Lessons Learned About Consumers' Relationships With Brand

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It has been ten years since the publication of my article, "Consumers and their Brands: Developing Relationship Theory in Consumer Research" (Fournier 1998). Over the course of the decade, we have learned a great deal about the nature and functions of consumers' relationships with brands, and the processes whereby they develop at the hands of consumers and marketers. In a broader sense, brand relationship research, grounded as it is in the notion of consumers as active meaning makers, helped pave way for the paradigm of co-creation embraced in brand marketing today (Allen, Fournier, and Miller 2008). Recent research, such as that in this volume, continues to build upon basic relationship fundamentals. Still, not surprisingly, many unresolved issues and conundrums remain. My own thinking about consumer-brand relationality has also evolved a great deal, particularly as important realities unanticipated or under-developed in the original theory are brought to the fore. In the sections below, I identify lessons I have learned about the relationships consumers form with their brands. These lessons are organized within the broader theoretical framework that guided my original thesis. Where applicable, I leverage research my colleagues and I have in progress to inform my points.

Tenet # 1: Relationships are purposive, involving at their core the provision of meanings to the persons who engage them.

A core insight from my thesis research emphasized the purposeful nature of consumer-brand relationships: brand relationships were meaning-laden resources engaged to help people live their lives. According to this tenet, the relationships formed between brand and consumer could be understood only by looking to the broader context of the consumer's life to see exactly what the brand/company relationships were in the service of. Still, in conducting our research, we have been guilty of reifying brand relationships. We forget that relationships are merely facilitators, not ends in and of themselves. A strong relationship develops not by driving brand involvement, but by supporting people in living their lives.

Academics and managers alike fall into the trap of assuming that brand relationships are all about identity expression: that the driving need behind people's brand relationships has to do with trying on the identities that the brand enables, or otherwise gaining status through the brand. This logic leads to a natural circumscription of the relationship phenomenon, wherein the perspective is meaningful only in high visibility/high involvement categories where identity risks apply. Brand relationships can serve higher-order identity goals, addressing deeply-rooted dialectic identity themes and enabling centrally-held life projects and tasks. But, they can also address functions lower on the need hierarchy by delivering against very pragmatic current concerns. Karen, our struggling single mother from the original thesis and article, bought Tide, All, and Cheer because one of these reliable mass brands was guaranteed to be on sale when she needed it. Karen's brand portfolio was filled with habitual purchases of otherwise "invisible brands" (Chang Coupland 2005). These relationships allowed Karen to extend her resources and develop the skills and solutions she needed to make it through her day. Karen's basic commercial exchanges can still be understood as brand relationships. Less emotional, surely, and less salient, perhaps; but relationships they remain.

Many brand relationships are also functional in that they focus on extracting greater exchange value from the company and the brand. So-called loyal customers often engage relationships not through zealous brand evangelism, but rather through a pragmatic desire for the better deals and special treatments that come with elite relationship status. Here again strong brand relationships emerge as a byproduct of meeting functional needs, not a drive to express identity through the brand.

The status of the brand relationship as a means versus an end is nowhere clearer than it is within the context of brand relationships forged at the community level. As seven years of brand community research has taught us, people are often more interested in the social links that come from brand relationships than they are in the brands that allow those links to form (see also O'Guinn and Muniz, this volume). People often develop brand relationships to gain new social connections or to level out their connections in some significant way. Brand relationships can also provide venues wherein emotional support, advice, companionship, and camaraderie are provided. As research into so-called Third Place brands (Rosenbaum et al. 2007) has taught us, these strong brand relationships are a consequence, not a cause; they result from the social connections engendered through the brand relationship. As researchers, we are guilty not just of prioritizing identity needs over those that are more functional: we have also disproportionately focused on idiosyncratic relationships versus collective relationships supporting the brand.

Robust brand relationships are built not on the backs of brands, but on a nuanced understanding of people and their needs, both practical and emotional. The reality is that people have many relational needs in their lives, and effective relationships cast a wide net of support. **Exhibit 1** provides a sampling of the provisional foundations of brand relationships suggested in published research; Ashworth, Dacin, and Thomson (2008, this volume) provide another perspective on the functions that brand relationships serve. Brand relationship efforts that comprehensively recognize and fulfill the needs of real people – individually and collectively – are those that deliver results.

Solving the "reification problem" also requires qualifying the conditions wherein brand relationships will viably form. When we push the theory too far and imply that all consumers form relationships to the same degree and in all circumstances, we unnecessarily lose supporters. Several researchers have turned to attachment theory and its secure, anxious/ambivalent, and avoidant relationship types for person moderators of relationship activity (see Paulssen and Bagozzi, this volume). In our own research, we have developed an attachment construct specific to commercial relationships that holds promise in predicting brand relationship propensities (Paulssen and Fournier 2008). Consumer manifestations of different relationship styles (independent, discerning, and acquisitive, Matthews 1986), orientations (power versus intimacy, McAdams 1984) and drives (McAdams 1988) should also prove informative.

To control run-away applications, we also need a way of identifying the relationship potential of a given brand. Much has been written about the facility offered through brand anthropomorphization, a concept about which I devoted a full thesis chapter myself. But this factor has proven itself a red herring or, a moot point in the simplest case. We do not need to qualify the "human" quality of the brand character as a means of identifying the brand's relationship potential: all brands—anthropomorphized or not—"act" through the device of marketing mix decisions, which allow relationship inferences to form (Aaker, Fournier and Brasel 2004; Aggarwal 2004). More critical is a way of identifying a brand's relationship potential that is sensitive to the person's life context. One such approach builds upon the insight that consumers play active roles as meaning makers in their brand relationships, mutating and adapting the marketers' brand meanings to fit their life projects, concerns, and tasks. The key is to understand how meanings attain significance in the context of the person's life world. With co-authors Solomon and Englis (2008, forthcoming), we have come to understand this question as a search for "Meanings that Matter," the answer to which lies in our construct of brand meaning resonance. **Exhibit 2** provides a multi-faceted

model for thinking about the resonance construct and the role it plays as a mediator driving brand strength. Resonance forces a shift in our thinking from firm- and competition-centric criteria such as the salience, uniqueness, favorability, and dominance of brand meanings to the reverberation and significance of those meanings in the personal and socio-cultural world. Resonance focuses not on what brands mean, but rather how they come to mean something to the consumers who use them. It highlights the developmental mechanisms driving the initiation (and maintenance) of consumers' relationships with brands.

Holt (2004) and others (O'Guinn and Muniz, this volume; Schroeder and Salzer-Morling 2005; Thompson, Rindfleisch and Arsel 2006, to name but a few) have contributed greatly to our understanding of the cultural processes that enable brand resonance, thereby allowing strong brand relationships to form. This research serves a critical perspective-gaining function by shifting attention from consumers' relationships with brands to brands' relationships with cultures. Predictable psycho-social factors can also trigger relational activity by precipitating a search for resonant brand meanings (see also O'Guinn and Muniz, this volume). Events such as the coming of age, the transition to parenthood, or a change in marital status serve as self-defining moments wherein identity planes experience tectonic shifts. Companies that anticipate these shifts with meaningful brand bridges add much-needed semantic continuity to consumers' lives; this is rewarded with strong relationship activity. Research can greatly inform these fertile periods wherein the individual's hunger for meanings is exacerbated and explicate the processes involved in the personal birth of relationships with the brand.

Pushed one step further, the notion of resonance and the meaning-based tenet on which it is built have implications for how we think about the strength and quality of a given brand relationship. Again, our metrics suffer from firm-centricity, focusing on evaluation of the person's satisfaction with or depth of commitment to the brand relationship that is formed. But relationships that resonate have a different focal goal: they are engaged to make people's lives easier, better, or happier. The construct of subjective well-being within the domain of positive psychology (Diener, Kesebir, and Lucas 2008) has much to offer in this regard.

Tenet # 2: Relationships are multiplex phenomena: they range across several dimensions and take many forms.

The second tenet of my thesis research and article called attention to the reality of relationship diversity. As a field, we had always been interested in strong versus weak relationships, with extensive learning generated under the brand loyalty rubric. But my thesis highlighted that relationships could also be meaningfully distinguished as hierarchical versus egalitarian or forced versus voluntary, for example, precipitating many different relationship types and forms (e.g., master-slaves and childhood friendships). Savvy relationship research recognized that consumer-brand relationships were quite complex, necessitating treatment according to their operative terms.

The multiplex phenomenon lends itself well to the development of marketing metrics, both to measure the strength levels of different brand relationships and to qualify various relationship types and forms. Brand attachment (Thomson, MacInnis, and Park 2005) provided one approach to relationship strength measurement; the brand relationship quality (BRQ) construct (Fournier 1998) served a similar goal. Leveraging ideas from interpersonal relations, BRQ included five relationship facets beyond the commitment and affect (love/passion) levels typically qualifying brand relations: intimacy, partner quality perceptions, behavioral interdependence, attachment, and self-connection. Over the past several years, I have conducted extensive research to develop a

reliable and valid scale for measuring BRQ. **Exhibit 3** provides preliminary items for the BRQ scale derived from a survey among 2250 respondents using a 3 (packaged goods, services, durables) x 2 (product categories) x 3 (brands) research design (Fournier 2000). Results provide preliminary support for the convergent, discriminant, and predictive validity of BRQ, and its distinction from similar concepts of loyalty, satisfaction, and brand attitude. The structure of BRQ is hierarchical, with seven correlated 1st order facets and a latent BRQ factor.

Although BRQ was intended to inform questions of relationship complexity by qualifying the strength of any given brand relationship, hindsight reveals it to suffer from a general bias that restricts its application and scope. As a field, we remain myopically fixated on the one type of relationship thought most capable of delivering firm value: the highly committed and affectively-laden "marital" relationship ideal. This bias crept into the BRQ measure, where facets such as passion, commitment, intimacy, and overlapping selves dominated. Experience has taught me that metrics must be sensitive to the type of relationship under consideration: you cannot measure relationship strength or vitality independent of the relationship form.

In ten years, however, we have progressed very little in our understanding of the complexity of brand-relationship space. Consumer research that demarcates exchange relationships from communal relationships provides one important step in the right direction (Aggarwal 2004). Still, this research taps but the tip of the iceberg of relationship variability, especially when one considers our tendency to relegate exchanges to "non-relational status" in the end. Preliminary attention has been given to other forms of commercial relationships: for example, friendships (Price and Arnould 1999), secret relationships (Goodwin 1992) and abuse (Hill 1994). But relationship-inspired theory concerning these and other potentially valuable or common consumer relationship forms is deficient (for exception, see Hill and Kozup 2007). The status of consumer-brand relationship mapping looks much like that observed for B2B relationships in the seminal paper by Morgan and Hunt published over twenty years ago: "Much remains to be done in distinguishing commercial, work, and romantic relationships. Also, the model is presented abstractly. It lacks conceptual detail and obvious ways to operationalize key variables." (Dwyer, Schurr, and Oh 1987, p. 20).

A first step toward a more conscious incorporation of the multiplex criterion involves a comprehensive identification of the relationship dimensions that allow us to map consumer-brand relationship space. Although relationship strength may reign supreme for practical reasons, this is but one of many important dimensions along which relationships vary. I have now inducted 52 facets distinguishing people's brand relationships (**Exhibit 4**), and have initiated survey research using mapping techniques to identify the structure of people's relationship perceptions. In a recent pilot, two hundred and twenty-five MBA students rated perceived normative relationships with 35 strong national and regional brands on the 52 relationship facets using 7-point semantic differential scales. Each subject rated twelve facets; four scales were in common and the remaining items were divided into four parallel survey sets. Another 150 MBAs rated eleven prototypical human relations along these same dimensions, again with facets allocated among respondents in three survey sets to reduce fatigue. Multidimensional scaling using INDSCALE identified seven dimensions accounting for 78% of the variance in brand relationship ratings: cooperative and harmonious versus competitive and hostile; emotional and identity-vested versus functionally-oriented; strong and deep versus weak and superficial; equal and balanced versus one-sided and hierarchical; long-term and enduring versus short-term; interactive/interdependent versus independent; and flexible/voluntary versus constrained/imposed. The first four of these dimensions emerged cleanly in the rating of human relations

as well, accounting for 58% of the variance. The map in **Exhibit 5** depicts the brands and human relations plotted on dimensions of strength and type of reward.

A more tractable avenue for descriptive and validation research considers the higher-order relationship models organizing people's perceptions. Fiske's (1992) relational models theory, which proposes communal sharing, authority ranking, equality matching, and market pricing as discrete relational categories offers a useful framework with strong empirical support. A similar empirical exercise considers the above brand mapping data using factor analytic methods. Three general forms of consumer-brand relationality manifest: partnerships (harmonious, interactive, and emotive engagements), benign acquaintanceships (harmonious though functional and shallow affiliations), and negative, disjointed relations. To date, negative brand relations have been considered only through postmodern social critique that tends to lack managerial application (for exception, see Thompson et al. 2006). Further, managerially-sensitive relationship applications tend to focus on positive and strong brand relationships or those that can readily be strengthened. Our mapping reinforces the central role that negative brand relationships play in the commercial marketplace. A fully-enabled perspective on consumer-brand relationship behavior must lose its false optimism and incorporate these dysfunctional relationship forms.

The next logical step in brand relationship space mapping involves the development of thick descriptions of pivotal relationship forms. Building on the insight that emotion profiles usefully distinguish human relations (Guerrero and Anderson 2000; Kayser, Schwinger, and Cohen 1984), Felicia Miller, Chris Allen and I have engaged projective techniques, ZMET interviewing, and surveys to identify the characteristic profiles for seven prominent brand relationship types. Results support unique emotion constellations for the different brand relationships: people in exchange relationships are pleased and satisfied; true partners experience happiness, appreciation, and fulfillment; adversaries feel anger, irritation, and skepticism in relationships with their brands.

A third stream of research-in-progress (Fournier, Avery, and Wojnicki 2004) leverages contract theory for insights into relationship phenomenology. Contract theory offers a valid and useful lens on the relationship typology problem (Kayser, Schwinger and Cohen 1984). The constructs of contracts and relationships are inherently intertwined, as revealed in the etymology of the word "contract," which comes from the Latin "contrahere" meaning "to draw together, to enter into a relationship" (Merriam Webster Dictionary of Law 1996). Relationships are intrinsically contractual: they are created when two parties come together with the intention of forming a collective understanding of what each party will provide to and reciprocally receive from the relationship other over time (MacNeil 1980). Although contract theory has been applied extensively in business-to-business marketing contexts, the socio-psychological status of contracts makes them especially pertinent to the consumer behavior context as well. Relationship contracts are psychological phenomena (MacNeil 1985) that exist only "in the eye and head of the beholder" (Rousseau and McLean Parks 1992, p. 19). Lusch and Brown (1996) empirically demonstrate how B2B relationships are governed not by their explicitly communicated contract terms, but rather by the behaviors of the parties to the relationship that constitute the implicit contract terms.

The contracting lens provides many constructs that are useful for illuminating consumer-brand relationship phenomenology. The relationship contract is largely comprised of rules and norms that guide perceptions, attributions, inferences, judgments, and actions within that particular relationship (MacNeil 1985; Rousseau and McLean Parks 1992). Relationship rules are statements which prescribe, proscribe, or permit particular types of behaviors; they provide standards of conduct that guide partners' behaviors and inform interpretations of the same

(Metts 1994). Relationship rules shared within a social group are referred to as norms. The operation of relational norms in the consumer setting has been empirically supported (Aggarwal 2004; Aggarwal and Law 2005; Aggarwal and Zhang 2006): consumers import norms from human relationships of like-kind into the brand relationships that they form.

Specific relational rules and special classes of norms have been articulated for specific relationship categories. Best known are the norms governing the reciprocation of benefits in the opposing classes of exchange versus communal relationships (Clark and Mills 1979). Opportunism—"self-interest seeking with guile"—is the global norm governing commercial exchange relations (Williamson 1975); relational norms supersede opportunism to enhance interdependent relationships (MacNeil 1980). Heide and John (1992) identify three classes of relational norms in the context of manufacturer-supplier relations: flexibility, information exchange, and solidarity. Research in psychology supports unique rule sets for particular types of communal relationships: for example, rules of friendship, marriage, kinship, workplace, and marketplace relations (Argyle and Henderson 1984; Davis and Todd 1982; Kayser, Schwinger, and Cohen 1984; O'Connell 1984). Operative relationship templates also dictate a prioritized higher-level norm specific to that type of relationship. For example, an equality norm governs friendships, a need norm governs love relationships, and a contribution norm governs relationships within the workplace (Deutsch 1975; Schwinger 1980). Research-in-progress with Avery and Wojnicki has informed an expanded conceptualization of the norms governing consumer-brand relationship contracts (See **Exhibit 6**). This typology includes not only an extended enumeration of the reward and reciprocity rules familiar to the exchange/communal dichotomy, but also rules sensitive to the relationship marketing context, such as interaction maintenance rules and relational rules governing the expression of intimacy, commitment, and trust.

Content particular to a given relationship contract extends beyond operative rules and norms. Relationship contracts specify the fundamental "gives" and "gets" of the relationship: promises to do something (or to refrain from doing something) in return for a payment-in-kind (Rousseau and McLean Parks 1992). They include operative relationship development goals and primary resource exchanges (Fitzsimons and Bargh 2003 ; Kayser, Schwinger, and Cohen 1984), benchmarks for assessing satisfaction (Baucom et al. 1996), prototypical beliefs about relational successes and failures (Baucom et al. 1989), expected risks and rewards (Sabatelli and Pearce 1986), transgression tolerance zones (Rusbult et al. 1991), trust forms and bases (Rousseau et al. 1998), and appropriate assuagement devices in the face of broken rules (Metts 1994). Relationship templates can be usefully thought of as scripts or schemata (Andersen 1993; Baldwin 1992) that offer workable relationship theories-in-use.

Research with Avery and Wojnicki informs the multiplex criterion by amplifying the relationship schemata that consumers use. The Partner template, for example, prioritizes the mutual helping norm. Partners give without getting, exhibit flexibility in company dealings, and accommodate problems with a "let's work together" approach. Best customers, another prominent template in our research, are governed by norms of privilege. Best customers expect special treatment and "insider status" that sets them apart; they engage in biased equity accounting that allows cashing in without cashing out. Some consumers view themselves as masters in a master-slave engagement, expecting distanced but unquestioning service above all else. Companies in these relationships are expected to anticipate needs, to be seen but not heard, to stick to the rules, and speak (with great formality) only when spoken to. The Company slave in this relationship is never intimate, and the Boss is always right.

I have applied this thinking in my consulting dealings with Harley-Davidson, who found value in research

identifying the Best Friendship as the dominant relationship template for their brand. Harley had long operated on the assumption that they were in the business of engaging committed partnerships. Though mapping exercises show that friendships and marriages can occupy the same "upper-right-hand quadrant" ideal space, the contractual differences between these relationships matter significantly. A marriage is a socially-supported contract to stay together despite circumstances, foreseen and unforeseen. Core strength drivers of marital bonds are commitment, love, and passion. Best friendship, in contrast, is a totally voluntary interdependence between parties intended to facilitate socio-emotional goals. The dimensions most characteristic of friendship are reciprocity and intimacy (and the vulnerability that intimacy entails). Buddies are friends too, but their drivers involve interdependence, not intimacy levels. The Do's and Don'ts of these different relationships contrast sharply, and may in fact conflict in fundamental ways (See **Exhibit 7**).

Tenet # 3: Relationships are process phenomena: they evolve and change over a series of interactions and in response to contextual change.

The third tenet of the thesis research emphasized the dynamic and interdependent nature of consumer-brand relationships. At a simplified and pragmatic level, relationships unfolded through a series of temporal stages including Initiation, Growth, Maintenance, and Decline. They manifest characteristic development trajectories such as the Biological Life Cycle, Passing Fad, Cyclical Resurgence, and Approach-Avoidance paths. Fluctuations in person, brand, and environmental factors triggered relationship evolution, with entropy and stress factors precipitating decline. Relationships were dynamic, temporal phenomena: they required active management over time.

Despite the fundamental process quality of brand relationships, developmental models that go beyond these broad generalizations have been lacking. Although we have spent decades designing programs to instill customer loyalty, mechanisms beyond commitment through which the consumer advances and maintains brand relationships are just now becoming known. Theories of attitude accessibility (Nayajankuppam and Priester, this volume), attitude change (Wegener, Sawicki, and Petty, this volume), self construction (Reimann and Aron, this volume), and habit (Tam, Ji, and Wood, this volume) provide promising avenues for process research.

Another useful approach to process specification is to identify the primary currency driving a given brand relationship, and expose the milestones and mechanisms that represent progress along this path. Research conducted for Harley-Davidson, for example, illuminated the journey of "Becoming a Rider" through a progressive accumulation of status-granting cultural capital of various kinds—knowledge, skills, experiences, and social connections, as well as dispositions concerning what is authentic within the group (See **Exhibit 8**). Models developed for members of the Harley Owner's Group focused on the accumulation of power and influence in the system, and pivotal experiences providing status credentials in this regard. The point of these examples is that relationship development is not always best understood as a process of increasingly deepening relationship bonds, be they affective, behavioral, and cognitive. Relationships "develop" along foundations critical to the type and function of the engagement at hand.

The relationship contracts perspective also allows a valuable lens on the developmental mechanisms shaping brand relationships. Relationship interrupts that render the contract salient, most notably transgressions, critically affect the relationship trajectory and course. But, everything the brand "does" affects the relationship—from the personality-suggestive colors and fonts of the company website to the tonality of communications from the brand (Aaker et al. 2004). Findings collectively suggest that consumers make inferences from meaning-laden

brand behavioral "signals" so as to interpret and reinterpret the type of relationship contract in play.

Current research with Avery and Wojnicki affirms the relevance and value of understanding relationship development as a contract signaling process wherein rules and terms evolve. **Exhibit 9** presents our working model for the various contract-relevant mechanisms involved in this process. Two sub-processes are particularly interesting for their ability to inform long-standing problems in consumer research. Supra-contracting involves extra-role behaviors beyond contract requirements that are engaged voluntarily and purposely on the part of the consumer (or brand) in order to signal a desire to transition the relationship to a new, deeper level. In our data we observed supra-contracting in the form of word-of-mouth advocacy, active customer recruitment, brand citizenship behaviors, and employee gifting. Loyalty, as we have come to understand it, can be understood as mutually reinforcing supra-contracting on the part of consumers and brands. A second process, contract misalignment, highlights the risks exposed in the inherently interdependent relationship setting. Psychological contracts, though individually interpreted, are assumed shared by both parties to the relationship who act *as if* their individual contract is aligned with the psychological contract of the relationship other; the concept of the normative contract has been developed to capture this idea (Rousseau 1989). Our research exposes the frequent presence and consequence of misaligned consumer-firm contracts, particularly in circumstances where the person has been led to believe s/he is a best customer of the firm. CRM strategies that are more concerned with the costs versus revenues of a given customer than with delivering on the contracts that have implicitly been put in place exacerbate this disconnect. As the marketing practice of firing customers gains in popularity, it becomes critical that we feel comfortable in our understanding of the relationships that are manifest. Only by stepping backwards to fundamental questions of content and process—as informed through the meanings and behaviors that consumers and brands bring to bear in negotiating their relationships—can our relationship theories and practices be informed.

Concluding Thoughts

Our move toward a science of consumer-brand relationships presents many challenges. Many doubt that something so idiosyncratic can be brought to the level of generalizability that science requires. But even though relationships may best be revealed by studying individual or collective relationship instantiations, this does not mean that actionable relationship systems can not result. Individuals and communities manifest relational principles that with dedication can be shown to be generalizable; we just need to apply ourselves to these goals. To have an impact, consumer-brand relationship theory must progress beyond thick description to the provisions of models that not only advance science, but prove actionable for firms (see, for example, Park, Priester, and MacInnis, this volume). These frameworks are essential lest the criticism rest that consumer-brand relationship research is merely an exercise in metaphor.

Other critics charge that the utility of relationship theory for understanding consumer-brand behavior has diminished: its application appropriate only for an ego-centric and less socially-conscious phase of branding which has now passed. This is a question not about applicability, but rather analytic perspective. People have relationships with anti-brands (O'Guinn and Muniz, this volume) and corporations (see Sen, Bhattacharya, and Du, this volume); cultures engage relationships with brands in the marketplace (Holt 2004). Brand relationships can be repellent and negative. Relationships can be purposive at their core. Contemporary brand relationships may be less tied to an image construction view of marketing, but relationships they remain.

As we enter the second phase of brand relationship research, opportunities for cross-disciplinary and cross-paradigmatic investigation present themselves. Though initially built upon psychological theories, the idiographic notion of brand relationships has matured into a vibrant psycho-socio-cultural construal. Brand relationships are determined by individual factors within a socio-cultural context. They manifest within a holistic and reciprocating system wherein the relationship the brand has with the culture affects the relationship the consumer has with the brand, and vice versa. The phenomenon of the brand relationship clearly extends beyond the one-to-one construal that initially fueled the development of the idea in marketing, and includes the one-to-many instantiation of community brand relationships, and the many-to-many relationships that characterize consumer societies as a whole. There is no argument that the socio-cultural is a significant part of the consumer-brand relationship equation (see, for example, research in this volume by Escalas and Bettman; Reed, Cohen and Bhattacharjee; and Schumann, Davidson, and Satinover). Relationship research that transcends so-called behavioral and Consumer Culture Theory (CCT) paradigms can integrate the psycho-social aspects of brand relationships in a way that is especially valid and true.

Integration across another common dividing line can also spark progress in future research. Relationships and the contracts that implicitly and explicitly bind them have a long and rich research tradition in the business-to-business context (cf., Heide 1994; Williamson 1975, 1996) and yet, for one reason or another, we have been reluctant to leverage these published works. Of direct relevance, for example, is Heide and John's (1992) research on the norms of marketing relationships; Heide and Wathne's (2006) probe of the phenomenology of friend and businesspeople relationship roles; and work by Narayandas and Rangan (2004) concerning extra- contractual behaviors that fortify and advance relationship bonds.

A third form of integration is also implicated in second-wave brand relationship research: integration across theoretical and substantive planes. While there is no escaping the fact that the notion of brand relationships is fundamentally practical, this nexus has not driven consumer-brand relationship research. Critical in moving research forward is the matter of finding the "so what" in consumer-brand relationships and demonstrating how and why they matter to the firms who engage them. The time has passed for the theoretically-driven among us to shy away from pragmatic relationship applications in a so-called tainted and exploitative marketing world. To have an impact, consumer-brand relationship research must consciously expand its reach into and implications for the substantive marketing domain.

Similarly, those who study brand relationships within the applied perspective of CRM have not leveraged consumer-based relationship theories. To state the case in the extreme, "people" are missing from the CRM relationship equation. Current CRM theory and application, with its focus on segmenting and differentially serving customers based on potential revenues and costs-to-serve, receives its inspiration from the discipline of economics. The error of CRM research lies not in its attention to issues concerning the firm's bottom line, but in an apparent single-minded fixation on economics that ignores and sometimes confounds consideration of the lived experiences of the consumers with whom commercial relationships are engaged. In embracing consumer relationships as business tools that enhance firm profitability, CRM researchers have lost sight of a critical insight pertaining to commercial relationships: relationships provide meanings that help consumers live their lives. Rather than treating consumers as partners in a mutually-beneficial, co-creative process of learning and engagement—as relationship marketing theory originally intended (Peppers and Rogers 1993)—the economically-centric firm treats consumers

as "assets" managed through "good old-fashioned, unsentimental cost/benefit analysis" (Landry 2005, p. 28) for the good of the firm. This lack of customer-centricity is implicated in reports of failed and lagging in-market results for CRM implementations (Boulding et al. 2005; Nelson 2004). To be true to the intended bridging function of marketing, CRM relationship research and strategies must prioritize the people over the firms that benefit from relationship activity (Fournier, Dobscha, and Mick 1998). The lived experiences of consumers' brand and company relations must be more judiciously taken into account, in all their shapes and forms.

As we push to develop substantive consumer-brand relationship theory, we must maintain a focus on and sensitivity to the marketing context in which this theory will be applied. If brand relationship theory is to have an impact, it cannot simply borrow concepts and insights from established interpersonal relationship theories and demonstrate their application to branding. The metaphoric argument for understanding consumer-brand engagements in relationship terms has been made and repeatedly reinforced. To quote Martha Stewart, this is "a good thing." But second-stage contributions require that we do more than prove the manifestation of known relationship principles with but a different scale or scope. Substantive contributions such as those contained in this volume advance new theories concerning how people relate to brands.

Exhibit 1: A Sampling of Relational Needs and Provisions

Reach beyond my network	Raise the quality of my interactions
Establish roots	Pursue luxuries guilt-free
Preserve moments of privacy	Sustain my passions
Capture the present	Explore different parts of my identity
Get help to get stuff done	Express devotion
Cultivate interests and skills	Deepen bonds through shared ownership
Stay adventurous	Aspire to be my own keeper
Manage Expectations of Me	Help position myself in the larger picture
Support my unique DNA	Level out my connections
Help resolve nagging tensions about who I am	Distance me from an unwanted self
Enable important role transitions	Provide comfort through routines and rituals
Help me contribute to the "greater good"	Get special treatment from the company
Build legitimacy and overcome fear of stigma	Get more out of my brand investments
Relax within a safe haven	Get technical support and advice
Get emotional support and encouragement	Clarify my values

Exhibit 2: Resonance: How Meanings Matter
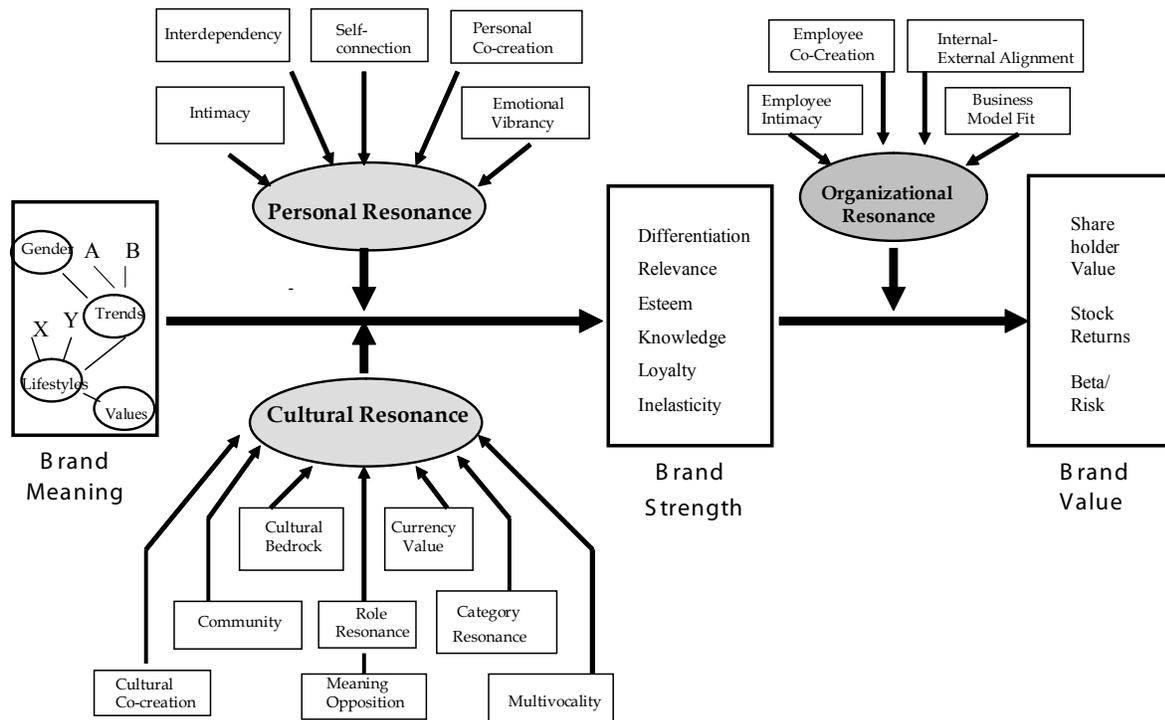
From: Fournier, Susan, Michael Solomon, and Basil Englis (2008, forthcoming), "When Brands Resonate," in *Handbook of Brand and Experience Management*, Bernd H. Schmitt (ed.). Boston, MA: Elgar Publishing.

Exhibit 3: The Brand Relationship Quality (BRQ) Scale

	R^2	Std Loading	SMC	Alpha
Interdependence				.89
Need brand and rely on its benefits	.79	.89[a]	.79	
Brand is an integral part of my daily life	.70	.84[a]	.71	
Dependent on brand	.69	.83[a]	.69	
Love/Commitment				.95
Brand and I are perfect for each other	.78	.88[a]	.77	
Really love the brand	.76	.87[a]	.76	
Thought of not being able to use brand disturbs me	.72	.85[a]	.72	
Very loyal to brand	.71	.85[a]	.72	
Willing to make sacrifices to keep using	.70	.83[a]	.69	
Unique feelings for brand	.68	.83[a]	.69	
No longer keep eye out for alternatives	.64	.80[a]	.64	
Partner Quality				.91
Brand takes care of me	.72	.85[a]	.72	
Brand listens to me	.71	.84[a]	.71	
Brand makes up for mistakes	.66	.82[a]	.67	
Count on brand to do what's best for me	.65	.81[a]	.66	
Brand is responsive to my concerns	.64	.80[a]	.64	
Self Connection				.93
Brand is part of me	.75	.86[a]	.74	
Makes statement about what's important to me	.74	.86[a]	.74	
Connects with part of me that makes me tick	.73	.85[a]	.72	
Fits with life goals or problems	.68	.83[a]	.69	
By using brand I'm part of a shared community	.68	.82[a]	.67	
Develop relationships with others who use brand	.65	.80[a]	.64	
Nostalgic Attachment				.83
Have sentimental feelings for brand	.70	.83[a]	.69	
Brand reminds me of phase of my life	.59	.77[a]	.59	
Thoughts of brand contain personal memories	.56	.74[a]	.55	
Intimacy (Consumer-Brand)				.81
Know brand history/background	.64	.80	.64	
Know what brand stands for	.61	.78	.61	
Know more about brand than average consumer	.54	.73	.53	
Intimacy (Brand-Consumer)				.86
Company understands my needs	.71	.84[a]	.71	
Knows me so well, could design product for me	.67	.82[a]	.68	
Company knows a lot about me as a person	.62	.79[a]	.62	

From: Fournier, Susan (2000), "Dimensionalizing Brand Relationships through Brand Relationship Strength," presentation at the Association for Consumer Research Conference, Salt Lake City: UT.

Exhibit 4: A Compendium of Relationship Dimensions

- *Emotionally Close / Emotionally Distant*
- *Intimate / Not Intimate*
- *Deep / Superficial*
- *Based on mutual liking / Not*
- *High sharing of information / Limited*
- *Long term / Short term*
- *Regular / Irregular*
- *Stable / Fleeting*
- *One-sided / Mutual*
- *Active / Inactive*
- *Intense interaction / Superficial interaction*
- *Interdependent / Independent*
- *Democratic / Autocratic*
- *Important to both individuals involved / More important for one than the other*
- *Equal in power / Unequal in power*
- *Reciprocating / Non-Reciprocating*
- *Harmonious / Clashing*
- *Conflict-laden / Conflict-free*
- *High costs and responsibilities / Low*
- *Warm / Cold*
- *Trustworthy / Not Trustworthy*
- *Sincere / Insincere*
- *Supportive / Not supportive*
- *Committed / Non-Committed*
- *Driven by attraction to other / Repulsion-driven*
- *Utilitarian and task-oriented / Emotional*
- *Frequent / Not Frequent*
- *Helps express who I am / Does Not*
- *Intense feelings / Superficial feelings*
- *Emotional / Not Emotional*
- *Hierarchical / Not Hierarchical*
- *Formal / Informal*
- *Fair / Unfair*
- *Secret / Out in the open*
- *Hidden / Known to others*
- *Friendly / Hostile*
- *Compatible goals and desires / Incompatible*
- *Productive / Destructive*
- *Relaxed / Tense*
- *Flexible / Rigid*
- *Difficult to break off / Easy*
- *Interesting / Dull*
- *Reliable / Not reliable*
- *Positive feelings/ Negative feelings*
- *Easy to resolve conflicts / Difficult*
- *Altruistic / Selfish*
- *Solicited / Unsolicited*
- *Imposed / Voluntary*
- *Cooperative / Competitive*
- *Much at risk/ Little at risk*
- *Choice-driven / Chance-driven*
- *Easy to enter / Difficult to start*
- *Temporary / Permanent*
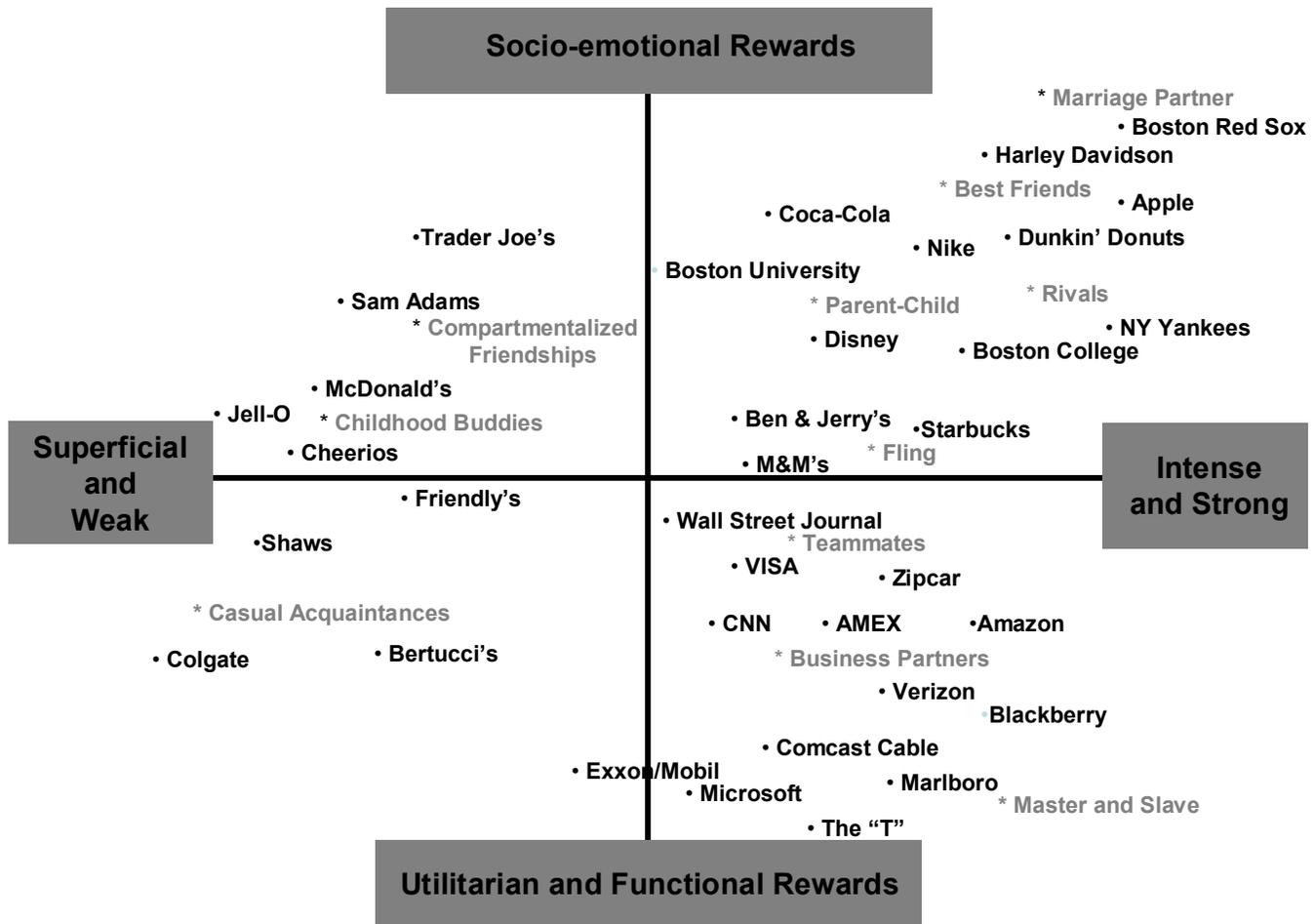
Exhibit 5: Brand Relationship Map

Socio-emotional Rewards	

* **Marriage Partner**
• **Boston Red Sox**
• **Harley Davidson**
* **Best Friends**   • **Apple**
•**Trader Joe's**   • **Coca-Cola**   • **Dunkin' Donuts**
                                        • **Nike**
• **Boston University**
• **Sam Adams**   * **Parent-Child**   * **Rivals**
                                                                    • **NY Yankees**
* **Compartmentalized**   • **Disney**
   Friendships   • **Boston College**
• **McDonald's**
• **Jell-O**   * **Childhood Buddies**   • **Ben & Jerry's**   • **Starbucks**
• **Cheerios**   • **M&M's**   * **Fling**

Superficial and Weak   **Intense and Strong**

              • **Friendly's**
•**Shaws**   • **Wall Street Journal**
                                        * **Teammates**
                                        • **VISA**   • **Zipcar**
* **Casual Acquaintances**
                                        • **CNN**   • **AMEX**   •**Amazon**
• **Colgate**   • **Bertucci's**
                                        * **Business Partners**
                                        • **Verizon**
                                                          •**Blackberry**
                                        • **Comcast Cable**
                      • **Exxon/Mobil**
                                        • **Microsoft**   • **Marlboro**
                                                          * **Master and Slave**
                                        • **The "T"**

Utilitarian and Functional Rewards

Exhibit 6: A Typology of Consumer-Brand Contracting Rules and Norms

Reward/Exchange Rules	Interaction Rules	Relational Rules
Reward Rules Rewards transmittal rules Satisfaction rules Level and degree of investment	**Boundary Rules** Degree of independent functioning Amount of activity shared together Interaction domains and spheres	**Intimacy Rules** Mutual information sharing Authentic self presentation Mastery of intimate details Actions recognizing specialness of relationship
Help and Support Rules Legitimacy of requests for help Presence and nature of expected sacrifices Emotional/financial support provisions	**Regard and Respect Rules** Critical expressions within/outside relationship Acceptance of other "as they are" Privacy rules; rules governing secrets	**Trust Rules** Trust basis (emotional versus calculative) Reliability, dependability, being counted on Willingness to assume position of risk
Reciprocity Rules Repayment of debt rules "Balance," equity, and distributive justice	**Communication Rules** Contact rules Listening rules	**Commitment Rules** Makes/respects plans, promises Barriers to exit allowable/encouraged Solidarity
	Power and Control Rules Allowable influence attempts Respective controls in decision making Mutual influence versus compliance standards	**Conflict Management Rules** Accommodation/Flexibility Acquiescence Transgression Tolerance

From: Fournier, Susan, Jill Avery, and Andrea Wojnicki (2004), "Contracting for Relationships," presentation at the Association for Consumer Research Conference, Portland: Oregon.

Exhibit 7: Playing by the Rules: Marriage versus Friendships

	MARRIAGE PARTNERS	BEST FRIENDS	BUDDIES
DO	■ Formalize the union ■ Negotiate the contract ■ Verbalize need for change ■ Strive to meet all needs ■ Add surprises/spark ■ Erect barriers to exit	■ Encourage other friendships ■ Self disclose ■ Listen ■ Ask and reciprocate ■ Be reliable, predictable	■ Compartmentalize per activities ■ Show only part of the self ■ Sustain interaction ■ Make entry/exit easy
DON'T	■ Breach fidelity pledge ■ Forget intimate details	■ Leak secrets ■ Discuss implicit contract ■ Try to change the other ■ Impose external pressures ■ Erect barriers to exit	■ Establish intimacy, deep or broad ■ Encourage emotional involvement ■ Make demands or add responsibility ■ Drop by uninvited ■ Use things without permission

Exhibit 8: A Cultural Capital Model for the Development of Relationships with Harley-Davidson

1st HOG Meeting

Talking the Talk

Refining Tastes

Acculturation

Knowing Who Knows

Walking the Walk

Facing Crisis

Assimilation/ Incorporation

Studying H-D Cultural History

Cultivating Skills

Creating the Shrine

Touching Greatness

1st Harley

Myths, Stories, Legends

Extending the Family

Blurring Social Lines

Broadening Connections

Status 2

Status 3

Bridging Groups

Status 1

Bike Maintenance

Habits and Habitats

Status 4

1st time on a Harley

1st Group Ride

2nd Harley in the Home

Status 5

1st Long Ride

Imprinting and Infatuation

1st Rally

Getting the "Inside Scoop"

HOG Leadership Experiences

Hanging at the Dealership

1st HOG Role

Safe Riding Lessons

Accumulating Badges
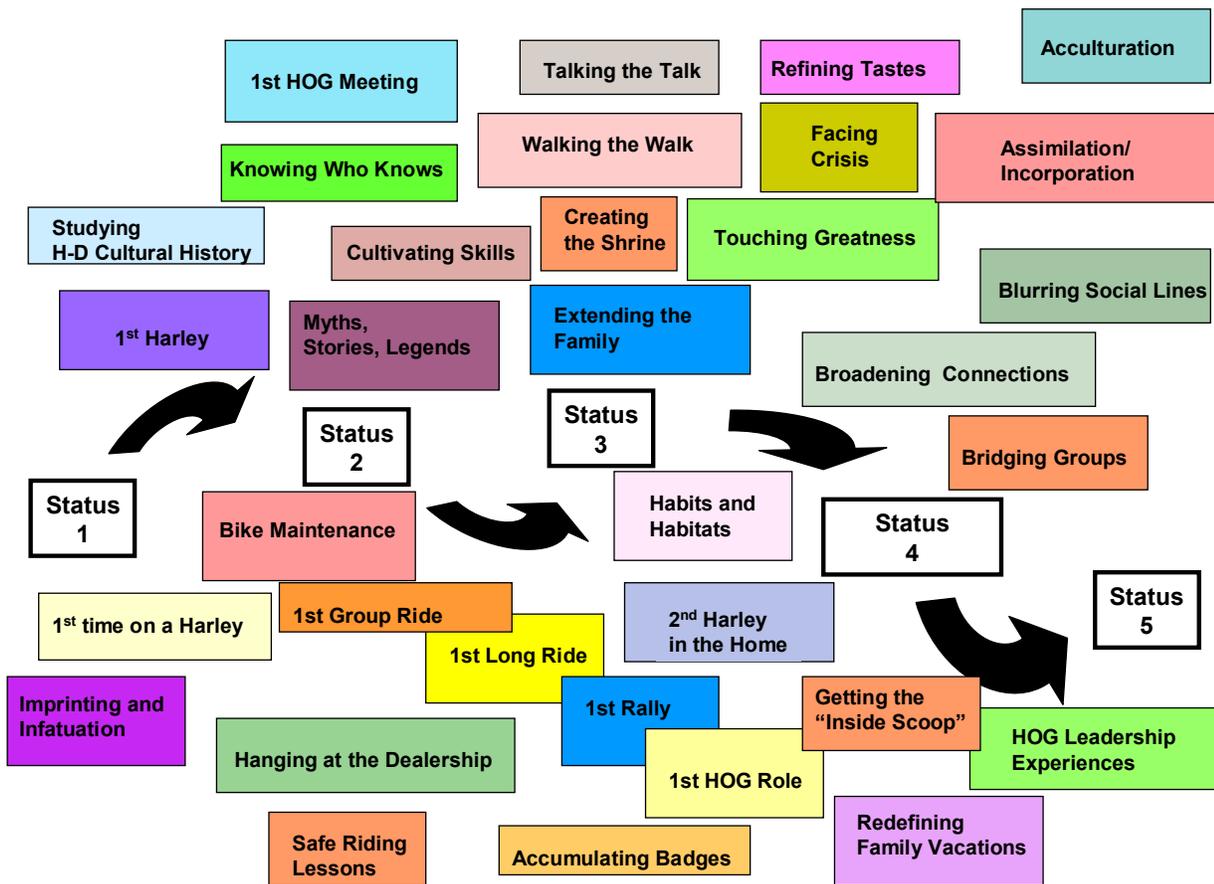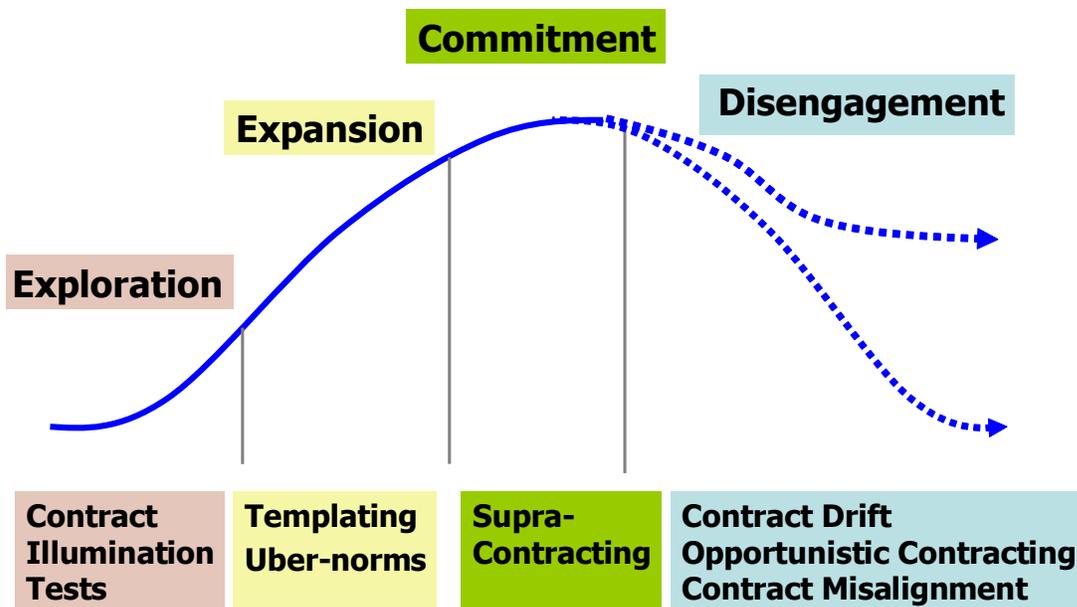
Redefining Family Vacations

Exhibit 9: Relationship Contracting Process Mechanisms

From: Fournier, Susan, Jill Avery, and Andrea Wojnicki (2004), "Contracting for Relationships," presentation at Association for Consumer Research Conference, Portland: Oregon.

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