

## **SELF-GIFT GIVING: A NEW WIDESPREAD CONSUMPTION CULTURE**

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### **SUMMARY**

The meanings derived from consumption goods have an increasing impact on the psychological formation of individuals. Hence, to understand the complex nature of consumer behavior, a multidisciplinary approach is needed.

Consumption goods become magical fetish objects which satisfy individual pleasures. The gift, in this concept, becomes a token that the individual gives her/himself, and evolves from being a collective system to an individual form of consumption. The aim of this study is to explore cross-cultural differences in self-gift giving behavior, which has been studied mainly in individualistic societies. This study will explore self-gift giving behavior in collectivistic cultures. Within this respect, this study investigates whether the seven factors of self-gift giving behavior identified by Mick (1991) are also valid in Turkish society. Based on these grounds this survey, investigating the behavior of self-gift purchases, also includes a measure of the attachment levels of individuals to traditions and an analysis of whether these levels significantly affect, purchasing behavior.

The giving and receiving of gifts, being an interpersonal communication phenomenon, has within the popular culture system been seen as an individualistic act, in which the individual recipient receives gifts directed towards her/himself. Individuals satisfy needs for “affection, indulgence, getting rid of stress, self-reward, motivation and fighting loneliness” that are usually met through collective relationships by buying self-gifts.

Western researchers have found that purchases are becoming more and more self-centered and that in this context self-giving has become more widespread. The present study investigates whether the seven categories of antecedents of the purchase of self-gifts put forward by Mick (1991) remain valid for practices in Turkish society.

**Key Words:** Self-centered consumption, popular culture, culture of desire, self-gift.

## INTRODUCTION

Nowadays consumption has increasingly become a phenomenon connected with the emotions of individuals. The purchase of consumption goods becomes a vicious circle of feelings of unease before the purchase and temporary feelings of enjoyment after the purchase. As Mick states, messages directed towards consumption are based on the effort to push the individual into a constant search for “happiness”. These efforts and the false belief that happiness can be found through the purchase of goods, are indications of a type of gratification culture in which consumers are pursuing a continuous search for the fulfillment of their desires (Mick, 1991).

The emotional pattern in self-gift buying behavior is similarly trying to satisfy a need for pleasure. Self-gift behavior plays a leading role in consumers’ mood-regulatory activities (Luomala-Laaksonen, 1999). Gift-giving behavior which emerged as a system which regulates relationships among people has within the popular consumption system become transformed into a phenomenon which is turned upon the individual him/herself. The emotion in this consumption behavior has changed from “what reason should I purchase and give this for” to “I want this, I want to possess it, I crave it”. Self-gifts are, on a symbolic level, a mediator of the communication the individual has with him/herself, they are previously planned and triggered by situational factors (Mick and DeMoss, 1990). Studies conducted in this area show individuals engage in self-gift purchasing behavior in times of personal success, disappointment, depression and holidays. When the individual faces circumstances that are difficult to handle or experience, a long period of stress is generated. Enduring difficult situations or relieving increased stress, along with the individual being nice to himself / herself (“I love myself”), and having extra money to spend, are situations in which the tendency to buying self-gifts increases (Mick and De Moss, 1990).

Commercial slogans are creating and stimulating these inclinations. For example *Ülker*, a Turkish company producing food, uses a high school student who comes out of the classroom after having taken an exam saying: “How to describe Metro? It is like you say well-done to yourself after you pass an exam” in the TV commercial of the chocolate bar named *Metro*. The commercial stimulates self-reward and celebration after accomplishing something difficult. Cosmetic products sold under the brand *L’Oreal* are advertised with the slogan “Because you’re worth it”. Along with emphasizing that every women has the right to the beauty and care that the products will provide, the commercial also underlines the notion that women should feel worthy of something special. Another cosmetics company *Lush* gives all of its handmade soaps their own names and has given a heart-shaped soap the name “I like myself” recommending their customers to express their love for themselves through buying this soap.

In order to understand individual consumption behavior based on gratification, psychological studies conducted on this concept have to be reviewed. Psychoanalysis puts forward the notion that the roots of gratification lie within human culture and the subliminal urges which sustains it. According to Freud, dreams express an individual’s

subliminal desires (Freud, 1991). Freud stresses the conflict between gratification and discontent and points out that the human soul is inclined to strive for gratification. However, he also states that there is an inner mechanism which hinders the striving for gratification through the domination of others. The structure of the soul of a human being aims to keep the level of stimulation at a minimum or at least stable. Based on this it was observed that “the pleasure principal comes from the stability principle” (Freud, 2001). Lacan has taken the theories of Freud a step further by stating that the search for pleasure is based on the period of development when individuals begin to symbolize things through the use of language. The individual who parts from the mother during this period from then on feels an urge for completion. “Language has a restrictive effect upon all speaking creatures and this restriction deprives the body of full satisfaction, the deprivation creates a division between the symbolic identity and the body which carries that identity” (Wright, 2002; 21). The separation of the child from the body of the mother creates a prior feeling of castration which reveals the wish to return to the body it parted from before the development of language skills. With the entrance of the individual into the field of language and the expression of this deficiency a non-fulfillable lust for an object which can never be obtained becomes visible (Zizek, 2002). This futile search experienced within the symbolic field becomes a fantasy of a lost object for the individual. The individual will continue to search based on the conception that the loss can be compensated (Wright, 2002).

The feeling of pleasure, which is created by the consumption of goods, is nurtured through the lack of satisfaction which resides in the unconscious of the individual. Just as Freud pointed out, through the addition of desire evoking a fascination for objects, a game of discomfort-pleasure or dissatisfaction-satisfaction is created between the individual and the object. In this context the consumption culture feeds off the desire located in the spiritual foundation of the individual. The aim of consuming goods is not to create a total feeling of satisfaction, but on the contrary it is to create an inclination toward constant restless consumption. “In order to create constancy in the consumption community “desire” should become comparatively pure, and a not truly satisfied restless longing for pleasure will mediate this aim” (Kovel, 2000). Boudrillard (1997), who points out that consumption behavior is increasingly related with the individual’s feeling of pleasure states that “consumers satisfy their materialistic needs but to an even greater extent their emotional yearnings”. According to Thayer the emotional state of the individual resides in the core of human behavior (Thayer, Newman and Mc Clain, 1994; 910). As emotions affect consumer behavior and become an object of control researchers need to focus more on this concept. Conventionally, emotions were seen as an intervening variable in consumer behavior researches. Now it has inevitably become a controlling mechanism of consumption behavior. In other words, emotions are both the reason for consumption and the result (Luomala-Laaksonen, 1997).

Researchers underline that the consumption behavior of western societies is stimulated by the pleasure seeking center and that ego-centric preferences have increased. Popcorn (1991), who has observed that self-gift behavior has increased in modern western countries, states that people’s attention toward themselves has become

militant and passionate. Belk (1987), who studies gift relationships between individuals has found that western adults tend to reward themselves with consumption goods when they experience success.

Furthermore, according to Mick (1991), who has conducted numerous studies in the field of self-gift behavior, although these studies have been conducted in the U.S.A., they can be taken as a reference because studies conducted in non-western societies would show that similar tendencies can be found there. The author has additionally found hints in a study (Kar, 2005) conducted earlier, showing that self-gift buying behavior exists in Turkish society.

As mentioned above, studies conducted in western societies have shown that consumers are acting increasingly ego-centrally when purchasing goods. Perhaps the most distinctive expression of these tendencies is the phenomenon of self-gift buying behavior. Studies in this field are conducted especially with American and European consumers. The tendency to purchase self-gifts is in western societies seen as a consumption pattern which is identical with individualistic life styles.

## **RESEARCH HYPOTHESES AND QUESTION**

This research follows from the recommendation of Mick (1991) to conduct studies in non-western societies. The aim is to test whether the seven categories of behavior/events that lead to the purchase of self-gifts which the author puts forward in his article "Giving Gifts to Ourselves: A Greimassian Analysis Leading to Testable Propositions" are valid in the context of Turkish society, or not.

Based on these, the hypotheses of the research are as follows:

**H1:** The inclination to buy self-gifts is a phenomenon that exists in Turkish society similar to Western societies.

Based on this general hypothesis the validity of the categories developed by Mick will be investigated as propositions; One rewards himself/herself for an individual or shared accomplishment, One cheers up oneself when feeling down, One relieves stress after an uncomfortable or difficult experience, One is being nice to herself/himself, as in self-affection (e.g., "I like me"), One establishes an incentive to achieve a goal (i.e., acquiring a self-gift in advance of goal-attainment), One indulges herself/himself when she/he has extra money to spend, One celebrates his/her birthday (Mick, 1991, 144-145).

Perhaps females are more involved with gift-giving because they are a social reproduction of intimacy, as suggested by Cheal (1987). This researcher explained that gift-giving is a way to express personal care both within and outside one's family, that women are the gift givers because of their social orientation toward maintenance both of their families and the quality of their personal relationships (Wesster – Nottingham, 2000). It has been found that gift-giving behavior among individuals displays a similar structure to that of self-gift behavior. Researchers working in this field have found that

women, when compared to men, show a higher tendency to buy self-gifts (Mick and DeMoss, 1992).

Therefore the following hypothesis has been developed;

H2: Women are more inclined to buy self-gifts than men.

In traditional societies, relatives, the extended family, friends and status obtained through birth take on multiple functions, whereas in modern societies these functions have been handed over to institutions. In modern societies obligatory functional societal relationships are regulated through professionals. In this context the definition of modern has been identified as dynamic, reformist, and entrepreneurial in the west and traditional, static and conservative in the east. The western modern individual, liberated through the handover of traditional relationships to institutions, wants everything for him/herself. In addition to this, Popcorn (1991), who has observed that self-gift behavior has increased in modern western countries, states that people's attention toward themselves has become militant and passionate.

Although the rate of urbanization in Turkey is increasing since 1950's, the majority of the population still live at agricultural areas within the collective relations (Kıray, 317-318). The individual only approaches material in order to possess and rule it and externalizes collectivity (Yavuz, 2000). In societies where traditional values are predominant, like Turkish society, Ergun (1991), points out that "the individual and individualism are not allowed to become more dominant than the society". Family ties, benevolence, and tendencies to collectivism are the fundamental values of Turkish society. In this context it is interesting to investigate a cross cultural perspective on the subject, whether self-gifts are purchased as a result of individualistic consumption behavior in societies, like Turkey, where traditional values are important.

However, the degree of attachment to traditional values varies among individuals. It has been examined whether giving importance to traditional values has an impact on self-gift buying behavior. Therefore, apart from the hypotheses stated above the following research questions have been examined.

- Q1 "Will attachment to traditional values affect the behavior of self-gift giving?"
- Q2 Will age affect self-gift buying behavior?
- Q3 Will the level of income affect self-gift buying behavior?
- Q4 Will marital status affect the self-gift buying behavior?

## **METHOD**

The aim of this study is to test whether the concept of self-gift, as researched in western societies, is valid for Turkish society. On these grounds an empirical study has been conducted to support the research. The field study has been designed to match descriptive techniques. The seven categories that Mick (1991) found have been chosen as the basis when cataloging reasons for buying self-gifts. According to the author the purchase of self-gifts in the form of consumption can be seen as the means of

communication on the micro (individual) and macro (cultural) level. As mentioned above, the seven categories that motivate individuals to buy self-gifts, found by Mick (1991, 144-145) were: Rewarding , Cheering up , Relieving stress, To be nice to oneself, (e.g., “I like me”), Incentive (i.e., acquiring a self-gift in advance of goal-attainment), Extra money to spend, Birthday.

While Mick’s seven categories were examined as dependent variables in this study, other sociological, cultural and demographic factors which were expected to have an effect on the categories were analyzed as independent variables. These mentioned factors are: Attachment to Traditional Values, Age, Sex, Money available for spending, Marital Status

*(Please see the response categories as appendix - 1)*

### **Sample**

The sample was drawn from the educational sector in Turkey. Respondents were selected from two cities, Istanbul and Erzurum, which respectively represent the west and east of Turkey. Istanbul, being the biggest metropole of Turkey, is both the most developed urban area and has the highest number of highly educated persons. In addition, Istanbul has the highest frequency of persons with high income level and consumption capacity. On the other hand Erzurum, with respect to these criteria, is one of Turkey’s least developed cities. It is expected that the population of these two cities will vary in levels of attachment to traditional values. It is assumed that respondents living in Istanbul will have lower levels of attachment while those living in Erzurum will have higher levels. Therefore it is expected that people living in these two cities will display different levels of self-gift buying behavior. In the present study, a non-probability convenience sampling method was used due to time and monetary restrictions. Moreover, the institutions featuring in the sample provided support to collect the data. The representative nature of the sample is valid only for the participants of the study, and does not reflect Turkish society as a whole.

### ***Socio-economic characteristics of selected urban areas***

The divergent economic and social parameters of the two cities shown below were also a reason for the selection (State Planning Organization, 2003)

	<b>Istanbul</b>	<b>Erzurum</b>
Urbanization rate:	% 90,69	% 59,80
Literacy	% 93.39	% 83.64
The rate of literate woman in woman population	% 89.49	%74.57
The rate of university graduates within the group of 22 year olds in the population:	% 11,92	% 6,89
GDP per capita:	\$2,250*	\$748*
The rate of privately owned vehicles per 10.000 people:	1000	304

(\* - USD /TRY Indicative Exchange Rates Announced at 15:30 on 02/12/2008 by the Central Bank of Turkey. EXCHANGE RATES ON BANKNOTES)

Another important indicator of the consumption habits in the two cities is that 1/3 of all Turkey's shopping malls are located in Istanbul (41 open, 35 under construction) while Erzurum has just one which is under construction (Association of Shopping Malls and Retailers, 2007).

The survey questionnaire was distributed to a total of 202 respondents. The participants were anticipated to have different tendencies in terms of self-gift giving based on four categories. These categories are primary school students and teachers and university students and lecturers. The total sample was composed as follows;

**Istanbul: 102 participants**

Istanbul University Students: 32  
Bosphorus University Students: 30  
Çağlayan Highschool Teachers: 40

**Erzurum: 100 participants**

Atatürk University Students: 55  
Cumhuriyet Highschool Teachers: 45

Participants may come from different provinces of Turkey both in Erzurum and in Istanbul. In this regard, in sample selection, not only development level criteria of these urban areas, but also attachment to the traditional values were considered in relation with self-gift giving tendencies.

**Scales**

The questionnaire consisted of two scales a part from demographics. Two scales were related to the reasons for buying self gifts and attachment to traditional values.

***Scale measuring reasons for buying self-gifts***

A scale containing twenty-five items measuring self-gift purchasing tendencies has been developed for this study. The items cover the above mentioned seven categories. The respondents were asked to estimate how much they acted upon the emotions present in the scale when buying self-gifts. The qualitative part of the research of Mick (1991) was also taken into account when formulating the items. A five point Likert type measurement scale was used in the present study. 1 point indicates "definitely disagree, 5 point indicates "definitely agree". The high scores show higher levels of self-gift giving. The reliability of the items were tested in two separate pilot studies and those found incoherent with the groups of statements were discarded ( $\alpha=0.80$ ).

### ***Scale measuring attachment to traditional values***

The study investigated the relationship between self-gift buying behavior and attachment to traditional values. A scale measuring the respondents' tendencies in this respect was developed. The study "Modernization, Cultural Change and the Presence of Traditional Values" by Ronald Inglehart and Wayne E. Baker (2000), comprising 65% of the population of 65 countries, was used as a source for the development of the scale. Some statements that exposed the validity of traditional values were as they were (Inglehart and Baker, 2000). Furthermore, Ihaab Hassan's (1985), schematic categorization of modern and postmodern phenomena has been an important source. In addition, Kongar's work (1985) "Communal Change Theorem and the Truth of Turkey" and Kiray's work (1999) "Communal Structure and Communal Change" have been used when developing statements covering the modernization of Turkey. The scale was at first developed with thirty items (12 items were eliminated in terms of the scale's internal consistency), and a pilot study conducted in order to test the reliability of the scale. The non-coherent items were then discarded ( $\alpha = 0.85$ ). As in the previous measurement, five point Likert type scales were used. 1 point indicates "definitely disagree, 5 point indicates "definitely agree". The high scores show higher levels of attachment to the traditional values.

#### **Procedure**

The surveys were distributed to the respondents and they were asked to fill them out and return them. The survey consisted of three parts;

I.Part: Statements measuring the tendency to buy self-gifts.

II.Part: Statements measuring levels of conservatism /modernity.

Both scales consisted of one-way, non-contradictory statements.

III.Part: Demographics

## **RESULTS**

### **Factors That Affect Self-Gift Buying Behavior**

The results of factor analysis showed that, *Rewarding*, *Cheering up*, *Relieving stress*, *To be nice to oneself*, (e.g., "I like me"), *Incentive* (i.e., *acquiring a self-gift in advance of goal-attainment*), *Extra money to spend* and *Birthday* are categories for buying self-gifts. Therefore, those seven factors of self-gift-giving stated by Mick are also valid for the present study.



**Table: 1**  
**Factor Analysis for Self Gift Giving**

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
<b>Factor 1: Nice to be One-self</b>							
When I want to behave nice to myself	,803						
When I want to feel self-appreciation	,745						
When I want to express I like myself to myself	,742						
When I want to encourage myself to do something	,728						
When I need motivation to begin a task	,728						
When I want to please myself/make myself happy	,694						
When I want to relieve myself	,626						
When I indulge myself	,510						
When I want to be nice to myself							
<b>Factor 2: Relieve stress</b>							
When I am unhappy		,802					
When I am depressed, to feel better		,700					
When I feel stressed		,685					
When I feel down bored		,667					
When I feel lonely		,619					
When I want to overcome distress		,488					
<b>Factor 3: Rewarding</b>							
When I finish accomplish a task successfully			,801				
When I am very happy			,753				
When I want to celebrate myself			,693				
<b>Factor 4: Extra money to spend</b>							
Without a cause when I have spare money				,789			
When I have money leftover from my expenses				,743			
When I am on vacation				,604			
<b>Factor 5: Incentive</b>							
When I feel unappreciated				,775			
When I expect gifts from others and do not receive them				,681			
<b>Factor 6: Cheering up</b>							
When I feel useless					,759		
When I think that I am unsuccessful					,681		
<b>Factor 7: Birthday</b>							
When celebrating my own birthday						,514	

KMO: ,785; Approx. Chi-Square: 1054,590; df: 300; \*P<.000; Reliability coefficient alpha: 0.80; Cumulative variance explained: 67.5.

\*\* - Five point Likert type of measurement scale was used. 1 point indicates "definitely disagree", 5 point indicates "definitely agree".

**Factors That Affect Attachment to the Traditional Values**

The three categories of traditional values- For the measuring of the participant’s attachment to the traditional values a scale is developed under the name of “Scale measuring attachment to traditional values”. Therefore, the results of the factor analysis, three groups are outcome, which are defined as, high attachment to the traditional values, medium attachment to the traditional values, lower attachment to the traditional values. These factors are used as the parameters of comparing Mick’s samples with the present studies samples for aiming of self gift giving behavior is not became only a consumption pattern among western cultures, it is also appeared in non-western societies.

**Table: II**  
**Factor Analysis for Attachment to Traditional Values**

	Factor Loadings		
	1	2	3
<b>Factor 1: Low Attachment to Traditional Values (Mean: 2,07)**</b>			
A woman should not be in a higher position than her husband	,768		
I do not think it is appropriate for a woman to earn more than her husband	,744		
I do not think it is appropriate for a woman to go on a holiday without her husband	,744		
I believe that men are more suited to be in upper managerial positions than women	,691		
Men should be more responsible of a household’s financials	,665		
I do not think it is appropriate for men to do household tasks that women should do	,633		
It is the responsibility of the mother to raise the children	,525		
<b>Factor 2: Medium Attachment to Traditional Values (Mean: 2,80)**</b>			
I think it is more trustworthy to have my things done through friends or people I know		,776	
The sole duty of parents is to live for their children		,756	
I prefer to carry out things with family members and friends rather than with people I do not know		,742	
I act in accordance with my parents opinions		,712	
When deciding to divorce the approval of elder family members should be		,618	
My biggest goal in life is to make my parents proud		,609	
My family must approve the person I want to marry		,558	
I prefer borrowing money from my family to taking a loan from a bank		,471	
<b>Factor 3: High Attachment to Traditional Values (Mean: 3,30)**</b>			
I want to raise my children according to traditional values			,713
It is essential for me to have my wedding performed by an imam			,671
The family should decide about the future of their children			,640

KMO: .887; Approx. Chi-Square: 1446,750; df: 153; \*P<.000; Reliability coefficient alpha: 0.85; Cumulative variance explained: 59.4.  
 \*\* - Five point Likert type of measurement scale was used. 1 point indicates: “definitely disagree”, 5 point indicates: “definitely agree”.

**The Role of Attachment to Traditional Values**

Multiple regression analyses were conducted in order to explain the predictive role of attachment to traditional values and the demographic variables. For each self-gift giving factor individual hierarchical regression analysis was carried out and then a summary of those analyses were given in a single table below. Table 3 shows the last step of hierarchical regression analyses for each dependent variable.

**Table: III**

**The Results of Regression Analysis**

Independent Variables	Rewarding one self		Cheer Oneself Up		Relieve Stress		Be Nice to Oneself		Incentive to achieve a goal		Extra money to spend		Birthdays	
	Istanbul	Erzurum	Istanbul	Erzurum	Istanbul	Erzurum	Istanbul	Erzurum	Istanbul	Erzurum	Istanbul	Erzurum	Istanbul	Erzurum
Low Traditional Values	,160	,024	-,081	-,183	-,101	-,099	,093	,061	-,091	-,033	-,181	-,177	,042	-,182
Medium Traditional Values	,073	,121	-,095	-,042	,131	,089	-,068	-,041	,138	,142	,102	,011	-,088	,147
High Traditional Values	,146	,204**	,340***	,369***	,223**	,258**	,222**	,270**	,232**	,240**	,348	,384	,004	,498***
R <sup>2</sup> total	,058	,097	,133	,083	,075	,075	,062	,080	,085	,109	,127	,153	,006	,248
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	,044	,083	,120	,069	,061	,061	,047	,066	,071	,095	,105	,131	-,025	,225
F value of model	2,31	4,71**	13,62***	15,16***	5,45**	7,33**	5,49**	8,048**	5,97*	6,61**	7,27**	14,53***	,001	15,32***

\*P<0,05 \*\*P <0,01 \*\*\*P<0,0001

The aim of this analysis was to understand, if attachment to traditional values predicted on Rewarding Oneself. The results indicated that, high attachment to traditional values had significant effect on Rewarding Oneself for the Erzurum participants ( $\beta = .204$   $p < 0,01$ ).

The findings demonstrated that, high attachment to the traditional values significantly affected Cheering up (İstanbul,  $\beta = .340$   $p < 0,0001$  Erzurum,  $\beta = .369$   $p < 0,0001$ ), Relieve stress (İstanbul,  $\beta = .223$   $p < 0,01$  Erzurum,  $\beta = .258$   $p < 0,01$ ), Be nice to oneself, (İstanbul,  $\beta = .222$   $p < 0,01$  Erzurum,  $\beta = .270$   $p < 0,01$ ), Incentive to achieve a goal (İstanbul,  $\beta = .232$   $p < 0,01$  Erzurum,  $\beta = .240$   $p < 0,01$ ).

Different from other dependent variables, attachment to traditional values had significant effect on Extra money to spend. Finally, the results indicated that, high attachment to traditional values had significant effect on Birthdays for the Erzurum participants ( $\beta = .498$   $p < 0,0001$ ).

### **The Role of Demographic Variables on Self-Gift Giving**

*Sex* is one of the factors affecting the individual to buy self-gifts as a form of “cheering oneself up”. Women in both the Istanbul and the Erzurum sample show a higher inclination than men to buy self-gifts as a result of this motivation ( $P < 0,000$ , t value for Istanbul = 4,25 and Erzurum = 5,84). The women of the Istanbul sample bought self-gifts as means of motivation more frequently than men ( $P < 0,05$ , t value for Istanbul = 2,351). Similarly, in the Istanbul sample women had compared to men higher tendencies to buying self-gifts when they had extra money ( $P < 0,05$ , f value for Istanbul = 2,257 ). Thus the results of the t-tests, show that H2 which stated that sex would affect self-gift buying behavior, is supported by the inclination to buy self-gifts when one has “extra money to spend”.

A variable that significantly affects self-buying behavior is the “*capacity of having money to spend*”. In the Istanbul sample the group that stated that they barely could afford to buy their basic needs, forms of behavior like “cheering up” and “spending without thinking about it” were almost non-existent. In other words as the *income level* increases the inclination to buy self-gifts just to make oneself happy increases as well. Similar findings were found for the Erzurum sample. Individuals stating that they could spend money without thinking much about it showed a higher tendency to buy self-gifts to indulge oneself than individuals stating that they could barely spend money on anything besides basic needs ( $P < 0,000$ , t value for Istanbul = 4,295 and Erzurum = 4,191). The behavior of buying gifts when you have extra money is more spread in the high income group in Istanbul. On the contrary the opposite can be observed in Erzurum. The group with lowest income level displayed a higher tendency to buy gifts when they had extra money than the groups with higher income levels ( $P < 0,05$ , f value for Istanbul = 4,215 and Erzurum = 4,662).

The fourth question of the research being *the marital status* of the participants, proved significant in the Istanbul sample in terms of affecting the inclination to buy self-gifts in order to give oneself a treat. Single and divorced participants were more prone to buying self-gifts than married participants. ( $P < 0,05$ ,  $f$  value for Istanbul = 3,728).

## **DISCUSSION**

The behavior of purchasing self-gifts has been defined and researched in modern western societies during the last few decades. It has been put forward that, parallel to the individualistic way of living in western societies', ego-centric buying behavior has increased and that self-gift buying behavior has emerged as a result of this. It is thus expected that ego-centric purchasing behavior should be weak in traditional societies where individual pleasure is found in collectivistic relationships. This study has found that the seven categories describing tendencies to self-gift purchasing behavior found by Mick (1991), in research conducted with American consumers, is valid for the Turkish society as well.

With respect to this, the validity of the first category "rewarding oneself" was tested. The respondents of this research indicated an inclination to buying self-gifts to "reward oneself". As Mick stated, the tendency to buy self-gifts to reward oneself is present in ego-centric western societies. Moreover, this study showed that attachment to traditional values does not prevent people from buying self-gifts. Individuals buy self-gifts when they accomplish a task in order to celebrate by themselves. Attachment to traditional values does not prevent consumers from internalizing western type of consumption tendencies like buying self-gifts.

The second category was buying self-gifts to cheer oneself up. Among the respondents the inclination to buy self-gifts to cheer oneself up was found. This tendency is not negatively affected by the level of attachment to traditional values. On the contrary, individuals who have higher levels of attachment to traditional values display this tendency more. Consistent with Mick's findings women are more inclined to buy self-gifts to cheer themselves up than men. In addition, this tendency increases with the level of income.

Another category found by Mick was the tendency to buy self-gifts in order to reduce stress and tension. The findings of this research showed that participants of the study bought self-gifts because of this reason. People buying self-gifts when feeling stress or depressed were similar to Mick's findings; mainly women.

Another category which exhibited parallel findings to those of Mick was buying self-gifts to be nice to oneself. Attachment to traditional values does not affect the tendency to buy self-gifts to be nice to oneself. On the other hand marital status does. Respondents who were single or divorced were more motivated to buy self-gifts to be nice to oneself than married participants.

A further category of Mick, buying self-gifts to establish an incentive to achieve a goal, was also found to be present independent of attachment to traditional values in

respondents of this study. Similar to the other categories women were more inclined to engage in this behavior than men.

Support for another category of Mick buying self-gifts when one has extra money to spend was found in the study. Interestingly, individuals with higher levels of attachment to traditional values demonstrated higher levels of engagement in this behavior. Furthermore the income level also affects this category. Respondents with higher income levels in Istanbul and respondents with lower income levels in Erzurum were more apt to buy self-gifts when they had extra money to spend. Women displayed higher levels of self-gift buying than men.

Just like individuals in American society buy self-gifts on their birthdays, individuals in the present study sample do so as well.

## **CONCLUSION**

Researchers have stipulated that the inclination to buy self-gifts in individualistic cultures derives from individualistic life styles. The study has found that being attached to traditional values is not decreasing the inclination to self-gift buying behavior. As Shils (1983) states “life is not lived entirely under the domination of traditions, no society is able to survive with only those objects, beliefs and models which are presented to it. Even in the most traditional society the traditional model is not always the only option for action”. Self-gift buying behavior is independent of attachment to the traditional values among the study sample units just as in the western societies. This outcome reveals that traditional values have been mixed with modern consumption behavior and that one must not rule out the other but that the concepts can co-exist.

Another important finding is that individuals increasingly seek pleasure in objects they buy as gifts for themselves. As stated above numerous researchers in the field of Social Sciences, like Thayer et. al (1994) and Baudrillard (1997), modern consumption goods primarily appeal to the emotions of consumers and those goods are bought not only for their material purpose but also for the satisfaction of emotional pleasures. Both in modern and traditional societies, despite cultural differences, consumption goods are a mediator of the satisfaction of similar emotions. Wishes like feelings of “happiness, indulgence and self encouragement” and the idea that the fulfillment of these wishes are the right of the consumer was presented in the literature review which gave examples of arguments that are used in the commercials of some goods. With respect to this, TV commercials clearly contribute to the legitimating and internalization of these wishes.

The study found that women were, compared to men, more inclined to buy self-gifts. In situations like “spoiling yourself, making yourself happy, getting rid of stress, motivating yourself, relaxing yourself, getting rid of loneliness and having extra money to spend” women show significantly higher tendencies to buy self-gifts.

An additional finding of the study is that the tendency of buying self-gifts is positively related to the level of income. The higher the level of income the individual has, the higher will the tendency to buy self-gifts be. Buying self-gifts in order to “spoil, make oneself happy, reward oneself, decrease the feeling of loneliness and spend extra money” is more common behavior among high income groups.

The marital status of the individual is generally not affecting self-gift behavior except for buying gifts in order to give yourself a treat, which is a form of behavior more widespread among single and divorced individuals.

### **FURTHER IMPLICATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH**

Self-gift buying behavior is a new area of study. Therefore the number of conducted studies in this field is limited. Studies conducted in western societies (Mick, 1991; Mick and Demoss 1990; Mick et al. 1992; Luomala H. and Laaksonen M 1997 – 1999) have made important contributions to the literature.

Researches conducted in western societies indicate that self-gift buying behavior is ego-centric and increasing. The aim of this study was to investigate whether self-gift buying behavior exists in Turkish society or not.

Although the author of the present study had found evidence of the existence of this phenomenon in Turkey in a previous study (Kar, 2005) the need for more comprehensive studies conducted with larger samples is obvious. In this context, this study analyzing the role and the functions of self-gift buying behavior in Turkish society, gives preliminary findings and is one of the first studies conducted in this area in Turkey.

The research has found that, based on the attachment levels to traditional values of the respondents, buying self-gifts being an ego centric consumption tendency, is present in Turkish society, although the society is considered collectivistic. Apart from this the effects of demographic characteristics like age, sex, income level and marital status upon the variables were examined. Due to time and financial restrictions the research which is quantitative could not be supported by qualitative methods. Some further research should carried out with qualitative methods.

As Mick and Demoss (1990) stated self-gift buying behavior is an attitude which is formed through the environment and living conditions of the individual. These conditions may vary according to the individuals' personality characteristics and socio-cultural environment.

The concept of self-gift may be defined differently from individual to individual. For example, while one individual considers a walk in the park a self-gift another considers the purchase of a possession a self-gift. The symbolic and semiotic definitions of the perception and functions of self-gifts may vary considerably from society to

society. In this context further cross-cultural research will make important contributions to the literature in this field.

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**Appendix – 1: Response Categories of Demographic Variables**

**Gender:**

Women	-	97
Men	-	105
<b>Total</b>		<b>202</b>

**Age Range:**

18 – 25	-	135
26 – 34	-	49
35 +	-	18
<b>Total</b>		<b>202</b>

**Income Levels\*:**

People who spend comfortably	-	58
People who spend less comfortably	-	82
People who spend most of their income for basic needs	basic needs	- 54
People who can barely afford their		- 8
<b>Total</b>		<b>202</b>

\*- These categories are developed by Prof. Suna who works for Marmara University, at Business Management department.

**Marital Status**

Single	-	146
Married	-	51
Divorced	-	5
<b>Total</b>		<b>202</b>