

Affective Responses of Low-Income Consumers To Losses of Symbolic Possessions

Autoria

Luciana Bellini Rangel - luciana.bellini@hotmail.com

Mestr e Dout em Admin de Empresas/IAG-A Esc de Negócios da PUC-Rio - IAG/PUC-Rio - Pontifícia Universidade Católica do Rio de Janeiro

Luis Fernando Hor-Meyll Alvares - hormeyll@iag.puc-rio.br

Mestr e Dout em Admin de Empresas/IAG-A Esc de Negócios da PUC-Rio - IAG/PUC-Rio - Pontifícia Universidade Católica do Rio de Janeiro

Diana Sinclair Pereira Branisso - dibranisso@yahoo.com

Mestr e Dout em Admin de Empresas/IAG-A Esc de Negócios da PUC-Rio - IAG/PUC-Rio - Pontifícia Universidade Católica do Rio de Janeiro

Resumo

During economic crises, consumers suffer significant losses that deeply affect the constitution of part of their selves. From 2014 on, Brazil faced a serious crisis and, although it is a period of individual suffering, it presented as a rare opportunity to study affective responses of low-income people, who socially ascended during a preceding period of welfare, to sudden lose symbolic possessions that identified them as members of the middle class. Such losses go beyond simple material deprivation and extend to the construction of a hardly acquired identity. The results presented suggest that affective responses to losses have close resemblance with grief phases (Kübler-Ross, 2000): denial, anger, bargaining, depression and acceptance. Twelve phenomenological interviews (Thompson, Locander & Pollio, 1989) were conducted. The interviewees were consumers who had socially risen and were then hit by the economic crisis, having suffered considerable upheavals in their construction of the self. The phases of reaction to loss surfaced in the narratives of the interviewees, contributing to the understanding of how losses of symbolic possessions resemble the death of an identity, thus affecting the self. Understanding the affective responses, under Kübler-Ross's perspective, may shed some light on a theoretical gap identified in the consumer behavior literature.



Affective Responses of Low-Income Consumers To Losses of Symbolic Possessions

Abstract

During economic crises, consumers suffer significant losses that deeply affect the constitution of part of their selves. From 2014 on, Brazil faced a serious crisis and, although it is a period of individual suffering, it presented as a rare opportunity to study affective responses of low-income people, who socially ascended during a preceding period of welfare, to sudden lose symbolic possessions that identified them as members of the middle class. Such losses go beyond simple material deprivation and extend to the construction of a hardly acquired identity. The results presented suggest that affective responses to losses have close resemblance with grief phases (Kübler-Ross, 2000): denial, anger, bargaining, depression and acceptance. Twelve phenomenological interviews (Thompson, Locander & Pollio, 1989) were conducted. The interviewees were consumers who had socially risen and were then hit by the economic crisis, having suffered considerable upheavals in their construction of the self. The phases of reaction to loss surfaced in the narratives of the interviewees, contributing to the understanding of how losses of symbolic possessions resemble the death of an identity, thus affecting the self. Understanding the affective responses, under Kübler-Ross's perspective, may shed some light on a theoretical gap identified in the consumer behavior literature.

Key words: extended self, symbolic losses, low-income consumers, affective responses.

Introduction

Brazil experienced a unique economic conjuncture between 2003 and 2013: reduction of inflation and unemployment, real increase in wages, improvement of economic and social indices and reduction of inequalities. Such scenario led to the rise of a so called new middle class (World Bank, 2007), with annual family revenue in the range of US\$ 6.000 – US\$ 30.000, stimulating the consumption rate and thus the country economy. The new consumers were avid for products and services that satisfied needs and desires dammed for years (Neri, 2010). The symbolism of consumption was strengthened, composing a new identity of the individual (Belk, 1988), with choices happening for a whole series of new reasons, not so easy to predict and understand.

However, from 2014 on, the scenario suffered a swift change, from economic growth to a swift, deep economic contraction, resulting in significant decreases in employment and in a dramatic increase in poverty rates (IBGE, 2016).

Not directly related to income levels, but to the feelings of restriction, the loss of consumption generates a psychological state that changes consumption behavior (Sharma & Alfer, 2012). Several countries have experienced serious economic crises that have affected the population's consumption profile - the United States in 1929 (Bolton, 1978); Japan in the 1990s (Ang, Leong & Kotler, 2000); Argentina in 2001-2002 (Zurawicki & Braidot, 2005); Greece in 2013 (Tilikidou, 2013) and Turkey (Kaytaz & Gul, 2014).

Those studies revealed that, through their choices of consumption, people strive to elevate their well-being, whose evaluation is often made comparing past experiences with those of the present, (Diener & Oishi, 2000; Diener & Biswas-Diener, 2002; Diener & Seligman, 2002). Corroborating the thought that products influence how consumers see themselves and how they are viewed, Tsai (2005) considers that consumers tend to choose products that provide symbolic meanings recognized in their socio-cultural environment.

A question then arises: which affective responses do they express when they lose access to symbols that represented their new extended self? The answer requires reflection upon the process of negotiation and renegotiation of the consumer identity. Black (2011) observed that the study of the losses is a gap to be filled in the literature, once researchers concentrate their focus on the acquisition of goods, services and experiences, dedicating less effort to what is lost. Smyczek and Glowik (2011) have identified a lack of studies dedicated to the knowledge of the individual's affective responses to involuntary losses. For Black (2011), such knowledge is necessary due to the importance of possessions in the representativeness of the self and in individual formation, suggesting studies on the effects of involuntary losses of the extended self.

Considering that affective responses may be associated with emotions that vary individually, temporally, and spatially, this study followed an interpretive line of research, based on existential phenomenology applied to consumer research (Thompson, Locander & Pollio, 1989, 1990).

Extended self and status

The theoretical basis followed an individual-centered perspective (Belk, 1988). First, concepts of the extended self were approached in James's (1890) seminal studies on self-construction, which influenced Belk (1988) in his theoretical definition of the extended self. To this concept, other contributions were added: Veblen (1899), with studies on consumption behavior of privileged classes; McClelland (1951), on the control of external objects for the conception of the self; Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton (1981) on material possessions as signs of the self; Ahuvia (2005), on the extension of the self as a construction of the individual throughout life; Lipovetsky (2007), on paradoxical happiness. Following that, concepts about the relationship between status and social classes are approached, aiming at a greater understanding of social relations and the processes of identity and identification proposed by Maffesoli (2000).

In the nineteenth century, the first concepts about how the individual sees himself, delineating self-esteem and self-efficacy, were discussed in Psychology - the person is what he or she believes to be (James, 1890, *apud* Belk, 1988). James has influenced future definitions of self-construction and, consequently, of the extended self, by asserting that the individual is the sum of all that he or she can call his own: not only the body and psychic powers, but clothes, home, wife and children, ancestry, reputation - the individual is the sum of his possessions, and all these factors arouse emotions (Belk, 1988).

Examining the structural and emotional meaning of specific possessions, Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton (1981) proposed that some material possessions, which are valuable and act as signs of the self, are essential to the individual and, hence, represent the created meaningful world. Therefore, consumption is quite often associated with happiness. Richins and Rudmin (1994) identified individuals who, by considering the conquest of goods and possessions responsible for the meaning given to life, place possessions and acquisitions as essential for their satisfaction and well-being. This line of studies was ratified by Corbi and Menezes-Filho (2006) and Lipovetsky (2007), who analyzed the ephemeral happiness provided by consumption.

McCracken (1986) explained that the meaning of consumer goods lies in three aspects: the good itself, the consumer, and the culturally constituted world, cultural meaning moving primarily from the culturally constituted world to consumer goods and, thereafter, to the individual consumer. Often circumstances of loss, sudden impoverishment or alienation show a feeling of mourning and recognition of the cultural significance transferred by consumer goods.

Distancing from McCracken's (1986) cultural perspective - for whom a social structure is given to the subject, who respects and follows it - and turning studies toward the self, Belk (1988), in a more reflexive perspective of the individual, considered that the subject does not necessarily follow a preformed social structure. Belk (1988, 2003) points out that the concept of extended self encompasses both the ME and the MINE. Thus, in order to understand consumer behavior, one needs to understand the meaning attached to possessions. If the individual thrives, he or she feels triumphant, evidencing this through consumption and possessions that may express more symbolic than utilitarian importance. When the individuals lose them, they may feel diminished (Belk, 1988).

Broadening the thoughts on the extended self to the digital world of the 21st century, Belk (2013) identified five emerging self-related behaviors: dematerialization, reconstruction, sharing, co-construction, and distributed memory. Evaluated in terms of the individual's understanding of their self, these new behaviors express consumer behavior in social networks and virtual environments, where natural dematerialization of goods and possessions occurs, and status symbols are not tangible (Belk, 2013).

Moving forward to the relationship between identification, social class and status, Martineau (1958) developed studies on society and consumption, and postulated that although money and income are indicators widely used in Marketing, social class offers a richer dimension of meanings. When the individual ascends socially, even unconsciously, he or she believes that they must send signs of their new social condition, in order not to be associated with the previous state (Martineau, 1958). Maffesoli (2000), in a more individual-centered view, seeks to elucidate questions of contemporary social groups and the relationship between identity and identification. For Martineau (1958), clothing, accessories, and personal fashion products are more evident signs of social representation. This conception dialogues with the concepts of Maffesoli (1995), for whom the society, ruled by the power of image, has in the dress code one of the main factors of social representation.

Investigating how the characteristics of social classes influence consumers' decisions, whether by functionality or by expressiveness, Henry (2002) found variations in shopping orientations between social classes, based on criteria of utilitarianism and symbolism. While symbolic acquisitions were often found in groups seeking to socially ascend, acquisitions based on functionality were related to those that lost social status.

Affective Responses to Loss

Loss triggers the feeling of mourning, which is not necessarily linked to death (Freud, 2013) - it is a reaction to the loss of someone or something. Situations of loss are inherent to the human condition, and pain is a natural reaction in all manifestations of physical, emotional, cognitive, behavioral and spiritual losses (Hall, 2011). If mourning is the price paid for the loss of people, projects and possessions, with which emotional bonds are established, the most painful losses of life are related to those of the self - losing part of who one is leads to the process of deconstruction and reconstruction of the self (Hall, 2011).

Starting from Freud's assumptions (2013), Elizabeth Kübler-Ross (2000) identified five stages of loss: denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance. Her definitions have been of great value in the fields of Sociology, Psychology and Social Sciences. Kübler-Ross (2000) also identified denial in people who refuse to live with material constraints - if they could choose, they would rather die than lose symbolic goods.

Feelings of anger, revolt, envy and resentment arise when the individual no longer supports denial. Patients with high social and purchasing power, feeling threatened with loss, express their anger more intensely, leading everyone around to pretend they still have power and control over possessions and choices (Kübler-Ross, 2000).

The third stage, the bargain, is useful to the sufferer for a short time. Actually, bargaining is an attempt to postpone the inevitable end through promises that may be associated with guilt (Kübler-Ross, 2000).

Depression occurs when denial, anger and negotiation give room to a melancholy feeling: the individual fails to hide their suffering. Losing employment or purchasing power, which prevents the provision for the house and the accomplishment of dreams, the individual is led to melancholy (Kübler-Ross, 2000).

Once he or she receives help, the individual becomes open to acceptance, no longer feeling depression or anger. Although he or she expresses envy and anger for those who do not share his suffering, his or her feeling is positive and resigned. This is not a stage of happiness, but instead of resilience (Kübler-Ross, 2000).

The stages identified by Kübler-Ross were applied in the study of losses related to consumption (Lim, 2013) and organizational crises (Manderscheid & Ardichvili, 2008). These studies show that there was a greater concern with waste reduction, a search for more information about the product or service before the acquisition, the choice of local brands over international brands, replacement of more refined products with generics, purchases in smaller quantities, preference for stores discounts (Ang, Leong & Kotler, 2000; Zurawicki & Braidot, 2005; Sharma & Alter, 2012; Stefanska & Bilinska-Reformat, 2014; De Nisco *et al.*, 2016).

Method

This study employed an interpretive approach, based on phenomenological interviews (Thompson, Locander & Pollio 1989, 1990), interpreting it from the experience of the individual interviewed, indicating the relations studied in the phenomenon and the respective effects.

The interviewees are individuals who, from 2003 to 2013, ascended from lower social classes to the new Brazilian middle class (Neri, 2010) and then, as a result of the economic crisis, lost symbolically important goods. The authors decided not to apply a formal social classification instrument, because the factors related to status and social class are complex. The interviewees identified themselves as members of the middle class during the period of ascension, building a new identity, failing to see themselves as poor. They were all residents in two districts, with poor conditions and clear social division, in the city of Juiz de Fora, a medium-size (500,000 inhabitants) city in the state of Minas Gerais.

The interviews were driven by some research interests: which affective responses (emotions, feelings, moods and assessments) the interviewees of poor origin, who ascended economically and socially to the middle class, express in face of the loss of symbols that represented their newly acquired extended self? How has their self been affected?

Selected by convenience, the first interviewees were recruited in one of the authors' network. The others were indicated by them.

The interviews, conducted in the interviewees' homes and lasting between 30 minutes and 3 hours, followed the course of the dialogues, without a pre-defined script, to stimulate the clear expression of the feelings lived. For ethical reasons, prior to the interviews, the interviewees were informed about the objectives of the study and authorized their narrative to be recorded, with confidentiality and anonymity, guaranteed by the interviewer. The interviews were later transcribed.

The interviewees' experiences and perceptions will be presented from their own perspectives. Table 1 summarizes the interviewees profile.

Table 1 – Interviewees Profile

Name	Age	Profession / Occupation	Marital Status	Neighborhood
Adriano	45	Electrician / unemployed	Divorced	Benfica
Gabriela	35	Physiotherapist	Stable Union	Benfica
Helen	34	Sales supervisor/ unemployed	Married	Dom Bosco
Isabela	37	Radiologist / Housekeeper	Married	Dom Bosco
Karina	26	Sales representative/ unemployed	Single	Benfica
Luciano	25	Manager	Single	Benfica
Margarida	67	Housekeeper / retired	Married	Benfica
Maria	63	Housekeeper / retired	Single	Dom Bosco
Mauro	29	Operational supervisor / unemployed	Single	Benfica
Patricia	40	Civil Servant	Single	Dom Bosco
Vagner	32	Mechatronics technician	Married	Dom Bosco
Vilma	50	Civil Servant	Divorced	Benfica
Wellington	36	Businessman / watchman	Married	Dom Bosco

Preconceived theoretical notions about the phenomenon changes as the researcher advances in the interviews and their analysis, since the detail of the experimenter's experience is an autonomous data entity. The phenomenon was treated as an autonomous text and came to be confronted on its own terms.

Data Analysis

From the described life histories, it was observed that all interviewees lost purchasing power, but each individual experienced loss in different ways. The most affected by loss were those who lost jobs. The interviewees that, despite being employed, had to change their activity, thus losing status, income, assets and possessions acquired during the ascension period, now struggle not to return to poor living standards. Other interviewees lost income and purchasing power, having to change their consumption patterns.

By losing symbolic possessions, respondents faced a socially unfavorable condition, going through a cycle of suffering until accepting and overcoming the inability to sustain the ascension identity that identified them with the middle class. Compared to a death in life, the loss of conquests that extended the self represented to them the loss of part of their identity (McClelland, 1951; Csikszentmihalyi & Rochberg-Halton, 1981; McCracken, 1986; Belk, 1988; Richins & Rudmin, 1994b; Thompson & Hirschman, 1995; Price *et al*, 2000; Ahuvia, 2005; Murray, 2002; Trudel *et al*, 2016).

Affective Responses to the Loss of Symbolic Possessions

Considering the individual characteristics, it was observed that those who emphasized material achievements suffered the most intense losses, corroborating Trudel *et al*. (2016).

When Isabela lost her job as a radiologist, she denied the loss and its effects, devoting more time to the care of the newborn child and to the second pregnancy. As Hall (2011) identified, she mitigated the effects of loss by concentrating her energy on new searches, so the loss is not always bad. Over time, other losses occurred and led her to reflect, having to sell personal items to clear basic accounts:

I have already sold my own things (...) Cell phone, I already sold more than three, and I'm still looking for a solution (...) There comes a moment that makes us want to

give up, to throw in the towel ... You think you will not get better (...), it seems that it is getting worse and things become more difficult, bills that won't stop coming ... (Isabela).

The effects of the loss can be extended to family members, friends and acquaintances. Karina's mother refused to accept her daughter's losses, denying in part her own losses regarding the way of life she experienced when her daughter improved her finances:

My mother demands me to this day: 'Why didn't you give me money last month, why do you not help me the way you helped me before? Ah, my daughter, come here, to our city ... ' I say: ' Mother, I don't have money! ' She says, 'But, my daughter, how? You earned so well, you're frugal, you saved money ... Where's your money? ' But she has no idea of how long I've been unemployed, and as long as you do not receive, you spend, and the money is going away ... Not to mention that a good part of that money was even for her, that I helped her ... (...) Before, I went to her house at least two to three times a month. Today I have no condition (...) So, I have not seen my mother for almost six months ... (Karina).

In the public self, the interviewees hid the truth, trying to prevent their peers from learning about their real situation. Even when the loss is noticeable, they try to preserve themselves from social judgments, lying and, or, creating fictitious scenarios in acts to convince their peers that their situation has not been shaken. These behaviors are similar to those identified by Squires and Brouwer (1991) - individuals conceal their identity because they do not feel socially accepted, - and by Black (2011) - individuals omit the loss of status. Just as Wellington did, even if after having lost his job, he would get ready and go out early every day, as if he were going to work: "So, after I lost my job, seriously, I'll tell you, I was so shaken up ... I did not want my neighbors to know that it was my wife who was providing for the house".

Arguments are common when the individual is feeling angry at the loss. Arguing with his wife for no apparent reason, Adriano expressed anger at himself (for not being able to keep his job and the comfortable life he enjoyed) and envy of his colleagues (who remained employed). Nervous and insecure about the future, he had intense quarrels with his wife, leading to the end of the marriage: "Then I thought about what I could have done to avoid being sacked ... Was I the one who failed? (...) I was very nervous at the time, not knowing what to do. I tried to control the expenses ... That's when my wife left me ..." (Adriano).

The losses of symbolic possessions are explained by means of new options. Having to live with more restricted income levels, they were forced to make changes to balance the budget: contracts were renegotiated in the search for fixed costs reduction; products are purchased in discount stores; travel, food in restaurants, leisure programs and luxury goods were reduced or eliminated. Murray (2002) explored Thompson and Haytko's (1997) interpretation of two opposing perspectives on the use of objects as signs or evidence of identity: the first assumes that the consumer as an agent, with free access to the domain of signs (constituent consumer); the second presupposes that the consumer is imprisoned by signs and social codes (constituted consumer).

The interviewees' consumer behavior was adapted, often prevailing choices of durable and utilitarian items. Experiencing loss implies effective deconstruction of the newly constructed prosperous identity and preparation for rebuilding another identity.

As this whole process of transforming identity was imposed by unintentional losses and in the face of the helplessness of reversing the situation, some of them depreciate their own image: "I am nothing else ... Adriano today is ashamed" (Adriano) ; "I am nobody, I feel diminished " (Helen); "I feel like the poop of the bandit's horse" (Karina).

By bargaining for consumption options, for having involuntarily lost possessions, respondents have affected their identity of middle class (Maffesoli, 2000), showing how possessions are important components of the sense of self and help in self-perception (McCracken, 1986). Luciano, for example, considers himself to be in a rebuilding process,

rethinking his choices, carving out a new identity. Because he suffered losses, he believes he has become more judgmental. In the ascension period, Luciano gave himself an iPhone, an iPad, a Podcast, conceiving possession of these products as a representation of his successful self: "I am making a good profit, I can pay, I need an iPhone, I do not want a Samsung" (Luciano). At the time of the interview, he wondered about such purchases, not feeling worthy of having such equipment. "In the past, I bought textiles, appliances, furniture to my whole house; nowadays, I would not do such a thing ... Nowadays, I give much more value to my effort, I don't know if I would return to the same consumption level as before. Even having income, probably not" (Luciano). Karina, who lost her job as a multinational sales representative, said: "Wow ... Now what? In the old days, I was the only representative from Brazil and suddenly I was nothing more ... To the market, I was nothing anymore more ... Who is Karina? Nobody knows..."

In a situation similar to the loss of singularity (Goffman, 2001), during the years in which she worked in the company, Karina was absorbing for herself part of a collective identity, with which she was shaping her own. When she was dismissed, she lost her use of the company's name, as if she were losing part of her social identity (Tajfel, 1978; Tajfel & Turner, 1979): her name, surname, professional occupation and social function, representing an important change in identity, habits and dreams. For her, one of the great symbols of ascension was the sofa, an expensive piece acquired during the period when she worked and earned a high salary. To lie down was the prize of a long and tiring day of work. But she had to sell it to the owner of the property in return for not being able to pay the rent.

My couch, I sold it to him, and it still hurts a lot 'cause it was very good ... And it was the great image of the well-being of the house, because I got home and the first thing I did was to throw myself on it. Nowadays, I just look at it... I mean ... I know it's there, but I can't enjoy the couch anymore ... I do not deserve it anymore... It's that simple ... (Karina)

Caring for appearance is one way of expressing the extended self. The impossibility of attending a beauty salon as before, having to reduce the care with appearance due to the income reduction, affected Maria's newly constructed identity, reflected in her low self-esteem: "Then there's the other side too: you should have your hair done, but you no longer can, it messes up with one's self-esteem" (Maria).

Affected both psychologically and financially by the crisis, consumers acquired different habits in relation to the period of ascension. By changing their consumption behavior, they began to build a new identity.

Despite the distinction between possessions of physical value and possessions of sentimental and symbolic value, both categories constitute extension of the self. The accumulation of possessions, in addition to imparting a sense of the past, informs us who we are, where we came from, where we are and even where we are going. Rather than simply having goods or objects, the feeling of possession becomes integral to its owner (Belk, 1988). As we become aware of the change in consumption, we realize that the loss of certain goods is more than simply "losing something", it is losing part of oneself and the new life, as Vagner expressed: "I died ... who am I now? I am nobody ... I have to be born again "(Vagner).

Findings and Discussions

It was evidenced that the interviewees, in the period they ascended socially, migrating from less favored classes, strived to achieve a middle-class lifestyle, often represented by symbols status. Veblen (1899) has shown that the cultural significance adjacent to consumer goods goes beyond simple individual-object relations, elevating to status. The interviewees identified themselves as members of the middle class, changing their levels of consumption. As in the findings of Martineau (1958), Berkman (1976) and Coleman (1983), this

identification was a determining factor in buying behavior. The status represented by symbolic possessions projected the respondents to higher social positions.

Necessity ceased to mean only food, clothing, and shelter, and came to mean status, represented by symbolic items, which extended the self (Belk, 1988; Thompson & Hyschman, 1995; Murray, 2002; Ahuvia, 2005; Trudel *et al.*, 2016), of which the individual was not willing to give up.

In the same way as it was pointed out in studies carried out in other countries, the crisis in Brazil also posed a threat of damnation to poverty. Several respondents demonstrated this concern, that the prosperity dream was threatened. Today, being hardly hit, they embody the Greek myth of Sisyphus, who was condemned to repeatedly push up a rock to the top of the mountain, that rolled again to the starting point, invalidating his effort. Respondents - affected by the involuntary loss of possessions due to the crisis - are indebted, trapped, deconstructing dreams, avoiding consumption, insecure about the future, and fearful of returning to the condition of being poor.

In this study it was observed that the interviewees, in the attempt to protect the newly constructed prosperous identity (Veblen, 1899; McCracken, 1986; Belk, 1988; Thompson & Hyschman, 1995; Murray, 2002) first denied their losses, for themselves and in the public self (Black, 2011), preserving their identity of judgment by third parties (Squires & Brouwer, 1991). Some respondents, trying to defend their identities (Squires & Brouwer, 1991; Murray, 2002), have maintained unchanged habits for a long time, denying the losses to themselves and others until they could no longer neglect them.

In the course of the interviews, affective responses of denial, anger, bargaining, depression and acceptance, such as those identified by Kübler-Ross (2000), were narrated by interviewees.

Individuals in similar situations of loss are affected in different ways. Although each respondent perceived and experienced their losses differently, these affective responses surfaced as a backdrop, presenting themselves in a similar way. Words, gestures, objects or memories triggered the anger, intensified or softened the depression, stimulating mechanisms that led to the logical thought of the need to make choices, meaning, to bargain.

Emerging when estrangement, anger and bargaining give way to a deep sense of loss, depression is associated with preparation for effective acceptance (Kübler-Ross, 2000). There were those who, declaring themselves fragile and apathetic, felt guilty for everything and with no expectations for the future. Adriano started using alcohol, feeling depressed and now spends most of his time in the bar next to his house. Affected by a deep sense of sadness, Karina suffered a miscarriage and today interprets this fact as a consequence of depression: "I was very sad, I discovered a pregnancy and lost the baby. And I realized that when you are feeling bad, if you let it dominate you, you will get worse and worse. I was very depressed ..." (Karina).

Either externalizing feelings or not, the interviewees who overcame depression became calmer, eliminating negative thoughts. Mauro, in accepting the losses, built a new identity, returned to live with his mother and assumed the status of head of the family. Today he is happy with his new way of life: "Today I can't go out with the friends I left when I worked ... I can't afford the nights out anymore. And I do not want to any more. Today I have fun at home. And I feel very happy about it".

An individual transformation cycle was generated in the interviewees, for whom the choices began to shape the observable behavior of consumption and to reflect on the reconstruction of identity. This study sought to show that, through the loss of symbolic possessions, the self-extension builds up the identity of the individual, in a dynamic process. In response to the lived experiences with the losses, the identity is being altered.

Based on Worden (1998) and Kübler-Ross (2000) thoughts, applied to the area of consumer behavior, and associated with Belk's (1988), Ahuvia (2005), Thompson and Haytko (1997), Murray (2002), and Thompson and Hirschman (1995), this study, besides contributing to fill the knowledge gap identified by Black (2011) and Smyczek and Gloik (2011), suggests that the involuntary loss of symbolic possessions starts a process of mourning (Worden, 1998) the death of the newly acquired identity, with affective responses of denial, anger, evaluations, depression and acceptance, similar to death in life. These responses, at each stage, are expressed and felt individually in the face of the personal experiences of each interviewee.

Items that represented achievements, raising the expense patterns of the respondents, were sacrificed, through exchanges and negotiations, altering their extended self (Belk, 1988) and preparing them for the building of the identity that they could afford to live at that moment. This highlights the importance of possessions for the sense of self and for self-perception. Throughout this process, interviewees often did not recognize themselves until they accepted their new condition and rebuilt a new self (Veblen, 1899, McCracken, 1986, Belk, 1988, Thompson & Hirschman, 1995, Murray, 2002; Ahuvia, 2005; Thudel *et al.*, 2016).

Future studies can be conducted to elucidate ownership-identity relations and harmful effects of consumer appreciation in contemporary society. The finding can be applied to financial products, trying to show how emotions can contribute to a financial education campaign, since it is increasingly evident that it is not the lack of financial knowledge that leads to indebtedness, but consumer behavior. Understanding affective responses to involuntary loss may facilitate the understanding of financial education programs and actions that are of great relevance to society.

In addition to experiencing the Greek myth of Sisyphus, the interviewees of this study can be related to the Phoenix legend – a symbol of Greek mythology of resurrection and strength, a bird capable of being reborn from its own ashes. Overcoming difficulties and rebuilding themselves with strength, determination and creativity, the interviewees try to rebuild themselves in search of a new identity: in the end, they struggle to be reborn from their own ashes.

References

- Ahuvia, A. C. (2005) Beyond the extended self: loved objects and consumers' identity narratives. *Journal of Consumer Research*, v. 32 (1), 171-184.
- _____; Leong & S. M., Kotler, (2000) The Asian apocalypse: crisis marketing for consumers and businesses. *Long Range Planning*, 33, 97-119.
- Belk, R. W. (1988) Possessions and the extended self. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 15 (2), 139-168.
- _____. (2013) Extended self in a Digital World. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 40 (3), 477-500, University of Chicago Press.
- _____; Austin, Mark (1986). Organ Donation Willingness as a Function of Extended Self and Materialism. *Advances in Ilcalih Care Research. 1986 Proceedings*, eds. M. Venkatesan and Wade Lancaster. Toledo, OH: Association for Health Care. 84-88.
- Black, I. R. (2011) Sorry not today: self and temporary consumption denial. *Journal of Consumer Behaviour*, 10, 267-278.
- Bolton, W. D. W. (1978) The economics of middle-income family life: working women during the Great Depression. *Journal of American History*, 65 (1), 60-74.
- Csikszentmihalyi, M. & Rochberg-Halton, E. (1981) *The Meaning of Things: Domestic Symbols and the Self*. Cambridge University Press. New York.

- Coleman, R. (1983) The continuing significance of social class in marketing. *Journal of Marketing Research*, 10, 265-280.
- Corbi, R. B. & Menezes-Filho, N. A. (2006). Os determinantes empíricos da felicidade no Brasil. *Revista de Economia Política*, 26 (4), 518-536.
- De Nisco, A.; Mainolfi, G. & Marino, V.; Napolitano, M. R. (2016) Effect of economic animosity on consumer ethnocentrism and product-country images. A binational study on the perception of Germany during the Euro crisis. *European Management Journal*, 34, 59-68.
- Diener, E. & Oishi, S. (2000). Money and happiness: Income and subjective wellbeing across nations. In E. Diener & E. M. Suh (Eds.), *Subjective well-being across cultures*, 185–218. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Diener, E. & Biswas-Diener, R (2002). Will money increase subjective well-being? *Social Indicators Research*. 57 (2), 119-169.
- Diener, E. & Seligman, M. E. (2002). Very happy people. *Psychological Science*, 13, 81-84.
- Freud, S. (2013) Luto e melancolia. São Paulo, Cosac Naify. <<https://clnicasdotestemunhosc.weebly.com>>.
- Goffman, E. (1963) *Estigma, nota sobre a manipulação da identidade deteriorada*. London: Penguin.
- Gray, P. (2006). *Psychology* (5th ed.). New York: Worth.
- Hall, C. (2011) Beyond Kübler-Ross: recent developments in our understanding of grief and bereavement. <<https://www.psychology.org.au/publications/inpsych/2011/december/hall/>>.
- Henry, P. (2002) Systematic variation in purchase orientations across social classes. *Journal of Consumer Marketing*, 19 (5), 424-438.
- Hirschman, E. & Holbrook, M. (1992) *Postmodern Consumer Research: The study of Consumption as Text*. Newbury Park: Sage.
- Husserl, Edmund. 1960 [1931]. *Cartesian Meditations: An Introduction to Phenomenology*. The Hague: Nijhoff.
- IBGE. (2016) Inflação volta a fechar abaixo de dois dígitos com queda na conta de energia. 2016. <<http://m.agenciabrasil.etc.com.br/economia/noticia/2016-04/inflacao-volta-fechar-abaixo-de-dois-digito-com-queda-na-conta-de-energia>>.
- Kaytaz, M. & Gul, M. C. (2014) Consumer response to economic crisis and lessons for marketers: the Turkish experience. *Journal of Business Research*, 67, 2701-2706.
- Kübler-Ross, E. (2000) *Sobre a morte e o morrer: o que os doentes terminais têm para ensinar a médicos, enfermeiras, religiosos e aos seus próprios parentes*. São Paulo: Martins Fontes, 8ª ed.
- Lipovetsky, G. (2007) *A felicidade paradoxal: ensaio sobre a sociedade de hiperconsumo*. São Paulo: Companhia das Letras.
- Lim, W. M. (2013) Revisiting Kübler-Ross's five stages of grief: some comments on the iPhone 5. *Journal of Social Sciences*. 9 (1), 11-13.
- Martineau, P. (1958) Social classes and spending behavior. *Journal of Marketing*, October, 121-130.
- Maffesoli, M. (2000). *O tempo das tribos: o declínio do individualismo nas sociedades de massa* (3a ed.). Rio de Janeiro: Forense.
- Manderscheid, S. V., & Ardichvili, A. (2008) A conceptual model for leadership transition. *Performance Improvement Quarterly*, 20 (3-4), 113-129.
- McClelland, David. (1951) *Personality*. New York: Holt, Rinehart, & Winston.
- McCracken, G. (1986) Culture and Consumption: A Theoretical Account of the Structure and Movement of the Cultural Meaning of Consumer Goods. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 13 (1), 71–84.
- Murray, J. B. (2002) The politics of consumption: a re-inquiry on Thompson and Haytko's (1997) "Speaking of Fashion". *Journal of Consumer Research*, 29, 427-440.

- Neri, M. C. (2010) (Coord.) *A nova classe média: o lado brilhante dos pobres*. Rio de Janeiro: FGV/CPS.
- _____. (2014) *A classe média brasileira*. Brasília: Secretaria de Assuntos Estratégicos, n. 1.
- Price, L. L. Arnould, E. J. Curasi, C. F. (2000) Older Consumers' Disposition of Special Possessions. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 27(2), 179-201.
- Richins, M. L. & Rudmin, F. W. (1994) Materialism and economic psychology. *Journal of Economic Psychology*, 15, 217-231.
- Sharma, Eesha & Alter, Adam L. (2012) Financial Deprivation Prompts Consumers to Seek Scarce Goods Source: *Journal of Consumer Research*, 39 (3), 545-560
- Smyczek, S. & Glowik, M. (2011) Ethnocentrism of Polish consumers as a result of the global economic crisis. *Journal of Customer Behavior*, 10 (2), 99-118.
- Squires, C & Brouwer, D. C. (1991) *Discernible Bodies: The Politics of Passing in Mainstream and Marginal Media*. New York: Harper Perennial.
- Tajfel, H. (1978). *The achievement of inter-group differentiation*. In Tajfel, H. *Differentiation between social groups*. London: Academic Press, 77-100.
- _____; Turner, J. C. (1979) An integrative theory of inter-group conflict. In: Austin, W. G. & Worchel S. (Eds.). *The social psychology of inter-group relations*. Monterey, CA: Brooks/Cole, 33-47.
- Tilikidou, I. (2013) Evolutions in the ecologically conscious consumer behavior in Greece. *EuroMed Journal of Business*. 8 (1), 17-35.
- Thompson, C. J. (2015) The Lived Meaning of Free Choice: An Existential-Phenomenological Description of Everyday Consumer Experiences of Contemporary Married Women. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 17 (3), 346-361.
- _____; Haytko, D. L. (1997) Speaking of fashion: consumer's uses of fashion discourses and the appropriation of countervailing cultural meanings. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 24, 15-42.
- _____; Hirschman, E. C. (1995) Understanding the socialized body: a poststructuralist analysis of consumers' self-conceptions, body images, and self-care practices. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 22 (2), 139-153.
- _____; Locander, W. B. & Pollio, H. R. (1989) Putting consumer experience back into consumer research: the philosophy and method of existential-phenomenology. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 16 (2), 133-146.
- Trudel, R.; Argo, J. J. & Meng, M. D. (2016) The recycled self: consumers' disposal decisions of identity-linked products. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 43(2), 246-264.
- Tsai, S. (2005) Utility, cultural symbolism and emotion: a comprehensive model of brand purchase value. *International Journal of Research in Marketing*. 22, n. 3, 277-291.
- Tully, S.; Hershfield, H & Meyvis, T. (2015) Seeking lasting enjoyment with limited money: financial constraints increase preference for material goods over experience. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 42, 59-75.
- Veblen, T. (1899) The Theory of the Leisure Class. <http://moglen.law.columbia.edu/LCS/theoryleisureclass.pdf>.
- Worden, J. William. (1998) *Terapia do luto: um manual para o profissional de saúde mental*. Porto Alegre: Editora Artes Médicas.
- World Bank (2007). Annual Report 2007 <http://siteresources.worldbank.org/EXTANNREP2K7/Resources/Portuguese.pdf>.
- Young, M. M. & Wallendorf, M. (1989) Ashes to ashes, dust to dust: conceptualizing consumer. Disposition of possessions. In TERRY L. CHILDERS et al. (eds.). *American Marketing Association Winter Educator's Conference Proceedings*. Chicago, IL: American Marketing Association.

Zurawicki, L. & Braidot, N. (2005) Consumers during crisis: responses from the middle class in Argentina. *Journal of Business Research*, 58, 1100-1109.