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Exploring the Utility of Self-Esteem in Conspicuous Behavior using a Multidimensional Approach

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Abstract

The aim of the present study is to explore the tenets of a theoretical framework regarding conspicuous consumption. In conspicuous consumption theory the concept self-esteem is widely used, yet seldom treated as a multidimensional concept. It is usually seen as either high or low. In this study different operationalizations of self-esteem were analyzed for their mediating role in relation to bandwagon-, snob- and Veblen-effects. Respondents (N=186) read scenarios and filled out the accompanying questionnaire. Using structural equation modeling software, model modifications were made based on the data. Results yielded a model in which liability of self-esteem can be seen a mediator in snob- and bandwagon-behavior; no mediating function of self-esteem in Veblenian behavior could be supported by the data. Distinctions between self-esteem measures and conspicuous behaviors contributed to a better fit of the final model. Implications for theory generation and future research are discussed.

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I. Introduction

On the following pages I will present a framework which incorporates liability of self-esteem in conspicuous consumption theory. This particular dimensionality of self-esteem is one of five tested in this research. This master thesis will take you from a historical view to what conspicuous consumption is to an explanation of the background it is seen against, and discusses conceptualizations and operationalization of the 10 concepts and the research methods used in this study. Finally the findings, conclusions and discussion of results of this study are reported. I will start with the conceptualization of conspicuous consumption.

1. Conspicuous consumption

1.1 Conceptualization.

At the end of the nineteenth century Thorstein Veblen writes his classic economic study of institutions: The theory of the leisure class. Not only a livid critique of American society, but also a very observational description of the drives of man to outdo, outshine and surpass his fellowman with regard to money, power or status. The notion of conspicuous consumption is one of these keen observations. In his own words “Conspicuous consumption of valuable goods is a means of reputability to the gentleman of leisure” (Veblen, 1899). The element that makes conspicuous consumption useful in attaining social status is that of wastefulness as a method of asserting wealth. Veblen noticed the phenomenon “the serviceability of consumption as a means of repute….works [is at its] best in those portions of the community where the human contact of the individual is widest and the mobility of the population is greatest.” (Veblen, 1899), but conspicuous consumption had been identified much earlier than at the end of the nineteenth century. In ancient Rome luxury consumption

was seen as a problem, and even laws were made to suppress it. Throughout medieval time ostentatious behavior was condemned for moral and religious reason and seen as a sinful act in the eyes of God. Also seen as a violation of the established class system and a threat to it, legislation had been implemented put proved futile up to the seventeenth century. Round 1600 there is a shift in the negative attitude towards conspicuous display; the issue is not seen as morally, but as an economic issue. Still perceived as negative though, conspicuous consumption was held responsible for increasing imports, weakening home markets, and discouraging thriftiness and industry. The behavior was seen as symptom of economic decay (Mason, 1981).

In the late seventeenth century a change in attitude towards luxury consumption began to appear as for the first time the benefits of ostentatious levels of consumption were recognized. John Locke (1632-1704) was among the first to fathom the particular importance of price in the context of ostentatious display and argued "fashion is for the most part nothing but the ostentation of riches and therefore the high price of what serves to that rather increases than lessens its vent" (Locke, 1692 cited in Mason, 1981 p. 2). In the eighteenth century Adam Smith (1723-1790) argued that people had moved away from the simple gratification of bodily needs to the satisfaction of social and cultural need, from physical to social survival. Confronted with this need for social approval the individual needed to find a way to establish and consolidate his personal status and prestige within the community. Conspicuous consumption of goods and services were seen as an ideal opportunity for wealth display in the interest of social advancement. Mid-nineteenth century John Rae proposed there was only one relatively simple motive for the overindulgence and luxury expenditures he observed, that of vanity. This deviates from Smith's perspective in that he does not allow for any social behavior underlying conspicuous display, rather he claims a psychological need underpins

ostentatious behavior, that of self-indulgence. In the late nineteenth century Veblen introduced the terminology of conspicuous consumption for the phenomenon. The drive for such a behavior, he believed, could only be derived from the social significance -in terms of status and prestige- given to the display of superior individual ownership and wealth. The key concept in the current study is conspicuous consumption which is conceptualized as: "the purchase and public display of luxury goods in order to show off to other people" (Antonides & Van Raaij, 1998). It is used as an umbrella concept for three distinct conspicuous behaviors; Veblen-, snob-, and bandwagon-effects. In an attempt to find which concepts are related causally within the behavior of conspicuous consumption, the conceptual framework in figure 1 on page 24 was posited. Conspicuous consumption as described by Veblen is presently interpreted as the Veblen-effect because of the involvement of ostentation to gain status. In this manner it is used in the current research.

1.2. Operationalization

The use of the conceptualization of conspicuous consumption as formulated by Antonides & van Raaij is different from the operationalization used for defining the Veblen-effect, yet stood model for its formulation: the purchase and public display of luxury goods as a result of individuals' need to show wealth. This definition was used to construct the path-way in the framework representing the Veblen-effect. This use of the Veblen-effect also differs from that by Leibenstein who addressed the Veblen-effect with the economic paradigm in mind. In this way he could in his own words: "Quite legitimately abstract from the psychological and sociological elements and address our attention exclusively to the effects that conspicuous consumption has on the demand function. The essential economic characteristic with which we are concerned is the fact that the utility derived from a unit of a commodity employed for purposes of conspicuous consumption depends not only on the

inherent qualities of that unit, but also on the price paid for it." (Leibenstein, 1950 p. 202-203). The variable labeled social utility reasons for conspicuous consumption (SURCC) is defined as the "cognitive orientations concerning the importance of conspicuous consumption; and self-expression via conspicuous consumption" (Moschis, 1981). This measure contains items like "Do you ever watch television commercials to find out what kinds of people use certain products". As we can observe this measure assesses information seeking behavior. In the present research it is used to measure if individuals that are placed in a conspicuous consumption setting and have heightened self-esteem as a consequence also search for information associated with conspicuous behavior. The underpinning for this reasoning is as follows: no matter what the current level of self-esteem is (high or low, positive or negative, stable or unstable) I assume it is never the agents' intention to lower its self-esteem and therefore is engaged in behavior that either maintains or heightens the current state of affairs. In the context of consumer behavior these behaviors could be related to future purchases, when this is a conscious decision one could search information concerning the importance and self-expression associated with conspicuous consumption.

1.3. Concepts of the study

The complete framework is to be seen in the light of conspicuous consumption. In the framework there are three distinctive path-ways each corresponding with one of three characteristic conspicuous behaviors. The Veblen-effect has been conceptualized; the other two: the snob-and bandwagon-effects will be in paragraph 1.4. A global idea of the framework can be derived from figure 1 on page 24. The place the variable social utility reasons for conspicuous consumption takes in the path-ways (and the entire framework) is that of dependent variable, based on the assumption that attitudes facilitate behavior.

1.4. Leibenstein's conceptualizations.

In the twentieth century Leibenstein (1950) took the first few steps to incorporate the phenomenon of conspicuous consumption into consumer's demand theory and made distinctions between the Veblen-effect; in which the demand for a consumers' good is increased because it has a relatively higher rather then a lower price (Leibenstein, 1950) and the snob- and bandwagon-effects. First, with the snob-effect Leibenstein referred to the "extent to which the demand for a consumers' good is reduced due to the fact that others are also consuming the same, identical commodity (or others are increasing their consumption of that commodity). This represents the desire of people to be exclusive; to be different; to dissociate themselves from the common herd" (Leibenstein, 1950 p. 189), thus showing off the distinctiveness of their individuality. The bandwagon-effect is also known as the demonstration-effect. Leibenstein referred to it as the degree to which the demand for a commodity is increased owing to the fact that others are also consuming an identical commodity. It represents the desire of individuals to acquire a commodity in order to get into "the swim of things"; in order to match with the people they wish to be associated with; or to appear stylish or fashionable; or, in order to be "one of the boys" (Leibenstein, 1950). These social effects on consumption have implications for consumer behavior and all taken together effects imply firstly, materialism based on a longing for the possession of goods and secondly, conspicuous consuming based on a desire for showing off the goods one owns.

The bandwagon-effect suggests that there is a minimum of similar commodities that has to be consumed in order to gain at least an equal status compared to others. This may result in behavior often designated as "keeping up with the Joneses" or imitating a reference group. The snob-effect suggests that there should be a minimum of different novelty commodities that have to be consumed to gain more status as an individual. This means that individuals who show this behavior are more inclined to own scarce goods and have a

preference for high aesthetic quality. Veblen-effects suggest that when it comes to showing off, discretionary income is the only limit. Veblen effects are understood as a function of price; whereas bandwagon- and snob-effects can be understood as functions of the consumption of others (Leibenstein, 1950).

1.5. Operationalization.

Consistent with Leibenstein's conceptualization the snob-effect was modeled round the individuals' need for uniqueness, and which assumed effect on self-esteem, which in turn influenced social utility reasons for conspicuous consumption. The definition of the snob-effect used is: the purchase and public display of luxury goods as a result of an individuals' need for uniqueness. Central to the definition of the bandwagon-effect is the individuals' need to be "one of the boys": the purchase and public display of luxury goods as a result of individuals' need for social conformity.

1.6. 'Post-modern' consequences for conceptualization of conspicuous consumption.

From a period starting from the late '70s, emphasis was gradually placed on marketing, selling, and consuming commodities, not on producing them and this period has been related with the rise of postmodernism in capitalist societies (Baudrillard, 1975, 1981; Ewen, 1988; Mourrain, 1989 cited in Chaudhuri & Majumdar, 2006).The postmodernist environment makes consumption processes, cultures, and consumers qualitatively different from those of the past: the simpler "rational"(economic) consumer of the past has replaced by a more complex consumer (Firat, Dholakia, and Venkatesh, cited in Chaudhuri & Majumdar, 2006). Marketing has put a great emphasis on consumption as a means through which individuals define their self-images for themselves and others. The fundamental importance of self- and social-images have given rise to the phenomenon where products serve as symbols, are evaluated, purchased, and consumed based on their symbolic content (Zaltman &

Wallendorf cited in Chaudhuri & Majumdar, 2006), consumption has now become a means of self-realization and identification (Firat 1991). Consumers no longer simply consume products; they consume the symbolic meaning of those products, the image (Cova 1996).

Consumption symbols represent social constructions of reality; they are media of interpersonal communication. Symbolic meanings of goods are used as an expression of consumer self-concept and tie the individual to society (Elliott & Wattansuwan cited in Chaudhuri & Majumdar, 2006). This connection to society is also made easy and fast in post modern times. Intertwinement of different media together with technological advancements in telecom, communication and information systems spanning the globe, make getting in touch with each other and any bit of information incredibly easy, fast, accessible and convenient to western society and most other parts of the world. Add to that the great mobility of individuals established by modern (digital) infrastructure, means of transportation and the large populations of people living together in strongly urbanized civilizations. We can observe all the conditions that Veblen constitutes as necessities for conspicuous consumptions to take place, are hallmarks of most of modern western society. Shopping has become one of the most important leisure activities and consumer socialization is at an all-time high. In this environment conspicuous consumption need not stay constrained to its original Veblenian meaning, and may be expanded by incorporating a more generalized and broader scope of socio-psychological phenomena as “being seen or identified by others”, “public consumption” (Bearden & Etzel, 1982; Grimm, Agrawal, & Richardson, 1999), and psychological notions like “self-concept” (Sirgy, 1982), and “uniqueness” (Tepper-Tian, Bearden, & Hunter, 2001).

Many products, which are consumed in public contexts (Bagwell & Bernheim, 1996; Bearden & Etzel, 1982), are used by people to signal wealth and, by inference, power and status. The individual driving a Jaguar signals he can afford driving his classy automobile and

this suggests a well paid, high placed job and a relatively high status. The Jaguar is not only a symbol of success; it is also evidence of it. Thus, the utility of some products may be to display wealth and power, as was noted by Veblen; and, in the face of the advancement of postmodernism, this motivation may remain strong among certain segments of customers (Chaudhuri & Majumdar, 2006) as a means of social comparison. These segments often find pricing a useful medium for signaling wealth and status (Amaldoss & Jain, 2005). Preferring expensive items for consumption; these consumers attach great value to price as a substitute indicator of power and status. This is because the primary objective is to impress others.

When conspicuous consumption was conceptualized by Veblen, the behavior was displayed by the new industrial tycoons seeking to match and if possible outdo the refinement of the longer-established rich. Veblen's description resides in money being profligately spent on materialistic excesses and extravaganza. Purchasing as an act meant solely for display, but still exclusively the privilege of extravagantly rich. Postmodernist influences took root mainly because of marketers' and advertisers' efforts in developing possession-related materialistic imageries (Turner, 1965 cited in Chaudhuri & Majumdar, 2006), resulting in the vindication of consumption as a source of social and self-identity. This kind of consumer behavior makes conspicuous consumption accessible not only for the extravagantly rich but also for the higher-middle class and the middle class as a legitimate tool for maintaining a positive view of oneself. Because of these developments, expenditures that previously appeared extravagant, gained legitimate functions in the personal and social domains. For consumers, the acts of buying and consuming gradually became the most important end in itself, rather than the use or practical value of the goods themselves.

1.7. Critiques on Veblen

Veblen's functionalist approach has been the focus of criticism in Campbell (1995). In The theory of the leisure class, Veblen gives the impression that all the actors are well aware of the status-struggle in which they are engaged. This has given rise to the conclusion that conspicuous consumption is a conscious and deliberate behavior in an attempt to gain status. Nowadays this is a popular perspective not in the least because of its empirical implications. After further investigation it becomes clear that this approach is not the only one to be extrapolated from Veblen's writings on conspicuous consumption. His anthropological explanation provides grounds for alternative interpretation. Veblen places particular emphasis on the underlying motives and stresses them more strongly than the goals or intentions of the behavior. What he calls "the emulative motive" is placed at the heart of his theory of ownership, claiming that "the motive that lies at the root of ownership is emulation," yet there is uncertainty about what he means by this, because of the meaning of the word emulation, which suggests a form of action that is guided by the intention of equaling or surpassing someone; it does not necessarily imply anything about a motive for such conduct (Campbell, 1995) it only states that an attempt is made to equal or surpass by imitating. Also he believes that emulation comes with the making of undesirable comparisons. Veblen writes: "Emulation is the stimulus of an invidious comparison which prompts us to outdo those with whom we are in a habit of classing ourselves". Undesirable outcomes of comparison processes compel us to compete for status with relevant others. This changes the outlook on conspicuous consumption from a conscious decision to display wealth, to conduct that arises out of the motive of emulation. Which Veblen judges to be "of ancient growth and … a pervading trait of human nature." And he believes that after the "instinct of self-preservation," it is "probably the strongest and most alert and persistent of the economic motives proper" (Campbell, 1995).

The quote puts forward the view of emulation as instinct rather than as a particular motive. This perspective helps to explain how conspicuous consumption could be conceived as intentional (in the sense of being purposeful), yet need not be voluntary, that is resembling instincts in animals in being a practice that is pre-programmed and common to a species. Evidently Veblen took a Darwinian perspective on emulation. And tried to account for the consequences this has for the behavior of conspicuous consumption, which, if arisen from instinct holds that individuals need not be conscious of the degree to which their behavior took this form (Campbell, 1995). As a result individuals could be deceived into thinking they were acting for other reasons, when in reality the "law of conspicuous waste" was the determinant of their actions. This is believed to be Veblen's position on conspicuous consumption (Campbell, 1995). He observed that "most… wasteful consumption" does not stem from "a conscious effort to excel in the expensiveness of … visible consumption, so much as it is a desire to live up to a conventional standard of decency in the amount and grade of goods consumed" (Campbell, 1995). "The law of conspicuous waste guides consumption… chiefly at the second remove, by shaping the canons of taste and decency." Campbell (1995) concludes from these quotes that according to Veblen, people bend their efforts to live up to given "ideals of decency" and act out a standard of living that they have learned to regard as "right and good" (Campbell, 1995) and that while they are doing this, they are exemplifying in reality and unknowingly, the law of conspicuous waste. In his further argumentation of the matter Campbell continues "therefore, according to this version of the theory, a sharp contrast exists between the conscious intentions of consumers, which are directed at realizing that "ideal of consumption" which lies just beyond their reach, and the motive or instinct of emulation, which is actually driving such conduct".

Campbell's differentiation between the economical and the sociological paradigms is evident in the previous. The economical perspective assumes that behavior must be conscious, where as the sociological stance allows for an underlying non-conscious drive. This is where the economic-psychological paradigm may be successfully applied. Combining the conscious actor with underlying non-conscious motivations at an individual level may reveal relations that are not assessable when studied separately in conflicting paradigms. Investigating whether the assumption that consumers act conscious is tenable in relation to (social utility reasons for) conspicuous consumption, but "The law of conspicuous waste guides consumption… chiefly at the second remove, by shaping the canons of taste and decency." is a tentative and provoking statement but not obviously an empirical one in the economic sense. Taste may be fine tuned in relation with a higher income and manifesting oneself in higher social milieus. But the shaping of decency may even be a contradiction when it comes to conspicuous waste in an era with ideals as energy preservation and environmental awareness. But a more important aspect of decency can intervene with the public display of ostentatious and conspicuous consuming patterns: conforming to a prevailing standard (e.g. cultural or religious) of modesty or reservation in spending behavior, making conspicuous behavior a social faux pas. This avoidance of ostentation was recognized by Lea (1980). Based on Leibenstein's economic conceptualizations of conspicuous consumption, he presented a 'counter-Veblen' effect. In this effect consumers buy less expensive commodities than they would need to, in order to circumvent display behavior. The underlying motivation of this inconspicuous consumer might be to not discomfort others by appearing wealthier, or to discourage others from asking for financial support (Lea cited in Braun & Wicklund, 1989). Trigg (2001) sums and describes three issues concerning conspicuous consumption outside of mainstream economics. Fine & Leopold and Lears (cited in Trigg, 2001) argue that

trendsetters of consumptive behaviors may also percolate instead of Veblen's 'trickling down' argument, as is the case with jeans. Originally jeans were only worn by the lower classes; later the middle and higher classes started wearing jeans too. Featherstone and McIntyre (cited in Trigg, 2001) argue that in the post-modern tradition consumer behavior is no longer shaped by positions of social class but by lifestyles that cut across the social hierarchy. Canterbery and Mason (cited in Trigg, 2001) commented that status is conveyed in more sophisticated and subtle ways.

2. Status

2.1. Conceptualization.

In general, status has been viewed as stemming from the human tendency to evaluate our own outcomes by comparing them with those of others. Subjective status is the result of a person's evaluation of outcomes in relation to those by other members of the group (Thibaut & Kelley, 1959). Status evaluations are encouraged by factors that make publicly visible, the consumption of rewards and incurrence of costs that put individuals in positions in which they obtain qualitatively comparable outcomes, and that lead people to believe they have comparable realms of power. A status system is maintained within a group when there is general consensus as to the status of each member. A person's social status within this system refers to the commonly held opinions about how the individuals' outcomes compare to those of other members of the group (Thibaut & Kelley, 1959). The goal of maintaining and gaining status is central to a whole variety of topics including self-presentation, social influence, affiliation and friendship, love and romantic relationships, aggression, prejudice, and group dynamics (Kenrick, Neuberg, & Cialdini, 2002). Self-esteem is linked to the maintenance of status not only to whether we feel liked by others but also to whether we feel respected by others, and we feel better when others look up to us (Kenrick, Neuberg, & Cialdini, 2002).

Status does not only carry the benefits of direct access to rewards, but also the indirect benefits of attracting mates and promoting the survival of our offspring (Kenrick, Neuberg, & Cialdini, 2002).

The relationship between consumption, income and prestige and the central importance of this relationship to status beliefs and theory has been recapitulated by Duesenberry (cited in Mason, 1981). In short Duesenberry's relative income approach presumed that utility from a given level of consumption depends not on the absolute level of spending of an individual, but also how that spending compares to that of others (cited in Choa & Schor, 1996). Prestige goes to successful people and success in society is closely correlated with income. Once a group of high income individuals are recognized as a group of superior status, their consumption standard itself becomes one of the criteria for judging success. Almost all consumption theories hold the view that high-income households will spend more on consumption than low-income households it follows that high standards of consumption are recognized as a criterion for high status (Antonides & Van Raaij, 1998). Once this has occurred it becomes difficult for anyone to attain a high status position unless he can maintain a high consumption standard, regardless of any other qualifications he may have (Antonides & Van Raaij, 1998). Conspicuous consumption is commonly seen as behavior that takes place in context of status evaluations.

3. Self-esteem

3.1. Conceptualization.

Self-esteem is typically defined as our attitude towards ourselves (Kenrick, Neuberg, & Cialdini, 2002). People who feel positively or favorably about themselves are assumed to have high self-esteem; people who feel negatively toward themselves are thought of as having low self-esteem. Self-esteem influences much of our social behavior. Rosenberg (1979)

concludes that few activities engage our lives and behavior so profoundly as the defense and enhancement of the self. “The self-esteem motive intrudes on many of our daily activities, influencing what we say, how we act, what we attend to, how we direct our efforts, how we respond to stimuli”. The self-esteem motive is the wish to think well of oneself which conjointly or separated with the self-consistency motive, the wish to protect the self-concept against change or to maintain one’s self-picture, is central to the individuals motivational system (Rosenberg, 1979). When an individual is characterized as having high self-esteem, then this does not refer to the negative connotation it sometimes has in everyday language, to feelings of superiority, in the sense of arrogance, conceit, contempt for others, pompous pride; it is rather meant that the individual has self-respect, considers itself a person of worth. Appreciating his own qualities, he none the less recognizes his faults, faults which the individual hopes and expects to overcome. When a person is regarded as having low self-esteem, it means that the individual lacks respect for himself, considers himself unworthy, inadequate, or otherwise seriously deficient as a person (Rosenberg, 1979). The view of self-esteem as an attitude to the self holds within its premises that like all attitudes, self-esteem has both cognitive and affective components (Leary & Downs, 1995). People are not dispassionate about their self-judgments. High self-esteem involves positive affect whereas low self-esteem entails negative affect. Hence self-esteem is not synonymous with self-beliefs or self-evaluations. Self-esteem includes an essential affective quality that less complex (other) cognitions about the self may lack (Leary & Downs, 1995). Allport (cited in Rosenberg, 1979) made an important point that the various psychoanalytical defense mechanisms all have the same objective, namely the protection of self-esteem.

In self-esteem research the emphasis lies on the self as object. That is on the self-concept, and not on the self, which is concerned with the self as subject. So the self-concept is

the image one has of the self, a representation of the drives, dispositions and inclinations one holds. An individual's self-concept then is distinct from the 'real self' because real life conditions can frustrate an individual to carry out the totality of his or hers aspirations (Rosenberg, 1979). Rosenberg's (1979) definition of self-concept holds "the totality of the individual's thoughts and feelings having reference to him as an object." Individuals will actively seek out information that confirms their self-concept while rejecting information that may threaten their general view of self (Wylie, 1979). Rosenberg, (1979) agrees to this stating that "the single most powerful mechanism for self-protection and self-enhancement is selectivity, the motivated choice from among available options". In his classic dissertation Rosenberg refers to Veblen when the former states the principle of direct reflections, holding that the self-concept is largely shaped by responses of others. In Veblen's own characteristic wording: "Those members of the community who fall short of this, somewhat indefinite, normal degree of prowess or of property suffer in the esteem of their fellow man; and consequently they suffer also in their own self-esteem, since the, usual basis of self-respect is the respect by one's neighbors. Only individuals with an aberrant temperament can in the long run retain their self-esteem in the face of the disesteem of their fellows."

There is ample evidence that the self-concept is persistent and stable. Markus (cited in Kunda, 1999) argued that comparatively enduring self-schemata serve to make important aspects of the self more salient, easier to organize, and easier to remember. This is in line with the self-consistency motive Rosenberg (1979) mentioned. Conversely, it is well known that situational influences can lead to momentary changes in self-evaluation (cf. Baumgardner, Kaufman, & Levy, 1989; Kernis, Grannemann, & Barclay, 1989; Markus & Kunda, 1986; Rosenberg, 1986; Tesser, 1988 cited in Heatherton & Polivy, 1991). This can be conceived of as the result of the self-esteem motive.

The idea of self-esteem being susceptible to momentary changes that are supported above is not a new one. James (1890) described self-esteem as similar to a barometer that rises and falls as a function of one's aspirations and success experiences. He also noted that there is "a certain average tone of self-feeling which each one of us carries about with him, and which is independent of the objective reasons we may have for satisfaction and discontent" (James cited in Kernis, 1995), that is; people maintain an image that is largely independent of objective feedback that might contradict the self-concept (Heatherton & Polivy, 1991). Thus, although momentary self-evaluations may be context dependent, people derive their overall sense of self-esteem by averaging feelings about themselves across a number of different social situations. This is important in relation to the scenarios used in this research, in which we describe only one social situation, that of the bandwagon-, Veblen-, or snob-effect per scenario. In order to provide a more consolidated scenario in which a momentary change in self-esteem could be observed, possible other sources of social information were excluded from scenarios. For the purpose of this research it is assumed that individual consumers in the bandwagon condition are motivated to feel good about their self in the present moment as well as to maintain positive self-feelings over time. This is different for the snob and Veblen conditions in which it is also assumed that consumers are motivated to feel better about their selves, now and in the future, but aspire to gain or enhance positive self-feelings instead of merely maintaining them.

3.2. Operationalization.

3.2.1. Rosenberg Self-esteem Scale. This widely used self-report measure for assessing global self-esteem was used in this study. Global self-esteem is usually defined as one's overall sense of worthiness as a person (Baumeister, 1993; Branden, 1994 cited in Schmitt & Allik, 2005). The term global holds that the self-consistency motive is part of this measure

this because stability of self-esteem is a desired outcome in an individuals overall sense of worth. The RSES has coefficient α of .92 reported by Rosenberg (1979) and in a cross-cultural study by Schmitt & Allik (2005) α value of .87 was found for the Netherlands. Items used in the RSES include "I feel I do not have much to be proud of."

3.2.2. State Self-esteem Scale. According to Heatherton & Polivy, 1991 the State Self-Esteem Scale (SSES) is a measurement of short-lived (i.e., state) changes in self-esteem. This multidimensional scale is constructed to measure state self-esteem within three distinct domains: performance, social, and appearance state self-esteem. The performance factor of the SSES measures the extent to which subjects feel their performance is worthy. For example, the performance factor of the SSES differentiated between those who had done well on a midterm exam and those who had done poorly (Heatherton & Polivy, 1991). Differences in the pattern of results obtained between the SSES and various mood measures were found, which suggests that they are empirically distinct constructs regarding different aspects of the self-concept as opposed to changes in self-concept as a result of mood influences. The SSES as reported by Heatherton & Polivy has a Cronbach coefficient α of 0.92. Performance items like "I feel confident that I understand things" were incorporated in this questionnaire.

3.2.3. Liable Self-esteem Scale. The liable self-esteem scale (LSES) was first constructed as a face-valid scale for the purposes of assessing the tendency to experience shifts in self-esteem and in this initial study a Cronbach alpha was .reported of .84 (Dykman, 1998). Since then this measure has been more frequently used in research and Cronbach alpha coefficients have been satisfactory with reported values of .92 in Karpinski, Steinberg, Versek, & Alloy (2007). The LSES includes items like "My self–esteem shifts rapidly from feeling good about myself on one day to feeling bad about myself the next day."

3.2.4 Self Liking Self Competence Scale. Global self-esteem is usually viewed as an indivisible construct that is influenced by an underlying hierarchy of more specific self-judgments (Marsh cited in Tafarodi & Swann, 1995). But Tafarodi and Swann (1995) offer an alternative conceptualization of global self-esteem as consisting of two dimensions: a sense of social worth, or self-liking, and a sense of personal efficacy, or self-competence. Rather than perceiving ourselves as simply positive or negative, we experience ourselves along the dimensionality of acceptable-unacceptable. This is referred to as self-liking, and is paired with an individual perceiving itself as good, socially relevant, and maintaining group harmony. The other dimension is that of strong-weak; this is related to feelings that one is capable, confident, and effective and is referred to here as self-competence. Combined these two dimensions constitute global self-esteem (Tafarodi & Swann, 1995; Tafarodi & Milne 2002). Self-liking is the part of self-esteem that is socially dependent. Self-liking is the affective judgment of ourselves, our approval or disapproval of ourselves, in line with internalized social values. High self-liking is marked by positive affect, self-acceptance, and comfort in social settings (Rogers, 1961). Conversely, low self-liking is marked by negative affect, self-derogation, and social dysfunction (Blatt & Zuroff cited in Tafarodi & Swann, 1995). Self-competence is the overall sense of oneself as capable, effective, and in control. High self-competence has the inherently characteristics of positive affect and value for the individual. Self-competence has also been assessed for its motivating role in purposeful behavior (Smith; White cited in Tafarodi & Swann, 1995) and for the adaptive role in coping with stress (Bandura; Seligman cited in Tafarodi & Swann, 1995). Cognitively, it is represented by a generalized expectancy of success (Fibel & Hale cited in Tafarodi & Swann, 1995). Self-liking items as “I feel comfortable about myself” and self-competence items like “I am a capable person” are included in these measures.

As we can deduct from the existence of these seven self-esteem measures, the dimensionalities of the concept self-esteem are plentiful. This multidimensionality of self-esteem is expected to show in this research, with different conspicuous behaviors influencing different aspects of self-esteem.

4. Social Conformity.

4.1. Conceptualization

Studies in the field of social psychology and group dynamics demonstrate that individuals interacting in groups exhibit a tendency toward social confirmation. This need to confirm to a majority which Forsyth (2006) describes as "a change in [the individuals] opinion, judgment and action to match the opinions, judgments or actions of other people or the normative standards of a social group or situation". Evidence for the incredible strength of majority influence on social confirmation of individuals was provided by Solomon Asch (1952, 1955, 1957) in what since then been known as the Asch paradigm. Participants were led to believe that they were about to make perceptual judgments (about the length of lines) in a group task. In reality the other group members were confederates that purposefully made errors on certain trials. Across various studies Asch found that people conformed in about one third of all instances in which individuals participated in the experiments. Although some participants never conformed, 75% to 80% conformed at least once and a few individuals conform in every single trial. In social groups and consumer behavior alike this interpersonal influence is moderated by the extent of an individual's sensitivity to social comparison information concerning product purchase and usage behavior (Calder & Burnkrant cited in Bearden & Rose, 1990). Among such resources of social comparison information are: behavioral cues, like the kinds of clothing or makeup worn (Jolson, Anderson, & Leber; Levy; Solomon & Schopler cited in Bearden & Rose, 1990); explicitly made statements of relative

suitability of the consumption of certain commodities made salient by important referents or aspiration groups (Miniard and Cohen cited in Bearden & Rose, 1990); the organization of social rewards and sanctions within social groups (Allen cited in Bearden & Rose, 1990); and attributions about and anticipations of likely reactions of group members to the individuals consumer behavior (Calder & Burnkrant cited in Bearden & Rose, 1990).

Nord & Peter, (cited in Bearden & Rose, 1990) presented evidence that advertising and a whole range of personal selling techniques offer explicit social comparison information by making salient consumers concerned with obtaining positive reinforcement as a result of commodity usage or punishment in the shape of social sanctions for failing to use a product. Evidence that the weight an individual places on such social information in advertising varies over individuals was obtained by Snyder & DeBono (cited in Bearden & Rose, 1990).

4.2. Operationalization.

4.2.1 The Attention to Social Information Scale (ATSCI.) was used in this study to measure the degree of social conformation. Individuals scoring high on this scale are aware of the reactions of others to their behavior and are concerned about or sensitive to the nature of those reactions. These individuals tend to care what other people think about them and look for clues as to the nature of those likely reactions (Bearden & Rose, 1990). In the study, Bearden and Rose found that the correlation of ATSCI with self-esteem was -0.33 ($p < 0.01$). More extensive tests revealed an inverse relationship existed between consumers' levels of self-esteem and scores on the ATSCI scale, in other words people with low scores on the ATSCI scale usually score high on self-esteem scales and vice versa. The Lennox & Wolfe (1984) ATSCI has been reported to have an internal consistency reliability estimate of 0.85 (Bearden & Rose, 1990). An example of one of the items in the ATSCI is "It is my feeling that if everyone else in a group is behaving in a certain manner, this must be the proper way to

behave." In this study individuals with low scores on social conformity are presumed not only to report high self-esteem, but also are higher in their need for uniqueness.

5. Need for Uniqueness

5.1. Conceptualization.

According to Forsyth (2006) individuals who are more independent than interdependent tend to emphasize their unique, unusual and idiosyncratic qualities. People who refuse to bend their will to that of the majority are believed to be independent. That is; individuals that publicly express ideas, judgments and believes that are consistent with their own personal standards, but inconsistent with those of other group members of group norms may display a high degree of independence. A consumers' need for uniqueness is defined as the pursuit of being different compared to others. This need is the outcome of social comparison processes (Festinger 1954), where an individual's desire is to be perceived differently from other individuals. This is realized through the acquisition, utilization, and disposition of consumer commodities for the purpose of developing and enhancing one's personal and social identity (Tepper-Tian, Bearden, & Hunter, 2001). Their Consumers' Need for Uniqueness (CNFU) reported good internal consistency, with a Cronbach alpha coefficient of .95 in a consumer mail survey sample and α coefficient of .94 in a student sample. This measure differentiates three different conceptualizations of uniqueness of which two were used in this study.

5.2. Operationalization

5.2.1. Creative choice counter-conformity This measure reflects the consumers' need to seek social differentiation from most others but that this consumer makes selections that are likely to be considered good choices by these others (Tepper-Tian, Bearden, & Hunter, 2001).

5.2.2. Avoidance of similarity. This instrument measures manifestation of consumers' need for uniqueness and refers to the loss of interest in, or discontinued use of, commodities that become commonplace in order to move away from the norm and reestablish one's differentness (Tepper-Tian, Bearden, & Hunter, 2001). Cronbach alpha coefficients for the creative choice counter-conformity component have been reported of .91 and .83 for avoidance of similarity. Creative choice counter-conformity is assessed by inquiries like "I have sometimes purchased unusual products or brands as a way to create a more distinctive personal image". And avoidance of similarity by items like "When products or brands I like become extremely popular, I lose interest in them".

6. Need to show wealth

6.1. Conceptualization

In all descriptions of the Veblen-effect the assumption is made that salience of consumption, squander and display behaviors are distinguished features of conspicuous consumption. This behavior is often designated as ostentatious. The Oxford dictionary describes ostentation as: flamboyant display which is intended to impress. Underlying this assumption of ostentation is evidence that status consumption can only take place in a social context with publicly visible products (Choa & Schor, 1996). Although luxurious commodities may also be purchased for private use e.g. pool tables or computer games, the reference group's influence on brand choice will be small (Antonides & Van Raaij, 1998) as opposed to publicly used commodities in which the reference group's influence on brand choice will be large. In order to impress and show off to others an individual may purchase expensive commodities to associate itself with high status (Antonides & Van Raaij, 1998). For the purpose of investigation in this study a face valid measure of ostentatious behavior was constructed and named Showing Wealth Inventory (SWI).

6.2. Operationalization.

6.2.1. Showing wealth Inventory (SWI). A pool of 11 items was composed, all inquiring the behavior of showing wealth. Among the items included were questions like "I express myself by wearing expensive clothing". All items pertained to public consumption of commodities and behaviors and cognitions associated with ostentation. This measure was used to investigate whether the showing of wealth is a helpful concept when modeling a discriminatory approach to the different conspicuous behaviors. It is expected that a high score on the showing wealth inventory is an indicator of high conspicuous consumption, and that this relationship is influenced by self-esteem.

7. Towards a conceptual framework and hypotheses

The conceptual model in figure 1 on page 24 represents the bulk of contemporary theorizing on conspicuous consumption as discussed in this paper. This is the general view on conspicuous behavior, and has a rather undifferentiated view of self-esteem. The concept of self-esteem in this research is used as an umbrella concept and deviates from the view usually held. It contains five different dimensions of self-esteem pertaining to themes as performance, competence, self-liking, stability of self-esteem and global self-esteem. These specific aspects will each in turn take the place of the general view of self-esteem.

In order to determine reliability coefficients for all measures included in the framework, a check for translation of the English items of scales into Dutch and condensing the scales a pilot study was conducted. This study has been reported in appendix I. In the main study of this research the testing of hypothesis will be addressed. Taking into mind the specific dimensionalities of self-esteem, the theoretical framework as a perspective on conspicuous consumption is checked for its fit. First I will discuss the hypotheses for the main study as derived from theory in the introduction section.

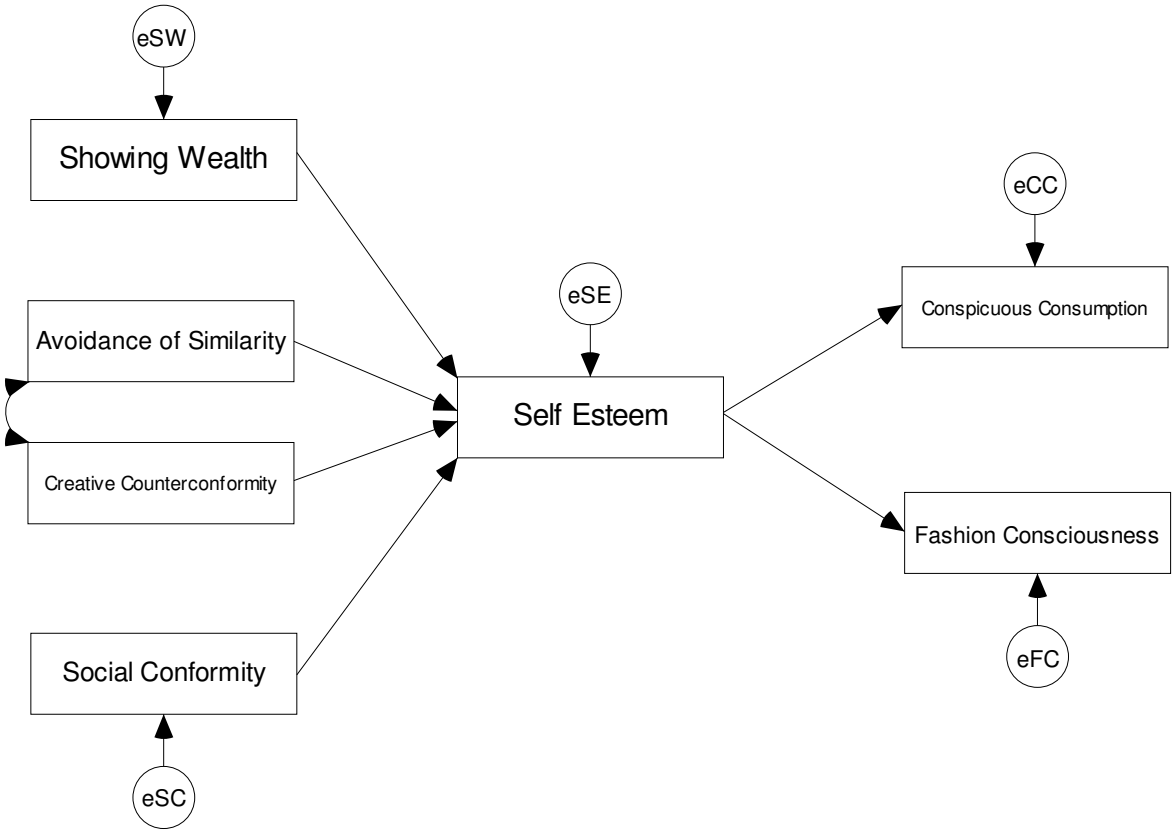


Figure1: Hypothesized Theoretical Framework

7.1 Hypotheses

This research was carried out in order to explore the fit of the conceptual framework that comprises that conspicuous consumption can be conceived of as a construct of three concepts, bandwagon-, snob-, and Veblen-effects. These concepts may be predicted more concise using psychographic variables. This idea is not completely new, as Vigneron & Johnson and Chaudhuri & Majumdar amongst others have theorized about this possibility. What is new is that this is the first tangible attempt to measure and analyze a framework that includes these variables. The conceptual framework consists of a total of eleven psychological factors: need for social conformity, two measures for need for uniqueness, need to show wealth, five measures for self-esteem, and social utility reasons for conspicuous consumption and fashion consciousness for all three conspicuous behaviors. Hypothesis with regard to the

theoretical framework with social utility reasons for conspicuous consumption as dependent variable are:

(I): The theoretical framework with global self-esteem as a mediator for conspicuous consumption fits the data better than when global self-esteem is not included in the model.

(II): The theoretical framework with the performance dimension of state self-esteem as a mediator for conspicuous consumption fits the data better than when the performance dimension of state self-esteem is not included in the model.

(III): The theoretical framework with the liability dimension of state self-esteem as a mediator for conspicuous consumption fits the data better than when the liability dimension of state self-esteem is not included in the model.

(IV): The theoretical framework with the self-liking dimension of state self-esteem as a mediator for conspicuous consumption fits the data better than when the self-liking dimension of state self-esteem is not included in the model.

(V): The theoretical framework with the self-competence dimension of state self-esteem as a mediator for conspicuous consumption fits the data better than when the self-competence dimension of state self-esteem is not included in the model.

Hypothesis with regard to the theoretical framework with fashion consciousness as dependent variable are:

VI: The theoretical framework with global self-esteem as a mediator for fashion consciousness fits the data better than when global self-esteem is not included in the model.

VII: The theoretical framework with the performance dimension of state self-esteem as a mediator for fashion consciousness fits the data better than when the performance dimension of state self-esteem is not included in the model.

VIII: The theoretical framework with the liability dimension of state self-esteem as a mediator for fashion consciousness fits the data better than when the liability dimension of state self-esteem is not included in the model.

IX: The theoretical framework with the self-liking dimension of state self-esteem as a mediator for fashion consciousness fits the data better than when the self-liking dimension of state self-esteem is not included in the model.

X: The theoretical framework with the self-competence dimension of state self-esteem as a mediator for fashion consciousness fits the data better than when the self-competence dimension of state self-esteem is not included in the model.

The process of extracting results that hold to these hypotheses is reported in chapter II.

II. Main Study

This study is in pursuit of exploring a theoretical framework regarding the use of self-esteem in conspicuous behavior using a multidimensional approach. This led to several hypotheses on the fit of separate conceptual models in which different dimensionalities of self-esteem were used. Hypotheses I to X (p. 25-26) were examined. This led to the test of 10 models regarding their fit on the data. All 10 models were derived from the general model depicted in figure 1 on page 24. Five models had social utility reasons for conspicuous consumption as dependent variable and five models had fashion consciousness as dependent variable. In both types of models the following five dimensionalities of self-esteem were analyzed for fit: global self-esteem, performance self-esteem, liability of self-esteem, self-liking and self-competence leading to a total of 10 models.

Method

8. Study

8.1 Participants. For this study 186 participants in the age of 18 till 34 filled out scenario based questionnaires (M=21, 65, SD=2, 696) at the end of 2008 and begin 2009. The sample taken at random on the Tilburg University campus consisted of 92 males and 93 females, one respondent left the question regarding gender unanswered. Individuals studied at four different faculties at Tilburg University. Ninety-six individuals were students of the economics and management science faculty, 28 studied at the faculty of law, 48 at the social sciences faculty and 14 at the humanities faculty. When asked for their education level 5 participants reported to have a secondary education level and 181 reported to have an academic education. Sixty-three participants filled out a bandwagon based questionnaire, 59 a snob based and 64 a Veblen based survey.

8.2 *Design*

8.2.1 Conceptualization of scenarios. For measurement purposes it was necessary to compose scenarios in which respondents are asked to place themselves in one of three particular situations. These three situations reflected different types of conspicuous behavior, the Veblen, snob and bandwagon behavior and were modeled in 6 scenarios on basis of gender specific products. These products were: a Porsche automobile, a tiara, an I-Phone, skinny jeans, digital photo camera and a Senseo coffee maker. Theoretical support for a division of commodities on the basis of gender is found in Davis and Rigaux (1974) which describe the perception of marital roles in decision processes. They typify the decisions for purchase of different products according to the husband and wife, the male and female marital roles. The purchase of a car is designated as husband dominant and is therefore used in the male version describing the Veblen scenario. The purchase of clothing was found wife dominant and consequently used in the female version of the snob scenario. Kitchenware has also been found wife dominant and was used to represent female purchase in the bandwagon

scenario. Electronics were typified as more male purchases in 1974, but in 2009 electronics are less gender bound than they used to be. Yet the electronics were nevertheless used in the male scenarios for the snob and the bandwagon scenarios. Although Davies and Rigaux did not mention purchase decisions on jewelry, the tiara was designated as a female product in the Veblen scenario. Scenarios further included demographics as income, gender, product purchase, and social utility reasons for purchase as between-subjects factors to make a complete as possible distinction between the Veblen, snob and bandwagon conditions. Respondents were asked to vividly imagine that they were in the situation as prescribed by the scenario. Six different scenarios were conceived and included descriptions like "You earn about € 12,000 a month as income (5 times modal). You have a car and it's in good condition. You wish to purchase a second car and you have chosen to buy a Porsche, as you can afford it. You are looking forward to the moment that everybody is able to see you driving it" in the Veblen scenario for males.

8.2.2. Questionnaire. The scenario was followed by a questionnaire containing within-subjects psychographic factors like: need for uniqueness, attention to social comparison information, showing wealth, different conceptualization of self-esteem, fashion consciousness and conspicuous consumption. The latter was added to find if respondents who were randomly assigned to a certain conspicuous behavior also thought their behavior was conspicuous. With the exception of Moschis' social utility reasons for watching television advertisements scale (SURCC) which has dichotomous response format, a seven-point Likert-type scale response format was applied to all scales, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). An odd scaled response format provided the respondents the opportunity to state that they sometimes agreed to see or feel themselves in a manner as questioned or

agreeing to engage in behavior as stated in the items. Items were randomized before inclusion in the questionnaire.

8.3. Materials used in the questionnaire.

The materials used in the study are the measures that proved to have satisfactory reliability coefficient in the pilot study. Additional explanation of the use of scales is provided where needed.

8.3.1. Conspicuous Consumption. Moschis' social utility reasons for watching television advertisements (SURCC) was assessed with a dichotomous response design. The fashion consciousness scale used a seven point Likert-scale response format.

8.3.2. Self-esteem measures. Measurement of all self-esteem measures were assessed with a seven point Likert-scale response format.

8.3.3. Social Conformity. The ATSCI had a seven point Likert-scale response format.

8.3.4. Need for uniqueness. A seven point Likert-scale response format was used for both the creative counterconformity (CCC) and avoidance of similarity (AOS) scales.

8.3.5. Need to show wealth. The showing wealth inventory (SWI) used a seven point Likert-scale response format.

8.4 Procedure

Respondents were asked to participate in the study and carefully read instructions, scenario and afterwards fill out the 33 item questionnaire. Female and male respondents were chosen at random. It took respondents 10 to 15 minutes to read and fill out the questionnaire. Less than 3, 3 % (N=6 out of N=186) of respondents found the assignment given in the scenario difficult. All analyses were computed with raw scores.

Results

9. Reliability of scales.

Measurement reliability for the concepts in this research differed from those in the pilot-study. In this sample Cronbach alpha for the social utility reasons for watching TV advertisements scale was ,66. The novelty-fashion conscious consumer subscale (FCCC) of the Consumer Style Inventory scale (CSI) measured ,92 on Cronbach alpha State Self-Esteem Scale (SSES) a measure of performance self-esteem has an alpha of ,66. Coefficient α for Consumers' Need for Uniqueness (CNFU) creative choice counter conformity was ,66 and for avoidance of similarity ,68. The Liable Self-esteem's Cronbach coefficient alpha was ,75. The Attention to Social Comparison Information Measure (ATSCI) Coefficient α was ,45, the three item ATSCI had very poor reliability and as a consequence only one of the items was included in the analysis. The RSES emerged with a Cronbach alpha coefficient of ,70. And the Self-Liking subscale from the SLCS alpha measured .81 and for the Self-Competence subscale it was ,60. Reliability for the SWI was ,81.

9.1. Structural equation modeling approach.

Initial testing of the conceptual frameworks for each of the five conceptualizations of self-esteem did not yield the expected results. Instead I found the frameworks fitted the data poorly, yet according to contemporary theory were sound. Results did not support the initial hypotheses. This is not of concern though as it is commonly recognized that in reality no restrictive model fits the population, and all fitted restrictive models are approximations and not hypotheses that may or not be true (McDonald & Marsh, 1990). The fit of the models was assessed with the root-mean-square error of approximation (RMSEA), and the comparative fit index (CFI). As a rule, a model with a RMSEA less than .08 and a fit index greater than .90 suggest a close approximation i.e. fit, between the model and the analyzed data (Hoyle, 1995). Both these measures were chosen because of the logic of model testing that lies at the basis of these measures. Accordingly a model should be a useful simplification of reality rather than a

precise replica of reality. The RMSEA assesses the extend to which the model fails to fit the data and of all fit indices is among the ones least affected by sample size (Byrne, 2001).The CFI and RMSEA both are indices that can be obtained as a direct function of the noncentrality parameter. The chi-square test of goodness-of-fit is also reported. This measure follows from a somewhat different assumption: it proposes that the posited model perfectly fits the population covariance matrix. This means that when a significant value for χ^2 is reached the two other fit indices leave more room for improvement of the model. Results pertaining to hypothesis I to V are given respectively. The model using Rosenberg's Self-Esteem Scale (RSES) showed χ^2 (9, N = 186) = 70,070 $p< .05$ a CFI of ,519 and RMSEA of ,192. In the model which used the State Self-Esteem Scale (SSES) as the measure for self-esteem and dependent variable SURCC, analysis yielded χ^2 (9, N = 186) = 72,779 $p< .05$ and a CFI of ,475 while RMSEA was ,196. Dykman's Liable Self-esteem measured χ^2 (9, N = 186) = 66,936 $p< .05$,573 for CFI and RMSEA of ,187. The Self-Liking subscale from the SLSCS gave way to χ^2 (9, N = 186) = 69,330 $p< .05$ while CFI reached ,550 with a RMSEA of ,190. And for the model with the Self-Competence subscale χ^2 (9, N = 186) = 71,449 $p< .05$, CFI ,485 and RMSEA ,194. Results are summarized in table 1.

The same procedures were followed for the five models with the dependent variable FCCC. Results did not confirm hypotheses VI to X. The use of Rosenberg's scale in relation to fashion consciousness measured χ^2 (9, N = 186) = 80,627 $p< .05$ with CFI of ,475 and RMSEA ,207.The performance self-esteem conceptualization lead to χ^2 (9, N = 186) = 81,728 $p< .05$ and CFI ,443 and RMSEA ,209. Liable self-esteem was accompanied by a χ^2 (9, N = 186) = 80,151 $p< .05$, CFI ,498 and RMSEA ,207, and the goodness-of-fit for Self-liking yielded χ^2 (9, N = 186) = 80,464 $p< .05$, with CFI ,500 and RMSEA ,207.

Table 1.

Results for model fit of five different models each containing one of five dimensions of self-esteem with dependent variable social utility reasons for conspicuous consumption (N=186)

Self-esteem	χ^2	*df*	*N*	CFI	RMSEA
RSES	70,070	9	186	,519	,192
SSES	72,779	9	186	,475	,196
LSES	66,936	9	186	,573	,187
SLike	69,330	9	186	,550	,190
SComp	71,449	9	186	,485	,194

Note: Every line represents a different model utilizing one of five conceptualizations of self-esteem: RSES is global self-esteem as measured by the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale, SSES is performance state self-esteem as measured by the State Self-esteem Scale, LSES is liable self-esteem as measured with the Liable Self-Esteem Scale, SLike is a self-liking dimension of self-esteem as measured with the Self-Liking Self- Competence Scale, SComp is a self-competence dimension of self-esteem as measured with the Self-Liking Self- Competence Scale. χ^2 is chi-square goodness-of-fit measure, *df* is degrees of freedom, N is number of respondents, CFI is comparative fit index, RMSEA is root mean square error of approximation.

While the self- competence factor measured χ^2 (9, N = 186) = 83,335 $p < .05$ and CFI ,439 with RMSEA ,211. These results are summarized in table 2. As the results show**, fit for the models is not as good as one would expect on basis of contemporary theory.** In pursuit of a model that contains some form of self-esteem and had a good fit a different approach was chosen. Applying regression analysis, expectations for individual regression-equations were tested. In these expectations the self-esteem dimensions were used as predictors for conspicuous consumption and fashion consciousness.

Table 2.

Results for model fit of five different models each containing one of five dimensions of self-esteem with dependent variable fashion consciousness (N=186)

Self-esteem	χ^2	*df*	N	CFI	RMSEA
RSES	80,627	9	186	,475	,207
SSES	81,728	9	186	,443	,209
LSES	80,151	9	186	,498	,207
SLike	80,464	9	186	,500	,207
SComp	83,335	9	186	,439	,211

Note: Every line represents a different model utilizing one of five conceptualizations of self-esteem: RSES is global self-esteem as measured by the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale, SSES is performance state self-esteem as measured by the State Self-esteem Scale, LSES is liable self-esteem as measured with the Liable Self-Esteem Scale, SLike is a self-liking dimension of self-esteem as measured with the Self-Liking Self- Competence Scale, SComp is a self-competence dimension of self-esteem as measured with the Self-Liking Self- Competence Scale. χ^2 is chi-square goodness-of-fit measure, *df* is degrees of freedom, N is number of respondents, CFI is comparative fit index, RMSEA is root mean square error of approximation.

10. Expectations

The lack of model fit led to the following expectations for the regression equations in the Veblen-effect condition.

(1a) the relationship between need to show wealth and social utility reasons for conspicuous consumption is predicted by global self-esteem as measured with Rosenberg's self-esteem scale.

(1b) the relationship between need to show wealth and fashion consciousness is predicted by global self-esteem as measured with Rosenberg's self-esteem scale.

(2a) the relationship between need to show wealth and social utility reasons for conspicuous consumption is predicted by the performance dimension of state self-esteem.

(2b) the relationship between need to show wealth and fashion consciousness is predicted by the performance dimension of state self-esteem.

(3a) the relationship between need to show wealth and social utility reasons for conspicuous consumption is predicted by the liability dimension of state self-esteem.

(3b) the relationship between need to show wealth and fashion consciousness is predicted by the liability dimension of state self-esteem.

(4a) the relationship between need to show wealth and social utility reasons for conspicuous consumption is predicted by the self-liking dimension of state self-esteem.

(4b) the relationship between need to show wealth and fashion consciousness is predicted by the self-liking dimension of state self-esteem.

(5a) the relationship between need to show wealth and social utility reasons for conspicuous consumption is predicted by the self-competence dimension of state self-esteem.

(5b) the relationship between need to show wealth and fashion consciousness is predicted by the self-competence dimension of state self-esteem.

The same method of expectation generation was applied to the snob effect with following expectations for analyses as result:

(6a) the relationship between need for uniqueness and social utility reasons for conspicuous consumption is predicted by global self-esteem as measured with Rosenberg's self-esteem scale.

(6b) the relationship between need for uniqueness and fashion consciousness is predicted by global self-esteem as measured with Rosenberg's self-esteem scale.

(7a) the relationship between need for uniqueness and social utility reasons for conspicuous consumption is predicted by the performance dimension of state self-esteem.

(7b) the relationship between need for uniqueness and fashion consciousness is predicted by the performance dimension of state self-esteem.

(8a) the relationship between need for uniqueness and social utility reasons for conspicuous consumption is predicted by the liability dimension of state self-esteem.

(8b) the relationship between need for uniqueness and fashion consciousness is predicted by the liability dimension of state self-esteem.

(9a) the relationship between need for uniqueness and social utility reasons for conspicuous consumption is predicted by the self-liking dimension of state self-esteem.

(9b) the relationship between need for uniqueness and fashion consciousness is predicted by the self-liking dimension of state self-esteem.

(10a) the relationship between need for uniqueness and social utility reasons for conspicuous consumption is predicted by the self-competence dimension of state self-esteem.

(10b) the relationship between need for uniqueness and fashion consciousness is predicted by the self-competence dimension of state self-esteem.

Expectations for both conceptualizations of need for uniqueness[1] were analyzed in interplay.

For the bandwagon-effect the following expectations regarding regression equations were held:

(11a) the relationship between social conformity and social utility reasons for conspicuous consumption is predicted by global self-esteem as measured with Rosenberg's self-esteem scale.

(11b) the relationship between social conformity and fashion consciousness is predicted by global self-esteem as measured with Rosenberg's self-esteem scale.

(12a) the relationship between social conformity and social utility reasons for conspicuous consumption is predicted by the performance dimension of state self-esteem.

(12b) the relationship between social conformity and fashion consciousness is predicted by the performance dimension of state self-esteem.

(13a) the relationship between social conformity and social utility reasons for conspicuous consumption is predicted by the liability dimension of state self-esteem.

(13b) the relationship between social conformity and fashion consciousness is predicted by the liability dimension of state self-esteem.

(14a) the relationship between social conformity and social utility reasons for conspicuous consumption is predicted by the self-liking dimension of state self-esteem.

(14b) the relationship between social conformity and fashion consciousness is predicted by the self-liking dimension of state self-esteem.

[1] Conceptualizations of need for uniqueness are: Creative Counterconformity and Avoidance of Similarity.

(15a) the relationship between social conformity and social utility reasons for conspicuous consumption is predicted by the self-competence dimension of state self-esteem.

(15b) the relationship between social conformity and fashion consciousness is predicted by the self-competence dimension of state self-esteem.

All these expectations were analyzed using regression analyses and are reported in appendix B. The results of analyses were drawn upon to make a blueprint for a model that would have a better fit.

10.2 Model improvement.

After these first inquiries the model was re-sculpted using structural equation modeling (SEM) software. Regression analyses were conducted on individual paths and simultaneously checked for fit. Results and conclusions for these analyses and expectations are summed in appendix B. Analysis revealed the regression equations with the self-liking- and the liability of self-esteem dimensions of self-esteem had the best fit and were significant. These equations were used as a blueprint for constructing a framework that fitted the data more accurately this model was named the hypothesized model M0 and contained only the relationships that proved to be significant. The SEM software allows for modifications of the relations between concepts based on the available date. This appliance of the modification indices can be used to create models that fit the data more concise. The model was built round the concepts of showing wealth, uniqueness, social conformity self-esteem and conspicuous consumption. This method and line of reasoning lead to the model in figure 2 below. The measures of self-esteem were narrowed down to LSES and SLike and both were included in the analysis, as opposed to the earlier separate analysis, for dependent variable SURCC. This yielded a slightly better fit for the model with the SURCC as dependent variable, χ^2 (11, N=186) = 61,863 $p < .05$ with CFI of ,756 and RMSEA of ,158 this model was labeled the research model M1 and was consequently modified.

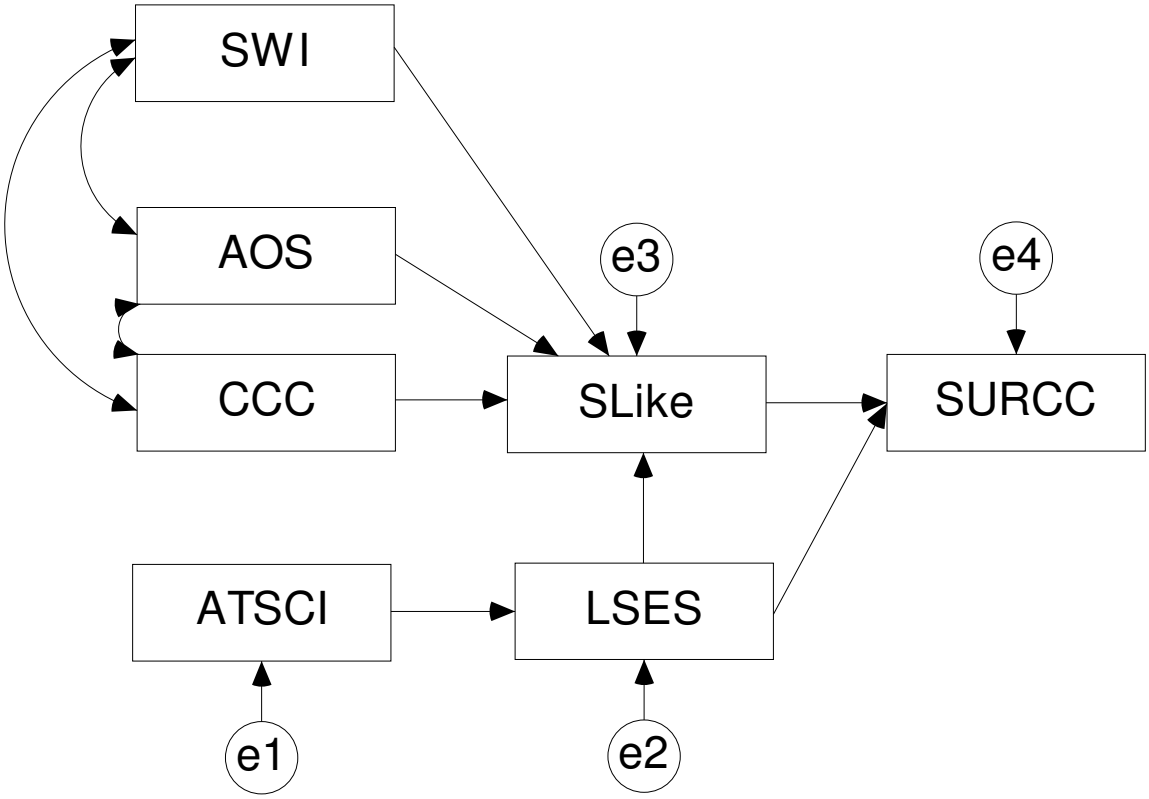


Figure 2. Hypothesized model (M0) flowing forth from regression analyses

This model is depicted in figure 3. Red arrows represent the changes suggested by SEM. According to SEM this was the best conceivable model, but one I could not reconcile with. I reasoned that showing wealth (SWI) could be correlated with social conformity (ATSCI) based on Veblen's emulation theory. If the extravagantly rich imitate each others consumption behavior possibly unknowingly, then there is a tendency toward conformity. The addition of this double headed arrow in the conceptual model was not without result. SEM had many more suggestions once this change was implemented. The results of these modifications mostly pertained to the self-liking concept. All relations, that is, arrows towards it and away from it vanished. The exclusion of the self-liking dimension was imminent. Also correlations between avoidance of similarity (AOS) and social conformity (ATSCI) and creative counterconformity (CCC) were established. AOS had an indirect effect on SURCC through LSES and a direct effect on FCCC.

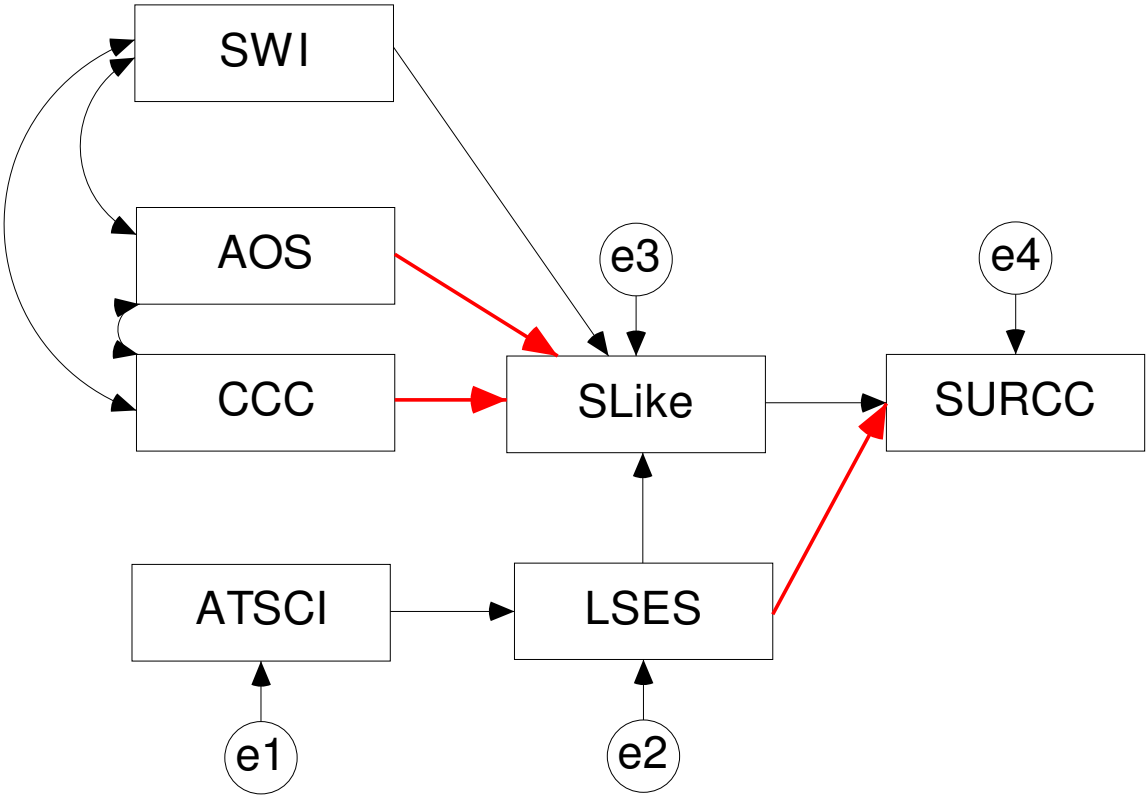


Figure 3. Research model M1 as suggested by structural equation modeling software

Creative counterconformity was correlated with the measurement error of LSES. Finally, showing wealth had a direct effect on both SURCC and FCCC. All these relations led to a satisfactory model fit, χ^2 8, N=186) = 6,492 p< .05 with CFI of 1,000 and RMSEA of ,000 this model was named the final model M2 and is depicted in figure 4. The results pertaining to model fit for the three models (M0, M1 and M2) are summed up for the LSES pathway in table 3. Numerical values of the direct, indirect and total effects for this model are found in appendix C. The model using FCCC as dependent variable was constructed in the same manner. First separate pathways were analyzed and then a model emerged. In this case, the LSES and SComp dimensions of self-esteem proved to be the most important pathways. The research model was almost identical to the hypothesized model and had χ^2 (5, N=186) = 4,035 p< .05 with CFI of 1,000 and RMSEA of ,000.

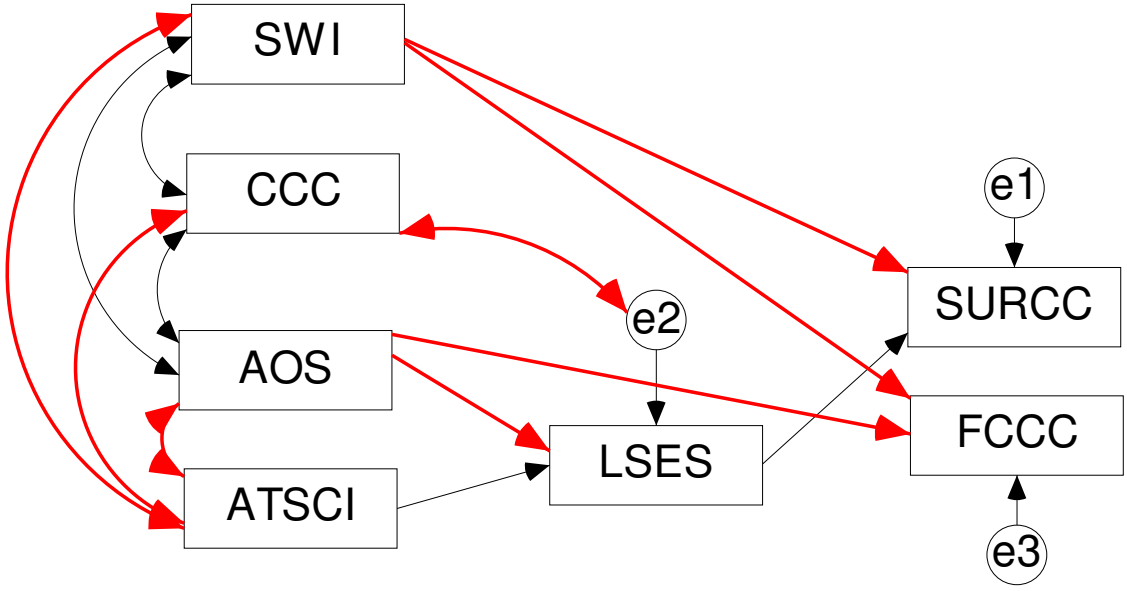


Figure 4. Final model M2 based on theory and SEM

Table 3.

Results of structural equation modeling: fit indices for the hypothesized model (M0), the research model (M1) and the final model (M2) (N =186)

Model	χ^2	*df*	$\Delta\chi^2$	Δdf	*p*	CFI	RSMEA
M0	67,588	14	--	--	,000	,743	,114
M1	61,863	11	5,725	3	,000	,756	,158
M2	6,429	8	55,434	6	,599	1,000	,000

Note.χ^2 is goodness-of-fit index, *df* is degrees of freedom; $\Delta\chi^2$2 is chi-square difference, Δ *df* is degrees of freedom difference, CFI is comparative fit index, RMSEA is root-mean-square error of approximation.

The research model is shown in figure 5 and the only modification to it made was the removal of the arrow that led from LSES to FCCC this arrow is color coded in blue. In the integration with the final model M2 the relations of the self-competence dimension fell away. Standardized effects pertaining to the final model are summed in appendix C.

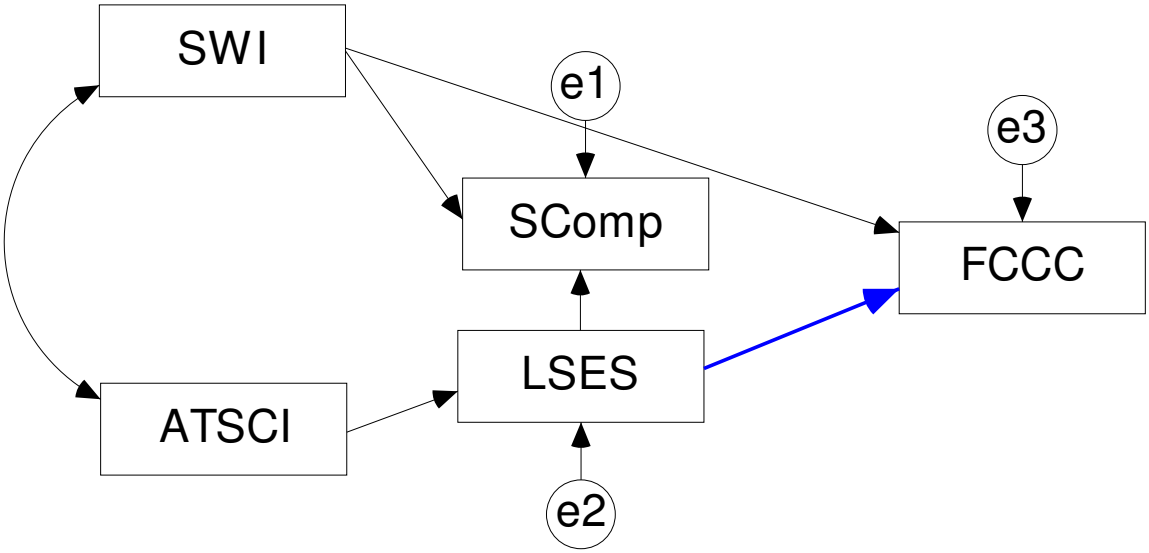


Figure 5. Final model for fashion consciousness the blue arrow was a non existing relation

Discussion

To start I will address strengths and weaknesses of the study after which I will discuss the implications of the results in the light of hypotheses and expectations. Then these conclusions will be followed by recommendations for future research and a prediction of how conspicuous behavior may prove to play out in reality.

10.3 Strengths & weaknesses of the study.

First I need to address the use of scenarios in this study that may be explained as strength of this study in two ways: the scenario structure made it possible to induce the three conspicuous behaviors and ensured that participants were mentally engaged with behaviors as described in the scenarios. Also it is feasible that because of the scenario structure people tend to be more open and honest in their responses as opposed to answering according to a social desirable ideal in a real-life setting. This concern is uttered frequently in research of conspicuous consumption and I took a few precautions against it. But the scenario based structure of the research is twofold. It can also be explained as a weakness of the study. the use of scenario's in which people are asked to project oneself into a situation and identify

with the role one plays as described in the scenario, not only can be difficult cognitively, but it can also be argued that this has nothing to do with how things play out in reality, but is merely a meta-thought of the individual. Besides the two strong points of the scenario based structure, another forte of this study is that it is the first empirical test of the concept of self-esteem in the context of influencing factors of conspicuous behavior, which provides a more solid basis for external validity than researching the concept in isolation. A thorough analysis of theories and available literature previous to the empirical testing of the conceptual model proved its value yielding amongst others five different operationalizations of the concept self-esteem. Furthermore the method of analysis through structural equation modeling differentiates between direct, indirect and total effects. The use of a pilot study to test reliability is a standard procedure in research as is making sure sample size is large enough. Like in every study there are some weaknesses in this study and the first one is already acknowledged when discussing the scenario structure. A second weakness may be the use of a student sample. One can not be sure that the results obtained through means of a student sample will also hold in other populations. Having said that I do wish to refer to the tradition in social science for using student samples, this practice is closer to being a norm than an exception. Through the manner of data collection, respondents were not monitored while filling out the questionnaires, the quality of the data was not controlled at the time of collection. This can also be perceived as a weakness; in the end it is the author's humble opinion that the strengths outweigh the weaknesses, both in number and in severity.

10.4 Conclusions

I set out to explore contemporary economic theories of conspicuous consumption, which pivot the psychological concept of self-esteem. That is, the concept of self-esteem in which an individual is perceived as having either high or low self-esteem. But self-esteem in

psychology is not only viewed of as a dimension of high and low, there are many operationalizations of self-esteem along very different aspects. As economic psychologist I was not only interested in this one dimension of self-esteem and next to the concept of global self-esteem I included performance, competence, and liking and liability dimensions. This choice was made on basis of evidence from previous research for the stability of global self-esteem over time by amongst others Rosenberg. This meant that changes in global self-esteem would be very difficult to show when measuring only this concept. Which lead to the inclusion of a measure for instability of self-esteem and a scale for performance self-esteem. These facets of self-esteem are likely to be less stabile and therefore more suitable for the measurement of differences. Self-liking and self-competence completed the picture against I wished to set self-esteem, which does not mean that the dimensions of self-esteem are exhausted (e.g. implicit self-esteem). After analysis of all those different operationalizations of the concept and the confirmation of some hypotheses and the rejection of others, **the most salient result is the absence of influence of self-esteem in the Veblen-effect.** But also the evidence that is found for influence of self-esteem is not along the line of high or low self-esteem**. Liability of self-esteem is the heaviest weighing factor when it comes to self-esteem, but only in the snob and bandwagon conditions.** These findings can mean two things: either there were mistakes made while measuring or there is no room for self-esteem in a conceptual model of conspicuous consumption, at least not in the sense of an individual having high or low self-esteem. The only operationalization of self-esteem that exerted influence on conspicuous behavior was the aspect of liability. This last view is supported by Braun & Wicklund (1989), who found that conspicuous consumption is influenced by what they named insecurity.

10.5 Future research

For starters the measure used in this research to measure the need to show wealth (SWI) could benefit from validating research. Because we have to take in consideration that although the influence of liability of self-esteem is significant, the effect size is relatively small, recommendations for future research will not include more research to try and find support for self-esteem in a conceptual model of conspicuous behavior. It seems that the liability of self-esteem measure is a useful addition to a model of conspicuous consumption when one wants to describe bandwagon and snob behavior if one wants an extra 10% of explained variance. This can be seen as the proverbial cherry on the cake. According to the final model the liability of self-esteem measure is not a particular useful concept for measurement of Veblen-effects, nor is any of the other dimensions of self-esteem used in this research. If emulation is a driving force behind Veblen behavior it can be useful to ask questions that relate to spending patterns in their social environment especially significant others. Also a measure of need for cognition can shed some light on whether people who are high in need of cognition are conscience of their conspicuous behavior; if they are not then this may be interpreted as evidence of emulation. **Furthermore the social conformity concept may be just a dimension of the concept of need to belong, this because liability of self-esteem proved to be the foremost factor of self-esteem; inclusion (and exclusion) forces (Baumeister, 1995) may guide conspicuous consumption more than uniqueness and conformity factors.** In the authors' opinion it would be for the better if we abandoned the inclusion of self-esteem in future research of conspicuous behaviors as they do not have much explaining power, and focus on inclusion and exclusion forces and especially on the need to belong. In this context I am even tempted to make a prediction about the nature of this relationship. It might prove that there is only one mechanism at work here. All agents in all

three (Veblen, snob and bandwagon) conspicuous behaviors act out of a need to belong to their respective reference groups of significant others. It is very much possible that the same social behavior (whether it happens to be conscious or non-conscious) in different groups of individuals with more or less homogenate demographics and psychographics, can result in different effects.

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