



Identity (Re)construction through sharing: A study of mother and teenage daughter dyads in France and Japan



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ABSTRACT

We use the transitional and liminal stage when daughters enter adolescence to investigate how sharing practices within families are employed as a resource in identity work. We show the importance of “sharing in” within some French dyads, as a means for discovering new life projects and for rediscovering past identity projects driven by self-expressive motivations. In contrast, Japanese dyads are often reluctant to share personal possessions (sharing out) in order to maintain hierarchical relationships (affiliation motivations) and remain fashionably up-to-date (self-expressive motivations) in their identity work, and in their drive to maintain and prolong their mothering role. In order to better target adolescent girls’ mothers, retailers could develop more clothing appeals based on inter-generational approaches in France and intra-generational approaches in Japan.

1. Introduction

We know that teenage daughters influence their mothers’ clothing consumption behavior, telling them which fashion clothes to buy for example – that’s not new. But teenage girls don’t just socialize their mother, they also affect the fashion products mothers consume for themselves which affect their own identity (New-York Times 2011¹).

Mothers and their teenage daughter are the targets of a vast body of information about the nature of their relationship and common consumption activities. Press,² books,³ and even movies depict the specificities of mother - teenage daughter relationships and their clothes sharing practices. Specifically, some retailers observe that many mothers follow their teenage daughters’ clothing styles such that mothers and daughters often share clothes with each other (New-York Times, 2011). Thus, retailers recognize the benefits of targeting both mothers and their teenage daughters. In France, for example, women between 35 and 60 years old spend an average of over 65€ on clothing each month compared with adolescent daughters who spend an average of €72. However, the world’s most avid clothing shoppers are probably Asian women shoppers. Japanese women spend an average of 56€ per day on clothing (more than 220€ per month) (Institut Française de la

Mode, 2015). Mothers and their teenage daughters thus represent some of the most important spenders of discretionary income on clothing items in the world. From a theoretical perspective, why do mothers engage in clothes sharing practices with their teenage daughter(s)? What identity mechanisms underlie mothers and teenage daughters’ motivations to adopt such clothes sharing practices?

Sharing is defined as “the act and process of distributing what is ours to others for their use and/or the act or process of receiving or taking something from others for our use (Belk, 2007, p. 126)”. Research has identified that the willingness to share is affected by different factors: self-construal (desire to help others and reduce one’s own worries) (Smidts et al., 2013), the strong relationship between family members (Belk, 2010), the reported closeness of family members (Belk and Llamas, 2011a, 2011b), and the similarity between the borrower – e.g. the mother - and the sharing target – e.g. the teenage daughter (Gentina et al., 2013a). Although the research documenting different determinants of sharing practices is critical for understanding the scope of the problem, we argue that it is limited in its ability to provide information on the underlying identity mechanisms that influence sharing practices between mothers and their teenage daughters.

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¹ “You’re not going out in that... why mums now dress like their daughters” (New-York Times, July 2011); Available on: <http://www.independent.co.uk/life-style/fashion/news/youre-not-going-out-in-that-why-mums-now-dress-like-their-daughters-2325935.html>

² “Meet the mums who wear their daughters’ clothes” (Mail Online, May 2015); “Sharing clothes with your teenage daughter” (Professor’s House, March 2015); “Sharing clothes with your kid: cute or creepy?” (Parents, January 2015)

³ The 2009 book from Sherrie Mathieson, “*Steal This Style: Moms and Daughters Swap Wardrobe Secrets*,” examines mother and daughter style sharing.

First, previous research assumed that the consumer needs to possess the object, and that possession plays a key role in identity construction for individuals who go through identity transitions (Schouten, 1991). However, prior studies fail to consider how the identity (re)construction framework might relate to sharing practices within the family (Gentina et al., 2013a). Second, much if not most research on sharing within the family has focused on either the parent – the mother (Gentina et al., 2013a) – or the teenager (Gentina and Fosse-Gomez, 2012). Our study examines dyadic relationships, both the mother and her teenage daughter, around sharing in families. Third, most of research on sharing has focused primarily on individual consumers in single national contexts e.g. the United States (Bardhi and Eckhart, 2012; Lamberton and Rose, 2012), Canada (Scaraboto, 2015), New Zealand (Ozanne and Ozanne, 2011), France (Gentina et al., 2015), and England (Tinson and Nuttall, 2007). However, few studies have examined sharing practices in families in different cultural contexts (Gentina et al., 2013b). Our data are drawn from two different cultural contexts – Japan, which is a highly collectivistic culture which views the self as embedded in group memberships; and France, which is an individualistic culture, which views the self as a unique entity (Hofstede, 2001; Triandis, 1995).

Our research addresses these gaps identified above. Using an interpretive approach, we show that sharing may serve as part of the identity (re)construction practices within families, and more specifically within teenage daughter and mother dyads who are going through periods of change. We examine how different practices of sharing evolve in families as both mothers and teenage daughters (re)construct their sense of self during periods of change. Specifically, the entry of the daughter into adolescence is a significant period of identity transition for both mothers and daughters. For women, for instance, this can be a time of transformation as they move from a status that is the often largely family centred as “mothers” into almost a revived status as “women” with a greater focus on life beyond the family setting. This article considers how the different forms of sharing (sharing in vs. sharing out) relate to different identity motivations (self-expression vs. affiliation) for French and Japanese dyads, during the transitional, liminal stage as the daughters enter adolescence. In some senses, this involves a period of identity renaissance for the mothers. In essence, these women are now starting to move away from lives dominated by mothering imagery and back towards a more publicly defined feminine role, which they would have experienced before they started their families. We use the identity motivations identified by Schau, self-expression and affiliation et al. (2009) as the basis for a two-dimensional theoretical framework in order to map the identity mechanisms that underlie sharing practices between mothers and their teenage daughters during the liminal processes of identity renaissance for mothers; and of identity transition for daughters.

2. Theoretical background

2.1. An identity perspective: becoming an adolescent

The notion of liminality refers to the ambiguity of a transitional life stage that individuals experience. They are in the transition from one role to another (Noble and Walker, 1997). Adolescence is a major liminal period which corresponds to identity construction (Cody, 2012), involving many physical, psychological and emotional changes along with intellectual development. Adolescents, who often go through a liminal period as they transition from childhood to adulthood, need ownership and other consumption practices to help them transition from the state of being a child to their new state as an adult. This period in family life – adolescence – can represent important opportunities (and challenges) in identity work not only for young teenagers (Erikson, 1968) but also for their mothers (e.g. (re)construction of identity (Decoopman et al., 2010)). Like other important events in family life – the transition to motherhood or empty nesting (Banister et al., 2010) –

the entry of a child into adolescence is also an important event in mothers’ lives, which may generate for mothers a variation on the “empty nesting syndrome” (Decoopman et al., 2010), because adolescent daughters establish their personal identity, separate from mothers, while seeking a certain level of attachment. The feelings akin to those associated with empty nest transition lead mothers to re-define their relationships with their adolescent daughters. Mothers seek alternative activities in order to feel closer to their adolescent daughters by sharing intimate and privileged moments together (Henwood, 1993). Moreover, because the teenage daughter ultimately will become a woman, her entry into adolescence may provoke a sense of self-loss for her mother (Ruebush, 1994). The adolescent daughter projects a new image of femininity as she becomes a woman. Mothers, in turn, cope with the progressive loss of their maternal identity (reproduction, child care), and redefine themselves by reworking and seeking to reclaim their own femininity (Henwood, 1993; Gentina et al., 2013b). Therefore, as role identity theories predict, a daughter’s entry into adolescence should provide a significant opportunity for metamorphosis for her mother.

When identity undergoes strong challenges during transitions, consumption often helps people cope with their adoption of a new or different role (Schouten, 1991). Clothing consumption is a particularly topical issue for mothers and their adolescent daughters because clothes are important symbolic representations of identity both during adolescence (Piacentini, 2010) and also during adult life transitions (Decoopman et al., 2010). Adolescence in family life is the empirical context for this study, with a focus on sharing clothes, more particularly publicly consumed clothes (e.g., tops, pullovers, cardigans, vests, dresses/skirts, trousers and clothing accessories). We examine the interrelationship between sharing practices and mothers’ and teenage daughters’ identity work.

2.2. Sharing practices in Japan and France

Sharing is a social practice which involves some degree of exchange (Habibi et al., 2016; Scaraboto, 2015). Unlike economic exchanges which carry obligations of balanced reciprocity (Bagozzi, 1975), sharing is described as unselfish, non-reciprocal, personal and generous, and involves love and caring (Belk, 2010). Parental socialization practices contribute decisively to the formation of different sharing practices.

Socialization is an inherently cultural process in which “children, through insight, training and imitation, acquire the habits and values congruent with adaptation to their culture” (Baumrind, 1980, p. 640). The socialization goal of Western cultures, such as France, is to promote an individual sense of identity, assertiveness, autonomy (Triandis, 1995), and verbal expression and to establish skills (Rose et al., 2002). French parents encourage adolescents to make decisions for themselves on a variety of issues, including consumer choices in shopping, life decisions such as the choice of a boy/girlfriend, marriage, and career. On this basis, French teenagers enjoy more autonomy and are well-prepared to make their own decisions with less reference to family expectations (Gentina, 2008). In contrast, Eastern cultures, such as Japan, emphasize the strongly interdependent nature of mother-teenage daughter relationships. Japanese mothers encourage consideration for others, strong family attachments and the desire to please the family (Hess et al., 1980). “Doi, p 132 (1962) believes “*amae*” – a highly interdependent and indulgent relationship that encourages dependence on others – is a key to understanding relationships between Japanese parents and their children” (Rose, 1999, p. 806). Japanese parents foster respect for parental authority and obedience to seniors (Sakashita and Kimura, 2011). Thus, Japanese teenagers are not encouraged to make their own decisions regarding their life events. For instance, according to Confucian teaching, it is immoral for adolescents to choose a mate or decide a career path without getting prior consent from their parents (Yang and Laroche, 2011, p. 982).

Different parental socialization practices between Western and

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