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〔Article〕

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1. Introduction

Women and their adolescent daughters represent a growing and lucrative global market. Japanese women under 35 years old spent an estimated of $525 on clothing in just three months (Nikkei Business, 2009). European women generally spend less, $400 per year on clothing in France for instance, but still represent a sizable market (Le Figaro, 2011). Researchers highlight the importance of a youthful style and the significant role of adolescent daughters in helping their mothers construct such an image (Decoopman, Gentina and Fosse-Gomez, 2010). Despite the apparent significance of this market, mothers' sharing behaviors with their adolescent daughters remain uncertain in cross-cultural consumer research.

Theoretically, why do mothers adopt clothes sharing practices with their adolescent daughters? Although the vast majority of research on mother-adolescent daughter has focused on the U.S. (e.g., Mandrik, Fern and Bao, 2004), additional studies are beginning to emerge in other cultures, including Europe (e.g., Gentina, Decoopman and Ruvio, 2012), or Asia (e.g., Sakashita and Kimura, 2011). These studies to date, however, have been conducted in one nation. Thus, much remains unknown about differences in adolescent daughters' mothers' sharing behaviors and their motivations across nations.

This research examines mothers' motives to engage in the experience of clothes sharing with their adolescent daughters in two national cultures, Japan and France (Schuster and Copeland, 1999). Japan is a collectivistic, interdependent country, with high power distance, whereas France is an individualistic, self-oriented society, with low power distance (Hofstede, 2001). To tease out these differences, we take the social comparison approach. Given that clothing satisfies the need to defend self-image in relation to others, clothing consumption provides fruitful insights in the context of intercultural study.

Prior studies on mother-daughter interactions suffer from three limitations. First, they focus on consumer socialization and intergenerational influence theories, thereby failing to investigate the question of the role of adolescent daughters on their mothers' clothing consumption (Ruvio, Gavish and Shoham, 2012). Because adolescent daughters are considered as the most immediate layer of their mothers' extended self (Sakashita and Kimura, 2011), they may be significant comparison targets (Gentina, Decoopman and Ruvio, 2012). Second, studies on social comparison focus on vicarious role models (Martin and Gentry, 1997) and thus overlook a segment whose specificities render it particularly worthy of investigation: adolescent daughters' mothers. Third, little research in marketing has been devoted to understanding the impact of culture on motives underlying sharing practices within the family (Epp and Price 2008), and more specifically within specific dyads – mothers and their adolescent

daughters. In response, the current study determines if mothers from collectivistic (Japan) and individualistic (France) cultures engage in social comparison processes differently when they share clothes with their adolescent daughters.

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1. Sharing within the family

Among the three fundamental ways of acquiring goods and services – by purchasing marketplace commodities, by receiving gifts, and by sharing – sharing is likely the most common as well as the most neglected in the consumer behavior literature (Belk, 2010). Contrary to commodity exchanges which involve a transfer of ownership (what is mine becomes yours), sharing involves joint-ownership without reciprocal expectations. The shared object is ours rather than mine or yours (Belk and Llamas, 2011). Because family is held to be the most immediate layer of extended self after the individual, it is also where the greatest amount of sharing takes place (Belk, 2009). Household members share their family possessions and resources within the home in order to create feelings of solidarity and bonding (Rose and Poynor, 2007). However, surprisingly, little research in marketing has been devoted to understanding sharing practices within the family (Epp and Price, 2008), and more specifically between mothers and their adolescent daughters (Decoopman, Gentina and Fosse-Gomez, 2010). For these reasons, the objective of this research is to determine mothers' motives to engage in the practice of clothes sharing with their adolescent daughters. For that, the social comparison theory is used as the main theoretical framework of this research.

2.2. Social comparison with the adolescent daughter

The social comparison theory, initially introduced by Festinger (1954), posits that in the absence of objective information about themselves, people judge themselves and evaluate their opinions and abilities on the basis of comparison with others. It is argued that individuals make social comparisons with others considered as part of their self (Gardner, Gabriel and Hochschild, 2002). The process of social comparisons is closely linked to life changes and events (Erikson, 1959). Individuals who go through significant life transitions engage in social comparison processes with a desirable standard in order to enhance their self-perception (Wills and Suls, 1991).

Of all the transitions that occur in life, a daughter entering adolescence is a significant event in a mother's life (Eliacheff and Heinich, 2002). Because the adolescent daughter ultimately will become a woman, the daughter's adolescent years may represent a period of uncertainty for mothers. That is, mothers face the progressive loss of their maternal identity (child care, reproduction), which often gets replaced by a reawakening of their feminine dimension (Nortar and McDaniel, 1986). Prior research has shown that mothers see their adolescent daughter as their extended self (Sakashita and Kimura, 2011). In this sense, mothers can evaluate themselves to their adolescent daughter and use the daughter as a mirror, which introduces a social comparison process (Gentina, Decoopman and Ruvio, 2012).

2.3. The impact of cross national culture on social comparison process

Though the topic of social comparison is of interest to consumer researchers, little empirical research examines cross-cultural differences in social comparison processes (Wajda, Peng and Hu, 2008). Yet research in this area is needed as culture shapes aspects of the self (degrees of independent/ interdependent self construal, and individual/ collective self-esteem) and social comparison strategies (Lorenzi-Cioldiand and Chatard, 2006). Individualistic cultures (France) value personal autonomy and an independent construal of self, whereas collectivistic countries

(Japan) emphasize intragroup harmony and an interdependent construal of self (Hall and Hall, 1990). Moreover, psychology research has shown that making any comparisons may often be a function of the uncertainty of the self, including low self-esteem (Festinger, 1954). Asian cultures promote collective self-esteem whereas Western cultures value individual self-esteem (Ogawa, 2007). Such cultural differences may explain why comparison target is the individual rather than the group among individualistic cultures. In contrast, collectivist countries promote intergroup comparisons processes (Lorenzi-Cioldiand and Chatard, 2006).

3. Methodology

Our interpretive study was comprised of visual stimuli and in-depth interviews with 32 dyads of mothers and their adolescent daughters (16 dyads were from urban areas in Japan and 16 from an urban region in France). The sample profile showed sampling equivalence in mothers' jobs as well as mothers' (38-54) and adolescent daughters' (14-18) ages across cultures. The back translation method, in which the interview guide is first translated from French to Japanese and then back again to French, was applied to ensure the idiomatic equivalence of the French and Japanese versions. We first elicited narratives and then posed "grand-tour" questions about (1) their personal and familial life, (2) the kind of relationships between mothers and teenage daughters, and (3) their clothing consumption patterns. Visual stimuli - three pictures showing French/ Japanese mother-daughter dyads with different degrees of fashion similarity - helped deepen what was said in the part of the interview. The data collection was mostly conducted in the homes of informants to ensure an appreciation for their intimate and living space. Interviews lasted between 60 and 90 minutes; all interviews were recorded and immediately transcribed, resulting in a total of 950 typed pages of data.

Each interview was read in totality by all the researchers in order to embrace the holistic understanding of the phenomena. The axial coding of interview transcripts was used, noting relationships among codes (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). Then, patterns of experiences were sought and identified within individual interviews (idiographic analysis) and across informants' interviews (nomethetic analysis) (Thompson, Locander, and Pollio, 1990). The data was closely examined and compared for similarities and differences, and the few cases of disagreement discussed and analyzed until consensus was reached. The final stage consists in specifying relationships and moving to a higher level of abstraction (Arnould and Wallendorf, 1994). The two major themes which emerge from data are (1) mothers' interpersonal versus intergroup social comparison processes across cultures, and (2) the different mothers' interpersonal comparison motives underlying the experience of clothes sharing.

4. Results

4.1. Mothers' interpersonal versus intergroup social comparison processes across cultures

The need for making social comparison should occur among individuals in all societies. The actualization of this need, however, should vary across cultures and reflect differences in the relative importance of conforming to group norms versus establishing an independent self (Kitamaya and Markus, 1992). Our findings reveal that French and Japanese mothers engage in two major forms of social comparison processes, corresponding respectively to an individual analysis level and to a group analysis level. Our findings reveal that because French mothers consider themselves as independent, they tend to engage in interpersonal rather than intergroup comparison process with their adolescent daughter. In this sense, adolescent

daughters offer an important mirror that French mothers use to see themselves. French mothers' self gets established according to the image that the adolescent daughter provides of that self. This interpersonal comparison process takes the form of an active projection which involves femininity.

"I often compare myself to her. I would like to be more alike, for her physique, her clothing style, her personality, all." (Christine, 51).

When daughters enter into adolescence, they may be significant comparison targets for French mothers who seek reconstruct their femininity. The experience of clothes sharing can be a means for mothers to engage in interpersonal comparison processes with their daughter. Indeed, mothers report using sharing clothes as a symbolic resource to clarify who they are.

In contrast, Japanese mothers, who view the self as connected with the collective, tend to engage more in an intergroup (i.e., the global family) than an interpersonal comparison process. Both mass media and society values reflect the idea that physical appearance is highly important in Japan (Luther, 2009).

"I feel like I should stay really healthy because I have a whole family to take care of, so I feel like my body does not even belong to myself. It belongs to my family member instead." (Naoko, 44)

This may explain why Japanese mothers are pressured to conform to the societal expectations of pleasing through an attractive physical appearance. Because Japanese mothers report feeling social pressure to wear fashion similar to those in their same age, they refuse to share clothes with their daughter; they prefer giving or lending clothes without borrowing. Beyond this intragroup comparison process, the findings reveal that some Japanese mothers make also intrapersonal comparisons with their adolescent daughter but specific motives underlying such intrapersonal comparisons process differ across cultures.

4.2. Different mothers' interpersonal comparison motives across cultures

Our findings highlight different mothers' motives underlying interpersonal comparison processes with daughters across cultures. The primary goal of interpersonal comparison is to acquire information about the self, according to three specific underlying motives: self-evaluation, self-improvement, and self-enhancement (Wood, 1989).

The results suggest that French mothers regard their adolescent daughters as ideal references of femininity. Because French mothers consider their daughter to be superior in terms of physical attractiveness, they report engaging in upward comparisons. Consistent with prior studies (Martin and Gentry, 1997), self-evaluation emerges as the primary motive which prompts upward comparisons, which may result in lowered self-perceptions.

"Corentine(daughter) has never had weight problems, and she is taller than me. All the clothes she wears make her a thin silhouette. When I look at her, I find my rolls of fat!" (Anne, 47).

These poor self-perceptions also create doubt among French mothers about their femininity. That is, French mothers seek to compensate these deep-seated doubts about their femininity, by sharing clothes with their adolescent daughters.

"I often feel insecure, and I need my daughter to feel better and closer to her. When I share clothes with my daughter, I feel more attractive." (Marie-Isabelle, 46).

Self-improvement emerges as another primary motive which prompts upward comparison. We find that French mothers use upward comparisons with their daughter in order to self-affirm and restore their perception of their own physical attractiveness. Thus the adolescent daughter becomes a significant motivational factor.

"My daughter gives me a boost … maybe she stops me from becoming an old woman! She allows me to remain feminine and beautiful." (Nadine, 42).

The experience of clothes sharing is central to

self- improvements because it helps French mothers affirm and enhance their feminine identity through their interactions with their daughters.

"When I wear the same clothes as my daughter, I tell myself, I am not old!" (Florence, 46).

In contrast, it is not lack of self-esteem but rather a need to conform to the current societal values that seem motivating Japanese mothers to engage in downward comparisons with their adolescent daughter. Consistent with prior research (Sakashita and Kimura, 2011), we find that Japanese mothers try to control their daughter by promoting authority and rules. Thus, Japanese mothers, who consider their daughter as little girls, engage in self-enhancement strategies in order to maintain positive views of themselves in the society.

"I feel like my daughter is still a baby girl. At home, she behaves like a baby. […] As a woman, I would die if I lost interest in men. And I would feel jealous if my daughter becomes more sophisticated than me." (Naoko, 44)

Japanese mothers avoid sharing clothes with their adolescent daughter in order to maintain their superior position of control: they prefer giving or lending clothes. Moreover, they implement strict rules for exchanging clothes – time period (quasi immediate exchange), place (separate closet), and prior permission.

"If I want to borrow my mom's clothes, my mother always tells me to ask her before. If I cannot get through to talk to her, I always give up on the clothing and switch to the other stuff." (Sayaka , 15).

5. Discussion

Research to date has often assumed the universal social comparison process across cultures (Festinger, 1954). However, we also show that social comparison processes differ across cultures, and reflect differences in the emphasis mothers place on independence versus interdependence. In an individualistic country (France), mothers engage more in an interpersonal comparison process with their adolescent daughter, whereas in a collectivistic country (Japan), they make intergroup comparison process by considering the family and more largely societal expectations. Moreover, several motives drive this process depending on cultures: self-perception and self-improvement are the primary motives for comparison in individualistic cultures, whereas self-enhancement is valued in collectivist countries. Such differences in mothers' social comparison processes and their motives impact the experience of clothes sharing with their daughter.

Summarizing these results, our research contributes to an emerging stream of research that highlights the importance of national culture in mothers' social comparison processes and motives to engage in the experience of clothes sharing with their teenage daughters. These differences implicate different approaches for managers targeting French and Japanese adolescent daughters' mothers. Fashion retailers targeting Japanese mothers should place emphasis on the social dimension of intergroup comparison in their marketing communication, depicting attractive women who seek differentiated themselves from their daughter to maintain their social position. In contrast, advertising directed toward French mothers should highlight the importance of interpersonal comparison by developing the mother-daughter concept in all directions (e.g., decompartmentalized clothing offerings but also mother-daughter team tournaments, cooking and writing competitions and so on).

Despite these theoretical and managerial implications, there are some limitations to be noted. First is our focus on mothers and their adolescent daughter. However, it would be interesting to extend this research to other family groups (e.g., father-teenage son, siblings, or mother-daughter-grandmother), or different time period of the life stage (e.g.,

mothers-in-law, grandmothers or great-grandmothers), in order to determine if similar social comparison mechanisms emerge. Also, the use of a single product category, clothing, should be noted. Future research should examine other product fields, such as sport, leisure goods and so on.

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