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To start being....The anticipation of a social role through consumption in life transition: the case of the first-time pregnancy

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ABSTRACT

In the present research, we focus upon an important life transition in women's life: the first-time motherhood experience in modern societies. After a presentation of life transition and motherhood literature, we discuss the results of an qualitative study based on interview of pregnant women. The findings emphasize that pregnant women realize childbirth and anticipate their future role of mothers, through consumption. Finally, we highlight two dimensions in pregnancy: a *child oriented* dimension and a *role of mother* oriented dimension. These two dimensions are connected by a temporal focus and rooted in a sociocultural framework.

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Whatever an individual's social or cultural status, his/her life may be understood as a cycle limited by birth and death and punctuated by events which drive personal transformation. In the present research, we attempt to study the adoption of a new social role and status through transition in post-industrial societies. In this research context, we are particularly interested in sociocultural and symbolic aspects of consumption in the Consumer Culture Theory (CCT) perspective (Arnould and Thompson 2005). Many authors in marketing have shown that life transitions can be made through the consumption of goods and services (Belk 1989; Fischer and Gainer 1993; McAlexander 1992; Ozanne 1992; Roberts 1991; Rook 1985; Schouten 1991a, 1991b; Wright 1991; Young 1991) more precisely they serve the learning and the performance of social roles (Solomon 1983; Belk 1988).

The life event chosen for this study is the first maternity. There are two reasons for this choice. First, this event is generally presented as the most important event in a woman's life (Fischer and Grainer 1993). Secondly, academic interest — even marketing research — is low, despite the intensity of the consumption practices that accompany first-maternity — 4,116 € spent the first year of child in 2004 in France (source: INSEE) and £ 52,605 from birth to the age of five in UK (source: The Guardian, 2005).

The consumer behavior in the first year of a child's life domain has been relatively little studied (Banister and Hoog 2006; Fischer and Gainer 1993; Houston 1999; Prothero 2002, 2006; Thomsen and Sorensen 2006). By contrast, marketing research focuses on children's socialisation (Ward 1974), parents or children's influence (Moore-Shay and Lutz

1988; Moore and al. 2002) but not really baby and not really from the parents' perspective. In the present context, we approach first-time motherhood more specifically during the pregnancy phase, where consumption serves to materially prepare for the child's arrival.

In a first part, we develop the theory of life transition including identity changes, new social role and the theory of rites of passage. Then, we specify the qualitative methodology used and present our findings. We finally discuss the results obtained in our investigation, analyse managerial implications and propose relevant developments for future research.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Life transition: a break in the path of life and the accession to a new social role

Life transitions are for authors as a succession of important stages or events in individual's life — birth, adulthood, marriage, divorce, retirement or death. These events appear central in the path of life, so much so that they “play a more important part than age in the break in the rhythm of the course of life” (Attias-Donfut 1991, p.79). Several expressions reflect the importance of such events, such as “life events”, used by Attias-Donfut (1991, p.79), and “life crisis”, used by English-speaking anthropologists. Life events represent a break in the path of life and create two periods, a before and an after.

Two main conceptual visions are developed to shed life transitions. First, the life-cycle concept contains three elements of strict definition: the notion of stages, maturation and generation. Its alternative conceptions life span or life course — the individual life history or biography — do not contain these three elements (O'Rand and Kreckler 1990). Second, the rites of passage theory defined by Van Gennep (1909) and developed by Turner (1969). This special form of rite marks the transition of an individual's social status in three universal

successive stages which correspond to three sorts of rites: separation characterised by the removal of the individual from his/her previous social status; the liminal stage, a period of transition in which the individual is neither endowed with the previous status nor with the new status; and the incorporation into a new social state, when the passage is finally completed. Some french research which studied life transition through the rites of passage theory, emphasize the difficulties to use it in contemporary societies (Bozon 2002; Lemaire 1995) and the little relevance of this theory in the respect of its formal dimension (Sevin and Ladwein 2006).

This two conceptual visions show life transitions are break leads to various changes in the individual on a physical, psychological and/or social level (Erickson 1963; Gould 1978; Levinson 1978; Lepisto 1985; Rivière 1995). While the events act on the identity and the personality of the individual and increase stress levels and consequently imply necessary adaptation (Holmes and Rahe 1967; Andreasen 1984), they also act on his/her social dimension by adjusting and redefining the existing systems of social status and roles (Levinson 1978; Lepisto 1985). Life transitions involve a new social role and status — closely dependent concepts that are the subject of a dense theoretical past. Linton defines social status as a social position: "the place which a given individual occupies within a given system at a given moment will be named his/her status" (1947, p.330). Social role can be defined as the dynamic face of status. From a psychological perspective, the role appears as a component of a person's identity (Linton 1936) and can see the personality as a set of roles (Chappuis and Thomas 1995). Individuals have many different social statuses and roles. A status can be in effect while another remains latent (Linton 1947). When individuals obtain a new social status or role, an adjustment of their system of roles and statuses is necessary. To incorporate social roles and status, individuals engage in the direct or indirect observation of other individuals. This is social learning according to the role model theory developed by

Bandura (1976). Observation allows us to acquire information which is then used as a guide to our actions. The role models can be people who are close to the individual such as parents, family or friends. Interpersonal relations influence the attraction and the attention paid to these role models. They also facilitate direct contact and the exchange of information. Indirect role models are defined as those with whom direct relations are impossible — media communication considerably widens the number of available indirect role models. Thus, imitation is at the heart of observational social learning (Bandura 1976) and "by imitating a gesture, while playing it in our turn, we enter a social role" (Kaufmann 1995, p.250). Role models help the individual to adopt a role conforming to the values shared by society. The theory on social learning distinguishes between different stages (Bandura 1976). First, the individual selects what is to be observed among the number of potential models, it's the attention process. Then the individual learns by observing the behavior of the role model; this is the acquisition phase. Lastly, there is the process of driving reproduction, where the individual translates the representations into actions according to the integrated behavior. "People do not translate into acts what they have learned" because of social norms (Bandura 1976, p.34).

In the context of such events, everyday life is modified, and so too are consumption practices. Thus, in marketing literature, authors have developed a theory of segmentation through the life-cycle concept. Most particularly, authors in marketing use the family life-cycle concept to explain the succession of changes of family consumption practices (Rigaux-Bricmont and Davis 1974; Schaninger and Danko 1993; Wells and Gubar 1966; Wilkes 1995).

Life transition: the role of consumption practices

The marketing literature has widely shown the various symbolic functions played by

products in post-industrial societies and the meanings attached by individuals to material possessions. Objects exceed their utilitarian function (Baudrillard 1970) and play a role in the construction of identity as an extension of the self (Belk 1988) — “You are what you consume” —, as well as in social relations (Solomon 1983). Consumption and purchases are vested with a “psychic energy” (Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton 1981).

The role of consumption during transitional periods has received increasing attention in recent years. Many authors have shown that life transitions nowadays can be experienced through the consumption of goods and services (Belk 1989; Fischer and Gainer 1993; McAlexander 1992; Ozanne 1992; Roberts 1991; Rook 1985; Schouten 1991a, 1991b; Wright 1991; Young 1991). More specifically, the importance of consumer goods in the learning and performance of social roles is also recognised (Belk 1988; Solomon 1983). Some consumer goods will mark an ostentatious status. Thus, the various roles played by an individual are facilitated or inhibited by the presence or absence of material symbols (Solomon 1983). This is the active side of tangible property.

In life transition, consumption intervenes more precisely in the reconstruction of the self (Schouten 1991b). Objects help us through change insofar as they facilitate the identification of the status and act as a support for social standards. Thus, Solomon (1985) shows that a suit can be seen as an accessory in the contemporary rite of passage that is a woman’s entry into the professional environment. The author notes that clothing can communicate competency and professionalism. In a study into another modern life transition, divorce, McAlexander (1991) shows that the distribution of possessions resulting from the marriage has a symbolic value. Indeed, the choice made by the partners in relation to shared possessions is in accordance with the identity-linked desire to release oneself from the throes of marriage and the life that goes with it. The absence of initiation rites to enter adulthood is characteristic of our society (McCracken 1988). The consumption practices could compensate

for the absence of initiatory rites (Ozannes 1992; Wright 1991).

Motherhood : an important life-event for women

The experience of motherhood is one of the most important events in a woman's life and a stressful potential life event in Holmes and Rahe's classification (1967). The motherhood should be appreciate through sociocultural and historical (Thompson 1996). In the rites of passage theory (Van Gennep 1909), first-time motherhood have been sequenced in three phases. Stopping of job is the separation stage. Pregnancy is described as a liminal period. Childbirth is the incorporation stage.

In the recent studies in different disciplines, authors highlight the changes of identity of women (Bailey 1999; Smith 1999a, 1999b), the importance of possible selves (Banister and Hogg 2006), the role of consumption to reinforce the construction of mother identity (Jennings and O'Malley 2003), the good mother identity in the eyes of others (Prothero 2002). Consumption also allows constructing identity for their baby (Miller 2004, Clarke 2004). Few research initiate the idea that certain objects such as pram can be vehicles for the acquisition and maintenance of the role as motherhood (Thomsen and Sorensen 2006). Fischer and Gainer (2003) have seen "baby showers" as a modern rites of passage which mark both an acceptance of the new role and a denial that anything fundamental would change.

The literature review has allowed the emergence of an interest in the role of consumption in this life transition, new social status and identity changes. Moreover, the studying first-time motherhood begun to be studied by marketing research in this way. However, any studies interested at the dynamic process of the construction of the role of mother. Thus, in this study, we would understand better the dynamic process of the first-time motherhood and most particularly, the construction of the role of mother and its anticipation

trough consumption.

METHODOLOGICAL CHOICES:

SAMPLE, DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

In this study, we attempt to carry out an in-depth exploration of life transition with interpretive logic (Holbrook and O'Shaughnessy 1988; Sherry 1991), to understand practices system (Garfinkel 1967), practices and what links them together (Blanchet et Gotman 1992) and meanings ascribed to consumption practices (Thompson 1997). Thus, we propose to offer a wide ethnographical reading of the event and product theory from data (Glaser and Strauss 1967). We use individual interviews with pregnant women expecting their first child, with a focus on consumption practices.

We built our sample so as to benefit from diverse cases (Miles and Huberman 1994) in terms of age, socio-professional categories and the number of gestation months already completed. In order to obtain maximum variation, we diversified our sources and methods of recruitment. We initially enlisted the help of personal network and later respondents were recruited at ante-natal classes in a midwifery clinics and a maternity hospital. Our final sample is composed of 27 pregnant French women (age 17 - 40, average age 28) who were expecting their first child.

It is necessary to point out that the researcher, thus the interviewer, not has yet experienced the first-time motherhood. Contrary to Prothero's work which press on researcher subjective introspective (2002), we prefer following Kaufmann's recommendations (1996 [2004]) about the researcher position as "ignoramus".

Interviews were carried out by one interviewer. They were generally conducted in the place of residence of the respondents, though in certain cases the interviews were held in a

café. The interviews, tape recorded to facilitate subsequent data processing, took place between February 14 and May 18, 2005. The duration of the interviews varied from half an hour to hour and a half. To understand the symbolic meanings, we adopt a phenomenological approach. Then, three themes were systematically explored: 1) how pregnancy was construed, 2) what changes were caused by pregnancy 3) what preparation for childbirth had been carried out. Where necessary, the interviewer asked for further explanation on precise points and also explored new topics.

The 27 individual interviews were transcribed verbatim, so as to preserve as accurately as possible the initial character of the remarks. The interviews lend themselves to reading as they were recorded. The data was analysed using an iterative process of searching for recurrent themes (Miles and Huberman 1994) with a final axial coding. The coding is based on constant comparison: initially comparing data to data, later comparing data to theory (Spiggle 1994; Strauss and Corbin 1990). Three major themes emerge from the analysis of data and are discussed in the next section.

FINDINGS: PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION

The decision to have a first child: process and meanings

Having a child is now a conscious decision, carried out on a reflexive mode, on two levels — both individual and collective. Thus the analysis of data provides many elements on the decision-making process.

In most cases, the reflection process begins before the final decision is made. . . . Motherhood is closely associated with the female identity, as soon as childhood.

“If he had told me I don’t want to have any children with you, I don’t think we would have stayed together.” [Joulia (31-year-old junior analyst)]

In the decision-making process, the couple undergoes pressure from its family and other relatives, its friends and colleagues and more broadly from society, through the standards, which it imposes. First of all, the age of the pregnant woman is an element endowed with a highly normative character. Women whose age is very different to the national average — 29.6 years old in France — like Amélie (17), Hélène (19) and Sophie (40) are seen by those who know them as exceptional cases. owing to awareness of the cost incurred by child-rearing, the couple's economic situation and professional status become important criteria. Women anticipate the cost of a child's becoming. At this stage, parenthood is associated with material child's well-being. Most particularly, in western societies, motherhood implies that purchases and utilisation of a lot of material goods for baby. Attias-Donfut (1990, p.105) suggests that “the fact of viewing one's offspring as a source of wealth has now been replaced by viewing it as a source of expenditure, an evolution which characterises modern society.

“It's true that financially we could have afforded it for a long time (...) Yeah; I've been working for 6 years already, and Vincent for 3. But you know, our relationship was a bit chaotic for a while, so we waited until our life as a couple was nice and steady.” [Ingrid (31-year-old primary school teacher)]

The child symbolizes an irreversible break from the past and introduces a sharp distinction between the previous life and the new life. Laetitia C (a 31-year-old manager) spoke of the “beginnings of a new life”. Sarah (a 28-year-old teacher) had “the impression of finding herself at a crossroads”. For Céline (a 26-year-old nurse), “this is how life has to evolve.” Through this decision, the woman is conscious that she will have a new social status with attached role. In the case of first-time motherhood, the social status and role of the mother, publicly assumed at the time of the birth of the first child, are added to the marital and professional status and roles, which are then necessarily redefined (Linton 1947). In fact, When individuals obtain a new social status or role, an adjustment of their system of roles and statuses is necessary. Thus, when a woman takes up her role as a wife or a mother, she endorses the system of values and behavior which is attached to it. In daily life, women will

have to juggle between their roles and various statuses (Cicchelli, 2001). The new role of mother will have a significant impact on the identity of the woman, whose status shifts from that of her mother's daughter to that of a mother (Stern and Bruscheiler-Stern 1998). The decision anticipates the idea of new organisation of everyday life with a readjustment of the roles of both partners.

The notion of descendants is also at stake with the birth of the first child, as it constitutes an opportunity to create direct descent, a higher privilege than collateral descent (brothers, sisters or cousins), and perpetuate the family unit. Pregnant women evoke the idea of transmitting the familial's cherished possessions (Folkman Curasi and al. 2004) or the family values, beliefs and attitudes including certain consumption practices. Thus, it's an anticipated conception of the intergenerational influence (Moore-Shay and Lutz 1988) and transgenerational capital (Ladwein and al. 2007).

The arrival of a child is a positive emotional event — understood as something remarkable occurring in an individual's environment (Augé 2003). Thus, the consumption practices to prepare child's arrival are not seen as a chore but as a pleasure activity.

Pregnancy: transitional period with changes of everyday life consumption practices

Women experience pregnancy as a necessary stage towards motherhood. Pregnancy is the occasion for her to endorse a transitional role, that of a pregnant woman whose objective is the protection of her child. During pregnancy, the everyday life of pregnant women goes through changes.

The majority of these changes are related to the presence of the child and the desire to protect him/her. Thus, the management of risk is different, with the risk limit being lowered. The new perception of risk modifies certain daily consumption practices (Thompson 2005).

Their characteristics are the transitional dimension of certain practices that exist only during the pregnancy and in relation to the role of pregnant women. We can highlight some of these changes. First, with the protection of the child in mind, there is a search for a healthier life: they give up tobacco and alcohol. Then, various food patterns develop. Food is closely associated with the good health of the baby, whom it can protect from various pathologies. Like Sarah (28-years-old, teacher) tells “I think it twice more because we are two then I try to eat more healthy” Thus, pregnant women adopt a balanced diet with more dairy products, fruit, vegetable, enriched mineral water and health supplements. The cocooning attitude of certain pregnant women develops new pattern of consumption such as internet purchases, delivery carried out, location of DVD movies (vs. cinema). The pregnant women needs to trust what they buy. Thus, she prefers brands, food with labels or organic food. The advice of medical experts is more important for pregnant women.

Pregnant women look after themselves (Prothero 2002). Rapidly, as soon as the pregnancy is known, pregnant women buy a lot of cosmetics, leisure goods (books, music) and new clothes.

During the pregnancy, a more or less intense upheaval of the traditional distribution of domestic roles is observed. Normally, social norms prescribe the role that each partner will play in the couple (Roberts 1981). Thus, even if this tends to be moderated, women become more involved in domestic activities, such as cooking and washing, while men are in charge of the car and the D.I.Y. A more or less significant involvement of the man in household chores, such as shopping or washing — tasks more frequently carried out by women — is observed. Like Virginie tells laughing “he (his husband) help me, he washing home, he preparing the dinner, all of what I did before !” This is one way for the man to become involved in the pregnancy.

Pregnancy is also the cause of a change in social behavior. It is characterised by decreased social commitments — leisure activities are reduced and professional activities are interrupted. In social relations, the status of pregnant women seems to dominate all others. The interviews show a “mystification” effect related to the social status of pregnant women, which materialises in a greater amount of attention being paid to pregnant women. For example, the customers who shop in Catherine's store (a 31-year-old store manager) show an interest in her pregnancy. Sophie (a 40-year-old secretary) is allowed to jump the queue at the post office, while Lucie (a 30-year-old journalist) says “in my family, I am the star”. An inflation of unilateral social interaction is also observed. Pregnant women are seen as “attractive”. Women who are already mothers initiate interactions with pregnant women. As former pregnant women, they feel the need to tell of their own experience with pregnancy as the narrative of the self (Ladwein 2004). The social interactions framework positions the women as pregnant women and future mother.

These elements allow us to conclude that pregnancy can be associated with a period of transition between the former and future social roles, with everyday life changes. This period emphasizes the initiation of the anticipation and the reality of expected child. Much of this developed elements are focused on child more than the role of mother. This anticipated process of expected child continues through the consumption practices, which concern material preparation of child coming.

The anticipation process of the role of mother

During the pregnancy the child is not yet present, so the mother's social role and status are not yet official. However, progressively, pregnant women social status moves towards the social status of mother and prepare the future role.

The cognitive anticipation of the child's arrival

The pregnancy is a period spent in expectation of the child's arrival and during which preparatory psychological work with regard to the future role of mother takes place by way of the mental construction of the child (Stern and Bruschiweiler-Stern 1998). Most pregnant women acknowledge having difficulties in giving a concrete form to the pregnancy for the first three months. Then pregnant women progressively internalise their state and the future arrival of the child through a succession of stages.

First, medical contact such as blood tests, ante-natal classes, medical appointments and, finally, ultrasound scans provide chronological pace to the pregnancy. Ultrasound scans are more precisely one of the strong and memorable moments of the pregnancy because they reveal the first images (Fellous 1991) of the child and initiate the construction of the mental image of the future baby. In certain cases, the need to see and feel the growing foetus may constitute the first steps of the future visual tracking of the child, materialised by several photos and films. We can underline the rise of three-dimensional ultrasound scan in private centers or the recording on DVD. Each ultrasound scan appointment becomes a sacred experience and ceremonial time.

Furthermore, the ultrasound scan now makes it possible to predict the sex of the child. Choosing to know the sex of the child is then justified by a willingness to be able to personify the child and to personalise the material preparation, more particularly in terms of clothing items and decorating the baby's room. Thus, the knowledge of sex of the baby influences purchases. In the same vein, the choice of a first name also contributes to imagining the child. The naming of the child traditionally takes place at birth. That implies an anticipated choice, which is realised in a methodical and meticulous process with specific book or Internet research. The choice of first name seems the first important decision for the future life of the

child.

Moreover, two physiological events also make it possible to contribute to the reality of the child: the sensation of the baby's movements and the belly, which swells gradually, become the testimony to the pregnancy and to the presence of the foetus.

Lastly, the first purchases of material goods also contribute to reinforce the reality of the coming child with certain emotion. Then all along the pregnancy, each purchase solidify the reality of the coming child — bedroom, push chair, clothes.

An new stage begins more actively: the learning of material preparation of expected child which reinforces the construction of the role of mother.

The social learning of the role of mother and the “knowledgeable consumer”

During the pregnancy, women undertake the social learning of their future role as mother, a role that is unknown to them. Pregnant women acquire the necessary knowledge, competencies (know-how) and attitudes in relation to the social role of motherhood. The role of mother is directly related to the idea of looking after the child's well-being on all levels — material but also educational and emotional needs. Thus, this learning also concerns consumption because becoming a mother is to develop as a “knowledgeable consumer”. However, a good praxis may be conditioned by possession of the correct objects. However, the child welfare market is unknown to first-time pregnant women. That explain, pregnancy women need a lot of information. Where we might see a simple external search for information on behalf of the pregnant women, it is necessary also to see the social learning of the role of mother. This means that the direct and indirect role models will serve to help such women understand what to consume and will exert considerable influence on their purchases but also use of objects. Particularly in the field of consumption, role models are identified as

any person with whom an individual can come into contact, directly or indirectly, and who is likely to influence the consumption-related decisions and the actions of that individual.

Pregnant woman will quite naturally favour female role models. Direct role models are other mothers from her close such as friends, sisters or work colleagues. These models can be women who have already had children, very recently if possible so that they may be able to visualise the maternal role that the expectant mother awaits. This social learning by direct role models is justified by the desire of the pregnant woman to be a good mother in accordance with the social norms imposed by society and sociocultural patterns of motherhood.

“Yeah, you know, then I’m afraid that, em, I mean it has to be perfect when he arrives and super clean and I don’t want him to be sick, I’ll have to have somewhere to wash him and change him with something, and I’ll need clothes to dress him but I don’t have anything, you know, I mean I’ve got a couple of things, but, you know, I’d like to buy him clothes as well, stuff that I’ll actually give him myself and not just stuff I’ve borrowed, you know?.” [Naïma (27-year-old student)]

The pregnant woman observes the behavior of the other mothers in order to assimilate them and then to imitate them when the child finally arrives. It is therefore interesting to consider the experience of Sarah [28 years old, teacher], who accompanied a friend so as to observe her organisation with the baby. The direct contact with role models is a new form of social interaction that would not have taken place without the pregnancy. One of the potential role models is the pregnant woman’s own mother. During the pregnancy, the mother and daughter link is reactivated. Fischer (1981) shows that "more reciprocal contact between them would then be observed." However, the mother can be a potential more or less important role model. Because of the rapid changes taking place in product offers, the selection of direct role models in terms of consumer learning is made in accordance with how recently the role model in question experienced her pregnancy. This explains why some pregnant women have difficulty accepting their own mother as a potential role model. For certain respondents, their mother’s experience is too remote and is no longer in phase with the changes in marketplace

and certain cultural aspects of society.

“She is a bit old fashioned, I think, for example prams, there’ve been big changes, they didn’t have Maxy Cosys that do everything for you back then. Before, they had the big Landaus and that was all, you know? She gives her opinion, but everything that comes out in the shops is a bit much for her, it’s not at all like before.” [Céline (26-year-old nurse)]

On the contrary, for other respondents, generally younger, the mother is a central model and may be ever-present. Amélie (17) and Hélène (19) particularly emphasise their mother’s expertise. However, we notice that intergenerational influence is reactivated particularly as far as it is concerned the nostalgic attachments on the pregnant women infancy. For example, women pregnant ask mother to remain the brands who used when their were baby. Solène [27 years old, teacher] chose for the push chair, “Bébé Confort” brand because her mother bought this brand when Solène was baby. We can observe nostalgic connexions and emotional attachment to certain brand (Fournier 1998) and then more trust for these brands.

Indirect role models can also be identified. Pregnant women may look for an indirect role model through various media sources like television, the press or the Internet. They will seek someone who generally corresponds to their experience or point of view.

“I initially asked my sisters and went on to Internet forums for mothers. Yeah, I actually spent a lot of time on those sites and em, and that’s it, you know, I read what they have to say and some of them talk about what they bought, which is what you need.” [Naïma (27-year-old student)]

However, the direct role model appears very powerful.

“People with experience can give better advice — not necessarily, but because they have experience they know more about what needs to be bought than the magazines for example.” [Sarah (28-year-old teacher)]

Pregnant women make their own minds up about their future role. In fact, they observe social norms through the actions of their role models, which remain accessible. Then they adapt these observations to their own notions of what is good or bad (Kaufmann 1995). Finally, women engage in "D.I.Y" of their future role through additional observed data (Bandura 1977).

“And people give a load of advice about everything to do with daily chores, hygiene, how to put the baby to bed, what to do for them every day, what products to use. I think it’s good to give you an idea, you have lots of different opinions and then you can make up your own mind and have your own idea of what to expect.” [Céline (26-year-old nurse)]

“I read it of course, yeah, and you know I learned some stuff, although not that much, I mean there’s so much out there. I’m telling you when you’re 20 you don’t know much, but when you’re 40 you’re well informed about things and you know, you’ve got a lot of friends and family around you who have had kids, so you talk and observe.” [Sophie (40-year-old secretary)]

It is worth noting that the learning of the role of mother begins as early as childhood (Stern and Bruscheiler-Stern 1998). In fact, many pregnant women evoke with laugh their childhood when they played with their doll.

An exchange of the information acquired by role models can be observed between pregnant women. If a pregnant woman is at a more advanced stage of the pregnancy, she can become a role model for another pregnant woman. This was the case for Céline, whose sister was pregnant before her, allowing Céline to observe the way she dealt with the pregnancy. However, the social learning may begin before the pregnancy, but it continues well after childbirth (Stern and Bruscheiler-Stern 1998).

Furthermore, a learning phase can be initiated by purchases for other children. This allows the constitution of a minimal stock of information concerning the products available.

“And then, em ... with regard to purchases, you start to buy things for the baby. It’s a world that you might know a little indirectly; I have nephews and so I have bought them presents. I also have friends who have had children, so I’m always, you know, em (...) I also think that being a woman makes you a little softer about these things...” [Catherine (31-year-old, store manager)]

The anticipated social role of mother through material preparation of the child’s arrival

During pregnancy, women orchestrate a meticulous material preparation of the child’s arrival necessary to the child well being. These goods correspond to two objectives: building the universe of the child (bedroom, clothing, toys and other child care goods) and preparing for maternity stay (maternity kit). Besides, the other consumption practices like the one of

woman decrease to the consumption practices for future baby.

“ I bought much fewer things for me, for expenses, there are Christmas then I bought for my family but for I bought much fewer I find. And I spend for her, for the baby. I spend much less than when I wasn't pregnant. It's a parenthesis, in your feminine life in fact... ” [Sarah (28-year-old, teacher)]

The material preparation often ritual dimension in the Rook's structural acceptance (1985) with a belief system and a system of symbolic action (Holt 1992). First, consumption helps to control the duration, which separates the pregnant woman from childbirth, i.e., the moment when the new role becomes active. Secondly, it can reduce the stress generated by the life transition (Schouten 1991a, 1991b). Finally, it allows pregnant women to adapt to the new role of motherhood. Even if the role is fully effective and recognised by the act of childbirth, a social recognition and an anticipation of the performance of the role will be operated through the material preparation. The consumption of goods becomes an indicator and an instrument of the role of mother. The material attributes have a double function: 1) to establish the role of mother on the eyes of others — object can be a vehicle (Thomsen and Sorensen 2006) — certain objects such as push chair or pram can have a strong social risk 2) to facilitate the performance of this role before child's arrival. Fischer and Gainer (1993) study a popular ritual in the USA known as a “baby shower”. This is a prenatal party to celebrate the anticipated arrival of the baby. The authors show how this party serves to accompany the acquisition process of the role of motherhood. Young (1991), in a study of various life events, notes that consumption facilitates and validates the changes of status and role during a life transition. We choose to speak of consumer goods as “facilitators” of the role transition.

Furthermore, the involvement of family members, or people close to the couple, can be observed in the preparation of the child's arrival. This may involve an anticipated exchange of gifts, which normally takes place after the birth. The gifts do not have the same

mean when they are given after the birth. These gifts should be understood as a system of social solidarity within the complex sociocultural construction more than just an aggregate of dyadic exchange (Giesler 2006). In fact, the financial participation of the family in the preparation for childbirth — material gifts or money — symbolize its contribution to the birth (Cicchelli 2001). We can also see the role of consumption in facilitating the integration of the role of grandparents, uncles or aunts.

GENERAL DISCUSSION

The findings are theorized in terms of the concept of the anticipation and the construction of the role of mother during the pregnancy. The preparation process of material goods to child's arrival meanings ascribed contributes to construct the role of mother. Thus, consumption practices have not only a functional role to child's arrival but also help pregnant women to adapt to their future role. An interesting pattern can be proposed from the findings. Infact, we can define from coding process two dimensions 1) consumption practices with a "child oriented" which expressive through a role of protection 2) consumption practices with a "social role of mother" oriented. The anticipation of the social role and status of motherhood are here emphasised. In this dimension, two functions of consumer goods can be exposed. On the one hand the material goods establish the role of mother. On the other hand, they imply an anticipated performance of the role by their purchase. As an accessory to the role, the tangible property is then a facilitator of this performance and reduces stress. Thus, the pregnancy offers an initial dramatisation of the role of mother through consumption. The major theoretical contribution of this study is the notion that consumption allows an anticipation of the forthcoming social role and status during the transitional period, at which time they are not yet in effect. Furthermore, we can see through consumption the sociocultural structure

with maintains the form of social status and role of mother.

Many particularity of the framework can be exposed. First, a temporal dimension can link this two stage. The new role of mother becomes increasingly solidified all long the pregnancy phase. Each month of pregnancy influence both consumption of old roles and new consumption practices. Then, consumption is a result of social learning about the role of mother through the observation of direct or indirect role models. Thus the two dimensions with wide social interactions framework. Finally, this framework is rooted in sociocultural patterns. Then, we can suggest that consumption practices substitute for ritual practices in traditional societies.

CONCLUSION AND RESEARCH PERSPECTIVES

Our research highlights consumption practices offers an initial preparation and anticipated dramatisation of the role of mother through. The major theoretical contribution of this study is the notion that consumption allows an anticipation of the forthcoming social role and status of mother during the transitional period, at which time they are not yet in effect. Finally, as Raulin (1986) suggests concerning childbirth that the “social birth seems to anticipate the biological birth”, the birth of “mother” is socially anticipated by consumption.

The qualitative methodology is the best method to understand and capture the dynamic process of the construction of the role of mother. But some of methodological limitations can be exposed. In fact, to enrich the findings our methodological choice should include photographs data of child care material goods. Moreover, we could complete the data of interviews, by observations in store where pregnant women can. Finally, the study should have been extended to other context that French context.

The present study suggests relevant developments in consumer behavior research.

First, we propose as the next step of this research the exploration of the consumption practices immediately after first childbirth. Then, we are interested in exploring more specifically the transmission of consumption practices from mother to daughter in case of first-time motherhood to a daughter. This research show also the interest in the role of consumption in the passage to fatherhood, given the inability of men to become pregnant and the inherent difficulties they have in preparing for the child's arrival. Lastly, we can study the loan of objects between mothers and pregnant women through the consumer resistance theory.

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