

We are family -- but advertisers often miss the point

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Even though most Americans think of themselves as part of a family – and many list “being a family” as a top priority – very little is known about how membership in this collective actually affects consumer decisions, from choosing a cell phone plan to remodeling the kitchen to how we display treasured keepsakes.

“Highlighting the interplay of individual, relational, and family identities and practices can shed light on important contemporary family challenges,” explain Amber Epp (University of Nebraska) and Linda Price (University of Arizona).

Some of these choices include how to sustain family togetherness when people move far away, how to juggle work and family, and how to create a collective identity following a divorce or a remarriage.

In the June 2008 issue of the *Journal of Consumer Research*, Epp and Price challenges researchers in consumer behavior to think of how consumption patterns may be guided by a desire to build a family identity. This includes the things we buy, how we spend our time, and the services we use.

For example, Epp and Price point out that vacations are often thought of as an opportunity for a family to spend quality time together and build group memories. Studying only the individual’s role in purchasing behavior overlooks that the behavior is driven by a desire to emphasize the family unit. Similarly, families may use vacations to strengthen

particular relationships within the family such as father-son or child-grandparent relations, Epp and Price note.

“Consumer researchers consistently conclude that firms should make decisions about positioning strategies and who to target based upon individual family members’ decision roles and relative influence in households,” Epp and Price explain.

They continue: “However, this completely misses the point . . . firms might gain more value from positioning and targeting based on the idea that products, services, and brands act as resources for achieving relational and family identity goals.”

Citation: Amber M. Epp and Linda L. Price, “Family Identity: A Framework of Identity Interplay in Consumption Practices.” *Journal of Consumer Research*: June 2008.

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