The Why of Consumption

Contemporary perspectives on consumer motives, goals, and desires

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14 The power of metaphor

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"I survived the wedding!" "When I grow up." "Let's go for it." The ideas of surviving or lasting, growth or journey, and movement in these quotes are metaphors relating to goals. So, too, are metaphors such as "When my ship comes in," "Let's shoot for that date," and "My life's mission," which involve notions of vessel and arrival, choosing targets and triggering actions, and a deep sense of purpose. In fact, so fundamental are metaphors to the expression of goals that it is very hard to describe the metaphoric content of these ideas without using still other metaphors. What is a goal after all, if not a metaphor? A goal is a proxy, a representation of one thing such as reaching a finish line, scoring, graduating, finding inner peace, and achieving other physical and emotional states. Consider football, for instance, which involves literal goal lines to be crossed or defended. The process of literally achieving a goal in this business called a game involves *clutch* first downs, *big plays, time out, dead ball fouls, beating another player, and a Hail Mary*. It may also involve being on cloud nine and spiking. At the same time, there are other metaphoric statements about what the defending team does to prevent a goal from being achieved. Viewed from the larger systems perspective of an action on a playing field by two teams and officials, we see conflicting purposes and objectives being experienced all at once and necessarily described with the use of metaphor. This shouldn't be surprising since it is estimated that people use an average of 5.7 metaphors per minute of speech (Gibbs 1994). The topic of conflicting goals will be addressed later in this chapter.

As other chapters note, most definitions of a *goal* incorporate the terms, "desired end-states," acknowledging that goals occur over time, and often involve a series of interrelated phenomena essential to the achievement of a goal. In consumer, psychological, and social psychological research, the predominant conceptualizaton of the structure of goals is hierarchical (Gutman 1982; Huffman *et al.*, this volume; Reynolds and Gutman 1988). This perspective argues that the highest order of goals or values, for example, freedom (Rokeach 1973) or self-concept (Sirgy 1986), serve as guides for our lower-level goals or sub goals, such as personal projects (Little 1989), life tasks (Cantor *et al.* 1987), and current concerns and

product purposes (Huffman *et al.*, this volume). Alternative ways of structuring goals including networks, graphs, and lattices (Hebb 1995; Ortony, Clore, and Collins 1988) have also received some attention. To elicit and examine individuals' goals and their importance, researchers have employed multiple methods which we discuss in more detail later in the chapter.

The majority of this research has contemplated the conscious aspects of goal setting and goal striving (Bagozzi and Dholakia 1999). Recent research (Austin and Vancouver 1996; Bargh and Barndollar 1996) however, suggests that many goals and the processes encompassing goal attainment are unconscious. Thus, while methodological pluralism has aided in understanding conscious goals, their structure and content, there continues to be a need for methods that will help to tap the unconscious goals and related processes, and deal with their idiographic nature, interrelatedness, and evolution over time (Austin and Vancouver 1996).

Our purpose is to examine goals as desired states or experiences and discuss how goals, both conscious and unconscious, are represented and/or expressed in terms of metaphors. Specifically, we consider how consumers express goals through metaphoric expressions, conceptual metaphors, complex metaphors, and deep metaphors. Second, we contemplate the ability to use metaphor and a metaphor-based method to better understand goals, and their idiographic, interrelated, and evolutionary nature. After arguing the power of metaphor for realizing and understanding goals, we provide an empirical illustration using a metaphor-based method to examine consumers' goals with regard to visiting a dentist. We conclude with some suggestions and questions for going forward with goal-related research.

Cognition and metaphor

In making the case that metaphor can be a powerful tool for understanding goals, we draw upon literature with regard to cognition and metaphor. Two recent findings, (1) thought is mostly unconscious, and (2) thought is largely metaphorical and imaginative, have challenged our understanding of reason and metaphor while providing grounding for our argument that metaphor can help us to understand goals. In this section, we briefly discuss these two findings.

Thought is mostly unconscious

With regard to the first point, "thought is mostly unconscious," there is consensus in cognitive science and neuroscience that most cognition occurs in the cognitive unconscious. Lakoff and Johnson (1999) suggest that unconscious thought accounts for 95 percent or more of all cognition. Others (Damasio 1994; LeDoux, 1996; Hoffman 1998) support this perspective. For example, while we are aware of experiencing memories, we

are not aware of the far more complex processes whereby these memories are formed and forgotten. Nor are we aware of the reconstructive processes involved in their recall. We may be keenly aware in our mind's eye of a novelist's description of a flower soaking up sun but not have any awareness of the many other events required of our mind to produce that picture, to give it meaning and to provide us with the experience of having produced it. In fact, most of our creation of what we see, smell, touch, taste, and hear is the product of a large number of unconscious but highly intelligent, creative rules whose operation generally escape our attention (Hoffman 1998; Bornstein and Pittman 1992). Imagine, too, trying to teach someone else to paint, catch a ball, ride a bicycle, blow a bubble with bubble gum, stifle a sneeze, or fly a kite relying only on your ability to share knowledge that is consciously available. Or try explaining how ideas occur to you, what it is like to feel joy or claustrophobia, know you have found your mate for life, or why a movie brought tears such that someone else can share that experience with you. We simply don't have sufficient access to all that goes on in our minds to be able to report accurately. We may do many things at once, but are capable of only maintaining awareness of one thing at a time (Dowling 1998).

This is not to suggest that conscious thought is unimportant. To the contrary, it is very important. Among many other things, it is what allows us to examine matters with care and to learn from experience. In all likelihood, for something to reside in the unconscious mind, it should be capable in theory of being brought into the conscious mind (Searle 1994). Emotions are an example. They are generally thought to exist as biological systems outside conscious awareness (LeDoux 1996). Under some circumstances they are occasionally experienced consciously as feelings. Some emotions like pride, guilt, embarrassment, and shame seem to be experienced as feelings more readily than others such as fear, anticipation, surprise, or joy (Tangney and Fischer 1995). The hard wiring involved in all emotions is to some degree influenced by or adaptive to changes in the social environment. Moreover, important variations occur across cultures and across unique individual experiences. These variations account for differences in what triggers an emotion, whether it emerges as a conscious feeling, and how the feeling is managed (Bagozzi *et al.* 1999). This brings us to the important possibility that emotions are the birthplace of conscious (as well as unconscious) goals. For some consumers financial security as a goal may have been born in fear and for others with a somewhat different personal history, it may have been born in embarrassment. It is easy to imagine self-fulfillment having pride or joy or even guilt as a birthplace.

To the extent that conscious goals are given life and salience by emotions (unconscious events), and that other unconscious processes such as those involved in memory, learning, and socialization shape the ways goals are pursued, frustrations and disappointments dealt with, and judgments made about whether or not goals have been adequately fulfilled, then we need to

find ways of exploring and surfacing unconscious cognitive processes. This is especially the case when these processes are malleable to begin with and used as a kind of play dough by social and cultural processes. This brings us to the second important point, that thought is largely metaphorical. The import of this idea is that metaphors and idiomatic expression serve as vehicles for transporting less than conscious thoughts into the realm of consciousness where they can be examined and understood more fully. Beyond serving as vehicles, metaphors and particularly systems of metaphors signal unconscious evaluations of things and processes.

Thought is largely metaphorical

The second point, which acknowledges that thought is not purely literal, but is indeed largely metaphorical and imaginative, provides us with some basis for suggesting that we should listen to metaphor and other figurative speech, as well as see how people use images to express one thing in terms of another. This section offers a discussion of metaphor (i.e. metaphorical expressions, conceptual metaphors, complex metaphors, and deep metaphors), but the interested readers may also see, for example, Lakoff and Johnson (1980, 1999) and Ortony (1993).

A metaphor is often thought of grammatically as "A is B." Lakoff and Johnson (1980) define *conceptual metaphors* as mappings across conceptual domains that structure our reasoning, our experience, and our everyday language. These conceptual metaphors are articulated in our everyday conversations through *metaphorical expressions,* the words, phrases, or sentences that are the surface realization of the cross-domain mappings (Lakoff 1993). Continuing in the football domain, one might use the metaphorical expression, "that defensive back is a well-oiled machine," to mean that he is an outstanding performer.

Research indicates that conceptual metaphors occur as a consequence of repeated pairings of two domains (Johnson 1997), and "we acquire them automatically and unconsciously as part of the normal process of neural learning, and may be unaware that we have them" (Lakoff and Johnson 1999). "Conceptual metaphor is pervasive in both thought and language" (Lakoff and Johnson 1999: 45), and arise from us conceptualizing an idea, a subjective experience, in terms of grasping an object, a sensorimotor experience. So, observing that well-oiled machines continue to perform, whereas those not oiled break down would lead one to make the connection between being well-oiled and good performance, and the consequent metaphor that a well-performing athlete is a well-oiled machine. In the goal context, two conceptual metaphors – *goals are destinations* and *goals are desired objects* – embody the definition of goal. Returning to our football example, the metaphorical expression "Fourth and goal" illustrates that the destination is near, while the metaphorical expression "playing their hearts out" or "they are all pumped up" conveys the desirous nature of the goal.

In both cases, scoring a touchdown involves subjective and sensorimotor experiences.

Importantly, *conceptual metaphors* serve as building blocks for *complex metaphors* which are represented as metaphorical maps. In other words, the linkages between and among conceptual metaphors construct mental models (Lakoff and Johnson 1999; Grady 1997, 1998). These mental models, by definition of metaphor, are culturally shared. Consider our conceptual metaphors – *goals are destinations* and *goals are desired objects.* Collectively, they can be thought of as a complex metaphor, "*goals are journeys.*" For instance, "the road to the Super Bowl," which taken metaphorically speaks to the process, the journey, that one must travel to reach that desired goal: playing in the Super Bowl. For that matter, the expressions, "It's not whether you win, but how you play the game" and "It's not how you play the game, but whether you win" are complex metaphors, used in and out of athletics, juxtaposing two important aspects of goals: *how* they are achieved or lost and *whether* they are achieved or lost. This juxtaposition conveys an important position with respect to certain values one associates with goals and how they are pursued.

Metaphorical expressions, conceptual metaphors, and complex metaphors serve as the basis for identifying *deep metaphors*. Deep metaphors serve as a means to organize a whole system of concepts. They provide a higher level of abstraction to the phenomena than do the previously discussed conceptual and complex metaphors. Because of their abstractness, deep metaphors both reflect and guide people's thinking. In essence, they are fundamental orienting concepts or "viewing lenses" that predispose people to perceive and interpret information in particular ways. Lakoff (1993) discusses deep metaphors, such as "orientation" (references to spatial orientation; e.g. up/down), "container" (references to being in/out of something), "time" (references to the passage of time), and "journey" (references to taking a trip, to following a path). An extended but not exhaustive listing of deep metaphors and their respective references are presented in Table 14.1.

To illustrate the relationship among metaphorical expressions and conceptual, complex and deep metaphors, in Table 14.2, we present metaphorical expressions consistent with the conceptual metaphors, "goals are destinations," and "goals are desired objects," and the complex metaphor, "goals are journeys." With regard to the conceptual metaphor, "goals are destinations," we offer metaphorical expressions that relate to reaching a goal, making/not making progress toward a goal and the process of reaching a goal. As noted in Table 14.2, the metaphorical expressions related to "reaching a goal" are associated with the deep metaphor, motion. The other three aspects of "goals are destinations" (i.e. making progress, not making progress, and the process of reaching a goal) involve a variety of deep metaphors, including motion, force, orientation, and physicality. With regard to the conceptual metaphor, "goals are desired objects," the

Table 14.1 Deep metaphors and metaphorical expressions

Deep metaphors	*Metaphorical expressions*
Physicality	Body references such as taste it; feel it; pick up, ingest, see my point; hurts me.
Balance	References to equilibrium, balance, equalize or compensate; including both sides; images of scales, teeter-totter, balance beam.
Motion or movement	References to moving (flowing, traveling, running or walking); references to action (doing something, getting going); keep moving; keep it going.
Nature	References to nature, outdoors, natural world, wildness; chaotic, untamed; specific images of nature – rain forest, desert, woods; references to breeding, evolving, growing.
Force	References to power, a powerful presence, or a source of energy; references to the consequences of force (getting hit; slammed, impact).
Fight vs. flight	References to war; fights, battles; choose your battles; avoid a fight; don't get involved; running away or hide from something.
The ideal	Reference to the ideal object, situation, feeling; statements about one's ideal self; references to perfection, the perfect one.

metaphorical expressions are tied to the deep metaphors, ideal, physicality, and nature. Finally, the complex metaphor, "goals are journeys" reflects the deep metaphors of motion, journey, and ideal.

Contemplating goal assessment and the power of metaphor

While the previous section illustrates that we do indeed use metaphors to discuss goals, questions remain about the value of metaphor in helping to elicit goals, both conscious and unconscious. Austin and Vancouver's (1996) review of goal constructs, and their consideration of methods to assess goals, underscores the power of metaphor in understanding goals. Additionally, Bagozzi and Dholakia (1999) suggest that metaphor-based methods have merit in eliciting and understanding goals and goal processes. These ideas, augmented by other research, are noted below.

Latent versus phenomenological perspectives on goals

Austin and Vancouver (1996: 339) draw a conceptual distinction between latent and phenomenological perspectives on goals. The former holds that "goals define the pursuits of individuals, regardless of awareness or

Table 14.2 Metaphoric expressions and conceptual, complex, and deep metaphors

	Metaphoric expressions	*Deep metaphors*
Conceptual metaphor:		
Goals are destinations		
Reaching the goal	He's coming down the home stretch	Motion
	He's crossed the finish line	Motion
	His ship has come in	Motion
Making progress toward the goal	He's off and running	Motion
	He's seen the light at the end of the tunnel	Physicality, Motion
	He's covered a lot of ground	Journey
Not making progress toward goal	His hands are tied	Physicality
	He's hit a brick wall	Force
	He's behind the eight ball	Orientation, Force
The process	He's on a roller coaster ride	Journey, Orientation, Motion
	There are hills and valleys along the way	Journey, Motion, Orientation, Balance
	He's fighting an uphill battle	Journey, Fight vs. Flight, Orientation
Conceptual metaphor:		
Goals are desired objects		
	It's the cat's meow	Ideal
	My heart skipped a beat	Ideal, Physicality
	It's the cream of the crop	Ideal, Nature
Complex metaphor:		
Goals are journeys		
	He's reaching for the brass ring	Motion, Journey, Ideal
	He's going for the gold	Motion, Journey, Ideal
	He's reaching for the stars	Motion, Journey, Ideal

volition," whereas the latter holds that "an individual's goals may be a simple rationalization." While these two perspectives can seemingly co-exist, research indicates that most emotions and cognitive functions that guide thought and behavior occur without our awareness (Plutchik 1993; Shimamura 1994). And as noted previously, Lakoff and Johnson (1999) state that cognitive operations are largely unconscious, and that unconscious thought accounts for 95 percent of all cognition. With this in mind, we take the latent perspective, arguing that goals may be either conscious or unconscious. In fact, a given goal may shift between these two states, acknowledged by expressions such as "losing sight of our goals," "getting side-tracked," or "being excessively driven." The first two expressions

involving losing sight and being side-tracked reflect having a goal that slips from awareness, whereas the third expression reflects the over prominence of a goal. At any one time, most goals lie below awareness even when we are fully aware of doing things to attain them (e.g. driving to work, and performing work).

Metaphors have a long history of use in clinical contexts ranging from projective tests to clinically driven content analyses of ordinary discourse. Of relevance here is their value as vehicles for transporting ideas from the unconscious mind to the conscious mind where they can be examined more readily by clients and therapists or consumers and researchers. Metaphors are expressed non-verbally as well as verbally and often both are used simultaneously. Even when expressed verbally, they may involve various physical senses ("Let's put them in touch"), as well as more abstract references ("They need to partner" or "How do we bridge that rift?").

An important and often under-appreciated quality of metaphor is that they hide as well as reveal thoughts and feelings (Glucksberg 1995). This is another reason why metaphor is often more revealing than conventional verbal and behavioral protocol analysis (LeDoux 1996). This quality of metaphor becomes particularly evident when analyzing systems of metaphors. For instance, when people use competitive metaphors involving, say, sports or war, they may be hiding notions of cooperation and mutual gain which are present but may be judged ideologically unacceptable in a social context (e.g. board-room meeting, consumer activist planning, developing lobbying strategy). Or, the use of a system of metaphor that stresses cooperation and mutual gain may be sufficiently threatening to the person using zero-sum systems that they need to actively avoid them – the unconscious equivalent to letting sleeping dogs lie. When a system of metaphor becomes evident, it is almost always productive to try to understand what system it is being used in lieu of and why. Revealing unsurfaced thoughts and feelings to consumers may make tacit assumptions and knowledge more explicit thereby helping consumers and researchers to better understand motives and desires (Belk *et al.*, this volume).

Idiographic goals lacking in shared meaning

Researchers have approached goal assessment in a number of ways. One popular method is the use of self-reports using scales of goal items (Houston and Walker 1996). These methods have respondents identify their goals using a list of predetermined goal items, or have respondents help to develop the list and then indicate salience, relevance, or priority (Little 1989). Qualitative methods, including: projective techniques (Kingten and Holland 1984), laddering (Reynolds and Gutman 1988; Valette-Florence and Rapacchi 1991), and phenomenological depth interviews (Mick and Buhl 1992) also have been employed. Additionally, see Escalas and Bettman (this volume) for a discussion of using narratives to discern self-identity related to

consumer goals and motivation. While "more" quantitative methods allow us to *know* about the existence of specific goals, "more" qualitative methods allow for a better understanding of these goals' *meanings*.

Austin and Vancouver (1996) express concern about assessing goals in any manner because of their *uniqueness*, and their *lack of shared meaning*. Other perspectives (Geertz 1973) suggest that goals are not unique and can have shared meanings even across different people. The critical underlying issue in this range of perspectives seems to be the depth or level at which a goal is being examined, as well as the context. With rare exceptions, everyone seeks success, although they may define success in very different ways depending on their chronological age, physical endowments, geography, fiscal and other resources, and what a particular culture encourages or values. Even those who experience anomie share a common goal state.

These countervailing perspectives with regard to the idiosyncratic nature of goals and their content suggest the need for a method that through some common vocabulary could find commonalities across idiosyncracies. Because metaphors are necessarily culturally shared, a metaphor-based method could serve as a basis for not only eliciting goals that are shared, but also in bridging the idiographic nature of goals.

Goal interrelatedness

Still, whether (or even when) goals are idiosyncratic or widely shared at any level of analysis, assessing their structure and content can be difficult. One reason for this difficulty is that goals are interrelated. Some, who view goal interrelatedness from a hierarchical perspective (Gutman 1982), suggest that goal interrelatedness occurs because a lower-level goal (e.g. controlling a child's sugar consumption) is linked to a higher-order, typically more abstract, goal (e.g. teaching children proper nutrition) which may be related to still another goal (e.g. enhancing the quality of the mother–child relationship). The difficulty this poses for understanding goals is basically one of categorization. When does one goal begin and the other leave off? How does one establish a boundary around a particular goal so that its structure and content can be understood adequately?

Another perspective which is essentially a more complex version of that noted above, is the heterarchical perspective (Broadbent 1985). This view holds that a goal at one level may be attached to multiple higher-order goals. So, for example, controlling a child's sugar consumption could be linked to teaching the child good nutritional habits, *and* it could be linked to a desire to maintain or improve the child's physical appearance. Both of these goals may be linked to multiple higher-order goals which include not only enhancing the quality of the mother–child relationship, but also the quality of the relationship the mother has with her peers. The heterarchical view also allows for interrelatedness between or among goals that appear to co-exist at the same level.

The co-existence of multiple goals begs the question of their compatibility. While in some cases goals are compatible (e.g. moderating a child's sugar intake and teaching sound nutritional practices), in other cases they have the potential to conflict (e.g. over-control of sugar intake does not allow children to learn about balance and moderation when making food choices). Note the complication introduced with this last example. The manner in which a goal is pursued (controlling sugar intake and teaching sound nutritional practices) determines whether the goal is achieved and hence experienced in a beneficial or dysfunctional way. Moreover, who experiences the benefit and/or the dysfunction, the child and/or the mother, illustrates yet another important quality of goals complicating their study: goals are ultimately rooted in social relationships. More specifically, their origins, the manner in which they are pursued, and the experience of their consequences are not an individual affair.

Several conceptualizations of metaphor underscore their ability to tap into the linkages among goals and goal-related processes. First, Narayanan's (1997) neural theory of metaphor holds that in the course of learning, the repeated co-occurrences or conflation (Johnson 1997), are realized neurally, and result in permanent neural connections which serve as the basis for metaphorical associations. Second, Fauconnier and Turner's (1998) theory of conceptual blending suggests that distinct conceptual domains can be co-activated and under certain conditions connections across domains can be formed, leading to new inferences (Lakoff and Johnson 1999). Thus, the connections of metaphors across domains enables, perhaps even requires, one to contemplate the hierarchical and heterarchical nature of goals. Thus, a metaphor-based method appears to be a viable approach to assessing goal structure, content, strength or impact with an ability to both disentangle interrelated goals and/or to treat them in their more natural interconnected states.

Goal development and change

The *dynamic* nature of goals also contributes to the difficulty of assessing their structure, content, and functioning. While higher-order goals, e.g. life themes and values and life projects are relatively invariant over time, lower level goals, e.g. personal projects (Little 1989), life tasks (Cantor *et al.* 1987), and current concerns, and product purposes (Huffman *et al.*, this volume) tend to be more changeable. Various self-report methods using longitudinal designs may be efficient ways to track changes in goal intensity and purposes being served for lower- and, perhaps, higher-order goals.

For understanding more abstract goals or the deeper meanings of lower-level goals, metaphor-based methods used in clinical practice in mental health settings, and marketing, organizational, and cultural studies, for instance, are likely to be more appropriate. Metaphor-based methods, because of their ability to surface unsurfaced or hidden knowledge, are

better able to tap consumers' meaning with respect to recent and historical knowledge. For example, changes in the specific metaphors and in the metaphor systems that patients use provide immediate and meaningful clues about how a patient's goals are changing at all levels of a goal hierarchy (Kopp 1995; Weiser 1993). Whether traditional self-report methods, metaphor-based methods, or some combination are preferred, it is desirable to track goal dynamics longitudinally. Insights about how goals change in dynamic ways are central to a deep understanding of their structure, functioning, and even content.

Being carried to the dentist: an illustration

We have argued that using a metaphor-based method would help us to surface unsurfaced knowledge, identify hidden goals and have a deeper understanding of the meaning of goals. We draw upon research using a metaphor-based method, the Zaltman Metaphor Elicitation Technique (ZMET)[1] to illustrate the types of metaphors and the insights they might provide into consumer goals. The study was conducted by Futuredontics, a company interested in understanding consumers' thoughts and feelings related to good oral hygiene. Details of ZMET and its theoretical underpinnings can be found in Zaltman and Coulter (1995) and Zaltman (1997).

Based on Futuredontics' screening criteria, eight women and four men between the ages of 24 and 39 with an annual income of at least $40,000, and who had no dental insurance and had not been to the dentist within the past two years, were selected to participate. Prior to participating in a one-on-one depth interview, each participant was asked to collect 8 to 10 images (e.g. photographs, pictures in books or magazines) that expressed their thoughts and feelings about going to the dentist. The two-hour interview primarily focused on the images that the participant brings. The interview is relatively unstructured but typically involves a seven step process: (1) storytelling, (2) missed images, (3) construct elicitation, (4) metaphor elaboration, (5) sensory images, (6) the vignette, and (7) the summary image.

Our discussion here reports on selected findings from our analysis with a focus on participants' perspectives with regard to good oral hygiene. To briefly summarize, our analyses clearly illustrate the co-existence of conflicting goals. On the one hand, individuals have goals related to *going* to the dentist to practice good oral hygiene, to get clean, white teeth, to feel good about one's appearance, be more self-confident, and to be at peace. On the other hand, they have goals related to *avoiding* the uncertainty and anxiousness about going to the dentist, the wait for the dentist, the pain of the exam, the smells and sounds in the office, and the related costs of dental care. The visit to the dentist's office is at best an approach-avoidance dance.

In the following discussion, we offer illustrations of identified metaphorical expressions, and conceptual, complex and deep metaphors as they relate to lower- and higher-level goals, and the subtleties of the dentist–patient relationship.

The conceptual metaphors: necessary evil and the knight in shining armor

Our analyses revealed that participants in the study saw the dentist and his work as a *necessary evil* and as a *knight in shining armor*. The former of these two conceptual metaphors is evidenced in the following metaphorical expressions:

> This is a picture of two women hugging each other. That represents that I usually go to the dentist with someone else . . . I don't like going to the dentist . . . always in the back of my mind, I feel that something is going to go wrong. Maybe they might cut my gums, and I might swallow a filling.
>
> (Female, 37)

> [Deciding to go to the dentist] is like a battle with myself . . . a macho thing. I feel I don't need to go unless my teeth really hurt . . . I can hold out from going to the dentist because my teeth don't hurt that bad. I'm strong, I can make it without the dentist. It's a macho thing, like the running of the bulls.
>
> (Male, 27)

> [The drill] is the most feared item in the dentist's repertoire of tools: that bzzz, that little bzzz. When I was a kid I used to worry about the thing spinning off and into my cheek or onto my tongue. [I also feared] the vibrations on the teeth. It's just [a part of] going to the dentist.
>
> (Male, 32)

The other side of the picture, so to speak, is that the dentist was perceived in a very positive light, as if he was a knight in shining armor.

> [It's a picture of] a guardian angel, and it's how I feel safe with the dentist that I have gone to for a long time, Dr Schwartz . . . I've just gone to him for years and I really didn't have to think of anything, just sat in the chair and he did his thing . . . Dr Schwartz, he was a protecting, loving force.
>
> (Female, 38)

> Once you get to know how [the dentist] works, you can talk about different things. It is more relaxed. My dentist, he grew up with us . . . we have a lot in common . . . He tells me exactly what he is doing. You've got to trust the dentist to feel easier . . . When you are all done with [what is] going to be done, [you feel] confident about yourself.
>
> (Male, 35)

The complex metaphor: good vs. evil

The complex metaphor, *good vs. evil*, seems to capture the conceptual metaphors, *dentist as necessary evil* and *dentist as knight in shining armor*, as well as the meanings communicated by participants' summary images and the consensus map. Both participants' summary images and the consensus map serve as complex metaphors; the former is each participant's network of meaning related to good oral hygiene, and the latter is an aggregation across study participants that represents the socially shared network of meaning. To exemplify the value of examining these metaphors, we present one participant's summary image and the consensus map (and related metaphorical expressions) to illustrate the *good vs. evil* complex metaphor.

The summary image

During Step 7 of the ZMET interview each participant works with a computer graphics technician to create a composite image from the pictures that they brought to the interview. As the name suggests, this image serves as a summary of the participant's thoughts and feelings about going to the dentist. Figure 14.1 is one participant's (Male, 27) summary image, and Figure 14.2 is the participant's description of the meanings related to the various components of the summary image. Upon reading the description, the co-existence of conflicting goals becomes evident. There are certainly positive physical and emotional outcomes associated with the dentist, e.g. having clean, white teeth, feeling good about one's appearance, and becoming more self-confident. Alternatively, the participant also has goals related to *avoiding* the wait for the dentist, the pain of the exam, and the smells and sounds in the office.

The consensus map

Metaphorical expressions are a key mechanism through which participants in a ZMET study express ideas. Thus, we review transcripts of all interviews and code them for the main ideas (i.e. constructs) that were elicited. Constructs, therefore, represent basic ideas mentioned by participants when discussing their thoughts and feelings about going to the dentist. The aggregation of participants' constructs and their interrelationships form a complex metaphor, a mental model which illustrates the linkages between goal-related actions and behaviors. (For more details on construction of the consensus map, please see Zaltman and Coulter 1995, Zaltman 1997.)

Figure 14.3 illustrates the consensus map for our study about dental hygiene; the map represents connections between constructs made by at least one quarter of the participants. The *good vs. evil* complex metaphor is apparent, with two central constructs being *Go to the Dentist* and *Don't Go to the Dentist*. On the *good* (*Go*) side of the consensus map, participants relate *positive childhood experiences, a favorable ambiance in the dentist's office*, a *trusting*

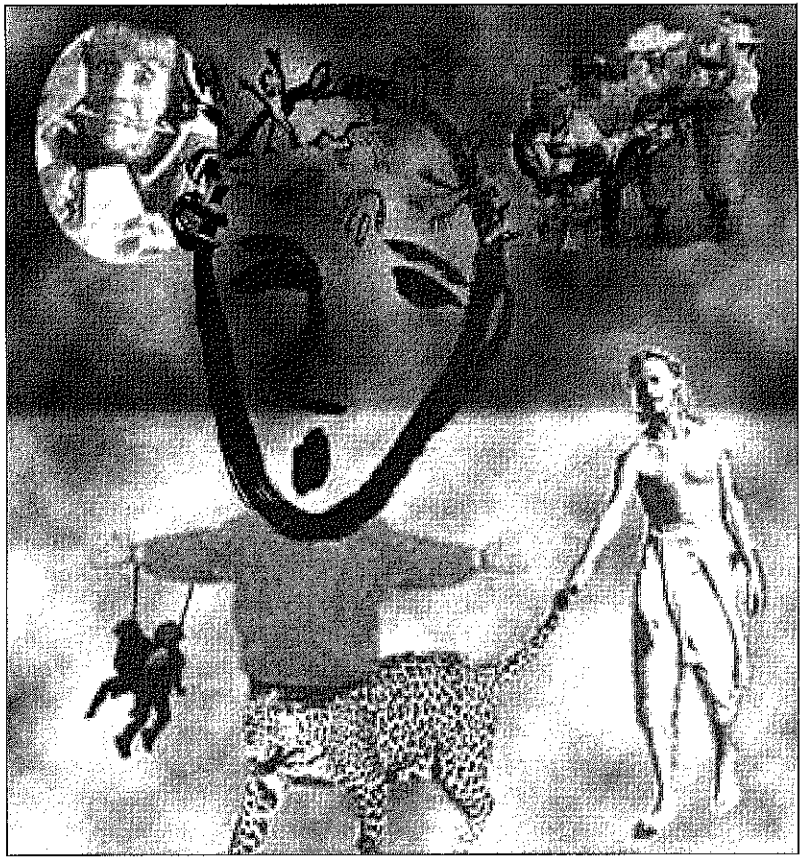

Figure 14.1 Participant's (male, 27) summary image.

and positive rapport with the dentist as factors that encourage them to schedule dental visits. Moreover, the participants relate their lower-order (relatively speaking) goal of dental hygiene to higher-order goals of self-esteem, personal worth, and peace. The following metaphorical expressions illustrate the positive aspects of visiting the dentist.

> When I go to the dentist I feel confident, not just for that day . . . but for months after and you just feel better and have a better attitude, a better outlook, a healthier attitude. You're confident, you know everything's okay.
>
> (Female, 35)

> When I think about going to the dentist, I think about getting my teeth white again, clean . . . I feel better about myself. If I look good, I feel good, self-confident, and professional.
>
> (Male, 39)

[In the center of the image is] a person with sort of a large head with different ideas floating around it. The main body is shrugging to indicate my "oh well" feeling towards everything, and my very strong belief in my ideas about why I go or don't go to the dentist.

The bottom of my body is represented by a tiger, or actually I think it is a leopard's body, being pulled by the tail, by a man. This represents my feeling that the dental industry is pulling my tail as far as telling me that I have to go to the dentist every six months.

Off my right arm is an image of children, swinging on a swing. This represents me feeling like a child when I go to the dentist, and having very little control over the environment, and being treated like a child. It represents having very little control in being placed in this chair and being told that this is for my own good and digging around in my mouth.

In the upper left corner of the picture there is an image of this woman, who is anxious. She is on the phone and she has two phones up to each ear and she has a pencil in her mouth. It looks like she has a lot of sources of information around her. She seems confused, an overflow of info. That's how I feel about having to find a dentist, and then schedule an appointment, and make sure that it is all ok with my insurance, and that I can squeeze it into my schedule. There is this anxiety over the logistics of going to the dentist.

On the opposite side of the head, swerving around, there is an image of a person being carried by one of the people. This is my feeling. I would need to be carried to the dentist in the sense that either it would have to be because of a physical pain, my teeth really hurt, in excruciating pain, or some other reason that someone would make me go. But literally, they almost have to carry me to the dentist, because I won't go there on my own free will.

The background is cloudy, dark on top around my head where it is filled with all this anxiety. This is different from the normal color, the light color below which represents a day to day existence.

[*You talked about this image in the upper right-hand corner being carried to the dentist, what is it that deters you?*] Well, I don't like being at the dentist, the sharp objects, very obtrusive and painful and unpleasant. Sitting in the chair and having them dig with these sharp little scrapers in my teeth. [*What would make it more pleasant?*] No sharp objects in my mouth. It's funny the dentists tell you, "Don't every put anything sharp and obtrusive in your mouth," and then they go and scrape you with these things. Geez, you think they could figure out new ways to clean your teeth without having to scrape you with metal, like a medieval torturing device.

The head itself has these really weird images floating around that represent this deeper anxiety of going to the dentist. People telling me that I need to go, and me not wanting to go. It's that whole conflict between the two that creates anxiety and these weird images, I don't even know what they are. The expression of myself in this is, my hands outstretched saying, 'Well, this is me and this is how I am and I am not going to change.' I don't know whether the shrugging is actually conveyed in the picture, but that is my attitude, 'Oh well, this is how I am, and this is how I plan to stay. Don't pull my tail.'

[*If you were to put a title on this image what would that be?*) 'Doctor, please don't pull my tail or don't yank my tail,' playing on the pun of having your teeth yanked.

Figure 14.2 Verbatim for participant's (male, 27) summary image.

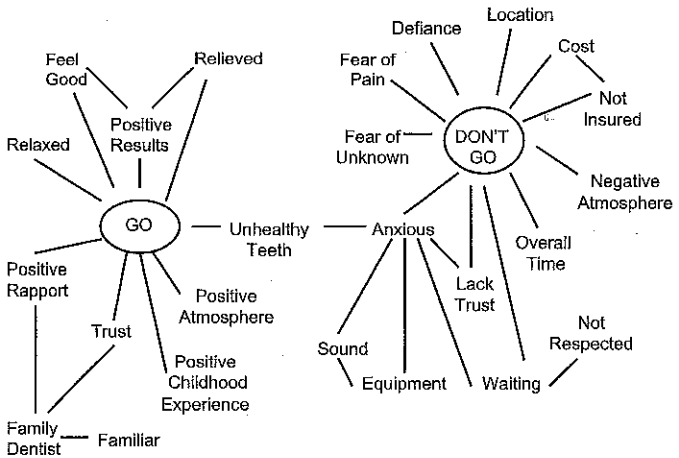

Figure 14.3 Consensus map for thoughts and feelings about good dental care.

On the *evil* (*Don't Go*) side of the consensus map, participants comment on a variety of negative factors, including *cost-related issues, time- and location-related concerns,* as well as *the fears and anxieties related to pain, the unknown, and the dreaded office-related equipment and sounds*. Our participants' metaphorical expressions vividly convey their negativity toward going to the dentist.

> [Going to a dentist] could be inclement weather. It looks like it is getting dark. It could be like a major thunderstorm about to happen and there is no real place to go undercover immediately. So I am vulnerable to the elements.
>
> (Female, 38)

> I just don't feel right about having someone dig into my mouth with metal tools. They feel like sharp, little bullhorns going into my teeth. They poke you. It feels like flesh in a chair being ripped around with their little pointy metal things . . . I feel like I am being interrogated in the dentist's chair.
>
> (Male, 27)

> It is the whole waiting room process. You rush to get there on time to be a good patient, you are waiting in the waiting room with bad magazines. It is not fun . . . You probably have to be at work. [T]he waiting room causes a lot of anxiety. I want to go home . . . You pay them all this money and they can't keep their appointment.
>
> (Female, 32)

> To me, the dental office smells like flesh or burning flesh or some kind of a smell that you can't even put your finger on . . . I would hold my stomach if there weren't other people in the waiting room. I want to . . . stop the butterflies and try to make my stomach feel better.
>
> (Female, 34)

The deep metaphor: balance

The deep metaphor, *balance*, refers to equilibrium, to equalize or compensate, to viewing both sides of a matter. Balance aptly captures the essence of the conceptual metaphors, *dentist as necessary evil* and *dentist as knight in shining armor*, and the complex metaphor of *good vs. evil*. A closer look at participants' metaphorical expressions reveals three themes regarding balance. The first concerns participants' balancing the positive outcomes of the dental visit against the negatives associated with a visit to the dentist's office, the second refers to participants' need to achieve a more "favorable balance" during their office visit, and the third refers to discussing the "imbalance" in power between the dentist and the patient.

A dominant theme with regard to *balance* and the dental visit involves consumers trading off the negative aspects of the dental visit and its preparation against the physical and emotional good that can come from following through with a dental visit. With regard to the former, consumers deal with the pre-visit anxieties such as the anticipation of the unknown, the impending pain, the financial concerns, and the waiting game in the office. These negatives coupled with the physical unpleasantries of having a dentist work on their teeth, and listening to the nerve-wracking dental equipment unnerve dental patients. Alternatively, the positive outcomes, including white, healthy teeth, being self-confident, and feeling relaxed help to counter, or at least give a somewhat favorable light, to the gloomy visit to the dentist's office. Several participants' comments illustrate the trade-off between the dental visit occurrences and their more abstract goals, e.g. post-visit emotional comfort.

> I hate the smell of the dental office. I get kind of nervous . . . I don't like waiting. If I hear the drills going on, it makes me think more. Once I'm there, I want to get it over with . . . [and when it's over] I'm more relieved . . . more relaxed.
>
> (Male, 35)

> This picture is three guys with machine guns and they are all firing at the same time. It's the same song [that you hear] in the dentist's office – when [my mouth] is open and they are drilling . . . I would rather have a baby than a toothache, and that's a lot of pain. When there is pain in your mouth, it hurts everywhere . . . and you can't function . . . I can't wait to finish [my dental appointment]. Peace.
>
> (Female, 37)

A second theme with regard to *balance* deals specifically with the patient's time in the office. Participants, after harping on bothersome aspects of the dental visit, seemed compelled to offer suggestions that they believed would make a dental visit a more palatable experience, to bring it more into balance with their expectations of a more favorable service encounter.

As evidenced in the following, participants use vivid metaphors to communicate the perceptions of the dental visit and provide advice for the dentist to improve the experience.

> When the dentist is scraping my teeth, it reminds me of someone dragging their nails across a chalkboard. It's very unpleasant . . . If the next time I went to the dentist and had a really positive experience, I'd say, "I could do this again." If the dentist was really nice and had fresh breath, and the chair was comfortable, and they gave me gas, so I wouldn't feel the pain, and there was music, I might even like it.
>
> (Male, 27)

> With the insurance hassle, getting bills . . . I feel like I should just be banging my head against the wall . . . And, another problem I had with dentists, I just felt that they weren't gentle enough and my teeth are really sensitive . . . I can tolerate a lot of pain, and when I say "I'm in pain," I'm in pain . . . Going to the dentist should almost be like a field trip. It should be nice and soft and recreational and not sporty, but fun . . . You look forward to going and seeing everyone, and you know you're going to have a good experience.
>
> (Female, 30)

A final theme on *balance* concerns the imbalance of power between doctors and patients, with the dentist in control, and the patient relatively helpless and vulnerable. The participants talk about their vulnerability, their feelings of no power, and perceptions of being treated like a child. Participants' feelings are evoked by dentists who keep them waiting, who don't listen to their cries of pain, and who aren't conciliatory.

> [This is] a picture of a shark. Fear, like if someone had a knife at my throat. Just a fear that seems like it is out of my control. Large, ravenous teeth, sharp that can take a bite out of you . . . [When I am at the dentist's office] I feel like a homeless person . . . feeling vulnerable and feeling open and exposed . . .
>
> (Female, 38)

> [Dentists] have control of you. You are the patient and the doctor has control . . . you are downright helpless . . . [the dentist] is the dominant one, and [the patient] is the helpless one.
>
> (Male, 35)

> [The dentist] is not respectful of my time . . . The last couple of times I've been to the dentist, it is just a matter of waiting and confusion . . . I may not be a doctor, but my time is valuable, and I just get mad that people don't respect it.
>
> (Female, 27)

To summarize, our analyses revealed the paradoxical nature of participants' goals and good oral hygiene. Participants' metaphorical expressions, e.g. the picture of the shark; the smells of burning flesh, the little bullhorns going into teeth, and the sound of fingernails on chalkboards, more clearly articulate participants' issues related good dental hygiene than would be the case using more typical self-report methods. In discussing their goals to avoid pains and anxieties, and desires for peace and self-confidence, as related to their goal of good dental care, participants tried to balance the good of going to the dentist, against the bad of being there, against the good of leaving. And, while acknowledging that going to the dentist is the "right thing to do," some participants resolved their goal conflict by going to the dentist, others resolved it by staying home. The meanings behind the metaphors elicited in the study provide valuable insights into the customer's perspective of the doctor–patient relationship and about their goals and interrelationships. Moreover, though not the focus of this chapter, our findings have significant strategic and managerial implications.

Summary

Goals are everywhere. Goals litter stadiums, are prominent on the lawns of non-profit groups during fund raising, are evident in the migration of various animal species, surface in sales force training programs, appear in the personal classified sections of magazines, and are the raison d'être of commencement speeches. Durkheim's classic work on anomie and suicide reminds us of the centrality of goals in giving life meaning. Goals even endow people with the ability to delay death for short periods of time until after a major cultural, religious, or family event. It is not surprising given their ubiquity that, in one way or another, goals are the foundation on which consumers base their acquisition, consumption, and disposal of goods and services. Goals are not only the foundation on which consumer behavior is built, they are also the energy source or fuel for constructing these activities.

We have noted as others have, that studying consumer goals is challenging for a number of reasons. First, goals are often contiguous with one being a means of achieving another and in the contiguity they may appear nearly seamless. This introduces the challenge of separating contiguous goals from one another. It also raises the issue of whether the appropriate unit of analysis is an individual goal (assuming it can be readily isolated) or a goal cluster. Second, a given goal or goal cluster is part of a system and may be related to multiple other goals of both a higher and lower order if one takes a heterarchical perspective in viewing goals. This raises the following methodological challenge: if the meaning of a goal is found in its association with other goals, how do we understand a given goal without taking into account multiple other goals? Third, the context of a goal has an important impact on how it is structured, its exact content, the benefit it

may provide. This context is frequently, maybe unavoidably, social in nature. This presents us with the challenge of understanding goals using the convenience of individuals while knowing goals are not individual affairs.

These and other challenges prompt us to encourage the use of more diverse methods for understanding goals. The most commonly employed methods for studying goals in consumer behavior contexts have proven quite productive and will continue to be so. They are helpful and efficient in making comparisons across multiple groups about the presence and relative importance of particular goals. They are also helpful in tracking changes in goals and goal sequences within a population. This, in turn, provides insight into the dynamic ways in which goals do and do not operate, especially as changes in life circumstance occur.

This chapter has encouraged more frequent use of metaphor-based approaches to studying goals as a way of augmenting the insights offered by other methods. Metaphor-based approaches such as those used in a variety of mental health counseling settings, and now increasing in business settings, provide a special opportunity to learn about the deeper qualities of goals. These deeper qualities include the hidden emotional character of goals, the manner in which goals interact to produce paradox and conflict, and the socially negotiated character of goals which individuals ultimately accept. Metaphor studies make this possible by digging deeper into the unconscious mind of the consumer, helping them, in effect, to open windows into their own mind and look in and then share their observations with a researcher. In the process, hidden knowledge about goals, including what a person doesn't know they know about the presence of goals, and how those goals operate, is frequently surfaced. Metaphor-based methods better enable individuals to understand and share goals that they simply had not had the occasion or ability to explore. Importantly, they enable consumer and other researchers to tap into varying levels of goals, to elicit deeper meanings of goals, better know the linkages among goals and their potentially paradoxical nature. Continued investigation of methods used to explore goal setting and goal processes will enable us to more fully understand consumers' mental models for goal attainment.

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Note

1 ZMET is available for use without restriction for academic research purposes. Training materials are available and we are pleased to provide additional guidance to academics. The technique is patented, and non-academic use requires prior authorization. Further information for academic purposes can be obtained by contacting the Director, Mind of the Market Laboratory, Harvard Business School, Boston, MA 02163. ZMET is also widely used in proprietary commercial studies in markets worldwide.

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