

How Consumers Consume: A Typology of Consumption Practices

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This article examines what people do when they consume. In recent interpretive consumer research, three research streams have emerged, each portraying how people consume through a distinctive metaphor: consuming as experience, consuming as integration, and consuming as classification. The research reported here—a two-year observational case study of baseball spectators in Chicago's Wrigley Field bleachers—builds on this literature to systematically detail the universe of actions that constitute consuming. The resulting typology refines, extends, and synthesizes the three existing approaches to consuming and adds a fourth dimension—consuming as play—to yield a comprehensive vocabulary for describing how consumers consume. The usefulness of the typology is demonstrated by applying it to develop an alternative conception of materialism as a style of consuming.

What do people do when they consume? Consumer research has traditionally viewed this question as self-evident, assuming that consuming is structured by the properties of the consumption object. From an economic perspective, products have been conceived as bundles of attributes that yield particular benefits, and from a symbolic perspective, products have been conceived as vessels of meaning that signify similarly across all consumers. Recent field studies, however, offer a different perspective (e.g., Bourdieu 1984; Halle 1992; Morley 1986; Press 1991; Radway 1984). These studies demonstrate that the act of consuming is a varied and effortful accomplishment underdetermined by the characteristics of the object. A given consumption object (e.g., a food, a sports activity, a television program, or an art object) is typically consumed in a variety of ways by different groups of consumers. This pervasive variation in consumer actions suggests an important and relatively underdeveloped research stream for the discipline of consumer research: to comprehensively describe the variety of ways in which people consume, to understand how these differences vary across groups and situations, and to explain the unacknowledged conditions that structure how

different groups consume and the unintended consequences of such patterning (see Giddens 1979).

The study reported in this article focuses on the first stage of this research program and examines how people consume in systematic detail (cf. Prus 1987). Informed by the constructionist and interactionist perspectives found in sociology, consuming is viewed in this research as a type of social action in which people make use of consumption objects in a variety of ways (see Simmel 1950). The basic conceptual units used to describe consumers' actions are termed "consumption practices."¹ The goal, then, is to develop an analytic language—a typology of consumption practices—that usefully represents the variety of ways in which consumers interact with consumption objects.

In consumer research, an innovative research stream has recently emerged that plumbs the different ways in which consumers consume, using ethnographic and phenomenological methods to problematize the discipline's foundational verb. Three distinct metaphors for consuming have emerged in this literature, each attending to a particular dimension of how people consume: consuming as experience, consuming as integration, and consuming as classification. However, because the goal of these studies has been to detail specific aspects of consuming, there exists a need for a comprehensive framework that describes the universe of actions

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¹Basic categories of social action are often termed "methods" or "practices" (Bourdieu 1977; Garfinkel 1967; Giddens 1979). In the phenomenological and Wittgensteinian traditions on which these social theorists draw, practices are viewed as the embodied skills that people bring to bear in their everyday activities. This use is somewhat different from the way in which the term is used in Marxist theory (often "praxis").

that constitute consuming. In this article, I use a case study to extend, refine, and synthesize these three perspectives and add a fourth dimension—consuming as play—to yield a typology that offers a comprehensive vocabulary for describing how consumers consume.

The typology of consumption practices was constructed through analysis of extensive observations of baseball spectators sitting in the bleacher seats at Chicago's Wrigley Field. I attended 43 games during the 1990 baseball season and 35 games during the 1991 season. Baseball spectating was chosen because consumer actions in this activity are publicly accessible and because the slow pace of the game allows for high levels of interaction between consumers. Because the goal of the study was to build theory, a distanced approach to participant observation was used that focused on etic understanding. I sought to distance myself from the "normal" perspective of the baseball spectator in order to bring into relief the otherwise taken-for-granted actions that constitute spectators' consumption of the game (see Latour and Woolgar [1979] on "making the familiar strange"). In this regard, the methodological strategy used by Erving Goffman throughout his career served as an exemplar.

A three-part, iterative analytical technique was used to develop the consumption practices: preliminary working categories were constructed through a process of abstracting and generalizing from the specific observations of baseball spectating by means of constant comparison, coding, and memoing procedures (Strauss 1987); these categories were then interpreted and reconstructed in light of contemporary social theory; and, finally, the categories were integrated with the relevant consumer research literatures. This methodological strategy generally follows the logic of Burawoy's (1991) extended case method, in which a single, detailed case study is used to reconstruct and extend existing theory. Thus, while the typology is developed from a case study of baseball spectating, the methodological strategy used in the study aims at developing a descriptive framework of consuming that is useful in analyzing a broad range of consumers and consumption objects.

METAPHORS FOR CONSUMING

Two basic conceptual distinctions help to organize how the different aspects of consuming have been treated in previous research—the structure of consumption and the purpose of consumption (cf. Holbrook 1994). In terms of structure, consuming consists both of actions in which consumers directly engage consumption objects (object actions) and interactions with other people in which consumption objects serve as focal resources (interpersonal actions). In terms of purpose, consumers' actions can be both ends in themselves (autotelic actions) and means to some further ends (instrumental actions). Crossing these two dimensions yields a 2×2 matrix that locates the three

predominant metaphors currently used to describe consuming—consuming as experience, consuming as integration, and consuming as classification—as well as a neglected fourth dimension, here termed "consuming as play" (see Fig. 1).

Consuming as Experience

The consuming-as-experience metaphor underlies research examining consumers' subjective, emotional reactions to consumption objects. Holbrook and Hirschman (1982) pioneered research examining what they have variously termed the experiential, hedonic, aesthetic, autotelic, and subjective dimensions of consuming. Most of their work, as well as subsequent research that bears their influence (e.g., Belk, Wallendorf, and Sherry 1989; Celsi, Rose, and Leigh 1993), tends to view consuming as a psychological phenomenon from a phenomenological perspective, emphasizing the emotional states arising during consumption. The sociological view of consuming as experience developed here complements this work, describing a variety of consumption practices in which these emotional states are embedded.

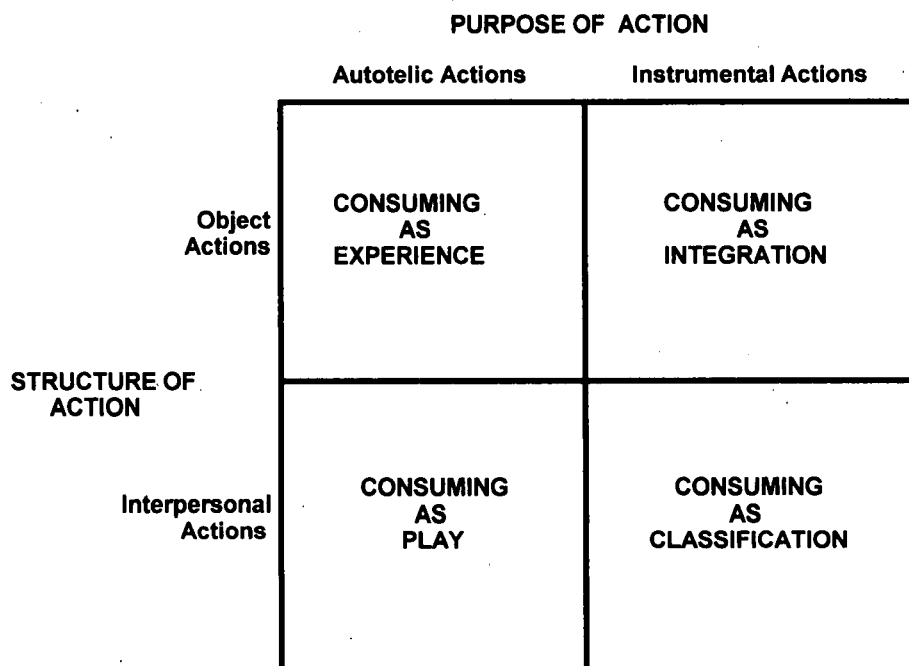
Consuming as Integration

Research relying on the consuming-as-integration metaphor describes how consumers acquire and manipulate object meanings. Through a variety of consumption practices—for example, Rook's (1985) consumption rituals, Belk's (1988) self-extension processes, McCracken's (1986) personalizing rituals, and Belk et al.'s (1989) sacralizing processes—consumers are able to integrate self and object, thereby allowing themselves access to the object's symbolic properties. This research extends these studies by refining existing descriptions and adding an institutional dimension that is missing from current formulations.

Consuming as Classification

The consuming-as-classification metaphor undergirds research that views consuming as a process in which objects—viewed as vessels of cultural and personal meanings—act to classify their consumers. Building on foundational statements by Levy (1959), Sahlins (1976), and Douglas (1979), consumer research has drawn from a number of academic traditions interested in meaning (e.g., cultural anthropology, semiotics, and literary theory) to specify the classificatory aspects of consumption. However, this tradition has focused almost exclusively on describing how meanings are structured and on interpreting the meanings particular to certain groups or consumption categories, paying little heed to the classificatory processes involved. Thus, classification is usually assumed to be an unproblematic process that is accomplished through

FIGURE 1
METAPHORS FOR CONSUMING



possession and social display of the consumption object. Because the consumption practices through which classification occurs have received little attention, the present research identifies a variety of ways in which consumers classify that have not been previously described in the literature.

Consuming as Play

A fourth dimension of consuming—autotelic, interpersonal consumer actions—has received little attention in the consumer research literature (Sherry [1990] and Arnould and Price [1993] are notable exceptions). As detailed below, this neglected dimension, termed consuming as play, is an important aspect of consuming. This case study describes how people use consumption objects to play and develops the relationship between this aspect of consuming and the other three dimensions.

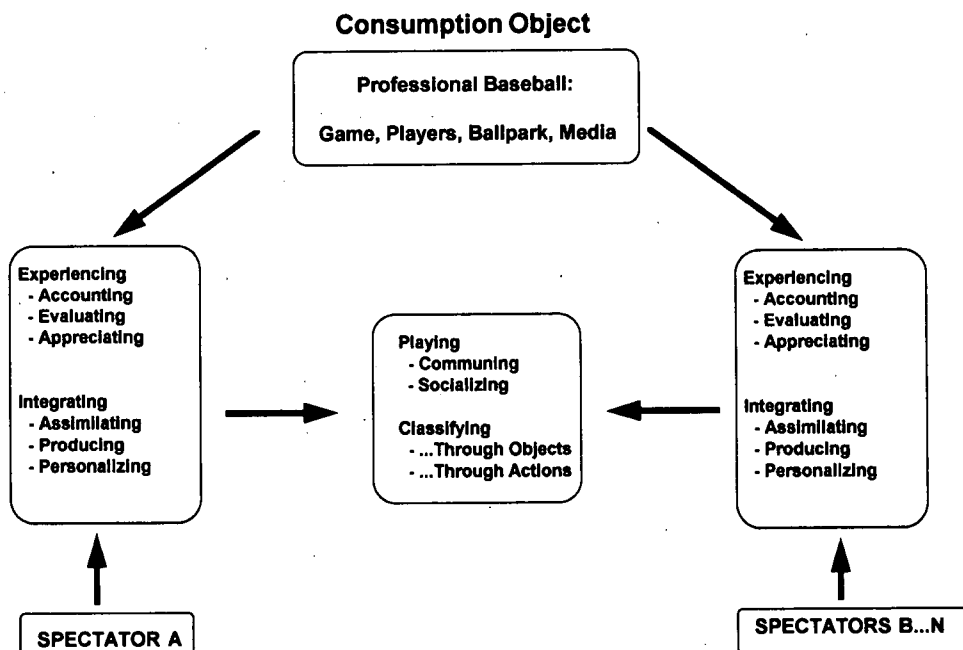
All four metaphors are necessary to describe comprehensively how spectators consume professional baseball. The 10 consumption practices constructed in this research explain the most important and distinctive features of these four domains and provide a specific vocabulary to describe how consumers consume (see Fig. 2).

CONSUMING AS EXPERIENCE

The consuming-as-experience metaphor references the methods used by spectators to make sense of and

respond to professional baseball. Such experiences are rarely constructed anew by consumers. Rather, how consumers experience consumption objects is structured by the interpretive framework(s) that they apply to engage the object. While people regularly apply a primary (or everyday) framework that enables understanding and action in everyday life (Berger and Luckmann 1967; Goffman 1974), there also exist numerous social worlds (Becker 1982) consisting of secondary frameworks that provide particular understandings of more specialized domains of our existence. Many consumption objects are embedded in such social worlds, which impart to consumers a shared definition of reality by structuring perceptions of "the way things are" in that world (Berger and Luckmann 1967). The social world of baseball is constituted not only by the formal rules of the game but, more important, by the wide variety of conventions, habits, strategies, and styles on which spectators draw (Swidler 1986). The baseball world provides participants with an intersubjectively shared lens through which they can make sense of situations, roles, action, and objects in the baseball world as well as a template that orients their actions (Geertz 1973). Spectators use interpretive frameworks to experience professional baseball in three different ways: through accounting, spectators make sense of baseball; through evaluating, spectators construct value judgments regarding baseball; and through appreciating, spectators respond emotionally to baseball.

FIGURE 2
CONSUMING PROFESSIONAL BASEBALL: A MODEL OF SPECTATOR CONSUMPTION PRACTICES



Accounting

Spectators engage in accounting when they apply an interpretive framework, usually that of the baseball world, to make sense of what they encounter at the game. Because accounting is such a basic, well-integrated activity in everyday life, its practice is often unremarkable and so goes unnoticed. However, when the sense-making task is complex and requires specialized information, accounting becomes a significant component of consumers' actions. In professional baseball, the complexity of numerous baseball world conventions and rules and the enormous number of relevant facts produces a wide variety of possible situations and interpretations of those situations. It is the complexity of baseball that makes accounting an intensive and often rewarding activity for the spectator. For the baseball expert, accounting comes easily and naturally, except in situations of rare complexity, while for a novice spectator, even the simplest accounts can be a struggle.

Two 10–12-year-old boys (Billy and Tommy) sit behind me with their fathers on each side. Each of them is scoring the game on an official scorecard. Billy gives Tommy some tips on scoring.

Billy: For a single, you put a line through it; a strikeout is a K.

Tommy: What's that mean?

Billy: Strikeout.

Billy and Tommy argue about what the symbols for scoring mean, and then attention returns to the game.

Father: Watch the game, Billy.

Billy and Tommy: (The first out is a strikeout. They shout in unison.) K!

Billy: (The second out is a foul ball that is caught.) No K unless it's a strikeout.

Father: (Ground ball is hit to first baseman Mark Grace, who bobbles the ball and gets it to Shawn Boskie, the pitcher covering first base, just in time.) He almost blew it. Did you see that?

Billy: Yeah. It was an error.

Father: It would've been an error if he beat it out.

Tommy to Billy: They don't get an at bat if they walk, OK?

Billy to Tommy: (Tommy is looking at the center field scoreboard.) Tommy, pay attention!

Tommy: (George Bell hits an infield ground ball and appears to run half-heartedly to first.) Run! Run! Run! He did that [made an out] on purpose. (This is the first evaluative comment from either Billy or Tommy during the game.)

Tommy: (Andre Dawson flies out to the warning track just out of our vision behind the wall.) Ground rule double! Home run! (Searching in vain for an account of the action.)

Father: No. He caught it. Four feet more and it would have been a home run.

Billy: It was so close.

Tommy: (Luis Salazar hits a ground ball to the shortstop.) Run! Run! Run! (Salazar is thrown out at first base on a routine play.) Safe!

Billy: Safe! (Salazar is called out. Billy switches from excited tone to matter-of-fact tone.) Ground out. (June 12, 1991)

The practice of accounting usually involves two steps: spectators typify (Berger and Luckmann 1967) actions and objects, assigning them specific meaning and value, and then they contextualize this account by making connections with relevant facts to create a richer understanding. Because the interpretive framework of the baseball world is seldom specified at the level of detail necessary to allow for automatic application, spectators must infer how it should be applied to specific circumstances. For example, when a batter hits a ball into the outfield and runs to first base, there are many deductive steps that the spectator takes before defining the event that has transpired as a single.

Typifying actions in terms of relevant rules and conventions alone is often unsatisfactory because it yields an account that does not discriminate the particularities of a given action. Defining a play as a single, for example, provides a relatively thin understanding of what has transpired. Thus, accounting also frequently involves linking context-enhancing facts to the account in order to increase its specificity. For example, knowing that the batter who hit the single was a pitcher who was trying to bunt in order to advance a runner provides a more nuanced account of the play.

Evaluating

Spectators account when they use an institutional framework to make sense of baseball, while they evaluate when they apply this framework to pass judgment on the situations, people, and actions they encounter. Spectators evaluate action by making comparisons to a variety of norms and baseline expectations. These baseline expectancies are usually those constituted by the baseball world, but spectators make judgments by comparing experiences to everyday frameworks as well. For instance, the diving leap of a fielder, the velocity of a pitch, and the distance that a baseball is hit are frequently compared to references in other spheres of life, including one's own perceived ability to perform these actions. While neophyte spectators tend to make these everyday comparisons, more experienced spectators commonly use the baseball world framework, because it allows them to make comparisons at a fine enough level to extract appreciable differences. For example, while any pitch of any professional pitcher is exceptional by the standards of most people's general framework, the baseball world framework allows one to discriminate between an older, tactical pitcher who can only throw 80 miles per hour and a young fireballer whose velocity approaches the century mark.

Evaluating involves comparisons to three types of baselines: norms, history, and conventions. Specific baseball "facts" are important for all three types of evaluation, as these serve as grist for such comparisons. Spectators constantly evaluate action according to the normative expectations they have developed in their interaction with the game, often using statistics to justify

their judgments. These "objective" baselines are not always official statistics but can also be measures created by the spectator, as is the case when a spectator evaluates pitchers based on length of time between pitches (August 2, 1990). While a large percentage of players' and teams' performances can be quantified via statistics, a number of important, intangible measures are difficult to translate into numbers. Thus, for important performance dimensions such as smartness, quickness, hustle, and choking, the norms are implicit. For example, spectators may berate an outfielder, yelling "Bonehead play!" (August 1, 1990) when he allows a base runner to advance an extra base by throwing the ball to the wrong infielder.

While normative evaluations are derived from comparisons to baseball world baselines, historical comparisons involve more narrow comparisons centered on the specific performance of a particular player or team in particular situations. Using history as a basis for comparison requires more specialized knowledge than do normative comparisons and often leads to nuanced judgments of action that would otherwise be considered unexceptional when viewed according to norms. For instance, one spectator evaluated Ryne Sandberg's hitting performance in April as promising, even though his batting average was not exceptional on a normative basis (May 24, 1990). This evaluation stems from a historical baseline that illuminates the fact that in past years Sandberg has hit poorly early in the season and then raises his average with exceptional performance in the warmer months.

Spectators evaluate action not only in terms of performance but also in relation to applicable conventions. Much of the action of the players, umpires, and spectators is conventionalized, and so spectators who are aware of these conventions use them to evaluate what they observe. For example, the sequence of actions used in pitching—the stance, the windup, the delivery, and the follow-through—are conventionalized. Thus, spectators evaluate how pitchers' actions differ by using these conventions as a baseline. For example, former Cubs relief pitcher Mitch Williams has a most unconventional style in which he nearly falls over at the end of his throw. This unusual motion is a prime target for evaluation by spectators.

Appreciating

Spectators appreciate professional baseball when they respond emotionally to its situations, people, action, and objects. The term "emotion" is used here in an interactionist sense to describe the holistic, short-term feelings that spectators express in response to the game (McCarthy 1989; Schott 1979). Appreciating taps the full range of emotional responses: in addition to clearly positive emotions such as feelings of excitement and awe in reaction to a spectacular diving catch or the joy and relief felt when a clutch hit drives in the winning

run in the ninth inning, appreciating may also include negative emotions—anger at a poor throw by an outfielder or feelings of disappointment and frustration when the Cubs fail to score with the bases loaded and no outs. Like accounting and evaluating, appreciating is accomplished through the application of a variety of frameworks, although, again, the baseball world framework predominates. Important types of appreciating for baseball spectators include aesthetics, humor and irony, ambiance, and sensory stimulation.

Aesthetic responses involve emotional reactions to the artistry and beauty of professional baseball (see Holbrook and Zirlin 1985). For example, spectators often use an everyday framework to appreciate the fluid, athletic movements of players as they dive for the ball or swing the bat—feats that are beyond what they can imagine themselves doing. These same actions generate aesthetic responses cultivated in the baseball world, where beauty is identified in finer, institutionally defined gradations of action. For example, the baseball world framework allows spectators to appreciate the efficient elegance of Dawson's throwing motion when he guns down a runner at third base, the enthusiastic abandon with which Shawn Dunston unleashes a throw from his shortstop position, or the anticipation and timing required for Doug Dascenzo to make a diving catch in center field.

Spectators are particularly responsive to situations and actions that are perceived as out-of-the-ordinary, plays that challenge the expectations set up by the baseball world framework. These situations can induce responses such as surprise, joy, irony, humor, disappointment, and even awe. For example, this is the case when home runs, relatively rare events anyway, are bunched together in unusual fashion, such as when the Cubs Hector Villanueva hit two homers in consecutive at bats to the same spot in left field. The novelty of this repetition led to crowd to jump to its feet and chant "Hector! Hector!" for several minutes (May 1, 1991).

The ambiance created at Wrigley Field is a primary draw for many Cubs spectators. In an everyday framework, Wrigley Field is appreciated for providing a change of pace; an expanse of green in the middle of an urban enclave, it is an idyllic setting. The design of the ballpark, the old-time organ music, the vendors throwing peanuts—all act to create a radical, nostalgic departure from the typical Chicago environs. But the characteristics of the ballpark are appreciated using the baseball world framework as well. Spectators appreciate Wrigley Field as being one of the few remaining classic ballparks, as reflected by its age, design, excellent sight lines, idiosyncratic features (the vines on the outfield wall), lack of modern accoutrements (the only ballpark that still uses a manual scoreboard), and the baseball savvy of its spectators.

Sensory experiences associated with attending a ball game are also appreciated in both everyday and baseball-specific frameworks. For instance, drinking a cold

beer on a hot day in the sun is a pleasant experience for many, but this activity is particularly appreciated by baseball world participants, for whom it is meaningful because of its symbolic linkages with the baseball world ideal of a day at the ballpark. Spectators also enjoy wolfing down ballpark franks wrapped in sweaty buns, working through a bagful of peanuts over the course of a game, and using wooden spoons to eat frosty malts that quickly become less than frosty. The appreciation of these items lies more in their socially constructed associations with baseball spectating than with their material culinary attributes. For example, spectators who otherwise rarely eat hot dogs occasionally remark that for some reason, hot dogs always taste better at the ballpark. Appreciating the hot dog is primarily driven by the consumption of its meaning based on the local framework of baseball. The sweaty, unadorned hot dog serves as a concrete symbol of professional baseball and baseball spectating, and these valued meanings have become imbued and naturalized to the extent that the hot dog actually tastes better.

CONSUMING AS INTEGRATION

The consuming-as-integration metaphor references the methods used by consumers to enhance the perception that a valued consumption object is a constitutive element of their identity (or self-concept [Rosenberg 1979]). In contrast with consuming as experience, integrating is an instrumental act pursued to facilitate the symbolic use of the object. Baseball spectators integrate a variety of elements of professional baseball into their identity; a particular game, a team, players, the ballpark, and the baseball world all serve as targets for integration.

Integrating practices operate in two directions. Practices that integrate consumption objects into one's identity have been termed self-extension processes (Belk 1988) in that such actions symbolically draw external objects into one's self-concept. In addition, spectators integrate in exactly the reverse manner—they reorient their self-concept so that it aligns with an institutionally defined identity (see, e.g., Zerubavel 1991; cf. Solomon 1983).

While integrating is all but automatic for consumption activities in which consumers significantly participate in the creation of the consumption object (e.g., camping, parties, or photography), the task becomes more difficult with mass-produced consumption objects (e.g., banking, automobiles, or celebrities), where the reified quality of the object makes integration with the consumer's subjective identity a problematic process (Miller 1987). Thus, while institutional structures, such as social worlds, are necessary to provide consumers with resources to construct their experiences as meaningful (McCracken 1986), the objectification necessary to constitute such worlds has the ironic effect of making it more difficult for consumers to appropriate the consumption object's meanings. Integrating practices, then,

are methods applied by consumers to break down this institutional distancing between consumer and consumption object: through assimilating, the baseball world framework becomes perceived as a natural way of thinking and acting; through producing, spectators assert that their actions help to construct the consumption object; and through personalizing, spectators alter the baseball world to assert the individuality of their bond with professional baseball.

Assimilating

Assimilating practices are the methods by which spectators become competent participants in the social world of professional baseball. For baseball spectators, assimilating is closely tied to the length and quality of interaction between spectator and valued elements of the baseball world. Assimilating may occur in any interaction with the baseball world: watching a game on television, reading the sports page, or talking about baseball with a friend at work. However, attending a game as a spectator offers enhanced possibilities for assimilating, because spectators are able to interact directly with the game, players, ballpark, and other baseball world participants at a level that is unavailable through other modes of consumption. In addition, attending allows spectators the opportunity to learn about and play the role of spectator as defined by the baseball world.

Because assimilating involves thinking like, feeling like, acting like, and looking like a baseball world participant, one important aspect of assimilating is attaining a degree of competence in the three experiential practices, so that enacting the role of spectator becomes taken for granted. For instance, assimilating as a spectator requires developing the requisite baseball world knowledge and the specialized tastes that flow from this knowledge: knowing where the best seats are and seeking them out, understanding the game's longstanding rivalries and showing keen interest in those matchups, and appreciating the unique characteristics of Wrigley Field that make games at other parks less enjoyable by comparison. Given that assimilating involves not only thinking like a baseball world participant but also acting like one, actions such as dressing in Cubs paraphernalia, talking about Cubs statistics with the person sitting next to you, rooting for the Cubs, jeering bad calls, and emphatically punching the air and yelling "One! Two! Three strikes you're out!" with television announcer Harry Caray are all potent loci of assimilation.

Producing

Producing practices are methods through which spectators act to enhance their perception that they are significantly involved in the production of professional

baseball.² Participating in the production of consumption experiences is often a mundane matter when the institutional configuration of the consumption world allows the consumer a significant degree of control (e.g., in holiday meals [Wallendorf and Arnould 1991]; or skydiving [Celsi et al. 1993]). But when the consumption object is controlled by others, producing practices become problematic. The role of spectator in professional baseball is one that allows little opportunity to exert one's will on the baseball game. Yet, spectators still pursue practices through which they seek to enhance the perception that they are involved in the game's production. The primary types of producing practices used by spectators are managing, predicting, and bonding.

Spectators frequently engage in imaginary interactions with managers, players, and umpires, attempting to influence their actions, second-guessing their calls, or berating their performance (see Caughey's [1984] "imaginary social worlds"). In essence, they create and play out a fantasy in which they are managing, in charge of play on the field. Some spectators even assert that their actions significantly influence the game.

When the Pirates take the field, the fans immediately jump on Andy Van Slyke, yelling the familiar derogatory chants. Ted reprimands them (seeming to forget that he led these chants in days past), "Hey guys, the last time we got him pissed off he hit two home runs. Hey, don't mess with him. There are two guys you don't want to piss off—Van Slyke and Strawberry. Anybody else is fine." (April 22, 1990)

In addition to managing, predicting action on the field can be used as a means of interjecting some control over the game. Even predictions that require little in the way of competence can be empowering on the infrequent occasions when they are accurate.

In the bottom of the ninth with the Cubs down by a run, Dawson comes to bat. Steve says, "Andre's gonna hit one out." Dawson crushes one to the top of the left-field bleachers above us, and Steve yells with a smirk (evidencing much satisfaction), "Who called it?" (May 8, 1990)

Because of the difficulty involved in becoming an officially recognized producer in the baseball world, spectators often pursue an alternate strategy of bonding with those deemed the official producers of the game—primarily the players, coaches, and media. By establishing some sort of relationship—no matter how tenuous or even fictional—with the productive core of the consumption world, spectators are able to engage in vicar-

²It is important to note that spectators' participation in producing practices is a subjective phenomenon. For instance, Becker (1982) argues that consumers play a key role in the production of cultural goods. However, one characteristic that distinguishes consumers from "official" culture producers is that consumers seldom recognize their productive role.

ious production. They perceive that they have tapped into the official producers' productive capabilities and thus have become insiders (Unruh 1979). The wide variety of celebrity-worshipping activities found in American society can be interpreted as practices in which consumers seek to establish relationships with those at the core of a valued social world.

Because of institutional constraints, establishing any kind of relationship with baseball world producers can be an arduous task, so spectators employ a variety of creative strategies: attracting players' attention while on the field, waiting for players at the locker room exit before and after games, collecting autographs and other personalized memorabilia, and attending baseball conventions and store promotions where players often appear as a draw. Confirmation of the spectator's bond with players on the field occurs when a player reacts to the spectator. Thus, a wink or a nod at a fan's screamed comment, a wave to the crowd, or a practice ball thrown to a spectator in the stands are potent indicators that the player has reciprocated.

A spectator yells to Cubs outfielder Jerome Walton, "Hey Spudnick!" (Walton scans the bleachers.) "He looked! I can't believe it! That's his nickname. Now we can tell our friends. . . . I don't know him, but I know his nickname." (June 5, 1991)

Roger McDowell, a pitcher for the Philadelphia Phillies during the 1990 season, was easily the most popular non-Cubs player among bleacher spectators because of his willingness to interact with them.

A young woman seated next to me screams at McDowell, asking him to take a picture with her camera. She drops her camera to him. McDowell, in his typically playful manner, waves for the fans on each side of the woman to get in the picture. Perhaps a hundred fans pack close together for the shot. He does the same at the other end of the left-field bleachers . . . and then comes to return the camera. He is greeted with adoring comments ("Roger, we love you!" "Hey Roger, we want you on the Cubs!" "Why don't you play for the Cubs?"), having won over the fans with his antics. He gives a baseball to the woman with the camera. She screams. (April 10, 1990)

Personalizing

Personalizing practices are methods in which spectators add extrainstitutional elements to the baseball world in order to assert the individuality of their relationship with professional baseball. Like producing practices, personalizing practices involve exerting one's influence on baseball. However, while for producing practices this influence occurs within the institutional boundaries of the baseball world, personalizing practices involve modifying the baseball world in some way. Acts of personalizing have been discussed extensively in the consumer research literature (Belk 1988; Belk et al. 1989; McCracken 1986; Wallendorf and Arnould 1991). In that literature, the term has been used to describe

actions in which consumers symbolically and physically tailor mass-produced consumption objects in order to acquire and manipulate their meaning-carrying properties. The approach taken here further refines this definition: personalizing only occurs when consumers' manipulations alter institutional elements of the consumption world. Many instances in which consumers manipulate goods are, in fact, institutionalized acts that are structured by their respective social worlds (e.g., decorating a house to achieve a homey look [McCracken 1989]; cooking a homemade Thanksgiving meal [Wallendorf and Arnould 1991]). Such actions are more appropriately categorized as assimilating rather than personalizing practices, because they indicate the consumer's integration into a collective identity rather than an attempt to singularize the good. Indeed, the boundary between personalizing and assimilating practices is forever shifting, for personalizing actions are subject to the process of institutionalization and thus can, over time, become part of the consumption world that the actions initially sought to modify.

Like assimilating and producing practices, personalizing practices are problematic for spectators, who have limited access to the productive nucleus of the baseball world—the game and its players. Spectators attempt to adorn the stadium walls with distinctive signs and occasionally exhibit a proclivity for pelting the field with foreign objects, but such personalizing acts are discouraged at Wrigley Field. So, instead, spectators concentrate on personalizing one element over which they are able to exercise some control—themselves. By personalizing dress, signs, and comments, spectators attempt to individuate their relationship with players, teams, and the game. Because dressing in Cubs paraphernalia has become an institutionalized aspect of spectating at Wrigley Field, personalizing requires staying one step ahead of the crowd by incorporating idiosyncratic elements into the standard ensemble: customizing hats with pins, ticket stubs, or flashing lights, sewing handmade shirts with the Cubs logo, or constructing strange-looking signs with offbeat narratives. More radical personalizing acts are also witnessed occasionally, such as that of a group of four young men who sat bare-chested throughout the game, each with a large, grease-painted letter drawn on his chest so that together they spelled "C-U-B-S" (June 11, 1991). At the extreme, a few spectators go to great lengths to completely personalize their attendance at the game by combining costumes, props, and commentary to create fictional characters such as *The Bleacher Preacher* or *Ronnie Woo Woo*.

Spectators also personalize professional baseball by integrating their own personal experiences with those that are constituted within the baseball world. For example, spectators often compare action on the field to their childhood experiences on Little League or high school baseball teams or to more recent episodes in local softball leagues. If an outfielder sustains a shoulder in-

jury diving for a ball, someone is bound to comment that they once experienced a similar injury. Spectators also engage in personalizing when they integrate disparate elements from other spheres of life into their accounts of the baseball game. For example, spectators sometimes adapt jokes from *Saturday Night Live* skits to Cubs games: former Cubs outfielder Doug Dascenzo is "the Doug-man, the Dougster, playin' in the majors," and unquestioned allegiance to the Cubs is confirmed in a self-mocking manner by declaring "da Cubs."

CONSUMING AS PLAY

Consuming not only involves directly engaging consumption objects but also includes using consumption objects as resources to interact with fellow consumers. As with object actions, this interpersonal dimension of consuming also can be usefully divided into autotelic and instrumental components. Playing practices capture the autotelic dimension: consumer-object-consumer interaction that has no ulterior end, interaction for interaction's sake (Simmel 1950).

Spectators, when they play, adopt a metacommunicational frame that defines the content of their talk and actions as meaningless except for its role in enhancing interaction with others (Bateson 1955; Goffman 1974). This frame also defines the roles and rules that those who participate in play assume. The consumption object is essential for playing because it provides the materials through which playful interaction is enjoined. Professional baseball acts as a resource for playing; just as haystacks have served certain artists and the weather has served many neighbors, baseball provides a common locus for people who often have few other commonalities. Two types of playing are prevalent among baseball spectators: in communing, spectators share their mutually felt experiences with each other, and in socializing, spectators make use of experiential practices to entertain each other.

Communing

Spectators commune when they share how they are experiencing the consumption object with each other such that their interaction with the game becomes a mutual experience (cf. Arnould and Price 1993). Spectators who apply the baseball world framework often experience the game in much the same way. When in the company of like others, this mutuality of perspective reverberates between consumers, creating a subtle but powerful form of interaction. Numerous scholars in the Durkheimian tradition have described the power of group interaction focused on a central icon or totem that often serves as the basis for sacred experiences (Belk et al. 1989).

In the Wrigley Field bleachers, the collective sharing of experiential practices is a critical element of consuming. In fact, one could argue that a primary reason

for sitting in the bleachers (where the "seats" are benches, the view is less desirable than that of other locations, and fellow spectators can be obnoxious—yet, tickets are often scalped for three times their value) is that its close quarters and celebratory, carnivalesque atmosphere facilitate the communal aspects of consuming. The potency of communing is most evident in spectators' reactions to extraordinary occurrences (e.g., a spectacular play, a dramatic finish, or an ironic circumstance). In such situations, spectators' reactions play off each other, this spiraling interaction raising the level of emotional intensity to the point where happiness is expressed as ecstatic screams, disappointment brings tears, and anger can quickly build into open hostility (a potential threat to fans of other teams). For example, when Cubs catcher Damon Berryhill hits a home run in the bottom of the ninth inning to win a game, spectators erupt in joyous celebration, pumping fists into the air, yelling, and reveling for several minutes as the dramatic tension that had gradually increased as the Cubs failed to take advantage of opportunities to win the game is suddenly released. While these spectators certainly engage in what was earlier termed "appreciating," that does not capture all of what has transpired. A significant aspect of consuming here is the sharing of this unusually dramatic finish with others, through which the spectators create the adrenalin-filled celebration in the stands that follows the game.

Socializing

In addition to communing, playing often takes on a more performative, reciprocal style in which spectators use their experiences with the game to entertain each other (see Sherry 1990). Participants take turns exchanging comments, often attempting to replicate, if not outdo, other participants in terms of the quality of their commentary. Nuanced evaluations, witty repartee, and emotional demonstrations of tastes are the favored means to engage in this type of play.

Jim: (Jim gives his interpretation of Sandberg's error that ended his record-setting streak for most errorless games.) It seemed like he was trying to do it, trying to end the streak. The Cubs had the game won anyway, so it didn't hurt to take a risk. If it had been close, he would never have thrown it. . . . (The Reds catcher hits a ball between the center and right fielders.) . . . Gonna be two.

Craig: Little bit of a 'tweener [a hit that lands in the gap between two outfielders, usually leading to an extra-base hit].

Jim: That's a 'tweener. . . . Did you watch the road games last week? [Cubs outfielder Dwight] Smith almost killed two people with foul balls, slicing them the opposite way.

Craig: Smith is starting to hit the ball. . . . (seventh-inning stretch) . . . AIIII right! Let's get some runs! (Mimicking Harry Caray's standard postsong battle cry when the Cubs are behind.)

Jim: (Dunston makes a routine putout in the top of the eighth inning.) I wish he was still a little wild. It was always fun watching people in the third or fourth row duck when he let one fly. . . . (Sandberg doubles in the bottom of the eighth.) Two and three [i.e., Sandberg and Grace, the second and third hitters in the lineup] haven't done anything all year. . . . They're giving him third base [i.e., the pitcher is allowing Sandberg to take a big lead at second base].

Craig: That's tough with a lefty [i.e., it's difficult for a left-handed pitcher to hold a runner close on second base]. (May 22, 1990)

While Craig and Jim's conversation certainly contains instrumental elements, its primary characteristic is autotelic interaction rather than the communication of specific information. Jim and Craig use the game as a means to socialize, entertaining each other through humorous and insightful commentary that plays off the game.

CONSUMING AS CLASSIFICATION

The consuming-as-classification metaphor references the ways in which consumers use consumption objects to classify themselves in relation to relevant others. Consumers classify by leveraging their interaction with the object—their experiential and integrating practices—to communicate with other consumers (where the "other" can be also be oneself viewed in the third person [Mick and DeMoss 1990]).

Classifying practices serve both to build affiliation and to enhance distinction. Spectator sports offer an effective vehicle for building affiliation through the totemic symbols of team, ballpark, and players. The productive resources of the baseball world provide concrete markers to represent spectators' collective identities—as baseball fans, Cubs fans, and Wrigley Field aficionados. Affiliation at the team level is particularly important. Interaction that valorizes the Cubs—showing concern and respect for the Cubs star players, wearing a Cubs jacket, or declaring the length and intensity of one's affection for the team—serves to construct and sustain meaningful ties between otherwise heterogeneous consumers. And, as social boundaries must always be at the same time exclusive and inclusive (Douglas and Isherwood 1979), classifying practices always serve to distinguish as well as to affiliate. Cubs games serve as both the sacred site from which affiliative bonds emanate (Belk et al. 1989) and the locus of value in the baseball world where the means to create distinction is earned (Bourdieu 1984). Engaging in actions that enhance one's sense of affiliation as a Cubs fan also necessarily results in distinguishing oneself from those whose allegiance is not as strong and from those who affiliate with other teams or none at all. Baseball spectators engage in two distinct methods of classifying—classifying through objects and classifying through actions.

Classifying through Objects

Consumers classify through objects when they use the shared meanings associated with a consumption object to classify themselves or others. This type of classification has been much discussed in consumer research (e.g., Levy 1959; McCracken 1986), but the interactional processes required to classify through objects are rarely problematized. Because most studies of the signifying properties of consumption objects have examined highly visual material goods (e.g., clothing, food, automobiles, housing, or favorite objects), they tend to assume that classification is a mundane process of displaying one's possessions to others (e.g., Fisher and Price 1992; Kleine and Kernan 1991). Display is an incomplete description of how people communicate through objects and is not applicable to consumption objects that, because they are not material goods (e.g., services or ideas) or because they are public objects (e.g., cities or works of art), cannot easily be owned or displayed.

In order to classify through objects, consumers must first establish the nature of their relationship to the consumption object. This is often a complex and problematic process, as demonstrated by consumers of professional baseball. Spectators seeking to communicate their association with symbolically valued elements of professional baseball—a game, a player, the Cubs, or Wrigley Field—have adopted a variety of classificatory practices that serve to demonstrate their association with these objects to self and others. Attending a game is a powerful indicator of spectators' associations with professional baseball's valued objects, but it is both short-lived and not necessarily directed at those with whom one is interested in communicating. So spectators have adopted a number of practices to enhance their ability to communicate their affiliation and distinction beyond the temporal limitations of the game itself. A variety of objects are often used as symbols to mark associations with ephemeral events. Clothing that incorporates the team's insignia is, of course, a primary tool used to extend the temporal boundaries of one's affiliation. Souvenirs and photos are also primary markers for baseball spectators. They add credibility to the claims and opinions of their owner, and they add context to stories by serving as conversation pieces. Souvenirs that certify one's attendance are particularly valued: otherwise worthless freebies that are given away at games; home-run, foul, and batting practice balls; and even the ivy covering the outfield walls at Wrigley Field. Also, many spectators take photos and videos that document their attendance; and in pursuit of the ultimate documentation, they often crowd together, push over one another, and hold up special signs (e.g., "The CUBS and WGN are #1!") to get the television camera operator's attention.

Yet, documentary markers, even photographic evidence, are relatively ambiguous indicators of associa-

tion. They give credibility that some type of relationship exists, but they are not able to pinpoint its quality or intensity. It is left to techniques that allow for a higher degree of specificity to fill in the details. Storytelling is the primary vehicle through which spectators specify the nature of their relationship with professional baseball. Through stories, spectators are able to interlace autotelic conversation (i.e., playing) with descriptions of their ties to professional baseball by using details to give credibility to their claims. Often, spectators will use stories to describe previous games they attended, which reaffirms the length and strength of association with the Cubs and Wrigley Field. Because important or unusual games are the most salient representations, spectators often tell stories about such games in which the storyteller can intimate, I was there. For example, Ted conveys his long-term, intensive relationship with the Cubs and Wrigley Field by weaving stories conveying that relationship into his ongoing "playing" banter with other spectators.

When asked by a fellow spectator why a large section of seats in center field is not in use, Ted tells him that the seats are blocked off so that the hitter can see the ball better (reasonably common knowledge among Cubs fans) but then adds some historical detail: "In the sixties, we used to bring an extra shirt to the game. When the Cubs were up we'd have dark blue shirts on, but when the opposition came to the plate we'd change into a white shirt. [The batters on the other team] couldn't see anything against the white background. People finally caught on, and they blocked off the seats. We thought it was fair—home-field advantage. I've been sitting here since 1967. The crowd around me has changed but I don't." (April 22, 1990)

In fact, a significant attraction of attending games in person is to gather ammunition for distinction-building storytelling. Spectators even cite the Cubs record for games when they have been in attendance as if it were their own record.

The Braves take the lead in the top of the ninth inning. Duncan and his friend raise their beers, showing their loyalty in the face of losing by toasting, "Win or lose!" Duncan relates this turn of events to last season: "Yeah, I had a bad record last year, 7 and 4" [i.e., the Cubs won seven and lost four games that Duncan attended]. (May 29, 1990)

Classifying through Actions

Past research describes how consumption objects serve to classify strictly in terms of what is above termed classification through objects—classifying oneself and others by means of objects with which one has demonstrated an established association. However, in addition to this method, consumers also use the manner in which they experience the consumption object to classify. For object classification, the particular meanings associated with a consumption object provide the

content of the classificatory act, while for action classification, object meanings are irrelevant—what matters is *how* one interacts with the object.³ In baseball spectating, the meanings of actions are conveyed to others through participating in conventions, predicting, mentoring, and expressing tastes.

Although applying the three experiential practices in a public forum such as a ballpark allows for some degree of "natural" communication of one's experience, the process involved can be problematic: How do spectators know how others are experiencing the game? Participating in baseball conventions allows spectators to classify more explicitly. Because conventionalized actions are publicly displayed, they serve as clear symbols. Important conventions for bleacher spectators at Cubs games included derogatory chanting aimed at the opposing team's players (e.g., "Strawberry sucks!"), salaaming to ex-Cubs star outfielder Dawson as a sign of respect, staying until the end of the game no matter what the score, and one anticonvention—avoiding participation in the "wave." To demonstrate the importance of conventions in communication, both the most celebrated and the most subtle conventions at Wrigley Field are described.

Wrigley Field's most notorious convention is the "throw back"—the bleacher spectator's defiant return of the opposition's home-run ball to the field from which it came. This act is a potent form of producing—taking the game into one's own hands by symbolically rejecting the opposition's foray. But, at the same time, it serves as a dramatic, public display of one's status as a knowledgeable Cubs fan and bleacher spectator. This is particularly true given that, in this instance, participation requires more than just knowledge of the convention; it also requires resisting the temptation of the neophyte spectator to engage in object classification by pocketing a valuable souvenir from the game.

Fred McGriff hits a two-run homer to right field, where a spectator grabs and holds onto the ball. He is met with a loud and persistent round of "Throw it back!" chants, followed by the left-field fans chanting "Right field sucks!" This time the right-field fans do not reply since the chant has a target and they appear to be in agreement with the interpreted sentiment (i.e., the fan in right field does "suck"). For the next three outs, the "throw it back" chant reappears between plays. A Crowd Control man sits next to the fan, evidently to protect him from possible hostile actions from the angry crowd. The fans around me are not truly angry, though. They laugh about the situation, agree that they might do the same thing, but still feign anger and join in on the chant. Two innings

³What I term "classification through action" is quite similar to what anthropologists and sociologists have called "ritual action." I have chosen to use the former because the term "ritual" has been used in a variety of ways in consumer research, few of which align with the term's predominant usage in the social sciences (see Holt [1992] for a review). Also, this choice allows for consistency with other terminology in the typology.

later, the fan finally decides to throw the ball back and receives a standing ovation. (June 6, 1991)

Widely touted conventions such as the throw back provide a public forum for demonstrating one's affiliation with and distinction from other spectators at varying levels—as baseball world participants, as Cubs fans, and as bleacher spectators. However, spectator conventions do not always involve the enactment of consciously sanctioned rules; spectators' routine actions are subject to conventionalization as well. Conventions that require spectators to respond quickly to play on the field are particularly suited to creating distinction. For example, whenever a ball is hit over the outfielder's head, whether for a home run or an extra-base hit, bleacher spectators immediately stand up and often let out an exclamation (e.g., "All right!" if the Cubs are batting or "Oh no!" if the opponents are batting). Because several seconds often elapse between the time the ball is hit and the conclusion of the play, spectators put their accounting competence on the line when they engage in conventional reactions before the outcome has been established. Fly balls to the outfield can be difficult to judge from the perspective one gets in the bleachers, so these serve as a challenging opportunity for spectators to react properly and quickly. Those who correctly account for a fly out by not standing up are pleased with themselves and often expect others to defer to their competence, while those who jump up when they momentarily believe that a ball might carry for an extra-base hit or a home run often sit down quickly with a sheepish grin acknowledging their accounting miscue.

Another way of classifying through action is mentoring. Baseball world competence is rarely distributed equally among spectators within earshot. Thus, more competent spectators often will act as mentors for the less competent, building their credibility as a baseball authority.

A ball gets by the Cubs catcher, allowing a run on the play. Ted loudly gives his ruling on the play, "Scoring on the play—wild pitch! Any time the ball hits the dirt, it's called a wild pitch, even if the catcher should have stopped it." The official scoring flashes on the scoreboard moments later—wild pitch. (April 22, 1990)

Spectators not only make use of post hoc accounting skills to classify, they also use an *a priori* variant—predicting. Predictions rely on probabilistic assessments of alternative scenarios based on a detailed accounting of the current game situation analyzed against baseline expectations. If the prediction is justifiable based on the baseball world norms for such situations, it signals the predictor's ability to account for action, regardless of whether the prediction turns out to be accurate.

Larry: This is probably Maddux's last inning.

Sam: They got no one warming up. (Paul Assenmacher had warmed up but had sat down.)

Larry: Seven innings. First start of the season.

Sam: He went seven innings in preseason.

Larry: They count pitches thrown, too.

Sam: He hasn't walked any. (April 10, 1991)

Like storytelling, such predictions serve as rhetorical devices that allow the spectator to build distinction or affiliation. In much the same way, the expression of tastes acts to reveal the sophistication of the spectator's grasp of the baseball world framework. Tastes serve to distinguish when they reveal a more nuanced, even iconoclastic, view that can be supported by baseball world facts, as opposed to mere repetition of an accepted majority position (e.g., "Andre Dawson's awesome"). Here, Ted distinguishes himself by asserting his allegiance to a marginal Cubs player—Dascenzo—giving supporting evidence to back his view.

Ted comments that Dascenzo (the Cubs utility outfielder, who is playing left field today) is "on the bubble" (meaning that when the club has to cut back its roster by three people on May 1, Dascenzo is one who may lose his job). Even if his statistics are not that great, "You want a guy like that in the clubhouse, because he has a great attitude. He's a 'gamer.'" Dascenzo makes a catch moments later. Ted yells, "Yeah, Doug! That's my man Doug!" (April 22, 1990)

APPLYING THE TYPOLOGY: MATERIALISM AS A STYLE OF CONSUMING

One way to judge the value of a theory-building study is to evaluate whether the resulting theory provides useful insights when applied to topics of interest to the discipline (Peter and Olson 1983). While such a goal extends beyond the empirical scope of this research, an application of the typology is offered—developing a new approach for conceptualizing materialism—that is suggestive of its usefulness and would merit further empirical investigation.

Past studies have viewed materialism as a trait or value that measures the importance of possessions in one's life (Belk 1985; Richins and Dawson 1992). While this work has produced interesting results, the emphasis these studies place on possessiveness is a potential weakness. Possessions are of great importance not only for those usually considered to be materialists but also for others who do not readily fit the materialist moniker (see, e.g., Belk et al. 1989) and include those who have very little to call their own (e.g., the homeless [Hill and Stamey 1990]). Indeed, anthropologists have argued persuasively that possessions are of critical importance for all humankind in substantiating and hence reproducing cultural meanings (Douglas and Isherwood 1979; McCracken 1986). Thus, the importance of possessions may be too general a measure to capture what is commonly meant by materialism.

Instead of focusing on the overall importance of possessions, it may be more productive to define materialism in terms of how people use their possessions. The typology of consumption practices offers a useful tool

for analyzing materialism in this manner because it categorizes the different ways in which people use consumption objects. Materialism can be conceptualized as the consumption style that results when consumers perceive that value inheres in consumption objects rather than in experiences or in other people. Consuming in a materialist style, then, emphasizes integrating practices over experiential practices (because integrating serves to link consumers to valued objects) and classifying through objects over classifying through actions (because objects are perceived as value laden), and it deemphasizes playing practices (because playing is centered on other people rather than objects).

This approach to materialism has several advantages. First, instead of relying completely on attitudinal differences, particular consumer actions are detailed that together constitute materialist consumption. Second, this conception offers a tighter specification of the dispositional profile that leads to materialist consumption. Defining materialism in terms of the importance of consumption objects to life satisfaction (Richins and Dawson 1992) conflates the different ways in which objects can generate satisfaction. Objects can yield satisfaction as ends in themselves and as signifiers but also because they facilitate highly valued experiences and playful interactions. Instead, the typology suggests that materialism is a distinctive style of consumption that results when consumers believe that value inheres in consumption objects rather than in experiences or in other people.

Finally, this view provides more specification in defining the opposite end of the continuum: What is consumption when it is not materialist? Conceptions of materialism that emphasize the importance of possessions often define materialism's opposite as voluntary simplicity—choosing to live a life of material simplicity because one values moral responsibility, spiritual growth, and self-actualization (Elgin 1981; Richins and Dawson 1992). While nonmaterialists may indeed have fewer possessions than materialists, the explanation implied by voluntary simplicity—that people have fewer possessions because they place less value on objects—runs contrary to ethnographic evidence. For instance, some studies have found that exactly the opposite relationship holds: those who live with fewer objects may assign more importance to those objects that they do have (e.g., consider the "ascetic" new class, [Bourdieu 1984]; or the few special possessions retained by the homeless [Hill and Stamey 1990]). Why, then, might nonmaterialists have fewer possessions than materialists?

The typology of practices suggests that nonmaterialism consists of two ideal types: the consumption style that results when value is perceived to inhere in experiences (i.e., experiential consumption) and the consumption style that results when value is perceived to inhere in other persons (i.e., play consumption). While in materialist consumption objects are viewed as a

source of value to be appropriated and communicated, both types of nonmaterialism treat consumption objects as resources to be leveraged rather than as terminal sources of value. In experiential consumption, objects serve as resources to create valued experiences, and in play consumption, objects facilitate interactions with valued others.

Nonmaterialists, then, may well have fewer possessions than materialists, but not because they place less value on possessions. Instead, their relative lack of possessions results because possessions can more readily satiate nonmaterialists' desires for enjoyable experiences and interactions, whereas materialists' desires to develop object linkages are potentially insatiable. While finer or more numerous possessions may serve to enhance experiences and interactions, nonmaterialists' acquisitive desires are constrained by their finite ability to sustain the necessary experiential and playing practices required to receive value from these objects. For example, owning a beautiful vacation home in the mountains is of little benefit for nonmaterialists if they are not able to use the house to enable enjoyable experiences or to enhance interactions with friends and family.

On the other hand, materialists are faced with a different set of constraints on their desires to acquire possessions. Materialists are limited by the resources they have available to build relationships with valued objects. These resources can be human—consider, for example, the time and effort required for baseball spectators to establish a credible bond with the Cubs and communicate this to others. However, integrating with valued objects can be accomplished by means other than these labor-intensive consumption practices. In materialist consumption, financial resources can sometimes substitute for human resources, because the act of owning serves as a powerful means of building object relationships and requires a negligible human investment in consuming. If one returns to the vacation house example, materialists assert their relationship to the house and the desirable location simply by owning the property (although this relationship certainly would be bolstered by labor-intensive integrating practices)—little human investment is necessary to materially consume the house. Thus, materialists' desires for more possessions are constrained only by their financial limits.

The increased specification of materialism offered here also allows for some demystification of the polemical characteristics of the materialism debate both in and outside academia. Nonmaterialists are often viewed as morally preferable to materialists because they assign less importance to consumption objects. However, if one adopts the conception of materialism above, it seems more likely that condemnation is provoked not by the importance granted to objects (because all three types of consumers can highly value objects for different reasons) but by the way materialists use objects. Perceptions of materialists' moral inferiority, then, appears

to flow from two aspects of their consumption style: that they view objects as ends rather than resources and that they use object values to enhance how they are viewed by others.

But are the consumption activities often deemed nonmaterialist really that different? Because materialism involves how one consumes, not what one consumes, it need not involve material goods—services and activities such as entertainment, vacations, and even education can be consumed in a materialist style (see Kelly 1986). Consider, for example, the current popularity among upper-income professionals of vacations to remote and exotic locales, trips that are frequently arranged by groups such as the Sierra Club that explicitly condemn materialism (see, e.g., Durning 1993). According to the argument developed above, it is perfectly feasible for participants to consume these vacations in a materialist style, for example, by valuing an adventurous vacation in the Himalayas as an object that can be used to classify oneself as adventurous, healthy, or interested in the environment. The major difference is that the accumulation of experiences, even when consumed in a materialist style, still requires a modicum of human participation, and so acquisitiveness applied to nonmaterial objects is more restricted than that applied to material objects.

Second, even when people consume in a nonmaterialist style, this fact does not negate the possibility that they are using consumption for the same instrumental purposes as materialists. As Cubs spectators demonstrate, experiencing consumption objects is both an autotelic and a classifying activity. While the way in which materialists use objects to communicate is frequently a focus of condemnation (e.g., the yuppie signifiers of the 1980s), experiential practices can also be leveraged to communicate the same meanings that materialists are often taken to task for—status, economic success, and the like. Adroitly comprehending the intricate strategies at a Cubs game, evaluating the subtle nuances of a microbrewery beer, or appreciating the natural beauty of a mountain range in a refined manner can all signify status just as wearing a Rolex did a decade ago. Such classifying practices are perhaps even more powerful because of their potential subtlety.

CONCLUSION

Consuming is a mode of action in which people make use of consumption objects in a variety of ways. In the past decade, a provocative research tradition has emerged that describes important aspects of how people use consumption objects. The typology constructed in this study, situated within this tradition, provides a comprehensive framework describing the different ways in which consumers consume—what are here termed consumption practices. The typology of consumption practices makes four specific contributions to this literature: (1) it extends existing descriptions of consumer

actions directed toward the consumption object, (2) it develops the neglected interpersonal dimension of consuming (i.e., how consumers use objects to interact with other consumers), (3) it describes the institutional structuring of consuming, and (4) it provides a framework describing linkages between heretofore isolated metaphors for consuming.

Research examining consumption as experience has detailed how consumption objects are appreciated. But, in addition to appreciating, the present study demonstrates that accounting for and evaluating consumption objects are significant aspects of consuming, actions that can be just as important as appreciating in determining consumer satisfaction. And, in each of these three practices, consumers do not create their experiences anew; rather, they apply interpretive frameworks to experience consumption objects. A comprehensive understanding of how people experience consumption objects, then, requires not only a phenomenological description of consumers' felt experiences but should also include an understanding of the institutional framework(s) that consumers apply to engage objects, for these frameworks provide the raw materials with which consumers construct their experiences.

In much the same way, research attending to consumption as integration has focused on only one of the three integrating practices described here, emphasizing how consumers manipulate object meanings to fit their personal identity. In addition, the present study demonstrates that integration is pursued through the opposite process, adapting one's identity to fit institutionalized meanings through assimilating and producing practices. These practices again suggest that an institutional perspective is a necessary component for understanding the ways in which consumers make use of the symbolic qualities of consumption objects. Much of the dynamism of consumption results from consumers seeking to reinvent themselves in order to take on desired roles or to participate in desired social worlds (see, e.g., Schouten 1991). The prevalence of assimilating and producing practices among consumers suggests that research should focus on mapping those institutional frameworks to which consumers aspire (see, e.g., Richins 1991) as well as the valorization processes through which these frameworks come to exert such motivational force on consumers.

The typology also extends the domain of consumption to include two dimensions that have received negligible attention in the consumer research literature—how consumers use consumption objects to play and to classify. The importance of consumption for social classification has been amply documented in previous research, but the ways in which classifying is accomplished through consumption has received far less attention. In addition, the use of consumption for autotelic interaction—playing—has been a neglected topic in consumer research. This study demonstrates the complexity of the consumption practices used by con-

sumers to play and to classify. All acts of consuming are rife with such interpersonal interaction (even private acts of consuming involve self-communication and, often, self-play), but this is particularly true of consuming that occurs in groups—families, peer groups, subcultures, organizations, and the like. Consumer research that examines group forms of consumption needs to consider these interpersonal dimensions of consuming or risk ignoring the core characteristics of consuming as a group phenomenon.

Finally, the typology suggests some of the ways in which the four core metaphors for consuming—experiencing, integrating, playing, and classifying—are interrelated. One important implication is that consuming is never just an experience, a disinterested end in itself. Consumer actions directed toward consumption objects have many faces: they are lived experiences that enlighten, bore, entertain, or raise our ire, but they are also means that we use to draw ourselves closer to valued objects and resources that we use to engage others—to impress, to befriend, or simply to play.

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