

Abstract

The importance of material possessions in human psychological development has gradually gained attention in social psychology. Dittmar theorized the first comprehensive framework regarding the relation between human and personal possessions. Besides their mere instrumental functions, possessions can also act as symbolic expressions of the owners' identities, i.e. different possessions may mean differently to various individuals. According to her social constructionist approach, the meaning-construction around material possessions takes place in a social context and within social interaction. It is this symbolic aspect that could be used to distinguish different social category dimensions, e.g. gender, social status, or age. Cross and Madson proposed different self-construal in male and female, which was said to be able to explain the difference in their social behavior. This paper is going to explore the relationships among gender, self-construal and meanings of material possessions so as to explain the gender difference in possessive behavior in terms of their self-construal. Four different meanings of possessions - Sentimental-Relational, Individual-Self, Intrinsic value, and Emotional catalyst - were discovered in Hong Kong, some of which matched Dittmar's. The results, however, disproved the suggested difference in self-construal between male and female. The task of unpacking gender, therefore, became impossible. The validity issue of the instruments - Singelis' Self-construal Scale (SCS) and the Twenty Statement Test (TST) - was addressed as one of the limitations of the present study. At the end, the issue of gender stereotypes was also discussed briefly.