Sharing

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Sharing is a fundamental consumer behavior that we have either tended to overlook or to confuse with commodity exchange and gift giving. Sharing is a distinct, ancient, and increasingly vital consumer research topic that bears on a broad array of consumption issues ranging from sharing household resources versus atomized family possessions to file sharing versus intellectual property rights. This theoretical review distinguishes between sharing in and sharing out, and suggests that sharing in dissolves interpersonal boundaries posed by materialism and possession attachment through expanding the aggregate extended self. However, such sharing is challenged by growing market commoditization. Implications for consumer theory and research are considered.

> [Sharing is] the most universal form of human economic behavior, distinct from and more fundamental than reciprocity. . . . Sharing has probably been the most basic form of economic distribution in hominid societies for several hundred thousand years. (Price 1975)

In much of Asia the tea cups are quite small and the beer bottles are quite large. For, in contrast to contemporary Western drinks, the beverages in these containers are meant to be shared. It is generally unthinkable that dinner companions would pour their own tea or sake or that they would consume a bottle of beer by themselves. So the small cups and large bottles assure frequent replenishment of others' beverages. Rituals of sharing are also emphasized in the communal dishes of a Chinese banquet with its round table and rotating Lazy Susan laden with food for all. A good Korean or Chinese host will even pick out the best morsels of food and place them on the plate of a guest. Such sharing of food and beverages is not restricted to Asia. In the West a meal served "family style" means that the contents of serving dishes are freely available to all at the table. Participating in a "potluck" meal is another form of routinized sharing. Although we have a more individualized etiquette than the medieval European days when people ate from common trenchers and sat on common benches, we have retained many communal elements of sharing in eating. We also retain many vestiges of shared hospitality, as exemplified by hosting parties, accommodating houseguests, and caring for grandchildren.

Nor is all contemporary sharing merely a vestigial relic of times when we were more interdependent, as some suggest (e.g., Sennett 1970). Consider the help, advice, and information that we share daily on the Internet. The Internet is a cornucopia of shared information available to all. Contrasts like Wikipedia versus traditional encyclopedias or Linux versus Windows operating systems show the difference between freely shared and proprietary information. By transcending the perspective that information is something to be owned, bought, and sold, Flickr, YouTube, Facebook, Google, and many other such sites have ushered in a new era of sharing that has quickly been embraced by millions. Even offline, sharing information such as recipes, directions, travel tips, weather forecasts, and restaurant recommendations is often more the rule than the exception.

Most people of the world also share their homes, furnishings, food, resources, and belongings with other household members. While children in the household may ask for food ("demand sharing"), they may often simply help themselves to the contents of the family refrigerator and cupboards ("open sharing" or what Gudeman [2001] calls a commons to be shared by all). They need not seek permission to enter their family home, use the telephone, sit on the sofa, take a bath, or turn on the lights. These shared things are, in effect, joint possessions. Although the attendant bills, mortgages, and debts most likely legally belong to the adults in the family, everyone in the family may feel

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free to use most of the home and its contents. The children need not fear that they will be given an itemized bill when they leave to set up homes of their own.

Household pooling and allocation mechanisms in affluent societies are ideally a close approximation of Louis Blanc's precept: from each according to his or her abilities and to each according to his or her needs. But other possibilities as well as other types of families exist. Fine (1980) found that in Tamil Nadu India two-thirds of families allocated scarce food according to the caloric needs of family members, approximating Blanc's ideal. But 20% allocated food in proportion to the status of family members (with the male head of household at the top), and nearly 10% tried to maximize the survival chances of the "most important" members of the family.

Numerous anthropological studies have examined patterns of food sharing, primarily in forager societies. These studies have generally concluded that the sharing frequently found in such societies improves the efficiency of resource use, increases security by sowing seeds of reciprocal obligations, or enhances the status or mating opportunities of those who share (e.g., Gurven 2006; Hawkes 1991; Kelly 1995). But recently some social researchers have begun to argue that there is more to sharing than this and, specifically, that sharing is not a form of exchange (e.g., Fiske 1991; Price 1975; Woodburn 1998). Because contemporary consumer behavior has been characterized as being tied to marketplace exchange (e.g., Bagozzi 1975), the possibility of non-exchange-based sharing as a common, if not dominant, mode of consumption challenges existing thought in the field.

The present conceptualization examines the nature of consumer sharing and considers how it differs from commodity exchange and gift exchange. Despite its pervasiveness, the ubiquitous consumer behavior of sharing remains not only a theoretical terra incognita, but a nearly invisible and unmentioned topic in the consumer behavior literature. This study offers the beginning of a redress for this neglect. It starts by presenting a prototype theory of sharing versus two other acquisition and distribution mechanisms. Emerging cultural models of sharing are presented, followed by a consideration of contemporary sharing within the family, the extended family, and the community. The paper then distinguishes between cultural and individual approaches to the phenomenon of sharing and concludes with a summary of initial theoretical insights and consumer research issues involving sharing.

RELUCTANCE TO STUDY SHARING

There are several apparent reasons that prior consumer research and research in related disciplines have neglected sharing. One is that sharing has sometimes been treated as either gift exchange or commodity exchange. This is part of a larger impediment: the pervasive lens of rationalism (e.g., Becker 2005). Because reciprocal exchange seems to be self-interested, it is tempting to see all of human life as an exchange of some sort and to see human beings as rational selfish creatures competing with others for presumably scarce resources. At the extreme, adopting this exchange lens leads to what has been described as the commodification of everything (e.g., Agnew 2003; Radin 1996).

Even though Marcel Mauss's (1925/1967) highly influential theory of the gift started out seeking an alternative to the utilitarianism of marketplace exchange (Graeber 2001; Hart 2007), it wound up being a theory of exchange between groups in order to secure common benefits, often with a competitive agonistic tone. Gregory (1982) posits gift giving as a form of exchange that is friendlier than buying or exchanging commodities. He sees gift giving as a holdout or counterforce to the encroachment of the market. Gifts make friends, express love, and celebrate human bonds. Yet studies of contemporary gift exchange practices often show participant ambivalence, anxiety, resistance, and conflict (e.g., Fischer and Arnold 1990; Marcoux 2009; Sherry, McGrath, and Levy 1993), suggesting that an overly romanticized view of gift giving as a corrective to the market is not always warranted either. This "dark side of the gift" suggests that rather than being free of the rational, self-interested, calculating characteristics thought to pervade the market, gift giving can be as agonistic and as selfish as market transactions. To those who view all of human nature as self-interested rationalism, this is not surprising. This includes most economists (e.g., see Kolm and Ythier 2006), many social psychologists, and a substantial number of anthropologists. In consumer research self-gifts have been theorized as the epitome of self-interest in gift giving. While focusing on the positive aspects of self-gifts, Mick and DeMoss (1990) acknowledge that construing indulgences to oneself as a gift may be but a subtle disguise for harmful materialism.

A second reason that sharing may escape recognition and study is that it is an activity that is more characteristic of the interior world of the home rather than the exterior worlds of work and the market. There is likely an accompanying gender bias since traditionally women have been associated with the interior of home and men with the exterior world. The reality may be different as two-worker households become the norm, but the continuing dominance of women in the sharing activities of childbirth, child rearing, and feeding the family and guests suggests that the association of women with home and sharing has hardly disappeared. Although he focused on gift giving rather than sharing, these activities lie in the realm of the "love culture" that Cheal (1988) has theorized. He suggested that gifts are spontaneous expressions of autochthonous emotions. This desire for intimacy with others is the most important determinant of human behavior, according to Durkheim (1964). Both gift giving and sharing are expressions of this desire for connection. And like gift giving (Fischer and Arnold 1990), sharing is a behavior disproportionately enacted by women in the contemporary West.

One further explanation for the lack of attention that sharing has received lies in its ubiquity and its resulting taken-for-granted character. Although gift giving is often high-

lighted by special ceremonial occasions for the individual (e.g., birthdays), couple (e.g., Valentine's Day), family (e.g., Christmas), or community (e.g., weddings), sharing is enacted daily. Whereas most gift giving is formally acknowledged with verbalized thanks, most sharing is not (Visser 2008). Some sharing, like that in controversial communes, may be highly visible. But the majority of daily sharing of food, money, and possessions goes unnoticed and is invisible to most people for whom it is routine. It has been argued that the wrapping and ceremony of gift giving are necessary in order to distinguish gifts from ordinary sharing, on one hand, and commodity exchange, on the other (Belk 1996). The same is true of the excess, extravagance, and luxuriousness of gifts as opposed to the sharing of more ordinary goods. As a result, like the gender bias that renders women's work within the home largely invisible or trivial to their partners and to male culture in general (e.g., Hochschild 2003; Strasser 2000), routine sharing, especially within the household, often goes unnoticed and unappreciated.

SHARING AND RELATED CONSUMPTION CONSTRUCTS

Prototypes

Benkler (2004) sees sharing as "nonreciprocal pro-social behavior." Belk (2007, 126) defines sharing as "the act and process of distributing what is ours to others for their use and/or the act and process of receiving or taking something from others for our use." Neither of these definitions is sufficiently precise, but further precision is difficult. Rather than attempt an Aristotelian definition of sharing, in this paper I suggest an alternative approach based on family resemblances (Rosch and Mervis 1975; Wittgenstein 1968). Within this perspective prototypes replace taxonomic definitions, and we may instead judge whether something is sharing, gift giving, or commodity exchange based on its resemblance to the prototype of each. It is not specified which particular characteristics determine similarity to a prototype. Just as a child may have her mother's eyes and smile or have her height and intelligence, we judge family resemblance based on multiple characteristics of the prototype. As long as we agree on the prototypes, we should be able to judge whether a behavior should be regarded as one thing or as something else (Weinberger 2007).

Belk (2007) suggests two key prototypes for sharing: mothering and the pooling and allocation of resources within the family. In giving birth the mother shares her body with the fetus and subsequently shares her mother's milk, nurturing, care, and love with the infant. This care is given freely, with no strings attached and no expectation of reciprocity or exchange. Providing this care is seen as normal and natural. Because of this expectation of "natural" maternal caregiving and love we find such ideas as paying surrogate mothers and selling babies to be troublesome (Belk, Wallendorf, and Sherry 1989; Radin 1996). The lack of reciprocity in sharing is often explained using Sahlins's (1972) notion of generalized reciprocity, where no one keeps track of the balance between giving and receiving (e.g., Gell 1992; Godbout and Caillé 1998; Wilk and Cliggett 2007). But as we shall see, there is more to sharing than this.

Within the family, shared things are, de facto if not de jure, joint possessions. Their use requires no invitation, generates no debt, and may entail responsibilities as well as rights. The responsibilities may include taking care not to damage shared possessions, not overusing these things to the detriment of other family members, and cleaning up so that others will find these resources in a similar state of readiness for their own use. Such responsibilities underscore a difference between shared possession and sole ownership. Where a household member is regarded as the sole owner of something, there is more freedom to treat these items as he or she pleases. In order to use the personal (i.e., not jointly owned) possessions of family members in the West, it is considered proper to ask permission to borrow. This would normally be the case, for instance, when a child wishes to wear a sibling's clothing. In other instances like dog or cat ownership, it is difficult *not* to jointly receive the animal's affection, regardless of who in the family technically owns it. Tinson and Nuttall (2008) find that European siblings see borrowing as distinct from sharing. It is regarded here as a borderline case of sharing. Although it is a one-way (i.e., nonreciprocal) temporary use of durable goods, nevertheless it has some elements of gift giving. So long as it is not "covert borrowing," it would likely generate a thank you.

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. Not everyone desires such bonding. Douglas and Isherwood (1979, 66–67) speculate that "there is a class of solitary feeding where the person wolfs or bolts down his food, probably standing by the refrigerator in his overcoat." Fortunately for society, such a person is far less common than the person who prefers to eat and live in the company of others. Turner and Rojek (2001, 28) suggest that our preference for companionship gave rise to sociology, which they explain as "the scientific study of friendship or companionship. . . . It should be recalled that the notion of companionship derived from the Latin *pannis* or bread. Companionship is the consequence of a shared meal . . . between people who trust each other because of shared involvement in a ritualistic community." Sharing, whether with our parents, children, siblings, life partners, friends, coworkers, or neighbors, goes hand in hand with trust and bonding. It differs from economic exchange, which rarely creates communal bonds with other people. As Turner and Rojek (2001, 7) frame it, sociology seeks "to understand how social bonds are formed and sustained, despite rather than because of economic exchange." Economic exchange may create economic obligations between buyers and sellers, but regardless of the popularity of "relationship marketing," it generally fails to forge social bonds.

If the prototypes for sharing are mothering and the pooling and allocation of resources within the ideal family, the pro-

totype for economic exchange is buying bread from a store. Let us ignore for the moment the question of whether buyers and sellers are really free individuals rather than pawns of the political economy in which they are embedded (Carrier 1997; Ortiz 2005). From this perspective we exchange money for bread in an unconditional reciprocal transaction. Although we might also barter with a baker for the bread, this is a less apt prototype because the lack of equivalence in bartered goods may create lingering obligations or conditions (Humphrey and Hugh-Jones 1992). Money is a more perfect commodity. In prototypical market exchange, when the exchange partners complete their transaction they need never again encounter each other. Regardless of whether the setting is a retail store, a bazaar, a garage sale, or an online auction, the liberal economic ideal is that such markets bring together transactors who are only temporarily connected through an impersonal exchange. Commodity exchange is about the reproduction of rights to objects, not the reproduction of relationships between people. Therefore, ideally the exchange is simultaneous so that there is no lingering debt to tie the parties to one another.

Another prototypical characteristic of commodity exchange is calculability. Weights, measures, and specifications together with fixed or explicitly bargained or auctioned prices help make clear exactly what we give and what we get in such exchanges. Contracts and contract law stipulate the conditions of sale and what is required of whom. Trade laws encourage honest treatment and give us means to settle disputed outcomes. Such specificity and legal requirements are generally absent in the contexts of sharing and gift giving. Where they are present (e.g., prenuptial agreements) they threaten to turn what would otherwise be sharing or gift giving into a commodity exchange by virtue of their prescriptive stipulations of what is required of whom.

The prototype of gift giving can be found in the notion of the pure or perfect gift (Carrier 1995; Derrida 1992). As with marketplace commodity exchange and sharing, let us for the moment ignore the possibility that gift givers may not be acting as free individuals (Mauss 1925/1967). The perfect gift is immaterial (the thought counts more than the material manifestation), priceless (removed from the monetary considerations of commodity exchange), and imposes no obligation of a return gift. While Carrier (1995) concludes that such gifts can exist, Derrida (1992) deconstructs each of these characteristics to argue that the pure gift is an impossibility. However, even if this is so, it does not preclude viewing the perfect gift as a prototype for gift giving. Belk (1996) makes this argument and specifies six characteristics of the perfect gift:

1. The giver makes an extraordinary sacrifice
2. The giver wishes solely to please the recipient
3. The gift is a luxury
4. The gift is something uniquely appropriate to the recipient
5. The recipient is surprised by the gift, and
6. The recipient desires the gift and is delighted by it.

Using O. Henry's "The Gift of the Magi" and Shakespeare's "The Merchant of Venice," Belk (1996) demonstrates how these ideals are venerated and argues that they are important influences on gift selection and exchange rituals in the West, even if they are seldom fulfilled. There is also careful effort by the gift giver to separate the item selected as a gift from any evidences of its marketplace origins. The price tag and store markings are removed (at least in the West), the gift is concealed by gift wrapping and trimmings, and it is delivered with befitting ceremony. As Carrier (1995) emphasizes, these are the rituals through which we transform commodities into gifts. As noted previously, they also help distinguish gift giving from sharing.

Distinctions and Ambiguities

The lines between gift giving, sharing, and commodity exchange are imprecise. When a gift is too far from the characteristics of the perfect gift it may not be perceived as a gift at all. Giving money is one instance where the transformation into a gift usually requires, at the least, crisp bills in a special wrapper. Even so, it may still fail to be perceived as a gift (e.g., Webley, Lea, and Portalska 1983). Such an offering may alternatively be read as a bribe (an attempted commodity exchange—Noonan 1984) if it is given to someone with more wealth or power, or charity (closer to sharing) if it is given to someone with less wealth or power than the giver. Different cultures may draw these distinctions differently, as with the acceptability of money gifts in Ukrainian Orthodox Canadian weddings (Cheal 1988).

A further instance of ambiguity between gift giving and commodity exchange arises because even though the prototypical gift imposes no obligations of a return gift, it is common in practice to restrict our gift giving to those who also give us gifts. More prototypical one-way gift giving may occur when giving to the very young or very old and when giving for a life cycle event like marriages, births, or funerals. But for simultaneous or paired mutual gift-giving occasions like Christmas, Valentine's Day, White Day, birthdays, and wedding anniversaries, we normally expect reciprocity.

There is also potential overlap due to the ability of both sharing and gift giving to bind the giver and recipient. However, whereas the gift imposes an obligation of reciprocity, sharing does not. Unlike marketplace commodity exchange, gift exchange should ideally be staggered so that the exchange is never completely balanced and someone is always in gift debt to someone else. By remaining perpetually indebted, the exchange partners remain linked. The inalienability of the gift ("We can't just sell it; it was a gift from Uncle Fred") also helps to establish and maintain bonds (Weiner 1992). Being a part of a gift exchange network or being invited to a gift-giving celebration like a birthday party is a sign of inclusion (Komter 1996). Someone who reciprocates a gift too quickly is opting out of the indebtedness and the bond it signals, albeit more subtly than by refusing the initial gift. Similarly, someone in the West who evidences explicit calculation in attempting to perfectly balance

the exchange is both betraying an overly commoditized view of the exchange and suggesting that they wish to annul the relationship rather than carry forward an imbalance.

As these betrayals of gift giving suggest, the judgment of which prototype a given transaction best resembles is sometimes a fuzzy one. Family resemblance cues may include the presence of appropriate rituals and behaviors, appropriate expectations and understandings, and appropriate objects and persons. There are other cues as well. Since commodity transactions typically involve strangers, the goods exchanged also lack the inalienability that often lends singularity to gifts and shared objects. Stated differently, the value of commodities in marketplace exchange does not depend upon who it is with whom we exchange. It is alienable from this person. This is the prototypical case. But the extent to which a commodity exchange is actually impersonal can vary considerably in, say, buying something online versus purchasing it at our best friend's garage sale. Buying used goods necessarily involves buying singularized potentially inalienable possessions that may be perceived as contaminated by their prior owners (Belk 1988; Gregson and Crewe 2003). Therefore, secondhand goods, especially those of a "personal" nature like used clothing, underwear, or shoes, are not perfect commodities. Furthermore, business exchanges embedded in personal friendships also lose some of their impersonal commodity character (Carrier 1995; Granovetter 1985; Silver 1990).

While the prototype of economic exchange is a marketplace exchange of money for bread, money itself is more complex than it may seem. Besides being a medium facilitating commodity exchange, money is thought to be a commodity par excellence. It is fungible, nonsingular, alienable, and impersonal. But there are some exceptions (Belk and Wallendorf 1990; Bradford 2009; Zelizer 1994). For example, an inheritance of money upon the death of a parent has a different meaning than money earned in wages. The wage money may be freely spent on anything, whereas the inheritance is different because it is associated with the dead parent and is more apt to be spent on something "special" that can serve as a memorial. Gell (1992) offers a revised criterion for distinguishing between commodities and gifts, which may also help to distinguish commodity exchange from sharing. He says that such classifications depend upon the social context of the exchange rather than the relationship between people (independent/interdependent) or between people and objects (alienable/inalienable). When the context is one of social reproduction such as marriage or alliance formation, the transfer involves gift giving or sharing. When the context is one of trade or barter, it involves commodity exchange. This is a useful addition because it helps us to understand why the money received as wages is a commodity while the money received as a birthday gift is not. But at the same time the contextual explanation does not negate the fungible, nonsingular, alienable, and impersonal characteristics of the commodity exchange prototype of buying bread in a store. It simply suggests that contextual characteristics (here a store) may also be indicative of the prototype. Although the presence of commercial sellers may mark offerings as being part of commodity exchange, when a seller engages in relationship marketing, the intent is to create an interpersonal dependency between seller and buyer, to make products or services nonfungible, and to singularize offerings through their inalienable association with the seller. The reasons for doing so are easy to see in Gell's (1992) formula: gift/reciprocity = good; market exchange = bad.

Although we do not hesitate to inspect and inquire about the characteristics and condition of an object we are contemplating buying, to similarly examine or inquire about a gift would be to "look a gift horse in the mouth" and likely transform the gift into a commodity. Usury laws came about to prevent the commoditization of loans to others and to instead keep such loans within the realm of sharing without expecting interest or gain (Atwood 2008; Hyde 1983). In the rise of the market it first became permissible to offer usurious loans to strangers, but not to kin or neighbors. Although Islam continues to prohibit usury, Shariah bank loan fees and risk sharing are substituted to allow what are effectively commoditized loans to friends as well as strangers (Maurer 2005). Such loans do employ a calculus of profit and return. They differ from other bank loans through a rhetoric maintaining that the resulting gains and losses are shared by borrowers and lenders. But as the history of usury also suggests, judgments about what should or should not be sold as a commodity can vary over times and cultures (Radin 1996).

Several recent examinations of communal activities in consumer research use gift giving and sharing interchangeably (e.g., Giesler 2006; Joy 2001; Kozinets 2002). There is little in the literature that explicitly compares gift exchange to sharing, but there are some key comparisons between gift exchange and commodity exchange. We have already noted Gregory's (1982) suggestion to focus on interpersonal dependence and object alienability and Gell's (1992) suggestion to instead focus on the context of the transaction. Characterizations of gift exchange in consumer research stress the ability of gifts to forge and reinforce bonds of friendship or love (e.g., Belk 1979; Sherry 1993). Although the possibility of one-sided agapic gifts of passion has been suggested (e.g., Belk 1996; Belk and Coon 1993), the majority of gift theorizing insists that the gift is motivated by self-interest. In Mauss's view, gift giving is driven by three obligations: to give, to receive, and to return a reciprocal gift. In the total *prestations* of the "archaic and primitive" societies on which Mauss's analysis was based, gift giving was an essential process that formed and reinforced alliances and prevented warfare. One of the sources of confusion about gifts in such societies, according to Mauss, is that they are "in theory voluntary, disinterested and spontaneous, but are in fact obligatory and interested. The form usually taken is that of the gift generously offered; but the accompanying behavior is formal pretense and social deception, while the transaction itself is based on obligation and self-interest" (Mauss 1925/1967, 1). Even though Mauss was talking about the "total social fact" of obligatory societal

expectations in "primitive" economic, legal, religious, and moral systems, we can see here how even in contemporary gift giving the ruse of selfless one-sided giving is given great lip service even though most gift giving involves self-interested expectations of reciprocity. But in considering the contemporary gift, Mauss goes to the opposite extreme and makes the underlying motives for gift giving quite similar to the underlying motives for commodity exchange. Although Mauss distinguished between gifts and trade or barter, he rejected Malinowski's (1922) contention that "pure gifts" lie at one end of a continuum and "pure trade" at the other. He also rejected Malinowski's example of gifts between spouses as pure (read: prototypical) gifts and instead maintains that a husband's gifts to his wife are "a kind of salary for sexual services" (Mauss 1925/1967, 71). Malinowski himself later recanted the contention that there are pure gifts (Malinowski 1926). Thus, in Mauss's view contemporary gift giving is a very practical form of exchange; we give in order to get and because we are caught up in a system of mutual obligations, even if we hide the exchange characteristics of the gift through the pretense of bestowing a generous gift, expecting nothing in return. There may still be pure trade in this view, but there are no pure gifts except as an ideal.

Despite the self-evident spirit of sharing within the idealized family, this has not stopped some scholars from characterizing these behaviors as self-interested commodity exchanges as well (e.g., Becker 2005; Hawkes 1991; Trivers 1971). Drawing on Becker, Ruskola (2005) sees elements of both gift giving and sharing in the resource allocation of the traditional, if dated and idealized, model of family. But overall she finds commodity exchange a more apt model than altruistic kinship sharing: "A wife's caring for the home any one month and the husband's sharing (part of) his paycheck that month are surely gifts in the sense that neither party is explicitly basing his or her contribution on the express expectation of a *quid pro quo*. Yet, when these exchanges that occur over time are viewed as part of one transaction, a contract called 'marriage,' it appears that, as part of the traditional sexual division of labor, wives are providing housework and sexual services in return for maintenance" (Ruskola 2005, 333–34). What treatments like Ruskola's leave out is caring. Whereas she concludes that the (presumably Western) family is similar to a corporation, I conclude the opposite: the ideal of the family engaged in caring and sharing is dramatically different from the ideal of the corporation engaged in impersonal commodity exchange. Even with increased atomization within the family and more joint incomes (Coontz 1997; Weiss 2000), caring and sharing continue to distinguish the family from the corporation (Belk 2007).

Given the confusions between gift giving, commodity exchange, and sharing and the debates they have engendered, family resemblances to the prototypes offer better recognition of the fuzzy boundaries between these consumer behaviors than do absolute definitions. Table 1 enumerates some characteristics of these three consumption phenomena as well as some counterindicants and exceptions. It should be borne in mind, however, that these are descriptors of the prototypes and not definitional criteria. The judgment of the category to which a given behavior should be assigned is not dependent on meeting any certain criterion. It is rather based on a "looks right, feels right" judgment using the prototype as a basis for comparison. While the table is presented in linear fashion, it should really be cylindrical in order to suggest that not only can sharing and commodity exchange sometimes be confused with gift giving, they can also sometimes be confused with one another.

Just as the characteristics of the three concepts are not definitional criteria, the counterindicants and exceptions do not necessarily negate the concepts. However, where a counterindicant for one concept is a characteristic of another, it is a likely basis on which to discriminate. For example, exchange is characteristic of both gift giving and commodity exchange but is a counterindicant in the case of sharing. Likewise, both gift giving and commodity exchange involve transfers of ownership, whereas sharing involves joint ownership, at least de facto. The partners in gift exchange are recognized separately as givers and receivers, and the partners in commodity exchange are buyers and sellers. But there are no separate terms to distinguish the parties in sharing. This mutuality of possession is an important characteristic of sharing. And in contradistinction to commodity exchange, sharing is likely to involve caring and love. But even here there is potential ambiguity, as with the phenomenon of paid caregivers. Caregiving within an institutional setting is something that these organizations and their employees do for money. Yet, as Stone (2005) finds, these caregivers typically become highly loyal and bonded to those for whom they are caring. They go above and beyond the call of duty, sometimes spending their own meager wages to help care for those in their charge. Their rewards for such true care are intrinsic more than extrinsic. They become quasi family to their fictive kin clients and frequently set aside self-interest, bend administrative rules, and help their clients after hours. As Stone summarizes:

> Experience with care markets demonstrates something quite extraordinary: Even when people get paid a pittance for taking care of utter strangers in the most physically and emotionally demanding jobs, love creeps in. Study after study of nursing home aides, home health aides, child care workers, nannies and *au pairs*, even domestic workers, finds the most amazing alchemy. People who care for strangers, no matter what the pay, commonly fall in love with the people they care for and come to consider them family. They say they love their clients. Even though they have been trained by their teachers and warned by their supervisors and their friends to keep their emotional distance, they inevitably get close to clients and they say things like "You get attached to them." (Stone 2005, 275)

If so, then views of service workers as people performing onerous emotional labor (e.g., Hochschild 1983) as well as views of neighbors and community members growing ever

TABLE 1

PROTOTYPES AND CHARACTERISTICS

	Sharing	Gift giving	Commodity exchange
Prototype	1. Mothering 2. Pooling and allocation of household resources	The perfect gift (Della and Jim in "The Gift of the Magi")	Buying bread at a store for money
Characteristics	Nonreciprocal Social links to others De facto or de jure shared ownership or usufruct rights Money irrelevant Singular objects Networked inclusion Inalienable Personal Dependent Sharing context Social reproduction Nonceremonial Love, caring	Nonreciprocal in appearance; reciprocal exchange in practice Nonobligatory in appearance; obligatory in practice Transfer of ownership Thought that counts Sacrifice; luxury To please recipient Nonfungible Singularizes objects Wrappings; ceremony Lingering imbalance Networked inclusion Inalienable Personal; dependent Gift giving/alliance-formation context Qualitative relations between people Thank yous	Reciprocal Balanced exchange No lingering obligations Transfer of ownership Monetary Nonsingular Partible commodities Calculation Inspection Alienable Impersonal Independent Trade/barter context Quantitative relations between objects
Counterindications	Reciprocal expectations Formal monetary debt Forced compliance Exchange Thank yous	Appearance of reciprocity concern Too quick a return gift Too generous a gift Gift scrutiny; inspection Gift requests	Love, caring Embedded relationships Socially meaningful money (e.g., inheritance) Thank yous
Exceptions	Borrowing and lending Some paid caregiving Voluntary anonymous charity	Age and wealth exceptions to reciprocity Money gifts; gift certificates Mandated charity (e.g., Zakat)	Secondhand goods Relationship marketing Usury prohibitions; Shariah banking

more alienated from one another (e.g., Putnam 2000) are overly negative.

STREAMS OF GIFT-GIVING AND SHARING THEORY

Sharing within Gift-Giving Theory

A central stream of theory in cultural and economic anthropology as well as consumer research holds that reciprocal gift giving is distinct from the market and a key feature of human social life. While this emphasis on reciprocity is often attributed to Mauss (1925/1967), Sigaud's (2002) careful analysis reveals that it was really Lévi-Strauss (1949/1967) who simultaneously propelled Mauss to iconic status in anthropology and reinterpreted his work as being all about reciprocity. As Graeber (2001) and Hart (2007) emphasize, Mauss was a lifelong socialist who wrote *The Gift* in order to call into question the assumptions that marketplace exchange and self-interest are the necessary order of human interaction, even though he ironically ended up reinforcing rather than overturning these assumptions. A history of the stream of gift theory since Mauss will aid in understanding the newly emerging branch of this stream that focuses on sharing.

Bourdieu (1972/1979) first diminishes the distance between gift giving and economic exchange by noting that all that separates the gift from simple barter is the time delay between the gift and the countergift. But he goes on to suggest that this disguise of the economics of gift exchange is critical "to prevent the economy from being grasped as an economy, i.e., as a system governed by the laws of interested calculation, competition, or exploitation" (Bourdieu 1972/1979, 172). Arguably, just as the traditional Kabyle of Algeria studied by Bourdieu went to great lengths to make it seem that there is an alternate realm—gift giving or sharing—where the laws of self-interested exchange do not apply, so do contemporary market societies insist upon these two worlds. But, as we shall see, this is a largely Anglophone view that differs from the Francophone view.

Sahlins (1972) took another tack in arguing that there is indeed a realm in which the laws of self-interested exchange

do not apply—that of the family and close kin. Within this realm he maintains that the dominant practice is "generalized reciprocity." Sahlins includes sharing within his view of reciprocal exchange. He prefaces his typology of reciprocity in the "primitive world" with a stipulation that reciprocity "may include sharing and counter-sharing of unprocessed food, hospitality, ceremonious affinal exchanges, loaning and repaying . . . and so on and on" (Sahlins 1972, 192). Unlike Mauss (1925/1967) and Malinowski (1926), Sahlins believes that there is such a thing as a pure gift, and he suggests sharing, hospitality, kinship duties, and noblesse oblige distributions as examples of giving with only a vague expectation of reciprocity. But despite their vagueness, Sahlins still sees these as acts of generalized reciprocity—giving without keeping track—as imposing reciprocal obligations. Using food sharing among near kin and the suckling of children as examples, he goes on to note that although the countergift is left vague and will depend upon the abilities of the current recipient and the needs of the current donor, there is nevertheless an obligation imposed. With larger distance between giver and receiver, Sahlins (1972) suggests that tit-for-tat balanced reciprocity ensues. Although this might seem closest to an anonymous marketplace exchange, Sahlins characterizes market exchange as even more antagonistic, involving negative reciprocity where each party seeks to get more than is given. This is trade between enemies who use hard bargaining and deceit in order to maximize their gains.

This largely Anglophone two-worlds view is generally cast as the West being dominated by capitalist economic exchange principles and the Rest being dominated by gift exchange (Hart 2007; Sigaud 2002). Gregory's (1982) formulation of this two-worlds view has been noted, but it can also be found in the work of Carrier (1995), Strathern (1988), Testart (1998), and others. Moreover, the two-worlds view can also be found *within* the West. For example, Zelizer (2005) analyzes the strong legal distinction between economic activity and intimacy (especially personal caregiving, sharing, and gift giving) and calls this the "separate spheres" or "hostile worlds" ideology.

The Francophone anthropological view is found among a group of intellectuals who came together in 1980 to form Mouvement Anti-Utilitariste dans les Sciences Sociales or MAUSS. As the name suggests, their primary connection to Mauss was a resistance to the utilitarianism now associated with Gary Becker and the Chicago School and its program to frame all human behavior in terms of rational choice theory (see Graeber n.d.). The organization publishes *La Revue du MAUSS*, which has printed more than 1,000 articles along with about 30 books. Most of this material is in French, but the work of Godbout and Caillé (1998) and Godelier (1999) has been translated into English. Graeber (2001) and Gregory (1982) are members who have written in English.

Although there are some differences among members of MAUSS, from the point of view of sharing (e.g., Boilleau [1991] does not consider sharing to be a form of gift giving, while Godbout and Caillé [1998] do), I will take Godbout and Caillé's book as exemplary. Graeber (2001) does so as well. Rather than see the world of distribution and consumption as divided into gifts and commodities, Godbout and Caillé (1998) specify three spheres of distribution: the market, the state, and the domestic, with the latter being the realm of the gift in contemporary society. Instead of reciprocity, they stipulate that a gift imposes a debt on the recipient—a debt that it may not be possible to discharge. This debt, they say, begins with the gift of childbirth, which causes the child to feel indebted to the parents. They also stipulate that people within the family all feel that they owe a great deal more to others in the family than they could ever possibly repay. This differs from Sahlins's (1972) generalized reciprocity, but like Sahlins they maintain that sharing within the family is simply a form of gift giving. The emphasis on debt and repayment here is similar to a recent treatment by Atwood (2008), who reminds us that the negative side of this system is paying back hostility with vengeance and revenge.

A Diverging Stream: Alternative Models of Sharing

Bird-David (2005) notes the strong emphasis on sharing in hunter-gatherer societies and among the anthropologists who study them. Hunt (2005) designates such sharing, along with household sharing of goods, as a one-way economic transfer rather than an exchange. He describes a typical sharing of meat in such a forager society: "The meat from a large animal is shared with all members of the camp. Typically the carcass is butchered into large segments at the kill site and carried back to camp. The large segments of the carcass are then cut into smaller pieces. . . . Once cut, the pieces are moved in a way that everybody in camp gets a piece. And the rule is that everybody gets an equivalent piece" (Hunt 2005, 298). Bird-David (2005) sketches a brief history of theoretical anthropological accounts for such sharing. She notes that in the 1960s it was wrongly believed that the meat was given away so it would not spoil. During the 1970s, Sahlins's (1972) notions of generalized reciprocity held sway. In the 1980s it was argued that meat was seen as common property with everyone entitled to a share, or, alternatively, it was maintained that an egalitarian ideology regarded everyone as political equals, with sharing being used as a means to reduce material inequality. And the 1990s saw the emergence of a view that Bird-David (1990, 2005) characterizes as that of the giving environment. Here the environment is seen as giving to people just as parents give to children, and therefore it is natural to pass along this natural bounty by sharing with others.

The history of these nonutilitarian (or at least nonegoistic) accounts of sharing may not be as linear as Bird-David suggests, and each view continues to have its adherents. Other than Sahlins (1972), all of these accounts maintain that sharing in foraging societies does not involve exchange, debt, or reciprocity (e.g., Fiske 1991; Price 1975; Widlock

2004, 2005). This does not mean that these societies do not have exchange and gift mechanisms for other things in their economies, and the theorists acknowledge that these forager societies are an exception among human societies (Woodburn 1982). But they do establish that sharing can exist apart from exchange and reciprocity. And this is enough to have generated a series of reactive, exchange-based, responses. As Marlowe (2004) outlines them in the context of food sharing, five possibilities are mutualism, nepotism, reciprocity, costly signaling, and tolerated scrounging. Mutualism involves two or more people helping each other hunt because the chances of getting meat by attacking prey together is greater. Nepotism involves giving food to kin when the costs of doing so are less than the benefits (e.g., feeding infants makes them more likely to care for us in the future). Reciprocity may involve either non-in-kind exchange (e.g., I give you berries and you give me meat) or in-kind delayed reciprocity (e.g., I give you meat today, you give me meat next week). Costly signaling involves showing off one's ability to hunt and share meat so that one can attract more or better sexual mates and enjoy other social benefits (e.g., Hawkes 1991). Finally, tolerated scrounging results from the decreasing marginal utility of continuing to eat more and the trade-off between the cost of defending resources from scroungers versus the benefit of doing do.

But as Woodburn (1998) convincingly argues, such egoistic sociobiological interpretations that see sharing as some form of self-interested reciprocal exchange do not accord well with the evidence. Drawing on his own work on meat sharing among the Hadza of Tanzania as well as studies in many other cultures, Woodburn (1998) draws five conclusions that effectively undermine the exchange interpretations of such sharing:

1. There is no need to dispose of meat before it rots, since it can be dried and stored for months.
2. The hunter's generosity is not stressed; instead others present engage in demand sharing (i.e., their requests cannot be denied) as a matter of entitlement.
3. The hunter has little control over who gets the meat, so he cannot favor those who have provided him meat in the past, those who may do so in the future, or his own kin.
4. Those who receive the meat are not obliged to reciprocate either with food or in some other way.
5. Success in hunting and subsequent sharing does not make the hunter more likely to have access to food or other resources supplied by others in the future.

As Belk (1984) has argued, not only is ownership a communal concept in such sharing societies, so to a large degree is the concept of self. There is held to be a more aggregate or communal sense of extended self in many hunter-gatherer societies and, as Ingold (2000) summarizes, these people also share their lives and environments with nonhuman plants, animals, and features of the landscape. The entire distinction between subjects and objects blurs within this worldview (Woodburn 1998). For example, among the Iñupiaq it is believed that the whale gives itself to all the people to be killed and eaten (Bodenhorn 2005). The spirit of the whale does not die but goes back to the community of whales until it returns again to feed the people. As Bodenhorn (2005, 91) explains: "What we are talking about here is neither the bounded individual nor performative fragmentary dividuals who sound so postmodern. Instead we are talking about being part of a whole that is neither indistinguishable nor separate from it. The cosmology of the whale/human relationship is profoundly unifying." This is a broader sense of extended self than Belk (1988) envisioned in that it goes beyond purely human communities, and here self and other are less separate entities than they are part of a single reality.

Sahlins's (1972) explanation of sharing as generalized reciprocity is refuted in alternative sharing models. Woodburn (1998) points out that because the hunter has no choice but to share the animal he kills (demand sharing), it is inappropriate to think of this as either an act of reciprocation or an act made in anticipation of future, albeit unspecified, returns. He suggests that just as we do not think of our taxation systems as involving generalized reciprocity, neither should we think of meat distribution among foragers this way. And like welfare entitlements, recipients of this meat receive portions regardless of whether or not they have contributed in the past or will contribute in the future. Others have made similar arguments about the inapplicability of generalized reciprocity to explain demand sharing (e.g., Bird-David 1990; Ingold 1986; Price 1975). Although some have attempted to characterize even the one-way demand sharing of children's Halloween treats as generalized reciprocity (Wilk and Cliggett 2007, 153), future reciprocity here is highly unlikely. Price (1975, 5) does not deny that generalized reciprocity exists but insists that the concept is overextended when applied to "continuous one-way flows, which would be better considered as sharing." Widlock (2004, 61) is more definitive in suggesting that "sharing is not only unbalanced but a completely one-sided transfer and therefore not reciprocal at all."

A much more pervasive ideal mode of sharing is household pooling and sharing of resources. As Hunt (2005) points out, all humans are born helpless and depend upon adults for liquids, food, clothing, and shelter. The provision of these goods is not an immediate or delayed exchange. For example, Lamb (2000) finds that among Bengalis in the village of Mangaldihi in northern India a son's wife may be expected to care for his parents, but neither he nor his siblings who have received their parents' care are expected to help care for them. Rather, demand sharing is the rule, and children avail themselves of many parental resources without incurring a debt.

Bearing in mind the prototype theory offered to distinguish gift giving, commodity exchange, and sharing, we can appreciate Price's (1975) stipulation that gift exchange draws on both the principle of sharing and the principle of reciprocity. Still, he sees sharing as a more fundamental and older principle. Gift giving, he suggests, enters the picture

as "an extension of sharing patterns beyond the ordinary social contexts of sharing" (Price 1975, 3, 12). By ordinary social contexts he refers to family, close kin, and sometimes groups as large as a clan or village. He notes the role of food, stimulants (e.g., coffee, tea, tobacco), and depressants (e.g., alcohol) as instances when sharing may become reciprocal gift giving and observes the particular ability of these gifts to serve as acts of social communication. In this regard, he cites Firth's (1970) observation that in England an offer of a cigarette is readily accepted, while someone who is offered an equally priced postage stamp would insist on paying. The difference, Price suggests, is that only the cigarette can act as a conduit of social communion and, because it extends beyond the ordinary social context, it is a gift more than sharing.

According to findings in the United States, we normally consider our immediate family to be a part of our extended self (Belk 1987), and thus sharing with them is like sharing with self. The family is often bound together by what Epp and Price (2008) call a shared family identity or what Belk (1988) calls the family level of extended self. Here, too, we can see evidence of this in Lamb's (2000) work in India. She finds that families feel a common sense of self, even a common body, by virtue of sharing food, living in the same home and neighborhood, sleeping in the same bed, touching, and having sexual relations. This extends to others as well, so that those who prepare and serve food transfer some of their essence, nature, and qualities to those who eat it. Sharing in this instance can be seen as a negative contagion when it cuts across castes or as positive contagion when sharing food with welcomed visitors. While Gregson and Crewe (2003) found fears of negative contagion in purchases of secondhand clothing, Nemeroff and Rozin (1994) found both positive and negative contagion effects involving wearing the sweater of another person, depending on whether the other person was seen as good (e.g., lover, rock star) or bad (e.g., murderer, fanatical leader). Such findings suggest that notions of extended self and family should be keys in seeking to better understand sharing.

SHARING AND EXTENDED SELF

Familial Sharing

Sharing within the Western family is centered primarily within the home. Distinctions and boundaries are drawn between the private sharing sphere of the home and the public sphere outside the home (Allan 1989). Because family is held to be the most immediate layer of extended self after the individual (Belk 1988), it is also where the greatest amount of sharing takes place. This is not to say that the use of home spaces is purely egalitarian. Control of the home and its spaces differs with time, circumstances, purposes, cultures, and relationships (e.g., Munro and Madigan 1999). Adult owners generally have more access to the home and its contents than children, lodgers, nonresident kin, neighbors, friends, au pairs, and live-in nannies. Members of reconstituted families and children who have left home may feel less "at home" than others living there. Being at home implies certain taken-for-granted sharing privileges. As noted earlier, those who feel at home do not need to ask permission or be invited to use family resources (Belk 2007). They share food and common spaces within the home. These spaces and family possessions also have meanings that are shared within the family but that are unknown to outsiders (e.g., Money 2007; Olson 1985; Riggins 1994). Even a humble drinking glass has deeper meanings to the family members who have drunk from it over many meals and family occasions. But sharing in the family is usually taken for granted and seldom draws attention since it is a routine activity without the more formalized rituals of gift giving. It is likely that one reason for Western parents making gifts in the name of mythical gift givers like Santa Claus, the Easter Bunny, and the Tooth Fairy is that for the young child this is one of the few ways we can distinguish special gift giving from normal everyday sharing.

Cultural and economic differences in the use of family spaces can be important. For example, men's and women's spaces in Arab Muslim homes are more gender segregated (e.g., Farah and Klarqvist 2001), and the communal apartments of Soviet homes had far less privacy from nonfamily members than residents desired (e.g., Boym 1994). Privacy is also a problem in the smaller and closer confines of the poor (e.g., Stack 1974). But within bourgeois families of the West, several generalizations about sharing can be made. A number of studies find that cohabiting unmarried couples tend to retain more individual ownership of possessions rather than the greater shared ownership and integration of possessions found among married couples (e.g., Olson 1985; Rosenblatt and Budd 1975). Even the laundry of unmarried couples is unlikely to be merged (Kaufmann 1998). Those who fail to merge their possessions may not last as a couple (e.g., see Miller 2008, chaps. 16 and 24). Although siblings may sometimes share toys, rooms, and other possessions, there is a taboo against sharing intimate personal clothing like underwear (e.g., Gregson and Crewe 2003), as contagion theory would suggest (e.g., Belk 1988). Gifts made to an individual in the family, especially on an individuating occasion like a birthday, are also more likely to be regarded as private property by the recipient (Bossard and Boll 1950). Sharing does not come naturally to children, at least in the West, and they must instead be taught to share (Belk 2007). However, in Aboriginal Australian societies, sharing is a stronger norm than ownership (e.g., Altman 1987; Belk, Groves, and Østergaard 2000).

The two categories of possessions on which the greatest amount of research on sharing within the home has taken place are food and money. Food encodes feelings of nurturance, love, health, happiness, and hospitality (e.g., Lupton 1996). Sharing a family meal is an important bonding ritual. Food is frequently used by wives and mothers in families to express love and affection (Miller 1998). This often includes sweet treats and comfort foods for children in the family, although mothers also accept responsibility and guilt for their family's health and eating habits (Charles and Kerr

1987). Pahl (1988) concludes that because family meals are consumed collectively, there can be little or no variation in food consumption within the family. But while many people claim that food is fully shared in their family, this is not necessarily the case. A pattern of sacrifice by women is strongest among poorer families (Charles and Kerr 1987). Although there is somewhat greater equality in sharing when the woman works outside the household and when she earns relatively more money, the pattern of discrimination does not disappear entirely (e.g., Commuri and Gentry 2005; Pahl 2000; Poloma and Garland 1971).

As with possessions, compared to married couples, cohabiting heterosexual couples are less likely to pool income and more likely to employ private individual money management practices (Elizabeth 2001; Heimdal and Houseknecht 2003; Vogler 2005), although the exact form of these practices differs culturally. Even though women may receive large amounts of money for "their use" in middle-class households, it is often understood that this use is confined to household maintenance, food for the family, and expenditures on the children (Burgoyne 2004; Zelizer 1994). Whether cohabiting or married, women are likely to have less discretionary money within the household than men (Burgoyne 1990; Elizabeth 2001; Pahl 1983). Although there is a tendency for couples to report and actually believe that they are pooling their money and sharing it equally, sharing with equal access to funds is the exception rather the rule (Burgoyne 1990; Commuri and Gentry 2005; Marshall and Woolley 1993). Thus, whatever the romantic ideal of the marital vow "With all my worldly goods, I thee endow," it holds only for a minority of married couples (Fehlberg 2005), and in places without joint property laws it is unlikely to hold in divorce settlements either. Far from sharing, divorcing couples may battle over possessions (McAlexander 1991).

Children not only have less access to money within the family than do adults, they may also be responsible for various household tasks in order to receive their "allowance" (Belk, Rice, and Harvey 1985). However, as noted earlier, children generally have free access to most areas and goods within the home. And both legally and out of love, middle-class parents and grandparents provide for most children's needs as well as many of their desires (e.g., Qureshi and Simons 1987). But within the family in consumer cultures we also see less sharing in the increased atomization and privatization of what were once the family radio, family television, family car, family vacation, and family meal (Belk 2007). Although Sennett (1970) suggested that with affluence and abundance the community sense of self and associated patterns of sharing would lessen, he did not anticipate that this constriction of self and sharing might also occur within the family.

Sharing within the Extended Family

According to studies in the United States, one level more distant than the immediate family in the extended self is the extended family (Belk 1987, 1988). Intergenerational sharing outside of the home and immediate family is quite common both upward to parents and downward to adult children and grandchildren. Some of this sharing is concerned with helping financially, while sharing heirlooms and other family possessions is often more about passing family meanings and myths from one generation to another (e.g., Curasi, Price, and Arnould 2004; McCracken 1987; Price, Arnould, and Curasi 2000). In some cultures this pattern of sharing and meaning-making extends beyond death as the ancestors are offered food, clothing, shelter, and other possessions (e.g., Bonsu and Belk 2003; Lamb 2000; Scott 2007). The majority of research and theorizing, especially but not exclusively from economists, treats these transfers of goods and money as reciprocal exchanges (e.g., Corrigan 1989; Mitchell 2003). The reasoning is that we "invest" in our children during their youth to insure that they will take care of us in our old age. Although this may sometimes be the case, there is also good reason to challenge this rational model. The amounts that older children give to their parents are considerably less than the amounts parents give to their children (e.g., Caplow et al. 1982; Cheal 1983). There is also a notable decline in the practice of the older generation living with their children and an increase in the expectation that they will continue to support themselves and live elsewhere, even in more interdependent societies like India, China, and Japan (e.g., Bethel 1992).

Others have observed that we have institutionalized much of our former pattern of caregiving for ill or dying family members (e.g., Bane 1983). Thus, the expectation of direct reciprocity from one's children in later life does not always appear to be borne out. However, as Hyde (1983) suggests, there may still be an indirect paying back (or more accurately paying forward) by showing the same sharing and gift-giving generosity to our children that our parents showed with us. Just as we are more apt to share the highway and allow someone into our lane after someone else has done the same for us, this pass-along sharing appears to be infectious and provides an example for recipients to emulate.

Sharing In, Sharing Out, and Aggregate Extended Self

The question of sharing outside of the immediate family is where the phenomenon of sharing becomes the most interesting and has the greatest social and theoretical implications. Widlock (2004, 61) observes that "sharing food with neighbours, relatives, or anyone who happens to be around at the time is done for the sake of shared enjoyment of whatever it is that is being shared. Sharing in this perspective is not primarily *sharing out* between dyads of givers and receivers but a *sharing in*, extending the circle of people who can enjoy the benefits of the shared resource." Sharing out (Ingold 1986) involves giving to others outside the boundaries separating self and other, and is closer to gift giving and commodity exchange, while sharing in is closer to the prototype of sharing within the family in that it involves regarding ownership as common, such that the others are included within the aggregate extended self. It treats

those who have been invited to share food as quasi family members. Just as individual consumers can extend themselves through possessions, so too can they extend themselves through other people (Belk 1988). This appears to be a key basis for intimate sharing.

When sharing is expanded outside the family, it can involve either sharing out or sharing in. Sharing out, as seen in dividing a resource among discrete economic interests, preserves the self/other boundary and does not involve expanding the sphere of aggregate extended self beyond the family. But sharing in expands the sphere of extended self by expanding the domain of common property. Sometimes the act of making extended self boundaries permeable to others is ritualistically enacted, as with the following recollection from a study by Belk and Llamas (forthcoming), in which a woman suppressed her fear of contagion in order to be accepted as part of the group:

> I can remember vividly the day I learned to share. . . . 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. . . . So I bit my lip and passed around my drink. And the worse 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. (F 22)

Other people no longer cause fears of boundary invasion when they are incorporated within the aggregate extended self. Thus we may more comfortably taste our friend's smoothie than a stranger's. Moreover, the ritual of doing so initiates and celebrates this self-extension via an act of communion. Both cultural processes and individual psychology are involved here. A less socially desirable instance of sharing in and the aggregate extended self from the same study was the case of a group of friends who felt compelled to celebrate their interlocking extended selves by sharing answers (i.e., cheating) on exams.

Sharing in and the expanded sense of self that it encompasses are characteristic of the sharing prototype. A "time share" condo is sharing out and creates no bonds. Sharing a car within a couple or family is generally a case of sharing in, while sharing a car within a large-scale commercial car-sharing organization is more a case of sharing out (e.g., Katsev 2003; Meijkamp 1998). Small-scale cooperative car-sharing arrangements like those of the Swedish car-sharing organization studied by Jonsson (2006) are somewhere in between. This car-sharing group has no employees, yet some members worried that with 340 members it was getting too large so that they no longer personally knew each of the other members. Those who complained felt that it had become more difficult to sustain feelings of community with so large a group.

The latter car sharing is one instance of what has been labeled collaborative consumption (Felson and Spaeth 1978). Eating a common meal and sharing a household washing machine are other examples of collaborative consumption. And like car sharing, whether or not such collaborative consumption involves sharing in and aggregate extended self depends upon how it is consumed. When cohabiting couples avoid doing their laundry together (Kaufmann 1998) they reveal a sharing out that suggests unmerged selves. On the other hand, unmarried couples who signal their commitment to each other through such collaborative consumption arrangements as sharing a pet, new furniture, or clothes suggest a sharing in and demonstrate a merged aggregate extended self. Newer forms of collaborative consumption may be implicit in brand communities and co-creation of brand meanings. This raises interesting issues of whether virtual collaboration leads to an aggregate sense of extended self to the same degree as face-to-face collaboration.

The boundaries of the aggregate sense of self can sometimes be flexible enough to include new acquaintances. Lastovicka and Fernandez (2005) found that when there is more of a shared extended self based on perceived similarity, transfer of emotional-laden possessions is more likely. Thus at a garage sale, having a profession in common meant that beloved tools of the trade could be passed on to such a kindred spirit. Similarly, collectors of the same objects often report a sense of pseudo-kinship (Belk 2001).

SHARING IN SOCIOCULTURAL AND SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVES

Before moving on to discussion, it should be noted that perspectives on sharing and gift giving differ markedly between the sociocultural view that our behavior is shaped by cultural forces with minimal individual choice and the social psychological view that our behavior is a matter of individual volition with minimal cultural influence. For example, the meat division in traditional hunter-gatherer societies is seen by many anthropologists to be culturally prescribed, leaving the hunter little choice in deciding whether or how to share the meat he has provided (e.g., Hunt 2005). Extending this view to the contemporary middle-class urban household, we might say that the demand sharing by which many children can claim they are entitled to eat from the family refrigerator and to use most of the household furniture is something over which neither they nor their elders have much control. It is the way that society and the law prescribe that families should behave. Similarly, Mauss (1925/1967) describes the gift giving involved in the Melanesian Kula Ring as being an obligatory and culturally enforced means of maintaining peaceful relations between groups. Mauss saw gift giving in contemporary urban societies as a vestigial remnant of earlier obligatory exchanges and, therefore, under less cultural and moral sway. Nevertheless, we can appreciate that in most societies today, those we invite to our son's birthday party or our daughter's wedding (with gifts expected in both cases) may feel that we

should also participate in their children's rites of passage when the time comes, bearing appropriate gifts.

From a social psychological perspective the explanations for the same contemporary consumer behaviors would differ. Concepts of property, ownership, and possession are seen as individualistic matters more than cultural prerogatives (see Rudmin, Belk, and Furby 1986). While sharing choices might well be made with an eye to their social consequences, they are seen as individual choices subject to individual as well as cultural differences (e.g., Furby 1978, 1980). More recent psychological work emphasizes differences between the two worlds of communal and exchange relationships, with caring for infants being an example of the former and marketplace purchases an example of the latter (e.g., Clark and Mills 1979, 1993). A four-category model of relationships has been worked out by Fiske (1991): communal sharing, authority ranking, equality matching, and market pricing. Although Fiske is an anthropologist, he has published the majority of his work on this model in psychology journals and has influenced others in psychology and consumer research (e.g., McGraw and Tetlock 2005; McGraw, Tetlock, and Kristel 2003). Both Fiske's multidisciplinary perspective and other examples of the complimentarity of psychological and anthropological perspectives (e.g., Belk 2005) suggest that it would be shortsighted to attempt a unidisciplinary explication of sharing. Both perspectives have been invoked here in the attempt to understand contemporary consumer sharing.

DISCUSSION

Conceptual Dimensions of Sharing

Sharing is bound up with ideas about property, ownership, and self that are learned during childhood. Despite prevalent childhood lessons that sharing is good, sharing outside the family in the contemporary Western world has been found to be relatively uncommon in adulthood (Belk and Llamas, forthcoming). Although this might suggest that whatever sharing lessons learned in childhood are lost by adulthood, this is likely an oversimplification. Children learn lessons not only stressing that it is good to share but also that they should take care of their possessions. The sharing that binds a nuclear family together through a sense of mutual extended self may be dramatically refocused among dating and mating partners and within close groups of friends. But as the extended self is opened and expanded to include others, there is no reason that this should entail contracting the aggregate extended self of the nuclear family, especially in cultures in which emphasis on extended family is strong.

How is it that some people within a given culture learn to be generous in their sharing and others learn to be stingy? There are several relevant conceptual dimensions of sharing in need of further consumer research. These dimensions are outlined below.

Possessiveness and Attachment to Possessions. One factor likely affecting our willingness to share what we perceive as ours is our feelings of attachment to these possessions. People are more reluctant to share things to which they have a strong emotional attachment. Possessiveness (Belk 1985) and feelings of mastery and control of possessions (Kleine and Baker 2004) are aspects of object attachment and materialism that threaten sharing. Cultural differences in the focus and nature of object attachments are also important to consider (e.g., Mehta and Belk 1991; Wallendorf and Arnould 1988). And possession versus access to objects is another important distinction to address in this area (Chen 2009).

The rise of possessive individualism over the past few hundred years (Tuan 1982) has been accompanied by a concomitant decline in our sharing of many things, ranging from plates and utensils to grave sites (Deetz 1980). However, recent work on brand community (e.g., Mathwick, Wiertz, and de Ruyter 2008; Muñiz and O'Guinn 2001) shows that possessive attachment and sharing may be compatible and reinforcing. In this case, although members of a brand community may be possessive of their particular branded objects, they share a reverence for the brand itself and find that this joint possession is enriched by the sense that it is shared with like-minded members of the brand community. Similar shared attachments may be found in the reverence people feel toward a city, sports team, or celebrity (e.g., Belk and Tumbat 2005). In such cases, rather than Hardin's (1968) tragedy of the commons, we instead encounter what might instead be labeled a comedy of the commons (Bauwins 2006; Cline 2005). Consider, for example, being the only one to speak a language, or own a fax machine, or have e-mail. If there is no one else with whom to communicate, these devices would be useless. But the more people who share these things, the richer the possibilities become. This is more than just an "unlimited good" society in which life is no longer seen as a zero-sum game (Foster 1969); instead, the benefits grow exponentially as more people share.

A sense of collaborative ownership, like viewing the Internet as a commons (David 2005), is a prime example of such sharing. A simple search on the Internet provides ample evidence of our ability to access nearly infinite shared content thanks to others' contributions to bulletin boards, chat rooms, blogs, wikis, Web pages, and the like. Like sharing a song or a joke, such practices exemplify the fact that we can often share something without losing it (Belk 2007). With such a wealth of resources available, it is understandable that some of us may want to offer our own contributions to unseen others who share our interests. The comedy of the commons view here is that of an expanding aggregate extended self that encourages a sense of sharing in.

Independence versus Interdependence. Besides possessiveness, another salient dimension of Belk's (1985) materialism formulation that opposes sharing is nongenerosity. Richins and Dawson (1992) found that those high in materialism were less likely to report being willing to give or lend things to friends or relatives. They were also less likely to choose warm relationships with others as a personal value.

This suggests that materialists share less because they value things over people. Independence means a constricted aggregate extended self and less sharing in. By clinging tightly to individual possessions we place barriers between ourselves and others. The trade-off in such cases is highlighted in Nathaniel Hawthorne's version of the Greek myth of King Midas. Midas got his wish that everything he touched turned to gold but paid the price with the loss of his daughter's love when she became a golden statue. This trade-off between things and people also appears related to the finding of O'Guinn and Faber (1989) that compulsive buyers score higher on the nongenerosity component of materialism. Kasser and Ryan (1993) found that materialists had shorter and more problematic relationships than those who were less materialistic.

Sharing may also be inhibited because some people seek to avoid feeling dependent on others who are willing to share their resources. There are cultural as well as individual differences in this tendency. For example interdependence is thought to be regarded more positively in Japan and China than in the United States (Markus and Kitayama 1991). This is also suggested in the greater incidence of sharing rituals in Asia, as seen in the beverage sharing highlighted at the start of this paper. A greater preference for group travel may be another demonstration of the Asian embrace of interdependence. While not alone among religions stressing sharing, Buddhism emphasizes *dana*, or generous sharing, as an antidote to consumerism. The result is not only less materialism, but more community (Santikaor 2005). What is shared may also differ culturally: "Traditional Africans pool labor, food, and living space to an extent that often astonishes Americans. But in these same societies, people almost never disclose their past actions, their plans, their aspirations, their attitudes or their feelings even to family members—the Communal Sharing of these subjective matters in America often astonishes Africans" (Fiske n.d., 4).

Privacy, the Leaky Self, and the Stranger. From sexual partners sharing bodily fluids to mothers sharing milk when nursing infants, many prototypical sharing moments are fluid. Liquids continue to nourish aggregate extended self when socializing. The example of sharing smoothies at school is also exemplary. Likewise, when we donate blood, toast the bride and groom, baptize infants, take communion, or celebrate Seder, liquids play a key role in linking and merging identities. Like sharing generally, the state of liquidity means that selves flow together. When this happens we symbolically become one so that, at least for a moment, the former me and you, as well as mine and yours, become us and ours. From toothbrushes to secrets, these shared possessions invite an aggregate extended self. But for those who crave privacy and seek to avoid contamination from others, there is likely a fear of what Gregson and Crewe (2003) call the "leaky" self.

As one aphorism has it, "sharing is caring." Although there may be exceptions found in the final conceptual dimension of sharing discussed below, for the most part sharing involves demonstrations that we care for another person. Sharing a pleasing meal is an act of caring as well as nurturing. Parental sharing with children is quintessential caring. In Stone's (2005) emotionally involved personal care workers, we see further evidence that caring can lead to sharing.

Sobo (1994) asks why rural Jamaicans are plump but never wealthy. The answer, she finds, is that they share money and food. No one gets rich, but everyone is well fed: "The ideal body is plump with vital fluids, and maintaining the flow of substances through the body is essential for good health" (Sobo 1994, 133). Here, too, we can see a connection to fluids and sharing as well as a link to keeping these flows moving: "The importance of keeping clean inside . . . parallels the importance of keeping goods and services flowing through networks of kin and corresponds . . . to the idea that hoarding is bad. An overabundance of perishable resources not passed on will rot. Even money uncirculated is associated with decay" (Sobo 1994, 140). In rural Jamaica the thin person is a stranger who never shares and never cares for others. In other words, rural Jamaican culture stigmatizes the Scrooge-like miser as being not only uncaring, but not a part of the community.

Utilitarianism. There are also cases of apparent sharing in which pragmatic economic motivations seem central. Collaborative ownership with others can allow some people to afford a vacation home that they could not have afforded on their own. Just as schoolchildren or siblings who share clothing leverage their material lifestyles by effectively increasing their wardrobes with no additional expenditure, the joint owners of major, but infrequently used, durables gain greater access to expensive possessions at a lesser cost. The same leveraging motivation is likely for commercial car sharing and use of public goods like parks and roads. For those who see themselves as using their share of these possessions for a time, this is a sharing out rather than a sharing in. There is little sense of aggregate extended self, and we begin to worry about free riders and overusers as economic theory and Hardin's tragedy of the commons suggest. In other words, what appears to be sharing is actually more of a self-interested commodity exchange.

Issues for Future Research

Sharing is framed here as a pervasive, overlooked, and fundamental consumer behavior process. As such, there are many issues in need of further research. The list that follows offers some examples.

1. To what extent is the self best conceptualized as extended (i.e., beginning with an individual atomized self and radiating outward into the world) versus part of an organic unity with others and the environment? How does this differ culturally and historically and what are the implications for sharing? Tian and Belk (2005) offer the beginning of one alternative formulation of extended self.
2. How do contemporary consumers draw distinctions

between sharing, lending/borrowing, gift giving, and commodity exchange? How do these distinctions differ across cultural, political, and economic systems? For instance, what can we learn from the sharing experiences of kibbutzim and the versions of communism previously practiced in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union?

3. What are the effects of shared experiences (not considered here) on tendencies to share tangible possessions? Just as Lastovicka and Fernandez (2005) found that occupational similarity broke down barriers between self and other and increased the likelihood of a certain form of sharing, we might ask whether common consumption communities, ethnicities, collecting interests, and birthplaces (only some of which are volitional choices) can have a similar affect.
4. What are the impacts of various types of economic, military, and natural catastrophes on sharing tendencies? If people sacrifice and help each other during times or structural conditions of shared hardship, as Stack (1974) found, why do people in times of greater abundance narrow their sharing proclivities? Is individualism and self-interest fostered by abundance more than by scarcity?
5. What can be done to encourage prosocial sharing of rides, cars, durables, toys, and other resources that are now used wastefully? Considering findings of Gregson and Crewe (2003) as well as others, why do we seem more willing to share our children's possessions than our own? Is hand-me-down clothing less stigmatized and less subject to symbolic contagion because of some mythical purity of children, or is it more a matter of trying to extract greater use value from clothing and toys that have been outgrown before they are worn out?
6. What consumer goods should be regarded as public goods whose use is facilitated by mandated sharing (or at least mandated financing for potential shared use)? For example, public beaches, public parks, footpaths through private land, and public roads and streets are opposed by private estates and gated communities with private roads. What are the issues of social justice, morality, and sense of national or municipal heritage at stake in such cases of usufruct?
7. In light of findings by Giesler (2006), Hemetsberger (2006), and others, why do online cooperative arenas seem much more conducive to sharing than offline real world arenas? What are the implications of the anti-sharing stance of Intellectual Property Rights laws?
8. How does sharing differ across different family structures and cultures in which different emphases on extended family, differing gender roles, alternative notions of gendered spaces, and different degrees of individualism are common (e.g., see Netting, Wilk, and Arnould 1984; Wilk 1989). How does something as simple as helping yourself at the dinner table versus being served or passing things around signal sharing versus gift giving (e.g., Wilk 2006).

Some of these issues are more central than others to extended self and sharing in versus sharing out notions. But like the conceptual dimensions of sharing discussed in the prior section, they suggest the richness and importance of the phenomenon.

CONCLUSION

The desire for and experience of a feeling of unity and an aggregate sense of self is likely a key reason for sharing in. Even when this is not the intent behind the sharing in, it can be an important and gratifying outcome. For example, Sharp (2007) finds that the families of organ donors commonly develop feelings of fictive kinship with the organ recipient and his or her family. They refer to each other as brother and sister, parents and children, grandparents and grandchildren, or quasi spouses. This shared sense of self between organ recipients and donors is not only symbolic, but exists even at the level of transferred DNA. To be sure, any given family engages in all three practices—sharing, gift giving, and commodity exchange—at different moments, even between the same individuals (Fiske n.d.). But neither this fact nor the sometimes fuzzy boundaries between these concepts negate the conceptual distinctions between them.

At one point in her research with poor black children, Elizabeth Chin (2001) gave them each $20.00 to spend and took them to an otherwise inaccessible shopping mall. Strikingly, some of the children spent much of their precious money on others. One boy, who took care of his younger brother in a troubled home, bought walkie-talkies: "Davy had chosen a toy that by its very nature needed to be shared, not just because he wanted to communicate with others; although he was the only child in his family to be taken on a shopping trip, he wanted to come home with something his other siblings could enjoy with him" (Chin 2001, 124). Perhaps this should not be surprising. Stack (1974) found that the poor commonly share as both a tactic of survival (sharing out) and an expression of community (sharing in).

David (2005) suggests that one way to appreciate the power of sharing is to contrast the alchemists' attempt to hide the secrets of their "dark science" with the open science model that has dominated since the Scientific Revolution. When we academics present our work at conferences, publish or otherwise distribute papers, and review for journals, we play a part in this sharing model of open science, even though there may also be some self-aggrandizement. But even this sharing model is being challenged as universities, pharmaceutical companies, and biotechnology firms scramble for intellectual property rights (IPR) to these ideas and the profits they may produce (e.g., Angell and Relman 2002; Eisenberg and Nelson 2002). As Mark Getty, chairman of Getty Images, put it, intellectual property is the oil of the twenty-first century (www.oil21.org). At the same time that new technologies like the Internet and bioengineering enable new sharing possibilities, the corresponding increase in IPR legislation opens new realms of ownership that threaten evident sharing inclinations (Benkler 2006). And, in turn, de-

velopments like open source software (e.g., Hemetsberger 2006), file sharing (e.g., Giesler 2006), and the covert sharing of counterfeiting (e.g., Belk, Eckhardt, and Devinney 2005) have emerged to challenge these IPR attempts to restrict sharing. Sharing versus proprietary ownership has entered a new and important era of contest.

The derisive term "Indian giving" resulted from European colonists in the Americas mistakenly seeing sharing through the European lens of gift giving (Murray 2000; Parry 1986). When Native Americans took back something they allowed the colonists to use, they were merely practicing the sharing that had long sustained them. It was the colonists' failure to recognize that the bountiful land was everyone's that was the incomprehensible behavior within the original sharing system. We make a similar mistake if we assume that all consumer behavior is either gift giving or economic exchange. Sharing is a more subtle, and likely more pervasive, mode of consumer behavior that has gone largely unrecognized or misrecognized.

Consumer researchers' neglect of sharing is a fundamental omission in seeking to understand consumption. Not only is sharing critical to the most recent of consumption phenomena like the Internet, it is also likely the oldest type of consumption. At the same time that sharing within families is challenged by privatization of what were formerly family possessions, new forms of sharing are opening up with developments such as online support groups for consumers of medical procedures (e.g., Radin 2006). Issues of social justice, consumer welfare, environmentalism, materialism, commoditization, global food security, sustainable environments, and much more, all stand to be vitally informed by work on sharing. For example, imagine cutting the amount of commuter traffic by half through ride sharing. Sharing in and sharing out also correspond to in-groups and outgroups. This suggests that expanding notions of aggregate extended self may be a superior way to encourage sharing rather than reinforcing the sense of us and them that characterizes sharing out. As Internet and Native American sharing demonstrate, the "us" of sharing in can become quite broad. And only by recognizing and challenging the encroachment of the perspective that all the world is a market and everything and everyone within it is an exchangeable commodity can we begin to appreciate the critical role of sharing in consumer behavior.

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