



Desafiando conceptualizaciones clásicas sobre el

LUJO

UNA VISIÓN DISRUPTIVA EN LA
SOCIEDAD DE CONSUMO
CONTEMPORÁNEA

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Challenging Classic Conceptualizations of Luxury:
Disruptive Perspectives in
Contemporary Consumer Society

Desafiando Conceptualizaciones Clásicas sobre el Lujo:
Una Visión Disruptiva en la
Sociedad de Consumo Contemporánea

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this doctoral research is to explore the meaning of luxury in contemporary consumer society. This investigation departs from traditional approaches to the study of luxury focusing on luxury goods and luxury brands by offering new socially constructed notions of luxury connected to philanthropic giving and freedom. In order to investigate the phenomenon of luxury from a consumer perspective, a phenomenological research approach was applied. In particular, consumers' multifaceted constructions of luxury were elicited by means of phenomenological interviews in a multisited empirical field covering four European capital cities: Stockholm, London, Berlin, and Madrid. The findings show that philanthropic giving may be perceived as luxury when giving triggers significant transformations of non-related others (outward transformations), transforms the sense of self in relation to others (onward transformations), elevates the status of the self (upward transformations), and ultimately, transforms the self (inner transformations). In addition, this research argues that consumers may place luxury in the realm of freedom, whether in terms of liberation (freedom from), license (freedom to) or both. Furthermore, it illustrates that some possessions hold the power of providing consumers with both freedom and slavery. These contributions extend the traditional conceptualizations of luxury as inextricably bound up to having, by arguing that luxury can also be embedded in rationales of sharing out and being free. In addition, the findings highlight that transformational value is germane to the disruptive views of luxury presented in this research and that meaningfulness permeates the consumers' discourses of luxury as philanthropic giving and freedom.

Keywords: Luxury; Philanthropy; Freedom; Giving; Self-transformations; Societal transformations; Meaningfulness; Phenomenology; Consumer perspective.

RESUMEN

El objetivo de esta investigación es explorar el significado del lujo en la sociedad de consumo contemporánea. Esta investigación se distancia de enfoques tradicionales basados en el estudio de bienes y marcas de lujo, aportando nuevas nociones del lujo socialmente construidas, relacionadas con filantropía y libertad. Con el objetivo de investigar el fenómeno del lujo desde la perspectiva del consumidor, se ha adoptado un enfoque de investigación fenomenológico. En concreto, se han obtenido complejas interpretaciones del lujo a través de entrevistas fenomenológicas llevadas a cabo en cuatro capitales europeas: Estocolmo, Londres, Berlín y Madrid. Los resultados muestran que la filantropía puede ser entendida como lujo cuando da lugar a transformaciones significativas en la vida de otras personas (transformaciones externas), transforma la propia identidad en relación a otras personas (transformaciones hacia delante), incrementa el estatus personal (transformaciones hacia arriba) y, en último lugar, transforma la propia naturaleza de la persona (transformaciones internas). Asimismo, esta investigación argumenta que los consumidores pueden situar el lujo en el ámbito de la libertad, ya sea en términos de liberación (liberarse de), licencia (libertad para), o ambos. Igualmente, se ilustra cómo determinadas posesiones pueden constituir una fuente de libertad o de esclavitud. Estas contribuciones amplían la tradicional conceptualización de lujo, inextricablemente unida al concepto de tener, argumentando que el lujo también está conectado a la idea de compartir y ser libre. Asimismo, los resultados de esta investigación enfatizan que el valor transformacional es inherente a las visiones disruptivas del lujo presentadas en esta tesis doctoral. Finalmente, es necesario destacar que los discursos sobre el lujo de los consumidores participantes en esta investigación están impregnados con referencias a la búsqueda de sentido en la vida.

Palabras clave: Lujo; Filantropía; Libertad; Transformaciones personales; Transformaciones sociales; Sentido de la vida; Fenomenología; Perspectiva del consumidor

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“Let’s be thankful to people who make us happy, they are the charming gardeners who make our souls flower.”

– Marcel Proust

The process of writing this doctoral thesis has meant a journey through different stages, from understanding the meaning of doing research, to finding myself immersed in both inner mental journeys and outer physical ones. I have benefited from personal and intellectual growth by walking this bumpy road, sometimes alone, sometimes with many traveling companions who have contributed, each in their way, to shape and improve this dissertation and to whom I feel indebted.

Most of the research presented in the upcoming pages has been done out of my hometown and out of my comfort zone. Living and working abroad has made me face many challenges, become familiar with different cultures and ways of living and doing research, has given me the opportunity to get to know many special scholars, and even better, it has brought some excellent and true friends to my life.

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From Canada to Sweden, and from a memorable experience to an unforgettable one. Stockholm University was my next destination. My arrival there was on the 2nd of November, during the darkest period of the year. Again, I was moving to a cold country to spend the winter, and found an attic full of nice, friendly, and warm people who welcomed me with open arms. I would need many pages to express all I learned at the Stockholm Business School, from both a personal and an academic point of view. The impact of sharing time and conversations with excellent people and avant-garde researchers made me understand the real meaning of doing research, opened my eyes to the charms of it and, consequently led me to rethink the whole approach of my dissertation. That was the first of many visits to Sweden and rewarding experiences. Thanks to all my colleagues at the Marketing Department for an inspiring and enjoyable working environment, for making me feel part of the group, pleasant coffee talks (*fika*), and great time.

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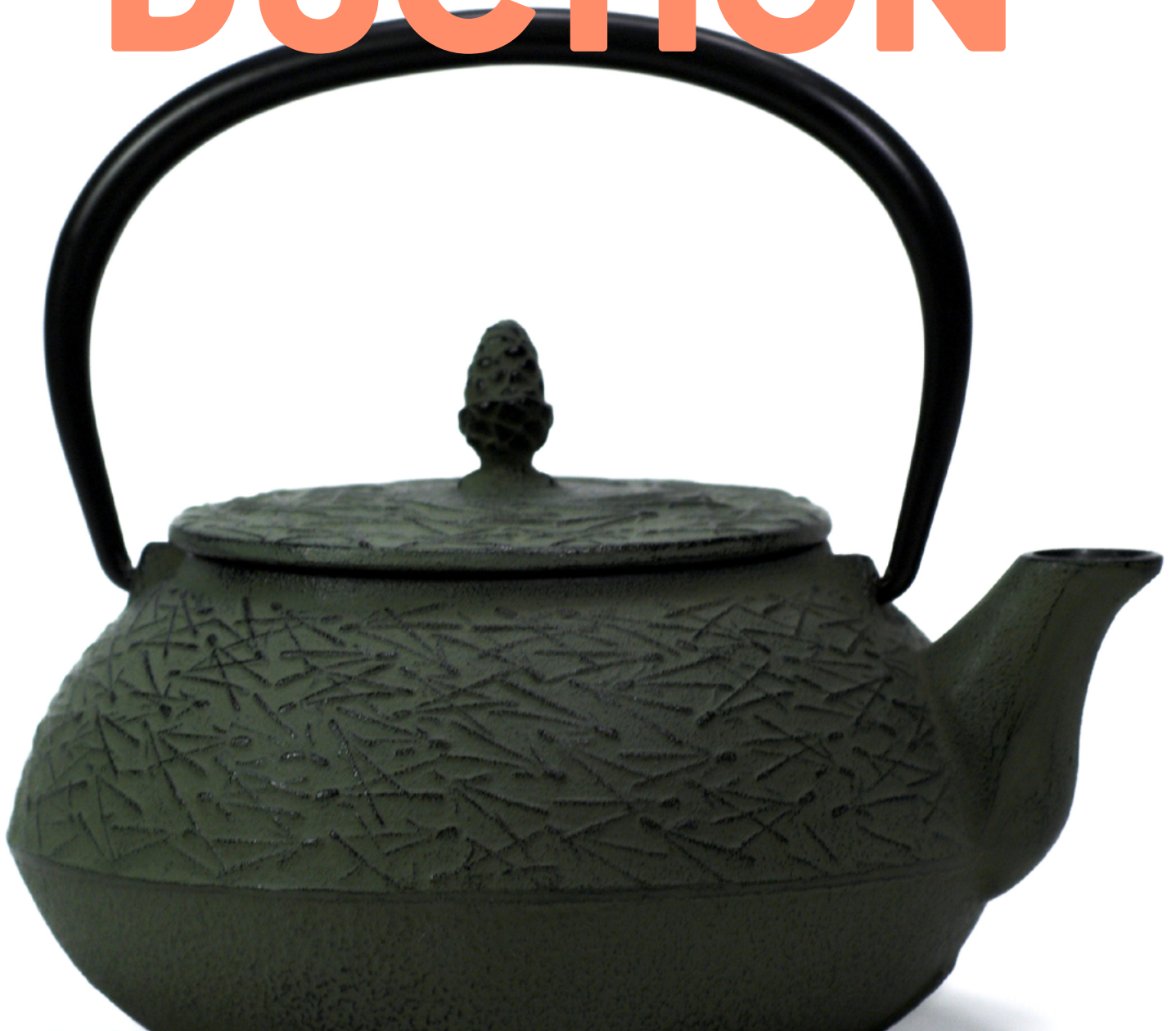
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Chapter 1

INTRO DUCTION



INTRODUCTION

“The important thing is to not stop questioning.

Curiosity has its own reason for existence.”

— Albert Einstein

1.1 Background and research interest

The versatile, complex, and captivating, albeit seemingly superficial character of luxury, made me to succumb to its charms. Thus, this doctoral dissertation aims at deepen the understanding of the meaning of luxury in contemporary consumer society from a consumer perspective. My interest in luxury stems from my initial research project, which was about relationship marketing with the objective of understanding the relationships between brands and customers in the luxury sector. In the process of defining and outlining the luxury sector, I began to reflect about what is luxury. I realized that luxury was a very ambiguous concept and that the definitions in the literature did not fit my own idea of luxury. I wondered if the real luxury was glittering, if there was just one luxury or instead, there were many, and if

the real treasures had a label or a price tag stuck on them. This personal introspection moved me in this direction, so this research emanates from my own quest about what is the meaning of luxury in contemporary consumer society, offering a wider and deeper picture than the one we get when looking at luxury through the brand name eyeglasses or the flashy logos peephole.

When reflecting about my personal notion of luxury I found myself swimming in a sea of ideas, experiences, thoughts, and states of mind but not diamonds, champagne, yachts or mansions, neither Manolo Blahnik shoes or Birkin bags. Instead, my collage of luxury included books, people who I treasure, a variety of stories around the world, and a never-ending curiosity, which lead me to explore what else luxury could be.

Given the grassroots motivations of this dissertation, I decided to explore what consumers define as luxury. Thus, this dissertation divorces from the mainstream perspective in the marketing literature focused on luxury from a managerial point of view to give voice to consumers and their personal interpretations and meanings of luxury.

1.2 Purpose and positioning

Anthropological and archeological evidence suggests that the phenomenon of luxury might be as old as human material culture itself. Nevertheless, the notions of luxury have been constructed differently in different systems. The meaning of luxury

in contemporary consumer society has received very little attention and remains under-theorized. Thus, the objective of this research is to shed light to the meaning of luxury within the current system, from a consumer perspective.

This dissertation is embedded in the field of Consumer Culture Theory (CCT), studying the polysemic nature of the concept of luxury. It goes beyond the brand name luxury approach that prevails in the marketing context, offering a wider understanding of the phenomenon of luxury by exploring the meanings assigned by consumers to the notion of luxury. In Slater's view (1997, p. 8), "consumer culture denotes a social arrangement in which the relation between lived culture and social resources, between meaningful ways of life and the symbolic and material resources' on which they depend, is mediated through markets. Consumer culture marks out a system in which consumption is dominated by the consumption of commodities, and in which cultural reproduction is largely understood to be carried out through the exercise of free personal choice in the private sphere of everyday life."

The contribution of this thesis to the still nascent field of luxury within the Consumer Culture Theory, implies delving into this socially and culturally constructed concept furthering the understanding of how consumers filter the mainstream meaning in society and create their own notions, giving room to new approaches within the luxury research. As it will be documented in the following chapters, luxury is a prism with many sides. While classical conceptualizations of luxury are related to material

possessions, conspicuous consumption, and social standing, the disruptive views presented in this dissertation are linked to transformations through philanthropic giving and experiencing freedom, both in everyday life and in aspirational scenarios. This may lead to a re-conceptualization of the notion of luxury, including new dimensions, nuances and eclectic perspectives. From a managerial point of view, it becomes crucial to be able to identify the meanings of luxury in the consumer society as well as their implications within the marketing context.

1.3 Structure

The structure of this thesis is as follows: the upcoming Chapter 2 provides a first theoretical framing of the dissertation. First, it offers a retrospective historical view of luxury, from ancient times to nowadays, aimed at contextualizing the phenomenon of luxury and its underlying meanings in different ages. Second, it presents consumer research perspectives on philanthropic giving, freedom, and transformations of self, since these are the streams of research in which the meanings of luxury emerging from this doctoral research are anchored. These theoretical fields are further unfolded in Chapters 4 and 5.

Methodology is the core issue in Chapter 3 explaining the phenomenological approach adopted, as well as illuminating the main issues regarding data collection and analysis. In particular, insights about the multisited enquiry, informants, data

collection procedures, and analytical process are discussed. The decisions about the methods were aimed at gaining understanding about the complexities and ambiguities of the phenomenon from different perspectives, trying to overcome the taken-for-granted barrier, and joining the dots to get a panoramic picture of the phenomenon of luxury from the consumer perspective.

The main findings of this research are conveyed in Chapters 4 and 5. These findings and their specific theoretical anchoring have been articulated into two academic papers: (1) *The luxury of Igniting Change by Giving: Transforming Yourself while Transforming others' Lives*, with Thyra Uth Thomsen, which has been accepted for publication in the special issue "Leaving Pleasantville: Transforming beyond Self in Everyday Life" in the Journal of Business Research; and, (2) *Is freedom the new luxury? A contemporary consumer perspective*, accepted for publication in the proceedings of the 15th International Marketing Trends Conference, in Venice.

Chapter 4 presents the paper "The Luxury of Igniting Change by Giving: transforming yourself while transforming others' lives." This study expands the pervasive view of luxury as accumulation of highly valued goods by offering a transformative perspective of luxury as transforming the life of distant others by giving them valuable philanthropic gifts and thereby, ultimately transforming the self of the giver. The study shows how giving away economic capital (money and time), social capital (networks and influence), and cultural capital (skills and knowledge) to non-related others can

provide the giver with a sense of luxury in terms of pleasure, purpose, and connection with humankind. Thus, this study not only extends the traditional conceptualization of luxury from having to giving, but also challenges current conceptualizations of sharing out as non-reciprocal pro-social behavior, by illustrating how ‘the luxury of giving’ relies on both pro-social and pro-ego consumption rationales, which implicitly include circular reciprocation.

Under the title “Is Freedom the New Luxury? A contemporary consumer perspective,” Chapter 5 presents a conceptualization of luxury as freedom. Even though freedom has traditionally been considered as an essential human need, this study sheds light on how consumers place freedom in the realm of luxury, whether in terms of liberation (freedom from), license (freedom to), or both. Furthermore, it shows that some possessions hold the power of providing consumers with both freedom and slavery. These contributions extend theory in the luxury consumption domain and further the theoretical perspectives of freedom in consumer culture. This view of luxury as freedom has implications for understanding certain emancipatory consumer behavior trends like downshifting, voluntary simplicity, and austerity, as well as rebellious consumer behavior aimed at escaping the market. It calls for more research about the role of freedom in the production and consumption condition, and yields important managerial implications for companies adopting a culture of freedom in the workplace and/or embracing freedom as a significant aspect of the brand strategy.

Finally, Chapter 6 addresses the main conclusions of this dissertation and its contribution to the consumer research field. In particular, this last chapter first emphasizes how the disruptive views of luxury expand classical theorizations of luxury, demonstrating that it can be embedded not only in the having rationale, but also in the being free and sharing out rationales. Second, it highlights how transformational value is germane to the disruptive views of luxury. Finally, it shows that meaningfulness is at the heart of the disruptive views of luxury, permeating the notions of luxury as philanthropic giving and freedom. The chapter concludes with an agenda of topics that call for research in order to advance the understanding of the perspectives on luxury from a consumer point of view. It also summarizes the main managerial implications for companies, which may integrate philanthropy and freedom as essential parts of their corporate philosophy, as well as for non-profit organizations, educational institutions, and consumer society.

Chapter 2

CONCEPTUALIZING
LUXURY



CONTEXTUALIZING LUXURY:

FROM ANCIENT TIMES TO CONTEMPORARY CONSUMER SOCIETY

*“People have declaimed against luxury for two thousand years,
in verse and prose, and people have always delighted in it.”*

— Voltaire

This dissertation extends traditional conceptualizations of luxury by framing luxury from the outset of philanthropic giving, freedom, and transformations of self. In the following, the main body of research applied from these areas is presented. These disruptive views of luxury stemmed from the scrutiny of the data, as a result of adopting an inductive qualitative approach. As it will be explained in the chapter devoted to methodology (Chapter 3), this research has employed a phenomenological approach. This type of inquiry involves deliberately putting aside researcher’s own beliefs, as well as bracketing previous knowledge about the phenomenon under investigation (Carpenter, 2007).

In spite of this, it was necessary to review previous conceptualizations of luxury along history, since literature review helps researchers to manufacture distance by providing them with a set of expectations that the data can confront (McCracken, 1988). In addition, given that luxury is historically contingent and is defined by society (Kapferer and Bastien, 2012), an overview of luxury along history provides insights regarding the relevance and historical metamorphose of this phenomenon. Thus, an archeology of luxury is presented first, offering a pre-understanding of the phenomenon of luxury from ancient times to contemporary society, focusing afterwards on the three main bodies of literature connected to the disruptive views of luxury in contemporary consumer society portrayed in this dissertation.

2.1 Archeology of luxury

The pursuit of the sumptuous instinct may be portrayed as an anthropological constant, a common passion for every civilization and age. “Even within the new and always difficult study of the history of ideas, luxury presents an unusual problem in meaning, since it is not susceptible to ready definition. Context is important, and during three thousand years, this has shifted many times, and in many ways” (Sekora, 1977, p. 4). Enzensberger (1999) states that in spite of poverty, there has not been any society living without luxury, while Lipovetsky (2004, p. 23) posits that “even before of being a mark of materialism, luxury was a phenomenon of culture, a mental attitude which could be considered as a characteristic of the social character of the human beings.”

In archaic societies luxury was based on wastefulness and squandering, had strong magic and religious connotations, and the aim of attaining prestige (e.g., Bataille, 1988; Mauss, 1966). Adornments, celebrations, splendor, and magnificence emerged as a means to assert dominant positions in these ancestral communities. Hence, originally, luxury was not related to accumulation (to have) but to squandering (to waste). Potlatch – a very popular ritual among American Indians in the northeast coast of Pacific ocean - (Barnett, 1938) and Kula ring - an extended practice among the inhabitants of the Trobriand islands - (Malinowski, 1922) are examples of ancestral luxurious practices.

Symbols of luxury, such as palaces, monuments, exotic products, and refined entertainment, associated to religious and political issues, were common along history. For example, great pomp and splendor dominated the life and the afterlife of Pharaohs (Kapferer and Bastien, 2012) who were considered as deities in ancient Egypt. In opposition to Egyptians, in the ancient Greece, Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle considered austerity as a priority, emphasizing “being” over “having.” This prevailing philosophy of life, summarized in the Ancient Greek aphorism “Know thyself,” involved an introspective view of life, perfectly compatible with the role of the State. This civilization lived a modest private life in terms of properties. Instead, Ancient Greeks found different expressions of luxury in the *polis* (e.g., entertainment, pleasure, and culture).

Yet again, an exaltation of materialism and luxury was displayed in the Roman Empire; ostentation being the key characteristic of luxury. Emperors and nobles enjoyed excess in adornment, copious banquets and Dionysian feasts, splendid funerals and celebrations, ingestion of pearls, and magnificent buildings like the Gold House of Nero. In an attempt to stop the rise of luxury and excess, the Roman governors set up the Sumptuary Laws (Lex Oppia, Orchia, Fannia, Licinia, Aemilia, and Antia). These laws established certain limits such as the amount of gold that women could possess, the display of wealth, the color of their garment, the number of guests invited for dinner, the consumption of food and wines, the expenditure per day, and the inherited amount of riches (Dari-Mattiacci and Plisecka, 2010).

To a less refined extent, squandering continued to play a key role in the Middle Ages. The quest for differentiation and the craving for power motivated feudal lords to use their fortunes to indulge in luxury goods (Smith, 1978).

Technological change, as well as the rise of international trade inside Europe and with Asia and America fueled the rise of consumer culture -and luxury consumption in particular- in Europe during the late seventeenth century and the eighteenth century (Berg and Clifford, 1999). During this time, exotic commodities from afar like exclusive perfumes and spices from the Caribbean were considered luxuries (Berthon, Pitt, Parent, and Berthon, 2009). The Industrial Revolution entailed a rise in economic welfare levels, yielding an increasing “democratization” of luxury

(Hauck and Stanforth, 2007), which ultimately led to two trends in the 20th century: the increasing popularization of the luxury consumption, and the coexistence of extreme luxury with affordable luxury known as *Populuxe* (Hine, 1986) or *McLuxury* (Gumbel, 2007). The latter claims the right for everybody to have access to luxury goods, which were previously reserved to a privileged minority of consumers.

Nowadays, it seems that the concept of luxury has, at least partially, lost its lust because of a misuse of the concept (Thomas, 2007). Thus, the popularization and overuse of the word luxury has led to confusion (Kapferer, 2015) and contributed to reinforce its elusive nature (The Economist, 2014). Mortelmans (2005) states that the widespread popularization of luxury means that certain goods once considered luxuries, are nowadays affordable for a vast amount of consumers. However, luxury as a social phenomenon does not disappear but it evolves. Besides democratization, Lipovetsky (2004) points to individualization and emotionalization as the processes shaping contemporary luxury culture. Enzensberger (1999) wonders if future luxury takes a distance from expensive cars, jewelry, delicatessen and exotic products but instead is connected to basic conditions of life like tranquility, salubrious water, and space. He explicitly identifies six luxuries: time, attention, space, rest, clean environment, and safety, arguing that true luxury consists of having all of them. Similarly, Lipovetsky (2004) asserts that even though conspicuous luxury has not faded away, other approaches emphasizing luxury for oneself (e.g., experiences, health, and subjective well-being) are gaining momentum.

As this retrospective view of luxury along history suggests, luxury has changed form throughout time. At the same time, conceptualizations of luxury in consumer research have predominantly considered luxury in terms of having (conspicuous) consumption goods (cf. the review of luxury in consumer research in Chapter 4). This called for a phenomenological study of the notion of luxury in order to unveil contemporary nuances of the meaning of luxury in current consumer society. The findings of this dissertation stress that nowadays, some luxury perspectives are not so explicit, ostentatious, and conspicuous. Instead, they adopt a different guise, linking the idea of luxury to transformational experiences through philanthropic giving and freedom. The following sections provide theoretical background on these topics.

2.2 A consumer research perspective on philanthropic giving

Sharing is a consumer behavior of increasing importance but has been traditionally neglected by consumer researchers (Belk, 2010). The seminal conceptual paper by Belk (ibid.) on sharing opened the season and skyrocketed the scholars' interest on sharing issues. Some interesting studies have been published since then in the context of consumer research, focusing on different aspects related to sharing (e.g., Bardhi and Eckhardt, 2012; Griffiths and Gilly, 2012; Lambertson and Rose, 2012; Visconti, Sherry, Borghini, and Anderson, 2010).

Sharing has two different meanings (Oxford Dictionaries, 2015): (1) having a portion of (something) with another or others, and (2) giving a portion of (something) to another or others. While the first meaning involves communal consumption, the second acceptation implies transfer of ownership, even though it does not necessarily imply that the owner loses the shared resources. For example, when sharing knowledge, the recipient receives knowledge but the giver still keeps that knowledge.

When sharing takes place inside the limits of the family and friends circle is regarded as sharing in. By contrast, sharing out means sharing with non-kin, and voluntary sharing out is recognized as philanthropy (Ilchman, Katz, and Queen II, 1998, p. ix). The findings in this dissertation are rooted in the second type of sharing, i.e., sharing as giving to another or others (non-kin), since as it will be depicted in Chapter 4, in some cases consumers regard philanthropic giving –or sharing out- as luxury. Given that the sharing paradigm is at the heart of the notion of luxury as philanthropic giving presented in this doctoral dissertation, a parallel study aimed at gaining understanding of the nature and effects on sharing on consumer behavior was conducted in the U.S., Canada, and Spain (Belk and Llamas, 2010), laying the foundation for an understanding of sharing in connection to philanthropic giving as luxury (see Appendix).

A review of the literature on philanthropic giving shows a lack of consensus regarding the terms employed to refer to this concept. For example, Bajde (2009; 2012) has used the terms “charitable giving” and “charitable gift giving,” while Magat (1989)

employs the term “philanthropic giving.” In addition, some authors use the terms philanthropy and charity interchangeably. The notion that springs from the discourses on luxury in this dissertation aligns with the definition of philanthropy proposed by Hladká (2009, p. 2), who states that “philanthropy covers not only traditional types of charitable giving, but also a range of ways in which people may show their general goodwill to society.” Not in vein, etymologically philanthropy means “love of humanity.”

The difference between philanthropy and charity is often exemplified through the proverb “give a man a fish and you feed him for a day; teach a man to fish and you feed him for a lifetime.” While the first part of the adage refers to charity and it is focused on the short term, the second part regards to philanthropy, showing a long term approach. In other words, charity is focused on relieving the “symptoms” of a particular problem in a certain moment (short term focus) while philanthropy adopts a long term approach by working on the roots of the social problem (Gross, 2003). Additionally, some cultural specificity of the appreciation of philanthropy both in the use of the word, and in the various cultural practices involved can be observed. In the context of the Western world, one of the most striking differences takes place between the U.S. and the U.K. While the word philanthropy is commonly used in the U.S., charity and charitable giving are the most prevalent terms in the U.K. (Jas, 2000; Wright, 2002).

However, in this dissertation philanthropic giving is treated as a distinctive paradigm from gift giving. In his account about gift giving, Sherry (1983) posits that any resource can potentially become a gift. According to Sherry, two factors foster the transition from a resource to a gift: the social relationship between giver and recipient, and the gift giving occasion. As it will be depicted in the coming chapters, in the discourses about philanthropic giving as luxury, initially, there is no relationship between the giver and the recipients (non-kin) and the giving does not take place as a result of a special occasion. In line with this, and based on Sherry's discussion on the gift, Fischer, Gainer, and Arnold (1996) also draw a line between charitable giving and gifting, emphasizing the dissimilarities between these two phenomena. On the other hand, Bajde (2009; 2012), one of main exponents addressing the study of philanthropic giving in consumer research, frames charitable giving in the gift giving realm, understanding donations as postmodern gifts to distant others (Bajde, 2009).

A literature review shows mixed evidence about the nature of philanthropic giving behavior. Whereas some authors like Benkler (2004) and Widlok (2004) see sharing in the light of pure altruistic acts, self-interest can also be traced as one of the components of philanthropic giving. In this regard, Andreoni (1989; 1990) points to altruism as the consumption of the "warm glow," posing that individuals donate not only to help a particular cause but also because it supports their self-image, as an altruistic individual (Urbain, Le Gall-Ely, and Gonzalez, 2010). Besides acting in line with a pro-social self-image, another driver for engaging in philanthropic

giving is conforming to the social norm (e.g., Aaker and Akutsu, 2009; Fisher and Ackerman, 1998; Fisher, Vandebosch, and Antia, 2008; Sargeant, Ford, and West, 2006). Recent research by Hanson (2015) offers a portrait of charitable giving as conspicuous generosity. He asserts that charitable giving constitutes a way for the elite to exert power and domination and to show status and superiority. This view is consistent with Veblen's (1994/1899) approach, considering philanthropy as a public display of wealth aimed at securing esteem, and consequently, he places this exhibition in the sphere of conspicuous consumption. Moreover, the obligation to give is stronger for well-off individuals than for middle and low classes. For the affluent, not complying with the norm of helping those in need might endanger their position in society (Odendahl, 1990; Ostrower, 1997). However, according to Berking (1999) the moral obligation of aiding those in need goes beyond the wealthy, to influence individuals from all walks of life due to what this author terms as the remoralization of the individual-society-nature triad (ibid.).

Additionally, research on helping behavior shows that helping others produces positive psychological consequences for the helper, sometimes labeled as "empathic joy" (Batson and Shaw, 1991) and, ultimately, philanthropic giving brings happiness to the giver (Dunn, Aknin, and Norton, 2008; Liu and Aaker, 2008). In fact, according to the Oxford English Dictionary, the first use of the word philanthropy (in the early seventeenth century) had the meaning of "the disposition or active effort to promote the happiness and well-being of one's fellow men."

Philanthropic giving does not involve an expectation of reciprocal returns, which is consistent with Shalin's (1972) idea of generalized reciprocity. It implies giving without an expectation of direct or imminent return (ibid.). In this line, the Giving Pledge is an initiative that shows "a commitment by the world's wealthiest individuals and families to dedicate the majority of their wealth to philanthropy" (givingpledge.org). Edgar M. Bronfman, former CEO of the Seagram Company, has signed the Giving Pledge. In his statement, Bronfman posits that "helping is a joyful experience and enriches the giver as much as those who receive" (ibid.). This statement ponders the pro-social and pro-ego ethos underlying philanthropic giving as luxury. It implies that while individuals who engage in philanthropic giving do not seek reciprocity, they may get benefits from giving. As it will be illustrated in Chapter 4, the findings of this research show how individuals from all walks of life find a luxury the idea of indulging in philanthropic giving, igniting significant transformations in the lives of distant others, while experiencing a transformation of self. The findings also trace the connection between philanthropic giving and self-interest as well as universalism, suggesting that the luxury of philanthropic giving is rooted in both pro-social and pro-ego behavior.

2.3 A consumer research perspective on freedom

Most of the literature on freedom in the context of consumer research revolves around the open debate on the impact of the consumer culture on consumers' freedom. This debate finds confronted positions. On one hand, consumer culture

has been theorized to influence the freedom of individuals, shaping their wishes and making them to lose control of their own lives. On the other hand, consumer culture has been understood as providing consumers with untrammelled consumption choices so they freely create and express their individual and collective identities through their consumption choices, achieve self-fulfillment through consumption, and entertain themselves (Goodman and Cohen, 2004).

In their account about liberatory postmodernism, Firat and Venkatesh (1995) posit that markets have a growing influence on consumers, which yields in molding their identities and limiting their human freedom. Along the same lines, Bauman (1988) considers that in today's society, market forces and consumerism are undermining individual freedom of the liquid men and women. According to Blackshaw (2005), Bauman's discourse is an attempt to make consumers more aware of their own possibilities, bolstering their positive freedom and encouraging them to take action instead of allowing consumer culture to decide for them. Firat and Venkatesh (1995, p. 255-56) argue that markets "constrain consumers' creative roles and identities, limit their human freedom by enforcing particular views of reality, and make their everyday life less diverse and more passive." Dittmar (2008) goes further to assert that consumer culture can be seen as a "cage within," curtailing individual freedom and diminishing consumers' well-being. In her view, consumers perceive consumer culture as an open stage where they can jump on and express themselves but, in fact, in this performance the script is already written, portraying unrealistic characters.

On the other hand, consumer society can be perceived as fostering freedom to the extent that it provides consumers with several options so they can choose those which adapt better to them, manufacturing and displaying their identities, and thereby, rendering high levels of freedom. In this vein, Arnould and Thompson (2005, p. 871) consider that “the marketplace provides consumers with an expansive and heterogeneous palette of resources from which to construct individual and collective identities.” Along the same lines, but on a broader discourse, Twitchell (1999, p. 27) emphasizes that consumer culture has promoted unparalleled levels of welfare and personal freedom fueled by consumption, “ironically spending more and more time at the carnival, less and less in church.”

Other scholars like Sassatelli (2007), adopt an intermediate stance asserting that “everyday consumption should be seen as a territory neither for the domination of the masses, nor for the freedom of the self” (p. 195) while Fiske (1989/2000) draws a line between production and consumption. According to this author, in the arena of production people lack freedom in terms of where to work and/or regarding their working conditions; instead, the sphere of consumption allows consumers to transcend the restrictions experienced in the condition of production yielding freedom and choice.

Drawing from the interpretations above, in contemporary consumer society, consumers have a wide range of options at their disposal but different forces may

shape their choices. Schor (1991) bemoans that by falling in the comfort of the good life, keeping up with the Joneses, and/or complying with social norms, consumers lose their freedom and become trapped by the tyrannies of the consumerism, feeding and empowering the work-spend spiral. In addition, Foucault (1979) refers to a panoptical society where individuals cannot escape to the gaze and control of others, while Blackshaw (2005) points to Bauman's emphasis on the liquid modern individuals who are now free to choose, choose to consume.

As it will be portrayed in Chapter 5, consumers can perceive freedom as being closely linked to luxury both in the arena of production and consumption. They place the luxury of freedom in an aspirational scenario, i.e., as a luxury that they currently do not possess but they would like to achieve. Paradoxically, the findings mirror the twofold perspective in the literature portraying consumer culture both as fostering and limiting consumers' freedom. According to the findings, some informants consider that consumer culture has diminished their freedom (through social norms and external circumstances) and aspire to the luxury of liberating themselves from this social conditioning. At the same time, they long for the luxury of using the freedom to choose among the numerous choices that the markets make available for them in order to pursue personal growth and, ultimately, self-actualization. Finally, consumers perceive that consumption may encapsulate both freedom and slavery. Thus, luxury resides on having free choice to choose emancipatory consumption practices.

2.4 A consumer research perspective on transformations of self

Since the seminal paper by Levy (1959) about brands as conveyors of identity, self-expression, and signaling, a growing body of literature in the context of consumer research has addressed the relationships between possessions and identity (for an exhaustive review see Ruvio and Belk, 2012). The starting point for these studies revolves around the idea that possessions help consumers in their endeavor to craft and display their sense of self. In this vein, Belk (1988, p. 160) asserts that “we are what we have” and “this may be the most basic and powerful fact of consumer behavior.” Therefore, brands can influence consumers’ identity in different ways. They can be used to signal and express consumers’ sense of self (e.g., Aaker, 1997; Belk, 2013; Escalas and Bettman, 2005; Ruvio and Belk, 2012), restore and reconstruct their self-view (Gao, Wheeler, and Shiv, 2009), challenge consumers’ actual self (Cutright, Samper, and Fitzsimons, 2012) and facilitate the transition from the current self to the desired self (Arnould and Thompson, 2005; Dittmar, 2008). In particular, possessions and brands help consumers to navigate through identity transitions (Schau, Gilly, and Wolfenbarger, 2009).

Other types of consumer behaviors not related to having and possessing can also support identity transformations. Consumers construct and re-assert their identity not only by accumulating but also by giving (Schwartz, 1967). Gifts become

“containers for the being of the donor who gives a portion of that being to the recipient” (Sherry, 1983, p. 159). Giving holds a symbolic function since it is a vehicle for the giver to express his/her self-concept to the recipient (Ward and Broniarczyk, 2011). Regarding charitable giving, some scholars consider that this type of giving can influence the sense of self, bolstering a compassionate, pro-social, or influential self-image (Bekkers and Wiepking, 2007), and even contribute to a wealthy sense of self (Chance and Norton, 2011). Along the same lines, Piliavin and Callero’s (1991) study suggests that blood donors develop an altruistic self-concept as a consequence of continued blood donation, while Reed, Kay, Finnel, Aquino, and Ley (2015) found that giving time to a cause reinforces the moral sense of self of the donor more strongly than donating money. Paraphrasing Leadbeater (2008, p. 26), “in the 20th century we were identified by what we owned; in the 21st century we will be defined by how we share and what we give away.” Even though there is ample evidence about how philanthropic giving contributes to the donor’s sense of self, there is a lack of research about the transformations that this type of giving triggers on the recipients’ identities.

Being is also part of the triad fostering the transition from the current self to the desired self. In particular, being free may trigger the transformation from the actual self to the authentic self. In this vein, Wang (1999) states that the authentic self is that state of ‘being’ emancipated from social norms and normative regulations and free to become anyone and anything (Firat and Venkatesh, 1995). Hence, the

mode of “being free” can ignite identity transformations, uncovering the authentic self. Golomb (1995) states that the inauthentic self avoids free choice in order to escape from the responsibility attached to freedom, while the authentic self shows a coherence between internal experiences and external expressions (Avolio and Gardner, 2005; Erikson, 1995).

In the context of consumption, some studies disclose how consumers uncover their authentic identities in liminal zones where social norms and restrictions are suspended, even if temporary. Kim and Jamal (2007) discuss touristic destinations as favorable playgrounds supporting the transition from the current self to the authentic self. In the same vein, Brown (2013) stresses that freedom and meaningful choices can pave the way for tourists to get in touch with their true selves, while Kozinets (2002) echoes consumers’ quest for authenticity through the emancipation from the norms of the market even within the consumerist society.

Prior research in the context of consumer research offers vast evidence about possessions as catalysts for self-expression. In this sense, having and displaying (symbolic consumption) become a means for conveying the own sense of self. Thus, luxury consumption helps consumers to craft and express their self-concept. However, the studies in this doctoral research point to luxury connected to identity transformations conveyed by sharing out, dispossessing, the emancipation of self through philanthropic endeavors, freedom from the consumer society, and

license to choose the choices that drive consumers' self-actualization. In particular, whereas philanthropic giving is conceived as a luxury when it fosters substantive transformations in the lives of distant others while transforming the own self, freedom as luxury enables the transformation from the current self to the authentic self.

Chapter 3

METHODOLOGY



METHODOLOGY

“Grown-ups love figures. When you tell them that you have made a new friend, they never ask you any questions about essential matters. They never say to you, “What does his voice sound like? What games does he love best? Does he collect butterflies?” Instead, they demand: “How old is he? How many brothers has he? How much does he weight? How much money does his father make?” Only from these figures do they think they have learned anything about him.”

— Antoine de Saint-Exupéry

3.1 A phenomenological research approach

The studies covered in this doctoral thesis explore the phenomenon of luxury from a consumer perspective adopting a qualitative approach. By means of qualitative methods, the researcher gains an “inner experience of the study participants, to determine how meanings are formed through and in culture, and to discover rather than test variables” (Corbin and Strauss, 2008, p. 12). In particular, a phenomenological research approach was applied. Phenomenological explorations “describe the meaning for several individuals of their lived experiences of a concept or a phenomenon” (Creswell, 2007, p. 57), which in this case, is the phenomenon of luxury.

Individuals charge phenomena with meaning “through meditations, conversations, day dreams, inspirations and other interpretive acts” (van Manen, 1990, p. 37). According to McCracken (1986), the meaning of consumer goods is imposed on the consumer from a top-down system. Specifically, he states that “cultural meaning is drawn from a culturally constituted world and transferred to a consumer good. Then, the meaning is drawn from the object and transferred to an individual consumer” (McCracken, 1986, p. 71). However, this research aligns with Thompson and Haytko’s (1997) view, considering that meanings are negotiated and reworked by consumers who not simply accept or reject them. In this vein, the meaning of things and concepts is seen as derived from an interplay between cultural traditions and personalized meanings, which involves that meanings need to be contextualized and situated in relation to culturally shared knowledge (Thompson, Pollio, and Locander, 1994).

The aim of phenomenology is to broaden and magnify our understanding of “what” phenomenon the informants have experienced and “how” they have experienced it, not why (Moustakas, 1994; Spiegelberg, 1982). Therefore, a phenomenological inquiry brings to the surface several and immediate meanings regarding consumption experiences of research informants (Stredwick, 2001), providing a holistic understanding of the phenomenon and revealing the potentially polysemic nature of the concept. Polysemy is a term deriving from modern hermeneutics, meaning that any unit can have more than one meaning (Alvesson and Skoldberg, 1994).

Phenomenological approaches have been previously used in the field of marketing, and particularly, in the consumer research context. Some of the most prominent works in this area include the iconic studies by Thompson and Haytko (1997) exploring the meaning of fashion, Mick and Demoss's (1990) exploration of self gift giving, and Belk, Ger and Askegaard's (2003) phenomenological inquiry about consumer desire (see Goulding (2005) for a review of the use of phenomenology in consumer research).

3.2 A multisited inquiry

Consumers' multilayered constructions of luxury were elicited by means of phenomenological interviews in a multisited empirical field covering four European capital cities: Stockholm (10 informants), London (10 informants), Berlin (10 informants), and Madrid (9 informants). The underlying reason behind the deliberate choice of selecting these capital cities was to bring into the study the cultural richness and diversity of Europe. Even though all consumers living in these cities belong to the same consumptionscape, it is interesting to explore the nuances emerging from looking at the idea of luxury from culturally different lenses. The historical, cultural, and social background of these contexts would allow to craft a wider, more sophisticated and detailed painting on the plain luxury canvas.

Stockholm and Madrid were selected because of convenience reasons. Part of this dissertation was written during two research stays at Stockholm University and also the idea of developing these studies was conceived during the time the researcher was living in Sweden so it was natural to start the fieldwork in the city where the seed was sown. The empirical work in Madrid was conducted when the researcher was back in Spain after spending six months in Sweden, so she benefited from a cultural distance from her own country which helped her to reduce the cultural blindness that researchers suffer when conducting research in a culturally unfamiliar milieu (McCracken, 1988, p. 22).

The motivation for including London and Berlin was to reinforce the cultural category in the research. The objective was not finding differences among different cultural settings but introducing the cultural aspect with the same importance as any other category (e.g., age, gender or occupation), that was varied in order to find diverse voices on the subject matter. Even though the first intention was to include also Paris and Rome, the data already collected was enough to arrive at redundancy and fulfill the research objective. In this regard, McCracken (1988, p. 17) states that in qualitative studies, “it is more important to work longer, and with greater care, with a few people than more superficially with many of them.” He even endorses eight as an adequate number of respondents for many projects, since this is where redundancy is usually obtained in relatively homogeneous samples. In a similar vein, Smith, Flowers, and Larkin (2009) deem that in a phenomenological

study, the emphasis must be placed on acquiring detailed information about the individual experience rather than on the number of interviews. In addition, the objective when using qualitative methods is not to achieve generalization through findings from informants representing the total population (Parker, 2004; Smith and Osborn, 2003). Instead, this methodology offers “the opportunity to glimpse the complicated character, organization, and logic of culture” (McCracken, 1988, p. 17) and consequently, provides the framework to develop new theories, or to enable emergent and challenging perspectives, furthering the understanding of a topic (Charmaz, 2003; Yardley, 2000).

Another driver for this decision was that the saturation point was achieved. According to Bertaux (1981) and Bryman and Bell (2007), the saturation of information (i.e., when the researcher begins to hear the same information reported and is no longer learning anything new) is a sign of having enough data. Having in-depth interviews and visual data from four countries to be exhaustively digested in order to analyze qualitatively, and having achieved saturation, were both indicators of putting an end to the fascinating and addictive fieldwork. The researcher felt that she already had all the pieces of the puzzle on the table, so it was time to stop searching for new pieces and to start playing with them.

3.3 The informants

Based on a purposive sampling procedure, informants from different walks of life were selected to participate in the studies. Purposive or theoretical sampling entails selecting informants who are able to shed light on the phenomenon studied. This sampling technique emerged in connection with grounded theory and phenomenological studies, even though it is employed in all types of qualitative research (Charmaz, 2003; Smith and Osborn, 2003).

The sample was deliberately diverse in terms of age and gender with the aim of amplifying the possibility of finding varied stories (see Table 1). In order to preserve the anonymity of the informants, their real names have been replaced with fictitious names in this dissertation. The number of participants (39) was not determined in advance but in the field as a saturation point was reached (cf. Strauss and Corbin, 1990).

Table 1. Informants' profiles

Pseudonym	Age	Gender	Country	Occupation
Christian	61	Male	UK	Gallery assistant
Nathan	37	Male	UK	Marketing analyst
David	42	Male	UK	Business analyst
Glenn	38	Male	UK	User experience architect
Jennifer	53	Female	UK	Administrative assistant
Megan	35	Female	UK	Banking- investor relations
John	26	Male	UK	Marketing manager
Angie	33	Female	UK	Personal banker
Neil	33	Male	UK	Accountant
Oscar	27	Male	UK	Chartered accountant
Ragnar	59	Male	SW	Superintendent
Ivar	46	Male	SW	Project manager
Matts	21	Male	SW	Fashion designer
Sven	34	Male	SW	Business controller
Kajsa	29	Female	SW	Sociologist
Maria	44	Female	SW	Researcher
Anders	25	Male	SW	Research assistant
Eva	50	Female	SW	Teacher
Harald	70	Male	SW	Engineer
Fredrick	25	Male	SW	College student
Henrike	25	Female	GE	Project manager
Elke	45	Female	GE	Nurse
Marcel	38	Male	GE	Journalist
Jerry	25	Male	GE	College student
Edita	26	Female	GE	Project manager
Anja	30	Female	GE	College student
Claudia	42	Female	GE	Journalist
Hans	28	Male	GE	PhD student
Sarah	38	Female	GE	Marketing manager
Grettel	38	Female	GE	Teacher
Eduardo	31	Male	SP	Engineer
Mar	25	Female	SP	Trainee
Ana	64	Female	SP	Psychologist
Guillermo	26	Female	SP	Public relations
Martina	40	Female	SP	Personal branding manager
Lydia	30	Female	SP	Marketing manager
Pedro	30	Male	SP	Project manager
Oscar	39	Male	SP	Cook
Pablo	47	Male	SP	Entrepreneur

The informants were recruited in two different ways: in Stockholm, London, and Madrid they were people in the social network of people that the researcher got to know in these cities while informants from Berlin were contacted through Xing, a professional social network. The informants were contacted in advance by e-mail, so the researcher could introduce herself, explain the nature of the inquiry in general terms, and ask for their collaboration in the study. When they agreed, they were sent a set of instructions previous to the interview. Since the objective was to explore the informants' personal perceptions of luxury, their preparation for the interview included collecting pictures (from magazines, newspapers, internet, personal pictures, etc.) representing what luxury meant to them. By using pictures as stimuli during the interviews, the photo-elicitation technique helped the informants to articulate the complexities regarding the phenomenon under study (Heisley and Levy, 1991). Furthermore, the process of selecting pictures representing what luxury meant for the informants triggered reflexivity, which is an essential component of qualitative research (Sherry and Schouten, 2002).

3.4 In-depth interviews

When the informants were ready to meet, a mutually convenient date and place for meeting was set. Most of the interviews took place in public venues; mainly quiet cafes while having a pleasing conversation in a nice atmosphere, but some of them also took place in offices and homes. After introducing each other, the researcher

proceed with some pleasant small talk, a brief explanation of the research topic and the aim of the interview in order to build trust, and encourage the informants to talk freely (Mellon, 1990). Then, they were asked for permission to record the interview (with a digital recorder), emphasizing that their participation was completely anonymous and confidential.

The interview in itself would start in a “grand tour” style (McCracken, 1988; Spradley, 1979), asking general questions to break the ice and stimulate the initial dialogue. Thus, the informants would gain confidence, open up, and become more engaged in the conversation. McCracken (1988, p. 38) has emphasized this aspect in the following way: “whatever is actually said in the opening few minutes of the interview, it must be demonstrated that the interviewer is a benign, accepting, curious (but not inquisitive) individual, who is prepared and eager to listen to virtually any testimony with interest. Understandably, {interviewees} are not keen to reveal very much about themselves, or to take a chance with an idea, if there is any risk of an unsympathetic response. {Interviewees} must be assured that the potential loss-of-face that can occur in any conversation [...] is not a grave danger in the present one. [...] It is better here to appear slightly dim and too agreeable than to give any sign of a critical or sardonic attitude.”

Typically, the informants were first asked about the difficulty of choosing pictures representing their personal view of luxury. Then, the informants chose one of the

pictures and started talking about the content of the photograph. Thus, researcher and informants got progressively immersed in the topic through a friendly but also deep conversation guided by the pictures the informants had previously chosen, unfolding the different layers of the luxury theme.

During the course of the interview, the role of the researcher was not to ask questions but to encourage informants to talk about their personal perceptions of luxury represented by the pictures they selected, expressing their feelings, experiences, meanings, and symbolisms associated to the photographs. Metaphor elicitation by using pictures may facilitate participants to overcome the taken-for-granted barrier and to embed their thoughts, feelings, and experiences in elaborate narratives (Clark-Ibanez, 2004; Collier, 1967), as well as trigger reflection and discussion leading to broad abstractions (Banks, 2001; Harper, 2002). However, the pictures were not the main focus of the interview but served as a common thread to guide the conversation and a foundation to gain insights about the informants' perceptions (Morley, Pawley, Jordan, and Adams, 2011).

As an interviewer using a phenomenological approach, the main task of the researcher was to guide the conversation and motivate the informants to tell the personal stories behind the pictures, providing thick descriptions (Geertz, 1973), making them feel comfortable and, at the same time, trying to get them involved and submerged in the topic (Cook, 2008). Story telling was prompted by asking

informants to describe actual experiences of their own notion of luxury rather than keeping the interviews on an abstract level (McCracken, 1988). Informants were encouraged to elaborate on their accounts by means of “floating prompts” (ibid., p. 35). For example, repetition of the informants’ last words with an interrogative tone, elicited thicker descriptions of the concepts gaining a deeper understanding of the topic. This phenomenological interviewer tactic (Thompson, Locander, and Pollio, 1989) allowed deep insights into consumer experiences to emerge, with as little intrusion or direction as possible. Follow-up questions had an important role since they helped the informants to convey rich accounts, expressing in greater detail, and critically questioning the stories told (Crang and Cook, 1995).

The relaxed way in which the interviews were conducted was considered a key factor to release informants’ inhibitions, and express the meaning of luxury from their point of view. In every case, privacy and tranquility were key aspects in the atmosphere to invite the informants to feel comfortable, open up, and discuss their personal views of the concept of luxury.

Being a foreigner in three out of the four countries also helped the researcher to cultivate a distance, since researchers working in another culture benefit from a critical distance from what they study. McCracken deems that “scholars working in another culture have a great advantage over those who work in their own. Virtually everything before them is, to some degree, mysterious. Those who work in their

own culture do not have this critical distance from what they study and therefore may have a hard time to “bracket” their own pre-understanding of the subject matter, which would be the ideal according to the phenomenological method (Spinelli, 1989). Thus, they carry with them a large number of assumptions that can create a treacherous sense of familiarity” (McCracken, 1988, p. 22). In other words, conducting research in another culture reduces the risk of suffering from “cultural blindness” (Berg, 2003), and allows the researcher to go deeper into seemingly trivial and taken-for-granted questions by helping respondents to articulate elaborate accounts. As McCracken (1988) points out, the informants need the help of the researcher to make full accounts of ordinary topics which are part of their everyday life.

The interviews had a duration of between one and a half and three hours, were tape recorded, and transcribed verbatim. They were conducted in English with the exception of Spain where they were conducted in Spanish, since the informants felt more comfortable using their mother tongue. These interviews were transcribed and then translated into English.

All the informants expressed their satisfaction about taking part in the study. They showed their gratitude for giving them the opportunity to think about these topics at a deep level. Many of them wanted to have a follow up conversation and some of them sent e-mails like this:

I must say it was a real pleasure to meet you last week. It was really nice to be able to talk about things on a deeper level. I don't get to do that as often as I would like. Thank you very much! (Glenn, M38, UK)

3.5 Analysis and interpretation

The interviews were transcribed verbatim and then interpreted with an emic approach, following Thompson's hermeneutic framework (1997). An "emic perspective" (Pike, 1967) aims at understanding culture through natives' eyes (Willis, 2007). It involves that the interpretation of the data is based on the informants' own terms and views, providing an insider view of the phenomenon. According to Corbin and Strauss (2008), the goal of qualitative analysis is to elicit meaning contained in the data, furthering the comprehension of a certain topic. By digging into the qualitative data, the researcher is able to perceive patterns and themes, which releases a process of reflection and interpretation and, ultimately, expands the knowledge about the phenomenon under investigation. In particular, a phenomenological approach extends current conceptualizations of a certain phenomenon by identifying and furthering the understanding of "themes that emerge from narratives indicative of common human experiences" (Coyle and Sculco, 2003, p. 206).

In phenomenological studies, analysis and interpretation are considered synonyms, and begin with a process of reflection (Gadamer, 1989). The analysis of the data

started during the data collection process since the researcher began to make notes about the interviews in a field diary while collecting data. Undertaking these two tasks in parallel allowed a total immersion into the research process, gaining a continuously deeper understanding about both the methodology and the research topic, identifying, and labeling themes and patterns arising from the material, which simplified the data management and the formal analysis that followed.

The analysis process followed the methods of grounded theory, focusing on the meaning that informants ascribed to luxury, moving from open, to axial, to selective coding of data, with progressively deeper theoretical results at each step (Strauss and Corbin, 1990). The first stage of the analysis consisting of open coding, brought to the fore major conceptual categories (e.g., luxury as giving away cultural capital, social capital, and economic capital). Following from this, axial coding aimed at establishing relationships between these major conceptual categories (e.g., luxury as philanthropic giving). Finally, selective coding developed an integrated framework, identifying the core variable that integrated all of the data, furthering understanding of the phenomenon under study (e.g., high value at the core of the notion of luxury) (ibid.). This was an iterative process involving extensive and repetitive readings of the material, reflecting, and writing, breaking the whole set of data into categories, without losing the context of the whole phenomenon (Hycner, 1999). As recommended by McCracken (1988), the data was first analyzed and coded within-case, revealing the uniqueness of every set of data and allowing the researcher to become familiar

with every individual account, which can improve across-case analysis (Eisenhardt, 1989). An across-case analysis followed, disclosing common concepts, categories and subcategories across cases. Combining within-case and across-case analysis allowed both uniqueness and commonalities (Stake, 1995) emerge from the data.

The goal of this process was to get a holistic interpretation, identifying individual meanings of luxury, shared meanings that emerged across the narratives and pictures brought by several informants, and broader conceptual insights shared in society, filtered down through the informants. Immersion in the data set revealed the polysemic nature of luxury. Two main themes stemmed from the data, portraying new and disruptive perspectives on luxury: philanthropic giving as luxury and freedom as luxury. These findings are addressed in the following chapters.

In qualitative studies, trustworthiness is based on the researcher's integrity, mastery of methodology, and rigorous and systematic analysis and reflexivity (Alvesson and Sköldböck, 1994; Silverman, 1993). On the other hand, as mentioned above, the objective when using qualitative studies is not to generalize to a larger universe but to abstract conceptualizations (Miles and Huberman, 1994). Following from this, in qualitative studies transferability is more relevant than generalizability, since it involves the possibility of conceptually transferring the results regarding the richness found in the data to other individuals or segments in a new context. However, transferability is at the discretion of the researcher seeking to transfer the results to some other

contexts or situations. It should offer a highly detailed and thick description of the cultural phenomenon being studied, enabling readers to see the phenomenon in their own experience, and consider whether or not the transfer is possible (Lincoln and Guba, 1985; Moisander and Valtonen, 2006).

Chapter 4 - Findings I

PHILANTHROPIC
GIVING



THE LUXURY OF IGNITING CHANGE BY GIVING:

TRANSFORMING YOURSELF WHILE TRANSFORMING OTHERS' LIVES¹

“What does one person give to another? He gives of himself, of the most precious he has, he gives of his life. This does not necessarily mean that he sacrifices his life for the other — but that he gives him of that which is alive in him; he gives him of his joy, of his interest, of his understanding, of his knowledge, of his humor, of his sadness — of all expressions and manifestations of that which is alive in him. In thus giving of his life, he enriches the other person, he enhances the other’s sense of aliveness by enhancing his own sense of aliveness. He does not give in order to receive; giving is in itself exquisite joy. But in giving he cannot help bringing something to life in the other person, and this which is brought to life reflects back to him.”

— Erich Fromm

4.1 Introduction

Consumer research has traditionally linked the concept of luxury to conspicuous consumption as a way for the members of the upper class to demonstrate their wealth, power, and status through profligate spending (e.g., Dubois and Duquesne,

1. Llamas, M. R. and Thomsen, T. U. (2016). The luxury of igniting change by giving: transforming yourself while transforming others' lives. *Journal of Business Research*, 69 (1), 166-176. Available at: <http://authors.elsevier.com/a/1S1suXj-jBM5F>

1993; Kastanakis and Balabanis, 2014; O’Cass and McEwen, 2004; Okonkwo, 2007; Truong, Simmons, and Kitchen, 2008; Veblen, 1994/1899). Past research has rarely defined luxury per se —few exceptions are Sombart (1922) and Sekora (1977), stating that luxury is anything beyond necessity. However, this definition takes point of departure in what luxury is not, rather than defining what luxury is. Attempts on defining luxury have since been made in specific contexts such as the context of luxury goods — in particular luxury brands. In this vein, Berry (1994, p. 41) states that “a luxury good is a widely desired (because not yet widely attained) good that is believed to be ‘pleasing’, and the general desirability of which is explained by it being a specific refinement, or qualitative aspect, of some universal generic need.” In line with this, Appadurai (1986, p. 38) offers a definition of luxury goods emphasizing their role as social markers, asserting that their “principal use is rhetorical and social, goods that are simply incarnated signs.”

Goodwin, Ackerman, and Kiron (1997) assert that traces of luxury and symbolic consumption can be found throughout history; anthropological and archeological evidence suggest that such consumption is, perhaps, as old as human material culture itself. Following from this, the notions of luxury have been constructed differently in different systems — as a dynamic construct, always in motion (Kapferer, 2008), going through a metamorphose and renewing its appearance (Jäckel and Kochhan, 2000; Mortelmans, 2005). The once prevalent conspicuous, tangible and eye-catching concept of luxury that is linked to physical luxury goods and brands is

evolving into the concept of luxury as intangible and subjective (Lipovetsky, 2003). This turning point marks the beginning of an interest into experiences of luxury as co-created phenomenon beyond the consumption of incarnated signs (Tynan, McKechnie, and Chhuon, 2010).

Past research has not yet fully explored luxury as a socially constructed phenomenon beyond the consumption of the “unnecessary.” If luxury is more than that, then how can organizations accommodate consumers’ needs for these other kinds of luxury? Especially, if they do not know what else luxury could be? Thus, the goal of the study was to take a step back to examine the phenomenology of luxury as seen by consumers. Based on this endeavor, the authors have learned that luxury has a plethora of meanings for consumers, besides the dominant understanding of luxury as the consumption of certain goods and brands. This paper presents one of the meanings that stood out due to its disruptive and counter-traditional take on luxury: luxury as philanthropic giving (economic, social, and cultural capital) to distant others, transforming the lives of others and self. This less prevalent but rather thought-provoking meaning of luxury differs significantly from previous research on luxury in which having is at the core of the luxury concept (e.g., Megehee and Spake, 2012).

Drawing on the previous literature on luxury, sharing, and giving, the authors chart a link between sharing and philanthropy as luxuries in the postmodern society. The informants show that philanthropic giving may be perceived as a luxury when giving triggers significant transformations of non-related others (outward transformations), transforms the sense of self in relation to others (onward transformations), elevates the status of the self (upward transformations), and ultimately transforms the self (inner transformations). In the following sections the paper illuminates this consumer-based view of luxury as giving and its aftermath in terms of personal and societal transformations. The authors address the theoretical implications of the findings for the study of luxury, identity, status, philanthropic and pro-social behavior, well-being, and transformative consumer research. A discussion of the managerial implications of luxury as philanthropic giving follows, emphasizing the consequences of the findings for companies, non-profit organizations, educational institutions, and consumer society. These agents might re-think their mission by adopting a philanthropic approach as their *raison-d'être*. So, consumers and markets co-operate in the making of significant social change, fostering a transition from corporate social responsibility to collective social responsibility and thereby replacing industrial growth with life-sustaining society.

4.2 Theoretical background

4.2.1 A classical approach to luxury

The classical works of Berry (1994), Mandeville (1732), and Sombart (1922) investigate luxury in terms of changing attitudes about luxury and its benefits for society. The main body of research on luxury has since emerged in the specific context of goods. Even though this area is well-researched, the list of definitions of luxury applied to goods or brands goes on without consensus (Choi, 2003; Wiedmann, Hennigs, and Siebels, 2009). Goods and brands earn the luxury epithet when they have high price (e.g., Choi, 2003; Dubois and Paternault, 1995; Keller, 2009), excellent quality (e.g., Atwal and Williams, 2009; Choi, 2003; Christodoulides, Michaelidou, and Li, 2009), aesthetic beauty (e.g., Kapferer, 1997), pleasure (e.g., Berry, 1994), exclusivity, scarcity or uniqueness (e.g., Atwal and Williams, 2009; Chevalier and Mazzalovo, 2008; Christodoulides, Michaelidou, and Li, 2009; Pantzalis, 1995), lack of utility and non-essentiality (e.g., Dubois and Paternault, 1995; Twitchell, 2002; Wiedmann et al., 2009), symbolic value (e.g., Keller, 2009; Vickers and Renand, 2003), and hedonism and pleasure (e.g., Christodoulides, Michaelidou, and Li, 2009; Shukla, 2011; Vigneron and Johnson, 2004). In the same line, Megehee and Spake (2012, p. 1436) define “luxury” as “a configuration of a unique, aesthetic, functional, and expensive product-service experience.” Finally, Kapferer and Bastien (2012, p. 22) propose an integrative view when they assert that “luxury designates objects or

services which are needlessly expensive: non necessary –one can live without it– no functional argument can ever justify their price, only the feeling of privilege made of rare quality, hedonistic experience, symbolic elevation and conspicuousness.”

Several studies have focused on identifying specific aspects of luxury as incarnated signs, that is, studies of luxury brands (Belk, Kimura, and Tanaka, 2007; Beverland, 2005; Dubois, Laurent, and Czellar, 2001; Dubois and Paternault, 1995; Freire, 2014; Groth and McDaniel, 1993; Phau and Pendergast, 2000; Vigneron and Jonson, 2004; Walley, Custance, Copley, and Perry, 2013), particular luxury goods conglomerates (e.g., LVMH: Cavender and Kincade, 2014), and specific product categories like vehicles (e.g., Hummer: Luedicke, Thompson, and Giesler, 2010; Schulz, 2006), or fashion (e.g., Fionda and Moore, 2009; Miller and Mills, 2012). Some have used a cross-cultural approach (e.g., Dubois and Duquesne, 1993; Tidwell and Dubois, 1996; Wong and Ahuvia, 1998), while others have focused on particular consumer behaviors like consuming counterfeits (e.g., Hoe, Hogg, and Hart, 2003; Nia and Zaichkowsky, 2000; Poddar, Foreman, Banerjee, and Ellen, 2012). Along these lines, some studies (e.g., Postrel, 2008) suggest that those belonging to the upper class are not so interested in luxury goods as status markers, but as pleasure providers.

4.2.2 Luxury as having and transformations of self

As the review of research on luxury illustrates, from an identity perspective, luxury has been mainly studied in terms of economic capital, which can be consumed conspicuously to signify consumers' social standing and identity (Appadurai, 1986; Douglas and Isherwood, 1979; Wiedmann, Hennigs, and Siebels, 2007). Hemetsberger, Hoppe, Matzler, Mühlbacher, and Pichler (2010) as well as Hoppe, Hemetsberger, Pichler, and Matzler (2009) refer to the self-transformative power of brands, seeing brands as enhancers of the transformation from the current self to the ideal self. Additionally, prior research (Bauer, von Wallpach, and Hemetsberger, 2011; Thomsen and Sørensen, 2006) documents that stereotypical products with strong symbolic values –like luxury brands– may aid consumers to cope with temporary or permanent transformations of consumer selves. They attribute their findings to the fact that some consumers experience liminality in terms of role uncertainty and discrepancies between current and ideal selves, which can be bridged by consuming and displaying easily recognizable goods that fit the hoped for identity (Noble and Walker, 1997; Schouten, 1991).

This conceptualization of the link between luxury and transformation of self rests on the notion of accumulation and display rather than donation of material goods. The findings of this study document that the link between luxury and transformation of self in the context of giving is of a different nature than in the context of having.

4.2.3 Philanthropic giving and transformations of self and others

Current conceptualizations of giving to non-kin, also termed as “sharing out” (Belk, 2007; 2010; 2014), are non-reciprocal, since the giver does not hold an expectation of receiving anything in return from the recipient. Specifically, Benkler (2004) states that sharing is a ‘nonreciprocal pro-social behavior.’ Nevertheless, according to the data, a “pro-ego” component may be also germane to the notion of sharing out since the giver may benefit from and be transformed by the act of giving in different ways. This idea resonates with Mauss’s (1954) and Derrida’s (1992) critical reflection about the existence of pure gifts. They argue that while pure gifts should be voluntary, disinterested, and spontaneous, involving no reciprocity or debt, they always involve some kind of self-interest –not least in terms of good feelings. In line with this argument, this study illuminates possible self-interest aspects of sharing, while recognizing its deeply rooted pro-social logic.

Sharing out may lead to some transformations of the giver –apart from changing in the eyes of the others. First of all, according to self-signaling and self-perception theory (Bem, 1967; 1972; Dhar and Wertenbroch, 2012; Lepper, Greene, and Nisbett, 1973), individuals come to know themselves in much the same way that they come to understand others by observing their own behavior. Thus, sharing out may cause consumers to change their self-identity. For example, they may infer

from their behavior that they are “good” or “caring”. In this vein, Belk and Llamas (2013) consider that sharing out may shape the self-identity of the giver as “being helpful, generous, kind and thoughtful.”

Second, philanthropic giving provides the giver with positive emotions (Dunn, Aknin, and Norton, 2008), which promote the giver’s general well-being and happiness (Seligman, 2011). Specifically, prior research proposes that giving increases social and emotional bonds (Belk and Coon, 1993), which, in turn, can foster meaning as a sense of being “coherent, significant, directed, and belonging” (Schnell, 2009, p. 487). Since meaning, in terms of belonging and contributing to the common good, is a key source of happiness (Seligman, 2011), giving ultimately changes the general well-being of the giver (cf. Aaker and Akutsu, 2009).

Finally, “sharing tends to be a communal act that links us to other people. It is not the only way in which we may connect with others, but it is a potentially powerful one that creates feelings of solidarity and bonding” (Belk, 2010, p. 717). This proposition means that sharing may involve transformations of the self and others by increasing their feeling of affiliation to a community. Sharing dilutes self-boundaries, invigorating consumers’ gregarious sense of self. This idea is in line with prior research on gift giving, which documents that large gifts transform not only those who give but also their children and future generations (Scaife, McDonald, and Smyllie, 2011).

4.3 Method

In order to explore the phenomenon of luxury from a consumer perspective, a phenomenological research approach was applied. By adopting a qualitative approach the researcher gains an “inner experience of the study participants, to determine how meanings are formed through and in culture, and to discover rather than test variables” (Corbin and Strauss, 2008, p. 12). The meaning of things is derived from an interplay between cultural traditions and personalized meanings, which involves that meanings need to be contextualized and situated in relation to culturally shared knowledge (Thompson, Pollio, and Locander, 1994).

In particular, consumers’ multilayered constructions of luxury were elicited by means of phenomenological interviews in a multisited empirical field covering four European capital cities: Stockholm (10 informants), London (10 informants), Berlin (10 informants), and Madrid (9 informants). Informants from different walks of life were recruited through the social and professional network of one of the researchers. The sample was deliberately diverse in terms of age and gender in order to amplify the possibility of finding varied stories (see Table 2 in section 4.4.1). They were contacted in advance by e-mail, asking for their collaboration in the study. Since the objective was to explore the informants’ personal perceptions of luxury, their preparation for the interview included collecting pictures (from magazines, newspapers, Internet, personal pictures, etc.) representing what luxury meant to them. Metaphor elicitation

by using pictures may facilitate participants to overcome the taken-for-granted barrier and to embed their thoughts, feelings and experiences in elaborate narratives.

The interview would start with a small talk and a brief introduction about the research. Then, the informant would choose one of the pictures and would start talking about the content of the photograph. During the course of the interview, the role of the researcher was not to ask questions but to encourage informants to talk about their personal perceptions of luxury represented by the pictures they chose, expressing their feelings, experiences, meanings and symbolisms associated to the pictures, taking into account that “what is found in the picture is conditioned by the cultural knowledge the viewer brings to the viewing” (Ball and Smith, 1992, p. 18). Informants were encouraged to elaborate on their accounts by means of “floating prompts” (McCracken, 1988, p. 35). For example, repetition of the informants’ last words with an interrogative tone, elicited thicker descriptions of the concepts gaining a deeper understanding of the topic. Furthermore, the interviewer prompted story telling by encouraging informants to describe actual experiences of their own notion of luxury rather than keeping the interviews on an abstract level. This “phenomenological” (Thompson, Locander, and Pollio, 1989) interviewer tactic allowed deep insights into consumer experiences to emerge with as little intrusion or direction as possible.

The interviews had a duration of between one and a half and three hours, were tape recorded, transcribed verbatim, and interpreted with an emic approach, following

Thompson's hermeneutic framework (Thompson, 1997). The analysis process followed the methods of grounded theory, moving from open, to axial, to selective coding of data, with progressively deeper theoretical results at each step. The aim of this process was to get a holistic interpretation, identifying individual meanings of luxury, shared meanings that emerged across the narratives and pictures brought by several informants, and broader conceptual insights shared in society, filtered down through the informants. Immersion in the data set, revealed the polysemic nature of luxury. The term "polysemy" derives from modern hermeneutics, meaning that any unit can have more than one meaning (Alvesson and Sköldbberg, 1994). This paper addresses the notion of luxury as philanthropic giving, which emerged as a significant theme in 11 of the 39 accounts (see list of informants in table 2). Surprised by this untraditional, philanthropic approach to luxury, the authors carried out several iterations of coding and depth analysis of these 11 accounts to delve into the meaning of luxury as giving.

4.4 Findings: Luxury as giving something valuable to distant others

The aim of this research was to explore the phenomenon of luxury nowadays as seen by consumers. Not only one meaning but many, stemmed from the data, disclosing the polysemic nature of luxury. Regarding to luxury as giving, an emic definition emerged from the data, as a voluntary act consisting of giving away something valuable and

thereby making a significant, positive difference in the lives of distant others and the planet and, at the same time, transforming the self. Following, this article focuses on the main characteristics outlining this definition of luxury, that is, the valuable given (economic, cultural, and social capital), which leads the transformation of the recipients (non-related others, nature), and self, in different ways.

4.4.1 The given: Valuable philanthropic gifts

Giving away to others outside the boundaries of the family could include a wide range of activities such as giving a few coins to a beggar or a busker, donating blood/organs, adopting or sponsoring a child, making donations to different causes (e.g., non-profits, church, museums, art galleries, and Heritage), getting involved in volunteering, offering couchsurfing, and paying taxes. However, informants do not place all these examples under the luxury umbrella. The notion of luxury explored in this paper emerges from giving away something that the informants perceived to make a difference in the life of distant others, including future generations. High value is also germane to the pervasive idea of luxury but with a different scope. In this vein, Wiedmann, Hennigs, and Siebels (2007) emphasize that the consumption of luxury goods entails acquiring goods that are valuable for both the individual and the reference group. So, while high value is part of the luxury equation, the classic approach rests upon the idea of accumulating highly valued goods, while according to the informants, their view of luxury does not only involve having but also giving

highly valued resources. Therefore, the informants do not consider giving a few coins to a beggar a luxury, while they place making a remarkable contribution to the lives of those in need in the luxuryscape. Table 2 illustrates the breadth of what our informants wanted to give, to whom they wanted to give, and which informant perceived the given as luxury.

As table 2 illustrates, this study broadens the scope of luxury to include not only traditional economic capital accounts of luxury but also social capital (networks and influence) and cultural capital (skills and knowledge). The article frames this type of giving as philanthropic giving, since “philanthropy covers not only traditional types of charitable giving, but also a range of ways in which people may show their general goodwill to society” (Hladká, 2009, p. 2). Based on the examples in table 2, the following sections elaborate on luxury as giving away these three types of capital.

Table 2. The given, the recipients, and the informants

Type of giving	What is given	To whom	Informant
Donation	Endowment for a gallery which carries cultural heritage goods	for other people to see and enjoy	(Christian, M61, UK)
Donation	Economic resources for different causes	related to children, poor people	(Nathan, M37, UK)
Donation	Economic resources for different causes related to schools, hospitals and nursing homes	children, ill people, elderly	(Ragnar, M59, SW)
Adoption	Economic and time resources	starving children	(Edu, M31, SP)
Adoption	Economic and time resources	an ill-fated child	(Gretel, F38, GE)
Taking care	Time resources	children who have no place to go or parents who are not functioning	(Eva, F50, SW)
Volunteering	Knowledge and time resources devoted to teaching English and saving animals in the rainforest	poor children animals	(Edita, F26, GE)
Promoting a good cause	Economic and social resources to widen access to education	children	(Mar, F25, SP)
Work for a charity	Time resources devoted to helping people improve their quality of life	less fortunate people	(Kajsa, F29, SW)
Making conscious (and more expensive) consumption choices	Economic resources to enable more environmental friendly consumption choices, like buying an electric car	environment	(David, M42, UK)
Making conscious (and more expensive) consumption choices)	Economic resources to enable more sustainable consumption choices, like pursuing an eco-friendly lifestyle	future generations and the environment	(Henrike, F25, GE)

4.4.1.1 Giving economic capital

Veblen (1994/1899) argues that the consumption of luxury objects can signal differences in the economic capital of consumers. Instead, luxury as philanthropic giving rests upon giving away economic capital to others (e.g., Ragnar, M59, UK). However, the informants do not perceive every giveaway as a luxury; only substantive amounts of money, able to alleviate poverty and make a difference in the lives of those in need, ultimately make the giver happy and fulfilled as a reward. Nathan explains his view of luxury in terms of the parallel transformations experienced by the recipient and the giver, establishing a contrast between materialistic luxury versus the luxury of transforming others:

Some rich people are never satisfied. They have a big house but they want even a bigger house. They want two houses. They can't stop. I don't know... That's not luxury in my view. [...] Once you get to this stage where you can afford whatever you want, it would be too luxurious. Once you've got these things you sort of... anything else you want is different. Bill Gates donates to charity. They think 'I have enough so I can share it with people'. They get to this stage where they have got everything so they start giving back. Richard Branson, one of his companies gave all the profits to charity. Millions of pounds. Once you have got a car, a house, an island, it does not necessarily make you happy. Once you get there it does not make you any happier once your needs are fulfilled, you need fulfillment, you would probably get more pleasure making other people happy,

to make a difference. You can go around helping people, donating different causes but you can't help everybody. It could be children, poor people, and your family. (Nathan, M37, UK)

Veblen's Theory of the Leisure Class (1899/1899) states that consumers emulate the conspicuous consumption patterns of those individuals at a higher point in the social hierarchy. As the account above illustrates, emulation can also be at play in inconspicuous consumption, since the notion of "noblesse oblige" may translate into the obligation to give once the giver has enough, thus emulating the consumption patterns of the upper class. Notably though, Nathan acknowledges this behavior as a personal luxury of fulfillment by making a change for others.

4.4.1.2 Giving cultural capital

Bourdieu (1984) characterizes the cultural capital as composed of a set of socially rare and distinctive tastes, skills, knowledge and practices, which secures positions of status in the social hierarchy by exercising a mark of distinction. In this vein, one of the informants, Edita, volunteered in Ecuador, teaching English to very poor children who live in the jungle. She perceives sharing out her knowledge and skills with people in dire need as one of the greatest luxuries that she has experienced.

When asked about what luxury meant to her, she said the following:

I went to Ecuador for four months, and that was a luxury. [...] I lived in the jungle, in the mountains and I taught the Ecuadorians kids English at a very poor school. [...] I think the worst thing for me would be at some point to be by myself. Living in a typical type of luxury people could think of and being by myself, maybe in a city in a nice expensive apartment and being by myself that would be terrible. You do not need all the money if you are not happy, if you are not enjoying yourself. [...] I would rather be in a rainforest not having much money or whatever but having the greatest fruit because they just come from the tree and being able to save the world by saving animals and bringing them back to rainforest or you are helping to save the rainforest and at the same time you will be helping the people because they will have a better standard of life. Just to be useful, to do something important. (Edita, F26, GE)

This informant contrasts her understanding of luxury with what she defines as a typical type of luxury, which she describes as having expensive possessions but no meaningful job –which would allow her to contribute to the lives of others, improving their standard of life. Instead, her idea of luxury relies on sharing cultural capital in terms of command of the English language and knowledge about wildlife preservation.

According to Bourdieu (1984), economic and cultural capital are inextricably related, since economic capital ensures buying capacity while cultural capital indicates a taste for choosing specific luxury items. Yet another link between economic and cultural

capital lies in the ability to use economic capital to strengthen the cultural capital of others. For example, one of the informants dreams of providing the economic resources that allow the cultural capital of distant others to increase by endowing a gallery.

I'll tell you another luxury. [...] I would also be happy to endow galleries and museums. Probably that is just vanity to get your name on. But I would not even mind doing it on anonymous basis but I would be quite happy to. I always liked galleries I always visited them. I even ended up working in one of them. It makes it easier for other people to see and enjoy. For example, in France last year they had the paintings of John Dunn, they had to raise a lot of money to pay special dues to get the cash in. If I was in a position to do so I would probably have bought it for them. (Christian, M61, UK)

4.4.1.3 Giving social capital

Social capital is “the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition” (Bourdieu, 1983, p. 249). As one of the informants explains, luxury is to have the social capital that is needed to give a voice to and empower the less fortunate. This informant selected a picture of three black boys sitting in a classroom, smiling. Mar explains as follows:

I've chosen this picture as representing a luxury because I would like to have the money or the ability to make a difference. Actually I think

that the world would be much better if every single child had access to education and could read, write and go to school and I would really, really like to have the money or the ability to help and to make a difference. I think that it's our obligation to help those countries to have access to education and so every single child would be able at least to read and write and spend their childhood in school because it's where they should be and not working. There are many issues about poverty but making it possible for every child in the world to go to school I think that it would make a big, big difference. (Mar, F25, SP)

For this informant, luxury means to transform the lives of children via education, which she sees as a powerful transformational agent. She specifically points to individual transformations that –when accumulated– involve societal transformations. So, being influential and able to turn the spotlight toward those who do not have access to education and finally facilitating that access leads to the betterment of human life. On top of knowledge, the informants point to the social capital of fame and connection. For example, when asked about the meaning of luxury, Mar describes luxury as being able to make the kind of contribution that Angelina Jolie makes:

Sometimes when you see actresses like Angelina Jolie –who are, not only playing Lara Croft– who are also UNESCO ambassadors and you see how much money they collect just because of her presence, just because of her being in that country, and they are able to collect a lot of money... I would like to be able to make that

difference. It's not to have the money to pay for it, if I had the money I'd be glad to invest it there, but having the power to make people to draw their attention to that. These children need school, of course they need food too but... It's not about having the money to do it, it's about having the power, the influence to make people aware of these problems, of these situations. (Mar, F25, SP)

Here, Mar explains how celebrities like Angelina Jolie are willing to share not only their economic capital but also their social capital to transform the lives of others. Being able to emulate this philanthropic behavior would constitute a real luxury for this informant, which illustrates how sharing out social capital can be perceived as luxury.

The accounts above illustrate how luxury as giving differs in terms of giving economic/social/cultural capital respectively. The basic notion of luxury is, however, the same for all of these categories: a voluntary act consisting of giving away valuable resources and thereby making an impactful difference in the lives of non-related others and the planet and, at the same time, transforming the self.

4.4.2 The recipients of the transformations

According to Clark and Mills (1993), most people act as givers, contributing instinctively to the lives of others in close relationships like marriages and friendships, without keeping score about what they are giving and getting to/from them. In line with this

ethos, the informants do not consider a luxury to contribute to the lives of the close ones. Instead, when consumers indulge in the luxury of contributing significantly to the lives of non-kin, they become part of a philanthropic milieu, enhancing their bonds and showing their goodwill to the members of their extended family, the human family. “Essentially, philanthropy is the mechanism through which people express their humanitarian impulses, and confirm their membership of a wider society” (Lloyd, 2004, p. 11). Accordingly, the informants indicate both non-related others, nature, and self as recipients of the transformations that luxury as giving brings about.

4.4.2.1 Non-related others

According to the accounts, the act of giving must have a substantial impact on the common good in order to be perceived as luxury, for example, in terms of raising the level of goodness for someone unrelated to the giver. In this regard, several of the narratives describe the luxury of giving as related to improving the lives of other human beings, especially children. For example Gretel finds a luxury to be able to perform a permanent transformation in the life of a girl by adopting her:

I also find it a luxury to adopt a girl. [...] Even if I had the time [to have another baby], I would like to adopt a girl, because there are many girls in some countries in Africa or in India who are treated badly and they also suffer discrimination compared to boys. [...] My uncle has just adopted two Ethiopian sisters. (Gretel, F38, GE)

The accounts related to children range from luxury as investing time and money in adopting a child, just like Gretel's uncle did, to luxury as spending time and/or money on children in wretched living conditions. Eva considers the latter to be a luxury:

I think it is also luxury to be able to spend time with children [...] I wish I could find a way to offer my services to the society, taking care of children who have no place to go or parents who are not functioning, for a while as long as they cannot live at home. (Eva, F50, SW)

Finally, a third way of describing luxury as giving to children is to donate and work for children's causes using education as the catalyst for transformation (*Mar, F25, SP*).

While most informants link the luxury of philanthropic giving to children as recipients, they also mention other beneficiaries. However, unfortunate circumstances are a common factor in all the beneficiaries, that is, poor people (Nathan, M37, UK), the elderly (Ragnar, M59, SW), ill people (Ragnar, M59, SW), or people in need beyond their resources (Christian, M61, UK).

4.4.2.2 Nature

On top of making a difference to others, some informants describe how the common good could also consist of preserving the planet, contributing to the lives of other living beings and future generations. For example, David has bought a car that is

slower and more expensive than other cars he could have bought. However, David justifies the extra cost because it is a luxury to him to be able to drive a “green” car which preserves the nature.

My new luxury is that I just bought a new car. I bought the Prius [...] It is an ecological car. [...] I could buy a car for 5000 pounds. This one costs 18000, so the rest was about luxury, about aspiration. [...] It is not price. You move to a different aspiration area. You suddenly start buying what is ‘green’. I care about the environment now. I am still driving and still burning fuel, but now burning is much less. [...] It was more expensive than the carbonized car. But I am already very happy about it because I am making a positive effort for the environment. [...] The wealthier people have more choice and they want to feel good about their purchase. Not everybody but I do. I care about the environment. (David, M42, UK)

Likewise, in Henrike’s view, to be able to buy organic food is a luxury –not just in order to be healthy but also to contribute to the future well-being of the planet.

[Another luxury that I have is that] I buy all my food organic in ecoshops. [...] I am a really conscious consumer. [...] I am really keen [...] to have good healthy food, but the other thing is to have good development of nature and everything, because I do not want to use everything and give my son and the future generations a rotten world. I would like to have more eco farmers and people who look what they are doing to take care of what we have. Our planet is where we live and we will not

have another one, we have to be conscious of what we are doing with it, this is really important for me. (Henrike, F25, GE)

While recent studies question the compatibility of sustainable practices and the category of luxury products (Achabou and Dekhili, 2013) these accounts show how consuming sustainable can be perceived as a luxury per se, since this luxury involves investing economic resources in making a positive effort for the environment. According to Achabou and Dekhili (ibid.), product quality overcomes sustainability in relation to the acquisition of luxury products. However, as illustrated above, the performance of sustainable consumption practices can be perceived as a luxury in its own terms – even if the consumer does not consider the consumed a luxury.

4.4.2.3 Self

All the informants included in this study conceptualize giving as a personal luxury. Consequently, they initially recognize giving away either economic, cultural, and/or social capital as something of value to them personally and thus not intended to be solely pro-social. Giving holds the potential of not only transforming others but also the self, and in that respect also a pro-ego behavior. For example, the informants acknowledge that allowing themselves the luxury of philanthropic giving would ultimately have an impact on their own lives. Informants look forward to fulfillment (e.g. Nathan, M37, UK), a better world for their children (e.g., Henrike, F25, GE), or –as the following account describes– feeling useful:

[Another luxury for me is that] I would like to work in something to help people to feel better or make a better quality of life for them. [...] Something that has to do with charity or something where you really see results of helping people or doing something, you know. You feel useful by helping people in some way. (Kajsa, F29, SW)

Likewise, for example, some informants explicitly refer to specific outcomes in store for the giver in terms of, for example, recognition and satisfaction:

At this time in my life I don't find a luxury to have an expensive car or a yacht, I wouldn't be satisfied. Instead, I would prefer to donate this money to an institution. I'm not one of those people who want a monument or a huge nameplate but eventually, I'd like a mention in a book or in any other place saying that I've made a good contribution. It might be a school, or a hospital, or a home for elderly people. Then I'd be more satisfied. (Ragnar, M59, SW)

Further, some of the mentioned pro-ego aspects of sharing are its ability to support the creation of a sense of self, and its ability to bring about a state of well-being. As for self-extension (Belk, 1988), the informants refer to an extended self in terms of being a conscious consumer (Henrike, F25, GE), being an atypical luxury consumer (Edita, F26, GE), or being someone who gets recognition for making a good contribution (Ragnar, M59, SW).

In terms of well-being, the informants point to both positive emotions and a meaningful life. Positive emotions include, for example, feeling very happy and good (David, M42, UK), feeling love and loved (Edita, F26, GE), getting pleasure (Nathan, M37, UK), and feeling useful (Kajsa, F29, SW).

Further, the informants consider a meaningful life as an important outcome of giving, described as, for example, fulfillment (Nathan, M37, UK) and as making a difference (which proves to be essential for all informants). In the data, the notion of luxury is a life imbued with purpose, associated with the fruitfulness of giving, by bettering the lives of others. Together, positive emotions and a meaningful life are two important components of overall happiness and well-being (Seligman, 2011) and thus the luxury of giving holds strong promises of self-directed benefits.

The luxury of giving does not involve dyadic reciprocity, since the giver presents the philanthropic gift without any expectation of return from the unrelated recipients. Nevertheless, the luxury of giving cannot be described as truly altruistic since, as shown in the data, self-directed benefits are inextricably linked to the luxury of sharing out. However, these pro-ego outcomes of sharing out are largely non-contingent on reactions from the actual recipients of what is given but instead are linked to the giver's idea of making a difference. Within this study, acts of kindness bring about change in the common good, which spreads and ultimately reflects back on the giver as part of mankind, what the authors would coin "circular reciprocity" at play.

4.5 Discussion

This paper extends conventional understandings of the notion of luxury based on *having*, by placing luxury in the realm of transforming self and others by *giving*. Here, luxury does not necessarily mean having and displaying expensive brands or extravagant experiences, instead, according to the informants, luxury can also mean being able to make significant improvements in the lives of distant others by providing them with economic, cultural, and/or social capital and, simultaneously, transforming the self of the giver. In this vein, the present study offers new and disruptive insights to the luxury literature from a sociological perspective, urging a multilayered redefinition of the construct.

In addition, the endeavor to disentangle the rather unknown phenomenon of “luxury as philanthropic giving,” adds to current discussions about the conventional understandings of the notion of sharing as “nonreciprocal pro-social behavior” (Benkler, 2004) by highlighting how sharing out can also entail pro-ego components and aspects of circular reciprocity. As illustrated by this study, certain types of sharing can be perceived as a personal luxury, thus acknowledging the interlinkages between the well-being and transformation of others with the well-being and transformation of self as essential parts of sharing out.

This study shows that these transformative components of the luxury of giving take place in a plurality of levels of others and self. First of all, substantive contributions to the lives of distant others lead to *outward* transformations and, ultimately, due to a ripple effect, to societal transformations. Second, *inward* transformations may occur due to the rise of a fulfilled and whole self in the aftermath of engaging in meaningful and pleasurable philanthropic giving. Third, by linking the self to the lives of others, the relationship between non-related givers and receivers is strengthened and the membership to humankind as the first and foremost community is upgraded, yielding *onward* transformations of the philanthropic giver via a gregarious sense of self. Finally, similar to the status-elevating potential of conspicuous consumption, the luxury of giving can promote *upward* transformations in the social status of the giver by means of conspicuous generosity. The paper elaborates on the four types of transformations below.

4.5.1 Outward transformations: Transforming distant others

In an individualistic society where personal goals are encouraged, one of the notions of luxury takes a turn toward universalism, in a quest for the common good and finding meaning and happiness in the process. The keywords outlining the personal meaning of luxury provided by the informants are non-possessiveness, generosity and friendliness, which contrast with the personality traits attributed to materialism:

possessiveness, non-generosity, and envy (Belk, 1985). This view of luxury falls into the category of what Sombart (1922) names as “idealistic or altruistic luxury” as opposed to “materialist, egoistic luxury,” challenging the common association between luxury and materialism.

The pervasive notion of luxury aligns with the core values of the egocentric society, that is, “safety, comfort, middleworld pleasure, and enhancement of socioeconomic status” which involves accumulation of wealth, leading finally to “boredom, addiction, alienation, and meaninglessness” (Plotkin, 2008, p. 46-47). This egocentric society celebrates individualistic values at the expense of consumers’ connections with their peers, which is the first and foremost community to which they belong. The feeling of other-orientedness and belongingness lies at the root of the human nature but the individualistic and egocentric society has suppressed this sense of association – or dramatically limited these ties to close ones.

This study documents that some consumers perceive making significant contributions to the lives of others and experiencing self-transformations while doing so, as a luxury. Thus, they show a quest for significant macro transformations by providing transformative agents like education, shelter, affection, art, culture, care, knowledge, and money. They are able to yield more cultured selves, educated selves, healthy selves, loved selves, happier selves, selves with a better-looking future and a better-preserved planet. These consumers leave behind an egocentric

society (materialistic, anthropocentric, competition based, class stratified, violence prone, and unsustainable) and move into a soulcentric or even an ecocentric society (imaginative, ecocentric, cooperation based, just, compassionate, and sustainable) (cf. Plotkin, 2008) while indulging in the luxury of giving.

4.5.2 Inward transformations: A desired self

Just like luxury brands have the power of transforming an ordinary self into a sophisticated and glamorous one, the findings illustrate how the luxury of performing significant acts of altruism holds the power to transform an ordinary self into a desired self. The luxury of initiating substantive transformations in non-kin by giving away economic, cultural, and/or social capital can bring about inward transformations and release a renewed self: for example, an altruistic, socially responsible, purposeful, fulfilled, and joyful self.

According to Thompson and Hirschman (1995, p. 151), “consumption serves to produce a desired self through the images and styles conveyed through one’s possessions.” The findings extend this proposition about the desired self by adding actions as conveyors of identity. In particular, the informants identify engaging in purposive activities –like indulging in the luxury of giving valuable resources to improve the welfare of non-related others– as a way of creating a desired self. Their personal views of luxury reveal that making a significant impact in the lives of others

constitutes an avenue for self-expression, triggering a shift in their own identity. This notion is in line with self-signaling theory, according to which people infer what kind of person they are from their consumption practices (Dhar and Wertenbroch, 2012), including their sharing out behavior (Belk and Llamas, 2013).

This burgeoning self emerges in a social context, so the others unconsciously, perform the role of helpers in this process of identity transformation. So, in the narratives, the distant others act as the ink enabling consumers to write their story. According to Kauppinen (2013), consumers perceive as meaningful those activities which “move our life story forward in the direction of making a difference in the world.” In other words, meaning comes from transcending the ego, by serving a cause bigger than ourselves (Seligman, 2011).

Additionally, the paper illustrates how the luxury of giving can bring about inward transformations by providing the giver with joyous feelings. This emotional consequence of doing good has been documented in prior research on charitable behavior regardless of whether the donor acts according to a social norm or according to a specific (pro-social, altruistic) self-image (Bekkers and Wiepking, 2007). The joys of charitable giving have been studied under labels like “empathic joy” (Batson and Shaw, 1991), “warm glow”, or the “joy of giving” (Andreoni, 1989). Giving provides the giver with feelings of happiness, which may raise personal happiness more than spending the same amount of money on own consumption (Aknin et al., 2013). This

outcome is in line with research on charitable donations in which the pro-ego effects of giving are a well-documented phenomenon (Ye, Teng, Yu, and Wang, 2015). Notably, this result reaffirms the abovementioned idea that indulging in the luxury of giving is not altogether devoid of the pleasures and positive feelings commonly associated with the accumulation or consumption of luxury goods (e.g., Kapferer, 1997).

4.5.3 Onward transformations: A gregarious self

Consumer research literature addresses giving in all its versions, whether monadic, dyadic or systemic gift giving, as an enhancer of relationships (with self or others). Gifts can engender an expression of love and caring for another person or group of persons (Cheal, 1988), but they can also be used to express cultural values and social connections (Belk Wallendorf, and Sherry, 1989). Giving increases the feelings of interdependence and belonging (Lyubomirsky, 2008), while supporting identity projects (Belk, 2010; Sherry, McGrath, and Levy, 1995).

In the same vein, philanthropic giving reinforces the link with others, transcending the traditional, immediate circles (kinship, friendship, romance) experiencing more permeable and fluid self-other differentiation boundaries. However, unlike traditional gift giving, philanthropic giving does not strengthen the link with a particular recipient, but serves a higher purpose of setting a link with the whole community –humankind, which is the primary natural community. Hence, opening up self-boundaries by

giving creates a sense of communion with unrelated others and the world, leading to a gregarious sense of self.

The instinct for human connection inherently resides in human nature and goes beyond family ties. However, perhaps the individualistic society has reduced consumers' sense of common humanity, limiting their relations to a micro scale. So, some contemporary consumers experience interconnectedness at a large scale by perceiving it a luxury to make valuable contributions to the lives of non-related others. Notably, to these consumers others-interest and self-interest are not mutually exclusive but a compatible and desirable tandem.

4.5.4 Upward transformations: The status-elevated self

The traditional understanding of luxury is tightly linked to the pursuit of status, and luxury as philanthropic giving is not utterly devoid of this notion. Some of the informants mention acknowledgement as an expected outcome of the luxury of performing significant acts of altruism. Hence, luxury as giving holds the ability to provide symbolic capital that can add to the giver's identity construction and social status. Therefore, in the realm of distinction, traditional logos of luxury brands coexist with philanthropic displays. In this line, Veblen (1994/1899) considers that philanthropy involves a public display of wealth aimed at securing esteem, and consequently, he places this exhibition in the sphere of conspicuous consumption.

More recently, Toynbee and Walker (2008) take an anti-philanthropy position, asserting that philanthropy is “mere ostentation,” “a passport to the in-crowd,” and “another way of exerting power and control.” Indulging in the luxury of doing good may turn into “badges of luxury” especially due to the blurred lines of public/private spheres in the digital age. Similarly, previous research shows how conspicuous philanthropic displays enhance the status and prestige of the giver (Boone, 1998; Hardy and Van Vugt, 2006; Roberts, 1998), while Winterich, Mittal, and Aquino (2013) find a strong link between recognition and charitable behavior. So, making a difference in the lives of others may be rooted in self-interest, acting as a catalyst for upward mobility in the social status of the giver by means of conspicuous generosity rather than conspicuous consumption.

Some of the richest people in the world enact their identities as philanthropists via altruistic endeavors. These social investors are running transformative organizations that are part of an emerging phenomenon named “philanthrocapitalism” (Bishop and Green, 2008). This term describes the “growing recognition by the leaders of capitalism that giving back much of their fortune to improve society is much a part of the system as making money in the first place” (Bishop and Green, 2008, p. xii). Furthermore, world-class celebrities appear in the mass media revealing their humanitarian side. For people with higher status in society, philanthropy may be a way to fit in rather to stand out, a way to conform the norm “noblesse oblige” and not entirely a voluntary act. Since individuals from the upper class are showing

an altruistic behavior, consumers from lower classes may mimic this behavior in a quest to gain status in society (Veblen, 1994/1899).

4.6 Managerial implications

Jafari (2013, p. 4) asserts that “we have failed to make effective use of markets and marketing for the betterment of human life in general.” This statement may come as a surprise in an age where corporate social responsibility is the rule rather than the exception for many businesses (Murphy and Schlegelmilch, 2013; Torelli, Monga, and Kaikati, 2011). While acknowledging this situation, Jafari (2013) calls for *collective* social responsibility rather *corporate*, which resonates with the voices of the informants. Corporate leaders have not been elected, nor do they necessarily have the expertise, to ameliorate the well-being of society. They depend on consumers and governments to crave for social enterprise in order to create a humanistic society which measures its performance based on the width of its citizens’ smiles instead of the size of their pockets (ibid.). According to the findings, this interest in the collective smiles has spread its seeds in current consumer culture, and notably, without necessarily any tradeoff between the interest in collective and personal smiles. The informants believe that collective smiles –set off by personal generosity– can create instant personal smiles, trickle forward, and create a spiral of good, which, in turn, changes society and themselves. This proposition requires an inclusive approach from consumers, companies, NGOs, educational and public

institutions, widening their horizon to being not only pro-social but being pro-humanity. In the following, the article underlines the implications of the findings for these agents:

4.6.1 Companies adopting a philanthropic approach

First of all, in recent years the business world has witnessed how CSR initiatives have gotten more space in the business agenda. However, they are still pushed into the background, not taking a protagonist role. Previous research on consumer identity shows that consumers prefer brands whose identity matches their own identity (Bhattacharjee, Berger, and Menon, 2014). According to this idea, consumers who align with the informants' perception of luxury will show a preference for brands contributing significantly to altruistic causes. Similarly, recent research by Chernev and Blair (2015) report that companies who truly engage in socially responsible activities (e.g., philanthropic giving), driven by benevolence rather than self-interest reap the benefit of not only having a positive impact on the company's reputation but also on consumer perceptions of product performance. Drawing from the four types of social responsibilities of businesses, that is, economic, legal, ethical, and philanthropic (Carroll, 1979), this implication puts clear emphasis on the latter and implies that the philanthropic component of CSR requires increased attention.

Second, besides offering consumers the role of social activists by making philanthropic consumption choices, companies may also consider to do so by offering philanthropic career choices. Some informants perceive having a job which allows them to make a meaningful contribution to humankind as a luxury. In addition, Grant, Dutton, and Rosso (2008) assert that employees establish stronger bonds and higher levels of commitment with companies with active corporate volunteering programs. Thus, managers may consider a redefinition of the corporate objectives in order to match the quest for making the meaningful contributions that individuals are claiming. “Just Better Jobs” is an example of such a corporate philosophy. This company is targeting people who consider making a difference a key issue in their careers, by “connecting job-seekers directly with for-profit companies that share their commitment to positive social and environmental change” (Just Better Jobs, 2014).

The informants place making significant contributions in the realm of luxury and in a desirable and aspirational scenario, which involves that they might not be accessible for them. However, triggering positive transformations in the lives of those in dire need may be easier to achieve for powerful companies than for individual consumers, which means that companies and consumers can join forces in co-constructing societal change when brands that pursue this transformative objective are available to and preferred by consumers and employees. Thus, companies may benefit from adopting a philanthropic approach and marketing managers can

decide to communicate the company's philanthropic endeavors in order to engage with consumers and employees who highly value them.

4.6.2 Companies born with philanthropy at their heart

Rather than adopting a philanthropic approach when they are mature companies, some firms have been born under the idea of making a difference for the “family of mankind.” “Les Deux,” a Danish fashion brand, follows this idea by teaming up with consumers in order to transform the lives of children in Zambia. The company explains its philosophy as follows: “The time has come where it is our turn to give back to those in need. Even though we are a small company we believe that we make a difference. So, we are building a school in Zambia and making sure that the kids have what they need in order to educate themselves and create a better future. Every time you buy an item from Les Deux we will give a child at the school a fresh t-shirt and make sure that all students at the school have a school kit when they start –including everything from pencils to malaria vaccine. (..) As we always say –A family–” (Les Deux, 2014).

This example illustrates the merger of entrepreneurship and philanthropy, which are increasingly intertwined in a new generation of business that have a transformative approach as part of their DNA. In this vein, Chandy (2015, p. 1) asserts that a movement called philanthropreneurship is gaining protagonism. According to this

author, “the philanthropreneur business model involves working donations of time, effort, and money into the very core of how a business operates,” which mirrors the transformative agents in the informants’ view of luxury. This approach opens a new world of opportunities for a new generation of start-up companies with a transformative approach at their heart, working hand in hand with consumers to co-create a difference in the lives of those in need. Bearing in mind that consumers conforming with generation G’s values replace greed with generosity as the pivotal aspect in the business and societal mindset (Trendwatching, 2009), generosity may act as the connector linking consumers and companies in a common endeavor to beget impactful transformations in the lives of non-related others and meaningful social change while boosting a shift from corporate social responsibility to collective social responsibility.

4.6.3 Philanthropy in non-profit organizations and educational institutions

The findings also imply that non-profit organizations might consider widening their horizon. The results of this study point at a qualitative rather than quantitative shift in the sharing out phenomenon. The fact that consumers can feel so strongly about sharing out that this ethos becomes a personal luxury to them means that social marketers and charities may want to address pro-social consumer behavior differently in the future than they have done so far. Traditionally, charities have asked consumers

to contribute to social causes mainly through monetary contributions (affordable to them). By allowing and fostering consumers to engage in social projects on a deeper level, giving them the opportunity of engaging in meaningful experiences, making a difference, by sharing their social or cultural capital, not just as external agents but as active change makers may enhance the collaboration of some consumers with the non-for-profit sector.

This transformative approach is also emerging in the educational system. An example of this is the University of South Carolina which offers a master of science in social entrepreneurship with the following claim: “changing the world, that’s your business” and explicitly states that if you enroll in this master “you will balance your head and heart as you embark on a career with meaning and attack the most pressing global challenges [...]. Make an impact in areas including poverty alleviation, healthcare, gender equity, education and the environment. Bring more meaning to your career in the private sector” (USC Marshall, 2014, p. 1). Along the same lines, ever since 2007 the London Business School has co-hosted, with the Stars Foundation, the Philanthropreneurship Forum, an event turning the spotlight toward an entrepreneurial approach to philanthropy. They specifically state that “it is giving that disrupts the status quo” (Philanthropreneurship Forum, 2015, p. 1).

4.6.4 Philanthropy in consumer society

Chandy (2015) asserts that the concept of philanthropreneurship is not restricted to the corporate world. Instead, this approach covers a wide array of agents including corporate leaders, political figures, celebrities, for-profit companies, non-profit organizations, and academic institutions. They all share the following traits: “passion to make life better for others; willingness to give, in money, ideas, and/or time; ingenuity to envision new approaches to solving problems; leadership and the ability to direct, organize, and influence the efforts of others” (Chandy, 2015, p. 1).

The dominant values in consumer society revolve around competition, individualism, growth, greed and hierarchy (Mathur, 2014, p. 135), erecting an invisible wall separating us (me and my close group) from distant others. As a counter-reaction –or perhaps even rebellion– toward this individualization and disenchantment in consumer society, consumers may increasingly act as postmodern tribalists seeking connection rather than consumption per se, relegating the use of the object consumed to a secondary position and bringing the linking value to the fore (Cova, 1997). The results of the analysis show that some consumers find playing an interventionist role in society and being part of the philanthropreneurs community to be a luxury. As the authors have illustrated, this consumer quest can be addressed by companies, non-profit organizations, and educational and public institutions, in different ways, all sharing the idea of a co-creative, collective endeavor for the common good.

Also, since sharing inspires others to do good, well-being may spread and change the social surroundings of the giver. For example, research shows that generosity can spread by three degrees, from giver to recipient and from recipient to the next recipient (Christakis and Fowler, 2009). Ultimately, this dynamic implies that sharing out leads to both individual and collective well-being (cf. Belk and Llamas, 2011).

Finally, the academic community plays a key part in leading transformations in society, inspiring and empowering different stakeholders to not settle to uneventful and meaningless roles in the society but instead search for purpose, make a social impact, and encourage purposeful lives. If academia succeeds in this pursuit, society will witness a democratization of the luxury of achieving meaning by making significant contributions to the lives of others, as well as the transformation of an industrial growth society into a life-sustaining society (Macy and Brown, 1998). The authors hope to have contributed to ignite this change by giving voice to a pro-social, pro-ego, and pro-humanity consumer perspective that, they believe, is new to the arena of luxury.

Chapter 5 - Findings II

FREE DOM



IS FREEDOM THE NEW LUXURY?

A CONTEMPORARY CONSUMER PERSPECTIVE²

“Sometimes choice is a luxury that fate does not afford us.”

— Jasper Fforde

5.1 Introduction

Luxury is a dynamic concept whose meaning has been constructed differently within every age and civilization along history. While in some ages luxury was beloved, in others it was reviled and persecuted. In all its forms whether glorified, coveted, or sacred, public or private, ostentatious or introspective, no one looks at it with indifference. According to Sekora (1977, p. 2), “the concept of luxury is one of the oldest, most important, and most pervasive negative principles for organizing society Western history has known.” The contentious and dynamic qualities of luxury have contributed to its elusive nature and added complexity to the attempts of conceptualization. In spite of inspiring the writings of many thinkers, from philosophers, to anthropologists,

2. Llamas, M. R. (2016). *Is freedom the new luxury? A contemporary consumer perspective*. Proceedings of the 15th International Marketing Trends Conference, Venice, 21-23rd January.

and from historians to social scientists, research on the phenomenon of luxury in contemporary consumer society is scant.

Even though luxury is a prism with many angles, the research approaches to this controversial and ambiguous concept in the marketing literature address its study only from a managerial perspective, lacking a consumer-oriented approach. In order to bridge this gap in knowledge, this study explores the socially constructed phenomenon of luxury in contemporary consumer culture. A multisited enquiry (Stockholm, London, Berlin and Madrid) was conducted by means of phenomenological interviews, aimed at eliciting consumer multifaceted discourses on luxury. The findings expand classical conceptualizations of the notion of luxury, which view luxury as a vehicle to display wealth, signal social status, and assert symbolic domination (e.g., Dion and Arnould, 2011; Eng and Bogaert, 2010; Han, Nunes, and Drèze, 2010), by adding new and disruptive perspectives broadening the focus about the phenomenon of luxury as seen by consumers. In particular, this study presents one of the emerging meanings of luxury stemming from the data: freedom as luxury.

The paper proceeds first by presenting a retrospective about luxury, showing how the idea of luxury has mutated along the history. Then it turns the spotlight to the different views of freedom as luxury that emerged from the consumers' luxury discourses: freedom from the system, freedom to or license to choose, and possessions as a source of freedom or slavery. Finally, the paper draws conclusions about the

theoretical implications of the findings for the study of luxury in the consumer research context. The managerial implications of freedom as luxury are also emphasized, focusing on the implications for companies, organizations, and consumer society.

5.2 Theoretical background: the evolution of luxury

Bataille (1988) points that “the history of life on earth is mainly the effect of a wild exuberance; the dominant event is the development of luxury, the production of increasingly burdensome forms of life.” Enzensberger (1996) states that luxury has been present in every society since the beginning of mankind, from archaic societies to modern times, adopting different guises, in different eras.

In archaic societies luxury was based on wastefulness and squandering, had strong magic and religious connotations, and the aim of attaining prestige. The luxury of Ancient Egypt was splendid while in the Ancient Greece luxury occurred in the public domain, and it was focused on the body and the mind. Luxury became a synonym of excess during the Roman Empire in both public and private spheres, turning into a quantitative and rude luxury fostered by the wish of differentiation during the Middle Ages. From the 17th century and onwards, luxury was understood as leisure and convenience, gaining protagonism in society. During the 20th century two trends shaped the evolution of luxury: the democratization of the luxury consumption and the coexistence of extreme luxury with affordable luxury.

The second half of the twentieth century witnessed an outstanding increase of the luxury consumption fostered mainly by the improvement of welfare levels in developed countries, globalization, and commercial openness of some nations like Japan -which represents an important share of the luxury industry. Luxury goods became popular and accessible to a large extent of the population, as the aftermath of the democratization of luxury, also labeled as *Mcluxury*, (Gumbel, 2007) or *luxe populi* (Davis, 2002). This trend claims the right for everybody to have access to luxury products, which were previously, reserved to the elite few. The popularization of luxury has been followed by a debate about what can be considered as luxury. If luxury is now available for the masses, does it mean that it has lost its exclusivity and then it should not be called luxury? Kapferer (2015) bemoans that the popularization and misuse of the word luxury leads to managerial turmoil, while Frank (2008, p. 1) argues that “luxury isn’t dead, but the word might be.” This debate suggests that nowadays, luxury is an elusive and divisive concept, which might be in the eye of the beholder (The Economist, 2014).

According to Mortelmans (2005), the popularization of luxury makes certain goods, once considered as luxuries, available to an increasing body of consumers. Yet, this does not involve that luxury as a social phenomenon disappears. It will rather evolve into new forms of luxury, changing its guise. Lipovetsky (2004) posits that the cult to the sumptuary expenditure does not seduce consumers any longer. Instead, individualization, emotionalization, and democratization, are the processes shaping

the luxury culture in contemporary consumer society. In his view, luxury nowadays is free from social prescriptions, giving preference to personal sensations (ibid.).

Even though, the connection between luxury and conspicuousness has not disappeared, other approaches to luxury based on experiences, health, body, and subjective well-being are gaining momentum. This author also mentions free time, quality of life, and peace of mind as luxuries in contemporary society (ibid.). Along the same lines, Enzensberger (1996) argues that future luxury might take a distance from expensive cars, jewelry, delicatessen, and exotic products, connecting with basic conditions of life. He explicitly identifies six luxuries: time, attention, space, rest, clean environment, and safety, highlighting that the true luxury consists of having all of them. The informants in this study also highlighted different types of luxury which fall into the category of the essential. In the following, the view of luxury as freedom is unveiled.

5.3 Method

The aim of furthering the understanding on the meaning of luxury from a consumer perspective, supports the decision of adopting a phenomenological research approach. The qualitative phenomenological research seeks to explore how people construct meaning. The meaning of things is derived from an interplay between cultural traditions and personalized meanings, which involves that meanings

need to be contextualized and situated in relation to culturally shared knowledge (Thompson, Pollio, and Locander, 1994). In this regard, empirical fieldwork consisting in phenomenological interviews, was conducted in four European capital cities: Stockholm (10 informants), London (10 informants), Berlin (10 informants) and Madrid (9 informants).

The underlying rationality behind this intentional choice of cities was to imbue the study with the cultural richness and diversity of Europe. Given that the phenomenon of luxury is socially and culturally contingent (e.g., Wong and Ahuvia, 1998), bringing the cultural factor into the study would allow to explore how culture may shape consumers' perceptions of luxury. The criteria behind the selection of Stockholm and Madrid was convenience since the researcher was living in these two countries during the period of data collection, while the motivation for including London and Berlin was to reinforce the cultural category in the study. Informants from all walks of life were deliberately recruited in order to maximize the possibility of finding diverse stories. In Stockholm, London, and Madrid, the informants were recruited through the social network of people that the researcher got to know in these cities, while the informants from Berlin were contacted through Xing, an online professional social network.

The data collection procedure included different phases. Previously to the meeting, the informants received information about the study and a set of instructions via

e-mail. The preparation for the in-depth interview included collecting pictures (from magazines, newspapers, internet, personal pictures, etc.) representing what luxury meant for them. During the course of the interview, the informants were encouraged to express their meaning of luxury associated to the pictures. Metaphor elicitation using pictures facilitates participants to convey their thoughts, feelings and experiences, and then articulate more elaborated narratives to overcome the taken-for-granted barrier. By combining non-verbal images with verbal communication, more meaningful messages are anticipated that will better resemble consumers' deep-seated thoughts and emotions (van Dessel, 2005). In addition, informants were encouraged to elaborate on their accounts by means of "floating prompts" (McCracken, 1988, p. 35). The interviewer adopted a non-intrusive role, eliciting thick narratives by repeating the informants' last words with an interrogative tone, and encouraging them to describe their own experiences about luxury rather than keeping the interviews on an abstract level, which yielded deep insights about consumers' perspectives on luxury.

The duration of the interviews ranged from one and a half hours to three hours, were tape recorded, transcribed verbatim, and interpreted with an emic approach, according to Thompson's hermeneutic framework (1997). The data analysis was performed following the methods of grounded theory, evolving from open, to axial, to selective coding of data, acquiring deeper theoretical understanding at each step. This process aimed at getting a holistic interpretation, identifying personal meanings of luxury, shared

meanings that emerged across the accounts and pictures brought by several informants, and wider conceptual insights shared in society, filtered down through the informants. Numerous meanings of luxury emerged from the data, revealing the polysemic nature of this construct. This paper addresses the notion of freedom as luxury.

5.4 Findings: the luxury of freedom

Whether longed, taken for granted, or misunderstood, in the name of freedom battles have been fought throughout time, statues have been erected to honor it, revolutions have found its source of inspiration in it, and laws and Constitutions have been set to safeguard it. There are different degrees of freedom ranging from freedom of speech and expression, freedom of press and thought, freedom of worship, economical, moral, and social freedom. Freedom applies to several ideas such as having free will, being free spirits, enjoying free living, free choice, or free love.

Abstract freedom can be perceived in different ways. In his book *Escape from freedom*, Fromm (1941) explores the concept of freedom, drawing a distinction between positive and negative freedom. Whereas negative freedom raises in the absence of obstacles and the opportunities that are possible for an individual as a result of a lack of constraints, positive freedom is based on the degree of fulfillment that a person is able to reach due to his/her self-determination, taking into account that the self is embedded in the society.

In the continuum between needs and luxuries, freedom, as an essential human right, has been traditionally placed on the needs end. However, predominant in all informants' narratives was a core theme of freedom perceived as luxury. In particular, the informants articulated their narratives about luxury around the two types of freedom suggested by Fromm (ibid.): negative and positive freedom.

5.4.1 Negative freedom: Emancipation

Hayek, the leading exponent of negative freedom, defines individual freedom as “the state in which a man is not subject to coercion by the arbitrary will of another.” It involves that one “can expect to shape his course of action in accordance with his present intentions” (Hayek, 1944, p. 11-12), and as marked by the “rule of law.” Fromm (1941) defines negative freedom as emancipation from restrictions imposed by other people or institutions.

The feeling of liberation, to be free from pressures, schedules, deadlines, stress, from cultural and social constraints, from routines, banal chores, offices, economic restrictions, and sources of authority had an important role when informants talked about their personal perception of luxury. The scarcity and the craving for being free from all these tasks, routines and restrictions were the cornerstone aspects driving consumers to consider them as luxuries.

Freedom perceived as luxury involves being the owner of one's time, breaking free from time and space constraints. Some of the informants in this study perceived as a luxury the freedom to choose how to manage their time, being free from time constraints. The following narrative expressed the luxury of being free from others' rules dictating how to use one's time:

The luxury for me would be not to have to work so I could use my time as I pleased; it would be to decide how to use my time, I'd have a very active life but without the pressure that I have to do... I'd be the one who sets my deadlines. (Jennifer, F53, UK)

In addition, offices are seen as prison cells while routines act as chains. A Swedish informant brought a picture showing a man with a laptop in a park, representing the luxury of having the freedom to move her workplace anywhere:

It's a luxury to be able to move your work out of the office, the flexibility to get in contact with whoever you want in a park like this. I don't like the atmosphere in an office, you have to be in there from 9 to 5 everyday. I don't like the routine of that.... it seems that he (the man in the picture) has his own company, so he is like... free. Freedom, that's what it is! (Kajsa, F29, SW)

Bosses and job rules dictate how to use labor time, while social norms command how to use leisure time, leading to another kind of luxury: liberating oneself from others' approval. A young informant from Berlin put it in the following way:

What would be a luxury is to do whatever you want, no pressure or have a job where you can behave the way you want to like going to opera, theater or classical music concerts only to fit into the upper class or to demonstrate to your boss how cultured you are. For example, when you go to conferences and meet all kind of important people and they say: 'Let's go and play golf', and you do it not because you want to do it but because you have the impression that you have to do it, that you have to spend time with them, and that's one of the big problems when you get a position which is quite high, to still to be whatever you like to be, because many people are looking at you and judging you by things you are doing. Some people hate going to the opera or theatre but they do it because all their colleagues do it, and they feel some kind of pressure to fulfill these social opportunities and although I do not have this problem so far I feel a bit troubled by these things. How do you know if you like to do it because you like it or because other people expect you to do it. (Hans, M28, GE)

This informant referred to the symbolic battle between the two categories of free time: clean and dirty (Valtonen, 2004), finding a luxury the opportunity of not having to cope with this battle, challenging the prevailing tacit expectation of filling one's time efficiently, not only during work time but also during free time (Moisander and Valtonen, 2002).

In this scenography, there is a liberty protocol and the others act as jailers, so freeing from the socially acceptable is also a luxury. Thompson and Hirschman (1995) claim

that consumers are not free to behave as they wish since they are always under observation. Thus, the activities to carry out during free time should fit in the realm of the socially acceptable, complying with social norms, and cultivating and civilizing oneself or growing up as a consumer and a citizen. In line with the liberation from social norms as luxury, an investigation by Belleza, Gino, and Keinan (2014), suggests that nonconforming behaviors are a particular form of conspicuous consumption which enhance the status and competence of the rebellious consumer.

The conception of luxury in the above narratives, confirms that leisure time does not necessarily mean free time but instead “free time rests upon the ideal of a free individual; upon the ideal that free time is time when ‘I can do whatever I want.’ Free time is the time when one owns time and can exploit it according to one’s will” (Valtonen, 2004, p. 72). In line with this, a middle-aged informant from Stockholm described a luxurious experience as a private party for his senses. He metaphorically spoke about his schedule as his prison:

Talking about luxuries, a truly luxurious experience for me is when I’m in another city and in the morning I go out, sit in a cafe, read the newspaper, feel the atmosphere, listen to people speaking but with no work meetings in my schedule. I’m not there to work so I can spend two hours or three hours.. that kind of lazy life is a luxury. I like to do things as I please, I can spend the day wandering around, sitting in cafes, listening to conversations, etc. Then the schedule is not my prison. (Ivar, M46, SW)

The key issues in this experience is that it takes place in another city, which is not part of his everyday life, the freedom from obligations, i.e., the right to manage his time at his convenience, and the optimal use of his senses to enjoy and perceive an ordinary experience as a luxurious one.

Drinking plays a central role in some consumption rituals and is able to construct a separate and ideal world (Heath, 2000). In particular, drinking coffee appears in some of the informants' discourses on luxury related to freedom experiences. This is consistent with studies addressing the substantial cultural role that coffee plays in the Western society as a ritual loaded with meaning (Gusfield, 1987; Schievelbusch, 1986). Drinks are able to create an ideal world (Bolt, 1987) and even draw a line between time for work (coffee) and leisure time (alcohol) (Gusfield, 1987). However, the findings in this study show that coffee also plays a crucial role in leisure time by creating a special atmosphere, a time out which is perceived as a luxury.

Economic restrictions are understood as locks and the chance of not having to think about being able to afford certain consumption practices, expected or unexpected, mundane or extraordinary, was mentioned by informants from all the countries. An informant from Sweden expressed his perception of freedom from economic restrictions as luxury in the following way:

Luxury for me is skiing, traveling, nature, freedom. Luxury for me is mostly freedom, I think. Freedom, to be able to do stuff without the economic boundaries. (Anders, M25, SW)

In this informant's view, luxury is to be able to get involved in the activities and experiences that he enjoys without economic constraints, unleashing all his desires and questing for pleasurable experiences, taking a step out of his ordinary life. Two informants from Madrid -Eduardo, (M31, SP) and Mar (F25, SP)- also mentioned the luxury of freeing themselves from economic constraints, not only for engaging in enjoyable activities like treating themselves with a special dinner, but also for dealing with unexpected expenses in their everyday life, like affording a visit to the dentist if necessary, instead of being forced to postpone the visit due to economic limitations.

5.4.2 Positive freedom: License

Thomas Hill Green, one of the main proponents of the positive freedom, states that when we talk about freedom we mean "something to be so highly prized, we mean a positive power or capacity of doing or enjoying something worth doing or enjoying, and that, too, something that we do or enjoy in common with others" (Green, 1906, p. 370-71). This author highlights three aspects in the notion of freedom: (1) it is closely connected with self-realization and its aim is "to make the most and best of ourselves;" (2) freedom happens in a social context, and we enjoy it with others, assuming that the self is always socially embedded; (3) there is a connection between freedom and self-development which has objective social conditions (ibid.). Along the same lines, Fromm (1941) posits that positive freedom entails using freedom to create.

The meaning of positive freedom as luxury was also present in the informants' discourses on luxury. The feeling of having the chance to choose among different choices represents a luxury nowadays, according to the informants in this study. Some informants living in East Germany before the fall of the Berlin Wall chose photos of the Wall illustrating the freedom to choose that the fall of the Wall brought to them. One of the informants selected a picture of the Berlin Wall as a symbol of freedom as luxury and organized the rest of the pictures also representing what luxury meant to him, around this particular one. Those photographs symbolized the freedom to travel, to go to the University, choose his degree, and to be an exchange student in another country. These were luxuries inaccessible to his parents.

This is a picture of the German wall and this means freedom to me. To me freedom is a luxury, I grew up here in the GDR and before the fall of the Wall I was not able to travel, the system was very repressive and we were not able to choose what to do, we didn't have the choice to choose. My parents wanted to go to the University but it didn't depend on them, there were some rules and some restrictions telling who could go to the University and who couldn't. If you didn't follow the rules of the political system you were not able to make any choice. Nowadays many people complain about the political system but to me is a situation where I can choose whatever. If I want to go to the University, I can go. It's a kind of freedom which is a luxury to me. (Jerry, M25, GE)

Having a range of choices is perceived as a luxury by this informant, in stark contrast with the lack of options that his parents experienced. Positive freedom is allowed when experiencing emancipation from a restrictive system (negative freedom). This wide spectrum of options can be perceived in an active or in a passive way, including the choice of doing and also not doing. One of the informants, a young Stockholmer, expressed her view of luxury in the following way:

It's a luxury to have the opportunity to not do anything, to just relax and to be on vacation. Because here people work all the time, and when you don't work you have to fill your time with something else important blah blah blah but this (pointing to the picture) is like doing nothing and it's a luxury to have time for that. You just live for the moment there. (Kajsa, F29, SW)

Usually free time involves the assumption of active time, i.e., time for doing, instead of just being (Valtonen, 2004). It seems that free time should be filled with doing, showing that we are efficient in all spheres of life (Moisander and Valtonen, 2002). As discussed by Cross (1993, p. 1), "time has become money in both work and 'after hours.' But ultimately, the problem is that we lack time free from working and spending." The scarcity underlying this kind of time might be the driver leading to the perception of time for just 'being' as a luxury. This is consistent with prior research on luxury goods showing that scarcity has a positive effect on product value (Lynn, 1991), and thus, rarity is one of the key variables in the equation of luxury goods (e.g., Brun and Castelli, 2013; Dubois, Laurent, and Czellar, 2001), enhancing the desirability of those goods (e.g., Park, Rabolt, and Jeon, 2008).

For some informants, luxury is not only having a range of choices but having agency to choose fulfilling options, whether feeding the individual's creativity longings, learning, or having access to non-mainstream culture, among others. Being free to work on something that they really liked was perceived as a luxury by the informants. One of the informants from Berlin articulated her narrative about luxury around a picture of an artist working on a painting. Part of the interpretation was the following:

I find it a luxury to have the opportunity to make a living by releasing your creativity like he is doing while painting; he is not working, he's letting himself go, enjoying, absolutely focused on that, being part of that, expressing himself..” (Claudia, F42, GE)

In the same vein, a young lady from Stockholm explained that the picture that she chose showing a bunch of paintings, represented the luxury of having agency in her choice of using her time in a creative way:

The luxury of being able to have a hobby like painting or to work with something that is creative. It's just the feeling of creating something what I find a luxury. (Kajsa, F29, SW)

Having the option of consuming non-mainstream movies was perceived as a luxury by some informants. This informant also emphasized the luxury of learning something from this kind of films.

Talking about luxury, for me it's a luxury having the possibility to see alternative films in a cinema, to have this choice and not only see those American ones. It's a luxury the possibility to choose what movie to see. You learn something new, they are from different cultures, they can be from Iraq or... It's great to see their perspectives and not the Hollywood image of them. (Kajsa, F29, SW)

She implicitly suggested that the view from Hollywood can be misleading and found a luxury to have the freedom to see the world from the eyes of a local director which, presumably, gathers more realistic insights about other cultures. Learning is also at the core of other accounts of luxury as freedom. For example, an informant from Spain (Ana, F64, SP) chose a picture representing the luxury of being free to learn which included a quote: "Keep on learning new things. Learn more about computers, martial arts, gardening, whatever. Don't allow your brain to be lazy, so it becomes the home of the devil, and the name of the devil is Alzheimer."

5.4.3 Freedom or slavery: the heads or tails of possessions

The meaning of possessions has been widely researched within the context of consumer research. Possessions define consumers' social status, are used as a mark of wealth and power (Bernstein, 2000), act as an extension of the self (Belk, 1998) and support it since "our fragile sense of self needs support, and this we get

by having and possessing things” (Tuan, 1980, p. 472) because, to a large degree, we are what we have and possess (e.g., Feirstein, 1986; Rosenbaum, 1972; Tuan, 1980; van Esterick, 1986).

Materialism involves a belief that those who own coveted luxuries are happier than those who do not (Bernstein, 2000). However, in the informants’ accounts, this picture is nuanced. Possessions were seen in two different lights: as charged with freedom and as providers of slavery. Informants illustrated how goods can become vehicles for freedom and in that light, they are perceived as luxuries. An informant from Stockholm emphasized the freedom that a yacht would bring to him. Pointing at the picture, he expressed it the following way:

This is a very expensive yacht, but I find it a luxury not because it is so expensive but instead because it provides you with freedom, that’s why I think of it as a luxury. (Sven, M34, SW)

Some male informants also stressed the feeling of freedom associated to cars. The cars in their pictures were not expensive, but they symbolized luxuries in the sense that they offered the choice to potentially go anywhere. The romanticism embedded in a road trip became evident in their narratives when talking about the excitement of driving to new places, having the freedom to stop or continue as they pleased, and drive off the beaten path. This view of goods as providers of positive freedom and, consequently as luxuries, is only appreciated among male informants,

regardless the culture, which shows a strong gender difference. An informant from Sweden expressed how he would like to indulge in the luxury of enjoying the freedom provided by owning a (non-expensive) car:

*To me a Volkswagen Caravan is a luxury. It's kind of 70s and I like the aesthetics of the car and if I buy a car one day I'm not going to buy an expensive car. [...] I think that this car is a luxury because you can just go away as much as you want. [...] If I want to go with my boyfriend to the ocean we just go and we can sleep in the car and I think that it's so magic, you know? Maybe it's not a luxury like people see luxury but for me this car is a luxury. It's also been crazy with the car, you just take the car and go to see the sunset or the sunrise wherever you want and I really love this idea. [...] I don't care about Ferraris and Porsches or BMWs, for me they mean nothing. People are crazy about cars, they want to show that they have money so they buy.. but I like this car, it's big and functional and friendly, it makes you feel like going for a barbecue with your friends and funny, even if you paint it in black is not a boring car.
(Matts, M21, SW)*

This informant establishes a contrast between the conventional idea of a luxury car and his personal perception of a luxurious automobile. In this informant view, luxury is not associated with certain brands but with a certain lifestyle based on freedom and fun facilitated by a specific car. In the same line, another male informant, Guillermo (M26, SP), objectified freedom as a private jet. In his view, it is a vehicle of liberty in its broadest sense. Again, this informant rejects the luxurious symbolism

commonly associated to a private jet (status and wealth) to focus on the private jet as a provider of experiences and freedom.

Houses are also possessions which can be located in the realm of luxury when they grant freedom. Some informants stressed how the luxurious aspect of their home rested upon freedom from others' rules and freedom to make their own choices. The following informants from London elaborated on the idea of their home as a provider of freedom:

This one (picture) represents my new flat, I just signed the contract on Saturday and the reason to say that it is luxurious it is because it will be my own place. I just moved there, it's nice and convenient, close to the railway station,.. There's not much in there but it's my place! I don't have to live by someone else's rules, it's just my choice. Just being there, is a luxury, doing the dishes while looking through the window. (Glenn, M36, UK)

For me it is a luxury having your own place. Since I came here, I have been sharing a house, sharing a flat, you share a bathroom, a living room, so if you want to watch a movie you have to ask if someone is gonna watch a movie or you go to your own room. Now I rent my own house. It is important to have your own space not having to negotiate. This is my bathroom, this is my living room, I do whatever I want. If I decide to have everything immaculate, it is immaculate. (Megan, F35, UK)

Yet, houses have the power to both liberate and enslave. As it has been discussed, some informants see them as luxury goods since they might bring freedom while others considered a luxury to be free from the burden of mortgages and rejected the slavery of paying the fee every month. In this regard, an informant from Sweden stated that a luxury for her would be to start a new life, liberating herself from her current chores, responsibilities, and duties, including her mortgage (Maria, F44, SW).

Mobile phones also fit in this category, as providers of freedom and style but also commonly mentioned in informants' narratives as a "vice," "addictive," and a "source of overwhelming feelings," deeming the option of switching it off as a luxury. An informant from Germany expressed the luxury of not using her mobile phone in the following way:

*Another luxury to me is to get rid of my mobile phone during a whole day. It would be a luxury to skip the phone calls which to me, mean extra work, because it is so stressful. I work as substitute correspondent for a radio channel and also for an advertising agency and sometimes work at both companies overlaps and then I want to die.. So, being able to switch off my phone would be a true luxury.
(Sarah, F38, GE)*

Nevertheless, other informants also articulated their discourses about freedom as luxury within the domain of technology. In particular, Ivan, an informant from Sweden, also crafted his account about freedom connected to technology but with a diametrically different approach:

“This is the picture of an iPhone which is a luxury to me. I love technology and it is something basic in my life. I can go around, answer e-mails in the subway, update my calendar, organize my schedule, it gives me freedom and makes my life easier. It’s a very well designed product, it has endless functions and gives you mobility and all its functions are efficient and joyful. I also like the aesthetics, the bright colors over the black background.” (Ivar, 46M, SW)

The perception of a consumer good as a luxury is not ultimately related to the item in itself but to its usage and the feelings that it provides to the consumer. While the former account shows the luxury of experiencing negative freedom (liberating from the stress provided by the mobile phone), the later illustrates the luxury of experiencing positive freedom (license to perform certain activities and tasks on the go).

5.5 Discussion

Drawing on the empirical fieldwork consisting of phenomenological interviews using pictures to encourage informants to express their meanings of luxury, this study highlights the disruptive notion of freedom as luxury. Even though freedom has traditionally been considered as an essential human need (Galtung, 1990), some authors conceive freedom as a luxury or privilege. In Otto von Bismarck’s view, “freedom is a luxury that not every one can afford” while Martin Luther King stated that “freedom has always been an expensive thing. History is fit testimony to the

fact that freedom is rarely gained without sacrifice and self-denial” (Carson, 1998, p. 28). In this vein, Karl Marx asserts that it can be both: privilege or right: “freedom has always existed, in one way or another, sometimes only as a particular privilege, sometimes as a general right” (Marx, 1842, p. 7).

In the context of consumption, Ger and Belk (1996) posit that with the rise of materialism some consumer goods which were considered luxuries before, experience a change in their status, becoming necessities. Alternatively, Enzensberger (1996) claims that in a time of overconsumerism the essential turns into luxury. Specifically, this author suggests that the luxury of the future is connected to the essential conditions of life which will only be accessible to a privileged minority of consumers (ibid.). This is consistent with the shared view of the participants in this study who emphasized the luxury of freedom. Two different kinds of freedom were identified: liberating (freedom from) and licensing (freedom to).

Freeing oneself from work pressures, routines, economic, and social constraints, i.e., consuming time and goods without physical, social, and economic boundaries was conceived as luxury by the informants. The findings also document that luxury is represented by licensing or freedom of choice. In a system where efficiency is fostered in both leisure and work time, the unproductive expenditure of time is perceived as a luxury, but also having the autonomy to engage in activities that consumers find fulfilling. In this regard, the informants mentioned the luxury of being able to sate

their curiosity, their zest for learning, and being intellectually challenged, as well as focusing on personal growth. The state of mind consisting of feeling intellectually thirsty and being inspired to create, was particularly brought to the fore by female informants. This disruptive perspective of luxury emphasized by the informants is in line with Enzensberger's (1996) approach. He asserts that nowadays, the person who lives in luxury is the one who always has the time for doing what s/he pleases, who can decide what to do, where and with whom.

This novel view of freedom as luxury is related to a rising movement labeled "voluntary simplicity," which has emerged in response to the spiral work (earn)/consume (spend) fostered by the consumerist lifestyle (Shaw and Newholm, 2002). The search for free time is one of the reasons behind a growing body of consumers voluntarily choosing a lifestyle based upon simplicity, finding satisfaction through non-material aspects of life (Etzioni, 1998; Shaw and Newholm, 2002). Voluntary simplifiers place on the top of their priorities owning time by liberating themselves from authority (whether bosses, society, or other institutions) dictating how to use their time and what to consume (Shaw and Newholm, 2002). Voluntary simplicity advocates consuming less and values modest consumption instead of conspicuous consumption, freeing the individual from the culture of consumerism (Doherty and Etzoni, 2003). In the same vein, Elgin (1993, p. 25) defines voluntary simplicity as "living in a way that is outwardly simple and inwardly rich." On one hand, this novel view of luxury is related to riches, yet specifically to inner riches and finding satisfaction in life, rather than to

material riches. On the other hand, while traditional luxury is commonly associated with conspicuous consumption (e.g., Dubois and Duquesne, 1993; Kastanakis and Balabanis, 2014; O’Cass and McEwen, 2004; Okonkwo, 2007), indulging in the luxury of freedom may entail consuming less and focusing on inconspicuous consumption which is also a tendency gaining momentum (Eckhardt, Belk, and Wilson, 2015).

Finally, the paradox of possessions as providers of both freedom and slavery emerged from the informants’ narratives. The freedom attached to some possessions (houses, cars, private jets, and yachts) was the main reason to consider them as luxuries, mainly by male informants. They did not conceive these possessions as a means to convey messages about social status, but instead, considered a luxury the possibility of traveling or living without having to conform to others’ rules. In this vein, possessions can act as suppliers of freedom and it is in this light, that they are perceived as luxuries. On the other hand, houses were also mentioned when exemplifying the luxury of being free of mortgages, while mobile phones hold the dual power to liberate and enslave consumers.

The luxuries sketched by the informants in this study do not fit into the category of the inessential (Sekora, 1977; Sombart, 1922) neither belong to the realm of extravagant living (Davidson, 1898). Instead, they draw essential liberties. Bearing this mind, fostering the debate and dialogue about freedom as the new luxury in contemporary society appears to be an imperative necessity.

5.6 Managerial implications

The findings extend theory in the luxury consumption domain and further the theoretical perspectives of freedom, providing managers with crucial insights to understand how contemporary consumers frame luxury in terms of freedom. This view of freedom as luxury has implications for understanding certain consumer behavior practices, movements and trends and, consequently, yield critical managerial implications for companies, from both the point of view of branding management and internal marketing.

Successful companies leading the way by embracing and fostering employee freedom are obtaining very good results in terms of engagement, innovation, performance, loyalty, and employee satisfaction (Gargiulo, 2011). Freedom in the workplace allows non-traditional work schedules, working from different locations, and choosing the projects to work on. For example, Google has adopted a leading-edge approach by encouraging employee freedom through an innovative and transformative formula in the workplace, which results in better business (Bock, 2015).

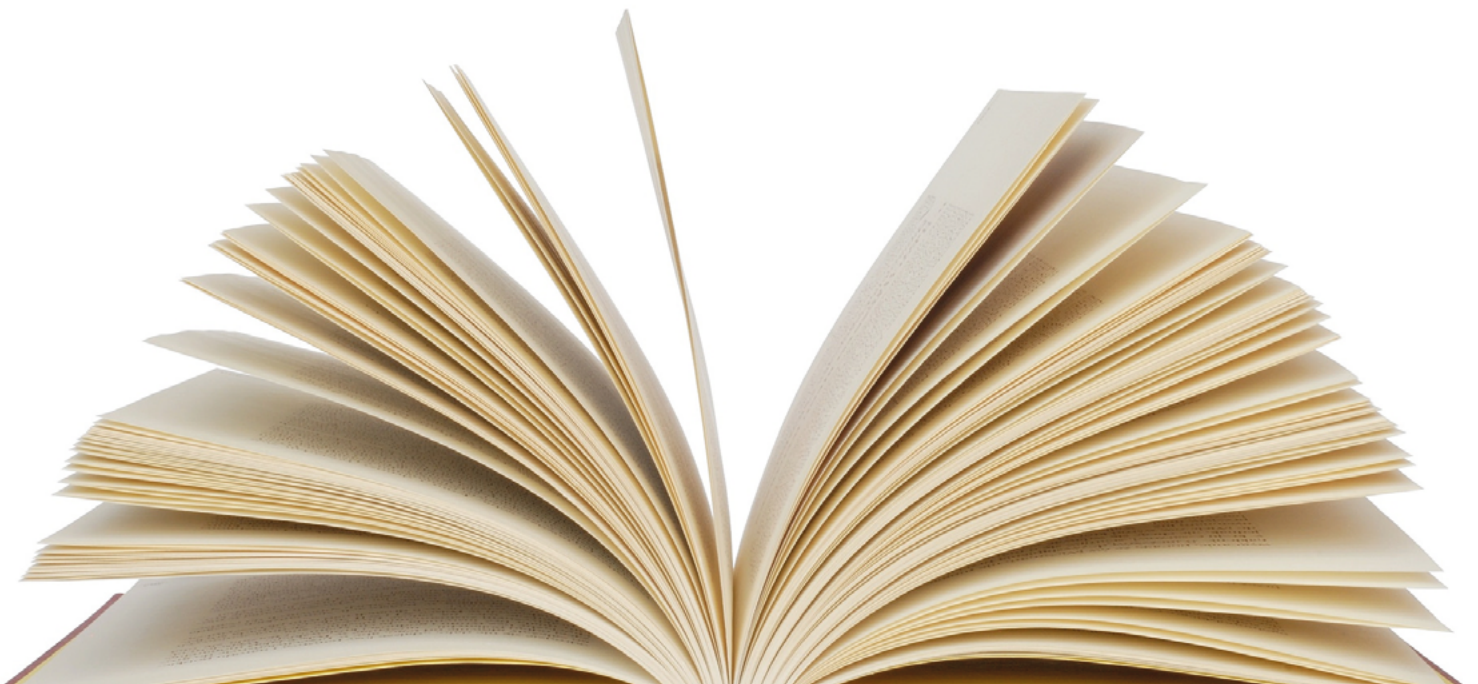
In addition, given that some consumers perceive freedom as luxury, brand managers may consider freedom as one of the pivotal elements of the brand promise. The findings show that some consumers place certain goods in the realm of luxury to the extent that they perceive these goods as providers of freedom. Bearing this

in mind, marketers may manage the brand by emphasizing freedom as a salient aspect of the brand strategy. Harley Davidson is an example of a brand achieving the status of iconic brand (Holt, 2004), by becoming a (postmodern) symbol of freedom where consumers take an active role in the co-construction of the brand experience (Schembri, 2009).

Finally, the idea of freedom from social constraints as luxury suggests that some consumers are craving for liberating themselves from the norms and restrictions dictated by the forces of the markets. This longing for freedom leads some consumers to escape the market within the market by opting for either consuming less, consuming more consciously, replacing conspicuous consumption with modest consumption, or choosing rebellious options within the consumer culture. In this regard, freedom as luxury offers opportunities for start-up companies able to deliver escapist promises to consumers who show a quest for indulging in the luxury of experiencing freedom, as well as for companies aiming at expanding their existing business portfolio, and companies that are ready for a shift by targeting consumers in pursuit of freedom.

Chapter 6

DISCUSSION &
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DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

“The pursuit of natural knowledge, the investigation of the world - mental and material - in which we live, is not a dull and spiritless affair: rather it is a voyage of adventure of the human mind, a holiday for reckless and imaginative souls.”

— Seneca

The overall purpose of this dissertation is to contribute to the field of consumer research by examining the phenomenon of luxury from a consumer perspective. The present research offers new and disruptive insights to the consumer research field, urging a multilayered redefinition of the concept of luxury. This chapter presents theorizations on luxury, which emerged across the plurality of meanings of luxury in either study 1 (philanthropic giving), study 2 (being free), or both. The contributions of the thesis from a managerial perspective and areas for further research are also presented.

Even though several authors agree about the dynamic nature of luxury, being a concept always in motion (e.g., Berry, 1994; Ferrero, 1901; Hudders, Pandelaere, and Vyncke, 2013; Kapferer, 1998), the extant literature on luxury still revolves

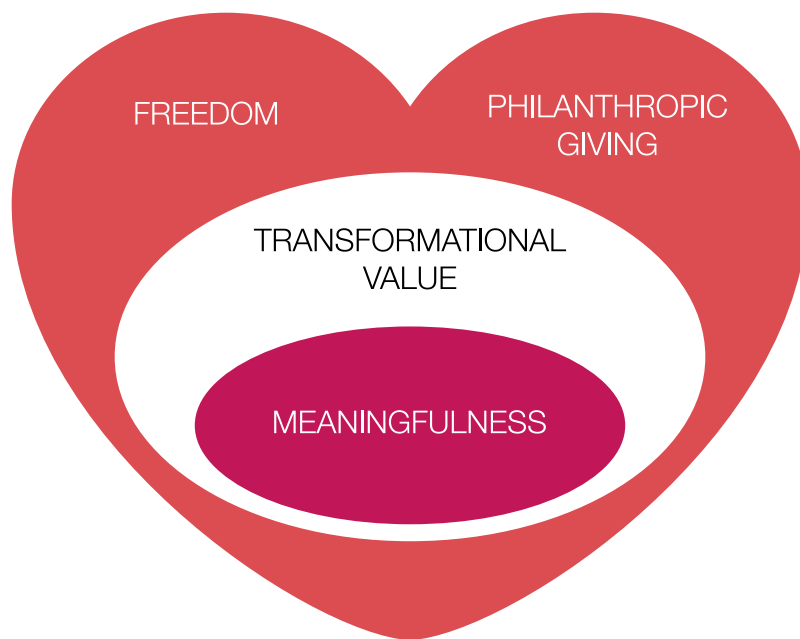
around a traditional and limited idea of luxury, understanding luxury as luxury brand consumption (e.g., Joy, Wang, Chan, Sherry, and Cui, 2014). On the other hand, several authors employ the term “new luxury” (e.g., Truong, McColl, and Kitchen, 2009; Silverstein and Fiske, 2003), but they do not offer radically new views. Instead, they present a definition of affordable luxury (or “masstige”) based on the democratization of luxury, becoming more appealing and accessible to mass market consumers. Finally, most studies about luxury continue to focus only on affluent consumers (Danziger, 2005; Dubois and Duquesne, 1993; Dubois and Laurent, 1995), traditional major luxury sectors (Chevalier and Mazzaloro, 2008; Danziger, 2005) and classical luxury brands like Louis Vuitton and Hermès (Freire, 2014), leaving outside the perspectives of non-affluent consumers, sectors beyond the archetypal industries, and concepts of luxury beyond the brand.

In order to gain understanding about luxury as a phenomenon in contemporary consumer society and address the gap in the literature, it was necessary to open the scope, taking a step back to explore the phenomenon from a wider perspective, by examining the meanings that consumers from all walks of life assign to luxury and framing the study in the CCT tradition where consumers are seen as meaning-makers (Mick and Buhl, 1992; Thompson, 1996).

By widening the focus and adopting a consumer-based perspective, this research reveals that luxury is a multilayered concept, disclosing disruptive meanings that

consumers ascribe to the idea of luxury. The previous chapters have presented the most significant meanings attributed to luxury stemming from this phenomenological exploration, setting a linkage between luxury and freedom, and between luxury and sharing. According to the results, sharing out, or philanthropic giving, holds the power to trigger significant transformations of self and others' selves, while freedom is able to release the authentic self. In addition, the notion of luxury is inextricably bound up with meaningful experiences and ultimately, rests upon the good feelings that the significant transformation of the self/selves renders. Following from this, a common core underlying the amalgam of disruptive meanings of luxury can be summarized as follows (see Figure 1):

Figure 1. Disruptive views of luxury



Conceptualizations of luxury should include luxury as experiencing significant, positive *transformations* of self and/or others, ignited by achieving *freedom* and/or *philanthropic giving*. These remarkable transformations add *meaning* to consumers' lives, yielding happier and fulfilled selves.

Thus, the exploration of the phenomenology of luxury as conceived by consumers contributes to the literature at the nexus of the field of luxury and consumer research in different ways: (a) Luxury as embedded in rationales of being free and sharing out; (b) Luxury as imbued with transformational value; (c) Luxury as infused with meaningfulness.

6.1 Luxury as embedded in rationales of being free and sharing out

Traditionally, luxury has been linked to physical goods, placing the idea of 'having' at their core (e.g. Megehee and Spake, 2012). In addition, the literature of luxury commonly approaches the study of luxury in terms of acquiring goods in the marketplace, i.e., via commodity purchase (e.g., Amatulli, Guido, and Natarajan, 2015) or the purpose of the acquisition, for example, gift-giving (Reyneke, Parent, and Berthon, 2011) and collecting (Belk, 1995). At the same time, the intersection of luxury and philanthropic giving and luxury and 'being' is under-researched, even though both rationales are fundamental in consumer research (Badje, 2009; Belk, 2010; Solomon, 2014).

The findings of this research address this gap by illustrating that the linkage between luxury and transformations of self, both in the context of giving and ‘being’, is of a different nature than in the context of ‘having’ (see Table 3).

Table 3. Luxury as embedded in rationales of having, philanthropic giving, and being free

Conceptualizations of luxury	Rationales	Rooted in	Nature of luxury
Classical	Having	Materialism Possessiveness Non-generosity Self-interest Superfluosness	Materialistic or egoistic luxury (Sombart, 1922)
	Philanthropic giving	Non-possessiveness Generosity Universalism Self-interest Meaningfulness	Idealistic or altruistic luxury (Sombart, 1922)
Disruptive	Being free	Aliveness Authenticity Materialism Dematerialization Meaningfulness	Existential luxury

When looking at luxury through the pervasive lenses of **'having,'** luxury is intimately connected to materialism. Possessiveness, non-generosity, and envy are the personality traits that according to Belk (1985) outline materialism and that can be transferred to luxury as 'having.' Sombart (1922) labeled this ubiquitous approach to luxury as "materialistic, egoistic luxury." Instead, the findings of this thesis depict an uncharted notion of luxury in stark contrast to this prevalent view. Luxury as **philanthropic giving** differs in its nature, showing features of non-possessiveness, generosity, benevolence, and universalism. This type of luxury mirrors the "idealistic or altruistic luxury" described by Sombart (1922). Nevertheless, luxury in the realm of philanthropic giving is not completely devoid of selfishness. In this vein, the findings suggest that when embedded in the sharing out rationale, luxury can combine others-interest and self-interest. In other words, luxury as philanthropic giving is anchored in both pro-social and pro-ego logics.

On a different level, the findings show that luxury is also embedded in the context of 'being' and, particularly, **'being free,'** which presents a stark contrast to the commonplace view of luxury as 'having'. According to Fromm (1978, p. 33), "having and being refer to two modes of existence, to two different kinds of orientation toward self and the world, to two different kinds of character structure the respective predominance of which determines the totality of a person's thinking, feeling, and acting." He goes on to assert that "the mode of being has at its prerequisite independence, freedom, and the presence of critical reason. [...] Only to the extent

that we decrease the mode of 'having,' that is of non-being – i.e., stop finding security and identity by clinging to what we have, by “sitting on it,” by holding onto our ego and our possessions – can the mode of being emerge” (ibid.).

Consumers perceive freedom as luxury since freedom allows them to activate the mode of 'being,' by liberating them from external constraints, decreasing the importance of 'having', and unleashing the true self. In this type of luxury, the substance ('being') triumphs over the appearance ('having'), the essence (inner) wins over social conventions (outer), and meaningfulness overcomes superfluousness.

Nevertheless, Fromm (1941) bemoans that individuals also fear to experience freedom, so they prefer to escape from it, “getting rid of our individual self either by submission to new forms of authority or by compulsive conforming to accepted patterns” (Fromm, 1941, p. 135). According to this view, consumers have renounced to their freedom and consequently, lost their individual self by complying with social norms. This would explain why regaining their true self (via freedom) can be perceived as a luxury.

Consumers find a luxury to be able to escape in terms of both time and place, engaging in different types of activities and experiences, which provide them with aliveness like learning, being in the flow, or just sitting in a café. Even though these experiences seem to be mundane, they are perceived to belong to the realm of luxury

and refer to “existential time,” which according to both Kierkegaard and Heidegger, means time for the human existence (Stambaugh, 1993). These fleeting and scarce existential escapes allow consumers the luxury of reducing the predictable monotonies of everyday life.

Whereas in the mode of ‘having,’ luxury is related to materiality and possessions, in the mode of ‘being,’ luxury can involve both dematerialization (getting rid of possessions which enslave consumers like houses via mortgages, or mobile phones via responsibilities and stress) but it can also imply materialization through possessions which grant freedom to consumers (e.g., mobile phones giving the consumer the freedom to perform certain tasks on the go).

6.2 Luxury beyond possessions: From economic value to transformational value

High value is germane to both the classical view and the disruptive notions of luxury but with a different scope. Symbolic value is at the core of the traditional understanding of luxury (e.g., Dion and Borraz, 2015; Kapferer and Bastien, 2012; Keller, 2009; Vickers and Renand, 2003; Wiedmann, Hennigs, and Siebels, 2007). The classical notion of luxury has also been associated to economic value and high price (e.g., Choi, 2003; Dubois and Paternault, 1995; Keller, 2009). Vigneron and Johnson (1999) added a more complete perspective, posing that luxury brands

offer conspicuous value, unique value, social value, hedonic value, and quality value, while Tynan, McKechnie, and Chhuon (2010) highlight the symbolic/expressive, experiential/hedonic, and relational value derived from luxury brands.

Products like diamonds, luxury apartments, and expensive yachts embody these types of value but some informants explicitly refrain from considering these goods as personal luxuries by stating that “it is no luxury for me.” Notably, the discourses about luxury in this doctoral research distill value, yet the value that emerged from the analysis of the empirical data resides in the power of transforming self and others, so it is **transformative value** rather than economic. Blocker and Barrios (2015, p. 1) define transformative value as the “social dimension of value creation which illuminates uplifting changes among individuals and collectives in the marketplace.” To be qualified as luxury, both philanthropic giving and freedom have to be able to make a remarkable contribution to the life of self and/or others, triggering substantial transformations of self and/or others.

The findings show that **philanthropic giving** is only interpreted as a luxury when it forges **transformations of self and others**. The notion of luxury emerges from giving away valuable resources (economic, cultural, and social capital) able to make a significant difference in the lives of non-kin, including the planet and future generations, which yields a transformation of self in the process. According to the consumer narratives in study 1, the idea of luxury does not lie on the money

needed to adopt a child in itself, but in the transformation of the child's life fostered by the adoption. Similarly, organic food and ecological cars can be conceived as luxuries since they lead the transformation -or at least preservation- of the planet; not because of their economic value.

Luxury as philanthropic giving takes place in a plurality of levels of others and self. First, significant contributions to the lives of distant others lead to *outward transformations* and, ultimately, to societal transformations. Second, *inward transformations* may occur, unleashing a fulfilled self who engages in meaningful and pleasurable philanthropic giving. Third, by giving, the self gets a sense of interconnectedness to humankind, yielding *onward transformations* of the philanthropic giver via a gregarious sense of self. Finally, philanthropic giving as luxury can promote *upward transformations* in the social status of the giver facilitated by showing conspicuous generosity.

Moreover, as study 2 illustrates, *freedom as luxury* is perceived as an agent able to liberate the self, driving the transformation *from the current self to the true self*. Negative freedom (Hayek, 1944) liberates the self from external restrictions (whether authority, social conventions, or economic restrictions) while positive freedom (Green, 1906) gives license to the self to pursue his/her inner desires. The informants' narratives show that *possessions* are conceived as luxuries, not because of their economic value but because of their power to liberate the self from others' authority.

For example, the luxurious aspect of owning an apartment may rest upon freeing the self from the rules that the consumer should follow if s/he shared a rental apartment, transforming an ordinary self into a free self. In the same line, the *dispossession* of certain material things can also be perceived as a luxury to the extent of liberating the self from others' authority. For example, switching off the mobile phone is described as a form of anti-consumption liberating the self from others' authority (e.g., boss), which can be perceived as a luxury. Finally, the informants find it a luxury to get the *license* to spend their time in a meaningful way. It is when they escape from economic and social restrictions and get the license to pursue their inner desires that the transition from the current self to the authentic self takes place.

Whereas in the mode of 'having,' certain products and valued brands are seen as facilitators of the transformation from the current self to the ideal self (Belk, 2003; Hoppe et al., 2009), in the mode of 'being,' the transition from the current self to the authentic self is enhanced by freedom. It is when the consumer relinquishes certain types of socially-conditioned consumption, that the transformation from the actual self to the authentic self is forged. Similarly, 'giving' valuable philanthropic gifts to distant others triggers not only significant transformations of non-related others but also on the self. These findings contribute to self-signaling theory, which deems that consumers infer what kind of person they are, based on their consumption practices (Dhar and Wertenbroch, 2012), by showing that dispossession (facilitated by freedom and giving) also plays a key role in defining the consumer self.

Ashforth (2001) avers that self-transformations involve a change in the behavior of the individual within a particular social system. Philanthropic giving and experiencing freedom drive the transformations portrayed in this dissertation. Megehee, Ko, and Belk (2016) outline a five-dimensional framework, classifying transformations as micro/macro; private/public; volitional/imposed; conscious/non-conscious; ephemeral/permanent. According to this framework, the type of transformations underlying the notions of luxury presented in this thesis are micro but have the potential to progress to macro. They can also be characterized as private, volitional, conscious, and permanent. These transformations go beyond the appearance to permeate the inner self. In Zukav's (1990) view, the inner self is the invisible realm in which the origins of the individual's deeper understanding are located.

The idea that transformational value is quintessential in the disruptive perspectives of luxury is in line with Gilmore and Pine's (2009) view, who pose that transformational value is the ultimate value surpassing the economic value. They take their argument further, placing meaningfulness at the core of consumers' transformations. Thus, consumers experience transformations through meaningful experiences, which conform to their self-image. Along the same lines, meaning also plays a crucial role in the consumer-based notion of luxury that emerged from the empirical data in this doctoral research.

6.3 Luxury and meaningfulness: Back to basics

Meaning and purpose impregnate the accounts on luxury portrayed in this dissertation. As illustrated in Figure 2, meaningfulness permeates the novel views of luxury as philanthropic giving and freedom.

Figure 2. Meaningfulness in the disruptive views of luxury



According to the findings, the meaningfulness of *philanthropic giving as luxury* resides in consumers' contribution to a greater purpose by igniting a significant transformation in the lives of non-kin and the planet. This is consistent with previous research about *pro-social* and *pro-environmental* behavior showing that consumers conceive as meaningful the choices that are in accordance with their social identity (Goldstein, Cialdini, and Griskevicius, 2008). At the same time, philanthropic giving provides the giver with purpose and *connection to humankind*. Not in vein, philanthropy is defined as "the mechanism through which people express their

humanitarian impulses, and confirm their membership of a wider society” (Lloyd, 2004, p. 11). Along the same lines, Binay, Brace-Govan, and Oppewal’s (2011) research confirms that interconnectedness and sharing are sources of meaning.

Moreover, according to the findings, the meaningfulness of ***freedom as luxury*** resides in two domains: (1) *liberating* the self from external constraints, whether economic restrictions or social norms, allowing the authentic self to emerge (negative freedom) and (2) giving *license* to the self to pursue his/her inner desires (positive freedom).

Negative freedom brings meaning to consumers to the degree that it permits them to remove the social conditioning layers, revealing the *authentic self* as result. Consumers have voluntarily accepted to follow rules from different sources of authority, expectations from their reference group, and conventions from society advocating how to behave, how to use their work time and leisure time, and what and how to consume in order to signal how they fit in the social structure (Todd, 2011). The meaningful experience of uncovering the authentic self through the emancipation of all this unwanted but accepted impositions can be perceived as a luxury. It is only when individuals are in touch with their inner self that they act authentically (Kale, 2004). This is in line with previous research, which traces the connection between meaning and self-definition (Bhattacharjee and Mogilner, 2014).

Positive freedom adds meaning to the lives of consumers by providing them with choices of personal growth. Rather than choice of object acquisition, these choices of positive freedom involve engaging actively in activities supporting informants' *self-actualization*, whether by learning and developing, being helpful to others, or by giving free rein to their creative desires, both in the working time (time to produce) and in the leisure time (time to consume). In the same vein, previous research suggests that active engagement in goal-directed activities brings *meaning* to the individual (Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). In addition, some consumers also show a quest for indulging in the *luxury of 'being'* or as Fromm (1978, p. 33) framed it, "the being mode of existence" in stark contrast to 'having' and 'appearing'. In line with this, certain choices with freedom at their core, provide meaning by encouraging simple and more sustainable lifestyles, liberating consumers from some of the tyrannies of the society. Thus, a growing body of consumers pursue the luxury of freedom, by opting for "downshifting" (Schor, 1998) and "voluntary simplicity" (Elgin and Mitchell, 1977). In this regard, voluntary simplicity entails "living in a way that it is outwardly simple and inwardly rich" (Elgin, 1981, p. 25). Similarly, Alexander (2011) avers that voluntary simplicity ushers into a deeper and more meaningful way of living from an existential and/or spiritual perspective.

Finally, the findings suggest that luxury can be perceived as being infused with meaningfulness due to its ability to foster feelings of *well-being* which depart from the pleasure of having and consuming. Informants referred to the positive emotions

released while engaging in meaningful experiences. For example, they mentioned happiness, joy, making other people happy, feeling good, feeling better, feeling useful, feeling love and loved or feeling fulfilled. In sum, indulging in the luxury of philanthropic giving and/or experiencing freedom (positive and negative) leaves the consumer with a feeling of well-being. This finding is consistent with Seligman's (2002) research, proposing a life of meaning as a pathway to achieve true happiness.

Well-being is connected to the idea of luxury whether from a classical perspective or from a disruptive approach. However, the nature of well-being associated to luxury is essentially different. Displaying status and wealth is germane to the traditional concept of luxury, which is connected to hedonic well-being. Instead, the disruptive views of philanthropic giving and being free as luxuries are bound up with fulfillment, deep satisfaction, and happiness, i.e., eudaimonic well-being. Thus, the findings of this doctoral dissertation complement the literature on luxury as hedonic consumption (e.g., Tsai, 2005; Vigneron and Johnson, 1999) by adding an eudaimonic dimension rooted in the idea of sharing out and freedom as luxuries.

In sum, findings of study 1 and 2 contribute to the important but scarce body of research addressing meaning beyond possessions, which according to Richins (1999) is scant due to a lack of interest on the meanings of "not possessing." However, the results of this research confirm the idea that post-materialism is gaining momentum (Inglehart, 1981). In addition, the luxury of achieving meaning beyond

possessions highlights the relevance of meaningfulness in the context of consumer research, which has recently been acknowledged by the Journal of Consumer Research, through the curation “Meaningful Choice” by Jennifer Aaker (2014).

6.4 Future research and managerial implications

This doctoral research has presented a plurality of meanings encapsulated in the notion of luxury, according to contemporary consumers in the European consumptionscape. Future research might address a similar phenomenology beyond the European milieu. Bearing in mind that the meaning of luxury depends on the context and situation (Hennigs, Wiedmann, Klarmann, and Behrens, 2013), and that culture influences human behavior in different ways (Craig and Douglas, 2006), an exploration of the meaning of luxury in a different cultural context, for example, Asia and South America, might provide interesting insights about the perception of luxury in different cultural settings, uncovering the cultural layers underlying the luxury phenomenon. Likewise, gaining understanding about the notion of luxury in developing countries may illuminate new approaches in order to complete the panoramic picture of the idea of luxury on a global scale.

In this dissertation, meaningfulness has stood out as a central theme across the multiple narratives about luxury. Even though some studies have addressed the search for meaning in the marketplace (e.g., Tian and Belk, 2006) and outside the

consumerist culture (e.g., Binay, Brace-Govan, and Oppewal, 2011), additional research is needed to address how consumers' quest for meaning drives them to indulge in the luxury of engaging in meaning-laden experiences both inside and outside the consumer society.

The findings have built understanding of the diversity of transformations that consumers conceive as luxury. Transformations of self and others via philanthropic giving and freedom (involving both possession and dispossession) have been reported as luxuries. The study of the luxury of liberating the authentic self through austerity requires additional attention by consumer researchers. In this regard, consumers interested in personal growth as a pathway to the transformation of self are more inclined to adopt frugal consumption patterns (Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). For example, the Omega Institute offers consumers the luxury of unveiling their authentic selves in ascetic retreats. Austerity is the new luxury according to Heyman (2015), who cites the words of a consumer attending the retreat offered by the Omega Institute: "It's not about who you know or what you're wearing. It's about escaping that regimented, masky, label-driven consumerist culture" (ibid., p. 1). Austere proposals like this one, offer to traditional luxury consumers and newcomers an escape from the consumer society within the consumer society. Asceticism runs afoul with the traditional idea of luxury anchored in conspicuousness, but not with the disruptive view of luxury as transformation of self presented in this thesis. In this regard, the findings reveal that consumers pursuing the luxury of freedom may

perform “burning man” rituals (Kozinets, 2002). Further research into the ritualistic dimensions of indulging in the luxury of escaping the market within the market, might elucidate interesting insights about rebellious consumption practices in consumer society.

This research has addressed consumers’ meanings of luxury but it would be also desirable to explore how companies construct the notion of luxury in their communication efforts, and to what extent the business world is adopting the disruptive views of luxury depicted in this doctoral dissertation. In this regard, philanthropreneurship is a movement gaining momentum, which is aligned with the meaning of luxury as philanthropic giving. In addition, an investigation on how companies incorporate transformational value as part of their core values, would fill a gap in knowledge about this type of value that according to Gilmore and Pine (2009, p. 9) can be regarded as the “fifth and final economic offering in the progression of economic value, occurring when companies use experiences as in the phrase - life-transforming experiences to guide customers to change.”

Managerial implications of luxury as philanthropic giving have been presented in Chapter 4, emphasizing how companies, non-profit organizations, educational institutions, and consumer society would benefit from embracing philanthropy. Consumers and employees will show a preference and engage with companies contributing significantly to altruistic causes and co-creating societal change.

By considering philanthropy as an essential aspect of the corporate philosophy, companies replace corporate social responsibility with *collective* social responsibility, fostering a humanistic and life-sustaining society. On the other hand, as depicted in Chapter 5, the conceptualization of freedom as luxury derives managerial implications from both the internal marketing view and the brand management perspective. In this vein, managers may consider freedom as a pivotal element at the core of the corporate strategy, playing a crucial role in the design of employee programs and/or as part of the DNA of the brand strategy. Finally, freedom as luxury from the system leads to new trends in consumption, linked to frugality, conscious consumption, and emancipatory practices within the consumer culture, shaping opportunities for companies that align with these values.

Chapter 7

DISCUSIÓN Y
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SIONES**



DISCUSIÓN Y CONCLUSIONES

“La búsqueda del conocimiento natural, la investigación del mundo – mental y material – en el que vivimos, no es un asunto aburrido y exánime: se trata, en cambio, de una aventura de la mente humana, unas vacaciones para almas temerarias e imaginativas.”

— Seneca

El objetivo principal de esta tesis doctoral es realizar una contribución en el ámbito del estudio del comportamiento del consumidor mediante la investigación del fenómeno del lujo desde la perspectiva del consumidor. La presente investigación ofrece nuevas y disruptivas perspectivas en el contexto de la investigación del consumidor, poniendo de manifiesto la necesidad de proceder a una re-definición del concepto de lujo. En este capítulo se presentan distintos aspectos clave para una re-conceptualización del fenómeno del lujo, derivados de la pluralidad de significados asociados al lujo como filantropía (estudio 1), como libertad (estudio 2) o como ambos. Las aportaciones de esta tesis desde la perspectiva de la gestión empresarial, así como las áreas en las que desarrollar futuras investigaciones también se presentan en este capítulo.

A pesar de que distintos autores están de acuerdo en afirmar el carácter dinámico del lujo, como un concepto en permanente evolución (Berry, 1994; Ferrero, 1901; Hudders, Pandelaere, y Vyncke, 2013; Kapferer, 1998), la literatura existente sobre la noción del lujo gira en torno a una conceptualización tradicional y limitada, estableciendo una equivalencia entre lujo y consumo de marcas de lujo (e.g., Joy, Wang, Chan, Sherry, y Cui, 2014). Por otra parte, numerosos autores emplean el término “nuevo lujo” (Truong, McColl y Kitchen, 2009; Silverstein y Fiske, 2003), pero no ofrecen perspectivas radicalmente nuevas en torno a este fenómeno. En cambio, presentan una definición de lujo asequible (o “masstige”), basado en la democratización de este fenómeno, es decir, en un lujo más asequible y atractivo para los mercados masivos. Finalmente, la mayoría de las investigaciones sobre el lujo estudian únicamente a consumidores pudientes (Danziger, 2005; Dubois y Duquesne, 1993; Dubois y Laurent, 1995), se centran en los sectores tradicionales del lujo (Chevalier y Mazzaloro, 2008; Danziger, 2005) y en marcas de lujo clásicas como Louis Vuitton y Hermès (Freire, 2014), dejando de lado el estudio de consumidores menos pudientes, sectores más allá de los arquetípicos, y conceptos de lujo diferentes a los relacionados con la marca.

Con el objetivo de avanzar en el conocimiento del lujo en la sociedad de consumo contemporánea y llenar el vacío existente en la literatura académica, se consideró necesario ampliar el enfoque desde el que explorar el fenómeno del lujo, investigando el significado que todo tipo de consumidores asignan al lujo, enmarcando el estudio

en la tradición denominada CCT (Consumer Culture Theory, Teoría de la Cultura de Consumo) donde los consumidores son vistos como creadores de significado (Mick y Buhl, 1992; Thompson, 1996).

El estudio del fenómeno del lujo desde una perspectiva amplia y orientada hacia el consumidor, desvela que el lujo es un concepto que presenta múltiples facetas, evidenciando significados disruptivos que los consumidores atribuyen a la noción de lujo. Los capítulos previos han presentado los significados más representativos que los consumidores asocian con la idea de lujo derivados de la investigación fenomenológica llevada a cabo, estableciendo un nexo entre lujo y libertad y entre lujo y filantropía. De acuerdo con los resultados de esta investigación doctoral, la filantropía tiene el poder de generar transformaciones tanto en la propia persona como en otras personas fuera del círculo de la familia y amigos, mientras que la libertad puede desencadenar transformaciones personales al liberar el “yo” auténtico. Asimismo, el concepto de lujo está indisolublemente unido a experiencias cargadas de sentido y, en último lugar, descansa sobre la sensación de bienestar que las transformaciones significativas tanto del “yo” como de otros, generan. A continuación se resume el núcleo común identificado en la plétora de significados disruptivos de lujo (ver Figura 1):

Figura 1. Perspectivas disruptivas sobre el lujo



Las conceptualizaciones del lujo deberían incluir *transformaciones* significativas y positivas de la propia persona y de otras personas, desencadenadas por el logro de la *libertad* y/o el ejercicio de la *filantropía*. Estas transformaciones extraordinarias aportan *sentido* a la vida de los consumidores, lo cual se traduce en consumidores más felices y satisfechos.

Así, la investigación de la fenomenología del lujo desde la perspectiva del consumidor contribuye al estudio del campo de conocimiento situado en la intersección entre el lujo y el comportamiento del consumidor de distintas formas: (a) El fenómeno del lujo está integrado en el paradigma de compartir y de ser libre; (b) El fenómeno del lujo está imbuido de valor transformacional; (c) El fenómeno del lujo está impregnado con sentido.

7.1 Lujo integrado en los paradigmas de compartir y de ser libre

Tradicionalmente, el lujo ha sido asociado con bienes físicos, situando la idea de ‘tener’ en el núcleo del concepto (Megehee y Spake, 2012). Además, la literatura sobre el lujo habitualmente se centra en aproximaciones al estudio de este fenómeno en términos de adquisición de bienes, mediante la compra de productos (Amatulli, Guido, y Natarajan, 2015), o centrándose en el objetivo de la adquisición, por ejemplo, con el propósito de hacer un regalo (Reyneke, Parent, y Berthon, 2011) o con la motivación del coleccionismo (Belk, 1995). Al mismo tiempo, el estudio de la intersección entre lujo y filantropía y lujo y ‘ser’ no ha sido suficientemente investigado, a pesar de que tanto el paradigma de compartir como de ‘ser’ son fundamentales en la investigación del consumidor (Badje, 2009; Belk, 2010; Solomon, 2014).

Los resultados de esta investigación contribuyen a llenar este vacío en la literatura académica, ilustrando que el fenómeno del lujo tanto en el contexto de la filantropía como en el ámbito de la libertad, tiene una naturaleza distinta a la que caracteriza el lujo dentro del paradigma basado en ‘tener’ (ver Tabla 3).

Tabla 3. Lujo integrado en los paradigmas de tener, compartir (filantropía) y ser (libertad)

Conceptualización del lujo	Paradigma	Basado en	Naturaleza del lujo
Clásica	Tener	Materialismo Posesividad Falta de generosidad Interés por uno mismo Superfluidad	Lujo materialista o egoísta (Sombart, 1922)
	Compartir (filantropía)	Carencia de posesividad Generosidad Universalismo Interés en uno mismo Sentido	Lujo idealista o altruista (Sombart, 1922)
Disruptivas	Ser (libertad)	Vivacidad Autenticidad Materialismo Desmaterialización Sentido	Lujo existencial

Cuando se estudia el lujo a través de la visión generalizada basada en ‘tener,’ el lujo está íntimamente ligado al materialismo. Posesividad, carencia de generosidad, y envidia son las características personales que, según Belk (1985) perfilan el materialismo y que pueden ser transferidas al concepto de lujo basado en ‘tener.’ Sombart (1922) definió este enfoque ubicuo como “lujo materialista y egoísta”. Sin embargo, los resultados de esta tesis describen un concepto de lujo inexplorado

que contrasta con esta visión generalizada. El lujo como **filantropía** difiere en cuanto a su naturaleza, mostrando características como la carencia de posesividad, generosidad, benevolencia, y universalismo. Este tipo de lujo se asimila con el “lujo idealista o altruista” descrito por Sombart (1922). No obstante, el lujo en el contexto de la filantropía no está totalmente desprovisto de egoísmo. En este sentido, los resultados de esta investigación sugieren que cuando el lujo está integrado en el paradigma de ‘compartir’, puede combinar tanto interés en uno mismo (egoísmo), como interés en otros (universalismo). En otras palabras, el lujo como filantropía está integrado tanto en una lógica pro-social como en una lógica pro-ego.

En un nivel diferente, los resultados también muestran que el lujo puede estar integrado en el contexto de ‘ser’ y, particularmente, **ser libre**, lo cual contrasta con la perspectiva habitual del lujo basada en ‘tener’. Según Fromm (1978, p. 33), “tener y ser se refieren a dos modos de existencia, a dos tipos diferentes de orientación hacia el ‘yo’ y hacia el mundo, a dos tipos diferentes de estructura de carácter, cuya respectiva predominancia determina la totalidad del pensamiento, sentimiento y forma de actuar de una persona”. Fromm continúa su disertación, aseverando que “el modo de ser tiene como pre-requisito la independencia, la libertad, y la presencia de la razón crítica. [...] Sólo en la medida en que reduzcamos el modo de tener, que significa no-ser – es decir, que dejemos de encontrar seguridad e identidad en aferrarnos a lo que tenemos, ‘sentándonos sobre ello’, conservando nuestro ego y nuestras posesiones – solo así puede emerger el modo de ser” (ibid.).

Los consumidores perciben la libertad como un lujo ya que la libertad les permite activar el modo de 'ser', liberándoles de restricciones externas, reduciendo la importancia de 'tener', y revelando el "yo" verdadero. En este tipo de lujo, la sustancia ('ser') triunfa sobre la apariencia ('tener'), la esencia (lo interior) vence a las convenciones sociales (lo exterior), y el sentido supera a la superfluidad.

No obstante, Fromm (1941) se lamenta de que los individuos temen experimentar libertad y, por ello, prefieren escapar de ella, "deshaciéndose de su "yo" individual ya sea mediante el sometimiento a nuevas formas de autoridad o conformando de forma compulsiva con modelos aceptados" (ibid., p. 135). De acuerdo con esta perspectiva, los consumidores han renunciado a su libertad y, consecuentemente, han perdido su "yo" individual mediante la aceptación de las normas sociales. Esto explicaría por qué recuperar el verdadero "yo" (a través de la libertad) puede ser percibido como un lujo.

Los consumidores perciben como un lujo la posibilidad de escapar tanto en términos de tiempo como de espacio, involucrándose en diferentes tipos de actividades y experiencias que les proporcionan vivencias como aprender, experimentar 'flujos', o simplemente 'ser'. A pesar de que estas experiencias pueden parecer mundanas, son percibidas como experiencias lujosas ya que hacen referencia al "tiempo existencial", que según Kierkegaard y Heidegger, significa el tiempo para la existencia humana (Stambaugh, 1993). Estos momentos de escapismo existencial

son fugaces y permiten a los consumidores el lujo de reducir las predecibles monotonías de su vida diaria.

Mientras que en el modo de 'tener', el lujo se relaciona con materialismo y posesiones, en el modo de 'ser', el lujo puede implicar tanto desmaterialización (liberándose de posesiones que esclavizan a los consumidores como casas a través de hipotecas, o teléfonos móviles vía responsabilidades y stress), pero puede implicar también materialismo mediante posesiones que aportan libertad a los consumidores (por ejemplo, teléfonos móviles que proporcionan al consumidor la posibilidad de realizar determinadas tareas mientras está en movimiento).

7.2 Lujo más allá de las posesiones: del valor económico al valor transformacional

El valor elevado es inherente tanto a la visión clásica del lujo como a la visión disruptiva pero con un enfoque diferente. El valor simbólico se sitúa en el centro del enfoque tradicional del lujo (Dion y Borraz, 2015; Kapferer y Bastien, 2012; Keller, 2009; Vickers y Renand, 2003; Wiedmann, Hennigs, y Siebels, 2007). La idea clásica del lujo también ha sido asociada con valor económico y precio elevado (Choi, 2003; Dubois y Paternault, 1995; Keller, 2009). Vigneron y Johnson (1999) aportan una perspectiva más completa, al considerar que las marcas de lujo ofrecen valor conspicuo, valor único, valor social, valor hedónico, y valor en relación

con la calidad, mientras que Tynan, McKechnie, y Chhuon (2009) destacan el valor simbólico/expresivo, experiencial/hedónico y relacional derivado de las marcas de lujo.

Productos como diamantes, apartamentos de lujo, y yates incorporan estos tipos de valor pero los participantes en esta investigación, explícitamente rechazan considerar estos bienes como lujo desde su punto de vista, afirmando que “no es un lujo para mí”. No obstante, los discursos sobre lujo presentados en esta investigación doctoral destilan valor. El valor que subyace en el análisis empírico de las narrativas de los consumidores reside en el poder de transformar tanto al consumidor como a otros consumidores. Se trata, por tanto, de un **valor transformacional** en lugar de económico. Blocker y Barrios (2015, p. 1) definen el valor transformacional como la “dimensión social del valor de creación que ilumina cambios edificantes en los individuos y colectivos en el contexto del mercado”. Para ser calificados como lujo, tanto la filantropía como la libertad deben ser capaces de realizar notables contribuciones tanto a nivel personal como en otras personas, provocando transformaciones sustanciales tanto en el propio “yo” como en el “yo” de otras personas.

Los resultados muestran que la **filantropía** es solamente interpretada como un lujo cuando forja transformaciones del donante y de los receptores. La noción del lujo surge de contribuir con valiosos recursos (capital económico, cultural, y social)

capaz de fomentar una diferencia significativa en la vida de otras personas (fuera del círculo de familia y amigos), incluyendo el planeta y futuras generaciones, lo cual tiene como resultado una transformación del propio donante en el proceso. Según los discursos sobre el lujo presentados en el estudio 1, la idea del lujo no se relaciona con el dinero que se necesita para adoptar a un niño, sino con la transformación en la vida del niño producida como consecuencia de la adopción. De igual forma, la comida orgánica y los coches ecológicos pueden ser concebidos como lujos, no por su valor económico, sino por la transformación –o al menos preservación- del planeta que conllevan.

El lujo como filantropía tiene lugar en una pluralidad de niveles del donante y de los receptores. En primer lugar, contribuciones significativas a las vidas de personas fuera del círculo de familia y amigos conllevan *transformaciones hacia afuera* que pueden desencadenar transformaciones sociales. En segundo lugar, también pueden ocurrir *transformaciones internas*, resultando en un donante satisfecho que se implica en placenteras y significativas actividades filantrópicas. En tercer lugar, mediante la filantropía, el donante consigue un sentido de interconexión con la humanidad, lo cual se traduce en *transformaciones hacia adelante* del donante a través de un sentido del “yo” gregario. Finalmente, la filantropía como lujo puede promover *transformaciones hacia arriba*, elevando el estatus social del donante quien puede mostrar una generosidad conspicua.

Asimismo, la **libertad como lujo**, se percibe como un agente capaz de liberar el “yo” verdadero, fomentando la *transformación desde el “yo” actual hasta el “yo” auténtico*. La libertad negativa (Hayek, 1944) libera al consumidor de restricciones externas (autoridad, convenciones sociales o restricciones económicas), mientras que la libertad positiva (Green, 1906) da licencia al consumidor para perseguir sus propios deseos internos. Las narrativas de los participantes muestran que las **posesiones** son concebidas como lujos, no por su valor económico, sino por su poder de liberar al consumidor de la autoridad de otros. Por ejemplo, el aspecto lujoso de poseer un apartamento puede estar relacionado con la liberación que supone no tener que vivir limitado por las reglas de otras personas en caso de compartir apartamento, propiciando la transformación del “yo” ordinario, en un “yo” libre. En la misma línea, la **desposesión** de ciertas posesiones materiales puede ser percibida como un lujo en el sentido de que libera al consumidor de la autoridad de otros. Por ejemplo, apagar el teléfono móvil supone una forma de anti-consumo que libera al consumidor de la autoridad de otros (por ejemplo, del jefe) que puede ser concebida como un lujo. Finalmente, los participantes conciben como un lujo tener licencia para usar su tiempo de una forma significativa. Cuando los consumidores se liberan de restricciones económicas y sociales y obtienen licencia para perseguir sus deseos internos, se produce la transición desde el “yo” actual al “yo” auténtico.

Mientras que en el modo de ‘tener,’ ciertos productos y marcas valiosos son vistos como facilitadores de la transformaciones desde el “yo” actual al ideal (Belk, 2003;

Hoppe et al., 2009), en el modo de 'ser', la transición desde el "yo" actual al "yo" auténtico es facilitada por la libertad. Cuando el consumidor rechaza ciertos tipos de consumo socialmente condicionados, se forja la transformación desde el "yo" actual al "yo" auténtico. Asimismo, 'contribuyendo' con valiosas aportaciones filantrópicas a la vida de personas fuera del círculo familiar y de amigos, se fomentan no sólo transformaciones significativas en los receptores sino también en el propio donante. Estos resultados contribuyen a la teoría de la señalización que considera que los consumidores infieren qué tipo de persona son, basándose en sus propias prácticas de consumo (Dhar y Wertenbroch, 2012), demostrando que la desposesión (facilitada por la libertad y la filantropía) también juega un papel crucial en la definición de la identidad del consumidor.

Ashforth (2001) asevera que las transformaciones personales implican un cambio en el comportamiento del individuo dentro de un particular sistema social. La filantropía y la libertad facilitan las transformaciones presentadas en esta tesis doctoral. Megehee, Ko y Belk (2016) perfilan una estructura con cinco dimensiones, clasificando las transformaciones como micro/macro; privadas/públicas; voluntarias/impuestas; conscientes/inconscientes; efímeras/permanentes. De acuerdo con esta estructura, el tipo de transformaciones relacionadas con las nociones de lujo presentadas en esta tesis son micro pero tienen el potencial de convertirse en macro. También pueden ser caracterizadas como privadas, voluntarias, conscientes y permanentes. Estas transformaciones van más allá de la apariencia para impregnar el "yo" interno.

Según Zukav (1990), el “yo” interno es el dominio invisible en el cual se localizan los orígenes de la comprensión más profunda del individuo.

La idea de que el valor transformacional es esencial en las perspectivas disruptivas de lujo es consistente con la visión de Gilmore y Pine (2009), quienes afirman que el valor transformacional es el valor más importante, sobrepasando al valor económico. Estos autores desarrollan su argumento, situando el sentido de la vida en el núcleo de las transformaciones. Así, los consumidores experimentan transformaciones generadas por experiencias cargadas de sentido que son coherentes con la imagen que tienen de sí mismos. Finalmente, es necesario destacar que el sentido de la vida también desempeña un papel crucial en la noción de lujo desde el punto de vista del consumidor que ha surgido como consecuencia del estudio empírico llevado a cabo en esta investigación doctoral.

7.3 Lujo y sentido de la vida: vuelta a lo básico

El sentido de la vida impregna las narrativas sobre el lujo que se recogen en esta investigación doctoral. Como se ilustra en la Figura 2, el sentido de la vida forma parte de la esencia de las nociones de lujo como filantropía y libertad.

Figura 2. Sentido de la vida en las visiones disruptivas de lujo



De acuerdo con los resultados, el sentido de la vida dentro de la visión de **filantropía como lujo**, reside en la contribución de los consumidores al bien común, mediante las transformaciones significativas que potencian en las personas receptoras de sus acciones filantrópicas y en el planeta. Este resultado es consistente con investigaciones previas sobre el comportamiento *pro-social* y *pro-entorno* que sugiere que los consumidores perciben las opciones que son coherentes con su identidad social como opciones con sentido (Goldstein, Cialdini, y Griskevicius, 2008).

Asimismo, la filantropía proporciona al donante una sensación de *conexión con la humanidad*. No en vano, la filantropía se define como “el mecanismo a través del

cual las personas expresan sus impulsos humanitarios y confirman su pertenencia a una sociedad más amplia” (Lloyd, 2004, p. 11). En la misma línea se pronuncian Binay, Brace-Govan, y Oppewal (2011) quienes sostienen que la sensación de interconexión derivada de compartir se erige en una fuente de sentido en la vida.

Además, de acuerdo con los resultados, el sentido de la vida en la perspectiva de la **libertad como lujo** reside en dos aspectos: (1) la liberación de restricciones externas, ya sean restricciones económicas o normas sociales, permitiendo que el “yo” auténtico emerja (libertad negativa) y, (2) la licencia para perseguir los propios deseos internos (libertad positiva).

La libertad negativa aporta sentido a la vida de los consumidores en el sentido de que les permite deshacerse de su condicionamiento social, revelando el “yo” **auténtico** como resultado. Los consumidores han aceptado voluntariamente seguir las reglas dictadas por distintas fuentes de autoridad, expectativas procedentes de su grupo de referencia, y convenciones sociales aconsejando cómo comportarse, cómo usar su tiempo de trabajo y de ocio y qué y cómo consumir, con el objetivo de mostrar cómo encajan en la estructura social (Todd, 2011). Así, el hecho de desenmascarar el “yo” auténtico a través de la emancipación de todas estas imposiciones aceptadas aunque indeseadas, puede ser percibido como un lujo. En este sentido, cuando los individuos entran en contacto con su “yo” interior, es cuando actúan auténticamente (Kale, 2004). Esta apreciación es coherente con

una investigación previa centrada en la conexión entre sentido de la vida y auto-definición (Bhattacharjee y Mogilner, 2014).

La libertad positiva aporta sentido a las vidas de los consumidores en la medida en que les proporciona opciones para su desarrollo personal. En lugar de opciones relacionadas con la adquisición de objetos, las opciones relacionadas con la libertad positiva incluyen implicarse activamente en actividades que apoyan la **auto-realización** de los consumidores, ya sea aprendiendo, fomentando su desarrollo intelectual, ayudando a otras personas, o dando rienda suelta a sus deseos creativos, tanto durante el tiempo dedicado al trabajo (tiempo para producir), como en el tiempo de ocio (tiempo para consumir). En la misma línea, investigaciones previas sugieren que implicarse activamente en actividades dirigidas a la consecución de objetivos concretos aporta sentido al individuo (Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). Además, algunos consumidores muestran interés por experimentar el *lujo de 'ser'* o como Fromm (1978, p. 33) lo ha denominado, “el modo de ser de la existencia” en contraste con el modo de ‘tener’ y ‘aparentar’. En la misma línea, determinadas opciones que tienen la libertad como esencia, proporcionan sentido mediante la adopción de estilos de vida más simples y sostenibles, liberando a los consumidores de algunas de las tiranías de la sociedad de consumo. Así, un número creciente de consumidores persigue el lujo de la libertad, eligiendo la opción de “downshifting” (o ralentización) (Schor, 1998) o la “simplicidad voluntaria” (Elgin y Mitchell, 1977). En este sentido, la simplicidad voluntaria conlleva “vivir de una forma que es externamente simple e

internamente rica” (Elgin, 1981, p. 25). En la misma línea, Alexander (2011) sostiene que la simplicidad voluntaria lleva a una forma de vida más profunda y con mayor sentido desde una perspectiva existencial y/o espiritual.

Finalmente, los resultados sugieren que el sentido de la vida impregna estas nuevas perspectivas del lujo debido a su habilidad para fomentar *bienestar*, distanciándose del placer de tener y consumir. Los participantes en el estudio se refirieron a las emociones positivas experimentadas como consecuencia de implicarse en experiencias que aportan sentido a sus vidas. Por ejemplo, mencionaron felicidad, alegría, hacer feliz a otras personas, sentirse bien, sentirse útiles, sentir amor, o sentirse realizado. En resumen, experimentar el lujo de la filantropía así como el lujo de la libertad (positiva y negativa) proporciona al consumidor una sensación de bienestar. Este resultado se alinea con la investigación de Seligman (2002), quien propone una vida llena de sentido como una vía para conseguir auténtica felicidad.

El bienestar está ligado a la idea de lujo, tanto desde una perspectiva clásica como desde un enfoque disruptivo. No obstante, la naturaleza del bienestar varía en función del enfoque. La ostentación de estatus y riqueza está inherentemente unida al concepto tradicional del lujo, conectado con el bienestar hedónico. En cambio, las visiones disruptivas del lujo como filantropía y libertad están relacionadas con plenitud, satisfacción profunda, y felicidad, es decir, bienestar eudaimónico. Por tanto, los resultados de esta tesis doctoral complementan la literatura sobre

consumo hedónico (Tsai, 2005; Vigneron y Johnson, 1999), añadiendo una dimensión eudaimónica en conexión con las perspectivas disruptivas de filantropía y libertad como lujos.

En resumen, los resultados de esta tesis contribuyen al importante pero escaso campo de investigación que aborda el sentido de la vida más allá de las posesiones. Richins (1999) sostiene que la investigación sobre este tema es escasa debido a una falta de interés en el significado de “no poseer”. No obstante, los resultados de esta investigación doctoral confirman la idea de que el post-materialismo está ganando protagonismo (Inglehart, 1981). Asimismo, el lujo de conseguir sentido más allá de las posesiones destaca la relevancia de este concepto dentro del contexto de la investigación del consumidor, lo cual ha sido recientemente confirmado por el *Journal of Consumer Research*, a través de la curación “Meaningful Choice” (“Opción con sentido”) realizada por Jennifer Aaker (2014).

7.4 Futuras líneas de investigación e implicaciones para la gestión

Esta tesis doctoral ha presentado una pluralidad de significados encapsulados en la noción de lujo de acuerdo con las visiones de los consumidores contemporáneos en el contexto europeo. Investigaciones futuras podrían basarse en un estudio fenomenológico similar pero más allá del territorio europeo. Teniendo en cuenta

que el significado del lujo depende del contexto y la situación (Hennigs, Wiedmann, Klarmann, y Behrens, 2013), y que la cultura influye en el comportamiento humano de distintas formas (Craig y Douglas, 2006), una investigación del significado del lujo en un contexto cultural diferente, por ejemplo, en Asia y en América del Sur, podría aportar un conocimiento interesante sobre la percepción del lujo en diferentes contextos culturales, poniendo de manifiesto las raíces culturales que subyacen en la percepción del citado fenómeno. Asimismo, la investigación del fenómeno del lujo en países en vías de desarrollo podría aportar nuevos enfoques que ayuden a completar la visión panorámica del concepto de lujo a escala global.

En esta tesis doctoral, el sentido de la vida ha sobresalido como un tema central en numerosas narrativas sobre el lujo. Aunque algunas investigaciones se han centrado en estudiar la búsqueda de sentido en el mercado (Tian y Belk, 2006) y también fuera de la sociedad de consumo (Binay, Brace-Govan, y Oppewal, 2011), es necesario ahondar en esta línea de investigación con el objetivo de entender cómo la búsqueda de sentido lleva a los consumidores a experimentar el lujo de implicarse en experiencias cargadas de significado, tanto dentro como fuera de la sociedad de consumo.

Los resultados de esta investigación han contribuido a comprender la diversidad de transformaciones que los consumidores conciben como lujo. Las transformaciones tanto de la propia persona como de otras personas fuera del círculo inmediato de familia y amigos, facilitadas por la filantropía y la libertad (mediante tanto la posesión

como la desposesión) son percibidas como lujos. El estudio del lujo como libertad, materializado a través de la austeridad es un tema de investigación que requiere mayor interés en el campo de la investigación del consumidor. En este sentido, los consumidores interesados en la opción de crecimiento personal como vía para su transformación son más proclives a adoptar modelos de consumo frugales (Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). Por ejemplo, el Instituto Omega ofrece a los consumidores el lujo de revelar su “yo” auténtico mediante retiros ascéticos. La austeridad es el nuevo lujo de acuerdo a Heyman (2015), quien cita las palabras de un consumidor que asiste a uno de los retiros austeros ofrecidos por este Instituto: “no se trata de a quién conoces o cómo vistes. Se trata de escapar de la farsa de la reglamentada sociedad de consumo basada en logos y marcas” (ibid., p. 1). Propuestas austeras como ésta, ofrecen tanto a consumidores tradicionales de lujo como a nuevos consumidores un escape a la sociedad de consumo dentro de la propia sociedad de consumo. El ascetismo muestra una contradicción con la idea tradicional del lujo basada en el consumo conspicuo, pero no se contrapone con las visiones disruptivas del lujo relacionadas con transformaciones presentadas en esta tesis. En este sentido, los resultados revelan que los consumidores que persigan el lujo de la libertad pueden implicarse en rituales como los de el “burning man” (Kozinets, 2002). En este sentido, es necesario realizar investigaciones adicionales sobre las dimensiones ritualistas derivadas de experimentar el lujo de escapar al mercado dentro del mercado, ya que podrían elucidar interesantes aspectos sobre prácticas de consumo rebelde en la sociedad de consumo.

Esta investigación ha abordado los significados del concepto de lujo desde la óptica del consumidor pero también sería deseable e interesante explorar cómo las empresas construyen la noción de lujo a través de sus esfuerzos de comunicación y hasta qué punto el mundo empresarial está adoptando las visiones disruptivas de lujo presentadas en esta investigación doctoral. En este sentido, el concepto de “filantroempresariado” es un movimiento que está ganando protagonismo, y que es consistente con el significado del lujo como filantropía. Asimismo, una investigación que aborde cómo las empresas incorporan valor transformacional como parte de sus valores clave, contribuiría a llenar un vacío en el conocimiento sobre este tipo de valor que según Gilmore y Pine (2009, p. 9) puede ser considerado como “la quinta y última oferta económica en la progresión de valor económico que tiene lugar cuando las compañías usan las experiencias para guiar a los consumidores en el cambio”.

Las implicaciones para la gestión del lujo como filantropía han sido presentadas en el Capítulo 4, haciendo énfasis en cómo las empresas, organizaciones no-gubernamentales, instituciones educativas, y sociedad de consumo se beneficiarían de la adopción de un enfoque filantrópico. Los consumidores y empleados muestran preferencia y se implican más con empresas que contribuyen significativamente a causas altruistas, co-creando cambio social. Si se considerara la filantropía como un aspecto esencial de la cultura corporativa, las compañías reemplazarían la responsabilidad social corporativa por responsabilidad social colectiva,

fomentando una sociedad humanística y sostenible. Por otra parte, como se ha presentado en el Capítulo 5, de la conceptualización de libertad como lujo se derivan una serie de implicaciones para la gestión desde el punto de vista tanto del marketing interno como desde la perspectiva de la gestión de marca. En este sentido, los directivos podrían considerar la libertad como un elemento crucial en la estrategia corporativa, jugando un papel esencial en el diseño de programas para empleados y/o como parte del ADN de la estrategia de marca. Finalmente, el lujo de liberarse de normas sociales y del sistema, guía nuevas tendencias en consumo ligadas a frugalidad, consumo consciente, y prácticas emancipatorias dentro de la cultura de consumo, evidenciando oportunidades para empresas que se alineen con estos valores.

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Appendix

SHARING



The Nature and Effects of Sharing in Consumer Behavior³

Russell Belk and Rosa Llamas

*Thousands of candles can be lit from a single candle,
and the life of the candle will not be shortened.
Happiness never decreases by being shared.
-Buddha*

Sharing is a diverse, prehistoric, and increasingly significant contemporary consumer behavior, as suggested by a few examples:

- In most foraging hunter-gatherer societies, everyone in the village of a successful hunter is free to claim a piece of meat.
- In *The Republic*, Plato proposed an ideal society in which private property has a limited role, and a culture of public sharing prevails.
- Napster was the first successful large-scale system of file sharing in which users freely shared music, films, and digital copies of other documents.

3. Belk, R. W., and Llamas, R. (2011). The nature and effects of sharing in consumer behavior. In D. G. Mick, D.G., S. Pettigrew, C. Pechmann, and J. L. Ozanne (eds.). *Transformative consumer research for personal and collective well-being*. New York: Taylor and Francis, 625–646.

- Car-sharing services like Zipcar work because they are more affordable, environmentally responsible, and convenient than private car ownership.
- The Robin Hood flour company encourages children, with the help of their parents, to bake cookies and share them with neighbors.
- Hundreds of thousands of people contribute advice, facts, opinions, photos, videos, and software code online each day.
- Because of such information, as well as online support groups, it is possible for medical patients to know more about their illnesses than their doctors do.
- Our public parks, libraries, roads, fire departments, museums, and recreational facilities are freely available for all.

The list could go on, but it suggests that sharing is a remarkably promising topic that has largely been overlooked in consumer research.

At the same time that sharing grows in significance, it is also threatened by several antisharing phenomena:

- Intellectual property rights legislation is rapidly expanding.
- Bioprospecting and securing patent rights to human and nonhuman genes have replaced the shared cooperation of the Human Genome Project.
- We are privatizing former family possessions and activities, including televisions, radios, telephones, cars, stereos, dinners, computers, incomes, and recreations.

- As global affluence grows, consumers increasingly privatize their transportation, education, health care, entertainments, housing, and finances.
- Social Security in the United States is actually impersonal financial security rather than the true social security of helping one another in times of difficulty.
- Growing materialism and possessive individualism discourage sharing and are negatively related to feelings of well-being.
- Free resources like smiles, directions, common courtesies, and even the time of day seem harder to come by in our anonymous urban landscape.
- Although academic researchers continue to share their research in the open model of science, prepublication academic sharing is increasingly scarce.

As these countersharing examples suggest, the topic of sharing is vital because of the battles taking place between open sharing and closed proprietary ownership. At stake is not only access to resources but also direct effects on the environment, science, sustainability, communal values, and human well-being.

A recent conceptual paper by Belk (2010) distinguishes sharing from commodity exchange and gift-giving and offers a distinction between the inclusive phenomenon of sharing in, in which those with whom we share are made a part of our extended selves, and the more charity-like phenomenon of sharing out, in which this incorporation into the extended self does not take place. In this chapter, we consider the basic nature of sharing and why it has become so contentious. We outline the

implications of various practical issues involving sharing and not sharing. We draw on a multicultural exploratory study of sharing during the crucial life junctures of childhood and when forming a couple or family. By examining these data, we gain some understanding of the critical influences on sharing and nonsharing tendencies.

What is sharing?

Of the three fundamental ways of acquiring goods and services—by purchasing marketplace commodities, receiving gifts, and sharing—sharing is likely the most common and certainly the most neglected. We share our possessions and resources with other household members. In offering and receiving hospitality, donations, and charity outside of our households, we expand the sphere of intimates with whom we share. When we participate in various Internet forums, we share with a virtual community of strangers that may be vast. On a smaller scale, if we respond to requests for directions, the time of day, or spare change, these are also sharing activities. On a grander scale, we share a variety of public goods, including parks, water, and roads, as well as public services, such as government, fire protection, and police. Yet, with a few exceptions (Belk, 2007, 2010; Rose & Poynor, 2007; Tinson & Nuttall, 2008), little consumer research has addressed sharing behavior.

Even though working in employee-owned companies, participating in profit sharing plans, owning corporate stocks and bonds, and sharing laundry, cleaning, and

cooking responsibilities at home are forms of sharing, they involve production rather than consumption. What concerns us here is shared consumption. Sometimes both production and consumption may occur simultaneously, as when we share information online or jointly prepare and consume a meal with friends. Yet, the conceptual distinction between sharing in consumption and sharing in production remains clear.

Both sharing and bartering can be traced back to ancient times and involve the circulation of resources. One key distinction between sharing and exchange phenomena is that exchange involves a transfer of ownership; what is mine becomes yours. Sooner, in the case of marketplace commodity exchange, or later, in the case of gift-giving, what is yours becomes mine to complete the reciprocal interchange. In sharing, however, either possession or ownership is joint. The shared object is effectively ours rather than mine or yours, or at least it appears so from within contemporary Western understandings of ownership, self, and bilateral exchange. Although there are instances when misunderstandings of the yours/mine/ours distinction between sharing and exchange may occur (e.g., “Oh, did you expect me to return that? I thought it was a gift”), even such claims of confusion recognize the basic distinctions.

Belk (2010) suggests that two key prototypes of sharing are mothering and the pooling and allocation of resources within the family. Neither involves the expectation of reciprocity or exchange, even though some scholars have treated them as

reciprocity-inducing gift-giving (e.g., Godbout & Caillé, 1998; Vaughan, 1997) or even commodity exchange (e.g., Becker, 2005; Ruskola, 2005). The pooling and allocation of resources within the family in affluent societies are ideally a close approximation of the precept of “from each according to his or her abilities and to each according to his or her needs.” On the one hand, children may either ask for food, a request that parents generally cannot deny (i.e., demand sharing), or help themselves to the contents of the family pantry (i.e., open sharing). They do not need to ask permission to enter their family home or use most of the facilities and possessions they find there, which are effectively joint possessions. They may also learn that they must use these joint possessions responsibly, as with cleaning up after they use the bathroom or kitchen. On the other hand, to use the personal possessions of others in the family, we normally ask permission and offer thanks. Such borrowing and lending are only quasi-sharing, because they involve individual rather than joint ownership and use.

A further characteristic of sharing is that it usually involves or expresses caring. Paid institutional caregiving may seem impersonal. Yet, D. Stone (2005) found that professional caregivers often become like family to their clients and frequently disregard administrative rules in order to help their clients, treating them as putative relatives by sharing their personal time and money.

Sharing in cultural and historical perspectives

An example of a sharing society

Nomadic hunter-gatherers reject the accumulation of material possessions, because they become an unnecessary burden to transport and care for. The mobility-based lifestyle relies on sociability and sharing. In recent decades, the last of the nomadic Australian Aborigines have settled in fixed communities, but a strongly ingrained sharing ethos often continues even with such possessions as televisions, VCRs, and automobiles (e.g., Belk, Groves, & Østergaard, 2000; Gerrard, 1989). Their sharing transcends home boundaries and helps assure the well-being of the community. Generosity is a highly valued ethic, and sharing shelter is an essential source of self-esteem (Hiatt, 1982; Schwab, 1995). Refusal to share brings shame to the person and the family and involves stigma and loss of face (Schwab, 1995). Although some analyses conclude that this is reciprocity with strict sanctions against nonreciprocity (e.g., Thompson, 1949), more recent analyses suggest that this may be a projection by those who expect to see reciprocity, and the sharing model is more apt (e.g., Altman, 1987; Stanner, 1979). Still, European influences, including private property and legal systems, have begun to alter these indigenous sharing patterns and conflicts about property, and instances of alcohol bingeing and bludging (i.e., demand sharing of others' cash and alcohol) are severe problems in many Aboriginal communities (Groves & Belk, 2001; Groves & Pettigrew, 2002;

McKnight, 2002). Such potentially negative outcomes caution against an overly romanticized treatment of sharing as necessarily being good.

Once people become settled, especially in small-scale band societies, there remains a strong tendency to share food, tools, labor, and land (Price, 1975), but a small-scale band society does not guarantee pervasive systems of sharing. Reciprocity is one alternative, which Price (1975) argues misled Malinowski due to his selection of the Trobriands as his focus of study: “Malinowski was describing a relatively complex society without a strong sharing ethic. If he had lived among the Bushmen instead he probably would have perceived primitive society as operating by sharing rather than reciprocity” (p. 18). Indeed, sharing societies appear common and continue on various scales today.

There have been further theoretical issues raised by sharing in traditional societies. Foster (1972) proposes that a key problem for all human societies is how to deal with envy of those who have more. Besides concealment, denial, and offering a “sop”—a token form of sharing one’s fortune—we may avoid others’ envy by true sharing. In Foster’s view, true sharing is most often a result of either institutional mechanisms like income taxes or strong moral or legal sanctions so that we have little choice but to share. Yet, Foster (1969) offers a way out of such a dismal view of sharing in another paper, in which he proposes the notions of limited good and unlimited good societies. In a limited good society, resources are perceived as scarce, and life is seen as a zero-sum

game. There is only so much good to go around, and one person's gain is everyone else's loss. In contrast, a society that views good as unlimited sees nature as bountiful and views one person's gain as having no effect on others. In Cohen's (1961) account, members of such a society know "that there is always food to be gotten" (p. 325). Bird-David (1990) calls this view that of a giving environment as opposed to a reciprocating environment. This is likely an idealized view, and there are surely economies of scarcity, but sharing is by no means limited to economies of abundance.

The Commons and Its Vestiges

Besides hunter-gatherer and band societies, pastoral societies are the other context in which sharing has often been examined. When we think of the pastoral commons today, we almost inevitably think of Hardin's (1968) "tragedy of the commons." Using a hypothetical common pasture shared by a number of animal herders, he suggests that each herder succumbs to the temptation to increase his or her herd by one more animal until the commons is ruined by overgrazing. In this view, sharing is the road to ruin. It thus offers a logical rationale for the enclosing and privatizing of European commons between the 15th and 19th centuries, supposedly resulting in saving these pastures and providing unparalleled production efficiency (Boyle, 2005).

This argument has also been widely adopted and applied to a number of subsequent environmental, economic, and public policy problems (e.g., Frischmann, 2005;

O'Toole, 1998; Shultz & Holbrook, 1999). Yet, as appealing as Hardin's (1968) metaphor has been to economists and other advocates of both privatization and government management of public resources, it has flaws. Stevenson (1991) points out that Hardin's model is not that of a commons, which is a resource jointly managed by those who use it, but rather a model of free-for-all open access to resources with no management. If Hardin had chosen a true commons like the Swiss alpine grazing commons (Stevenson, 1991), Hutterite agricultural commons (Baden, 1998), or Canadian Ojibway wild rice commons (*The Ecologist*, 1993), he might have seen that commons can work quite well for sustaining resources and balancing individual and group desires. Moreover, the enclosure of the commons had the social effects of not only concentrating economic power in the hands of a few but also leading to "the loss of a form of life, and the relentless power of market logic to migrate to new areas, disrupting traditional social relationships, views of the self, and even the relationship of human beings to their environment" (Boyle, 2005, p. 236).

Boyle's (2005) reference to the migration of market logic to new areas resonates in a number of contemporary contestations between sharing and newly marketized private property, including human genes, organs, semen, eggs, wombs, and babies (e.g., Scheper-Hughes & Wacquant, 2002); music and film (e.g., Giesler, 2006); household labor, child care, and sex (e.g., Ertman & Williams, 2005); Internet images, advice, information, and software (e.g., Benkler, 2006); brand designs, colors, names, and trademarks (e.g., Phillips, 2005); and cultural heritage, artifacts,

myths, and rites (e.g., Brown, 2004). Many of these contested spheres involve, on the one hand, that which has traditionally either been jointly owned and shared or regarded as operating outside the logic of the market and, on the other hand, the growing realm of trademarks, copyrights, and intellectual property rights. According to many critics, the tendency to provide legal property rights to more and more types of things and extend these rights for longer periods of time is an attempt to enclose the information commons, which is being extended to such invisible or virtual realms as cells, DNA, bits and bytes, and even dreams.

Barnes (2006) suggests that rather than commoners now exploiting these new commons for their private gain, it is increasingly corporations that are privatizing and exploiting formerly shared domains for their private gain. He offers these examples:

- *Disney stories taken from the public domain*—Aladdin, Atlantis, Beauty and the Beast, Cinderella, Davy Crockett, The Legend of Sleepy Hollow, Hercules, The Hunchback of Notre Dame, The Jungle Book, Oliver Twist, Pinocchio, Robin Hood, Snow White, Sleeping Beauty, The Three Musketeers, Treasure Island, The Wind in the Willows
- *Disney stories added to the public domain*—None (p. 120)

As this example and the contexts just noted strongly suggest, the consequences of sharing or not sharing can be profound, both economically and culturally. But before

we can reasonably consider such broad issues, it is well to begin with some data closer to home.

Sharing experiences as children and young adults: a retrospective study

Methods

An interpretive study was undertaken based on verbal accounts by college students and other young adults in three cultures. The aim was to look at recollections of childhood sharing and ownership as well as how these patterns and outlooks seemed to change among young adults who were either single, married, or cohabiting. The initial informants were 24 graduate students (13 males, 11 females) in an interpretive consumer behavior class in the Western United States. After agreeing on a topical outline of sharing topics, each student wrote a personal essay about sharing experiences and inclinations. Topics included sharing during childhood while at home and at school, parental sharing lessons and behaviors, contemporary sharing, and feelings about sharing things on a list of 16 items ranging from books and videos to vacation homes and automobiles. The informants described childhood experiences and sharing, Internet posting, and file sharing, as well as positive and negative experiences with sharing.

After completing their personal sharing narratives and being trained in qualitative data collection, these students each conducted and transcribed two depth interviews, one with a man and one with a woman. The interview topic guide was approximately the same as that used for the personal sharing narrative. Most of these interviews were with peers of about the same age. This resulted in 72 U.S. self-narratives and interview transcriptions averaging 10 double-spaced pages each. Of the 72 U.S. informants, 86% were in their 20s or 30s, with a mean age of 28.2. The study was also carried out with 102 Eastern Canadian and 24 Northwestern Spanish participants, all with similar demographics to the U.S. participants.

After immersion in the data set, we began by distinguishing positive and negative aspects of sharing and attitudes toward sharing during childhood and among those who were currently in various types of relationships (e.g., living with roommates, cohabiting with a partner, married). Since the general pattern described was one of prosharing experiences and lessons as a child and a decline in sharing as a young adult, we became particularly interested in critical incidents cited as being influential in shaping or accounting for current tendencies to share or not share. We also paid attention to differences in sharing inclinations over different types of relationships and possessions. After several iterations of coding the material, some distinct patterns emerged that helped us understand factors that were cited as critical to current sharing tendencies. These patterns were interrogated in light of prior sharing literature.

Findings

The Couple

By far the strongest incentive for sharing reported by these young adults was finding a life partner or likely life partner:

I share just about everything with my girlfriend; we even have shared toothbrushes.... I often share a bed at night, I share clothes with my girlfriend; yes, I even borrow some of her clothes from time to time, just not underwear! (20-year-old U.S. male)

According to our informants, sharing strengthens ties and binds people together. Not only is such sharing based on love and trust, but also it fosters these same feelings:

Sharing everything with my wife has kept us closer than I believe we would be if we said, "This is mine and that is yours." I think the more sharing there is in marriage, the longer the relationship is likely to last, and the better the quality will be. (34-year-old U.S. male)

Computers, for example, were most commonly regarded as individual property by the couples studied, but most were nevertheless willing to share their computers with their partners. This included sharing personal passwords, which involves total transparency rather than privacy. However, negative experiences like a partner

deleting personal files or using too much hard drive space made some informants refrain from sharing. Joint bank accounts, credit cards, and telephone calling plans were common among married couples, but this was not always the case either. Even with joint bank accounts, use of these funds was not necessarily expected to be free and equal, as one man explained:

With my wife, sure, I'd have a joint bank account.... But I think you should still keep track of your bank account and how much you spend, because it can get confusing on who spent what in a joint account. (25-year-old U.S. male)

The concern here seems to be loss of financial control and added economic uncertainty. Although there is a tendency for couples to report and actually believe that they are pooling their money and sharing it equally, equal access to funds is the exception rather the rule. It is usually women in relationships who have less access to joint funds (e.g., Burgoyne, 1990; Marshall & Woolley, 1993; Wilson, 1987).

Sharing among couples was not universal, complete, or necessarily pleasing. One woman complained that she hated sharing a car with her husband, because he leaves his trash and clothes in the car. This example foreshadows concerns with contagion as well as loss of control of visible self-extending possessions, which are concerns that we will see in childhood sharing experiences as well, and shows that sharing can be a source of marital stress. Another woman complained that in sharing food with her husband, he had not learned moderation and took more than

“his share.” So, fairness and respect toward the other partner are key aspects for sharing within couples.

Marital vows to “share and share alike” seem to have an influence, since we found that there was greater resistance to sharing among boyfriends and girlfriends than among spouses. However, several couples who felt more committed demonstrated their joint involvement through sharing a possession like a dog or furniture to signal commitment, anticipate a future together, and express an emerging joint sense of self (Belk, 1988).

The Family

The family is considered a moral economy rather than a market economy, gift economy, or political economy. Cheal (1989) distinguishes moral economies from political ones based on their valuation of social relationships and ritual interactions above rational self-interest. Sharing is one of the basic tenets of the family, and the extended family is where we experience the greatest amount of sharing, as these accounts suggest:

With family, you have that trust and love no matter what. With that, you feel compelled to share what you have if it makes them and their lives feel better.

I also think family is different. We have a duty to take care of our families, and that often means making sacrifices. I said before

that our families are the most important thing within our [Indian] culture, and that a strong and healthy and successful family leads to everyone being very happy ... if I am unemployed and cannot feed my children while the rest of my brothers and sisters are doing well and are successful ... the rest of the family one way or another feels the pain of our hunger. So, doesn't it make sense to share your resources with your family and make sure everyone is doing well? (30-year- old Canadian male)

It's great to share with the family. If I won the lottery, I wouldn't keep all the money, some of it would go to my family, that's for sure. The family means everything to me. (21-year-old Spanish female)

Family meals at the kitchen or dining room table entail two kinds of sharing: tangible (i.e., food) and intangible (e.g., experiences, plans, ideas, worries, aspirations). Fraser (1994) observed that “meal tables were the sites for confession, laughter, revelations of catastrophes, for rites of passage and initiation” (p. 15). Nevertheless, a tendency toward more individualistic lifestyles, along with the decrease in the number of family members and a fast-paced, time-impooverished life, drive us to share less in the family in terms of space and time and, consequently, also in terms of everyday life, meals, conversations, and entertainments. This is the argument of B. Stone (2009), who observes how the “high touch family breakfast” in the United States has been replaced by “high tech mornings” when laptops, iPhones, video games, Facebook, Twitter, and text messages receive the most attention (p. A1). A

Canadian woman saw such changes even without technological competition:

As a child, we share whatever we discover. We share our candies, our toys, and our experiences (usually involving friends that we bring home). As teens, we share long conversations with our parents, where we hear their stories and experiences and realize their intention is to teach us from those experiences. We also share moments and daily conversations at the table for breakfast, lunch, and dinner. As we start to grow, we still share with our family; however, the instances for sharing start to decrease as we move out from our home. Those sharing moments at breakfast, lunch, and dinner decrease to a couple of dinners or lunches during the week. (30-year-old Canadian female)

Besides changing social ecology, increased affluence and fewer members per family may be factors precipitating this decline in familial sharing:

We had to share everything growing up. I had 12 brothers and sisters, and our house was only five bedrooms and one bathroom. It was really nice, though, so much love and good times we shared and memories. We had to sleep three to a bed sometimes. Now I have four bedrooms and only one child still living at home, four TVs and four phones, and three bathrooms. (59-year-old U.S. male)

There are some differences in Spain, where children leave their parents' house at a later age. With less atomized families, Spanish students also reported greater

familial sharing than their counterparts in North America. The norms for sharing are also more relaxed within the family in Spain. Sharing without asking the owner for permission is one of the traits of the spontaneous and improvised character, when a high level of trust and familiarity shape the sharing. It could be that these patterns have been learned of necessity where multiple bedrooms and bathrooms are lacking. Whatever the cause, the familial sharing ethos appears stronger in Europe:

We (my siblings and I) usually ask before taking something that belongs to one of the others, but sometimes we forget it. If it is something important, sometimes the owner gets angry, but usually it works. My parents want us to ask for permission before sharing something, but as I just said, sometimes we forget it. (24-year-old Spanish female)

There is some indication that early family sharing patterns may continue into adulthood. A Spanish man recalled that sharing was always part of his family life, ranging from his childhood when he used to share bikes and toys and inherit clothes from his older brother to nowadays when they share traveling, experiences, and computers.

Resources in moral economies are distributed and mobilized through social processes that define the meaning of the family rather than through market mechanisms of supply, demand, and prices. We found three key features of sharing within family

boundaries. First, sharing with parents and adult siblings was seen to result from previously established love and trust. Second, sharing inside the family has a nonreciprocal nature unlike the need for reciprocity reported when sharing outside the family. Third, familial sharing lacks a strictly equalitarian character; redistribution of resources responds to needs:

In our family, we have always shared everything. Everything belongs to everyone. My parents never give the same to every sibling; they give to every one of us what we need. My eldest brother practices motocross, which is a quite expensive sport, so he requires more money from the family budget than we do—my youngest brother and me—but we never complain about that. (22-year-old Spanish female)

This idyllic situation regarding distribution of family resources is not always the norm. One woman from France who was studying in Spain cited a controversial aspect of sharing in distributing goods among the family members when a person passes away:

When a person dies, normally, the resources are distributed equally among children, but in some cases, the main recipient should be the child who took care of the parents (in the case that they suffered from some illnesses, for example). This distribution is sometimes the source of many conflicts in families. (22-year-old French female)

Zelizer (2005) also found that inheritance distributions are often problematic occasions when greed and envy of other family members' portions of the inheritance can overcome sharing tendencies within families. To a lesser degree and over a narrower range of possessions than in the case of sharing with life partners and immediate family, informants also said they currently shared the quasi-family of roommates and friends. In this narrowing of the sphere and intensity of sharing, we can begin to examine some of the justifications that people used to account for not sharing or not sharing outside their nuclear families.

Friends

The American TV series *Friends* (Crane, Kauffman, & Bright, 1994–2004) cast the lives, loves, and laughs of six young friends who share life together in Manhattan. Like Rachel, Ross, Chandler, Phoebe, Joey, and Monica, many of our informants share daily life with friends and roommates. Sharing space and possessions makes boundaries vanish, fosters interpersonal relations, and opens us up to former strangers, while sharing nontangible issues and personal pieces of information involves strengthening emotional ties between people. One man expressed it this way:

First of all, I share things because of confidence in the others; maybe it is not enough to share anything else, but then, when you really want to know these people, when you really want these people to be part of your life, you need to share different issues such as feelings, thoughts, worries, and so on. (22-year- old Canadian male)

A 25-year old U.S. student from France was living with three other students, and they all shared the same common room. He reported that they shared many other things also, including a television, photos, music, local travel, meals, food, an Internet connection, and a computer. He learned, however, that he could rely on some of his roommates more than others:

I am sharing my living room and everything with Pui, my roommate— everything I can, I mean. I told her my things are your things, and she told me her things are my things. We used to leave [our] doors open, and whenever we need something, even if the other is not there, we can go ahead and take it, without asking.... [But] I am sharing my bathroom with Kate, and I am not really happy about that, because she never cleans it. I mean, we've been here for ... two months and a half, and I've cleaned the bathroom four or five times, I think, and she has not cleaned it at all.... A bathroom needs to be cleaned from time to time, you know. And she doesn't. The other day I was cleaning it after she took a shower, and she came and asked me, "Can I dry my hair, do you mind?" And I was like "No, go ahead," thinking that after drying her hair, she would come and help me. But she didn't, she didn't say anything, went to her room, closed the door and just forgot about it. (25-year- old U.S. male)

Here, open and closed doors represent corresponding attitudes toward sharing, trust, and open self boundaries. While Pui followed the tacit norms behind sharing of building trust and a sense of joint possessions ("my things are your things"), Kate adopted opportunistic behaviors that crossed the line defining responsible sharing.

A common condition for establishing trust among nonfamily members is that sharing has to be reciprocal in some way. If one person feels that he or she is doing all the giving, one is apt to feel that he or she is being taken advantage of. The opportunistic behavior of one person is one of the main threats to sharing in this nonfamilial context: “I wouldn’t share with people who don’t deserve it, because ‘All lay loads on a willing horse’” (21-year-old Spanish female). Sometimes this reciprocity can be quite simple, as another informant put it: “In my view, sharing is very easy when I get a ‘thank you’ in return. I would be able to share everything with thankful people who like sharing. Instead, ungrateful and opportunistic people make it very difficult to share” (25-year-old Spanish male).

The codes for sharing—asking for permission and offering thanks—play an important role when sharing with friends and roommates. Gratitude is an important part of sharing outside of the family (Emmons & McCullough, 2004), but for the gratitude to be most effective, it should be perceived as a sincerely felt emotion rather than merely a ritual expression (Visser, 2008). Most participants also found that minimal reciprocity is a must in sharing with nonkin, and negative experiences were cited as one of the main barriers to such sharing. Trust is at the heart of sharing, so if one of the parties undermines the trust or fails to reciprocate, this can create a reluctance to share with that person. Trust can be built in other ways, but reciprocity is a demonstrative way of building it. Even though some degree of reciprocity is a key aspect to perpetuating sharing, when asked about the distinction between sharing

and lending, most participants mentioned reciprocity as the line which differentiates them: “I think that sharing is giving without expecting anything in return, whereas lending is with the assumption that something will be given back or paid back” (34-year-old Canadian male).

Informants also told stories of inconvenience resulting from lending something like a snowboard and then not having it when they wanted it. Experiences like this were offered to justify not lending more. There was also reluctance to lend things that were valuable either financially or in terms of emotional attachment. The fear in such cases was not so much that the item would not be returned as that it would be treated badly:

I think people tend to think that people need to earn the right to be shared with (similar to respect). Sharing involves trust (e.g., you need to trust that your neighbor won't break your snow blower if you lend it to him). (25-year-old Canadian female)

While couched in terms of financial worries, another feared injury here seems to be the one that might be inflicted on the extended self. We take care of our stuff well, because it is seen to be a part of us, but extended self is also involved in another way. As Belk (2010) argues, when someone engages in “sharing in,” they make those with whom they share a part of their extended self. But when someone engages in “sharing out,” it is more like charity, and there is no lingering feeling of connection between those involved.

Besides possessions, sharing intangibles like feelings and secrets is another way to build or fail to build trust among friends: “On an emotional level, people might decide not to share their feelings, secrets, frustrations due to the fear of others’ opinions or to preserve their intimacy, to keep a ‘secret garden,’ to protect themselves, or just because of shyness” (23-year-old Spanish female). Sentiments, thoughts, and personal information were placed by our informants in the sphere of highly valued possessions and, consequently, were often considered off-limits for sharing.

The fear of being exposed to the judgment of others, bothering people with one’s problems, or feeling vulnerable were the reasons they pointed to as barriers to sharing. Female informants particularly mentioned their reluctance to share these:

I’m more willing to share tangible things, objects, material possessions. But when it comes to intangibles like personal feelings or problems, I don’t often share them, so I don’t trouble anyone with my problems. (22-year-old Spanish female)

I would not be willing to share secrets or things of great importance with anyone excluding my best friend. Things that are very personal and important with high emotional involvement would classify at these secrets. (22-year-old U.S. female)

I think that it is difficult to share everything related with emotions and sentiments, particularly with love feelings. Revealing them is like “getting naked.” You don’t know what the other person thinks, and that makes it risky and difficult to share. (22-year-old French female)

In the same vein, some informants reported their unwillingness to share highly treasured goods like gifts or family heirlooms:

I would never share personal objects with sentimental value, but besides those, I'm willing to share everything. (25-year-old Spanish male)

I am pretty much open to sharing everything. I do not like sharing my pen because it has sentimental values, because I have been using the same pen for over 8 years. (42-year-old Canadian female)

There is also an important distinction among adults outside the family between joint use, as with borrowing something or feeling that it is free for another person to use, and joint ownership in a more formal sense. Joint ownership was seen as riskier outside of family, as one woman explained: "Books, videos, and clothing, I jointly own those things with my sister. It's hard to own something jointly with a group of friends, though, because when you go your separate ways, it'll be hard to tell who gets what" (21-year-old U.S. female). Aside from the practical concern expressed here, the formality of joint ownership takes things outside of the realm of sharing for some participants and makes it more like a market transaction: "I do not like joint ownership, because it is too materialistic. It takes the emotions out of the sharing process and makes it a business transaction. The positive feeling associated with sharing is lost in joint ownership" (30-year-old U.S. female). Our informants also expressed concern that there was less freedom in jointly owning possessions,

whose use would have to be negotiated or planned rather than spontaneous. Nevertheless, some informants did go in with friends to jointly purchase occasionally used durables like ski boats, vacation homes, and all-terrain vehicles, but this was generally seen as a practical way to minimize costs rather than something done to build a sense of sharing in.

The counterpart of willingness to lend is willingness to borrow from other people. Reluctance to borrow was common, especially in the United States:

I don't really borrow anything. I don't really like borrowing anything. I'll be honest, I do use things that someone has a lot of and that is not something special. Like, I'll use someone's coffee sometimes. I'll use little things that everyone uses as community anyway. (30-year-old U.S. male)

I am having trouble thinking of things that I borrow from others, because I do not do it very often. I was brought up to be independent, which makes it difficult for me now to borrow things from others. Some say I need to let others help me. I don't look at it that way—I just like to be self-sufficient. (23-year-old U.S. female)

In part, this fear of borrowing was justified by fears of damaging an item, but there is also an American ethic of self-sufficiency evident here and a fear of intimacy (Aron, Aron, Tudor, & Nelson, 1991) that leads to unwillingness to either impose or

feel dependent on others. There was also awareness that a breach of borrowing etiquette is likely a breach of a relationship:

I am generally open with my personal items and don't mind lending things out to others. However, I am more hesitant about borrowing from others, as I don't want to put anyone out or take something they might need. Also, I remember once borrowing \$20 from a friend while out to dinner, and she stopped talking to me, because I didn't pay her back right away. I had forgotten that I had borrowed and had no idea why she was mad at me until someone else told me. I wished she'd just reminded me, but we lost the friendship instead. I think this ... made me more hesitant to borrow in the future. (31-year-old U.S. female)

When relationships are more secure, there is less chance of this happening, but one American woman did report a rough period in her relationship with her boyfriend after she broke a CD he had lent her. Thus, failure to take care of lent possessions may weaken, damage, and jeopardize relationships.

Some people also felt, as with joint ownership, that borrowing things can be more like a business transaction and less like sharing. Yet, this was not necessarily the case, as one man explained:

In my opinion, lending or borrowing is not sharing, and this can be categorized as a business transaction where both the parties have a

mutual material gain (like borrowing money from a bank), although the words lending and borrowing are commonly used to imply sharing, for example, lending a pen or book to someone. When the consideration of such a transaction cannot be materially justified, in my opinion, it is sharing—not lending or borrowing. (41-year-old Canadian male)

Among those who reported sharing outside their immediate families, the two most commonly invoked rationales were that it made financial sense to borrow or jointly own, and it was the friendly, neighborly, or godly thing to do. One man explained how interwoven sharing experiences with neighbors made them rely on one another:

Today, my wife baked a bunch of cookies, and we are about to go share them with the neighbors. We often share food like this and in social situations. For example, we have our friends over and share our board games and snack food. Our friends have returned such favors. There is a friend of ours who has regular game nights with other friends, and they came to borrow a game we had several times. It was interesting, because they bought the expansion to the game but not the actual game. They relied on borrowing it from us. Lending, borrowing, and sharing have cut costs, saved time, and expanded our experiences for us as well as others we have shared with. It has contributed to the building of better relationships. (24-year-old U.S. male)

Unlike those who avoided borrowing to remain independent and free, the mutual dependency here was seen as a positive outcome of sharing, but others resisted

this. Asked how he felt about sharing a lawn mower with neighbors, one man said,

First of all, nowadays, people hardly make an effort to get to know the neighbor they've lived next to for 10 years let alone make the necessary communications to share a lawn mower with them. Second of all, who is going to be the one to own the lawn mower to be shared in the neighborhood? If everyone pitches in to buy a neighborhood lawn mower, who has to store it? And who pays for the gas it runs on? What about Mr. Johnson who mows his 13 acres versus Mr. Smith who mows his 10×10-foot patch of grass? How do you compensate for the wear and tear? I think that's a major issue—letting someone borrow items that receive wear and tear every time it's used. It's like letting someone drive your car for 500 miles. Even if they pay for gas, it still decreases the life of the car. (45-year-old U.S. male)

Nevertheless, it is clear that some of these reasons given for not sharing are imagined excuses and justifications rather than being based on actual negative experiences.

Possessiveness, attachment to things, and materialism are also behind an antisharing behavior according to a young Spaniard:

The excessive attachment to things that we have nowadays makes it more difficult to share. Years ago, people had very few things and used to share them, but today we have more and more things and more expensive ones, so we feel afraid of losing those if we share them. (21-year-old Spanish male)

This suggests that when people share from necessity, they may feel a greater sense of sharing in. Yet, when sharing becomes a discretionary choice, a less personal sharing out may occur as well as a more possessive individual attachment to these things.

Sharing During Childhood

Having a life partner and having children are key events that dramatically expand sharing.

Nevertheless, the first experiences related to sharing take place during childhood:

*Sharing with the family is the first step that one person takes in his/her process of integration in the society. In my view, the family is the first social group in which the person develops, so most of the attitudes learned in the family will be extrapolated to the rest of social relationships. With the family, we share not only possessions but also immaterial issues such as values, sorrows, joyful moments.
(21-year-old Spanish female)*

One of the first things children must learn to share is their parents:

As a middle child (the fifth of seven), I suffer from the stereotypical and unending pursuit of my parents' attention. I suppose my first memorable experience with sharing highlights this fact clearly. I was in the first grade (5 years old), and after much pleading on my part, my mother had agreed to volunteer to supervise a class excursion to the Toronto Zoo with my grade 1 class.... Each parent was assigned two children to supervise for the day. My best friend and I were assigned

to my mother. I was so looking forward to this trip, not because of the destination but because my mother was going to be there. However, it ended up being one of the worst trips I have ever participated in. My mother, trying to make my best friend feel comfortable, paid so much time focusing on her, I felt completely neglected. Even though, looking back on it, my mother was not ignoring me at all. I suppose I had accepted the fact that I had to share my mother's attention with my other siblings, but I definitely was not prepared to share her with my friends—not even my very best friend! Needless to say, I felt horrible that day and never asked my mother to come on another class trip. (32-year-old Canadian female)

Childhood sharing tendencies and attitudes were influenced by conscious lessons taught by parents, church leaders, and teachers; by unconscious parental modeling; and in interactions with and observations of siblings and friends. Parents and teachers offered maxims like “Share your toys, not your germs,” “Sharing is caring,” and “Share with others if you want them to share with you”:

When we were children, my brother and I used to fight for toys many times. Our mom used to bring peace to our conflicts, and she used to teach sharing lessons and commitments like “If you want to play with your brother's toys, then you must allow him to play with yours.” (24-year-old Spanish female)

Some perceived cultural differences that they believe shaped their sharing tendencies:

Although I was born and brought up in Canada, I have grown up in a traditional “Indian” home. This has meant numerous family gatherings, where I had to share my toys and overall living space, and the inherent lack of privacy stemming from such gatherings from childhood. I was told to partake in such activities without the promise of personal gain. For example, every time my “relatives” dropped by, I did not look for a toy/chocolate as a gift in return for my generosity to my cousins. I think that if you grow up in a culture that does not promote sharing from a young age, then sharing as an adult becomes especially difficult. In the Indian culture, socializing is a big part of it. We are not “individualistic,” and as such, there are constant opportunities to share, and as part of the culture, it’s not a choice but expected. (28-year-old Canadian male)

Teachers were also remembered for enforcing sharing by such tactics as putting out a box of crayons for a group of students to share. Parents taught similar lessons, usually framed in terms of sharing with siblings:

I have one brother and one sister, so I’m used to sharing everything since I was a child. For example, my father used to go to buy bread for lunch on Sundays, and he would bring also some candies. We used to count them and divide them into three parts, regardless [of where] the three of us were at the moment. If one of us was not there, we would keep his/her candies in a safe place. Now that we are adults, we still do that, even though it might sound ridiculous. (21-year-old Spanish female)

Almost all the informants from Spain regarded their sharing experiences during childhood, whether with siblings or classmates, as positive. Only one woman mentioned that sometimes sharing with the family is more difficult than sharing with friends, because we choose friends but not family. She highlighted, however, that family ties are so strong that they are difficult to ignore. Yet, in North America, many informants described either resentment at having to share with siblings or relief at being an only child or a child with no siblings near their age to share with:

A few short years later, I was graced with a stepsister with whom I hated sharing. Everyday was a battle for the both of us. We would never share anything even if it meant physically fighting over it. It didn't matter what the item was. (22-year-old U.S. female)

Several of those who reported not sharing with siblings as a child found it strange when their college roommates expected them to share possessions within a quasi-family group. Sometimes having to share with relatives was resented to such an extent that the informant became less generous with others:

I didn't share much with my school friends. I think since I was a twin and was constantly sharing at home, I was very protective of things that were mine or that I didn't have to share with my twin. I didn't share many physical objects, such as clothes or movies or CDs, with school friends. (22-year-old U.S. female)

One time a cousin of mine came from America, and her mom brought gifts for all of us. Her mom gave me a doll, a very cute doll, and my cousin was so mean that she wanted the doll back from me. She was spoiled and had no manners. I had to give her my brand new doll, because she would not listen to anyone. My mom forced me to give my brand new doll to her. I hated her for that. (37-year-old U.S. female from Pakistan)

Even in instances in which sharing with siblings was more positive, disagreements arose:

I shared a bedroom with my brother until I was about 10 years old, then I got my own room. I liked sharing a room, because we would talk a lot at night, and I thought that was cool, but my brother likes to be very organized, and as you know, I am not very organized, so we would clash. We did the whole draw the line down the middle of the room thing. We shared a closet, and that caused problems, because I would always leave it dirty, and my brother liked it clean.... We had to share a bathroom. My brother would shower at night before school [the next morning], and I would shower in the morning. One time my brother decided that he was going to shower in the morning, so he got up and got in the bathroom before me and showered and threw the whole system off, so I ended up being late to school, and my mom was late to work, because she was sorting out the fight. We had a big fight and couldn't figure out who should be first. (26-year-old U.S. male)

The difference in organization of joint space here reflects different preferences for

control and order. Such differences made it difficult to share and disrupted the sense of extended identity imposed on these spaces. It also reveals the unwelcome and contaminating overflow of the sibling's extended self.

In several cases in the United States, parents were reported to have provided each of their children with identical possessions to preclude such sharing squabbles, even if doing so reinforced a nonsharing ethos:

They [his sisters] hated sharing. They couldn't share anything. If they got one thing, everybody had to have the same thing.... They each had to have one of their own. They all had to be the same thing, because otherwise someone would say, "You know the other one was better." (34-year-old U.S. male)

This is something that some parenting experts began to recommend in the 1920s in the United States (Matt, 2003). These feelings are bound up with feelings of sibling rivalry, individual identity formation, and desire for control. Issues of control and identity through the extension of self into possessions often translated into feelings of possessiveness and sometimes into abnormal fears of contagion from others' contact with "my things":

I am a person that likes to be in control of things that I own. I also think that I take better care of my things than most people, so things that could get damaged, like my laptop, I don't like to share. I am

also kind of obsessive-compulsive about germs, so I don't like to share food or clothes either. (22-year- old U.S. male)

In addition to material possessions, another thing that informants appreciated or missed in childhood was a private area of the home to which they could retreat and regard as a sanctuary from other family members. One woman recalled fighting so often with her sister, with whom she shared a bedroom, that their parents gave them their own rooms.

Despite childhood lessons that sharing is good, many informants reported learning the hard way that sharing with friends could lead to having possessions damaged or not returned at all. Six informants also recollected that their parents admonished them not to share clothes and other objects with schoolmates for these same reasons. Just as some traditional groups eat in private to avoid having to share with others, some parents of those studied were reported to have done something similar: "I do also remember my mom putting certain prized and fragile toys away when certain friends came over so that we wouldn't play with it and ruin it" (31-year-old U.S. female). Tinson and Nuttall (2008) also found that some sisters hid their possessions, so they would not be borrowed.

Besides lessons in sharing, adults were also cited as teaching potentially conflicting lessons about responsible ownership. Typically, lessons about sharing were based

on the presumption that children owned their toys, clothes, and other possessions:

Well, I always remember being somewhat selfish, you know, like every other kid. The famous words "it's mine, it's mine" I am positive rang out from my mouth. But, I think when the real principle of ownership struck me is when my parents gave me my first real, big bike when I was 13 years old. I then knew that I had to take care of it and put it away when I was not riding it, so it would not get stolen. It was an expensive item, and I did not want to lose it. (26-year-old U.S. male)

In a small number of cases, parents instead either suggested that their children's possessions were really group possessions belonging to the entire family or were possessions of the parents that their children were merely using.

Informants also recognized that parental lessons about sharing were conveyed by example. Parental examples of generosity include sharing with neighbors, donations to charity, and fairness and balance in sharing money and possessions with their children. Sometimes, deeper lessons were gained via examples than through platitudes and explicit teaching. Most recalled that as children, their parents showed no favoritism toward them or their siblings. If one was given something, then the other children in the family were usually also given something. Some informants even received gifts on their siblings' birthdays. Some parental sharing examples were pivotal in the recollections of informants:

The most prominent story ... while I was growing up was a time that my Dad and I stopped at a fastfood place to buy lunch for the both of us and some other friends. As we pulled out of the drive-thru, there stood a homeless woman. My Dad put the car in park, got out, and handed over all of the food we had just ordered. Situations like this have occurred a lot in my life, and seeing how generous and giving my Dad is has made me more apt to share. (22-year-old U.S. female)

Many childhood lessons about sharing were learned from sharing experiences with siblings and friends:

As a child, my parents always stressed the importance of sharing. I shared a bedroom with my sister for 7 years. Objects such as toys, computers, and videos were considered “community” items in my family, where everyone had access to mostly everything. There is one instance in particular where I convinced my young sister that we should share money, because she had more than I did. My parents were quick to inform me that this was not an appropriate means of sharing and that I was taking advantage of my sister’s innocence. (22-year-old U.S. female)

We (cousins) would eat together always. We would share food, take bites out of each other’s dinners, share dinner plates, etc. School friends were also like cousins, and there was nothing off-limits for them. We would share lunch and books, we would do homework for each other, sometimes help (cheat) each other in exams as

well. In fact, it was not considered cheating among friends; we felt obligated to show our answers to friends if they were having a hard time. (44-year-old U.S. male)

The first example here is a case of trying to put limits on socially inappropriate sharing, whereas the second is a case of failing to put limits on socially undesirable sharing.

The sense of sharing in cheating also meant that it must be through mutual consensus:

Cheating off someone without their knowledge is a violation; they are not choosing to share with you, you are taking from them. (25-year-old Canadian female)

Cheating off is only sharing when there is a mutual consent; otherwise, it is opportunistic behavior. Personally, I prefer to share my knowledge and resources before the exam, lending my class notes and helping with doubts and avoiding the risk of getting caught. (26-year-old Spanish male)

If peer pressure could bring about socially undesirable sharing like cheating on exams, it could also bring about socially desirable sharing in the service of friendship:

I can remember vividly the day I learned to share. After many times of

my family nagging me to have a bite of my ice cream or a sip of my Sprite, how much I hated to have someone else's slobber on my straw or in my ice cream. I would always say "no" to my family, because I did not care what my family thought. All this was really the building up to my deciding factor. It really came down to peer pressure from my friends.... I was in the 7th grade, so about 12 or 13 years old. It took place in the school cafeteria at lunch. We were all drinking our own smoothies, and all of my friends decided to try each other's smoothies to see which one was the best. I realized at that moment that if I wanted to be accepted, I couldn't be selfish and tell them no that I did not want your spit like I could to my family. So I bit my lip and passed around my drink, and the worst part was re-drinking it. But after that, I realized that sharing was cool. (*laughs*) It was the "in thing" to do, and I fitted in. (22-year-old U.S. female)

Here, fear of contagion was overcome by the desire to bond with friends and not be a social outcast.

Another reason to share with schoolmates was the positive affirmation of extended self in having possessions that others wanted to borrow: "I would always share my toys with other kids after school, because I always had the coolest toys, and they all wanted to play with my toys" (21-year-old U.S. female). In this case, sharing of extended self through possessions was an affirmation of self-worth.

Others were never in such a position and instead saw that their sharing in childhood

was born of necessity due to poverty. Yet, even without such an economic imperative, the overall sense in the accounts by these young adults was that there are more important things than having the most or best possessions and jealously guarding them against use or damage by others. Facing a choice between being a giver and being a taker, most people preferred the former role. One 23-year-old American man recounted a story of his high school friend who had a reputation of borrowing from others and never paying them back. Nevertheless, he agreed to loan his friend money:

I agreed to front him some money for a road trip right after high school. He agreed to pay me back as soon as he had the money. Well, needless to say, he still doesn't have the money, and I don't really care about it anymore. At the time, the money was a big deal, but at this point, I could care less if I ever get it. It bothered me for a while, but I have now gotten over it and realized that no amount of money that I was willing to give up then was worth ruining our friendship, and if he absolutely needed money, I would probably do it again. (28-year-old U.S. male)

The trade-off here is friendship and caring support versus monetary advantage; that is, social security was preferred to financial security. Although in different circumstances this could potentially become an attempt to buy friendship, the recognition here that friendship is worth more than money suggests that the moral economy of sharing operates by rules that may conflict with the monetary or marketplace economy.

Discussion and conclusions

The other is essential to sharing. Sharing is bound up with ideas about property, ownership, and self and also notions of solidarity and generosity. It breaks barriers, removes interpersonal distance, creates bonds, and strengthens relationships. Asymmetries, lack of fairness, and transgressing social norms impede sharing. One of the main incentives for sharing is the desire for connection. According to Durkheim (1964), the desire for intimacy with others is the most important determinant of human behavior. It follows that fear of intimacy, not just fear of loss, is a major barrier to sharing. Although this was not directly expressed by informants, it can be seen masquerading as independence in the unwillingness to borrow from others, but social bonds in committed relationships are germane to experiencing well-being (Diener & Seligman, 2004). The findings presented here provide a glimpse of the role of intimacy in sharing behavior.

Children receive early lessons about the goodness of sharing. Their integration into society both at school and in the family involves sharing, beginning with crayons, games, toys, bedrooms, or food. Children learn not only that it is good to share but also that they should take care of their possessions. Inside the family, sharing is mutual, usually nonegalitarian, and rooted in the love among the family members. It can be spontaneous and altruistic, but it is more apt to be forced by parents and teachers. Even though sharing is sometimes a source of tension and fights between

siblings, it is the glue cementing the family together (see also Epp & Price, Chapter 29 of this volume; Prinz, Chapter 28 of this volume). At the same time, smaller families, rising affluence, and individualistic and fast-paced lifestyles all threaten sharing. With increased privatization of possessions within the family, some parents giving duplicate possessions to their children, and practices like giving gifts to siblings when one child has a birthday, there is not as much sharing in the middle-class family as there might be. Instead, there is a tendency toward individualization and claiming private space even when living in a common house. This trend is sharper in North America compared to Spain. Living in apartments instead of spacious houses, children leaving their parents' homes much later, and a more gregarious culture, in contrast to the more individualistic and autonomous ethos in North America, shape two different lifestyles of sharing.

Despite the prevalent childhood lesson that sharing is good, among the young adults studied, sharing is not so open outside the family; some participants observed that sharing ends at the family front door, while others showed more extensive generosity although restricted to certain goods and certain others. Here, sharing is not forced or compulsory, as it might be during childhood; instead, adulthood brings independence to decide to share or not.

The sharing lessons learned in childhood, along with previous negative experiences when sharing, reportedly led to dilemmas about what to share and where to draw the line for sharing. Abusive and opportunistic behavior, asymmetries, violating

the social norms of sharing, lack of gratitude, and selfish behavior all drain the opportunities to share and lead people to a less sharing-oriented behavior. There is reluctance to share expensive (e.g., jewelry), easily damaged (e.g., CDs), and symbolic possessions (e.g., gifts). Intimate pieces of information like personal secrets and feelings or personal diaries are not shared or are reserved for very best friends and partners. Fear of becoming vulnerable or being judged are the main barriers to sharing sensitive information, even though these emotional possessions are the ones that create engagement and meaningful relationships when shared. It seems that social media like Twitter and Facebook tend to have a disinhibiting effect on sharing personal information (Nissenbaum, 2010), which could either be because of an illusionary feeling of anonymity online or because the Internet fosters a true sharing community, as some have suggested (e.g., Benkler, 2006).

We also observed a tension between sharing as a means of social connectivity and the desire for material independence that resists sharing possessions with either siblings or friends. On the one hand, belongingness and building a sense of community act as drivers for sharing, whereas on the other hand, possessiveness, attachment, and independence inhibit and limit sharing. There also appears to be some gender bias, with females being more likely to be givers in sharing relationships.

Sharing nourishes the relationships between people and brings togetherness and belongingness, but it also has the power to make social ties evaporate. Differences

of opinion about sharing and fair distribution of certain resources even within the families (e.g., wills) may lead to acrimony and resentment among the family members, fueling confrontations and tearing families apart (e.g., Sussman, Cates, & Smith, 1970; Titus, Rosenblatt, & Anderson, 1979). Furthermore, some family members who are writing wills may engage in either predeath coercing (e.g., “I can write you out of my will”) or even postmortem control (e.g., “only on the condition that he marries within the faith”).

In an era in which overconsumption seems to be the norm, reducing ownership and increasing sharing would benefit both individuals and society. At a macrolevel, sharing has economic, social, and environmental consequences. One of our informants from Spain explained that she shares clothes with her sister: “We love it, because this way, we don’t need to buy so much” (24-year-old Spanish female). Sharing more means consuming less, which leads to a more sustainable way of life. By giving priority to sharing the use of things instead of sharing the ownership of things, we promote socially and environmentally conscious consumption. An example with an additional incentive is in the San Francisco Bay area, where freeways have special areas for those seeking rides. Lone drivers are apt to pick up these passengers, because it allows them to drive in the faster highoccupancy vehicle lanes.

It has been forecasted that in 40 years, 70% of the world’s population will be living in cities, which is likely to lead to inequalities and a more dehumanized society (Zabalbeascoa,

2010). Sharing builds up communities, makes people feel engaged in groups, redistributes resources, and brings a more human touch to everyday life. According to Fiske (2004), unity, solidarity, and understanding the community as a “natural kind” of human coexistence are some of the outcomes of communal sharing (p. 69). When we share, we relate to others. Cova (1997) argues that links (i.e., social relationships) are more important than things (e.g., brands, products, experiences, ideas). People have reported greater happiness and life satisfaction when they experience relatedness and belongingness (e.g., Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Myers, 2000).

At a personal level, sharing goods frees up resources (e.g., time, money, space) that can be used for other purposes. If we are what we have, and we share what we have, then we feel an expanded aggregate sense of self. Sharing reaches the highest degree of intensity and intimacy when it takes place with a significant other and covers material and emotional issues, ranging from daily life objects to a joint life project, from bills to dreams, from home tasks to life aspirations, and from financial and emotional crises to blissfully happy moments.

As one of the aphorisms offered by a quoted informant has it, “sharing is caring.” For the most part, the sharing reported by informants involved demonstrations of caring for another person. Parental sharing with children is quintessentially nurturing. Sharing a pleasing meal is an act of caring as well as nurturing. In this sense, there is a key distinction between compulsory sharing as a social norm and heartfelt sharing. While

the latter is the most rewarding, the former can be experienced as forced, unnatural, and even unpleasant. Charity in this context does not necessarily connote either sacrifice or altruism. Rather, as Bajde (2006) found, “an absolute merger between self and other (leaving only ‘us’) annihilates the very foundation of concepts such as altruism and egoism” (p. 57). Here, too, we see the importance of the aggregate sense of self. With Bajde’s charitable donors as well as D. Stone’s (2005) emotionally involved personal care workers, we see strong evidence that sharing and caring need not end at the front door. Well-being is often related to prosocial motivation and the ability to make positive contributions to the lives of others. It entails less emphasis on *I* and *mine* and more appreciation of *we* and *ours*. From this perspective, the altruistic aspects of sharing and the positive impact on others’ lives that it entails drive us to the highest level of both individual and collective well-being.

Sharing is a contemporary hotbed topic. As Leadbeater (2008) has put it, “In the 20th century we were identified by what we owned; in the 21st century we will be defined by how we share and what we give away” (p. 26). Choosing sharing instead of monopolizing influences our personal well-being, tightens bonds, enhances social connection, and builds a sense of macroaggregate self, minimizing repercussions on the environment and improving collective well-being.

Current models of consumer behavior are steeped in assumptions of egoistic individuals competing for limited resources and making independent decisions

(Commuri & Gentry, 2005). Models of the family make assumptions that are not too different from these and emphasize conflict resolution and bargaining in decision making within the family. These models fail to recognize the factors identified here that may facilitate sharing. Under a sharing scenario, the individualistic ownership and the egoistic assumptions pitting people against one another in a zero-sum game evaporate. A growing number of models of sharing are ripe for investigation by scholars of Transformative Consumer Research. One is the growing number of bicycle- and car-sharing organizations (see, e.g., Jonsson, 2006; Katsev, 2003; Meijkamp, 1998). Another is the online organization CouchSurfing, which focuses on facilitating staying in a local host's home throughout most of the world. At a more general level, there are several online organizations that facilitate sharing various things with neighbors, such as The Sharehood and Sharability.

Digital file sharing and open source software like Linux are other examples (see, e.g., Giesler, 2006; Hemetsberger, 2006). Flickr, Wikipedia, Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and millions of blogs, forums, and chat rooms provide ample evidence that sharing is alive, well, and growing, in spite of, and perhaps because of, increased privatization and intellectual property rights. Such sharing is by no means restricted to the more affluent world, and there are no doubt many more as yet uncharted opportunities for sharing globally. Examining and facilitating these opportunities is an immense opportunity for influencing well-being through Transformative Consumer Research.

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