



Contents lists available at ScienceDirect

Journal of Business Research



Becoming sensory disabled: Exploring self-transformation through rites of passage

Anthony Beudaert^{a,*}, Nil Özçağlar-Toulouse^a, Meltem Türe^b^a MERCUR, Université Lille-SKEMA Business School, 59000 Lille, France^b MERCUR, SKEMA Business School-Université Lille, 59000 Lille, France

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 1 October 2014

Received in revised form 1 May 2015

Accepted 1 May 2015

Available online xxxx

Keywords:

Identity

Normalcy

Sensory disability

Transformation

Vulnerability

ABSTRACT

Based on Van Gennep's framework of rites of passage, this research examines the self-transformation process of consumers who acquire a sensory disability. The analysis of 15 in-depth interviews reveals a complex three-stage process. With the onset of disability, individuals experience a forced withdrawal from their consumption activities. This withdrawal gives way to liminality of undetermined duration, nurtured by consumers' memories of the past, sufferings in the present, and fears of the future. Consumers achieve self-transformation by attributing new meanings to their consumption. These results have two contributions: (1) the liminal phase of the rite of passage has a multitemporal structure that might inhibit the formation of a new self and (2) redefining the boundaries of normalcy helps consumers achieve self-transformation.

© 2015 Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

Consumers with disabilities constitute a significant segment, representing the largest minority group in the United States with nearly 50 million individuals (Brault, 2012). Disability is an important context for "self-transformation" (McCracken, 2008) that often entails vulnerability and generates difficulties for consumers' everyday lives (Baker et al., 2002; Kaufman-Scarborough, 2000). However, the literature lacks the identity perspective in disability, falling short of explaining the influence of such life transition on identity or the role of consumption in this process.

Focusing on accessibility and barriers in the marketplace, existing research shows that stigmatization such as discriminatory behavior by in-store employees or the unreachability of goods on shelves hinders the participation of consumers with disabilities in the marketplace (Baker, 2006; Baker et al., 2002; Kaufman-Scarborough, 1999; Kaufman-Scarborough & Baker, 2005). Other studies find that new technologies (e.g., the Internet) can create both improvements and difficulties for consumers with disabilities (Childers & Kaufman-Scarborough, 2009; Kaufman-Scarborough & Childers, 2009). Few studies explore the impact of legislation (e.g., Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990) that prohibits discrimination against individuals with disabilities (Kaufman-Scarborough & Baker, 2005; Stephens & Bergman, 1995).

Yet, beyond stigma and accessibility, the literature neglects how consumption contributes to the self-transformation of consumers who acquire a disability. As disability occurs and bodies become "spectacles of otherness" (Garland-Thomson, 1997, p. 8), individuals experience an abnormal, unnatural, and illegitimate condition (Titchkosky &

Michalko, 2009) that makes them greatly vulnerable by putting their selves in jeopardy and making them feel out of control (Baker, Gentry, & Rittenburg, 2005). Especially when disability is visible, consumers try to decrease this vulnerability by avoiding the "critical gaze of others" (Pavia & Mason, 2014, p. 481). Adkins and Ozanne (2005) show, for instance, that consumers with low literacy act literate to deal with the shame of their inability to read. Thus, the felt vulnerability and consumers' efforts to deal with the loss of normalcy can be important for the self-transformation process following the onset of a disability. Taking into account vulnerability and normalcy, and using Van Gennep's (1960) theory of rites of passage, the present research explores consumers' self-transformation following the onset of sensory disability and the role of consumption in this process.

With the significance of senses for consumption and the popularity of sensory marketing, sensory disability is of specific interest. Sensory marketing has become a growing field of research (Krishna, 2012), supporting the assumption that consumers are endowed with their entire sensory capabilities. Retail environments are designed for consumers "sighted and visually attuned to labels, colors, lighting, point-of-purchase displays, point-of-sale information, and merchandising" (Baker, 2006, p. 38). Thus, there is still much to learn about how the personal rites of passage of consumers who acquire sensory disabilities shape their identity transformation (Schouten, 1991), and, consequently, their consumption.

Using the rites of passage as a theoretical lens and based on qualitative research, this study addresses two questions. What type of self-transformation process do consumers who acquire sensory disabilities go through? How does consumption play out in this self-transformation process? The results delineate the self-transformation of consumers who acquire sensory disabilities as a three-stage process and make two

* Corresponding author. Tel.: +33 6 03 17 11 40.

E-mail addresses: beudaert.anthony@gmail.com (A. Beudaert), nil.toulouse@univ-lille2.fr (N. Özçağlar-Toulouse), meltem.ture@skema.edu (M. Türe).

theoretical contributions: (1) the liminal phase of the rite of passage has a multi-temporal structure that might inhibit the formation of a new self and (2) redefining the boundaries of normalcy helps consumers achieve self-transformation.

The article begins with a review of the literature on consumer vulnerability, normalcy, and theory of rites of passage as a framework to understand self-transformation. The methodology section describes data collection and analysis. The findings section explains how informants experience their self-transformation. The final section discusses the theoretical and practical implications, limitations, and future research directions.

1. Theoretical background

This section first reviews vulnerability and normalcy broadly and as important aspects of consumers' experiences with disability, and ends with a discussion of Van Gennep's theory of rites of passage and the relevance of this framework in understanding the self-transformation process that accompanies the onset of a sensory disability.

1.1. Consumer vulnerability

Scholars describe vulnerable consumers as “more susceptible to economic, physical, or psychological harm in [...] economic transactions because of characteristics that limit their ability to maximize their utility and well-being” (Smith & Cooper-Martin, 1997, p. 4). Acquiring a disability, especially if sensory, can create a sense of vulnerability by limiting consumers' physical ability to enhance their well-being. Consumers with disabilities also suffer from stigma (Baker et al., 2002) and various obstacles in the marketplace (Kaufman-Scarborough, 1999), ranging from physical challenges (e.g., absence of Braille menus in restaurants) to employees' infantilizing behaviors (e.g., waiters communicating with sighted individuals while ignoring their blind companions). These external factors also create feelings of vulnerability through discrimination or repression (Hill, 1995; Peñalosa, 1995).

Two different views of vulnerability can be found in the disability literature. While the medical model of disability highlights impairment as the cause of vulnerability, the social model incriminates society and external conditions including discourses or language as the root of all evil (Barnes & Mercer, 2010; Shakespeare, 1998). The present research bridges these two views by using a rites of passage framework and approaching the self-transformation accompanying the loss of a sensory ability as both a social and an individual experience. Thus, this study regards vulnerability as multidimensional (Baker et al., 2005) and negotiates the “tendency within the social model of disability to deny the experience of our own bodies, insisting that our physical differences and restrictions are entirely socially created” (Morris, 1991, p. 10).

Recent research actually acknowledges the multi-dimensional view of vulnerability. For Baker et al. (2005), vulnerability is an interaction of individual characteristics (e.g., age, sex), individual states (e.g., divorce, grief) and external conditions (e.g., physical elements). Other studies show that consumers with disabilities experience vulnerability in various ways and respond differently to the marketplace (Baker & Mason, 2012; Baker et al., 2001). Vulnerability is therefore variable and contextual rather than a fixed state, and anyone can become vulnerable permanently or temporarily. For instance, losing a loved one disrupts one's life and the grieving individuals feel liminality which contributes to their vulnerability (Gentry et al., 1994). Natural disasters can also create a shared experience of vulnerability (Baker et al., 2007). Shultz and Holbrook (2009) find that vulnerability—especially if economic or cultural—can be reversible with “an alteration in resources, a shift in abilities, or any other circumstances” (p. 125). While these studies focus on time-limited vulnerabilities, a small number of studies show that vulnerability resulting from physical, cognitive and behavioral impairments can be complex, dynamic, and sometimes unresolvable (Pavia & Mason, 2014). Some authors have suggested that certain

forms of impairment remain disabling in spite of social improvements (French, 1993; Shakespeare, 2006). Extending this view, this study explores permanent loss of sensory abilities and the consequences of the felt vulnerability on consumers' identity transformation.

While being an important and, at times, inevitable experience for consumers with disabilities, vulnerability is not specific to disability. Conversely, disability cannot be reduced to a permanent state of vulnerability, as individuals with disabilities are not “necessarily vulnerable in all situations” and “actively work to reduce [vulnerability] in pursuit of getting their lives back to normal” (Baker et al., 2005, p. 7). As such, experiencing vulnerability might stimulate rather than constrain the self-transformation process following the onset of disability and goes hand in hand with the desire to achieve consumer normalcy.

1.2. Consumer normalcy

Goffman (1971, p. 239) defines normalcy as a state deemed natural with “nothing out of the ordinary.” The literature explores how normalcy can be disrupted or regained. For instance, Boaz and Morgan (2014) show that post-operative complications in kidney transplants can disrupt normalcy. Wong and King (2008) suggest that regaining normalcy might be difficult for women with breast cancer due to the future risks they face, although breast reconstruction operations might help decrease the perceived loss of femininity and restore normalcy.

Thus, the altered feeling of normalcy depends on the norms and current ideals of normalcy prevalent in the marketplace (James et al., 2011; Thompson & Hirschman, 1995) and how consumers perceive their previous selves. Missing from this view is a more complete understanding of self-transformation that involves consumers' (albeit altered) visions about their future selves.

To obtain normalcy, individuals with disabilities try to manage public interactions and develop a positive self-image (Goffman, 1959). Consumption can enhance perceived normalcy by reconstructing the disability as unimportant and “de-emphasizing its value” (Titchkosky & Michalko, 2009, p. 17). For instance, individuals with physical disabilities use adaptive sports to challenge biases and feel normal by socializing and feeling equal to others (Lundberg et al., 2011). Similarly, Internet shopping reinforces a sense of normalcy by decreasing perceived vulnerability (Elms & Tinson, 2012). These findings echo Baker's (2006) dimensions of normalcy: participating in the marketplace, achieving distinction, displaying competence, and being perceived as an equal. According to Baker, just being in the marketplace can help consumers with disabilities to achieve normalcy. For instance, families whose children have disabilities use public arenas of consumption (e.g., restaurants, Disney World) to mark their normalcy (Mason & Pavia, 2006).

Thus, consumer normalcy implies individuals' ability to maintain their participation in the current marketplace and show that they are still able to play their roles as consumers. Yet, consumer research lacks a theoretical understanding of the relationship between self-transformation, normalcy, and vulnerability for consumers with acquired disabilities, and the role of consumption in this relationship.

1.3. Rites of passage as a framework to understand self-transformation

Van Gennep (1960) describes rites of passage in three phases: (1) the pre-liminal phase (separation), wherein the individual separates from a social status; (2) the liminal phase (transition), wherein the individual has yet to acquire a new one; (3) the post-liminal phase (re-aggregation), wherein the individual reintegrates into society with a new status. Consumer researchers use these rites of passage to decipher the self-transformation process accompanying life transitions. Focusing on tweens' consumption, Cody (2012) finds the transition from childhood to adolescence ambiguous. Also, Gentina et al. (2012) show that teenage girls use makeup as a ritual to move towards adulthood. Mehta and Belk (1991) suggest that losing identity-relevant

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/10492942>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/10492942>

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