

# Guitar heroes: When the magic transfers from rock stars to instruments

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Budding guitarists seek the magical powers of rock hero instruments, according to a new study in the *Journal of Consumer Research*.

"Like people from the Middle Ages who sought saints' relics, modern consumers like the budding rock guitarist desire fetishes (objects perceived as magical and possessing extraordinary power)" write authors Karen V. Fernandez (University of Auckland, New Zealand) and John L. Lastovicka (Arizona State University).

"We live in a world where anybody with a modest amount of money can buy a close copy or a replica of a desired object," the authors write. "We wanted to know why consumers who desired a particular rock star's instrument would settle for replicas of it; and how those copies became perceived as special, magical objects in their own right."

The researchers conducted in-depth interviews with sixteen men who owned more than one guitar and resided either in New Zealand or the United States. They found that many participants believed in the idea of "contagious magic" (the idea that two entities that touch can influence each other). For example, many fans want to have rock stars sign their instruments, and one established performer explained how he used another rock star's discarded guitar strings.

The research also revealed that replica guitars appeal to participants' belief in "imitative magic" (things that look alike are alike). "They often bought the best possible copy they could attain, and then if needed, made

further changes to it so that it resembled the desired object even more closely," the authors explain. For example, some consumers switch out knobs on their guitars to more closely resemble the instruments of the artists they admired.

When players acquire new instruments, they play them often and become bonded with the objects. "A guitar then often becomes perceived as a player's confidant, companion, collaborator, wife, girlfriend, or muse," the authors write. And guitar players act out their fantasies by playing their guitars in private and in public.

"A fetish object does not guarantee a hit recording, a major league record, or a safe return home from battle," the authors write. "However, fetish objects increase confidence and reduce anxiety and hence increase performance."

**More information:** Karen V. Fernandez and John L. Lastovicka. "Making Magic: Fetishes in Contemporary Consumption." *Journal of Consumer Research*: August 2011. Further information: [ejcr.org](http://ejcr.org) . To be published online soon.

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