



The emergence of Consumer Introspection Theory (CIT): Introduction to a *JBR* special issue

Stephen J. Gould*

Department of Marketing and International Business, One Bernard Baruch Way, Box B12-240, Baruch College, New York, NY 10010-5585, United States

ARTICLE INFO

Available online 3 March 2011

Keywords:

Introspection
Researcher introspection
Autoethnography
Consumer Introspection Theory (CIT)
Introspective thought exercises
Consumer Culture Theory (CCT)

ABSTRACT

Introspection in its various forms, names, paradigmatic controversies and especially its power for insight has earned its place as a topic for a special issue. Here, I introduce this issue in terms of the introspections it contains and introspect a bit myself mainly through introspective thought exercises. What I find grounded in the texts of the submitted papers as thematic data is an emergent (rebranded) perspective on introspection which I call, Consumer Introspection Theory (CIT). I relate CIT as a paradigm to different forms of research: Consumer Culture Theory (CCT), critical marketing and experimental research. I also further elaborate how it functions in terms of single versus multiple person introspection, autoethnography and other practice variations; narrative versus metacognitive introspection; grounded versus hypothesis-driven introspection and introspective thought exercises.

© 2011 Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

Much of consumer research has failed to describe many experiential aspects of my own consumer behavior, especially the everyday dynamics of my pervasive, self-perceived vital energy. (Gould, 1991, p. 194)

1. Introduction

This introductory quote represents the most important line I ever wrote (at least to me and perhaps the one that influenced me the most, a form of self-influence) was the first line in my JCR article applying introspection. As things have evolved and introspective and other work has been published that gap has been ameliorated somewhat, but the basic idea of it has not. There are still many things about my and our consumer and other behavior that remains opaque and unexplored. This special issue may be another step toward that amelioration and perhaps you as readers and participants can think about whether it achieves that goal now and over time. Many of the issues I discuss below arose in terms of the papers that came in for this issue as well as being part of the pre-existing Zeitgeist of this introspective project.

I view the issues as they have unfolded like a sort of blog over time in which many of us have laid out our ever changing perspectives. For instance I note that when I wrote my JCR article in 1991 I stated that I was 44. Now I'm 63 and have in that span of years popped up every so often with some new piece on introspection reflecting my own

intervening experiences as well as being informed by the introspections of many others. Paradoxically, if you will, the very personal and subjective introspections of various players have been hermeneutically driven over time by the very personal and subjective introspections of various other introspectors, something I have hoped might happen and which has as this issue illustrates. In some respects, this issue and my introduction in particular may be seen as meta-introspective, an introspection on introspection at this point in time (see also Patterson in this issue who has a slightly different though not unrelated version of meta-introspection).

Introspection has a long and storied, if checkered history in Western academic culture ranging across a variety of disciplines and under a variety of guises. Psychologists, sociologists, ethnographers, behavioral economists and of course, consumer researchers, among others have applied, disputed and otherwise engaged with introspection. We see so many forms including but not limited to introspection, researcher introspection, subjective personal introspection, reflexivity, self-reflexivity, introspectionism, autoethnography, auto-netnography, narrative introspection (also storied), metacognitive introspection, meditative introspection, systematic self-observation, self-experimentation, spiritual, and synthetic. I went back to my own recent writing about introspection (Gould, 2008a,b) and realize these names have continued to proliferate (and/or at least my awareness of them). Indeed, as I reflected about this in the course of editing this special issue, an important question I thought about with this arrival of all these forms is whether we are decreasing the impact of introspection through dilution or are we increasing its impact by deconstructing and extending its range or perhaps some of both?

In this regard and the pain of not mentioning all those who have influenced me in my framing and experience of introspection, including those who are not academics, I nonetheless want to thank a number of

* Tel.: +1 646 312 3279 (office); fax: +1 646 312 3271.

E-mail address: Stephen.Gould@baruch.cuny.edu.

people as it has evolved for me. First, I would like to thank Arch Woodside who writes about introspection himself (e.g., [Woodside, 2006](#)) and whose idea for this special *JBR* issue and my editing of it was. When people echo Newton in terms of standing on the shoulder of giants, I can say that Arch is one of those who saw potential in what I do that I did not see myself. And the list goes on. Leon Schiffman, my dissertation advisor, who did 'qualitative' work and introduced me to it long before its various interpretive, critical and CCT incarnations manifested. Sidney Levy is another giant figure who has set the stage for all of us introspectors and who continues to inspire me in just his very being. Elizabeth Hirschman was an early influence who encouraged me to do introspection in the first place. Around that time, Morris Holbrook was a great example to me as he has been to us all. Both of them separately and together further created a context for researching experiential consumption in general and introspection in particular. [Holbrook's \(1988\)](#) paper on his personal encounters with psychoanalysis and entitled in part, "I Am an Animal", had perhaps the most influence of all his work on me as I have wrestled with issues of mind, consciousness and personal experience. The late Barbara Stern whom I sorely miss was a tremendous colleague who supported and inspired me early in my career as I undertook this work. I would also like to thank another person upon whose shoulders, I have stood, Mark Tadajewski, for his insight in encouraging me to write about the genealogy of my introspective experience and also for framing it in a critical marketing perspective. I cannot overlook the influence of Stephen Brown on my continued introspective evolution and his novelistic–autobiographic approach in shaping introspective thought and in influencing me to push even more my own boundaries. In particular, I have been inspired to echo his out of the box approach involving his personal perspectives and in particular his ability to bring theatrics, fun and biting satire to both his writing and presentations. People can talk about experiential and lived experience, but Stephen makes it happen, makes it *alive*.

Thanks also to the authors and reviewers of this special issue. It has been an exhilarating experience putting this issue together and dealing with all the issues that have arisen? It is truly a contested, negotiated experience in going back and forth with the various actors and trying to come to resolutions if not agreements. Indeed, there are aspects of some the papers here that do necessarily not reflect my own positions and that in some cases I actually disagree with. Introspection is not one thing or understood by people in the same way. That is well to the point in a poststructuralist perspective in which everyone is a site of meaning. To the degree that we listen or mutually share experiences, we may mirror each other but this is by no means certain. An irony as I went through this process is that while I felt exhilarated in engaging with everyone involved, I also felt more solipsistic in the sense that my own view though not totally alien and certainly sharing much with the introspectors in this issue and elsewhere is nonetheless quite different, informed as it is by my adult life-long contemplative experience which both predates and co-evolved with my scholarly experience and training. I think one reason for this is what I have referred to in introspective versus extrospective terms. For the most part, most people are extrospective most of the time meaning they focus on the outside world around them. They see people, trees, objects and so on. They think about what they are going to do today and tomorrow in that outside world. But suppose they were to introspect or focus on their inner world of thought, feeling and sensation as though they were looking at trees and objects. In other words, explore and pay attention to your inner space in way similar to how you pay attention to your outer spaces. After some experience, deconstruct those spaces or perhaps better notice how they deconstruct themselves. What do you identify with?

2. The emergence of Consumer Introspection Theory (CIT)

In presenting this special issue, I will share my own take on introspection as it stands at the moment and situate the other papers

relative to that, to each other and to the broader fields of consumer research and other social science disciplines. Thus, I will not just list the papers in this issue and say what they are about but I will apply them as data to reach further meta-introspective understandings and insights. In many respects, this constitutes an emergent grounded theory and hermeneutical approach in that while I had a priori expectations I also have expectations about the unexpected. In that regard, my expectations about who would submit and what would be submitted are partially confirmed but a number of surprises emerged as well. For instance, while I expected single researchers introspecting, I was greatly surprised by the great number of researchers collaborating to report their joint introspective efforts. I realize that for the most part, I was surprised because I mostly tend to think of and do introspection in terms of doing it alone, as Barbara Olsen, Stephen Brown, Sidney Levy, Peter Earl and Seth Roberts, as well as Rob Kozinets and John Sherry in their poems, did in this issue.

However, several papers took a multiple researcher or person perspective, reflecting some of the early work by [Gould and Stinerock \(1992\)](#) who applied such a perspective and [Wallendorf and Brucks \(1993\)](#) who elaborated on this approach in a conceptual way. They all applied research introspection though with a hermeneutic reflecting each of their own views. In "Researchers' Introspection for Multi-Sited Ethnographers: A Xenoheteroglossic Autoethnography", Yuko Minowa, Luca Visconti and Pauline Maclaran and in "Sustainable Consumption: Introspecting across Multiple Lived Cultures", Catherine Banbury, Robert Stinerock and Saroja Subrahmanyam reflect on sustainable consumption by conjoining separate points of view. Amina Beji-Becheur, Nil Özçağlar-Toulouse and Sondes Zouaghi in "Ethnicity Introspected: Researchers in Search of their Identity" apply introspection to deconstructing ethnicity. Three papers vary the research role by having one researcher introspect and another one comment or at least contribute in the background (Amy Tiwskul and Chris Hackley "Postmodern Paradoxes in Thai-Asian Consumer Identity"; Markus Wohlfel and Susan Whelan "Saved!" By Jena Malone: An Introspective Study of a Consumer's Fan Relationship With a Film Actress") or in the case of Fiona Sussan, Richard Hall and Laurie Meamber, "Introspecting The Spiritual Nature of a Brand Divorce", two other researchers comment and help shape the work of the introspector. Others applied introspection or forms of it in studies of consumer informants: Anthony Patterson, "Social-Networkers of the World, Unite and Take Over: A Meta-Introspective Perspective on the Facebook Brand," and David Mick, Stephen Spiller and Anthony Baglioni in "A Systematic Self-Observation Study of Consumers' Conceptions of Practical Wisdom in Everyday Purchase Events."

As can be seen, I have tried to encourage a multiplicity of views and perspectives to be included. This is well reflected both in the papers and reviewers. The state of introspection may on the basis of this issue be seen to be alive and flourishing. Previously introspective work was scattered here and there although it is growing and evolving. This also drove the emergence of what I designate as Consumer Introspection Theory (CIT) as a possible organizing, meta-introspective paradigm. In organizing this thought here, I will provide some introspective reflections on how I construct what I see here. Because publishing in a linear order is required no matter how I might want to let things fall out I need to decide an order. There is no single sculpture in this unformed stone but many. I also want to look at this body of work and see if it tells us anything as a whole, by itself and relative to other work on introspection, not to mention Consumer Culture Theory (CCT; [Arnould and Thompson, 2005](#)), critical marketing and other research. This is a unique opportunity so let's see what we can do with it.

Much of what [Arnould and Thompson \(2005\)](#) said about Consumer Culture Theory applies here as well in that CIT is not one grand (meta)theory or reductionistic metanarrative but rather includes a variety of perspectives and practices that rely on some form of introspection or other. The touchstone of this CIT framework as embodied in this issue is shaped in one aspect in terms of who is

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/1018235>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/1018235>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)