The Ritual Dimension of Consumer Behavior*

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In daily living, people participate regularly in a variety of ritualized activities at home, work, and play, both as individuals and as members of some larger community. The average person also relies on various ritual events to mark such significant life passages as graduation, marriage, and death. Despite these pervasive and meaningful ritual experiences, consumer research has largely failed to recognize this extensive behavioral domain. The present article introduces and elaborates the ritual construct as a vehicle for interpreting consumer behavior and presents the results of two exploratory studies that investigate the artifactual and psychosocial contents of young adults' personal grooming rituals.

3:29 A.M. Harvey Reeves fell asleep over two hours ago, during David Letterman's second guest, and his television set is still on. The station is now signing off by playing the American national anthem. Although the audience for this daily predawn ritual is substantially supine, the ceremony is, nonetheless, conducted with appropriate patriotic dignity. In a few hours, Harvey awakes to the sound of an electronic household alarm and, like millions of other individuals, performs a personal ritual that transports him from the land of Nod to the office. First, Harvey shuffles into the kitchen to start the coffee. Then he turns on the radio. In about ten minutes he's through with the newspaper and into the shower. Harvey is spending a little more time grooming these days and has just recently added a skin moisturizer to his morning routine. At 7:03 he turns on his phonemate, exits his apartment, and slips into his 280-Z and onto the freeway. En route to work Harvey attends an early mass at St. Vincent's, and afterwards mails a birthday card to his Aunt Helen.

At the office the morning is particularly trying because of interminable negotiations with a Japanese business team. The highly formal and slow-paced Japanese bargaining style is driving Harvey crazy. Lunch is a real snooze: a retirement luncheon for the head of the accounting department. Harvey's attention begins to wander: "What am I going to buy Mother for Christmas? Will we stay in town or go someplace?" After an afternoon of formal personnel reviews, Harvey begins to think about his blind date tonight. He meets Susan at the Red Onion for an early getting-to-know-you dinner; then they drive to the Sports Arena to drink beer, shake their pom-poms, shout "Defense! Defense!" for two hours, and watch the Clippers lose again. Susan has decided that Harvey is a bore, so the basketball game is followed by the awkward rituals of social disengagement. As he prepares for bed, Harvey does his 50 sit-ups, pumps some iron, and consumes a bowl of cereal with Joan Rivers. Across town, Susan sets her hair and alarm clock, applies a facial mask, says her prayers, and falls asleep with Agatha Christie.

This imaginary scenario is presented to illustrate the pervasiveness of ritual behavior in modern everyday life. Each of these hypothetical activities is associated with a distinctive ritual type: media, patriotic, household, grooming, religious, gift giving, business, eating, rite of passage, holiday, romantic, athletic, and bedtime. But despite individuals' extensive ritual involvements, social research has largely failed to focus on postindustrial ritual phenomena. Even anthropologists are far more likely to study the consumption rituals of a remote Amazonian Indian tribe than the market rituals of an American suburban shopping mall. Consequently, a prominent dimension of consumer experience remains virtually uncharted territory. This neglect is surprising, because ritual behavior often involves the extensive exchange of goods and services, which are often consumed at dramatic, ceremonial, or even solemn occasions. Gift giving, for example, is a central component of numerous exchange rituals (Sherry 1983). Also, food preparation and consumption is often associated with particular ri-
ual events (Farb and Armelagos 1980). Consumption in general has even been interpreted as the essential ritual of modern life (Wright and Snow 1980). Relative disinterest in the ritual phenomena of postindustrial cultures may be due to the persistent but erroneous notion that rituals are exclusively religious expressions or are primitive regressive behavior (Moore and Myeroff 1977). Interpretations of ritual behavior as anachronistic (Ayer 1959) and deteriorating (Douglas 1974) are uncompelling, because the average person participates in numerous ritualized behavior systems every day (Browne 1980).

A MODEL OF RITUAL EXPERIENCE

Ritual phenomena are highly varied types of expressive behavior that occur in quite diverse settings. Edmund Leach (1968) observes that there is wide disagreement among those who have specialized in studying rituals even as to how the word ritual should be used. Published research about human ritual experience comes primarily and traditionally from cultural anthropology, history of religions, field sociology, and dynamic psychology. Recently, a trickle of business-related studies of ritual behavior has emerged in organizational behavior research (Feldman 1977) and marketing research (Kehret-Ward, Johnson, and Louie 1985; Rook and Levy 1983; Solomon and Anand 1985). Each disciplinary area relies on its own preferred set of constructs, which makes comparative interpretation difficult. Because individuals’ ritual experiences are so extensive, varied, complex, and meaningful, it is reasonable to ask whether it is either possible or useful to derive a single definition of ritual that encompasses such considerable diversity. Are there structural and content elements common to all modes of ritual behavior? The following discussion will answer both questions affirmatively.

Ritual Definition

Many current definitions of ritual are unsatisfactory because they myopically restrict ritual experience to religious or mystical contexts. Some interpretations misconstrue rituals as essentially primitive, regressive behavior, and others depict rituals as only occurring in large-scale, public settings. The following definition interprets ritual behavior as a positive and meaningful aspect of both everyday and extraordinary human experience:

The term ritual refers to a type of expressive, symbolic activity constructed of multiple behaviors that occur in a fixed, episodic sequence, and that tend to be repeated over time. Ritual behavior is dramatically scripted and acted out and is performed with formality, seriousness, and inner intensity. This definition incorporates both the structural elements that characterize ritual behavior and the qualitative components that distinguish ritual from similar behavior modes.

Ritual experience is built around an episodic string of events. For example, a religious ritual might commence with a procession, followed by an invocation, hymn singing, a sermon, an offering, and a recessional. A given ritual-behavior string may be relatively short and simple (greeting and parting rituals) or more elaborate (civic ceremonies), but to understand any particular ritual requires an appreciation of the multiple behavioral events that comprise it. Another distinguishing feature of rituals is the linkage of the episodic event strings in an exact, fixed sequence. One action element is almost always followed or preceded by a series of events that does not vary. Ritual action is designed to conform to stereotyped scripts, and acting in conformity with a prescribed script is considered to be intrinsically rewarding (Bird 1980), although some rituals are more casual than others in this respect. While it might be considered profane to alter the event sequence of a religious ritual, the order of events at a child’s birthday party may be less rigidly specified. Yet here, too, there are common ideas about exactly when it is appropriate to open the gifts, play party games, and dispense cake and ice cream.

A third characteristic of ritual behavior is the repetition of the event sequence over time. A ritual tends to be performed in the same way each time it is observed, so ritual events function as mnemonic devices that elicit specific thoughts and sentiments from the individual (Mead 1956). Thus, appropriate feelings are generated each time a ritual is dramatized. Variation in content or sequence may arise, but it tends to do so slowly and is often met with considerable resistance. In this respect, rituals are similar to behavioral habits and customs.

Rituals share other common features with behavioral habits; in fact, some rituals are performed more or less habitually (a religious service, personal grooming). Rituals and behavioral habits represent overlapping sets: not all habits involve rituals, nor do all rituals necessarily represent habitual activity. For example, a wedding is a common social ritual, but it is not a habit. And eating a chocolate donut may be a morning habit, but not constitute ritualized consumption. Typically, a ritual is a larger, plural experience, while habits tend to be singular behaviors such as tying one’s shoes, twisting one’s hair around an index finger, or taking a vitamin pill in the morning. Although some habits are complex and highly involving (addictions), they are often less personally meaningful than rituals, and it would depreciate a ritual to describe it as merely habitual (Erickson 1977).

Rituals are further differentiated from habits by their dramatic scripting. Ritual scripts typically have beginnings, middles, and ends (Leach 1958) that are acted out by participants who assume particular dramatic identities (Bird 1980). Ritual experience may be per-
formed ceremoniously, with elaborate formality and numerous theatrical trappings. One readily conjures up images of candles and trumpets, invocations and commemorations, costumes and contests, and parades, pomp, and circumstance. On the more mundane level, rituals also display a dramatic dimension. Social introductions, for example, may involve intricate etiquette rituals, and common rituals such as retirement dinners can become melodramatic and tend to stimulate intense emotions among participants (Bird 1980, Bossard and Boll 1950). Major rites of passage such as graduations and weddings mark important social status transitions and stimulate a great deal of psychological involvement and anxiety. Even a small child’s birthday party involves some serious concerns for involved participants—Who came? Who didn’t? Are the child’s gifts too lavish or trivial? Has reciprocity been observed? And rituals serve to include or exclude individuals from kinship and community membership. This is most accentuated in religious, fraternal, and civic settings, where rituals are commonly quite solemn.

Finally, rituals trigger an immediate behavioral response (Leach 1976). Ritual is body language that functions like a natural symbol, facilitating interpersonal interactions. In the United States even a handshake is significant, particularly when it is refused.

Ritual Elements

Ritual experience relies on four tangible components:

1. Ritual artifacts
2. A ritual script
3. Ritual performance role(s)
4. A ritual audience.

Because rituals are dramatic enactments, this analysis is similar to Goffman’s (1959) use of dramaturgical metaphor to study human social intercourse. Ritual artifacts may often take the shape of consumer products (Douglas and Isherwood 1979) that accompany or are consumed in a ritual setting—food and drink, jewelry, diplomas, candles, or ceremonial garments. When used in a ritual context, such artifacts often communicate specific symbolic messages that are integral to the meaning of the total experience. They also serve more generally as ritual symbols in the form of mythological characters, icons, logos, or significant colors. Artifacts are also commonly exchanged as gifts between ritual participants (Belk 1979; Sherry 1983) or used for interpersonal communication, as in holiday greeting cards and telephone calls.

A ritual script guides the use of the various artifactual materials. Much like a cognitive script (Abelson 1981), a ritual script prescribes a consumption paradigm, which may include either extensive or relatively limited product usage. The script identifies not only those artifacts to be used, but their behavioral sequence, and by whom they will be used. Some scripts may be relatively casual (family mealtime rituals) and allow for spontaneous variation. Other ritual scripts such as civic rituals and rites of passage are commonly more formally scripted and unvarying. In extreme cases such as religious and initiation ceremonies a ritual script is highly codified. Here the ritual script may appear in a written document, although nonwritten scripts such as those used in many etiquette rituals are not necessarily less formal.

A ritual script is performed by individuals who occupy various ritual roles. Sometimes an individual’s ritual role is explicitly scripted, as in wedding and graduation ceremonies. On other occasions a ritual role may be vaguely scripted, as in formal personnel evaluations. Uncertainty, anxiety, or embarrassment can arise when someone is called upon to participate in an unfamiliar ritual. In many contexts individuals have a great deal of freedom in ritual-role enactment; often they may choose with impunity to not participate in a particular ritual or they may opt for extensive involvement. For example, almost everyone can point to a neighborhood that goes all out for Christmas, with massive festoons of electric lights and various secular (Santa and reindeer) and religious (crèche) lawn displays. An individual’s ritual-role enactment can be extensive, limited, or nonexistent. It can also be either passive or active. Today the mass media allows a person to participate in a wide variety of religious, civic, and cultural rituals indirectly rather than as a direct participant.

Finally, a ritual may be aimed at a larger audience beyond those individuals who have a specified ritual-performance role. It is easy to identify the target audience for many rituals. For example, when a civic leader is inducted into office, the audience is the larger polity. In certain household rituals, the audience does not typically extend beyond the immediate family, while with other rituals the identity of the target audience may be more uncertain. Who, for example, is the target for the Columbus and Ground Hog Day rituals?

RITUAL BEHAVIOR TYPOLOGY

Despite the enormous variety of ritual experiences, it is still possible to classify rituals in terms of their behavioral origins and to observe common elements among very different ritual types. Levy (1978, p. 20) points to a multidisciplinary framework for constructing a typology of ritual behavior by identifying five primary sources of behavior and meaning:

1. Human biology
2. Individual aims and emotions
3. Group learning
4. Cultural values
5. Cosmological beliefs.
Any single behavior may be a product of many sources and is also likely to be stimulated by environmental and situational factors. Nonetheless, distinctive ritual types appear to cluster around one particular source. Table 1 summarizes the linkages between a primary behavior source and the types of ritual experience that flow from it.

The understanding of human ritual experience is enhanced by an appreciation of ritual activity among other animal species. Ethological studies commonly describe animal-kingdom ritual systems, pointing to parallel forms of behavior among humans. Animal rituals are quite literally a body language whose vocabulary is essential for the function and survival of a species. Julian Huxley interprets animal-behavior ritualization as promoting nonambiguous communications, stimulating specific behavior patterns in others, reducing aggression, and facilitating social or sexual bonding (Huxley 1966, p. 250). Human ritualization is functionally quite similar, but in human systems ritual behavior is culturally as well as genetically inherited. Much human ritual is consciously created from the evolving dynamics of a particular culture. Consequently, human ritualization is more varied and changing than that found within an animal-species group.

One of the richest sources of human-ritual experience is a culture's cosmological belief system. Much early discussion of human ritual behavior emphasized its relationship to formal religion. Tylor (1871) described ritual as the "gesture language of theology," and Smith (1889) suggested that ritual performance is symbolically more important than the actual beliefs of a given theology. In a more recent discussion, Clifford Geertz explains how ritual practices solidify religious doctrines (1968, p. 669):

> It is in ritual . . . that somehow the conviction is generated that religious conceptions are veridical and that religious directives are sound. It is in some form of ceremonial form . . . that the moods and motivations which sacred symbols induce in men . . . meet and reinforce one another.

Historian of religions Mercia Eliade's (1965, 1975) work is typical of the approach that emphasizes ritual's cosmological dimension; he regards rituals as primarily reenactments of sacred prototypes (1965, p. 132). The association between ritual and religious purpose has been so strong that analysis of the two has almost invariably proceeded together (Moore and Myerhoff 1977, p. 1). While religious rituals are documented extensively, interpreters sometimes too narrowly restrict ritual expression to religious settings.

A broader view of ritual recognizes that ritual activities function in nonreligious contexts and that mystical elements are present in nonreligious situations. Despite post-industrial cultures' secular and rational emphases, individuals today still cling to superstitions and often appear highly motivated by them, as Procter and Gamble recently discovered when a massive rumor linked them with Satan, citing hidden Satanic symbolism in the P and G logo as evidence. This seemingly unbelievable superstitious gossip cost the company millions of dollars in lost sales, litigation, and logo redesign costs. The dearth of persuasive empirical evidence notwithstanding, many individuals invest in lucky numbers (lotteries, racetrack betting), favor good luck garments (lucky sports clothes, the "power suit"), and invoke luck-encouraging procedures (craps-table incantations). Such arbitrary beliefs are often enacted in ritual performances. Superstition also appears in modern folk tales that are passed along, sometimes ritualistically, as part of a culture's oral tradition (Sherry 1984).

If transcendence is one characteristic of cosmology-based rituals, several forms of aesthetic experience qualify as a separate class of ritual behavior. Bocock (1974) interprets aesthetic rituals as a secular displacement of religious impulses. Various aesthetic products (opera, symphony, theatre) are commonly considered to be spiritually elevating, and their consumption is highly ritualized (Levy, Czepiel, and Rook 1981). Even less elevating aesthetic situations, such as a heavy metal concert, are extensively ritualized episodes.

Cultural values and processes are another primary source of ritual behavior. One class of ritual phenomena has been labeled by anthropologists as rites of passage (Gennep 1908). This ritual type centers around the social observance of events that symbolically mark individuals' social status changes. Major classes of rites have been identified that mark pregnancy and childbirth,
adolescent initiation into adulthood, betrothal and marriage, and funerals. Rites of passage are symbolic devices that accentuate the permanent quality of a status change (Mol 1976, p. 239). This type of collective, symbolic behavior is a primary focus of much of the anthropological research of premodern cultures (Turner 1969). The place of formal rites of passage in today’s post-industrial world is controversial, yet the developmental stages in the average person’s life are still linked by a fairly predictable series of ritual experiences: circumcision, baptism, religious confirmation, graduation, military induction, marriage(s), divorce(s), disengagement (retirement), and funeral.

Many public rituals are widely viewed as contributing to social cohesion (Leach 1968; Munn 1973). Ritual is also interpreted as an effective means for regulating social conflict (Levy and Zaltman 1975). Ritual is a social language (Levi-Strauss 1962) that defines the right way to do things (Bossard and Boll 1950) and provides a social coding of experiences (Firth 1973). Rituals make symbolic statements about the social order by dramatizing cultural myths (Campbell 1972; Harrison 1912) and link the present with the past (Durkheim 1912). Daniel Boorstin’s (1973) historical analysis of American culture provides numerous examples of how various rituals emerged on the frontier and in the cities to bind a new nation with a common set of symbolic practices.

Some contemporary observers detect a decline in common cultural rituals and interpret this as a grave social problem (Douglas 1974). Certainly some social rituals have become relatively empty and meaningless and are now merely ritualistic (Erikson 1977). On the other hand, while some ritual occasions have declined in popularity, new rituals have emerged to take their place, if not replace them. The relatively new Super Bowl Sunday is one of the largest ritualized celebrations on the planet, and participation in the more venerable St. Patrick’s Day bacchanalia seems to be increasing each year. Because some rituals have faded or are fading from the scene does not mean that all rituals are declining; like most marketplace products, rituals are also subject to life cycle forces. Also, it is useful to recognize how segmentation forces give rise to rituals that appeal to increasingly smaller audiences—for example, the re-emergence of ethnic rituals out of the American melting pot.

Civic rituals invoke themes of community and social inclusion (or exclusion) and rely on symbolic vehicles such as national songs, pledges of allegiance, parades, and commemoration ceremonies. Such events also commonly involve the extensive social use of ritual artifacts—e.g., flags, costumes, floral arrangements, food. Warner’s (1959) analysis of the American Memorial Day parade exemplifies anthropological study of a prominent civic ritual. At the smaller group level, many diverse ritual practices pervade daily living, from the Elks’ Pancake Day to formal office luncheons to business negotiation rituals. Even a visit to a McDonald’s

is interpreted as a contemporary social ritual (Curry and Jibou 1980; Kottak 1978).

The family is the source of numerous and highly variable rituals that animate mealtime, bedtime, and birthday and holiday celebrations. Almost any household activity has the capacity to become ritualized; in fact, some observers see the presence or absence of family ritual systems as a reliable index of a family’s social health (Bossard and Boll 1950). The extensive buying and consuming that characterize many contemporary family rituals are major forces that bind a household together (Daun 1983). Within a family unit, ritual practices cement relationships and foster joint participation in household activities. Christmas is celebrated today with a set of important rituals that not only affects the family unit internally, but also relates it to the larger culture (Barnett 1954). Family rituals also serve to instruct younger family members in appropriate behavior and may do so almost invisibly (Caplow 1984). Finally, kinship rituals serve to validate the authority roles of senior members (Bossard and Boll 1950).

In addition to the external forces that give rise to various ritual phenomena, there is the individual psyche, also a rich primary source of ritual behavior. Dynamic psychological interpretations tend to depict ritual behavior as providing a defense against impulsiveness by demanding the renunciation of socially harmful instincts (Freud 1959, 1962) and, more generally, by “keeping back the dangers of the unconscious” (Jung 1959, p. 22). Acting as more than a preventative, rituals provide positive benefits by contributing to a person’s individuation (Jung 1958, p. 273) and fostering healthy ego development (Erikson 1982, p. 73). Individual ritual practices are common in everyday grooming and in various household activities. These practices provide structure and meaning to the most mundane of activities. On the other hand, if these practices become excessively restrictive, they may represent neuroses, such as compulsive hand-washing rituals.

ASSESSING RITUAL VITALITY

Among the dozens of public ritual occasions that span the calendar, there is considerable variation in the vigor of their observance. Some rituals continue to enjoy extensive notice, while others are relatively ignored, and many more suffer from an uncertain status. The New Year ritual can be celebrated with an array of artificial paraphernalia: noise makers, party hats, paper streamers, champagne, all climaxing in the familiar “count down” ceremony. Yet even this popular ritual event is characterized by a degree of script and role uncertainty. People often express some confusion over whether the New Year should be welcomed in at home or in a public venue. Some choose not to participate in New Year’s Eve festivities, but opt for the following day’s marathon of football bowl games, and/or calling on close friends and family. On the other hand, observation of several
traditional American rituals has declined sharply over a few generations—e.g., April Fools’ Day, May Day, Labor Day, and Lincoln’s Birthday. Other traditional rituals show signs of increasing popularity: St. Patrick’s Day, formal weddings, and Christmas. And new rituals emerge regularly: Tupperware parties, wine tastings, aerobic sessions, Super Bowl Sunday, Elvis’s Birthday.

It is possible to evaluate any ritual’s vitality using the structural elements identified previously. Table 2 summarizes the assessments of four illustrative ritual occasions in terms of these criteria:

1. The nature and extensiveness of artifactual consumption
2. The presence or absence of a well-defined ritual script
3. The clarity of participants’ ritual role perceptions
4. The presence or absence of a well-defined target audience beyond the immediate participants.

One of three possible scores is assigned to each dimension: + connotes that a particular dimension is clearly defined and vigorous, ? represents a generally uncertain status, and – indicates a relatively deteriorated condition.

Using these criteria, Christmas is assessed as a vigorous ritual occasion. Although its celebration was once forbidden in Puritan New England (Barnett 1946), Christmas is observed publicly across much of Western culture, with particularly intense involvement by millions of American households. Several industries rely on consumers’ extensive gift-exchange rituals and on the widespread deployment of ritual symbols (colored lights, mistletoe, wreaths, Santa Claus representations) for the bulk of their annual sales. Christmas rituals also prescribe the consumption of special food and drink at ceremonial occasions. But even the Christmas ritual is experiencing changes, showing some signs of script and role uncertainty. Nonchurch goers are prone to experience anxiety about the prescribed annual church visit. The increasing numbers of both single-person households and multiple-marriage families give rise to uncertainty and conflict about prescribed ritual location, mix of participants, and gift-exchange norms. Also, script elements such as door-to-door carolling appear to be fading from the modern urban scene.

Halloween’s status as a ritual is more ambiguous. Most individuals are familiar with its prescribed ritual artifacts—costumes, candy, ghost and goblin characters, orange and black colors—yet the Halloween script is not well-defined. Trick-or-treat activity has been under siege for some years now, and parents have adopted a cautious attitude. Children still enjoy costume parties at school and home, but adult masquerades are less pervasive. Ultimately, it is not really clear whether Halloween is primarily intended for an adult or a children’s audience (Stone 1959), since serious Halloween rituals can be both scary and debauched. (Both Halloween and Christmas represent rituals that have moved from a strictly religious toward a secular arena. For many participants, the material superstructure dominates the spiritual elements.)

The American May Day represents a ritual that has quite deteriorated. Few people today dance with colored streamers around a maypole on May 1; they might even be thought strange if they did. Nor do many children secretly deliver baskets of flowers and candy to their friends’ doorsteps, despite the creativity and enjoyment that this clandestine activity provides. Ritual observance of May Day in the United States has largely disappeared, its celebrity ironically displaced by the aggressive military symbols of a different, Communist ritual. Perhaps the present nonagrarian American culture no longer finds meaning in this older fertility rite, or perhaps May Day’s demise represents a case of deficient marketing.

Students’ graduation ceremonies represent the type of situation where the ritual script, roles, and audience are well-articulated, but the artifactual dimension is less explicitly prescribed. While the diploma certifies a change in status, no single gift has preeminent status as a graduation marker. Also, while post-graduation celebrations are common, they are not governed by the explicit scripting of such rituals as a wedding reception or a retirement dinner. This situation is similar to the status of married couples’ anniversary occasions: the participants are clearly identified, but their respective roles and the artifactual exchange requisites are not explicitly defined. Belk (1979) provides some evidence to show how gift price categories are affected by the type of occasion and gift recipient involved. His results suggest that consumers share common ideas about gift-exchange situations, but that there is still much variation when it comes to script, role, and artifactual detail. When such variation becomes extreme, a ritual’s vitality may be diminished. This might not always be the case, because an idiosyncratic anniversary celebration could represent a vital ritual experience for the persons involved. Yet if there is little social consensus about a

### Table 2

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ritual occasion</th>
<th>Christ- mas</th>
<th>Hallow- een</th>
<th>May Day</th>
<th>Graduation</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ritual artifacts</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>–/?</td>
<td>?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ritual script</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>+</td>
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<td>Ritual role</td>
<td>+</td>
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<td>–</td>
<td>+</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ritual audience</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>+</td>
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Note: + = Well-defined, vigorous.  
? = Uncertain status.  
– = Poorly defined, weak.
ritual’s observance, this lack may threaten its longterm vitality.

RITUAL SIGNIFICANCE

Any ritual’s vitality is likely to decrease when participants no longer find the ritual meaningful. While the symbolic significance of many large, public rituals is often quite obvious, the meaning of individuals’ personal rituals may be more elusive. Most interpretations of ritual behavior are quite particularistic; they explain how rituals function in specific settings—within families (Bossard and Boll 1950), rites of passage (Gennep 1908), community life (Warner 1959), or even the modern beauty parlor (Ewen 1979). Psychologist Erik Erikson’s (1977, 1982) explanation is distinctively universal when he suggests that all ritual behavior is rooted in the human psyche. Erikson’s theory dynamically connects large-scale, public, ritual expression with individuals’ development of everyday ritualized behaviors. He argues that although such a major ritual event as a rite of passage represents a public announcement of an individual’s new status, it is through daily ritual activities that the change is symbolically reinforced. For example, a girl’s sweet sixteen party traditionally symbolizes her social transition from childhood to young womanhood; but this ritual event per se does not accomplish an instantaneous transformation. Rather, it is in such everyday rituals as those centering around personal grooming or courtship routines that the new social status is functionally enacted.

Erikson interprets ritual as essentially integrative behavior, and his analysis builds upon his psychosocial theories of human development. More than Freud, Erikson emphasizes the press of external social forces on the development of the human psyche. He sees all human development as proceeding sequentially through eight basic stages (1951). Each stage presents the individual with specific behavioral tasks, which in turn give rise to a distinctive psychosocial “crisis.” The degree of success an individual experiences in resolving these developmental crises is ultimately reflected in the relative health or pathology of the adult personality. Finally, each crisis is characterized by a distinctive thematic element that energizes both everyday ritualized behavior and larger public rituals. A young woman’s daily grooming rituals, for example, are motivated by the same psychosocial forces that generate the cotillions, proms, and formal debuts that socially “introduce” her and mark her transition to a sexually available status.

The relationships between (1) the stages of individual development, (2) the psychosocial crises and ritual themes that distinguish each stage, and (3) the marketplace arenas where these themes are most prominently acted out are summarized in Table 3. Rituals with numinous (mystical) themes originate in infancy’s crisis of trust. Healthy personality development results in an infant trusting some primal “other” (Erikson 1982, p. 45), who is initially the mother, and who later assumes a cosmological identity (god, the force) in the individual’s life. Unsuccessful crisis resolution produces a mistrustful personality and accompanying negative views about the cosmos and life in general. According to Erikson, these perspectives are translated to the public arena, where there is considerable variation in the degree to which different mystical rituals express hope and trust.

Erikson links early childhood’s crisis to an entirely different area of ritual experience: law and order. The child’s toilet training period symbolizes the basic crisis of autonomy versus shame and doubt. The rituals of this period are aimed at instructing the child in elemental “yeses” and “nos” and how to differentiate between right and wrong. Normal acceptance and internalization of these standards generate self-perceptions of independence and legitimacy, while failure often produces compulsive pathologies. Erikson interprets this developmental stage as the source of the judicious elements in adult ritual behavior and as the psychological foundation of society’s legal and moral structures and the corresponding rituals of the judicial system.

It is not necessary to elaborate each element of Erikson’s framework to identify the several theoretical

TABLE 3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Developmental stage</th>
<th>Psychosocial crisis</th>
<th>Ritual thematic elements</th>
<th>Marketplace arena</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Infancy</td>
<td>Trust vs Mistrust</td>
<td>Numinous</td>
<td>Religion, Superstition, Luck/chance</td>
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<td>Early childhood</td>
<td>Autonomy vs Shame</td>
<td>Judicious</td>
<td>Law and order</td>
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<td>Initiative vs Guilt</td>
<td>Dramatic</td>
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<td>Industry vs Inferiority</td>
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<td>Young adulthood</td>
<td>Intimacy vs Isolation</td>
<td>Affiliative</td>
<td>Partnership, Career Organizations</td>
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<td>Adulthood</td>
<td>Generativity vs Stagnation</td>
<td>Generational</td>
<td>Education Tradition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Old age</td>
<td>Integrity vs Despair</td>
<td>Philosophical</td>
<td>Wisdom Philosophy</td>
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strengths that distinguish his interpretation of ritual behavior. First, it both illuminates the dynamic significance of an individual’s daily, ritualized experiences and links them to the larger, public ritual events. While these grander occasions provide dramatic public expression, the real symbolic work may actually be done on a smaller scale through the daily ritualization of individual experience. Second, Erikson’s theory relates adult ritual behavior to the individual’s childhood experiences, which is precisely why rituals are meaningful and involving: they symbolically link the present with the past. Erikson’s logic and the title of his book, *Toys and Reason*, reflect the popular colloquialism that the only difference between men and boys is the price of their toys. Adults and children are not separate species; “grown-up” living is built on childhood experiences.

A third strength of Erikson’s theory is the degree to which it is based on conflict. His crisis model recognizes the difficulties individuals experience in coping with the demands of external social forces. Much consumer research fails to acknowledge the dimensions of conflict and ambivalence that characterize various aspects of market behavior (Levy and Zaltman 1975). Erikson’s model is more realistic since it depicts human behavior with more dynamism than most extant behavior models. Erikson appreciates that many individuals do not resolve their developmental crises successfully. This failure generates such feelings as mistrust, shame, guilt, inferiority, and isolation. The majority of contemporary consumer research pays little attention to these negative feelings and does not fully appreciate how they affect consumers’ behavior.

**AN EXPLORATORY STUDY OF CONSUMERS’ GROOMING RITUALS**

Researchers today rarely depict consumer behavior with the rich and dynamic complexity that Erikson does. Yet, if much buying and consumption is in fact ritualized, and if ritual behavior is as intensely motivating as Erikson and many others suggest, then many common household and market rituals are more than mindless habits. Even everyday rituals, such as those associated with personal grooming, involve deep-seated emotions and aspirations. The following discussion presents selective results from two exploratory studies designed to probe the artifactual and psychosocial content of young adults’ morning grooming rituals. The results presented are not intended as generalizations about the young adult population; rather, they are offered as illustrations of the nature and depth of sentiment that distinguish ritual behavior, and as suggested methodological alternatives for investigating such phenomena. In targeting individuals’ grooming behavior, specific attention was focused on hair care and maintenance rather than the overall grooming process.

**Study 1: Grooming Ritual Activity**

Human grooming activity is not only hygienic, it also functions parasomatically to modify the body’s color, smell, apparent size, and shape (Holman 1981). Literally, grooming behavior is a form of body language, communicating specific messages about an individual’s social status, maturity, aspirations, conformity, even morality. Human grooming has been extensively interpreted as a form of ritual behavior (Ewen 1979; Hope 1980; Miner 1956; Wax 1959). At the core of most grooming rituals are various cleansing, cutting, shaping, and anointing processes directed toward one’s head of hair (Vlahos 1979). The threefold purpose of this first study is: (1) to describe selectively the artifactual content of the respondents’ overall morning grooming rituals, (2) to measure their hair-satisfaction levels, and (3) to identify their frustrations with their hair-care routines.

**Methodology**

Respondents completed a lengthy questionnaire designed to investigate broadly the activities, ideas, attitudes, and preoccupations that energize their grooming rituals. The questionnaire was largely self-administered, although a handful of responses were obtained through personal interviews. In some situations, respondents were paid five dollars for their participation. The sample totalled 91 individuals (44 males and 47 females) selected from college classrooms and several field settings: a public assistance office, shopping mall locations, and student housing. Respondents were selected in roughly equal proportion from working class \( n = 24 \), lower-middle class \( n = 29 \), and upper class \( n = 34 \) populations. Social status was measured by using Warner’s (1949) Index of Status Characteristics in combination with respondents’ levels of education and parental occupation information. This was done to control for the fact that college students’ social status backgrounds are often poorly measured by income, residence, and occupation characteristics. The respondents’ ages ranged from 18 to 25 \( m = 22.3; sd = 3.79 \). In discussing some of the research results, respondents’ verbatim protocols are identified in parentheses by sex and age immediately following each quotation.

**Results**

Hair care activities occupy center stage in the grooming scripts of the young adults sampled, and numerous artifacts are employed in daily ritual performances. Almost two thirds reported that they usually or always shampoo their hair every morning; many who didn’t shampoo in the morning (women especially) said that they shampoo at night to get a head start on the next morning. Also, almost half of the respondents indicated that they usually or always condition their hair as part of their morning grooming routine. Slightly over one
third of the sample said that they are likely to use a blow dryer on their hair. One hair care product—hairspray—is out of fashion with the sample group (at least in the morning); only 8 percent reported regular hairspray usage. Two other grooming products—hair oil and dandruff shampoo—are used regularly by only 4 percent of the sample. Obviously, there are other artifacts that can assist in hair-grooming rituals, but the present analysis does not focus on idiosyncratic product usage or on products that are (relatively) unambiguous in gender.

The survey next sought to discover how young adults actually feel about their hair. When asked directly, respondents indicated that they felt absolutely and relatively quite happy with their hair. The students completed a 26-item Body Cathexis Scale (Secord and Jourard 1953) that asked them to indicate how satisfied they were with their various body features; they used a five-point Likert type scale to rank the features. Of the 26 items measured, hair ranked highest in overall satisfaction: 82 percent of the sample reported that they felt either positive or very positive about their hair. Eye and sex-organ appearance ranked second and third, respectively, in satisfaction, while waist was the least positively perceived (only 44 percent positive or very positive), followed closely by knees and toe nails. These results suggest that the young adults surveyed should energize their hair-grooming rituals with upbeat enthusiasm, yet such an interpretation is clouded by the findings from another survey question designed to probe hair affect less directly.

Respondents were asked to consider all of their typical daily grooming procedures and then select the single activity that causes them the most frustration. By a substantial margin, hair care was the most commonly cited, and grievances were frequently aired with some emotion. Many complaints focused on how long it takes to do one’s hair, as these modal protocols illustrate:

Fixing my hair is the most difficult. I spend hours—actually HOURS—doing my hair. IT DRIVES ME CRAZY! (female-20)

I really hate blow drying my hair. It takes so long because of the length. (female-21)

Perhaps due to the contemporary difference in between-sex hair lengths and also to rigorous personal appearance norms, complaints about time were more common among female respondents. However, the core frustration with hair grooming is not so much with the time factor per se as with the disappointing results achieved despite prodigious efforts. This idea was voiced strongly by both the young men and women in the sample.

I hate setting my hair, blow drying it for 20 minutes, and then it never comes out the same. (female-24)

I really hate going through the trouble of washing and drying my hair, and having it sometimes look like shit when I’m through. (male-20)

These frustrations seem entirely plausible; anyone might become agitated when something doesn’t materialize as planned. Yet grooming frustration often goes deeper than simple disappointment with a procedure gone awry. Young adults’ grooming behavior involves more than getting cleaned up because it is motivated by powerful converging forces: the psychosocial crises of individual identity and interpersonal intimacy (Erikson 1951, 1977), the rigid appearance norms of peer-group narcissism, and the vocational pressure to look just right. As Erikson’s (1977) interpretation would predict, grooming ritual behavior involves negative and ambivalent as well as positive feelings. While the results of this study provide some evidence for these elements, there is not much depth of content in the findings. This is largely due to the inherent limitations of direct self-report survey research designs.

Study 2: Grooming Ritual Fantasy Themes

Although ritual is a form of body language, its vocabulary may be relatively unconscious, and discursive speech about it is likely to be misleading (Bird 1980; Caplow 1984). In order to understand more thoroughly the psychosocial content of the young adults’ grooming rituals studied here, a uniquely designed Thematic Apperception Test (TAT) instrument was administered. This research approach assumes that some ritual agenda items may be relatively hidden. A creative, expressive technique such as the TAT will encourage respondents to relax their defenses and project their own psychological material onto imaginary characters and situations (Levy 1986; Murray 1938). When asked directly, individuals may not really be aware of their grooming motives and emotions, and their explanations may be simple rationalizations. Also, they may be reluctant to discuss freely topics that are commonly considered private and sensitive. A projective approach has the potential to break through these communication barriers.

Methodology

Two Grooming Thematic Apperception Test (GTAT) stimulus pictures were selected based upon evaluative criteria suggested by Henry (1956) and Murray (1938). The two GTAT stimuli included pictures of: (1) a young to middle-aged woman in curlers applying make-up, and (2) a young man blow drying his hair. These symbols were presumed to be of near universal familiarity among the young adult population. The projective hypothesis (Rappaport 1942) suggests that respondents’ imaginative stories, articulated in response to the pictorial stimuli, will reveal unconscious and other hidden aspects of their grooming ritual behavior. The GTAT stimulus pictures encouraged respondents to focus on haircare issues.

Fifty-nine young adults (31 females, 28 males) recruited from classroom and field settings participated...
in the study. Respondents were selected in roughly equal proportion from working class (n = 20), lower-middle class (n = 19), and upper class (n = 20) populations, using the measurement criteria described in the first study. They ranged in age from 19 to 26 (m = 21.5, s.d. = 3.36). They were presented with the set of GTAT pictures and instructed to write creative and dramatically complete stories about the pictures, each with a beginning, middle, and end, and with identified characters. Respondents’ stories varied in length from 175 to 250 words, generally satisfying the widely used 200-word criterion for respondent involvement (Murstein 1963), and requiring from 35 to 60 minutes to write. All stories were collected through self-administration, except for a few from respondents with inadequate writing skills; these were gathered verbatim.

Results

To guide the construction of their imaginary stories, respondents were asked to provide each stimulus picture’s only visible character with an identity. Most subjects gave their characters at least first names and often supplied minute demographic and psychographic detail, outlining age, economic status, occupation, personal aspiration, sexual behavior, and various lifestyle information. Young adults apparently need little stimulation to involve themselves in the fantasy realm of experience.

Identity Projections. The man with the blow dryer is generally seen as young—somewhere between 16 and 25 years old. Beyond this there is little agreement as to what type of individual he is. To some he is just one of the guys, an average fellow cleaning up after work or exercise. Some stories elevate his character to role-model status: a manager or other professional, a “jock,” or a sophisticated bachelor. Still other stories inflate these roles to heroic proportions: an international tycoon, a professional sports superstar, and a sexual athlete. The imagery pattern for the woman in curlers is structurally similar. She is described as being between 20 and early middle age. She is frequently imagined to be either a housewife, junior executive, or college student. These are generally positive images, and in these stories the woman’s grooming is associated with desirable outcomes.

In contrast, quite a few stories depict the main character as hopeless losers and total nerds who are vocationally unaccomplished and consistently romantic failures. Even more extreme are the depictions of the stimulus characters as derelicts (alcoholics or drug abusers), delinquents (school drop-outs, prostitutes, punkers, or bikers), or deviants (psychotics, homosexuals, transexuals).

Paralleling these variations in identity, the stories’ dramatic content ranges from socially conventional plots (dating or work preparation, post-athletic grooming) to unusual, highly fantastic themes (hallucinations, murder, space travel). These results do not necessarily imply that the young adults surveyed identify directly with or aspire to the characters and situations they describe, although some probably do. Rather, their thematic constructions reflect intense preoccupations. Few rituals are as closely linked to the psychosocial identity crisis as daily grooming rituals, so it is not surprising that respondents’ grooming fantasies reflect their awareness of both positive and negative identification possibilities.

Breaking Away. In contrast to the extensive variation in each stimulus character’s imagined identity, there was considerable consensus about the grooming agenda’s important psychosocial issues. Respondents sometimes described an individual who is an active and in-charge personality. The man with the blow dryer is busy closing business deals, or winning football games with last-minute passes. This guy makes things happen; no one tells him what to do. The woman was sometimes imagined to be an executive dynamo or the perfect housewife. She could also be a domineering co-ed who calls the shots in her interpersonal relationships. On the other hand, almost as frequently the characters were imagined to be less independent, simply trying to stay out of trouble. The young man lives at home and is the family goat; his teachers have it in for him at school. Sometimes he hides out in his room or withdraws into liquor or drugs. He might try to escape his tormenters by running away from home or his job, but every so often he strikes out against his enemies. The woman was sometimes described as being under a boss’s or husband’s thumb, fighting for independence and respect. These diverse perceptions graphically illuminate the internal conflicts that accompany young adults’ strivings for personal autonomy and illustrate how respondents project their preoccupations onto grooming ritual themes.

The stories also reveal how grooming artifacts are invested with ritual significance. In the developmental battle for independence, the blow dryer is a symbolic weapon. It empowers the young man to mimic peer group appearance norms and assert himself confidently in the social scene. The latest fashion may aggravate a parent’s more traditional orientation, but even conventional grooming may be linked with some rejection of parental or other authority:

Jim is supposed to stay home and study tonight, but he’s getting ready to go out anyway. He’s hoping to meet some hot chicks and he wants his hair to look just right.

(male-20)

Whether a young man is blowing his hair into a conservative preppie look or trying to achieve a renegade punk effect, he is preparing to become an independent social actor, seeking to distance himself from parental regulation. Symbolically the blow dryer is phallic and aggressive; when confronted with the stimulus picture,
respondents’ stories were sometimes quite agitated. They sneered at this puny, inadequate runt or harassed him with interpersonal confrontations and sometimes abused him with drunken brawls. Hair curlers do not seem so symbolically potent, but they are valued for their transformational properties. Sometimes they are resented because of the social control they imply.

**Vocational Placement and Performance.** Respondents’ preoccupation with vocational concerns represents the convergence of fantasy and socioeconomic reality. Today’s young adults are very career oriented; many of the subjects used in this study were just beginning their professional lives. Work and success themes are prominent in their grooming fantasies. When a vocational script is constructed, the grooming role is often described as instrumental to success. The young adults in this study appreciated grooming’s practical payoffs, as the following scenario excerpts illustrate:

Ron was getting ready for work, taking his usual care with his appearance . . . Later that day his boss told him he was putting him up for promotion. (female-22)

Susan is getting ready for her first presentation and she’s very nervous. If it goes well, maybe her boss will help with a downpayment on a new car. (female-21)

Joe Hearn gets up every morning at 6:30, showers, and blow dries his hair . . . He is an FBI agent and has to look sharp in his sunglasses or he’ll lose his job. (male-25)

Respondents’ stories reveal their images of grooming crime and punishment. While some stories link grooming to vocational rewards (sales contracts, recognition, bonuses, promotions), others associate deficient grooming with a failed job interview, professional humiliation, or the loss of employment. Notably and not surprisingly, such stories are often told with an ironic and humorous tone: humor is a common mechanism for deflecting anxiety.

**Intimacy Aspirations.** More than any other script element, young adults project grooming rituals as preparation for dating and sexual interactions. Some stories highlight individuals’ romantic eagerness:

Rhonda was amazed that the cutest guy on the beach had walked over to her and asked her for a date. As she was applying her makeup, she wondered if this was a dream. (female-20)

Sam’s getting ready to go out and look for some heavy-duty action. Tonight he’s going to the disco, where he’ll pick up one, maybe two or three girls, and then take them home and show them what they’ve been missing. (male-22)

Quite a few stories describe grooming behavior as leading directly to positive romantic outcomes: the co-worker confesses she’s had an eye on him for a long time; the “blind” date becomes a steady girl; the young man satisfies his sexual desires. Sometimes respondents’ stories involve the risky combination of work and sex:

Renee has worked her way through four vice presidents. Nothing permanent, but each one got her a raise. Now she’s plotting on this new guy. (female-22)

It must already be 80 degrees, and it’s only 7 AM. By the time I finish blow drying my hair I’ll probably need another shower . . . It feels like it’s blowing 150 degrees of heat into my face . . . but who cares? When I finish using my Mighty Mite I just look so good. All the girls in the office will want to play in my hair. (male-26)

Still other scenarios highlight the resistance and ambivalence that young adults experience about dating pressures:

Bob can’t understand why he did such a stupid thing as asking Linda to this party. She really wasn’t all that nice, or even intelligent. He didn’t even find her that attractive . . . He really didn’t want to go to the party anyway. (male-21)

While romantic themes were generally quite common, there were observable between-sex variations. Males tended to focus on meeting girls and having sex, while females placed greater emphasis on dating relationships and marriage.

**Ritual Magic.** Young adults appear quite willing to suspend their disbelief about the miraculous properties of grooming products and procedures. Not infrequently, the subjects described various grooming effects that can be characterized as ritual magic. Imaginary scripts depicted extraordinary before-and-after changes achieved because of some specific grooming activity: a tired drone is transformed into an energetic dynamo; an elixir makes Plain Jane look glamorous; one of the guys becomes a Romeo.

Respondents may not actually believe in grooming’s mystical powers, but they see no harm if grooming somehow encourages Lady Luck. Another magical effect ascribed to grooming flows from its role as a psychic energizer. Grooming is valued as a mechanism for overcoming introversion, and some stories resonate like tribal war chants with themes of off-to-social-battle. These internal exhortations focus like a mantra on confidence-building sentiments and whip up the requisite energy for the situation at hand. Curiously, such stories closely parallel the plots of many grooming product commercials.

**Discussion**

Even everyday rituals such as those associated with personal grooming are psychologically complex and intense. To think of this type of highly involving behavior as merely habitual is to miss the point, as these exploratory data suggest. A projective research approach appears useful in assessing respondents’ ritual preoccupations, but quite a few puzzles remain to be solved.
The results presented here are largely subjects’ modal responses; how should we interpret low incidence or even idiosyncratic items? Given ritual’s unconscious elements (Bird 1980; Caplow 1984), might not low frequency themes be latent in large numbers? Future research also needs to investigate how fantasy themes vary between consumer segments, and how specific thematic elements relate to consumers’ actual buying and consumption behaviors.

**CONCLUSION**

Consumers’ extensive ritual involvements challenge researchers to conceptualize and investigate market behavior in new ways. Some recent discussion criticizes the narrow range of market phenomena that researchers typically study. A collective call is out for a broader perspective using fresh research constructs. The study of ritual promises to illuminate some of the specific research blind spots that have been identified. Specifically, much market and consumer research targets only subjects’ mental activities; consequently, there are large gaps in information about consumers’ actual behavior. Holbrook and Hirschman (1982) suggest that researchers need to investigate the experiential aspects of behavior more vigorously. Ritual expression is body language and involves both mental and physical behaviors. As such, it invites more direct observational studies of consumers’ experiences in choosing, buying, and using various ritual artifacts.

Second, rituals are often serious and normative. As the enactments of social and individual myths (Campbell 1972; Levy 1981), rituals dramatically and symbolically portray individuals’ strivings for social status, maturity, and sexual identity. Some consumer rituals do so directly: election to an exclusive organization, graduation ceremonies, or a sweet sixteen party. These are serious, extraordinary life events, but many everyday rituals are also serious because they regulate social interaction (queuing, and greeting and parting rituals) and prescribe the “right” way to do things. Ideas about what is right and wrong are reiterated through ritual practices that highlight the normative aspects of buying and consuming, an area yet to be extensively researched (Zaltman and Wallendorf 1977).

Ritual experience also illuminates the psychological depth, conflict, and fantasy components of everyday behavior. Although commonplace during the motivation research era (Newman 1958), the role of complex consumer motivation has largely been forgotten during the recent process-oriented period. Yet many consumer behaviors still ultimately flow from deep seated motives. Psychologist Erik Erikson interprets ritual behavior as drawing from superstition and belief in magic and, at times, from feelings of shame, guilt, inferiority, confusion, and isolation (1977, 1982). This refreshingly dynamic perspective contrasts sharply with the various static and naive behavioral models that depict consumers as rational and constructive attribute maximizers. Researching ritual behavior also draws attention to the role of fantasy in consumers’ lives (Rook and Levy 1983).

Ritual systems represent the type of symbolic behavior that has been relatively neglected in consumer research for over twenty years. Gardener and Levy’s (1955) critical observation that product symbolism is a major marketing blind spot is no less true today. Although it is widely recognized that many products and services are symbolic stimuli (Holman 1981; Levy 1959; Solomon 1983), relatively little empirical work has investigated the dynamics of symbolic consumption. Ritual behavior is a symbolic language; learning how individuals come to ritualize specific aspects of their marketplace behavior will complement recent work that reveals when they learn to decode products’ symbolic meanings (Belk, Bahn, and Mayer 1982).

A final epistemological consequence of recognizing the ritual dimension of market behavior should serve to loosen paradigmatic thinking about research methodologies. The majority of consumer and marketing research in print today relies upon self-report techniques wherein the researcher has little interaction, if any, with the respondents. Fixed-format surveys designed for statistical computer-analytic processing dominate the field, with few exceptions. Such prophylactic approaches barely scratch the surface of consumers’ real lives and jeopardize the relevance of much consumer research. To study consumers’ ritual behaviors challenges the research community to try more holistic, qualitative approaches. By its very nature much ritual behavior invites field observation. To extract the meanings imbedded in ritualized behavior may require intensive and open-ended interviewing. And in some cases, consumers may not have a conscious understanding of or direct access to a ritual’s meanings; indirect approaches such as projective techniques may prove useful.

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