

SELF-EXPANSION AND BREAKUPS:  
EFFECTS ON POSSESSIONS

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## ABSTRACT

The current study strives to understand the influence of breakups on the expanded self and its representation through possessions. The self-expansion theory (Aron & Aron, 1986) states that involving oneself in a romantic relationship alters one's sense of self by taking on the partner's characteristics and qualities and integrating them into the self. The study examined the reported self-expansion in the relationship and the couple representativeness of a possession to see if this affected the outcome of the possessions (kept vs. discarded). Participants were asked to report their three favorite possessions and five possessions they would keep (or kept) and five possessions they would discard (or discarded). As hypothesized, people in self-expanding relationships kept (or would keep) possessions that were more representative of their relationships; this was not found for items that were discarded (or would be discarded). People in a prior self-expanding relationship had more relationship representative items as their favorite possessions; this was not seen for those currently in a self-expanding relationship. There was no significant relationship between self-expansion in a prior relationship and emotional distress or self-concept clarity for those who were dumped by their partner. This study provides some support for the idea that people keep possessions from self-expanding relationships to receive support for the expanded self.

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## CHAPTER 1

### SELF REPRESENTATION

Humans are social creatures, and because of this, relationships with others are fundamental to the human experience (Fiske, 2010). People enter into relationships for many reasons, be it for love, for money, for prestige, or for security. No matter what the reason, relationships help to define who we are (Aron et al., 2004; Fiske, 2010). People listen to what important others (i.e. relationship partners) say about them and discover how those in their social relationships react to them (Fiske, 2010; Shrauger & Schoenenman, 1979). These interactions may support one's beliefs about the self (that is self-concept) or they may reveal that others see them differently. Close others may suggest or identify characteristics or discrepancies of possible selves.

While love and passion are strong motivations to begin and continue a relationship, building and supporting the self are believed to be even stronger motivators. According to Self-Expansion Theory (Aron & Aron, 1996a), people enter into relationships in order to enlarge their sense of self, and they prefer relationships that give the greatest opportunity for growth. Such relationships are in fact hypothesized to be the source of the passion that attracts people to each other (Aron & Aron, 1996b).

Expansion occurs as people incorporate aspects of their partner into their own self-concept. Aspects of the partner that may be included in the sense of self are resources, identity,

and perspectives (Aron, et al., 2004). In support of Self-Expansion Theory, partners begin to confuse memories and characteristics of each other revealing a “blending” of self-concepts. However, a de-expansion of the self may occur after a break-up, resulting in distress.

As the self changes, so will the representations of the self made to others as people try to bolster their new self-concept through social validation. Possessions are an important way of doing that. The possessions we gain from a relationship may provide a mechanism for self-expansion, encouraging others to treat us differently in accord with the characteristics acquired in one’s relationship. When a relationship ends, however, those possessions may remind us of lost aspects of identity or continue to reinforce actual changes in self.

In this paper, I will examine the effect of breakups on the expanding self and its representation through possessions. Below, I reviewed literature pertaining to the self, the self-expansion process, and possessions as a mechanism to represent expansion. As a result of this, I developed hypotheses about the effect of breakups on the representation of the self and then proposed a study to test hypotheses about the links between these constructs.

### The Self

Perhaps from birth, our understanding about ourselves is learned through interactions with others. Feedback from others, both directly and in the form of social comparison, provides a basis for development of a self-concept. As people age, they initiate interactions to reinforce their self-concept as well as expand it (Hamlyn, 1977). Cooley (1902) thought the self was socially constructed by examining what others thought of the self’s appearance (i.e. physical appearance, character, goals) and adopting those ideas. He called this the “looking-glass self” (Cooley, 1902). The “looking-glass self” is made up of three areas: “the imagination of our appearance to the other person, the imagination of his judgment of that appearance, and some

sort of self-feeling, such as pride or mortification” (Cooley, 1902, p. 184). Individuals see themselves through the reactions of others and react to themselves as an object. Cooley (1902) also states that a sense of ‘my’ or ‘mine’ derived from one’s social environment is the foundation from which the sense of self develops. Cooley’s seminal ideas have been manifested in many if not most social psychological models of the self since their instantiation.

Recent social-psychological approaches to the self highlight the existence of multiple selves, recognizing that people react to multiple “mirrors.” These include both private and public selves (Andersen, Glassman, & Gold, 1998). The private self consists of aspects of one’s identity that are defined as personal, individualized, or internal. The public self consists of aspects of the self that are defined as collective, social, and external. Baumgardner, Kaufman, and Cranford (1990) argue that the public self can enhance the private self because the facets of the self are connected and any modification in one may be extended to the other. As a result, social interactions that evoke different behaviors in public may also impact the private self-concept. In addition, if someone fails to master an activity in a private area, he or she might overcompensate in social settings to gain proof of competence. Wicklund and Gollwitzer (1981), for instance, documented that people uncertain of their accomplishments in an important domain may be more likely to seek social interactions that reinforce their identity relative to that domain. They further speak to an individual’s use of possession to achieve this. Symbolic Self-Completion theory specifically proposes that people may use symbols of accomplishment recognized by others (i.e. possessions) to help bolster the self in areas of incompleteness (Wicklund & Gollwitzer, 1981).

Higgins’ (1987) Self-Discrepancy theory may provide the link to understand why people feel incomplete. According to this theory, people have images of how they are (actual self), how

they want to be (ideal self), and how they should be (ought self). When those images do not match, when one's actual accomplishments are less than one's ideal, one experiences a "self-discrepancy." This elicits an affectively negative state that motivates a change in the selves to bring them closer together.

### Possessions as Representations of the Self

What makes a possession valuable? In some cases, objects serve only utilitarian needs but often times, their value goes beyond that. A possession may serve as a private symbol or carry a more public meaning (Richins, 1994). Private meanings of a possession are the personal meanings a possession holds for a particular person, meanings associated with the receipt of the object or the memories it represents. If a girl is given a diamond necklace at her high school graduation by her grandmother, only the girl will know the personal significance of that item. Public meanings of objects are socially constructed and thereby understood by others. The fashion industry attempts to actively influence the meanings of certain goods by starting trends. These meanings associated with possessions allow them to serve as non-verbal statements about who one is (Gosling, 2008).

'Self-directed identity claims' relate to the private meanings of possessions, and they serve to remind an individual of his or her beliefs about the self (Gosling, 2008). Examples of self-directed identity claims are a picture of a person's children or a stone from a previous home. These items have a personal meaning, a meaning known only to their owner. Private or personal meanings may also allow individuals to use possessions to manage their emotions. Gosling (2008) refers to these as feeling regulators; possessions in this category are often family photos and keepsakes that remind a person of positive occasions from the past. Outsiders may see these

possessions as being unimportant but they can help the holder reminisce about events, other people, and relationships (Csikszentmihalyi & Rochberg-Halton, 1981).

‘Other-directed identity claims’ emerge from the shared meanings of objects, allowing them to communicate important aspects of the self to others (Gosling, 2008). They may elicit reactions and social reinforcement needed to verify the self-concept. Erving Goffman (1959) described how people present themselves much like an actor on stage trying to control situations and desiring to convey a certain impression. One’s personal environment may be selected and “staged” in order to assist with the scene. Possessions then act as props that may help the person evoke desired reactions from people and to reinforce one’s sense of self. Through their public meanings, possessions thus help individuals control the “self” others view, creating the “me” to which others respond. Possessions give a sense of who a person is, what he or she has done, and what he or she will do in the future (Belk 1992). Consequently, one might imagine that people will dispose of items from failed relationships or unsuccessful events as a way of distancing themselves from those failed relationships (Belk, 1990; Snyder, Lassegard, & Ford, 1986) to insure the impressions formed by others are good (Snyder et al., 1986). This helps individuals avoid negative evaluation from others or themselves.

## CHAPTER 2

### ROMANTIC RELATIONSHIPS AND POSSESSIONS

#### Romantic Relationships and the Self

As noted above, the self-expansion model developed by Arthur and Elaine Aron (1996a) suggests that people enter into relationships with others to expand their self-concepts. As one enters into a relationship with another person, one gains access to the other person's identities, perspectives, and resources. As the partners grow closer, they begin to treat the other's identity, perspectives, and resources as their own (Aron et al., 2004) and experience greater self-concept clarity (Lewandowski, Nardone, & Raines, 2010).

Self-expansion occurs through incorporating portions of a partner's identity. In a now classic study, Aron, Aron, Tudor, and Nelson (1991) found that traits and memories of a close other are easily confused with the self's own traits and memories, suggesting that in fact the partner is incorporated into the self. People in self-expanding relationships further evidence their expansion in self descriptions, using more terms to define who they are. Students who fall in love for instance, report a greater rise in the content domains (word or phrases related to emotions, family relationships, social statuses, etc.) included in self-descriptions (Aron, Paris, & Aron, 1995); the authors also observed an increase in self-efficacy and self-esteem after falling in love (Aron et al., 1995). These studies support the notion that a close relationship expands the sense of self.

Self-expansion also occurs through acceptance of a partner's perspective. Pinel, Long, Landau, Alexander, and Pyszczynski (2006) found that people are attracted to those whom they share an "I" with, which results from proof of a shared subjective perspective. Relatedly, when another person is included in the 'self,' cognitive and self-related attributional biases tied to one's subjective experience and perspective are applied to the other just like the self (Aron et al., 2004). This was documented in a study by Sedikides, Campbell, Reeder, and Elliot (1998), who found that participants in distant relationships showed a standard self-serving bias, taking greater responsibility for the success than for the failure of the dyad, while people in close relationships did not show such a difference implying that they accepted their partners' perspective as equivalent to their own.

Finally, close relationships expand one's access to important resources; resources like knowledge, material, and social assets that can aid in accomplishing objectives (Aron et al., 2004). In a marriage, sharing of material resources is literally codified into law. However, access to non-material resources including friendships, affect, and experiences may also be gained through a close relationship. Moreover, a partner's outcomes may also be shared, like a medical degree earned or a promotion from work.

One result of self-expansion process is passion toward the partner (Aron & Aron 1986). It is theorized that the rate of expansion affects the degree of passion, with greater passion associated with rapid growth in the self. Consistent with this, passion tends to be strongest in the beginning of a relationship when self-expansion is at its highest.

A relationship essentially provides rewards because of the expansion of the self by including the other in the self. In order for a relationship to continue and be satisfying, it must remain connected with self-expansion, but the mechanism by which self-expansion occurs is still

poorly understood. Based on classic sociological theories, it may be hypothesized that the expanded self needs social recognition and validation to become “real” which relates to the topic of possessions as a route to gaining this validation.

### Possessions and Relationships

People’s most prized possessions are often objects that connect them to others (Csikszentmihalyi & Rochberg-Halton, 1981). Pictures of relatives, family heirlooms, or a wedding photo all serve to remind individuals of relationships with others. As a result, possessions may serve to represent one’s relationship to others and may thus be used to represent an individual’s expanded sense of self to others.

Gifts may be one form of possession that signify a connection with a partner. When people give gifts, they are giving part of themselves to another person as a way of extending the self (Sartre, 1943). This may be a reason why so many people cite gifts from someone close as being favorite possessions (Csikszentmihalyi & Rochberg-Halton, 1981). Gifts let a person know he or she was once valued and loved. Greater demonstrations of effort on the giver’s part, like hand making the gift, lets the receiver know they were worth the effort put forth (Kroger & Adair, 2008). Gifts from significant others demonstrate how important the relationship was and bring to mind memories of the giver (Kroger & Adair, 2008). These possessions can reflect a person’s heritage, instances spent with significant others, connections to others, or care from others. The fact that an item was received as a gift, adds a layer of affiliation which makes even objects not considered self-relevant more difficult to discard. Sartre (1943) believed that a gift embodies the giver’s identity because of its association with the giver; accepting the gift means accepting some of the giver’s identity into the self causing a self-expanding experience.

Couples may also symbolize their new self through outward symbols of their couple-ness like buying art, plants, furniture, or knickknacks on which they both agree. Lohmann, Arriaga, and Goodfriend (2003) observed that couples who want visitors to know about their “couplehood” place objects prominently around their house that highlight their identity as part of a dyad, like wedding photos. There are two ways couples represent themselves; they can use symbols to remind them of interdependence and cue couple cognitions or have outward symbols of the couple’s relationship to others. Both of these are related to higher rates of closeness, dyadic adjustment, and commitment. Recently, Paniccia (2011) found that those in self-expanding relationships valued most those items that represented their couple-ness and their expanded self.

## CHAPTER 3

### BREAKUPS AND POSSESSIONS

#### Breakups and the Self

If entering into a relationship expands the self, what happens when that relationship ends? A breakup can be one of the most distressing events to happen to a person and is often experienced with negative emotions like sadness, anger and loneliness. There is some research pointing to different emotions experienced whether a person does the breaking up or is the one that is dumped. Perilloux and Buss (2008) did a study examining Rejectors and Rejectees. They hypothesized that compared to the Rejectors, the Rejectees would report more depression, more rumination over the breakup, and a decline in self-esteem. All hypotheses were supported. Rejectees were more likely to cry and plead with the Rejector, and the Rejector made more attempts to boost the Rejectee's self-esteem. Examining the emotions experienced, Rejectors and Rejectees both reported feeling uninterested, frightened, regretful, and bitter. Rejectees reported more feelings of grief, anger, surprise, bewilderment, and envy. The Rejector reported increased feelings of guilt and cheerfulness.

Breakups can have a significant effect on one's self-concept (Slotter, Gardner, & Finkel, 2010). Some argue that distress occurs after a breakup not only because of the loss of the significant other but because a person now experiences a discrepancy between the old and the

new self (Slotter et al., 2010). He or she can no longer collectively hold the self views he or she shared with his or her former partner.

When a relationship ends, the leaving partner takes his or her resources, perspectives, and identities with them (Aron et al., 2004). Lewandowski, Aron, Bassis, and Kunak (2006) found that after a breakup there was a greater loss to the self-concept when the relationship was more self-expanding. Slotter, Gardner, and Finkel (2010) discovered that a breakup leads to emotional distress in part because of the reduced self-concept clarity and greater self-discrepancy. This is because sources of potential efficacy gained by including the other in the self are lost when the relationship ends (Aron et al., 2004), leaving the person thinking, “Who am I” and “I don’t know who I am anymore” (Haber, 1990).

One reason people may enter into a romantic relationship is because it brings them closer to their ideal self, so after the breakup the person loses that feeling. Campbell, Sedikides, and Bosson (1994) found that those who were not in a romantic relationship reported greater self-discrepancies than those who were in a romantic relationship. Green, Campbell, and Davis (2007) found that those who engrossed themselves in memories of a former relationship indicated more self-discrepancy than those in the comparison group, who thought about themselves now, after the breakup.

Aron et al. (2004) predict that a key factor in determining how much distress a person will feel is how much the person included the former partner in themselves. If the former partner was highly included in the person’s self there would be higher levels of distress after the relationship is over because of the greater potential self-loss that may occur. Boelen and Van Den Hout (2010) found a positive correlation between the results of the Inclusion of Other in the Self scale and the severity of breakup-related grief. Those people who still felt a deep

interconnection between themselves and their former partner had stronger symptoms of distress. However, if the relationship did not allow for self-expansion, then there might be more feelings of happiness because of the potential for personal growth in starting anew (Aron et al., 2004). For those people, there is now novelty in the breakup itself and the newly-found independence.

Notably, Lewandowski et al. (2006) reports when a relationship ends, much of what was included in the self, from involvement with the partner, is not lost, at least not immediately. For example, if the partner introduced the person to golfing and taught that person how to golf, that person may maintain an interest in golfing after the breakup, if they truly enjoyed it. However, he or she might not have as easy access to equipment or financial support to enjoy golfing as often.

#### Possessions and Breakups

People have many reactions to breakups that may be reflected in different treatments of possessions associated with their partner. Some may willingly give up possessions that previously tied them to the partner. Disposing of the item could help to eliminate the self as experienced in their relationship. Others may mourn the loss of possessions that represent new and valued aspects of the self acquired through a relationship with the prior partner. Holding on to an item could keep a tie to the relationship and an aspect of the self they may be in jeopardy of losing. Kleine, Kleine, and Allen (1995) found that even objects that people evaluated as not representing them were sometimes hard to dispose of because they represented valued interpersonal connections. Belk and Coon (1993) stated that it is not abnormal for gifts or mementos from a previous relationship to be kept, especially by women, because they serve as souvenirs of cheerful memories from lovers. Gifts that were individualized, rare, or more lavish

had greater importance because they symbolized a stronger dedication by the giver and the receiver (Belk & Coon, 1993).

McAlexander (1991) conducted one of the few studies of the disposition of possession following a breakup and linked it to a desire to separate versus cling to their former partner. Usually those who initiated the divorce wanted to free themselves of the possessions that represented their marriage. However, they may keep possessions that they had before the marriage or those that represent parts of their life external to the marriage. McAlexander (1991) hypothesized that the initiators may feel guilty about the divorce and let the other person have most of the possessions to ease their conscience. The perspective offered here is that this allows them to create a new sense of self without their partner. On the other hand, the divorced partner may accept the possessions from the relationship as a way to keep close valued aspects of the former partner and relationship.

## CHAPTER 4

### THE CURRENT STUDY

#### Hypotheses

In the current study, I used the self-expansion model to explore the disposition of possessions after a breakup in people who were currently not in a relationship (i.e., one that recently broke up) as well as people who were still in relationships. According to this perspective, the amount of distress experienced after a breakup depends on the potential loss of the self that results. The more possibility of expansion experienced in the relationship, the higher the distress associated with the breakup, but if the relationship lacked possibility for expansion, the breakup might provide opportunities for growth. The following hypotheses were therefore proposed:

1. Those in a self-expanding relationship will report favorite possessions that were more representative of their relationship than those not in a self-expanding relationship.
2. Those who experienced the breakup of a self-expanding relationship will report favorite possessions that were more representative of their relationship than those who experienced a breakup of a non-expanding relationship.
3. Those who are in a self-expanding relationship and asked to imagine what items they would keep or dispose of, would be more likely to keep items and less likely to

dispose of items representing their relationship than those who are not in a self-expanding relationship.

4. Those who experienced the breakup of a self-expanding relationship will be more likely to keep items and less likely to dispose of items representing a past relationship than those who experienced a breakup of a non-self-expanding relationship.
5. The breakup of a self-expanding relationship will lead to reduced self-concept clarity and greater emotional distress for those who were dumped by their partner than those who initiated the breakup.

## Method

### *Participants*

One-hundred-sixty-nine Indiana State University psychology students volunteered to participate in a study of “People, things, and feelings.” Participants had to be or have been in a romantic relationship. Six volunteers did not meet these criteria and were excluded leaving a sample of 163 participants. Participants consisted of 108 females (66.3%) and 55 males (33.7%) ranging in age from 18 to 43 years old ( $M = 20.48$ ,  $SD = 3.13$ ). The majority of participants identified themselves as White/Caucasian (73%) while the remainder were Black/African American (20.9%), Hispanic/Latino(a) (3.1%), Asian/Asian American (1.8%), or Other (1.2%). The participants were mostly heterosexual (91.4%) although several identified as homosexual (3.7%) or bisexual (4.3%); one did not report sexual orientation. The majority of participants were currently in a relationship (64.4%) ranging from 1 month to nearly 17 years ( $M = 23.52$  months,  $SD = 30.97$ , 5 not reporting). Participants (35.6%) who were not in a relationship

reported their prior relationship had lasted from 1 month to 5 years ( $M = 11.42$  months,  $SD = 11.15$ , 40 not reporting)<sup>1</sup>.

### *Measures*

*Demographic Questionnaire.* The demographic questionnaire (Appendix A) asked about age, gender, sexual orientation, and year in school.

*Breakup Questionnaire.* The breakup questionnaire consisted of four items (Appendix B) that asked if the participant was currently in a relationship and if not, if they had ever been in a relationship. Participants were also asked the length (in months) of their current or most recent relationship; participants not currently in a relationship were also asked who first raised the idea to end their most recent relationship and whether they thought they expected to get back together with their ex-partner.

*Self-Expansion Questionnaire.* The Self-Expansion Questionnaire has 14 Likert-type items to measure participants' experiences of self-growth from their current or most recent relationships, depending on their current relationship status (Lewandowski & Aron, 2002; Appendix C). Participants indicated their level of agreement with each item on a 1 (not at all) to 7 (a great deal) rating scale. Wording was appropriately modified to reflect the past-tense for those reporting about a prior relationship. Item responses are averaged together to form a single score;  $M = 4.47$ ,  $SD = 1.22$ ,  $\alpha = .95$ , for those reporting on past relationships;  $M = 5.56$ ,  $SD = .96$ ,  $\alpha = .93$ , for those reporting on current relationships. Higher scores indicated greater levels of self-expansion experienced in the relationship.

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<sup>1</sup> The question about length of relationship was placed so that it was easily missed.

*Inclusion of Other in the Self Scale.* The Inclusion of Other in the Self Scale (IOS) (Aron, Aron, & Smollan, 1992) requires participants to evaluate the closeness of their relationship by picking a set of 7 pairs of overlapping circles that best represents or represented their relationship with their partner (Appendix D). The more the selected circles overlap, the more closeness experienced with the partner. This single item has high levels of reliability, discriminant, convergent, and predictive validity (Aron & Aron, 1996a). Means in the current sample were 4.94 ( $SD = 1.57$ ) for those in current relationships and 3.43 ( $SD = 1.77$ ) for those reporting about prior relationships. The IOS was included for exploratory purposes.

*Couple Possession Representativeness.* All participants were asked to name their three favorite possessions and to indicate how closely this possession was tied to their relationship (Appendix E). Those reporting on a past relationship were asked to indicate how involved their former partner was in the purchase of the item and whether the item was important to their prior relationship. Responses were given on a 1 (no involvement; strongly disagree) to 6 (fully involved; strongly agree). Responses to these two items for the three favorite possessions were averaged for a total score. Higher scores indicated that the favorite possessions were more representative of their relationship. The reliability of this scale ( $M = 2.16$ ,  $SD = .83$ ,  $\alpha = .54$ ) was only marginal but item-level statistics did not identify a means for improvement.

Those currently in a relationship completed the 6-item couple representativeness scale as used by Paniccia (2011, Appendix F) for each of the three favorite possessions. Participants rated their agreement with each item on a 1 (strongly disagree) to 6 (strongly agree) Likert-type scale. Averages of all six items across these possessions were computed for total score. Higher scores indicated that these possessions were more representative of the relationship. The scale proved reliable in this sample,  $M = 2.92$ ,  $SD = 1.13$ ,  $\alpha = .90$ .

*Possession Questionnaire.* All participants were asked to create a list of up to five items they kept (if not in a relationship) or would keep (if currently in a relationship) and up to five items they discarded at the end of their relationship (if not in a relationship) or would discard after a breakup (if they were currently in a relationship) and provide a reason for each decision (Appendix G). Then they were asked to indicate how involved their romantic partner was in the purchase of each item and how important each item was to their past or current relationship with their significant other; both sets of responses were reported on 1-6 scales. Scores were averaged across reported items kept (or to be kept) and discarded (or to be discarded). Higher scores indicated that the set of possessions kept or discarded were more representative of their relationship. This measure proved reliable for those reporting about possessions from a past relationship,  $\alpha = .87$  (disposed items;  $M = 2.82$ ,  $SD = 1.42$ ) and  $\alpha = .91$  (kept items;  $M = 3.16$ ,  $SD = 1.50$ ), and also for those reporting about possessions from a current relationship,  $\alpha = .93$  (disposed items;  $M = 3.72$ ,  $SD = 1.53$ ) and  $\alpha = .91$  (kept items;  $M = 3.42$ ,  $SD = 1.56$ ).

*Coding Measures for Possessions and Reasons.* The primary author and another coder reviewed the lists of possessions and reasons for keeping or discarding possessions with no awareness of participants' claims about their self-expansion experience in the relationship. Possessions were coded into one of sixteen categories (see Appendix H) like technology, clothing, pictures, and jewelry. Reasons for wanting to keep or discard items were coded into one of eleven categories, that identified whether it connected them to their partner/relationship, or whether it would be kept/discarded for some other reason, including hedonic qualities (e.g., pleasure/displeasure), was "owned" by the partner, or provided utilitarian benefits (see Appendix I for details). These categories followed a coding scheme developed by Kamptner (1995) and

used by Paniccia (2011) but were expanded to accommodate responses arising uniquely in this sample (reflecting the inclusions of participants whose relationship had ended).

Overall, the two judges agreed 90% of the time when assigning 1,240 possessions into 16 categories and 67% of the time when placing 738 reasons into 11 categories. Kappa coefficients (Appendix J) were significant for classification of each of the up to thirteen possessions reported by respondents (.68-.95). Kappa coefficients were also significant for classification of reasons people kept (or would keep) items, .55-.77 as well as for items that were (or would be) discarded at the end of a relationship, .43-.61, although they tended to be lower for reasons items were (or would be) discarded. Disagreements between judges were resolved by random assignment of a single judges' codes to a participants' responses

*Thoughts of Breaking up.* The Thoughts of Breaking up scale was adapted by Impett et al. (2010) from the Marital Instability Index (Booth, Johnson, & Edwards, 1983; Appendix K) and completed by those in a current relationship. It is a four item scale that measures a person's thoughts about breaking up with his or her partner, containing questions like: "Have you or your partner ever seriously suggested the idea of breaking up?" and "Have you discussed breaking up with a close friend?" Responses were given on 3-point scale (0 = never, 1 = within the last month, 2 = currently). The final question assessed how many times the partners had broken up. The thoughts of breaking up scale ( $M = 1.53$ ,  $SD = .56$ ) proved reliable in this sample,  $\alpha = .79$ .

*Self-Concept Clarity Scale.* The Self-Concept Clarity scale (Campbell et al., 1996), completed by those not in a current relationship, is a 12 item Likert scale that measured the clearness and unity of the aspects within the self-concept (Appendix L) on a scale of 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Higher scores on the self-concept clarity scale indicated *lower*

self-concept clarity. The scale ( $M = 2.84$ ,  $SD = .73$ ) proved to be reliable with this sample,  $\alpha = .88$ .

*Emotions Towards Partner/Relationship Scale.* The Emotions Towards Partner/Relationship Scale is a 13 item scale measuring anger and guilt towards the partner and the relationship based on a scale by Ahrons (1983; Appendix M). Eight items relate to anger and five items relate to guilt. Participants who were not currently in a relationship rated their degree of feeling each emotion from 1 (always felt this way) to 5 (never felt this way), where a *lower* score specified greater feelings of each. Both the anger ( $M = 3.61$ ,  $SD = .84$ ) and the guilt ( $M = 3.30$ ,  $SD = .89$ ) scales proved reliable in the current sample,  $\alpha = .86$  and  $.79$  respectively.

#### *Procedure*

Participants completed the online questionnaires by either attending a group session in a classroom that took no more than 30 minutes or by completing the survey on-line on their own time. Before the participants began answering questionnaires, they were presented with an informed consent (Appendix N) and then completed the demographics questionnaire and breakup questionnaire. As stated above, participants were given slightly different questionnaires appropriate to their current relationship status. Applicable questionnaires were answered in the following order by people currently in a relationship: self-expansion questionnaire, IOS, favorite possessions and possession representativeness, possession (items discarded and kept) questionnaire, and thoughts of breaking up. The following order was used for people not currently in a relationship: the self-expansion questionnaire, IOS, favorite possessions and possession representativeness, possession (items kept and discarded) questionnaire, self-concept clarity, and emotions towards partner/relationship scale. After completing the questionnaires, participants were debriefed (Appendix O), and thanked for their participation.

## Results

### *Main Analysis*

The analyses are presented in two parts. First, I present the results of the content analysis of participants' favorite possessions and the possessions they kept/discarded following an actual (or imagined) breakup. The frequency of reports of each category of possessions and reasons for their decisions are presented. Second, I present correlational analyses to test my hypotheses a) that those who are currently or previously in a self-expanding relationship report favorite possessions that more represent their romantic relationship, b) that those who are currently or previously in a self-expanding relationship will keep items more representative of their relationships and dispose of items that are less representative of their relationship with their partner and c) that those who were once in a self-expanding relationship and were rejected by their partner will have reduced self-concept clarity and greater emotional distress.

*Qualitative possession descriptions.* Tables 1 and 2 provide the frequencies of each category of possessions and the reasoning identified as participants' favorites, items they kept (would keep) after a breakup, and items they discarded (or would discard) after a breakup. Overall technological items dominated the category of favorite possession. The most common things kept after relationships (after the "other" category) were articles of clothing. Participants typically reported that they would keep items because of their utilitarian value, but the second most-frequent reason was to represent the prior romantic relationship. The most frequent items participants would discard were pictures, and the overwhelming reason for discarding items was their connection to the romantic relationship.

Table 1

*Frequency of Favorite, Kept, and Disposed Possessions*

Variable	Favorite	% of Total Responses	Kept	% of Total Responses	Disposed	% of Total Responses
Technology (e.g. cellphone or laptop)	153	32%	30	8%	10	3%
Transportation related (e.g. car or motorcycle)	69	14%	7	2%	6	1%
Music related (e.g. CD or guitar)	14	3%	6	2%	8	2%
Jewelry (e.g. watch or ring)	57	12%	48	13%	66	17%
Clothing (e.g. shirt or sweatshirt)	28	6%	69	19%	73	19%
Pictures (e.g. couple pictures or photo album)	25	5%	41	11%	89	23%
Stuffed animal (e.g. teddy bear)	14	3%	5	1%	28	7%
Sports equipment (e.g. bat or basketball)	11	2%	3	1%	0	0%
Books (e.g. star wars book)	6	1%	5	1%	1	0%
Animals (e.g. dog or cat)	21	4%	9	2%	4	1%
Notes/texts/letters (e.g. love letters)	1	0%	19	5%	26	6%
Religious (e.g. Bible or cross)	9	2%	1	0%	0	0%
Movie/movie related (e.g. Batman movie or movie stubs)	1	0%	7	2%	7	2%

Table 1(continued)

*Frequency of Favorite, Kept, and Disposed Possessions*

Variable	Favorite	% of Total Responses	Kept	% of Total Responses	Disposed	% of Total Responses
Blankets/bedding (e.g. pillow pet)	5	1%	15	4%	11	3%
Other (e.g. painting or gun)	35	7%	79	22%	51	13%
Non-possession (e.g. family, heart, or freedom)	30	6%	23	6%	14	3%
Number of possessions	479		367		394	

Table 2

*Frequency of Kept and Disposed Possessions' Reasoning*

Variable	Kept	% of Total Responses	Disposed	% of Total Responses
Utilitarian (e.g. I use them regularly)	67	19%	48	12%
Enjoyment (e.g. It's my favorite)	55	16%	8	2%
Intrinsic quality (e.g. It was expensive)	29	8%	0	0%
Memories (e.g. Memories of my life)	43	12%	23	6%
Social (e.g. Has family ties)	5	1%	0	0%
Self (e.g. Represents who I am)	4	1%	2	1%

Table 2 (continued)

*Frequency of Kept and Disposed Possessions' Reasoning*

Variable	Kept	% of Total Responses	Disposed	% of Total Responses
Romantic relationship (e.g. It will always remind me of him)	64	18%	190	48%
Revenge on partner (e.g. Spite)	2	1%	4	1%
Avoidance of negativity (e.g. Too sad)	1	0%	55	14%
Owned by one partner (e.g. It was his)	40	12%	31	8%
Other (e.g. learning experience)	36	10%	31	8%
Number of reasons	346		392	

To assess the validity of the content analysis of “relationship-oriented” reason for keeping or discarding possessions, correlations between the number of each participant’s responses that were coded as “relationship-oriented” and participants’ self-ratings of the average relationship representativeness of their kept/discarded possession were computed. The results are presented in Table 3. As seen there, although not high, significant correlations were observed between the number of items coded as “relationship-oriented” and participants’ self-rated relationship-representativeness for both kept (past and current relationships) and disposed (current relationships) possessions.

Table 3

*Correlations between the Coded Number of “Relationship-Oriented” Responses and Self-Rated Relationship Representativeness of Kept/Disposed Possessions*

<u>Self-Rated Variable</u>	<u>Number Kept</u>	<u>Number Disposed</u>
Kept (past relationship)	.32*	
Disposed (past relationship)		.22
Would keep (current relationship)	.43**	
Would dispose (current relationship)		.38**

\*  $p \leq 0.05$ . \*\*  $p \leq 0.01$ .

*Correlational analysis.* Table 4 presents Pearson correlations between self-expansion and the degree to which participants’ rated favorite items, items to be kept, and items to be discarded following a breakup as representing their relationship. The first two hypotheses stated that those who are currently in or were previously in a self-expanding relationship would report favorite items that were more representative of their relationship. These results are shown in the first line of the Table 4. As seen there, participants whose prior relationship was self-expanding reported that their current favorite items were more representative of that relationship (as indicated by the significant positive correlation), in support of Hypothesis 2. Although a similar positive correlation between self-expansion and the relationship-representativeness of favorite items was observed for those currently in a relationship, it was notably smaller and did not approach significance, contrary to Hypothesis 1.

Table 4

*Correlations between Self-Expansion and Self-Reported Representativeness of Possessions*


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Variables	Current Relationship	Past Relationship
Favorite Possessions	.13	.27*
Kept Possessions	.26*	.28*
Disposed Possessions	.08	.04
N	100-103	53-58

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\* $p \leq 0.05$ .

Hypotheses 3 and 4 stated that people in self-expanding relationships would keep more items and dispose of fewer items that represented their relationship. As seen in the second line of Table 4, participants currently in more self-expanding relationships anticipated keeping possessions that were more representative of their relationship. Similarly participants who had broken up with their partner reported that items they kept from their past were more representative of their relationship when it had been a greater source of self-expansion, consistent with Hypotheses 3 and 4. However, as seen on line 3, self-expansion in relationships was unrelated to the relationship-representativeness of items that were (or would be) discarded after a breakup, contrary to Hypotheses 3 and 4.

Hypotheses 1-4 were further examined by correlating participants' self-reported self-expansion levels in their reported relationship with the number of possessions coded as kept/discarded for "relationship" reasons by the judges. These results are presented in Table 5. As seen there, none of the correlations were large enough to even approach significance, providing no support for any of the hypotheses.

Table 5

*Correlations between Self-Expansion and Number of Possessions Kept/Disposed Representing the Relationship*

<u>Coded Representativeness</u>	<u>Current Relationship</u>	<u>Past Relationship</u>
Number kept possessions	.06	.18
Number disposed possessions	-.07	-.14
N	105	58

The fifth hypothesis stated that those who were dumped by their partner in a self-expanding relationship would have reduced self-concept clarity and greater emotional distress. Only fourteen respondents reported being “dumped” by their prior romantic partner, resulting in minimal power for testing this hypothesis. The positive correlation between self-expansion in the prior relationship and self-concept clarity,  $r(12) = .19$  indicated that greater self-expansion in the prior relationship was associated with lower levels of self-concept clarity (Recall high scores on the SCC scale indicate lower clarity) although this did not approach significance ( $p = .51$ ). Although correlations between self-expansion in the prior relationship and current emotional distress about the breakup were moderate,  $r(12) = -.41$  for both feelings of anger and guilt, they did not achieve significance either ( $p = .15$ ).

### Discussion

The goal of this study was to explore the consequence of breakups on the expanded self and its representation through possessions. It was hypothesized that people keep possessions from self-expanding relationships to continue to receive support for their expanded self. The current data offer some support for this. People who had left self-expanding relationships were

more likely to report that items they kept after their break-up were representative of their relationship with their partner; their favorite possessions were also more likely to be representative of their past relationship. Similarly, people who imagined breaking up with their current partner reported that they would keep items more representative of their relationship when their relationship is a source of self-expansion. However, there was no relationship between self-expansion and the relationship-representativeness of items participants disposed (or expected to dispose of) after a breakup. Finally, there was no association between self-expansion in a prior relationship and emotional distress or self-concept clarity for those whose partners initiated their breakup.

As noted, participants currently and previously in self-expanding relationships cited more relationship representative items among items kept after a breakup and participants in previous self-expanding relationships cited more relationship representative items amongst their current favorite items. These findings reveal a sustained connection to the relationships that are a source of self-expansion. Relationship-oriented possessions may be a means to maintain self-expansion begun with the prior partner. Outwards symbols of the expanded self may be especially important after a breakup because one no longer has the partner to provide reinforcement of the expanded self; instead, support must be found in the evoked reactions of others. It is also possible however, that attachment to possessions from a self-expanding relationship are desired not because of their support for the expanded self but to serve as, in Gosling's (2008) terms, feeling regulators that evoke positivity associated with the relationship (Aron & Aron, 1986). This matter needs further exploration.

It was surprising that no relationship was found between self-expansion and favorite items among people currently in relationships as was found in Panaccia (2011). It was predicted

that these participants would also use relationship-oriented possessions as other-directed identity claims to evoke supportive reactions for their expanded self. It seems likely that differences between the current procedures and those used by Paniccia (2011) may account for these differences in results. Whereas participants in the current study frequently listed “technological devices” as among their favorite possessions—devices that are unlikely to be seen as representative of a romantic relationship—Paniccia’s (2011) methodology minimized such reports, perhaps resulting in more relationship-representative possessions being reported. Paniccia’s (2011) methodology, which elicited “favorite” possessions by asking respondents what they would search for following a very stressful natural disaster, may have also elicited relationship-oriented possessions as a form of psychological coping responses. Additional research is necessary to confirm this conjecture.

Consistent with the above claims, it was also hypothesized that participants would be less likely to dispose of relationship relevant items from a self-expanding relationship, but this was not supported by the current data. Perhaps other motives overwhelm self-expansion in decisions about discarded items, e.g., emotionality, prior ownership, etc. Consistent with this, additional codes were added to the content-analysis scheme used in this study over those used by Paniccia (2011) and the coders/judges—as “objective” outsiders to the relationship—showed lower agreement in judgments about the reasons participants had for discarding items.

Although participants’ self-reports showed that people in self-expanding relationships would keep/kept relationship-representative possessions following a break-up, this was not evident in the content analytic results where there were no significant correlations between participants’ self-expansion experiences and selection of relationship-representative possessions as coded by the “objective” outsiders in the form of coders/judges. This may reflect error in the

content analysis process as evident in the low—though significant—correspondence in the judges' classifications (which may have reflected the terseness of many participants' responses). However, this finding also challenges the assumption that the possessions kept after a break-up are maintained as “other-directed” identity claims as other-directed identity claims are only valuable if they effectively communicate about the self to others (Gosling, 2008). Perhaps, as suggested above, items are kept after self-expanding relationships for some other purpose, for instance, regulating mood. It is also possible that the number of relationship possessions (as computed from the “coded” responses) is less important than the symbolic meaning of those possessions (as represented in participants' self-reports).

Besides decisions of what to do with possessions, people also have different emotional and psychological reactions to breakups. Previous research has found that rejectees experience more symptoms of depression and lowered self-esteem after a breakup (Perilloux & Buss, 2008), and Slotter et al. (2010) found that the emotional distress after a breakup is in part caused by the reduced self-concept clarity. Although this study did not find significant correlations between self-expansion (prior to a break-up) and self-concept clarity afterwards or the degree of emotional distress experienced, this likely reflects the very small number of participants relevant for testing these hypotheses.

### *Limitations*

Although this study provided some support for a relationship between self-expansion and couple representativeness in possessions kept from a relationship, the study also suffers from a number of limitations that should be addressed in future research. First, those in a relationship and those not currently in a relationship did not complete the same relationship representativeness measure for their favorite possessions, making it difficult to interpret the

different results for these two groups. Although this decision was made in order to try to replicate Paniccia (2011), other differences in sample and methodology make even those comparisons tenuous. Whereas this is generally the case, it is recommended that authors assure the validity of internal comparisons before concerning themselves with comparisons with other samples.

A second limitation concerns the timing of responses. Participants were asked to report on the qualities of a prior relationship, and whether their recollections are accurate across time is unknown. It is also unknown whether participants' responses were colored by the nature of the break-up itself. Participants may have been more likely to keep items following a positive break-up (and also to report more positive experiences in the relationship, i.e., self-expansion), providing a possible confound to the current results. Unfortunately, no data is available on how long it had been since participants' relationships had ended or on the positive or negative nature of the break-up which might have been included as a covariate in the analyses.

It should also be noted that the participant sample itself reflects a fairly restricted group of people, consisting solely of Midwestern college students. College students, who are still in the process of developing an adult identity, may be more willing to accept and exhibit their partner's identity than an older adult would. College students are less likely to have made significant purchases together (e.g., furnishings) that provide a basis for externally representing their relationship. College students are also more reliant on computers than non-students which may account for the large number of technological devices in students' favorite possessions. Thus, students—who may have more motivation than non-students to represent their relationship to others—may have fewer means of doing it. Future research should strive for broader samples to validate the findings obtained here.

### *Future Research*

Additional studies should be conducted to understand the complex relationship between breakups and self-expansion. Many participants in the current study did not elaborate on their reasons for keeping/discarding an item, challenging the content-coding process. A qualitative interview would allow for deeper probing of these reasons as well as of the qualities of the relationship that might overcome concerns about accuracy of recall and reporting on prior relationships. Similarly a longitudinal method that followed the entire course of a relationship would provide insight into how one's favorite possessions change in accord with changes in the self that are presumed to happen in self-expanding relationships.

One of the big questions to be addressed in future research is whether relationship-oriented possessions are really preferred for their role as identity-claims or as feeling regulators. If they are liked as identity claims, the assumption underlying both this and Paniccia's (2011) study, are they self- or other-directed identity claims? Prior research (Lochbaum, 2010; Paniccia, 2011) has discussed the difficulty of making this distinction from currently available data.

Although some may see understanding the psychological importance of possessions as unworthy of study outside of marketing research departments, the importance of such understandings is especially salient to those working with divorcing couples, who may expend considerable effort and resources determining an acceptable split of marital assets. Research like the current study offers insight into why couples have a difficult time splitting up their possessions. Conflict isn't only about objects; it is about the meanings of those objects and the selves each member wants to represent and reinforce in their post-relationship lives. Ironically,

the results of this study imply that those couples with the “best” (that is, most self-expanding) relationships may have the most difficulty with this process.

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## APPENDIX A: DEMOGRAPHICS QUESTIONNAIRE

1. What is your age?
2. What is your gender?
  - a. Female
  - b. Male
3. What is your race/ethnic background?
  - a. White/Caucasian
  - b. Hispanic/Latino(a)
  - c. Asian/Asian American
  - d. Black/African American
  - e. Native American/American Indian
  - f. Bi-racial
  - g. Multi-racial
  - h. Other
4. What is your year in school?
  - a. First-year
  - b. Sophomore
  - c. Junior
  - d. Senior
5. What is your sexual orientation?
  - a. Heterosexual
  - b. Homosexual
  - c. Bisexual
  - d. Do not wish to report

## APPENDIX B: BREAKUP QUESTIONNAIRE

1. Are you currently in a romantic relationship?

Yes

No

2. If you are not currently in a relationship, have you ever been in a relationship?

Yes

No

3. How long have you been in your current relationship (in months) total? \_\_\_\_\_

Or If you are not currently in a relationship how long did your most recent relationship last (in months) total? \_\_\_\_\_

Not in a relationship group:

1. Who first raised the topic about ending the relationship?

You

Your partner

It was mutual

2. Do you think you and your ex-partner will get back together?

Yes

No

## APPENDIX C: SELF-EXPANSION QUESTIONNAIRE

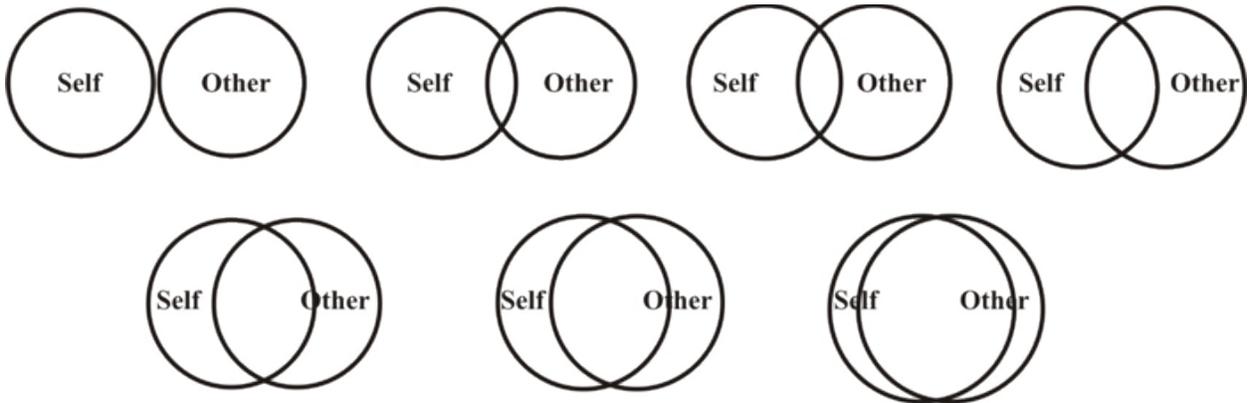
Thinking about your relationship please answer the following questions

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

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

## APPENDIX D: INCLUSION OF OTHER IN THE SELF SCALE

Please select the set of circles that best represents your relationship with your partner



## APPENDIX E: COUPLE POSSESSION REPRESENTATIVENESS-PAST RELATIONSHIP

Now, please think about all the things you own, the possessions that you value. Please name the three things that you would consider your favorite possessions.

Most favorite possession \_\_\_\_\_

2<sup>nd</sup> favorite possession \_\_\_\_\_

3<sup>rd</sup> favorite possession \_\_\_\_\_

Please answer the following questions to the best of your ability (past relationship only)

No involvement ` \_\_\_\_\_ Fully involved (e.g. gift)

(e.g. personal purchase)

1                      2                      3                      4                      5                      6

1. How involved was your romantic partner in the purchase of item 1
2. How involved was your romantic partner in the purchase of item 2
3. How involved was your romantic partner in the purchase of item 3

Please answer the following questions to the best of your ability (past relationship only)

Strongly disagree \_\_\_\_\_ Strongly agree

1                      2                      3                      4                      5                      6

1. Item 1 was important to my relationship with my significant other
2. Item 2 was important to my relationship with my significant other
3. Item 3 was important to my relationship with my significant other

APPENDIX F: COUPLE POSSESSION REPRESENTATIVENESS-CURRENT  
RELATIONSHIP

For each item you named please answer the following questions

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 my romantic relationship.
3. This possession reminds me of my romantic partner.
4. This item represents my romantic relationship
5. This item connects me with my romantic partner
6. My relationship with my romantic partner would be upset if this item was destroyed.

## APPENDIX G: POSSESSION QUESTIONNAIRE

Thinking about your most recent relationship, please list the items you kept from that relationship and explain why you kept them.

	Possession	Reason for keeping
1 <sup>st</sup> kept possession		
2 <sup>nd</sup> kept possession		
3 <sup>rd</sup> kept possession		
4 <sup>th</sup> kept possession		
5 <sup>th</sup> kept possession		

Please answer the following questions to the best of your ability

No involvement`

Fully involved (e.g. gift)

(e.g. personal purchase)

1                      2                      3                      4                      5                      6

1. How involved was your romantic partner in the purchase of item 1
2. How involved was your romantic partner in the purchase of item 2
3. How involved was your romantic partner in the purchase of item 3
4. How involved was your romantic partner in the purchase of item 4
5. How involved was your romantic partner in the purchase of item 5

Please answer the following questions to the best of your ability

Strongly disagree

Strongly agree

1                      2                      3                      4                      5                      6

1. Item 1 was important to my relationship with my significant other
2. Item 2 was important to my relationship with my significant other
3. Item 3 was important to my relationship with my significant other
4. Item 4 was important to my relationship with my significant other
5. Item 5 was important to my relationship with my significant other

## APPENDIX G (continued)

Still thinking about your most recent relationship, please list the items you disposed of from it and explain why you disposed of them.

	Possession	Reason for disposing of item
1 <sup>st</sup> item disposed of		
2 <sup>nd</sup> item disposed of		
3 <sup>rd</sup> item disposed of		
4 <sup>th</sup> item disposed of		
5 <sup>th</sup> item disposed of		

Please answer the following questions to the best of your ability

No involvement`

Fully involved (e.g. gift)

(e.g. personal purchase)

1                      2                      3                      4                      5                      6

1. How involved was your romantic partner in the purchase of item 1
2. How involved was your romantic partner in the purchase of item 2
3. How involved was your romantic partner in the purchase of item 3
4. How involved was your romantic partner in the purchase of item 4
5. How involved was your romantic partner in the purchase of item 5

Please answer the following questions to the best of your ability

Strongly disagree

Strongly agree

1                      2                      3                      4                      5                      6

1. Item 1 was important to my relationship with my significant other
2. Item 2 was important to my relationship with my significant other
3. Item 3 was important to my relationship with my significant other
4. Item 4 was important to my relationship with my significant other
5. Item 5 was important to my relationship with my significant other

## APPENDIX H: QUALITATIVE POSSESSION CODING

1. Technology
2. Transportation related
3. Music related
4. Jewelry
5. Clothing
6. Pictures
7. Stuffed animal
8. Sports equipment
9. Books
10. Animals
11. Notes/texts/letters
12. Religious
13. Movies/Movie related
14. Blankets/Bedding
15. Other
16. Other non-posessions

## APPENDIX I: QUALITATIVE POSSESSION REASONING CODING

1. *Utilitarian* (object provides utilitarian benefits, e.g., is useful, functional, or fills a need; provides convenience; provides independence). May also prove to be no longer useful or fill a need
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). May no longer be enjoyed or liked.
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 or from one's romantic partner.

## APPENDIX I (continued)

8. *Revenge on partner* (object provides a way of getting back at the partner, perhaps by keeping or disposing of it)
9. *Avoidance of negativity* (object brings up feelings of sadness, anger, or hurt)
10. *Owned by one partner*-self or other
11. Other

APPENDIX J: KAPPAS AND PERCENTS OF AGREEMENT FOR POSSESSIONS AND  
REASONING

<u>Variable</u>	<u>Possession</u>		<u>Reasoning</u>	
	<u>Kappa</u>	<u>Percent</u>	<u>Kappa</u>	<u>Percent</u>
Favorite Possession 1	.934	94%	(not asked)	
Favorite Possession 2	.931	94%	(not asked)	
Favorite Possession 3	.880	90%	(not asked)	
Disposed Possession 1	.940	95%	.596	71%
Disposed Possession 2	.886	90%	.472	60%
Disposed Possession 3	.849	87%	.428	60%
Disposed Possession 4	.901	91%	.613	72%
Disposed Possession 5	.676	72%	.492	62%
Kept Possession 1	.876	89%	.555	61%
Kept Possession 2	.786	81%	.717	76%
Kept Possession 3	.820	84%	.547	61%
Kept Possession 4	.801	83%	.699	75%
Kept Possession 5	.955	96%	.767	82%

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*Note:* Reasons were not given for the favorite possessions

## APPENDIX K: THOUGHTS OF BREAKING UP SCALE

Please answer the questions to the best of your ability

	Never	Within the last month	Currently
Have you or your partner ever seriously suggested the idea of breaking up?			
Have you discussed breaking up with a close friend?			
Even people who get along quite well with their partner sometimes wonder whether their relationship is working out. Have you ever thought your relationship might be in trouble?			

1. Have you and your partner previously broken up?

Yes

No

2. If so, how many times have you and your partner broken up? \_\_\_\_

3. Thinking of the most recent time you and your partner broke up, what was the length of time (in days) you and your partner remained broken up? \_\_\_\_\_

## APPENDIX L: SELF-CONCEPT CLARITY

Please indicate the extent of your agreement with each of the following statements

Strongly disagree 1-----2-----3-----4-----5 Strongly agree

1. My beliefs about myself often conflict with one another.
2. On one day I might have one opinion of myself and on another day I might have a different opinion.
3. I spend a lot of time wondering about what kind of person I really am
4. Sometimes I feel that I am not really the person I really am.
5. When I think about the kind of person I have been in the past, I'm not sure what I was really like.
6. I seldom experience conflict between the different aspects of my personality.
7. Sometimes I think I know other people better than I know myself
8. My beliefs about myself seem to change very frequently
9. If I were asked to describe my personality, my description might end up being different from one day to another day.
10. Even if I wanted to, I don't think I would tell someone what I'm really like.
11. In general, I have a clear sense of who I am and what I am.
12. It is often hard for me to make up my mind about things because I don't really know what I want.

## APPENDIX M: EMOTIONS TOWARDS PARTNER/RELATIONSHIP SCALE

Thinking about your breakup or past romantic partner please answer the following questions.

- [1] I have always felt this way
- [2] I have often felt this way
- [3] I have sometimes felt this way
- [4] I have rarely felt this way
- [5] I have never felt this way

1. I have felt angry for the hurt I have gone through
2. I have hated him/her
3. I have hoped he/she has problems in new relationships
4. I have thought he/she should be punished.
5. I have wanted revenge for wrongs done to me by him/her.
6. I have wanted to get back at him/her for what's been done to me
7. I have blamed him/her for the breakup
8. I have felt he/she doesn't deserve to be happy
9. I have wished I had tried harder to make the relationship work
10. I have not felt any guilt about the breakup
11. I have blamed myself for the breakup
12. I have felt guilty about the breakup
13. I have wished I could make up for the hurt I have caused him/her.

## APPENDIX N: INFORMED CONSENT

You are being invited to participate in an online research study on personal possessions and relationships. This research is being conducted by Master's student, Caroline Sandrick and Dr. Virgil Sheets of the Psychology Department at Indiana State University. Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary.

To participate in this study, you must either be in a romantic relationship or have been in one previously.

If you choose to participate, you will be asked questions about your romantic relationships, things you own, and feelings about both. You will also be asked some demographic information (sex, age, etc). This study is expected to take no more than 30 minutes and will be completed online in an Indiana State University classroom.

At no time will you be asked for any personally identifiable information. After you complete the survey, you will be directed to a separate webpage where you will enter your name (for those who are in classes where your instructor may give credit for research participation). This data will be stored separately and will not be connected with your survey responses.

Your participation is totally voluntary, and even if you choose to participate, you may skip any item you choose not to answer. You may quit the study at any time simply by closing your browser without any penalty other than the loss of this particular research opportunity.

There are no known risks of your participation beyond what you might experience in any on-line study.

Any questions or concerns about this research can be directed toward the primary researcher, Caroline Sandrick, by e-mail at [csandrick@sycamores.indstate.edu](mailto:csandrick@sycamores.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 [Virgil.Sheets@indstate.edu](mailto:Virgil.Sheets@indstate.edu).

This project has been reviewed and determined to be exempt by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of Indiana State University. 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 Holmstedt Hall, Rm. 272, Indiana State University, Terre Haute, IN 47809, by phone at (812) 237-8217, or e-mail the IRB at [ISU-IRB@indstate.edu](mailto:ISU-IRB@indstate.edu).

#### APPENDIX O: DEBRIEFING FORM

Thank you for your participation in this study. In this study I was interested in looking at the effects of self-expansion on possessions. Particularly if individuals in a self-expanding relationship were more likely to favor possessions from their relationships, keep possessions from their relationships and less likely to dispose of possessions from their relationships. I also was examining individuals' self-concept clarity and emotional distress following the breakup of a self-expanding relationship.

If you experience continued distress following this study, please contact the Student Counseling Center at (812) 237-3939. If you have any questions or if you are interested in the results of the study please contact Caroline Sandrick at (724) 953-3064. You can also e-mail her at [csandrick@sycamores.indstate.edu](mailto:csandrick@sycamores.indstate.edu). 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 Holmstedt Hall, Rm. 272, Indiana State University, Terre Haute, IN 47809, by phone at (812) 237-8217, or e-mail the IRB at [ISU-IRB@indstate.edu](mailto:ISU-IRB@indstate.edu). Also, please do not discuss this study with your friends because they may be participating in it in the future.