

Looking Ahead: Future Research in Psychological Ownership

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Abstract

While interest in psychological ownership in consumer behavior has been growing, there are many research opportunities remaining. This chapter provides a brief summary of the book chapters and also delineates broad areas for future research. Included are seven sections beginning with the measurement of psychological ownership in consumer research and potential new directions. Next are questions and opportunities related to the characteristics of the owner, and the characteristics of the target, or what is owned. Following this, types of ownership are discussed as well as time dimensions related to psychological ownership. Then, the downstream consequences of psychological ownership are detailed including current work and potential extensions. Finally, the dark side of psychological ownership is acknowledged and situations where feelings of ownership can be counter-productive are delineated. The intention of this chapter is to spark new ideas for further work in psychological ownership and consumer behavior.

Keywords: psychological ownership, ownership measurement, characteristics of the owner, target of ownership, types of ownership, lifecycle of ownership, consequences of ownership, dark side of ownership

Throughout this book, we have discussed many different ways that consumer behavior is affected by psychological ownership. From technology and design issues, to market-level policies related to ownership, to implications for the digital self, we have covered much of the exciting work that is happening in the field of marketing and beyond. Many of our consumption experiences, how we make decisions, and form evaluations are influenced by the sense of “mineness” associated with psychological ownership. Evidence has accumulated that psychological ownership drives these effects above and beyond legal ownership. Today, the evolution of this construct is evident in the diversity of perspectives and approaches taken to the study of psychological ownership.

While interest in psychological ownership in consumer behavior has been growing, there are many research opportunities remaining. We encourage you to read each chapter as the authors have insights into unanswered questions in their area. In this chapter, we suggest some broad avenues for future research. We have divided this chapter in to seven sections. We begin by discussing ideas related to the measurement of the construct. We then examine potential research ideas having to do with the characteristics of the owner and characteristics of what is owned. We continue with various types of psychological ownership, time dimensions related to psychological ownership, consequences of psychological ownership, and finally when psychological ownership is counter-productive. Our hope is that this chapter inspires creative new inquiries to the study of ownership.

Measurement of Psychological Ownership

A nuanced understanding of the history and development of the psychological ownership construct allows us to consider future avenues of research in this area. Jon Pierce (this volume, chapter 1) originally began work on psychological ownership as a result of examining organizational and legal employee ownership arrangements and the subsequent effects on employee work performance and morale. One of his key insights was that in order to have positive effects of legal ownership, such as higher employee satisfaction and better work performance, the legal ownership of employees must be accompanied by psychological ownership. Conceptually, Pierce and colleagues defined psychological ownership as a “state where an individual feels as though the target of ownership is ‘theirs’ (i.e., it is MINE!)” (Pierce, Kostova, & Dirks, 2001, p. 5). For empirical study, Van Dyne and Pierce (2004) developed a measure of psychological ownership toward an organization and focused on possessiveness. The instructions and seven items are from Van Dyne and Pierce (2004), page 449 and are as follows.

Instructions: Think about the home, boat or cabin that you own or co-own with someone, and the experiences and feelings associated with the statement ‘THIS IS MY (OUR) HOUSE!.’ The following questions deal with the ‘sense of ownership’ that you feel for the organization that you work for. Indicate the degree to which you personally *agree* or *disagree* with the following statements.

1. This is MY organization.
2. I sense that this organization is OUR company.
3. I feel a very high degree of personal ownership for this organization.
4. I sense that this is MY company.

In Brown, Pierce and Crossley (2014), the scale was modified with the addition of several items. These include:

1. I sense that this job is MINE.
2. I feel a very high degree of personal ownership for this job.
3. I sense that this is MY job.
4. I sense that the work I do as part of my job is MINE.
5. I feel a very high degree of personal ownership for the work that I do.
6. The work I do at this organization is MINE.

Researchers in consumer psychology then introduced this construct into behavioral work in marketing, with slight adjustment to the original measure to align with specific research questions. Peck and Shu (2009) introduced the measure to consumer research and adapted the above scale to have an emphasis on products. The following three items were used.

1. I feel like this is *my* (target of ownership).
2. I feel a very high degree of personal ownership for this (target).
3. I feel like I own this (target).

Fuchs, Prandelli and Schreier (2010) altered the above with the following six items.

Instead of including only the possessive nature of psychological ownership, they included items that represent the target as being part of the extended self.

1. Although I do not legally own these (targets) yet, I have the feeling that they are ‘my’ (target).
2. The selected (targets) incorporate a part of myself.
3. I feel that these products belong to me.
4. I feel connected to these (targets).
5. I feel a strong sense of closeness with these products.
6. It is difficult for me to think of these (targets) as mine. (reversed)

Subsequently, researchers have used variations of the listed scales. For example, Kirk, Peck, and Swain (forthcoming) used following five items.

1. Although I do not legally own this (target of ownership), I feel like this is “my” (target).
2. I feel a very high degree of personal ownership of this (target).
3. I feel like this (target) belongs to me.
4. I feel a strong sense of closeness with this (target).
5. This (target) incorporates a part of myself.

In consumer behavior, other researchers have either used Peck and Shu (2009) (e.g., Kamleitner & Feuchtl, 2015; Peck, Barger, & Webb, 2013; Shu & Peck, 2011) or adapted the items (e.g., Kirk, McSherry, & Swain, 2015; Shu & Payne, 2013; Shu, Payne, & Sagara, 2014). For all of the scales, the measurement of the construct tends to be both highly reliable and valid.

Territoriality researchers (Kirk, Peck & Swain, forthcoming) have adapted these commonly-used measures of consumer psychological ownership (Peck & Shu, 2009) to examine when consumers perceive that someone else is signaling their own feelings of ownership of a product, or marking their territory. For example, Kirk, Peck and Swain (forthcoming) found that an individual's signal of control, investment of self, or intimate knowledge leads observers to perceive that the individual was communicating feelings of ownership. These perceptions of another individual's ownership signals were measured with the following items. Once again, reliability was high.

Other's Psychological Ownership Signaling (Kirk, Peck & Swain, forthcoming);

Studies 1-5:

1. Although the (other) does not legally own the (target), they seem to feel like the (target) is "theirs."
2. The (other) seems to feel that the (target) belongs to them.
3. The (other) feels a high degree of personal ownership of the (target).
4. The (other) is sending a message that they feel the (target) is "theirs."

Personal space study (web appendix D):

1. The other customer seemed to be sending a message that they owned the space around me.
2. I felt like the other customer was claiming ownership of the space around me.
3. The other customer was not respectful of the space around me.

In order to keep the measure gender-neutral, reflecting common current usage the researchers employed the use of "they" and "theirs" even though the "other" was a single individual.

In addition, Kirk, Peck and Swain (forthcoming) also introduced the concept of psychological ownership metaperception. Metaperception refers to individuals' beliefs about how others perceive them (Wallace and Tice 2012). Understanding when a consumer thinks that another person believes the consumer feels ownership of something is important to gaining insight into when consumers will respond territorially. In their research, Kirk, Peck and Swain

(forthcoming) once again adapted commonly-used psychological ownership items (Peck & Shu, 2009) for this purpose. Psychological ownership metaperception was measured as follows:

Psychological Ownership Metaperception (Kirk, Peck & Swain, forthcoming):

1. Although I do not legally own this (target), the (other) clearly believes the (target) belongs to me.
2. The (other) definitely believes this is “my” (target).
3. Although I have not yet purchased this (target), the (other) probably believes that I own this (target).
4. The (other) probably feels this is “my” (target).
5. The (other) has good reason to believe this (target) belongs to me.

While the measurement of the psychological ownership construct has focused mostly on self-reported feelings of possessiveness and an object’s relation to the self, it may be interesting to measure the four motivations or roots of psychological ownership. These include an effectance motivation or the motivation to exert some mastery over one’s environment, a self-identity motivation or a signaling both to oneself and others who a person is, the motivation to have a sense of comfort, security or a home, and finally, a motivation for stimulation or the need for arousal (Pierce & Peck, this volume, chapter 1). It is likely that these underlying motivations differentially affect feelings of ownership. More work in this area is needed.

In addition, the antecedents of psychological ownership may be clearly articulated to establish a composite measure. The three include an investment of the self in the target, intimate knowledge of the target, and the ability to control the target (Pierce et al., 2001). There has been some measurement of these routes in the organization behavior literature (Brown, Pierce & Crossley, 2014) but they have been mostly manipulated and not measured in the consumer behavior literature (e.g., Brasel & Gips, 2014; Kirk, Peck, & Swain, forthcoming). Often, more than one of these routes is activated in order to establish a feeling of ownership. Yet, an antecedent of psychological ownership may also be a consequence of this same feeling of

ownership. For example, an investment of the self may foster a sense of ownership, and this may also result in subsequent investment of the self to better care for the target of ownership. These reciprocal relationships are important to understand; under what conditions are the relationships strengthened? When do these relationships deteriorate? While existing measurement of the construct seems to be adequate, careful measurement of the motivations and the antecedents of psychological ownership may be worth considering.

It may also be that these antecedents and the motivations of psychological ownership of a target cannot be easily articulated by the owner. In fact, some neuroscientific research has considered the neural bases of psychological ownership. There is a significant memory advantage for objects that are owned by the self as opposed to owned by a familiar other (Cunningham et al., 2008), and this has been connected to differential brain activation in processing of hypothetically self-owned and other-owned items (Turk, van Bussel, Waiter, & Macrae, 2011). These authors demonstrate that a self-referential memory advantage can be elicited by feeling as if you have ownership over a product and that this effect is underpinned by activity in a neural network that supports attentional and reward-based processing.

Other researchers further demonstrate that imagining owning an object activates regions of the brain involved in self-referential processing, and this felt psychological ownership then predicts positive subsequent evaluations of that object (Kim & Johnson, 2014). This growing area of neuroscientific work has been instrumental in validating the inextricable association between ownership of objects and self-thought. Yet, neuroscientific work could further investigate both the antecedents and the consequences of psychological ownership.

One of the drivers of psychological ownership is the ability to have control over an object. The control associated with owning an object influences an individual's psychological

ownership of that object (Peck, Barger, & Webb 2013). Future research could consider how valuation of a product changes under differing conditions of resource depletion and levels of control, or how feelings of psychological ownership are enhanced or attenuated by these conditions. Previous work has investigated a neural account of self-regulatory resource depletion by identifying areas of the brain that are associated with the implementation of control (Hedgcock, Vohs, & Rao, 2012). Thus, neuroscientific work has begun to consider how differences in ownership are represented neurologically and physiologically, yet there are many interesting avenues to explore with novel measurement of the construct.

Finally, in the management literature, Pierce and Jussila (2010) examine collective psychological ownership which is defined as “a collective sense of ownership - a socially constructed, shared mental model reflecting common beliefs about a group’s possessive relationship with a target of ownership” (Pierce, Jussila, & Li, 2017, p. 3). The following scale was developed to measure collective psychological ownership (Pierce, Jussila, & Li, 2017, p. 10).

Collective Psychological Ownership;

Instructions: Think about the house, automobile, work space, or some other item that you own or co-own with someone, and the experiences and feelings associated with the statement ‘THIS IS OURS!.’ The following questions deal with the ‘sense of ownership’ that you and your work team members feel for work that you do. Indicate the degree to which you personally agree or disagree with the following statements.

1. We (my team members) and I collectively agree that this is OUR job.
2. We (my team members) and I collectively feel that this job belongs to US together.
3. We (my team members) and I feel a very high degree of collective (team) ownership for this job.
4. All of the members of my work team feel as though we own this job collectively.

While collective psychological ownership has not yet been brought in to the consumer behavior literature, it is easy to see how the scale could be adapted for consumer based applications.

Characteristics of the Owner

Another key area for future research involves characteristics of the owner of the target. Central to original conceptualization of psychological ownership by Pierce et al. (2001) was both a cognitive and an affective component to the construct. As an owner, what types of affective responses are associated with psychological ownership? While some work has been done in this area (Shu & Peck, 2011; Kirk, Swain, & Gaskin, 2015), this is an under-researched topic. For example, a feeling of pride has been touched on as a relevant emotion but there is limited work in this area (for an exception see Kirk, Swain, & Gaskin, 2015). And a self-assessment of weirdness, especially when the target of ownership is non-tangible has been suggested as an area for further work (Kirk and Swain, this volume, chapter 5). Feelings of infringement (Kirk, Peck & Swain, forthcoming), jealousy, and fear could be all be associated with a feeling of ownership, depending on the context. Arousal may also play a key role, especially if there is a potential loss of the ownership target.

Besides various emotions that may be associated with psychological ownership, individual differences should be further examined. Weiss and Johar discuss their egocentric categorization theory or ECT (Weiss & Johar, this volume, chapter 3) which examines how people mentally represent their owned products as part of the “self.” They conceptualize and measure *me-mine sensitivity* as an individual difference relating to the extent to which an

individual characterizes a target of ownership as a member of the category, self. This construct is a powerful example of how an individual difference measure can tap into the essence of psychological ownership. There is great fluidity with which people categorize items as “me” and “not-me.” There is potential to use this construct to further explore relationships among the self and non-tangible ownership targets.

Other personality variables may relate in interesting ways to psychological ownership. Narcissistic individuals have an exaggerated sense of self and therefore assume that others are aware of their feelings of ownership over attractive targets – a psychological ownership metaperception bias – even though this is an unreasonable assumption in some cases (Kirk, Peck, & Swain, forthcoming). Kovacheva and Lambertson (this volume, chapter 12) remark that other factors such as self-construal (Kirk & Swain, 2016) and interdependence may influence whether and when people want psychological ownership of an experience. Wiggins (this volume, chapter 11) suggests that perceptions of in-group/out-group, especially as it relates to the social identity motivation, affects felt psychological ownership. One can imagine that need for control, need for approval (Barger, 2012), and technology innovativeness (Kirk & Swain, 2013) as fertile ownership variables that have not yet been explored.

Various demographic groups may also relate differentially to targets as far as psychological ownership is concerned. Children born around the turn of the 21st century are becoming adults and they are the first generation to mature with mobile devices. Dubbed the i-generation (or generation Z) they are the first generation to use social media as a fundamental way of establishing and maintaining social relationships. It has become a key facet of their social lives. They are engrossed in digital media and have access to and control over a large amount of digital content. How does this way of interacting with the world influence aspects of

psychological ownership? How does this increased control over their digital selves, an antecedent of psychological ownership, affect their evaluations of their social experiences? If objects are an extension of the self, does the dependence on dematerialized or non-tangible items result in a diminished self or a freer self? In the virtual world, we may have surrogate selves in which we “own” our virtual self (Belk, this volume, chapter 4). What implications does this have for our representations of our extended self (Belk, 1988; 2013) or our ideal self? Lee and Shu (2015) examined psychological ownership in the context of virtual communities. They found that developing an ideal or better self, results in greater psychological ownership of the online community. This is because people took the time and invested themselves in developing their ideal self.

More broadly, how is the intangibility or dematerialization of society influencing our desire to own, our need to own, the types of objects owned, and the type of ownership (individual, shared, rented) either psychologically or legally? Does less tangible legal ownership increase the need for psychological ownership? There are many unanswered questions with respect to new technology, digital consumers, and the implications on psychological ownership.

Are there generational differences? Important research has uncovered age-related differences in information processing (Cole & Gaeth, 1990; John & Cole, 1986; Wang & Cole, 2016; Yoon, Cole, & Lee, 2009). Are there similar age-related differences in the formation of a sense of psychological ownership? Consider older, assisted living residents who have given up, often begrudgingly, many targets of ownership as well as a sense of control over other aspects of their lives. How does this influence their relationship with the current psychologically- and legally-owned possessions? Do they cling more tightly and become territorial over their

remaining targets of psychological or legal ownership, or do they more easily relinquish control? How do they approach future ownership?

At the other end of the spectrum, Friedman, Pesowski and Goulding (this volume, chapter 2) provide evidence that, even for very young children with no experience with legal ownership, there is strong evidence that this age group has a fundamental understanding of ownership. Indeed, ‘mine’ is often one of the first words infants learn. Young children understand that ownership is acquired by making, finding, or buying an object (Nancekivell & Friedman, 2014 a,b). As the youth of today mature, the changes in the digital world and artificial intelligence will likely influence perceptions of “real and not real” and “mine and not mine.” The research questions relevant to this area of study are yet to be discovered, but clearly this is, and will increasingly become, an area ripe for research.

Characteristics of What is Owned

While owner characteristics are important, the nature of what is owned is perhaps the biggest change in ownership, both legal and psychological. One large change, alluded to by many chapters in this volume, is the intangibility or dematerialization of the owned target. Kamleitner and Mitchell (this volume, chapter 6) discuss our digitized selves and the personal data that is associated with each of us. They delineate a digital blueprint as an aid to conceptualize the vast amount of data that we each own. Do we feel more ownership of some aspects of our digitized selves compared to others? Why or why not?

Kirk and Swain (this volume, chapter 5) broaden the discussion by examining our relationship with digital technology and how this may influence feelings of ownership. They note

that intangibility and impermanence are defining characteristics of new technologies. They offer many interesting examples and offer further ideas of research extensions. For example, they have an intriguing discussion of voice interactions with digital devices and point out that voice commands have the effect of making the device seem more like a social entity (Brasel, 2016) with consumers less likely to feel a sense of psychological ownership or part of the extended self (Belk, 1988; 2013) compared to haptic-oriented devices.

This raises other questions about sensory interactions as they relate to psychological ownership. While touch increases psychological ownership (Brasel, 2016; Brasel & Gips, 2014; Peck, Barger, & Webb, 2013; Peck & Shu, 2009), it may be that other sensory input may alter the feeling of ownership, even resulting in the anthropomorphism of the device. In fact, simulated social touch may have a completely different effect on feelings of ownership. And, Kirk and Swain (2015) found that interactivity in the virtual domain increased perceptions of control which increased psychological ownership and willingness to pay. But, these effects were only found for individuals who were lower in technology innovativeness.

Dickert, Ashby, and Dickert (this volume, chapter 9), when discussing economic decision making, call for a better understanding of dematerialized form of economic consumption and the subsequent effects on psychological ownership. Shu (this volume, chapter 10) also looks at financial products as the target of ownership. Whereas previous generations relied on tangible statements, information is now virtual and digitized. Does this influence feelings of ownership? Effectance as a motivation for psychological ownership depends on some type of control. While giving up physical control, the ability to interact with information and to control when and how it is viewed, is a new form of control.

The idea of extended presence is also associated with extended digital objects (Belk, this volume, chapter 4) and extended virtual worlds (Kirk & Swain, this volume, chapter 5). Do these changes manifest in feelings of ownership, strength of ownership, or even the willingness to give up ownership? Taking this a step further, Belk (this volume, chapter 4) discusses the extended self both in the material and the digital world (Belk, 1988; 2013) but also mentions that we define ourselves by objects that we do not own. Disassociative psychological ownership or a feeling that it is NOT MINE or NOT ME is a thought-provoking concept and worth of further inquiry.

In modern society, it has become less acceptable to think about an individual as the target of ownership. While individuals have historically been bought, sold, and traded, these exchanges are inhumane and illegal today. Unfortunately, there remain black markets around the world where individuals continue to be sold for sex and labor. How might we leverage our knowledge on psychological ownership to reduce the incidence of this type of behavior? How does psychological ownership of people differ from psychological ownership of products? There are many policy-related issues relevant to understanding the psychological ownership that humans feel over one another.

Kamleitner and Mitchell (this volume, chapter 6) address the issue of consumer's data. Our personal information or data is not something we traditionally think of as "ownable", yet our personal information and everyday behaviors are becoming increasingly profitable for companies to buy and sell. Therefore, it may be beneficial to feel ownership over our personal information to protect it. Some aspects of our personally-identifying data may be more central to our sense of self, such as our names, compared to other information, such as the tracking of our path through a retailer. And, some dimensions are more under our control and more malleable than others.

Consumers are increasingly using fitness tracking devices to monitor physical and health information – do consumers feel any psychological ownership over the data acquired from personal tracking devices? Under what conditions does an individual feel concerned about the quantification of the self? How do these aspects of self-data influence feeling of ownership, privacy concerns, and the potential sharing or protection of our own data? How do we make individuals feel greater ownership over personal data? Would increasing psychological ownership affect how people think about privacy? Can we find ways to better protect personal information?

Kamleitner and Mitchell (this volume, chapter 6) suggest using a personal data manager in which a person would have to give up control of some aspects of their data in order to help manage the amount of information available. Perhaps ownership may be divested by first sharing psychological ownership over a target and then losing even more control as it is completely given up. Lessening the antecedents of psychological ownership of control, intimately knowing and investment of the self in the target, should result in decreasing an individual's feeling of ownership. One example is decreasing the interaction with the target which decreases control and feelings of ownership. In fact, moving a target out of sight distances the target from the self which can facilitate disposal (Lastovicka & Fernandez, 2005). Can these same antecedent levers be used with intangible targets?

A clear question is whether certain types of targets are more likely to foster feeling of ownership compared to other types of targets. Pierce and Peck (this volume, chapter 1) reminds us that targets that satisfy the underlying motives of psychological ownership such as effectance, self-identity and sense of place or home are more likely to foster a feeling of ownership compared to targets that do not offer these aspects. Kovacheva and Lamberton (this volume,

chapter 12) discuss shared experiences as the target of psychological ownership. Given the motivations of ownership, one could imagine that self-identity may be communicated more easily through psychological ownership of an experience compared to an object. But, this likely differs by individual and by context. A more thorough understanding of the types of targets and their influence on ownership is necessary.

Also, mentioned by Kovaceva and Lamberton (this volume, chapter 12) is the valence of the target. There is evidence that those endowed with ownership focus more on positively-valenced product features and less on negative features relative to non-owners (Nayakankuppam & Mishra, 2005). Interestingly, other researchers demonstrate that negative features of a product do not inhibit the formation of psychological ownership. That is, individuals endowed with a product still report greater psychological ownership even when the haptic features of a product are unpleasant (Shu & Peck, 2011). If a negatively valenced *product* has the capacity to increase psychological ownership, would a negatively valenced *experience* do the same? And, how would sharing this experience influence the feeling of ownership?

Belk (this volume, chapter 4) discusses the extended object or extended presence as a target of ownership. Memorials make memories of the past more tangible. Now, in 2017, confederate monuments are being taken down as they are associated with a mythic past, yet some feel intense psychological ownership over these monuments. While we've discussed that ownership has memory advantages, what about the feeling of ownership of a memory itself? Is it possible to feel ownership over your own memories, or even others' memories? Can individuals feel a sense of ownership over an event that didn't even occur in their lifetime and that they didn't experience firsthand? We know that it is possible to create false memories (Loftus &

Pickrell, 1995), and understanding the role of psychological ownership in that process may be revealing.

In a similarly abstract sense, the idea that you can feel ownership over not only a product, but potentially a memory and even an experience is intriguing as well. Examining tangible reminders of intangible experiences, Chu and Shu, (2017) find that tangibilizing an experience with a memento lessens the negative affect associated with the end of an experience. How does psychological ownership change with the addition of a memento? Can the ownership be transferred from the experience to the object and vice versa?

Types of Ownership

While this volume is primarily concerned with psychological ownership of the feeling that something is “mine,” most chapters in this volume mention the relationship between legal and psychological ownership. Pierce was originally drawn to the study of psychological ownership due to the legal ownership of employees of companies (this volume, chapter 1). Friedman, Pesowski and Goulding (this volume, chapter 2) note that, while children are not versed in the laws of ownership, they understand many aspects of what we call legal and psychological ownership. Legal ownership can exist without a feeling of ownership and vice versa. Dickert, Ashby and Dickert (this volume, chapter 9) mention the bi-directional relationship between legal and psychological ownership as each can influence, and is influenced by, the other. And, new forms of temporary or partial ownership are emerging with sharing and renting as options besides purchase in many product categories, little is known about how these different forms of ownership influence psychological ownership.

Another dimension to consider is whether the ownership is individual (it is “mine”) or collective (it is “ours”). Collective psychological ownership is defined as “the collectively held sense (feeling) that this target of ownership (or a piece of that target) is collectively ‘ours’” (Pierce & Jussila, 2010, p. 812). Consumer research is beginning to examine an organization or brand as the target of psychological ownership and the implications of having multiple consumers join together in a collective sense of ownership. Belk (this volume, chapter 4), Kirk and Swain (this volume, chapter 5), and Wiggins (this volume, chapter 11) discuss aspects of this ownership. For example, Wiggins (this volume, chapter 11) find that consumers can perceive psychological ownership of an organization at a collective level, if they feel identification with the other consumers in the group and they feel that the organization is associated with the group. And while sharing ownership can be positive, Baxter and Aurisicchio (this volume, chapter 7) point out elements of the sharing experience that can be negative. Sharing among strangers will likely have differing effects on felt psychological ownership given that the presence of an unknown other might taint a product or affect how an individual interacts with the offering. How might we construct communities around shared objects/resources that heighten individual and collective psychological ownership?

Kovacheva and Lamberton (this volume, chapter 12) also consider how shared psychological ownership may provide unique benefits acquired from a collective consumption experience. When would a person want to claim more ownership over an experience and when is sharing psychological ownership of the experience more desirable? And, what about ownership asymmetry in the psychological ownership experience? Is it sometimes preferable to “own” more or less of the target compared to other owners? Do people’s perceptions of their own ownership

differ when the target is “ours”? Does this depend on how many owners there are, or that there are perceived to be?

Related to this is the transfer of ownership and how it affects both the original owner and the new owner. Weiss and Johar (this volume, chapter 3) use Egocentric Categorization Theory and examine transfer of attributes both to the target from the owner and from the owner to the target. What happens if ownership is transferred? Is it different for tangible versus virtual targets? Since self-identity is a motivation for psychological ownership, is the sense of self diminished with ownership transfer, or do we replace the target of ownership with something better to enhance our sense of self? This can also be asked of the other motivations including effectance and having a place or a home.

The sense of collective ownership is something that the Green Bay Packers have leveraged and capitalized on. This National Football League team is publicly-owned by individual stockholders (a.k.a., fans) who purchase common stock in the organization. These shares are not like stock in the traditional sense, but instead pay no dividends, benefit from no earnings, and cannot be sold or traded. For \$250, Packers fans have recently purchased a piece of paper that brands them as a “Packers shareholder”. The corporation currently has 364,414 people who collectively own 5,014,545 shares of stock after the last stock sale of 2011–2012 (Packers.com, n.d.).

Fans of many professional teams experience an incredibly strong sense of psychological ownership making it “my team” or even “my boys/girls”. In the context of the Packers, the psychological ownership felt by fans has translated into a strong willingness to pay for an objectively meaningless designation. Despite this, a collective sense of ownership is attained while seeming to solidify individuals’ feelings of psychological ownership. Exploring the

conditions under which psychological and collective ownership are mutually enhanced or differentially affected would be an interesting avenue for further research.

Time Dimensions related to Psychological Ownership

The time dimensions relating to psychological ownership have been a relatively understudied area of research. Baxter and Aurisicchio (this volume, chapter 7) suggest a lifecycle of psychological ownership. Aspects of this include the acquisition of psychological ownership, the duration of psychological ownership, and finally, the relinquishing of psychological ownership. It seems that these stages may or may not correspond to *actual* acquisition, use, and disposal of a product. Under some circumstances, there may be a delay in experiencing psychological ownership or these feelings could persist even after actual ownership ceases. Further research should consider the conditions under which this is true.

Interesting temporal considerations are revealed through access-based consumption (Baxter & Aurisicchio, this volume, chapter 7), in which no transfer of ownership takes place. In the case of car sharing, many individuals use and share a common resource. These authors argue for a design approach to ownership with a focus on human needs and comment on the increasing complexity in the ownership experience. Along with the dematerialization of the target of ownership, they suggest that the duration of use as well as the number of users be considered when designing the ownership experience. It is argued that in some cases, slowing of consumption may be a goal, especially in light of sustainability concerns (Baxter, Aurisicchio,

& Childs, 2015). To do that, consideration of how to slow the development of psychological ownership may also be warranted.

Another time element concerns the speed of divestment or acquisition. Various paths to feelings of ownership through acquisition and disposition are likely (see Baxter & Aurisicchio, this volume, chapter 7). Natural disasters such as floods force rapid relinquishing of objects. We know little about if and how the speed of divestment influences psychological ownership. Or, how it influences future acquisition and divestment. One could imagine a loss of self as objects tend to be part of the extended self (Belk, 1988) and serve the motive of self-identity (Pierce, Kostova, & Dirks, 2003). In addition, targets of psychological ownership fulfill the motive of having a sense of place or home. When confronted with a sudden loss, how do people rebuild their sense of self? And how does this link to psychological ownership? Likely the effects would be very different depending on me–mine sensitivity (Weiss & Johar, this volume, chapter 3). Chu and Shu (2017) note that a memento of an experience may also help eliminate the negative affect associated with the end of the experience. What if the experience is negative? What effect could a memento have?

What causes individuals to feel psychological ownership faster? Certainly, under conditions of scarcity, we could predict that the time to psychological ownership would shorten, meaning that individuals would more quickly experience a heightened sense of ownership. Consider that a strength of psychological ownership construct could help explain how readily a person relinquishes psychological ownership of a target. Feelings of psychological ownership are not likely to be constant over time; feelings of mineness can ebb and flow. More work could consider what elicits the warming and cooling of psychological ownership.

More research ought to consider the implications of future ownership as well. The idea that you will become an owner at some point in time may have implications for feelings of psychological ownership and behaviors in the present. We know that the longer a person owns a product, the more ownership is felt over the product (Reb & Connolly, 2007; Strahilevitz & Loewenstein, 1998). How does the amount of time a person waits for a product affect psychological ownership? Do waits of unknown length increase or decrease feelings of ownership compared to waits of known length? Do we acquire psychological ownership during that time? At what point in time is psychological ownership most intense? Interesting time-oriented propositions could be made leveraging literature on temporal distance (Trope & Liberman, 2003), consumer wait times (Miller, Kahn, & Luce, 2007), or temporal framing (Chandran & Menon, 2004).

Consequences of Psychological Ownership

A nascent research area is delving in to the consequences of psychological ownership. Judgements of the self and judgments of the target may be influenced by psychological ownership. The endowment effect (Kahneman, Knetsch, & Thaler, 1990) acknowledges that owners value an object more highly than buyers, presumably because this represents a loss for owners but not for buyers and losses loom larger than gains. Consumer researchers have found that psychological owners, not necessarily legal owners, also value a target more compared to psychologically non-owners (Brasel & Gips, 2014; Shu & Peck, 2011) and that these more general cognitive frames influence valuation (Morewedge & Giblin, 2015). Valuation has been the most studied consequence of psychological ownership, but what implications does this have

on consumer behavior? Besides willingness to pay, Dickert, Ashby and Dickert (this volume, chapter 9) examine economic decisions, and include dependent variables such as bargaining behavior and charitable giving. Expanding our understanding of the domains relevant for psychological ownership is important.

Weiss and Johar (this volume, chapter 3) find that individuals represent target objects as part of the self when they feel ownership, compared to when they do not. Further, Egocentric Categorization Theory or ECT predicts that feelings of ownership do not always increase the favorableness of product judgments. When individuals judge themselves as being low on an important product trait, psychological ownership of the product may decrease that product judgment. Considering what those self-relevant characteristics are that encourage or dissuade individuals from using the self as a reference should be explored.

Behavioral consequences of psychological ownership should be explored more fully. While hoarders feel excessive psychological ownership over targets (Chu, this volume, chapter 8), feeling a responsibility and caring for psychologically-owned targets is an expected consequence of psychological ownership (Pierce et al., 2003). It could be that hoarders feel intense psychological ownership, but do not actually care for the targets of ownership. Both Sussenbach and Kamleitner (this volume, chapter 13) and Shu and Peck (this volume, chapter 14) examine increasing psychological ownership for shared resources with the intention that consumers take better care of those resources. Preliminary evidence suggests that this is an effective strategy. However, there are many research opportunities in this area. For example, does collective ownership (is it “ours”) differ from individual ownership (it is “mine”) as far as stewardship? And, could collective ownership lead to the tragedy of the commons or the free-riding effect where a person assumes that others will take care of the object? What exactly is the

relationship between individual psychological ownership and collective psychological ownership as far as stewardship? Is one more effective than the other? What boundary conditions or moderators would be relevant to understand this relationship?

Using the antecedents of control, investing the self and intimately knowing (Pierce et al., 2001), these have been manipulated to increase the feeling of ownership. Customization such as remixing of music (Kirk & Swain, this volume, chapter 5) or customizing a product (Moreau, Bonney, & Herd, 2011) increases feelings of ownership. Control including physical control of touch (Brasel & Gips, 2014; Peck & Shu, 2009) and a two-way communication link (Kirk & Swain, 2016) have also been found to increase psychological ownership. However, in some instances, decreasing feelings of ownership may be warranted. When would this be beneficial and how would this be achieved? How do certain emotions influence the increase or decrease of psychological ownership and how does the intensity of these emotions affect behavior? Much more work needs to be done investigating the role of emotions in the formation and processing of ownership.

As investment in the self is an antecedent of psychological ownership, a person's own assessment of effort may be completely different than other's assessment of their effort. This has no doubt resulted in disagreements over order of authorship, loss of friendships, and changes in working relationships. Ideally would each person feel strong individual psychological ownership over the project or would they feel strong collective psychological ownership over the project, or both? Pierce maintains that to have collective psychological ownership, each person must first feel strong individual psychological ownership (Pierce & Peck, this volume, chapter 1). Is this always the case? Intellectual property disputes are a real problem and examining the

underpinning concept of the psychological nature of ownership may provide important insights in this area.

Friedman, Pesowski and Goulding (this volume, chapter 2) note that young children use ownership to predict how others will feel and how others will behave. Little work has been done in this area in consumer behavior research (for an exception see Kirk, Peck, & Swain, forthcoming). It is easy to see that various retailer behaviors such as signaling psychological ownership of a brand could actually be detrimental to the retailer because it may lessen the psychosocial ownership of the brand for shoppers. Even the use a pronoun “my” or “I” by a salesperson such as, “These are *my* new offerings” may inadvertently signal psychological ownership (Pennebacker, Mehl, & Niederhoffer, 2003) and ward off shoppers.

It’s interesting to note that people use ownership language frequently. In facing an athletic competitor who is difficult to beat, someone might say, “She owns me!” Or, a student who performs poorly on an examination might say, “that test owned me!” We also use this language to exert control or communicate boundaries to others. By asserting, “you don’t own me!” a child may express their desire to make independent choices and not be told what to do. What are the implications of feeling like you, yourself, are owned?

Finally, there are likely cultural differences in the consequences of psychological ownership. For example, we have control of our individual space, which results in feeling a certain amount of ownership of this space. We know that the use of space in interactions differs vastly across cultures (Knapp, Hall, & Horgan, 2013) so it is likely that felt ownership of personal space may result in infringement and territorial reactions in some cultures but not in others. This should be investigated. More broadly, do individuals from more individualistic/collectivistic cultures experience individual/collective psychological ownership

differently? There is currently a non-existent literature on cross-cultural differences of psychological ownership, but there remains great potential for work in this area.

When Psychological Ownership is Counter-Productive

In consumer behavior, most research to date has focused on ways to increase psychological ownership, and there seems to be a natural tendency to think of psychological ownership as positive. Individuals who feel a sense of ownership tend to value the target more, care for it more closely, etc. But, when does psychological ownership induce counterproductive behaviors? Are there negative or detrimental behaviors that are associated with heightened psychological ownership? For example, individuals with greater psychological ownership could be more willing to engage in aggressive behavior to safeguard what they consider to be theirs. In this instance consumers may become uncivil or disruptive.

Similarly, a dark side of feeling psychological ownership may be the tendency to feel territorial over the target. Toddlers are less likely to share a toy that belongs to them (Eisenberg-Berg, Haake, Hand, & Sadalla, 1979) and will actively protest when someone else takes their toy (Rossano, Rakoczy, & Tomasello, 2011). It should be no surprise that adults may act in much the same way. The object can be a tangible object, an idea, or even space. Kirk, Peck and Swain (forthcoming) identify various territorial behaviors that may be exhibited when a person feels their territory is threatened. An unanswered question as far as psychological ownership and consumer behavior concerns when specific reactions to infringement may be expressed. For example, when infringed upon, what factors determine whether a consumer will stand their group and defend their target of ownership, and when will they simply abandon ownership? It

may be that consumers with stronger psychological ownership would tend to fight. What factors influence the strength of psychological ownership? Do different combinations of antecedents elicit different strengths of psychological ownership? And, what about feeling infringed for another owner? It is likely that people closer psychologically would tend to elicit infringement responses. This is an important area for potential research.

Another downside of psychological ownership may be suboptimal financial decisions for consumers. Shu (this volume, chapter 10) examines policy issues related to social security and when people tend to claim their money. Having people feel less ownership and claiming money later would be beneficial, yet some individuals redeem social security early, which is likely due to a feeling of great ownership of the money in the account (Shu & Payne, 2013; Shu, Payne, & Sagara, 2014). And, feelings of ownership impact loss aversion, which can result in poor investment decisions. There are many potential public policy research opportunities both in the financial and in the medical domain. How can people be made to feel more ownership over their physical and mental health? Could possessing psychological ownership over food induce overeating? Perhaps detaching oneself from a food product and feeling less ownership over it could enhance the ability to exercise self-restraint in food consumption. Similarly, how can social programs leverage campaigns to detach individuals from poor behaviors and realign them with desired behaviors? Certainly, considering the ownership that an individual feels is an important factor in this. Thus, there are many implications for researchers who study prosocial behavior.

The downsides to psychological ownership are evident in consumers' over-accumulation of things. Hoarding behavior, as discussed by Chu (this volume, chapter 8), involves an extreme view of ownership and uses possessions both as a form of security (Kellett, 2007) and to define

the self (Stekettee, Frost, & Kyrios, 2003). Again, it is in the individual's best interest feel less ownership over targets so that they may relinquish ownership. Kovacheva and Lamberton (this volume, chapter 12) examine shared experiences and wonder when is less ownership better and whether asymmetric ownership makes sense in some cases.

Another dark side of ownership involves territoriality. Kirk, Peck and Swain (forthcoming) document territorial behaviors that can result if psychological ownership is high and a threat of another's ownership is perceived. Pierce also notes that having too much ownership of an idea may result in defensiveness and sabotage behaviors in the workplace. This is likely to have implications for the study of psychological ownership in consumer settings too. In general, the counter productivity of psychological ownership may influence behavior for some individuals. Understanding the conditions under which psychological ownership is counter-productive is certainly an important issue. When is feeling less psychological ownership better?

It should be clear from this chapter that there are more unanswered questions regarding psychological ownership than there are answers. With so many changes in consumer behavior, from the dematerialization of targets to the sharing economy, questions of ownership continually emerge. We look forward to more research in this area. We hope that reading this book, holding it in your hands, and exploring these ideas with us has engendered a sense of psychological ownership within you. Come along with us and take ownership of future research in psychological ownership!

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