews, of video recording was conducted.

The observational topics of the photographs and video recordings involve athletes' and

spectators' outfits, brands, fashion, language, sponsors, indie rock bands' concerts, general

ambience of the sites, and general consumption practices, including purchase, usage, and

disposal. This type of practice is often recommended and used in ethnographic consumer

research (e.g., Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw 1995; Kjeldgaard and Askegaard 2006; Kozinets 2002; Maclaran and Brown 2005). These spontaneous and intact consumption praxes observed in the contexts can produce cultural themes that further facilitate the understanding of the cultural dynamics in the market. The observational data together with other forms of data are useful to further clarify and grasp the phenomena. Observation facilitates the understanding of indigenous cultural meanings as well as complex and, at times, paradoxical oral and behavioral presentations of consumption, especially when those cultural values and orientations are unconsciously manifested (Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw 1995). In particular, participant observation helps collect more contextualized and less "refracted" data because the researcher experiences what other participants experience. In addition, participant observation sometimes enables a researcher to reverse original conceptualization and/or anticipated cultural plot of the phenomenon of interest, which consequently offers new insights for current and future research (Dewalt 2002).

Epistemology

The extended case method (ECM) is deemed appropriate for this study exploring substantial and dynamic themes of extreme sports participants' identity projects (see Burawoy 1998 for extended case method). The themes are composed of consumers' cultural representations of their micro level management of cultural conditions. Moreover, the emergent themes are expected to unveil the theoretically anomalous parallax of the relationship between consumer culture and co-optation, which has to be based on macro analyses. It is claimed that "the extended case method applies reflexive science to ethnography in order to extract the general from the unique, to move from 'micro' to the 'macro,' and to connect the present to the past in anticipation of the future, all by building on preexisting theory" (Burawoy 1998, p. 5).

The theoretical explanation of the link between the past and the present is also a potential characteristic of the ECM because it searches for the patterns of socio-cultural transformations of the subject matter on the time horizon. Therefore, the historical changes and the following implications in consumer cultures and the market can be shaped as the discovery-oriented themes unfold. Holt (2002) exemplifies the procedure in which micro themes, macro themes, and the historical discussions of branding are presented.

One of the means to facilitate theory reconstruction is Burawoy's (1998) "reflexive model of science – a model of science that embraces not detachment but engagement as the road to knowledge" (p. 5). Reflexive science emphasizes participation, intervention, and multi-fold exploration through dialogues (intersubjectivity) for the expansion of the theory to macro and historical narratives. Reflexive science also regards contexts as "point of departure but not point of conclusion" (Burawoy 1998, p. 13), which is consistent with the convention of consumer culture theory (Arnould and Thompson 2005). Reflexive modernity explains that a society is always self-reflective as its theoretical advances from individual exploration and discoveries become conventions through and by which ordinary individuals are disciplined in the society. Noumenon is the core, nature, and truth of the subject matter we strive to know, and the only way to accomplish the task is to experience the mundane representations of them: phenomena. Consequently, for the ECM, the researcher's participation (phenomenological approach) is a means to reach the core (noumenon) of the subject matter more closely, and the intervention (interviews) is to comprehend the interaction between theories and counter-theories by "laymen (consumers)." This study, therefore, follows this tradition of the ECM.

Genealogy

Foucault (1977, 1997) provides a method that seems quite anti-scientific yet commensurate with the ECM's tradition. Genealogical method stresses deconstruction of the truth that has been constructing human body, relationships, and perspectives. In doing so, genealogy specifically helps elucidate how plurality and contradictions of history have formulated the current status of the truth. Uniformity and/or regularity of history and the truth in particular are refuted as forgotten or marginalized truths become intelligible through postmodern sensibility that advocates multiple ways of being (e.g., Firat and Dholakia 1998, 2006; Firat and Shultz 2001). The knowledge that has been subjugated or disqualified becomes the basis for understanding the "inconvenient truth" at hand. A bipolar view of consumption that segregates agentic consumers from non-agentic ones appears to serve the discourse producing a calcified truth that has been masking different possibilities of power relations in the market. Scholarly erudition coupled with local memories and knowledge (collected data) will help originate a new discourse as one of the forms that the power relations in the market can take.

Interpretation

The possibly disjointed and less meaningful textual data from the multi-layered approach are coded, sorted, and bundled together through QSR Nvivo 8 to empirically restructure the semiotic schema of consumer culture (Figure 3) and analyze macro and socio-historical implications of the schema (cf. Arnould and Wallendorf 1994). Following Thompson (1997) and Spiggle (1994), a creative, playful, subjective, and yet substantially translative hermeneutics is expected to yield meaningfully interpreted and theoretically contributing themes of the consumer cultural dynamics in the market, based on consumers' transformative ideologies and performances.

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The hermeneutical approach is also pertinent to the intra-textual analysis and inter-textual analyses that produce context-specific outcomes followed by general interpretations of the contextualized findings (e.g., Thompson, Locander, and Pollio 1989). In addition, the hermeneutics involves continuous iterations between data-specific interpretation and the emergent understanding of the schemata presented by the data (Spiggle 1994; Thompson 1997). The hermeneutical approach also puts an emphasis on the idiosyncratic or autonomous nature of the qualitative data, which has to be maintained for different perspectives that may evolve from the data (Arnold and Fischer 1994). Because the texts bear the potential to reveal what even the owner or author of the texts do not know or understand, the thick descriptions kept in the coded texts must be interpreted in a "humanistic-naturalistic" way (Arnold and Fischer 1994, p. 61). Consequently, a hermeneutical approach is suitable for this study because: it is coherent to the epistemological basis (reflexivity) of the study; this study originates from the discovery-orientation for its emergent themes; the nature of the data is fundamentally textual and narrative; and the approach can produce macro, historical, and general understandings of the data from a micro and specific context.

TABLE 1. Informants Profiles

Pseudonym	Age	Sex	Education	Residence	Occupation	Interview Location
Jack	20	M	College student	South Texas	Student	Local park
Ruben	24	M	BA	Vail, Colorado	Hotel manager	Winter X-games
Ron	28	M	BA	New Hampshire	Filmmaker; Hotel Valet	Winter X-games
Randi	5~	M	BA	Los Angeles	Rental Car Manager	Summer X-games
Zac	20	M	College student	South Texas	Student	Local Park
Abby	30	F	BA	Los Angeles	Director of marketing (TV station)	Winter X-games
Ralph	52	M	MBA	Alaska	Instructor of business ethics	Winter X-games
Hank	35	M	BA	"Nomadic"	Snowboard instructor	Winter X-games
Nash	25	M	BSc	Los Angeles	Engineer	Summer X-games
Chen	30	M	BSc	Beijing, China	Chinese Ski Association	Winter X-games
Cali	20	F	College student	Indiana	Student	Winter X-games
Baker	40	M	High school	Los Angeles	Police officer; former BMX athlete	Summer X-games
Cale	44	M	High school	Aspen, Colorado	Ski instructor	Winter X-games
Sabrina	28	F	BA	Aspen, Colorado	Public service personnel	Winter X-games
Marc	24	M	BSc	Los Angeles	TV production	Summer X-games
Anne	46	F	BA	Denver, Colorado	Meeting planning business	Winter X-games
Brant	24	M	High school	Duluth, Minnesota	Snowmobile athlete	Winter X-games
Kacy	50	F	BA	Denver, Colorado	Housewife	Winter X-games
Chad	17	M	High school	Aspen, Colorado	High school Student	Winter X-games

Celia	41	M	BA	Beaumont, Texas	Housewife	Summer X-games
John	58	M	BA	Lost Angeles	Artist; painter	Summer X-games
Ted	23	M	BA	Los Angeles	Marketing for Quicksilver	Summer X-games
Corby	26	M	BA	Sydney, Australia	Student	Winter X-games
Russ	4~	M	BA	Atlanta, Georgia	Former MotoX athlete	Winter X-games
Kimberly	35	M	BSc	Bend, Oregon	OR nurse	Winter X-games
Dana	28	F	Highschool	Aspen, Colorado	Bartender	Winter X-games
Hanna	28	F	BA	Colorado	Parts manager in a motorcycle shop	Summer X-games
George	4~	M	BSMD	Brazilia, Brazil	Medical doctor	Winter X-games
Pam	4~	F	BA	Connecticut	Housewife	Winter X-games
Kai	38	M	Associate degree	South Texas	Skateboard shop owner	Local Park

CHAPTER VI

CONSUMERS IN THE CONTEXT

The Sites

The X games events radiate so much synergetic cultural energy into the public space of

our time as the crowd seemed to create and embrace eccentricity and diversity that would not be

easily available in any other venues. Summer X-games 2008 were held in multiple locations in

Los Angeles, California for four days. The locations include the Staples Center for Big Air, Park,

and Vert (names of different skateboard and BMX competitions) as well as the Home Depot

Center for MotoX (automobile racing). Winter X-games 2009 took place at the Buttermilk Ski

Resort in Aspen, Colorado for four days. The winter events include ski, snowboard, and

snowmobile. Unlike the summer events, admission for the winter events is free. Both exhibited

an almost identical atmosphere, crowd, sponsors, and cultural richness. The only exception

would be the athletes' and the crowd's outfits from different brands.

"Freestyle" was encouraged in almost every aspect of the event. The commentators,

crowd, security guards, and the athletes all performed respective roles with a few or "no strings

attached," but all seemed to respect the rule guided by freedom. Unlike many other sports events,

such as the Olympics or World Cup Soccer, there was no tension or hostility expressed amongst

the athletes and the crowd even though the event and the venue were organized for a series of

competitions. It seemed that the winners would be the consumers who could collect the most

cultural elements for his or her identity project. The events provided a multitude of possibilities for consumers to keep their identities updated or reevaluated, utilizing the new styles, trends, and brands. Competition became less important when everyone sought for their own cultural substances and materials. Even those who "do" extreme sports did not necessarily support a particular athlete. They, instead, focused on the new "tricks and flips."

Nobody would interfere with anybody, and the role of the security guards was merely to provide directions to different venues. During the duration of the events, the researcher did not see or hear any signs of alcoholic substances brought to the sites, or of any public disturbance. Considering the cultural intensity of the events and the stereotypical images of extreme sports and its followers, the "worryfree" environment was quite impressive. Followings are the initial descriptions and analyses of the sites based on photographs, videotaped observations, and fieldnotes.

Inverted Conformity

The fact that extreme sports are no longer an effective means with which one identifies him/herself as an outsider of the mainstream is evident in the brand names of the venues. Extreme sports are now totally commercialized, planned (as opposed to improvisatory or spontaneous ethos of the sports), broadcasted, and money-making enterprise of the co-opting (marketers) and the voluntarily co-opted parties (participants). Surprisingly, most in the crowd, allegedly counter-culturalists, do not seem to exhibit peculiarity in terms of their outfits, behaviors, and possibly interests. Most share the same brands and styles (i.e., baggy shorts, skateboard shoes, flat visor caps, and some tattoos) as the rest of the crowd. Ironically, the researcher stands out because of the popularized brands (Nike shoes and Red Sox cap) and styles (cargo shorts and Polo short sleeves). If one is not familiar with the details of the styles, the

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difference would not be noticeable since the styles do not necessarily deviate so much from what the researcher wears. However, there are a handful number of brands widely adopted by the majority and distinct styles that define who the crowd is. Those traditional styles and highly commercialized brands do not appeal the crowd. As a result, an extremely "normal" style becomes so visible. It is a "the tail wagging the dog" situation *per se*, and thus it seems unclear if anyone (dis)conforms to anything. The majority that does not conform to the general guidelines of sartorial expression now conforms to the norms of the particular group of consumers who try not to conform to the greater norms. Conformity (Nike) clearly becomes counter-conformity in the context, in which disconforming minority becomes the norm, and *vice versa* is also witnessed. This "inverted-conformity" is shown in Picture 1 in appendix A that shows the "popularized style of shoes" widely observed in the venue.

The Legitimate and the Illegitimate

The context seemed suitable for any possible occasion, such as friends get together for youngsters, killing time for anyone, dating for couples, and even quality family time. The mix and exuberance of distinct cultural elements from a range of life modes (i.e., peer groups, families, and dating couples) create an atmospheric transformation that subverts the general expectations by a novice participant (i.e., the researcher) and enables consumers to escape the quotidian script that tends to be less dynamic and imaginative.

Recycling is a very noticeable element of the event that shows the participants' awareness of their responsibility, and it is particularly designed for young children who may be less aware of the important practice (see Picture 2 and 3 in the appendix B). It is quite unexpected to see that recycling is successfully practiced in an event, which somewhat more than

300,000[14] people have attended. Consumption of regular foods or drinks on the site is not easily accomplished because of the limited number of concessions with minimal assortments. These all may be seen as indications of an anti-corporate capitalism movement. However, the movement, if not misunderstood, is contaminated with alternative music, fashion, radio (TV) stations, organic products, and brands (see pictures 4 and 5 in appendix B) that occupy respective booths and promote their "stuff" just as many mainstream marketers do. Moreover, amongst the booths, some are taken by easily recognizable brands (i.e., Mountain Due, Jeep, Taco Bell, Oakley, New Balance, Play Station, and Edge), which, in fact, confuses the legitimate with the illegitimate of the ethos of the sports. For many extreme sports fans and their tradition, commercialization and corporate influences were originally the points to resist, but they are now forced to embrace or at least acquiesce in the commercialism (which they generally mock) prevalent in the sports. Those popular brands adopted into the sports are now tainting the legitimate "grassroots" brands invented by true followers of the sports. The presence of the US Navy for recruitment purposes is also somewhat surprising because of the generally expected tendencies of young extreme sports participants who do not show an ideological fit with military discipline and loyalty (see picture 6 in appendix B).

Common Good

There were organizations present to help and facilitate breast cancer patients, injured athletes, teens in need of developmental guides, and environmental consciousness. The booths were operated by volunteering and enthusiastic young people, and most of them are also extreme sports participants. They proclaim in their brochures and websites that it is very possible and desirable to bring public attention to social responsibility through the sports events. In practice,

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[14] http://www.espneventwrapups.com/xgamesfourteen/About/Overview.aspx

the grass-roots type of social movements that those organizations pursue is very much similar to the corporate capitalists' approaches, such as corporate social responsibility and cause-related marketing. In principle, however, their philosophy is different from that of bigger organizations or companies in that they do not target many and unspecified persons in their social-connecting (sponsoring) programs. They prefer mentoring, personalized help, and individual "cliques" by which an individual in need is more carefully selected and given a more intimate and relevant aid instead of mass-producing and distributing "inferior benevolence." The individuality-oriented mentality of the sports seems to have been transformed into a community-oriented philanthropic endeavor as many (e.g., Cova, Kozinets, Shankar 2007; Mafessoli 1996) have noted that tribalization of consumers is almost inevitable (see Picture 7 in appendix B).

Elements of Consumer Cultural Quality

Before looking into the polysemic manifestations of individual consumer agency in consumption and the dynamics in the market concerning co-optation, each informant's cultural quality (based on the ability to signify and urge for distinctiveness) is qualitatively examined in order to understand general consumption patterns and styles of different consumers. The initial analysis of the data begins with a thorough reading of the transcriptions of the interviews followed by the process in which different cultural elements representing respective consumer groups, and the process is repeated until no more theoretically obscure or contradictory interview content emerges. The excerpts from the interviews that illustrate the informants' cultural qualities are presented in Appendix C.

Indicators of High Ability to Signify (HAS)

Based on denotative readings of transcriptions, 14 interviewees showing the cultural elements (indicators) in Table 2 are categorized as consumers of HAS. The "competing meanings" in the initial denotative readings are the bases of understanding how different consumers observe, internalize, (re)produce, and communicate meanings of consumption and the materials for identity projects (cf. Mannings 1987). The second column in Table 2 represents operationalizations of the definition of the ability to signify. As shown, the denotative meanings in the first column correspond to the definition of the construct. Consumers' HAS is represented mostly by creativity, reminiscence (memory or nostalgia), personalization, unusual experience, relationship-orientation, experimentation, and, especially, being outdoors as the first priority for extreme sports participants. It is an observation that valuing "being outdoors" is not only the inception, but also the quintessence of the signification process for many interviewees showing HAS. In Appendix C, each indicator of HAS is explained with excerpts from the interview transcriptions.

TABLE 2. HAS Indicators

Denotative Readings (Indicators)	Definitional Correspondence (Operationalization)	Connotative Meanings (Themes of HAS)	Informants
Non-negotiable pursuit of happiness	Impracticality	The happiest vocation	Cali Baker Kai
Valuing being outdoors	Impracticality		
Seeking a fun job	Individuated meanings		
Arduous personalization	Valuing sings & Individuation		
Nostalgia	Impracticality	Exclusive reminiscence	Ron Clair Zac Ralph
Self-definition by time	Practicing idiosyncratic identity		

"Scarvenirs" Cherished possession Collection Relationship Memory Diary	Valuing signs & impracticality		
Eccentricity Anti-emptiness No plainness	Valuing signs & Individuation	The unbearable emptiness of being	Hank Zac Corby Ruben Ron Cale
Personal setup	Creating and practicing idiosyncratic identity		
Creative risk-taking Manual-free Mix & Match Hodgepodge Taking initiative	Creating and practicing idiosyncratic identity	Audacious hybridization of material	Abby Hank Sabrina
Unusual experience Self-amusement Substance Experiment	Valuing signs Individuation & Practicing idiosyncratic identity	Experimental Lifestyle	Hank George
Karma Awareness	Valuing signs Impracticality & Practicing idiosyncratic identity	Metaphysical worldview	Ruben Cale

Subsequent connotative readings as the second stage of the "semiotic clustering method"
yield metaphoric and metonymic themes of the denotative indicators, which include reflections
of the researcher's intrinsic and subjective grips and perspectives of the phenomena of interest.
Connotative readings aim not only to reveal the interrelations of the indicators, but more
importantly, to extract the inter-subjective values and inter-textual meanings shared among
informants (Feldman 1995). Accordingly, the HAS construct appears to be multi-faceted.
Consumers with HAS develop or find methods to more precisely portray and pursue their

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lifestyles, which pertains to identity discourse on a daily basis as the consumers mention that they constantly refine their self-images through extreme sports. HAS displays the multi-fold, transformative, characteristics of an individual because the construct deeply permeates into different levels (i.e., individual vs. social) and dimensions (i.e., relationship, (a)vocation, possession, and experience) of self-identity, as well as into the means to manage the "high maintenance" task, identity project. There were six convergent themes identified from the semiotic clustering. Each of these themes represents a distinct way in which consumers with HAS engage in the sense-making of their lives in relation to (at times in opposition to) social norms, enticing marketing influence, pseudo-authentic cultural materials, and conformity-ridden socio-cultural environment.

The Happiest Vocation. For some extreme sports participants, being outdoors transcends traditional value, which underlines institutional education, and separatedness between occupation and hobby. Such transcendental perspectives of individual lifestyle correspond to the definition of ability to signify that emphasizes individuated meaning generation and pursuit of idiosyncrasy. The importance of formal education (socially created meaning) is undermined as an informant values lived experiences obtained outdoors, and the divide between work and hobby (socially constructed value) is nullified when an extreme sports participant finds individual meanings of life from continuously riding anything and everything. Outdoor activities provide materials and contexts for those consumers to create their own life values and discover individual versions of happiness.

As a sophomore at one of the Ivy League schools, Cali expresses her keen appreciation for outdoor activities by mentioning that her most powerful motivation is to be outdoors. Her ambition is to establish a grass-roots snowboard equipment brand, and she believes that to do so

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requires a high commitment to outdoor activities. She believes this commitment will help her achieve her dream:

> *I would say well just being out here in the industry and being able to network with all the different sponsors and all the different athletes and workers it's a great opportunity for me and that's the greatest motivation for me to come back from school umm for every competition….(about her dream) I will start off by saying that a lot of people at my school….We're all getting ready to declare our majors and everything and a lot of people are picking them for the money or whatever they think is going to produce the highest value right out of college. That's great. That's not my philosophy at all. I'd rather do it for the love because if I can wake up and do this for the rest of my life where it doesn't feel like it's a job then I've succeeded period. And this is the only thing that I have found thus far that makes me so happy, and I don't mean to imply that I'm choosing it by default, but I mean it is….When I am happiest is when I'm out here.*

It may be somewhat risky for any college student to skip classes in order to pursue more immediate and tangible happiness, but Cali's HAS helps her prioritize different kinds of happiness she would pursue in comparison to the norms of success strictly inflicted upon younger generations. She signifies her lifestyle as a consumer when she cruises downhill wearing the virtually unknown grassroots snowboarding brand for which she is working. Her signification socio-politically compromises her status as an elite student, but it is a valid statement of her lifestyle because it is still very relevant to her vocational ambition. In contrast to the normative guidelines of career development that is usually determined by hard work, seriousness, commitment, and work ethics, she chooses what brings pure happiness and philosophical autonomy to her.

Baker, a former BMX athlete and currently an active police officer, manages his life in accordance with his passion for riding:

> *Well, for one, I don't feel like a police officer, I don't look like a police officer. There are a lot of police officers who look like police officers with their uniform on or not. At my job, I'm not the typical you know officer, I'm a little bit different. I guess, I'm not, it's hard to explain it. You know how the typical*

police officer is... I can't elaborate a whole lot. But I'm not the typical police officer. The reason I got hired was mostly because of my background, with bike riding and everything else.... Well....dream job, to ride my bike forever. I mean I have the dream job. It's one of the things that I could work outdoor, I don't have to be inside all the time. I drive around all the time. I love to drive. Yeah, I always thought that chasing people in pursuits would be fun. It is. It's a great job, I love it.

The demarcation between vocation and avocation is very blurred for Baker, and it is in fact intended and deliberately sought in a way that he can continue to design and perform his lifestyle with his own values as opposed to those typical vocational guidelines. His unique lifestyle and philosophy of life are not merely indicative of his distinction-orientation but his ability to signify because it is less explainable that one chooses a risky and underpaid job to present distinctiveness. Given the fact that Baker is a forty year old police officer, it seems quite symptomatic of the prevalent mentality among extreme sports participants that personally defined happiness precedes financial freedom and socially desirable achievement. It is a situation of "I name it, I deliver it."

By definition, creative and individuated engagement in every moment of life is a component of consumers' ability to signify. This aspect of the construct transposes the conventional meanings and norms of work/hobby and transgresses the schematic boundary of the two (e.g., Tian and Belk 2005). In other words, consumers of this kind constantly synchronize their activities, hobbies, jobs, dreams, aspirations, and ideologies with "the happiness" they have been projecting and simulating. The happiest self, for them, would be a "synchronized self," which is more than just an extended self with potential disjunctures on the time, spatial, and material horizons of self (cf. Belk 1988). As individuals extend their selves, they become somewhat "polydactyl" with minimal or nominal coherence among extensions. The synchronization, however, would cause a tension to a certain degree because the socio-politico-

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cultural environment they face does not encourage them to playfully construct their own lives, especially when there are more traditional values conflicting with individuated value schemata (i.e., skipping classes; chasing a suspect for fun).

The postmodern prosthetic self has enjoyed the proliferation of self through mobility, availability, and immediateness of the material for self-expression and identity (re)construction (Lury 2001). Some individuals (consumers with HAS) today even outdate prostheticity of self and propose a more congruent identity that shows no, or at least less, dissonance among the self-portrayals for different time and space (Ahuvia 2005). However, from the conversations with Cali and Baker, unlike Ahuvia's (2005) findings, it is noted that the congruence of identity is not necessarily a product of dialectics that requires a sacrifice or modification of an identity. They simply pursue a transcendental happiness in performing their identity projects rather than a compromised one. Cali added:

> *If it's a person that is just kind of....They just have the illusion of being a ski bum and they just want to come up and do the tour. I don't think it's going to last and I think they will either drop out of school or drop out of the circuit so I think that it's easy for me to say yes to that (a question if she is able to manage the conflict between school and snowboarding) because I know that this is where I belong and I'm so motivated and driven to break into this industry....*

Instead of pursuing a "meet halfway" type of identity, Cali is very self-assured in the ideal position of herself with regard to time, space, and ideology, which indicates HAS because of her future orientation compared to the instant pleasure pursued by "ski bums," conscious choice of the space she wants to be, and ideological counterproposal to the current market dynamics (grassroots brands). Her HAS is also evident in that she refuses major brands and styles but creates her own fashion and hair style.

For Baker, his job is peripheral and subordinate to his passion of riding, but he successfully maintains the congruence of identity as he drives on the street. His happiness goes

on, "It's just something that everybody has to get a job. I had to get one. I'm happy with it." He found the job in order to maintain the happiness he pursues outside all the time. Accordingly, the profession of police officer is not an outcome of his internal struggle dealing with two incongruent identities. He signifies as he chooses not to grow out of the "happy riding."

Exclusive Reminiscence. For some extreme sports participants, identity "props" tend to be very specific and very circumspectly chosen. Instead of having multiple less related historic possessions and the attached memories that may or may not facilitate identity project, some develop very special and enduring relationships with their reminiscent material. In contrast to the construct of extended self that addresses the 'sense of past' as one of many ways to describe self and subsequently claim our identities (Belk 1988), some informants utilize only one or very few cultural artifacts in order to maintain the most salient identity protected from the dilution with other identities. Ron associates his collection of skis with his identity narrative:

> *....I ride them until they're completely broken, and then it's just, like, you know there are not a lot of things that you have. Like, a lot of the things that I've had, like skis, or photography, or pants, or certain long underwear stuff that I've had for a long time; it's beautiful and you…just associate that activity with, ah, particular things. And that's almost when I…Like, I have a lot of grievances with consumerism, but with a thing like a ski, with skis, or a snowboard you really spend a lot of time…a lot of time with it, do a lot of time with it……learning how to use it and then you just have a lot of experiences with it, like, for a pair of skis, or surfboard, or something like that, so it becomes something very immediately related to the story that you have….*

Ron's identity is not constructed around materials that represent trend, luxury, success, or social status; rather, it is based on the material, in which he immerses, and the lived experiences from the material with which he constantly identifies himself as he accumulates more embodied experiences (skis and poles) rather than abandoning them as most do. The lived experience here for consumers with HAS is to walk along the borderline between consumer agency and socially

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imposed symbolic meanings widely available and accepted for consumer identity project (e.g., Murray 2002; Thompson and Haytko 1997). In other words, instead of buying a new fashionable pair of skis for his unique identity as an extreme sports enthusiast, he tries to sustain his historically developed identity based on his identity narratives about his experiences with skis. Capitalizing on the cultural artifacts that foster isomorphic identities, consumers with HAS show competence in constructing novel stories of their own, which later translate into identity narratives that continuously invite more immersion. The total immersion in the scaffolding identity does not necessarily mean a total rejection of all other "pseudo-selves" that are still necessary to neutralize the influence of the marketized symbols and internally reprocess the meanings (Giddens 1991). The collection of broken skis is the practice of defusing the grieved consumerism, and the moment of recollection activates his signification through which identity narratives become congruent. Ron enjoys the process of defining and refining his identity: "Like, it's…every time I have, like, experience like that, I just, like, keep adding these on and I'm, like, "Wow!" It's just…My life just gets better all the time, because, just, like, you know, time naturally… defines me."

Integrating the fragmented identities required by modernity in a postmodern context is an indicator of consumers' ability to signify. To reverse the "loss of the identifiable," as one of the prominent characteristics of contemporary identity discourse in which multiplicity is taken for granted, is to create an identity less volatile than the inadvertently fragmented one (Gergen 1991). Authenticity, in this sense, appears to be the degree of the relevance of multiple identities and the immersion in the principal identity. A continuous fragmentation of self by conforming to the rhetorical assumptions that we become happier and more patriotic as we assign multiple identities to numerous products, experiences, contexts, and brands is simply inauthentic (e.g.,

Rinehart 2008). Exclusive reminiscence is a meditation stage of a consumer who suffers or is

disoriented by the "vertigo" of the unavoidable fragmentation (Caillois 1961). The specsumers

(spectator/consumer) of X games are an extremely vulnerable population to the bewilderment

from the ever-transforming consumption milieu in which an identity is idolized then quickly

maligned as more "prefabricated desires" become available by marketers (Hughes 2004). One

way to remedy the vertigo is to collect and recollect the memorables that shield the identity from

the massified identity.

The projection of congruent identities develops further when the memories and

reminiscent materials take physical form. Cali materializes her identity as she puts the mosaic

pieces of her identity narrative together:

> *I will never ever ever ever trade in or sell an old pair of skis or snowboard*
> *because I make have you ever seen the benches that are designed out of*
> *them….Well just because it's our own personal equipment that we're putting*
> *into these pieces of furniture it's just a little bit nostalgic I guess in the sense*
> *that you know you have so many memories and so many runs you know maybe*
> *you took that set of skis to Whistler Blackcomb or maybe you took that*
> *snowboard on a snowcap in New Zealand or maybe went to the Swiss Alps. I*
> *mean there's a million of different things that you could've done on those and*
> *so it's a way to keep them around and I will never ever sell them as that like*
> *raw material or as a finished product I will always keep them.*

As the skis and poles enter and start playing an indexical role in her identity narrative, they

become agents with which she composes the narrative together (Epp and Price 2010). The

indexicality of the chosen identity "props" intensifies the emotional and ideological attachment

to the benches she has made because the indexical signs (benches) invoke individual experiences

and unforgettable moments of life (Grayson and Martinec 2004; Grayson and Shulman 2000;

Peirce 1998). Bestowing agency on the reminiscent materials (benches made of broken skis and

poles) is the ultimate form of signification because one's identity can be in synchronization with

the agent (bench) unless the primary agent (Cali) recommodifies the material (selling or

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abandoning) or drops the lived experiences from the identity narrative (Epp and Price 2010). The agency of the object reinforces the significance and prolongs the duration of the identity as the representative of fragmented identities. This identity and the following materialization is chosen and maintained based on indexes and therefore indicates HAS.

For skateboarders, broken boards are "scarvenirs (scar and souvenirs)" that also represent both object and agency. The objects (boards) become an agent as the skateboarder interacts (rides) with the reminiscent material. The identity narrative of a skateboarder is characterized not solely by his socio-cultural orientation and/or ideological standpoint but with the spontaneous and improvisational experiences that have unfolded while on the boards. Zac thanks his boards for being an agent around which his identity narrative evolves:

> *I mean, like…like broken boards…still laying around and old shoes… don't know. It's kind of, like…kind of like skateboarding…souvenirs or a trophy, or it's, like, "Look what I did!" It's, like, I don't know, like, it means something. It's just, like, a sense of, like, I don't know, I guess, all that board did for you and, like, the good…like, good things came with that board……and then it broke, and it's just, like……it's, "Thanks – for being there." It's just, like, you can't just throw it away.*

As such, empowering object agency and capitalizing on it is "hyper-signification" because signification is, by definition, imbuement of meanings upon objects rather than conferment of agency or ontological definition (e.g., Zwick and Dholakia 2006). The object itself is not the means of signification, but the end product of signification, which dictates the identity narrative.

The Unbearable Emptiness of Being. Consumers with HAS see marketized material as empty and thus exert effort to supplement the "kitsch" of commoditized cultural products with their own kitsch. The borderline between HAS and LAS is whether or not a consumer performs personalization of cultural materials in the commercial domain in order to use them for the composition of identity narrative. It is surely an oxymoron to say "individualized kitsch."

Nonetheless, the demarcation between consumer-generated and market-generated kitsch becomes vivid as consumers with HAS adorn the tangible objects and transform the meanings of commoditized material as a part of their identity projects. Those who experience emptiness from the "symbols for sale" try to fill the lack of cultural and ideological representation of the material. What is missing in the kitsch produced by marketers is not cultural substance, but the relevance to the consumer's lifestyle that has to be present for a more congruent identity. Personalization involves not only physical and aesthetical modification and/or embellishment but also hardly sensible cultural showcase. Hank's personalization of his car evidences the possibility to personalize tangibles with intangibles:

> *I bought this brand new Suzuki. I was thinking, "Would I paint it green? Would I to take it to the paint shop, and paint it, like, lime green? No. I probably wouldn't…. I drove here today blasting that band, Meshugga, out of my car, absolutely cranked up to the…to eleven on the sound system in my car, y'know? I love the music, but maybe I enjoy the fact that everybody can hear all this crazy heavy metal coming out of my car….Maybe I like that. I don't know why I do that. It must be some sort of…some sort of, like, "Look at me!" thing. I don't know. I do it. I don't know. Maybe that's personalizing my, er…my car….myself, or….*

Playing heavy metal music as loud as possible is the individualized kitsch that is deployed to neutralize (in fact, stuff) the popularized (empty) kitsch (the vehicle) in the totalitarian marketplace as Horkheimer and Adorno (1976) named "culture industry." It may be seen as a selective disclosure of identity as the heavy metal band is not popular enough to be easily identifiable. Only the people who recognize the music can roughly map out the individual's cultural position in the web of myriad of identities. Consequently, the pursuit of a congruent identity in this case again shows a quite distanced perspective from the dialectical view of identity project because a negotiated identity would have required him to play a more

popular music that could still approximately represent him. When negotiation in personalization is simply "deprioritized" or forgotten, consumers' ability to signify seems to culminate.

Consumers with HAS personalize their possessions with their own kitsch not to differentiate, but to "complete" meaning production in the desire-purchase-use (own)-disposal (including re-commodification and gift giving) process. Meanings imprinted on the consumer goods are incomplete rather than inferior or too clichéd. Detecting the incompleteness and the following treatment is an apparent practice among consumers with HAS. Zac would not tolerate emptiness:

> *Oh yeah, I actually do something unique to all of my skateboards. Erm, there's a brand… That's, like, it's called Skate Mental…and, so, like, we had a board in the shop one time, I remember, and I sold the board and in…and a lot of times the boards up there are, like, stencils……like for scraping……so I took…I took the stencil from…it said "Skate Mental"… …and I cut the "Mental" part off, so all it says is "Skate" and then, upper left hand corner of all my boards I put…I spray-paint "Skate"… …on top of my grip tape….and so, that's kind of, like, a personalized thing….[About stickers on his skateboards] But it just makes huge difference. 'Cause they just look…It just looks empty. So you…but, I mean, even though there's a picture, it still looks empty, and like…like I said, my school stuff, it just looks empty, and so I just have to…put things. It looks complete. It's just like personalization. Like, it doesn't really feel like mine unless I don't…like, I do something to it. Like, my phone, like, it's just a phone, but now it's the one with the skateboard on it. That one's mine, you know? That's me and then, like, all my stuff is just, like, plain and…. just kinda, like, putting my signature on everything.*

His personalization is neither a self-extension to spatial domain (Tian and Belk 2005) nor a practice of "debranding" (Coupland 2005), but rather an attempt to playfully transform the market-generated cultural meanings of his possessions in order to have no discrepancy or disjuncture between his identity and the materials. Incongruence creates the cultural, aesthetic, and ideological emptiness in the vector of self-identity, rather than a linear extension of self because contemporary consumer identity is not merely a matter of "me or not me" but multi-dimensional and multi-directional. The remedy is to fill the vector space with one's own

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"signature," which is the true representation of self. Zac, as a fanatic of extreme sports, makes "normal" products and experiences abnormal (Smith, Fisher, and Cole 2007), but the "abnormalization" of the normal is a necessary condition for signification.

Abnormalization needs to be applied to a normal body. Any given body is subject to distortion due to its monotony. Corby is an Australian who frequently visits the United States to expose himself to more (he believes) excitement and newer cultural substances. His identity narrative revolves around fun and thrill as he plays his guitars and participates in cart-racing. Thus, plain skin without any playfulness makes him bored:

> *[About his tattoo] It's interesting. It's something, y'know, a little bit more…more interesting, y'know, than plain skin, I suppose, y'know? Yeah. You can tell, plain skin…like, plain skin can be really nice, but it can be boring sometimes too, as well, right? Yeah, but it has meaning as well, like, it's…it's kind of decoration, y'know? It's the same as wearing a T-shirt - with a T-shirt on, y'know?*

Theories contend that bodily ornaments would be the "scraping the barrel" for identity (re)construction (e.g., Belk 1988; Giddens 1991). However, for Corby, tattooing is no different from wearing clothes. His identity might be seen very *passé* because of his unselective utilization of mass-marketized products and experiences; nevertheless, what makes his identity authentic and congruent is the constant pursuit of fun, which tends to be supplemented with low-brow kitsch. The story of how he had his tattoo, which he refers to "the meaning," is highly improvisational and hardly meaningful:

> *I got it [the tattoo] when I was, er, twenty-one, in San Francisco. Yeah. `Cause I came to America, and I traveled around everywhere, and went to Las Vegas, and I won a lot of money on roulette, in Las Vegas, used that money and bought a tattoo and bought a guitar, and, y'know….Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. It's...It's...It's actually a twenty-three in Roman numerals, because twenty-three is what I won all the money on – the number twenty-three….Well, like, twenty-three is kinda, like, a special number. Like, it's always been a special number for me. It's er…and in…in Vegas, I…I met someone who was playing, as well, at the same*

> *table as me, and she said to me, "Twenty-three. Best number in the world!"*
> *And I was, like, "Yeah! It is the best number in the world!"*

Corby' ability to signify corresponds to his clear objective in life, having fun, and the ability is

materialized through his eternal journey for instant pleasure, which is quite abnormal in

comparison to general social expectations. The abnormality, however, becomes the most

important asset to present oneself in the vector of identity discourse. His signification through

tattooing the lucky number on his body substantiates that he values individuated meanings more

than practical and socially constructed ones and is proud of his choice of such a lifestyle.

Audacious Hybridization of Material

> *…. I think I like to mix a lot of color, lots of unique pieces. I love to wear fun*
> *jewelry, wear crazy hats, or, you know, a great pair of shoes. I love.…I work in*
> *a very creative environment - I'm a marketer.…and so, I've never worn a suit to*
> *work, and I felt…feel like, if I had to wear a suit to work, I would feel very*
> *stuffy…I would feel kind of part of the expression of myself is…is how I present*
> *myself, and the wild or creative or funky things that I wear, that are…that…*
> *that   express my creativity, and express my, you know, my desire, my… my, you*
> *know, risk-taking. You know? (Abby).*

Creativity for Abby requires risk-taking that differs from traditional senses of creativity

as a prerequisite to produce idiosyncrasy (Schau, Gilly, and Wolfinbarger 2009). In line with

aforementioned facets of HAS, risk-involved creativity invalidates the received view of identity-

negotiation. Abby's creativity is almost a rejection of the "manual" of consumption as she states,

"I make things up. I don't follow recipe books. I have a few, but never use them. Yes. I am not a

recipe follower. I have… I think it's probably good for my creativity. I don't want to follow a

recipe. I want to make something up myself." Non-negotiation is a pure risk for a contemporary

consumer who needs to define self in relation to a range of contexts, consumers, politics,

aesthetics, and ideologies. Unbendable identity performance, however, is highly rewarding. The

non-negotiated elements of an identity are the high-risk investment seeking high-return to the

ongoing identity project. The practices of eccentricity and anomaly enhance creativity and thus facilitate stylization of self-identity (Murray 2002). For Abby, deviation is analogous to signification. She had just bought a pair of yellow python heels (fourinches high) that she matched with jeans and a grey cocktail dress. She habituates herself to high-risk, hodgepodge, and avant-garde self-expression, asserting her own identity, and the process involves different contexts and time horizons, such as home, work, and social gathering. The constant pursuit of non-negotiated identity indicates that her identity tends to be congruent in principle as well as in practice and thus possibly authentic in a sense that authenticity means the degree of relevance or congruence of identities in the identity vector (non-linear) space.

Becoming a hybrid is one of the most effective ways to stylize an identity differentiated from identities built upon commercialized meanings and values. The marketized images and cultural elements a hybrid identity employs cancel out (deconstruct) each other and synthesize into an "uncopyable" identity. Hank hybridizes himself, "Er, yes, snowboards – I sticker them. I put stickers on them, to make them look weird. I put all that personalized stuff. Er, well, I personalize my appearance in some ways. I mean, look, I'm wearing, like, skinny jeans and I'm wearing, like, hiking boots, and I'm wearing, like, skier sun-glasses….and I'm wearing, like, a pretty normal vest, `n, y'know, I mix it up a little bit….so, er, nobody else is gonna look like me, probably…." Hybridization encompasses multiple dimensions of identity discourse: local/global, individuated/commercialized, and stylized/stigmatized (e.g., Cvetkovich and Kellner 1997). The process also subsumes individual risk-taking and juxtaposition of conflicting cultural values and meanings, and the identity, as a result, becomes eclectic. The eclecticism as a general postmodern condition, however, does not necessarily mean an ongoing fragmentation of identity as the consumers who perform hybridization tend to reprocess the diversity and create their own

"lived" meanings (e.g., Lyotard 1984). Sabrina employs as many resources as possible and the outcome is a spatial representation of her identity:

> *…. We tried to re-use a lot of things that we already had, like….putting different pictures in different frames and paint it and, you know, purchase a new couch, a new TV, a new entertainment center, erm and used a little bit of Craig's list in between….so it was definitely hodgepodge, but, erm, I think we had an idea of what we wanted the place to look like and then sort of found the individual elements for different places. Erm, we sort of got it from a design magazine…and got some inspiration…and sort of worked around that.*

"Symbols for sale" are definitely needed for her signification process, but the end product is not a simple refurbishment of the symbols but de-articulation and re-articulation of cultural elements (see Hall 1980 for articulation). The meanings historically imposed on the materials are quite resilient, but as new linkages between the materials are created, the calcified meaning structure in the "semantic mud" transforms into a more malleable (hybridized) structure. Taking advantage of this malleability indicates her HAS.

The process of transforming the meaning structure, however, does not always take the form of deconstruction; rather, it preserves the original (marketized) meanings and simply connects them to the material that has never been juxtaposed. Abby mixes and matches: "I think I personalize things in the way I mix things together, but not so much deconstructing the things…the individual things that I own, but I wear them together. I like putting individual pieces together." The contents (meanings) are not necessarily hybridized, but the forms (newly created physical mixture) help express idiosyncrasy, which is the essential component of signification.

Experimental Lifestyle. Consumers with HAS create realities rather than acclimatize to "the reality shows" that marketers create. The commercialized realities tend to be purely fantasized, beautified, and scripted places, such as Las Vegas, the Disney parks, the Sea World,

and the like. Although they no longer provide consumers with the sense of an unadulterated

"getaway," those unreal places become the reality that consumers have to take for granted (cf.

Belk and Costa 1998). Consumers can escape the everyday script, but they quickly realize that

the escape is simply a subscription to another script (e.g., Arnould and Price 1993; Celsi, Rose,

and Leigh 1993). It has become very difficult to consumers to present a distinct identity, using

experiential elements, because there are very few "unincorporated areas" of consumer experience

that are not yet scripted (e.g., Pine and Gilmore 1999). Consumers with HAS look for those

intact experiences. Hank went on an experiential experiment, and it turned out successful:

> *For example, okay, back in the…in Whistler, if they[his friends]'re looking for*
> *something to do, we can just go out to the…to the bar, or something, and,*
> *y'know, have a few beers, and whatever….and then I, er, came up with the idea,*
> *"You know what? I know there's an Indian…there's an Indian reservation*
> *North of here…"Fifty kilometers. Let's go there. Let's play Bingo. So we went*
> *up to Mount Currie; we played Bingo for the night, with all these…and there's*
> *all these…and there's nobody there but Indians, most of them missing*
> *any…most of their teeth. They're old and they're playing Bingo. And we went*
> *in there: we played bingo. Best night of that year. Best night of that winter.*
> *Yeah, I had a great time. Yeah. We…Yeah. So, I always love something like*
> *that. Yeah.*

Hank's lifestyle circumscribes the self-created amusements that enable him to stylize his identity

project. The experimentations are continuous because he would not be able to motivate himself

otherwise. Trying new (unscripted) things is the only momentum he can rely on when he defines

and refines himself:

> *….Like, people do...people do…just wear stupid things here, or do…or do just*
> *stupid things just to be…just to amuse themselves. I think it's part of all of this,*
> *y'know…People like myself, I think we're all just, like, we're…Oh, well I just*
> *wanna say that I'm like...Yeah, well I...I see myself as being kind of ADD,*
> *y'know what I mean? I need…I need something to amuse myself, or I'm not*
> *happy. I need to do something new. It needs to be something funny or sunny. It*
> *has to be something, like, outside of normal….*

Disorientation, unhappiness, and fragmentation experienced when not amusing himself can be cured as he constantly pursues abnormal experiences that reflexively corroborate his authentic self-identity. His authentic self is still a "ludic agent," but his definition of playfulness clearly defies negotiated (scripted) experience in which marketers always intervene (Kozinets et al. 2004). He believes that it is normal to see some degree of experiential liminality in commercialized experiences, and it is what makes him unhappy (see Turner 1974 for liminality). The "inter-agential" experiences do not necessarily interest him because he seeks the enclaved "real" experiences. Constant experimentation and denial of market intervention characterize his identity, which is authentic in a sense that the authenticity parallels consistency and relevance of one's identity narratives. The exploration of unincorporated domains of consumer experience demonstrates his ability to signify.

Albeit not as explicit as Hank's case, consumers with HAS find the experiences that replenish their identity narratives with new meaningful episodes. The new experiences involve risk-taking, expedition, and courage that may not always produce the desired cultural material for identity projects. George, a Brazilian dentist, has explored different places, such as New Hampshire, Japan, and European countries in order to improve his skiing skills, and also planned to go to Austria. His experiential experimentations might seem to conform to the scripted experiences that marketers design and control because of the well known places for skiing he listed; however, his main objectives to visit those places are quite "recontextualizing." His agential endeavor promotes recontextualization of the commercial meanings and connotations (usually caused by distinct cultural environment) driven by his focus on "substances" rather than superficiality (cf. Brannen 2004). He travels not because he wants to experience different cultures of consumption, but because he likes to challenge his current skiing skills:

I think, er, many people don't know how to ski, but they wanna do a fashion. I worry about the sport. I…I speak to the people who want to be… …more about the sport. I like the substance and not the look…Substance. Like any sport. Like, I know how to ski, he (an athlete) knows…knows how to jump. He knows the stuff, not how to dress…I care only if the guy knows how to do the stuff.

George extracts the material useful for performing his identity project from the contexts dominated by marketing influences. Therefore, his experimentation seems dual-fold: selective utilization of identity material available in commercial contexts and resistance to commercial forces. He added, "I don't have to follow the fashion…. because fashion is the thing that goes out of fashion first." Trying new things in new contexts also makes him feel alive. This unstoppable drive for adrenaline from recontextualization evidences his HAS and dictates his identity narratives. "It's good for you, not ordinary. It's boring. Are you, too? You left Korea (the researcher's home country). Why did you leave? Because you want adrenaline….You want get to know new things. And you stay young if you want to do new things, like make experiments…." (George). The subjective interpretation and re-appropriation of the symbolic and ideological elements in the commercial locales require "experi-mentality" (e.g., Holt 1998). Those experimentalists' identities are authenticated insofar as they constantly engage in adrenaline-charged experiments to create their own realities separated from the popular ones. To invent a reality through an experiment shows those consumers' penchant for individuated meanings (substances) rather than "free-floating" symbols (fashion) in the marketplace; thus, the experimental process is quite identical to signification.

Metaphysical Worldview. Spirituality, ecology, coexistence, and coprosperity (described by informants) take physical and evident forms of an existential value system as they nurture and mature individual ability to signify. Presentations and practices of metaphysical values in the consumption locales and contexts are embodiments of the consumers' beliefs in

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things beyond materiality of the life of our time (e.g., Thompson and Troester 2002).

Coexistence as a metaphysical value illuminates the entangled (virtually inseparable) relationship

between metaphysics and material culture: "While we might not want to restore theology's

standing as the queen of sciences, we do need to reexamine the metaphysics of material life. We

clearly need to expand our inquiry into belief systems animating consumption beyond the

Christian mythology researchers have begun to explore" (Sherry 2000, p.278). Correspondingly,

consumers with HAS seem to understand the acute duality (metaphysics vs. materiality) of

consumption as an opportunity to draw a line between consumerism and existentialism when the

latter is deeply associated with individuated meaning generation (Marino 2004).

> *[Conversation about Cale's independent clientele-base ski lessons]….Yeah, you know, and, anyway, you get a clientele base going, and…and you're set, `cause the private request pays a lot more than just the regular ski lessons. That's kind of the way it feels. It's not what it is, but it has that feel to it. I have that, you know, liberty to do that here….Erm, I often tell `em, you know, parents of kids that I teach, `cause I teach kids, erm, that it's…you know, it's more than a ski-lesson: it's a lesson in life. We teach a lot more than just skiing to these kids – at least, I do. I teach through steps. I teach through everything about their surroundings. I teach them awareness because it's…to me that's just the way a human should be – aware of their surroundings and aware of who they are, especially in relation to other people and…and, you know, they're not the only one on the earth, you know? Aspen's got a pretty…you know, the clientele base – rich people, you know, high society, and we then have a lot of people that come in from other parts of the world that come and work here, that aren't that and it's that…I think people need to know and be aware of other aspects of the world, to make the world a smaller, better place (Cale).*

Cale neither focuses on the techniques that he is paid for nor precipitates the children he teaches

into the world of disconnectedness or disenchantment. Rather he instills the value he prioritizes

in the younger generation that is extremely vulnerable to the material-determined and

relationship-blind environment. His existential construction and presentation of self-identity is a

manifested interplay between freedom and pursuit of authenticity, which are the underpinnings

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of ability to signify (Marino 2004). Existential freedom is generally understood as *liberum*

arbitrium (free will) that advocates individual choices and creation of values, which, however,

always entail responsibility. The consequence for not choosing the normative alternative for the

sake of authenticity is already subsumed under the choice.

Recognition of interconnectedness and destined causality of one's actions boosts the

significance of metaphysical aspects of life. Ruben's distinct worldview enables him to portray

an agentic persona freed from the normalized (Americanized, more precisely) social behaviors

and work ethic as a hotel manager:

> *When I'm working with my employees at my hotel, if a guest needs something*
> *done, I don't always ask our butler to do it. I'll just take care of it. It gets me*
> *when there are guests and I went to the back, I got the muffins. I took them to*
> *them. That should have been the butler's job. And then once they left, I cleaned*
> *up all of their plates, took `em back into the kitchen. I went and got the vacuum*
> *sweeper and cleaned up the mess so it didn't have...they had breadcrumbs and*
> *stuff all over the floor, because I didn't want another guest to come down and...I*
> *didn't want to wait, or ask someone else do it, when I knew I could do it just as*
> *quickly. Erm, I try to be polite if I go to a grocery store or something. You know,*
> *if I see a lady taking her cart and putting it away, I'll help her with her cart.*
> *You know, just...I think being kind to other people is karma, you know? It'll*
> *come back to you.*

The metaphysical value (karma) he creates in different contexts typifies the idiosyncratic signs of

his identity in the symbol-laden culture of professionalism and ultimately grants him authenticity

in the sense that one is authentic when s/he practices what s/he believes. In contrast to the high

cultural capital (HCC) consumers in Holt's (1998) analysis who simply work against materialism,

consumer goods, popular symbols, and ostentatious consumption to create just enough socio-

cultural distance from cultural majority, Ruben displays more fundamental and yet profound

ways to design his life. The "symbolic materiality syndrome" that impedes consumers' voluntary

participation in the construction of new and better world for the next generation is cured as they

transform the axiological canons into everyday chores and errands. This transformation indicates those consumers' HAS.

Non-dialectical Identity Project through Signification. Through the analyses of each themes, it appears the case that signification represents the multi-fold, transformative, characteristics of an individual because the construct deeply permeates into different levels (i.e., individual vs. social) and dimensions (i.e., relationship, (a)vocation, possession, and experience) of self-identity, as well as into the means to manage the "high maintenance" task: identity project.

FIGURE 4. Non-dialectical Model of Identity Project
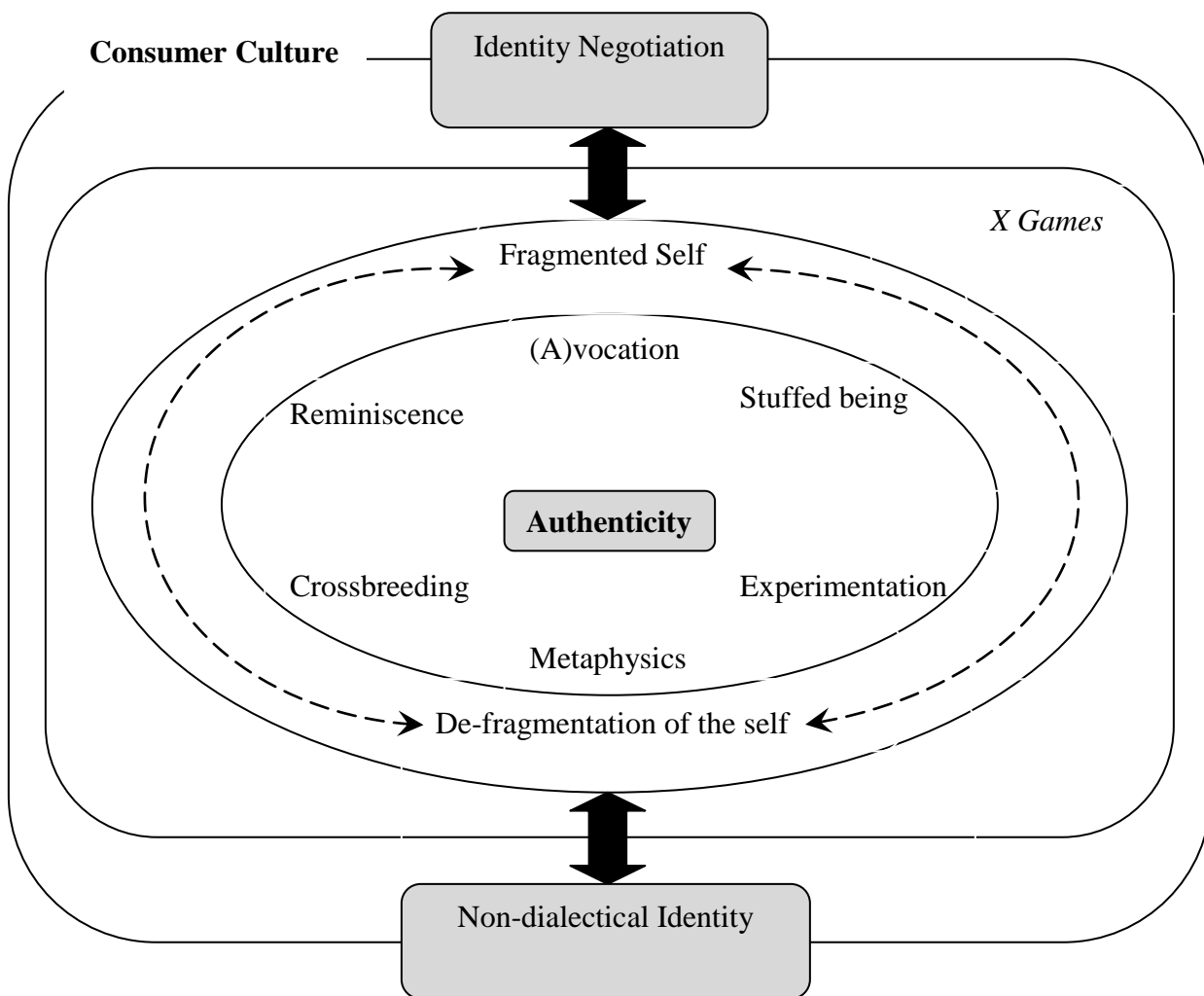
Each of six previous themes represents a distinct (non-negotiated) way in which consumers engage in the sense-making of their lives in relation to (at times in opposition to) social norms, enticing marketing influence, pseudo-authentic cultural materials, and conformity-ridden socio-cultural environment. Figure 4 describes how a non-dialectical identity project through signification is substantiated.

Indicators of High Urge for Distinctiveness (HUD)

Denotative readings of interview transcriptions indicate the following as representative cultural elements of consumers' HUD: exceptionality, exoticism, distancing, popularity avoidance, iconoclast, attention seeking, rareness, solitariness, difference crafting, no copy, flamboyance, intrinsic difference, foreign identification, anti-tradition, and antagonism to "sold-out" (see appendix C). Among the elements listed, some overlap with what scale for need for uniqueness indicates: creativity, unpopular choice, and similarity avoidance (Tian et al. 2001). Those generic themes are considered as leverage, but not thoroughly discussed for developing vernacular vocabulary and further contextualization of the study. In order to capture intertextuality and intersubjectivity (Greimas 1987), those individual meanings and aspects of HUD were subsequently categorized into higher order (condensed) cultural values and manifestations of HUD through connotative reading just as executed for HAS. The indicators (cultural elements) of HUD are summarized in table 3, and there were 14 consumers identified. As operational definitions, three types of urge for distinctiveness were used to identify such a predisposed cultural orientation of consumers. There were consumers who proactively engaged in rule-breaking practices that grant distinction to them (agentic difference-making). The other type of consumers defines and differentiates themselves with their own standards without taking norms, rules, and universals into consideration (self-defined difference). Lastly, there were

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consumers who believed they were born to be different (naturalistic difference). The following

themes of HUD also correspond with the three operational definitions of the urge for

distinctiveness.

TABLE 3. HUD Indicators

Denotative Readings (Indicators)	Definitional Correspondence (Operationalization)	Connotative Meanings (Themes of HUD)	Informants
Exceptionality Breaking rules Outrageousness Anti status quo	Agentic difference-making	Iconoclastic Expression of Self	Abby Ron Brant Russ
Enjoying the self Flamboyancy	Self-defined difference	Self-complacent Consumers	Ron Kacy
Natural difference Being true to the self	Naturalistic difference	The Intrinsic	Baker Zac
Exoticism Appreciation-seeking	Equivalent to need for uniqueness	Creativity	Abby Corby
Distancing Attention-seeking Extremity Foreign Identity		Unpopular Choice	Abby Hank Chad Nash
Solitary Individuality Anti "sold-out"		Similarity Avoidance	Hank Cali Dana Kai

Extreme sports participants with HUD appear to pursue autotelic self-identity that is less

negotiated and more asserted than what theories have thus far codified (cf., Giesler 2008; Kates

2000; Kjeldgaard and Askegaard 2006; McCracken 2008; Miller 1987; Sandikci and Ger 2010;

Slater 1997; Thompson and Haytko 1997). HUD in the extreme sports context, in which "mild

and naïve" distinctions become worse than "no distinction," may be seen as the extreme case of

"the cult of the self." In order to turn the blurred line between self and others to a bolder one,

consumers with HUD perform narcissistic practices with less concern about reflexivity of self (cf., Finkelstein 1991; Giddens 1991). The narcissism consumers with HUD take for granted is their ultimatum to others that prevents unwanted overlaps of self-identity. Narcissism for those consumers is the mode of being that is not a pathological anomaly, but a purely cultural choice for cultivating the self as Giddens (1991, 81) states, "we have no choice but to choose." Some consumers choose narcissism as their means to achieve the distance between the self and others. It is, however, hardly seen that those extreme sports participants engage in a dialectical process by which the projected self-identity can be "corrupted" (e.g., Sennett 1977). Among many possible forms that autotelic and/or narcissistic consumption praxes can take, extreme sports participants employ subversive, self-complacent, and intrinsic methods for making distinction. The extracted themes of HUD indicate possibilities of presenting distinctiveness to the outside of the self without negotiation.

Iconoclastic Expression of the Self

> *....skiers denounce snowboarders as subversives who lack civility and defile the pristine nature of the slopes; in contrast, snowboarders disparage skiers as conformists and elitists and in turn lionize their own flamboyant actions as enlivening the ideals of personal freedom and individual expression (Luedicke, Thompson, and Giesler 2010, p. 1017).*

The unending and yet quite conclusive discussion about "distinction" as a generic term for some (in fact a growing number of) consumers' incessant obsession with peculiarity, novelty, and differentiated self-expression yields a received view of consumers making distinction in a negotiated fashion. For some, however, negotiation does not provide what true distinction should hold for consumers; rather, it deteriorates the quality of distinction because of the potential "dilution effect." Abby pursues exceptionality that does not comply with the norm of fashion:

> *....you know, I'm not really a shopper of the Gap or Banana Republic - they're too traditional for me.... You can get some jeans there, white T-shirts, but*

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you're not gonna find any, you know…you're following the norm. It's not exceptional. If following the norm is your…is…is your life….you're part of the every-day, you're part of the big group of people that are just being normal. If you think that these athletes again…they tried something different, they've broken the rule and that's exceptional.

For Abby, exceptionality as a means to make distinction can be achieved by overthrowing the current normative outlook of sartorial expression. Her urge for distinctiveness is hardly negotiated or compromised as she chooses items that deviate enough from the norms that may dilute her distinctiveness. For example, she tends not to meet half way, but prefers aberration: "I tend to be the person that, when you walk into the store, everybody buys the black or white staple, I buy the orange, or yellow, or the green. I buy something, the one that's different…." In constantly making "book-burning" type of distinction, Abby seems to have developed a tendency to excessively overreact to the norms accepted by the crowd. As Turner (1982) contends, one's creative potential and subversive inclination may promote self-transformation that truly liberates the individual (cf., Kozinets 2002). Far from liberation, Abby's distinction-making is entirely gripped by non-negotiated norm-avoidance. Her hyper-sensitivity to negotiation and dissident expression of self are the bases of her HUD.

As read in the beginning quote of the section, in order to differentiate one from others, extreme sports fans seem to have to turn things upside down and denunciate others not necessarily overtly, but covertly or reflexively (Thompson 2004). Explicit statements of disapproval and abhorrence may create some uniqueness, but autotelic consumers consider implicit and intrinsic establishment of distinctiveness a more active and productive. Simply put, rather than slandering the mainstream and popular culture, consumers with HUD tend to create their own styles and arts of living by not following dogmatic propositions and schemas. Their

means to make distinction encompasses not only their fashion but also the ways to ride their "vehicles of lifestyle" and construe self-identity. Ron perceives himself as an iconoclast:

> *I think, like…I'm not really big into fashion, per se, but, like, sort of, ski fashion and I guess, like to, you know, have a certain style or whatever. So, when I find something it's always…it's always very rare. It's always, like, something very specific. Then I…yeah, I either see it, and I'm thinking, "Yeah, I really like that." Or, I really see it and I just immediately and instinctually think, "Oh, I really want that!" Um, like this sweat shirt I bought. And that, it's, like, well, I like skating, surfing, snowboarding and I don't follow the rules and all that, as if you're trying to establish yourself as…like an iconoclast, you know? Um… An iconoclast, and I guess, to an extent, I definitely enjoy doing that. So, yeah, I guess in terms of stress I'd say that, but for manners, like, I think if you were to look at me, I mean, say my clothing style...or else you would think it's, like, the way I approach - not everything, but a lot of things - sort of reveals some certain, you know, personality about me, that's unique...*

Iconoclasm and non-conformity is the algorithm of making distinction, and fashion is one of the applications. Fashion has evolved as the most popular and convenient application, which, however, does not mean the others are useless or implausible (e.g., Murray 2001; Pountain and Robins 2000). Different riding styles and the choice of language are less convenient and somewhat cumbersome applications, but they can deliver a greater distinction than fashion does for the consumer. The focus placed on fashion when distinction is discussed is less relevant in the context of extreme sports as participants are all required to be "cool" for the sake of the greater "hip culture." Looking cool is simply a pre-requisite that does not guarantee a successful creation of distinction. George, one of the informants mentioned, "fashion is the thing that goes out of fashion first." The life expectancy of the distinction made by fashion is much shorter than that of distinction made through other applications of iconoclasm. Other domains of distinction, such as deep-rooted mentality of frontier spirit and musical preference are highly valued at the extreme locale.

> *Interviewer: Do you have anybody you wanna be like?*

Brant (a snowmobile athlete): I'm just trying to go out there and do the best I can do, you know? I'm not, er, trying to copy, or do anything else anyone else is trying to do. I try and go out there…and get out there myself. Erm, to copy someone else, like, to look like them, and go out, and, er, I mean, I can perform like someone else, but you can sure look like it, y'know, like…put…put on the act, y'know, like, wear the same gear, and goggles, and….buy everything he has, `n, ride the sled he has, `n…I'm just trying to go out there, `n, er, make a name for myself. Erm, everyone on our teams looks alike, but, er, there's different things that, er, we do or act. We know we…we're all trying to be ourselves, though, y'know? Oh just be yourself, I mean, er…To copy, or…or try to, like, er,…like gangsters, or something, y'know, like….like a white guy trying to act black, I mean, er, it's er…I don't know, it looks silly to me, actually, y'know?

There are surely many extreme sports participants and athletes who (want to) imitate others' outlook, skills, and equipment. They could succeed, but it is not a success for Brant because he believes that the way to succeed is to reject the sameness prevalent in the culture of extreme sports. He understands there are rules to follow; however, he also reckons that the boundaries of such rules must be encroached in order to establish himself. For example, he mentioned an athlete who tried to land after 720 degree somersault (double backflip) on a snowmobile for the first time. He almost made it with minor injuries, and Brant calls it "something to look up to." The safety issues and potential impact on the followers of such an exquisite skill are the rigid boundaries of the current norm of the sports. Brant, however, sees them breakable and break-prone for any athletic pioneer. Rules and norms seem trigger catalysts rather than constraints for consumers with HUD.

The eternal enemy for iconoclastic consumers would be the status quo. The repugnance for the normative stance of general sports and the ancillary culture industries, such as media and sports gear companies, is the momentum for rule-breaking consumers to surmount the physical risks and cultural suppression. Over the past two decades, Russ broke "some" ribs, received scars, and hurt his loved ones by being a rebel on the streets and in the woods. His interest in extreme sports does not discriminate against any of the events in X-games. Mountain bike, dirt-bike,

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motocross, ski, snowboard, rock-climbing, and paragliding are the ones of his choice, and, according to him, the list will expand. He believes that pursuit of what is stigmatized or marginalized is an effective way to display his distinctiveness:

> *Interviewer: What does trend mean to you?*
>
> *Russ (self-appointed extreme sports expert): I don't like to follow any trends. I do pretty much whatever I wanna do. I don't care if it's a trend or not. Because I don't like them. Just being a follower's just, you know, never been my mode. Yeah. People say, "Oh, no, you can't do that." I'll just do the opposite and just do that. That's why I was…When extreme sports first started coming out, that's why I liked them so much…because it wasn't the status quo, wasn't just safe. It was something different, something special, something outrageous and that's why it's so popular now.*

Russ understands the usual, almost destined, cycle of trend-setting and the following task for the trend-setters. Vigilance is the only preventive measure for consumers with HUD who do not want to be "sold-out." He says the reason his list of activities is constantly expanding is that extreme sports, as a distinctive identity work, are void unless he continues to seek more extreme or "outrageous" sports that undermine the current, safer ones. As he explores new things, he suffers from multi-point injuries. He is, however, willing to pay the "tuition" for better and hopefully longer-lasting distinction. Ignoring safety measures and potential risks involved in the sports is a quite defiant move as he states, "Break your arm, they (doctors) fix it. Break your leg, they fix it. I mean, everything…everything can almost be fixed, except for head and neck, if you break it." He believes that one should be bold enough to make any distinction, and he translates his daring into action.

There is another point of application of iconoclasm. Musical preference can easily make or break the distinction. Riding anything without music is considered almost dumb among extreme sports participants. This belief hints at us why almost all outdoor jackets and helmets have those small holes for ear buds. Listening to music certainly helps the total immersion as

many have expressed. Then, the question becomes which music to choose. Hip-hop and heavymetal are two popular genres for extreme sports, but there are too many to choose from each. "American top 40" type of music would make the participant look dumber than no music while riding. They have to break the musical codes as well in order to make distinction:

> *Something "rare and unique." Well, I mentioned my other hobby was music. I've always been drawn to really strange forms of music, really strange forms of, er, expression. Like really extreme heavy metal, or extreme ambient music, or electronic music, something….that's really, really on the edge of boundaries of what people consider normal (Hank).*

Going abnormal is again an efficient way to express one's difference. The normative boundary of musical tastes is frequently and intentionally trespassed. However, it seems that Hank has not realized that the music he listens to does not sound normal to ordinary Joes at all. He is already greatly distanced from the boundary, but he does not see it because his competitors (general extreme sports participants from whom he wants to differentiate himself) are the ones on the edge sneak-peeking at both sides of the boundary. He thinks what normal people think is totally abnormal barely normal. The extreme context pushes almost everything to the extreme. A quite distinctive expression of fashion, language, aesthetics, and music in other contexts become modest in this context. Iconoclastic consumers push the boundary further without realizing that they have gone far enough. Distinction inflation is widely observed and practiced in the extreme sports context.

Self-complacent Consumers

> *….technologies of the self, which permit individuals to effect by their own means or with the help of others a certain number of operations on their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct, and way of being, so as to transform themselves in order to attain a certain state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection, or immortality (Foucault 1988, 18).*

To sketch and construe the self, we need to engage in a highly technological game, called "truth game" (Foucault 1988). An individual consumer is, of course, not the sole player; there is a four dimensional matrix in which we strive to position the self. Understanding the dimensions is critical as they operate together, which is quite parallel to the received view of identity negotiation (e.g., Askegaard et al. 2005; Epp and Price 2008; Kjeldgaard and Askegaard 2006; Oswald 1999; Schau et al. 2009). "Technologies of the self" by and large refer to the process through which individuals transform her/himself into a subject when the self has been objectified and almost determined by scientific inquiry (Foucault 1988). Besides the technologies of the self, there are technologies of production, sign system, and power, according to contemporary identity discourse, none of which dictates who the individual is. Therefore, it is of more interest to illuminate a context that possibly provides immunity to the truth game.

The distinction inflation accelerated and deteriorated in the cultural milieu of extreme sports bodes consumers bluntly liberating themselves from the negotiation process (truth game). Consumers with HUD realize that however hard they try, the distinction they create is quickly decried or popularized. Both cases simply devastate the distinction-maker. Egoistic expression of self tends to make consumers with HUD more satisfied with the distinctive self for a longer period of time. Ron talks about his experience:

> I think there are some selfish times when I do things that will make me stand out purely on stuff that lets me stand out, but it's not ever…like, I'm very, very self-conscious….not in the sense that I hide myself, but I'm very self-aware, um, so that, um, like, I just feel like my personality is unique….and makes me feel unique in other aspects, where it wouldn't otherwise. But I don't … wouldn't say it's especially important that I'm unique, it's just that I feel like it's important for me to do the things I believe in and to be myself for no other reason than I've …I'm myself and I've enjoyed myself for two days. Yeah!

Consumers of this sort also demonstrate the "demise of the social" as Baudrillard contends through his series of analytical anatomies of contemporary society (Baudrillard 1975, 1981,

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1983). Social codes (signified) as the logic of distinction have become indistinct because the signifier is the signified in the context (e.g., Kellner 1989). In other words, distinction for some consumers does not need to mean anything social because the social codes vanish and change soon enough to circumvent. This deemphasized social aspect of distinction endorses the self-fulfilling "anti-social" consumers.

Aesthetics is understood as modern tastes and peculiar design or artistic expression by self-complacent consumers. Not only do consumers arbitrarily manipulate technologies of sign, but they also subjectively interpret the general notion of aesthetics (presence of absence of beauty) help them produce distinction (e.g., Charters 2006; Postrel 2003). In neither case is negotiation germane. The new definition of aesthetics for those consumers is that whatever makes distinction is beautiful. Kacy enjoys wearing the "modern" style that is not necessarily beautiful but simply flamboyant:

> *Interviewer: What is your (fashion) style like?*
>
> *Kacy: Probably, erm, I'd say more modern. Because I'm an interior designer…Flamboyant. Yeah. I don't know. Well, no, I don't know if that's the right word, but I…I wear…you know, I love to wear, you know, color……chartreuse, or, you know…bold colors, or nice styles. Sometimes. I mean, when I ski, I have, you know, really…paisley pants and, erm, you know, kind of these modern animal prints…pants with sequins and stuff. I don't know if I'm trying to do that (being different) or I just love color and pattern and design, you know? If it's more than that…and then, because I wear them, I get comments on them all day…because it's really so different. Yeah. I like it. I get a…I get…everyday that I ski with…you know, I get a dozen comments a day…you know, because it's really…I really wear different clothes…*

Kacy believes that she receives compliments because her style is totally "off-code." She indicates that it does not matter if the comments are genuine. She is just delighted with the fact that she can at least present a quite atypical style, and it brings some positive, albeit self-conceived, rewards to her. Perhaps such consumers with HUD accept potential stigma and enjoy

internal destigmatization that is a tremendous source of distinction (cf., Sandikci and Ger 2010).

For them, the only counterpart to negotiate with is the self.

The Intrinsic

> *Cool is not something you can set out to acquire; it is something that is acknowledged in you by others. It involves originality, self-confidence and must be apparently effortless. It is often transgressive and anti-establishment. It is certainly narcissistic (Nancarrow and Nancarrow 2007; 135).*

In making distinction, spontaneousness, improvisation, and authenticity are highly valued (Bourdieu 1984; Holt 1998; Ustuner and Holt 2010). However, authenticity may not facilitate and ensure non-negotiated distinction as it often involves social authentication process (Beverland and Farrelly 2010). Authenticity is at times simply seen as an antonym of mass-culture (e.g., Kates 2000; Muniz and O'Guinn 2001; Penaloza 2001), which makes it just another lifestyle that merely provides pseudo-distinction. Then, spontaneousness and improvisation are expected to play a greater role in making distinction. As Knobil (2002; 22) notes, "If you have to try you've already failed; if you want it (cool) too bad, you are just chasing your tail." Cool is the currency in the game of distinction-making, and it is not something anyone can explain, pursue, or practice. Some extreme sports participants understand the logic of cool, which is the ultimate distinction because of its minimal imitability. Baker believes he has been cool, which he never tries to be:

> *When I started biking, biking wasn't cool. Nobody, it wasn't…. Maybe, I had two or three friends that rode bikes but we didn't have there wasn't a bunch of ramps. There were skate parks but bikes weren't allowed in skate parks yet. And it wasn't really cool. Even when I turned 18-19years old, I was still riding a bike. People were saying, you know most of my friends that rode with me all got cars and girlfriends and moved on and I just kept riding my bike. It wasn't the cool things to do, I just loved it. And I didn't stop doing shows until I was 37 years old or so. It just lasted forever….We were different, but we never tried to be. We were a little bit different because it wasn't a mainstream sport. It wasn't something that many people ever saw…. The only thing I didn't enjoy was the limelight. Like winning a contest or going up on the podium and everybody*

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applauding for you. That kind of stuff I can give or take it. I mean I like to do good and I like to win. But I wasn't the kind of guy who needed to go up there and give a speech. It wasn't for me.

Believers in intrinsic distinction know there is no "die-hard" distinction. When one tries to create such, it will be simply uncool and uncomfortable. The ostentatiousness that the "don't knows and don't haves" displayed to the "sophisticated knows and haves" in the past is quite identical to the demarcation between cool and uncool (cf., Bourdieu 1984). Nonetheless, cultural capital as a platitude when discussing distinction is a less relevant and highly debatable construct for the intrinsic distinction Baker stresses due to its lack of contextualization (e.g., Ustuner and Holt 2010). A contextualized version of cultural capital is of more importance. Cool is the embodied language and medium of subcultural capital as it contextualizes the cultural field in which it operates. Consumers having acquired the subcultural capital are *nouveaux riches,* who create and disseminate new tastes as well as transcend the general notion of distinction (Thornton 1995).

One way to be cool and thus distinct is to be honest with the self. Trying hard to stand out is the easiest and fastest way to degrade the subcultural capital that can help present the intrinsic distinction otherwise. Zac thinks almost all (extreme sports participants) have subcultural capital, but some of them abandon it as they are not sincere to their selves:

> *It's (the way he expresses himself) different. I don't know. I try to…I mean, I try to stay true to myself, like I said. I mean, even though I can walk around the school, and I see no-one dressed like I'm dressed, no-one…And so I see that and, like, I'm not gonna fall into that. I'm not gonna, like…wearing the traditional to blend in. I'm not trying to stand out, but…but I'm not gonna try and blend in either. I'm gonna do…I'm gonna dress how…how I think I should…*

According to him, it is very obvious when someone is not presenting her/his true self. Distinction is made not by what one wears, possesses, and how they act out, but by how naturally the distinction maker enters the cultural field (the context), portrays his/her aura, and still leaves

some nuanced cultural substances: hipness, strangeness, fetishism, and the retro, to name a few. Extreme sports participants with HUD prefer intact and innate distinction that entails minimal ostentatiousness and optimum conspicuousness. Bourdieu's cultural capital and Veblen's notion of wealth both advocate the structuralists' version of "trickling-down" distinction, which most uncool followers of cool strive to gain (cf., Miller 1987). Baker and Zac disregard the extrinsic distinction that everybody can imitate and pass to others. Therefore, they are also narcissistic and autotelic consumers with less concern about negotiation, which, in turn, signifies their HUD.

Low Ability to Signify (LAS) and Low Urge for Distinctiveness (LUD)

FIGURE 4.Consumer Cultural Quality

Urge for Distinctiveness

		Low	High
Ability to Signify	High	Ruben, Sabrina, Ralph, Cale George, Hanna, John,	Abby, Ron, Hank, Cali, Corby Dana, Baker, Zac, Kai, Randi
	Low	Pam, Kimberly, Jack, Chen Ted, Marc	Anne, Brant, Kacy, Russ, Chad Nash, Celia

There were 16 consumers (LAS) who showed little or no interests in individuated meanings and the cultural values that other consumers with HAS practice and maintain. Instead, they are defenseless against popular brands, dependent upon commercialized services, indifferent to self-expression or personalization, passive, conservative, and unaware of different choices. Consumers with LUD display perceptions and practices that denote popularity-proneness, classic, genericness, less self-consciousness, observation rather than participation, false beliefs about their distinctiveness, practicality, conformity, and refusal of cool.

Through the readings of extreme sports participants' cultural qualities, it is observed that HUD is not necessarily an indicator of HAS and *vice versa* as shown in Figure 4. In the following chapter, how each group of consumers makes sense of their lives in the dynamic marketplace that depends on each consumer as a constituent of the system. The boundary conditions that assign different roles to such consumers will also be discussed.

CHAPTER VII

MARKET DYNAMICS

In this chapter, consumers with different cultural qualities (based on the combination of HAS, HUD, LAS, and LUD) are further analyzed in terms of their everyday consumption praxes, identity project management, ideological (re)configuration of meanings of consumption, and ultimately their respective roles played for the market dynamics. Although each group of consumers may share certain roles as consumers in general, the distinctive roles of each identified group of consumers are observed and thus discussed in order to better understand how the consumer market is sustained and continuously revamped.

The Stigmatized (HAS and HUD)

The body of literature in consumer research (especially the area known as consumer culture theory) has documented a variety of stigmatized consumption venues, activities, and practices, such as the mountain man myth, *Star Trek* fandom, gay community, and Apple Newton brand community (e.g., Belk and Costa 1998; Giesler 2008; Holt and Thompson 2004; Kates 2000; Kozinets 2001; Muniz and Schau 2005; Sandikci and Ger 2010; Thompson 2004; Thompson and Tian 2008). The listed literature contends that such stigma is a consequence of pursuit of idiosyncrasy and imbument of individual meanings upon possessions and experiences as well as disconformity-orientation. Those are very relevant and resonant elements of high

ability to signify and urge for distinctiveness. However, such consumer behaviors are initially seen by general public and broadcasted by mass media as negative, somewhat shameful, discredited, disapproved, and against norms until it is popularized and/or commoditized (i.e., graffiti, hippie, tattooing, piercing, the goth, and veiling). It is because the connotations of them are related to mythologization, fantasy, gender-distortion, anti-consumption, religious misrepresentation, and anti-society, which seem to hinder the linear progression of the society based on modernization and marketization. Therefore, extreme sports participants identified as consumers with HAS and HUD in this study are also stigmatized because of their constant pursuit and practice of escaping the market system as they signify and make distinctions.

In the literature, stigma has hardly been discussed with respect to its socio-historical impact on market dynamics. Rather, it has been generally regarded as a means to achieve individual goals of identity (re)construction, even though a particular stigmatized consumption might bring historicity to the relevant domain of consumption. For example, the gay community, as a collective manifestation of individual identity projects, might have tremendously contributed to the development of new gender roles and expectations in fashion industry, but the linkage has been neither explored nor explicated. More recently, research such as Giesler (2008) and Sandikci and Ger (2010) has analyzed the socio-historical effects of such stigma and documented that stigmatized practices reconfigure and redefine the current marketplace. However, this research still focused on the "acts" of being stigmatized rather than "modes" of being stigmatized in the chosen contexts. That stigma can manifest itself in different manners is overlooked. Stigma sometimes appears to be "non-stigma" as it acquiesces to the ruling symbolic impositions, but informants in this research context indicate that it is still stigma as the acquiescence is

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temporal, local, and even mocking, which seems totally the opposite of what Kozinets (2002) found in the Burning Man project.

Although Holt (2002) has reported how individuals contribute to the overall expansion and innovation of cultural branding as one of the most significant domains of the market system, the analysis elucidates and advocates only the dialectical progression of the consumer culture *vis-à-vis* brands as though there is no other possible ramification or rupture in the power relations. Hence, different modes of stigma are explicated in the context of X Games in order to theorize how consumers partake in the ever-evolving marketplace. Dependent upon distinct modes of stigma, consumers identified as HAS and HUD in the context of X Games showed ramified approaches to the current market dynamics. Three recognizable modes were found: equilibrium in life, assimilation with co-optation as business culture, and hyper-factionalization of consumer market.

For Equilibrium

Consumers' pursuit of balance has been centered on binary oppositions and their resolutions, such as utilitarian/hedonic, nature/technology, healthy/harmful, and most notably individual/social (e.g., Belk, Ger, and Askegaard 2003; Giesler 2008; Thompson 2004; Thompson and Troester 2002). Although individual consumers denote that they have intra-personal motivation for balance besides relational or oppositional, the literature has thus far codified one type of balance that involves only the critical theory-based individual ventures for balance. Consumers in the context of X Games, rather, address the relative importance of internal peace, relief, and ultimately the sense of balance. Ron explains what he values and how he balances:

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...I'm working on it (environmentalism), but, er...and then I get...I get that...It's, like, very closely related to the...I don't know...the...I guess, intellectualism. I don't know, it's, like, I've gone to decent schools, and it's always been a...a really cool thing to have for me, because it's...it's sort of this physical aspect that I get a lot of enjoyment out of, like surfing and skiing and that's almost completely, like, turn the brain off, just, like, living in the moment and then this other part that is almost, like, completely the opposite, and gives, like, a different kind of satisfaction and thrill.... I mean, I basically think, for me, there's the physical and there's the intellectual. You know, you go out to surf, or you go out ski, and you are sort of naturally drawn to do things. Like, I see a wave in my arc, so you do a maneuver on it. It's not that it's a mindless process, but it's much more like you're responding there to your intuition - to things around you. It's a habit, like a good conversation, or you read a good book. You really are centered, sort of, by your instincts, constructing. You really are thinking, reconstructing your actions and that is another challenge...another challenge. It is, like, really enriching because you can really push yourself to be, like, "Where...what are the limits of my beliefs? And why do I believe this and that? What is important in all these different things? It's always... It's healthy for me to have these two things.

While he represents the stereotypical stigma widely recognized and observed in the context as he wears run-down shirts and still feels comfortable with them, he considers such practice as a requirement to arrange a more balanced life. Pursuing two different spheres of life is not necessarily dialectical because they are not two opposing values, and one does not hold relatively higher importance than does the other as Ron states, "They (intellectual and physical) give you completely different spheres and they give me different satisfactions." It appears that liminality, rather than dialectical process, is an acute necessity for consumers to transcend the dominant cultural codes inflicted upon their lives (see Turner 1974 for liminality). In the transitional period (participation in the sports), Ron does not abide by the general cultural codes and normative boundaries, which stigmatizes him, but as the liminality manifests, he starts contributing to society, more specifically the market dynamics. Environmentalism is what enables him to partake in the market dynamics in a positive way:

I grew up, like, skiing, and hiking...biking, and surfing, and, you know, outside all the time in New Hampshire, so, like, that...I think that naturally led to sort of an

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appreciation of the outdoors…but, then, I think, erm, the years went on in high school and college. It became a thing where I realized, you know, that…that just, you know, I guess what we're doing with the environment is that it has changed a lot, and we are…the time is here, and I'm a surfer, and, like,I depend completely on nature for those activities and it's completely hypocritical to act in a manner that is, like, deliberately destroying those things. But, erm, that's sort of, I guess…relating that to skiing and surfing, that's sort of how I feel. Like that place in my life, it's just…it's just, like, you can't…I feel like it's ridiculous when people are driving, these, like, jacked-up pick-up trucks to go skiing.

Ron does use public transportation as often as he can, except when it is economically and practically unreasonable to practice such a lifestyle. He owns a small hybrid vehicle that he believes does less harm to the nature he wants to enjoy for years to come. As such, his stigma as a hardcore extreme sports fanatic and film maker resonates with what politicians, economists, sociologists, ecologists, and marketers together hope for: sustainability. Dependent upon how a stigma is expressed and practiced, it does have a role in the market system. In this case, it is not to provide some cultural codes that are easily co-optable (e.g., Frank 1997; Heath and Potter 2004; Thompson 2007), but to suggest a less thinkable group of consumers as a new market. If Ron had not grown up with nature, environmentalism might have still remained a vague concept and thus less meaningful to him. His stigmatized quality (HAS and HUD) as a consumer has provided an opportunity for him to "de-stigmatize" the stigma and implicates a new marketing opportunity for marketers. It would be less suggestive to associate extreme sports participants with environment-friendly products otherwise. His quest for intra-personal balance ultimately transforms itself into pro-social behaviors that sustain the market dynamics as the market now has at least one more target group to approach. Stigmatized consumption domain can be incorporated not for its cultural connotations and symbolic attractiveness, but for its potential as a market for currently available cultural items.

Being a cultural omnivore is an evident means to maintain a balanced life. Hank has

experienced a range of high and low cultures, including cello, guitar, rock band, rowing, being an

extreme sports instructor, and teaching history in a high school. From each of the listed

experiences, he finds a cultural element that helps better construct the self-identity that makes

him happier:

> *Interviewer: What is the thing (among the listed experiences) that motivates you the most?*
>
> *Hank : Oh, my god! Pursuit of happiness. Being happy. Like...having a good lifestyle. I've tried...I've tried other things. I've tried to be, like, motivated to making money, and things like that…doesn't make me happy. I go crazy. I'm only happy if I'm outside all the time. I don't want to be inside all the time, and I don't want to be in front of a book all the time. I don't want to be marking papers all the time, so I think I probably made a mistake, and I don't think it's a career I can do. Not for long. I mean, I like the...I like to have an intellectual challenge…like when I was in school, erm, in High School, Junior High School, all the teachers said, "Oh, you're very, very smart, but, er, you don't work very hard." The truth was, actually, no, I just go crazy when I don't…I…need to have, er...I need to be outside, and I need to…do different things all the time, y'know? I need to be active.*

As a well-educated 35 year old man from a quite affluent middle class family, Hank has a

stigmatized image for his hyper-fashionable lifestyle, unstable occupation, and constant pursuit

of new experiences that make him feel like alive. However, the stigma, for him, is a necessity to

achieve an internal poise that gives him the sense of orientation and belongingness to greater

entities and institutions, such as nature, education system, and the market. Perhaps his stigma is a

result of the temporality of belongingness.

In comparison to the HCCs in Holt (1998) and Ustuner and Holt (2010)'s analyses that

show quite consistent, uni-directional (upward) cultural orientations and practices, stigmatized

consumers in the context, including Ron and Hank, present multi-directional cultural adaptability

and transgression. Their seemingly disoriented lifestyle is, nevertheless, well-managed and

cultivated as they recognize the importance of another domain of internal balance:

> *[About his experience of a rowing team] Er, because the school I went to, those were the two main sports, was rugby and rowing, so…so, I was okay at rugby, but I was…I was good at rowing…Yeah, this was a school in, er…in…in, er…on Vancouver Island in…in British Columbia. You know where Vancouver Island is, right? Yeah, you know – Victoria, you know. Good. So, there's a few, er, boarding schools there that are influenced by old British boarding schools. They've been around for, like, a hundred years. So I went to one of those. Um, and, er, so, that's why I had...so I was, er, rowing. So, anyway…So I did rowing very seriously, and then, when I was seventeen, I, er…I wanted to try snowboarding. It was kind of like, er, the opposite end of.... I loved it, `cause it was just pure…You could be physical, but you could be totally creative and in control of what you wanted to do. I just needed to be creative at that time. I always loved it. Alw-Always loved the feeling, just couldn't…couldn't wait `til I could do it again. Dreamed about it all the time. Had to do it again…[About discipline and creativity] Just to say I've got to do both. You've gotta have both. Discipline without creativity is...is a terrible, I think. [laughs] Creativity without any discipline…Well, maybe that's not so bad. Like, freer, yeah. It seems like you're gonna…It's a richer life experience if you have some…well I...I guess...Y'know, I'm gonna go with creativity. I'll go with creativity and then discipline, but both are important…(Hank).*

The most important balance that stigmatized consumers seek to realize is the one between

creativity and discipline. While Hank stated that creativity has slightly more weight than

discipline for an individual at this point of our history, recognizing the importance of discipline

allows him to contribute to the market dynamics. His contribution is actualized through a

disciplined individualization of style, which involves hybridization and creolization of cultural

codes and nuances. In contrast to other stigmatized consumers in other contexts (i.e., Hardcore

punk fanatics, Goths, and graffiti artists) who present hardly appreciable and appropriatable

codes, Hank believes that his style is complete in a freer manner, readily co-optable, and yet

indicative of his liberated mind. He experiences some immediate and almost exact "pop-

propriation" of his own style: "It [his style] took…it took a few more years for it to catch…catch

on. Or, it's like…see it's like you see people wearing Aviator sunglasses…You know, it took

about five years, and then you see them in the cities…" He also mentioned that the reason his style becomes popular is that he tries to be somewhat conservative, which is related to his value of discipline.

Hank's narrative points out that, in order to partake in cultural market dynamics, HAS and HUD (stigmatized) consumers do not always need to present radical and defiant cultural props, elements, and episodes. A more disciplined (balanced) and possibly conservative expression of idiosyncrasy still nourishes the market dynamics to sustain. Again, intra-personal pursuit of balance based on plentiful lived experiences facilitates stigmatized consumers' performance as market-feeders. Different modes, rather than the presence or magnitude of stigma, are recognized and thus must be valued.

Cali also points out that a balanced life helps her better envision her future life with respect to the occupation to which she wants to commit. "Breaking out of cubicle" gives her opportunities to learn how the real marketplace operates, and it is a very valuable experience for her to establish a grassroots snowboarding brand that does not follow the big money-making enterprises' business models, but one that sustains a more culturally neutral (a brand but not a corporate brand) business model. This dream justifies her stigma in skipping classes and a career fair in her school:

> *I learn from every mistake and I think that in some ways mistakes are more valuable than when everything goes as smoothly because if you teach me how to kind of balance my more a type personality and then my more b type personality umm just being completely happy with life that I have learned how to communicate more effectively and just how to get work done and not procrastinate… that's the other thing. I would say that my college education, entire experience would not be as enriched as it is right now if I weren't coming out and doing this [promoting a grass-root snowboarding brand]. And I have a career fair to go to next week and that's soon I mean. That's kind of uh projection for uh like a nine to five cubicle job and I'm happy to go and oblige my professors and do that for them but A. it's not cut out for me and B. on top of*

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> *that a lot of the firms that are there they're awesome, but I I'm just not meant to work there.*

An enriched perspective of life and life goals acquired from trial and error, as well as learning in two different contexts, enables her to more pro-actively participate in the market dynamics, which she sees as somewhat stale and of inertia. Some can totally "dis-necessitate" popular brands for their identity narratives, which may be more coherent without any of such brands:

> *It [Grenade] takes a grassroots marketing strategy. It recruits. I mean typically younger people but anybody who loves the snow and people that are snowboarding, and they recruit them to me and what's called the grenade army, and basically there's all types of uh like missions and quotes, and it's just things like… you know, take a picture of yourself snowboarding and send it in and when you do they'll send you a free product from grenade (Claire).*

There are some exemplary grassroots brands (i.e., Grenade and Rome) that are widespread in the snowboard and outdoor equipment industry. A handful of individual fanatics and supporters of snowboarding have launched their own brands in order not to negotiate with the brand identities and personalities developed by marketers and other consumers. These "no logo" praxes are not as direct, hostile, or perceptible as boycott, anti-consumption, consumer terrorism, or "culture-jamming" (Klein 2000; Lasn 2000), but still contribute to the transformation and revitalization of the current market dynamics, as they suggest a clear idea as to how to create more culturally sustainable brands that are less vulnerable to consumer activism and/or cultural shift. Clair's stigma as the externality of her internal balance provides a new business model for cultural marketers. The model begins with community-building, rather than brand-building, followed by the former as seen in many brand communities. Claire and other consumers as her business partners in the company share the same type of stigma, but together they enlighten the current "backward" system.

Politics of Co-optation

Stigmatized consumers tend to understand what co-optation means to contemporary consumers and how they should react to the workings of co-optation as the business culture today. Their stigma does not necessarily impede the "culture production system," in which marketers extract novel cultural elements created by consumers and process them into brands and trends. Rather, they assimilate with co-optation as they realize their options are limited but do so in order to manage their identities and play a part in the marketplace. Profound and substantial understanding of the politics of co-optation leads them to work more diligently to bypass the culture production system, which, in fact, seems working for the system. Randi demonstrates his understanding of co-optation:

> ….*Because anything is good in this country [U.S.], or all over the world. Once the big corporation, they know this thing is good, they put their hands on it, and they just bombard you again. You know what I'm saying? They kill you with…with…with the…Like, er, the skate-…skate-boards, as soon as they know that skateboarding is good, the next thing you know, my goodness, they…they get their hand into it…skateboard…and the skateboards that is…that was supposed to be ten dollars, twenty dollars, maximum fifty dollars, they sell for three hundred fifty, four hundred fifty, all because this wheel is from Bulgari.That thing…That's exactly what it[co-optation] is. You know what I'm saying? Do you understand…? I'm…I'm just telling you that, well, you know, because the system…er, then again, the system is this way, you know? It just…It's just gets you. We…I…I just want people to be…to be aware of these things, and don't let them to…*

Because he knows too much of the supposedly stealth politics of co-optation, he appears to resist the system. However, the reality is that he actually resists not the system, but the fact that he has already been taken in by the system.

He knows why Hannah Montana concerts have to be extremely expensive for his daughter to attend and what actually constitutes the prices of Mercedes and BMW. Nevertheless, his means to counteract the system is to simply not pay the full price: "I love, erm, er…er, I love,

erm…erm, smart shopping, you know? I always go to good places, but, er…but I look for the sale. I like, er…I like Hugo Boss. They make good stuff. You know what I'm saying? But, then again, you have to pay for it. Yeah, I mean, like, Mercedes is pretty good. I mean, BMW is pretty good, you know? So…Lexus is good. So, it's…it…it all depends on…[how we control]."

As such, some stigmatized consumers are those who have become deeply involved with the system and have realized that pure resistance is not a viable option for them unless one does not want to belong to the whole system. Randi added:

> *They…They don't want you to resist. They want you to go with, and follow.*
> *You know what I'm saying? I mean, they, er…This is it. It's amazing that we*
> *have this type of, er, system in America, you know, with this, er…You know,*
> *with this beauty, they just tell you what to do, what not to do, you know? And,*
> *of course, they…they don't want you to resist, but some people resist, and*
> *once…once you resist against the system, of course you're gonna lose some*
> *benefits.*

On one hand, such consumers resist the system that executes mass-brainwashing for the sake of illusionary class stratification through status symbols and trend-setting cultural items, and this is how they become stigmatized. On the other hand, some mechanics of their naïve resistance unintendedly create a tremendous marketing opportunity. As soon as marketers realized that there were a sufficient number of consumers who wanted to control the price and the way they made their own transactions, "eBayization" as a metonymic expression took place and prospered. Intercepting market intervention and minimizing its cultural influence on prices had been somehow feasible just before "powersellers" on eBay started acting as conventional marketers. Craigslist was invented as a more localized and grassroots type of market system and soon became marketing-prone. Stigmatized consumers try to stay away from the system without realizing that the attempt is in fact reinforcing the system in terms of its contents and extent.

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Consumers of this sort assimilate with co-optation because they see some benefits in doing so. While they scorn the absurd irrelevance of the presence of different sponsors at the X Games, they admit that the "absurdness" eventually brings opportunities to the sports and the participants. Hank acquiesces to the politics of co-optation:

> *...Maybe I have a problem with the fact that it's just about money and selling...it's just about selling products. I mean that's, like...Well, like, I don't know, who are the sponsors this year: like, Jeep, or whatever, y'know? Or Pizza Pockets. I mean...these guys, just...they're, y'know, they're just ...they're here to sell their brands. It's got nothing to do with this[X Games], but, fortunately for the sports, a lot of money goes into this. What does Taco Bell have to do with snowboarding? Nothing, but… ...because of the corporate sponsors, and then you get this, and this is impressive, this is good. This is good for the sport, so...Yeah.*

As a ski and snowboard instructor, Hank embraces the relentless invasion of corporate sponsorships upon the sports and the potential dilution of the ethos he initially followed because he can make a better life as the pool of clientele expands due to marketing influences. Another upside of commercialization of the subculture is that "mainstream adverts" are now empowered as magazines and TV shows (i.e., Big Brother and Jackass) adopt and legitimate the styles and values of extreme sports. At the same time, however, his stigmatized self-identity paradoxically resists the reckless penetration of mass-marketized cultural elements such as Van's eleven sponsored "mega skate parks" next to shopping malls in different states. Consumers who know the operations of co-optation tend to resist harder and more creatively (e.g., Beal and Wilson 2004). Hank also "enlightens" markets as he ridicules them: "My rebellion towards that [pop music] was, like, heavy metal, and, y'know…Oh, I had a kinda, like, *rebellion*… ...against that kind of music, and my rebellion was going towards heavy metal, and, y'know…strange forms of music – extreme punk rock – that sort of thing…" As he moved to different bands that played weirder genres again and again, he saw that each of them became a "sellout." He fed the music

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industry that he found "despoiling." The vigilance and resilience of the market system enables itself to always outrun stigmatized consumers who reflexively supply cultural materials for marketers.

Another perspective that stigmatized consumers present is that co-optation simplifies, minimizes, and domesticates naturalistic cultural elements in the sports. It is also viewed as "the due course" to mainstream status of the sports, and achieving such status is the demise of the sports. Zac objectively sees the whole process:

> *It [extreme sports]'s getting more mainstream, and stuff. I think it's…I think it's…it's coming…overall it's good for the sport, you know? Probably get more parks…more places for kids to skate, more skate shops. Like, those'll become more available, with more people following it, but also, on the downside there'll be more people trying to take advantage of it, more people just trying to just make money off it. Well, I mean, there's nothing wrong with making money off of skateboarding, but there's some people that might sacrifice quality just for…to make money and… Well, I mean, there's positives and negatives for that. I think overall… …and then, er, like, yeah, I think, if it became more mainstream…like, I mean, any town's gonna have a football field, or a soccer-field. Skate-parks are still kinda hard to find. I think the main goal behind everything becoming commercialized in sport is that people see a market for it. People see an opportunity to make money, so… It's very interesting to see something, er, that was, er, looked down upon… Now it's becoming very popular. Every young…Every single young kid… It could fall. It could, kind of, like, build up, build up, build up, and then, like, kind of reset, I think, to the way it was before, like, always looked down upon. I think it's possible, but not necessarily, in the near future, but…*

The rationale for him to predict a "qualitative fall" of the extreme sports is that the original spirit of the sports is not to compete, but to enjoy one's own style and appreciate each others' stylizations in terms of skating, fashion, and ultimately life, which means authenticity in the skateboarding world (Beal and Weidman 2003). As marketers build more skate parks and encourage more young consumers to subscribe to the readership of current fashion and trends of skateboarding, consumers overlook the sports' original culture of non-competition. Not only is there the athletic competition constantly taking place in the parks, but the cultural competition

among consumers (skateboarders) is also emerging. Although skateboarding developed on the streets, as it is simplified and domesticated in the parks, everything has become conspicuous, including fashion, riding style, and musical preference. As a result, a competitive consumption tendency deteriorates the ethos further (e.g., Heath and Potter 2004). Consumers in the parks compete with each other in terms of the price of their wheels, recency of their skates, and brands of their clothes, just as "soccer moms" are always eager for better and more luxurious vehicles, and "beer after sports" dads want more expensive and newer toys. As soon as stigmatized consumers, such as Zac, grasp how meaningless any of such competition in the sports is, they go on the streets again for "real" rails and obstacles for them to jump over and film themselves to boast their authenticity and celebrate the seeming win over marketers' cultural influence (e.g., Borden 2001). Their more creative and rebellious progress on the streets outside the parks, however, has a very short life span because marketers are able to quickly turn the creativity and rebelliousness into production. Indi-label films created by stigmatized consumers are no longer "indi" because it is already what "Twins" and "Y-generations" feel they have to watch and simulate. Stigmatized consumers' in depth knowledge about co-optation, in fact, accelerates and enriches the process.

Some manifest their stigma through apathetic acquiescence to co-optation. They realize that it is impossible to stop or reverse such a mechanism. Corby admits that there are positive aspects of commercialization of everything, but still censures the process' inhumane practices and the ensuing negative consequences:

> *I think it's actually, probably positive. D'y'know what I mean? It...It means that people...people actually earn money doing it. Without that, I really think people, y'know...I don't think this would be on without that commercialization, y'know? You need money to come in somehow, with sponsorship, commercialization, or it'll never happen, y'know? And, like, yeah, you gotta get paid somehow, or else you're gonna go and do something else, y'know? Erm.*

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Like, I'm not really into too much, like, commercialization, but if…in this example, actually, it's a means to an end, y'know? Like, I suppose…I can't…I can't really think of that much of a downside, to be honest, like. I know in a…in a lot of other situations it…it can, y'know…can kind of change the sport. Y'know what I mean? Like, it can turn the sport into something else, y'know? Like, it means that it's about money. It's not about the sport anymore, but I think in this example, like, y'know, it's still very much about the sport….But…. Yeah, er, pretty, erm…pretty negative, generally, like. I don't know, like I was talking about, when you were talking about supermarkets, and things like that…it's a fucking terrible thing, like… It's - particularly in Australia, like I was saying yesterday – y'know, there's…there's two big supermarkets there; Woolworth's and Kohl's, and they're, y'know, just killing all the little guys, y'know? And…And…And… Yeah. Just, really, like, they have no morals, y'know, basically. Like, it's a really bad thing. Erm, as far as sport's concerned, y'know, because in Australia with sport as well, if you're talking about Rugby League, or something like that, the players don't get paid much to play. They get paid out of sponsorship. That's where they get their money from. They wouldn't do it if they didn't get paid, y'know what I mean? So, like, er, I think it's a necessary evil, `though.

As many other stigmatized consumers previously discussed, Corby sees the paradoxical and reflexive characteristics of co-optation that baffle contemporary consumers. His choice to react to the necessary evil is to "shop local" as much and often as possible. His antagonism to retail dinosaurs is quite serious as he says, "The whole thing [supercenters] is gross…actually, allergic to it. Because it's become…it pushes the little guy out." He has been supporting local businesses since he was sixteen. The support for local businesses by local consumers, however, at times, turns into easy and promising targets for marketers. Many popular local restaurants have been sold to bigger management companies and lost their unique flavors. Starbucks had to either take over local coffee shops' locations or kill them (e.g., Thompson and Arsel 2004). Tailor-made become readymade. Carpentry and cabinetry are now found at Home Depot and Lowe's. Local contractors have no room to stand because of the "rabbit town" syndrome. It may be seen as industrialization or modernization rather than commercialization or co-optation, but the fine line between them is very palpable to stigmatized consumers. As a result, they voluntarily opt out

from the modernized retail spectacles and shop local, which, however, identifies opportunities

and cultural competitors for marketers. In the long run, stigmatized consumers' practices sustain

the market system as new indigenousness is created and vanished (co-opted) cyclically.

Factionalization of Subculture

> *New heroes of consumer culture make lifestyle a life project and display their individuality and sense of style in the particularity of the assemblage of goods, clothes, practices, experiences, appearance and bodily dispositions they design together into a lifestyle (Featherstone 1991:86).*

> *When a sociologically circumscribed group has no other aim in life but to live in a world of waves or snow, when an entire life is devoted to one moment of ecstasy, it is time to consider the most intimate ways by which human beings build their own cultural landmarks and make them meaningful (Midol 1993:27).*

Postmodern "image-saturated" culture today encourages individual consumers to produce

images that are original and robust enough to be utilized for their identity projects (Kellner 1995).

The image production often involves production of physical items, distinct behaviors, and

ultimately observable styles. Consumers' rationale to produce such images to design their

lifestyle through the sports is that the depthless, image-based culture promoted by mainstream

media and brands erodes the core substances and values of the sports too rapidly and inexorably

so that consumers can no longer find any authenticity (e.g., Jameson 1991). The insider notions

of authenticity (i.e., no-competition, anti-commercialization, and being true to oneself) enable

some extreme sports participants to work on more detailed "symbolic boundaries" (Kiewa 2002).

In other words, the traditional boundary between the mainstream and the stigmatized is now

titular enough for them to further sophisticate their authenticity. Hank, as one of the consumers

who see the cultural invasion by marketers, elaborates his identity as a "snow bum" and "street

bum" by inventing and riding something new:

Well it's interesting. I think, y'know, er…if I think of it as a consumer, y'know, everyone follows trends, I think, a little bit. Here and…and back I'll just compare it to the two places I really know. That's here and back home in Edmonton. Edmonton, it just seems like everyone's following trends…and there's different branches of these trends, but they're pretty much the same in each way….and out here, it's really kind of, er, the trends seem to be, like, these are people at the beginning of the curve – these are the early adapters, here….for trends in clothing, fashion, music…erm, also the sports, too, like, for example, I mean, we had these little things called snow-decks. It's like a skateboard with a ski underneath. We were using these, like, ten years ago....and they're just starting to get popular here. And another thing is, like, erm...The other thing I got into, is, like, long-board skateboarding. So, like skateboards that are like this long or high [about three and a half feet]….You use them for going really fast on the road. Like, my friends in snowboarding and skiing were using these things for, like, years and years…and now I see them…all over Edmonton, like, my home town. But...But I was...I went and…I went back down to see in 2004, and nobody was on one. I was skating all around the streets of Edmonton, and all these kids were running out of their houses, like, "What the hell? What are you doing? Blah, Blah, Blah…" It's called a long-board skateboard. So it's like a skateboard, but not the little ones. It…That you do tricks on…I don't skateboard on the little ones. Not the ones that you do lots on tricks on. I did the bigger ones, where you go fast on the road, where you have to where leathers.

As soon as Hank realized that the sports were no longer what he had previously aspired to because of the waning symbolic meanings of the sports, he created his own "vehicles of identity" with other "extreme essentialists." As pointed out in the interview, the lifespan of the new images from the new physical items as a cultural identification were quite long (about five years before being introduced in the market).

Notably, the process is quite analogous to what Foucault (1980) observed and analyzed: the inevitable emergence of local power relations that are still intentional, but not subjective. That is, stigmatized consumers' critical attempts to identify themselves with "marketing-free" cultural items and activities appear to be subjective; however, it is simply the nature of power relations, and the subjectivity is a necessary element in a broader spectrum of the power relation. What matters is how long such attempts take to be internalized by the power relations that

buttress the market system. Creation of new cultural items is a very effective means to show one's cultural autonomy as the ethos of extreme sports, but "the creatures" are simply donated to the marketers who feed on such cultural donations (see picture 8 in Appendix B for snowdeck, longboard, two-wheel roller skates, and snowskates). Factionalization of a subculture into different genres benefits marketers because of the potential for market expansion. It is "subcultural product assortment and product-mix." Marketers can now grow by diversifying into different groups of consumers that have different cultural aspirations and preferences with a variety of cultural items.

Style as a subcultural currency helps identify oneself as a skateboarder who appreciates and practices what the sport is all about (i.e., freedom, embracing diversity, individuality, and being cool). Stylization of such substances of the sport often causes factionalization of the subculture. Kai, as a skateboard shop owner and the coach for his skateboarding team has witnessed some instances that are no more than factions of the same subculture sharing and presenting almost identical cultural codes (hipness, rebelliousness, creativity, and cool hunting):

> *It [skateboarding] gave you friends that were just tight and you didn't have anything else in common and never would have hung out with each other or known each other's names if it wasn't for the fact that you both skated and all of a sudden you're best friends, and it gave you somebody to run with all the time and it didn't matter where you go if you were a skater you were buddies. That's another thing that's changed you know, back in the day I could go anywhere in the world and talk to somebody and if they were a skater, that's it… that's all it took… it was a brotherhood. But now you got the X-Games and it's a big deal and it has become competitive. Now even skateboarding has its own sub-cultures, you've got your Hessians, these kids that are wearing the tight pants and the spikes and the funky hair. The Hessians there, like the updated version of the 80's, the old school. And you've got your urban guys, going to the skate shops that have to have the pimped out shoes and shirts and baggy pants, you know its whole different sub-culture. Then you have the average dude that skates a lot and doesn't have any kind of look at all. And that has become a look in itself just your basic sneaker, no flash on it, vulcanized sole, slim fit pant,*

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slim fit cotton t shirt, a hat if you can pull it off. And you look like an average Joe but you spend 60 bucks on those pants because the denim stretches, and the shoes you spend sixty or eighty bucks on those because it's a good pair to skate in and its real durable. Those t-shirts are slim fit and high premium cotton and everything, and it's just, I called it metro-sexual skateboard for a while but then I kind of realized it's just nothing. It's what it has developed into, it's the look that's at the mall now, it's the look that's in any store you know there are skate shoes. It is not a sub culture anymore and it also became competitive now just because you're a skater means that's all your friends do now. It doesn't mean you're all skaters, now it's the skaters that dresses that way or skates the style of that you know and it's kind of divided it up and here in the valley [an area in South Texas] it really makes me mad. Like every little skate park has its own thing.

Consumers of a subculture need to break out of the stereotypes assigned to their styles in order to better present their own understanding and portrayal of the cultural meanings of the subculture rather than representing the less nuanced and sublimated cultural elements that marketers continuously promote. Stylization, however, almost always entails marketing opportunities as it presents newer, more creative, and sometimes even avant-garde articulation of the subculture, which, in turn, is very exotic and attractive to general consumers interested in new trends, not in the sports. "Being seen" as 'the guy' who rides and knows the substance is as important as actually "doing it" in the subculture (Rinehart 2000). The need for constant presentation of self-identity to others encourages the riders to change and embrace the changes by others. Consumers' individual cultural *bricolage*, juxtaposing and blending unrelated materials, symbols, and meanings together, is simply too convenient for marketers to co-opt, and there is a myriad of combinations of such "props" for stylization as performance by stigmatized consumers in the marketplace.

Self-contradictory Adrenaline Huntsmen (HAS and LUD)

Contradiction in the contemporary consumption domain is somewhat inevitable because of consumers' incessant pursuit of reality of their own (e.g., Baudrillard 1983; Murray 2002). Creating reality and bestowing individuated meanings to it is germane to signification, but, contrary to stigmatized individuals, consumers with LUD contradict themselves as they perceive self-contradiction as "resonant and engaging" (Rose and Wood 2005, p. 294). Consumers of this sort deem self-contradiction a necessary condition to achieve authenticity through a resolution process. Nonetheless, such a process is only self-entrapping and does not resolve anything because they unconsciously engage in market-driven symbolization games in which brands are deeply involved. Pursuing, achieving, and maintaining authenticity through brands is historically very ephemeral and potentially inauthentic (Holt 2002; 2004). Those consumers' LUD, however, redefines the meaning of authenticity. Idiosyncrasy, uniqueness, and distinction-making as manifestations of UD are replaced with adrenaline surge, which relieves them from the self-contradiction with respect to their conscious quest for authenticity followed by unconscious consumption of brands.

Pragmatic Brands as Postmodern Identity

Brands are versatile, and some consumers take advantage of the versatility, which involves practicality, quasi-authenticity, and just enough conspicuousness. Discourses of postmodern consumption postulate that consumer ideology operates as a determinant of consumers' conscious choices of images, items, and trends in the market (e.g., Crockett and Wallendort 2004; Firat and Venkatesh 1995; Hirschman 1993). However, when ideology becomes less relevant, as in pragmatism (Hickman and Alexander 1998), quasi-authenticity of certain consumption objects, experiences, and practices become equivalent to authenticity. If

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having an ideology restricts (due to potential ideological inauthenticity) the types and quality of

lived experiences that contemporary consumers strive to obtain for their identity projects, the

ideology simply opposes the notion of appreciation of local and peripheral consciousness as a

"postmodern manifesto" (Kjeldgaard and Askegaard 2006). This paradoxical nature of

postmodernism does not necessarily help consumers make a decision as to how and what they

want to consume to communicate self-identity. Ideologies, cultural shifts, and the following

socio-political adjustments made by individuals are simply forgotten or ignored by some

consumers in the context of X Games. Consumers rather accept the paradox in the ideological

domain of consumption and serenely engage in the self-contradiction caused by the paradox.

Consumers with LUD prioritize immediacy, simplicity, and promptness over

signification. In other words, they do not actually make a clear distinction between practicality

and individuality as do stigmatized consumers (HAS and HUD). The absence or ignorance of

clear ideological underpinnings and/or orientations frees consumers from resolution-ridden and

contradiction-free authenticity. What is practical is authentic. Brands are authentic as well

insofar as they serve consumers' ongoing identity projects. This kind of mentality pervades in

some consumers in the extreme locale to a certain extent, and it appears due to their LUD. They

tend not to mind sharing identities associated with certain brands because distinction-making is

not such an immanent imperative for them. Ruben clearly shows how ignorant or indifferent he

is to self-contradictory consumption practices as he emphasizes frugality, practicality, and the

irrelevance of trends to his life, but at the same time he purchases and aspires to brands:

> *Erm, well [about his old laptop], I think that just watching...growing up with my*
> *parents and seeing how they lived and...My parents always told me, you know,*
> *"You don't need it. What you have is good enough." So, I mean, if it works, just*
> *keep using it, so...You don't always have to have the greatest and weirdest thing.*
> *Work with what you have and fix...If it's broken, you can fix it yourself…. Erm,*
> *[about shopping and trends] I wanna save my money for other things like*

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travelling and... Because when you travel you create memories and experiences.
You gain knowledge... ...you know, cultural experiences which...you buy
material items, what does that give you? A lot of people like it. But I just have
different views.....and I just never went shopping and I hated - I ha-...I still hate
going shopping. Yeah, I mean if I...I only go shopping when I need something
and I go there, buy that and leave, you know? I don't walk around, and
window...you know? I think that, you know...everybody has different...different
likes, the things that they like, you know? So, I like travelling, they like to, you
know, keep up with the fashion. It's just...I don't have any problems with those
people, you know? They look cool. All this stuff out here, I mean it looks very
cool...all the things that they wear. I mean, it's...I'd like to have it, but, right
now I don't have enough money to just go buy all those things.

Ruben's attitude reveals that he simply cannot afford both trends and saving for traveling

rather than that he does not want to follow trends. It is impractical for him to keep up with

current fashion and brands. He would rather save little by little for traveling in order to signify in

the future than keep up with current fashion and brands in the present for better expression and

communication of identity based on lived experiences. However, his HAS is somewhat

undermined by his practicality-orientation. He compliments brands that are usually targeted by

consumer activists or stigmatized consumers for their cultural misdeeds, such as instilling false

and yet seemingly positive brand identities and the following connotations, which, in fact,

degrade consumer imaginations and make them eventually disenchanted. Ruben chooses Nike

and Burton as hegemonic brands that are not usually associated with consumers with HAS, "Big

brands do a really good job of advertising. I mean, they spend a lot of money on research and

development, and being able to have, you know, good commercials, good ads and there are just

some...some brands that just...they get it, you know? Coca-Cola does a good job – their

advertising. Absolute Vodka... So, Nike does a good job. Burton does a good job." It appears

self-contradictory to value spirituality and metaphysics (i.e., karma) and rely on popular brands

at the same time. Ruben continues: "…but I try to stay away from material items. You can't take

them with you when you die, right? But I mean...[I still like those brands]." Consumers with this

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inherent cultural contradiction (e.g., Epp and Price 2008) contribute to market dynamics and its

sustainability as they receive and disseminate brand images that marketers contrive. For example,

Ruben frequents brand-related blogs and forums as well as consumer-generated brand

communities in order to gauge each brand's authenticity with its cultural and functional

practicality. Plurality in terms of different meanings and definitions of authenticity enables each

marketer to claim the authenticity of their brands.

Brands even cure consumers' internal feelings of guilt, which is the terminal symptom of

self-contradiction (e.g., Henry 2010). Consumers with HAS and LUD in the context of X Games

struggle with themselves seeking balance and spirituality rather than commercialized cliché and

pastiche (fashion and/or brands) in their everyday life. The efforts, however, tend to fall apart as

those consumers are overwhelmed by the cultural influences and eventually consume brands

once in every while. This paradoxical cycle is quite apparent in Sabrina's narrative as she, in fact,

aspires to brands and is brand-conscious, but she always tries to distance herself from them for

the sake of spirituality in life. This cycle, however, concludes with her mixed feelings of guilt

and pseudo-satisfaction with her purchase of brands:

> *Erm…I guess when I feel better I…I would probably be more apt to go out and consume. Erm, when I felt like my life was going well and things were balanced, perhaps I would…I would be more open to being a consumer. Erm, more…Like, if things are going well, I'm…I'm very…erm, I'm very plugged in to the world around me and so I'm…I'm going out more and seeing people and visiting with friends and erm, I think I'm probably more apt to go out and buy dinner with friends than if I felt like my life wasn't in balance. I would stress out and I would rather just have a, you know, dinner at home that was quick and easy, erm, but I feel that when things are balanced and I have all the aspects in my life going on that I want to be there, on the body, mind and spirit level… There are a lot of people, you know…if you're kind of depressed, you know, go out and eat out and go to movies, buy things. I'm the opposite. I used to live in Boston. Erm, and I was probably more like that there. …but I feel like here [Aspen, Colorado] it's a little different. There's not a lot of, erm, consumer opportunities here, even…for people that aren't, like, the mega-wealthy – so that makes it different on that front. So, like, retail therapy doesn't really exist*

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very much here, unless you're willing to go out and drop five hundred dollars on something, in which case, if I did that, I would…I would be in such a deep depression from having spent five hundred dollars on a pair of jeans that, it doesn't really make that my coping mechanism at all. It's more like, if I'm down, I'm gonna go out for a hike and try and boost my spirits that way, or, if I'm down, go and try and do something that's more outdoors and even cheaper for me. Well, I…yeah, I do [shop], but you can still get things in Anthropologie for, like, a hundred dollars, instead of five hundred. I don't know. It's, like, once every couple of months I get a sweater, or… What I feel at the moment…becomes kind of natural high…`cause things are going so well, so, all of a sudden, out of the blue, you wanna spend some money…for yourself.

For Sabrina, brands are again versatile and thus pragmatic just as for Ruben. That is, the two different aspects of brands give the feeling of balance to her. When she is in a bad mood, brands are what she disdains or mocks; brands become another source of delight when she is happy about her life. The delight, however, quickly triggers depression, the first phase of the cycle followed by an ascetic lifestyle, which is very transient. She claims to be indifferent to brands, but when she sees any practicality from any brands, she becomes more indifferent to how expensive the brands are and what they culturally connote. For example, when she renovated and decorated her condo with her sister, she spent a great deal of money to complete the layout and interiors with brands, such as SONY flat-screen TV, curtains from Pottery Barn, and furniture from Bombay, which are quite a stretch for them. It seems that this type of consumer has the fewest thoughts about the meanings of brands. They tend to adopt brands as they are as long as they provide some practicality, including aesthetics, functionality, and conspicuousness for those consumers whenever they are in need of such a self-contradictory practice for the sake of balance. Marketers with established brand names benefit from such consumers because their consumption style is straightforward and unadulterated enough to reinforce the brand meanings, personalities, and identities. BMW drivers make what BMW connotes; iPhone users create the global cultural syndrome on behalf of Apple; IKEA fanatics present how and when to use the brands in their

websites. Criticism-absent culture of consumption is brought to us by such consumers seeking balance, but who contradict themselves as they explosively purchase brands when they feel balanced.

Self-contradictory consumers' pursuit of spirituality and balance is sometimes nullified as they choose brands simply because they are on sale or seem more practical (e.g,, Bahl and Milne 2010). As a sincere Christian, Ralph emphasizes the importance of the spiritual sphere of life and authentic lifestyle that, he believes, has to be centered on religious beliefs. He also underlines consumer awareness not to be "exploited or victimized" by marketers. However, his indiscriminate shopping of brands on sale and longing for a certain brand taint his authenticity, "I…I'm not very materialistic, so I don't buy much stuff. I don't care about brand name stuff. I like things that are paid for, that are…that they work. I don't care if it's used…They[brands] do have a pretty good deal, so I try to get stuff on sale, you might say and that…that helps a little bit, but I always…I always buy stuff on sale myself…. I would like to have a Corvette. I've always liked Corvettes…" His religious beliefs and definition of authenticity totally reject the material aspect of life, which is quite contradictory to the notion of inseparability between material and spiritual life (Sherry 2000). Starting from the contradiction results in a more overt self-contradiction through which consumers of this kind perform his or her role as a consumer fetishisizing brands and idolizing their identities. Taken for granted brand images tend to be disseminated by consumers who contradictorily participate in the market dynamics with less concern about shared identities drawn mostly from brand identities and promote the intact pre-designed brand meanings either online or offline.

Adrenaline Rush

Consumers perpetuate the self-contradiction rather than finding means and ways to minimize the influence of the undesirable aspect of contemporary consumers' lives. Avoidance, or dodging away, is usually sought by such consumers under the name of fluidity and freedom. Self-contradictory consumers in the context choose to be on the mountains or streets in order to deal with their stress and tension. Those negative and unhealthy symptoms of our lives, however, do not result from the conflict between work/personal life, ideals/realities, or norms/personal beliefs, but mainly from the irresolvability of the contradiction. As a career woman in her 20s, Hanna is familiar with the brands and trends that her friends and colleagues purchase and wear, but, because of her personal belief that disallows her to be more frugal and less spending, she is anxious about her look and style. Such tension tends to be resolved as she enjoys outdoor activities including skateboarding, motorcross, and racing trucks, but she does not realize how much she has to spend on those expensive outfits and equipment from well-known brands. She justifies her self-contradiction, "I had a little pit bike, and I rode it all over, rode it at my grandparents', and just continued to ride. Took a few years off here and there, rode horses for a while, still just really like motorcycles. It's just fun. Adrenalin rush pretty much. It's dangerous, fun, it sucks to get hurt, but it's all just part of the sport." As she runs away from the everyday "headache" caused by "brand-consciousness," she actually pays more for the high maintenance hobbies and for her multi-point injuries. What she believes to be the only practical way to deal with her confusion is in fact impractical. In order to have the adrenaline charge, she first needs to charge and refuel her expensive branded equipment and shield her body with brand name outdoor jackets. Brands are practical because she can blow the stress from brand-consciousness, but they make the whole cycle totally paradoxical. The adrenaline she seeks is the same as

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painkillers that simply stimulate another part of our body in order to reduce the pain, which of course never cures anything. The use of adrenaline to face the tension between frugality (autonomy) and brands seems to deteriorate the self-contradiction just as the side effects of painkillers because she is now addicted to the temporary cure without realizing the long-term effects.

Consumers' addictive reliance on adrenaline blinds them to their own contradictory consumption practices. Sabrina, as public service professional in Aspen, Colorado, gains free lift tickets from her work and goes skiing every Saturday and Sunday for "fluidity" as her term for adrenaline. While she does not pay for the expensive tickets (about one hundred dollars a day), she purchases many brand name items online (i.e., Backcountry.com) in order to "save her face" in the resort. She still believes this practice is practical because she saves almost two hundred dollars a week while enjoying the adrenaline surge. Moreover, her choices of products and brands are based entirely upon consumer reviews, which usually correspond to the current styles and trends. She decided to participate in lifestyle sports when she moved to the area, but she is disoriented with symbols and styles instead of creating and embellishing her lifestyle.

For Ruben, the relief from the adrenaline charge on the hills is almost an excuse he uses to justify his contradictory consumption patterns. He lives in Vail, Colorado, which is approximately one hundred miles away from Aspen, Colorado, but he managed to attend the X Games event during weekdays between his shifts. His justification is that he always wanted to feel relief (adrenaline) in the global, liberal context. However, his focus was on brands as he continued to mention the brand names he observed and/or aspired: "I love Burton. I love six-eight-six. Six-eighty-six is probably my new favorite brand. These pants are six-eight-six. But, er, I like Four Square....erm, Bonfire's cool. Yeah, I like 'em all. TC's cool. [To the question about

regular casuals not snowboarding apparel] Regular casual brands? Erm, I don't know. I don't

really shop a lot, so..." Those brands are all sellouts and are thus contested severely by some

essentialist extreme sports participants (it is quite common for them to spit on the streets when

they see people wearing those brands). Although consumers such as Ruben are able to signify as

they show their own originality and creativity in other practices and contexts, the irresistible

temptation of adrenaline makes them less able or unable to signify in the particular consumption

context. Their somewhat philosophical justifications for the pursuit of such pleasure (i.e.,

freedom, fluidity, relief, balance, and spirituality) become excuses for their cultural "dissonance,"

and it is what exactly marketers hope for: unhindered or uncontested delivery of pre-fabricated

brand images and identities. Consumers' HAS without HUD seems to allow them to contribute

to the market dynamics by acting as exemplary consumers of brands who play their roles as

"brand missionaries" in the online review websites and offline word-of-mouth.

Distinction 2.0 (LAS and HUD)

Consumers' HUD with or without low ability to signify confuses them between economic

capital and cultural capital (cf., Bourdieu 1984). Although one can never replace the other,

consumers of this sort believe that such confusion is a general and effective when to satisfy their

HUD. Some consumers in the context even advocate class stratification based on economic

capital and that it is an inevitably definitive means to be distinctive. The classical view of social

class is resurrected and practiced in their minds as they lack ability to signify as a cultural

prerequisite that fulfills one's urge for distinctiveness. According to such consumers, the "haves

and knows" are the people who can recognize and afford brands that are exclusive of the "have

nots," who have insufficient economic resources but still want to be distinctive. Celia, a

housewife who enjoys extreme sports, appears to appreciate diversity, but deems it the basis for

distinction based on economic capital:

> *….And so, for them, it's good [The event and the crowd]. Plus, I think it's great when you can have different cultures, different beliefs, different economics, all come together because they all love skateboarding. I just think you…Well, I mean, it's a presumption, but I think you can tell, erm…you can just tell by people, how they hold themselves and by the purses they carry and by the jewelry they're wearing and all…You can just…you can just tell. It doesn't necessarily mean one has more money than other, it's just…the way that they look…different social classes. Mmn. I'm trying to think how to explain. Erm, I don't know. What I meant was, it's, like, we travelled half way around the world to bring our kids to do this. Not every…Not most people could do that, and so, they…we're not local LA people, or people that could get in the car and drive two hours to bring our kids to do this. I mean, we, you know, flew and it's been a whole lot of money to be here for our kids and that's what I mean by you've got people coming in that… making a vacation out of this and all of this and then you've got people that have probably been saving to get to come to this. There are little kids…that would never get to come to something, that may live right in this area…and they're out skating on the streets and would never get to come and do something like this, but it comes around maybe once a year and maybe they can. That's kind of what I mean.*

Affluent consumers or affluent wannabes are, as she mentions, distinctive consumers

simply because they visit, purchase, and wear what the other consumers cannot. Brand-

consciousness is again observable among these consumers, not as a practical excuse for

adrenaline hunters, but as an indicator of distinctiveness. Due to the absence or insufficiency of

ability to signify, upscale brands or exotic places to visit are the substitutions for individual

meanings and idiosyncrasy. For example, for Celia, general brands and places are not attractive

or even consciously avoided:

> *I like to shop nicer places. I like `em to be clean. If it's not clean…I don't go Walmart or anything like that. I won't shop there. Not ever? Not…I…Only if I have to and it's not very often. Not even once a year. I don't like it at all. I would say in our little city that we live in…You just get weird people living there. Yeah. I think so. I don't like the people that shop in there. But I like the people here, I hope. [About her hobby] Erm, I mean…Er, yeah, I mean, we…we follow ice hockey because of our kids…[About her favorite brands] Banana*

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> *Republic…Yeah. J. Crew. Isabella Fiore. I avoid just anything that comes from Walmart.*

What Celia means by "exotic places" are expensive places to visit, such as the cities of New York and Los Angeles. Those cities are not necessarily expensive because they are still domestic, but when the trips are made to let their sons to watch NHL teams they support and extreme athletes they follow, the destinations become exotic enough because not everyone could do the same.

In contrast to consumers with HAS and LUD, this group of consumers practice superficial spirituality, which usually translates into the conscious pursuit of brands. While this group of consumers claim that they consume brands in order to realize and enhance their spiritual sphere of life and balance, the actual performance of such objectives is quite equivocal compared to *adrenaline huntsmen*. In other words, the latter in fact accomplish their objectives as they practice pragmatic consumption (using brands as necessary), but the former does not because they try to replace such philosophical and metaphysical values with luxury brands and exoticism. Temporal, contextual, unconscious, and pragmatic engagement with "brandscape" (Sherry 1998, p. 112) is practiced by consumers with HAS and LUD, whereas constant and conscious consumption of brands based on economic capital is observed among the consumers with LAS and HUD. Anne values spirituality and fetishizes brands at the same time, and the latter is neither temporal nor contextual:

> *I...I really love the feeling of the turning on the mountain. I love the mountains and I love the scenery, and I love just being outside, and being active, and it makes me appreciate my health, and…So, I…It's very spiritual for me to go out for a day, and go skiing, or snowboarding…. [About a book she recently read] A New Earth, by Tolle - his spiritual philosophy, and, erm, so I read a lot of, erm…I like to be, erm, enhanced in some way when I read…. I travel abroad, and financially, would…would do more, but the money isn't there and it's on account of it, but…we're gonna take our kids somewhere international, here, in the next couple, two or three years, just don't know exactly where… Well, erm,*

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we really make decisions all together, and so, what we would do is probably come up with two or three ideas, and as a family decide whether it's a beach vacation somewhere, or a…we talked a lot about going to Europe, and go skiing one winter…maybe going to, like, erm… Austria…I've heard, like, Austria is less expensive than Switzerland….I don't like….Again, I don't like to go where everyone else is going. It's not my style! I like to be a little bit more obscure... Like, there's not a big part of me that wants Hawaii. And, maybe I will go there someday, but when beaches come up and everyone I know has been to Hawaii….and I wanna go to Tahiti. You know, I tend to want to go places I research. But I tend to like...I don't like to do what everybody else is doing. I don't want to go where a...a big convention would go. I want to go to the more rural…Uh-huh. Uh-huh....quiet...more spiritual place, than the big….

She has traveled abroad many times, and now she feels that her destinations have not been exotic enough to be spiritually enhancing, which is thought to be distinction-making. More exotic experiences require more financial resources; thus, her spirituality is totally dependent upon economic capital. In conjunction with her quest for the exotic, her brand-reliance adds to her shrinking financial freedom. For example, her sunglasses were Maui Jim ($300 a pair), and she currently purchases many clothes from Kenneth Cole, not from outlet stores. In her mind, money may be the only element that "breaks or makes" her spirituality as an indicator of distinction she wants to conspicuously communicate with others.

Fetishisizing and idolizing luxury brands are evident among consumers with LAS and HUD. High price tags and exclusivity of certain brands make them convinced that they own what they are expected to own for the subscription to the class (based on economic capital) to which they want to belong. The high "subscription and maintenance fee" compensates as they believe that those brands are more durable than others and survive through trend shifts. Kacy clearly shows how such beliefs are hold, "A Mercedes…erm, the SUV. The L450. It's, er…Eight Liters [Actually eight cylinders]. Yeah. It's pretty. It's a good…We need a big…a good SUV to go back and forth from Denver to Vail every weekend…My son's on the Vail snowboard team….I had the…the Lexus - the LX-470. It was even bigger…. Because I believe they last

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longer….they *do* last longer." She now considers purchasing Infiniti Q56, which, she thinks, is roomier and more "stylistic." If she buys it (apparently, she had already talked to the sales representative), it would be her third luxury car in nine years. If they really last long, the first car should still be in her possession. Luxury brands mechanically last long, but not culturally.

Kacy also paradoxically misbelieves that expensive goods last longer too, "[About her fashion] You know….and there are styles that just…it's just, like, about ten years ago, maybe not quite so long, my husband bought me this very expensive ski suit. It's probably a thousand, twelve hundred dollar ski suit. In two years they were *so* out of style. It was *so* out of style to wear a ski suit and I think that was because of the snowboarding `cause they didn't wear such…you know…" She still wears the expensive suits because she believes that saying "Oh, it's twelve hundred dollar piece" still stylizes her lifestyle and distinctiveness based on the monetary value of the item. Consumers of this kind unselectively "worship" brands and exotic (in fact, more expensive) experiences without conscious internalization (understanding) of the brand images and meanings. However, their lifetime subscription to the luxury brandscape and exotic locales is sometimes suspended when they occasionally shop at T.J.Maxx and Marshalls. Celia, Anne, and Kacy all go to those more general and moderately priced shops in order to purchase basic (hidden) or less noticeable items, such as socks, umbrellas, and underwear. This temporal and contextual irregularity is still brand worshiping as they continue to search for more luxurious brands in those stores. It is rare to find True Religion socks or Janie and Jack t-shirts in those places, but, if there, they are purchased by those consumers with higher brand-consciousness. Brands are not necessarily appealing to consumers with competence in appreciating and sorting out brand meanings and identities (cultural capital), but to consumers obsessed with their misbelief that the most immediate way to make distinction is to capitalize on their economic

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capital. With them, marketers can keep raising their prices as long as the luxury images of their brands are recognized. If overstocked, they put some markdowns on the price tags and sell them in discount stores. Working advertisement is their role in market dynamics. Such consumers unconsciously drive demo cars, walk on the runways, and host home shopping parties on the streets.

Self-normalization (LAS and LUD)

You know better than me the unfortunate fate of this word "normalization."
What is not normalization? I normalize, you normalize, and so on. However,
let's try to identify some of the important points in all this (Foucault 2007: 56).

Consumerism established through modernization naturalizes consumption activities and experiences in terms of expressions of self-identity centered on hedonic rather than rational sphere of such consumer behaviors (Slater 1997; Stearns 2001). As a result, consumption has become the very means to identify and communicate oneself in the power relations in society operating based mostly on market logic. This consumerization, borrowing Foucault (2007)'s term, is normation in which individuals are trained to posses certain qualities for prescribed roles in society. Normation pursues a totalizing, unifying value as a norm, whereas normalization, as a more technical reference to power relations, embraces plasticity and multiplicity of manifestations of "the norm." Applying these notions to consumer research, it is the case that consumerism as the norm has already been pervasive, but the interpretation and implementation of such norms can be as flexible and oscillating as it has to be for an individual. Power relations in the market do not necessarily regulate or regularize individual understandings and practices of the norm unless too many consumers trespass the normative boundaries set through normation.

Consumers with LAS and LUD are apparently the ones who consciously monitor

themselves and redirect their individual consumption patterns and styles in order not to violate

the imagined norm for contemporary consumers. However, this normalization is neither applied

nor pertinent to the whole body of consumers. Rather, it is self-perceived and self-prescribed

adjustment to what they believe to be "normal." Almost all consumers in this group recognize

co-optation as the norm and an important part of consumersim in the current market system:

> *No it's not too bad, commercial is very important to us now, without our*
> *sponsor without money we do nothing because skiing and snowboarding is very*
> *expensive (Chen).*

> *Some of it is what I pictured, but I didn't know how spread out it would be and I*
> *know with how it has to be set up I knew they had to do different events different*
> *places because it could take all day to set up something, so it is kind-of cool that*
> *you cannot be stuck in one spot. Some places you are stuck in one stadium, like*
> *you can walk around a little bit but you are focused on one area, this you can*
> *walk around to different things and go at your own pace and it is a lot more*
> *spread out. With this there is a lot of marketing and sponsoring involved in this.*
> *You know its ESPN that puts it on so it is hosted by a TV company and they*
> *make their money off of advertising so there is a lot more commercialism in this*
> *kind of venue than at a football stadium or baseball stadium or soccer stadium.*
> *Yea much more, there are booths for everything, you go to a sports stadium and*
> *you might see a credit card company booth saying sign up for our credit card*
> *and you will get some free stuff associated with the team and that kind of stuff*
> *here you have radio stations trying to sell…. Yea Oakley came from sporting*
> *stuff and I think skiing and snowboarding and stuff, they are the sportier kind of*
> *shades so this is a good venue for that. And New Balance has gotten big*
> *because they make skater shoes and stuff like that, they are more known for that*
> *kind of shoe than sneakers and athletic shoes. (Marc).*

> *I think they've been sponsors for a couple of years. It's fine. I think it's… `Cause*
> *this is the market they're targeting. Don't you think? There are a lot of young*
> *people here, so I think this would be a good venue for them to be here (Pam).*

Consumers of this sort take the normative workings of the market system for granted and thus

seek ways to stay within the boundaries even when their individual behaviors and choices have

minimal relations to the norm. In other words, they regard conformity as the first priority while

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indicating that they also value disconformity dependent upon contexts. Jack, for example, shows

his self-normalizing practice:

> *You know, something, like, I…I wanna…I wanna have, you know, everything that he [his brother] has, you know? Not everything he has, but, like, you know, that's kind of, like, I look up to him, you know, like, I want to…At his age, I wanna, you know, at least have all that,what he has. You know, like, a good job, a wife and, you know, planning to get a house - you know, stuff like that. Like, I…I wanna do that….But I can't think of anything else. Like…you know, like…Like, I don't know, that's why…er, that's why I started getting away from my skateboarding, `cause I felt like I kinda…kinda growing up and I feel like I'm kind of growing out of it. I don't want to say that, but I think I am. Like, I know everything through skating, `cause I've been through it. You know, like, just to be good, like a normal person.*

He gave up his passion and talent as a skater for the more normal life that his brother presents.

For him, a successful life is defined as what one materially possesses at a certain age, rather than

how close one is to self-actualization. At the age of twenty, he abandoned everything that he had

lived for and chose a normal life. He perceives the norm as very inflexible and thus bends

himself. His choice of brands and products corresponds to his usual view of norm. GAP is what

he believes to be the brand for a normal twenty year old man. Although he could afford more,

better, and different, he bought a four-cylinder, four-door, five-passenger car simply because he

thinks it is normal. While he mentions that he values disconformity as well, it appears that he

still conforms to the culture of disconformity of the sports:

> *Well, not exactly, like, create, your own thing, but, like, I mean, `cause most tricks are already invented, you know, you're doing a trick's that already invented, but, like, you know, it takes time to, like, practice it, you know, and stuff, like…like, some of them may be good at another trick that you're not good at, you know, like….and think, you know….That's all right. You know, that's like, I'm being creative, which is, you know, just that. Just think of, like, something, you know, like, `cause you're not gonna be thinking the same thing as someone else…*

As such, while he values creativity as a manifestation of the norm of disconformity, he still

purchases well-known name brand skateboarding pants because it is the norm as well. His

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creativity facilitates not true individuality in the sports, but normalization-ridden culture of consumption.

Another type of self-normalization is observed when consumers with LAS and LUD search for cool. In contrast to the intrinsic meaning of cool as the art of living and authentic counterproposal to mass culture (Nancarrow and Nancarrow 2007), some hunt only normalized cool, which is usually inauthentic and conforming. Of course, there is less artistic endeavor followed by pseudo-authenticity in that sort of cool-hunting. For them, cool means early adopters' cultural outlook rather than creative stylization of one's mode of being:

> ....*Like I snowboard, but 15 years ago nobody snowboarded, you know snowboarders, that was like the cool thing to do, and now there are more snowboarders than skiers I think. When I was learning how to snowboard and stuff, the short skies or skate skies or whatever, that was the cool thing to do. But that never caught on, sometimes they catch on and sometimes they stay as little niche things that will die out and stuff like that. You know some fads come and go kind of thing and there are other ones that become part of culture (Mark).*

> *I mean the fact that the x-games are at the Staples center where Wayne Gretzky and Kobe Bryant play that just shows how big this sport is now all these sports. [In response to some criticism on the commercialization of the sports] You can call it what you want I mean I agree with that. [Reason to participate] Because it's cool. Because it's on TV now, it's becoming more accessible (Ted).*

The espousal of "sellout cool" and ostentatious style indicate that these consumers are quite far from cool; they are rather close to normalization-ridden mode of being. Their insufficient cultural capital drains faster as they follow institutionalized cool and massified authenticity. However, they are the very ones who buttress the entire market system because the power relations in the market constantly require normalization that provides cheap replacement for cultural capital so that it effectively and incessantly kindles the respective desires to consume the normal. Self-normalizing consumers make the possibly cumbersome normalization process quite natural and seemingly autonomous.

Inconclusion: Modes (Arts) of Being (Consumption)

A dialectical progression of the system (e.g., Holt 2002; Giesler 2008), or a resolution process for oppositional ideals and objectives between individuals and marketers in the consumer market, is not present in the market dynamics drawn from the context of X Games. Rather, the interplay and relationships among all participants, components, and cultural elements are what energize and advance the consumer market system. In other words, contrast, contest, and conflict followed by a "solution" or an unended cultural antagonism between two parties, one seeking cultural autonomy and the other looking for more cultural control, appear unproductive and counter-systematic interpretations and understandings of such an interactive and even harmonized system. Not only immediate relationships between two outwardly oppositional groups of consumers, but also indirect and mediated interactions among different participants in the consumer market uphold the dynamical, rather than dialectical, sustainability of the system.

As proposed in an earlier chapter, there are intrapersonal variations observed in terms of cultural manifestations of consumer identity. Figure 5 depicts how market dynamics systematically functions, leveraging the multiplicity of consumers' performance of their roles and cultural interplays among all necessary components of the system. Consumers with pragmatic lifestyles sometimes perform the role of self-normalizing consumers as they conform to the normative influences of brands and symbols when pursuing spirituality and a balanced life. Self-normalizing consumers occasionally appear to be distinction-obsessed consumers or pragmatic consumers when following some "cultural stimulants" and/or emulating the iconicity of brands. Stigmatized consumers further marginalize themselves because of the "cultural threats" posed by pragmatic and distinction-obsessed consumers. The nature of the threat is the potential and actual stereotypes of the stigma that are not necessarily its true cultural stance. As the other

two types of consumer identity resemble what the stigma superficially presents, especially when cool-hunting and pursuit of balance are present, pragmatic and distinction-oriented consumers might be seen as playing the role of the stigmatized. However, the self-contradiction by pragmatic consumers and the inauthentic consumption practices by distinction-oriented consumers make those stereotypes really "the stereotypes." Self-normalizing consumers are victimized as they are regarded as the bottom of the pyramid of class stratification based on economic capital that is highly valued by distinction-oriented consumers who sometimes normalize themselves while shopping in more general places. Distinction-oriented and pragmatic consumers seem to look alike as they enjoy the brandscape for their own identity project management and virtually play an interchangeable role in the brandscape when the role is restricted to the context of X Games. Nonetheless, in a broader consumer identity field, the former type of consumers is different from the latter in that their employment of brands is temporal rather than continuous.

Stigma and normalization are the haunting oppositions in the discourses of consumer identity deeply interrelated to consumer agency and marketers' cultural (re)appropriation of subcultures as well as their "centrifugal" factions and individual consumers' authentic expressions of self-identity (e.g., Ustuner and Holt 2010). It has been the theoretical explanation that these two disparate forces in the market dynamics create an ongoing tension that eventually enables the market system to culturally progress. In contrast, in the context of extreme sports, the two opposing values are inter-connected through two other forces in the same consumer identity field. A balanced life and *cool* are transformed into irresistible stimulus and a new style as a norm by pragmatic consumers and distinction-oriented consumers. As such, self-normalizing consumers often play the role that is originally designed by the stigmatized. However, it is still

paradoxical as self-normalizing consumers perceive the stigma as negativity that has to be normalized (marketized) without realizing that they are normalizing based on what the stigma portrays. The unawareness of the stealthful relationship between the two parties seems to be caused by the stereotypes generated by mediators. What self-normalizing consumers think to be negative is not the original meanings and cultural implications of the stigma, but the stereotypes that are widespread in the market. Intriguingly enough, stigmatized consumers also perform the role that is expected to be played by other types of consumers, especially the self-normalizing consumers. For example, NIKE recently introduced NIKE SB to skateboarders after a major failure about a decade ago. It was immediately recognized by hardcore skaters, who value non-competitive individual performance and originality, as one of the "must-owns" for its performance and durability. A decade or two ago, it would be disastrous to them to see any pair of NIKE shoes around their skateparks. However, as extreme sports and its relevant consumer market started growing and popularizing, the "cultural wicking and transfusion" is further progressed. Consumers in the market simulate each others' roles and supply what others seek to continuously engage in the dynamics that also require the multiplicity of consumer roles in the market and the following launch of new cultural episodes.

FIGURE 5. Interactivity and Inter-reliance in the Consumer-Market Dynamics
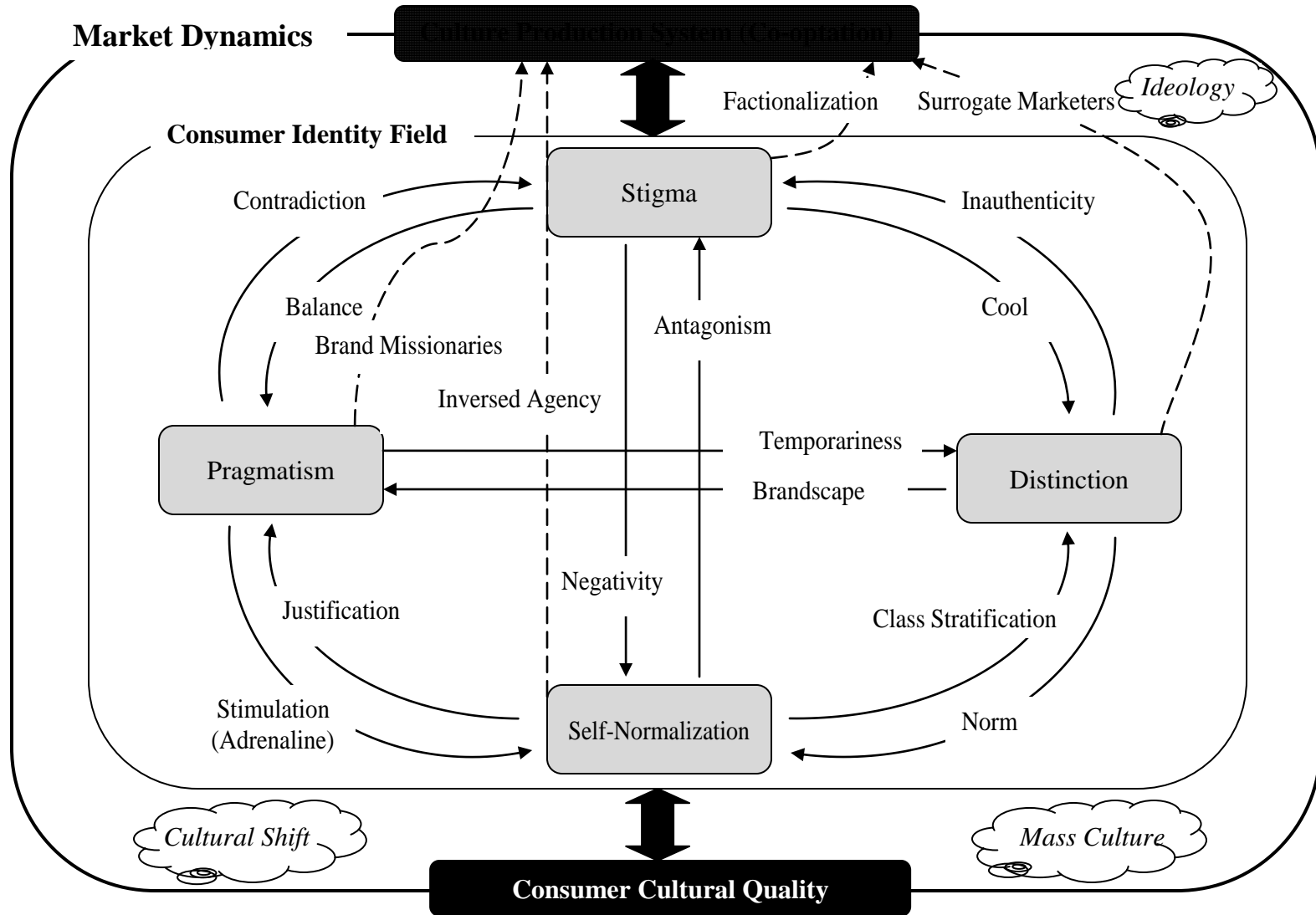
CHAPTER VIII

DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS, AND LIMITATION

Non-dialectics as a Promising Challenge to Consumer Research

The Hegelian dialectics that characterize Marxian theories, dialectical materialism in particular, has become part of the bedrock foundation in consumer research, especially in CCT, which intentionally regards consumers and marketers as opponents in order to perpetuate the historic findings well-accepted in the field, such as conflict/resolution and resistance/appropriation. Because dialectical research in consumer culture literature presumes that phenomena can only be understood and theorized based on materials (evidence) and experiences, a multitude of manifestations of consumer-market dynamics cannot be easily approached. That is, if there are complicated systematic interrelationships, socio-cultural variations, and philosophico-ideological elements intervening in the dynamics, employing an analytical lens rooted in dialectics ease the theorizing process, especially when such considerations are deemed to be given all the time and thus are less relevant. In addition to this practical viewpoint, theoretically, consumer culture literature often deals with class, gender, and ethnicity (race) so that dialectics has more to offer than to lose or miss. Neo-tribes in subcultures and brand communities are still exemplifying new types of class struggle, and ethnic enculturation can still be viewed as traditional discourses of class. Gender identity (re)configuration in the market, which is always of interest and importance in consumer research,

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is also germane to conflicts steeped in class/power discourse. Making distinctions among classes (i.e., LLCs and HCCs in Holt 1998), drawing lines between consumers and the market(ers) (most CCT literature), and beautifying co-optation as the only motor for the consumer-market dynamics inevitably require oppositions, and all of such practices and beliefs makes the whole paradigm excessively dialectics-reliant.

In the light of normalization discussed by Foucault (2007), the notion of neoliberal governmentality (Foucault 2008) helps explicate the consumer-market dynamics far from dialectics. It explains that the power relations purposefully configured and allocated in the market demand subjective contests against the greater system. In other words, governmentality neither inflicts anything upon individual consumers nor overtly controls them; rather, the intentional "pasturage" is expected to be more effectively transforming individuals into self-governing subjects. Consumers in the market have been given respective cultural qualities and economic assets that eventually bring them the imaginative autonomy that is the intention of power relations in the market. There is no intended conflict and resolution, but only inter-reliance and interaction for the culturally sustainable market system; thus, dialectical analysis and theorization of the neoliberal governmentality is neither theoretical nor implicative. It is not to say that disdaining dialectics, as Hardt and Negri (2000) did for the sake of multitude and ignored dialectical mediation in *Empire*, is what consumer research ought to do, but that mediation (interactions and inter-reliance) is still present in a "polyvalent" (Foucault 1978) form rather than in a dialectical form. Through mediation, an entity transforms to the opposite or acts the other's role just as consumers immersed in the market dynamics transpose their cultural configurations (roles) and rearticulate their identities according to the intended power relations in the market. Therefore, these multi-directional and multi-faceted relations in the consumer-market

require a theoretical and methodological standpoint more capable than dialectics. Here arise two urgencies that are deeply related to one another.

First, theoretically, consumers (at least those who enjoy extreme sports) treat each moment of their life as truth or reality even when they perform a role that their cultural and economic backgrounds do not allow them to play. When the consumer market appreciates the multiplicity of the forms that the relationships among different consumers and the market can take to maintain and (re)activate the dynamics, consumers also have their own modes of reality management just as the market has different modalities of truth (viewed as reality by consumers) production (Foucault 2007). To understand this "veridiction" that is more than the whole of consumers, marketers, and their ideologies, as well as cultural orientations, and that overarches individual consumers' and marketers' reality production, dialectical thinking has to be broadened in terms of its scope and quality. The consumer-market dynamics often operate outside of the linear and oppositional diagrams of consumer-market relationships frequently presented in consumer culture literature.

Second, a more appropriate methodology must be recognized and refined by the academic community in order to better understand the polyvalent power relations in the market. Genealogy, as an attitude rather than a methodological template or manual, needs to be closely examined for its explanatory power. Intervention and observation suggested by reflexive science (e.g., Burawoy 1998) provides a "to do list" for scholars but does not necessarily suggest how to approach a phenomenon. Dialectical or semiotic methods tend to blind research to new and less palpable possibilities of truth/reality-making as binary oppositions and conflict resolutions are always the points of analyses. In order to understand peripheral ideologies and local identities that in fact support the whole system, a method that actually, rather than nominally, embraces

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multiplicity is needed, and genealogy offers such an attitude to researchers. Nevertheless, it should be noted that such an attitude never refutes other methodologies' legitimacy or capability, but simply encompasses all for the merits of each of them. What makes this attitude a methodology is that, with it, we can deal with complex, unstable, unbalanced, heterogenous, mobile, fragile, and discontinuous (re)distributions and (re)configurations of force relations, frequently observed in the market, but not in dialectical theories.

Non-dialectical Identity Project

As empirical analyses show, extreme sports participants who perform signification assert their identities in a non-dialectical fashion. The emergent themes are palpable manifestations of the possibilities to envision a non-negotiated identity narrative. Novel approaches and distinct responses to ideology, aesthetics, lifestyle, and world view grant the ultimate consumer agency to signifying consumers in the context of X Games. For those consumers, identity negotiation does not facilitate establishing an authentic self-identity, but simply intensifies identity fragmentation. Meanwhile, the symbolic interactions taking place in the context incrementally foster and advance current consumer culture as they exemplify a possibility to rethink historical viewpoints: identity negotiation and dialectics prevalent in consumer culture theory. Accordingly, some theoretical implications can be discussed.

It is noteworthy that a new context can promote a theoretical divergence. As a context, the X Games seem akin to the Burning Man project (Kozinets 2002), skydivers (Celsi, Rose, and Leigh 1993), and baseball games (Holt 1995) in terms of participation and spectatorship. Most contexts have thus far, however, required a high-level of commitment to, or compliance with, the cultural environment from consumers to be identified with(in) the context. In contrast to the Burning Man project that only guarantees temporary and geographically-bounded sanctions to

such an anti-market endeavor, the X Games unleash the consumers from cultural and normative dogma, which have constrained consumers to discontinue pursuing non-negotiated identities in other spaces (i.e., home and work) after the end of such events. Evidently, some extreme sports participants continuously work on their authentic non-negotiated identity. Thus, research that specifically discusses some contexts in which consumers opt to be a true agent with little or no concern about inter-agential conflict will move the current theoretical outlook of consumer agency forward. Moreover, when such additional contexts are found to exist and become more common than before, the boundary conditions should be identified. In other words, it is of importance to study when the supposedly incessant pursuit of non-negotiated identity fostered in the context ceases.

The "dialectical model of branding" (Holt 2002) can be revisited as well. When consumers practice non-negotiated identity project, the dialectics in the domain of branding become less explanatory. That is, consumers do not necessarily need to symbolically rely on or respond to the brands they constantly face in the market. Authenticity of the brands does not concern them as they can totally "dis-necessitate" brands for their identity narratives, which may be more coherent without any brand. There are some exemplary grassroots brands that are widespread in the snowboard and outdoor equipment industry. A handful of individual fanatics and supporters of snowboarding have launched their own brand in order not to negotiate with the brands identities and personalities developed by marketers and other consumers. Research should address these type of "no logo" praxes that are not as direct, hostile, or perceptible as boycott, anti-consumption, consumer terrorism or "culture-jamming" (Lasn 2000), but that are still transforming the current consumer culture.

Perhaps all the simulations and emulations in the identity narratives by signifying consumers are not meant to contest or escape the market system, but to revitalize the inertia in the market. The context of the X Games and the participants appear to propose a new way to enjoy symbiosis between consumers and the market as the context promotes "hyper-authenticity" and individuals take advantage of it to survive, as contemporary consumers, without dialectics. It will be, however, of more interest to observe and theorize about how marketers respond to the extreme presentations of self-identity without any trace of negotiation. Can (will) they still co-opt them?

For Distinction 3.0

Consumers in the extremely playful and culturally affluent context of the X Games show their audaciousness, self-love, and naturalistic approach when making (hyper) distinction. It is also palpable that, in the context, the nature of cultural capital is different than what has thus far been inculcated. Formal education, knowledge, sophisticated tastes, and cultural skills, together forming the habitus, do not serve the distinction-maker well in the context of the X Games. Consumers who freely improvise and still display nuanced hipness are distinct in the context. Socio-cultural background is neither questioned nor relevant. Unlike some macro (national) and global(ized) contexts in which the logic and practice of distinction-making have been studied (e.g., Holt 1998; Ustuner and Holt 2010), in the relatively micro and more culturally defined context, consumers appear to unleash themselves from rigid cultural propositions and schemata. Because Bourdieu (1984, 1990) is not a determinist, there is always room for consumer agency, not subjectivity, even though the habitus is all-pervasive. In practice, perhaps consumers have to be a subject with minimal consumer agency in certain contexts wherein habitus is less malleable,

but they can be rule-breakers in some contexts (i.e., X Games) that encourage agentic contribution to cultural progress (cf. Bourdieu 1990). Thus, additional research must follow in order to better understand how consumers perceive the boundary between the two possibly distinct types of context. Research about how consumers maneuver within the field of distinction that connotes different levels of plasticity of the habitus will also provide a theoretical insight for consumer researchers.

"Trickling-up" cultural penetration and proliferation are of particular interest. The hipness and cool invented and spread by a group of people (i.e., extreme sports athletes and participants), who socio-politically represent almost the opposite of "high-cultural-capital" consumers, are now the dominant form of distinction in many contexts. The encroachment of the culture from the "bottom of the pyramid" upon the historical role of cultural capital, which has been operating as the most important currency for distinction, is widely observed and rapidly developing. The Winter Olympic Games' acceptance of some events (i.e., ski cross and half pipe) created by rebellious and yet cool people who originally ridiculed the elitism in the sports, clearly shows how the logic can be upside down.

The consumers who portray a cool persona and practice natural hipness are comparable to the consumers in the past who enjoyed their high cultural capital. Although cool may not be something to be explained, analyzed, and theorized, it would be thought-provoking if research explores different facades of cool in varying contexts to see if a similar manifestation of cool in a context can be transferred to the other. Cool, as distinction in the context of the X Games, seems well-received in many other contexts as marketers strive to transplant the cool to brands and trends. However, the grassroots types of distinction (cool) found in this study, are very far from what is usually targeted by marketers and consumers because such distinctions present extremity

and essentialism. The distinction inflation promoted in such a context may hinder co-optation as business culture, and therefore it protects the distinction from commercialization. In that case, what would hyper-co-optation of hyper-distinction (distinction 3.0) be like?

The Cyborgian Consumers

Consumers in the consumer-market dynamics appear to be cyborgs not because they incorporate information technologies, media, and social relationships in the material world with their minds (cf., Cartesian dualism), but because they become the system itself as they switch their modes of being between presentation and representation. Cyborg is generally defined as "a cybernetic organism, a fusion of the organic and the technical forged in particular, historical, cultural practices" (Haraway 1991, p. 51). The "posthumanist epistemology" introduced by Giesler and Venkatesh (2005) elucidates that, in the new era of technology, consumers hybridize themselves with technology and create a "techno-mind" in order to position themselves as subjects in the market and continuously (re)act in(to) the system. Their view of "system as distinction," however, is not in accord with what this study has revealed. They claim that negotiation through communication is required when the way consumers observe, interpret the system, and eventually create their reality with their "techo-mind" makes the distinction they pursue. In other words, perpetual negotiations in the brandscape, subcultures, and consumer activism necessitate that consumers have to persuasively present themselves and the market is often persuaded (co-opting), and that there have to be media and communication technologies that facilitate the entire process. As a result, consumers need to be hybridized with technology. However, if such negotiational practices are already obsolete or simply ignored in a given context, their "posthumanist manifesto" does not hold.

The received view of systematic conflict (albeit to be resolved) between consumers and the market renders the theory less explanatory because the theory seems to rhetoricize what has been continuously practiced by consumers. That is, consumers have been doing what the posthumanist consumers as cyborgs are expected to do. Moreover, it is unclear whether the difference between hybridized consumers (embodied minds) and consumers (minds) constantly and proactively utilizing the materials for their own reality-production is theoretically substantial. When oppositions, conflicts, and contests followed by certain resolutions through dialectical negotiation are absent in a system, what would posthumans as cyborg consumers be like? Perhaps the system is the very "embodied mind," as consumers hybridize with the system. The view of consumers as necessary components and lubricants of the market system, rather than an oppositional value system to the market, illuminates a new possibility of theorizing posthuman consumers as cyborgs.

Consumers are cyborgs because they represent what the system wants, and those representations are forged from consumers' presentations of their own systematic reality-production and value schemata. Foucault (2007)'s "biopolitics," which liberates consumers from norm(ation) to a certain degree, but still reflexively domesticates their liberal minds, can be successfully applied to consumption domain in which abnormal (stigamatized) consumers and others are treated as normal groups that constitute the consumer body as a multiplicity. Consequently, each individual consumer plays the system as they perform and simulate multiple roles (regularities). Cyborgs also challenge and undermine binary oppositions and socio-politico-cultural sanctions as they attempt to blur boundaries and break down borders (e.g., Haraway 1991). Demarcations among different groups of consumers are blurred as they interact and

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facilitate each others' roles, and thus the systematic boundary between the market and consumers has also been fading.

Research should embark to explicate the consciousness and ideological standpoints of consumers becoming cyborgs with possibly disoriented identities playing multiple roles for (as) the system. It will also be of importance to see how the inverted relationship between marketers and consumers manifests in marketers' minds. As cyborgian consumers work for brand and trend dissemination, does the role of marketers shrink or expand? Perhaps their main role is not to maintain and reinforce the culture production system, but simply to facilitate the culture distribution as web 2.0 and social media prevail. If so, it is imperative to expound how each of the communication technologies is utilized for different roles played by different groups of consumers. Can (will) a single form of communication (i.e., Twitter, Epinions, and YouTube) dominate and serve all types of cyborgs? In addition, some issues of globalization can also be further explicated with the findings and aforementioned implications. Homogenization of consumer desire (i.e., Apples unprecedented success on a global scale) in a supposedly heterogenized world of tastes in postmodernity may be explained by the notion of cyborgian consumers performing what the system is supposed to perform. The new version of consumerism, namely posthumanism, that transforms different consumers into a single form of "multitasking" cyborg may have reduced the cultural distance between historically distinct groups of consumers and nullified geographic remoteness so that one market can exist and inexorably expands.

The Masculine Whiteness of the System: Thoughts and Limitations

Blackness and femininity are overtly contested in the context of extreme sports. It seems because white males have been losing their ground as socio-culturally distinct and thus attractive

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individuals to the other gender (e.g., Leonard 2008). The encroachment of black culture and feminine values (i.e., metrosexuality) upon the rigid distinction (white masculinity) stimulates that very group of consumers (white males) to invent a new distinction, unintendedly based on race and gender discourses. As a result, gender and race issues has been transformed into attitudes toward risk and danger as well as intrinsic rewards from accomplishment and progression in the sports because black people and females supposedly have different ideals (Wheaton 2004). This technically incomplete or even flawed view of gender and race, however, formulates (sub)urban middle-class youth culture that is one of the most important "hatchery" of cyborgian consumers. One theoretically important point is that Whites often appropriate black culture, but not necessarily *vice versa*. Virtually no black athletes or spectators is known or observed. Female participants (athletes) are neither welcomed by the community nor favorably introduced in media (Kelly, Pomerantz, and Currie 2008). Such considerations were mentioned by a few informants, but those were beyond the researcher's theoretical foci and backgrounds in this study and thus remain unexplicated. Those issues are, however, now emerging as imperatives because the consumer-market dynamic relies heavily on individual consumers' competency to play the role of the market based on cultural interaction and mediation amongst them, which are absent in the "gendered and xenophobic" context. Gender and race discourses represented by risks, adrenaline, and the feeling of self-actualization in the context of the X Games do not seem to be commensurate with the research findings. Future research should investigate if such a politico-ideological field in the realm of consumption simply circumscribes or overlaps with the non-dialectical consumer-market dynamics.

The other type of limitations, which always arises in all interpretive studies, is the research validity issue in general. As Wallendorf and Belk (1989) explained, in interpretive

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research, there are four different mirror images of internal validity, external validity, reliability, and objectivity in positivist approaches to methodology. Among those four, credibility, transferability, and confirmability issues were dealt with as participation, engagement, intervention, observation, and triagulation were employed and practiced throughout this study. However, it is always difficult to establish dependability especially when the study is cross-sectional, solo-authored and interpreted solely by the primary researcher. It is not to say that embracing multiple realities in interpretive research guarantees "no challenge" in terms of research findings that may not be as sense-making and/or insightful as it should be to other researchers, but to acknowledge the potential disagreement and the remedies for future research. One way to ensure dependability would be to revisit the sites and informants and to subsequently address instable explanations (changes). Due to the context of choice (X Games events), the same context and the informants were not readily accessible once the study was conducted. If the context is not easy to revisit, constant communication (longitudinal approach) with informants can facilitate eastablishment of dependability. Along with dependability check, establishing transferability by applying the same research findings in other contexts (i.e., rock climbing and hang gliding) then comparing and contrasting the contextual effects will help explicate the gender and race issues and ultimately increase the value of the study.

EPILOGUE

> *"Nearly ninety-nine percent of the test subjects accepted the program provided they were given a choice - even if they were only aware of it at a near-unconscious level. While this solution worked, it was fundamentally flawed, creating the otherwise contradictory systemic anomaly, that, if left unchecked, might threaten the system itself. Ergo, those who refused the program, while a minority, would constitute an escalating probability of disaster….Your life is the sum of a remainder of an unbalanced equation inherent to the programming of the matrix. You are the eventuality of an anomaly, which despite my sincerest efforts I have been unable to eliminate from what is otherwise a harmony of mathematical precision. While it remains a burden assiduously avoided, it is not unexpected, and thus not beyond a measure of control," said the Architect (The Matrix Reloaded 2003).*

Having to realize that the system is always there and so am I as the system is the very inconvenient truth as a temporal and variable presentation of the Truth. Nobody wins or loses in this timeless journey to the newer and purportedly better system. A breakout from the system is merely an ontological madness, which is the only abnormality that the system does not embrace. Other anomalies can be cured by the system that expects more. Because we are the subsystems, things we do are what the system outsources. We are connected and plugged into the system that bestows ontological security upon us. Opposing and/or denying the system is simply the easiest way to commit ontological suicide. Remember, however, we now have more options with which we partake in the system. Confronting the system is not the only mode, and we shall enjoy the multiplicity of presentational styles: more reasons not to be unplugged. We are all subjects not in an inflexible, normative system, but in a multivalent scheme. Live or leave.

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APPENDIX A

APPENDIX A

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Introduction

1. Thank the participant for taking time and talking to us.
2. Remind him/her briefly of the purpose of the study.
3. Get his/her consent and point out that participation is voluntary and confidentiality of the information is guaranteed.
4. Hint the interview will be fun as it relates to everyday consumption.

Interview Questions

Ask participants about the followings:

- Hobbies
- Things that motivate (interest) them
- Favorite brands (ask stories and relationship)
- Leisure activities
- Places to shop
- Tattoo/piercing/plastic surgery
- *Seek for contradictions and probe further.*

Obtain information about the followings:

- How they became extreme sports participants. Any triggering event (person)?
- Things (meanings) they seek from the participation
- The relationship between extreme sports and everyday life. Does one affect the other? Are they totally different moments of life? Do they consume in different ways (elaboration needed)?
- Opinions on the commercialization of the subculture
- Pros and cons of the commercialization
- How they deal with the commercialization
- *Seek for contradictions and probe further*
- *Any difference between the local and the global informants? Probe further.*

- Could you show me some (pictures) of your peculiar possessions? (If they don't have, ask them to bring some of them next time; Ask informants to bring some pictures when schedule the interviews). Could you tell me about the stories of them?
- Can you tell me about some things you have, but no one else you know has? Tell me stories of each.
- Who would you most want to be like? Do you have anybody in your mind as a role model (possibly from a book, ads, TV show, and/or movie)? What makes you want to be like him/her?
- What do you think about consuming mass-marketized (popular) goods (brands) and services?
- Could you tell me about your self-expression?
- Could you tell me about some unusual activities and/or places you have participated in or been to?
- Give me a list of your favorite possessions (experiences) and tell me stories about each of them.
- How did you decide to get (experience) them?
- How and when do you use them? When you use them, do you use them as they are, or personalize them?
- What is the nature of personalization (dependent on the things)? Painting, attaching something to them, "tuning," and/ or adorning?
- Ask them to elaborate the stories of personalization.

Participant Profile

- Age: - Ethnicity:

- Sex: - Occupation:

- Education: - Religion:

- Place of birth: - Introduced by:

Location: Date: What
                                                               day?

Start   End   Duration:
time: time:

APPENDIX B

APPENDIX B

PICTURES

PICTURE 1. Inverted Conformity

PICTURE 2. Recycling Store

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PICTURE 3. Recycle Bins

PICTURE 4. Energy Drink

PICTURE 5. Sun Block

PICTURE 6. NAVY
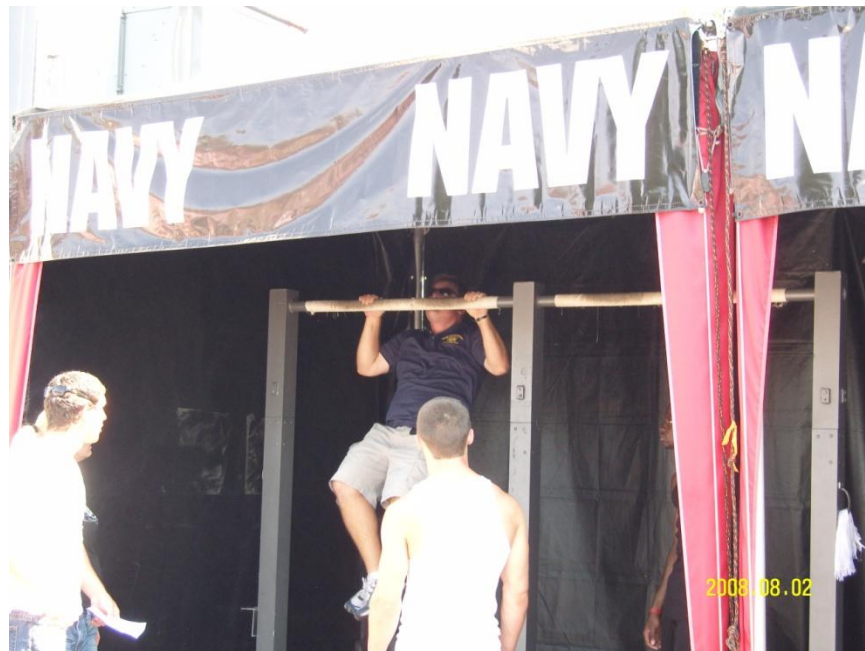
PICTURE 8.Snowdeck, Longboard, and Snowskates

APPENDIX C

CULTURAL QUALITIES OF INFORMANTS

| Informants	AS	UD	Excerpts	Elements
Abby	HAS		states: ".… I think I like to mix a lot of color, lots of unique pieces. I love to wear fun jewelry, wear crazy hats, or, you know, a great pair of shoes. I love.…I work in a very creative environment - I'm a marketer…… and so, I've never worn a suit to work, and I felt…feel like, if I had t o wear a suit to work, I would feel very stuffy…I would feel kind of part of the expression of myself is…is how I present myself, and the wild or creative or funky things that I wear, that are…that… that express my creativity, and express my, you know, my desire, my… my, you know, risk-taking. You know?" continues on dress code: "I would probably be the one who start a petition. I…I…I really would, because I don't feel like, and I think that others that I work with would feel the same way, that if you're not comfortable in what you're wearing, and if you're not comfortable with yourself during the day, you're not going to be good at doing your job. If you're not at your best self, and part of that is how you present yourself, if I don't feel like me in this stuffy buttoned-up suit…" talks about cooking: "I make things up. I don't follow recipe books. I have a few, but	Creativity; Risk-taking Taking initiative "Manual-free"

Abby	HAS		never use them. Yes. I am not a recipe follower. I have… I think it's probably good for my creativity. I don't want to follow a recipe. I want to make something up myself.”	
			talks about movies:	
			"I go to movies. I love movies, but, again, I don't really love all the blockbuster hits, you know, the…the…I like the movies that… that have a little bit more spirit and heart to them. I just saw the Wrestler. I march to my own drum.”	Specific preference
			confides her special possession:	
			"It's a king bed. It's great…really nice bed and it's very comfortable, but I think what I'm most obsessed about is how I decorate my bed, and I have these gorgeous Indian quilts that were hand-made on my bed and I used to be the girl that, when I was young, was in grade school, high school…you know, how you'd go to the department store, and you'd pick out a comforter set, and say "I like this set." And then, a year later, I'd be, like, "I'm so sick of it. It's so ugly." You know. "I want something new, mom." And she'd be, like, 'You just got it!" You know? …and this…my bed…I've had the same bed, the same comforter, decorated…the same decorations on that bed for nine years…and I am not sick of it…Everyday I am like, "Oh, I love my bed!"….it's so silly! Yeah….and I think it…it…it's so different. Again, the fact that the quilts are so beautifully…beautifully done, really ornate, and I've never seen anything like it before, and…. It came from India, actually. Yeah, and it's gold…and a little bit of gold and orange and brown, and it's…just together it's gorgeous, and so, I think that that's, like, the thing that I love the most. It's so silly! It's so beautiful, and it's so different, and there's…there is so much handcraft put into it…”	Cherished possession
			says:	
			"I think I personalize things in the way I mix things together, but not	Mix & match

Abby	HAS		so much deconstructing the things…the individual things that I own, but I wear them together. I like putting individual pieces together."	
Abby		HUD	expresses: "….you know, I'm not really a shopper of the Gap or Banana Republic - they're too traditional for me…. You can get some jeans there, white T-shirts, but you're not gonna find any, you know…you're following the norm. It's not exceptional. If following the norm is your…is…is your life….you're part of the every-day, you're part of the big group of people that are just being normal. If you think that these athletes again…they tried something different, they've broken the rule and that's exceptional."	Exceptionality
			talks about recent purchase: "My favorite recent purchase, which some might think would be crazy, would be a pair of yellow python high heels. They're high. About 4 inches. They're *very* sexy…. They're gorgeous! …and you can't wear… and you can't wear canary yellow python very often, so I tend to buy things that are a little….I've worn them a couple of times. The other day I wore them with a pair of jeans and a navy top…."	Exotic
			mentions about shopping: "I tend to be the person that, when you walk into the store, everybody buys the black or white staple, I buy the orange, or yellow, or the green. I buy something, the one that's different…."	Distancing
			drives: "a Saab, and I think that, you know, living in LA, I drive…many	Avoiding popularity

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Abby		HUD	friends that drive BMWs, or…or Mercedes, and things like that. Those are the…or Audis. They're, like, the more traditional cars, but, yeah, I like the Saab. It's a little different. Not everybody has one. So, yeah. Again, I don't follow… I follow all the same…"	
			thinks self-expression is that: "Authentic - in a way that's only me. I don't want to express myself the same way that everybody else does. I want to be Abby. I don't wanna be… I don't want to ever be the same as the girl next to me, and so I want to… my…all of my expressions to be true to who I am, and, real for me, inspiring to others, but most of all, fulfilling to me…. and so, yeah, I'm similar in that I might do the…we might both do the same thing, have the same hobby, or we both might like to go to Brazil on our next vacation, but I…I'm…I'm gonna seek out the places in Brazil that are sort of the unknown places…."	Authentication
Ron	HAS		describes his collection of skis: "Just because, like, well, like, *hey* I ride them until they're completely broken, and then it's just, like, you know there's not a lot of things that you have. Like, a lot of the things that I've had, like skis, or photography, or pants, or certain long underwear stuff that I've had for a long time; it's beautiful and you…just associate that activity with, ah, particular things. And that's almost when I…Like, I have a lot of grievances with consumerism, but with a thing like a ski, with skis, or a snowboard you really spend a lot of time…a lot of time with it, do a lot of time with it……learning how to use it and then you just have a lot of experiences with it, like, for a pair of skis, or surfboard, or something like that, so it becomes something very immediately related to the story that you have. So, I always have all my skis and I remember, like, all the great days I had on them, and, like, where I went with them and it's really serious stuff to have all my surf boards still. And I guess when I have, um, certain photos…Like, I love	Nostalgia

| Ron | HAS | | photography and I don't really want to be a photographer, but I really like doing it because, you know, I…especially when I, like, travelled a little bit for my Spanish major and you just…It's really cool to be able to go some place, and you're sort of, you're there that one time, and then, you know, a couple of times I've been able to make some really cool photos of a place I really enjoyed, or had a cool band, or something like that. You…You sort of remember the details of that and, for me, it's just sort of, it's kind of like history: you have this stuff on the wall, and it's just a constant…For me, especially, it's a constant reminder of, like, how lucky I've been to be able to do all the things I've been able to do, and just, like, being able to witness certain events at school, take a photo, or, you know, like, there are people that are important to me, and they're in a contest that I think is important, erm, and it just sort of…it's very comforting for me to be able to look back at that, even though I'm pretty young, and say, like,"Yeah, I've been able to do a lot of really rare and special things." And it just makes me, like, again really happy to be what I'm in. So….I never…I don't…I don't like to lose…not that I'm, like, incredibly nostalgic, but I don't like to lose contact with those things that are really important to me. Like, it's…every time I have, like, experience like that, I just, like, keep adding these on and I'm, like, "Wow!" It's just…My life just gets better all the time, because, just, like, you know, time naturally….defines me"

talks about his T-shirts:
     "Well, I have a huge T-shirt collection, for sure. I wear them, yes, but I find that, er, when I saw them this past couple of summers, because I have all these T-shirts from High school, or whatever, I just realized I hadn't worn this shirt in six months. I don't really like a lot of the shirts that say things on them. I feel like they become irrelevant, very, very quickly. I don't know what I have against them. Like, for me, it's got to be very, very particular, what it says. Um, so often, like, the design's more than the pattern…" | Collection |

Ron	HAS		mentions about personalization:	Personal setup
			"I always, like, put a few stickers on my helmet, or on my skis. Definitely, for…no, I guess, to be unique, and also, I like having…it's just kinda, like, fun, having something like that. Not meaning…having to be different from other people, but this is sort of, like, this is *my* set-up, um… Yeah, like, I could be completely alone the whole winter, and I'd still feel the importance of doing….the things I do, um, so, I guess those kinda things, and, … sometimes with clothing, if I have something I don't like and I tried several times to like, I've tried to stitch something on to 'em but it never turned out well, so I, um, you know, I just give them to someone else, then someone else can have a use for it. You know, sometimes I've modified them and then I like it for a little bit, and then I don't really, and it's, like, no big deal."	
		HUD	talks about fashion:	Iconoclast
			Yeah. I think, like…I'm not really big into fashion, per se, but, like, sort of, ski fashion and I guess, like to, you know, have a certain style or whatever. So, when I find something it's always…it's always very rare. It's always, like, something very specific. Then I…yeah, I either see it, and I'm thinking, "Yeah, I really like that." Or, I really see it and I just immediately and instinctually think, "Oh, I really want that!" Um, like this sweat shirt I bought. And that, it's, like, well, I like skating, surfing, snowboarding and I don't follow the rules and all that, as if you're trying to establish yourself as…like an iconoclast, you know? Um… An iconoclast, and I guess, to an extent, I definitely enjoy doing that. So, yeah, I guess in terms of stress I'd say that, but for manners, like, I think if you were to look at me, I mean, say my clothing style...or else you would think it's, like, the way I approach - not everything, but a lot of things - sort of reveals some certain, you know, personality about me, that's unique..."

describes himself: | |

Ron		HUD	"I think there are some selfish times when I do things that will make me stand out purely on stuff that lets me stand out, but it's not ever…like, I'm very, very self-conscious….not in the sense that I hide myself, but I'm very self-aware, um, so that, um, like, I just feel like my personality is unique….and makes me feel unique in other aspects, where it wouldn't otherwise. But I don't … wouldn't say it's especially important that I'm unique, it's just that I feel like it's important for me to do the things I believe in and to be myself for no other reason than I've …I'm myself and I've enjoyed myself for two days. Yeah!"	Uniqueness
Hank	HAS		talks about his experience: "For example, okay, back in the…in Whistler, if they're looking for something to do, we can just go out to the…to the bar, or something, and, y'know, have a few beers, and whatever….and then I, er, came up with the idea, "You know what? I know there's an Indian…there's an Indian reservation North of here…"Fifty kilometers. Let's go there. Let's play Bingo. So we went up to Mount Currie; we played Bingo for the night, with all these…and there's all these…and there's *nobody* there but Indians, most of them missing any…most of their teeth. They're old and they're playing Bingo. And we went in there: we played bingo. Best night of that year. Best night of that winter. Yeah, I had a great time. Yeah. We…Yeah. So, I always love something like that. Yeah."	Unusual experience
			talks about personalization: "Er, yes, snowboards – I sticker them. I put stickers on them, to make them look weird. I put all that personalized stuff. Er, well, I personalize my appearance in some ways. I mean, look, I'm wearing, like, skinny jeans and I'm wearing, like, hiking boots….and I'm wearing, like, skier sun-glasses….and I'm wearing, like, a pretty normal vest, 'n, y'know, I mix it up a little bit….so, er, nobody else is gonna look like me, probably…."	Mix & match

Hank	HAS		says:	
			"I drove here today *blasting* that band, Meshugga, out of my car, absolutely cranked up to the…to eleven on the sound system in my car, y'know? I love the music, but maybe I enjoy the fact that everybody can hear all this crazy heavy metal coming out of my car….Maybe I like that. I don't know why I do that. It must be some sort of…some sort of, like, "Look at me!" thing. I don't know. I do it. I don't know. Maybe that's personalizing my, er…my car [*laughs*] myself, or…."	Eccentric personalization
		HUD	describes his experience in Czech Republic:	
			"Strange. It was, like, a student exchange thing. I was snowboarding there, and it was…and I didn't realize, when you do it there, it was really…you were really *different*. Like, nobody…. *Nobody* else was doing this. I mean, yes…yeah, I enjoyed it (getting attention). Yeah. Okay, I did. But, er, on the other hand, I didn't want to be, like. Sometimes it's just too much, like, I was snow-…I started snowboarding down the Rhine….Everybody would stop skiing, and watch..because I was weird. But, er, the part I did like was, "Oh yeah!" It was, like, get attention, and it's…well, like I'm doing something that everyone else is afraid to do, and I'm doing it, so….I felt good about that. It gave me confidence."	Getting attention
			talks about the music he listens to:	
			"Erm, something "rare and unique". Well, I mentioned my other hobby was music. I've always been drawn to really strange forms of music, really strange forms of, er, expression. Like really extreme heavy metal, or extreme ambient music, or electronic music, something.…that's really, really on the edge of boundaries of what people consider normal, so….	Extremity
			Says:	
			"I had super long hair, with…in, like, in the late 80's, when I went to	Solitary

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Hank		HUD	school. When *every* kid had the short preppy haircut and I didn't. I was, like, the only one."	
Cali	HAS		talks about her philosophy: "I will to start off by saying that a lot of people at my school we're all getting ready to declare our majors and everything and a lot of people are picking them for the money or whatever they think is going to produce the highest value right out of college….that's great, but that' not my philosophy at all. I'd rather do it for the love because if I can wake up and do this for the rest of my life where it doesn't feel like it's a job then I've succeeded period. And this is the only thing that I have found thus far that makes me so happy, and I don't mean to imply that I'm choosing it by default but I mean I am happiest is when I'm out here." emphasizes: "I will never ever ever ever trade in or sell an old pair of skis or snowboard because I make have you ever seen the benches that are designed out of them….Well just because it's our own personal equipment that we're putting into these pieces of furniture it's just a little bit nostalgic I guess in the sense that you know you have so many memories and so many runs you know maybe you took that set of skis whistler Blackcomb or maybe you took that snowboard on a snowcap in new Zealand or maybe went to the Swiss Alps I mean there's a million of different things that you could've done on those and so it's a way to keep them around and I will never ever sell them as that like raw material or as a finished product I will always keep them." mentions: "Well here's a considerable part I do spend an absurd amount of money on like way more than the average person I know I buy a lot of cd's I'm a cd freak in the sense that I don't really like mp3 files or just	Pursuit of happiness Nostalgia Collection as Make-up

Cali	HAS		buy stuff of iTunes because I like to have actual cover art and the actual album…. Um and I buy from like a lot of underground like independent bands that nobody has ever heard of but I think are great and so I would say that um what I lack for in like name brand clothing I make up in music."	
		HUD	talks about travel: "I love being around people and the civilization I think is great but I just I like to have like independent thing and just take the path less traveled and go see things that maybe not all people have been able to go see." talks about music: "I buy from like a lot of underground like independent bands that nobody has ever heard of."	Independence OnlyMe
Ruben	HAS		emphasizes work ethic and good deeds: "When I'm working with my employees at my hotel, if a guest needs something done, I don't always ask our butler to do it. I'll just take care of it. It gets me when there are guests and I went to the back, I got the.... muffins. I took them to them. That should have been the butler's job. And then once they left, I cleaned up *all* of their plates, took `em back into the kitchen. I went and got the vacuum sweeper and cleaned up the mess so it didn't have...they had breadcrumbs and stuff all over the floor, because I didn't want another guest to come down and...I didn't want to wait, or ask someone else do it, when I knew I could do it just as quickly. Erm, I try to be polite if I go to a grocery store or something. You know, if I see a lady taking her cart and putting it away, I'll help her with her cart. You know, just...I think being kind to other people is karma, you know? It'll come back to you." describes his uncle's combine: "I just...I mean, that's, like, this girl, er, that I'm kinda dating, she's	Karma Eccentric Romance

Ruben	HAS		from Spain....and we're gonna go to Indiana in either April, or May....and we're gonna go for a ride in a combine. Like, I told her: [*laughs*] that's one thing we have to do, is take a ride in a combine....because, it's just...It sounds *so* romantic! [*laughs*]. I...I mean *really*! [*laughs*] Yeah! In the moonlight something [*laughs*]. The smell. You know? I mean they (corns) *all* have such a distinct smell."	
		LUD	talks about brands: "I like *all* of the snowboard brands. [*laughs*] I love Burton. TC's cool."	Cool brands
			reads: "I read a lot of James Patterson books. Erm, I read all the Harry Potter books. I liked those."	Bestsellers
Anne	LAS		likes trendy brands: "….Erm, like, right now I've got Maui Jim….and I like `em….but I don't know if I'd buy them again. Erm….Clothes, erm…Well, let me think. Lately I've been trying to buy a lot of designers.'….erm…erm, Kenneth Cole….and Safari. Kenneth Cole….like, suits....y'know, the Levi jeans, erm - I don't know – shoes: oh, Calvin Klein. Let me think...Flip-flops, Tevas, y'know."	Brand conscious
			talks about personalization: "Personalize my stuff? Not...I don't have…have enough time. I have little bumper stickers on my car window....erm, I haven't altered it in any…I don't ever put anything on to buy and say, "Oh but I could just do this to add…" I…No."	No personalization
			describes her place recently remodeled: "So I got an old home and…and remodeled it. So, erm, very mish-mashy, I had help with some interior design, or some help with my home, because I like good design….....but I *don't* know how to do it	Dependence

Anne	LAS		myself, so I called in experts to help me….more modern than anything, probably. Not a lot of junk. Not a lot of knick-knacks. Not a lot of accessories."	
		HUD	likes to be unique: "I don't that...I don't have a desire for `em. I've never wanted `em. I like my Sorelles better. I don't know, I...I don't have people typically confront me that boldly. I wanna be unique.... Yeah. I like to be unique. One of a kind. There's *nobody* else like me. I'm big into yoga. I do tons of yoga, and I share it with a lot of people, and I'm really known in my circle of, y'know, community as being the yogi of us….Erm...Er...I was one of the…I'm one of the only women my age that is snowboarding….Forty-six. So, I started doing it when I was forty-three. Well that's very rare. Probably…There are probably, y'know, some others who snowboard at the age of forty-six, but, er, probably not many people started at the age of forty-three. And I decided that I…I wanted to try it, and I had to do it now, or I was never gonna do it, y'know? So I…I hit that, where I put that pressure on myself to just do it, because I wanted so badly to just try it, and I knew every year I waited, it was gonna be harder and harder to try it, so…."	Rareness
Corby	HAS		explains his tattoo: "I got it when I was, er, twenty-one, in San Francisco. Yeah. `Cause I came to America, and I traveled around everywhere, and went to Las Vegas, and I won a lot of money on roulette, in Las Vegas, used that money and bought a tattoo and bought a guitar, and, y'know….Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. It's...It's...It's actually a twenty-three in Roman numerals, because twenty-three is what I won all the money on – the number twenty-three….Well, like, twenty-three is kinda, like, a special number. Like, it's always been a special number for me. It's er…and in…in Vegas, I…I met someone who was playing, as well, at	No-plain

| Corby | HAS | | the same table as me, and she said to me, "Twenty-three. Best number in the world!" And I was, like, "Yeah! It *is* the best number in the world!" Erm, Yeah, no. I like it. It's interesting. It's something, y'know, a little bit more…more interesting, y'know, than plain skin, I suppose, y'know? Yeah. You can tell, plain skin…like, plain skin can be really nice, but it can be boring sometimes too, as well, right? Yeah, but it has meaning as well, like, it's...it's kind of decoration, y'know? It's the same as wearing a T-shirt - with a T-shirt on, y'know?"

talks about his guitars:
"Yeah, guitars, actually. I got lots of guitars. I'm trying to sell them, and I can't sell them. [*laughs*] Can't do it! Every…Every time… I can't do it. Like, I'll try. Every time I go to sell it…I buy it; can't sell it. Get it out… Yeah. I don't know. [*laughs*] I just…I can't do it. I suppose, like, it's…it's a really personal thing. I suppose, like, y'know we were talking about tatoos, well, to me, a guitar is a really personal thing, and, like, when…y' know, you almost develop a relationship with the guitar, [*laughs*] and you can't rid of it. It's like a… Oh, well, I suppose, like, it's just you spend so much time playing it, and you get to know it so well, that, like…that [*laughs*] y'know, you'd just be heart-broken to lose it, y'know, even if it is a piece of shit - because all my guitars are pieces of shit, but I [*laughs*]…I still can't get rid of them." | Relationship |
| | | HUD | emphasizes creativity:
"Yeah. Yeah, I suppose so. So, yeah, it depends on whether there's something…Yeah, I suppose that's the best way to put it…is, like…on whether something's a tool, or whether something is something creative, y'know? So, I always have respect for anyone who has a car that's different, d'you know what I mean? Anyone who has a car… I suppose...I suppose it depends on how you view it, because some people would say that it's a tool, and some people would say, like…I have respect for anyone who has a car that's | Creative difference |

| Corby | | HUD | different - do you know what I mean - that you don't see, like, anyone who has an old car. It doesn't matter what it is, like: got a V-Dub; got a Citroën; got *anything* old, then I have respect for you, `cause you've got something different, like, you got something that is, like, a little bit creative, y'know, like, and it takes a little bit more work, too. Do you know what I mean? When you're working on an old car…Like, y'know, a new car, whatever you do, it's just fine all the time, but, like, an old car takes a little bit more work than that, y'know, you gotta…you gotta keep it in good condition - y'know – put a little bit of work, a little bit of time and effort into it, I suppose. Erm, no, like, I always respect creativity, d'you know what I mean. Like, I respect creative…creativity over most other things, I suppose. Like I say, if I see someone with a car that…that I can see that they put work into, or I can see that it's, like, y'know, different, then, like, I have more respect for that, than…y'know. I understand that…that, for a lot of people a car is just a car, but it's, like, growing up in my family…Like, my old man's into cars in a big way, and so, growing up in my house is, like, y'know, cars are a big thing, and they're not *just* a tool, they're not *just* getting you from A to B. Like I say, I don't even drive that much. It's more about, like, y'know, that it's…You put the time and effort into it, and…and you know, you get an appreciation for it. Certain people say it and they're, like, "Yeah. That's a cool car. Like, y'know, that's more interesting than a fuckin' Toyota Corolla!" Y'know?" | |
| Brant | LAS | | expresses himself:
    "I mean, I'm not gonna go and dye my hair and grow a Mohawk to express myself, or something. I don't know. I guess, I'm not gonna change for anyone. I'm not going to do anything…I mean, I can pretty much do what I want, y'know?   But, what I want to do is race, right now. I mean...I mean, I express myself. I don't know how I express myself. I don't know if I'd jump up on the table `n start screaming… ...or anything like that, y'know? I mean, I'm a pretty | Indifference to self-expression |

Brant	LAS		laid-back guy and, er, I like to go out on the track and kinda show what I can do, so maybe that's expressing myself."	
		HUD	emphasizes: "....I wouldn't, er, be racing snowmobiles; or…or my dad, y'know? So, er…Role-models right now – I'm just trying to go out there and do the best *I* can do, you know? I'm not, er, trying to copy, or do anything else anyone else is trying to do. I try and go out there…and get out there myself. Erm, to copy someone else, like, to look like them, and go out, and, er, I mean, I can perform like someone else, but you can sure look like it, y'know, like…put…put on the act, y'know, like, wear the same gear, and goggles, and….buy everything he has, `n, ride the sled he has, `n…I'm just trying to go out there, `n, er, make a name for myself. Erm, everyone on our teams looks alike, but, er, there's different things that, er, we do or act. We know we…we're all trying to be ourselves, though, y'know? Oh just be yourself, I mean, er...To copy, or…or try to, like, er,…like gangsters, or something, y'know, like….like a white guy trying to act black, I mean, er, it's er…I don't know, it looks silly to me, actually, y'know?"	No copy
Sabrina	HAS		decorates her new condo: "Er, it was kind of a little bit of that. We tried to re-use a lot of things that we already had, like….putting different pictures in different frames and paint it and, you know, purchase a new couch, a new TV, a new entertainment center, erm and used a little bit of Craig's list in between….so it was definitely hodgepodge, but, erm, I think we had an idea of what we wanted the place to look like and then sort of found the individual elements for different places. Erm, we sort of got it from a design magazine…and got some inspiration…and sort of worked around that." values her international experiences: "…experiences living overseas or working....Erm, Costa Rica….	Hodgepodge International

Sabrina	HAS		…South Africa…. London. Mmn-hmm. So, I've either…I've lived or worked in different…I mean, I feel like those experiences meant more to me than a lot of other…."	Experiences
		LUD	states: "I guess…Yeah, I don't think I would do it through, like, how I dress, or anything like that, especially not today. Erm, so I think it would just be sort of, my enthusiasm and I guess I'm…I'm a hard worker when it comes to things that are important to me, so I guess I would differentiate myself on that front."	Non-physical
			talks about her purchases: "Okay. I usually try to buy things that look like something I would own. Like, I have a certain style that I usually pick. Erm…kind of, like, classic American…like, I don't know, I don't want to say preppy. It's not really that - just classic pieces that can be worn for years or seasons…. I'm pretty…pretty fixed, I guess."	Classic
Ralph	HAS		values relationships: "I think the biggest sources for me would be relationships, friends. I mean, I have a lot of friends that mean a lot to me. Er… (I gain) objectivity, er, advice, encouragement…er, fun. My friends can help me by pointing out things they see in my life, or in me…erm and they care enough to tell me the truth…and that's very valuable to me…. Not materialistic. Valuing people more than things. Er, valuing relationships more than…more than material things. So, most of my friends share a lot of my values…and that's the way its works. Erm, friends are way more important to me than things – items, stuff, money. Relationships are *way* more important."	Relationship
			cherishes books: "Erm, I have some old books that I value. I have books that came from my grandfather that I value. Erm, so I have a library at home that I actually use. So that's valuable to me. You know, it's not…not just	Memory

Ralph	HAS		books that I look at, but I actually do *use* `em."	
			identifies himself with Christianity: "I don't think so, I…I found my identity in being a Christian and that probably helped a lot, you know. That helped. Oh, yeah. It gave me identity. It gave me a reason to live. Yeah. A person who's trying to be like Jesus."	Religion
		LUD	describes himself: "I…I'm not very materialistic, so I don't buy much stuff. I don't care about brand name stuff. I like things that are paid for, that are…that they work. I don't care if it's used… So, er, my kids think I'm kind of old-fashioned that way, you know. (I own) Er, a couple of used cars and a pick-up. You know, they're all paid for. No car payments. I like that. Just, er, regular American-made stuff. Erm, my kids often say to me, "Why don't you buy a new car?" I say, "Why should I? I like the car I got! I…I don't need a new car.""	Immaterial
			wears: "I go for the regular, generic stuff, you know? Er, I don't… …care too much about brands"	Generic
			mentions: "I think…I associate self-consciousness with fear, inferiority…you know, anxiety maybe. Yeah…comparing yourself to other people – unfavorably. Being Afraid."	Less self-consciousness
Cale	HAS		explains his world view: "Yeah. Yeah, you know, and, anyway, you get a clientele base going, and…and you're set, `cause the private request pays a lot more than just the regular ski lessons. That's kind of the way it feels. It's not what it is, but it has that feel to it. I have that, you know, liberty to do that here….Erm, I often tell `em, you know, parents of kids that I teach, `cause I teach kids, erm, that it's…you know, it's more than a	Awareness

Cale	HAS		ski-lesson: it's a lesson in life. We teach a lot more than just skiing to these kids – at least, I do. I teach through steps. I teach through everything about their surroundings. I teach them awareness because it's…to me that's just the way a human should be – aware of their surroundings and aware of who they are, especially in relation to other people and…and, you know, they're not the only one on the earth, you know? Aspen's got a pretty…you know, the clientele base – rich people, you know, high society, and we then have a lot of people that come in from other parts of the world that come and work here, that aren't *that* and it's that…I think people need to know and be aware of other aspects of the world, to make the world a smaller, better place."	
			personalizes his vehicle: "Erm, my truck is very personal, there…there is *not* one like it, but that…it's a flat bed and I custom made that out of steel. I learned how to weld doing that. Erm, it's got this bike rack made out of tubing that I built and put pads on it and carries, like, eight bikes on it. So…and there…so, it…it's custom made. Erm, and it's painted. I spray-painted it with…with, er, stencils of, like, grenade….and different things on it, so *that's* really personalized. Erm, the mini-van's got stickers of all my sponsors on it. That's as personal as that gets. Other than that, it's a pretty regular-looking minivan - you know, family car."	Learn to personalize
Cale		LUD	talks about brands: "Erm, I'm a Chevy guy. Yeah [*laughs*] from back in my motorhead days. But, er, let's see, favorite brand…Wow! Don't really have any favorites, you know? Everything's been good to me. I've used almost every kind of everything. Yeah. That's why…ski gear – I've had Technica, Rasnow, K2, Soloman. I've had it all. It's all been good. It's just a matter of…(I shop) at….Er, Walmart! [*laughs*]. Well, yeah! I'm not too into the way I look, you know? I mean, it's not a big deal…..Not really. I mean, working in the industry I get a lot of, er…you know, some brands come up with more discounters than	No brand

Cale		LUD	others and I'll go that route, just because it's cheaper."	
Kacy	LAS		worships brands: "Yeah. Well, when I can afford it, I love Armani……because it's so tailored, but I always have to buy that on sale. I mean it's so fitted……and so…and the fabrics are so, erm, superior - you know, the*y last*. It's like…Yes, like, for *ever*. It's like an investment. It's like buying a Gucci bag or a Louis Vuitton bag." states: "I can't think of anything I have that's personalized. No. It (her design) just depends. You know, if we're doing…It depends on the client we're working for: if they want something very traditional, then we…that's the style; if they want very contemporary, cutting edge; if they want stark; if they want color. You know, we do what's called "programming" to see……what their goals are and then we…we'll go and visit other recently done, well done interiors and see what they respond to…"	Brand conscious No personalization
		HUD	Talks about her style: "Probably, erm, I'd say more modern. Because I'm an interior designer…Flamboyant. Yeah. I don't know. Well, no, I don't know if that's the right word, but I…I wear…you know, I love to wear, you know, color……chartreuse, or, you know…bold colors, or nice styles. Sometimes. I mean, when I ski, I have, you know, really…paisley pants and, erm, you know, kind of these modern animal prints…pants with sequins and stuff. I don't know if I'm trying to do that (being different) or I just love color and pattern and design, you know? If it's more than that…and then, because I wear them, I get comments on them all day…because it's really so different. Yeah. I like it. I get a…I get…everyday that I ski with…you know, I get a dozen comments a day…you know, because it's really…I *really* wear different clothes…"	Flamboyant

Russ	LAS		Emphasizes performance only: "No (I don't personalize stuff). Not really. I mean, there's my bike, it's a personal build, it's got the stuff that I want on there. Yeah. It's custom built. Yeah, I built it myself. But that's all that's custom built. My clothing? No. You can see. No big deal. My car? The only thing is I do get, like, erm, yeah, performance parts for the car. Yeah."	Indifference to personalization
		HUD	Dislike trends: "Erm, not really. No. I don't like to follow any trends. I do pretty much whatever I wanna do. I don't care if it's a trend or not. Because I don't like them. Just being a follower's just, you know, never been my mode. Yeah. People say, "Oh, no, you can't do that." I'll just do the opposite and just do that. That's why I was…When extreme sports first started coming out, that's why I liked them so much…because it wasn't the status quo, wasn't just safe. It was something different, something special, something outrageous and that's why it's so popular now."	Out of status quo
Dana	HAS		Expresses herself: "I write in a journal…Every day. For a long time. It is important to get everything down. Yeah, like major things. Important things. I got a lot going on! [*laughs*]" Cherishes: "Oh. Er, it would be my pearls…It'd be…My gran-…My great grand-ma's pearls. Family history."	Diary Memory
		HUD	Likes thrifty stores: "I like my own stuff. I don't like what everybody else is wearing. You know? Erm, I just don't want a jacket that seven hundred people have. Like, when you're in Aspen and everybody's walking around wearing...the same thing. I'm just not into that. Just for my own in…in…I can't say the word! Individuality!!! Yes! There we go!"	Individuality

George	HAS		Tries new things: "….Yeah, it's always, no? It's good for you not ordinary. It's boring. Are you, too – you left Korea, why did you leave? Because you want adrenaline. You want get to know new things. And you…you stay young if you…If you…You stay young if you want to do new things, like make experiment…" States: "I think, er, many people don't know how to ski, but they wanna do a fashion. I worry about the sport. I…I speak to the people who want to be…don't care about…more about the sport. I like the substance and not the look…Substance. Like any sport. Like, I know how to ski, he knows…knows how to jump. He knows the stuff, not how to dress…I care only if the guy knows how to do the stuff."	Experiment Substance
George		LUD	Talks about tattooing: "I don't know. It's…You wanna ex…(press)…No. It's not a question of expressing. They're showing to other people…You wanna show to…She…She (Angelina Jolie) was doing tattooing because she wants to show to the others. Yeah. I think they are looking for attention. I don't look for attention. I like to be not too…I like not to be…seen. [*laughs*] I like to be the opposite position. It's better to be observer than observed."	Observer
Chad	LAS		Expresses himself: "Yeah. I mean, if you look good, then you look good, but I don't think you have to wear, like, a certain style…like, a certain brand…Yeah. If you're, like, playing a sport, or whatever, if you win a game and you've accomplished something big, then you can't really replace the moment. I mean, you gotta get excited about it. So, if you get excited about it, you can jump and yell, or do whatever you want, but express yourself and don't care what other people think."	Excitement

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Chad	LAS		Personalizes his dirt bike: "Yeah, I put a lot of stickers on stuff. Like…show the brand, show what I'm into. …so, like, I put…I put…a lot of Monster Energy stickers on stuff and it also shows people, like, what I'm into and what I like."	Personalization through brand
		HUD	Explains his snowskates: "I don't know about that, but it's something else to do, other than snowboard or ski. It's one more thing to do. I do like to try new things. Not *that* many people do it but they think it's pretty cool. Like…you don't…you don't see it that much, but they…they (people) think it's pretty cool to watch."	Trying the new
			Likes unpopular brands: "I wear DVS……which is a skate shoe. I just don't wanna be like *everyone* else. I don't wanna wear the same thing as everyone else. Yeah. Not that many people wear `em and I just like the style of the shoe.	Unpopularity
Celia		LAS	Describes herself: "I'm who I am. I mean, I can dress a certain way to be like everyone else. I mean, like, I wouldn't have worn a sundress today, because that wouldn't have really fit in with what I was doing, but, I mean, I can…I will *physically* match where I am. I don't try…But I mean, you know, I wear my peace sign. I mean, I'm…I'm…I…this is…this is who I am. I may put on a pair of high heels and a dress, or……put on shorts, but, I don't ever change who I am because of where I am. I like who I am. I mean, I feel confident in who I am. I don't…I don't…There's…There would be…For me there would be no reason to try and fit in with everybody else, because I'm comfortable with who I am."	Persistent self
	HUD		Talks about her appearance: "I think I…I kind of look different than a lot of people, because of having curly hair and that seems to kind of already put you…as	Natural uniqueness

Celia	HUD		different. I mean, I'm not the blonde haired, blue eyed girl, you know? Especially in Texas, where there's *so* many, you know, with the big boobs, the big blonde hair, you know…All the men…That's just…That's just not me. So, I've always kind of been unique."	
Pam	LAS		Does virtually no shopping: "I'm not much of a consumer, so I'm not…I don't pay *that* much attention (to brands). I'm not very helpful for a marketing person, am I? I spend way more time out in the outdoors, skiing and doing sports than I would ever spend…and I would rather be bicycling somewhere than…than shopping. Shopping is just not for me, I would much rather…Like, if I need something, I have to go get it."	Non-consumer
		LUD	Shows little or no idea (interest) on self-expression: "I don't know. (I express myself) Just through my sports and my friends, I guess. Hanging out with friends."	Passive identity
Kimberly	LAS		Talks about her ski: "I have a special pair of skis that I wouldn't trade in for anything, until they wear out, but a lot of people have those. I just…Well, I don't know. I just really like the skis. They're a pair of skis I can ski on anything with."	Cherished ski
		LUD	Explains her shopping style: "I mean, if it's a good quality brand…then it's worth buying. I personally, usually go for the mass-marketed ones, `cause they're better quality. They're a little bit more expensive, but… and that's why I like backcountry.com, because you can find a lot of it on there. It's…you know, I just…I just buy it for quality. I mean, I know many things that are mass-marketed that are very good quality. Just look for the quality of it. I don't mind being different whatsoever, as long as it's good, you know… I am far from a fashion queen!"	Quality
Baker	HAS		Talks about his job: "Well, for one, I don't feel like a police officer, I don't look like a	Being outdoor

Baker	HAS		police officer. There are a lot of police officers who look like police officers with their uniform on or not. At my job, I'm not the typical you know officer, I don't I'm a little bit different. I guess, I'm not, it's hard to explain it. You know the typical police officer is… I can't elaborate a whole lot. But I'm not the typical police officer. The reason I got hired was mostly because of my background, with bike riding and everything else…. Well dream job, to ride my bike forever. I mean I had the dream job. It's one of the things that I could work outdoors, I don't have to be inside all the time. I drive around all the time. I love to drive. Yeah, I always thought that chasing people in pursuits would be fun. It is. It's a great job, I love it."	

		HUD	Started biking long time ago:
			  "No, when I started biking, biking wasn't cool. Nobody, it wasn't…. Maybe. I had two or three friends that rode bikes but we didn't have there wasn't a bunch of ramps. There were skate parks but bikes weren't allowed in skate parks yet. And it wasn't really cool. Even when I turned 18-19years old, I was still riding a bike. People were saying, you know most of my friends that rode with me all got cars and girlfriends and moved on and I just kept riding my bike. It wasn't the cool things to do, I just loved it. And I didn't stop doing shows until I was 37 years old or so. It just lasted forever."
			
			Enjoyed being different:
			  "…I was still in school. So let's say, I'd go to Europe or something for a week and I'd be signing autographs for hours at a time. And I'd go back and I'm just in class. And a normal kid again. That wasn't really hard to deal with as a kid. Because I was really humble as a kid. I didn't talk a whole lot about it. Some people knew but it wasn't a crazy big deal. And it was kind of interesting to me it. It was kind of fun to go to from one extreme to the other. I did it all the time."
			
			Defines difference:
				Nobody but me
				
				Unknown distinctiveness

Baker		HUD	"We were different, but we never tried to be. We were a little bit different because it wasn't a mainstream sport. It wasn't something that many people ever saw…. The only thing I didn't enjoy was the limelight. Like winning a contest or going up on the podium and everybody applauding for you. That kind of stuff I can give or take it. I mean I like to do good and I like to win. But I wasn't the kind of guy who needed to go up there and give a speech. It wasn't for me."	Intrinsic difference
Nash	LAS		Talks about clothing: "Because we have the internet, you can go online and find what you're looking for. You know, there's times when I feel like I need a good pair of jeans or a new shirt for work and I go out and shop for something, can't find it. You know, there's always stuff out there. When that happens, though, it's a lot of times, I used to, it's easy for me to just buy something then. I can't find anything I like so I just buy the next best thing. These days, I don't do that. I just go shopping, if I don't find anything I like, I just won't buy anything and then I'll look next time or something. But you know it depends on how badly I need it and with clothing you rarely ever need new clothes that bad you know, unless you're really hunting for clothes, I guess."	Reliance
		HUD	Started skateboarding because: "I gotta be honest. I think I started because it was the trendy thing to do. Well, it wasn't very popular where I was from. I knew …'cause up in Alaska there wasn't a lot of skating going on. But it was trendy in other places and I knew that I never really identified well with Alaskans and so it was kind of a way of being different but still being cool and trendy at the same time because it was trendy elsewhere. Yeah, and it (skateboarding) wasn't a conscious thing. I think that's one of the reasons I grew out of it (skateboarding) so quickly when I left Alaska. But, uh, it was probably more sub-conscious than anything but I wanted to identify with people outside Alaska, because, I honestly didn't really like growing up there, so…."	Foreign ID

Jack	LAS		Enjoys skateboarding: "Well, having fun…Like, you know, being good at what you do, you know, like…you know, like…like, we're good at it. You know what I mean. `Cause you don't…You can't, like, skate one day and be good at it, you know. It's, like, practice. It's like anything else. Like, you gotta practice. Like, for real, you gotta practice hard and a lot, like, you know. And, I don't know, that's what gets you good, like, the practicing and…I mean, the whole…You know, like, there's really no *end* to it. You know, like, those professional skaters, like, they can stop skating, because, I mean, I guess they get money, or whatever. They could stop, whatever. But there's really no end. They're gonna…They're still gonna be doing, like, new stuff they haven't done. I'm not saying, like, tricks…"	Hard work
		LUD	Normalizes himself: "Like, normal…Yeah, like normal people. Like…You know, like, isn't…? Like, isn't being normal like…like…? And I'm not saying, like, we're not normal like, the skaters are not normal, but isn't, like, normal people, like, they just do, like, normal things? I mean they don't skate. They just go home or you know, they do something, they find something to do. They go to the movies and stuff."	Self-normalization
Zac	HAS		Lives with skateboards: "I put a skateboard on the back of my cell phone. Yeah, well my wallet too. I kind of…Like, I put some grip tape…I think other skateboarders have it. I mean, like…like broken boards…still laying around and old shoes… don't know. It's kind of, like…kind of like skateboarding…souvenirs or a trophy, or it's, like, "Look what I did!" It's, like, I don't know, like, it means something. It's just, like, a sense of, like, I don't know, I guess, all that board did for you and, like, the good…like, good things came with that board……and then it broke, and it's just, like……it's, "Thanks – for being there." It's just, like, you can't just throw it away."	Scarvenirs

Zac	HAS		Uses stickers: "Well, it's, like, skateboarding brand stickers. So, I put those stickers there (car), and, er, a lot of stuff on my school supplies. Yeah, `cause I just feel more unique. I don't know why…So you…but, I mean, even though there's a picture, it still looks empty, and like…like I said, my school stuff, it just looks empty, and so I just have to…Then it looks complete."	Filling emptiness
		HUD	Wears: "It's different. I don't know. I try to…I mean, I try to stay true to myself, like I said. Like, I mean, even though I can walk around the school, and I see no-one dressed like I'm dressed, no-one…And so I see that and, like, I just…Like, I'm not gonna…Like, er…I'm not gonna fall into that. I'm not gonna, like…wearing the traditional…like, er, to blend in……like, I'm not *trying* to stand out, but…but I'm not gonna try and blend in either. Like, I'm gonna do…I'm gonna dress how…how I think I should…"	Anti-tradition
Hanna	HAS		Continuously explores: "As a kid I had a little pit bike, and I rode it all over, rode it at my grandparents, and just continued to ride. Took a few years off here and there, rode horses for a while, still just really like motorcycles. It's just fun. Adrenalin Rush pretty much. It's dangerous, fun, it sucks to get hurt but its all just part of the sport. [Getting hurt is part of the X-Games?] In motto, I mean you get hurt skateboarding and stuff too, but it's just an adrenalin rush because it takes certain skills to do a lot of the things these athletes do so….I like to try any kind of sports, like I said I've ridden motocross, I've raced trophy trucks, I've skateboarded, skied, surfed, you know just to try stuff, I will pretty much try anything new."	Non-stop riding
		LUD	Explains herself:	

Hanna		LUD	"I don't generally want to stand out but I don't try to, I just kind of….Not so much….You know I can get along with pretty much any kind of person, I don't go out of my way to make people notice me or anything, I just live my life, if people are going to like me they are, and if they're not they're not but I don't have to stand out in a crowd."	Staying in my way
John	HAS		Recalls: "I actually was kind of a trend setter. I did have a clothing business at one time where we painted on clothing….I am not worried about conforming, to be honest as an artist it is not a really conforming career. And…I would say I am kind of a trend setter in what I paint and what I sell."	Trend setter
		LUD	Wears: "Well, I don't need to get cool at my age. I just need to stay alive and healthy and support the family. I would think. Yeah like I don't drive a cool car, I don't wear cool clothes. Most of the clothes I get are from people that give it to me, I have a rich brother, his kids go through the clothing."	No cool
Chen	LAS	LUD	Expresses high interest in popular brands, such as Oakley, Nike, and Honda and in fact own them. Shows absolutely no interest in self-expression or personalization of his possession.	
Ted	LAS		Adapts: "Yeah I'm not really worried about it (self-expression). I'm not like…I guess a, after a while you pretty much have to go with the trends now. Like these kind of hats, these flat hats, because they have become so popular I can't find the other hats that I like."	No choice
		LUD	Looks: "Well I know like a lot of like my friends like, I don't know you	Similarity

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Ted		LUD	don't want to look exactly the same as everyone else. You want to look similar but you don't want to be the same. Similar to the trend. I probably look a lot like everyone else….I don't actually care…."	
Marc	LAS		Responds (to the question about brands): "My feeling with buying name brand clothes and wearing them is there are so many signals. This brand is really expensive and really nice and stuff like that, I kind of feel like I don't want my clothes to define who I am and have people make judgments of me just from the clothes I wear. Which I think a lot of people wear clothing as a statement to express who they are and draw a certain kind of attention and I have no interest in doing that. Just verbally and by my actions like how I carry myself, what I do, what I say, and have that be how people see me not just go out and be judged on my appearances."	Pseudo-anti-commercialization
		LUD	Condemns consumerism: "Car, I don't give a crap about cars, If it looks in decent shape, it runs well, I can listen to music and I have air conditioning, I am happy. My old car was my parents old car, it was a big van, the air conditioning worked, it didn't have a CD player but it served its purpose, it got me around and eventually it got worn out and I got a small car and it's nothing special but I got something that fits in my budget and I can afford. If I make more money later on the first thing I am not going to go out and do is go out and buy some big expensive car. For a car I don't need all the bells and whistles and sleekness….I ignore them (sarcasm) because I don't care, if that's all they're going to think about that's not anybody I want to have anything to do with anyways because that's not who I am, if they want to go hang out with all those people that want to talk about cars and the new hot designer, they can do that great if that's what makes them happy, but it holds no interest to me and it is like, you know I wouldn't say it is a different world but you just have your own little circles that you are in and that is what they do and I can co-exist peacefully with them I mean my girlfriend is much more about designer clothes and stuff	Peaceful co-existence

Marc		LUD	like that and she is always trying to get me to buy the nicer clothes and dress up and I am like, I have no interest."	
Kai	HAS		Personalizes: "I customize my house I guess, paint it the colors I like, build a deck, somewhere to put my grill shoot I built 300sqft on the back of my house by myself. I had over three months of working on it and only four days a person helped me do something. But I couldn't lift trusses up on the roof by myself, I tried….300sqft, it is 20ft wide by 12 ft deep off the back of the house, it was fun learning how to do all of that stuff, I did it all good, it's up to code, it doesn't leak, looks like it is supposed to be there, and I probably added at least 5thousand dollars to the value of my house, and I paid about 3 thousand and did it by myself. I put a rock wall out back, I like to personalize I have all of these old rocks that I will collect from rock climbing. Like if a rock falls on me from up top or a rock pops and falls and hits me or it pops off while I was hanging on it I always try to find it and keep it."	Arduous personalization
Kai		HUD	Stays away from "sold-out": "No when you go to the skate park nobody is wearing that stuff. Unless kids' mammas are buying them stuff and it is because of convenience or a sale, you don't see that stuff at skate parks. You sure don't see it with your hard core kids down town who are jumping stairs and harassing security guards. They are buying skate stuff, just your plane white tee, it's just like in rap, or a gangster culture, if you don't want trouble you wear something plane, you wear a plane black shirt you wear a plane white tee, you wear grey. You know you don't want any trouble and you're not mad dogging anybody and it's kind of that same thing. Flannel shirts are a big deal now, it was a big deal when I was a kid, and I would go to the thrift store and get 5 – 10 flannels for fewer than ten bucks. That was my jacket, that's what I was wearing and that has kind of came back but now kids are spending 60 bucks for a Nike flannel or a Vans flannel	Distinction-making

| Kai | | HUD | but now we have got this stupid outlet mall over here and they have skateboarding brands that have outlets, that's another way that it has become big. You have a Zoo York outlet, you have Zoomies, Vans, people are going to buy your stuff because it's cheap, but still the really hard core kids will see the stuff that's over there and say nah they can't get that because it's at the mall. Its other peoples stuff not their stuff." | |

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Soonkwan Hong is originally from Inchon, South Korea and has lived in Vancouver, Canada and more recently in South Texas. His research interests include consumer identity project, consumer agency, and co-optation theory. He believes that "edutainment," utilizing up-to-date technology, is one of the most successful teaching methods. His research has been published in International Journal of Technology Marketing, CyberPsychology & Behavior, Journal of Promotion Management, Advances in Consumer Research, The TQM Magazine, International Journal of Quality and Reliability Management, Journal of Computer Information Systems, and Journal of Relationship Marketing. He is a member of three academic associations to which he has presented his research: American Marketing Association, Association for Consumer Research, and Academy of Marketing Science. He enjoys almost all sports, especially basketball, tennis, soccer, golf, and snowboarding. He is married with two children, Emily and Ian.

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