

SELF-EXPANSION AND COUPLE POSSESSIONS:
THE REPRESENTATION OF THE SELF AND
OTHER IN VALUED POSSESSIONS

A thesis

Presented to

The College of Graduate and Professional Studies

Department of Psychology

Indiana State University

Terre Haute, Indiana

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts

by

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August 2011

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Keywords: Possessions, Self-expansion, Social validation, Identity symbolism, Romantic relationships

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ABSTRACT

The current study seeks to understand the influence of romantic relationships on identity symbolism, specifically the use of personal possessions as a means of achieving social validation. According to self-expansion theory (Aron & Aron, 1986), engaging in a romantic relationship alters one's sense of self; romantic partners take on the qualities and characteristics of a partner and integrate them into the self. To understand the process of identity symbolism due to one's newly expanded sense of self, this study investigated the link between the amount of reported self-expansion and couple representativeness as well as the function of one's possessions (other-directed identity claim, self-directed identity claim, feeling regulator, and utility). Participants were asked to read a vignette in which they were told their home had been destroyed by a tornado and were then asked to list three possessions which they wished to find among the rubble. Results indicated that reported self-expansion is associated with the tendency to choose couple representative possessions as indicators of the self. As hypothesized, couple representativeness was significantly correlated with tendency to use possession as other-directed identity claims (as evidenced in both reported function and placement) and feeling regulators. Additionally, reported couple representativeness was significantly correlated with the tendency to use possessions as self-directed identity claims and for utility. This study provides support for the relationship between self-expansion and the tendency to communicate one's expanded self to others by means of material possessions as well as the emotional significance tied to such possessions.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to acknowledge my committee members whose continued support of all my academic endeavors has been invaluable. I would especially like to thank Dr. Virgil Sheets for his patience and guidance; his continued support has allowed me to develop not only confidence in my thesis research, but also confidence as an experimental psychologist. I would also like to thank my family, especially Wesley, without their love and support none of this would be possible.

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CHAPTER 1

SELF REPRESENTATION

Attempting to answer the question “Who am I” is difficult at best. Although self-definition is a daunting task, previous research has shown that personal possessions (Belk, 1998) and close relationships (Aron & Aron, 1986) are two avenues one can use to define the self. Both valued possessions and romantic relationships hold symbolic meaning in our culture and without these items it is plausible our sense of self would be entirely different (Belk, 1998). Engaging in a romantic relationship allows an individual to convey a certain identity as one’s romantic partner becomes an extension of the self (Aron & Aron, 1986). Similarly the use of material possessions conveys our identity from such things as the brand of shirt one chooses to wear to the pictures displayed in one’s home. According to Belk (1998), the “only reason we want to have something is to enlarge our sense of self and that the only way we can know who we are is by observing what we have” (p. 146). Thus, feedback provided by those around us can greatly impact the way an individual chooses to present his or her self.

In this paper I explore the role of romantic relationships and their effect on individuals’ valued possessions. I will review literature regarding representation of the self, the self-defining role of possessions, the self-expansion process, and the use of possessions in romantic relationships in an attempt to ascertain a link between these seemingly unrelated topics. Afterwards, I propose a study to further explore these links.

The Self

Social cognition theorists suggest that the self is understood as a cognitive structure, encompassing all of those traits that one claims to have. One can easily assert “I am this” or “I am that” based on the mental representations one has of the self (Greenwald, 1988). Moreover, an individual’s cognitive representation of the self shapes not only one’s understanding of his or her self, but also his or her behavior toward and attributions and evaluations of others. Our selves provide a framework with which we understand and interact with the social world (Kihlstrom & Cantor, 1984).

Social interactionist theorists propose that the self not only directs our interaction with the world but is shaped by it. They assert that our knowledge of the world is constructed based on others’ reactions to us (Solomon, 1983). For instance, Cooley (1902) proposed the notion of the “looking glass self” in an attempt to explain the interaction between one’s own view of the self and the influence of others. According to this theory, individuals acquire a conceptual understanding of how they appear to others from others’ reactions to the self. Previous research has confirmed that the opinion of others plays an important role in self-definition (Kinch, 1963), specifically the determination of one’s self-worth (Schimel, Arndt, Pyszczynski, & Greenberg, 2001), and for this, we need others’ approval (Greenwald, 1988). Thus, one’s sense of self is in part based on the perceptions of others (McCall, 1977).

Because others play an important role in one’s understanding of the self, the experience of the self may differ from one circumstance to another (Hamlyn, 1977). However, this may be moderated by an individual’s successful conveyance of their cognitive representation of the self to others. Anticipating and receiving approving reactions of others serves to strengthen our consistent self-definition and self-worth. Social validation serves as reassurance that one’s view

of the self is accurate (Schimel et al., 2001). To achieve social validation great care must be placed in how one presents his or her self to others.

Possessions and the Self

Social environments are constructed to represent many facets of the self, particularly dispositions, preferences, attitudes and one's view of the self (Ambady & Skowronski, 2008). Possessions make up a large portion of one's social environment and may therefore aid in identity management (Belk, 1998). One's social environment is not created haphazardly but instead constructed via a three step process of selection, evocation and manipulation, as the environment one chooses to create is rich with information regarding one's personality, values and lifestyles (Buss, 1987; Gosling, Gaddis, & Vazire, 2008). Choosing an environment is a purposeful endeavor involving a conscious decision making process regarding which environments one chooses to actively seek and avoid as we tend to evoke a response from our chosen environments. Perhaps more important to the discussion of possessions, individuals choose to intentionally modify certain environments through the use of decorations and possessions (Buss, 1987). Although providing no outward benefit to the tasks required of living and work spaces, decorations are commonly used as a means of individualization, serving as physical signatures of the dweller, exemplified by colors, patterns, and possessions (Gosling et al., 2008). Personal possessions allow for the creation of a social environment that is representative of one's personality (Prentice, 1987). Buss (1987) proposed that this all-important process of manipulation may not necessarily be conscious; however, it is indeed purposeful.

Possessions communicate symbolic meaning to the individual and others (Sirgy, 1982). They provide concrete representations of the self (Sivades & Venkatesh, 1995) and can

differentiate their owner from other individuals on a wide array of dimensions such as social class, lifestyle, occupation, age and gender (McCracken, 1986). Whereas the cultural meaning of possessions is transferred to the individual as if it is an extension of his or her self, they can be used to convey one's current understanding of the self (Kleine, Kleine, & Allen, 1995). Possessions also represent a personal archive allowing for reflection of who one has become (Belk, 1998). Thus, individuals choose certain possessions in an attempt to piece together their self-concept (Reimann & Aron, 2009), paying close attention to the cultural meaning of their possessions (Richins, 1994b).

Previous research has attempted to characterize possessions based on function. Prentice (1987) distinguishes possessions based on purpose, specifically functional (instrumental) versus symbolic (expressive) value. Functional possessions serve a utilitarian purpose whereas symbolic possessions represent important aspects of one's life such as thoughts, feelings, events and relationships. Similarly, Csikzentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton (1981), assert that possessions can take one of two forms, prized possessions and entertainment oriented possessions. Prize possessions imply a strong attachment and are characterized by the belief that if destroyed the possession could not be replaced (Kleine & Baker, 2004). Researchers have gone so far as to propose that the loss of a prized possession can drastically change one's view of the self (Wallendorf & Arnould, 1988). Regardless of which method is used to differentiate possessions, these characterizations exemplify the importance of possessions in representing the self.

Because possessions can be used to represent the self, important possessions will differ between people. Furthermore, within the same person the importance of possessions will vary as some possessions are ascribed a greater value than others. Judgments regarding the

significance of possessions are made in terms of personal values such that possessions that are considered by an individual to be most important tend to be representative of personal values (Richins, 1994a). Referring to the importance of possessions in our daily lives, Gosling (2008) states that possessions are “special furnishings – symbolic threads that bind us to our past selves and maintain continuity through the present into projected future” (p. 222). Possessions are a key component in our understanding of the self.

Beyond functional characterizations, possessions can take on either a public or private meaning. Possessions associated with a public meaning can be easily understood by others; however, private meanings are more difficult to decode as they reflect the subjective meanings an object holds for the individual (Richins, 1994a). In some respects, possessions serve as a communication tool allowing one to convey different components of the self to others, in some cases components of the self that are inexpressible by verbal language (Gosling, Craik, Martin, & Pryor, 2005; Richins, 1994a).

Gosling (2008) further elaborates on the distinction between public and private meanings of possessions. According to Gosling (2008), possessions can be used as identity claims or feeling regulators. Identity claims make deliberate symbolic statements that are either directed toward the self or others. Other-directed identity claims rely on public meaning as they serve as a signal of how one wishes to be regarded by others. They will be effective when they possess a culturally shared meaning that is easily interpreted by others. In contrast, self-directed identity claims reinforce how one sees his or her self. It is only necessary that item making self-directed identity claims have a personal meaning to the possessor (Gosling, 2008; Gosling, Ko, Mannarelli & Morris, 2002).

A simple way to determine if a possession is meant to be a self or other identity claim is its placement, as placement determines psychological function (Gosling, 2008). Specifically, self-directed identity claims are often placed in areas where the owner will see them often as a way of reinforcing their sense of self. In contrast, a possession placed in a public area and not often looked upon by the owner is an other-directed identity claim. However, the distinction between self and other-directed identity claims is not paramount; instead the importance lies in the fact that possessions are used to symbolize one's identity.

The use of possessions as other-directed identity claims is exemplified by the process of self-symbolism. Self-symbolism asserts that both the construction of the self and its depiction to others are dependent on the use of symbolic possessions. Symbolic possessions are the mechanism by which we elicit social validation that builds the self. Accordingly, when an individual feels a discrepancy between the self and others' perception of the self, he or she will engage in self-symbolism in an attempt to accurately convey the desired self to others. The acceptance of the self by others legitimizes one's own view of the self. Thus, engaging in self-symbolizing will lead to an increased sense of completeness because there is no longer a discrepancy between one's own perception of the self and others' perceptions (Wicklund & Gollwitzer, 1981). Note however that possessions that serve as other-directed self-symbols will vary depending on one's audience and identity component being exemplified (Gosling et al., 2002).

Besides serving as identity claims, possessions can also be used as feeling regulators, symbolic statements made for one's own benefit (Gosling et al., 2008). Feeling regulators are not meant to send messages about one's identity but instead serve as a means to manage one's thoughts and emotions. Feeling regulators typically include such possessions as family photos,

keepsakes, and mementos, but are not limited to such objects as the key component is their regulatory function (Gosling, 2008). They are often reminders of positive times in one's past that one can use to boost one's mood. Despite this theoretical functional distinction, self-directed identity claims and feeling regulators are to some extent intertwined as both contain an affective component (Gosling et al., 2002), and it is possible for a single possession to serve more than one function.

The importance assigned to a possession is not necessarily immediate (Richins, 1994b). Attachment to a possession tends to be multifaceted and emotionally complex based on a personal history between possessor and possession. Possessions come to hold emotional significance based on their association with significant people or events in one's life (Ball & Tasaki, 1992), which may themselves contribute to a sense of identity. The meaning of possessions may also change overtime as one's sense of self changes (Kleine & Baker, 2004); however, possessions hold value as long as they provide psychological benefits to the possessor (Prentice, 1987), regardless of the owner's gender or age (Gosling et al., 2005.)

CHAPTER 2

ROMANTIC RELATIONSHIPS AND POSSESSIONS

Self-Expansion

One particular area in which the use of possessions may be especially common is in romantic relationships, particularly self-expanding relationships. The origins of a self-expansion theory can be traced to some of the earliest writings in psychology. In the late 1800s, William James wrote about overlapping selves, a cognitive overlap between one's own psyche and that of another individual. Carl Jung proposed that romantic partners enable development of the psyche and lead to a greater sense of wholeness (Aron & Aron, 1996a). Similarly, Maslow proposed that beloved others are integrated into the self. Finally, in an attempt to explain basic human interactions, the symbolic interactionist theorists assert that attachment is based on the incorporation of other's behaviors and emotions into one's self-concept (McCall, 1974). Although the notion of incorporating one's romantic partner into the self is not a novel development in the understanding of interpersonal relationships, Aron and Aron (1986) integrated these various perspectives into a coherent theoretical model for understanding the process of integration in romantic relationships.

According to the self-expansion model, individuals engage in close relationships to fulfill an intrinsic desire to expand one's characteristics and abilities (Aron, Steel, Kashdan, &

Perez, 2006). This motive for self-expansion is driven by the need to increase one's "potential efficacy" and engage in "rapid" personal expansion (Aron, Norman, & Aron, 1998, p. 1).

Attaining the resources, perspectives, and characteristics possessed by a romantic partner facilitates self-expansion; therefore a romantic partner is simply an extension of the self. (Aron & Aron, 1986). The self expands through the integration of the partner into the self. When the self changes it is imperative that others recognize this change for the new self to become definitive (Markus & Wulf, 1987). That is, social validation is needed to evidence that one has successfully integrated the qualities of a romantic partner in the self.

The role of self-expansion is evident in the initial period of self-discovery present in new romantic relationships (Aron, Paris, & Aron, 1995). This period frees individuals to explore new or repressed aspects of their identity in a social context (Aron, et al., 1995). When selecting a potential partner, individuals will be most interested in mates that allow for the greatest amount of self-expansion (Aron et al., 1998); often we seek partners that possess qualities we ourselves want to possess (Klohmen & Mendelsohn, 1998).

According to Aron and Aron (1986), a strong motivation for entering into and maintaining romantic relationships is the experience of passion. Passion as defined by Hatfield and Walster (1978) is "a state of intense longing for union with another... associated with fulfillment and ecstasy" (p. 9). Passion manifests as euphoria and an intense preoccupation with one's romantic partner (Aron, et al., 2005). Aron and Aron (1996b) claim that the intense desire for one's romantic partner is a result of the self-expansion process; specifically that it reflects the opportunities and experiences of rapid expansion through a partner. Passion which is associated with the experience of intimacy tends to be strongest in the early stages of

romantic relationships (Baumeister & Bratslavsky, 1999) as does the experience of self-expansion.

Passion is a byproduct of the acquisition of a romantic partner's qualities and characteristics. Taking on the traits of a romantic partner enables an individual to achieve previously unattainable personal goals, as one may now possess the necessary traits acquired from a romantic partner (Aron & Aron, 1986). These personal goals are typically, but are not limited to, the ability to become an idealized version of the self. Thus, when faced with the prospect of a new romantic relationship one assesses the qualities of a potential mate because he or she will be gaining the partner's qualities through self-expansion if they enter into a romantic relationship (Aron & Aron, 1997).

Previous research has shown that individuals who had fallen in love have more diverse self-descriptions than those who had not fallen in love. In addition to an increased diversity of the self, individuals involved in a romantic relationship reported increased self-efficacy and self-esteem (Aron et al., 1995). Individuals in romantic relationships also tend to rate themselves as closer to their ideal self than those not in a relationship; thus as one expands he or she becomes closer to one's ideal self (Campbell, Sedikides, & Bosson, 1994). These increases in the self are attributed to the acknowledgement of qualities gained from a romantic partner (Aron et al., 1995).

Integration of self with romantic partner is evident in cognitive representations of the self. Previous research has shown a tendency to cognitively confuse the self with close others (Decety & Sommerville, 2003). This cognitive overlap is attributed to intertwining of once distinct mental representations (self and other) (Davis, Conklin, Smith & Luce, 1996). Relevant to self-expansion, Aron, Aron, Tudor and Nelson (1991) hypothesized that due to the cognitive

overlap between self and romantic partner, differentiation between self-descriptive characteristics and partner-descriptive characteristics would be difficult. When asked to differentiate between self-descriptive, partner-descriptive, or a removed other descriptive traits, participants experienced greater difficulty in distinguishing between traits attributed to the self and romantic partner (Aron et al., 1991). In addition, priming married couples to think of self-referential and spouse referential traits prior to a reaction-time task requiring participants to distinguish between self-representative and non-self-representative traits caused greater difficulty in couples that have cognitively incorporated a romantic partner into the self. Results indicated slower-reaction times when presented with a trait true of oneself but not of one's romantic partner as opposed to traits that were representative or not representative of both self and romantic partner. Aron and colleagues (1991) attributed the slower reaction time to confusion between self and romantic partner.

This tendency to cognitively view one's romantic partner as part of the self has implications for the amount of closeness experienced in romantic relationships. Closeness between romantic partners is affected by the amount of self-expansion present in the relationship, specifically how much one integrates the other into the self (Aron et al., 1991). Previous research has shown that the inability to distinguish between the self and one's romantic partner cognitively is moderated by the level of closeness experienced by romantic partners (Aron et al., 1991). Of particular interest is the previously mentioned study requiring participants to distinguish between self-representative and non-self-representative traits after priming self and spouse referential thoughts. In addition to the reaction task participants were also asked to complete the Inclusion of Other in the Self (IOS) Scale, measuring both feelings of closeness and actual closeness experienced in a relationship (Aron, Aron, & Smollan, 1992).

The IOS scale requires participants to indicate relationship closeness by selecting from a series of varying overlapping circles such that the greater the overlap the more closeness experienced in the relationship. Results indicated that IOS closeness ratings significantly correlated with the degree of difference in reaction time to traits that were both self and spouse referential versus traits that were only representative of the self or only representative of one's spouse (Aron et al., 1991). Aron and colleagues (1992) assert that these results indicate a schema of self-other overlap for romantic partners, which is interpreted as closeness due to self-expansion. The more self-expansion experienced in a relationship the closer romantic partners feel to each other causing greater difficulty when attempting to differentiate between the self and other.

The link between self-expansion and closeness is further exemplified in the use of first-person plural pronouns such as "we" and "us" when describing a romantic relationship as opposed to the use of first-person singular pronouns such as "I" and "me" (Agnew, Van Lange, Rusbult, & Langston, 1998). Individuals grammatically represent themselves and their romantic partner as a solitary unit as opposed to two distinct entities. This use of first-person plural pronouns is associated with cognitive interdependence, the tendency to represent the self and romantic partner as an integrated whole (Agnew et al., 1998).

As romantic relationships progress and partners become more familiar with each other the chance for self-expansion decreases (Aron & Aron, 1997). The decrease in self-expansion is attributed to a decrease in the novelty of one's romantic partner. Once an individual has integrated his or her romantic partner into the self, one's partner is no longer viewed as providing a unique opportunity to alter the self as the period of initial self-discovery has ended (Aron & Aron, 1996b). Thus, self-expansion and presence of passion is greater at the beginning of a romantic relationship. Once the novelty of a relationship has diminished, one way to

experience continued self-expansion is to engage in novel activities as a couple (Acevedo & Aron, 2009; Aron, Norman, McKenna, & Heyman, 2000). Furthermore, engaging in self-expanding activities together has been shown to increase both passion and overall relationship satisfaction in long-term relationships (Aron & Aron, 1997; Baumeister & Bratslavsky, 1999).

Aron and colleagues (1998) suggest that the loss of self-complexity from de-expansion will be a source for distress (Smith & Cohen, 1993). Research has shown that those experiencing high levels of self-expansion in a relationship are more negatively impacted by the dissolution of a romantic relationship than individuals that do not exhibit high levels of self-expansion, irrespective of the level of closeness experienced in the relationship (Lewandowski, Aron, Basis, & Kunak, 2006). This finding supports the notion that self-expansion is a fundamental human motivation as the loss of a romantic relationship implies losing a portion of one's self-identity (Aron & Aron, 1996a).

Possessions and Romantic Relationships

As previous research has shown, it is possible to represent the integration of one's partner into the self both cognitively and grammatically (Agnew et al., 1998; Aron et al., 1991) and this same process can also occur with tangible objects. Thus I am proposing that personal possessions provide an opportunity to represent the self-expansion experience in a romantic relationship by associating an individual with his or her romantic partner in the eyes of self and others. More specifically, possessions become a means of achieving social validation of the integration of one's romantic partner into the self. Because possessions can be used to convey one's current understanding of the self (Kleine et al., 1995), important possessions that represent both oneself and one's romantic partner signify the occurrence of integration.

Research has shown that possessions embody the relationship between the self and others (Myers, 1988). Possessions that are present in the home have the ability to communicate identity claims about romantic relationships (Arriaga, Goodfriend, & Lohman, 2004) because the home provides an opportunity to showcase items that have shaped an individual's sense of self (Csikzentmihayli, & Rochenberg-Halton, 1981). Previous research has shown that individuals in existing romantic relationships use possessions as a way to construct their identity as a couple (Wong & Hogg, 2009). Relationship-symbolizing objects such as prominently displayed wedding photos serve to indicate that two individuals should be viewed as a single unit. According to Arriaga and colleagues (2004) couples that desire social recognition of their romantic relationship are more likely to prominently display possessions that represent them as a couple. Typically, items representing the couple are acquired by both partners. However, not all individuals in a romantic relationship will choose to fill their homes with couple displays, and choosing to display couple possessions does not negate the value of possessions signifying one's individuality (Arriaga et al., 2004).

Possessions placed in the home may serve as feeling regulators cueing emotions associated with the romantic relationship (Arriaga et al., 2004). Cherished possessions representative of a romantic relationship allow partners to reminisce about previously experienced positive emotions associated with the relationship. For example, participants in a study regarding defining moments in a romantic relationship indicated possessions as an important mechanism for remembering and reflecting on their relationship (Baxter & Pittmann, 2001). Similarly, results from a separate study requiring participants to describe their favorite items indicated that one third of participants valued possessions that were somehow associated with their spouse (Csikzentmihayli & Rochenberg-Halton, 1981).

One possession that has been historically viewed as representative of a romantic relationship is gifts from one's romantic partner. It has been proposed that gift giving serves to reinforce interpersonal relationships (Belk, 2008). According to a study investigating favorite possessions, about half of participants reported their favorite possessions were received as gifts from an important individual in their life (Wallendorf & Arnould, 1988). Furthermore, previous research has shown that gifts from a significant other are commonly cited as favorite possessions (Csikzentmihayli & Rochenberg-Halton, 1981). Gift giving between romantic partners signifies the progression of the romantic relationship (Wong & Hogg, 2009).

The importance of gift-giving has led some to hypothesize that attachment to a possession received as a gift also symbolizes attachment to the giver (Belk, 1992). According to Kleine and colleagues (1995), gifts can best be understood as a tangible representation of the relationship between the giver and the recipient. The exchanging of gifts enables romantic partners to symbolically demonstrate their attachment to each other. Since gifts are viewed as an extension of the giver, by accepting the gift, one is also accepting the giver (Belk & Coon, 1993). Additionally, gifts from a romantic partner can also symbolize one's view of the self because gifts allow the recipient to define his or herself in terms proposed by the giver (Kleine et al., 1995; McCracken, 1986) indicating such things as a relationship status or characteristics the giver considers important of the recipient.

Empirical studies regarding the use of possessions by romantic partners have yielded diverging results. Qualitative data from six couples varying in relationship type (long-term marriage, newlywed, and cohabitating) indicated that the importance of possessions in romantic relationships is in part based on length of the relationship (Olson, 1985); with personal possessions being most important to young married couples because they indicate a shared

identity. In contrast, unmarried couples tend to value items that were individually acquired whereas older married couples valued functional possessions (Olson, 1985).

In contrast to Olson's (1985) findings, results from a larger ($n=345$) study conducted by Wallendorf and Arnould (1998) required participants to report information on their favorite possession indicated that as individuals age they are more likely to cite personal possessions representative of others as their favorite as opposed to items that serve a functional purpose. Approximately 60% reported choosing a possession because it was associated with a fond memory. Results further indicated a positive correlation between the tendency to choose possessions representative of interpersonal relationships and reported interpersonal attachment. Thus, individuals with strong interpersonal ties are likely to use personal possessions to symbolize those relationships.

Building upon the previous studies, Lohmann, Arriaga, and Goodfriend (2003) assert that the home provides a medium for couples to assert their joint identity. To study the importance of personal possessions in a romantic relationship, married and cohabitating participants were asked to indicate their favorite possessions and indicate if they were acquired together or reflective of the couple as opposed to the individual. Participants were also asked to complete the IOS scale to measure the level of closeness experienced in the relationship. Results indicated that possessions can hold a double function, representing the romantic relationship for others to perceive (couple displays) and serve as emotional cues for romantic partners (couple markers). Furthermore, the amount of reported closeness was correlated with the tendency to value couple representative possessions over individual representative possessions. The closeness experienced by romantic partners in this study exemplifies communality in the relationship, specifically the extent to which a couple possesses a shared

identity. Lohmann and colleagues (2003) believe that the shared identity associated with closeness is due to including some or all aspects of one's partner into one's own identity. These results support the notion that individuals in romantic relationships choose objects to represent the expansion as other-directed identity claims.

CHAPTER 3

THE CURRENT STUDY

Hypothesis and Predictions

The purpose of the current study was to create a framework based on self-expansion theory (Aron & Aron, 1986) to understand the role of possessions as representative of a romantic relationship. This study provides the means to understand the relationship between the amount of self-expansion and the tendency to represent the self as distinct from one's romantic partner or oneself and one's romantic partner as a single unit via material possessions (Lohmann et al., 2003). Based on the work of Gosling (2008), this framework further proposes that the function of possessions as identity claims and feeling regulators is affected by the amount of self-expansion present in the romantic relationship. Based on the integration of self-expansion and possession literature, the following hypothesis is proposed:

Hypothesis: Because of the need for social validation to support changes to the self, people in self-expanding relationships will select couple-representative possessions as indicators of the self more than people in relationships that are not experienced as self-expanding. Three corollaries are also implied.

- A. Couple possessions will be chosen to serve as other-directed identity claims as evidenced in subjects' reports of objects' functions as well as in the objects' placement.

- B. Also, people in self-expanding relationships may report that couple possessions serve as feeling regulators because rapid expansion of the self may generate passion between the partners; however, this relationship is believed to be artifactual – a result rather than cause of self-expansion leading to the prediction that the relationship between couple-possessions and feeling regulators will dissipate when controlling for the experience of self-expansion or passion.
- C. Whereas the selection of displays is presumably motivated by the need of recognition of the self, I do not expect that these couple possessions will hold particular functional (utilitarian) use.

To test this hypothesis and its corollaries, participants were asked to complete a series of questionnaires measuring self-expansion, passionate love, possession representativeness (individual or couple), and possession function (identity claims, feeling regulator, utility).

Method

Participants

Participants were 100 Indiana State University psychology and sociology students who had been living with a romantic partner for at least three months¹. The participant sample consisted of 73 females (74%) and 26 males (26%), excluding one participant that did not report gender. Participants ranged in age from 18 to 49 years ($M=21.35$, $SD=4.60$). Eighty-three percent of participants identified themselves as “white/Caucasian” (83%); the remaining participants were: “black/African American” (7%); “Hispanic/Latino” (4%); Other/Not-responding (6%).

¹ One participant was excluded from all analyses because they were an extreme outlier for relationship length and living situation (216 months).

Participants were predominantly “heterosexual” (87%) although several reported bisexual (7%) or homosexual (2%) orientations (4% non-reporting). Participants had been in their current relationship between 3 and 72 months, with an average of just over two years ($M = 25.32$ months, $SD=16.58$) and had been living with their partner an average of ten months ($M = 10.60$, $SD = 11.10$, range 3-60)². Participants were predominantly involved in an “exclusive relationship” (60%); the remaining participants were engaged (22%); married (9%); in a non-exclusive relationship (8%); not responding (1%).

Main Measures

Valued Possessions Questionnaire. Participants were presented with a hypothetical scenario in which they are told that a tornado has destroyed their home (Appendix A) and asked to list the three possessions that they would most hope to find among the rubble. Participants were told that their computer and cell phone were safely stored in their car (with them) during the tornado.

Qualitative Description of Possessions. Participants were then asked to answer a series of qualitative questions regarding each of the three possessions that they reported being most interested in finding. For each, they were asked to describe the possession, why they wanted to find it, and how it had been originally acquired. This qualitative information was used to determine the classification of each item, specifically whether each possession was representative of the romantic relationship, the individual themselves, other social ties, is valued because of specific qualities (e.g. uniqueness or monetary value) or served another purpose. These categories followed a coding scheme developed by Kamptner (1995)

² Due to survey coding error, this question was only asked of those who reported living with a romantic partner only (i.e., not if they also lived with other roommates, family members, children, etc.).

(Appendix G) with the stipulation that coding must be exclusive (Kamptner's original coding scheme is non-exclusive).

Couple Representativeness Scale. Participants were also asked to complete the couple representativeness scale (Appendix B), consisting of six Likert-style items measuring the representativeness of each possession, specifically the degree to which a possession was felt to represent the participants' relationship with their partner (as opposed to themselves).

Participants were asked to indicate their level of agreement with items such as "this item is important to my relationship with my significant other". Responses range from, 1, strongly disagree to 6, strongly agree. A high score on the scale indicates that the possession is representative of the romantic couple. The possession representativeness scale proved reliable in this sample, $\alpha = .91$. The couple representativeness scale averaged across all possessions was used as the primary measure of couple representativeness.

Possession Function Scale. Participants also completed a 16-item Likert-scale for each of the three possessions to determine the function of the possession (Appendix C). Participants were asked to select their agreement, ranging from 1, "does not apply to me at all" to 6, "applies to me all the time", consisting of items such as "it reinforces the type of person I see myself as now" (self-directed identity claim), "it shows others that I am similar to the people I aspire to be like" (other-directed identity claim), "it reminds me of important people, places, and events in my life" (feeling regulator), and "it has a lot of practical usefulness" (utilitarian). Average sub-scores were calculated to determine the extent to which a possession is used as a self-directed identity claim, other-directed identity claim, feeling regulator and utility. By averaging the appropriate items a total self-directed identity claim score, total other-directed identity claim score, total feeling regulator score, and total utility score were calculated with the

highest sub-score indicating the possessions' primary function. To verify claims that items were "other directed" the placement of items was also asked. Although scales measuring a possession's usefulness for regulating feelings or utilitarian purposes proved reliable ($\alpha = .78$ and $.77$, respectively), scales measuring a possession's usefulness for self- versus other-directed identity claims showed lower levels of internal consistency for self versus other-directed identity claims ($\alpha = .56$ and $.69$, respectively). To improve reliability of these scales two items were dropped, "if I do not have it in the future, I will still feel like the same type of person" was excluded from the self-directed identity claim scale; "it shows others my goals for the future" was excluded from the other-directed identity claim scale. After exclusion, the reliability of both these scales moved into acceptable levels ($\alpha = .75$ and $.70$, respectively).

Self-Expansion Questionnaire. The Self-Expansion Questionnaire (Lewandowski & Aron, 2002) was used to measure the amount of self-expansion experienced in a romantic relationship (Appendix D). The SEQ is a 14-item, Likert scale that measures participants' level of agreement to statements such as "How much does your partner help to expand your sense of the kind of person you are?" (Lewandowski & Aron, 2002). Participants were asked to respond to items by selecting his or her level of agreement with each item on a scale ranging from 1, not at all, to 7, a great deal. The higher a participant's score the greater the reported amount of self-expansion experienced in the relationship. The self-expansion questionnaire proved reliable in this sample, $\alpha = .93$.

Passionate Love Scale. Participants completed the Passionate Love Scale, developed by Hatfield and Sprecher (1986) to measure the passion experienced in romantic relationships. The scale measures the cognitive, emotional and behavioral components associated with the experience of passion in romantic relationships (Appendix E). Participants were asked to

complete the short version of the scale consisting of 15 items. Participants were asked to rate their agreement with items such as “I possess a powerful attraction for my partner”. Possible responses range from 1, not at all true, to 9, definitely true. The higher a participant’s score, the greater the reported amount of passion experienced in one’s romantic relationship. The passionate love scale proved reliable in this sample, $\alpha = .92$.

Demographics. Participants were asked to complete a general demographics questionnaire consisting of age, sex, sexual orientation, relationship status, relationship length, and living arrangements (Appendix F).

Supplemental Measures

Supplemental measures were not included in primary analyses but were included solely for exploratory purposes.

Possession Acquisition Items. Participants were asked to complete two forced choice items for each possession to determine acquisition and whether the item was a gift from a romantic partner. If the possession was a gift from a romantic partner, participants were also asked to identify the occasion and whether they give a gift to their romantic partner as well (Appendix H).

Combined Representativeness Scale. Participants were asked to complete a 6-item Likert scale measuring the importance of each item to the participant and the perceived importance to the participant’s romantic partner (Appendix I). Participants were asked to indicate their agreement with each item ranging from 1, not at all to 6, very much. The scale is comprised of items such as “how much does the item represent you?” (self) and “how much does this item represent your romantic partner?” (romantic partner). The items are set up as pairs such that a high score on both a self item and partner item would indicate that a

possession is representative of the couple. There were three pairs of such items. The scale proved reliable in this sample, $\alpha = .75$ and was highly correlated with the couple representativeness scale, $r = .736, p = .001$, and therefore was not considered in the main analysis.

Inclusion of Other in Self Scale. The Inclusion of Other in Self Scale (IOS) (Aron et al., 1992) requires individuals to evaluate the closeness of a relationship by deciding which set of two circles (based on the idea of Venn diagrams), the self and the other, best represents their relationship (Appendix J). There are seven possible degrees of closeness ranging from the other and the self as two distinct circles to the other and the self as overlapping circles. The more the self and the other circles overlap the more interconnected one feels with his or her romantic partner. The IOS scale represents both the affective and behavioral components of closeness.

Procedure

Participants completed the necessary questionnaires on-line in one session. Participants were provided with informed consent before proceeding to the questionnaire portion of the study (Appendix K). Participants were presented with the vignette and asked to list three possessions. Participants were then asked to provide a description of each possession, prior to being presented with the possession scales. Participants were asked to complete both the possession representativeness and possession function scale for each possession prior to continuing to the next possession. Once the possessions scales were completed for all three possessions, participants were asked to complete the remaining Self-Expansion, Passionate Love, and IOS scales as well as the demographic questionnaire.

Results

Main Analysis

The analyses are presented in two parts. First, I present the results of a content analysis of the possessions that people hoped to find after the imagined disaster. From this data, I explore the frequency of reports of “couple-representative” possessions and the correspondence between these qualitative reports and participants’ quantitative ratings of the “representativeness” of the possessions. Second, I present correlational analyses to test my hypotheses that people in self-expanding relationships are more likely to seek couple-representative possessions, a) that these possessions are used as other-directed identity claims and b) feeling-regulators and that the feeling-regulator (but not the other-directed identity) function is reflective of the passionate love felt for their partner, and c) couple possessions will not be valued for their utility; these latter (quantitative) analyses use the couple-representativeness scale averaged across possessions reported by a respondent.

Qualitative Possession Description. Two undergraduate students independently coded each of the respondents’ qualitative descriptions of possessions according to the coding scheme described above. Judges agreed 63% of the time when placing 269 possessions in 8 categories (Note that 28 reported possessions for which only one code was available were necessarily excluded from this analysis); this rate was significantly above chance ($Kappa=.55, p<.001$) (Please see Appendix L for qualitative possession coding) For the purposes of this paper, which is solely focused on testing the use of possessions to “represent” one’s identity as part of a couple, codes focus on a dichotomous categorization of objects as “couple-possession” (e.g. a reminder of one’s romantic relationship, an item that represents the romantic relationship, or that was acquired with one’s romantic partner) or not. Judges’ dichotomous codes (“couple

possession” or “not”) agreed 83% of the time across 269 possessions; this rate was, significantly above chance ($Kappa = .72, p < .001$). The few coding disagreements were resolved by the author.

Of the 297 possessions listed by participants, 60 (20%) were considered “couple possessions”. Participants themselves also rated these possessions as far more “representative” of their relationship ($M = 3.49, SD = 1.14$) than possessions that were not coded as “couple” possessions ($M = 2.71, SD = 1.05$), $t(294) = -5.06, p < .001$, providing convergent validity for these different measures.

Correlational Analysis. A Pearson correlation was used to analyze the relationship between self-expansion ($M = 5.18, SD = 1.04$) and reported couple representativeness ($M = 2.86, SD = 1.10$) of possessions. Results indicated a significant correlation between self-expansion and reported couple representativeness scores, $r(98) = .365, p < .01$, providing support for the hypothesis that people in self-expanding relationships select couple representative possessions as indicators of the self more than those in non-self-expanding relationships³.

Table 1 presents Pearson correlations between couple representativeness of participants’ reported possessions and average measures of the functions (other-directed, self-directed, feeling regulator and utility) of the possessions. Analyses were also performed on each individual possession; these yielded substantively similar results except when otherwise noted (For results involving each individual possession, see Table 2).

³ Additional operational measures of couple representativeness based on the perceived importance of one’s possession to oneself and to one’s romantic partner (combined representativeness) evidenced an even stronger correlation between self-expansion and couple representativeness $r = .419, p < 0.001$.

Table 1

Reported Couple Representativeness, Other-Directed Identity Claim, Self-Directed Identity Claim, Feeling Regulators and Possession Utility: Correlations and Descriptive Statistics

Variables	Couple Representativeness	Other-Directed	Self-Directed	Feeling Regulator	Utility
Couple Representativeness	1	.385**	.396**	.475**	.296**
Other-Directed	.385**	1	.852**	.580**	.419**
Self-Directed	.396**	.852**	1	.620**	.455**
Feeling Regulator	.475**	.580**	.620**	1	.181
Utility	.296**	.419**	.455**	.181	1
<i>M</i>	2.861	3.225	3.510	4.430	3.047
<i>SD</i>	1.103	1.183	1.132	0.882	1.100

Note: **Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

In support of corollary A, the results in Table 1 indicated a significant correlation between reported couple representativeness and reported other-directed identity claim possession function, $r(98) = .39, p < .01$, as well as reported placement (the possession is located such that it is easily visible to others), $r(98) = .26, p < .05$. Reported couple representativeness was also statistically correlated with the feeling regulation, $r(98) = .48, p < .01$, as proposed in corollary B. In contrast to predictions, the relationship between couple representativeness and reported feeling regulatory function of possessions is not artifactual; results indicated a statistically significant correlation between couple possessions and feeling regulators even when controlling for passionate love, partial $r(98) = .41, p < .001$, or when controlling for self-expansion, partial $r(98) = .39, p < .001$. However, these (partial) correlations are smaller than the original bivariate correlations reported above, and the

difference is marginally significant when controlling for passionate love, $t(98)=1.727, p<0.07$, and reached significance when controlling for self-expansion, $t(98)=2.001, p<0.05$.⁴

Unexpectedly, the results in Table 1 also show significant correlations between reported couple representativeness and reported use of possessions for self-directed identity claims, $r(98) = .40, p < .01$ and reported utility, $r(98) = .30, p < .01$ (in direct contrast to corollary C). Note that this latter correlation is only evident in the aggregate analysis (combining all three possessions); as seen in Table 2, the correlations are not significant when performed for individual possessions (Possession 1, $r(98) = .11, p = .28$; Possession 2 $r(98) = .14, p = .16$; Possession 3 $r(98) = .11, p = .29$).

Table 2

Individual Possessions: Reported Couple Representativeness, Other-directed Identity Claim, Self-Directed Identity Claim, Feeling Regulators and Possession Utility: Correlations

Variables	Other-Directed	Self-Directed	Feeling Regulator	Utility
Possession 1 Couple Representativeness	.205*	.265**	.350**	.109
Possession 2 Couple Representativeness	.224 *	.312**	.502**	.141
Possession 3 Couple Representativeness	.323**	.292**	.427**	.107

Note: **Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed). * Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

A t-test was used to determine if the two predicted correlations (between couple-representativeness and other-directed identity claim and feeling regulation) were significantly larger than the significant, but non-predicted correlations (between couple-representativeness

⁴ Tests for these differences were based on Sobel's t (Baron & Kenny, 1986). Although Sobel's t is most commonly used to test the significance of a "mediated effect" I , it is statistically equivalent to testing the difference in dependent β s, estimated with and without partialling for another variable.

and self-directed identity claims and utilitarian function). The correlation between couple representativeness and use for other-directed identity claims was not significantly different from the correlation with use for self-directed identity claims, $t(97) = -.23, p < 0.86$, or utilitarian function $t(97) = 0.75, p < 0.35$. Similarly, the correlation between couple representativeness and use as a feeling regulator was not significantly different than the correlation between couple representativeness and use as a self-directed identity claim $t(97) = 1.14, p < .25$, or utilitarian function $t(97) = 1.57, p < .15$

Additional Analysis of Couple Possessions.

The additional analysis is presented in two parts. First, I will present results of correlations among self-expansion, passionate love, and inclusion of other in the self. From these data, I will explore the relationship between couple representativeness and inclusion of other in the self as proposed by Lohmann and colleagues (2003). Second, I present the results of a frequency of the possessions focusing on the role of gift giving in romantic relationships. From these data, I will also explore the effect of gift giving on “couple representative” possessions.

Self-Expansion, Passionate Love, and IOS. Table 3 presents Pearson correlations between self-expansion, passionate love, inclusion of other in the self (IOS), and couple representativeness of participants’ reported possessions.

Table 3

Reported Self-Expansion, Passionate Love, Inclusion of Other in the Self and Couple Representativeness: Correlations and Descriptive Statistics

Variables	Self-Expansion	Passionate Love	IOS	Couple Representativeness
Self-Expansion	1	.620**	.138	.365**

Table 3 (continued)

*Reported Self-Expansion, Passionate Love, Inclusion of Other in the Self and Couple**Representativeness: Correlations and Descriptive Statistics*

Variables	Self-Expansion	Passionate Love	IOS	Couple Representativeness
Passionate Love	.620**	1	.316**	.331**
IOS	.138	.316**	1	.013
Couple Representativeness	.365**	.331**	.013	1
<i>M</i>	5.181	7.206	5.150	2.861
<i>SD</i>	1.041	1.258	1.410	1.103

Note: **Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Self-expansion and passionate love are strongly correlated, as are passionate love and inclusion of other in the self, which is to be expected due to the passion experienced during the self-expansion process (Aron & Aron, 1986). Reported couple representativeness, however, was not shown to be significantly correlated with IOS, which is in direct contrast to results previously reported by Lohmann et al. (2003). Couple representativeness was, however, shown to strongly correlate with passionate love.

To further understand the role of possessions in romantic relationships, the importance of possessions acquired as a gift was analyzed. Of the 297 possessions listed by participants, 10% were received as gifts from a romantic partner of which 76% of the time gift giving was reciprocated. Further analysis was performed on each possession individually. Possessions classified as gift were more likely to be classified as couple-representative (Possession 1, $X^2(26, N = 100) = 43.68, p = .016$; Possession 2, $X^2(27, N = 100) = 51.270, p = .003$, Possession 3, $X^2(24, N = 99) = 54.31, p = .000$). Results provided converging evidence that reported

couple representativeness for possessions that were received as a gift from one's romantic partner were significantly different than those not received as gifts.

Discussion

The primary goal of the present study was to understand the relationship between the self-expansion process (Aron & Aron, 1986) and the use of possessions to communicate one's expanded self to others for validation. Overall, results indicated that reported self-expansion is associated with the tendency to choose couple representative possessions as indicators of the self. As hypothesized, reported couple representativeness was significantly correlated with tendency to use possession as other-directed identity claims (as evidenced in both reported function and placement) and feeling regulators. The relationship between couple representativeness and feeling regulators was not shown to be artifactual as originally proposed. Additionally, reported couple representativeness was significantly correlated with the tendency to use possessions as self-directed identity claims and for utility. However, the relationship between couple representativeness and utility is not significant when looking at each possession individually.

The tendency for self-expanding individuals to choose couple representative possessions as opposed to individual representative possessions supports the change in self associated with incorporating one's romantic partner into the self, such that a romantic partner is seen as an extension of the self. Couple-representative possessions promote social validation of one's romantic relationship, connecting an individual with his or her romantic partner in the eyes of others. Results provided support for the prediction that couple possessions serve as other-directed identity claims in both reported use and placement. Through the self-expansion process, one's view of oneself may be substantially altered by cognitively assimilating one's

romantic partner into one's own sense of self, accepting his or her qualities as one's own (Aron, et al., 1991); as such, other-directed identity claims allow an individual to convey this new sense of self to others. Providing further support for the use of couple representative possessions as other-directed identity claims, results indicated that couple representative possessions are placed in such a way that they are easily viewed by others. Both the use of possessions as symbols of the self to others as well as prominent placement of possessions, allow for social validation of the self by allowing others to accept and reinforce one's newly formed self.

In addition to their role as other-directed identity claims, possessions may also direct romantic partners' feelings, thoughts, and actions (Lohmann et al., 2003). Results indicated that couple representative possessions also serve as feeling regulators; objects that are not meant to send messages about our identities but are instead used to manage our emotions and thoughts. Results did not provide support for the proposed artifactual relationship between reported couple representativeness and identification of possessions that serve as feeling regulators. These findings suggest that, even absent passion for one's partner, participants report that their "couple possessions" serve as feeling regulators; in other words, it appears that participants continue to tie affect to couple possessions even in the absence current feelings of passion for a partner. Perhaps this is because the value and meaning tied to a possession is developed over time and includes not only one's current emotions, but represents one's past experiences (Belk, 1990; Kleine, 1995) and affect as well. Therefore, controlling for current affect does not diminish an object's value as a memento that reminds oneself of a prior time (and corresponding positive experiences) when it was originally acquired (Arriaga et al., 2004; Baxter & Pittmann, 2001).

In addition to the predicted use of couple possessions as other-directed identity claims and feeling regulators, results also indicated that couple possessions serve as self-directed identity claims. This latter correlation may simply be an artifact of the collinearity inherent in the possession function scale which does not seem to differentiate between possession functions (Lochbaum, 2010). Although these scales seem to have high face validity, results indicate particular difficulty in distinguishing between “self-directed” and “other-directed” identity claims. Even this may be an artifact of participant characteristics. Participants were predominantly undergraduate students and are in a transitional period of ambiguity and attempted self-definition (Van Genneep, 1960). Therefore, not only is social validation of the self necessary, but possessions may also serve as reminders of the new role one has taken on as a college student (Young, 1991).

Results further indicated that couple possessions are valued for their utility. However, this relationship contradicts the prediction that participants will not value couple-representative possessions for their functional properties. The functional capacity of a possession does not allow for social validation of the self and therefore is of no use to an individual that is attempting to represent the integration of one’s romantic partner into the self. However, these anomalous findings may be an artifact of the utility scale as it is difficult to truly ascertain the utility of non-utilitarian items (e.g. rings, a photo album, or souvenirs). Perhaps participants valued such possessions because they support feeling regulation or allow for couple symbolism.

Similarly the relationship between couple representative possessions and utility may be a methodological artifact due to vignette wording, as participants were told their home was destroyed by a tornado. Although the natural disaster scenario was used to ascertain participants’ most valued possessions, the vignette may have also reinforced survival instincts

due to the loss of one's home. As with any natural disaster, one's focus tends to be on rebuilding, picking up the pieces, recovering valued mementos, and also salvaging items useful in the rebuilding process. Such items necessary for rebuilding would inevitably be utilitarian. When the relationship between couple representativeness and reported utility was analyzed for each possession separately (as opposed to averaging all three possessions) results did not indicate a significant relationship between constructs; only in the aggregate did the correlation become evident. Furthermore, visual inspection of the data indicated higher numbers of utilitarian possessions were reported for possession listed later on the list of items one wished to recover.

In addition to the relationship between self-expansion and couple representativeness supported by results of the present study, previous research has shown a relationship between closeness as measured by the tendency to include others in the self (IOS) and couple representative possessions (Lohmann et al., 2003). Results of the present study did not support a significant correlation between IOS as a measure of closeness and couple representative possessions as originally indicated by Lohmann and colleagues (2003). However, the mechanism for measuring possessions varies greatly between studies as Lohmann et al. (2003) interviewed participants asking them to list their five favorite objects as well as five object that they would most want others to see and used a coding scheme to determine couple representativeness whereas the present study did not prime other-directedness and asked participants for self-reported couple representativeness. The currently used self-expansion scale—at least on its face—seems to encompass the current experience of self-expansion whereas the IOS may include other components (such as feelings of closeness that might emerge as a result of assimilated expansion) (Aron, Aron, & Smollan, 1992).

Interestingly, additional analyses indicated the importance of gift giving in a romantic relationship. Results indicated a significant difference between possessions received as gift from one's romantic partner and those that were not. Accordingly, reported couple representativeness for possessions that were received as a gift from one's romantic partner were significantly different than those not received as gifts. This is consistent with the notion that gift giving helps to signify the intimacy of a relationship as a gift is viewed as an extension of the giver (Belk & Coon, 1993). By accepting a gift one arguably integrates the giver into the self.

In general, the self-expansion process allows one to increase his or her "potential efficacy" by taking on the qualities and characteristics of a romantic partner, in doing so one's romantic partner becomes an extension of the self (Aron & Aron, 1986). The very nature of the self-expansion processes causes individuals to adopt a new sense of self. Social validation is necessary for one to truly adopt these changes to the self. Because one's sense of self is in part based on the perceptions of others (McCall, 1977), others must recognize one's newly adopted qualities and characteristics. Results of the present study suggest that personal possessions can be used as a tangible indicator that one's romantic partner has become an extension of the self. Specifically, possessions can be used as other-directed identity claims, indicating the change in self others. Others recognition of such changes provide support for one's new sense of self, completing the self-expansion process.

Limitations

Although this study provided support for the novel relationship between self-expansion and couple representativeness, there were several limitations that should be addressed in future research. As previously noted, the possession function scale does not clearly distinguish between functions, causing great difficulty in obtaining a true measure of possession use. The

collinearity inherent in the possession function scale may cause spurious correlations, particularly the correlation between couple representativeness and self-directed identity claims.

Additionally, revising the vignette may provide greater insight into one's valued possessions as opposed to those needed for survival after a natural disaster. Creating a scenario in which participants are asked to choose three possessions in their home that they greatly value without the threat of a natural disaster will give better insight into possession use. As vignettes typically create an artificial scenario that may differ from one's actual experience, the ability to conduct such a study after the occurrence of a true natural disaster will provide better insight into one's valued possessions (e.g. Delorme, Zinkhan & Hagen, 2004; Sayre, 1994).

The results of this study are also limited by the participant sample, as participants were college undergraduate students. Although participants were in committed relationships and living with their romantic partner, there is some question as to the generalizability of these findings to older adults. College students' identities are often "in transition" which may contribute to a greater interest in accepting and displaying the "identity" of their relationship partner (than experienced by older adults). On the other hand, having already achieved a strong sense of identity, older adults may need greater social validation of changes in their identity associated with a new relationship. Further research is obviously needed, and one should generalize to other age groups with caution.

Future Research

Additional longitudinal research is also necessary to further understand the relationship between self-expansion and couple representativeness as the experience of self-expansion decreases over time (Aron & Aron, 1986). Longitudinal research will also provide a better understanding of couple representative possessions as other-directed identity claims; other

directed identity claims should only be necessary when one is integrating a romantic partner into the self as previous research has shown that expansion and integration occur during the beginning phase of a romantic relationship (Aron & Aron, 1986). After the process of integration and social validation, couple representative possessions should no longer need to serve other-directed functions.

Overall, this study highlights the role of self-expansion in self-symbolization process. The experience of self-expansion in a romantic relationship directly impacts the possessions one values. Couple representative possessions hold special value for individuals in a self-expanding relationship. Furthermore, romantic partners who are integrating their romantic partner into the self seek social validation by using possessions as tangible representations of the self to others. These couple possessions also help to regulate one's emotions, providing a tangible representation of past experiences in a relationship and associated emotions. As a whole, this study provides deeper insight into the use of possessions, particularly the use of possessions in romantic relationships.

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APPENDIX A: POSSESSION QUESTIONNAIRE

You are away from your home when a terribly tragedy happens. Please imagine that you are returning to your home after a tornado has completely destroyed it. Thankfully you have good insurance and your cell phone and computer we safely in your car. When looking through the rubble what three items do you most wish to find?

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

APPENDIX B: COUPLE POSSESSION REPRESENTATIVENESS SCALE

Strongly Disagree 1 -----2 -----3-----4-----5-----6 Strongly Agree

1. This item is important to my relationship with my significant other.
2. This item was important to the development of your romantic relationship.
3. This possession reminds you of your romantic partner.
4. This item represents my romantic relationship
5. This item connects me with my romantic partner
6. Your relationship with your romantic partner would be upset if this item was destroyed.

APPENDIX C: POSSESSION FUNCTION SCALE

Does not apply to me at all 1-----2-----3-----4-----5-----6 Applies to me all the time

Self-directed identity claims:

1. It reinforces the type of person I have felt like in the past.
2. It reinforces the type of person I see myself as now.
3. If I do not have it in the future, I will still feel like the same type of person.

Other-directed identity claims:

1. It show others that I am similar to the people I aspire to be like.
2. It shows others the type of person I have been in the past.
3. It shows others my goals for the future.

Feeling regulators:

1. It makes me happy.
2. It offers me relaxation and fun when life's pressures build up.
3. It reminds me of important people, places, and events in my life.
4. It ties me with memories and experiences.

Utilitarian Use (Richins, 1994b):

1. It allows me to be efficient in my daily life.
2. It has a lot of practical usefulness.
3. It provides me freedom or independence.

APPENDIX C (continued)

Placement:

1. I use it only for its intended function.
2. This object is located in a place where it is easily visible to others.
3. This object is located in a place where I am primarily the only one who sees it.

APPENDIX D: SELF-EXPANSION QUESTIONNAIRE

Not at all 1 -----2 -----3 -----4 -----5 -----6 -----7 A Great Deal

1. How much does being with your partner result in your having new experiences?
2. When you are with your partner, do you feel a greater awareness of things because of him/her?
3. How much does your partner increase your ability to accomplish new things?
4. How much does being with your partner make you more appealing to potential future mates?
5. How much does your partner help to expand your sense of the kind of person you are?
6. How much do you see your partner as a way to expand your own capabilities?
7. Do you often learn new things about your partner?
8. How much does your partner provide a source of exciting experiences?
9. How much do your partner's strengths as a person (skills, abilities, etc.) compensate for some of your own weaknesses as a person?
10. How much do you feel that you have a larger perspective on things because of your partner?
11. How much has being with your partner resulted in your learning new things?
12. How much has knowing your partner made you a better person?
13. How much does being with your partner increase the respect other people have for you?
14. How much does your partner increase your knowledge?

APPENDIX E: PASSIONATE LOVE SCALE

Not at All True 1 -----2 -----3 ----- 4 -----5 -----6 -----7 -----8 -----9 Definitely True

1. I would feel deep despair if my partner left me.
2. Sometimes I feel I can't control my thoughts; they are obsessively on my partner.
3. I feel happy when I am doing something to make my partner happy.
4. I would rather be with my partner than anyone else.
5. I'd get jealous if I thought my partner was falling in love with someone else.
6. I yearn to know all about my partner.
7. I want my partner physically, emotionally and mentally.
8. I have an endless appetite for affection from my partner.
9. For me, my partner is the perfect romantic partner.
10. I sense my body responding when my partner touches me.
11. My partner always seems to be on my mind.
12. I want my partner to know me—my thoughts, my fears, and my hopes.
13. I eagerly look for signs indicating my partner's desire for me.
14. I possess a powerful attraction for my partner.
15. I get extremely depressed when things don't go right in my relationship with my partner.

APPENDIX F: DEMOGRAPHIC QUESTIONNAIRE

1. What is your age?
2. What is your gender?
 - Female
 - Male
3. What is your race/ethnic background?
 - White/Caucasian
 - Hispanic/Latino(a)
 - Asian/Asian American
 - Black/African American
 - Native American/American Indian
 - Bi-racial
 - Multi-racial
 - Other
4. What is your year in school?
 - First-year
 - Sophomore
 - Junior
 - Senior
5. What is your sexual orientation?
 - Heterosexual
 - Homosexual
 - Bisexual
 - Do not wish to report
6. What is your relationship status?
 - Married
 - In an exclusive relationship
 - In a non-exclusive relationship
 - Single
 - Engaged

APPENDIX F (continued)

7. How long have you been in the relationship? Please specify whether it is days, months, or years.

8. Who do you currently live with?

- Alone
- Roommates
- Family
- Romantic partner

9. How long have you lived with your romantic partner. Please specify whether it is days, months, or years.

10. Where do you keep most of your belongings?

- Parents' home
- My own home
- Home I share with my romantic partner
- Romantic partner's home

APPENDIX G: QUALITATIVE POSSESSION CODING

1. *Utilitarian* (object provides utilitarian benefits, e.g., is useful, functional, or fills a need; provides convenience; provides independence)
2. *Enjoyment* (object provides enjoyment, "good" feelings, and enhances one's mood; provides feelings of "release", "escape", or relaxation; is a distraction or diversion; is entertaining or fun; is soothing or comforting; provides feelings of security)
3. *Intrinsic quality* (includes meanings related to physical, functional properties of the object, e.g., the object's monetary worth, uniqueness, irreplaceability, design, style, or color; the "ambience" it provides; its being a part of the decor or part of a collection)
4. *Memories* (object reminds one of a specific occasion or event-- no persons are mentioned)
5. *Social* (object represents interpersonal or familial ties, e.g., object is a reminder of someone special; was given by or belonged to a family member or other special person; the object represents attachment to or love toward another person; has interpersonal qualities)
6. *Self* (object represents or expresses aspects of the owner's self, i.e., it is a reminder or representation of one's self or one's personal history: "it is a part of me", "it looks like me", it "represents who I am", or it expresses one's personal values, goals, or ideals)
7. *Romantic Relationship* – e.g. is a reminder of one's romantic relationship, represents the romantic relationship, was acquired with one's romantic partner.
8. *Other*

APPENDIX H: POSSESSION ACQUISITION

1. Who did this item come from?
 - You
 - Romantic Partner
 - Both you and your romantic partner
 - Other

2. Was this item a gift from your romantic partner?
 - Yes
 - No

3. What was the occasion?
 - Birthday
 - Anniversary
 - “Just because”
 - Christmas
 - Other

4. Did you also give a gift to your romantic partner?
 - Yes
 - No

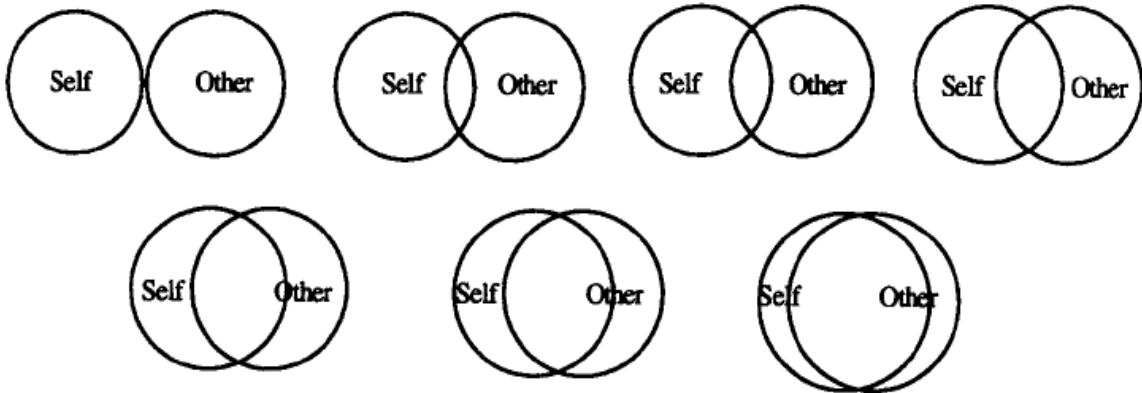
APPENDIX I: COMBINED COUPLE REPRESENTATIVENESS

Not at All 1 -----2 -----3-----4-----5-----6 Very Much

1. How much does the item represent you?
2. How much does this item represent your romantic partner?
3. How upset would you be if this possession was destroyed?
4. How upset would your partner be if the possession was destroyed?
5. This item is special to you.
6. This item is special to your romantic partner.

APPENDIX J: INCLUSION OF OTHER IN SELF SCALE

Please select the set of circles that best represents your relationship.



APPENDIX K: INFORMED CONSENT

You are being invited to participate in a web-based research study on personal possessions. This research is being conducted by master's student, Lindsey Paniccia and Dr. Virgil Sheets of the Psychology Department at Indiana State University. Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary. Please read the information below prior to deciding whether or not you will participate in the study.

To be eligible for participation you must currently be in a romantic relationship and living with your romantic partner for at least the last three months. If you choose to participate in this study, you will be asked to complete a computer based survey inquiring about possessions, your romantic relationship and some demographic information. Most items will ask you to click on the bubble(s) next to the appropriate response. A few items may ask for "fill in the blank" responses that may require using the keyboard to type in a short response (e.g., a number). The total time that is it is expected for most to complete the survey is 30 minutes and can be completed online in location of your choosing.

Efforts will be made to keep your identification and responses strictly anonymous and confidential. At no time will you be asked to put any identification with your responses. The software being used for the study specializes in Internet-based research, and is designed to enhance the privacy of all participants. All data collected will be kept in a secure database designed to maintain anonymity of internet-based research. The University's online experiment system will track your participation for the purpose of receiving extra credit; however, this

information is separate from the software used to record and store your responses.

You can choose whether or not to participate in this study. If you volunteer to be in this study, you may withdraw at any time without consequences of any kind or loss of extra credit to which you are otherwise entitled. You may do so by closing your browser at any point during the study. You may also refuse to answer any questions you do not wish to answer. Regardless of your participation, you will not be contacted in any way by the researchers.

Risks of participation are minimal and are not expected to be greater than what you would encounter in day-to-day activities. By participating in this experiment you may benefit by learning about scientific psychological research and gaining insight into the use of possessions. You also have the right to receive a report of the study's findings after the study is completed, if you so choose.

This project has been reviewed and approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of Indiana State University as adequately safeguarding the participant's privacy, welfare, civil liberties, and rights. If you have any questions about your rights as a research subject, you may contact the Indiana State University Institutional Review Board (IRB) by mail at 114 Erickson Hall, Terre Haute, IN 47809, by phone at (812) 237-8217, or e-mail the IRB at irb@indstate.edu.

Any questions or concerns about this research can be directed toward the primary researcher, Lindsey C. Paniccia, by e-mail at lpnicci@indstate.edu. The project supervisor, Dr. Virgil Sheets, can also be contacted in the Department of Psychology at 812-237-2451, or by e-mail at VSheets1@indstate.edu.

By clicking 'yes' below, you are confirming that you are at least 18 years old, and that you understand the information described above. In addition, you are agreeing to participate in

this study. Before beginning the study, you may print a copy of this consent form for your records. If you do not choose to participate, you may now close the browser.

APPENDIX L: REPORTED QUALITATIVE POSSESSION CODING

Possessions were further analyzed based on Kamptner's (1985) (Appendix C) coding scheme which provided further understanding of reported possessions. Agreement drops when considering coding of non-relationship categories using Kamptner's (1995) coding scheme versus chance, inter-rater reliability between two coders indicated 63% agreement, Kappa = .55 ($p < .001$). The most common classification for possessions was "social" (26%) such that the possession provides social ties to others, followed by "romantic relationship" (20%), "utility" (18%) the possession serves some function, "intrinsic" (15%) the possession itself holds value, such as monetary, uniqueness, or irreplaceability, "memories" (7%) the possession is somehow tied to memory but not associated with specific social ties, "enjoyment" (5%) provides enjoyment or relaxation, "self" (3%) representative of oneself, and "other" (6%) used when a possession was uncodeable (usually referring to an individual rather than a possession).