

EXPLORING CONSUMER BEHAVIOR UNDER PERCEIVED THREAT

by

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

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In 2012, a survey of individuals in over twenty countries showed that one in seven people worldwide believes the world will end during his or her lifetime. The severe disruptions to modern conveniences (e.g., grocery stores, electrical grids, and subway systems) caused by hurricanes Katrina and Sandy, the Fukushima meltdown, and the Haiti earthquake revealed the difficulty of life without these services. In reaction to such events, growing numbers of people have reevaluated their preparedness for future emergencies by stockpiling food, water, and ammunition. This group of people is collectively known as preppers.

This study focused on the role that perceived threat plays in shaping consumer behavior by employing a combined methodology—netnography and grounded theory. Three overarching patterns emerged during data analysis that can be viewed through the theoretical lenses of terror management and just-world theories. The analysis revealed that terror management theory is limited as an explanation for preppers' consumer behavior. The results also expand upon previously conducted terror management research by incorporating the just-world theory as a means of filling the existing void. Limitations of the study and recommendations for further research are also presented.

CONTRIBUTION STATEMENT

This study expands upon previously conducted terror management theory research by incorporating the just-world theory as a means through which to connect these two well-established theories. Despite the theories' well-established roots in psychology and despite rising interest among consumer researchers, the associations between existential insecurity and motivation have just begun to be explored. Thus, this study explicates this relationship.

DEDICATION

My father, Ahmad Aldousari, passed away during the writing of this dissertation. Out of everyone else, he was the most proud that his son was working toward a PhD. It is with pride and affection that I dedicate this work to him, his love, and his undying support and encouragement. I really miss you, Dad... rest in peace.

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Although this dissertation is an individual work, it would not have been possible without the help and support of so many people. I would like to thank my committee chair, Dr. Geraldine R. Henderson, who has the attitude and substance of a genius; she continued to push me to expand my vision of what my work could do. Had I not made the acquaintance of Dr. Henderson at a marketing conference, I would not have pursued a qualitative research in the exciting field of consumer culture theory.

I would also like to extend my gratitude to Dr. Elizabeth Hirschman, whose path-breaking research guided me throughout the writing of this dissertation; Dr. Jerome Williams, who helped improve my research skills by cooperating on many research projects; and Dr. Arthur Powell, who first introduced me to qualitative research and continued to help me improve my qualitative research skills. In addition, I would like to thank the College of Business Administration at Kuwait University for their generous financial support toward my higher education.

Finally, I would like to thank my mother, who, along with my father, instilled in me the desire to learn and made sacrifices so I could pursue a quality education; and my wife, who always believed in me and offered reassurance during the process. I was under their watchful eyes throughout this journey and gained the drive and ability to tackle challenges head on. Thank you for not abandoning me—your support sustains me!

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

In 2012, a survey of individuals in over twenty countries showed that one in seven people worldwide believes the world will end during his or her lifetime (Michaud 2012). The severe disruptions to modern conveniences (e.g., grocery stores, electrical grids, and subway systems) caused by hurricanes Katrina and Sandy, the Fukushima meltdown, and the Haiti earthquake revealed the difficulty of life without these services. In response to such events, a growing number of people have reevaluated their preparedness for future emergencies (Raasch 2012; Byrd 2012). This group of people is collectively known as preppers (Palmer 2012; Cobb 2012).

Preppers strive to be as self-reliant as possible to insulate themselves against coming disasters. They learn survival skills such as hunting, knitting, and blacksmithing; stockpile food and water, ammunition, and medical supplies; and live frugally. They have also formed online communities to share and exchange information with each other (Muniz and O'Guinn 2001). Their unique consumer lifestyle and sense of community have made preppers a consumer-culture phenomenon. In addition, recurring apocalyptic-themed movies, such as *Red Dawn*, *Blast From the Past*, and *2012*, and TV shows such as Discovery Channel's *Doomsday Bunkers* and National Geographic Channel's *Doomsday Preppers* (which is the channel's highest-rated series of all time) have also made preppers a pop-culture phenomenon (Zimmer 2012).

Other examples of consumer phenomena have been investigated before (Kozinets 1997; Muniz and Schau 2005; Schouten and McAlexander 1995). Yet, as of this writing, no consumer researcher has pursued this line of inquiry. This study focused on preppers' consumer behavior to uncover meanings and symbolisms that can inform and extend our

understanding of consumer behavior. In addition, this study was intended to provide insight into how contemporary consumers behave when life as they know it could change.

1.1 Background

In the early 1970s, retreaters and survivalists were the two major groups that preached the need to be self-reliant in anticipation of a coming threat. Retreaters are people who prepare a place in rural areas to go to when urban living becomes intolerable. This label was later replaced by the commonly used term *survivalists*. According to Saxon (1980), who arguably coined the term, a survivalist is a self-reliant person who relocates to rural areas during socioeconomic collapse and prepares a defense against potential looters (also known as “Killer Caravans”). In the early 1990s, the word *preppers* appeared in online forums when fears of the Y2K (millennium bug) started to grow (Raasch 2012). Palmer (2012) argued that preppers, rather than survivalists, are concerned with situations that people cannot avoid—situations that fall short of a complete collapse of civilization. Bradley (2012) explained that “survivalism” is one of the characteristics that a prepper should have. Most experts have argued, however, that both terms can be used interchangeably (Bostick 2012; Cobb 2012; Raasch 2012; Zimmer 2012). In this study, the term *prepper* is used to reference the whole because it has become a synonym for other similar groups, including survivalists and retreaters, and is defined as consumers whose consumption behaviors are mostly influenced by their need to provide a hedge against a prolonged disruption to the status quo.

Regardless of how the term *prepper* is defined, the common thread among preppers is their need to be self-reliant in anticipation of a prolonged period of

deprivation. Preppers plan for a wide range of scenarios. These events include natural disasters (e.g., hurricanes, earthquakes, volcanoes) and human-created events (e.g., financial meltdown, hyperinflation, power blackouts, water contamination, nuclear war, and pandemics (Bostick 2012; Zimmer 2012).

Mitchell (2002) spent a decade conducting ethnographic fieldwork among Pacific Northwest survivalists, interviewing people and observing the survivalist mentality. He examined the interaction between survivalism and modern times, seeking to understand how survivalism is both “a consequence of modern times and a way to understand modernity” (Mitchell 2002). His investigation of the Northwest Aryan Nations revealed that this group was involved in many illegal activities, such as robbing banks and counterfeiting money. Another group, Live Free, Inc., a survivalist movement led by Tim Dalkins, practiced the art of war by playing “cops and robbers.” A conservative group led by a Mount Rainier Ranger named “Hank” stockpiled food and other essentials as a form of preparation.

Mitchell (2002) found that survivalists rejected modern society because it was too restrictive. Survivalists felt that modern society limited their role to that of passive consumers of mass media and marketing. They wanted to create their own culture, or engage in “culture crafting” (Mitchell 2002, 9). What is clear from this investigation is that each group has its own belief about why and how to prepare. Survivalist groups encompass a wide range of backgrounds, including racist, hippie, religious, and pathological individuals. Preppers, however, comprise a larger group that includes people who simply feel it is necessary to have supplies, food, and water to be self-reliant (see

figure 1). Preppers' unique and diverse cultural and religious backgrounds make them an important marketing research topic.

[Insert figure 1 about here]

1.2 Consumer Culture Theory

Consumer culture theory (CCT) is part of the consumer behavior paradigm that centers on a study of consumption choices and behaviors from a social and cultural point of view, as opposed to an economic or psychological perspective (MacInnis and Folkes 2010).

According to Arnould and Thompson (2005), CCT conceptualizes culture as the essential fabric of experience, meaning, and action. Within CCT, there are four major interrelated research domains. First, *consumer identity projects* are concerned with the ways in which consumers forge a sense of self from marketer-generated materials. Second, *marketplace culture* represents a view of people as producers of culture, which contrasts with the anthropological position, in which people are culture bearers. Third, the *socio-historic* patterning of consumption addresses the social structures that influence consumption, such as class, gender, or ethnicity. A fourth domain, the *mass-mediated marketplace*, focuses on consumers' ideologies and interpretive strategies.

The prepping phenomenon departs from the research domain of marketplace cultures. Preppers show many characteristics of a community, including consciousness of kind (connection between members), rituals and traditions, and moral responsibility (Muniz and O'Guinn 2001). Schouten and McAlexander (1995) defined such a community as a "subculture of consumption" in which "a subgroup of society self-selects on the basis of shared commitment to a product class, brand, or consumption activity"

and are characterized by a “set of shared beliefs and values; and unique jargon, rituals, and modes of symbolic expression.”

Preppers believe in imminent disaster and the need to be self-reliant. They also have their own jargon (Rawles 2009). When the SHTF (S**t Hits The Fan, also referred to as TEOTWAWKI—The End Of The World As We Know It), one should GOOD (Get Out Of Dodge, a generic term for leaving the big city in a hurry). In the event of a disaster, a prepper should grab his or her BOB (Bug Out Bag, a kit of essentials) and drive a BOV (Bug Out Vehicle) to a BOL (Bug Out Location, a retreat). If he or she is stuck in the city, then a BIB (Bug In Bag) is needed to hunker down (hide in a big city). In addition, prepping is a tedious endeavor that entails daily routines, chores, and rituals, such as rotating stored food or practicing and learning new survival skills.

1.3 Significance

Preppers are growing in numbers. Reuters reported a survey that showed one in seven people in twenty countries believes the world will end during his or her lifetime Michaud (2012). In the United States, as many as 3.7 million Americans are classified as preppers, and the prepping industry is a “multibillion dollar business” (Ogg 2013) Marketers began targeting this market by promoting the idea that survivalism is just a matter of being in the right place at the right time with the right stuff—“protection can be bought” (Mitchell 2002, 32). To be ready for a catastrophic disaster (doomsday) a prepper must be as self-reliant as possible. This is a challenging goal to achieve, leading one to ask: What do preppers need and where do they get it?

Because physiological needs are the most basic requirements for human survival (Maslow 1943), many companies have focused on selling prepackaged freeze-dried and dehydrated food to preppers. For example, FoodPreppers sells gourmet food packed in thirty-six buckets (approximately 4,320 servings) for \$6,899.99, and even large warehouse stores such as Costco offer 8,671 servings of *Gluten Free & Vegetarian Emergency Food* for \$1,799. Preppers also need to learn a wide-range of survival skills—everything from gardening, canning, and knitting to how to perform surgeries. Preppers with families can buy prefabricated underground shelters from AtlasSurvivalShelters, starting at \$29,000, to protect them from nuclear or biological warfare—a more cautious family could carry the NUKAlert keychain to monitor radiation levels in their surroundings (see Figure 2).

[Insert figure 2 about here]

Many researchers have investigated consumer phenomena. For example, studies have focused on the so-called Cult of Macintosh (Belk and Tumbat 2005), the Harley Davidson brand (Schouten and McAlexander 1995), and the X-Files craze (Kozinets 1997). Other studies have investigated consumer behavior during past disasters—for example, the Great Depression (Hill, Hirschman, and Bauman 1997). However, as of this writing, no consumer researcher has explored the role that perceived threat plays in shaping consumer behavior. In addition, studies on survivalism have tended to have a clichéd focus on the consumer behavior aspect of the phenomenon, such as focusing on it from a religious (Wills-Brandon 2002) or sociological (Mitchell 2002) perspective. This

study is an extension of these areas of research because it explored the preppers phenomena from a consumer-behavior perspective.

1.4 Purpose

Because studies on this subject in contemporary literature are largely absent, conducting a phenomenological inquiry of preppers, with a CCT perspective, was necessary to examine the managerial implications of the prepper phenomenon. In this study, the prepper phenomenon was explored from a consumer behavior perspective. Thus, this study contributes to CCT. Because prepping deals with consumption, the guiding research questions were as follows:

1. What issues shape preppers' consumer behavior?
2. How does prepper consumer behavior inform and extend our knowledge of modern consumer behavior?

CHAPTER 2: METHODOLOGY

2.1 Research Strategy

In this study, the meanings and symbolisms of preppers' consumer behaviors were explored. Because this type of inquiry was not possible to conduct through experiments, surveys, or database modeling, a qualitative methodology was needed (Creswell 2009; Moisander and Valtonen 2006). Many studies have employed qualitative methods to gain insights into a phenomenon (Arnould and Price 1993; Celsi, Rose, and Leigh 1993; Hirschman and Thompson 1997; Kozinets 2001; Muniz and Schau 2005; Thompson 1997). In these studies, qualitative methodologies were employed to assist in understanding meanings and symbolisms. In qualitative studies, the researcher engages in the daily life of the subjects and collects data using observation and participation (Moisander and Valtonen 2006).

2.1.1 Grounded Theory

Grounded theory is a systematic and inductive methodology that helps researchers develop theories from data (Glaser and Strauss 1967). Its philosophical foundations were heavily influenced by Glaser's positivist epistemological approach, in which a neutral observer is assumed; Strauss's pragmatic ontological stance required that research participants be allowed their own voices (Breckenridge et al. 2012; Fischer and Otnes 2006). Because of the empirical and positivistic nature of the methodology, classical grounded theory has come under attack from postmodernists and poststructuralists (Bryant 2007; Charmaz 2000).

Charmaz, a student of both Glaser and Strauss, has criticized the original assumptions of grounded theory. Charmaz (2006) called the approach *objectivists'*

grounded theory because practitioners of the approach assume data already exist in the world and represent objective facts. Therefore, the role of the researcher is to find these facts and “discover theory from them,” while ignoring the social context from which data emerge (Charmaz 2006, 131). To address these issues, Charmaz attempted to postmodernize grounded theory by proposing a version based on the relativism of multiple realities and the co-creation of knowledge by both investigator and participants; this process “aims toward an interpretative understating of subjects meaning” (Bryant 2007; Charmaz 2000, 510; 2006). In spite of the criticisms of grounded theory, all grounded theory approaches have in common the activities of categorizing and constant comparison to develop theory inductively from data.

Although grounded theory is associated with sociology (Glaser and Strauss 1967; Strauss and Corbin 1990; Charmaz 2000), , the approach has been applied in the field of marketing and consumer research. For instance, in their investigation of the sacred and profane in consumer behavior, Belk, Wallendorf, and Sherry (1989) employed aspects of grounded theory in their analysis. Grounded theory was also utilized in Hirschman and Thompson (1997)’s analysis of advertising and the mass media and in Goulding (2000)’s investigation into consumer experiences in museums. Therefore, for this study, grounded theory was employed because the approach takes into account the role of the researcher in interpreting preppers’ consumer behavior and aligns with the philosophical assumptions of both consumer culture theory and netnography (Kozinets 2010; Sherry 1991).

2.1.2 Netnography

According to Kozinets (2010), who created the term *netnography* from “Inter[net]” and “eth[nography],” netnography is a qualitative method derived from ethnographic techniques to analyze the interactions of individuals through computer-mediated communications. There are several benefits to using online data. One benefit is that the data will likely remain accessible for the entire period of research. Netnography is also completely postmodern; it allows the researcher to “build his own vessel, stage his own show, and evaluate his own evaluations” (Kozinets 2010, 163). Researchers can find the data collection and analysis methods that are most appropriate to their research. In addition, netnography allows for naturalistic observation that provides researchers access to a “native world view” (Sherry 1991). This approach is a more reliable data collection method because consumers participate in similar discussions with others; therefore, participants do not feel uncomfortable answering questions. Discomfort with answering questions can lead participants to lie or to supply the answer they think the interviewer wants to receive (Kozinets 2010).

One of Kozinets (2002)'s suggestions for conducting participant-observation research is to gain entry to online communities, an action that reveals the researcher's identity. However, this study employed passive observation, sometimes called *lurking*, which is a method through which researchers observe an online community without stating their identity or posting comments. This approach is particularly important when exploring the community of preppers. First, preppers' golden rule is to remain under the radar and not reveal their identities. In a postapocalyptic world, preppers believe water and other essential resources would be scarce, and if other people (nonpreppers) know

that you have supplies, they will turn to preppers for help. If a prepper deny them, they will do everything in their power to get what they want—including stealing or killing.

Second, preppers are stigmatized and ridiculed by society (Bostick 2012). In fact, James Stevens (“Dr. Prepper”), who sold more than 800,000 copies of his book *Making the Best of Basics*, agrees that the word *prepper* became a “slur meant to impugn self-reliant folks like himself as paranoid loons” (Zimmer 2012). Finally, preppers can be viewed as a threat to national security. According to senator Rand Paul (R-KY), “Someone who has guns, someone who has ammunition that are weatherproofed, someone who has more than 7 days of food can be considered a potential terrorist” (McGreal 2011).

2.2 Data Collection & Analysis

In this study, ATLAS.ti, a computer software, was used to help with the collection and analysis of data. Researchers who studied the use of computer-assisted qualitative data-analysis software (CAQDAS) found that the software enables market researchers to mine data deeply for details, to identify minority views, and to produce useful resources for future research (Rettie et al. 2008). According to the software developer, Thomas Muhr, ATLAS.ti was developed to encompass the ideas, terminologies and methodological processes associated with grounded theory (Muhr 1991). In addition, in a review of the two most popular qualitative data-analysis programs—NVIVO and ATLAS.ti—the authors found the latter to be an excellent general-purpose software program good at importing, displaying, coding, and analyzing a wide range of qualitative data types (Lewis 2004).

The evaluation of preppers' experiences was guided by the principles recommended for the analysis and interpretation of qualitative data (Arnould and Wallendorf (1994); (Charmaz 2006; Glaser and Strauss 1967; Spiggle 1994)). Data collection and analysis followed a postmodern approach to grounded theory that took into account the social context from which the data emerged. Based on the constant comparative method, the first set of data guided the selection of each new data set, and in turn defined what to collect next (Charmaz 2000, 2006). In addition, the qualitative data analysis software *ATLAS.ti* was used to facilitate the analytical and hermeneutic interpretations of research findings.

Two data sets were used in this investigation, plus an additional data set to provide supplemental information. The main data sets provided extensive and detailed information about preppers' consumer behavior. The first data set contained archival data from different preppers' online communities, collected mainly from the American Preppers Network's website. The transcriptions of the TV show *Doomsday Preppers* were collected into the second data set. Both of these sets contained interactions that documented preppers' experiences, emotions, thoughts, ideologies, and other experiential aspects of their prepping journey. Together, they provided an emic view of preppers' consumer behavior (Wallendorf and Arnould 1991). The supplementary data set was constructed from preppers' responses to online opinion pieces and news articles that had been written about them. This data set supplemented the main data sets to expand the interpretation of the research findings.

The investigation started with collecting and analyzing the transcriptions of the TV show *Doomsday Preppers*. The data came from seventeen episodes of the first two

seasons, averaging forty-five minutes per episode, and constituted almost thirteen hours of video-recorded data. After applying the grounded theory and constant comparative methods, the first theme—The End is Near—started to emerge. At this point in the data collection process, it became apparent that almost all preppers on the American Preppers Network’s website criticized how the TV show presented them as paranoid and crazy. Therefore, to add another perspective on preppers’ consumer behavior, online data from the American Preppers Network was included in the investigation. This website had over thirty-thousand members as of October, 2014, more than four-hundred thousand posts, and an average of two-hundred forty posts per day. The online data used in this study consisted of three-hundred seventy posts (almost sixty-five thousand words.) Combining these two data sets with the supplementary data set, three overarching themes emerged from the data. The quotes used to interpret the three themes came from ninety-five unique respondents (Table 1.)

An important aspect of netnography is that data collection does not happen in isolation from data analysis. Thus, instead of being developed a priori, codes were developed throughout the data collection period by assigning labels to recurring phrases or behaviors, categorizing similar labels to identify a pattern, and then developing a theory or generalizing the findings (Arnould and Wallendorf 1994; Charmaz 2000; Glaser and Strauss 1967; Spiggle 1994).

[Insert table 1 about here]

2.3 Sampling Method

Sampling methods influence the trustworthiness of the data. For the first data set, the unique focus of netnography on online interaction makes the identification of appropriate websites critical. Kozinets (2010, 89) suggested six characteristics to look for in online communities: (1) relevant to the research; (2) active, with regular communications; (3) interactive—participants share information with each other; (4) substantial, that is, there is a critical mass of communication; (5) heterogeneous, encompassing different types of participants; and (6) data-rich, that is, containing detailed and descriptive data. The American Prepper Network's (APN) website satisfied all six criteria. In addition, APN offered a wealth of data that were arranged by disaster types (e.g., nuclear, financial, pandemic).

For the second data set, episodes from the first and second seasons of the TV show *Doomsday Preppers* were coded and analyzed. In addition, two methods were employed to select the supplementary opinion pieces and news articles: first, a snowball sampling method was used to follow linked articles posted by APN members, and second, Internet search-engines were used to search for words related to prepping (e.g., “Preppers,” “Survivalist,” and “Doomsday”).

Glaser and Strauss (1967) suggested that this sampling process should continue until the researcher judges no more relevant information is emerging from the data—the data is “saturated.” However, Charmaz (2006) argues that the sample size and project design depends heavily on the aims of the study. According to Arnould and Wallendorf (1994), the challenges to studying cultures are twofold: argued that the sample size and project design depend heavily on the aims of the study. According to Arnould and

Wallendorf (1994), the challenges to studying cultures are twofold: culture is generative and infinite in its manifestation, and social science is itself influenced with cultural meaning. The authors suggested that ethnographers should strive for credible rather than exhaustive interpretations. Thus, for this study, the sample size and theoretical saturation depended on the richness and size of the data provided by the main and supplementary data sets.

2.4 Ethical Issues

The use of passive observations of preppers' online community can represent an ethical issue, raising the question of what constitutes informed consent online. However, the decision to use this passive data collection method was based on two reasons: First, preppers' prefer to hide their identities. Second, passive observation facilitated the collection of honest data about the preppers' community. Some researchers have claimed that it is more disruptive to enter a social network and reveal oneself as a researcher than it is to remain invisible (Paccagnella 1997). In fact, Langer and Beckman (2005) have argued for the legitimacy of covert research and a revision of the existing guidelines for research ethics with regard to informed consent when conducting netnography.

In addition, the identities of users represent another ethical issue. Although the data targeted for this research are publicly available, users' real names (in the case of *Doomsday Preppers*) and pseudonyms (in the case of online users) have been changed, thus avoiding any direct link between their quotes and identities. All links were listed in a protected Excel sheet hosted in cloud storage (Dropbox) that was only accessible by the primary investigator and the academic advisor.

2.5 Limitations

Employing a qualitative and exploratory approach to preppers' consumer behavior provided significant insight into their unique lifestyle and consumption behavior, expanding understanding of the contemporary consumer. However, such methods are not without limitations.

This study provided explanatory rather than predictive insights specific to the preppers' community. Thus, extrapolating the results to the general population is not recommended. Second, the results are difficult to replicate because they are based on researcher's interpretation and perspective. In addition, netnography is mainly focused on textual data. While every effort was made to select a representative data sample, in such studies about cultures, reaching data saturation is challenging (Arnould and Wallendorf 1994.)

However, using qualitative research is the only way to investigate how individuals interact within specific cultural context. These lived experiences cannot be explained in experiments, surveys, or mathematical equations (Holbrook and Hirschman 1982.) In addition, the inclusion of the visual data from the second data addresses some of the limitation of netnography.

CHAPTER 3: FINDINGS

In this chapter, the three major themes that emerged from the data are reported. The three themes were given the following labels: The End is Near, You Reap What You Sow, and A Better World (see Figure 3). The prepping journey consumed every aspect of preppers' life: From the moment they embarked on the prepping journey, they were continuously stockpiling food, learning new survival skills, and sacrificing much of life's pleasures in order to be ready for the impending disaster. This lifestyle caused anxiety and stress that many researchers have shown to influence consumption behavior. The second theme involved preppers' justification for embarking on and continuing the prepping journey, given all the hardships they faced (Andreasen (1984); Mick and Fournier (1998); Pavia and Mason (2004)). The final theme pertained to how preppers imagined the world would be after a catastrophic disaster. These three emergent themes help provide insight into preppers' consumer behavior. The following section expands on each of these emergent themes by exploring participants' quotations.

[Insert figure 3 about here]

3.1 The End is Near

Preppers embarked on the prepping journey for many reasons. For example, the choice to become a prepper could be because of a habit acquired from being raised on a farm, from going camping, or from joining the scouts; because of a lived experience of previous disasters; or because of a religious reason such as preparing for the Tribulation. Similarly, the type of disaster that each prepper was preparing for differed.

I know this really sounds like doomsday talk.....and well I guess it is really, but here are the disasters that might/could/would/will happen we all need to be prepared for. (Thistle)

The comment shows that, even though a catastrophic disaster might not happen, it is necessary to prepare for it nonetheless. Even if this preparation makes preppers sound pessimistic, ignoring what others have to say and concentrating on the important event, even if it does not materialize, is one key behavior that defines preppers and their journey. This comment also shows that “doomsday” is a serious issue for preppers. Looking closely at a list of potential disasters posted by Thistle (see Table 2), one might conclude that preppers’ beliefs of a looming disaster is not without justification. For each of the anticipated events listed, the reason for its occurrence is mentioned to justify to others the belief that this journey is sound and not just “doomsday talk.” For preppers, these beliefs of anticipated disasters are not just an idea or a passing obsession; they are part of preppers’ everyday life, influencing and shaping their behavior.

[Insert table 2 about here]

For example, L.B. and her family started prepping three years ago. She and her family had “no other interest or purpose in life other than prepping for some Armageddon...” According to her, to nonpreppers she may seem obsessed with prepping. However, she is “not obsessed by anything,” she is “just prepping for the collapse of the economy; bringing on hyperinflation.”

I prep for a lot of the reasons above, namely, the economic collapse of the USA. I feel it’s not an “if” question, but “when.” It’s not in any way an “obsession,” but a lifestyle. Once you take a realistic look at the

possibilities, and read as much as you can about what is going on in this country, it's quite a wake-up call. (Sigismundo)

In all of these comments, the idea that prepping is not an obsession but a lifestyle seems to be a defensive mechanism or a response to contrary beliefs or ideas held by preppers. Many preppers experience normalcy bias, where members of society perceive preppers as “crazy” people who have nothing better to do. Thus, by making a seemingly strange behavior a lifestyle, preppers are able to reduce this stress and bias.

Normalcy bias is not the only source of stress for preppers; the goal of being self-reliant is a challenging and never-ending task in which a person gets more deeply involved the longer he or she continues on the prepping journey. For many preppers, the act of prepping guides everything they do, and, for many, prepping changes their lives. Embarking on the prepping journey alters people's perceptions, mindsets, and behaviors. They start to see the world differently.

It wasn't until quite recently that a full understanding of the survival mindset took root in my head—being able to defend others or myself with lethal force was really just the beginning. For months after my college graduation I couldn't shake the feeling that the lifestyle I had enjoyed would not continue into the future. Part of this was based on a study I had done in school on the effects of unsustainable energy consumption. This feeling didn't make me afraid of my future, but instilled an understanding that I needed to not become too reliant on the conveniences and pleasures I had enjoyed in my life thus far. (Herb)

This comment shows how the prepping mindset can not only change a person's physical lifestyle, but can also alter attitudes toward others. Rucker et al. (2014) has shown that attitudes are shaped by reactions to persuasive messages, or, as in preppers' cases, to evidence supporting their attitudes. These attitudes are modified and changed “through an attribution-based reasoning process.” Society perceives the use of lethal force to be a last resort and not a “beginning.” This alternation of convictions is

prominent in the preppers' community: When disaster strikes, every person is trying to survive. Of course, this awareness motivates the prepper to realize that his or her future is not going to be as enjoyable as the past.

A journey of a thousand miles begins with wondering what the h*ll you're doing on this road, it's not a very comfortable road, that one that everyone [nonpreppers] is taking over there is MUCH easier, looks like it's downhill the whole way... (Stampfer)

Whatever the reason, you are sitting there, shaking your head, looking at your screen and asking "Then WHAT DO I DO?" – "HOW do I START?" Starting is easy. But be warned: Once you start, you are going to find yourself on a life-changing journey that will be a continual process of education... (Arlan)

In addition to altered convictions and attitudes, the process, or prepping, itself, as shown in the above comments, is stressful. Therefore, preppers are aware of the implications of their choice, but it is not a choice they can easily ignore. According to preppers, once they realize what is coming, there is no going back. Awareness makes a person realize the likely outcome of the choice is a stressful future, altered attitudes and convictions, and a life of constant hardship.

This ongoing journey in which catastrophic events are predicted for the near future is fertile ground for studying stress-related behaviors. Consumer researchers have investigated consumers' stress-coping behaviors and found that preppers are dealing with their stress-filled perceived reality through their willingness to make huge sacrifices now in order to achieve their ultimate goals: self-reliance and a chance at survival (Andreasen (1984); Mick and Fournier (1998); Pavia and Mason (2004)).

My daughter would probably try to have me sedated if I even suggested changing to homemade pads. Personally, I just pray I've entered menopause before the SHTF! It's a hassle to deal with during normal times let alone having to make run for it in a survival situation, WITH CRAMPS? (Kip)

In the above comment, wishing to reach a stage of life where women can no longer become pregnant just to have a chance at survival shows how real “doomsday” is for preppers. This prepper expected to encounter a world in which minor health issues could lead to her death.

Terror management theorists have claimed that preppers’ coping behavior results from believing in a looming disaster (Greenberg, Pyszczynski, and Solomon (1986)). The theory is based on the idea that human behaviors and cognitions are motivated by the need to protect oneself against anxiety caused by the awareness of mortality. This awareness of death renders people prone to terror, which can be managed (or minimized) by a dual-component buffer consisting of worldview and self-esteem (Greenberg, Pyszczynski, and Solomon 1986; Solomon, Greenberg, and Pyszczynski 1998). Because preppers are anticipating a life-changing disaster (source of terror), which causes anxiety, they agree that they need to do something about the upcoming threat. These actions are coping mechanisms that preppers employ to reduce the stress associated with the looming disaster—a stress which can be reduced by stockpiling many items and learning different survival skills, thereby providing a sense of relief and enhancing their anxiety buffer.

For example, Lady Schwarz, a prepper, said that because she “spent a lot of time preparing for the worst-case scenario,” she can “afford to be cheerful for the rest of the time.” Another prepper, LostFalls, described being prepared as “a HUGE weight lifted off your shoulders to know that you will be ok no matter what happens.” These comments are indicative of how prepping enhances preppers’ anxiety buffer, as predicted by terror management theory.

To date, studies that have employed terror management theory within the consumer research field have mostly focused on existential insecurity (i.e., mortality salience) as a stimulus affecting consumer choice and preference (Arndt et al. (2004); Ferraro, Shiv, and Bettman (2005); Kasser and Sheldon (2000); Maheswaran and Agrawal (2004); Rindfleisch, Burroughs, and Wong (2009)). For example, Ferraro, Shiv, and Bettman (2005) examined how mortality salience (thoughts of death) affected consumer choices regarding food options, charitable donations, and self-indulgence from a behavioral decision theory perspective. Maheswaran and Agrawal (2004) studied the effects of mortality salience on consumer coping behavior from an information-processing perspective. There has also been interest in issues around the end of life among consumer researchers (e.g., Hirschman (1990); Price, Arnould, and Curasi (2000); Turley (1995)). However, the disaster that preppers are readying themselves for could lead to the collapse of society as a whole, rather than to a collapse on an individual level, as most of these researchers investigated in their studies.

In addition, although terror management theory can be used to predict why preppers embark on this journey (i.e., to reduce threat-related stress), the theory cannot be used to explain a major theme found in the preppers' communication within their community: motivation (Ramos Da Silva 2010).). Terror management theory indicates that people will seek to avoid any discussion of death (Bonsu and Belk 2003; Baudrillard 1993). This, however, was not the case with these preppers; for them, "doomsday" was a reminder and a motivator to continue prepping. Bonsu and Belk (2003) looked at the dynamics of postmortem identity construction among consumers in a non-Western society (Asante tribe) to understand how the tribal members manage death and some of

its related consumption phenomena. The authors found that members of the Asante tribe were not worried about death and, in many cases, welcomed it. Moreover, terror management theory cannot be used to explain why preppers expect to thrive in a postapocalyptic world rather than to just survive. In fact, some of these preppers expected survival to include an underground Jacuzzi, stockpiles of gourmet food, and postapocalyptic elections, as will be revealed later in the chapter.

3.2 You Reap What You Sow

As noted previously, for many preppers, the signs of a looming disaster are clear, and this is why they started prepping. They live in constant stress in pursuit of their goal to be as self-reliant as possible. For nonpreppers, however, the signs of impending disaster may not be as apparent; thus, preppers use “obvious” facts to convince nonpreppers of the dangers—for a prepper, it is just a matter of waking up and thinking critically about what is happening around the world.

The average prepper can see the writing on the wall; a government that is creating an unsustainable condition on multiple levels, and is doing what is necessary to survive the consequences of this lunacy. (Braden)

This comment shows preppers’ sense of superiority: Even the average prepper has situational awareness to figure out what is going on in the world. In the prepper’s view, ignoring these facts leads to more hardships once disaster strikes.

Almost everyone can see the high prices, the daily news and look at their meager balance in their checkbook. What they CAN’T see is WHY those things are happening. Most people will defend the gov. tooth and nail and say that they would never do anything to harm their own citizens. The more “asleep” they are, the harder the realization hits them when they finally wake up. It goes from a deer in the headlights look, to oh #\$*&!! I need to do something. (Yellin)

This comment reinforces the idea that everything a person needs to be convinced to start prepping is obvious, once he or she becomes aware of the danger. The sense of superiority deduced from the previous two comments shows that prepping is something that any intelligent person should be able to see and do—thus, prepping should be a priority for every person. Preppers justify their lifestyle by showing that embarking on this journey is not something out of the ordinary—in fact, many people, according to preppers, are employing the same prepping concepts in other aspects of their lives.

You have home owners insurance. You have car insurance. You have flood insurance. What about food and power insurance? A generator (& cables/power strips, etc.) and stored food just makes common sense! (Voahan)

Thus, prepping is similar to having an insurance policy that safeguards against hunger, thirst, theft, and, most importantly, against the need to rely on others for help. Having this policy in place becomes critical in life-and-death situations—as, for example, when society collapses and resources become scarce. In their investigation of different resource categories and the relationship between them, Brinberg and Wood (1983) found that resource scarcity affects the types of resources an individual was willing to give in an exchange. According to the research, the type of resource an individual is likely to exchange is influenced by both the resource received from some other person and the meaning ascribed to the resource, which is determined by external constraints such as resource scarcity.

The anticipated chaos and scarcity of resources motivate preppers to hedge against and insure their futures. For preppers, this insurance policy (being self-reliant) should be a personal responsibility. This responsibility does not stop at stockpiling food and water; the responsibility includes acquiring essential skills such as knitting, blacksmithing, gardening, and even performing minor medical surgery.

All disasters are personal; you are your own “First Responder” in any crisis. You are your own “World Bank.” You have a choice, you can panic blindly when something falls apart, or you can sit, wait and hope help reaches you in time, or you can prepare resources and skills before hand - prepping. (Wamwen)

Because it is believed to be a personal responsibility, this journey becomes even more stressful and requires many sacrifices be made to survive doomsday. Some preppers give up all their hobbies and stop spending money on “frivolous activities” because they believe such things are not essential to their survival.

[Nonpreppers are] running around buying iPods and iPhones and iPads and plasma TVs and gas guzzling SUVs instead of being smart and buying food and seeds and tools and guns and ammo. They have access to the same information I do, and if they choose not to look beyond the agendas for the real information it's not my fault. I won't endanger the survival chances of my own family because somebody chose to spend \$200 a month on an unlimited texting plan for their cell phone instead of having more than two days' worth of groceries in the house. (Ethelred)

I enjoy doing stuff like golf, but since I've been a prepper, I really haven't had enough time. So I miss a little bit of... what I call... normal life (D.M.)

Prepping has eliminated some hobbies—I don't golf, I don't bowl, I don't follow sport. Most of my time is focused on what can I best do to prepare family for nuclear holocaust. (P.L.)

Missing “normal life,” eliminating hobbies, and spending money on a monthly mobile plan instead of stockpiling for doomsday are all part of preppers' self-discipline and self-control. Many preppers look for bulk deals (e.g., 10 for \$10.00), collect coupons, and shop at warehouse stores (e.g., Costco and Sam's Club). They improve their self-control and adjust their shopping behavior to resist the temptation of impulsive consumption (Baumeister 2002). Prominent across the prepper community is the tendency to eliminate hobbies in response to the realization that a prepper cannot

continue to enjoy life. However, these sacrifices do not stop at the individual prepper, but also extend to their families and friends.

M.D. invested “every waking hour” in prepping, which “leaves little, if any room, for making money for college tuition for the children” But according to M.D., there is “something that is more important than that [money for school]...” The scene then cuts to show M.D. waking up his kids to take them to the woods for the whole day, skipping school (“no school today!” he says) to instead test and evaluate their survival skills. In another example, J.D. has spent every dollar from his furniture shop (nearly \$100,000, which is half of his family income) on prepping for doomsday. According to J.D., “Because we prep, we lost cars, we lost houses.” And “Now, we, instead of going to Disney World... we rather buy a case of dehydrated food, a case of water, or a couple of gas masks or chemical suits.”

These major losses, expenses, and sacrifices are experienced by preppers who believe that the world is “just” and that people get what they deserve. Not being prepared will lead to undesirable consequences, which preppers view as a justified outcome for nonpreppers who failed to take steps to protect themselves. Preppers have little regard for those who choose to ignore the signs of looming disaster and instead rely on others (or the government) for help. Nonpreppers who ignore these signs are referred to as “sheeple,” “ignorant,” “stupid,” and suffering from the “ostrich syndrome.”

Sheeple when faced with facts often stick their fingers in their ears and start figuratively making “LaLaLa” sounds in order to not hear what is being said. It’s a protection mechanism for the mind to simply not look too closely at the fundamentals of a belief system. (Wamwen)

The idiots that just say “I’ll go to Walmart and get what I need” are dangerous people that don’t know what is going on and do not have 2 brain cells to rub together to spark a thought.. It is scary reading this thread about what people say. (Dacosta)

The aforementioned quotes reveal a common theme: prepping is a personal responsibility and only those who prepare will survive. This theme can be viewed through the theoretical lens of the just-world theory (Lerner 1980).). Proponents of the theory posit that people have the tendency to believe that the world is just, and people get what they deserve. According to Lerner (1980), this belief enables individuals to view the world as an orderly and stable place, which is necessary for commitment to long term (e.g., self-reliance) and day-to-day functioning. In a rare study, White, MacDonnell, and Ellard (2012) investigated the just-world theory from a consumer behavior perspective. . The authors examined the theory in the context of a fair trade situation in which some degree of injustice toward producers was present. They found that consumers took actions to restore their belief in a just-world if their belief was threatened. According to the theory, then, maintaining these just-world views enables preppers to believe that they too will get what they deserve, and such views are often expressed in the form of the belief that good things should come to good people (preppers), and bad things to bad people (nonpreppers).

The people who are laughing at you now, as you stock up on canned goods and so forth? Don't pay any attention to them. People laughed at Noah as he was building that ark. These folks who are laughing at you now, will be begging for your help when things get Really, Really Bad (Matland)

Those who are snide and cynical about prepping will get what they deserve in the end, anyways (Sontag)

According to D.H.'s law of natural selection, these people "are the first ones to die," and they should be left alone to "deal with the ramifications." It is this belief in a "just" world that explains preppers' willingness to sacrifice hobbies and other life pleasures to survive doomsday. However, preppers want to not only survive, but also

thrive. By learning how to knit, garden, and forge, preppers are essentially “developing postapocalyptic skill sets” that are intended to be used later when such skills are worth more than paper money and can be used to barter. This forward-looking attitude is common among preppers.

I do hope people are paying attention—the more prepared people, the better our chances of maintaining a “normal” semblance [sic] of society post SHTF. (Kip)

I want to be here. I want to see this false paradigm collapse. I want to be a positive part of rebuilding the world without all of the corporate control, without all of the media brainwashing, without the “elite” mentality. (Keenum)

The belief in a just-world is an overarching theme in the preppers’ community. This belief helps preppers overcome the terror-avoidance tendency predicted by terror management theorists and find hope in a postapocalyptic world. In addition, the just-world theory helps explain why preppers do not want to exclude doomsday from their lives, and why, for some, doomsday is seen as an opportunity to rebuild a better society. This belief propels preppers beyond the terror and into a world where good things will be awarded to those who prepared. L.C., a prepper, fortified his family farm and called it “The Alamo” because:

that is a place we look for protection and our final hold-out when these events [mega earthquakes] take place. This place [the farm] is to be here as a beacon of hope for me and many others, and also help lay the way for our community in recovery.

3.3 A Better World

In a predisaster world, preppers’ behavior may seem unwise. While one may agree that personal responsibility is crucial, preppers are not working as part of their local communities, but are actually excluding their communities. Preppers reject predisaster

societal norms and replace them with their predicted version of postdisaster utopia: a community based on stand-your-ground and shoot-first attitudes. The current society, as directed by the “educated elite,” limits a person’s freedom in creating his or her own utopia, which preppers believe is not what the Founding Fathers intended when they created limited government “charged only with protecting your rights” (Wamwen.) Therefore, the skills preppers acquire, the amount of money they spend, the sacrifices they make, and opportunities they let go in a preapocalyptic world show that preppers are not planning on just surviving doomsday, but also planning on rebuilding a better world in which they and their philosophies can thrive.

Preppers have different reasons for welcoming doomsday. Some preppers are simply tired of how corporations and the United States government (referred to as the “gubement”) are taking control of preppers’ lives and how preppers depend on government services for survival. Others view this postapocalyptic world as an opportunity to build a utopian society composed of self-reliant and like-minded people. These attributes provide the basis for strong communities that can avoid and withstand disasters, provide a better standard of living, and help connect people.

Communities built around self-sustainment are by their very nature resilient to natural disasters, grid failures, and crime. By locally producing food, water, and power a community can almost completely eliminate the major vulnerabilities of today’s societies. The society is healthier, happier, and more connected. By once again localizing industry, the community can build, fabricate, or repair nearly anything and have a vibrant localized economy. Further, by having a large pool of like-minded citizens, the community can fend off both political and physical attacks. One threat can be defeated through the ballot box and the other through tactical numerical “superiority.” (Quintilian)

This comment is also indicative of why that world is much better than the present world—in a postapocalyptic world, self-reliant citizens live with, are governed by, and

are protected by like-minded people. Quintilian explained the process of rebuilding communities and detailed the unique election process in a postapocalyptic world.

To illustrate this point, 100 groups of eight preppers could disperse across the 50 states (two groups to a state). These small groups have zero political influence or protection and could be rounded up and wiped out in a single night by either hostile thugs or government forces operating in groups so small local law enforcement could field them. However, if you combined these groups in one area, you would have the local tactical strength of upwards of 800 people. This is a sufficient number to not just swing, but control elections in smaller districts, install a like-minded sheriff and deputies, and present a unified defense requiring at least a battalion of military regulars to engage with any chance of success. Imagine getting back to a time and place where instead of fearing police, the local police actually acted to “defend” the locals and keep the peace with the full weight of the people and the law behind it. Imagine a place where you could walk down the street and not be filmed, photographed, tracked, and fined for violating one of a seemingly infinite number of overbearing regulations. (Quintilian)

As these comments show, preppers’ detailed planning indicates they expect to thrive. For them, doomsday is a temporary period to be endured “as quickly as possible with as little pain as possible.” Doomsday is an opportunity to start with a clean slate to rebuild a better world. With such a forward-looking attitude, one can understand preppers’ justification for not spending money on “frivolous activities” such as playing golf or going to the movies.

Irrespective of their motivations, the vast majority of preppers spend conspicuous amounts of money preparing for a postapocalyptic world. It has been shown that human awareness of threat affects materialism and promotes conspicuous consumption to enhance self-esteem or support one’s cultural worldview (Arndt et al. 2004; Bonsu and Belk 2003). Thinking of doomsday causes preppers to reflect on the meanings and value of life. These reflections are usually accompanied by negative emotions such as fear and

anger, which may represent their pursuit of symbolic immortality through consumption (Bonsu and Belk 2003; Hirschman 1990).

I have everything for full flavor and gourmet foods. If the world comes to an end... I'll be the only one standing there who has an extra 100 lbs to lose. Everyone else will be skin and bones (Casey)

For the Cantrell family, installing an underground hot tub has a bigger meaning: "Our hot tub is not just about surviving, this is about thriving."

These comments illustrate how preppers go beyond acquiring the basic needs for survival to acquire materials to ensure their standard of living. Many studies have revealed that material possessions are used to create symbolic immortality (e.g., Belk (1988); Price, Arnould, and Curasi (2000)). Wealth acquisition and affluence can also act as cultural symbols of one's value, representing safety in this life and symbolic immortality thereafter (Arndt et al. 2004; Hirschman 1990). For example, L.H. is building a luxury survival condominium to protect against "anything Mother Nature throws at us," he said. This 14-story condo is completely hidden from view in an underground nuclear silo. According to L.H., this condo should make people feel like they are on a vacation and not surviving doomsday. "The condo has swimming pools, libraries, classes, exercise room, movie theater, bar and lounge." Thus far, he has spent three million dollars on this project.

Preppers' spending behaviors, as demonstrated by the above comment, are investments in the future. Their forecast of a postapocalyptic world is similar to that of an investor predicting the stock market. Because preppers are expecting a better world, they are hedging everything they own against doomsday—thus, spending money on "frivolous activities" is considered an unwise investment decision. As terror management theory predicted, preppers seek continuity through symbolic means to enhance their anxiety

buffer. These behaviors offer symbolic immortality by providing the sense that preppers are part of something that will outlive the individual (a better world). They receive a sense of being part of an elite group that will outlive those who did not prepare (akin to natural selection).

CHAPTER 4: DISCUSSION

4.1 Theoretical Implications

The data revealed three themes that describe preppers' consumer behavior. The first theme, The End is Near, shows how the anticipation of terror consumes every aspect of a prepper's life, and, as a result, causes stress and anxiety. According to terror management theory, these negative emotions force preppers to take action in order to reduce this terror-related anxiety. By prepping, preppers are able to create an anxiety buffer that allows them to enjoy life. However, as revealed in the second theme, You Reap What You Sow, preppers continually think about doomsday, which contradicts terror management theory that predicts people should not be thinking of the source of terror, but rather be seeking to remove it from their lives. Actions that preppers take to mitigate their sense of terror range from simply planning how to deal with nonpreppers during doomsday to making huge sacrifices that affect them and their families on a daily basis.

In addition, the Better World theme shows preppers' welcoming attitude toward doomsday and their expectation to not only survive, but thrive. This motivational aspect of preppers' consumer behavior is also not predicted by terror management theory. The belief in just-world theory, which posits that good things will happen to good people, helps to explain the last two themes—preppers believe they will survive and others (nonpreppers) will suffer, because preppers made changes and sacrifices and thus should be rewarded.

The findings in this study show that terror management theory is irrelevant in predicting preppers behavior. This conclusion is similar to the conclusions reached by Bonsu and Belk (2003) during their study of the Asante Tribe, whose members were not afraid of death and generally welcomed it. Even though the prepping community has a unique cultural context, its members' consumer behavior and lifestyle patterns provide evidence that can be used to extend our understanding of existing conceptual frameworks (e.g., Arnould (1989); Bonsu and Belk (2003)).

Although many researchers in marketing and social psychology have examined human behavior using terror management theory (for a review, see Cox et al. (2007)), their studies failed to integrate other important theories focused on explaining human motivation. Moreover, in all these studies, the impact of terror under investigation was on a microlevel (an individual person or a local community.) Preppers, on the other hand, anticipate a life-threatening event that could lead to the collapse of society. Thus, investigating consumer behaviors in such extreme situations is essential to having complete understanding of how terror management theory predicts behaviors when the impact of terror is far-reaching.

Figure 4 illustrates the role that terror management and just-world theories play in explaining the preppers' journey from a consumer behavior perspective. In the figure, the preppers' journey is divided into three stages representing different time frames: preterror, terror, and postterror. The data show an overlap between terror management and just-world theories.

[Insert figure 4 about here]

Preppers are currently living in the preterror stage while they work to ready themselves for the upcoming terror. For preppers, as shown earlier, this stage consists mostly of preparing for and dealing with stress and convincing others of their beliefs. The three components of terror management are (1) type of terror, (2) stress, and (3) anxiety-buffer. According to terror management theory, when an individual experiences an existential terror (e.g., financial collapse, pandemic, nuclear attack), anxiety is produced (stress). To cope with this feeling, preppers take active steps to hedge against and minimize this threat by prepping, and thereby enhance their anxiety-buffer.

However, preppers talk about doomsday and seem to welcome it; this behavior cannot be explained by terror management theorists, who have suggested that people will avoid any talk that would remind them of the terror. This integration of doomsday talk in preppers' lives, as well as their desire to make prepping a lifestyle, is another aspect in which terror management theory falls short. Terror management theorists claim that the human desire for literal or symbolic immortality is a terror-avoidance tendency (Bonsu and Belk 2003; Baudrillard 1993). Thus, any behavior that leads to thinking about the terror stage is not explained by terror management theory.

In the second and third stages (terror and postterror), only the belief in a just-world theory explains preppers' behavior. The just-world theory overlaps with terror management theory on how the act of "prepping" is perceived by preppers and predicts preppers' behavior into the third stage. In the first stage, terror management theory suggest that prepping is an anxiety-enhancing behavior, such as, for example, when LostFalls described being prepared as "a HUGE weight lifted off your shoulders to know that you will be ok no matter what happens." Just-world theory, however, would explain

prepping as a personal responsibility that each person must take seriously or suffer the consequences. Wamwen said, “All disasters are personal; you are your own ‘First Responder’ in any crisis. You are your own ‘World Bank.’”

In addition, even though according to terror management theory, individuals will seek symbolic immortality through different types of consumer behavior, the motivational aspects that preppers show in their welcoming attitude toward the impending disaster and the anticipation of a utopian world are not explained.

According to the just-world theory, on the other hand, good things will happen to those who deserve it; for many preppers who sacrificed their time and dedicated a large percentage of their income (copious spending) in preparing, this belief is their motivation. Because they sacrificed, they deserve to live and thrive (be rewarded) in a postdisaster world. This is why preppers not only anticipate doomsday, but also plan for the postapocalyptic world in which they can thrive and rebuild a utopian society (a better world). The preppers’ version of this society includes like-minded people who are self-reliant, independent, entrepreneurial, and who do not rely on government services. These elements encourage preppers to look forward to doomsday (and not avoid the terror), and thus represent their pursuit of symbolic immortality.

Therefore, the findings of this study indicate that just by reframing an idea (prepping) from something that is personal (enhancing anxiety-buffer) to something that is expected and required from everybody (personal responsibility), a relationship is established between terror management theory and just-world theory. This link between the theories is what motivates preppers to alter their consumer behavior to forgo all preterror pleasures.

4.2 Managerial Implications

Understanding preppers' lifestyle patterns provides broader understanding of consumer behavior so that marketers can develop more efficient strategies. The preppers' fear of being labeled as potential terrorists or being targets of theft when disaster strikes make them value their anonymity. Thus, the need for interactive and directed marketing strategies that cater to their community becomes essential. Van Noort, Voorveld, and Van Reijmersdal (2012) showed how an interactive brand website can be explained in terms of the online flow of marketing context experienced by consumers. The current exploration of preppers' communal consumption complements the authors' findings and provides a deeper understanding of consumer behavior by investigating emotions, motives, and symbolisms that cannot be tested using experiments or surveys (Holbrook and Hirschman 1982). Thus, this current study provides marketers with valuable insights into contemporary consumer behavior and helps managers develop strategies that are sensitive to the unique nature of online communities (Balasubramanian and Mahajan 2001).

As more consumers realize their vulnerability to future natural or human-created disasters, the prepping market will continue to grow. In addition, the preppers' community is a social interaction context that provides rich data about their consumer behavior; this community is not just an aggregation of individuals who share similar interests, beliefs, or passing obsessions. This consumer behavior information is continuously updated as members interact and exchange knowledge online, a process that can help managers develop marketing strategies and generate financial gains (Ritzer and Jurgenson 2010).

4.3 Future Research

Bonsu and Belk (2003) found that terror management theory did not apply to the Asante tribe. Similarly, as was shown in the current study, preppers are not afraid of impending disaster, and in many cases, they welcome it. Moreover, even though the authors posited that the theory was irrelevant in a non-Western setting, the data indicate that this outcome may also be the case with U.S. preppers. Therefore, future research intended to understand the characteristics of individuals rather than of the setting may help to explain the specific characteristics that are predicted by terror management theory.

As consumers, preppers represent a relatively new phenomenon that has roots in the survivalist movement. Thus, it is expected that this movement will develop and change as time and circumstances change. Future research may be necessary to find new consumer behaviors that show preppers are adapting to change.

Ramos Da Silva (2010) attempted to incorporate the just-world theory using an experimental paradigm, while this study used an explorative route. These two methods may become the start of future research aimed at developing the proper means to measure just-world beliefs so that the construct may be properly integrated with terror management research.

Table 1: Informants Table

Pseudonum	Source	Pseudonum	Source
1 Adarebeth	American Preppers Network	50 Keenum	The Economic Collapse
2 Ajay	American Preppers Network	51 Kermit	American Preppers Network
3 Arlan	American Preppers Network	52 Kip	American Preppers Network
4 B.B.	Doomsday Preppers	53 L.B.	Doomsday Preppers
5 Bartolemo	American Preppers Network	54 L.C.	Doomsday Preppers
6 Bobbette	The Economic Collapse	55 L.H.	Doomsday Preppers
7 Bolman	American Preppers Network	56 Lady Schwarz	Doomsday Preppers
8 Braden	American Preppers Network	57 Lakis	American Preppers Network
9 Brenn	American Preppers Network	58 Lauren	American Preppers Network
10 bruni	American Preppers Network	59 Le guin	American Preppers Network
11 C.N.	Doomsday Preppers	60 M.A.	Doomsday Preppers
12 Cantrell	Doomsday Preppers	61 M.C.	Doomsday Preppers
13 Casey	Doomsday Preppers	62 M.D.	Doomsday Preppers
14 Christophe	American Preppers Network	63 M.H.	Doomsday Preppers
15 Cindie	American Preppers Network	64 M.W.	Doomsday Preppers
16 Cocchi	American Preppers Network	65 Marso	American Preppers Network
17 D.H.	Doomsday Preppers	66 Martinez	American Preppers Network
18 D.M.	Doomsday Preppers	67 Matland	The Economic Collapse
19 D.P.	Doomsday Preppers	68 Maurita	American Preppers Network
20 D.R.	Doomsday Preppers	69 Mcilroy	American Preppers Network
21 Dacosta	American Preppers Network	70 Merseth	American Preppers Network
22 De castro	American Preppers Network	71 Minichiello	American Preppers Network
23 Deloris	American Preppers Network	72 Muttini	American Preppers Network
24 Dewey	American Preppers Network	73 Myca Ravera	American Preppers Network
25 Dolf	American Preppers Network	74 Odilia	American Preppers Network
26 Doll	American Preppers Network	75 Orrin	American Preppers Network
27 E.P.	Doomsday Preppers	76 P.L.	Doomsday Preppers
28 Elysha	American Preppers Network	77 P.R.	Doomsday Preppers
29 Emmanuel	American Preppers Network	78 Quintilian	Last Minute Survival
30 Ethelred	American Preppers Network	79 Rosalynd	American Preppers Network
31 Evaleen Lutes	American Preppers Network	80 S.S.	Doomsday Preppers
32 Feliks	American Preppers Network	81 Sarno	Doomsday Preppers
33 Gerek	The Economic Collapse	82 Sigismundo	American Preppers Network
34 Gill	American Preppers Network	83 Sontag	American Preppers Network
35 Greenberg	American Preppers Network	84 Stampfer	American Preppers Network
36 Hakesley	HappyPreppers.com	85 Sul	American Preppers Network
37 Hanna	American Preppers Network	86 Thistle	American Preppers Network
38 Herb	Survival Blog	87 Tudor Ma	American Preppers Network
39 Hertz	American Preppers Network	88 Vagts	American Preppers Network
40 Honig	American Preppers Network	89 Verared	American Preppers Network
41 Hottle	American Preppers Network	90 Voahan	American Preppers Network
42 Ibaeclya	American Preppers Network	91 Wainwright Schwarz	The Economic Collapse
43 Isselhardt	American Preppers Network	92 Wamwen	American Preppers Network
44 J.D.	Doomsday Preppers	93 Willem	American Preppers Network
45 J.S.	Doomsday Preppers	94 Yellin	American Preppers Network
47 Janaya	American Preppers Network	95 Yesson	American Preppers Network
48 K.O.	Doomsday Preppers	96 Zeitlin	American Preppers Network
49 Karpouzes	American Preppers Network		

Table 2: Potential Disasters

EMP from solar flares - see NASA warnings on sun activity
EMP from Enemies of the State - N. Korea, China, Russia
Major earthquake - New Madrid Fault line - could rip our country in half
Super volcanoes - Pacific NW - see past news headlines
Dirty bombs - home grown terrorists
Nuclear plant breakdown as a result of any of the above
Radiation in air, food, water as a result of above
Super virus, plague, etc., as a result of any of the above

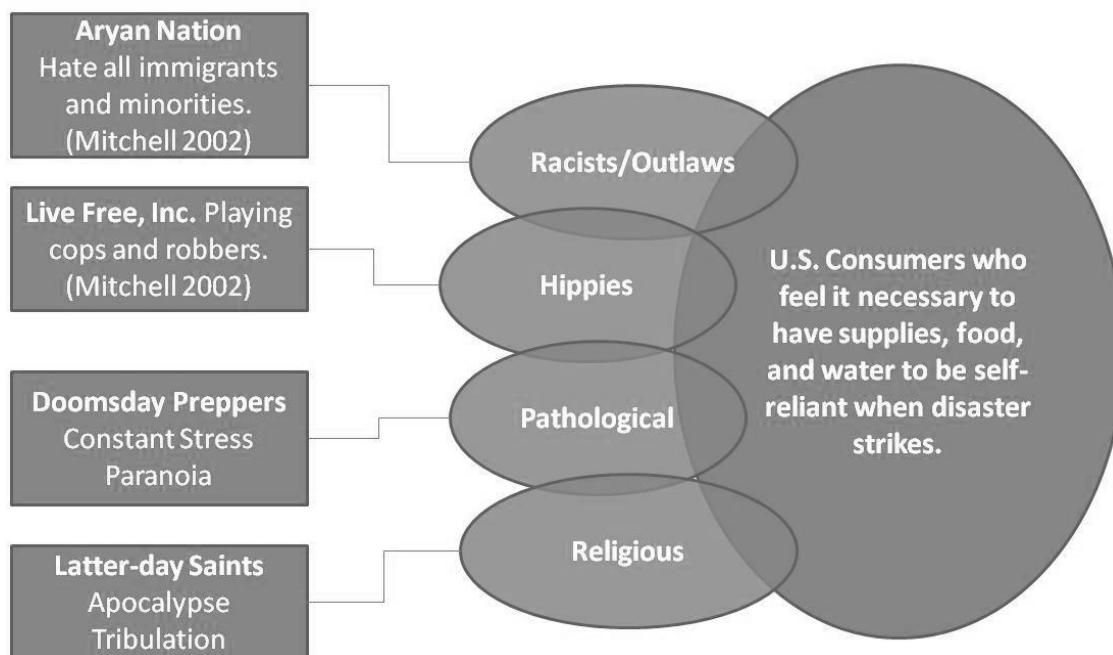


Figure 1: Characteristics of preppers



Self-Reliance Food from Costco

DIY books

NUKAlert

Underground Shelter from AtlasSurvivalShelters.com

Figure 2: Specialty products marketed to preppers

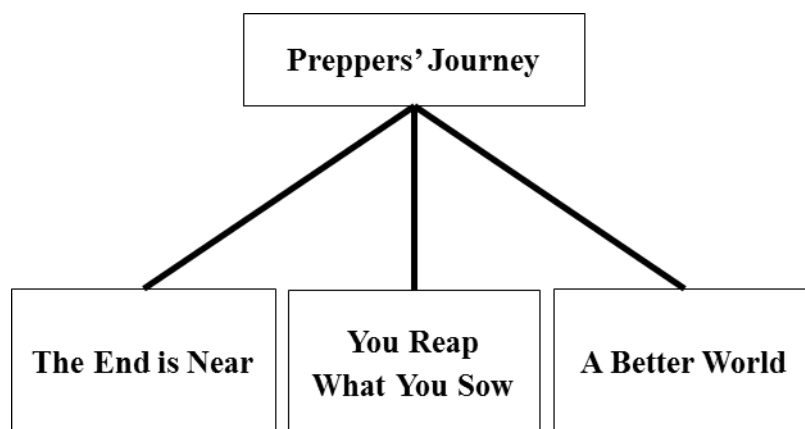


Figure 3: Three emergent themes from the data

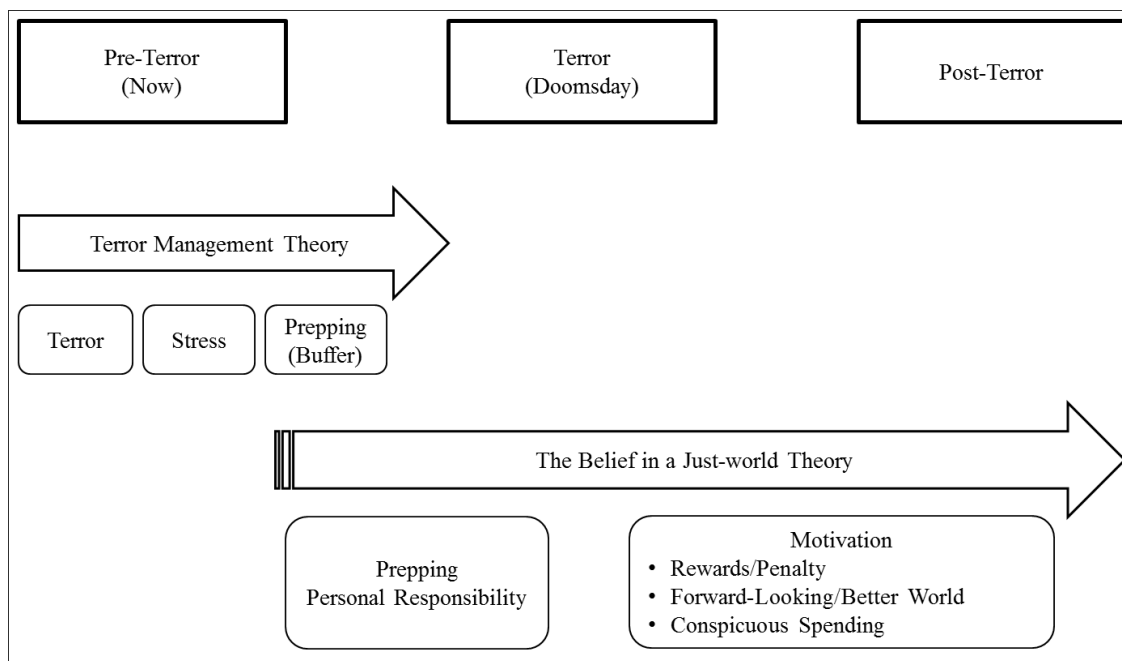


Figure 4: Terror management and just-world theories

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GLOSSARY

Term	Definition
BIB	Bug in Bag; kit of essentials.
Blackouts	the practice of minimizing outdoor lighting for protection from attack .
BOB	Bug out bag; kit of essentials.
BOL	Bug out location; a retreat.
BOV	Bug out vehicle.
EMP	An electromagnetic pulse that is damaging to electronic equipment and at higher levels can damage physical objects.
G.O.O.D	Get Out of Dodge, a generic term for leaving the big city in a hurry.
hunker down	keep hiding in a big city.
SHTF	S**t hit the fan, aka TEOTWAWKI.
Solar flares	A large energy release from the sun that may render all wireless communications useless.
TEOTWAWKI	The End of The World As We Know It.
Y2k	A computer problem that resulted from the practice of abbreviating a four-digit year to two digits.

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