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Notes for Contributors can be found at the back of the journal.

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May the Farce be With You: On Las Vegas and Consumer Infantalization

Russell Belk*

In the interpretation that follows, I argue that contemporary Las Vegas resorts jointly participate in a theatrical farce meant to infantalize their adult patrons by creating a fantastic liminal time and place. Infantalized adults make better gamblers and better consumers. But Las Vegas is not unprecedented. We have long created places on the margins of ordinary life where we invert normal behavioral propriety. Las Vegas is merely the grandest current enclave of non-reality in which we allow ourselves to play with carnivalesque abandon. It is now less a place for guilty transgression and more a playpen for farcical consumption. Though all this play comes with social and environmental costs, its ludic quality should not be disparaged for reasons of cultural elitism.

THE LAST RESORT

Dateline Las Vegas. Megacorp recently announced plans for a new, entirely below ground, hotel/casino/theme park here to be called "Hell." Having already themed Pharonic Egypt, the Roman Empire, Caribbean Pirates, South Sea Volcanic Isles, the Land of Oz, New York City, Paris, Venice, Monte Carlo, Bellagio, medieval castles, and other exotic locales and eras, it was perhaps only a matter of time before one of the corporations in Las Vegas tumbled to Hell. The resort ties in nicely with the city's annual Helldorado celebration as well as it's well-entrenched association with the mortal sins of greed, lust, drunkenness, debauchery, and bad taste. With the catchy ad slogans.

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Megacorp is trumpeting—"Go to Hell," "You'll be Dying to Get Here," "The Devil Made Me Do It," and "Damned Good Fun"—Hell seems destined to become the latest and greatest attraction in this city of excess. With Hell's promised spectacle of ever-flaming fire and brimstone, the Mirage's periodically erupting volcano is likely to seem tame. Planned theme rides like The Drop of Doom, From Here to Eternity, and The Bottomless Pit promise much more profound and frightening adventures than the roller coasters and log flumes of other Strip resorts. What's a wild wave pool when you can swim in boiling oil? What's a barge on the Nile when you can be ferried across the River Styx by Charon? And what's gambling for money when you can play "You bet Your Life"? If the Secrets of the Luxor appeal to those fascinated with New Age occultism, imagine the Satanic possibilities of titillating torture in Hell. Demonic and devilishly costumed employees will be fittingly called the croupiers from Hell, the cocktailwaitresses from Hell, and the pit bosses from Hell. The new resort's president is to be addressed as His Royal Satanic Majesty. And to attract aging baby boomers, Megacorp has already signed Mick Jagger to play the big doom doing "Sympathy for the Devil," along with warm-up acts Kiss ("Hotter than Hell") and Meatloaf ("Bat out of Hell"), while a succession of heavy metal bands will appear as lounge acts. It comes as little surprise that the resort's restaurants will feature flame-broiled dinners, deviled eggs, soul food, and devils food cake to guests seated in hand baskets. Shops in the resort's attached shopping arcade include Needful Things, Souls on Fire Discotheque, Hallmark Cards, Save My Sole Shoes, Rosemary's Baby Shop, Devil May Care Clothing, Hellraiser's Bar, Beetlejuice Julius, Paradise Lost luggage, Inferno Hot Tubs, S&M Candies, Purgatory Pete's Pets, Club Limbo, Death Watch Dinner Theater (featuring the "Corpses on Parade" musical revue), Hell's Angels Insignia Wear, the Faustus Follies, Hard Rock and a Hot Place, and Beelzebub's Brew Pub. In the future Las Vegas's rumored underworld connections are likely to have entirely new meanings.

LAS VEGAS IS LIKE...

I read the preceding paragraph to a doctoral student and a faculty colleague after explaining that it was the start of a paper on Las Vegas and that I felt certain they would get the drift as I read. As I concluded they looked at me perfectly seriously and asked when the new resort
would open. Satire is difficult in Las Vegas because the resorts of the city are themselves such gigantic farces. Even in a less preposterous era, Hunter Thompson (1971) wrote: "This is not la good town for psychedelic drugs. Reality itself is too twisted." He also suggested that Circus is what we all would be doing on Saturday night if the Nazis had won the war. But today it would not be surprising to learn of a Vegas resort called the Third Reich. It is more like the clowns have won the war, except that the spoofs and gags are not so much seltzerbottle/pie-in-the face buffoonery as they are calculated corporate efforts to separate people from their money.

Together, the Las Vegas theme resort casinos at the dawn of the millennium, are apt to leave us with the impression that we have just stepped into a three-dimensional television set with a wild agenda of disparate programming. It is a feeling that has been called kaleidoscopic (Baudrillard 1988)-a feeling familiar from theme parks, television, and shopping malls. Kowinski (1985) observed:

The [shopping] mall jumbles so many kinds of stores and services; from brokerage offices to cotton-candy stands, singles bars to interfaith chapels, that otherwise don't go together. But to a population used to seeing a bloody murder followed by soap opera sex, a religious revival, and a public TV fund drive, nothing much would seem incongruous (p. 72).

Langman (1992) takes this argument further and suggests that beyond simple kaleidoscopic patterns there are often contradictions in the mall that we have learned to ignore:

The usual impositions and juxtapositions of unending spectacles already presuppose the habits of televiewing in which rapid changes of spectacular disconnected images are the norm. The adjacent positioning of contradiction need not be resolved. Thus a weight-loss center may be found between an ice-cream shop and a large-size apparel store, a diamond merchant is next to a salami shop while across the hall may be a bank and video arcade or tax or legal service. This is little different from the media coverage of a war or disaster sandwiched between Hemorrhoid relief and the new improved car (p. 49).

Theme parks like Disneyland where Fantasyland, Frontierland, Adventureland, Mainstreet U.S.A., the Matterhorn, Pirates of the Caribbean, and the Jungle Cruise all about one another, are a further preparation for the improbably kaleidoscopic nature of Vegas. As Jillette (1999) observes, there are nevertheless some key differences between Disney parks and Las Vegas:
Disney is . . . policed to keep out nuttiness. You wouldn't see Disney with pictures of REAL giant lobsters on every street corner. Disney would have to anthropomorphize them before we could think about eating them: They'd be smiling, wearing bibs and using their killing claws as castanets. Vegas has more pictures of giant crustaceans in all their predator glory than the Discovery channel. It's a marketplace of BIG design ideas. If you can build it and it'll pull in a few people, it'll work in Vegas: circus tents, water slides, the New York skyline, volcanoes, Venetian canals, pirate ships, gold lions, bronze casts of topless dancers' asses and endangered species with big pictures of Siegfried and Roy (p. 52).

Nuttiness it may be, but Las Vegas sells. There is something that attracts us here. It is what John Hannigan (1998) calls a fantasy city, providing what George Ritzer (1999) has suggested is a reenchantment of Weber's disenchanted world. It is all the more striking in its bleak desert locale, which Drew (1998) characterizes as the city's spirit of denial. Denial also seems evident in the increasingly familyfriendly nature of this town dedicated to the morally suspect activity of gambling (Codrescu 1998).

As Hess (1993) suggests, both Disneyland and Las Vegas celebrate stylized versions of long-standing myths of the Western world (the exotic savage, knightly chivalry, winning the West, fabulous riches, utopian futures, and far away times and places). But unlike Disneyland, the casino resorts are the product of corporate competition for the next big thing, rather than a coordinated master plan. Las Vegas is also a further compressed version of the package tour of 10 countries in 12 days. The package tour provides its mythic kaleidoscope of people, places, and things by theming countries through stylistic stereotypes:

Peru becomes Incaland, Brazil is year-round samba and carnival, Norway is the land of trolls, and Mexico becomes a multi-themed tourist park we might call Gringolandia (Belk 1997; see Belk 1995 and Shacochis 1989).

Some shopping malls offer similarly themed pseudo-locales (Gottdiener 1997). The playful consumption mode in which we experience such themed places has been labeled post-tourism or post-shopping (Urry 1990; Featherstone 1991). Post-tourism is a playful sampling of the world with knowing recognition that the spectacle has been staged as a performance. Post-shopping is well illustrated in the film Scenes from a Mall (Simon 1991), in which Nick Fifer (Woody Allen) and his wife Deborah Finegold-Fifer (Bette Middler) spend a Christmas
season afternoon at a Los Angeles area shopping mall (Beverly Center). During their visit they encounter a magician, a mime, a strolling barbershop quartet of carolers in Dickensian dress, black rappers doing Christmas songs, a mariachi band in sombreros and serapes, and a Shanghai balancing act (see Belk and Bryce 1993). They also see an Indian movie (Mira Nair's Salaam Bombay), consume frozen yogurt at a snack bar, eat sushi served by kimono-clad "Japanese" waitresses, drink margaritas at a Mexican cantina, and have champagne and caviar in a French cabaret. While at the mall they also buy an antique English picture frame, an Italian sport coat, and an Australian surfboard. It is no wonder that we do not feel too jarred in Las Vegas when we cross the Strip from the de Medici splendor and gondoliers of the Venetian resort to Treasure Island resort with its Caribbean Pirates who sink a British naval frigate every 90 minutes following a fierce saber, musket, and cannon battle in the artificial lagoon.

Las Vegas is the vanguard of a growing trend seen in Mall of the Americas, Bourbon Street, Venice Beach, Branson, Mystic Seaport, and many other entertainment cum shopping meccas that appear to be revitalizing the spirit of the medieval carnival. Perhaps the closest parallel is in the West Edmonton Mall in Alberta. With the many themed portions of this megamall, Hopkins (1990) suggested,

Tourists will no longer have to travel to Disneyland, Miami Beach, The Epcot Park,... Bourbon Street, New Orleans, Rodeo Drive, Pebble Beach Golf Course, California Sea World, The San Diego Zoo, the Grand Canyon White Water Rafting. It's all here at the West Edmonton Mall. Everything you've wanted in a lifetime and more (p.12).

That everything includes submarine rides, a walk-through aquarium with sharks and sting rays, a wave pool, an ice skating and hockey rink, the world's largest indoor amusement park; an 18-hole Pebble Beach miniature golf course, Europa Boulevard with glass-domed arcade, a full-sized Spanish galleon, a trained dolphin show, the fantasy land hotel, and more. In fact there is a high degree of overlap and similarity in the simulated places of Las Vegas and the West Edmonton Mall, as well as in the amusement park entertainment offerings at each. The same games, rides, souvenirs, virtual reality video arcades, and carnival booths (ranging from the old knock-the-bottles-down to the new morph-your-face-onto-the-cover-of-a-magazine) abound in both. In each case those stepping off the thrill rides are offered an opportunity to buy a photo of themselves at the moment of
The boundary between mall and gambling mecca is further effaced by the casino located in the West Edmonton Mall and the casino-sponsored learn-to-gamble storefront in the Mall of the Americas. World's Fairs have provided such carnival for almost a century and a half and periodic local fairs, festivals, and celebrations around the world perpetuate a far older tradition of consumption carnivals. But of all of these, Las Vegas in the 1990s, having become the fastest growing city in the United States with more hotel rooms than any city in the world, became the most spectacularly successful. In 1900 there were fewer than 50 people living in Las Vegas. By 1995 the population reached one million, and two million residents are now predicted between 2005 and 2007 (Newcott 1996; Gottdiener, Collins and Dickens 1999).

Both in light of its economic success and because it seems a prototype for future tourism, shopping, and entertainment, Las Vegas deserves more detailed analysis. While some aspects of the Las Vegas phenomenon have been usefully addressed under the banner of postmodernism (e.g., by Baudrillard, Debord, Eco, Featherstone, and Urry- see Gottschalk 1995 for a summary), none of these fully addresses the farcical aspects of Las Vegas that I believe may account for its popularity and success. The farcical consumer phenomenon of Las Vegas is not all that new. Besides the medieval carnivalesque roots alluded to above, the beguiling offerings of the historic peddler contain a number of similar elements of magic, seduction, and the promise of something that is marvelously different from normal, offering hope of a total transformation of our lives (see Belk 1997). Lears (1989) notes the peddler's skillful theatricality and suggests that:

He was an emissary of the marvelous, promising his audience magical transformation not through religious conversion, but through the purchase of a bit of silk, a pair of earrings, or a mysterious elixir. Like the traditional conjurer multiplying rabbits, doves, or scarves, the peddler opened his pack and presented a startling vision of abundance (p. 78).

It is no coincidence that Las Vegas offers the largest concentration of magic acts in the world. Like the casinos, they offer alluring allusions that make something out of nothing and transform one thing into another. These are our contemporary sources of contact with the miraculous and numinous.
LIVING LAS VEGAS

Before discussing my interpretations of Las Vegas's consumer appeal further, I should disclose something of my "personal equation" as it relates to this place. My first contact with Las Vegas was on a family vacation by automobile when I was 11. The year was 1956 and my parents, my younger brother, and I were on our way from the Midwest to an ultimate destination of Disneyland. Crossing the desert without air-conditioning made the motel swimming pools of Las Vegas appear as refreshing as the oasis after which the city was named (Las Vegas: "the meadows"). There was little of what has since become the strip and most of the action was downtown in "Glitter Gulch." I remember being impressed by the neon, lights, and "western" feel of the town. But I longed to get on to the "real west" which was the world of Disney that I had seen televised on the Mickey Mouse Club and the Walt Disney Show. My next encounter with Las Vegas occurred during four visits in the company of my wife's family in the 1970s and early 1980s. Her stepfather was a heavy gambler and as a result we were lodged for free, first in the Hilton and later in the MGM Grand. We were also "comped" on food and shows in town. By this time I had a quite negative image of Las Vegas and found the polyester glitz and gold-chain glamour I associated with the place to be far removed from my own aesthetic, athletic, and outdoor consumer lifestyle. To the extent that I gambled, I was definitely a low roller, putting a few coins in the slot machines and video blackjack or video poker. I never won or lost much or got too involved, except as an observer. But I did enjoy some of the entertainments I saw there including a show by George Carlin and a wild New Year's Eve party with Sister Sledge. And it was nice to go to the short comp lines rather than wait in the regular queues with the unwashed masses. These perks, plus glitzy hotel rooms and abundant food, were attractive, buff hardly enough to make me throw over my granola lifestyle for the Las Vegas swinger's swagger. I was sufficiently fascinated by this contrast to my own consumer lifestyle and the sheer consumption excess of the town, that I had begun to take field notes and presented a few preliminary observations in a conference paper (Belk 1984).

In 1985 I attended the Association for Consumer Research Conference that was held that year in Las Vegas. Besides observing colleagues, going to a Paul Revere and the Raiders revival, and going to conference sessions in the MGM Grand Hotel, a number of us began to plan a cross-country qualitative field project called the
Consumer Behavior Odyssey. In 1986, along with Hal Kassarjian, Tom O'Guinn, and Melanie Wallendorf, I spend two days observing and photographing the Las Vegas strip with the resulting Odyssey. This time our home was a recreational vehicle stabled at the Circus Circus RV Park. While not much of Las Vegas made it into the papers, book, and video that resulted from this project, it struck me the time that the entertainments of the city shared carnivalesque elements with the flea markets in which some of our other work was also taking place. My next visit to Las Vegas was in 1992 when my daughter got married there in the Little Church of the West. The wedding party stayed at the soon to be demolished Dunes Hotel where the reception was also held. My daughter has a good sense of humor, as suggested by the Groucho glasses she wore to her graduation at Rutgers. She also seems to share my love-hate camp fascination with Las Vegas. While still in Germany where they were living, she and her husband had chosen Las Vegas for their wedding after they realized there would not be time during their visit to the U.S. to get everyone to their first choice for a wedding site: Disney World. The wedding gave me a chance to experience the packaged quickie wedding services for which Las Vegas is famous and to observe some of the then-new theme casinos that had started to open, including the Mirage and the Excalibur. I continued to talk to other visitors and keep field notes.

When Stephen Brown invited me to a 1995 conference on "marketing eschatology," convened in order to contemplate the millennium, Las Vegas seemed an appropriate parallel to the Biblical Babylon and became the focus of my presentation (Belk 1995) and a subsequent book chapter (Belk 1997). A more recent visit to Las Vegas was with Dominique Bouchet and one of his sons in 1996 began another period of research. This visit was specifically to observe the most recent offerings in Las Vegas and prepare for the present project. We stayed at the Luxor (already under renovation) and visited most of the strip hotel casinos in addition to Sam's Town, Rio, Hard Rock Cafe, and the downtown casinos that have been enveloped under a framework of lights and sounds called The Fremont Street Experience. We also made it a point to visit shopping venues and several residential parts of town. I went back in 1999 and 2000 after spending a year in Zimbabwe and against that background found the spectacle of Las Vegas even more striking. Over the course of this 40-year period of three- to five-day visits to Las Vegas, I have conducted only a few formal and extended interviews. My methods have been primarily participant observation, including numerous casual interviews, photography,
and secondary research using print and film material-fiction and non-fiction, popular and academic. Along with Fuat Firat, Dominique Bouchet and I presented some of our findings at a conference of the Association for Consumer Research (see Belk 1998). What Dominique critiqued as a hollow and dated American tourist spectacle, Fuat and I saw more favorably. I expanded on these views at a 2000 conference on deconstructing Las Vegas (Belk 2000). Together, this direct and vicarious experience is the basis for the following interpretation of Las Vegas consumption phenomena.

LEARNING FROM LAS VEGAS

An initial observation is that Las Vegas theme resorts play quite freely with what is real. In this respect they are like the Museum of Jurassic Technology in Los Angeles that weaves a museum-quality drama composed snippets of fact tied together with clever lies provoking smiles and revelatory reflections on the similar legerdemain performed by mainstream museums (see Rugoff 1995a, 1995b; Weschler 1995, Williams 1999). One example of Las Vegas resorts playing loosely with reality is the Luxor. On one visit to its pyramidal resort hotel and casino I floated "down" the hotel's then interior-encircling "Nile River" (now removed) on an Egyptoid barge, while observing along the "shore" numerous once living desiccated palm trees and such Egyptian wonders as the temple of Abu Simbel, rendered in 1/7 the scale of the original near Aswan. Just as Disney's Mainstreet USA at its theme parks has miniaturized architecture in order to make it more appealing to children, Egypt, along with Paris, New York, and Venice have been miniaturized in order to be more appealing stereotypes of the originals. If these attractions have been miniaturized, the sphinx outside the Luxor has been giganticized to twice the size of the original I once saw at Giza. The Luxor's sphinx has also had cosmetic coloration and a nose job to restore what is missing on the Egyptian original. Giganticism is also evident in the pyramid itself, said to be large enough inside for nine 747 aircraft. Such fascination with the gigantic, the miniature, and the exotic are elements that have been linked to the creation of consumer desire with resulting manifestations in the souvenir and the collection (Stewart 1984). At least part of the appeal of Las Vegas appears due to the its playful treatment of what is real through the interplay of manipulated scale, theatrical lighting, nostalgia, and pastiche (Fontana and Preston 1990).
On the lower floor of the Luxor, I paid a fee to visit the resort's Tomb of Tutankhamen and Museum. At the entrance to the museum is a piece of limestone the size of two hands with a plaque thanking the Egyptian government for this relic from the one pyramid larger than the Luxor—the great Cheops pyramid at Giza. Within the museum I saw Tut's tomb as it was discovered by Howard Carter in the 1920s, and was reminded of Tut's tomb treasures in Cairo's Egyptian Museum. The many relics in the tomb at the Luxor museum and the related professionally displayed papyruses, scarabs, coins, and cartouches prompted me to ask a guard just which things are authentic. He replied, "Do you remember that piece of limestone you saw when you entered the museum? That's it." True, Egypt itself has numerous elements of altered authenticity, including restorations to the sphinx, movement of the Abu Simbel temple when Lake Nassar covered the original site, and a Pharonic theme park outside of Cairo. But the patent falsity of the Luxor's Egyptiana (or the Romanesque carrera marble statuary reproductions of Caesar's Palace or the fake skylines of New York City, Paris, and Venice at other Las Vegas theme resorts) reveal a playful quality that marks what I think is the essential spirit of Las Vegas in its current incarnation. It is a spirit that combines extravagant spectacle and comic farce. It is the spirit that made my student and colleague so readily accept the opening scenario for Hell as the latest Las Vegas themed resort.

This spirit has been captured well by Los Angeles art critic Ralph Rugoff who suggests that:

Las Vegas is a comic spectacle. The Mirage's ejaculating volcano, so punctual you can set your watch by its eruptions, provides a type of extravagant farce absent from the architecture of our major cities. Rather than beguile visitors with escapist promises, theme resorts like Treasure Island and Luxor appeal to our sense that in today's shrunken world, the exotic getaway is a notion that can be spoofed. Las Vegas has become a place you visit in order to go somewhere else, but your destination is a joke. (1995b, p. 4)

A farce is a theatrical form in which humor is created through mockery involving sweeping improbabilities of plot and character. It is the theater of the absurd and the ridiculous, with predecessors including Aristophanes, Ionescu, the commedia dell'arte and Money Python (Davis 1978; Bermel 1982), just as the Museum of Jurassic Technology mocks the concept of the somber overly erudite cultural museum, the Luxor, with its talking camels and its Flying Mummies acrobatic team, mocks any reverential homage to ancient Egypt as
the cradle of civilization. The Luxor borrows the mystique and riches of Egypt, but only to exploit them in the same way an Egyptian themed video game, pinball game, or movie theater does. Consider the contrast between visiting the Luxor's museum and visiting Cairo's Egyptian Museum. Nothing in the Luxor is meant to be taken too seriously. For the visitor who buys a package ticket, the visit to the museum follows a motion simulator ride, 3-D movie, and adventure presentation—all part of the Secrets of the Luxor Pyramid. In this trilogy we learn of the pyramid discovered two miles under Las Vegas by an Indiana Jones type archaeologist named Carina. With the help of the casino developer she fights an Army colonel and the evil Dr. Osiris who seek to appropriate the pyramid and its levitator cars for their own purposes. Together Carina and the casino developer save the world by recovering the sacred crystal guarded by the pyramid's priests (see Wolkomir 1995). After this narrated adventure and a walk through the cavernous casino and lobby of the Luxor, the visitor reaches the Luxor museum and gift store with a much more playful set of expectations than the tourist to Cairo. While Urry's (1990) and Featherstone's (1991) post-tourist also carries a playful mood to foreign destinations, this playful spirit does not regard the local museum offerings in these foreign locales as a farce. They may not be consumed too seriously, but their authenticity is unquestioned and the reverent decorum we have learned to employ in our museum temples is still maintained. In the Luxor's museum, by contrast, the headset-guided tour provides an authoritative and serious narration, but almost no one takes long enough to listen to it or to match the audio narration with the corresponding displays before them. They are there to be entertained, amused, and amazed by fantastic treasures, not to be educated. This playful intent can also be seen in the Luxor's use of an Egyptologist, not so much to assure authenticity as to assure that the hieroglyphics displayed throughout the hotel do not really say anything to someone who might happen to understand them (Wolkomir 1995). Las Vegas is instructing us through its farcical architecture and spectacles to adopt a playful mood of irreverent disregard for our normal behaviors and sensibilities.

Some of the tourists visiting the Luxor proclaim that it is better than the real Egypt, which is hot, dirty, and inconvenient. Likewise Bly (1999) in celebrating Las Vegas's democratization of tourism, observes,

Arthur Frommer [in his] 1955 guidebook, Europe on $5 a Day . . . bemoans an escalating "homogenization of cultures" and... "a great many destinations have become far too popular for their own good. There's gridlock in Venice,
and you can no longer go to Florence eight months of the year without waiting in line for two hours to get into the Uffizi."

If so, why not go to the altogether nicer Venetian resort hotel in Las Vegas? If that gets too boring, ancient Rome, sidewalk Paris, Bellagio, and New York are all within blocks.

In saying that tourists come to Las Vegas to be entertained, amused, and amazed rather than educated, I am also excluding another seemingly likely motivation: that people come to Las Vegas to gamble. Some do, most do not. Although 90 percent of those who come to Las Vegas gamble, only 11 percent come specifically to do so (Wolkomir 1995). And increasingly, the typical gambler in Las Vegas is a low roller who plays only the slot machines. This does not mean a decline in profitability however. Up to 70 percent of Las Vegas casino revenues now come from the slots, with a single machine retaining as much as $500 a day (Peltier and Milo 1996). Slot machine design has accordingly become a strategic mix of high art and high tech, with specialized machines such with motifs from Monopoly, Jeopardy, and Wheel of Fortune (Abrams 1999). At the Hard Rock Hotel and Casino even Jimi Hendrix and Sid Vicious have become part of slot machine iconography (Borchard 1998). Although there are now more legal gambling venues than ever before (see Hetzel 1996), rather than eroding, tourism to Las Vegas has dramatically increased. Half of all Americans have now been in a casino, and this number is growing (Cooper 1995). I think this mainstreaming of gambling has also played an important role in the changing motivations of visitors to Las Vegas. In order to see this and understand what I have come to believe brings people to Las Vegas today, some historic perspective on the city's touristic attraction is needed.

**LAS VEGAS RESORT HOTELS: A BRIEF HISTORY**

Wright and Snow (1978) suggest that the traditional attraction of Las Vegas is "a formula combining opulent accommodations, gourmet food and the titillation of gambling and sex" (p. 42). Given the organized crime control of the city that began with Benjamin "Bugsy" Siegel's construction of the Flamingo hotel and Casino in 1946, coupled with the city's gambling, subsidized room rates, prostitution (illegally abundant in the city and legal in adjacent counties), and cut-rate pseudo-gourmet buffets, associations with greed, lust, and gluttony posed a glaring contradiction to America's Puritan past.
and its lingering work ethic. A sense of danger was fueled by the mob execution of Bugsy Siegel not long after the opening of the Flamingo and by several similar incidents including those depicted in the biographical novel and film Casino (Peleggi 1995). The city was seen as a vice-dripping dystopia by many, and this was precisely its attraction. It was the forbidden fruit. The tourist to Las Vegas was enjoying the thrill of transgression (Bataille 1985; Falk 1994). The expiation for the sin of transgressive enjoyment was a lavish monetary sacrifice at the gaming tables. Quick marriages and divorces, nude or near nude floor shows, free drinks, the exotic otherness of resorts with names like Aladdin's, the Riviera, Hacienda, el Morroco, the Sahara, and the Tropicana, and the general celebration of excess in the huge casino signs, huge hotels, huge stars, and huge meals, all open 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, added to the titillation of transgression. And, with the aid of air conditioning, the improbable location of Las Vegas in the Mojave Desert, the clockless, windowless casinos, and the resulting isolation of the city made Las Vegas gambling junkets something that could be partitioned off from everyday life--a fantasy, a dream, or as Baudrillard (1993) suggests, an hallucination. It was a liminal or liminoid space where normal roles and class distinctions disappeared and there was a feeling that anything goes (van Gennep 1960; Turner 1969). It was a place on the margin (Shields 1991), a place of inversion, excess, and carnival (Bakhtin 1968; Stallybrass and White 1984).

But the transgressive lure of Las Vegas began to change when in 1966 Howard Hughes started to buy out the mob ownership of the resorts, ushering in an era of corporate investment. The next year, Caesar's Palace, opened, financed by funds from the Teamster's pension fund. In 1969 Nevada laws were changed so that licensing was required only for major stockholders in gambling businesses, rather than all stockholders as was formerly the case (McCracken 1996). By the late 1980s Steve Winn's adjacent Mirage hotel had opened the door to Wall Street investment. And when Wynn's Treasure Island opened in 1993, a competition started focused on creating the newest big thing in resorts. It hasn't stopped. Excalibur, the Luxor, Monte Carlo, the MGM Grand, New York, Paris, Stratosphere, Bellagio, Venetian Hotel, and Mandalay Bay have all opened, along with the Fremont Street Experience. Meanwhile, older Casinos add huge renovations or rebuild entirely. There already 120,000 hotel and motel rooms in the city and more on the horizon (Newcott 1996). The corporate mega-resorts have also begun to offer much more elaborate
and often family-friendly fantasies and entertainments. Entertainments have begun to become extravaganzas costing tens of millions of dollars to produce, including EFX at the MGM Grand, Cirque du Soleil's "Mystere" at Treasure Island, it's "The Story of O" at Bellagio, and Andrew Lloyd Webber's Starlight Express at the Las Vegas Hilton (see Browne and Marshall 1995). The danger is gone and in its place there is a slick but sanitized corporate world that reminds many of Disney theme parks (e.g., Hess 1993; Hannigan 1998; Ritzer 1999; Tronnes 1995).

The mainstream hospitality industry that had shunned Las Vegas is now present in droves, with hotel casinos including Holiday Inn, Marriott, Hyatt, Ramada, Howard Johnson's, and Four Seasons. Inside these and other hotel casinos are Burger Kings, Pizza Huts, Wendys, and McDonalds. Hard Rock Cafe and Planet Hollywood offer museums of rock music and movies that present offer authentic artifacts of pretend significance rather than the Luxor museum's pretend artifacts of authentic significance. MGM, Universal, and Warner Brothers Studios are now big players in town. Automakers are happy to offer their vehicles as casino prizes. And Coca Cola has built the World of Coca-Cola Las Vegas with a 100-foot Coke bottle which refines the "digital storytelling theater" (Boje 1999) developed in its other "spectacular corporate showcases" (Penaloza 1999; Ger and Belk 1996). Visitors to the Las Vegas strip can now stroll (with the aid of moving sidewalks and monorails) through a pyramid with a laser beam that can be seen as much as 250 miles away, and experience volcanic eruptions, live tigers, sharks, and penguins, talking animatronic camels and dinosaurs, sea battles, bungee jumps, roller coasters, laser tag games, Statues of Liberty, an Eiffel Tower, obelisks, a sphinx, a simulated Appian Way with high rent shops, several arcades with changing "skys" that go from dawn to dusk each hour, medieval jousting, the yellow brick road, an automobile collection that includes Hitler's Mercedes and Elvis's Cadillac, the Liberace museum, an Elvis Presley museum, a gambling museum, and much more. With all these attractions, cheap rooms and free drinks are fast disappearing. Las Vegas is looking much less like a den of iniquity and much more like a fantastic theme park with attached fantasy shopping malls and fantasy hotels.

**LAS VEGAS AS FAMILY FARE?**

What is the effect of these changes in the character of Las Vegas on the tourist? Besides attracting more people the new Las Vegas also
attracts a broader cross-section of people, both foreign and domestic. But despite the amusement parks, pirate ships, and video parlors, Las Vegas has not tapped the family market in the way Disneyworld or even Los Angeles have. Corporate casino owners have been quick to tell the media that these changes were not intended to lure families and that Las Vegas is definitely not a place for children (e.g., Orwall 1995; Smith 1996). Less than 11 percent of visitors to Las Vegas are reportedly children (Newcott 1996) and a significant portion of them, "some in the industry suspect," are between ages 18 and 21 (Orwall 1995). Moreover, the casinos say that those who bring their children with them gamble less (Peltier and Milo 1996; Orwall 1995). Perhaps there is still something a bit unseemly about dropping $1000 at the craps table while the children are in the swimming pool, virtual reality arcade, or amusement park. However, even if these industry denials are true, this does not mean that the new fantasy resorts are a strategic mistake or that they are unprofitable. For whether or not they have attracted droves of children, the latest fantasy resorts seem to have infantalized adults.

The mainstreaming of gambling has also played an important role in the changing motivations of visitors to Las Vegas. In my field notes from a recent visit to Las Vegas I observed:

One of my first impressions in being back in the casinos is that people wandering from slot machine to slot machine with their cups full of coins are much like children browsing in a candy store with their coins clasped hotly in their hands. Those who are dressed in sweat suits further reinforce this image by taking on the look of children in their pajamas. They may not be quite as wide-eyed as children, but there is a hopeful anticipation that happiness is a purchase or handle pull away. This is more like a playpen for the middle class and middle aged than the city of broken dreams.

This is never-never land for all those Peter Pans who don't want to grow up. They seem to echo Blanche DuBois in A Streetcar Named Desire when she said, "I don't want realism, I want magic." Cooper (1995) offers a similar analysis:

...with so many Egyptian mummies, swashbuckling pirates, and dancing munchkins taking up residence on the Vegas Strip I might get the same wrong impression that other reporters have recently gotten, that this new adolescent-minded Vegas is up to something really dirty, like hooking a new generation of gamblers by getting them into the hotels while still in diapers-you know, the Joe Camel strategy . . . . I mean, sure, Las Vegas is trying to hook the kiddies.
But... that's not the real point. Nor is the signal truth here that American grown-ups have kids lurking inside them. Simply, it's that America's adults have become kids (pp. 334-335).

As Tom Wolfe (1965) suggested, Las Vegas represents the reawakening of dreams; a childhood liberation in a town where nobody can make us go to bed.

The point of spending billions of dollars to infantalize adults is that such infantalization, precipitated by the playful and farcical character of the current Las Vegas, fosters a willing suspension of cognitive, rational, adult control and a welcome succumbing to a dream world of possibilities. This triumph of fun and magical belief over purposive cognition and rationality is precisely the spirit associated with gambling (Lears 1994). As Allen (1995) explains:

Gambling invites me to take an hour's recess from adulthood, to play in a well-demarked sandbox of irrationality and to look at the world as a magical place, which of course it is when the light hits it at the right angle. Those people who stubbornly remain adults and who look upon gambling's happy meaninglessness from within will see a phalanx of games controlled by the indomitable law of averages, games that from an adult's wintry perspective you cannot hope to master. Those adults will see me, and the people sitting next me, giving our money away week after week to people who do not love us (p. 315).

Thus, adults, once they become infantalized by the magic, fun, and fantasy of Las Vegas, make better gamblers. They also make better consumers generally. One of the games they can play, for example, is "dress up." There is no clothing code in Las Vegas and all manner of outrageous clothing is likely to be seen. Another fun game is "pig out." All the normal inhibitions against too much of too many foods and drinks that are all bad for us are energetically broken in Las Vegas. "Shopping spree" is yet another adult entertainment played vigorously in Las Vegas, especially for the minority lucky enough to win big. The violation of these norms as well as norms suggesting reasonable bedtime hours, all encourage spending recklessly as well. Las Vegas is not a place for those hard headed adults who cannot let go of the control, rationality, and incredulity of adulthood. But for those who can indulge themselves in the magic, fun, and fantasy of childhood, Las Vegas is Mecca.

While I think this adult infantalization theme helps explain the current popularity of Las Vegas, I also wonder whether the casinos
protest a bit too much about not intending to attract children and families. The lure of transgressing taboos remains a vital form of consumer desire (Belk, Ger and Askegaard 1997) and the surest way to extinguish the thrill of transgression in Las Vegas is to assert that it is becoming a kiddie-land. Still all is relative. Turner (1969) insists that modern industrial societies do not have truly liminal rites of passage and suggests the alternative term "liminoid." But Bakhtin (1968) maintains that "Carnival spirit . . . was gradually transformed into a mere holiday mood . . . but this carnival spirit is indestructible, it continues to fertilize various areas of life and culture" (p. 33). Likewise I believe that the transgressive basis for consumer desire remains alive in Las Vegas and elsewhere, even if it has diminished in strength and importance as the more playful spirit of the ludic post-tourist has increased.

CONCLUSION

If Las Vegas offers spectacular farce and those who go there seek to engage in a form of infantile play, what should we make of these developments? Are they good or bad? Should Las Vegas be praised for its empowering liberation or should we lament that the nearby above ground nuclear tests that were a part of the 1950s Las Vegas spectacle weren't detonated in the center of the Strip? There are a number of good reasons to object to Las Vegas. The city's spectacular growth has also meant high crime rates, racial unrest, overcrowded schools, and environmental pollution (Zukin et al. 1998; Gottdiener, Collins and Dickens 1999). Tens of billions of dollars are spent each year at American casinos and the amount has grown by 1800 percent since 1976 (Popkin 1994). Gambling is self-indulgent and hedonistic rather than altruistic. It can readily be argued that the money spent in Las Vegas would be better spent on education, preventative medicine, and numerous charities. A disproportionate amount of income is spent by the poor rather than the rich on gambling, and the poorest of the poor cannot play at all. Although most of the current Las Vegas gamblers are not compulsive or addicted to gambling, many are and cannot help themselves (Burns, Gillett, Rubinstein and Gentry 1990). The alcohol that flows so freely in Las Vegas can also be addictive and destructive. There is something sadly ironic about walking up to the Las Vegas Hard Rock Cafe casino past power-guzzling neon lighting and water-guzzling foliage and passing their brightly displayed
slogan urging us to "Save the Planet." It might be argued that Las Vegas and its invitation to excess in eating, spending, sex, and entertainment, helps to promote instant gratification and subvert the work ethic. And it might easily be suggested that Las Vegas is tacky and promotes an image of America and Americans as being frivolous, materialistic, passive, and shallow. Although some of these criticisms are elitist ("my culture is good yours is bad"), excessively rationalistic ("if it doesn't produce something concrete it is bad"), or overly Puritanical ("play and fantasy are sinful and evil"), there is some truth to many of these criticisms. Nevertheless, to my surprise given that it is far from being my idea of a good time, my own conclusion is that there is more that is good than bad in the new Las Vegas.

The childishness and playful spirit that can be found among tourists to the fantasy worlds of Las Vegas is the same frame of mind that nourishes imagination, hope, and unapologetic fun. We need play (e.g., Huizinga 1970; Csikszentmihalyi 1975) and not just as release, ritual, refreshing re-creation, or rule-governed activity. We need play because it is a joyful, self-transcendent part of life. Las Vegas is not the only possible play venue, but it is largely elitist and ethnocentric to condemn it in favor of "higher" forms of play in music, literature, poetry, art, or other personal favorites. Others will argue that we should pursue self transcendence through religion or love instead of play. Play has been labeled a higher order need in affluent societies (Weisskopf 1966), although the same can be said of altruism. But play, even in the indulgent world of Las Vegas, need not preclude altruism. Our task should be to balance both. Just as no play makes Jack a dull boy, clinging always to purposive, rational, self-control makes Jack (and Jill) still duller. Just as the mocking self-burlesque and parody of the farcical resorts of the new Las Vegas tell us that Las Vegas does not take itself too seriously, they tell us that we should not take ourselves or our play too seriously either. Urry's (1990) post-tourist and postshopper carries just this attitude that it is good to lighten up some times.

The spirit of the new Las Vegas and the infantalized consumer who plays at being a tourist there, remains that of the carnival. What is the Strip but an elaborate midway? The new extravagant entertainments are updated versions of jugglers, fire-eaters, and freak shows, while the animal acts, showgirls, and magicians have simply added a bit of technology to their traditional acts. The neon lighting that long set Las Vegas aglow at night is borrowed from the midway at the 1993 Chicago World's Fair (Hess 1993). And the shops in Caesar's Forum, the
Fashion Show Mall, the shops of the Venetian and Bellagio, as well as the merchandise arcades of other casinos, are updated versions of the peddler, the carnival, the bazaar, and nineteenth century European shopping arcades. To call this postmodern does an injustice to these historical predecessors to the new Las Vegas. Rather than inventing something entirely new in either marketing or consumption, Las Vegas has expanded the scale and cost of attracting masses of jaded but still playful consumers. But the underlying promise of something entirely different and extraordinary is not new at all. People have always needed to play, even if they have not always needed to pay so much for the privilege of being infantalized. And we have always found our most intense carnival at the margins: in medieval fairs, on leisure beaches, at festival days that occur at the seams between seasons (e.g., New Year's Eve, Mardi Gras and Carnival, Midsummer's Eve, Lesbian and Gay Pride Day, Samhain, Guy Falkes Day, and Halloween-see Belk 1996), on the edges, far away on foreign holidays, and whenever and wherever we can partition off time and space to create an enclave of nonreality. If we now take this as farce and knowingly play with these inversions of the ordinary, it is not likely that the situation was ever much different. What has changed, and what makes Las Vegas unique, is the scale of the carnival. Las Vegas as a whole is the latest big thing. It will have to continue to innovate and reinvent itself in order to remain so, and the window of consumer tolerance for boredom has narrowed due the pace of change experienced there recently. But for the present and near term future, Las Vegas is the grand carnival and the big play pen of many average consumers.

Even the hypothetical new Hell theme resort is not without precedents. Cincinnati's Western Museum, established in 1820, had a number of spectacular exhibits including a mermaid made by stitching the top half of a monkey onto the bottom half of a fish, a tattooed Maori chief's head, and a charade known as the invisible girl (Dunlop 1984). But the most spectacular of all was an electrified and mechanized depiction of Dante's Inferno with which visitors loved to scare themselves and their companions. Two more recent precedents are the Tiger Balm Gardens (now Haw Par Gardens) in Singapore and Hong Kong. A key part of the gardens are the graphic sculpted depictions of various mortal sins such as adultery and anger and the 10 Buddhist hells in which such sins are punished. Depicted punishments include being sawn in half, being crushed under a heavy stone, and being devoured. Like the Western Museum, these depictions are popular tourist attractions. Likewise there are numerous popular torture
museums in various European cities. The proposal for a hellish theme resort may be a bit more spectacular, but it would hardly be the first hell on earth. Thus we might extend the maxim that the difference between a man and a boy is the size (or price) of his toys. As illustrated by the phenomenon of Las Vegas, the difference between the carnival of old and the carnivalesque of the present is the size and cost of the spectacle. And the difference between the transgressing Las Vegas tourist of old and the new playful post-tourist is the minimal size of our current guilt and the maximal size of our appetite for farce.

NOTES

1. A considerably condensed earlier version of this paper appears in Belk (2000).
2. The title is from Venturi, Brown, and Izenour's (1972) classic study of the architecture of Las Vegas.

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Consumer Aspirations in Marginalized Communities: A Case Study in Indian Villages

Reshmi Mitra* and Venugopal Pingah

The pro-liberalization shift in Indian development policy in the '90s created a boom in the consumer goods market. However, rural markets which were a significant part of the Indian markets in the '80s were relatively marginalized in the '90s boom despite the spread of consumerism in Indian villages. This anomaly needs to be understood against the backdrop of the vast differences among and within villages in India. The current research studies selected village based communities to determine the effect of class and gender in shaping the household's consumption aspirations using a simulated market game. It finds that there are both inter and intra village differences in the consumption and investment patterns of households. It postulates that because of rising consumerism household status is expressed through differential consumer aspirations. It is therefore possible for marketers to visualize the formation of consumption based communities within the broader village community.

1. INTRODUCTION

The speed with which market liberalization has been introduced in developing and transition economies in the '90s has changed the economic and social environment of the household in the hitherto marginalised sections of these societies. This is unlike the development of the "consumer society" in post-war West European countries which took about 40 years to develop. According to present consumer theory, the gradual learning of competencies, allowing full enjoyment
of the products, and having some time to anticipate and play with the thought of acquiring new consumer goods are important elements in consumer satisfaction (eg., Bourdieu 1984; Campbell 1987; Sen 1982). Depending on the household's competencies, expenditures are either used for a great variety of goods and services, or, if competencies are weak, for a very one sided consumption pattern (Usitalo 1997). Therefore a radical change in the supply of products or in financial resources does not necessarily mean increased quality of life. Extreme market liberalism may also widen the gap between the rich and the poor, and between the desired number of goods displayed and financial resources to acquire them. This increases consumer dissatisfaction, which often depends more on the uneven distribution of consumption than on its absolute level (Katona, Strumpel and Zahn 1979). It is in this context that the paper studies the changing pattern of consumer aspirations in rural markets in India post liberalization.

2. RURAL MARKETS IN INDIA
The Indian market can be broadly divided into urban and rural markets. Rural markets are defined as markets in rural areas, where a rural area is defined as having a population of less than 10,000 people (Sayulu 1994). Markets in all other areas with population greater than 10,000 are therefore classified as urban markets.

Till the early '80s marketers were primarily concentrating on urban markets since:

- Marketing to urban markets had been more or less streamlined adapting western paradigms while similar applications were not possible for rural markets (Mehta 1979).
- Very few studies had been done to understand the rural consumers and their consumption patterns (Desai 1985).
- Rural India benefited from the "green revolution" and the rising incomes did create a demand for products hitherto demanded only in urban markets. But marketers continued their focus on urban markets relying on the natural flow of goods to satisfy rural demand. This apathy can be understood if we take into consideration the fact that the cost of distribution to one percent of the rural markets is double the cost of distributing to the entire urban markets (Shankar 1992). Only in the '90s, when the urban market started to plateau (Table 1), did marketers consider the rural market as an emerging alternative. However they continued to treat rural markets as essentially homogenous.
Table 1: Urban Market Growth rates and stage of product life cycle for different consumer non durables by the end of the ‘80s

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Product category</th>
<th>Urban %growth</th>
<th>Stage of PLC</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Washing soaps/ cakes</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Decline</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Premium soaps</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>Late growth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Popular soaps</td>
<td>-2</td>
<td>Maturity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Talcum powder</td>
<td>-4</td>
<td>Maturity</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: ORG Monograph 1990.

According to Gopalaswamy (1997) in the ‘80s "there has been an explosion in the consumption of these products (consumer goods) in the rural areas". The significant aspects of the growth of rural market are:

- The rate of growth in the rural market increased from 17% in 1987 to 41% in 1989.
- Share of the total market which was accounted for by rural markets grew from 28% to 37%.
- The rural market for packaged goods nearly trebled from Rs. 7330 million (USD 175 million) in 1984 to Rs. 20830 million (USD 500 million) in 1989.
- Market share for different product categories ranged from 70% in bicycles and radios to 10-20% in color televisions and refrigerators (Table 2).

However, the rural market, which was considered to be the main stay in the ‘80s, did not seem to have contributed to the boom in the consumer goods market. The liberalization policies and economic reforms introduced in India in the ‘90s have seen a rapid growth in disposable incomes and the variety of goods available to consumers, leading to a boom in the consumer goods market. But the growth rate of consumer non durables in the rural market was only 12% (Rao and Natarajan 1996). The Rao and Natarajan study reveals that the rate of growth of consumer durables had also gone down in this period.
Table 2: Share of Rural Market for different product categories by the end of the '80s

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Products</th>
<th>Rural Market share (per cent)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Radios, bicycles, cigarettes, mechanical watches</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Washing cakes, tooth powder, cooking oil</td>
<td>60-70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table fans, sewing machines, motorcycles, vanaspati, toilet soaps</td>
<td>50-60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quartz watches, ceiling fans, Black &amp; White</td>
<td>40-50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Televisions, cassette recorders, washing powder, talcum powder</td>
<td>30-40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pressure cooker, toothpaste, health beverages</td>
<td>30-40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scooter, mixer grinders, cold creams</td>
<td>20-30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Color televisions, refrigerators, gas stoves</td>
<td>10-20</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: ORG Monograph 1990.

Though this was no mean growth rate in absolute terms, considering the much higher growth rate of the '80s this seems dismal. Different arguments have been put forth to explain the relatively low growth rate in rural markets. The primary reason seems to be that several marketers have been working on the assumption that rural consumers behave homogeneously and therefore they have been following uniform strategies for the rural markets (Pingali and Mitra 1999). This approach is a simplification that ignores variations in consumer aspirations and thereby potential consumption patterns between and within villages. A framework to capture these differences is therefore called for.

3. RESEARCH OBJECTIVE

This study views the third world consumer as being sufficiently empowered to choose the extent of his integration into the market system in the first place, and in certain contexts imbue the perceived homogenized consumption basket itself with his own cultural meaning. The choice element in consumer behavior thus needs to be enlarged from a simple optimization problem of choice between commodities embodying different utility levels to a study of what determines those utilities to begin with.

The research therefore conducts an inquiry into how consumers in marginalised communities assign different desirability levels to the
range of consumption and investment goods that are typically available in markets accessible to them.

An understanding of these issues would enable us to evaluate whether increased penetration of market systems to marginal communities generates a possibility of sustainable consumption practices, given their high vulnerability levels. This paper chooses to study the consumer aspirations of the "marginalized village" segments identified by Pingali and Mitra (Table 3).

### 3.1. Consumption Pattern

NSS (1990) states that the approximate expenditure incurred on food items by rural people is three fourth that of urban people and the expenditure on non food items is about half the expenditure in urban areas (Table 4). Over and above these average differences, one expects significant variations in the consumption pattern across households in the various rural segments.

Das (1986) states that the consumer response for a given type and nature of the product can be expected if the typology of the village is known. This assumes that all the consumers in a given village type would behave similarly. There could, however, be other important factors, economic, convenience and attitudinal, which could influence the individual consumer's response even within the village. Thus both village and villager level parameters should be used to capture differences in consumer aspirations. Dholakia (1986) states that the average consumer is a mythical figure since third world countries are categorized by wide disparities in income.

Desai (1978) found that social institutions play an important role in determining the purchasing pattern of the rural people. Layton (1986) found that the buying attitudes were influenced by market awareness and market communication as it influences the "modernity" level of...
the villager. Layton states that the modernity score relates to the purchases of household goods and expensive goods. In other studies, the change in composition of demand for consumption goods has been found to depend on (a) migration to urban areas (Basol 1984), (b) increased promotion-oriented activities of the business sector (Tokoz 1984) and (c) an increase in mass communication services (Borak 1986). Chapman and Volkman (1939) found that aspiration levels are modified to conform to group norms. Wilk (1986) found that with increased development the sense of community that was formerly present in villages lessened and villagers shifted from efforts to avoid provoking the envy of others to instead trying to cultivate the envy of

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sl No. Items</th>
<th>Rural (in Rs.*)</th>
<th>Urban (in Rs)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Cereals</td>
<td>45.38</td>
<td>42.34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Gram</td>
<td>0.40</td>
<td>0.59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Cereal Substitutes</td>
<td>0.24</td>
<td>0.22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Pulses</td>
<td>8.31</td>
<td>10.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 Milk and Milk Products</td>
<td>18.35</td>
<td>29.53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 Edible Oils</td>
<td>9.10</td>
<td>14.60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 Meat, Eggs and Fish</td>
<td>6.84</td>
<td>11.42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 Vegetables</td>
<td>10.25</td>
<td>14.65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9 Fruits &amp; Nuts</td>
<td>3.23</td>
<td>6.87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 Sugar</td>
<td>6.34</td>
<td>7.78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11 Salt</td>
<td>0.33</td>
<td>0.38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12 Spices</td>
<td>4.88</td>
<td>6.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13 Beverage &amp; Others</td>
<td>8.13</td>
<td>21.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14 Total Food Items</td>
<td>121.78</td>
<td>165.46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15 Pan, Tobacco &amp; Intoxicants</td>
<td>6.69</td>
<td>7.57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16 Fuel and Light</td>
<td>14.44</td>
<td>19.26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17 Clothing</td>
<td>12.15</td>
<td>19.86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18 Footwear</td>
<td>1.63</td>
<td>2.61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19 Miscellaneous goods &amp; services</td>
<td>27.80</td>
<td>55.89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20 Durable goods</td>
<td>4.33</td>
<td>15.38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21 Rents</td>
<td>0.57</td>
<td>11.40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22 Taxes &amp; Cess</td>
<td>0.03</td>
<td>0.57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23 Total Non-food Items</td>
<td>67.68</td>
<td>132.54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24 Total Consumer Expenditure</td>
<td>189.46</td>
<td>298.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*One USD is approximately Rs. 43.
Source: National Sample Survey 45th round Sarvekshana,16(1), S216-S217.
others. This may lead to a heightened desire for acquiring products with high social status and more importantly a need to differentiate one's consumption basket from that of other social groups within the village.

The above village level variables suggested by the different researchers can be broadly grouped as:

- **Internal variables**: (a) "percent of first generation buyers", (b) "percent of migrants to overall rural population" and (c) "social institutions" can be broadly clubbed under the heading "percent who have migrated to the urban areas". Greater the percent of migrants the greater would be a desire to obtain goods from the market to project themselves differently from the others.

- **External variables** that include (a) promotion done by the companies and (b) exposure to media can be broadly clubbed under the factor "communication channels". Better the communication channels the greater would be the desire to obtain goods from the market.

In addition to the above, villager level variables which include group norms, reference groups, subsistence consumption orientation and seasonal migration for earning livelihood would also determine the desire for acquiring products that will enhance social status. Based on these, variables, six possible groups have been identified. Households to represent the different groups could be most closely approximated as:

**Group 1**: Village sarpanch (Headman) who has large land holdings and is traditionally rich (Henceforth referred to as traditionally rich).

**Group 2**: Village household where no male member seeks employment outside his homestead and the female members do only housework (Henceforth referred to as large/medium farmers).

**Group 3**: Villagers who are marginal cultivators (have less than 2 acres of land) and are employed as agricultural laborers within the village (Henceforth referred to as Small & Marginal farmers).

**Group 4**: Villagers who are dependent on traditional caste based skills for their livelihood with restricted markets within the village (Henceforth referred to as Caste based labor).
Table 5: Hypothesized desire for acquiring goods: By type of Village

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Good communication channels</th>
<th>Poor communication channels</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>High % of migration</strong></td>
<td><strong>High to Moderate status goods</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Very high to high status goods</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Low % of migration</strong></td>
<td><strong>Low status goods</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>High to Moderate status goods</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Group 5: Villagers who are marginal cultivators forced to migrate to far off cities in search of livelihood during the off season. (Henceforth referred to as Distress migrants).

Group 6: Educated youth who are search unemployed (Henceforth referred to as young migrants).

3.2. Hypotheses

Based on the two differentiating variables: percentage of those who have migrated to urban areas and communication channels, the villages can be broadly classified into four groups. We hypothesize that consumer aspirations in villages would depend on this classification (Table 5).

Further, we hypothesize that within villages, the intra village differences in consumer aspirations that can be expected are as given in the Table 6:

Table 6: Hypothesized desire for acquiring goods: By type of Villager

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subsistence consumption orientation</th>
<th>Group Norms</th>
<th>Reference groups</th>
<th>Seasonal migration</th>
<th>Desire to acquire products enhancing status</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Group 1 Low</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Very high status goods</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group 2 Low</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Moderate</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>High status goods</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group 3 High</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Moderate status goods</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group 4 High</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Low status goods</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group 5 High</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>Moderate</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>Low status goods</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group 6 Low</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>Moderate</td>
<td>High status goods</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4. METHODOLOGY

4.1. Selection of Villages and Respondents:

On the basis of the above design, four villages (Table 7) were selected from a backward "development area" of Madhya Pradesh, a state in India. The research was conducted exactly five years after the new liberalization policy of the government of India was implemented in 1991.

From each village one household belonging to each of the six villager groups was randomly selected for the data collection.

4.2. Data Collection:

Consumer aspirations in buying behavior were studied through a market game administered separately to the male and female decision makers within the household.

Consumption Game Layton (1986) had identified four clusters items purchased by rural households. Based on his study and the type of products that are generally available in the rural markets a consumption basket was developed (refer Table 8). In order to record the revealed preference of the respondents, each respondent was given a certain amount of money to spend. The quantum of money given was based on the earning capability of the group to which the respondent belonged.

Investment Game Apart from consumption goods the emerging demand in rural India is also manifested in terms of demand for a wide variety of white goods which have entered the rural markets post liberalization. These goods are generally purchased out of savings because of the relatively high price of these goods. The demand for white goods competes, therefore, with the traditional use of savings for investment purposes. Further, in recent times the form of

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 7: Classification of villages</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>High communication channels</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Low communication channels</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>High on migration</th>
<th>Low on migration</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Korja</td>
<td>Latori</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Salka</td>
<td>Kosanga</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 8: Product Groups and Categories

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of product</th>
<th>Low</th>
<th>Contribution to social status</th>
<th>Moderate</th>
<th>High</th>
<th>Very High</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Food items</td>
<td>Rice</td>
<td>Vegetables</td>
<td>Fruits</td>
<td>Goat</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Dal (lentils)</td>
<td>Eggs</td>
<td>Pork</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Sweets</td>
<td>Fish</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Ice cream</td>
<td>Prawn</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Chocolates</td>
<td>Chicken</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Fruits</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clothing</td>
<td>Cheaper varieties of clothes</td>
<td>Kurta Pyjama (traditional Indian dress)</td>
<td>Pant</td>
<td>Branded clothes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Household articles</td>
<td>Earthen pot</td>
<td>Kerosene</td>
<td>Games</td>
<td>Fancy lamp</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Firewood</td>
<td>Plastic bucket</td>
<td>Tube light</td>
<td>Stainless steel</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Bulb</td>
<td>Steel bucket</td>
<td>steel bucket</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Beer</td>
<td>Branded Liquor</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Addiction items</td>
<td>Country liquor (loose)</td>
<td>Cigarettes</td>
<td>Country Liquor (packed)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cosmetics</td>
<td>Comb</td>
<td>Hair oil Soaps</td>
<td>Powder</td>
<td>Lipstick</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Investment has been enlarged to include non-traditional categories like spending on higher education for children as alternatives to traditional uses like land and gold ornaments. As in the case of the consumption goods a set of investment goods was developed for each respondent to choose from (refer Table 9). Here too, each respondent was given a certain amount of money to spend. The quantum of money given was based on the earning capability of the group to which the respondent belonged.

Table 9: Product Categories for use of savings corresponding to social status value

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Low status white goods</th>
<th>Moderate status white goods</th>
<th>High status white goods</th>
<th>High status Investment goods</th>
<th>Very High status white goods</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Wrist Watch</td>
<td>Cassette player</td>
<td>Scooter</td>
<td>Land</td>
<td>Air conditioner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transistor</td>
<td>Camera</td>
<td>Motor cycle</td>
<td>Education</td>
<td>Car</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bicycle</td>
<td>Moped</td>
<td>Television</td>
<td>House</td>
<td>Video player</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ordinary chair</td>
<td>Holiday travel</td>
<td>Better grade furniture</td>
<td>Ornaments</td>
<td>Refrigerator</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4.3. **Data Analysis:**

For the purpose of data analysis, the products were independently classified in terms of their position on the need hierarchy and the status value attached to it. To avoid researcher's interpretation and respondent's bias, this was done with the help of some villagers after the data collection was over. The classification of the products along with their groups is given in Tables 8 and 9.

5. **RESEARCH FINDINGS**

The choices of respondents of a group from different villages were more or less the same. The preferred consumption basket and investment options have, therefore, been clubbed and studied across groups, rather than across villages. The correlation between the members of the group is given along with the preferred ranking (section 5.1 and 5.2).

5.1. **The preferred Consumption Basket**

The degree of preference for consumption prod both on the need category, which it satisfies, as well as the social status level of the product. In general, the group preferences along with the mean ranking are given in Table 10.

5.2. **The Preferred Use of Savings**

The preferred use of savings for different groups is given in Table 11.

6. **DISCUSSION**

6.1. **The Effect of Class on Consumption**

It was found that groups one, two and six, that is, traditional landlords, large-medium farmers and the young migrant groups preferred high status products both in their consumption purchases and their use of savings. However some anomalies exist in the preferred basket of these groups:

- The traditional landlords have chosen low status food items in the first instance, contrary to expectations. This could be because, this
### Table 10: Consumption pattern for different groups

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Order of spending</th>
<th>Group 1 Male</th>
<th>Group 1 Female</th>
<th>Group 2 M &amp; F</th>
<th>Group 3 M &amp; F</th>
<th>Group 4 M &amp; F</th>
<th>Group 5 M &amp; F</th>
<th>Group 6</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rank 1</td>
<td>Low status food</td>
<td>Very high household items</td>
<td>Low to moderate status cosmetics</td>
<td>Low to moderate status food</td>
<td>Low status food</td>
<td>Low to moderate status food</td>
<td>Low status food</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rank 2</td>
<td>Very high status household items</td>
<td>Low status food</td>
<td>Low status household goods</td>
<td>Low status food</td>
<td>Low status household goods</td>
<td>Low status household goods</td>
<td>Low status household goods</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rank 3</td>
<td>High status food</td>
<td>High status cosmetics</td>
<td>Moderate status clothes</td>
<td>Low status cosmetics</td>
<td>High status clothes</td>
<td>Moderate status clothes</td>
<td>Moderate status clothes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rank 4</td>
<td>High to moderate status household items</td>
<td>moderate status clothes</td>
<td>Low to moderate status household items</td>
<td>Moderate status clothing</td>
<td>Moderate status clothes</td>
<td>High status food</td>
<td>Moderate status clothes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rank 5</td>
<td>Moderate status clothes</td>
<td>High to moderate status food</td>
<td>High status clothes</td>
<td>High status food</td>
<td>Moderate status cosmetics</td>
<td>Moderate status food</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rank 6</td>
<td>Mod. Status Cosmetics</td>
<td>High status clothes</td>
<td>Very high to high status food</td>
<td>0.62, p=.02</td>
<td>Insignif.</td>
<td>Insignif.</td>
<td>0.96, p=.08</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Kendall's coefficient:

- Insignif.
- Insignif.
- 0.86, p=.08
- 0.62, p=.02
- Insignif.
- Insignif.
- 0.96, p=.08
### Table 11: Investment pattern for different groups

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description of group</th>
<th>Kendall's coefficient Mean Rank for the group</th>
<th>Investment for Low status</th>
<th>White goods Moderate status status</th>
<th>Very high status</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Group 1 Male (traditional landlord)</td>
<td>0.75 (p=.06) 1.5</td>
<td>3.33</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3.17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group 1 Female (traditional landlord)</td>
<td>0.24 (p=.42) 1.88</td>
<td>2.63</td>
<td>3.63</td>
<td>3.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group 2 Male (large and medium farmers)</td>
<td>0.63 (p=.0004) 1.38</td>
<td>2.69</td>
<td>2.56</td>
<td>3.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group 2 Female (large and medium farmers)</td>
<td>0.82 (p=.002) 1.4</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>4.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group 3 M &amp; F (small and marginal farmers)</td>
<td>0.67 (p=.0001) 1.5</td>
<td>2.44</td>
<td>3.22'</td>
<td>2.94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group 4 M &amp; F (caste based labor)</td>
<td>0.48 (p=.99) 2.25</td>
<td>2.25</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>3.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group 5 M &amp; F (distress migrants)</td>
<td>1 (p=.09) 1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>3.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group 6 (young migrants)</td>
<td>0.38 (p=.18) 2</td>
<td>2.75</td>
<td>3.751</td>
<td>2.25</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Group comprises both large landowners and traders or other influential political and professional persons. To the extent that they may not be completely producing their basic food requirements domestically or may be selling all of their produce due to greater access to market information, their purchase of basic food items finds a place in their bought consumption basket. However, their subsequent consumption preferences are in the moderate to very high category. The very high status purchases are restricted only to household articles.

- Low status food items as expected do not find place in the bought consumption basket of group two members (large-medium.
farmers). This group has chosen only low and moderate status consumption items in the product categories of cosmetics, food, clothing and household articles. But high status clothing and food items also figure in their consumption basket, though these were chosen after the first group of purchases. The very high status purchases are restricted only to food items.

- Group six (young migrants) respondents have chosen low status food items in the first instance. Subsequent purchases in other consumption categories are restricted to low to moderate categories.

The lower status group respondents (Groups three, four and five that is the small and marginal farmers, caste based labor, and distress migrants) have, as expected, chosen low to moderate status items only. However, high status food items also enter the purchase basket much before all low to moderate purchases are made. Group four differs only in as much as they have chosen to buy high status clothing as opposed to high status food items.

It was found that the desire for products produced outside of the village economy increased with the increase in the status group of the villager. The higher status groups (groups one, two and six) have opted for high to very high status items which, especially in the product categories of clothing, household articles and cosmetics definitely need to come from production centers outside of the village economy. The poorer groups' consumption purchases except in the case of clothing can all be produced within the village economy.

A disturbing observation was that status orientation in the lower income groups led to substitution of some essentials by higher status non-essentials. The consumption purchases of the poorer groups (groups three, four and five) show a preference for only moderate to high status clothing items or high status food even before purchases in the low to moderate range of essential product categories are exhausted. There is substitution of essentials by products, which are more visible to the outside world, namely clothing and cosmetics.

The first product category of high or very high status goods selected by different groups (summarized from Table 10) was found to be dependent on the way the group wishes to enhance its status:

First product category of high or very high status goods: Traditional landlords: household articles,
Large and medium farmers: clothing,
Small and marginal farmers: food,
Caste based labor: clothing,
Distress migrants: food.

The landlords meet villagers in their house and hence project their image by acquiring high status household article. The large and medium farmers on the other hand are generally seen at the village centers and therefore require high status clothing. The lower groups (small and marginal farmers, caste based labor and distress migrants) have a different way of projecting their image and this is done mainly during the weekly market days. While the small and marginal farmers and distress migrants project their image by shopping (in the weekly market) for high status food items, the caste based labor project their image by wearing high status clothes to these weekly markets. The possible reason for the differences in the way status is being projected by the caste based workers and the other two groups is the traditional caste based structure. As mentioned earlier, caste based skills are confined to the lower class and hence they are not allowed to mix freely with the other groups. While the small and marginal farmers and distress migrants mingle amongst themselves and show off their purchases (high status food items), the caste based labor who are not allowed to mingle, like to be seen (from a distance) in good clothing.

6.2. The Effect of Class on the Use of Savings

Respondents of all categories have preferred investment goods to white goods, in the first instance. However not all investment opportunities have been availed of before buying white goods, showing that, to a large extent, a tradeoff exists with asset building taking a back seat to consumption here and now. This has implications for the long run sustainability of the households' buying power, given the very low asset base that many of these households are operating from. This tendency towards consumerism occurs irrespective of which respondent group the villager belongs to. The purchase of white goods shows an interesting pattern to the extent that all respondents have shown consistency in buying white goods belonging to a particular status level before shifting to purchases in other status levels. Further, the intra group consistency in the ranking order among the white goods status categories is also very high.
The very high status items in the savings game were chosen by all groups of respondents only after all other purchases. This may be because the degree of familiarity with these products is in general low in these villages.

From Table 11 it can be seen that the higher income groups (traditional landlords, large and medium farmers and young migrants) have chosen high to moderate status goods. However, it is evident that the pressure for visible social status is probably highest for the young migrant group (Group six respondents). The lower income groups have restricted their purchases to low and moderate white goods with an interesting exception being group 3 respondents whose purchases have followed a low-high-moderate path.

6.3. The Effect of Gender on Purchases

If social and economic development leads to greater emancipation of women, then there should be a tendency towards joint decision making in purchases and choice of income generation activities in the higher classes. But this was not borne out by our study. Our results indicate that gender differences exist in the perceived desirability of both consumption and investment goods in the highest social group in the villages. The consistency in preferences is low among male and female members of households with the highest economic and social status (traditional landlords: group one). In these households all buying and selling decisions are taken by the male head of the family who seem to be unaware of the preferences of the women in the household. This however does not hold true for other respondent groups. In lower status households a reverse tendency was noticed with purchase preferences reflecting greater similarity. Women respondents of the lower income groups were also found to have more search capital about products available as well as alternative income generation possibilities. Thus gender differences in spending preferences can be expected to increase as the status group of the villager increases but this may get less and less reflected in the actual purchases due to dominance of the male members in the final decision making.

7. CONCLUSION

While some earlier studies state that the effect of media exposure and migratory behavior has a pronounced effect on a household's market
dependence, this study shows that market dependence in rural India can be understood completely only if other villager level parameters are also taken into account. Individuals falling into alternative categories as defined by these parameters show a similarity in their consumption activities, that make it possible for us to visualize the formation of consumption based communities within the broader village community. Differences across gender and class show up in differences in consumption preferences and the degree to which these distinct subgroups within a village choose their market integration levels.

Rao and Natarajan (1996) have found that increased migration to cities and industrial townships have led to people in the villages getting to know more about what urban markets have to offer them. What they brought back from cities set the trend for others in rural India. The process has been aided by the inroads that the audiovisual media have made into the rural world. Because possessions play an important role in anchoring identity and establishing new identity, we expect possessions to be significant in identity reconstruction by migrating families (Mehta and Belk 1991). While this was found to be true of the younger and more prosperous migrants (group 6 respondents) this was definitely not true for distress migrants (group five respondents). Their consumption preferences seem to be untouched by their migration, while their income generating preferences are heavily tilted to agrarian modes in preference to non-agrarian market dependent activities. Distress migration contrary to popular belief about the positive relation between migration and market awareness, in fact insulates such migrants from alternative lifestyles since they work in ghetto like conditions (as among brick makers in Kosanga).

The lower income group categories in rural India were also found to demand high status consumption goods, especially in the more visible categories of cosmetics and clothing. This raises questions about the supposed increases in consumer welfare of these groups due to their greater choice over a widening range of goods available in rural markets post-liberalization. Substitution of lower status essentials by higher status non-essentials, both in the choice of the consumption basket as well as in the use of savings seems to be rampant. Given the abysmally low physical quality of life of some of these groups, their increased "consumer sovereignty" must be understood as leading to lower "consumer welfare". In addition, it is clear from the study that consumerism has created clear differences in the consumption and investment patterns of households according to their social status,
class and gender. This only partially bears up the statement that "consumption has increasing importance in the individual's construction of self identity and in social structuring. This means that consumer groups based on similar tastes, values and lifestyles will to a certain degree replace earlier class structure, which was based on people's position in the production process and work life. It has been proposed that consumption, albeit being a weak structuring force, is maybe the only structuring force in future society." (Maffesoli 1983; Usitalo 1997). Our study therefore concludes that class continues to be a strong structuring element in understanding consumption differences.

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Purchase Decision Making in India: A Critical Ethnographic Study of the Antecedents of Marital Power*

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The research reported here critically examines the underlying antecedents for marital power in purchase decision making. Taking the stance that spousal decision making is a culturally-situated phenomenon, the research was conducted in India, a culture vastly different from the one in which the existing antecedents of power were established. Data were collected via participant observation and multiple, in-depth ethnographic interviews and analyzed by a constant comparative method revealing insights into both the existing and emergent antecedents. This article reviews and integrates theories of marital power drawn from a diverse set of disciplines—consumer behavior, sociology, psychology, and counseling psychology—to provide a comprehensive framework for understanding the antecedents of power in purchase decision making. Interpretive material from personal interviews with spouses is then used to illustrate the underlying causes of marital power in decision making. Four existing antecedents—resources, ideology, involvement, and least-interest—and six emergent antecedents—aggressiveness, locus of control, confidence in spouse, compliance, caste, and joint family—are discussed.

The social structure of a family consists of the positions which members occupy in relation to each other. The most important aspect of family structure is the power positions of the members, particularly that of the spouses (Cromwell, Corrales and Torsiello 1973). For

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decades, spousal power in decision making has been of considerable interest to researchers representing the consumer behavior, psychology, sociology, and economics fields of study.

The preponderance of the research effort in the marital power arena has been geared toward determining who has greater relative influence in decision making and who ultimately makes decisions. These studies have assumed that the more powerful spouse makes most of the decisions for the couple in a diverse set of situations (e.g., Blood and Wolfe 1960; Davis 1970; Sharp and Mott 1956; Webster 1994).

Other studies have focused on family decision processes or the interactional techniques such as assertiveness, persuasion, problem-solving, or demandingness that individuals use in their attempts to gain control (Cromwell and Olson 1975; McDonald 1980). This research has concentrated on assessing the degree of conflict typical in family decision making, strategies of conflict management, and spousal use of influence strategies within the home. In one of the earlier decision process studies, Park (1982) investigated couples as they proceeded through the house buying process. He concluded that spouses have limited awareness of each other's decision strategies and move toward a final decision by stressing simple, minor decisions. In other words, they tend to "muddle through" the decision making process. In another process study, Spiro (1983) investigated both the level of influence as well as the mix or combination of strategies that spouses use to affect one another's decisions. Her results suggest that there are several socioeconomic and lifecycle variables that discriminate among groups of individuals who vary not only in the intensity of influence used, but also in the particular combination or mixes of influence strategies used.

There has been a scarcity of research, however, on the explanations of marital power-the antecedents or reasons why one spouse is more powerful or has greater influence than the other in purchase decision making. For decades studies pertaining to marital power have been primarily guided by four theories or concepts. The first one, resource theory, holds that the balance of power will be on the side of that partner who contributes more resources to the marriage (Blood and Wolfe 1960). This concept was extended by Rodman (1972) when he posited that the relationship between resources and power is moderated by normative influences. For instance, in patriarchal cultures, such as India, wives cannot influence decisions because the norms prevent them from doing so, regardless of their relative contributions of resources. The second theory, ideology, posits that the manner or
content of thinking characteristic of a particular culture will have a pervasive effect on individuals' behavior. For example, the more one identifies with a patriarchal culture, the more husband-dominant the decision making. Ideology encompasses sex-role orientation, which holds that couples with more modern or blurred sex roles will tend to exhibit egalitarianism in decision making and couples with more traditional sex-roles will lean more toward the homemaker and breadwinner roles—the breadwinner, invariably the husband, controlling the more important decisions (Burns and Granbois 1977; Scanzoni 1978). The third concept, involvement, asserts that power or influence in a decision is greater for a spouse who is more involved in the decision or purchase and desires that it reflect his or her individual interests and preferences. Lastly, the least-interested partner hypothesis holds that the least-interested spouse has less to lose if the relationship dissolves and will consequently have more power.

Although these established antecedents aid in our understanding of marital power, they seem to explain a small amount of the decisionmaking power phenomenon. For instance, with respect to resource theory, Allen and Straus (1984) found weak correlations between decision power and resources. Perlman (1989) found that dual-career and single-career couples did not differ in perceived power nor in self-reported strategies for influencing spouses. Other studies have found that a wife's resources, or the absence of them, do not justify more or less of her influence (Gauthier, Forsyth and Bankston 1993; O'Connor 1991; Mirowsky 1985). Even casual observations reveal many cases in which couples' decision-making power is not explained by these concepts.

The inadequacy of the current theoretical base is even more apparent outside the countries (mainly the U.S.) in which it was established. In particular, there is evidence that the Western theories do not fully explain the marital power patterns that can be found in a country such as India. Contrary to the ideology and resource-in-cultural-context theories for example, ethnographic studies indicate that Indian women may exercise considerable influence in both marital and community affairs even though norms are explicitly patriarchal (e.g., Bossen 1975). Further and contrary to Rodman's (1972) resource theory in a cultural context, Lee and Petersen (1983) found that wives' power in marriage is greater when they contribute substantially to subsistence production—even in patriarchal societies. Further, in patriarchal societies lower class females were often found to exercise
unusual authority. These deviant cases of female dominance usually occurred when the female had the resources to free herself of dependence on the male (Austin and Porter 1980).

Perhaps Western theories are insufficient because marital decisionmaking is a culturally-situated phenomenon that resists explanation by theories and concepts that have been imported and applied in general fashion. India is an interesting culture in which to explore the antecedents of marital power because its social and intellectual grains operate in ways vastly different from those the West now takes for granted (Saberwal 1983). For instance, unlike Western cultures where the nuclear and neolocal family is both the ideological and factual norm, the joint family has been and continues to be an important element of the Indian culture (Kapadia 1993). Also, the individualist philosophy of the West is not totally embraced by Indians. Collectivism is still the preferred model, with various adjustments to individual desires. There is not anything in contemporary thought and practice in India to suggest that an individualist framework will be incorporated into the Indian ethos (Ramu 1989). In a complicated element of life in India, one can also find a curious phenomenon not found in the U.S. or the West in general. Because Indian society is basically hierarchial (Dumont 1980), Indians give considerable weight to one's position. Anyone who occupies a relatively high position is given the same regard, independent of that person's individual background. Thus, while Indians may resist giving a high position to a woman, the resistance dissolves once she attains the position, and she is given coequal status and the same esteem accorded men in the same positions. Further, the literature on Indian familial or spousal relationships reveals an on-going clash between traditionalism and modernism. Although India, particularly its urban areas, is witnessing some significant changes in the economic and social status of women and the nature of household structure, the pull toward maintaining tradition remains quite strong. This tension between developing a more progressive element and maintaining what is desirable and acceptable in the traditional context is nowhere more evident than in the case of changing women's roles (Venkatesh 1994).

My purpose for this study is to gain insight into the underlying reasons why a spouse has more power or influence in purchase decision making. To meet this purpose, I engaged in participant observation and in-depth interviews with couples in different parts of India. Studying such phenomena in a culture such as India should
facilitate the discovery of themes that might be missed in a more familiar culture.

INDIAN FAMILIAL RELATIONSHIPS

The literature on Indian familial or spousal relationships may be encapsulated in two opposing themes. The dominant theme, following the ideology of pativrata, is that Indian households are extremely patriarchal. The second declares that Indian females wield considerable decision-making power.

Pativrata and Familial Relationships

The ideology of pativrata has played the dominant role in governing spousal relations in Hindu society through the years. The androcentric ideology of pativrata dictates that women be economically dependent on men since property is inherited by and transmitted through male heirs. The family structure is patriarchal; patrilineage is recognized and the residential pattern is patrilocal (Dhruvarajan 1988). The most universal model in terms of kinship structure is the tridependent relationship. From birth until marriage, a woman is under the protection of her father; during married life, her husband; and during later years, her son (whether her husband is alive or not). These relationships have made it impossible for a woman to be independent of male omnipresence in theory and practice, or to claim her own social space during her entire life (Mines 1988).

The ideal family type is joint. A woman ceases to be "a member of her family of orientation and becomes a member of her husband's family after an arranged marriage. She spends part of her life cycle in double powerlessness, subordinated not only to men but also to other women at higher status stages of their own life cycles (Das Gupta 1995; Visaria 1993). The relatively young wife is expected to follow household rules most scrupulously and it is not uncommon for her to be battered (Gupta 1981). She occupies a marginal status in this family until she has children, at which time she is gradually integrated into the family. As a mother she is in charge of training the next generation to abide by the tenets of this ideology.

Financial decisions are generally male dominant; however, a wife may be consulted if her husband chooses. A woman may give her ideas to her husband in private and encourage him to present them to
others as his own (Dhruvarajan 1988). Even when she is engaged in outside employment, pativrataya dictates that her paid work be considered part of her feminine obligations, thus nullifying the power of economic resources as an instrument of change in her domestic status (Bharat 1995; Ramu 1989).

Scholars (e.g., Suppal et al. 1996) believe that Indian ideology will continue to be markedly androcentric and authoritarian because the patriarchal nature of Indian society is steeped in historical injunctions laid out in the *Laws of Manu* and other Sanskrit texts such as the *Ramayana, Mahabharata, Upanishads*, and *Puranas*. The legends, myths, and moral fables in these sacred texts are translated into the vernacular of different regions and frequently retold in the form of didactic tales, edifying poems, and in skits by village elders, grandparents, and priests. Messages emanating from these tales and poems highlight traditional male-female role dichotomy, complete loyalty to husband, filial obligation, respect accorded to men and older members of the society, and the interdependent nature of the community based on customs of caste and class. They also point to penalties that may accrue due to failure to adhere to traditional beliefs. In short, the social values and beliefs exemplified in the old texts have demarcated cultural, societal, and religious norms for the people of India for centuries and most of the population appear to hold on to them.

Indeed, some studies conclude that modernity and urbanization are leading neither to the emancipation of women from patriarchal norms nor the opening of available options (e.g., Kapadia 1993), largely so because of the caste system and the joint family structure. Despite constitutional proscriptions, the caste system remains evident among the Hindus, who account for over 80 percent of all Indians (Mehta and Belk 1991). Both survey and demographic evidence indicate that urbanites are as likely to have joint living arrangements as are villagers. While educated couples may desire a neolocal residence, the unavailability of housing has made any such desire futile for most. This may be why urbanization itself is not a correlate of lower levels of joint living. Another reason why there are not more neolocal households in India involves the relationship between social class and the balance of power within the household. Middle class status is associated with lower power scores for the wife in both India and the U.S. Since the norms in India stress joint family residence with the relatives of the husband, it stands to reason that families or households with middle-class status would be likely to be characterized by husband dominance (Conklin 1988).
Nonpatriarchal Gender Relations

Although patriarchy appears to be a self-evident component of Indian society, some anthropologists argue that the reality of social organization is much more complex than the simplistic unilineal model, which undermines the impact of nonpatriarchal gender relations, overemphasizes unilineal descent, and fails to effectively rank or evaluate societies with mixed patriarchal features (Uberoi 1995). For example, both McHugh (1989) and Mines (1988) state that Indians -including females-demonstrate autonomy and the expression of individuated personal goals, finding evidence for this in instances of rebellions against hierarchical expectations and the depiction of oneself as an active agent in shaping the direction of one's life course.

Studies declaring that Indian females possess power in interpersonal relations can be grouped into two categories. The first group espouses that Indian females have always had some degree of power. As Dhruvarajan (1988) stated, as giver of life and nurturer of children, the woman is always revered. According to Ramu (1987), the literary portrayal of Indian husbands as patriarchal in matters of domestic power is rather exaggerated, although most husbands would like others to perceive it as such. She reports that a considerable number of wives have customarily exercised influence in domestic decisions on critical matters, and their husbands, in turn, have always valued their opinions and guidance. Even female children often have substantial power in their family because of the expectation they will marry into a family higher in status than their natal kin (Wadley 1976). And even in lower-status families in which close-kin marriages are relatively common, women tend to have a favorable position. They retain a comparatively high status and a considerable degree of independence because of the equal relationship that exists between their family and the groom's family (Kapadia 1993).

Other Indian scholars (i.e., Nayak and Donoghue 1982) have argued that the seeming inequality of wives in public may mask the real power they wield in private. Indeed, Khatri (1996) found that Indian children perceive their mothers to have considerable decisionmaking power. Another study found that although Indians say that husbands have the right to make important decisions and hold undisputed authority over their wives, there is, in fact, close consultation and bargaining in the exercise of domestic authority (Ramu 1989).

The second group of studies declare that female relational and household power is a relatively recent occurrence, due to changes
taking place in India: industrialization, mass-communication, urbanization and the ensuing social mobility, an increase in educational and occupational status among women, conferment of political and property rights to women, and the general weakening of caste as a social force (Beteille 1992; Nevadomsky 1980). Several scholars believe that these factors have led to the alteration of the family structure and the transformation of familial interrelationships (e.g., Gupta 1981; Nevadomsky 1980; Venkatesh 1995; Sinha 1984; Wadley 1976). However, it must be pointed out that these changes have primarily affected women and their families in certain urban contexts (especially the urban middle-class group, or careerwomen, or educated/ professional segments) (e.g., Conklin 1988; Ruth and Suraj 1998). There continues to be a lack of development among women in various other social categories (e.g., urban poor, rural, agrarian workers), primarily because of severe structural, cultural, and economic impediments (Sinha 1984; Venkatesh 1994).

As mentioned previously, the joint family system is a major structural arrangement that ensures male domination within the household through traditional gender-based household patterns of behavior. Contrary to the previously cited studies, other studies have found that the joint family as a corporate economic and domestic unit has given way to a constellation of conjugal families with close kin ties and solidarity (e.g., Rao, Kulkarni and Rayappa 1983). Though the joint family ideal remains strong for many, the nuclear household appears to be the practice. Even in rural areas the trend is towards the formation of nuclear households in which the conjugal pair is emerging as a critical unit (Conklin 1988; Nevadomsky 1980; Sinha 1984).

Relatedly, there is a movement away from traditional obligatory kinship ties with increasing recognition of egalitarianism (Kurian 1992) and husbands' greater tolerance for their wives' natal kin. The urban middle-class in particular is moving in the direction of the "conjugal pattern," that is, a marriage system which includes freedom of marital choice, an increasing age at marriage, rising divorce rates, companionate spouse relations, etc. (Kurian 1992; Nevadomsky 1980).

Some studies report that modernization trends in India have also affected the nature of caste influence (Mehta and Belk 1991). "Sanskritization" is a process by which lower caste imitate Brahmans, practicing Brahmanic food-purity rules anal giving up "unclean" occupations to thereby improve their relative status (Srinivas 1972). Secularization through declining state support of religious festivals
and increased emphasis on secular education also tends to weaken caste influence (Rao 1978). A related process of Westernization has resulted in nontraditional clothing, foods, furnishings, and occupations, all of which help in the gradual process of replacing caste prestige with a social class system of status. "De-Brahmanization," in which both Brahmans and others are less attentive to the obligations and privileges of caste, has also elevated the importance of social class, especially in urban areas (Rao 1978).

Thus, the literature on Indian familial relations is conflictual. While one stream of studies declares that Indian families are subject to the dictates of pativratya (and that females are powerless regardless of their resources), another stream maintains that Indian women have either always had considerable decision-making power or that they have recently achieved power. An interesting question stems from both streams. Why do Indian wives not have decision-making power given the changes brought about by modernization? And, Why have Indian wives wielded considerable decision-making power in what has always been characterized as a male-dominant society? Both questions can be summarized as, In the Indian context, what explains marital power in decision making? The following section details the ethnographic study that was done to explore the answer to this question.

THE ETHNOGRAPHIC STUDY

Ethnographic research techniques were relied upon in this research to meet two primary objectives: (1) to examine the applicability of the established theories and concepts of marital power in an Indian context and (2) to identify and analyze emergent antecedents with the intention of increasing current understanding of the antecedents of marital power in decision making.

This research was approached with the desire to uncover and portray the antecedents of marital power in decision making of Indian consumers from their perspective. It is important to note here that I am not Indian. I am a Caucasian American who was, however, familiar with India. Before I established residency in India to execute the current study, I had previously traveled throughout India as an explorer and as an ethnographic researcher (see, for example-1992). During my residency in India, I lived in different Indian households which ranged from upper to lower class and from patriarchal to
matriarchal with respect to dominance. Although I lived primarily in the south (Bangalore in the state of Karnataka), data were also collected from the northwest (Rajasthan) and from the east (West Bengal). Because of both studying the relevant languages (Hindi and Kannada) beforehand and having the assistance of a translator (for working with some of those in the lower social class stratum), no language problems were encountered. Establishing rapport with family members in the households in which I lived and with their guests and friends was relatively easy; however, some time and patience were required before I perceived that I was accepted and trusted.

The observations of spouses' characteristics related to dominance or power issues began immediately after I was settled in the first household. Observational data were collected in various situations, such as in household and restaurant settings in which spouses discussed purchases and in retail settings where I posed as a shopper while listening to spouses discuss purchases. The observations covered a wide range of decisions, such as those pertaining to automobiles, wedding jewelry and saris, curtains, and food items. During this time, I placed emphasis on the establishment of acquaintances in neighborhoods and markets that would later be used for networking to obtain interviews. After a few weeks, I began to interview. Trustworthiness was enhanced by the rapport stemming from the interviews, sustained contact, noticeably earnest intentions, and by becoming totally immersed in the culture. I lived as an "insider" with and among the populace; I visited households, attended weddings, joined neighborhood "gossip" and tea sessions, and accompanied locals on shopping excursions and on physician and temple visits. As an indication of increased trust, invitations were made to visit homes and to accompany residents on shopping, sightseeing, and errand trips. Further, as time and trustworthiness progressed, intimacy and referrals increased.

In addition to the data stemming from observations, data were also collected via in-depth interviews. The primary goal of the interviews was to investigate the relative power or influence of the spouses with respect to decision making and the antecedents of power or the lack thereof. Once rapport was established, marital power in a wide range of decisions was discussed. The decisions, based on previous research (e.g., Blood and Wolfe 1960; Bonham 1976), included items related to product purchases, finances (both orchestration and implementation), responsibility for household tasks and the caring and rearing of
children, and the general lifestyle of the family (i.e., where to live, how to spend leisure time, etc.). Also stemming from past research (e.g., Cromwell and Olson 1975; Lukes 1974), various aspects of marital power were covered as well. For instance, informants were asked about outcome power (i.e., who made the decisions); manifest power (i.e., attempts at change, conflicts, and strategies), and what they would have done (or failed to have done) in the absence of their spouses’ power or wishes. Loosely and informally interwoven in the interviews were questions related to the reasons, explanations, or antecedents of the marital power structure.

To achieve the greatest possible validity and reliability, the informants were rated on attributes which have been shown to be possessed by "good" informants: (1) comfortable and unstrained in the interactions; (2) not hurried; (3) generally open and truthful; (4) providing solid answers with detail; (5) staying on the topic or related important issues; and (6) thoughtful and willing to reflect on' what they said (Dobbert 1982). Data from a particular spouse was eliminated if it did not meet these criteria. However, this was rare because of the extent of my immersement in the participants' everyday lives. Usable observational and interview data resulted from 133 couples. In 23 cases where power issues were known and easily discussed, the couples were interviewed together. The other 110 couples were interviewed separately, with one immediately following the other. Privacy and cross-gender situations appeared not to be a problem. Further, observational data alone were collected from 56 couples, and interview data alone were collected from 77 spouses. Thus, observation and/or interview data were collected from a total of 261 couples. Respondents were observed primarily in homes and shops and were interviewed in a variety of settings, such as homes, offices, restaurants, and outdoor benches. Each interview was tape-recorded, and the transcriptions of those tapes resulted in a collection of 923 pages. The data base also included 441 pages of observational/ field notes and 194 photographs. Given the purposes of this research, a method was used that facilitates the achievement of a balance between being overly restrictive or (theory-laden) and overly permissive (theory-free). Interviews with informants began with "grand-",tour" questions (Creswell 1994) pertaining to their biographies and their experiences with marital power in decision making (i.e., the decision or action taken had the spouse been able to act alone, reactions of the partner to opinions, impediments to decisions, conflicts and strategies for effecting or preventing decisions, etc.). Interviews were kept as loosely
structured as possible, allowing informants the freedom to broach topics in their own ways and at their own paces. This method was considered most appropriate for the objectives of this research since it evokes richly textured descriptions of reasons for marital power which otherwise might be dismissed or overlooked. Under these conditions rapport developed rapidly, evidenced by the frankness with which informants divulged intimate details of their experiences, attitudes, and thoughts. As themes emerged, and as rapport with informants increased, it became possible to use more probing questions to test and explore themes across informants.

Content analysis was used to extract the plausible explanations for relative influence in decision making. Analysis was not relegated to the end of the project, but formed an integral part of an ongoing project. The validity and reliability of each piece of observational and interview information was assessed by examining its fit into the total body of data. As new data were collected, they were analyzed in the context of previously gathered data and examined for points of similarity and contrast. The constant comparison of new data to old occurred informally during interviews and more formally and exhaustively between interviews. As themes emerged, they were used to guide, but not necessarily restrict, the foci of future interviews.

Analysis was an iterative process of coding, categorizing, and abstracting the data (McCracken 1988). Data of apparent thematic similarity were identified throughout the field notes, highlighted, and coded with key words or phrases. Coded data were compared and contrasted to yield a few broad categories which, through further sorting and clustering, were reduced to the more basic patterns that constitute the principal emergent themes.

Interpretations of the key analyst were periodically submitted to colleagues of differing backgrounds (Wallendorf and Belk 1989) who sometimes challenged the interpretations or proposed alternatives, exposing the analyst's personal biases and leading to further scrutiny of the data and literature. Selected conclusions were also submitted to the study participants for their reactions. There was general assent to the plausibility of the interpretations. Complete agreement was deemed less important than dialogue and a thorough reexamination of questioned conclusions (Schouten 1991).

Thus, where possible, techniques set forth by Lincoln and Guba (1985) (i.e., triangulation across sources, methods, and researchers) and Wallendorf and Belk (1989) (i.e., independent audits), were used
to develop more trustworthy interpretations. However, since ethnographic significance is derived socially, not statistically, from discerning how ordinary people in particular settings make sense of the experiences of their everyday lives (Geertz 1973), an attempt was made to avoid a preoccupation with method as it alone is not sufficient to validate ethnographic research. Emphasis was also placed on "insightfulness" by using Thompson's (1990) explication of the gestalt experience, specifically conceptual gestalt.

ETHNOGRAPHIC ACCOUNT

This section is divided into two parts. The first part addresses the extent to which the ethnographic data supported the established antecedents of marital power in purchase decision making. The second part reveals additional antecedents of power that emerged during the study.

Established Antecedents

In general, both observational and interview data lead to the extension of the established antecedents of marital power in purchase decision making.

Resource theory Although resource theory receives general support in an Indian context, it appears relatively weak when compared to the other established antecedents. When asked about relative influence, the husbands with more resources than their wives generally replied that they had more power in decision making. Their wives said that it was either equal or husband-dominant. Observational data clearly showed that in cases where husbands' relative resources are greater than their spouses, they tend to exhibit more bargaining power within the relationship. As a husband's occupational, educational, and income resources increase relative to his wife's, his power was observed to increase also in making such decisions as whether or not an item should be purchased and how much should be paid. Although their wives were observed making many decisions (hence, their verbal acclamations of "equal"), the decisions were of a relatively minor type, such as which fabric or meat to buy-after their spouses had said these products could be bought and had imposed a limit on the amount of money to be spent on them.
Consistent with past research (Bharat 1995; Mirowsky 1985; Ramu 1989), this study found that while a positive relationship generally exists between the husband's resources and his marital power, the wife's resources appear to have little affect on her marital power. Shanti's (34, administrative assistant, middle class, urban) statement exemplifies this general finding:

We struggled at first because there wasn't that much money. When Kaushik started making more and more money, he wanted things his way even more than before-deciding on if we should or shouldn't buy something, how much to spend, how much to save, everything. But when I started working and making a good salary, it made no difference. It's the same way with my friends. We may have some power at work, but when we come home, nothing has changed.

Indeed, Kaushik was observed making decisions that defined and framed their lifestyle (such as how much to spend on apartment rent and which apartment to rent), while Shanti was observed making very minor decisions and performing low-impact, but time-consuming tasks (making the actual rental payment, deciding on relatively inexpensive rugs for the new apartment, contacting utility companies, and packing to move).

The observational data suggests that the effect of a wife's resources on her marital power in decision making seems to be moderated by her social status. Consistent with the findings of Austin and Porter (1980), when lower class wives either have the resources or know that they can get the resources to support themselves, they are more likely than their middle- and higher-class counterparts to free themselves of dependence on their husbands. This translates to their having more power in the relationship. Binuta (43, field worker, lower class, village) is a case in point. During several occasions, she was observed making the majority of the decisions—such as how much to spend at the market, whether or not alcohol would be consumed in the house, the assignment of tasks. She commented that if her husband "gave her too much trouble," she would leave him and continue to work and earn enough money to support herself.

In addition to socioeconomic resources, this research revealed two other resources that spouses may possess and use to gain relative influence in decision making. First, it was observed that as a wife ages, her power in decision making appears to increase, even when her other characteristics (i.e., self-esteem, sex-role orientation, and assertiveness) seem to remain virtually unchanged. She was observed making such decisions as whether or not the family
should take a holiday, how much should be spent on dowry, and delegating tasks to others in the household.

Second, attractiveness, or the perceived lack thereof, appears to influence a spouse's decision to stay or go, as well as his or her overall leverage in the relationship. *Ceteris paribus*, the more attractive partner is able to translate that feature into added bargaining power in the relationship. However, analysis of the observational data revealed that this connection exists mainly for males. An unattractive spouse may weigh her chances on the remarriage /relationship market as being few, and reluctantly decide to stay in the relationship. As Meena (42, homemaker, lower class, urban) explained,

> Women are always looking at Ajay. He would have no trouble at all finding another woman or wife. But it's different with me and we both know it... I'm not that pretty. If I didn't do what he wants, he could easily leave me and be with another woman.

Ajay and Meena were observed making decisions related to Meena's health care and to how their free time is spent. Ajay was clearly the decision maker for the more important decisions. However, neither interview nor observational data suggested an important linkage between a married female's attractiveness and her decision-making power. In other words, attractiveness on the part of married women did not necessarily translate to greater relative influence. This may be because the husband does not perceive his wife's attractiveness as a threat; in other words, societal norms perhaps dictate her loyalty to her husband.

Cultural ideology Both observational and interview data revealed many cases where spouses perceived restricted choice with respect to the imbalance of power in the household as normal and as they expected it would be. In many patriarchal households, wives refrain from challenging their spouses because they perceive his dominance to be legitimate and inevitable. Mia (25, middle 'class, village, joint family) expressed,

> Yes, he decides on all the major things, even my clothes. I'm not really happy with many parts of our life, but that is the way it is. My husband gets his way on things and this is nothing new. It was the same way with my father.
and mother. We women may not always like it, but they [the men] are supposed to be the leaders.

And, her postal worker husband, Shiv,

It is right that I decide on what we buy and how much we pay. That's the way it's supposed to be.

Mia and Shiv were observed proceeding through the decisionmaking process for several types of decisions (e.g., clothes for daughter, wedding gift for Mia's sister, auto repair, food). Regardless of the importance of the decision, the process was basically the same: Mia might or might not suggest a purchase and engage in limited information search; Shiv invariably narrowed the alternatives, made the selection, and then handled the transaction (except for minor food purchases made between major market trips).

In cases where the ideology theme was prevalent, the husbands viewed their dominance or more powerful position in decisionmaking power as natural and legitimate.

This research found that the physical proximity of a couple to the husband's family is a specific reason why a couple's particular power structure may be viewed as legitimate. Consistent with the ideals of pativrata, those wives who have moved near or in with their husbands' families and have become part of the joint family appear more likely to perceive a power imbalance as legitimate. This view changes when she is much older and when her daughter-in-law assumes the subordinate position. Irrespective of age, however, couples ascribing to more modern sex-roles tend to live in urban, nuclear households.

Sex-role orientation, which is strongly affected by cultural ideology, was observed to be a major determinant of marital power in decision making. The wives who appear to adhere to traditional sex roles tend to perform the socioemotional roles in the family. They primarily view themselves as homemakers and their decision making tends to follow traditional patterns, such as executing routine tasks, making minor decisions, etc. The husbands who adhere to traditional sex roles view themselves as the breadwinner and as the definite head of the household. They think it is their right to make the important decisions and to avoid unpleasant childrearing and household chores. The example of Mia and Shiv cited above is one of traditional sex-role orientation stemming from a patriarchal ideology.
On the other hand, there are cases of modern or blurred sex-role couples even in cultures with a patriarchal ideology. Husbands who exhibit more modern sex roles believe in a more equal distribution of power in the household. There is more balance in power in decision making and these husbands perform some of the traditional feminine activities, such as helping with the household and childcare tasks. Sansay (66, upper social class, urban) says he believes in equality between the sexes, in women's rights, and admires educated and professional women. He says he and his wife "have always shared roles." Observation of their making vacation decisions (e.g., where to go, when to leave, how much to spend) supported his statements in that there was considerable give-and-take and overall equality with respect to wishes granted.

Involvement

The observation and interview data suggest that a spouse's level of involvement is associated with power in making that particular decision.

Observational data were collected over time from Vivek and Rekka (mid-40s, upper lower class, village, extended family). It was obvious that Vivek was highly involved with vehicles and Rekka was highly involved with the yard. They each dominated in each decision (a process, *per se*, was not observed) in their respective areas across items varying in cost. Rekka's statement typifies those of other informants:

> It's not that one of us is *more powerful than the other*. It's more like who cares more about that decision that is being made. For example, I tend to chose the products that are needed for the compound (yard) because I'm the one who likes to work in it. I have taken that as my job, and I like it.

Vivek:

> On some things, she knows better than I do. And, just the opposite; I know for other things. I'm. the one who's interested in vehicles, the childrens' schooling, and things like that. I make all the decisions for those things.

An extension of this antecedent emerged from the data analysis-indifference. In several of the households in which the wife dominated in decision making, both she and her husband indicated in separate interviews that she tended to dominate, not because of aggressiveness or other reasons, but because of his general indifference. This finding existed even in households with characteristics associated with patriarchy. Kumar and Meenakshi represent an
excellent example of such a household. This couple has been married seven years; he is a factory worker and she is a homemaker in a midsize town. According to Meenakshi,

Yes, it ends up that I do make most of our decisions, but it's not like I have to. I decide on all kinds of things, like our clothes, what we do on holiday, how we spend our money, and on and on. Sometimes he doesn't tell me what he wants at all, and other times he does, but he never pushes it. He's always saying it doesn't matter to him.

Kumar:

I don't care what we buy in many cases. Sometimes I do, but that's just to say, well, we can do this, that, or the other-it doesn't matter which one, and then she chooses.

This couple was establishing the tradition of taking a special holiday once a year (driving to another area and staying in a hotel for a couple of nights). They were observed discussing the approaching special weekend. Meenakshi mentioned two places she would like to visit and Kumar mentioned one. He then said it didn't matter to him which one was selected. Meenakshi weighed the alternatives and made a choice.

Rajan and Sujatha represent another case in which the wife dominates in decision making. He is a servant and she is a homemaker and they have been married for almost two years. Rajan states,

It's just me, that's the way I am... a lot of things don't matter. There's very few things I want... just a job, enough money, my wife, my son... I don't care about little things, like how we spend that money... just as long as it's there. Sometimes she asks me things like, "what do you want to do, go for a walk or visit friends" or "should we buy that one or this one?" It doesn't matter to me. She can make all the decisions. These things really don't matter to me.

Observations definitely supported Rajan's statements. With respect to purchasing behavior, he only concern was not spending too much money. Otherwise, Sujatha dominated in all the decision areas.

Anand and Sashikala represent a case where he is clearly the powerholder and she is basically indifferent. They have been married 35 years, live in a large city, and both have recently entered early retirement from lucrative careers. Anand describes the nature of their decision making:
I make most of our decisions, both the little and major ones-such as who to hire for help finances, which school our daughters attended, our clothes, how the house is decorated. It has nothing to do with the maxi being the leader of the household. Our household is not like that. She has always stated, since we were first married, that she doesn't care about which choice is decided on and I really believe she doesn't.

And Sashikala states,

Anand decides many things for us. It's not that he's always right, because many of the times he's decided, they haven't exactly turned out for the best. It's just that a lot of things really don't matter to me. No, that sounds wrong. They do matter, but when it comes to deciding on 1, 2, or 3, it mainly doesn't matter. I would just close my eyes and pick one. So, he might as well decide.

Again, there appeared to statement-behavior congruency. As an example, Sashikala and Anand were observed discussing hosting a party in the near future. Sashikala said the details did not matter to her. Anand determined when the party would be held, who would be invited, what would be served, etc. From time to time, he asked her opinion, and she would reply "it doesn't matter-whatever you think:

*Principle of least interest* It was observed that the spouse with less power in decision making was the one who exhibited a lower likelihood of challenging the decisions of his or her spouse because of the fear of the other's withdrawal. Further, informants expressed that they are not as assertive as they would like to be or do not argue for their desires or point of view because they are afraid of rejection. These findings are consistent with the writings of Waller and Hill (1951) and Blumberg and Coleman (1989). Likewise, other informants declared that their power in decision making was "guaranteed" because their spouses placed more importance than they did on maintaining the relationship. As Mahendar (65, business, executive, lower upper class, small city, extended family) said,

I know that my wife couldn't make it without me... she depends on me too much for everything. Not for money, but for guidance. She can't even make decisions on her own. So, I know she will always give in. Sure I care for her, but not like she loves me. Maybe I shouldn't take advantage of that, but it's very easy to get my way.

Mahendar and Vana (63, recipient of sizable inheritance) were observed proceeding through the decision-making process for
household help. As they discussed and debated issues such as who to hire, how much to pay, etc., power appeared to be joint. But once Mahendar began subtly expressing what appeared to be his annoyance with Vana (verbally and nonverbally), Vana began relinquishing her control. At the end, Mahendar made the decisions and Vana executed them.

This research revealed another other reason why a spouse may be more interested in maintaining the relationship, specifically, social sanctions that would result if the marriage dissolved. In general, the higher the social status and the more importance an individual places on his or her status in the community, the more likely that individual will tolerate a subordinate position in decision making relative to his or her spouse. Doris, originally from the U.S., is 53 and a urban homemaker in a upper social class home. She met her Indian husband, Pravin, in graduate school in the U.S. and moved to India when she was 26. Doris and Pravin were observed over time as they discussed a vacation decision. A set amount, equivalent to $10,000 was going to be spent on the vacation; however, Doris and Pravin disagreed on the destination; she wanted to go to the U.S. and he to Australia. They struggled throughout the process, but Pravin won. The reason surfaced in both observations and in-depth questioning: As a foreigner, Doris was particularly concerned about her status in the community. She regularly relinquished power to her partner because she was fearful of the consequences if she did otherwise. Indeed in India, and consistent with the ideals of pativratya, those with "more interest" appeared to be the wives, not the husbands.

Emergent Antecedents

The data analysis process clearly indicated that the existing theoretical base for relative influence in purchase decision making is inadequate in the context of India. Six new antecedents (the presence or lack thereof) of marital power in decision making emerged from the study. The emergent antecedents are aggressiveness, locus of control, confidence in one's spouse, compliance, caste, and joint family.

Aggressiveness Observation and interview data revealed that the spouses who had considerably more power than their partners differed with respect to aggressiveness. Albeit perhaps rare, aggressive young wives were observed to have considerable decision-making
power even in a joint or extended-family setting. Marie (27, home-maker, upper lower class, village, joint) is an example of such an individual. She and other family members were observed discussing some relatively expensive clothing for an upcoming wedding. Although others in the family (e.g., her husband and in-laws) seemed to dominate during the early decision phases, Marie became very outspoken and domineering when the discussion turned to aspects of the decision in which she was interested (type of clothing, fabric, cost). Her father-in-law exclaimed later, "... we don't know what to do with Marie... (sigh) ... she becomes bent in hell on doing something, and she won't give in until she gets her way."

In another case, both spouses in a lower-upper class couple were asked separately about the influence in purchase decision making. Both replied that their decision making was egalitarian. However, the observational data showed that Rekha (49, professor) had considerably more power than her higher-paid husband, Raghul (50, engineer). In all situations, Rekha appeared to be very opinionated. In decision-making situations, she was always highly aggressive. This couple was observed making both low-involvement (e.g., where to eat out) and high-involvement (e.g., savings, decisions). Although Raghul would state his opinions and desires, Rekha would respond with insensitivity and aggressiveness. She invariably got her way.

Many spouses who hold the less powerful position in decision making relative to their spouses tend to be low in aggressiveness. These spouses tend to make only minor purchase decisions and engage in only the minor decision phases. Vasant and Neelam (35 and 32, upper lower class, village) typify this point. Although both spouses declared that Vasant had more power in decision making, the observational data once again contradicted the verbalizations. Vasant (tractor operator) would calmly state what he wanted. Neelam (homemaker) would always take a very aggressive stance, telling Vasant he "did not know his own mind," and that her way was better. Her aggressiveness also revealed itself strongly in her nonverbal behavior (facial expressions and body posture). Vasant would eventually shrug his shoulders and comply.

Relatedly, those spouses skilled in communication appear to have more power in decision making than their lesser-skilled partners. Communication skill involves the ability to achieve coercion and successful negotiation. Ramsundar (28, clerk, lower middle class, medium-size village) mentioned,
She simply talks or argues better than me. We can start talking about some decision, and she is very convincing when she explains her point of view... For example, not too long ago she wanted to update our home by getting many new items. I explained that it wasn't a good time to do that, our money was too tight. But it didn't do any good. She argues until she gets her way.

His wife, Sarmila (24):

I can argue better than he can. I remember last year, I wanted a lot of new things for the house. He didn't agree, but I could explain why we needed them. I got them right away... curtains, table and chairs....

Summary The high-aggressive spouses generally decide on family rules, boundaries, and modes of acceptable and unacceptable conduct. These high-aggressive individuals tend not only to dominate in purchase decision making, but also in decisions regarding who in the family is going to do what and how they are going to do it. High-aggressive individuals appear to have a disdain for individuality, disorganization, and spontaneity. They seem to place a relatively low level of importance on getting along with others; instead, their focus is on control and power. Skill in (aggressive) communication also leads to relative power.

Locus of control Many spouses who possess more power in decision making relative to their partners tend to differ with respect to locus of control orientation. Consistent with locus of control theory, those spouses who tend to believe they can control their own outcomes and are thus less malleable to influence from their partners are the ones who have more power in the household. They are more persuasive and assertive. What one wife, Ramani (38, middle class, urban, extended family) said typifies the comments of many others:

My husband and I are just different in our outlook. I think that everything I do and get is up to me—it is in my control. I really go after what I want. But I decide what I want and what should be done and which way, it should be done and then I do it. I am not so controlled by other people. It's up to me. Therefore, I make most of our purchase decisions—even large items.

She and her husband, Mohan, were observed during a shopping trip for living-room furniture. There were several instances in which Mohan and Ramani disagreed (whether new furniture was needed,
when to buy, style to buy, selection of actual pieces). Ramani would softly, but firmly, state her wishes. At all times (even when conceding on minor issues), she appeared to be in control. Moha later declared, "What to do? Things are as they are."

On the other hand, those who have considerably less power in decision making do not support their own interests as vigorously as their more powerful spouses. These individuals tend to "fit into," rather than control their environments. As one husband exclaimed, "...it's just my bad luck that things aren't the way that I would want them to be... " These externally-controlled individuals tend to be more sympathetic and less annoyed by their spouses' demands and counterarguments than their more powerful, internally-controlled partners. Consider the case of Ramraj and Hema (31 and 28, lower class, field workers, village, extended family). In separate interviews, both partners declared that their decision making was either maledominant (decisions made by Ramraj or his father) or egalitarian. However, this is another case where the observational data invalidates the verbal accounts. This household was observed as its members made a variety of decisions (e.g., whether or not to attend a festival, which floor covering to buy, how much money to spend on the floor covering, etc.). All of the adult members of the household were quite vocal in expressing their opinions and engaging in debates and arguments. However, Hema's demeanor was different from the others (incidentally, she was the only non-superstitious adult in the household) in that she was always self-contained and unsympathetic to others' wishes.

Consistent with pativratya, many Indian women feel they do not have control over their lives or their environment. However, as can be seen by the examples just cited, there are Indian women who fit McHugh's (1989) and Mines's (1988) description; that is, there are Indian females in all age groups who express individuated personal goals and opinions and who view themselves as active agents in shaping some important aspects of their lives.

**Summary** Spouses with an internal locus-of-control tend to place considerable importance on their autonomy and are more likely to develop the social skills necessary to manipulate their environment. Internals tend to be less malleable to social influence and more persuasive and assertive than externals. The tendency for internal spouses to behave more assertively than their external counterparts is consistent with locus-of-control theory. Since they believe they can
control events, internals are thought to pursue valued outcomes more vigorously and persistently than externals. The idea that internal individuals are reactive to their spouse's influence attempts is supported by the finding that internal individuals sometimes described their spouses as "strong and trying." A quietly self-contained, internal person is likely to be unsympathetic to, and annoyed by, his or her more external spouse's demands. Thus, married individuals' locus-of-control orientations appears to be associated with assertive and yielding behavior in conflictual situations.

**Confidence in Spouse**

Many informants indicated that they relinquished decision-making power because they trusted their spouses' decisions. Similar to the extension of involvement (indifference), this is an instance where power imbalance exists without conflict. The spouses with the majority of power knew that their partners had confidence in them because both parties had been pleased with their previously-made decisions. Although Pradeep (53, factory worker, upper-lower class, village, extended family) has some decision-making power at work, his wife, Lakshmi, makes most of the decisions that affect their home or personal lives. Pradeep, Lakshmi, and Pradeep's mother said that Lakshmi has more power in decision making across all areas of their life. This family was observed as they discussed the purchase of a car. The other family members were skeptical regarding the need for the new vehicle, but Lakshmi convinced them it was needed. When deciding on one of two models, Pradeep and his mother thought the cheaper car should be purchased. Lakshmi explained that the more expensive car represented higher value. After purchasing the product of Lakshmi's choice, Pradeep said, "My wife makes good decisions. We usually listen to her because what she says turns out to be the best thing."

In a middle-aged, dual-career couple, Rajeev holds most of the decision-making power. Although Phillis, his wife, says she is very involved with the products for which he makes decisions, she gladly accepts his lead. She both says and acts as if she is content with the power imbalance:

Rajeev is gifted in his tastes. Because of our positions and our social life, I am very concerned with my appearance and our home's appearance. Actually, I always was . . . where we are now doesn't really have much to do with it.
thing is, Rajeev is the one who decides mostly on the fabrics that will be used to make my clothes. Sometimes, we disagree, but I end up giving in because I know he knows best. It always ends up that way... that I'm glad I went along with him. He simply knows what become me better than I do. Same thing is true with things for our home, such as furniture, decoration, even our children’s things. It must be something artistic-like in him.

Rajeev and Phillis were observed shopping for some clothes for Phillis. Although she would select a few alternatives, Rajeev selected the items to be purchased, suggesting which items looked better on her and which ones represented good value.

In an older, semi-retired couple, Vimala comments that her husband, Selvan, makes the major decisions. Although Vimala obviously has a very strong, assertive personality, she turns over most of the decision-making power to him. According to Vimala,

I know I can trust him. Most of the time we don’t disagree at all, because I trust his decisions, including our purchases. I may make the small decisions, but he makes the big, important ones. So far, he hasn't let me down and we've been married almost 45 years! One time we did disagree about where to live when we moved to Bombay. But even then, I had confidence in him and he ended up deciding for us. His decision turned out to be the right one by far.

There were many cases in which the spouses had developed structured specialization regarding decision-making power for certain aspects of their lives. Even when a spouse is highly involved with a certain product category or purchase, he or she may relinquish decision-making power because of the high degree of trust in the opinions of their spouse. Further, even in households with aspects associated with patriarchy, some husbands relinquish decisionmaking power because of spousal confidence. In one family, both spouses, Vikash and Meena (40 and 38, lower class, village, extended family), said that she has considerable decision-making power. This family was observed as they discussed needed roof repair work. Vikash first suggested that a cousin of theirs be hired to do the work. Meena disagreed, saying that the cousin did sloppy work. She then suggested a plan for the repair work. The other family members listened and then replied that her plan made “good sense.” Meena's decisions were executed.

Summary A major reason why some spouses dominate in decision making is that their partners simply have a high level of confidence in
their opinions and decisions. In most cases, this particular antecedent appears to be the result of the partners having spent considerable time together for the trust and confidence to have been developed and maintained. In other cases, however, spouses trusted the decisions of their partners even when they had been together for a relatively short period of time.

The spouses with the lower level of power in their households have been pleased with their partners' previously made decisions. They recognize their spouses are skilled in certain areas, such as finances or choosing furniture and clothes, and subsequently relinquish power in decision making. Although individuals may be highly involved with the decision being made (i.e., where to live, which schools their children will attend, the clothes one wears), they appear to be satisfied with their lower level of relative influence when they trust the decisions of their spouses. Confidence in one's spouse is a sufficient reason for relinquishing control even when one demonstrates a strong, assertive personality.

Compliance

Another major theme that emerged from this research is that of compliance level. It was apparent that individuals "give in" to their spouses because of the need for acceptance and for conflict avoidance. On the other hand, the dominant, noncompliant spouses pursue their desired course of action because they know from past experience that their partners want to avoid conflict and will consequently submit to them. Further, they tend to be resistant, individualistic, and obstinate. Following are three detailed examples of wife dominance in Indian households due to the compliant nature of the husband.

Kannan and Mala (28 and 26, middle class, urban) have been married four years. She is definitely the power holder in their household, making the majority of the decisions. According to Kannan,

We can both know exactly what we want and sometimes our wants clash. She ends up getting what she wants because we're so different. I don't always want to, but I usually give in . . . . I think that's the nice thing to do. But, not my wife. She is very stubborn and insists on getting what she wants. She thinks she is always right and I'm wrong. I do blame myself for things... probably too much . . .
His wife, Mala:

Well, I really make our decisions, how the money is spent. (Laughs) Maybe it shouldn't be like that, but I know that my husband will give in... that's just the way he is. When we talk about buying something, like our car, we kind of share the whole thing. It's back and forth. Then, we'll disagree on something, such as price, or which cars are acceptable, and I always end getting my way. He ends up shrugging his shoulders.

Kannan and Mala were observed one evening while discussing the possible remodeling of their home. At first, Kannan appeared eager and excited about some plans for remodeling he had in mind. Mala listened, but then calmly disagreed—she had a completely different plan. After debating for several minutes, Kannan backed down and told her the work could be done as she wished. It was discovered later that Mala's plan had been implemented.

The next couple, married for seven years, lives with the husband's family. When queried about relative influence, the husband, Coover, said it's generally equal, but his wife, Chan, and his in-laws said Chan often has more clout in making decisions. As mentioned previously, past research has shown that wives tend to have a relatively low level of power in the extended family, unless they are older and have assumed the matriarchal role in the family. However, Chan was observed to have considerable power because her husband and in-laws are relatively compliant. They were observed discussing whether or not to attend a party at an acquaintance's home. Coover seemed eager to go, because he enjoys his friend's company. Coover's parents also seemed eager to attend the party, because not doing so would appear rude. On the other hand, Chan quietly stated that the family should not attend because she thought the other woman had been unkind to her in the past. Although Coover and his parents appeared to question her remark, they were eager to comply with her wishes.

The next couple has been married 15 years. Nagarajan has a civil servant job and Ramani is a homemaker. He is the one, who is compliant and she usually makes the decisions. As an example of the power structure in the household, this couple was observed in several occasions in which they discussed whether or not to purchase a new refrigerator. Ramani wanted a new one, and Nagarajan, thought their existing one worked fine and that they could not afford a new one anyway. It was very obvious that Nagarajan had fixed ideas about the refrigerator and that he wanted to please his wife. Indeed, she got her
way. Interestingly, once the decision to buy was made, Ramani did not seem to care about remaining related decisions (where to buy, brand, etc.) and therefore became quite complaint herself. Like many other couples associated with this theme, Nagarajan is not pleased with the power imbalance:

What am I suppose to do? She ends up getting her way on many things because I don't want her to be unhappy. But, it seems like it's okay for her if I'm the one who is unhappy. I like it very much when we get along. I try to do things she likes. When things go her way, then she is easier to get along with. And besides, she is a very good woman and mother and I like to please her. I think sometimes, though, that she takes advantage of me.

And, according to Ramani:

I don't know what's wrong with him [Nagarajan]. We start a debate and he quits on me… just throws up his hands and leaves. I decide on a lot of things, but other people don't know that. Nagarajan acts like he does and that what our neighbors and family think also. We let them think that way. But I do most of the deciding here. You know, he could easily win our arguments if he would be different! He's such a good man, so sensitive and unselfish. It really is easy for anyone to take advantage of him.

Summary The compliance theme holds that the spouse with the stronger compliance personality trait will have less decision-making power in the household. On the other hand, the low-compliance individual tends to place more emphasis on his or her needs and desires, is more individualistic and obstinate and consequently possesses more decision-making power. Compliant individuals tend to be apologetic and willing to blame themselves rather than others when things go wrong. They have a particularly strong desire to be loved, appreciated, and to be involved in activities of others.

Spouses with more decision-making power appear to be cognizant of the fact that their partners want to avoid conflict. Although there may be some disagreements, conflict rarely ensues because of avoidance on the part of one spouse. In some cases, individuals are manipulative in that they will act more upset than they actually are and stage heated arguments, knowing meanwhile that his or spouse will avoid the conflict and concede. The spouse with the majority of the power in the household and his or her partner view the costs and benefits of conflict differently. While the benefits of conflict outweigh the costs for the powerholder, the opposite is true for the spouse,
albeit he or she may be very dissatisfied with the consequences of the decisions.

_Caste_

As one might expect, a prominent relationship was found between caste and power in decision making. Specifically, in intercaste marriages the higher-caste spouse is also the dominant one. Mary, a homemaker, and Mahesh, an office worker, have been married for fifteen years. She is from a higher caste than her husband (Brahmin and Vashiya, respectively). Although they have always lived in an urban area, they have been affected by the ramifications and dictates of caste.

When interviewed, both spouses said they thought decision making power was equal. However, observational data indicated that she was by far the dominant party in the household; she was observed exhibiting dominance regarding which decisions they made, how they would proceed through the decision-making process, and ultimately making the final choice. This couple was observed discussing and making food, clothing, and lawn equipment purchases. Both spouses would express an opinion, but would invariably proceed according to Mary's wishes.

Both Prakash and Mamta (married 27 years, urban), appear to have aggressive, strong personalities (this observation was supported by neighbors' comments). On the other hand, they come from different caste backgrounds—she comes from the Brahmin caste and he comes from one of the lower level communities. They were observed making decisions on what to do in their leisure time and on some clothing items for Prakash. In one instance, Prakash stated he wanted to go to a particular shop to have some shirts and trousers made. Mamta disagreed with him and his idea was dropped from consideration. In another instance, they were observed making a decision on how to spend time during an upcoming holiday. Prakash said he wanted to visit some friends of theirs, and Mamta, agreeing that she would like to visit the friends, told him that they would not visit the friends, but would sightsee in another location. The couple did as she wished. Prakash:

> I end up going along with her on many things. Yes, there are some decisions that I make, but it's mainly her way. It's something about her that makes be in control… I don't know what it is… I can be pretty stubborn myself. I think
she thinks she's better than me. I know her family does. She went against their wishes when she married me. She has always acted superior. Maybe she is.

Mamta:

I come from a better background than my husband. That's fine; he is a wonderful husband and father. I did what was right. However, I've had more experiences than he has; I know best on many things. He should honor me.

Summary Although the influence of caste on peoples' lives has weakened, it still affects one's perceptions of another. Even in urban areas, Indian society is largely hierarchical. Accounts were given here of women who had married "below themselves" with respect to caste (a phenomenon rarely seen in rural or village areas). Their considerable decision-making power could not be traced to financial, ideological, or personality factors. Instead, they and their spouses behaved as if they deserved to be the powerholders in their households.

Joint-Family System

The last major theme that surfaced from the data analysis is that which will be simply referred to as the joint family. Several interviews and observations revealed cases in which wives had a relatively low level of decision-making power simply because they lived with their husbands' families. Two examples that typify these women will be given.

Lari (23, office worker) and Sudesh (25, factory worker) and their young daughter are a middle-class, small-city family. They live with Sudesh's parents and grandparents. Although Lari is obviously talented, makes an income similar to that of her husband, and is outspoken, she possesses very little power in her household. This family was observed as they made several types of decisions. Although Lari would usually state her opinion and wishes and others would listen, her relatives would then dismiss her and discuss and negotiate among themselves. Lari said during an interview,

I never really wanted to live with my husband's family. But I have no choice in this matter. In one way, though, it is good. My husband's family helps in many ways (in some ways, too much!). It would be very expensive for us to live on our own. But the price is very high for me. Nothing I say matters. They are nice to me, but I have no control over anything. Even though I work and eases some money, it doesn't matter.
Her husband, Sudesh:

No, Lari really doesn't have power in our household. It wouldn't be right for her to have power. My grandparents and parents have lived a long time and are wise. They know best on many things.

Patin (age 23, office clerk) and Reena (age 20) live with Patin's parents, his widowed grandmother, and older brother's family in the suburbs of a large city. Reena actually has a higher level of education than her husband and also has a vivacious, outgoing personality. During interviews, the family members indicated that power is hierarchical with respect to age. The observational data partially supported their statements. It appeared that the decision-making power was mainly in the arena of the older men, followed in order by Patin's mother, his brother, his brother's wife, and then finally, his grandmother and Reena. Here, the eldest and the youngest women in the household had virtually no power. In one particular case, this family was observed as they made a decisions regarding the remodeling of the section of the house in which Patin and Reena slept. At one point in the discussion, Reena stated her opinions. The men and her mother-in-law gave her a silencing look. The others had several discussions about the remodeling, and eventually the final decisions, contrary to the wishes of Reena, were made by Patin and his parents and brother. Reena exclaimed in an interview,

It never matters what I want. I am the same as a dog. I decide on nothing.

Summary The type of household a couple lives in—nuclear or joint—will greatly affect the power of the younger couple. If they live in a joint family, the youngest husband will have marginal status, superseded by that of his parents and older brothers. His young wife generally has no decision-making power; she is subordinated not only to the men in the household, but also to other women at higher status stages of their own life cycles.

The young women whose cases were reported here probably would have had considerable decision-making power had they lived in nuclear households and certainly had they lived in a less patriarchal culture. However, they had been moved into households in which the power and role structures were already well established.
DISCUSSION

Although the importance of marital power in decision making has been recognized for decades by psychologists, sociologists, and consumer behaviorists, there has been a scarcity of research on the explanations of power in decision making. Indeed, marital power studies across all disciplines have been guided by a theoretical base which was proposed decades ago in the context of U.S. culture, is considered inadequate even in the U.S., and has generally ignored the marital role phenomenon in other cultures. The goal of the current research was to gain insight into the underlying reasons for marital power in decision making by collecting data via participant observation and in-depth interviews. The research was conducted in India, a culture vastly different from the one in which the established antecedents stem.

Four theories or concepts have guided the research in marital power in decision making-resource theory, ideology theory, involvement, and least-interested partner hypothesis. Support was generally found for only two of concepts as they are stated in the literature-sex-role orientation (a component of ideology theory) and involvement. When Indian spouses perceive a clear distinction between female and male roles, they tend to ascribe to the traditional power structure in decision making. That is, husbands dominate in major decisions (e.g., those regarding houses, cars, where to live, whether or not his wife works outside the home, etc.) and wives dominate in decisions associated with the homemaker role (e.g., groceries, childrens' clothing, etc.). With respect to involvement, a spouses' power in decision making increases when they are deciding on something that holds a high level of relevance or importance to them. The involvement concept was extended here to include indifference. Some spouses have power in decision making simply because their partners are insouciant. Spouses relinquish control and power simply because they do not care-they have a lighthearted indifference regarding who makes decisions and which alternative is selected.

On the other hand, this research gave a different meaning to the impact of the three other antecedents-resource theory, least-interested partner hypothesis, and ideology theory, thus indicating that marital power is a culturally-situated phenomenon. Contrary to the research that has relied heavily on resource theory, but consistent with those who have criticized it (i.e., Allen and Straus 1984; Perlman 1989; Safilios-Rothschild 1970), resource theory barely surfaced as an
antecedent of marital power in purchase decision making. And consistent with pativratya, resource theory explains the relationship between one's resources and marital power more for husbands than it does for wives. It appears that the continuing influence of traditional values governing marital roles has encouraged Indian wives to acknowledge and defer to their husbands even though they share the provider role.

Furthermore, husbands in dual-earner families do not see their traditional superior status as threatened, and instead enjoy the economic benefits of their wives' labor along with the public image of being benevolent, liberated men who have permitted their wives to seek outside employment. Supporting Bharat (1995) and Ramu (1989), it appears that employed wives do not perceive their co-provider roles as a resource to be used in bargaining for domestic concessions from their husbands. Perhaps they view it as part of their obligation as good wives and mothers.

Resource theory, however, is more applicable to women if they belong to the lower classes. Thus, social class seems to moderate the relationship between a wife's resources and her power in decision making. One possible reason for this finding is that the effect of a wife's resources on marital power may depend on the husband's perceived need for her income. If a wife's labor is perceived as important to the welfare of the family (e.g., contributing to subsistence production), then husbands may be more dependent upon their wives' contributions of valued resources, and wives consequently will have more influence in purchase decision making.

Data collected from the informants extended resource theory in that non-socioeconomic resources were found to affect marital power. First, although a wife's occupational status and income do not generally constitute as "power resources," her age does in that older women receive a higher status in the family, more respect, and subsequently more power. A possible reason for this finding is that her competence in ruling the household comes with age. Other possible reasons are that children are likely to be present and that an increase in age is associated with greater integration into her husband's family. Further, attractiveness, or perceived lack thereof, was found to influence a one's decision to remain in or leave the relationship, as well as his overall power or leverage in the relationship. An unattractive person may weigh their chances on the remarriage/relationship market as being few and reluctantly decides to stay in the relationship. It appears that attractiveness constitutes much more of a
resource for Indian men than for women because males' chances for remarriage are much greater than those for females.

Similarly, the least-interested partner hypothesis was extended in that additional reasons (besides that of being less emotionally involved) were unveiled for being less interested. Relatively speaking, the lower the perceived social sanctions of a marriage dissolving, the greater that individual's marital power in decision making. Incidentally, this may partially explain why poorer, lower-class, Indian women exercise considerable decision-making power. Because there is less social disapproval over the breakup of a consensual union than over a marriage, the upper class woman is under more pressure to accept an undesired relationship than is the lower class woman. In general, an upper class woman's chances of remarriage are very poor, especially since she is unlikely to marry below her educational level and she may not find a consensual union after divorce a viable option. Further, a divorce for the upper class woman may result in a considerably poorer life style than that to which she is accustomed. The lower class woman does not suffer as much stigma over the breakup of a consensual union. Entry into a new consensual union may be easier than remarriage and, for this woman, not as morally repugnant as for the upper class. Moreover, any resulting life style change may be less threatening to her than for the upper class woman. This reality leads to the lower class wife being able to bargain for some decisionmaking power in the family.

Finally, this investigation uncovered an additional explanation for the perceived legitimate right for a husband's dominance. Specifically, the closer an Indian couple lives to the husband's family, the more legitimate his power becomes. Wives' power seems to be affected by the ways in which families (whether nuclear or extended) are bound together by customs of residence and descent. In particular, wives appear to be disadvantaged by patrilocal residence and patrilineal descent, and advantaged by their matrilateral opposites. The reasons for this may not emanate from any greater honor or status that inherently attaches to the gender through which descent is traced or residence determined, but rather from organizational properties of different kinds of kin groups that affect the social resources available to each gender. Thus, even village wives may possess considerable relative influence if she and her husband do not live in close proximity to his family.

The existing theoretical base was found to be inadequate for explaining marital power in Indian households. Six other antecedents
of marital power in decision making emerged during the course of data collection and analysis, further indicating that we broaden our perspective when considering the ability of a family member to influence others. First, those partners exhibiting a relatively high level of aggressiveness dominate in purchase and lifestyle decisions. They deemphasize empathy, view self-interested behavior, as natural, and take advantage of being in a "power-over" bargaining position.

On the other hand, those possessing more of a retiring, submissive personality exhibit far less power in decision making. For some Indian wives, particularly relatively young ones ensconced in joint families, their involvement may not necessarily lead to power. However, those with aggressive personalities tend exercise a fair amount of dominance. On a related note, those spouses skilled in communication appear to have more power in decision making than their lesser-skilled partners. Power in decision making relates to how proficient one is at arguing, negotiating, expressing wants; and convincing others their wishes are inappropriate.

Second, spouses with a relatively strong internal locus-of-control orientation revealed considerably more power in decision making. They seem to have more knowledge of themselves, are more persuasive and assertive, and are not as easily influenced by others as their external counterparts. Consistent with the teachings of pativrata, some Indian wives feel they do not have control over their lives, thus partially explaining their lack of influence.

Third, a spouse may relinquish power in decision making because he or she simply has confidence in his or her partner's ability to make wise decisions. Although this reason for power was primarily evident when a couple had known each other for a considerable length of time, there were also cases in which spouses indicated their trust or confidence in their partners was established in the very early stages of their relationship. Those who relinquish power appear to be pleased with their spouse's previously-made decisions, respect their partner's tastes, and admire their partner's thoughtful, careful decisionmaking style. Interestingly, some spouses who exhibit knowledge of what they want, who have greater resources, and who are highly involved with the decision relinquish power when they have confidence in their partners. Thus, the spouse who is perceived as being a good problem solver is likely to wind up with more power. This finding is similar to what French and Raven (1959) call "expert power." Individuals with ability to solve problems are those who tend to have more de facto power in the family system.
Fourth, spouses may dominate in decision making because they possess less compliance than their partners. Consequently, they are willing to engage in conflict while realizing their partners will "back down" to avoid conflict. Spouses with avoidance as their priority appear to be emotionally expressive and somewhat hypersensitive. They seem to desire to avoid rejection, embarrassment, or ridicule. This antecedent of power occurs differently than does the aggressiveness antecedent. Those exhibiting low levels of aggressiveness—that is, relatively high levels of submissiveness—have lower levels of dissatisfaction during and after decision making than those who are avoiding conflict. Spouses who take the inferior position in decision making are likely to be very dissatisfied with the manner in which decisions are made and with the outcomes of the decisions.

The last two antecedents that surfaced from the data analysis are caste and joint family dynamics. If the partners in a couple are disparate in caste, the spouse who comes from the more prestigious caste will generally have more decision-making power. Supporting the writings of Das Gupta (1995) and Visaria (1993), the research reported here indicate that a young wife who lives with her husband's family is not likely to have noteworthy decision-making power.

It was pointed out earlier in this manuscript that two questions surface from the conflicting streams of literature on Indian familial relationships. One was, Why do Indian wives not have decision-making power given the changes brought about by modernization? The research reported here yields several possible answers to this question. The Indian wife (even if she is an employed, educated urbanite) may not have considerable relative influence because of the unimportance of her resources (including her attractiveness), the close proximity in which she and her husband live to his parents, her confidence in her husband, the traditional sex-roles to which she and her husband ascribe, or her relatively high level of interest in maintaining her marital relationship due to the social sanctions that would result if the marriage dissolved.

The question stemming from the second literature stream was, why have Indian wives wielded considerable decision-making power in what has always been characterized as a male-dominant society? Her power in decision making may be due to her resources if she lives in a lower-status household, her high involvement in decisions, her aggressive personality, her internal locus-of-control orientation, her compliant- or insouciant-natured spouse, or her relatively high caste position. It is important to note that this research supports the
writings and studies of other scholars (McHugh 1989; Mines 1988; Ramu 1987, etc.) in that Indians— including females— have personal goals and depict themselves as active agents in shaping the direction of their life courses. A casual glance across the Indian culture may lead one to label it as patriarchal, but an in-depth investigation into the culture reveals that many Indian wives exercise considerable purchase decision-making power, even in matters traditionally considered in the domain of their husbands. As Ramu (1987) noted, Indian females have always had noteworthy power, a point often overlooked by scholars who emphasize the tenacity of pativratya and traditional Indian familial patterns.

These findings indicate that we need to broaden the theoretical underpinnings surrounding the marital power in decision making phenomenon. The current research unveiled several additional reasons why one family member dominates in decision making. Future research is needed to investigate the relationships proposed here. Because the extensions of existing theory and additional antecedents of power were uncovered in an Indian context, future research might first empirically investigate the relationships between the antecedents (i.e., an aggressive personality) and power in decision making in an Indian context as well. Further, the relationships between the antecedents and decision-making power might be Studied in other cultures, particularly those in the West. It would be interesting to discover if the parameters of the relationships between, the antecedents and decision-making power significantly vary across cultures. Future research might also investigate the relative effect of the antecedents on decision-making power across various product, categories and across different decision phases.

Another issue that deserves research attention pertains to power in family decision making and conflict. In their review of the consumer behavior literature, Wilkie, Moore-Shay, and Assar (1992) concluded that underlying conflict in family decisions appears to be a pervasive phenomenon. Further, Rollins and Bahr (1976) have argued that power and control are relevant constructs in families only when conflict exists between the family members. Other researchers (i.e., Bahr, Bowerman and Gecas 1974) have actually advocated the weighting of decision-making items by conflict. However, the findings reported here provide the impetus for us to rethink this issue because they clearly indicate that decision-making power does not necessarily imply conflict situations (e.g., when such factors as insouciance and compliance act as antecedents of power). Attention to such theoretical
and conceptual issues will illuminate the marital power construct and the manner in which it should be studied, thereby enhancing our knowledge of family decision making.

NOTES

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1. Pativrata means an unswerving and steadfast devotion of a wife to her husband.
2. Individuals were grouped into six social classes by using Driver and Driver's (1983) classification scheme.

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A Comparison of Consumer Experiences with Online and Offline Shopping

Mary C. Gilly* and Mary Wolfinbarger**

INTRODUCTION

The number of consumers buying online, as well as the dollar amount being spent by online buyers has been on the rise in recent years. In 1999, e-tailing sales in North America were estimated at $20 billion; for the first five months of 2000, sales are already $14.9 billion (www.forrester.com). Nevertheless, e-commerce sales currently account for around 1% of retail sales, and experts and scholars have argued over the possible upper limit to online consumer spending. Ultimately, the degree to which online and offline shopping fulfill various consumer needs will impact the amount of shopping dollars that consumers will choose to spend in each environment.

Shopping satisfies two basic consumer motivations: (1) achieving the goal of purchasing a specific product and (2) having fun (Babin, Darden and Griffen 1994). Hoffman and Novak (1996) speculate and Schlosser and Kanfer (1999) find evidence that online buyers shop differently when they are goal-oriented rather than experiential. Type of product may also affect consumer motivation, with goal-oriented shoppers especially utilizing the web to research products high in search qualities (Klein 1998).

None of these research efforts to date address how well online shopping satisfies goal-oriented vs. experiential needs, especially as

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compared to offline shopping. While consumer experiences are likely to change as technologies such as broadband and information appliances become a mainstream reality, and as offline retailers adapt to the competitive threat of e-tailing (Burke 1997), changes in broadband technology are largely not expected to hit mainstream users for five years (cf. Solomon 1999). Thus the underlying factors leading to choices of online vs. offline shopping should remain relatively stable for the time being.

In this paper, we examine consumer shopping motivations and how these motives are fulfilled in offline and online shopping environments. We begin by describing our research method, followed by a comparison of the attributes related by consumers to online and offline buying behavior. We end with comparisons to the literature and implications for future research.

Research Method

Because little is currently known about the experience of online shopping, qualitative research methods were appropriate to gain in-depth understanding of the phenomenon. We collected data from nine focus groups, including four online focus groups facilitated by Harris Interactive. All participants were required to have had experience purchasing online in one of six common online product categories (travel, CDs, gifts, auctions, apparel and books) in the past six months. Three offline focus groups were recruited from MBA students and staff of a west coast university. Two additional offline groups were recruited from a Southern California community by Harris Interactive and were conducted in a research facility in the area. Participants in the four online focus groups were recruited from the Harris Interactive panel and were interviewed in a "chat room" group environment; they came from all over the United States, with one participant from Canada as well.

The offline focus groups were transcribed and added to the online transcripts that were automatically generated during the online sessions. Investigators tried to understand the online experience in detail, all the way from the search, to making a purchase transaction online, to satisfaction with delivery and the actual product. In order to facilitate this understanding, we probed in detail the differences for consumers between online and offline shopping. One additional issue investigated was the degree to which online buyers perform relatively narrow product searches as opposed to browsing or shopping for fun online. Based on this research, we conclude that online and offline
shopping are viewed by consumers as different with respect to two attributes: (1) the freedom and control offered by they, online environment and (2) experiential qualities offered by offline shopping.

**FREEDOM AND CONTROL VS. EXPERIENTIAL BENEFITS**

Consistent with Jupiter Communication's finding that 77% of online shoppers have a specific purchase in mind (Solomon 1999), most of our participants tended to be goal-oriented rather than experiential. The online buying environment offers several goal-oriented attributes that facilitate the benefits of freedom and control frequently mentioned by our participants. Specifically, goal-oriented buyers value the following online attributes:

- Product selection
- Accessibility and convenience
- Ease of use/ website design
- Price and price comparison
- Lack of sociality
- Appropriate Personalization

The online environment does offer some experiential benefits, particularly for those consumers engaged in ongoing hobby-type search (Bloch, Sherrell and Ridgeway 1986) and for those consumers involved in online auctions. Nevertheless, the experience of being present online, or telepresence (Steuer 1992) is currently far less compelling than the multi-sensation possibilities and potential for surprise offered by offline environments. The benefits of experiential offline shopping included ambiance, positive sociality, impulse purchases, instant gratification and product assurance. We begin by reviewing the advantages and attributes important in online shopping, and then discuss the experiential advantages offered, by offline. As well, we review the experiential advantages that are emerging online.

**Product Selection**

Online consumers frequently mention selection as a reason to shop online. Several of our online participants live a long distance from retail centers. Thus, these consumers see the Internet as a way to control access to the goods they want; no longer are they at the mercy of retail
store location. In addition, online sites are also perceived to be a potential source of inventory when the local store is out of stock.

The [retailer has] all these things in the catalog and when you go in the bricks and mortar stores they are never in stock. Online it's always there because it comes directly out of their warehouses. (Offline focus group)

Bypassing the bricks-and-mortar stores results in access to greater variety "directly out of their warehouses." Online buyers' perceptions that e-commerce offers them better selection, however, often referred to the selection available on the Internet as a whole, rather than the selection on individual sites, which was often perceived as frustratingly limited compared to offline stores and even catalogs.

You know the selection [offered by the seller] is really huge, but you go to find something [on their web site and] you are given like 16 and you know they make 50 . . . you think, well gosh, why aren't the other 35 there? (Offline focus group)

When online retailers "hold out" on consumers, they are forgiven for now, but consumers in our focus groups expect the full array of goods offered in stores and catalogs to appear online in the future.

Accessibility and Convenience

The availability of websites 24 hours a day/ 7 days a week and not having to wait on the phone to place an order make websites attractive to many consumers. Many informants feel they need the convenience either because of time pressure, or how far away major stores were located from their homes. In particular, the following attributes increased the perceived convenience of online shopping:

• not having to be dressed to shop
• not having to walk from store to store
• not having to drive to the store or from store to store
• availability of information on websites
• ease of comparing products on various attributes, including price

Some consumers explicitly associate control and freedom with convenience:

What is the single most important factor in your satisfaction with shopping online?

The freedom to shop when & where I want... So easy & convenient. (Online)
While for most consumers the ability to shop from home is merely convenient, for one senior participant, the availability of online shopping provides her with a sense of independence as she ages:

You probably saw the large ad in the newspapers for Home Grocer...I live alone and recently I had pneumonia. I think I would have starved to death if I hadn't had access to that. It will enable me, I'm 81 now, to live at home alone a lot longer because when I get home at night, I'm not going to walk to the grocery store to buy a half gallon of milk.  
(Offline focus group)

Thus, online access to groceries represents the freedom to live alone and remain independent for this elderly consumer.

For many consumers, the relationship between convenience and freedom is implicit rather than explicit. While it is unknown if consumers actually "shop nekked" or "in my underwear" as some focus group participants put it, the implication is that they like the idea that they could flaunt social conventions and still shop. There is no need, for instance, to engage in the usual grooming, or to be concerned about socially appropriate eating behaviors (Venkatesh 1998) when alone at the computer.

The offline inconveniences of walking and driving; can be avoided by shopping online. Having stores only a "click away" gives consumers control over the amount of time they must expend shopping. There is no driving to the store, or store to store, or even walking from store to store within a mall setting.

Another aspect of convenience is the ability to locate desired information on a website. This includes manufacturers' websites where products were not necessarily sold, and is very important to most buyers. The focus group participants were enthusiastic about not having to rely on retailers for product information. Rather, they could control access to information by going directly to manufacturers, or to other consumers online for tips.

I like getting the information. I like to find out everything about everything before I make a decision...And it's hard to get for a lot of products, before it was impossible, now you can. (Offline focus group)

Websites, however, are less convenient in several ways:

- Can't touch or try on items
- No one to talk to when help is needed/ slow response to email
- No immediate gratification from product purchase
Participants sometimes coped with the inability to touch or try on products by exerting control and not purchasing items such as clothing or shoes online, or by checking out items offline before buying online. When help is needed, e-mail can be useful if the response time falls within 24 hours or less. Participants expressed frustration with slow and/or "form" e-mails that did not address their specific needs in the time frame they wanted. Some sites are now offering live help, but only one of our focus group respondents mentioned using this kind of help system as yet. When customers needed immediate gratification, they exerted control by shopping offline rather than online.

**Ease of Use/ Website Design/Overall Appearance**

Ease of use is extremely important to online consumers. Ease of use consisted of several different factors for our focus group participants as they attempted to control online interactions:

- Quick download
- "Intuitive" navigation, good search engines
- Graphics that show products, including options to get bigger and more detailed pictures upon request
- Absence of features that were "cool" but make the site more difficult to use
- Overall appearance, including immediate comfort level with the site

Informants agreed that navigation should be intuitive, easy to understand and quick. They often said they preferred sites that offered them several ways of categorizing items thus giving them the freedom to search in a way most comfortable for them. There was nearly universal impatience with confusing navigation, and there were high expectations for the ability to search quickly. Features that improved navigational ease and reduced the number of clicks to get to the wanted products-in the case of our online focus groups, the mouseover pull-down menus on EddieBauer.com that were "spawned" on their computers during our session,-evinced user enthusiasm. However, some website features are perceived as a hindrance; one online informant used the term "featuritis" to describe having too many options that are not useful on a site.

Because half to three quarters of users are coming online with a specific purchase in mind rather than browsing (Solomon 1999) and
because they want the transaction to be quick and efficient, a site that is difficult to use is like a store with a "closed for business" sign. Participants reported clicking to another site quickly if download is slow or if they have to click too many times before finding what they wanted. Our focus group participants did not like large graphics that took a long time to download. However, consumers did like the option to download larger graphics of products they wanted too inspect more closely. Thus, they want to be in control of when large graphics appear.

Finally, an additional issue informants raised with website functionality is the process of placing an order. A surprising number of informants mentioned that they often filled their shopping carts, entered all of their information, and then didn't know whether or not an order actually went through! Participants wanted to know immediately (or within a few hours) if their order was, in fact, successfully rendered, and were frustrated when they couldn't control this feedback. In addition, they expected the order process to be relatively easy and quick and to require the fewest screens possible.

The primary coping mechanism for consumers who are dealing with navigational or order difficulties is leaving the site. Yet, when asked when poor web site design might be tolerated, users often said that unique selection (something they "REALLY" wanted) and sometimes lower price would result in them tolerating poor navigation.

**Price/Price comparison**

As with offline shopping, price is important to many online shoppers. Many informants checked prices of products both on and offline; a few shoppers said they only purchased online when it was cheaper than offline. In addition, online buyers feel that the online environment facilitates easy price comparison compared to offline as multiple sites can easily be visited; in this sense, the online medium is the message. Informants also used online searching to help them price products even when they ultimately purchased products offline.

Consistent with the fact that many sites are offering low prices to encourage online shopping and to build online sales quickly, some shoppers are buying primarily on price. Many, but not all, participants feel that online prices are somewhat lower. Moreover, online buyers expect prices to be somewhat lower online, citing the fact that buyers can go from site to site much more easily, there are no salespeople to pressure customers; some online buyers even specifically
explained that online prices *should* be lower as they believe that overhead for online stores is lower than for offline stores. Informants never suggested that low prices are a result of short term special promotions designed to attract consumers. Lower prices are attractive enough to encourage quite a few of our informants to try no-name web sites for lower prices, especially when financial risk is low, as when purchasing a CD.

*So you're willing to take a chance but you'd rather not if you don't have to for the same price. That's right. Everyone deals on price... Response: Choose the one with the better reputation. Response: But if it isn't you're going to choose the one who you don't care about they're working out of their garage or a shoe box. Response: It depends on what you're buying. If I'm buying a new computer at $1000 I am going to go with a more reputable company, but if I'm buying a CD, you'll try anybody.* (Offline focus group)

However, the role of price in purchases sometimes changes as buyers gain experience. Once having a "low price" seller with poor service disappoints them, the decision models of online buyers change, and reputation and customer service may become more important in their considerations.

*I used to worry about finding the best price, but I've had enough negative experiences now that if I find that I get good service I will only use that site...* (Offline focus group)

Again reflecting a desire for control, many online buyers feel that shipping and handling costs should be revealed upfront, and should be added to the shopping cart along with the item so that they know the total price before they spend a lot of time on the site, placing items in a shopping cart, and then finding out that the shipping costs are too high. Consistent with our findings, a recent Forrester survey indicated that 82% of online buyers include shipping in the price of the item (www.forrester.com). Thus not surprisingly, many online consumers desire to see these shipping and handling charges early in the transaction.

*ALL prices given should INCLUDE shipping. For multiple purchases from the same site there should be a running total that INCLUDES all purchases and the shipping ALWAYS in view.* (Online focus group)

Several buyers exerted control over shipping costs by buying multiple items to lower the price of shipping per item. Interestingly, when
buying offline, few buyers consider gas and wear and tear on the
car to be part of the total price of acquiring goods. Those buyers
who did consider the drive were those who had to drive farther
distances to get to shopping centers.

**Product Return**

One of the most important drawbacks to the freedom and control
otherwise provided by online shopping is the perceived difficulty
and expense of returning items. Consumers who are already,
accustomed to these difficulties, specifically catalog shoppers,
have been estimated to be four times as likely to become online’
shoppers, and many of our participants indicated that they already
deal with returns from catalog purchases.

*I feel like it's just an extension of how I think and it's not any more of a
hassle to return by on-line than it is through the catalog.* (Offline focus
group)

The clicks and mortar combination is especially well suited to
aiding consumers to cope with the trouble and expense of returning
products, and most online buyers are enthusiastic about being able
to return products to physical stores. Consumers control the risk of
return by buying items that they have already seen offline,
shopping with a company with whose products they are relatively
familiar (e.g., sizes of clothing were known), or buying items that
are commodities (e.g., books and CDs).

**Sociality**

Offline shopping is perceived as involving many more people than
online shopping, including salespeople, other shoppers and friends
and family coming along on the shopping trip. The relative lack of
sociality online has strong positive aspects. When shopping online,
buyers like the fact that they can be in control of their information
search, unfiltered by incompetent or pushy salespeople. As well,
spouses are not pushing them either to be quick or to buy
something they don't want. Online shoppers also do not have to
deal with children asking to buy items, or with crowds of people
and lines.

*Freedom. 90% of shopping hassle is dealing with people. I need them,
but not as much as they think I need them.* (Online focus group)
The drawback of not having salespeople online is that online customers want sales help to be available when they need more information. Customers like the relatively rare but good help they receive offline. E-mail assistance is viewed as a form of online help, but is sometimes perceived as being too slow and not individualized enough for them (e.g., form e-mail responses). However, online sources are sometimes mentioned as being as unhelpful as offline sources:

I found that e-mail addresses on several websites don't seem to have anybody on the other end. You know, it's just there for someplace to complain to or whatever, but a lot of times you never hear anything again. Response: Well, you get a computer generated response. You get a lot of those. (Offline focus group)

**Personalization**

Our focus groups show that there are strong individual differences in responses to personalization. Most online shoppers like the convenience that registering on a site offers them, such as automatic order form fill-in. Some shoppers, but not all, enjoy the suggestions for other products that they may want to purchase. They are willing to share information if it improves their online experience:

Sure I like for the site to fit my tastes. (Online focus group)

I'm willing to put [my personal] information out there to a certain extent. And I think if it helps them refine their service or their products, I'll think that's fine. For me it's an even exchange. (Online focus group)

Nevertheless, many users strongly dislike some elements of personalization: after all, one advantage of being online is that without the face to face contact, a user can be relatively anonymous. Moreover, some users are offended that e-commerce sites predict their likes and dislikes, feeling they are unique and their purchase history not particularly revealing of their preferences. They want the freedom to be an individual, not a market profile. Participants also complained that personalization can result in unwanted e-mail solicitations.

I think it's really presumptuous. Presumptuous? Well, some computer algorithm shouldn't know what I want to buy... Gee Willie, you might like these things too and then there's the whole list . . .I just don't like anyone or anything second guessing what I'd like or want to purchase. (Offline focus group)

It [personalization] gives me . . . that Big Brother feeling . . . [one site you deal with] is linked with other companies. It distributes your
Thus, consumers want to be in control of who knows them, what is known about them, and how the information is used to improve their experience. Nevertheless, even users who are negative about personalization in general tend to prefer that sites that store much of their information (except for perhaps their credit card) in order to make transactions quicker:

(Saving information] makes it easy and quick for sites you use a lot.
(Online focus group)

Consumers feel comfortable with this type of personalization when they have chosen to develop a relationship with an online company.

EXPERIENTIAL QUALITIES OF OFFLINE SHOPPING

Offline shopping is perceived by many participants to be more enjoyable than online shopping. Many of the experiential qualities of offline shopping contrast with the benefits of online shopping:

- Ambiance
- Positive sociality
- Impulse purchases
- Instant gratification
- Product assurance

We discuss how consumers compare online and offline shopping on each of these attributes below.

Ambiance

Offline buyers mention attributes related to ambiance, such as smells, sound, and people watching, which are associated with shopping and browsing, as fun and enjoyable elements of offline shopping. The tactile experience of touching products, particularly clothing items, appealed to focus group participants.
I go shopping in a mall and I feel the fabrics and I look at different colors. (Offline focus group)

I like walking into a store and being hit by the smell of new clothes. (Offline focus group)

You can actually see and feel things. Especially where quality counts. (Offline focus group)

Getting out of the house and getting some exercise are also mentioned as a benefit of offline shopping. In addition, consumers enjoy the store decorations that get them in the holiday spirit:

It's an experience just to get out of the house. I feel like I did something if I left the house. (Offline focus group)

People like to see ambience and then also the mood, like the holiday mood. (Offline focus group)

Sometimes there are interesting people; sometimes I'm just sitting down at the mall. (Offline focus group)

**Positive Sociality**

While participants generally agreed that sales help in retail stores is sadly lacking, and getting worse, they did admit to occasionally having satisfying interactions with salespeople who are knowledgeable and helpful.

Sometimes the interaction is good, you know in a Nordstrom environment and stuff like that, if you get good help and you can chat with somebody. I even like the make-up center. Where they’re actually looking at you. Does this color look good on me? (Offline focus group)

You can get the salesperson to advise you. (Offline focus group)

I also purchase beauty products offline… my Mary Kay dealer would have a fit if [I did] otherwise. (Online focus group)

By interacting with salespeople, relationships can develop and consumers find it easier to trust the bricks-and-mortar store accordingly. The faceless online retailer is more difficult to trust.

You get to know the store better. I think you can trust the people there. (Offline focus group)
Going to a store you know someone at that store who is helpful and friendly. (Offline focus group)

In addition to getting the opinion of a trusted salesperson, consumers like the idea of shopping with a "purchase pal" who can offer another opinion pre-purchase.

You can get an opinion before you buy... You can get a comparison. (Offline focus group)

Offline shopping is also viewed as more of a social event, entertainment for the whole family, or for groups of friends. No one gathers a group together around their computer when shopping!

Sometimes I do shopping with my husband and... I spend time with my family. (Offline focus group)

It's a social thing. You go with friends or meet up with someone and say, "Let's go shopping." (Offline focus group)

**Impulse Purchases**

Focus group participants indicated that they are much more likely to make impulse purchases when shopping offline than online. While the lack of impulse buying online is often viewed positively by online shoppers, they do enjoy coming across a product serendipitously when at a bricks and mortar store.

Do you buy impulsively? In the stores? Always. (Offline focus' group)

It's [online shopping] not the same as a retail store and say, oh that's neat, or that's on sale over there. (Offline focus group)

If I want to browse, I browse off line. (Offline focus group)

Online browsing can't match the 3D world. (Offline focus group)

Online [shopping sessions] are very planned; off line I think about it less. For me it will be easier to return an item to a physical store if I find it's not right; for online, I'd have to do mail to return. (Offline focus group)

The only thing is off line you always end up spending more money... in the mall, you look at something and say, "Oh, I think this is okay" and buy stuff you don't really need and then you come home and two days later, "I gotta go to return this." (Offline focus group)

Thus, consumers are more impulsive offline than online, and are much more open to alternatives they did not necessarily seek:
[You may find] a lovely substitute . . . You have a choice. (Offline focus group)

**Instant Gratification**

The major advantage of offline shopping over online shopping, according to the focus group participants, is the instant gratification you receive.

*I see it, I want it, I have to have it and I can walk out with it, if they will take my money.*

(Offline focus group)

*You get immediate gratification to buy their product.* (Offline focus group)

*If I have time I will buy it on-line, if I need it right now I go to the store.* (Online focus group)

There is no waiting for the product to be shipped, so the product itself can be experienced sooner than online shopping. When shopping in experiential mode, consumers want to treat themselves, and online shopping does not offer an immediate "treat" except in the case of software and music downloads.

**Product Assurance**

Many consumers feel that product representation online can be deceptive, whereas offline, "what you see is what you get." For example, color names such as "vapor" and "zinc" are obscure, and pictures and descriptions are often not adequate to fully know what the product looks like, much less how it performs. Thus, online consumers often express reluctance to buy without actually seeing the product.

*[Shopping in stores] let's you see what you want to buy.* (Offline focus group)

*You know what you're buying [in a retail store].* (Offline focus group)

*[You can see] the quality of an item [in the store].* (Offline focus group)

*I buy swords. I can't expect a high quality sword unless I've held it myself to decide what it is worth. So I don't spend as much money on-line for swords as I would of line.* (Online focus group)

Consumers see product representation on websites as informative in terms of specifications stated in text form, but agree that there is a long way to go in representing products virtually.
When Online Shopping is Experiential

The absence of the above factors online could mean that online shopping is less enjoyable for consumers and might change the focus of shopping from a browsing and buying based activity to transaction based activity. However, while some informants feel that browsing online is too effortful, and thus made mostly planned purchases online, other informants browse regularly. Our informants reported four types of browsing activity online:

1. auction activities

   Sure you can browse, in an auction site you type in a keyword (like 'art deco') and see what's interesting... (Online focus group)

2. ongoing hobby-type search

Several informants regularly visit sites to find new products that facilitated hobbies, interests or their career. These, sites regularly post new products that made it worthwhile for browsers to check relatively regularly.

   Yes, I'm a softwareguy, and its always interesting to see what the latest program will do, so I visit all kinds of software companies . . . I visit Apple almost every day. (Online focus group)

3. searching for and locating great deals

   [For browsing] I like 'buy.com' to see what deals they have. (Online focus group)

4. avoiding offline shopping

   I don't like malls, so consequently I use the Internet. I go to my stores, but I do it on the Internet rather than to malls . . . I check out the [online] stores like when people checkout the malls. I mean I enter my store, checkout the sales and end up buying and buying. (Offline focus group)

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Marketers recognize that shoppers tend to shop differently depending on whether or not their motivations for searching are primarily
experiential or goal directed (Babin, Darden and Griffin 1994; Holbrook and Gardner 1993; Webster, Trevino and Ryan 1993). While research on consumers on the Internet has focused on the involving nature of the medium (e.g., Hoffman and Novak 1996), our research goes further to suggest that, while online shopping is involving, most online shoppers are goal-oriented and not very experiential. Rather striking for us are the underlying consumer motivations for shopping online; consumers reported a sense of freedom and control, with the ease of finding information and ease of purchase being particularly important in their satisfaction with their overall online experience. Consistent with the goal-directed search of many consumers, manufacturers and retailers have expressed concerned about the limited "merchandising options" which allow consumers to avoid "marketing distractions" on the Internet (Burke 1997).

Utilitarian shopping has been described as task-oriented, efficient, and deliberate (Babin, Darden and Griffin 1993; Batra and Ahtola 1991). The Internet facilitates this task-orientation as search costs are dramatically reduced; in fact, Klein (1998) has argued that experience attributes of goods will increasingly be turned into search attributes via virtual experiences on the Internet. While search on the Internet can be non-linear (Hoffman and Novak 1996), many users, including many of our focus group participants, currently prefer to undertake efficient linear searches on the Internet using the fewest number of clicks to get to the information they want. Online information display has been shown to alter decision making by influencing decision heuristics (Widing and Talarzyk 1993). Moreover and perhaps more directly, website tools that help in sorting and screening product alternatives and information have been shown to have positive impact on consumer evaluations of a website, as well as higher consumer satisfaction with a purchased item and intentions to return to the website (Lynch and Ariely 1999). The comparison tools and information available on the Internet are important elements that contribute to user perceptions of freedom and control while shopping online.

Our focus group research sheds light on the notion of selection, as online buyers are impressed with the selection on the web as a whole, rather than the selection on individual websites. Moreover, convenience and accessibility are defined and explained by our online buyers in detail. As has been indicated by market research, ease of use and navigation are important to online buyers; however, we find that ease of use is balanced against unique selection and prices for users.
A majority of our focus group participants engage primarily in focused product search; however, some browse websites that feature products that facilitate an ongoing hobby, checked out prices regularly, or enjoyed the unique atmosphere offered by auctions, particularly eBay. In investigating ongoing, hobby-type search, Bloch, Sherrell and Ridgeway (1986) found that the hedonic nature of ongoing search was more process than outcome oriented. The higher playfulness associated with experiential behavior results in immediate subjective experiences such as positive mood and satisfaction (Csikszentmihalyi 1977, 1990; Levy 1983; McGrath and Kelly 1986; Webster, Trevino and Ryan 1993). These experiential behaviors are desirable for e-tailers as they are associated with increased impulsiveness and spending online (Babin, Darden and Griffen 1994).

Specifically with respect to shopping on the worldwide web, Hoffman and Novak (1996) speculate extensively on the role of experiential motivations cum flow. The authors compare experiential to goal-directed behavior, suggesting that experiential motives are more intrinsic, ritualized, more likely to represent enduring involvement, consist of hedonic benefits, and are more likely to be non-directed. Importantly, our research suggests that experiential features need to be implemented in a way that does not interfere, with the goal-directed orientation of most online buyers.

Finally, there are strong individual differences in responses to personalization efforts. While a segment of buyers appears to like features where product alternatives are suggested based on their past purchases (e.g., Amazon.com's "Buyers who bought this book also bought..."), another segment is offended by the idea that "they are what they buy." However, online buyers who did not like other elements of personalization nevertheless liked websites that saved information that speeded future transactions, as long as they had chosen to develop a continuing relationship with that site.

It is important that researchers recognize the different needs of consumers when they are shopping for experiential rather than goal-oriented motives. When querying consumers about their preferences for website features, the context for those preferences must be made explicit. Features important in one context (e.g., auctioning) will likely be annoying and viewed as negative in a different online context (e.g., buying an airplane ticket). Greater understanding of consumer perceptions of online purchasing is needed, from interaction on the website, to product delivery, to customer service.
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