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Hard-Core Members' of Consumption-Oriented Subcultures Enactment of Identity: the Sacred Consumption of Two Subcultures

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Hard-Core Members' of Consumption-Oriented Subcultures Enactment of Identity: The Sacred Consumption of Two Subcultures

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates how hard-core members of two non-brand focused consumption-oriented subcultures enact their identities. The authors analyzed data collected from prolonged investigations of the North American organized distance running subculture and the Australian Hip Hop culture. Results suggest hard-core members enact their subcultural identities through reverence to sacred objects, times, people, and places. In addition, drawing upon the properties of sacredness outlined by Belk et al (1989), hard-core members experience a sacred-like lifestyle through objectification, commitment, sacrifice, mystery, and ecstasy and flow. These findings imply that sacred subcultural experiences can be enacted in domains traditionally conceptualized as profane.

"I have run on average 39 out of 40 days for 20 years solid. So at one level it fits into my lifestyle, but I absolutely have to do it now. It's ingrained in my lifestyle so now, it's my outlook. It still is a bigger chunk of my life than it ought to be because it is a totalizing kind of pursuit, because it is about pursuing absolute limits, and that always involves a very significant emotional and mental and physical commitment. For the vast majority of my life it has been at least the number one or two priority in my life." [Bryan, male runner aged 42]

"I'd spend every weekend passionately driving with friends or catching trains to get every single photo of graffiti I possibly could. Ended up with six/seven thousand photos of graffiti. That was from Australia, and now I've got thousands from traveling the world a couple of times. And I've continued to do that." [Simon, male graffiti artist aged 25]

Leisure and non-work activities are important and at times obsessive elements of consumers' lives, with several researchers espousing the benefits of exploring these kinds of consumption domains (e.g. Holbrook and Hirschman 1982; Kozinets et al. 2004). One interesting facet of this type of consumption is leisure activities taking on extreme levels of importance for an individual and becoming the dominant aspect of the individual's lifestyle and social identity (Borgmann 2000, 2003; Donnelly 1981). This is the case for the runner and graffiti artist in the opening narrative. The collectives that form around these kinds of focal activities are referred to as consumption-oriented subcultures and those individuals for whom the activity is the dominant aspect of their lifestyle are referred to as hard-core members of the subculture. Extant research has documented, in a variety of contexts and academic domains, the high levels of commitment exhibited by hard-core members of a subculture. The purpose of this study is to gain a deeper understanding of the nature of these commitments. Through a detailed analysis of two consumption-oriented subcultures, we explore the behaviors of hard-core subculture members to uncover the theoretical character of their identity enactments.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Understanding the behaviors of hard-core consumption-oriented subculture members requires understanding the answers to three key questions: (1) what are consumption-oriented subcultures and how are they understood in consumer research? (2) what is the

link between these collectives and the individuals that comprise them? and (3) how are hard-core members characterized and how do they differ from others in the subculture? To address these questions, the following literature review offers a parsimonious description of consumption-oriented subcultures and several key characteristics of these groups. First, we present an overview of how consumption-oriented subcultures are examined in consumer research. Building upon this foundation, we highlight the link between membership in a consumption-oriented subculture and individual identity. A discussion of the unique characteristics of hard-core members of consumption-oriented subcultures follows this.

Consumption-Oriented Subcultures:

Schouten and McAlexander (1995) introduced subcultures of consumption to consumer research. They define these groups as "a distinctive subgroup of society that self-selects on the basis of a shared commitment to a particular product class, brand, or consumption activity" (p. 43). They state that these groups are characterized by "an identifiable, hierarchical social structure; a unique ethos, or set of shared beliefs and values; and unique jargons, rituals, and modes of symbolic expression" (p. 43). Subcultures of consumption are conceptually similar to brand communities which Muniz and O'Guinn (2001) define as specialized, non-geographically bound communities based on a structured set of social relationships among admirers of a brand. Together, these collectives are referred to as consumption-oriented subcultures (or cultures). In this study, we focus on non-brand consumption-oriented subcultures.

Much research on consumption-oriented subcultures and the behaviors of its member has adopted a case study approach in which different theoretical aspects of these groups are highlighted through a detailed analysis of a particular consumption-oriented subculture. For example, Celsi, Rose, and Leigh (1993) examine the role of risk in the sky-diving subculture, Kozinets examines how a subculture forms around a television show to experience a fictitious utopian reality (Kozinets 1997, 2002), Kates (2004) examines the legitimization of brands within these communities, while Quester, Beverland, and Farrelly (2006) examine the ways in which commitment to a subculture is enacted by extreme sports participants.

Each of these studies offers a unique theoretical contribution relating to consumption-oriented subcultures as well as converging on several important key characteristics about these groups. Two of these characteristics are that these collectives are comprised of individuals with differing levels of commitment to the focal activity (e.g. Fox 1987) with the activity dominating the lifestyle of those members who are considered hard-core members of the subculture (e.g. Donnelly 1981) and that engagement with the focal activity involves the enactment of specific consumption practices and behaviors unique to each subculture (Schouten and McAlexander 1995). This kind of identity salience and its link to behavioral enactments are discussed next.

Identity and Consumption-Oriented Subculture Membership:

Research on consumption-oriented subcultures demonstrates that consumption activities can become extremely identity salient for core members of the subculture (e.g. Celsi et al. 1993; Donnelly

and Young 1988; e.g. Schouten and McAlexander 1995). Turner and Oakes (1986) note as individuals become more embedded in a collective, their perception of self changes from that of an individual person to being an exemplar of the group. This occurs as an individual increases their level of identification with the group though increased involvement, knowledge, possessions related to the identity, esteem related to the identity, and social connections related to the identity (Donnelly and Young 1988; Kleine, Kleine, and Kernan 1993)

As discussed in the previous section, consumption-oriented subcultures are comprised of individuals who vary in their level of identification with the collective, with some members being very closely tied to the group (e.g. hard-core members) and other being only peripherally related to the group (e.g. soft-core or peripheral members) (Fox 1987; Kates 2002; Quester et al. 2006). This intracultural variation results in several important differences amongst subculture members and sub-groups within the subculture. These differences stem from differences in the relationship between the subculture and each member's lifestyle (Donnelly 1981). Specifically, the differences at each level are a function of the amount of information possessed by members, the amount of commitment expressed by members of the subculture, and the degree to which the subculture is a dominant part of the member's lifestyle and constitutes a major component of their identity (Clarke 1974; Donnelly 1981; Fox 1987). Thus, for hard-core members of a subculture, the subcultural activity is *the* dominant aspect of their lifestyle, whereas, for peripheral members of the subculture, the subcultural activity is only a minor part of their lifestyle. Outlined next are the characteristics of hard-core members.

Hard-Core Members and their Identity Enactments:

Hard-core members of a consumption-oriented subculture exhibit a high level of devotion to the focal activity, with the focal activity being the dominant aspect of their lifestyle (Donnelly and Young 1988; Fox 1987; Schouten and McAlexander 1995). Consumer researchers have outlined several characteristics of hard-core subculture members. These members tend to know more about the 'backstage' activities and the history of the subculture (Quester et al. 2006), they generally know more about the activity (Thornton 1995), and they are better able to reconcile contradictions within the subculture through the utilization of their broader knowledge base (Donnelly and Young 1988). Hard-core members tend to be more interested in the functionality of objects associated with the activity while peripheral members focus more on the image that objects communicate to others (Donnelly and Young 1988; Quester et al. 2006). Also, while all members of a subculture tend to share the same core values, hard-core and peripheral members tend to be drawn to different elements of those core values and also enact those values differently (Quester et al. 2006). Finally, hard-core members of a subculture often serve as opinion leaders within a subculture and are actively involved with shaping the ethos and behaviors of the collective (Donnelly 1981).

In summary, extant literature suggests hard-core member's commitment to a consumption-oriented community is characterized by an extreme commitment to the lifestyle, large amounts of specialized knowledge, a strong link between the activity and self-identity, and that they differ from others within the subculture. However, while we are aware of the characteristics of hard-core members, very little research interprets why the consumption pattern of the focal activity dominating lifestyle exists and persists. While we have some knowledge of how an individual progresses from a neophyte member of a community (Donnelly and Young 1988), we know little about why the extreme involvement of hard-core members persists over time and how this involvement is

experienced. In addition, our knowledge of the nature of identity enactments amongst hard-core members through group membership and consumption practices is scant.

To address these questions, we conducted two ethnographically oriented studies analyzing the behaviors, and the meanings associated with these behaviors, of hard-core subculture members to explore why their characteristic traits exist and how their identities are enacted through consumption. Such research objectives were deemed imperative given the potential contributions the findings would make to the subculture literature, examining the nature of the hard-core member's experience (i.e. developing an understanding of their passion, commitment, and what keeps them coming back to the subculture). An investigation solely focusing on hard-core members was deemed appropriate as these participants act as opinion leaders within subcultural groups, actively shaping the ethos and behaviors of other members (Donnelly 1981).

METHODOLOGY

To explore the lifestyles of hard-core subculture members, we conducted analyses of two non-brand based consumption-oriented subcultures: the North American organized distance running subculture and the Australian Hip Hop subculture. These subcultures were selected for this study as both subcultures are firmly rooted in consumption objects and experiences. Furthermore, they have both been shown to be excellent sites for gaining insights about hard-core members' behaviors (Arthur 2006; Chalmers 2006). The inclusion of multiple case analyses allowed the authors to compare and contrast findings across subcultures that differ in both geography and focal activity.

We adopted an existential-phenomenological approach to understand how involvement with these particular subcultures shapes the lives of hard-core members (Thompson et al. 1989). This study relied on two principle methods: prolonged participant observation and in-depth interviews (McCracken 1989). The first author collected and analyzed data on the North American organized distance running subculture, while the second author collected and analyzed ethnographic data on the Australian Hip Hop culture. Both researchers spent a considerable amount of time in the field, 3 and 4 years respectively. This extended presence and participation in the field allowed the researchers to 'learn the language' of those under investigation, to experience life as one of the subjects (Elliot and Jankel-Elliot 2003), and to gain access to, and to understand life through the eyes of, the hard-core subculture members.

During the research process, both researchers kept field notes of their observations and informal conversations, which were then written up as soon as possible after the event. In addition, in-depth interviews with 21 hard-core members of the North American organized distance running subculture (14 males and 7 females) in both Canada and the United States and 20 hard-core members of the Australian Hip Hop subculture (18 males and 2 females) were conducted (McCracken 1989). As the researchers were subcultural participants a good rapport with the interviewees was established which helps to ensure the quality of the information (Elliot and Jankel-Elliot 2003). Purposive sampling was used throughout the research process to identify hard-core members of the subcultures.

The transcribed interviews and field notes were first coded using a free coding technique and then using QSR NVivo/N6 and standard data analysis and interpretation procedures (Glaser and Strauss 1967; Thompson 1997). Important themes and tensions were uncovered through across informant, within informant, across subculture, and within subculture analyses. The findings presented below represent a small subset of the findings from this study and focus almost exclusively on how hard-core members of the subcul-

tures perceive their experiences. As researchers, our focus is on understanding these perceptions through the eyes of informants to better understand their lifestyles.

FINDINGS

Emergent from the data is evidence of what Belk, Wallendorf, and Sherry (1989) describe as 'sacred consumption' within the respective subcultures. Interestingly, this applied to both objects of consumption and the entire subcultural lifestyle. Hence, the manner in which hard-core members enacted their identities was seen as a rich tapestry of a sacred lifestyle through which objects accorded sacred status were woven. While the subcultures were not perceived as actual religions, many aspects of religion, such as passion, meaning, and identity were observed and expressed through sacred subcultural consumption (as with the Apple Newton brand community (Muniz and Schau 2005)) and through the enactment of a subcultural identity. The authors interpreted the deep passion displayed by the participants and the extreme levels of affective involvement expressed for the consumption activities as examples of sacred attachment. For hard-core members, objects, times, people, and places held sacred status within the communities, predominantly because they were perceived as being quintessential exemplars of the subcultural ethos. Further, the holistic subcultural lifestyle exhibited five properties of the sacred (as outlined by Belk et al 1989): objectification, commitment, sacrifice, mystery, and ecstasy and flow. The presence of these sacred-esque experiences form the foundation of the appeal of the subcultural lifestyle, suggesting that the dominating subcultural activity over lifestyle is maintained because it is experienced as a sacred lifestyle.

Theme 1: Sacred Objects, Times, People, and Places

The first theme that emerged in the enactment of hard-core members' identity through consumption was the admiration and reverence of objects, times, people, and places that take on sacred like status within the community. Findings suggest that the primary reason these objects, times, people, and places take on this status is because they are viewed as being quintessential exemplars of the subculture (see Belk et al 1989 for a discussion of quintessence). Consider, for example, the iconic status of the turntables within Hip Hop culture. For hard-core members of the subculture the Technics brand, and 1200 MK2 model, of turntables are considered to be unequivocally right (and hence the company has not significantly changed the design since they were first introduced in 1978). As these objects are treated with such reverence and awe, it is considered strictly taboo for an individual (especially a soft-core or non-member of the culture) to touch another members' turntables without permission: the sacredness of the object is intricately tied to individual ownership and is threatened by contamination by non-members.

In addition to turntables, our results found several examples of objects accorded sacred like status in both subcultures. Shoes were one object that was considered sacred in both subcultures, but in different ways. Within the distance running subculture, quintessence of running shoes is defined by their functional utility (allowing runners to engage in the activity without injury) and, hence, sacred status for each shoe is only temporary as new technology replaces the old, however running shoes as a product category remain sacred in general. Shoes in the Hip Hop culture, on the other hand, exhibit quintessence of certain brands of shoes, such as the Nike Air Force 1, and the Adidas Superstar. These were defined by their symbolic qualities, and hence the sacred was deemed more permanent. As such, our findings suggest that sacred products that are consumed for their symbolic qualities have more enduring sacred status than sacred products that are consumed for their

functional utility. The implications for this interpretation are significant for those brands who wish to be loyally consumed within a subcultural arena.

Interestingly, the recent trend of sneaker manufacturers to reissue classic sneakers iconic to the Hip Hop subculture has made it easy for non-members and soft-core members to consume these shoes. This has had the effect of profaning the sacred through commercialization. As such, in order for the sneakers to retain their subcultural values and representations it is necessary for hard-core members to distinguish between the original shoes and the inauthentic and profane reissues:

Interviewer: "If I was wearing Air Force 1s, would you make an association with that?"

Informant: "It depends on whether it's a new school one or a classic, if you're wearing a classic then you're probably a head [slang for hard-core]."

In addition to objects, hard-core members also enacted their identities through the reverence of times that were significant to subcultural history (such as the old-school Hip Hop era, or the 1970's US running era), and times in which they had experienced a sacred experience. In some cases, objects associated with these eras take on sacred properties and are placed on display by hard-core members. These objects include such things as ticket stubs, event posters, race shirts, and race numbers.

In addition, hard-core members of both subcultures also perceived some individuals as sacred-like. The Australian Hip Hop culture's hard-core members considered the founding fathers of the Hip Hop culture, such as Kool Herc, Afrika Bambaata and Grand Master Flash, and groups of individuals such as the Rock Steady Crew sacred. While within the distance running subculture, a core icon within the community that takes on sacred status is Steve Prefontaine (an American distance runner in the 1970's). Prefontaine is considered to be the embodiment of the distance running mentality. Furthermore, he represents both a time and a place that are sacred to distance running. Consider these quotes:

"The whole [Prefontaine]-image...it shows the spirit of running and competitive running. It brings you back to when we were good at running in the United States." [Brayden, male runner aged 21] ; "Oregon [the home of Prefontaine] will always be totally synonymous with long distance running." [Daniel, male runner aged 41]

As illustrated in the above quote, places can also take on sacred status for subculture members, such as Oregon for North American distance runners and New York, the birthplace of Hip Hop culture, for hard-core members of the Hip Hop subculture. In fact, some informants even referred to New York as a mecca-like location: a pilgrimage destination capable of inspiring one with an evangelical zest:

"I ended up traveling around a bit and found my way to New York...I tried to get some work in design and advertising and stuff, which I eventually did, but I spent most of my time and money just tracking down Hip Hop tours, events and stores and doing all that sort of thing, it turned into a bit of a pilgrimage. That was probably the point that really inspired me and the thing that got me fired up (to create a Hip Hop magazine)." [male Hip Hop member aged 26]

The sacred objects, times, people, and places within subcultures serve as foundational pieces upon which hard-core subculture

members build their identities. The enactment of these identities within the confines of ordinary life take on a unique sacredness transcending that imbued on sacred objects. The sacredness of the lifestyle is discussed next.

Theme 2: Sacred Lifestyle

Through our analysis of both subcultures, the theme of sacredness surrounding everything about the lifestyle of hard-core members emerged. What is most interesting about this theme is that it does not only relate to specific events, products, times or other idiographic instances. This theme of sacredness permeates the lifestyle at a macro level and describes the nature of the interplay between hard-core subculture members and their enactments of subcultural identities: even mundane aspects of everyday routine life become experienced as if they are sacred. The manner in which informants described their lives and experiences resonate with themes of sacredness. Drawing upon the properties of sacredness outlined by Belk et al (1989), we find that five properties of sacredness are the best descriptors of the sacred lifestyle for hard-core members of both the Hip Hop and running subcultures. The five proprieties of interest, each described below in relation to our empirical findings, are objectification, commitment, sacrifice, mystery, and ecstasy and flow.

The first property of sacredness that we consider is objectification. This refers to the manner in which mundane elements of life are combined to form a transcendental frame of reference (Belk et al. 1989). From a subcultural perspective, this manifests itself as the focal activity being the dominant framework through which hard-core members experience their lives:

“If you do run, you have the discipline and the joy of it, you realize how it can make your life better, how it can benefit you and impact you and make other things in your life more clear, more purposeful and all-around better, healthier, happier, more determined. For me, it is the cornerstone that made my life so much more whole.” [Aidan, male runner aged 25]

What this quote and those like it indicate is that involvement with these subcultures is not just a part of hard-core members’ lifestyles, but the organizing framework around which their lifestyles are enacted. The lifestyle is their transcendental frame of reference.

The second property of sacredness that emerged in both subcultures was commitment. From a sacred perspective, commitment refers to the emotional attachment that individuals feel towards the sacred. In the case of subcultures, this refers to the emotional commitment hard-core members feel towards their subcultural identities and the corresponding lifestyle. This is exemplified in the following statements from Dylan, a former elite runner who experienced a career ending injury:

“I was a runner. That’s who I was. It controlled me...I don’t really know when exactly it happened but running just became the focus and every day was geared around the run. Nothing can replace it...[I miss] how alive it makes you feel. That’s what I miss about it. It makes you feel so alive to be able to just compete at that high level and ask your body for everything it can give. Running allows you to be really passionate about something. When I talk about passion it’s about something that you want to do all the time if you had the chance.” [Dylan, male runner aged 23]

Hard-core subculture members are not only committed to the activity in the traditional sense of the word (i.e. continuous engagement), they are also committed to it at an emotional level: a property

of sacredness. This emotional engagement with the focal activity elevates the experience of commitment from the ordinary, as a person might have for their job, to the extraordinary and sacred.

In conjunction with the emotional commitment to the lifestyle, sacrifice also plays an important role in the lifestyle of subculture members. From a theoretical perspective, individuals often engage in sacrificial acts to prepare themselves for contact with the sacred (Belk et al. 1989). Within this context, sacrifice involves forgoing some aspects of life or enduring significant hardship to enact the consumption identity. Hence, while this interpretation of sacrifice is somewhat different to that described by Belk et al. (1989) in that the sacrifice is not to prepare oneself for contact with the sacred, but so that the individual can enact the sacred lifestyle, this theme was evident in both subcultures.

For example, within the Australian Hip Hop culture this sacrifice often involved the extreme commitment of time to their chosen element of Hip Hop (MCing, Djing, Graffiti art, and Breakdancing) such that the members were often unemployed or working part-time positions. In addition, graffiti artists also risked being fined and possible imprisonment, and hence were willing to sacrifice their freedom to enact their subcultural identity. For runners, this sacrifice often manifests itself as an extreme commitment of time, the endurance of physical pain, and the expenditure of emotional energy required to train at highly competitive levels. Thus, as illustrated by the following quote from hard-core runner Tyler, being a hard-core member of a subculture, and reaping the benefits of engaging in a sacred lifestyle, involves sacrifice. This sacrifice, however, is viewed as a necessity of subcultural involvement.

“It’s a lot of work and a lot of time and a bit of pain that you have to run through. You end up running twice a day and when you have other things to do in your life it makes it pretty hard. A lot of sacrifice.” [Tyler, male runner aged 31]

The next property of sacredness indicative of the subcultural lifestyle is mystery. Mystery refers to the inability of the sacred to be understood cognitively (Belk et al. 1989). Hard-core subculture members express these sentiments when describing their devotion to the focal activity and lifestyle. Frequently, these members cannot understand their own attachment to the lifestyle and relate it metaphorically as an almost addictive physiological need. Mass MC describes his experiences:

“I’ll go to a classy restaurant with my girlfriend or something and I’ll go to the toilet and do [some quick graffiti] in there and then come out, adjust the tie and sit down again. No matter what you do Hip Hop lives in your soul...[It’s] just a disease dude. It’s like a lot of people are into it because it’s trendy. I’m into it because it’s a disease, That’s all I know: I know my music and I know that hip hop is what I was born to do. I was put here to love it and there’s nothing I love more than hip hop.”

Brayden expresses similar sentiments in reference to running:

“The level of commitment for some reason with runners is much higher than other sports. I don’t really know why...There’s some kind of physical or chemical addiction to running. Obviously this is unproven, but I think that makes sense. I’ve got to do it. I don’t know where the commitment comes from. It’s just some kind of inner motivation that you cannot miss a day and you have to do it.” [Brayden, male runner aged 21]

The experiences of hard-core subculture members are shrouded in a sense of mystery that allows them to experience their lifestyles as sacred. This mystery seems to add an element of reverence to the activity as their choice to become a member of the subculture is transferred into a lasting involvement beyond that of their rationality.

The property of mystery is closely related to the next property of sacredness evident in our data: ecstasy and flow. This refers to the ability of the sacred to produce ecstatic experiences where a person stands outside oneself. Further, these experiences are often momentary (Belk et al. 1989). The notion of flow refers to an experience where an individual becomes completely focused on an activity and attains a sense of mastery over self and the environment (Csikszentmihalyi 1975). One member of the Hip Hop culture describes his first experience writing rhymes:

“I’d say [I was] eight and it was just totally unexplained. I just felt heaps possessed while I was doing it and afterwards I was heaps relaxed like it was a full release.” [Keith, male Hip Hop member aged 23]

Paige, a distance runner, describes a similar experience while running.

“I enjoy the actual feeling of it. Sometimes when I’m on a run I can hear the crunching of the rocks underneath my feet, I look up and I see the beautiful sunset, I see the clouds going over, I think it gets me in touch with my own world. I’ve had days when I’ve gone out and just felt like I was floating in water. There were times when I just felt like at peace with myself and my environment.” [Paige, female runner aged 32]

In addition to discussing these kinds of ecstasy experiences, the narratives of both hard-core members of the distance running subculture and the Hip Hop subculture contain tales of flow-like self-mastery and self-expression respectively:

“When you’re running you get to decide exactly how much pain you’re under at any given moment and there’s something really comforting about that. Also knowing that you can push yourself more than you thought you could. That’s a little accomplishment: just pushing past the pain that you have because you had a point in time where it was actually impossible for you to run that fast, and then you somehow raise that bar and push through that wall.” [Megan, female runner aged 24]

“I guess I was more effected by the expression—the boldness of the expression—you know, the immediacy of it.” [Jimmy, Hip Hop male aged 18]

Hence, the final property of sacredness indicative of the subcultural lifestyle is ecstasy and flow characterizes the ‘outcomes’ of subcultural involvement: experiences that move a person beyond themselves, self-expression, and self-mastery.

In summary, the preceding discussion illustrates how the subcultural lifestyle of hard-core subculture members exhibits elements of the sacred. Objectification, commitment, sacrifice, mystery, and ecstasy and flow characterize the lifestyles. It is important to note that while these five properties of sacred were the most prominent in our dataset, other properties of sacred also characterize the lifestyle but are beyond the scope of this article. For example, hierophany was present in the Hip Hop subculture, (for

example many graffiti artists view a blank wall, and MCs view an instrumental beat, as something extraordinary) yet was not present in the running subculture.

DISCUSSION

The findings from this study make several important contributions to consumer research. First, the findings enrich our knowledge of consumption-oriented subcultures and the manner in which hard-core members of these subcultures enact their identities. This study builds upon previous research that describes the characteristics of hard-core subculture members by exploring the manner in which hard-core members perceive their subcultural experiences. We find that the experiences of hard-core members reveal an entire lifestyle exhibiting elements of the sacred. In addition, hard-core members enact and affirm their consumption through the sacred consumption of objects, times, people, and places. Given this continuously reinforced everyday experience of sacredness, it is not surprising that hard-core members of subcultures exhibit high levels of devotion to their subcultural identities and lifestyles.

A second contribution of this study is that it expands our understanding of the domains in which sacred experiences can occur. Traditionally, sacred experiences and objects were conceptualized as being separate from ordinary life, which is thought of as profane. We expand this conceptualization by demonstrating how the sacred is experienced within everyday life. For hard-core subculture members multiple aspects of their ordinary life express some property of the sacred. These elements combine to form an overarching and cohesive sacred lifestyle that exists within the domain of the ordinary. This persistent existence of the sacred within the ordinary presents an interesting expansion on conceptualizations of sacredness.

A third contribution of this study relates to the two different subcultures used as the contextual domains for our research. Given the use of two subcultures that are vastly different in terms of both the nature of the activity as well as their geographic location, it is interesting that we find such a high level of theoretical convergence in the nature of the subcultural consumption enactments of hard-core members. This demonstrates that, despite the superficial differences in subcultures, the members of these groups experience their lifestyles in very similar ways. While it is impossible for us to generalize our findings to all subcultures, this research provides some empirical support for the notion that commitment to subculture identities is not necessarily a function of the utility of consumption practices but rather the result of interplay between an individual’s identity and their enactment of that identity. Sacred consumption practices serve as a conduit through which the lifestyle associated with an identity is enacted.

Despite these contributions, there are two major limitations of this study worth noting. First, this study focuses exclusively on hard-core members of a subculture. Future research should examine the enactment of identity with other kinds of subculture members to better our understandings of subcultural consumption practices as a whole. Second, this study focuses on the similarities between the organized distance running subculture and the Hip Hop subculture: the differences between these subcultures should also be explored.

In conclusion, the purpose of this study was to explore the nature of hard-core members of consumption-oriented subcultures identity enactment. We conducted analyses of both the North American organized distance running subculture and the Australian Hip Hop subculture. Our findings show that, in addition to the subculture having several sacred objects, the entire subcultural lifestyle exhibits elements of the sacred.

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