



Leaving Pleasantville: Macro/micro, public/private, conscious/non-conscious, volitional/imposed, and permanent/ephemeral transformations beyond everyday life



Carol M. Megehee^{a,*}, Eunju Ko^{b,1}, Russell W. Belk^{c,2}

^a Coastal Carolina University, E. Craig Wall Sr. College of Business Administration, Department of Marketing, Hospitality, and Resort Tourism, P.O. Box 261954, Conway, SC 29528-6054 USA

^b Yonsei University, Department of Clothing and Textiles, College of Human Ecology, 262 Seongsanno, Seodaemun-gu, Samsung Hall 318, Seoul 120-749, Republic of Korea

^c Schulich School of Business, York University, Toronto, ON, Canada

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 1 November 2014

Received in revised form 1 April 2015

Accepted 1 June 2015

Available online 19 August 2015

Keywords:

Transformations

Micro/macro

Private/public

Volitional/imposed

Conscious/non-conscious

Ephemeral/permanent

ABSTRACT

Your first family pet! Your first kiss! Your first real job! Your first day of college! Your induction into whatever! Your first sale of a big idea! Certain transformations are with us forevermore while others are rather micro happenings that we soon are unable to recall. This special issue includes research into 32 different categories of transformations. The articles here are valuable for marketers and consumers. Understanding transformation processes contributes to marketers' ability to design and deliver offerings that are beneficial to customers and that consumers seek to experience. The introductory essay in the special issue proposes a five-dimensional framework for classifying transformation research, places each article in the special issue within the framework, and briefly introduces something unique and interesting about each article. Authors and reviewers participating in this special issue represent a diverse international group of scholars. Get ready! Reading this issue is going to transform you.

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1. Introduction

The planned scope of this special issue was to describe and explain micro and macro transformations of self beyond everyday life involving the dynamics of new thinking, buying, experiencing-doing, traveling, rebelling, witnessing, and socializing. The co-editors invited theory and field research studies relating to multiple dimensions of personal transformations, including individual and group, revocable versus irrevocable, public versus private, macro versus micro, conscious versus unconscious, automatic versus volitional, approved versus disapproved (by society, groups, and friends), viewed from a bystander perspective versus personal stance, and with positive versus negative outcomes.

Some examples of transformation presented in various forms include the following. The first example, a movie, *Pleasantville*, provides an emotional foundation for the special issue. In this movie, black-and-white is a metaphor for morality, conformity, and conventionality. As characters awaken to new realities through enlightenment (and "sin"), their perceptions of the world around them shift from black-and-white to color. Another example appears in a recent *Journal of Business Research* publication, in which Choi, Ko, and Megehee (2014)

examine the transformation of the central characters in the movie *Pretty Woman* as reflected in fashion changes undertaken by these characters.

Additional literature on and examples of transformations include Grant McCracken (2008) *Transformations: Identity Construction in Contemporary Culture*, Margaret Mead's (1928) classic anthropology book, *Coming of Age in Samoa*, and Tom Boellstorff's (2008) *Coming of Age in Second Life: An Anthropologist Explores the Virtually Human*. In "The Sacred and the Profane in Consumer Behavior," Belk, Wallendorf, and Sherry (1989, p. 1) explain, "Two processes at work in contemporary society are the secularization of religion and the sacralization of the secular. Consumer behavior shapes and reflects these [transformative] processes. For many, consumption has become a vehicle for experiencing the sacred. [The] article explores the ritual substratum of consumption and describes properties and manifestations of the sacred inherent in consumer behavior."

2. Transformation framework

To transform is to change. The transformation can be the process of changing, the change from beginning to ending state that results, or the totality of all of these structures and processes together. Lewin (1961) describes social change as a process of unfreezing, moving, and refreezing. However, transformations can and do take many forms in both structure and process.

The transformation framework proposals here capture five dimensions with two levels each. These dimensions are micro/macro, private/

* Corresponding author. Tel.: +1 843 349 2706; fax +1 843 349 2455.

E-mail addresses: cmegehee@coastal.edu (C.M. Megehee), ejko@yonsei.ac.kr (E. Ko), rbelk@schulich.yorku.ca (R.W. Belk).

¹ Tel.: +82 2 2123 3109; fax: +82 2 312 8554.

² Tel.: +1 426 736 2100x20852.

public, volitional/imposed, conscious/non-conscious, and ephemeral/permanent. Macro level transformations affect entire socio-cultural systems whereas micro level transformations take place at the individual (person or group) level. Whether a change takes place at a macro or micro level, public transformations are overt and observable, but private transformations are for internal consumption only. The individual unit or system may choose to undergo a change (volitional) or be forced to undergo a change (imposed) of which he/she/it/they may be aware of (conscious) or unaware (non-conscious). Finally, the temporal nature of transformations can range from transitory or short-lived (ephemeral) to long-lasting and extremely costly or impossible to undo (permanent), include the following terms, where the ~ symbol indicates “not”: macro (M) versus micro (~M), public (P) versus private (~P), conscious (C) versus non-conscious (~C), volitional (V) versus imposed (~V), and permanent (T) versus ephemeral (~T); the mid-level dot (“•”) symbolizes the Boolean logic “AND” condition. Examples of familiar transformations from everyday life help illustrate how the framework works. A haircut may be expressed as ~M•P•C•V•~T, that is, occurring at a micro, public, conscious, volitional, and ephemeral (temporally fleeting) level. In contrast to a haircut, a tattoo is usually M•P•C•V•T, representing a more macro and permanent change than a haircut. At another extreme, suppose a person undergoes a transformation after being slipped a drug in her drink. This transformation would be expressed as ~M•~P•~C•~V•~T, causing a private, non-conscious, non-volitional—and hopefully, temporary—change to the individual affected. The movie *Rebel without a Cause* expresses M•P•C•V•~T configuration in that teenage angst is macro, observable, non-volitional, and, as the title suggests, non-conscious for the rebel, as well as temporary—usually lasting 3–7 years. James Dean’s iconic death in early life (not in the movie) permanently personifies rebellion against parental and societal rules and gives credence to the usually temporary nature of such rebellions. Some of us do get stuck rebelling for lengthy periods of time, however, as Brick (played by Paul Newman) illustrates in the movie *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*.

Table 1 illustrates how the articles in this special issue fit into this transformation framework. Classification of each of these articles is open to multiple interpretations; the classification for each article here is for purposes of organization of the special issue. More than half of the articles deal with transformations that are public and volitional, likely reflecting the observability and report-ability of behaviors that are overt and chosen by the actor. In this issue, research on permanent transformations is introduced before research on ephemeral transformations with micro transformations following macro transformations within each classification.

The following sections introduce something unique and special about each article included in the special issue. These brief descriptions are merely a taste of what the reader will find in each article. Please refer to the full articles for details about the research.

3. Permanent macro transformations

Four papers are represented by the transformation type M•P•C•V•T. In “Pursuing upward transformation: The construction of a progressing self among dominated consumers,” Rodrigo B. Castilhos and Marcelo Jacques Fonseca show how lower-class consumers in Brazil increase their status by enrolling in a distance learning higher education program. Among other contributions of the research, the authors find that the students invest in their college educations through self-discipline, economic sacrifices, family support, and community building, and that these investments “produce an internally persuasive process of moral transformation in which students see themselves as selves-in-progress who are able to daydream and to make concrete plans for the future.”

Esi A. Elliot takes us into the craft world of the Pilsen Mexican community in Chicago in, “Craft consumption and consumer transformation in a trans-modern era.” Elliot’s study highlights the interplay of rational and spiritual dimensions of craft consumption that leads to consumer transformation and has implications for consumer co-creation and co-production for “cultural creatives.”

In “Mini miracles: Transformations of self from consumption of the Lourdes pilgrimage,” Leighanne Higgins and Kathy Hamilton take us through a 3 year ethnographic study of pilgrimages to Lourdes and introduce the concept of “mini-miracles”—miracles that are intensely personal and important to an individual’s life but that are not likely to be officially deemed to be miracles by the Catholic church. The authors shift focus from communal transformations to individually experienced transformations at pilgrimage sites and discuss how these transformations are attributed to factors beyond the individual.

In the fourth M•P•C•V•T article, “Transformation as reversion to Fitrah: Māori Muslim women’s narratives of self-transformation through reflexive consumption,” Djavlonbek Kadirov, Nilufar Allayarova, and Aisha Wood Boulanouar show how Māori women who convert to Islam take charge of their self-reflexivity to reduce risk and anxiety about the future. Conversion to Islam allows these women to avoid anxiety and helplessness that might otherwise lead to wasteful and harmful addictive behaviors.

The transformation type M•P•C•~V•T fits three articles. Tremendous personal and social transformations, many of which are beyond the control of any single individual, occur in the course of experiencing

Table 1
Transformation framework.

			Public (P)		Private (~P)	
			Volitional (V)	Imposed (~V)	Volitional (V)	Imposed (~V)
Permanent (T)	Macro (M)	Conscious (C)	1 Castilhos and Fonesca Elliot Higgins and Hamilton Kaduriv, Allayarova and Boulanouar	2 Al-Abdin, Dean and Nicholson Beudaert, Özçağlar-Toulouse and Türe Johns and English	3	4 Hollenbeck and Patrick
		Non-conscious (~C)	5	6 Gaviria	7	8 Masset and Decrop Parkinson, Gallegos and Russell-Bennett
	Micro (~M)	Conscious (C)	9 Hong and Vicdan	10	11	12
		Non-conscious (~C)	13 Halliday	14	15	16 Del Bucchia and Peñaloza
Ephemeral (~T)	Macro (M)	Conscious (C)	17 Chaney and Goulding Llamas and Thomsen Syrjälä	18	19	20
		Non-conscious (~C)	21 Ferreira and Scaraboto	22	23	24
	Micro (~M)	Conscious (C)	25 Bosangit and Demangeot Goulding and Saren Healy and Beverland Liu, Keeling and Hogg Ulusoy (Emre)	26 Ourahmoune	27 Seo Walther and Schouten	28
		Non-conscious (~C)	29 Ulusoy (Ebru)	30	31	32

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