

Anticipatory Consumer Socialization

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INTRODUCTION

Previous writers noted the importance of the area of consumer socialization among various groups of people including public policymakers, marketers and consumer educators (Ward 1974a, Moschis and Churchill 1978). The area becomes of particular interest as a topic in the field of consumer research for two main reasons: first, recent research suggests that a great deal of consumer behavior among adults is learned during pre-adult years (Olshavsky and Granbois 1979); second, the socialization perspective has increasingly become a viable approach to the study and understanding of human behavior in general (Brim 1966, Bengston and Black 1973) and consumer behavior in particular (e.g., Ward et al. 1977, Moschis and Moore 1979).

Although consumer socialization research has proliferated in the last ten years, it has focused almost exclusively on consumer orientations and norms children and adolescents can enact, such as the child's request for products advertised on TV, slogan recall, and attitudes toward advertising. However, many of the orientations and norms about consumption young people learn have little practical application for the child at the time they are learned. They cannot be practiced immediately and must be saved until a later time, since the direct consumer expenditures of children and adolescents are rather limited (Ward 1974a). For example, the child may develop desires for material possessions and yet be unable to enact them until much later.

He sees adults consuming various material goods, but he is too young to participate in similar types of consumption. Merton (1957) has called this type of learning "anticipatory socialization."

Anticipatory socialization often refers to "implicit often unconscious learning for roles which will be assumed sometime in the near future" (Ward 1974b, p. 5). In the field of consumer behavior Riesman and Roseborough (1955) have used the term to refer to the "role" of prospective householder young people assume prior to reaching the age of role-enactment. They suggest that anticipatory socialization may specifically entail development of expectations regarding career, product ownership and adaptive patterns of consumer behavior.

Hess and Torney (1967) describe three types of anticipatory socialization: the acquisition of attitudes and values about adult roles that have limited relevance for the child, but which serve as a basis for subsequent learning; the acquisition of specific information not directly applied until later in life; and learning skills that can be practiced immediately and called into play when appropriate occasions arise.

Although some consumer socialization studies have investigated learning skills that can be considered anticipatory (Moschis and Moore 1978 and 1979, Moschis and Churchill 1978), research on anticipatory consumer socialization is scarce and far from systematic in examining the various types of anticipatory skills that young people acquire. Research is particularly lacking on how the acquisition of specific attitudes and values about adult roles influences subsequent consumer behavior. This paper addresses the concept of anticipatory consumer socialization in more detail, by focusing on a variety of consumer cognitions and the processes by which they are acquired.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Consumer socialization research is based primarily on two models of human learning: the cognitive development model and the social learning model. The cognitive development model essentially views learning as a cognitive psychological process of adjustment to one's environment. Socialization is viewed as a function of qualitative changes (stages) in cognitive organization from infancy to adulthood. Stages are defined in terms of cognitive structures the child can use in perceiving and dealing with the environment. As the child "moves" from one stage to another, he or she is assumed to be developing various learning properties. The social learning model, on the other hand, seeks explanations for the formation of various

cognitions and behaviors from environmental forces acting upon the child, or persons and institutions — commonly known as “socialization agents” with which the child interacts in various social settings. Socialization agents are directly involved in socialization because of their frequency of contact with the individual, primacy over the individual and control over rewards and punishments given to the individual (Brim 1966).

Previous consumer socialization studies have used a conceptual framework of consumer socialization based upon the two main socialization theories (Moschis and Moore 1978 and 1979, Moschis and Churchill 1978, Churchill and Moschis 1979). The conceptual model incorporates five different types of variables: learning properties (criterion variables); age or life cycle and social structural variables (antecedents); and agents and learning processes, both combined to form specific socialization processes (Moschis and Churchill 1978). Socialization theory and research also suggest linkages between specific types of variables. Generally, socialization processes are conceived as having direct influence on criterion variables, while the influence of antecedent variables can be both direct and indirect by impact upon socialization processes.

Using this general conceptual framework of consumer socialization, this study examines the development of anticipatory consumption-related orientations. Specific orientations examined represent a fairly wide spectrum of decisions considered to be related to consumption including occupation (Riesman and Roseborough 1955, Ferber 1976) acquisition of strategic items (Grendal 1966, Arndt 1971), purchasing and consuming (Nicosia and Mayer 1976, Arndt 1975) and sex roles in family decision-making (Herbst 1952). Among these, only purchasing and consuming can be viewed useful in defining a person's consumer role, since society appears to have some prescribed norms of behavior regarding purchase and use of products (for example, comparative shopping, energy conservation) (Churchill and Moschis 1979, p. 24), but imposes few norms on occupational choice, purchases of products and sex-roles in family decisions.

Mass media, parents, peers, and school are considered to be important agents of anticipatory socialization in general (Thorton and Nardi 1975), whereas mass media, family and school are considered significant determinants of anticipatory consumer learning in particular (Riesman and Roseborough 1955). Adolescence is believed to be of particular importance as a period of anticipatory socialization (Riesman and Roseborough 1955, Moore and Moschis 1979). The social structural variables examined were those that can be incorporated into specific hypotheses on the basis of

previous theory and research, and they were the following: social class, sex, race and birth order.

HYPOTHESES

Mass Media. Among the mass media, television seems to play an especially important role in the development of a variety of expectations among young people. Previous research suggests that young people who watch a great deal of television are likely to be aware of occupations traditionally portrayed on television (DeFleur and DeFleur 1967, p. 785). In addition, television viewing has been linked to the development of certain occupational aspirations (Himmelweit, Oppenheim and Vince 1958). Such occupational aspirations may be acquired from television role models (Christiansen 1979).

Sociologists have also speculated that television contributes to the development of knowledge about and need for products in the consumer's "standard package" (Riesman and Roseborough 1955). Such television effects may be the result of both programming and advertising (Vener 1957, Rubin 1979, Adler et al. 1977). Finally, television may serve as a source of sex-role acquisition. Television ads, in particular, tend to portray stereotyped sex-roles that may affect the development of role conceptions among children (Freuth and McGhee 1975, Mayes and Valentine 1979, Miller and Reeves 1976, Dominick and Rauch 1972, Welch et al. 1979, Chiles-Miller 1975). The preceding discussion suggests the following hypotheses:

- H1: The greater the amount of television adolescents watch, the more likely they are to have developed (a) occupational aspirations, (b) expectations about the purchase of major consumer products and (c) traditional sex-role conceptions of consumer decision-making.

Family. Riesman and Roseborough, (1955) as well as others (Parsons et al. 1953), speculated that the family is instrumental in teaching young people rational aspects of consumption including basic consumer needs. Ward and Wackman (1973) found that parents' general consumer goals for their children include learning price-quality relationships, and Ward et al. (1977) found that such goals also included experiences with use of money and learning to shop for quality products. Older children appear to learn a greater variety of consumer skills from their parents than younger children. One recent study, for example, showed that parent-child communication was relatively unrelated to the adolescents' attitudes toward prices but it

was related to his propensity to perform other "rational" consumer behaviors such as managing his money and comparative shopping (Moschis 1976). The family is also believed to play a significant role in the occupational aspirations of the individual (Levine 1976). Thus, family may be instrumental in teaching children general, as well as specific orientations, regarding consumption.

H2: Parent-child communication about consumption is positively related to the adolescent's development of (a) occupational aspirations, (b) expectations regarding the purchase of major consumer products and (c) consumer role perceptions.

School. The educational system is usually charged with the responsibility of "preparing the youth to function as adults by giving them the skill, attitude, and knowledge bases necessary for good citizenship and economic self-sufficiency" (Campbell 1969, p. 844). Riesman and Roseborough (1955) speculated that young people learn from school ". . . something of the adaptive functions of consumption" (p.4). But in spite of the general availability of consumer courses in school curricula, empirical evidence suggests the school is not very effective in teaching such skills (Ward 1974a, Langrehr and Mason, 1977). The school may, however, play an important part in occupational socialization by providing a context of opportunities within which choices are both shaped and made (Levine 1976).

H3: The amount of formal consumer education is positively related to the adolescent's development of (a) occupational aspirations and (b) consumer-role perceptions.

Social Class. The influence of socioeconomic origins on later life is rather well documented. After summarizing much of the existing literature, Levine (1976) concluded that ". . . knowledge about a range of occupations, aspirations, and expectations for reaching various occupational and educational goals differ by social class" (p. 132). Although social class is not believed to have impact upon what Riesman and Roseborough (1955) call "anticipatory buying," previous research suggests that social class origins may affect the adolescent's perception of the time horizons associated with the purchase of items that may be included in the family's "standard package." The tendency to postpone the acquisition of major items, "deferred gratification," appears to be more common among upper class families than lower class families (Riesman and Roseborough 1955, Straus 1962). Such deferment may be related to delayed entry into the labor force to secure higher education (Straus 1962). In addition, upper class families may be more likely to set consumer role goals and prescriptions for their

children's consumer behavior and attempt to socialize them into such roles (Moschis and Moore 1978, Moschis et al. 1977).

H4: There is a positive relationship between an adolescent's socioeconomic background and (a) level of occupational aspirations, (b) deferred gratifications about consumption, and (c) consumer role perceptions.

Race. While growing up, black children may experience social deprivation which may affect their consumption expectations in a number of ways. Social deprivation may lead blacks to develop high levels of occupational aspirations. For example, a recent study reported by Levine (1976) found that blacks had higher occupational aspirations than whites. Social deprivation may also lead blacks to strive toward upgrading their status by means of conspicuous consumption. Findings reported by Bauer and Cunningham (1970) suggest that blacks tend to overspend on items of personal display and immediate gratification. Impatience regarding consumption may further affect their time horizons regarding the purchase of goods and services used by adults. Previous studies have also found that blacks are more likely than whites to hold sex stereotyped attitudes (Bayer 1975, Angrist et al. 1977). This may also be the case for sex-role conceptions in family decision-making.

H5: Black adolescents compared to their white counterparts are more likely to (a) have higher occupational aspirations, but are less likely to (b) defer consumption gratifications and to (c) hold equalitarian sex-role conceptions regarding family decision-making.

Birth Order. Previous theory and research suggest that first-born and only children are superior to later-born children on achievement motivation and educational aspirations (Glass et al. 1974). To secure higher education, first-born adolescents may delay entry into the labor force, and thus postpone the acquisition of major consumption items (Straus 1962).

H6: First-born and only children, compared to later-borns, are more likely to (a) have higher occupational aspirations and (b) defer consumption gratifications.

Age. Maturation is believed to be a major factor in the development of future role expectations regarding roles they may assume in the future (e.g. Thorton and Nardi 1975). With respect to the development of cognitions on anticipatory consumption, some sociologists have suggested that during adolescence, people are likely to develop expectations regarding the purchase of some key items that make up the family's "standard package" (Riesman and Roseborough 1955). Research also found that aspirations

(including aspirations for material possessions and impatience for their acquisition) varied by age (Cobb 1954). Similarly, older adolescents were found to be more interested in family consumption matters, including planning of finances (Moore and Holtzman 1965), and to have more accurate consumer role perceptions than their younger counterparts (Moschis and Moore 1978, Moore et al. 1976, Moschis and Moore 1979).

H7: As adolescents grow older, they are more likely to develop (a) expectations for purchasing products; (b) accurate consumer role perceptions; and (c) they are less likely to defer gratifications regarding the purchase of products.

METHOD

Sample

The sample for this study consists of 784 adolescents from six counties in urban, suburban, semirural and rural Georgia. In each county, self-administered anonymous questionnaires were completed by respondents in one middle and one senior high school as part of a longitudinal study. These self-administered questionnaires were filled out by students in a regular class session and took approximately 30-45 minutes to complete. The selection of schools was based on personal interviews with school officials, and attempts were made to select one middle and one high school representative of the respective counties. The sample was very representative with respect to sex (48% males and 52% females), age (52% middle schoolers and 48% high schoolers), race (11% blacks and 88% whites) and socioeconomic status measured on Duncan's (1961) scale (mean = 45.3).

Definition and Measurement of Variables

Amount of Television viewing, in line with previous research, was measured by asking respondents how frequently they watched specific program categories (McLeod and O'Keefe 1972, Moschis and Churchill 1978). These were national and local news, sports, movies, variety shows, cartoons, police and adventure shows. The responses were measured on a five-point, everyday (= 5) to never (= 1) scale and summed to form the television viewing index.

Family communication about consumption was operationally defined as overt interaction between parent and adolescent concerning goods and services (Ward and Wackman 1971, Moore and Stephens 1975). It was measured by summing responses to six items, such as "My parents and I talk

about buying things," with responses measured on a five-point very often (= 5) to never (= 1) scale. The alpha reliability coefficient of this scale was .62.

Learning at school may take place through such mechanisms as reinforcement (grades), interaction (class lectures, readings, and discussion) and through modeling (unconscious identification with teachers) (Campbell, 1969). *Formal consumer education* refers to the number of consumer-related courses taken at school. Students were asked to state the "number of courses you have taken" in consumer education, home economics, economics, environmental science, guidance (job education), as well as the names of any other courses in which they have studied about consumer matters. Courses were summed to form a scale which had a reliability coefficient of .54.

Sex-role conceptions in family decision-making refer to the adolescent's perceptions of the relative influence of husband and wife in family decisions. Perceptions were measured across twelve different decisions representing different degrees of husband-wife specialization. Using Herbst's (1952) typology, two decisions were selected to represent each of six possible categories: Husband's Household Duties (HH), Wife's Household Duties (HW), Common Household Duties (HB), Child Control and Care (Ch), Economic Activities (E), and Social Activities (S).

The following question was asked of respondents: "In a family with small children, check who you think should have the *most* say in deciding about the following things." The twelve decisions were then listed with four response alternatives ("Husband should have most say," "Wife should have most say," "Husband and wife should have equal say," and "I don't know.") The extent of the adolescent's perceptions of traditional sex-roles in family decision-making was measured by summing responses to "Husband *and* Wife should have most say" categories to form a 0-to-12 point index.

Consumer role perceptions refer to the accuracy of the individual's cognitions and perceptions of the consumer role in terms of functions, obligations, position, and rights involved in role description (e.g., Moschis and Moore 1978). Respondents were asked to indicate how much they would do or would not do eleven behaviors associated with (un)wise purchase and consumption of goods (e.g., "Check warranties and guarantees before buying," "Buy throwaway bottles instead of returnable ones") *when* they start work and raise a family. Responses were scored on a five-point "definitely would do" to "definitely wouldn't do" scale. High scores represent positive or desirable consumer behavior.

Occupational aspirations refer to the adolescent's perception of his or her future occupation. Respondents were asked to state "what they would like to do for a living." Open-ended responses were coded using Duncan's (1961) socioeconomic scale of occupations. The measure of the formation of occupational aspirations is the extent to which the adolescent reports a specific occupation, while the *level* of such aspirations is measured on the socioeconomic scale.

Purchase expectations refer to the time horizon in the adolescent's life cycle when purchase of specific items is anticipated. Respondents were asked to indicate the time they would first buy *eight* items: life insurance, encyclopedia, new car, house, stocks and bonds, trip to Europe, hi-fi stereo, and new furniture. Response alternatives included: "Before I get married," "After I get married," "After I have children," and "I don't know." The extent of the adolescent's anticipation of purchase of these items was measured by summing other than "don't know" responses to form a 0-to-8 point index. *Deferred gratifications* refer to the adolescent's tendency to postpone the purchase of the eight items until later stages in his life cycle (after having children = 3, after getting married = 2, before getting married = 1). Responses were summed to form an 8-to-24 point index.

Alpha reliability coefficients for the constructs ranged from .48 to .87, with .50 to .60 often considered adequate for early stages of the research (Nunnally 1967).

RESULTS

The relationship between television viewing and development of occupational aspirations, as well as purchase expectations, are nearly zero, providing little support for Hypotheses 1a and 1b. However, television viewing is positively related to traditional sex-role conceptions ($b = .09$, $p < .05$), supporting Hypothesis 1c.

The relationship between communication with family about consumption matters and the adolescent's career decision is significant ($b = .10$, $p < .01$), suggesting that intrafamily interactions may provide opportunities for occupational socialization. In addition, such interaction is likely to lead to the adolescent's development of expectations regarding purchase of products ($b = .13$, $p < .001$) and role perceptions regarding effective consumer behavior ($b = .22$, $p < .001$) providing support for Hypotheses 2b and 2c. The latter finding suggests that parents may emphasize normative consumer skills while interacting with their children.

Formal consumer education was related to the adolescent's career selection ($b = .13, p < .001$), providing support for Hypothesis 3a. However, the relationship between consumer related courses and consumer role perception is not strong enough ($b = .04$, n.s.) to support Hypothesis 3b.

The adolescent's socioeconomic background was related to the level of his career aspirations ($b = .18, p < .001$) providing support for Hypothesis 4a. However, SES was weakly associated with deferred gratifications and consumer role perceptions ($b = .04$ and $.01$, n.s., respectively), although in the predicted direction (Hypotheses 4b and 4c).

Race appears to be a rather weak predictor of anticipatory consumer socialization. The relationships between race and career aspirations and sex-role perceptions were nil, providing no support for Hypotheses 5a and 5c. However, black adolescents appear to be less likely to defer consumption gratifications than their white counterparts ($b = .08, p < .05$). This finding provides support for Hypothesis 5b.

First-born and only-born children are more likely to have higher aspirations than later-born children ($b = .09, p < .05$), supporting Hypothesis 6a. However, such aspirations may not necessarily affect the child's expectations regarding the purchase of products. The relationship between birth order and deferred gratifications was nearly zero, offering no support for Hypothesis 6b.

Age appears to be a weak predictor of anticipatory consumer socialization. The relationship between age and purchase expectations, as well as age and consumer role perceptions, are in the opposite direction hypothesized and insignificant ($b = -.02$ and $-.04$, respectively). Each was related, though to deferred gratification in the expected direction but the relationship was not significant ($b = .07, p < .06$) (Hypothesis 7b). These findings suggest that such anticipatory cognitions may be formed during pre-adolescent or post-adolescent years.

CONCLUSIONS

Among the socialization agents examined, the family appears to play an important role in the development of consumption-related orientations, especially the formation of purchase expectations and consumer role conceptions. Television apparently contributes to the adolescent's development of traditional sex-role perceptions regarding household decision-making. Since television is more heavily consumed by lower SES groups (Schramm et al. 1961) who are likely to hold traditional sex-role attitudes (Bayer 1975), it is likely that SES is a contaminating variable. Formal consumer education

appears to contribute to the adolescent's development of career aspirations, but not to the development of conceptions regarding socially desirable consumer behaviors.

Social class appears to affect the youth's occupational aspirations since the data indicate that upper social class adolescents have higher occupational aspirations than lower class adolescents. Higher occupational aspirations are also more likely to be held by first-born and only-born children than other children.

Maturation or age appears to be a weak predictor of anticipatory consumer cognitions. This is not surprising, though, since cognitive development theory suggests that learning occurs with the person's active interaction with his environment. Apparently the adolescent has limited opportunities to experience the purchase of major products commonly used by adults.

IMPLICATIONS

The study findings suggest implications of anticipatory socialization for marketers and consumer researchers. Because the development of purchase expectations is likely to affect the development of preferences for brands (Moschis and Moore 1981) which, once developed, tend to persist throughout adult years (Guest 1964), marketers may wish to better understand the time span in the individual's life cycle when such preferences are likely to develop. Additionally, understanding of the processes by which such cognitions are formed may assist marketers in influencing specific consumer learning such as the acquisition of desires for products and brands.

Future research could examine how the acquisition of specific attitudes and values about adult consumer behavior influences the development of subsequent consumer learning and behavior. For example, it would be useful to understand the sequence in which various anticipatory cognitions develop, their effect on later acquired orientations during pre-adult years, as well as the effects of earlier acquired cognitions on future adult roles. Longitudinal research designs appear to be appropriate for addressing such research needs.

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