# PSYCHOLOGY MISCELLANY

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# 1. MODERN CAPITALISMS AND CONSUMPTION AND RATIONAL THINKING

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Financial risk has always been at the heart of capitalism, but a "moral" distinction was made with gambling. "Over a generation, gambling, in its marked form, has changed moral valence and invaded everyday life across the world. It has been routinised in a widespread infatuation with, and popular participation in, high-risk dealings in stocks, bonds, and funds whose fortunes are governed largely by chance. It also expresses itself in a fascination with 'futures' and their downmarket counterpart, the lottery" (Comaroff and Comaroff 2000 pp295-296) (appendix 1A). This has been called "casino capitalism" (Strange 1986), (or I would use the term "leech capitalism" [1]). It is an attempt to have "capitalism sans production" (ie: capital autonomous of labour), with "consumption as the prime source of value" (Comaroff and Comaroff 2000) [2].

Comaroff and Comaroff (2000) referred to "occult capitalism" or "occult economies" to describe money-making schemes that are based on "irrational" beliefs rather than any rational foundations for investment. "These economies have two dimensions: a material aspect founded on the effort to conjure wealth — or to account

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[1] "Leech capitalism" refers the presence of "middlemen" who add themselves as an extra layer in order to take a profit without really adding anything. For example, a company buying the media rights to a sporting event will the sole purpose of selling them to broadcasters etc. Such a company saves the sport's governing body from having to negotiate with broadcasters, but this service is limited compared to the profit made, particularly if other middlemen appear in individual countries. So worldwide rights owner sells to individual country rights owner, who sell to broadcaster. The world could easily live without these middlemen in "leech capitalism".

"Leech capitalism" also covers individuals trying to make profit without the traditional entrepreneurial risk that justified such profit. For example, trading on "futures" where the trader does not put any money upfront. They buy the future crop, for example, on paper, and then immediately sell it for a profit. The profit is the only "real" money in the deal.

[2] A form of "disindustrialisation".

for its accumulation — by appeal to techniques that defy explanation in the conventional terms of practical reason; and an ethical aspect grounded in the moral discourses and (re)actions sparked by the (real or imagined) production of value through such 'magical' means" (p310). For example, seeking fortune-tellers to know if a business will succeed.

The gambling and occult come together in pyramid schemes, get-rich-quick schemes, and the like, which are aided by the growth of the Internet. One pyramid scheme in Albania in the 1990s, for example, was managed by "a gypsy fortune teller... who claimed to know the future" ("New York Times" 29 January 1997; quoted in Comaroff and Comaroff 2000). While in the USA, John Bennett created the Foundation for New Era Philanthropy "to change the world for the glory of God". Over $300 million were invested by religious organisations among many in response to the promise of doubling the money in six months. Bennett was subsequently imprisoned for 12 years for embezzling the money ("Chicago Tribune" 23 September 1997; quoted in Comaroff and Comaroff 2000).

"All of these things have a single common denominator: the allure of accruing wealth from nothing. In this respect, they are born of the same animating spirit as casino capitalism; indeed, perhaps they are casino capitalism for those who lack the fiscal or cultural capital — or who, for one or another reason, are reluctant — to gamble on more conventional markets. Like the cunning that made straw into gold..., these alchemic techniques defy reason in promising unnaturally large profits — to yield wealth without production, value without effort" (Comaroff and Comaroff 2000 pp313-314).

Capitalism at the end of the 20th century and the beginning of the 21st century ("millennial capitalism"; Comaroff and Comaroff 2000) is one of contradiction fusing "the modern and the post-modern, hope and hopelessness, utility and futility, the world created in its image presents itself as a mass of contradictions: as a world, simultaneously, of possibility and impossibility" (Comaroff and Comaroff 2000 p315). Around the world many individuals are shut out from acquiring wealth because of the structure of the world economy and of class systems in different countries (the sense of impossibility). While the sense of possibility is created by "occult economies", as the lottery advertisement says: "It could be you". This is a further contradiction in that it could be you winning, but it is more likely not to be. "To be sure, occult economies frequently have this bipolar character: At one level, they consist in the constant quest for new, magical means for otherwise unattainable ends; at another, they vocalise a desire to sanction, even eradicate, people held to have accumulated assets by those very means" (Comaroff and Comaroff 2000

p316).

It could be argued that most people wanting to become rich are not using "occult" practices, certainly in the "rational" West. But the magical way of thinking is there, whether it is trusting in the "invisible hand of the market" to control the economy, or paying an Internet "guru" to help you become an Internet millionaire. Often their advice is to find your own devotees who will pay you as their teacher/guru.

### 1.1.1. Identity and Meaning

Hall (2012) observed that "vast amounts of effort and money were invested in an advertising industry whose task was to place before the individual a spectacular and unending procession of fashions as pegs on which new but effortlessly disposable identities could be hung" (p375) [3]. But consumer capitalism tries to provide more than just identity, it wants to give meaning to everything. "Consumer capitalism, having learnt its techniques of imagery from past religious ideologies, takes advantage of the inescapable ontological fact that the proto-subject is universally characterised by flexibility, tension, lack and anxiety in its material substance and thus needs above all else to enter a cohesive symbolic order. If the two alternative paths away from the terror of the infant's original condition of helplessness are the stupid solipsistic comfort of primary narcissism or the risky identification of the split ego with alienating external signs, merging the two and producing political and subjective inertia alongside an economically powerful illusion of freedom and proliferating enjoyment has been consumer capitalism's most stunning triumph in the twentieth century..." (Hall 2012 p379).

What distinguishes consumer capitalism (or consumerism [4] generally) is "the desire and ability to

[3] Augoustinos (1999) adapted the Marxist idea of "false consciousness" for the modern world. Wetherell (1999) explained: "False consciousness, in her view, does not mean illusory perception or mistaken information processing but refers instead to a collective and discursive (rather than individual and cognitive) response to the real mystifications and distortions found in late-capitalist societies. It is not that people are seeing the world wrongly, and making thinking errors, it is rather that their seeing is guided by ideologies which plausibly make sense of mystifying appearances. Capitalism conceals what it is really like in a smoke screen of distortions; people accurately and collectively pick up on these distortions in their sense-making, but their understanding is false because it is based on distortions" (p403).
[4] Zhao and Belk (2008) defined consumerism as "a belief and value system in which consumption and acquisition rituals (eg: shopping) are naturalised as sources of self-identity and meaning in life, goods are avidly desired for non-utilitarian reasons such as envy provocation and status seeking, and

live beyond basic needs" (Moxon 2011). Consumerism generally can be traced back to the 16th and 17th centuries in the UK with the "commercial revolution" (Moxon 2011).

Possibly distinct today is a "culture of consumption" "where 'the dominant values of society' derive from 'the activity of consumption' (Hayward 2004 p144. Existence now seems to be dominated by advertising, marketing, mass consumption, and the stylisation of social life (ibid)... In such a world everything becomes a consumer item, even education and knowledge itself, and consumption becomes the key form of social expression..." (Moxon 2011).

Moxon (2011) applied this idea to the "riots" in the UK in August 2011, and in particular to the looting. Thus, "looting by those who are relatively socially deprived is not just a response to their relative deprivation and exclusion. It is also a consequence of their thorough inclusion in the consumerist dream. Thus, it has been argued that the looting during August represented 'envy masked as triumphant carnival' (Zizek 2011), envy of the celebrities and footballers who consume so conspicuously and publicly, but whose power to consume is unavailable to the bulk of us. The momentary overcoming of structural impediments to consumption is evidence of the free market economy working precisely as it should, what Sumner (2011) calls 'opportunistic materialism'; he suggests that when uncompromising individualism is valued so highly and state regulation of big business is seen as anathema, we should scarcely be surprised when 'Thatcher's babies' behave like 'aggressive entrepreneurs with scant regard for law' (ibid)...

The looters were attempting to acquire material products, but, more than this, they were also trying to consolidate or even better their place in the symbolic order, just as the conventional shopper does. Theirs was no rebellion against consumerism. Instead, it was an attempt to join in..." (Moxon 2011) [5].

consuming replaces producing as a key determinant of social relations" (quoted in Swim et al 2011).

[5] The reaction of Government to this behaviour can be summarised in Hall's (2012) observation: "Mobilising the 'politics of fear' to stir up panic, hatred and the required form of aggressive or punitive reaction amongst the community is an ancient and venerable psychopolitical technique, but it's not the only one. Because the principal objective is collective conatus rather than a permanent state of alert, the community's ruling elite does not wish persistently to stir up fear, which in the long-term would be disruptive and delegitimising, perhaps even fatal to the continuity of the elite's ideological community itself; best not to 'cry wolf' too often. It's also possible that the 'politics of fear' is a misnomer, and far more effective in this political game is objectless anxiety, the maintenance of a vague undercurrent of unsymbolised apprehension in which almost any object of fear, internal or external, can be manufactured to suit specific circumstances and political objectives" (p366).

## 1.2. CONSUMPTION AND STATUS

"Conspicuous consumption" is a term coined by Thorstein Veblen in the nineteenth century to describe the acquisition and display of possessions in order to gain social status ("position gains"). There is evidence that low-income households spend a larger proportion of their budget on "status-enhancing consumption" to "keep up with the Joneses" (ie: "to reduce the dissatisfaction they feel with their current level of possessions due to the widening gap between what they have and what others have"; Ordabayeva and Chandon 2011). "Keeping up with the Joneses" is motivated by social comparison with others, particularly with those above, and the drive to achieve the same level of possessions as these individuals. A form of "social envy" (Ordabayeva and Chandon 2011).

Rucker and Galinsky (2008) used the term, "compensatory consumption" in their research. In their first experiment, the researchers manipulated the feeling of power of sixty-one undergraduates at Northwestern University, USA, before the participants bid for different products. Participants were asked to think of a high-power or low-power situation, or a visit to the grocery store (control). For example, the instructions given for the low-power condition: "Please recall a particular incident in which someone else had power over you. By power, we mean a situation in which someone had control over your ability to get something you wanted, or was in a position to evaluate you. Please describe this situation in which you did not have power — what happened, how you felt, etc" (Rucker and Galinsky 2008 p260). The products offered for bidding were high-status (eg: silk tie, fur coat) or low-status (eg: ballpoint pen). The willingness to pay (WTP) was measured on a twelve-point scale.
Participants were willing to pay significantly more for high-status products in the low-power condition than the high-power one (mean: 4.47 vs 3.42). This experiment used different products in the high- and low-status conditions.

Experiment 2 used the same product (a framed picture) presented as high-status (limited-edition) or low-status (mass-produced). The 127 undergraduates experienced the manipulation of power as before. The participants in the low-power condition were willing to bid significantly more for the high-status version than the control and high-power conditions (table 1.1), but there was no different for the low-status version.

|            | Low-power | High-power | Control | All   |
|------------|-----------|------------|---------|-------|
| High-status | 72.38   | 47.86      | 40.55   | 53.39 |
| Low-status  | 24.65   | 23.79      | 26.52   | 25.02 |
| All         | 47.43   | 36.42      | 33.70   |       |

Table 1.1 - Mean bids ($) for picture.


The final experiment compared the willingness to pay of 65 more undergraduates for a gold executive pen with a prestigious university seal in the low-power and control conditions. The product was one with obvious high-status associations. The participants in the low-power condition were willing to bid significantly more than the control group (mean: $14.82 vs $8.51). Individuals who reported seeing the item as enhancing their power were willing to bid more in both conditions.
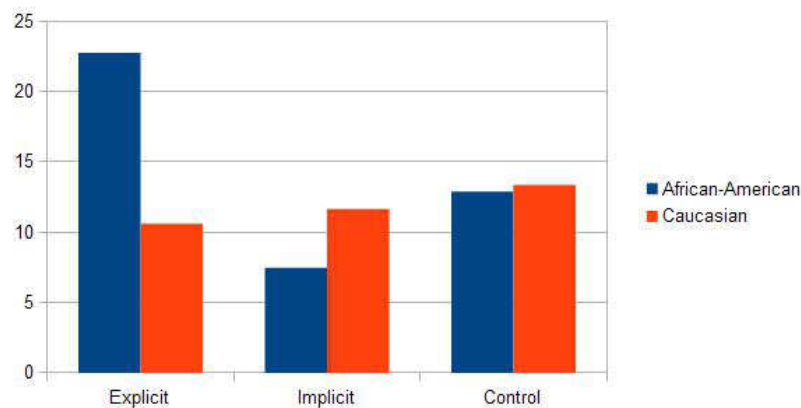

## 1.2.1. Ivanic et al (2011)

Ivanic et al (2011) provided evidence that African-Americans, who feel lower status, not only purchase more high-status products, but have a WTP more money for them. The researchers noted: "Spending money engenders feelings of equality because money begets respect from other people" (pp1557-1558).

In their first study, Ivanic et al (2011) recruited 113 African-American and Caucasian participants at a shopping centre in Los Angeles. In an independent design, participants were asked to think about differences between White and African-Americans on ten behaviours (explicit condition), to think about their behaviour in relation to ten stereotypical African-American behaviours (eg: low performance on an academic test) (implicit condition), or think about LA residents compared to other Californians on ten behaviours (control condition). Then all participants were asked how much they would pay for a pair of luxury headphones.

In the control condition, where race and status were not used, there was no difference in the mean bids between African-American and Caucasian participants. But in the explicit condition, which emphasised race and status, the African-American participants offered significantly more than Caucasians in the same condition, and all participants in the implicit condition (figure 1.1). Ivanic et al (2011) observed: "The data suggest that when the concept of race is explicitly activated, African-Americans become sensitised to stereotypes of being poor and inferior, and hence increase their WTP in what we argue is an attempt to assert their status. Conversely, these stereotypes and related behaviours are

so ingrained that implicit activation of the concept of race leads African-Americans to decrease their WTP, as they do not feel a need to assert their status" (p1559).
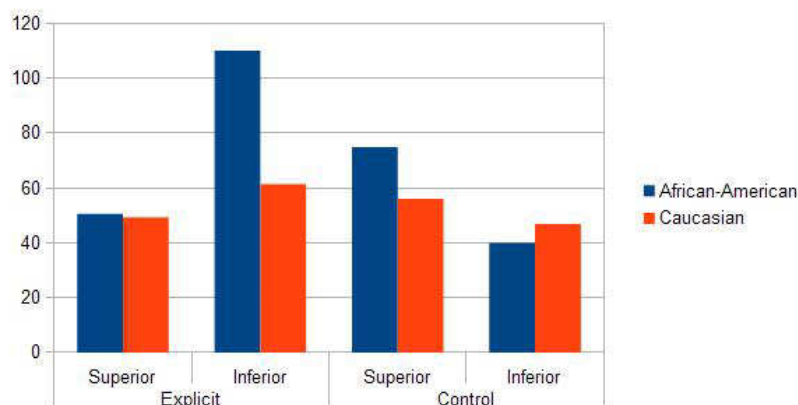


(Data from Ivanic et al 2011 table 1 p1559)

Figure 1.1 - Mean amount offered for headphones.


Study 2 took place online, and involved planning a vacation from the packages presented. The amount that an individual was willing to pay for a room or flight upgrade was used as the measure of WTP for high-status products. Participants were made aware of race as in the explicit and implicit conditions of Study 1 before the planning exercise. In the explicit condition, African-American participants had a WTP significantly more for the upgrades than Caucasian participants.

Study 3 developed the previous study using the same holiday planning exercise online. But this time two variables were manipulated - race and status threat. The former involved the explicit and control conditions from Study 1. The latter involved reading about a shopping experience where the consumer was treated badly by the staff (eg: brushed aside while other customers were served) (inferior condition) or given special treatment (superior condition). African-American participants in the explicit/inferior condition had a WTP the most for the room upgrade (figure 1.2).
Ivanic et al (2011) argued that the WTP more by African-Americans to fight against the stereotype of being poor (low-status) may encourage the system where discrimination occurs (ie: African-Americans can be changed more for home loads, for example). The WTP more can "reinforce an unjust hierarchy" (p1565).

(Data from Ivanic et al 2011 table 3 p1565)

Figure 1.2 - Mean amount offered for room upgrade in Study 3.


## 1.2.2. Ordabayeva and Chandon (2011)

Ordabayeva and Chandon (2011) showed in a series of experiments that income equality produces more status-enhancing consumption by low-income individuals than income inequality in certain circumstances. Where the focus of equality is upon a narrower "possession gap" between low-income individuals and the majority of people, consumption is reduced, but when the focus is upon the "position gains", consumption increases. In other words, equality reduces consumption when individuals do not seek status, but increases it when they do seek status.

In Study 1, Ordabayeva and Chandon (2011) described a neighbourhood with differing amounts of flowers in the gardens (used as the indicator of social status). Participants were told about the number of houses in five tiers (from no flowers to seven or more flower bushes), and this was varied between a high-equality and a low-equality condition. In the former, the majority of gardens were in the second to bottom tier (one or two flower bushes), while in the low-equality condition more gardens were in the top two tiers [6]. Participants were asked whether a home-owner with no flowers (implicitly presented as low-income) should spend money to buy three flower bushes or save the money using a nine-point scale (1 = "definitely save" to 9 = "definitely spend"). It was predicted that focus on the "position gains" would lead

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[6] Low-equality condition - 10% of gardens in tier one (no flowers), 20% tier 2, 20% tier 3, 25% tier 4, and 25% tier 5. High-equality condition - 10% (tier 1), 40%, 20%, 20%, and 10% (tier 5) respectively.

to a recommendation to buy in the high-equality condition.

Among 73 participants in Europe, the mean in the high-equality condition was 6.9 and 5.9 in the low-equality condition. So, where equality was greater, participants recommended spending on the flowers.

In Study 2, participants [7] were asked to choose a wedding gift for a classmate from five tiers increasing in cost. The level of equality was manipulated by a fake distribution of what other guests were choosing (similar to Study 1). Before the decision, participants' focus was manipulated to concentrate on the "possession gap" (by thinking about the pros and cons of the cheapest and middle tier gifts) or the "position gains" (by thinking about how many guests would be above or below them if they chose the middle-tier gift).

When focusing on the "position gain", participants were willing to spend more on a gift in the high-equality than the low-equality condition, but the opposite when focusing on the "possession gap" (table 1.2).

|  | HIGH-EQUALITY | LOW-EQUALITY |
|---|---|---|
| "Possession gap" | 4.3 | 5.4 |
| "Position gains" | 5.4 | 4.4 |

(Data source: Ordabayeva and Chandon 2011 figure 2 p34)

Table 1.2 - Mean preference for gift (where 1 = lowest cost gift and 9 = highest).

In Study 3, the researchers used scenarios about flowers in the gardens, home decoration, and type of clothing. In each case, a choice was given between purchasing a status-enhancing product (eg: brand name clothes) or a status-neutral one (eg: particular fabric of scarf) in either a high- or low-equality situation. There was a significantly greater willingness to recommend that the low-income consumers bought the status-enhancing product over the status-neutral one in the high-equality condition (mean: 7.3 vs 6.0 out of 9), but the opposite in the low-equality condition (mean: 6.4 vs 7.1).

In the next experiment (Study 4), Ordabayeva and Chandon (2011) manipulated the focus on social competition and comparison by reading statements (eg: "success is a relative concept") or social indifference

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[7] 214 adults "outside a large urban university campus" in Europe.

(eg: "true happiness comes from within") before presenting a scenario of dinner with co-workers, and whether a low-income employee should go to an expensive or inexpensive restaurant. Participants recommended the expensive restaurant in the social comparison/high-equality condition (table 1.3).

|  | SOCIAL COMPARISON | SOCIAL INDIFFERENCE |
|---|---|---|
| Low-equality | 4.4 | 5.3 |
| High-equality | 6.0 | 3.1 |

(Data source: Ordabayeva and Chandon 2011 figure 4 p38)

Table 1. 3 - Mean preference for restaurant (where higher score = expensive restaurant).

Ordabayeva and Chandon (2011) summarised the findings of the studies: "Our main conclusion is that increasing equality does indeed reduce inconspicuous (status-neutral) consumption and conspicuous (status-relevant) consumption for people at the bottom of the distribution when they do not care about status, for example, in a co-operative social context. However, we find that increasing equality actually fuels conspicuous consumption when people at the bottom of the distribution care about their social position. This is because greater equality increases the percentage of people in the middle of the distribution and therefore increases the gain in social position, and hence status, that a given spending on conspicuous consumption offers to consumers at the base of the pyramid" (pp37-38).

The experiments used hypothetical scenarios, and it is questionable how applicable these are to real-life. Is what an individual says in the experiment, what they will actually do in their lives?

### 1.2.3. Nelissen and Meijers (2011)

Nelissen and Meijers (2011) applied evolutionary theory to explain conspicuous consumption (ie: brand-labelled clothes and luxury-branded products). In particular, they used the "costly signalling theory" (Saad 2007) (or "handicap principle"; Zahavi and Zahavi 1997) which proposes that wasteful displays or behaviours is a signal of the quality of the individual that they can afford to do such things (and thus increase their attractiveness to the opposite sex). For example, the large tail of the male peacock is a handicap to survival,

but it is a signal that the possessor has good quality genes to allow it. In the case of conspicuous consumption, it is signalling social status.

Nelissen and Meijers (2011) presented seven experiments to show the benefits of advertising wealth through the products purchased (table 1.4).


Experiment 1


Wearers of luxury-branded clothes are perceived as higher status and wealthier than no-label. Shoppers in a city in the Netherlands were asked to rate a picture of a man in a polo shirt on certain characteristics, like status, and attractiveness. Four different shirts were used - no-label, ordinary label, average price label, and expensive label. The photograph of the man in the luxury-branded polo shirt was given significantly higher ratings of status and wealth than the no-label photograph (figure 1.3), but there was no difference on characteristics like kindness and friendliness.
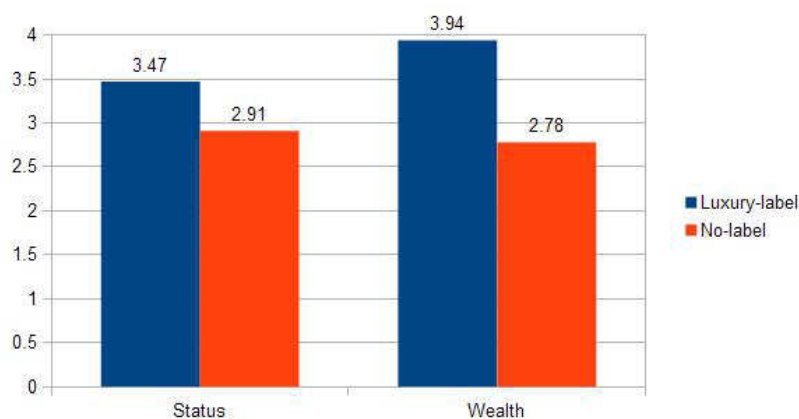


(Source: Nelissen and Meijers 2011 table 1)

Figure 1.3 - Mean ratings (out of 5) showing significant difference.


Experiment 2


Individuals are more likely to comply with requests from individuals wearing luxury-branded clothes. Shoppers in Tilburg, Netherlands, were individually approached by a woman wearing a luxury-branded or no-label sweater, and asked to complete a survey. Compliance occurred on 52.2% of occasions in the luxury-brand condition and only 13.6% in the no-label condition.

Experiment 3

Individuals in luxury-branded clothes are perceived more positively in a job interview. Students at Tilburg University watched a mock job interview, and then rated the suitability of a male applicant wearing a luxury-brand or no-label polo shirt. The former was rated as more suitable for the job of laboratory assistant (mean: 5.28 vs 4.76 out of 7), and recommended a higher wage (mean: 9.14 vs 8.36 euros per hour).


Experiment 4

Individuals wearing luxury-branded clothes elicited higher charity donations. A female confederate went from door-to-door collecting for the Dutch Heart Foundation wearing a luxury-branded or no-label polo shirt. The average donation was 0.34 euros in the luxury-brand condition compared to 0.19 euros.


Experiment 5

Individuals respond positively towards wearers of luxury-branded clothes. Students took part in an exchange game in pairs in which a player decided how much to give to the other player without knowing how much they would receive. One player was always a confederate dressed in a luxury-label or ordinary-label polo shirt. The students gave significantly more to the other player dressed in the luxury-label shirt (mean: 0.95 vs 0.70 euros).


Experiment 6

This experiment tested the response to individuals wearing luxury-brand clothes when the signal was reliable and unreliable. Students played the exchange game as in the previous experiment with the player wearing their own luxury or no-label shirt (intentional signal conditions) or shirts given by the experimenter (incidental signal conditions). This experiment, thus had four conditions. Students offered more money to luxury-label shirt wearers in the intentional condition (ie: own shirt) (mean: 1.11 euros) than to luxury-label wearers in the incidental condition (ie: shirt given to wear) (mean: 0.90 euros). There was no difference for the no-label shirts (mean: intentional 1.02, incidental 0.96 euros).


Experiment 7

This experiment was similar to experiment 5 but

involved the dictator game. In this game, one player decides how to distribute money between the two players, and the other player has no say. Participants gave more money to a partner wearing a luxury-label shirt (mean: 4.54 out of 10 euros) than an ordinary-label (mean: 3.61 euros).

Nelissen and Meijers (2011) concluded: "Seven laboratory and field experiments supported the prediction that people treat a person who displays luxury brands more favourably than a person who does not or, more accurately, than the same person when he or she wears identical clothing without a brand label. This effect was not person- or sex specific (as different confederates of both sexes were featured throughout our studies), nor was it dependent upon a single brand label".

| Expt | Independent variable(s) | Dependent variable(s) | Participants |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | One of 4 polo shirts | Rating of status, wealth, attractiveness, kindness, and friendliness on 7-pt scale | 80 shoppers in Tilburg |
| 2 | Luxury-label vs no-label polo shirt | Agree to complete survey or not | 45 shoppers in Tilburg |
| 3 | Luxury-label vs no-label polo shirt | Suitability for job/amount of hourly wage | 99 undergraduates at Tilburg University |
| 4 | Luxury-label vs no-label polo shirt | Amount donated to charity | 230 inhabitants of two poorer areas of Tilburg |
| 5 | Luxury vs ordinary-label polo shirt | Amount of money given to other player | 93 undergraduates at Tilburg University |
| 6 | 1. Luxury vs ordinary-label polo shirt 2. Own shirt vs given by experimenter | Amount of money given to other player | 88 undergraduates at Tilburg University |
| 7 | Luxury vs ordinary-label polo shirt | Amount of money given to other player | 31 undergraduates at Tilburg University |

Table 1.4 - Summary of methodological aspects of seen experiments by Nelissen and Meijers (2011).


## 1.3. CONCEPTUAL CONSUMPTION

"Although consumption is fundamental to all forms of life, human consumption is extraordinary in its variety

and sheer inventiveness. Some physical consumption, such as food and water, is essential for basic survival and thus shared with other organisms, but humans are remarkable in the scale of consumption over and above meeting basic needs, and indeed in the way that even 'basic' consumption is embellished and elaborated — consider, for example, the sheer number of brands of bottled water" (Ariely and Norton 2009 p476).

This consumption over and above basic needs includes the consumption of information (or meaning) ("conceptual consumption"; Ariely and Norton 2009). This has meant that physical consumption (like food) has become intertwined with conceptual consumption (eg: which brand of food). Ariely and Norton (2009) gave this example:

> Compare and contrast the decision to consume
> a cookie from the perspective of a dog
> or a human. From our experience with canines,
> the dog's psychology with regard to the cookie
> goes something like, "Yes", followed one second
> later by immediate consumption of the cookie.
> Contrast this to the human psychology of eating
> the cookie. Faced with a cookie on a plate,
> humans might think, "How many cookies have
> I had today?" "How does eating this cookie
> jibe with my weekly goal to lose two pounds?"
> "What will my co-workers think if I take the last
> cookie?" "I wonder if this cookie is organic?"
> "And if it is organic, is it even worth eating?"
> "Are any of the ingredients in this cookie produced
> by exploited third-world workers?" and so on (p497).

A modern example would be buying (with real money) virtual objects for a virtual house at Internet sites like "Second Life" (Ariely and Norton 2009).

Ariely and Norton (2009) outlined four "classes" of conceptual consumption:

i) Consuming expectancies - Expectations influence perception and behaviour. For example, the physical consumption experience can be altered by the label attached to the object as shown in experiments where the same beer, say, is given to individuals on two occasions but in a branded or unbranded container. There was a significant difference in ratings of taste between the two occasions (eg: Allison and Uhl 1964) [8].

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[8] Three hundred and twenty-six male beer drinkers in the USA were given bottles of beer to rate on nine characteristics (eg: aroma, after-taste) from 1-10. There were five brands of well-known beer used. When all bottles were unlabelled, the drinkers gave similar ratings to all five brands. When the bottles were labelled, participants gave significantly higher ratings for all brands, especially their favourite brand. So, for example, the same brand received an average rating of 63 (out of 90) when unlabelled, but 77 when labelled.

ii) Consuming goals - Goals, which may begin as related to physical consumption, can become ends in themselves to be "consumed". For example, individuals behave differently when "points" are allocated to different behaviours even when the points have no value.

The upshot is that the desire to consume the goal can increase physical consumption, and marketers can use this knowledge. For example, Nunes and Dreze (2006) gave out 300 loyalty cards at a car wash in a US city. Half of the cards offered a free car wash after eight purchases, and the other half after ten purchases but with two stickers attached. In both cases, eight purchases were required, but the latter condition gave the illusion of progress towards the goal ("endowed progress"). Around twice as many consumers redeemed the loyalty card in this condition than in the straight eight purchases condition (34% vs 19%; $X^2$ = 8.1, df = 1, p<0.01) [9].

iii) Consuming fluency - Fluency is the ease by which a stimulus is processed. For example, familiarity with an object through more exposure increases fluency and thus liking. In an experiment that varied the font in which offers were written, individuals responded more positively to easier to read (fluent) font in a web-based task on the choice of two cordless telephones (Novemsky et al 2007).

iv) Consuming "fit" - "Regulatory fit" is "when people 'feel right' when engaged in a task in which their motivations align with their behaviour" (Ariely and Norton 2009 p483).

Other aspects of conceptual consumption that influence physical consumption include variety seeking, "feature fatigue" [10], strategic memory protection [11], or perceived contamination [12] (Ariely and Norton 2009). In fact, individuals may choose negative physical experiences like staying in an ice hotel compared to an ordinary hotel, "because such negative physical consumption allows them to experience positive conceptual consumption, allowing them to enjoy a view of themselves as productive people who are adding to their collections

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[9] Also the time between visits was shorter in the ten purchase condition.
[10] This is where "people prefer products with more features at the moment of purchase but that feature-rich products subsequently can be difficult if not impossible to use, leaving them dissatisfied with their purchase" (Ariely and Norton 2009 p485).
[11] Individuals can prefer not to repeat an enjoyable experience - ie: the "consumption" of the memory becomes important.
[12] For example, cookies in a box which was touching a box of feminine napkins were less liked that those in a box standing alone (Morales and Fitzsimons 2007).

of experiences" (Ariely and Norton 2009 p489).


## 1.4. CONSUMING BEAUTY PRODUCTS

During an economic recession the demand for many goods and services declines, but the purchasing of attraction-enhancing products, like cosmetics, by women increases. This is called the "lipstick effect" (Nelson 2001) [13]. Hill et al (2012) explained it with evolutionary theory - during a period of resource scarcity, women increase their efforts to be attractive to a mate (who has resources) (ie: greater competition for less such mates). The evolutionary principle is that women's reproductive success is enhanced by securing a partner with resources to invest in the offspring, while men look for signs of fertility shown by physical attractiveness.
Hill et al (2012) presented evidence for the "lipstick effect" from different sources:


i) Data on spending patterns in the USA.

The relative amount spent on products that enhance physical attractiveness and general consumer goods were plotted against the rate of unemployment for the period 1992-2011. There was a significant negative correlation between unemployment and spending on electronics (r = -0.52), for example, but a significant positive correlation between unemployment and personal care/cosmetic products (r = 0.52) and clothing/accessories (r = 0.20).


ii) Experiment on purchasing preferences.

154 male and female university students read an article that focused their attention (primed) on economic recession or architecture (control) before indicating the strength of their desire to buy three products related to physical appearance (eg: lipstick or men's facial cream) and three consumer goods (eg: headphones) on a seven-point scale. For men, the desire to buy all the products

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[13] "Although the lipstick effect relates to a range of products that can enhance women's attractiveness, April Benson, a clinical psychologist in New York City, believes that lipstick, a product that can immediately and dramatically change a woman's appearance, epitomises the core of the phenomenon: '[Lipstick is] very primal. . . It's part of the uniform of desirability and attractiveness' (Schaefer 2008). Perhaps nowhere is this primal response clearer than for someone like Melissa McQueeney, a 34-year-old unmarried teacher in Connecticut. In the face of increasing bills and economic recession, she adamantly refuses to stop buying lipstick. Continuing to shop at Sephora during the recession, she triumphantly walks to the register with a new lip gloss: 'I didn't even try it on. I'm just splurging' (Schaefer 2008)" (Hill et al 2012 p288).

were significantly lower after reading about the economic recession than in the control condition (mean: 4.07 vs 4.51). For women, the desire for consumer goods declined in the recession group (mean: 3.47 vs 3.98 in control condition), but the attractiveness products significantly increased in this condition (mean: 6.19 vs 4.97 in control group).


iii) Experiment on mate preference.

In an experiment similar to the previous one, 76 unmarried female students were primed about recession or university stress by watching a slideshow before being asked about the importance of financial resources for a potential marriage partner on a seven-point scale. The level of agreement with the statement was significantly higher in the recession condition (mean: 5.36) than the control condition (mean: 4.84).


iv) Experiment to rule out other variables.

Women's purchase of lipstick etc in a recession may be a "cheap indulgence" rather than to attract a mate. In this experiment, 64 unmarried female students were offered expensive or cheap products that enhanced attractiveness and low-cost treats (eg: "Starbucks coffee") after being primed. The desire for treats was lower in the recession than control condition (mean: 2.86 vs 3.46 out of 7), but the willingness to purchase luxury attractiveness-enhancing products was significantly higher in the recession condition (mean: 5.86 vs 5.18 in control condition). This finding ruled out the "cheap indulgence" idea.


v) Experiment manipulating advertising.

In this experiment, attractiveness-enhancing products were presented with advertising that emphasised mate attraction (eg: "Be desired" - perfume) or not (eg: "This is a perfume by...") . Seventy-two unmarried female students were primed about recession or not before seeing the adverts. The desire to purchase the product was stronger when the advert was mate attraction, but this was strongest after a recession primer. After recession priming with control advertising, the desire for the products declined.

Hill et al (2012) concluded: "Taken together, these findings show that the lipstick effect reflects a strategic shift in women's consumer behaviour that is guided by the desire to attract the mates they most

desire in an environment where they are rarified" (p287).


## 1.5. APPENDIX 1A - RISK-TAKING

Testosterone is known to increase before a competition, and rises further in the winner while dropping in the loser of that competition. This has been called the "winner effect", and increased testosterone produces increased confidence and risk-taking (Coates and Herbert 2008).

Coates and Herbert (2008) looked at testosterone levels among seventeen male financial traders in the City of London while in action over eight business days. Saliva samples (to measure testosterone) were taken at 11am and 4pm each day along with details of profit and loss.

It was found that the mean testosterone level was significantly higher on days when traders made more money than their daily average. The testosterone level at 11am predicted the financial success of the rest of the day (ie: positive correlation). This assumed that the testosterone level produced the risk-taking associated with making money.

Other studies, usually with animals, show that high testosterone levels can increase vigilance and visuo-motor skills like scanning and speed of reaction as well as search persistence. These are behaviours that will benefit traders, and could explain the causal link between testosterone and trading success (Coates et al 2010).


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# 2. TWO EXPERIENCES OF THE SELF IN THE 21ST CENTURY

## 2.1. POST-MODERN SELF

The self in the post-modern world [14] is seen as fluid, "liquid", multiple [15], or chameleon-like. In fact, it is better to talk about selves. Bauman (eg: 1991) presents post-modernity as "an era of absence" lacking "stable anchors of meaning (eg: ultimate values and standards of appreciation)" leading to "ambivalence and existential insecurity" (Hazaz-Berger and Yair 2011). Within this permanent sense of uncertainty [16], individuals make sense of the social world and of themselves [17].

This article looks at two diverse situations and how individuals make sense of their self (selves) in them - online, and working in a call centre.

## 2.2. SELF ONLINE

Rainie and Wellman (2012) described a "triple revolution" of online social networks, the Internet generally, and mobile communications. These have led to,

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[14] "Post-modernism is not a coherent body of ideas. It refers to multiple points of view and narratives, the obliteration of eternal and unquestionable truths, and the positioning of perceptions or intellectual positions within specific contexts... The gradual annihilation of definite truths reflected new ideas concerning the arbitrary nature of 'truth' and 'beauty'... and later expanded through the critique of 'ideology' and the end of utopia. The blurring of genres and the hybrid combinations of previously coherent and authentic cultural products are created by ever-growing mobility of populations and groups across the globe ..." (Hazaz-Berger and Yair 2011 pp993-994).

[15] There are a number of theories of multiple selves, including James' (1890) distinction between "I" ("the self-as-knower") and "me" ("the self-as-known"), and the Dialogical Self (Herman and Kempen 1993). The latter developed the idea of a "distributed multi-voiced self" that is "constructed and reconstructed through encounters with others" while remaining "open, unfinished and personal" (Mottram 2008). Most of the theories accept that, to some degree, individuals are socially constructed (appendix 2A).

[16] "What is… new about the post-modern rendition of uncertainty… is that it is no longer seen as a temporary nuisance, which with due effort may be either mollified or altogether overcome. The post-modern world is bracing itself for life under a condition of uncertainty which is permanent and irreducible" (Bauman 1992 p21 quoted in Hazaz-Berger and Yair 2011 p994).

[17] "This liquidity is characterised by the collapse of modern illusions of a better future, and the disintegration of attempts at centralised administration of a better society; and social relations, including love, become temporary and fluid" (Hazaz-Berger and Yair 2011 p994).

what they call, a "social operating system" or "networked individualism". They say: "The social network operating system is personal - the individual is at the autonomous centre just as she is reaching out from her computer; multi-user - people are interacting with numerous diverse others; multi-tasking - people are doing several things; and multi-threaded - they are doing them more or less simultaneously" (quoted in Olds 2012).

These changes are having ambivalent effects as some "are beneficial to people and make society better while others are challenging to personal fulfilment and make society harsher [18]. Some of the changes just make it different in neither a positive nor a negative way" (Rainie and Wellman 2012 quoted in Olds 2012).

Individuals have kept written diaries in the past (and present), while today sees the move to the electronic version of "self-documentation" using computer technology and the Internet. The question is whether online diaries are just an updating of hand-written ones, or in some way different.

Kitzmann (2003) used the term "self-documentation" for online diaries, partly because individuals included other media beyond text in their electronic versions, and also because it is part of something different. This is the process of coping with "cosmological complexification" (Kitzmann 2003).

Keeping a written diary places the individualised self at the centre of the individual and offers the opportunity for self-reflexivity. "Indeed, to make the self modern is to make it the centre of attention: to reflect upon and articulate one's self as an individual, as one capable and perhaps even destined to determine one's fate and future. The place of the page thus becomes the place of the future, of the self made man or woman, of the isolated, focused and internally driven agent of history, will, and power. I write about myself, therefore I am" (Kitzmann 2003 p53).

Online diaries, however, represent change in a wider sense. For example, in the distinction between the public and the private - thus the online diary is not a private document, "but as a potential tool for communication and interaction... a paradoxical mix of intimacy and 'mediatisation' of introversion and self-promotion..." (Kitzmann 2003).

Self-documentation can be taken to the extreme with

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[18] Olds (2012) gave the example of the "addiction" to checking emails on the computer, tablet, or smart phone - "the danger of those gadgets seems to me to be that even when we're connecting with others face to face, a small part of our brain is preoccupied with whether a truly exciting email or text is about to arrive. In other words, have we all gotten so busy waiting for the next great thing that the joy of being with those we love has become permanently compromised?" (p515).

non-stop web cams, for example, and the intention to overcome presentation biases with selected material. This is part of the "fetishisation" of the authentic or real which also counters deliberate acts of deception on the Web (Kitzmann 2003).

Another key element in online diaries is writing in "real time" (often expecting a reply) ("the embodiment of immediacy"; Kitzmann 2003). "Web diarists write for themselves, and for others who also write for themselves and others, creating 'Webrings' which encourage nearly constant interaction. This discursive environment clearly privileges the present, the moment within which material is created and exchanged" (Kitzmann 2003 p62).

Put simply, the self of the Internet is constructed to communicate, and it is different, at least in part, to the self of hand-written diaries: "...the significance of Web-based self-documentation is its manner of re-organising or re-situating experiential and material conditions — those conditions indicated by the terms private, real, and time. To document oneself within an online environment is to situate oneself within a different material place—a place that engenders experiences, perceptions, and realities markedly different from those encountered within the materialities of such other media places as those produced by the book or the camera" (Kitzmann 2003 p63).


## 2.2.1. Dating Sites

In terms of presenting the self in dating situations, there is a tension between self-enhancement (altering impression given to fit the demands of the situation) and the need to present the "true self" (Ellison et al 2006). This process is slightly different in online dating environments where there is greater control over self-presentation than in face-to-face encounters. But this is limited when it is known that the individuals will meet in the future offline.

The users of online dating sites are aware of the possibility of misrepresentation or even deception. This makes the users eager to "prove their trustworthiness while simultaneously assessing the credibility of others" (Ellsion et al 2006). Thus users will look for ways to verify claims like using search engines, or focusing on small cues during online interactions. Among thirty-four US active users of a large online dating site interviewed, Ellison et al (2006) found that "they carefully attended to subtle, almost minute cues in others' presentational messages, and often seemed to take the same degree of care when crafting their own messages". Respondents referred to cues like misspellings (as a sign of educational level), specific wording (eg:

"sexual" references), length of email (eg: one interviewee felt that long emails implied a "desperation for conversation" - "a hermit"), and frequency of logging on to the site.

One way that the interviewees dealt with the tension between honesty and self-enhancement was to create profiles based around "a potential, future version of self" (the ideal self rather than the actual self). For example, "Christo1" said: "For instance, I am also an avid hiker and [scuba diver] and sometimes I have communicated with someone that has presented themselves the same way, but then it turns out they like scuba diving but they haven't done it for 10 years, they like hiking but they do it once every second year... I think they may not have tried to lie; they just have perceived themselves differently because they write about the person they want to be...In their profile they write about their dreams as if they are reality".

One issue was honesty about body weight, and a woman who posted a photograph from five years ago, when she was thinner, justified it by saying that she was going to lose the weight gained. The age given was also an issue as search filters used it. A number of users admitted to "adjusting" their age by one or two years, and there was a perceived norm of doing it, such that one interviewee felt forced to do it: "I'm such an honest guy, why should I have to lie about my age? On the other hand, if I put X number of years, that is unattractive to certain people... Everybody lies about their age or a lot of people do... So I have to cheat too in order to be on the same page as everybody else that cheats. If I don't cheat that makes me seem twice as old. So if I say I am 44, people think that I am 48. It blows" ("RealSweetheart").

Users also misrepresented themselves unintentionally because of the lack of self-knowledge. Ellison et al (2006) called this behaviour the "foggy mirror" - a gap between self-perception and the view of others.

Many profiles used the term "average" in relation to characteristics like body shape, and users circumvented this by relying on the visual information in photographs. But pictures can lie - for example, sitting poses can hide heavier body weight. Thus, some users made sure that they were standing in their photographs to avoid such possibilities. This was one of the ways individuals were "showing" their trustworthiness. Overall, "participants were cognisant of the online setting and its association with deceptive communication practices, and therefore worked to present themselves as credible. In doing so, they drew upon the rules they had developed for assessing others and turned these practices into guidelines for their own self-presentational messages" (Ellison et al 2006). The non-verbal cues used in face-to-face interactions are replaced by other cues in the online

environment.

## 2.3. CALL CENTRES

Call centre work involves constant interactions with customers, and the regulation of own emotions (eg: remaining calm in the face of abusive and angry callers). "Paradoxically, while the unique role of the call centre is the creation and maintenance of good customer relationships, call centres themselves have evolved in response to significant technological advances as well as global demands for cost-cutting initiatives. The CCW [call centre worker] is therefore faced with the opposing goals of optimizing productivity while delivering superior customer service" (Lewig and Dollard 2003 p367).

The level of surveillance in call centres has been seen as an issue with terms like "electronic panopticons" and "human battery farms" being used (Holman 2002).

Holman (2002) investigated four factors known to have a negative impact on employee well-being - job design, performance monitoring, human resources (HR) practices, and team leader support (table 2.1). He surveyed 557 workers at three call centres of a UK bank.

Overall, high levels of well-being were associated with high control over method control (eg: able to talk with customers without sticking to script), low levels of monitoring, and a supportive team leader. The well-being ratings compared favourably with shop=floor manufacturing and clerical work (Holman 2002).

| FACTORS | VARIABLES |
|---|---|
| Well-being | • Anxiety<br>• Depression<br>• Job satisfaction |
| Job design | • Timing control (ie: control over time spent with customer)<br>• Method control (eg: use of script to talk to customers)<br>• Attention demand (extent of concentration)<br>• Problem-solving demand (eg: "Do you have to solve problems which have no obvious correct answer?")<br>• Role breadth (ie: activities outside main task) |
| Monitoring | • Degree of monitoring |
| HR practices | • Payment fairness<br>• Performance appraisal<br>• Training |
| Team leader support | • eg: "Does your team leader discuss and solve problems with you?" |

Table 2.1 - Variables measured by Holman (2002).

"Burnout" was coined to describe employees who were forced to work too hard for long periods, and/or who deal closely with the problems, hardships, or emotions of others (Healy and Bramble 2003). Maslach and Jackson (1986) defined it as "a syndrome of emotional exhaustion, depersonalisation, and reduced personal accomplishment that can occur among individuals who do 'people work'". The emotional exhaustion is like "compassion fatigue" with a feeling of depleted emotional resources, and the depersonalisation (from distancing oneself from the emotional demands) can manifest as seeing the clients as the enemy (Healy and Bramble 2003).

Research has highlighted the factors that can lead to burnout including high work demands, role conflict/ambiguity, and lack of social support (Healy and Bramble 2003).

Healy and Bramble (2003) explored burnout among call centre workers of a large Australian public-sector utility company. The burnout was linked to:

• The repetitive nature of the work - large volume of calls with four-second break inbetween each one. Some employees reported a cynical feeling (linked to depersonalisation) of "heard it all before" for "debt calls" (bill payment due).

• Customer demands - Though repetitive work, there was a lot of changing tact between types of calls and the differing responses of customers.

• Extensive managerial surveillance - Statistical information was kept of number of calls taken (with each call recommended to be less than three minutes long).

• The remoteness of worker-customer interactions (ie: telephone-based) - eg: no non-verbal signals; a greater chance of a "fight" than face-to-face.

• "Emotional labour" [19] - eg: dealing politely with customers who angry and abusive.

In a study of another Australian call centre, Lewig and Dollard (2003) found that "emotional labour" mediated emotional exhaustion and job satisfaction. On the negative side, this can produce emotional dissonance (a conflict between the felt/experienced emotion and desired

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[19] "Emotional labour" describes how employees must express "organisationally desired emotions" during interactions with customers (Lewig and Dollard 2003).

displayed emotion) [20]. Lewig and Dollard found that high levels of dissonance led to emotional exhaustion [21].

On the positive side, "emotional labour can serve to facilitate task effectiveness by providing the service worker with a means to regulate what are often dynamic and emergent interactions and thus provide the worker with a sense of increased self-efficacy. Emotional labour makes interactions with customers more predictable, and allows the service worker to maintain objectivity and emotional equilibrium by cognitively distancing him/herself from the implicated emotion. Emotional labour may also facilitate self-expression by enabling the service worker to 'project at least some of the 'authentic self' into the enactment'" (Lewig and Dollard 2003 p368).


## 2.4. APPENDIX 2A - SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION OF THE SELF

If the individual self is socially constructed by languages and ideas (discourses [22]) in society, then what is happening all around is key.

The social construction of behaviour and meaning is not static. There is "the unceasing human activity of making meanings (the horizon of discourse) from which social agents and objects, social institutions and social structures emerge configured in ever-changing patterns of relations" (Wetherell 1999 p401). Thus, "it is not the subject who is seen as the agent of the idea, rather it is praxis (collective human activity) which produces the shape of mental life" (Wetherell 1999). The relationship between the individual and society is a key dualism, particularly in terms of theories exploring the self [23] [24]

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[20] 47% of employees surveyed reported emotional dissonance several times a day and 21% several times a hour (Lewig and Dolard 2003).

[21] Of the respondents, 24% reported high levels of emotional exhaustion and 29% moderate levels, with mean scores similar to police officers but less than social workers (from other studies in Australia) (Lewig and Dollard 2003).

[22] Laclau and Mouffe (1987) defined discourse to include logistic and non-logistic elements. Wetherell (1999) explained: "As an example of this combination, Laclau and Mouffe describe the activity of building a brick wall. The entire activity of building is made up of speech acts ('pass me that brick') and physical acts (placing brick on top of brick), yet both kinds of acts acquire their meaning in relation to each other and to the socially constructed and stabilised system of relations we recognise as 'building a brick wall'. They point out that not only is the 'being' of objects (such as bricks) established in this way, and therefore what these objects are for humans, but also the character, identity and the 'being' of social agents" (p401).

[23] A Marxist view of the self might offer "a way of examining both halves of the dualism - what the individual brings to society (an innate sociability in this view) and society to individual consciousness (productive practices, for instance, designed to satisfy human needs which come to retroactively shape those needs)" (Wetherell 1999).

[24] Foucault, for example, challenged the individual-social dualism that is evident in theories of the self. "Rather than look at the individual and the social as separate but related entities, investigation is focused instead on modes or practices of subjectification, the rituals and routines which produce human

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nature in the plural and our very sense of 'individuality'" (Wetherell 1999 p402).