Creating Sustainable Identities: The Significance of the Financially Affluent Self

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ABSTRACT

This paper uses identity theory and postmodern identity perspectives to analyse why high-income groups often have values, attitudes and intentions to consume sustainably, yet tend to have the highest energy consumption of any group. Two key arguments are presented. The first is that the affluent identity is opposed to the environmentalist identity and is more salient, desirable and likely to result in more social support and self-esteem rewards. Therefore, where both identities are held the affluent identity is likely to be more dominant and invoked in more circumstances. Second, the invocation of the affluent identity is liable to result in high-energy consumption. Despite some evidence of affluent identities being successfully connected by marketing with low-energy 'green' consumption, there is stronger evidence of the affluent identity being consistently embedded symbolically within high-energy consumption choices. Recommendations for marketing and social marketing are made and a matrix to guide sustainable identity strategies is proposed. Copyright © 2010 John Wiley & Sons, Ltd and ERP Environment.

Introduction

THE LINKS BETWEEN 'GREEN CONSUMPTION' AND MONETARILY AFFLUENT LIFESTYLES APPEAR TO HAVE INCREASED IN recent years. Fashion magazines *Vogue* and *Tatler* have published environmental special issues, websites such as greenaffluentlifestyles.com and greenchic.com are being created and the universal price premium of organic food and renewable energy has led many to conclude that sustainable consumption is primarily for the rich. These heuristic conclusions also appear to be backed up by empirical research, which shows that the wealthy are often most likely to engage in pro-environmental behaviours such as recycling and buying organic food, and can be the most willing to change their behaviour (Hines *et al.*, 1987; Davies *et al.*, 1995; Schultz *et al.*, 1995; Diekman and Franzen, 1999; Bentley, 2000; DEFRA, 2007) Furthermore, the wealthy often demonstrate strong environmental concern and environmental values (Arcury and Christianson, 1990). However, despite these examples, there is even stronger evidence that the connections between affluence and environmental behaviour are not enough to dictate the overall sustainability of affluent lifestyles.

Energy consumption is seen as a good proxy for overall sustainability (Gatersleben *et al.*, 2002; Goldblatt, 2005) and high-income individuals are consistently shown to display higher energy footprints than any other group (Hurth and Wells, 2007). This correlation has been found to be strong for direct energy use in the home (gas,

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electricity and other fuels) as well as transport and indirectly through resources and energy required to produce products and services (see, e.g., Burney, 1995; Vringer and Blok, 1995; Schipper *et al.*, 1997; Lutzenhiser and Hackett, 1993; OECD, 2002; IEA, 2004; Pachauri, 2004; Cohen *et al.*, 2005; Moll *et al.*, 2005; Lenzen *et al.*, 2006). The correlation is so strong that a call was recently made for individual rather than national income to form the basis of international carbon reduction targets (Chakravarty *et al.*, 2009). Therefore, on the one hand affluent people in western societies are shown to be very willing to act environmentally, and engage in green consumption, but actually the overall impact of their lifestyle is often larger than that of people of lower incomes who can express little concern about the environment. The disconnect between people's values, attitudes or intentions and their actual behaviour is a well known phenomenon often called the 'value–action gap', 'attitude-action gap' or 'intention-action gap' (Olsen, 1981; Kollmus and Agyman, 2002; Young *et al.*, 2009). The value–action gap is explored in relation to the eco-clothing industry in Niinimäki's paper in this issue. The evidence that the gap is particularly large in the case of the high-income groups and their 'environmentally friendly' consumption is also known (Darnton, 2004).

However, there has been little interrogation into what structures the strong relationship between income and energy. If environmental values, attitudes, knowledge and intentions to act are not enough to overcome the tendency to increase energy use as one's income rises, then other significant factors must be shaping energy consumption. Sustainable consumption research has tended to focus on the agency factors that drive consumption, including values, attitudes, knowledge and intentions. However, as highlighted in Soron's article in this issue, many now recognize that a more fruitful line of enquiry may be through socially embedded approaches to sustainable consumption, which recognize the intricate relationship between individual agency and the social and cultural contexts in which they are situated (Ropke, 1999; Wilk, 2002; Jackson, 2004). It is in this context that the influence of self-concept or 'identity', as a key means by which agency and structure are mediated (Giddens, 1991; Stryker and Burke, 2000), is highlighted as a critical, yet often overlooked, avenue of analysis for sustainable consumption research (Clayton and Opotow, 2003; Jackson, 2005).

Identity or self-concept has been diversely interpreted across a number of disciplines (Gleason, 1983; Stryker and Burke, 2000), and therefore there is still limited consensus about the term (Clayton and Opotow, 2003). However, Sirgy (1982) suggested that a common definition is the 'totality of the individual's thoughts and feelings having reference to himself as an object' (Rosenberg, 1979, p. 7). The approach used in this paper will draw specifically from 'identity theory' and postmodern theories of the relationship between consumption and identity. Both approaches emphasize the socially constructed nature of identity and the critical role of symbolic meaning. According to these approaches, and variously drawing from Mead's work on symbolic interactionism, a person's identity is structurally shaped and reinforced by shared meaning that is derived from symbolic meaning in social and cultural interaction. For postmodern theorists, consumption has come to play a central role as the primary conveyor of meaning through which our identities are negotiated (Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton, 1981; Beck, 1992; Featherstone, 1991; Giddens, 1991).

Analysis of the various facets of identity present important insights into why affluent groups have energy heavy patterns of consumption despite the common existence of a range of motivations to consume in a sustainable way. For the purposes of this paper, two aspects will be explored in detail. First, the multiple and hierarchical nature of identities that an individual can hold, which is a central feature of identity theory, will be highlighted. The paper will argue that, although people may have both affluent and environmentalist identities, the nature of the affluent identity, specifically its social salience, desirability and self-esteem rewards, means that it is likely to hierarchically dominate the environmentalist identity. Furthermore, the value-based differences between the identities mean that the two identities are likely to be highly contradictory and therefore may threaten each other.

Second, the postmodern emphasis on the foundational role of consumption highlights how recurrent invocation of affluent identities, in connection with certain types of consumption, might provide a primary structure for energy heavy consumption. This is because evidence suggests that the affluent identity is consistently embedded in energy heavy products, particularly those products with high identity signalling properties and high energy significance such as cars, holidays, homes and food. In contrast, although there are examples of low energy alternatives that are embedded with the affluent identity, in the main these continue to be embedded with a less socially desirable environmentalist identity, with little or no reference to the affluent identity. Additionally, these 'eco-chic' products do not have the market presence, and therefore the social salience, of the energy heavy alternatives.

Therefore, although green may now be associated in some ways with affluence, the narrative of what constitutes possession of an affluent identity continues to be one of energy heavy consumption.

This analysis leads to a number of practical recommendations for use in marketing and social marketing, which are key ways in which symbolic meaning is reproduced and manufactured. It is hoped that, if utilized, these recommendations may reduce the barriers to sustainable consumption for a large proportion of the population who hold an affluent or ideal affluent identity.

The Social and Personal Dominance of the Affluent Identity

From an identity theory perspective, the self is a reflection of society, and both are viewed as multifaceted and complex yet patterned, and with an inclination to reproduce themselves (Hogg *et al.*, 1995). More specifically, the self is organized into differentiated, multiple and sometimes contradictory identities. Using James's work (1890), identity theory posits that, as people interact in a range of groups, people will hold as many different identities as there are distinct groups of significance to them. Hogg *et al.* (1995, p. 256) summarize these identities as 'self-conceptions, self-reference cognitions, or self-definitions that people apply to themselves as a consequence of the structural role positions they occupy, and through a process of labelling or self-definitions as a member of a particular social category'. Significantly, these identities are not equal. Identities are organized hierarchically in one's self-concept. The ultimate aim of ordering and patterning is to maintain a sense of self-congruence, a goal facilitated by long term themes and short term life projects (Mick and Buhl, 1992). Those identities towards the top of the hierarchy are more likely and more often invoked in situations to guide action to achieve self-congruence, and therefore are more self-defining than others towards the bottom of the hierarchy (Hogg *et al.*, 1995).

Because, it is argued, someone will hold a range of enduring yet dynamic identities, these identities vie for position and are consequently 'potential competitors in producing behavioural choices' (Stryker, 2000, p. 21). Different situations will invoke different behaviours depending on which identity is most salient in that situation. How high up the hierarchy an identity is in general (and therefore how often it guides behaviour overall) depends on the commitment to the identity as part of the long term ideal self. According to McCall and Simmons (1978), relative position depends on the support given by the person and others who affirm an identity through social interaction, how much someone has committed or invested in it and the internal and external gratification associated with it. Related to this, a primary function of identity is to maintain self-esteem, which is monitored reflexively by interpretation of self, through the outcomes of interaction with others (Sirgy, 1982).

As forms of commonly held identities are personally subjective and socially and culturally structured, it is impossible to classify one version of any one identity. However, in terms of what an 'affluent identity' might mean, certain generalizations can be drawn about the key features or stereotypes of what it means to be 'affluent' or a 'relatively wealthy person' in a given setting. These stereotypes are significant because the heuristic measures by which people judge others are likely to be the same ones that they use to create their own self-perception (Bem, 1972). This leads to what is known as self-stereotyping, where people perceive themselves in line with the stereotypes of a group and behave in line with salient attributes of that group (Biernat *et al.*, 1996).

Research indicates that the affluent identity is extremely salient, elicits wide support from general society and is consequently connected with high levels of gratification and self-esteem. Hirschman (1990) concludes that society tends to link affluence to positive notions of success and entrepreneurial achievement. Similarly, Dittmar and Pepper, in their 1994 study of the impact of material wealth on perceived identities, specifically isolate wealth as being synonymous with intelligence, hard work, success and having a desirable lifestyle. Furthermore, Dittmar believes that the affluence is strongly connected to commonly held notions of the 'good life' (Dittmar, 2008). Similarly, Darnton (2004) points out that 'quality of life' is often interpreted as meaning 'level of financial wealth'.

Empirical studies have shown that people distinctly connect financial wealth to attractive personality characteristics such as individuality and uniqueness (Furby, 1980), higher worth or value as a person (Marshall, 1982; Poggi, 1983), greater societal contribution (Eisenstadt, 1968; Robertson, 1935) and sexual prowess (Low, 2000). One study showed that, although not all affluent identity traits are positive, those people displaying affluence had the consistent and pronounced result of being perceived as successful, sophisticated and displaying a lifestyle that was both attractive and desired (Christopher and Schlenker, 2000). Of high significance to sustainable consumption,

affluence is often linked, via technical and scientific prowess, to the ability (and duty) to control the environment (Hirschman, 1990; Dittmar *et al.* 1989) and the capacity to be wasteful (Veblen, 1899). Furby (1980) concludes that direct control of the physical environment is a key attribute of wealth.

Under definitions of role identities used by identity theory, it is possible to describe the affluent identity as more of a social attribute, similar to gender or race, than a role (Hogg *et al.*, 1995), thereby exerting only an indirect effect on identity (Stryker and Serpe, 1982), for example through the function wealth plays in enabling the consumption practices necessary for maintaining congruence of other identities. However, for many, especially those with strong commitment to being affluent, it is likely to exert an independent role as an identity, because, as described above, the notion of being 'an affluent person' goes beyond the application of that wealth and directly influences affective and self-esteem outcomes. The likelihood of affluence operating as a distinct identity is reinforced by the fact that many companies specifically target the affluent identity. The example of affluent supermarket food brands will be discussed later. Although affluence can be considered a distinct identity, the identity is difficult to separate from a relative 'high-status identity' because of the intricate connection between affluence and its role in structuring and signifying social status (Beck, 1992; Bourdieu, 1984; Hirschman, 1990).

In contrast to the salient and desirable affluent identity, which is linked to dominance of nature and technological mastery, the environmentalist identity is stereotypically linked to affective qualities, which subject humans to nature and tend to reject technological advances. It is also related to a rejection of wealth, 'hard work' (in the productivist sense) and traditional consumptive notions of 'the good life'. Influenced by historical and publicly held representations of environmentalists, these salient aspects of environmentalist identities are often viewed negatively (Ger *et al.*, 1999). These differences indicate a fundamental value and ideological divide between the affluent and environmentalist identities. Such a divide may mean that the affluent identity is threatened by the environmentalist identity, or vice versa, resulting in avoidance or negative stereotyping (Breakwell, 1986).

A recent article in a prominent British broadsheet newspaper about the Green Party describes one important culturally held stereotypical view of environmentalists: the author talks of the 'tendency to wallow in hairshirt dreariness. Its willingness to blame the planet's woes on humanity borders on self-loathing. Some members revel in demanding a constrained human existence – rather in the manner of Opus Dei carrying out self-flagellation. They give the impression that if some technological breakthrough were found that stopped global warming and meant we could all carry on consuming with cheerful abandon, they would be nonplussed' (Phibbs, 2008, p. 1). Supporting social identity theory, which outlines the tendency to reject or avoid 'out-groups' (Tajfel, 1984), evidence of the negative view of 'environmentalists' was outlined in a study by Barr, where a focus group participant stated 'I feel really dodgy saying you're an environmentalist, sort of like you're Swampy and his mates' (Barr *et al.*, 2006, p. 8). Swampy was a dreadlocked anti-road activist who rose to fame and commonly represented the environmentalist identity.

From an identity theory perspective, the salience of the affluent identity in society, and the social rewards it brings compared with the environmentalist identity, will mean that for those who hold both identities, the affluent identity is likely to dominate in a majority of situations. The affluent identity is also likely to dominate the overall 'ideal self', unless there is a very strong commitment to the environmentalist identity: for example, those who fall into the category of 'ethical hardliners' referred to by Niinimäki in this issue. For those who do not yet hold an environmentalist identity, there are significant identity barriers to overcome in order to reconcile holding the two identities simultaneously.

Affluence and Energy Heavy Consumption

The propensity for the affluent identity to dominate in most situations where both the affluent and environmentalist identity are held is significant to sustainable consumption. This is because affluent identities do not merely derive from the possession of money, but must be actualized. According to postmodern theory, consumption is the key means for this actualization, replacing production as the main way in which identities are negotiated (Featherstone, 1991).

Consumption in the broadest sense can include all changes to material and energy (Stern *et al.*, 1997) and can also include non-material consumption, such as visual consumption (Schroeder, 2002). However, consumption's

realm of significance extends beyond the physical to the 'complex sphere of social relations and discourses' that surround it (Mansvelt, 2005, p. 6). Of concern here is how consumption of all kinds ultimately impacts on energy use and therefore sustainability.

Consumption has long been recognized as a purveyor of symbolic meaning, and people are known to have negotiated aspects of identity through the consumption of symbolic aspects of goods and services since early society (Douglas and Isherwood, 1979; Miller, 1995). However, in contemporary 'Western' society the role of symbolically loaded consumption in identity construction and maintenance has become heightened (Featherstone, 1991; Giddens, 1991; Beck, 1992), as has as the 'need' for identity itself (Max-Neef, 1991). The increased importance of consumption to identity has been attributed to the breakdown of traditional forms of social structure (Beck, 1992), the proliferation of consumption choice (Bocock, 1993; Slater, 1999), the heightened activity of marketing and advertising (Baudrillard, 1998) and increased disposable incomes (Ransome, 2005). Empirical evidence of this has been found in studies that show, sometimes against expectations, that identity is an independent predictor of consumer behaviour (Sparks and Shepherd, 1992; Hagger and Chatzisarantis, 2006).

For those who have an actual or ideal affluent identity, not only is the identity likely to provide a dominant force on consumption choice, but those with corresponding financial means will be able to widely engage in consumption as an identity tool. These factors, combined with the large number of people who are likely to hold the affluent identity in some form, means that the types of consumption with which the affluent identity is symbolically associated are of high environmental consequence.

There are media claims that affluence and environmentalism have now been successfully connected within low energy consumption. Some claim that 'green is the new black' (Carrell and Lean, 2006; Carter, 2006) and is highly fashionable with the wealthy.

Given the fundamental differences that currently exist between the affluent and environmentalist identities, as outlined earlier, it is important to question exactly how prevalent or significant these eco-chic goods are in improving the sustainability of the affluent identity. Furthermore, how well are they providing a means for the values underpinning the affluent identity to become more aligned with environmentalist values that can maintain a deep and long-term change to resource use? The continued strong symbolic connection between the affluent identity and energy heavy goods suggests that eco-chic may in fact still be a superficial advance, which has not substantially altered the income–energy relationship. At the same time, most relatively low energy products continue to be embedded with the contrasting and less desirable environmentalist identity, without any reference to the affluent identity. Therefore, the divide between the identities would appear to persist.

For example, the environmentalist identity is now strongly used by Toyota, who have one of the best average carbon dioxide emissions per kilometre at 129.15 grams. Recent adverts for its Prius hybrid car, which emits 104 grams per kilometre, utilized visual and verbal references to nature and conservation. Although the Pruis has gained affluent association 'in use' through celebrity adoption of it, the affluent identity is still most strongly connected with cars such as Jaguar, where adverts are based on promoting sexual prowess and status, for example in its 'gorgeous' adverts. Jaguar's average emissions are 200.3 grams and its recent Car of the Year 2008 has emissions between 199 and 264 grams of carbon dioxide per kilometre.

Nouvelle 100 per cent recycled toilet paper, one of a handful of recycled brands, relies heavily on symbols of environmentalism in its branding, for example stating 'by choosing Nouvelle you know you are making a positive contribution to protecting our environment' (Woodland Trust, 2008, p. 1), whereas the growing market for non-recycled extra thick toilet paper is based on strong links with the affluent identity. In Japan, where the luxury toilet market is highly established and growing, the paper is 'routinely scented, extra-thick, aloe-moistened, strictly 'virgin' (unrecycled), patterned, or – the latest trick – infused with pineapple enzymes to counteract odour'. In Germany, Proctor and Gamble position its luxury toilet paper in 'urbane black-and-charcoal-grey packaging designed with the consumer in mind…with a Gucci look and feel' (Hrabi, 2005, p. 1).

A more pervasive example can be found within high-end supermarket food ranges. In Britain, most supermarkets now differentiate their own brand products into ranges aimed at different consumer groups. High-end food ranges are specifically aimed at the affluent identity and therefore provide an ideal way of assessing what types of food people with an affluent identity identify with, how connected to the environmentalist identity they are and also the supermarket's social reading of what would attract someone with an affluent identity. These ranges overtly link affluent lifestyles with the 'good life'. Sainsbury's state that 'every single product in our Taste the Difference

range is as good as it gets' (Sainsbury's, 2008, p. 1). Morrisons say that 'For The Best we make no compromises. Meals must be exceptionally well prepared. And producers must supply the finest ingredients every time' (Morrisons, 2008, p. 1).

A small study was undertaken in the month of June 2008 of five major British supermarkets to investigate how high-end ranges were, or were not, connected to energy use or the environmentalist identity. Energy use was represented by the amount and type of packaging and the source location of the ingredients. Association with the environmentalist identity was taken to be represented by the presence of an organic, Fairtrade or any other standard that incorporates overtly environmental goals. Three items from the fruit and vegetable category and three items from the cakes and bakery category were selected at random from a store of each of five major supermarket chains: Tesco, Sainsbury's, Asda, Morrisons and the Co-Operative.

The method of choosing the products in the shop was not purposive, however, the selection of the store location was made on the basis of proximity to the researcher, which is likely to have influenced product range. Additionally, the small sample size means that the results cannot be taken to be representative of the full range the high-end ranges across the supermarkets. However, the data do provide evidence for the sample stores in question and illuminate certain facts about products that exist in the high-end ranges.

Of the 30 products sampled, one was Fairtrade and none of the products were either organic or had another environmental standard. This indicates that there is little connection between the affluent identity and the environmentalist identity in the products sampled. In terms of energy use, over a third of all products were specified to come from long distance locations; however, all but one type of product was in fact in season and could have been sourced locally.

The Co-Operative supermarket advertises itself as environmentally aligned; however, two products sampled from its 'Truly Irresistible' high-end range were Kenyan asparagus (when British asparagus had come into season) and apples that although clearly marked from New Zealand, were described as 'seasonal varieties'. All but one traditionally loose product was in some form of plastic packaging with an average of 2.4 layers of packaging. Two products' packaging was particularly energy heavy. Crème brûlées from Asda contained two thick glass pots weighing much more than the product they carried. In the Co-Operative a 50 gram thick plastic tub of meringue nests weighed only slightly less than the nests themselves (75 grams). These results indicate that in the large supermarkets there is likely to be a significant gap between the affluent identity and both low energy use and the environmentalist identity.

How the affluent and environmentalist identities are polarized in everyday consumption practices such as food is significant. It perpetuates the income–energy use relationship and results in tensions and consumption dilemmas for higher-income individuals, who may hold or be developing an environmentalist identity. Particularly significant is that the affluent identity is strongly associated with consumption that has strong social and market presence and that is also likely to be very energy heavy, for example long haul holidays, inefficient cars, large homes and fast moving fashion.

If polarized notions of the affluent and environmentalist identity are pitted against each other in diverse product choices, the more desirable and salient identity will generally triumph: in this case the affluent identity. For example, one participant in a research project undertaken by the author described how she was delaying buying a new car because she was facing an identity dilemma. She was undecided about whether to upgrade to the new model of her energy heavy car, which fitted her identity and status, or to buy a small car. She felt that buying the small car was environmentally the right thing but she was reluctant because it meant entering a whole new identity realm that was more akin to her student days than how she saw herself presently.

If affluence and energy heavy consumption are consistently linked and affluence and environmentalism consistently opposed, those holding the affluent identity are likely to see themselves as relatively high energy consumers who are fundamentally different to environmentalists. The more this income–energy connection is highlighted by environmentalists and media, without symbolically relevant alternatives being offered, the more affluence will be made to seem immovably opposed to environmentalism. Similarly, the more the environmentalist identity, and the symbolically associated energy frugality, will seem like countercultural self-denial. As a result the two identities become heightened threats to each other.

Affluent individuals who have a growing concern about the environment and a developing environmentalist identity are likely to have strong feelings about their unsustainable consumption. Critically, Jager suggests that

this dissonance is likely to result in any longer-term positive environmental rewards being 'discounted', thereby improving the relative benefits of more immediate energy intensive consumption (Jager, 2004).

As awareness of environmental issues grows and post-materialist sentiments are enhanced, it is becoming viable for an increasing number of people to elevate the environmentalist identity up their identity hierarchy and repress the affluent identity. However, maintenance of this situation is difficult and requires high levels of effort, as social support favours affluence. Therefore, for most people it is futile to ask them to reject a consumption practice that is vital to their affluent identity, or to adopt a new practice that embodies negative identity symbolism, without engaging in a strategic programme of symbolic meaning change where the same identity services are offered in the alternative more sustainable product (Ger *et al.*, 1999; Jager, 2004; Jackson, 2005). Therefore, in order to fundamentally increase the sustainability of consumption *en masse*, the symbolisms and values of the environmental and affluent identity must be brought closer together.

It is unlikely that a strategy that relies on eroding the attraction of wealth and the consumptive means to achieve an affluent identity is the most effective or likely way of achieving timely climate change mitigation. Therefore, it is suggested that, rather than opposing or merely ignoring affluence, we must consider how affluent identities can be actively used to aid household energy use reduction. At the same time, if there is to be a chance of creating enduring sustainable consumption patterns, it is critical that the opportunity is taken to mould the ideology and values of 'affluence' to be more connected with nature, less individualistic and less materialistic. Symbolic meaning change must therefore be aimed at the very notion of the affluent identity if it is to be successful. Otherwise, there is a risk of perpetuating identity greenwashing, where environmental consumption is merely an add-on to the affluent identity. As a result, the inconsistency between environmental sentiments and energy consumption will persist.

Options for Change

In terms of how to enact change, a range of actors are engaged in symbolic meaning creation (e.g. companies, government, individuals), and these symbolic meanings are reinforced or rejected through continuous social interaction, which is impossible to monitor or predict. However, marketing has a particular and advanced role in meaning creation (Elliott and Wattanasuwan, 1998; Mick and Buhl, 1992). Therefore, marketing and social marketing (as the use of marketing for social good) both have a significant role to play in altering definitions and outcomes of affluent and environmentalist identities.

Two key high-level marketing approaches are apparent. First, the affluent identity can be consistently linked with *relatively low-energy-consumption* choices. This could be described as implicit value-based change to the income–energy relationship, as it would alter the environmental outcome of the identity but only indirectly alter the identity itself and the values it supports. Second, these affluent–low-energy links can be supplemented with an *explicit symbolic connection to the environmentalist identity*, thereby creating a stronger alignment between the affluent and environmentalist identities and promoting explicit value-based change. The relative benefits of each approach depend on socio-cultural and consumption specific factors such as the existing level of agreement between the two identities. The success of these approaches depends on the quality of the environmental credentials of the low energy consumption; this will be explained further below.

Similar calls to create behavioural strategies that work within the current paradigms have been made by Kilbourne (2004) and Hobson (2002). However, unlike Hobson, the perspective presented here does not unequivocally endorse ecological modernization but instead emphasizes that, by creating commonalities between the affluent and environmentalist identities and connecting affluent identities with lower energy consumption, the current dominant paradigms of affluence will necessarily be altered. As well as shaping consumption by high-income groups, the symbolism within the products aimed at the affluent identity (through the motivation for self-congruency) will shape the affluent identity itself (Sirgy, 1982).

Kilbourne (2004) and Hobson (2002) call for a deeper analysis and understanding of the nature of the dominant social paradigm (DSP) as a key to change. Similarly, to achieve the aims proposed here means firstly being attentive to how the current affluent and environmentalist identities are perpetuated and played out, how they are connected with each other and how they are each symbolically connected to consumption of varying relative energy

Relatively low-energy practice

Affluent identity

No / Weak   Yes / Strong

	No / Weak	Yes / Strong
Environmentalist identity — No / Weak	A Affluent-environmentalist identity opportunity	B Implicit-value based affluence-low energy link (Approach 1)
Environmentalist identity — Yes / Strong	C Explicit value-based environmentalist – low energy link	D Explicit value-based affluent-environmentalist identity link (Approach 2)

Relatively high-energy practice

Affluent identity

No / Weak   Yes /Strong

	No / Weak	Yes / Strong
Environmentalist identity — No / Weak	E Opportunity for social marketing to embed unattractive identity symbolism	F Affluence - high energy reinforcement
Environmentalist identity — Yes / Strong	G Greenwashing	H Gold-plated greenwashing

Figure 1. Decision matrices for identifying sustainable affluent identity marketing strategies

intensity. Then, this information can be used to create marketing strategies that actively engage in creating sustainable affluent identities.

Figure 1 comprises two matrices, which situate the two approaches outlined, as well as others. These matrices can also be used to identify the current situation and future strategies for any market or company. Relatively high-energy consumption practices are located in one matrix and relatively low-energy counterparts in another. In each matrix, one axis represents the affluent identity and the other the environmentalist identity. The question of whether an identity is embedded is described simply as 'yes/strong' or 'no/weak', as there are varying degrees of strength of identity symbolism (Kilbourne, 2004).

The first and second approaches described above are represented in Boxes B and D. Box C represents the current approach to many low-energy consumption practices that have an explicit symbolic 'value-based' link with the environmentalist identity. Box A indicates opportunities to positively link relatively low energy consumption with the affluent and environmentalist identities. Box F indicates the current situation, where the affluent identity is often symbolically connected with high-energy products, thereby reinforcing the income–energy use link. Box G represents what is known commonly as 'greenwashing', where a relatively high-energy product is overtly connected with the environmentalist identity and its values. Box H is where greenwashing is supplemented by a connection with the affluent identity, thereby creating what could be called 'gold-plated greenwashing'. Box E represents an opportunity for social marketing to embed negative identity symbolisms in high-energy products that are currently void of strong symbolism.

In Box C, where a strong symbolic connection with environmentalism already exists, there are opportunities to downplay the environmentalist identity and more consistently embed the affluent identity, for example renewable energy or travel by train.

Many of the examples of 'eco-chic' fall into Box B, where affluence is already embedded in low-energy products. These should be built on and extended. For example, the upper class consumption cultures of spending a large amount of money on very high-quality products that are then kept for life, repaired and passed down to future generations could be extended. Patek Philippe utilized this sentiment in its 'begin your own tradition' campaign, where its slogan was 'you never actually own a Patek Philippe. You merely look after it for the next generation' (Wolfe, 2008). This also plays heavily on the idea of legacy and immortality, which is seen as highly connected to the desire for an affluent identity (Hirschman, 1990). Additionally, there is a fine line between the antique market and the second hand market, which can also be utilized to encourage greater admiration of old products and their quality and affective significance. Furthermore, well made products such as Miele or wood burning Rayburns are aimed at the affluent and have long warranties, sometimes up to 20 years. As yet these have not been popularly connected with the environmentalist identity.

Figure 1 also helps identify where companies are engaging in 'gold-plated greenwashing' (Box H). For example, the Lexus hybrid car is marketed to both the environmentalist and affluent identity with its slogan 'One day lower emissions will come with higher performance. That day is today' (Rightee.com, 2008). However, it emits 192

grams of carbon dioxide per kilometre, and the footnote to the slogan explains that its lower emissions are only in comparison with six-cylinder premium SUVs. Therefore, instead of 'greening' the affluent identity, the symbolic links between affluence and high relative energy use are actually being reinforced by such adverts and the environmentalist identity subverted and weakened.

To reduce the prevalence of either form of greenwashing and instead to extend and create valid energy significant symbolic connections requires business, government and non-governmental organizations to be strategically engaging in marketing and social marketing interventions. This must start with a detailed understanding and segmentation of the varying forms of affluent lifestyle groups. Government should also consider legislative measures and national standards that guide the marketing activities of organizations towards the first and second approaches described above. On a voluntary basis, organizations should be extending their corporate social responsibilities to include how they positively market energy heavy consumption to the affluent identity rather than focusing on operational activities alone. This includes how they design products in the first place as well as how they price them, advertise them and distribute them.

Conclusions

This paper has highlighted the crucial role of identity in shaping the relationship between income and energy use, both for those with an actual affluent identity and those with an ideal affluent identity. It has outlined two features of identity which may be driving the disconnect between environmental concern and values of affluent groups and the overall sustainability of their consumption.

First, it is likely that the affluent identity is overpowering the environmentalist identity where a person holds both identities simultaneously. This is because the affluent identity elicits strong social support, provides self-esteem rewards and therefore is likely to be highly salient and prompt strong commitment. On the other hand, the environmentalist identity is often negatively perceived and is stereotypically associated with values of frugality and self-denial.

It has been argued that a strategy that relies heavily on people fighting the strongly and positively held affluent identity and adopting a polarized environmentalist identity is unlikely to be effective. Instead, the affluent and environmentalist identities must be brought closer together so that environmentalist identities gain the allure of affluence and values associated with affluence become more aligned to environmental values.

Second, the crucial role of consumption in mediating identities was highlighted. Consuming material goods, directly or indirectly and whether 'green' or not, will generally exacerbate our sustainability crises. However, we must recognize that identities are intricately woven through consumption of goods and services on a continual basis. Although this 'consumerism' should not be promoted, it would be foolish to ignore its role in creating unsustainable social and cultural contexts. It therefore must be harnessed to shape sustainable identities.

A key issue in the identity–consumption relationship is that the powerful affluent identity tends to be embedded by marketing in relatively energy heavy products. Two marketing approaches are suggested to intervene in this association. First, the affluent identity should be consistently connected with lower- rather than higher-energy consumption practices, providing implicit value based change. Second, the gap between the affluent and environmentalist identities must be reduced by explicitly combining these identities within low-energy products. To implement these approaches requires government and non-governmental organizations to strategically engage in social marketing interventions as well as considering legislative measures that guide the marketing activities of organizations. On a voluntary basis, organizations should themselves be considering action in this area, including detailed analyses of how they market energy heavy products to the affluent identity and how creating sustainable identities forms (or does not yet form) part of their corporate social responsibility policies.

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