Self–object relationships in consumers' spontaneous metaphors of anthropomorphism, zoomorphism, and dehumanization

How consumers relate to possessions and consumption goods, and pursue identity goals through spontaneous metaphors of anthropomorphism, zoomorphism, and dehumanization (AZD) in consumption, has not been explored. Whereas previous studies primed and prompted AZD by focusing on consumers' reactions to marketers' AZD, we examined AZD metaphors that emerged spontaneously from our conversations with Greek consumers in this phenomenological study. We identify four patterns that show how different attachment styles to consumer goods were combined with different types of AZD metaphors to provide different emotional benefits relating to identity goals. The study contributes to our understanding of how consumers employ AZD as self-therapeutic metaphors to cope with unwanted feelings such as guilt and ambivalence within identity conflicts, approach and feel closer to their desired selves, experience self-augmentation, and cope with their undesired selves and self-diminishment in consumption. We discuss how marketing campaigns linked to product design, branding, and advertising might facilitate consumers' metaphoric coping by stimulating consumers' AZD metaphors.

Keywords: metaphors, anthropomorphism, zoomorphism, dehumanization, self-identity, ambivalence

Self–object relationships in consumers' spontaneous metaphors of anthropomorphism, zoomorphism, and dehumanization

This study builds on the central premise that consumers relate to consumption goods in a way similar to how they relate to people (Fournier, 1998; MacInnis & Folkes, 2017). Extant research discusses how consumers form relationships with their possessions and pursue identity goals, such as approaching their desired selves and self-augmentation, or avoiding their undesired selves and self-diminishment (Ahuvia, 2005; Bahl & Milne, 2010; Belk, 1988; Hoffman & Novak, 2017; Hogg et al., 2009; Ruvio & Belk, 2018). However, consumer research has left a gap in our understanding of consumers' self–object relationships by neglecting to explore, first, consumers' different attachment styles (Dunn & Hoegg, 2014; Mende et al., 2013; Swaminathan et al., 2009; Thomson et al., 2012) to their possessions and goods; and, second, consumer–object relationships that are characterized by either conflicts or transitions between self-augmentation and self-diminishment (Hoffman & Novak, 2017).

Just as people use metaphors to express the self and describe their relationships (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980; Landau et al., 2010), consumers' spontaneous metaphors of *anthropomorphism*, *zoomorphism*, and *dehumanization* (AZD)[1] have the potential to offer insights into consumers' self–object relationships. Anthropomorphism is the attribution of humanlike physical or mental characteristics, emotions, and intentions to inanimate objects and animals; zoomorphism is the attribution of animal traits to objects or humans; dehumanization is the attribution of animal or object traits to oneself and others (Healy & Beverland, 2013; 2016; Kniazeva & Belk, 2010; Woodside, 2008)[2].

[1] AZD: anthropomorphism, zoomorphism and dehumanization

[2] There are two types of zoomorphism, that is, attribution of animal traits to a) objects and b) humans, and two types of dehumanization, namely, a) animalistic dehumanization, in which humans are contrasted with animals; and b) mechanistic dehumanization, in which humans are contrasted with objects and machines. Zoomorphism and animalistic dehumanization overlap in some cases (when people think of themselves or others as animals). Zoomorphism and dehumanization can be positioned as forms of anthropomorphism as, without direct mental

Fournier's (1998) seminal paper proposed that consumers form relationships with brands because they tend to anthropomorphize brands. However, consumer research has largely adopted a passive view of the consumer as a receiver of brand or marketing stimuli and has focused on consumers' reactions to forced or market-driven metaphors of AZD (Aggarwal & McGill, 2007; 2012; Hur et al., 2015; Kim et al., 2016; Kim & Kramer, 2015; Kim & McGill, 2011; Kniazeva & Belk, 2010; May & Monga, 2014; Woodside, 2008). Even though AZD metaphors are a natural human tendency (Epley et al., 2007; 2008), consumer research has neglected consumer-driven AZD relating to consumers' possessions and goods that are forms of magical thinking (Fernandez & Lastovicka, 2011; James et al., 2011) and can reflect their self–object relationships and identity goals. An exception is the work by Healy and Beverland (2013; 2016) that examined how a selected special group of divergent consumers self-transform as furry animals to pursue identity goals. However, their work did not examine more mainstream consumers who are more relevant to marketing managers, and focused on self-dehumanization neglecting consumers' metaphors of anthropomorphism and zoomorphism regarding their possessions. Moreover, Healy and Beverland (2013; 2016) did not focus on consumer–object relationships.

Therefore, the research question of this phenomenological study with more ordinary Greek consumers is: how do consumers relate to possessions and consumption goods and pursue identity goals through spontaneous AZD metaphors in consumption? We begin by reviewing relevant gaps in the literature on self–object relationships, magical thinking, and AZD, and then outline the methodology of the study.

Self–object relationships

access to the animal or object world, the animalistic or object qualities in zoomorphism or dehumanization require interpretation from our human perspective (Healy & Beverland, 2013). However, for the purposes of this study, anthropomorphism, zoomorphism, and dehumanization are regarded as different metaphors in order to explore possible nuances in consumer–object relationships.

Consumers' desired and undesired selves (positive and negative imagined selves; Markus & Nurius, 1986) dominate in explaining relationships with possessions and consumer goods (Ahuvia, 2005; Belk, 1988; Epp & Price, 2010; Hogg et al., 2009; Ruvio & Belk, 2018). In positive self–object relationships, consumers feel that possessions help augment the self by enabling self-extension (the self is extended outward by cathecting objects with meaning and casting aspects of the self onto possessions; Belk, 1988; Ruvio & Belk, 2018) or by enabling self-expansion (possessions are enveloped inward into the self and aspects of another's identity are absorbed into the self via consumption; Aron et al., 1992; Connell & Schau, 2013). In negative self–object relationships, consumers feel that objects diminish the self by stimulating self-restriction (the consumer can do less as the object impedes and limits the consumer's capacities, or, in other cases, the consumer impedes and limits interactions with the object) and self-reduction (the object constraints the consumer's capacities in a way that the consumer feels reduced as a person; s/he becomes less) (Hoffman & Novak, 2017). However, consumer research has neglected to explore, first, conflicts between self-augmentation (self-extension and self-expansion) and self-diminishment (self-restriction and self-reduction) in consumer–object relationships; and second, the transitions between types of experience with possessions such as from self-expansion to self-reduction, as calls for research indicate (Hoffman & Novak, 2017).

Extensive research has supported that consumers have relationships with consumption goods that can be referenced to social relationships (Fournier, 1998; MacInnis & Folkes, 2017). Attachment theory, that is, a theory of individuals' interpersonal relationships styles based on their prior experiences (Ainsworth, 1979; Bowlby, 1969), can also potentially provide further insights into consumers' relationships with their possessions and consumer goods. According to attachment theory, individuals' relationship styles (secure, preoccupied, fearful, and dismissive styles) depend on their feelings of anxiety and avoidance in relationships that

capture their (positive or negative) view of themselves and of others, respectively (Bowlby, 1969; Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991). Consumer research has explored how attachment styles influence marketplace relationships (David, 2016; Mende et al., 2013; Swaminathan et al., 2009; Thomson et al., 2012; Whelan & Dawar, 2016), but it has neglected to investigate consumers' different attachment styles to possessions and consumption goods and the related complexity, ambivalence, and effect (or intentionality) of consumers' attachment styles to goods. Nevertheless, Thomson and Johnson (2006) called for studies to examine how consumers use consumption relationships to achieve goals. Research on attachment styles also does not focus on consumers' AZD metaphors. For example, Dunn and Hoegg (2014) suggested that more attention should be paid to the brand anthropomorphizing aspect of self-brand relationships. Hence, our study examines consumers' relationships with possessions and goods in relation to their spontaneous AZD metaphors to add to our understanding of consumer experience.

Magical thinking

Consumers use magical thinking [i.e., blurring fantasy and (perceived) reality] during consumption experiences, such as river rafting and weight loss efforts, to gain emotional benefits like hope, motivation, excuses for self-indulgences, good self-feelings, and self-augmentation (Arnould & Price, 1993; Arnould et al., 1999; James et al., 2011). For example, Belk et al. (1989) implied that consumers use magical thinking in the process by which objects can become sacralized and be regarded as self-extensions. Fernandez and Lastovicka (2011) found that consumers use magical thinking to incorporate an extension of another's more accomplished self (e.g., famous musician) into the possession (e.g., replica instrument of famous musician) and to assimilate into oneself this more accomplished self when using the possession (i.e., self-expansion).

Only predominantly positive self–object relationships have been explored with respect to magical thinking (Belk et al., 1989; Fernandez & Lastovicka, 2011), even though magical thinking involves both approach and avoidance tendencies. This gap makes sense of recent calls for greater exploration of negative and ambivalent relationships with goods (Alvarez & Fournier, 2016; Fournier & Alvarez, 2013; Park, 2013). Consumers can experience entities perceived as magical or sacred with strong positive feelings (e.g., devotion, fascination) and/or strong negative feelings (e.g., fear, repulsion), and they can also have strong, ambivalent reactions (Belk et al., 1989; Fernandez et al., 2007).

AZD metaphors

Magical thinking is based in metaphor (Arnould et al., 1999). Consumer research implicitly suggests that (but has neglected to directly explore how) ordinary consumers can spontaneously generate AZD metaphors in pursuit of identity goals such as the pursuit of a desired self (Kniazeva & Belk, 2010; Woodside, 2008). Likewise, implying that both a desired and an undesired self are in play, motivation theory suggests that anthropomorphism is often driven by the desire to maintain a sense of familiarity, predictability, and control as well as to reduce a sense of uncertainty; or by the need for belongingness; and that people who feel lonely may anthropomorphize nonhuman agents (pets, religious agents) (Chen et al, 2017; Epley et al., 2007; 2008; Keefer et al., 2011). Bastian and Haslam (2010) also implied that an undesired self may play a role in self-dehumanization, which can be stimulated by internalized harmful treatment (e.g., social ostracism) that the individual has experienced from others. Healy and Beverland explored how non-normative consumers in a community of like-minded individuals engage in the stigmatized practice of animal transformations and not only try to achieve a desired identity by drawing on the symbolic power of animals (2013), but also try to manage tensions (created by zoomorphism and perceptions of difference); they try to gain mainstream acceptance and expand their identity (2016). Yet, consumer research has neglected to explore

how more ordinary consumers generate AZD metaphors to pursue identity goals and to relate to possessions and goods.

Research also discusses consumers' positive (Aggarwal & McGill, 2007; Chandler & Schwarz, 2010; Delbaere et al., 2011; Landwehr et al., 2011; Rauschnabel & Ahuvia, 2014; Waytz et al., 2010) or negative reactions (Kim et al., 2016; Kim & McGill, 2011; May & Monga, 2014; Puzakova et al., 2013) to market- or researcher-driven anthropomorphisms of goods. However, these polarized reactions to induced or forced anthropomorphisms of goods may not entirely represent consumers' relationships with the goods they themselves anthropomorphize, as these relationships can be more complex and ambivalent. Hur et al. (2015) explored consumers' reactions to anthropomorphized ambivalent products (e.g., tempting, desirable, but harmful products, such as tasty, but unhealthy, cookies). In their experiments, the anthropomorphism of a temptation increased indulgence, as anthropomorphism reduced individuals' perceived control and responsibility for their actions by creating the presence of another agent (the product). Yet in Hur et al.'s (2015) work, anthropomorphisms were researcher-driven rather than consumer-driven.

There is considerable scope for further investigation of the negative and ambivalent feelings (that are common, but often overlooked) in self–object relationships (Alvarez & Fournier, 2016; Fournier & Alvarez, 2013; Park, 2013). Examining how anthropomorphism affects guilt and then self-control in consumption (Hur et al., 2015), or exploring attachment styles to consumer goods in relation to AZD metaphors, would both contribute to better understanding consumer emotions and experiences.

Moreover, consumer research has largely concentrated on the anthropomorphism of brands rather than possessions (Aggarwal & McGill, 2012; Fournier, 1998; Fournier & Alvarez, 2013; Kim & Kramer, 2015; Kniazeva & Belk, 2010; MacInnis & Folkes, 2017; Puzakova et al., 2013; Rauschnabel & Ahuvia, 2014; Swaminathan et al., 2009). A brand

represents a set of replaceable objects and an abstract concept (Lastovicka & Sirianni, 2011). Consumers may relate more directly to objects that are experienced as specific, concrete, and unique by owners due to properties like decommodification (Wallendorf & Arnould, 1988) and singularity (Epp & Price, 2010). Exploring consumers' spontaneous AZD in relation to their possessions rather than exploring consumers' responses to marketers' anthropomorphisms of brands can get us closer to consumers' lived experiences.

Finally, consumer research has a tendency to prime AZD in study designs (Aggarwal & McGill, 2007; 2012; Chandler & Schwarz, 2010; Kim & Kramer, 2015; Kim & McGill, 2011; Kim et al., 2016; May & Monga, 2014) and prompt AZD using direct questions or images of anthropomorphized products (Hur et al., 2015; Kniazeva & Belk, 2010; Woodside, 2008). However, marketers' efforts to depict products and brands as humanlike or animal-like can be independent from consumers' motivation to attribute humanlike or animal-like characteristics to consumption goods. According to Zaltman and Zaltman (2008, p. 37), researchers should not ask consumers what kind of person or animal best describes a brand, product, or store; anthropomorphism and zoomorphism must emerge naturally and spontaneously so that the consumer, rather than the researcher, introduces them into the discussion. Following this argument, our informants were not induced to think in AZD terms.

METHODOLOGY

Research context

Greece was this study's empirical context. Prior research on consumers' attachment styles (David, 2016; Thomson et al., 2012; Whelan & Dawar, 2016), AZD metaphors (Aggarwal & McGill, 2007; 2012; Chandler & Schwartz, 2010; Delbaere et al., 2011; Kim & McGill, 2011; Landwehr et al., 2011; Woodside, 2008), and consumers' magical thinking (Arnould & Price, 1993; Arnould et al., 1999; James et al., 2011) has largely been conducted in more affluent Western societies. In Greece, sociocultural and economic influences may particularly shape

both consumers' relationships with goods and consumers' AZD metaphors that express such relationships (which can emerge as more complex and ambivalent).

The Greek society became largely urban and industrialized in the early 1960s (Georgas, 1989). This process was boosted by integration into the European Union, global exposure to mass media, tourism, and cultural exchanges (Georgas, 1989; Stewart, 2014). Stores and advertising have promoted a consumer culture facilitated by greater discretionary income and consumer credit (Kouremenos & Avlonitis, 1995). However, Greece has been vulnerable to the global recession (like other societies in, e.g., Spain, Portugal, Italy, and Ireland) and struggled to manage its debt. The recession in Greece has generated austerity measures, significant reductions in salaries and pensions, job cuts, increased unemployment, job insecurity, and burdensome working arrangements (Eurostat, 2015). Our study examines Greek consumers' spontaneous AZD in relation to their consumption to add to our understanding of consumer experience.

Research methods

Considering Askegaard and Linnet's (2011) call for more context-attentive phenomenological studies, this study captured middle-class Greek consumers' metaphors and experiences with their possessions and goods before and during the major recession in Greece (30 participants were interviewed before the recession and 35 during the recession[3]). Snowball and convenience sampling identified participants aged 18 to 69 years that belong to a broad urban middle class in Greek society, judged by their education and occupational roles (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Participants lived in the two largest cities in Greece, namely, Athens and Thessaloniki. Their personal characteristics are summarized in Table 1 (see Mendeley Data). Except for two participants, most participants used AZD metaphors in discussing their consumption experiences (Tables 3–6; Mendeley Data).

[3] Data collection took place in the summer and autumn of 2007 and 2012

Existential phenomenology was chosen for a focus on the perspective of the experiencing individual (Kvale, 1983; Thompson et al., 1989). In semi-structured phenomenological interviews (conducted in Greek by the first author who is Greek), informants largely drove the conversations (Kvale, 1983; Thompson et al., 1989). Participants were informed that the study's purpose was to obtain insights into their experiences with possessions, products, and consumption activities that are meaningful to them. Anonymity was assured; the informants were told that the interviews would be audio taped. Consumers were then invited to talk about themselves, their families, and their life histories, focusing on major life experiences, core goals, and decisions. Participants interviewed during the recession were also asked to discuss how their lifestyle and consumption had changed. To stimulate more discussion on consumption, informants were invited to "Tell the story" about possessions, products, and/or consumption activities that are meaningful to them. Informants spontaneously shared their experiences of anthropomorphizing and zoomorphisizing their self-relevant possessions and dehumanizing the self. The interviewer probed for the AZD examples that the participants had begun describing. Only after participants had offered AZD examples, did the interviewer invite more discussion about consumers' AZD. This is in line with the "clean language" method of interviewing (e.g., Tosey et al., 2014) that facilitates exploration of a person's inner world through their own, naturally occurring metaphors, maintaining fidelity to the participant's inner world by keeping the interviewer's language as "clean," or free from the interviewer's metaphors as possible.

The interpretive analysis was conducted by both authors. In a phenomenological–hermeneutical analysis (Thompson et al., 1989; 1990), each interview was first interpreted individually and iteratively; data "parts" were interpreted and reinterpreted in relation to the developing sense of the "whole." Then, separate interviews were related to each other to identify similarities and differences (Thompson et al., 1989). Our conceptualization was

primarily based on how consumers conceptualized their possessions and themselves. Then, an *etic* interpretation linked the *emic* meanings to broader theoretical terms (Thompson et al., 1989; 1990).

FINDINGS

Participants' AZD were metaphorical ways of thinking about consumer goods and the self rather than firmly held beliefs (e.g., that material objects have humanlike traits) (Epley et al., 2007). Even though participants were aware that their AZD metaphors built around consumption were fantasies (Hirschman & Holbrook, 1982), they gained emotional benefits through this form of magical thinking. Figure 1 emerged from the analysis and depicts the interrelationships between consumers' relationships with material goods (in the form of attachment styles), magical thinking (in the form of AZD metaphors), and emotional benefits regarding identity goals (particularly desired vs. undesired selves, and self-augmentation vs. self-diminishment). The findings illustrated four patterns of how consumers' various attachment styles to consumer goods were combined with different types of AZD metaphors and linked to different identity goals (see Table 2). We discuss these patterns below.

First Pattern: AZD based on compatible identity goals and secure attachments

In the first pattern, possessions were associated with identity goals that were compatible (e.g., approach to a desired self—e.g., "financially secure"; and avoidance of an undesired self—e.g., "financially insecure"). In this case, consumer goods were valued because they represented or enabled desired selves and represented distance from or deactivated undesired selves. Participants experienced self-augmentation (self-expansion or self-extension) through these possessions. They had positive feelings about and secure attachments with such possessions (Ainsworth, 1979; Bowlby, 1969), that is, relationships that were characterized by low levels of attachment anxiety and low levels of avoidance and there was a willingness to "trust" and rely on these possessions, which caused participants to feel supported in their life

projects. These secure attachments were reflected in participants' AZD metaphors (see Table 3; Mendeley Data).

Participants in the first pattern anthropomorphized and zoomorphized possessions as agents with positive characteristics that help approach desired selves, cope with undesired selves, and enable self-augmentation. Zoi (aged 46), for example, formed a secure attachment with her car that she thinks of as a lion that empowers her to approach her desired selves—"powerful and free"—and to avoid her undesired selves—"powerless and weak." She said: *"I like the eyes, that is, the lights of my car; like leonine eyes. They fit my character. Lion is free, powerful, the king of the jungle. Car makes you fly… makes you free."*

Zoi's description reflects her self-expansive relationship with her car that she zoomorphized as a lion. By using her car, she feels she incorporates perceived aspects of a lion (i.e., powerful and free) into the self. Zoi's relationship with her car was also both support- and growth-orientated. It resonates with the *"best friendships"* relationships with brands identified in other studies (Fournier, 1998, p. 362; Alvarez & Fournier, 2016, p. 131; Fournier & Alvarez, 2013). These relationships are voluntary unions based on reciprocity; they endure through continuous provision of positive rewards. In line with theory on secure attachments (Ainsworth, 1979; Bowlby, 1969; Hazan & Shaver, 1994), participants in the first pattern were comfortable depending on and felt cared for by their attachment figures (i.e., their valued possessions).

Another example is Mark (aged 37), who returned to his parental home after becoming unemployed and is supported financially by his parents. He feels guilty for putting financial pressure on his parents. He experiences problems with his partner due to financial stress. He thinks of his music CD collection as a person giving him a hug in difficult moments, soothing the pain, compensating for his undesired selves—"pressured and feeling guilty"—and guiding him toward the solution of problems and toward his desired selves—"spiritually balanced and

relaxed." His secure and self-expansive relationship with his music CDs may compensate for his problematic interpersonal relationship.

Mary (aged 56) thinks of some of her possessions as her children based on her desired selves—"financially independent and an achiever of material comfort"—that she feels her possessions represent. She feels secure attachment toward these possessions. Mary's self-extension relationship with her loved possessions is one of validation (i.e., validating a desired self; Table 3). It also resembles the *"committed partnerships"* of consumer–brand relationships in other studies (Fournier, 1998; Alvarez & Fournier, 2016; Fournier & Alvarez, 2013). These relationships are long-term, voluntary, socially supported unions that are high in love, intimacy, trust, and commitment, where the adherence to exclusivity governs.

Another example is Diana (aged 50), who sees in her mother's gown her mother, who passed away, reflecting contamination of the possession through contact (Belk et al., 1989). When feeling upset about her family's financial and health problems, she hugs and smells the gown, feels closer to her mother and to her desired selves—"calm and loved"—and copes with her undesired selves—"upset and afraid." Diana's secure attachment to her mother's gown reflects the secure attachment Diana had with her mother and echoes the "*childhood friendship"* consumer–brand relationship in other studies (Fournier, 1998; Alvarez & Fournier, 2016; Fournier & Alvarez, 2013). This relationship refers to an infrequently engaged, affectively laden relationship reminiscent of earlier times that yields comfort and a sense of security associated with the past self. Diana's example also resembles *"marriages of convenience"* in other studies (Fournier, 1998; Alvarez & Fournier, 2016; Fournier & Alvarez, 2013), that is, long-term, committed relationships precipitated by environmental influences versus deliberate choice and governed by satisficing rules. Diana's relationship with her mother's gown was also a support-orientated, healing relationship as well as a transference

relationship in which Diana behaved toward the possession in the ways she behaved toward her mother.

Moreover, reflecting secure attachments with consumer goods, participants in the first pattern also thought of the self as an object with positive characteristics (Christopher, Mark, and Patca). Patca (aged 38), for example, sees herself as a piece of music in emotionally difficult situations. This offers Patca relief from her undesired self—"feeling upset"—and helps her approach her desired self—"feeling calm." Her self-expansive and secure attachment with some music pieces may compensate for her problematic interpersonal relationships (see Table 3; Mendeley Data). Overall, in this pattern, reflecting compatible identity goals and secure attachments with possessions, AZD metaphors helped participants compensate and empower the self; to approach or feel closer to desired selves and cope with undesired selves; and to experience self-augmentation.

Self–object relationships in the first pattern

These participants' secure attachments with possessions that enabled self-augmentation resonate with the *best friendships* (Bill, Mark, Nena, Zoi, Patca, Joanna, John, and Paul), *childhood friendships* (Alice and Diana), *marriage of convenience* (Christopher and Diana), and *committed partnerships* (Julia, Mary, Kara, Daphne and Rea) (see Table 3; Mendeley Data) relationships with brands identified in other studies (Fournier, 1998, p. 362; Alvarez & Fournier, 2016, p. 131; Fournier & Alvarez, 2013, p. 256).

Our findings reveal how some *best friendships* and *committed partnerships* with possessions are support-orientated relationships (Nena, Patca, and John), some are growth orientated (Joanna and Paul), some both support- and growth-orientated relationships (Bill, Mark, Zoi, and Daphne; Tables 3, 7), and some are validating a desired identity (Julia, Beatrice, Mary, Kara, and Rea; Tables 3, 7). *Marriages of convenience* relationships with possessions can be support-oriented (Diana) and validation (Christopher) relationships. *Childhood*

friendships relationships with possessions can be transference relationships (Alice and Diana). Also, our findings on consumers' AZD extend consumer research by revealing how secure attachments to consumer goods are connected to specific compatible identity goals (to approach desired selves and self-augmentation, and to avoid or cope with undesired selves) and link to the aforementioned self–object relationships Fournier (1998) first discussed (see Table 7).

<u>Second Pattern</u>: Anthropomorphism based on conflicting identity goals and preoccupied attachments

In the second pattern (and the third pattern discussed in the next section), possessions were associated with conflicting identity goals (pursuit of a desired self necessitated reluctant compromise with an undesired self; e.g., "caring parent, but not able to afford personal luxuries" or "enjoying personal luxuries, but feeling a negligent parent"). That is, possessions were associated with identity conflicts (Ahuvia, 2005; Bahl & Milne, 2010; Karanika & Hogg, 2010). In this case, consumer goods were experienced as representing or activating both a desired and an undesired self and as enabling both self-augmentation and self-diminishment. They were hence experienced with ambivalent feelings (Karanika & Hogg, 2016; Otnes et al, 1997; Voice Group, 2010).

Participants in the second pattern formed preoccupied attachments (Ainsworth, 1979; Hazan & Shaver, 1994) with such goods, that is, relationships characterized by high levels of anxiety, low levels of avoidance, and a great persistence in seeking comfort and support from attachment figures. These preoccupied attachments were reflected in participants' metaphors of anthropomorphism (Table 4; Mendeley Data).

In attachment theory (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991; Bowlby, 1969), preoccupied individuals view others positively, but also express incoherence when discussing their relationships. Similarly, consumers in this pattern view their special possessions as having

predominantly positive characteristics, even though they feel that these possessions represent or activate both desired and undesired selves and enable both self-augmentation and self-diminishment. They think of their possessions as humans with needs and drawbacks, but who mainly enrich and augment the self. In attachment theory, preoccupied individuals are insecure and anxious about their social relationships. Similarly, participants in this pattern feel anxious conformity in regard to some possessions and insecure about retaining these.

Nancy is an example. She had to leave her rented house and move in with her sister as she lost her job. She associates her car with her currently unattainable "independent" desired self, but also with her undesired self of "putting financial pressure on her parents." She feels guilty for receiving financial support from her parents (among other things to maintain her car) as they also have recession-related financial difficulties. Thus, she has cut back on using her car due to the cost of petrol. She worries about whether she can keep her car due to her financial difficulties, reflecting anxious conformity and preoccupied attachment in regard to her car. She thinks of it as a male companion representing her "independent and secure" desired self. Her story indicates that her relationship with her car was initially characterized by self-extension (aspects of her past "independent" self were extended outward into the car). However, due to financial difficulties, Nancy's relationship with her car has also been associated with her undesired self—"putting financial pressure on her parents"—and with self-reduction. She tries to cope with this through self-restriction (limiting her use of the car):

> *Your dignity is wrecked; it is tough, being 35 years old, at the peak of your creativity and having to get an allowance from mum and dad… They have a difficult time supporting two unemployed children […] this increases my anxiety […] I'm holding onto the car with all I have. I cannot pay for its expenses like the gas, my parents do […] The car was and still is the 1st item of my independence […] the result of my work. I studied in my town, and then started working here, so I left my parents' home late.*

The car gave me the freedom to leave, to be alone; to go anywhere... to go further out of the city. We grew up together with the car; we became independent. Giving it away would upset me greatly […] It is a boy, as I feel safe in his arms […] on his birthday (the day I bought him), I take him to be cleaned as a reward, as a gift.

Anthropomorphizing her car, Nancy argued that it is worthy of care and love, thus reducing her guilt and justifying her decision to retain her car despite her and her parents' financial difficulties (and hence despite associating her car with both her desired and undesired selves and with both self-augmentation and self-diminishment). She talked about her car as a co-consumer with needs (to be cleaned, to be taken care of with car services).

Some participants' stories also illustrate how anthropomorphism can be used to deal not just with guilt, but also with other negative feelings such as embarrassment (that reflect conflicts between desired and undesired selves and between self-augmentation and self-diminishment in consumption). For example, embarrassment about low-quality, cheap possessions (like Anita's old, cheap mobile phone seen as a good friend) or about aesthetically displeasing possessions (like a gift of dishes seen as the giver; Joanna's story) or about possessions perceived as inappropriate for one's age (Kara's teddy bears seen as affectionate people) (Table 4). Anthropomorphism helped individuals reason that such possessions were worthy of love, thus helping deal with negative feelings in consumption and support the decision to keep these items. Anthropomorphism leads consumers not only to represent a product as a human, but also to treat it as human and, thus, to keep it.

Other participants' anthropomorphisms (Dennis, Maria; Table 4; Mendeley Data) helped them reason that products were capable of social influence and had influenced them, and thus helped reduce a sense of responsibility (the delegation of implicit responsibility to products; Hur et al., 2015) and deal with guilt. Consumers in this pattern pursue conflicting identity goals. They experience conflicts between desired and undesired selves and between

self-augmentation and self-diminishment in consumption. Anthropomorphism helps deal emotionally with their identity conflicts because it strengthens the association of the possession with a desired self and with self-augmentation, thus moderating ambivalence and doubts in consumption. For example, Nick talked about a motorbike accident he had had in the past that raised his concerns about how a bike can enable self-reduction and his undesired self—"not safe." He tries to cope with these concerns through self-restriction (riding his bike less and in a more careful way). He sees his motorbike as a partner, enabling self-expansion and his desired self—"free and relaxed"—with rides to the countryside. This anthropomorphism strengthens Nick's association of his bike with his desired self and with self-expansion, moderating his negative feelings for compromising with his undesired self—"not safe with a motorbike." People frame controversial topics metaphorically in terms of a familiar domain (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980) to reduce uncertainty and indecisiveness about these controversial topics (Keefer et al., 2011). In this pattern, participants, by using metaphors of anthropomorphism, reduced uncertainty and indecisiveness about controversial, ambivalent possessions (experienced with both positive and negative feelings and associated with identity conflicts). Metaphors can change how an entity is represented and how the speaker feels about it (Merten & Schwartz, 1982).

Self–object relationships in the second pattern

In line with the second pattern, previous consumer research also discussed examples of predominantly-positive-but-mixed-emotion relationships that are generally perceived to be positive, but demonstrate negative undertones under closer scrutiny. These included *"flings"* with brands that evoke excitement and passion, but also regret and shame, or counterfeits that yield pleasure, but also shame and the fear of being exposed; *"secret affairs"* with brands that are highly emotive, privately held relationships considered risky if exposed to others; *"dependencies"* with brands experienced as irreplaceable that are highly emotional, obsessive,

and selfish attractions, yielding separation anxiety and high tolerance of the brand's transgressions (Alvarez & Fournier, 2013; Fournier, 1998).

Our findings identify that consumer–object *dependencies* are preoccupied attachments in which tolerance of the consumer good's transgressions include regarding the valued good as being costly (Dennis, Nancy, and Simon), dangerous (Nick), being associated with the undesired self of "being selfish or negligent of others' needs" (Dennis, Nancy, and Maria), or being old (Anita) or unreliable due to functionality loss (Victoria) (Table 4; Mendeley Data). Some participants' preoccupied attachments (Kara and Joanna) with possessions resonate with *secret affairs* relationships in other studies (Fournier, 1998; Alvarez & Fournier, 2016; Fournier & Alvarez, 2013) (e.g., Kara's relationship with the teddy bears she hides from others and Joanna's relationship with the gift she considers aesthetically inferior and, thus, hides; Table 4). Joanna's relationship with the gift also resembles a *"kinship"* relationship (Fournier, 1998), that is, non-voluntary union with lineage ties.

Our findings reveal that some *dependencies* with anthropomorphized possessions can be support-oriented relationships (Anita, Nick, Simon), some growth-orientated (Dennis), some both support- and growth-orientated (Victoria), and some validation relationships (Maria and Nancy) (Tables 4, 7). Also, some *dependencies* with possessions in our study resemble co-dependent relationships, where the consumer could not function without the possession, was feeling anxiety or depression without the possession, and often would do something out of the ordinary things to keep the possession. For example, Anita feeling stressed about the idea of losing her 6 year-old inexpensive mobile phone and refusing her father's offer of a new, technologically more advanced mobile phone; Nancy trying to maintain her car by getting financial support from her parents despite their financial difficulties and her feelings of guilt; or Maria feeling naked without her perfume (Table 4). Some of these co-dependent relationships were very sacrificial (Anita, Nancy; Table 4). Some *dependencies* resemble bitter-

sweet relationships where the consumer feels love or passion for the anthropomorphized possession, but at the same time hate and frustration or fear and may not be able to stand it at times (Victoria, Nick; Tables 4 & 7). Also, some of these preoccupied attachments to possessions reflected transference relationships (Nick, Joanna; Tables 4, 7).

The findings demonstrate that consumers experience conflicts between self-augmentation (self-extension or self-expansion) and self-reduction (Hoffman & Novak, 2017) in their preoccupied attachments to possessions. They try to deal with these conflicts and the related consumption ambivalence by engaging in self-restriction in consumption and by anthropomorphizing these possessions as agents with positive characteristics. Fournier and Alvarez (2013) suggested that ambivalence may be so strong as to lead to negative redefinitions of the consumer–brand relationship. They call for additional theorization that may yield a different take on relationship negativity by highlighting the undesirable aspects that otherwise positive and self-expanding relationships may obtain. Our next section (third pattern) responds to these calls.

Third Pattern: Anthropomorphism based on conflicting identity goals and fearful attachments

As discussed above, in the second and third patterns, possessions were associated with conflicting identity goals (identity conflicts) and were experienced as representing or facilitating both a desired and an undesired self and as enabling both self-augmentation and self-diminishment. Hence, in the third pattern (as in the second pattern), participants felt ambivalence toward some goods. In the third pattern, conflicting identity goals linked to participants' fearful attachments (Ainsworth, 1979; Hazan & Shaver, 1994) with goods, that is, relationships characterized by high levels of anxiety and avoidance and fears of the potentially negative consequences of closeness and reliance on partners (i.e., products in this case). These fearful attachments stimulated specific anthropomorphisms. In line with

attachment theory that states that fearful individuals view others as unreliable and unsupportive, participants in this pattern think of some possessions as humans with mainly negative traits who are unsupportive and responsible for disabling, impoverishing, and diminishing the self. This helped reduce attribution of responsibility to self or others (relatives) by explicitly delegating responsibility to the possession and focusing on what resources (money, time, energy) it "took."

Eric (35), for instance, initially acquired his family car (with a loan) to live up to his desired self as a "caring father." Yet, after being severely affected by the recession, he now associates his car with his undesired self of "financially anxious" and, thus, with self-reduction. He exhibits fearful attachment to his car. He thinks of it as a person who "has put a rope around his neck," enabling his undesired self. Attributing anthropomorphic intentions to his car, he explicitly assigned responsibility to his car (contrary to Hur et al.'s, 2015 predictions), thereby reducing internal attributions of responsibility for taking the loan:

> *We pay a loan for a car we bought without knowing there would be a financial crisis; I bought it before the first measures [...] Now, I look back and I regret it, as I have another 2.5 years in front of me for the loan; it is a rope around my neck because we do not have this money; we barely make the payments…The car has put a rope around my neck…I was alright then financially; without the anxiety we have now.*

Most participants in this pattern tried to cope with a sense of reduced personal agency by attributing agency to their possessions using anthropomorphisms. Vivian (aged 67; Table 5; Mendeley Data), who is also severely affected by the recession, has a fearful attachment to her car. She mainly associates her car with her undesired self—"financially stressed"—and with self-reduction even though she initially bought it (with a loan) to enable self-expansion and to live up to her desired self—"enjoying countryside escapes." Ascribing intentions to her car (i.e., seeing it as a person who drove her family to a dead end) helps Vivian in reducing her

feelings of guilt and in not attributing her financial difficulties to her adult unemployed daughters whom she supports financially in a weak welfare state. Anthropomorphisms in this pattern were often related to commitments (e.g., Georgia's house mortgage; Table 5) that had been undertaken before the first austerity measures and were no longer wanted. Reflecting debtors' "imprisonment," informants used anthropomorphisms to convey their feelings of entrapment. Our findings provide empirical support for Arsel and Stewart's (2015) expectation—that when people recognize identity-disparaging meanings late in a relationship with a brand, they feel locked in and entrapped. Some participants in the third pattern expressed regret over acquiring their possessions (Eric, Georgia, Vivian, and John) and their intention to sell these possessions (Georgia). This finding stands in contrast to previous research that found that consumers who have anthropomorphic beliefs about objects have an increased sense of attachment and decreased willingness to replace them (Chandler & Schwarz, 2010).

In attachment theory, individuals with fearful attachments are hypervigilant about others' attempts to control them or limit their autonomy and freedom. Similarly, participants in this pattern raised their concerns about how some products and possessions limit their autonomy, freedom, and life satisfaction. For example, Elena (aged 28) (and Mara, aged 34) discussed how fashion can control and victimize people. In particular, anthropomorphism of fashion helped Elena reduce her feelings of guilt for spending much money, time, and energy visiting shops (in pursuit of her desired self—"feminine and modern") by explicitly delegating responsibility to fashion (Table 5). Kara (aged 58) has anthropomorphized products as agents that control and chain humans. Attributing agency and intentions to products helped Kara reduce internal attributions of responsibility and feelings of guilt about hoarding possessions. Note that in the second and third patterns, where consumers experienced feelings of guilt in consumption, product anthropomorphism rather than zoomorphism occurred possibly because anthropomorphism better facilitates delegation of responsibility compared to zoomorphism.

Experiencing the possession as a human being rather than as an animal is likely to make it easier to diffuse responsibility.

Self–object relationships in the third pattern

Participants' self–object relationships (Table 5) in this pattern resonate with the *"enslavements"* consumer–brand relationships in other studies (Fournier, 1998; Alvarez & Fournier, 2016; Fournier & Alvarez, 2013) that involved negative feelings but persisted because of circumstances. *Enslavements* in our study were compromising and often exhausting self–object relationships (Elena, Mara, Eric, Georgia, Kara, and Vivian) requiring hard work. Some *enslavements* were experienced as dominating or even abusive relationships, where the anthropomorphized possession was experienced as controlling the consumer and setting rules (Eric, Georgia, Kara, Vivian; Tables 5, 7). Some *enslavements* were experienced as toxic relationships where participants would feel attraction for the possession even though it ended up leaving them incapacitated (Elena, Fofika; Tables 5, 7). Our findings on consumers' anthropomorphic metaphors in the third pattern reveal how conflicting identity goals and fearful attachments to consumer goods link to *enslavements*, enriching our understanding of self–object relationships (Table 7). Finally, our study identified how consumers can experience a transition from self-expansion to self-reduction (Hoffman & Novak, 2017) in their fearful attachments to possessions. They try to cope with this transition by anthropomorphizing these possessions as agents with negative characteristics who are responsible for self-reduction.

<u>Fourth Pattern</u>: Self-dehumanization based on compatible identity goals and dismissive attachments

Consumers in the fourth pattern experienced compatible identity goals and concerns about their identity constraints (desired and undesired selves experienced as impossible to approach and avoid, respectively, in the present or the near future). Feeling that consumption of some products would further facilitate undesired selves and detract from desired selves, participants

developed dismissive attachments to such products, that is, relationships characterized by high levels of avoidance, low levels of attachment anxiety, and a denial and dismissal of attachment needs that leads to keeping a distance from attachment figures. As in attachment theory (Ainsworth, 1979; Hazan & Shaver, 1994), consumers in the fourth pattern with dismissive attachments feel that relational figures (i.e., products in this case) are untrustworthy and will hurt them. Thus, they engaged in self-restriction, dismissively avoided some products, and discussed the benefits of consumption avoidance. Driven by their sense of identity constraints, informants attributed control to dismissed products and viewed themselves as animals or objects under negative conditions (see Table 6; Mendeley Data).

An example is Natasha (aged 26), who is unemployed and looking for a job in different Greek cities and abroad. She experiences her undesired self—"financially insecure, lacking stability in life"—as impossible to avoid in the present. She engages in self-restriction and dismisses the value of buying hard copies of books, music CDs, and movie DVDs, feeling that these material goods would further facilitate her undesired self—"financially insecure"—and would be a burden if she finds a job in a different place. She illegally downloads online books, music, and movies. Not owning many material objects, she feels better able to move anywhere she may find a job. She objectified herself as a tree leaf that goes wherever the wind blows. Self-objectification helped her escape and keep an emotional distance from negative parts of the self (i.e., being financially insecure, lacking life stability) and, thus, cope with the distance from her desired selves "financially secure, feeling stability in life" (Table 6).

Also, Alec (aged 46), a married father with three young children, was experiencing financial difficulties and felt close to his undesired self—"lacking control or choices, feeling weak." Considering he cannot afford some consumer goods as these would further enable his undesired self, he engages in self-restriction and dismissively avoids these goods. He zoomorphized himself as the animated cartoon character *Bugs Bunny* based on this undesired

self. Reflecting that feelings of powerlessness may stimulate self-objectification (Yang et al., 2015), he said:

> *I like movies, but the cinema is a process that is more expensive than it used to be and may not be worth it. I either rent DVDs or have downloaded them from the Internet, illegally […] You are like Bugs Bunny and the carrot makes you run… the carrot wants me to run; the carrot is the person who sells, who wants to get you in the process "Buy this because you need it." We do not need many of the things we buy… the one who gets you to pay instalments… monthly fixed expenses for TV subscriptions or car accessories […] but I did not pay for the car in cash; I borrowed… it is convenient for the kids and family… as single, you are in a position of power; without pressure into doing things. Then, you do not choose; you are stuck in a corner and do things.*

Self-dehumanization in this pattern may be an attempt to avoid internal attributions of responsibility (e.g., for being unable to afford some goods), and thus a way to moderate negative feelings such as guilt. Also, self-objectification or "becoming animal-like" can provide escapism and allows people to think about themselves as other-than-in-identity (Bettany & Belk, 2011). Thinking of the self as an animal or object helped participants to escape emotionally from an unwanted part of the self. Dehumanization helped participants to adopt a self-distancing perspective which, compared with a self-immersed perspective (Kross et al., 2014), helps observe and accept our own feelings, reflect on painful experiences, and ultimately helps cope with an undesired self. For example, some participants who are experiencing financial difficulties dismissively avoid several consumer goods and dehumanized themselves (Table 6; Mendeley Data). Mark thinks of himself as an ant saving resources and living in a limited way. George thinks of himself as a machine that can explode and needs to release pressure. Adam and Mina think of themselves as hard-working dogs and Luke as a bird with wings cut off. In dehumanization theory, if individuals perceive the values

of an out-group as dissimilar from those of their in-group, then they are likely to deprive the out-group of humanness (Struch & Schwartz, 1989); people dehumanize dissimilar others with whom they do not want to be related (Waytz et al., 2010). Our study found that dehumanization takes place also when individuals perceive parts of the self as unwanted and dissimilar to their values or wants. Also, note how Alec above addressed himself as "you" (*"You are like Bugs Bunny," "you do not choose; you are stuck"*). Participants often addressed themselves in the second rather than first-person, suggesting second-person self-talk (Dolcos & Albarracin, 2014; Kross et al., 2014), which, along with self-dehumanization, facilitated keeping a distance from an unwanted part of the self. This self-distancing perspective in self-dehumanization suggests that thinking of oneself as an animal or object is not an attribution that is truly absorbed into the self-image. This paradox reflects Mead's (1934) "me versus I" discussion, that is, the self as an object versus the self as a subject. Finally, dehumanization in this pattern may have also occurred to self-motivate behavior to change circumstances (and the dismissive consumption avoidance) as some participants (Tina, Alicia, Laura, Debbie, Mark, and Alec) zoomorphized or objectified themselves in discussing their thoughts about finding a job abroad (Table 6; Mendeley Data).

Self–object relationships in the fourth pattern

The dismissive attachments with consumer goods exhibited in participants' self-dehumanization metaphors in the fourth pattern resemble, but are different from, the *"enmities"* consumer–brand relationships identified in earlier studies (Alvarez & Fournier, 2016; Fournier, 1998; Fournier & Alvarez, 2013) that were intense relationships characterized by negative affect and desire to avoid the brand. Our informants' dismissive attachments with consumer goods in this pattern were stimulated by the circumstances (e.g., financial difficulties, that intensified the sense of identity constraints) and would not be dismissive if the circumstances were different (Table 6; Mendeley Data). The circumstances also generated

what Fournier (1998) identified as *"rebounds/avoidance-driven"* relationships, that is, unions precipitated by the desire to move away from a prior or available partner, as opposed to maintaining attraction to a chosen partner per se. These were compromising relationships with consumer goods. For example, Natasha's relationship with the e-books that she illegally downloads (as she feels she cannot afford to buy and to carry abroad hardcopies of books) or Alec's and George's relationship with the movies they watch at home (as they cannot afford to go to the cinema) resonate with *rebounds/avoidance-driven* relationships in Fournier's (1998) study (Tables 6, 7). Our findings on consumers' self-dehumanization metaphors in the fourth pattern reveal how compatible identity goals and a sense of identity constraints stimulated dismissive attachments with consumer goods that link to the experience of self-diminishment in consumption, enriching our understanding of self–object relationships (Table 7).

DISCUSSION

This study explored the variety of relationships consumers have with material goods via participants' spontaneously generated AZD metaphors. The findings illustrated four different patterns that show how consumers' various attachment styles to consumption goods were combined with a range of AZD metaphors, and provided different emotional benefits regarding identity goals (see Table 2 and Figure 1). Thus, this study enriches our understanding of self–object relationships (Ahuvia, 2005; Fournier, 1998; Lastovicka & Sirianni, 2011; Ruvio & Belk, 2018). We discuss the contributions of this study in more detail in the following sections.

Consumer–object relationships

We add to the emerging theory of attachment styles in marketing that has focused on interpersonal attachment styles in consumption contexts, but has neglected consumers' different attachment styles to possessions and consumer goods (David, 2016; Dunn & Hoegg, 2014; Mende et al., 2013; Swaminathan et al., 2009; Thomson et al., 2012; Whelan & Dawar, 2016). As people can exhibit different attachment styles to different figures (La Guardia et al.,

2000), participants had a variety of attachments to their different possessions[4]. Rather than reflecting either positive or negative self-views as previous consumer research suggested for consumers' interpersonal attachment styles, we highlight that consumers' identity goals (compatible or conflicting) are important in the formation of attachment types to possessions and consumer goods.

We also expand consumer research focused on consumer–brand relationships. This stream of research started with Fournier's (1998) paper and has more recently focused on how relationships with brands can be characterized by positive vs. negative affect, strong vs. weak bonds, high vs. low arousal, equal vs. unequal status (e.g., Alvarez & Fournier, 2016; Fournier & Alvarez, 2013). We add to this stream of research, first, by concentrating on relationships with possessions and consumption goods rather than with brands. We found that relationships in Fournier's study (1998, p. 362) that demonstrate high attachment security with brands (*best friendships, committed partnerships, childhood friendships,* and *marriages of convenience)* emerge also for possessions. This is in comparison to *arranged marriages, casual friends, compartmentalized friendships,* and *courtships* that emerge for brands (Fournier, 1998), but have not emerged for possessions in our participants' AZD, possibly because these latter relationships are characterized by lower levels of affective attachment. Our findings provide support for the view that consumers may relate more directly and emotionally to possessions (than to brands) because they may experience possessions as more specific, concrete, and unique (compared to brands) (Lastovicka & Sirianni, 2011; Wallendorf & Arnould, 1988). Second, we add to this stream of consumer research by identifying additional aspects of self–

[4] For example, Kara exhibits secure attachment to her ring (first pattern), preoccupied attachment to her children's teddy bears (second pattern), and fearful attachment to some other possessions like new technological models (third pattern). Joanna experiences secure attachment to her books (first pattern), but preoccupied attachment to the set of dishes that was a gift from her mother (second pattern). Mark exhibits secure attachment with his books and music CD collection (first pattern), but dismissive attachment with some other goods (fourth pattern).

object relationships (growth, support, validation, transference, etc.; Table 7). Third, the study expands consumer research (Ahuvia, 2005; Fournier, 1998; Hoffman & Novak, 2017; Lastovicka & Sirianni, 2011) by identifying not only consumers' different attachment styles to possessions and goods, but also how these attachments link to different identity goals and AZD metaphors (Table 2).

Consumers' identity goals

Our study is a response to calls (Thomson & Johnson, 2006) for exploring how consumers use consumption relationships to achieve goals by demonstrating that consumers form particular relationships with consumption goods and generate AZD metaphors regarding these goods to pursue identity goals. For example, consumers pursued desired selves and self-augmentation and coped with undesired selves through secure attachments to possessions and through AZD metaphors regarding these possessions (first pattern). Consumers tried to cope with undesired selves and with a sense of self-diminishment through dismissive attachments to goods and through self-dehumanization metaphors in consumption (fourth pattern).

The study also extends consumer research by revealing that consumers try to cope, first, with identity conflicts (Ahuvia, 2005; Bahl & Milne, 2010; Karanika & Hogg, 2010; Ruvio & Belk, 2018); second, with the related conflicts and transitions between self-augmentation and self-diminishment in consumption (Hoffman & Novak, 2017); and third, with the associated consumption ambivalence (Otnes et al., 1997; Voice Group, 2010) through spontaneous anthropomorphisms of their possessions (second and third patterns). Specifically, participants' anthropomorphisms of their ambivalent possessions (associated with both positive and negative feelings and identity conflicts) as agents with drawbacks, but mainly worthy of love and linked to desired selves and self-augmentation (second pattern), were attempts to assert consumption decisions, moderate negative feelings in consumption (e.g., guilt), and endure consumption ambivalence related to identity conflicts. This resonates with the coping strategies

of assertiveness, "toughing it out" (Otnes et al., 1997), and endurance (Voice Group, 2010). Informants' anthropomorphisms of their ambivalent possessions as capable of social influence (second pattern) and responsible for actions and situations (third pattern) resonate with the strategy of external locus of control (e.g., Karanika & Hogg, 2016) and helped moderate negative feelings such as guilt in consumption related to identity conflicts.

Our participants anthropomorphized their ambivalent possessions as agents with either positive or negative characteristics (second and third patterns, respectively) in an effort to polarize the source of contradiction (i.e., to focus on either their positive or negative emotions for the object); the goal is to determine which position to adopt toward these possessions and reduce uncertainty and indecisiveness thereof. They use metaphors of anthropomorphism to "mute" contradictions about ambivalent possessions to deal emotionally with their ambivalent feelings.

Hence our findings also address calls to explore the psychological significance of metaphoric thought (Landau et al., 2010). Adding to work that suggests that metaphors can reorganize the perception of situations and can shape the psychological world of the individual (Schlegel et al., 2012), our study reveals consumers' AZD as self-therapeutic metaphors that facilitate coping with unwanted feelings like guilt, embarrassment, and ambivalence within identity conflicts. Consumers' AZD metaphors help them approach desired selves, experience self-augmentation, and cope with undesired selves and with self-diminishment.

The study also expands research that discusses how consumers use magical thinking in positive self–object relationships to facilitate self-augmentation (Belk, 1989; Fernandez & Lastovicka, 2011) by identifying how consumers also use magical thinking in their ambivalent and adverse self–object relationships to not only facilitate self-augmentation, but also cope with self-diminishment in consumption (second, third, and fourth patterns).

AZD metaphors

We also add to theory on the antecedents and effects of anthropomorphism. According to psychological research, anthropomorphism can occur due to loneliness and social affiliation deficits (Epley et al., 2007; 2008). However, we found that consumers' anthropomorphisms occur not only due to loneliness (Nena) and lack of social connection to compensate for interpersonal deficits (Mark, Diana, Patca), but also in relation to secure social affiliations (secure interpersonal attachments; Joanna's second example, Nena, Diana, Julia, and Alice). We also found that anthropomorphism of possessions can be used to protect interpersonal relationships (Vivian and Fofika) from attribution of responsibility or blame, expanding our understanding of person–object–other relationships (Ahuvia, 2005).

We also answer calls for research to examine how anthropomorphism affects negative emotions like guilt in consumption (Hur et al., 2015). Our findings demonstrate that anthropomorphism can moderate guilt in consumption directly through the explicit delegation of responsibility to the product that is seen as responsible for the situation (third pattern) [this is in contrast to Hur et al.'s (2015) predictions]. Anthropomorphism can also alleviate negative feelings such as guilt in consumption indirectly, not only through implicit delegation of responsibility to products that are seen as capable of social influence (second pattern, Hur et al., 2015), but also by helping reason that possessions are worthy of love and care (second pattern).

Previous consumer research induced anthropomorphism and suggested that low-power individuals perceive anthropomorphized objects or time to be riskier and more aversive (Kim & McGill, 2011; May & Monga, 2014) and that consumers with lower financial status may be less willing to anthropomorphize products as they do not expect good treatment from the companies' agents (i.e., the products) (Kim & Mcgill, 2018). In contrast to these suggestions, our study found that consumers who are experiencing financial difficulties and may feel they are low in power also anthropomorphize their possessions (first, second, and third patterns), as

anthropomorphism offers emotional benefits (like reducing guilt in consumption; second and third patterns) and they often experience their anthropomorphized possessions as desirable and not aversive (first pattern: Bill, Christopher, Mark, and Diana; second pattern: Anita, Dennis, Nancy, and Simon).

We also add to previous consumer research that initially presented a positive framing of self-zoomorphism/animalistic self-dehumanization (i.e., attribution of positive animal traits to the self) (Healy & Beverland, 2013; Woodside, 2008) by identifying how consumers may engage in a less positive framing of self-zoomorphism/animalistic self-dehumanization that nevertheless helps cope with an undesired self (fourth pattern). We also identified that, even though self-zoomorphism in extreme practices (like self-transformation as furry animals) can create tensions due to perceptions of stigma and desire for mainstream acceptance (Healy & Beverland, 2016), ordinary consumers engage in anthropomorphism of possessions to cope with identity tensions (second and third patterns).

Financial conditions and consumer–object relationships

Our findings respond to Hoffman and Novak's (2017) call for research to examine what triggers transitions between types of experience (self-augmentation and self-diminishment) with possessions. In some cases in the third pattern (Eric, Georgia, Vivian, and John; Table 5), participants' experiences with possessions (that were acquired with credit and required resources to operate and maintain) changed from self-expansion to self-reduction—a transition that was triggered by downward mobility and the experience of financial difficulties. However, note that all four patterns characterized experiences with possessions before and during the recession. For example, participants formed secure attachments to and anthropomorphized possessions not only before the recession, but also during the recession (first pattern). Secure attachments to possessions during the recession related to inexpensive possessions that either helped consumers cope financially, such as making their own DIY furniture (Christopher), or

helped them cope emotionally, such as music and books (Bill, Mark, and John). Similarly, as previous research with non-recessionary consumers demonstrates (Ahuvia, 2005; Otnes et al., 1997; Voice Group, 2010), participants felt ambivalent towards some of their possessions not only during the recession, but also before the recession (second and third patterns). The types of possessions consumers value or feel ambivalent towards may change during a recession, but consumers form various attachments (secure, preoccupied, fearful, and dismissive) with possessions before and during recessions.

Future research directions and marketing implications

Future research with more longitudinal data could explore the trajectories of consumers' relationships with specific possessions when economic conditions change. Research can also explore how these findings resonate in different settings—for example with more affluent consumers. Future research can also explore how consumers' spontaneous AZD metaphors are influenced by marketers' AZD in product design, branding, and marketing. For example, Zoi in our study thinks of her car as a lion, but her car is a Peugeot car, which has the logo of a lion. Dennis in our study anthropomorphizes his perfume (The One by Dolce & Gabbana) as a successful, sociable young man with a satisfying personal and professional life and he may have been influenced by relevant advertisements for this product. Future research can explore when and to what extent consumers' AZD are influenced by marketers' AZD.

Finally, our study can enhance understanding of consumers' experiences with anthropomorphic and zoomorphic marketing and can suggest directions for better designing products, brands, and advertising campaigns. Marketers can consider how AZD metaphors can help consumers feel closer to their desired selves and more distant from their undesired selves (all patterns) and use this understanding in their communication and branding strategies. Uncomfortable feelings of guilt, embarrassment, or ambivalence are central to consumers' experiences. Marketing managers can assist consumers to navigate such feelings by facilitating

consumers' magical thinking and metaphoric coping through assisting consumers' anthropomorphism through product designs, product descriptions (using lifelike descriptors), and advertising copy. For example, marketers can facilitate consumers' coping with ambivalence about a product by facilitating their anthropomorphizing the product as an agent with needs and drawbacks, but which mainly enriches and augments the self and is worthy of love (second pattern). Or managers for social marketing campaigns can consider that anthropomorphizing tempting, but harmful products (alcohol, cigarettes, drugs) even as agents that impoverish and diminish the self runs the risk of diluting consumers' internal attribution of responsibility and self-control (third pattern).

References

Aron, A., Aron, E.N.,& Smollan, D.(1992). Inclusion of other in the self-scale & the structure of interpersonal closeness. *Journal of personality & social psychology*, 63(4), 596

Askegaard, S., & Linnet, J.T. (2011), "Towards an epistemology of consumer culture theory Phenomenology and the context of context", *Marketing Theory*, 11(4), pp. 381-404

Aggarwal, P., & McGill, A.L. (2007). Is that car smiling at me? Schema congruity as a basis for evaluating anthropomorphized products. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 34/4, 468-79

Aggarwal, P., & McGill, A.L. (2012). When brands seem human, do humans act like brands? *Journal of Consumer Research*, 39(2), 307-323

Ahuvia, A.C. (2005). Beyond the extended self: Loved objects and consumers' identity narratives. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 32(1), 171-184

Ainsworth, M.S. (1979). Infant–mother attachment. *American psychologist*, 34(10), 932.

Alvarez, C., & Fournier, S. (2016). Consumers' relationships with brands. *Current Opinion in Psychology*, 10, 129-135

Arnould, E.J., & Price, L.L. (1993). River magic: Extraordinary experience and the extended service encounter. *Journal of Consumer Research*, *20*(1), 24-45

Arnould, E.J., Price, L.L., & Otnes, C. (1999). MAKING MAGIC CONSUMPTION. *Journal of contemporary ethnography*, *28*(1), 33-68

Arsel, Z., Stewart, S. (2015). *Identity degrading brands. Strong Brands, Strong Relationships*

Bahl, S., & Milne, G.R. (2010). Talking to ourselves: a dialogical exploration of consumption experiences. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 37(1), 176-195

Bartholomew, K., & Horowitz, L.M. (1991). Attachment styles among young adults. *Journal of personality and social psychology*, 61(2), 226

Bastian, B., & Haslam, N. (2010). Excluded from humanity: The dehumanizing effects of social ostracism. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, 46(1), 107-113

Belk, R. (1988). Possessions & the extended self. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 15(2), 139

Belk, R.W., Wallendorf, M., & Sherry Jr, J.F. (1989). The sacred and the profane in consumer behavior: Theodicy on the odyssey. *Journal of consumer research*, *16*(1), 1-38

Bettany, S., & Belk, R.W. (2011). Disney discourses of self & other: Animality, primitivity, modernity, and postmodernity. *Consumption Markets & Culture*, 14(2), 163-176

Bowlby, J. (1969). *Attachment and Loss: Attachment. V*. Basic Books

Chandler, J., & Schwarz, N. (2010). Thinking of objects as alive makes people less willing to replace them. *Journal of Consumer Psychology*, 20(2), 138-145

Chen, R.P., Wan, E.W., & Levy, E. (2017). The effect of social exclusion on consumer preference for anthropomorphized brands. *Journal of Consumer Psychology*, 27(1), 23-34

Connell, P.M., & Schau, H.J. (2013). Self-expansion and self-extension as distinct strategies. *The Routledge companion to identity and consumption*, 21

David, M.E.(2016).The role of attachment style in shaping consumer preferences for products shown in advertisements that depict consensus claims. *Journal of Advertising*, 45(2), 227

Delbaere, M., McQuarrie, E.F., & Phillips, B.J. (2011). Personification in advertising. *Journal of Advertising*, 40(1), 121-130

Dolcos, S., & Albarracin, D. (2014). The inner speech of behavioral regulation: Intentions and task performance strengthen when you talk to yourself as a you. *European Journal of Social Psychology*, 44(6), 636-642

Dunn, L., & Hoegg, J. (2014). The impact of fear on emotional brand attachment. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 41(1), 152-168

Epley, N., Waytz, A., Akalis, S., & Cacioppo, J.T. (2008). When we need a human: Motivational determinants of anthropomorphism. *Social Cognition*, 26(2), 143-155

Epley, N., Waytz, A., & Cacioppo, J.T. (2007). On seeing human: a three-factor theory of anthropomorphism. *Psychological review*, 114(4), 864

Epp, A.M., & Price, L.L. (2010). The storied life of singularized objects: Forces of agency and network transformation. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 36(5), 820-837
Eurostat (2015), "Living standard statistics", http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Living_standard_statistics&oldid=288334 (last accessed 13/09/19)
Fernandez, K.V.,& Lastovicka, J.L. (2011). Making magic: Fetishes in contemporary consumption. *Journal of Consumer Research*, *38*(2), 278-299
Fernandez, K.V., Veer, E.,& Lastovicka, J.L. (2007). Auspiciousness: Coping with kratophany. *NA-Advances in Consumer Research Volume 34*
Fournier, S. (1998). Consumers and their brands: Developing relationship theory in consumer research. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 24(4), 343-353
Fournier, S., & Alvarez, C. (2013). Relating badly to brands. *Journal of Consumer Psychology*, 23(2), 253-264
Georgas, J. (1989), "Changing family values in Greece from collectivist to individualist", *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology*, 20(1), 80-91
Hazan, C., & Shaver, P.R. (1994). Attachment as an organizational framework for research on close relationships. *Psychological inquiry*, 5(1), 1-22
Healy, M.J., & Beverland, M.B. (2013). Unleashing the animal within: Exploring consumers' zoomorphic identity motives. *Journal of Marketing Management*, 29(1-2), 225
Healy, M.J., & Beverland, M.B. (2016). Being sub-culturally authentic and acceptable to the mainstream. *Journal of Business Research*, 69(1), 224-233
Hirschman, E.C., & Holbrook, M.B. (1982). Hedonic consumption. *Journal of Marketing*, 46(3), 92–101
Hogg, M.K., Banister, E.N., & Stephenson, C.A. (2009). Mapping symbolic (anti-) consumption. *Journal of Business Research*, 62(2), 148-159
Hoffman, D.L. &Novak, T.P. (2017). Consumer & object experience in the internet of things: An assemblage theory approach. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 44(6), 1178-1204
Hur, J.D., Koo, M., & Hofmann, W. (2015). When temptations come alive: How anthropomorphism undermines self-control. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 42/2, 340-58
James, Y., Handelman, J.M., & Taylor, S.F. (2011). Magical thinking and consumer coping. *Journal of Consumer Research*, *38*(4), 632-649
Karanika, K., & Hogg, M.K. (2010). The interrelationship between desired and undesired selves and consumption. *Journal of Marketing Management*, 26(11-12), 1091-1111
Karanika, K., & Hogg, M.K. (2016). Consumption through the ambivalent prism of intergenerational support. *European Journal of Marketing*, 50(3/4), 575 - 601
Keefer, L.A., Landau, M.J., Sullivan, D., & Rothschild, Z.K. (2011). Exploring metaphor's epistemic function. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, 47(3), 657-660.
Kim, S., Chen, R.P., & Zhang, K. (2016). Anthropomorphized helpers undermine autonomy and enjoyment in computer games. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 43(2), 282-302
Kim, H.C., & Kramer, T. (2015). Do Materialists Prefer the "Brand-as-Servant"?. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 42(2), 284-299
Kim, S., & McGill, A.L. (2011). Gaming with Mr. Slot or gaming the slot machine? Power, anthropomorphism, and risk perception. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 38(1), 94-107
Kim, H.Y., & Mcgill, A.L. (2018). Minions for the Rich? Financial Status Changes How Consumers See Products with Anthropomorphic Features. *Journal of Consumer Research*
Kniazeva, M., & Belk, R.W. (2010). If this brand were a person, or anthropomorphism of brands through packaging stories. *Journal of Global Academy of Marketing*, 20(3), 231-8
Kouremenos, A. & Avlonitis, G.J. (1995), "The changing consumer in Greece", *International Journal of Research in Marketing*, Vol. 12 No. 5, pp. 435-448

Kross, E., Bruehlman, E., Park, J., Burson, A., Dougherty, A., Shablack, H., Ayduk, O. (2014).Self-talk as a regulatory mechanism. *J of personality & social psychology*, 106/2
Kvale, S. (1983). The qualitative research interview: A phenomenological & a hermeneutical mode of understanding. *Journal of Phenomenological Psychology*, 14(2), 171
La Guardia, J.G., Ryan, R.M., Couchman, C.E., & Deci, E.L. (2000). Within-person variation in security of attachment. *Journal of Personality & Social Psychology*, 79(3), 367
Lakoff, G., & Johnson, M. (1980). The metaphorical structure of the human conceptual system. *Cognitive science*, 4(2), 195-208
Landau, M.J., Meier, B.P., & Keefer, L.A. (2010). A metaphor-enriched social cognition. *Psychological bulletin*, 136(6), 1045
Landwehr, J.R., McGill, A.L., Herrmann, A.(2011). It's got the look: The effect of friendly & aggressive 'facial' expressions on product liking & sales. *Journal of Marketing*, 75/3, 132
Lastovicka, J.L., & Sirianni, N.J. (2011). Truly, madly, deeply: Consumers in the throes of material possession love. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 38(2), 323-342
MacInnis, D.J., & Folkes, V.S. (2017). Humanizing brands: When brands seem to be like me, part of me, and in a relationship with me. *Journal of Consumer Psychology*, 27(3), 355-74
Markus, H., & Nurius, P. (1986). Possible selves. *American Psychologist*, 41(9), 954
May, F., & Monga, A. (2014). When Time Has a Will of Its Own, the Powerless Don't Have the Will to Wait. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 40(5), 924-942
Mead, G.H. (1934). Mind, self and society (Vol. 111). University of Chicago Press.: Chicago.
Mende, M., Bolton, R.N., & Bitner, M.J. (2013). Decoding customer-firm relationships. *Journal of Marketing Research*, 50(1), 125
Merten, D., & Schwartz, G. (1982). Metaphor and self: Symbolic process in everyday life. *American Anthropologist*, 84(4), 796-810.
Miles, M.B., & Huberman, A.M. (1994). *Qualitative data analysis*. Sage
Otnes, C., Lowrey, T.M., & Shrum, L.J. (1997). Toward an understanding of consumer ambivalence. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 24(1), 80-93
Park, C.W. (2013). From brand aversion or indifference to brand attachment. *Journal of Consumer Psychology*, 23(2), 269-274.
Puzakova, M., Kwak, H., & Rocereto, J.F. (2013). When humanizing brands goes wrong. *Journal of Marketing*, 77(3), 81-100.
Rauschnabel, P.A., & Ahuvia, A.C. (2014). You're so lovable: Anthropomorphism and brand love. *Journal of Brand Management*, 21(5), 372-395
Ruvio, A., & Belk, R. (2018). Strategies of the extended self: The role of possessions in transpeople's conflicted selves. *Journal of Business Research*, 88, 102-110
Schlegel, R.J., Vess, M., & Arndt, J. (2012). To discover or to create: Metaphors and the true self. *Journal of Personality*, 80(4), 969-993
Stewart, C. (2014), "Colonizing the Greek Mind?", *The Reception of Western Psychotherapeutics in Greece*, 33(1)
Struch, N., & Schwartz, S.H. (1989). Intergroup aggression: its predictors and distinctness from in-group bias. *Journal of personality and social psychology*, 56(3), 364
Swaminathan, V., Stilley, K.M., & Ahluwalia, R. (2009). When brand personality matters: The moderating role of attachment styles. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 35/6, 985-1002
Thompson, C.J., Locander, W.B., & Pollio, H.R. (1989). The philosophy and method of existential-phenomenology. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 16(2), 133-146
Thompson, C.J., Locander, W.B., & Pollio, H.R. (1990). The lived meaning of free choice: an existential-phenomenological description of everyday consumer experiences of contemporary married women. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 346-361
Thomson, M., & Johnson, A.R. (2006). Investigating the differential effects of attachment style across relationship contexts. *Psychology & Marketing*, 23(8), 711-726

Thomson, M., Whelan, J., Johnson, A.R. (2012). Why brands should fear fearful consumers: how attachment style predicts retaliation. *Journal of Consumer Psychology*, 22(2), 289-98
Tosey, P., Lawley, J., & Meese, R. (2014). Eliciting metaphor through clean language: an innovation in qualitative research. *British Journal of Management*, 25(3), 629-646
VOICE group. (2010). Buying into motherhood? Problematic consumption and ambivalence in transitional phases. *Consumption, Markets and Culture*, 13(4), 373-397
Wallendorf, M., & Arnould, E.J. (1988). "My favorite things": A cross-cultural inquiry into object attachment, possessiveness, & social linkage. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 14(4), 531-547
Waytz, A., Cacioppo, J., & Epley, N. (2010). Who sees human? *Perspectives on Psychological Science*, 5(3), 219-232
Whelan, J., & Dawar, N. (2016). Attributions of blame following a product-harm crisis depend on consumers' attachment styles. *Marketing Letters*, 27(2), 285-294
Woodside, A.G. (2008). Using the forced metaphor-elicitation technique (FMET) to meet animal companions within self. *Journal of Business Research*, 61(5), 480-487
Yang, W., Jin, S., He, S., Fan, Q., & Zhu, Y. (2015). The impact of power on humanity: self-dehumanization in powerlessness. *PloS one*, 10(5), e0125721
Zaltman, G., & Zaltman, L.H. (2008). *Marketing metaphoria: What deep metaphors reveal about the minds of consumers*. Harvard Business Press

Figure 1

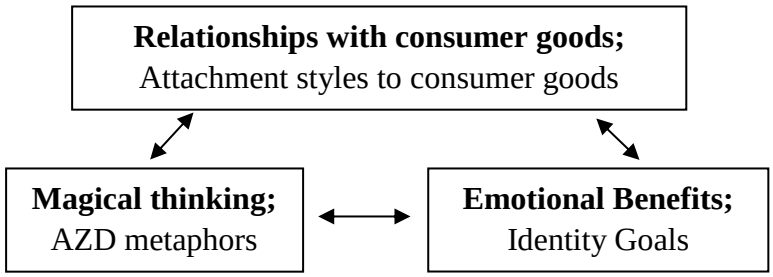

Table 2: Results' summary

	Compatible identity goals [5]	***Conflicting identity goals*** [6]
Positive views of consumer goods	**First pattern** – **secure** attachments to goods AZD → help approach or feel closer to desired selves and cope with undesired selves → facilitate self-augmentation	**Second pattern** – **preoccupied** attachments to goods Anthropomorphism → ▪ Strengthens the association of the possession with desired selves & with self-augmentation ▪ Reappraises possessions (seen as worthy of love and care), thus justifying consumption ▪ Implicit delegation of responsibility to possessions seen as exerting influence → moderates guilt, doubts, ambivalence → helps cope with identity conflict and with conflicts between self-augmentation and self-reduction in consumption
Negative views of consumer goods	**Fourth pattern** – **dismissive** attachments to goods Self-dehumanization → helps escape and keep emotional distance from undesired self → helps cope with self-diminishment in consumption	**Third pattern** – **fearful** attachments to goods Anthropomorphism → goods as accountable; explicit responsibility delegation moderates guilt → helps cope with (transition from self-expansion to) self-reduction in consumption

[5] Pursuit of a desired self means avoidance of an undesired self and vice versa. Also, pursuit of self-augmentation in consumption means avoidance of self-diminishment and vice versa.

[6] Identity conflicts; pursuit of a desired self and avoidance of an undesired self requires acceptance of another undesired self and abandonment of another desired self. For example, pursuit of the desired self as 'a caring parent' meant for some participants acceptance of the undesired self 'not able to afford particular personal luxuries'. Also, conflicts between self-augmentation and self-diminishment; self-augmentation in consumption facilitates also self-diminishment.

Table 7: Self–object relationships

		Support	***Growth***	***Validation***	***Transference***	***Codependent***	***Bitter-sweet***	***Dominating***	***Toxic***	***Compromise***
Compatible identity goals/ secure attachment	*Convenience marriage*	+		+						
	Committed partnership	+	+	+						
	Best friend	+	+	+						
	Childhood friend	+			+					
Conflicting identity goals/ preoccupied attachment	*Dependency*	+	+	+	+	+	+			+
	Secret affair				+					+
	Kinship				+					+
Conflicting identity goals- fearful attachment	*Enslavement*							+	+	+
Compatible identity goals/ dismissive attachment	*Avoidance driven*									+
	Enmity									+
	*****									

***** Relationships with brands in previous studies; Alvarez & Fournier, 2016; Fournier 1998; Fournier & Alvarez, 2013