

CONSUMER ESCAPE: A CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

By

ANDREW KUO

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For Wanda

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CONSUMER ESCAPE: A THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

By

Andrew Kuo

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This dissertation investigates the phenomenon of consumer escape—the process by which individuals relieve stress through the consumption of entertainment media (e.g., movies, books, and video games). Through a series of case studies examining first-hand experiences with consumer escape, a theoretical framework is built to specify the antecedents and mechanisms by which different forms of consumer escape (i.e., passive and active) occur. Subsequently, the Experiential Escape Scale (EES) is developed for the purpose of measuring the unique dimensions comprising the escape construct (Studies 1 and 2). Phenomenological and theoretical distinctions between the constructs of escape, flow, and recreation are demonstrated through implementation of the EES in Studies 3 and 4.

CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

According to a recent article published in the *Wall Street Journal* (2008), men and women in the United States now spend 15% of their waking hours in front of the television. Even amidst one of the worst economic recessions of recent times, the video game industry has grown an estimated \$18 billion dollars over the past year, and summer blockbusters like *Wolverine* and *Star Trek* continue to break box-office records despite rising ticket and concession prices. As the demand for entertainment media continues to grow, it is impossible to deny an increasing trend toward escapism—the desire to abandon the stresses of reality for the pleasures and thrills of fantasy.

As a theoretical construct, the term escapism has been defined loosely within the marketing literature; a brief review of the last decade reveals that it has been used to describe an entire range of activities and behaviors (see Table 1-1). Although exact definitions differ across research paradigms, several unifying themes have emerged—as seen in Table 1-1, escape is most often invoked to describe a set of avoidance behaviors. Mandel and Smeesters (2008), for example, discuss food as a means by which consumers avoid feelings of low self-esteem. By indulging in foods like chocolate and cookies, individuals escape from the stresses of self-awareness by focusing on the tangible sensations of eating. Likewise, Sherry and Kozinets (2001) discuss themed restaurants as a means by which consumers avoid the stressful responsibilities of work. In the rich fantasy settings of restaurants such as ESPN Sports Zone, individuals are given the opportunity to escape from reality during their consumption experience.

Regardless of the usage situation, the term escapism has come to represent a process of mentally “getting away” through the consumption of products or services. In most instances, individuals engage in escape behaviors to avoid the experience of a negative situation, event, or

disposition. At a broader level of conception, however, individuals seeking escape have a common goal—the alleviation of stress. As such, one of the primary goals of this research is to explore the concept of escapism as a response to stress (Chapter 2).

Apart from stress, another common theme to emerge from the literature includes the notion of mental absorption as the means by which escape occurs. From *The Matrix* (Kozinets 2007) to *Dungeons & Dragons* (Martin 2004), escape appears to diminish the negative effects of stress by focusing an individual's attention on the escape activity. By completely preoccupying attentional resources, escape functions by diverting the conscious-awareness of an individual away from sources of stress. While the exact process has yet to be fully understood, theories of transportation through narrative (i.e., Wang and Calder, 2006) and fantasy (i.e., Casey, 2003) suggest possible mechanisms. A review of the existing literature seeks to clarify the process of mental absorption and examine the role of transportation and fantasy within the context of escape (Chapter 3).

Finally, escapism appears to fall into a larger category of consumer behaviors related to the consumption of entertainment. Clearly, not all instances of entertainment (e.g., movie watching) are escape experiences; consumers often go to the theater as a form of recreation [i.e., play (Mathwick & Rigdon, 2004)]. Likewise, the state of mind described as flow (Csikszentmihályi, 1990) can often appear phenomenologically similar to escape—by outward appearance alone, it can be difficult to discern between states of flow and escape (e.g., a consumer immersed within a video game experience). Without a deeper understanding of the escape process, there is little theoretical ground by which escape and flow can be separated. In fact, there are instances in which escapism has been reduced to a dimension of flow (Mathwick

& Rigdon, 2004). Consequently, this research seeks to build a framework that articulates the process of escape and distinguishes the experience from flow and recreation.

Table 1-1. Examples of consumer escape in existing literature.

| Usage | Citation | Dimension |
|---|----------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Individuals who feel unable to meet ideal standards may try to escape this aversive state of self-awareness by turning their attention away from themselves. | Mandel & Smeesters (2008) | elimination of self-awareness |
| . . . people immerse themselves into a TV program because it helps them forget about their problems and provides an escape. | Russell, Norman & Heckler (2004) | removal of external stressors |
| Consumers' compulsion to self-gratify by escaping into dramatically altered digital realities became the basis for a range of mass culture cautionary tales of technological seduction and dystopian societies such as those featured in the <i>ExistenZ</i> and <i>Matrix</i> motion pictures. | Kozinets (2007) | fantasy |
| Thus, while escaping from his current stressful work life, Zane also enacts the role of the fearless, mentally powerful wizard who has the capacity to succeed in conditions of uncertainty. | Martin (2004) | role-play |
| ESPN Sport Zone (a themed restaurant and sports bar chain) appeals to men in large part because it creates a hedonic playpen that allows men to escape from the serious responsibilities of the breadwinner role. | Holt & Thompson (2004) | removal of external stressors |
| Fear provokes thoughts and actions to escape the crisis and not problem-oriented actions to address it. | Passyn & Sujun (2006) | relief of negative affect |
| . . . greater temporal perspective allows consumers to escape the influence of indulgence guilt and causes them to experience a wistful feeling of missing out on the pleasures of life. | Kivetz & Keinan (2006) | relief of negative affect |

Table 1-1. Continued.

| Usage | Citation | Dimension |
|---|---|-------------------------------|
| We proposed that choices of hedonic luxuries over cash of equal or greater value reflect the difficulty of consumers in treating themselves to indulgence and having more fun as well as a conscious attempt to escape the default inclination to spend on necessities. | Kivetz & Simonson (2006) | avoidance behavior |
| . . . consumers appear to watch TV mainly for entertainment, to relax, to "kill" time, or "to escape from worries." | Woltman, Wedel, & Rik (2003) | stress relief |
| . . . an important goal when faced with a choice involving conflicting objectives (i.e., attributes that must be traded off) is to escape from the unpleasant state of conflict induced by the decision problem itself. | Luce, Payne, & Bettman (1999) | relief of negative affect |
| Romance has been the dominant escape from the cold grip of rationality in the modern world. | Belk (2005) | disassociation from reality |
| . . . people may often use television and compulsive shopping as a means to escape the burdens of self-awareness. | Arndt, Solomon, Kasser, & Sheldon (2004) | elimination of self-awareness |
| . . . the natural action tendencies associated with worry are escape, avoidance, and protection from the prospective threat. | Sunghwan & Baumgartner (2004) | relief of negative affect |
| Despite the fact that many researchers describe individuals who spend large amounts of time on the Internet as people who are trying to escape the "real world," respondents in our study reported that escapism is not a major motivation of online chatting. | Zinkhan, Hyokjin, Morrison, & Peters (2003) | disassociation from reality |
| . . . shopping and spending act as an escape for the compulsive buyer. | Mowen & Spears (1999) | avoidance behavior |

CHAPTER 2 STRESS

Traditionally, there have been two approaches to understanding and defining the concept of stress as a theoretical construct: (1) the stimulus approach, and (2) the response approach (Lazarus, 2006). According to the stimulus approach, stress is best understood as an external stimulus (i.e., external stressor) exerting traumatic force upon an individual. When an individual is exposed to an external stressor that is sufficiently traumatic, a stress reaction (i.e., the need to cope) is provoked. As such, the stimulus approach emphasizes the role of external stressors as the cause of a subsequent stress reaction. The response approach, on the other hand, acknowledges the highly subjective nature of stress reactions—an external stressor capable of provoking a stress reaction in one individual may not be sufficiently traumatic for another. Hence, the response approach emphasizes the subjective nature of stress reactions over the role of external stressors.

As an illustration of this distinction, consider the Social Readjustment Rating Scale developed by Holmes and Rahe (1967). In an effort to objectively measure the degree of stress caused by external stressors, Holmes and Rahe created a list of common life changes (e.g., death of spouse, pregnancy, divorce) and asked participants to rate each item based on the amount of psychological trauma induced. By computing the mean ratings for each item, Holmes and Rahe assigned an objective score to each life change (e.g., divorce received scored a 73 out of 100). This approach to stress measurement was founded on the assumption that certain stimuli within an individual's environment (i.e., external stressors) are inherently traumatic. Based upon this assumption, the stimulus approach argues that the measurement of stress should occur at the level of external stressors.

Contrary to the stimulus approach adopted by Holmes and Rahe, the response approach assumes that external stressors are not inherently traumatic; rather, trauma is subjectively perceived as a result of individual differences (Lazarus, 1999). For example, the response approach would not attach objective measurements of stress to life changes such as divorce—under specific conditions (e.g., spousal abuse), a divorce could actually produce feelings of relief. Consequently, the response approach assumes that external stressors are neutral within the context of stress. Based upon this assumption, the response approach argues that the measurement of stress should occur at the level of stress reactions. As such, the response approach defines stress as a set of predefined emotions related to psychological trauma (e.g., anxiety, worry, fear).

To reconcile the differences between the stimulus and response approaches to stress, Lazarus (2006) proposed a third approach—the relational approach. According to Lazarus, stress occurs when environmental demands (i.e., external stressors) overwhelm the resources available to an individual. Under such conditions, an individual perceives the external stressor as a threat to his or her well-being, and the stress manifests itself through stress emotions (i.e., a stress reaction). For example, a medical student preparing for board exams will perceive the exam as an external stressor if he lacks the necessary resources (e.g., time to study). Consequently, the medical student internalizes the stressor as a threat to his well-being (e.g., failing the exam would jeopardize his career) and experiences stress emotions such as anxiety, worry, and fear.

The relational approach differs from previous accounts by acknowledging both the external stressor and stress reaction as equally important components of stress. According to the relational approach, stress occurs when an individual perceives a difference between the resources demanded by an external stressor and the resources on hand. When a substantial

difference is experienced (i.e., demand exceeds supply), it produces stress emotions within the individual. As the perceived difference increases, the severity of the stress emotions increases as well. Consequently, the relational approach to stress takes individual subjectivity into account without disqualifying the inherently traumatic nature of certain stressors.

Bandura (1997) provided support for a relational approach by manipulating the degree of stress emotions produced by an objectively traumatic stimulus. In his experiment, individuals reported the degree of anxiety (i.e., a stress emotion) experienced while anticipating a painful electric shock (i.e., an external stressor). Bandura found that increasing the self-esteem (i.e., the psychological resources) of an individual reduced the amount of anxiety reported. Contrary to the stimulus approach to stress, Bandura demonstrated the context-dependent nature of stress—the stress produced by the anticipation of shock was clearly subjective. On the other hand, Bandura also demonstrated that the degree of stress felt by an individual could be manipulated by shifting the availability of resources—thereby taking the emphasis off individual differences. As such, the relational approach has become the most commonly accepted interpretation and definition of stress.

From a relational perspective, stress reactions occur when external stressors are interpreted as a threat to the well-being of an individual. More specifically, stress reactions occur when an individual perceives a threat to his or her composition of self (Baumeister, 1991). As defined by Baumeister, the self has two components: the (1) biological component, and the (2) social component. With respect to Lazarus' definition of stress, stressors that affect the physical well-being of an individual (e.g., sickness) threaten the biological components of the self, and stressors that affect the psychological well-being of an individual (e.g., divorce) threaten the

social components of the self. Given the psychological nature of escape within the context of consumer behavior, the present research focuses on threats against the “social” self.

As discussed by Baumeister, the “quest for control” is one of the overarching needs experienced by the self. As social beings, humans continually seek to control their interactions with the environment, other individuals, and even themselves. Consequently, an inability to meet the demands of a stressor can lead to a perceived loss of control. Under such circumstances, the individual experiences stress emotions as a result of internalizing stress as a threat to control. For example, an elementary school teacher faced with a misbehaving student may experience stress because he lacks the resources (e.g., parental support) to discipline the child. In this example, the child represents a stressor that threatens the teacher’s sense of control over his classroom. As a result, the teacher experiences stress emotions (e.g., “I am frustrated because I don’t have the proper resources to maintain control of my classroom.”).

Apart from the “quest for control,” individuals are also motivated by a desire to maintain self-esteem. According to self-discrepancy theory (Higgins, 1987), there exist multiple domains of the self, including the actual self (i.e., how an individual views himself) and the ideal self (i.e., how an individual wishes he could be). Discrepancy theory posits that individuals are primarily motivated by the differences (i.e., discrepancies) they perceive to exist between the multiple domains of self—goals and aspirations stem from a desire to minimize the discrepancies perceived between the actual and ideal selves (e.g., “I wish I had more patience.”). When large discrepancies are perceived, individuals tend to experience feelings of dejection and low self-esteem. Consequently, an inability to meet the demands of a stressor can lead to lowered self-esteem by drawing attention to a perceived self-discrepancy.

For example, reconsider the elementary school teacher mentioned above. In the previous example, the teacher interpreted a stressor (i.e., the misbehaving student) as a threat to control because he did not have adequate resources (i.e., parental support) to discipline the child. However, if the teacher had attributed the cause of stress internally to a lack of ability (e.g., patience), the stressor would have been interpreted as a threat to self-esteem (e.g., “I don’t have the patience required to be a good teacher.”). Although the stressor remained constant across both examples, it was interpreted as a threat to control in the first scenario and as a threat to self-esteem in the second. Driving this distinction is a difference in attribution style—the first scenario represents an external attribution (i.e., the teacher blamed an external factor—the parents) while the second scenario represents a internal attribution (i.e., the teacher blamed an internal factor—himself).

When faced with the threat of stress, individuals seek out coping mechanisms (i.e., stress regulation) to avoid the subsequent stress emotions. According to Folkman and Lazarus (1980), coping mechanisms fall into one of two general categories: (1) problem-focused coping, and (2) emotion-focused coping. As defined by Folkman and Lazarus, problem-focused coping is a solution-oriented strategy that seeks to eliminate stress by dealing directly with the stressor (e.g., a teacher calling the parents of a misbehaving student). Emotion-focused coping, on the other hand, seeks to reduce the negative effects of stress by eliminating the impact of stress emotions (e.g., a teacher watching TV at home to forget about a rough day at school). Using Folkman and Lazarus’ terminology, escape behavior is a clear example of emotion-focused coping.

Although the specific reasons for engaging in escape are both numerous and diverse, the underlying motivation is derived from a desire to eliminate the negative emotions stemming from stress. Rather than dealing directly with a stressor, escape seeks to eliminate stress

emotions by directing an individual's attention elsewhere. When the individual no longer perceives a lack of resources, he or she is no longer subject to the stress emotions that typically follow. Similarly, Baumeister (1991) defines escape as a disassociation of the self from itself—in other words, escape permits an individual to shift the focus off himself for a period of time. Without the self as a reference point, threats against control or self-esteem do not provoke stress emotions. The following chapter explores the processes and mechanisms that allow escape to occur.

CHAPTER 3 ESCAPE

As an emotion-focused style of coping, escape relies heavily on the degree to which an individual experiences mental absorption—the preoccupation of one’s thoughts and conscious-awareness processes. For mental absorption to occur, however, the escape activity must possess some quality that draws an individual’s attention away from external stressors. One such quality, as proposed by Green and Brock (2000), is narrative character. According to Green and Brock, transportation can occur when “all mental systems and capacities become focused on events occurring in [a] *narrative*.” While Green and Brock propose that narratives most often include a presentation and resolution of conflict, they acknowledge that the defining characteristic of a narrative is the presence of a storyline. When an individual becomes immersed within a narrative (e.g., reading a novel), transportation occurs when he or she becomes involved in the events presented by the storyline. As a consequence, the individual ceases to be aware of events occurring outside the scope of the narrative.

A transportation account of escape makes sense intuitively. Television shows such as *Star Trek* are often cited as examples of escape because they weave rich narratives with exotic settings and interesting characters. Likewise, the high drama of reality shows and soap operas make them suitable for successful escape experiences as well. While transportation through narrative can account for a variety of escape behaviors, however, there are clear examples of escape that do not appear to meet the guidelines of transportation. Most forms of music, for instance, do not typically contain an explicit storyline, yet listening to music is a commonly reported form of escapism. Similarly, “Wikipediaing” (i.e., surfing Wikipedia by clicking through successive pages) contains little narrative character as well. Without an obvious storyline or narrative character, how are these activities able to sustain mental absorption?

Activities such as listening to music and Wikipediaing can fit within the transportation account if the concept of a storyline is simply understood as a sequence of events. While conventional narratives typically contain storylines with discernable plots, settings, and protagonists, a narrative in its barest form is the communication of one event following another. When understood as such, music (i.e., the presentation of a sequence of notes) and Wikipedia (i.e., a sequence of interconnected web pages) appear to take on a non-traditional narrative character. Just as an episode of *Star Trek* encourages transportation through the presentation of a conventional storyline, music and Wikipedia encourage transportation through the presentation of non-traditional narratives.

Apart from narrative character, certain escape activities seem to achieve a degree of mental absorption greater than transportation. Escape through video games (e.g., World of Warcraft), for example, appear to offer a level of immersion that surpasses music and television. Furthermore, participation in virtual communities such as Second Life provide a degree of interactivity absent from other forms of escape. While activities such as watching television and listening to music allow individuals to shift their focus away from stressors, activities such as playing video games and participating in virtual communities provide a higher order of escape that removes individuals from reality and transplants them into fantasy.

Fantasy, as discussed by Casey (2003), is best described as a mental activity with several distinct characteristics including: (1) narrative character, (2) a sense of participation, (3) waywardness, (4) wish fulfillment, and (5) belief. Just as television shows have storylines, fantasies possess a narrative character as well. For instance, an individual playing World of Warcraft is introduced to a narrative in which he must defend himself from an ancient tribe of jungle trolls. As such, the key distinction between a simple narrative and fantasy is the presence

of interactivity (i.e., a sense of participation)—individual must defend himself from the invasion of trolls. While individuals watching a television show passively observe the narrative unfold, participants in a fantasy experience actively shape the narrative from a first-person perspective.

Should an individual actually be placed in a situation where he must defend himself from jungle trolls, it is unlikely that the experience would be a pleasant one. Consumers, however, routinely seek out that exact scenario within the World of Warcraft. Although an individual is hardly equipped to handle a similar scenario in real life, he is granted a degree of control (i.e., defined by Casey as waywardness) within the World of Warcraft that increases his chances for success. In the fantasy world created by the World of Warcraft, individuals can wield powerful weapons and cast magical spells—even when an individual feels powerless in real life, he or she can exert a great degree of control over the events within a fantasy. In this way, individuals who experience a loss of control in reality can experience a sense of empowerment through participation in fantasy.

As a result of waywardness, fantasies are often experienced as wish-fulfilling. Within the boundaries of a fantasy world, individuals are permitted to become whomever or whatever they wish to be. There is no better example of this phenomenon than Second Life—a virtual community in which participants are represented online by user-generated avatars. Given the opportunity to design one's own avatar, individuals routinely create virtual representations of themselves that are younger and more attractive. Consequently, individuals who lack confidence in reality are suddenly uninhibited when participating in Second Life. With the ability to improve upon oneself instantaneously, individuals struggling with a perceived self-discrepancy can immediately attain their ideal selves by logging into Second Life. Just as fantasy provides a sense of empowerment for individuals experiencing a loss of control in reality, participation in fantasy

can potentially boost self-esteem by allowing an individual to overcome a perceived self-discrepancy.

At this point, it becomes clear that escape through fantasy provides a different sort of stress relief when compared to escape through transportation. While individuals engaged in transportation are passive observers during the escape experience, individuals immersed in fantasy are active participants. While fantasy does provide mental absorption through its narrative character, it goes beyond the alleviation of negative affect by providing a sense of empowerment and affirmation when control and self-esteem are threatened. In effect, escape through fantasy is a two-pronged strategy for stress relief—not only does fantasy diminish stress emotions through mental absorption, it counters the threat of external stressors through empowerment and affirmation. With the differences between transportation and fantasy in mind, it is useful to denote a typology of escape behaviors: passive escape functions by allowing an individual to escape through transportation as a third-person observer (e.g., reading a novel), and active escape allows an individual to escape through fantasy as a first-person participant (e.g., playing a video game).

CHAPTER 4 FLOW AND RECREATION

With escape defined primarily as an avoidance behavior, it is clear that the activities described in previous sections do not always qualify as escape. For example, not all instances of watching television are necessarily for the purpose of avoiding reality. Likewise, many individuals who play video games or participate in virtual communities are not always explicitly seeking stress relief. Yet from an outside perspective, it may be difficult to distinguish between individuals in and out of escape. In fact, escape behavior may phenomenologically appear identical to other forms of consumption. As mentioned in the introduction, escape is best understood within a larger context of consumer behaviors related to the consumption of entertainment products and services. Consequently, this section will examine the related phenomena of flow and recreation.

As defined by Csíkszentmihályi (1990), flow is a “state in which people are so involved in an activity that nothing else seems to matter.” Described as an intrinsically motivated optimal state, flow is experienced when individuals participate in activities that challenge the limits of their skill. When skill and challenge are balanced as such, individuals experience a flow state characterized by several key indicators: clear goals and direct feedback, intense focus and concentration, a sense of personal control, and the loss of self-consciousness. Although flow is most often discussed within the context of sports (e.g., a basketball player “in the zone”), flow can be experienced across a wide variety of activities as long as the criteria are met.

Just as mental absorption is a principal component of the escape process, it is integral to the flow experience as well—both involve mental absorption into an activity, leading to a subsequent shift in self-awareness. In many instances, discerning between the two processes may be difficult, as the outward manifestation of escape and flow appear identical (i.e., an individual

playing a video game may appear to be experiencing escape and flow simultaneously). Despite the similarities, however, the underlying mechanisms leading to mental absorption during escape are different from those that lead to mental absorption during flow— while escape requires either transportation or fantasy, flow relies on the interplay between balanced skill and challenge.

When an individual is engaged in flow, balanced skill and challenge creates a feedback loop in which the individual must constantly monitor his performance—when challenge is too low, the individual enters a state of boredom, and when challenge is too high, the individual ends up in a state of anxiety. As skill and challenge approach an equilibrium, however, the individual is focused on the reception and interpretation of feedback mechanisms (i.e., indicators of performance) intrinsic to the activity. For example, a chess player engaged in flow is focused on the positioning of remaining chess pieces; with each move, the player must reevaluate the chessboard and react accordingly. Mental absorption occurs when the individual merges action with awareness, restricting his conscious thought to the events of the activity. As long as the balance between skill and challenge is preserved, mental absorption during flow persists until the goals of the individual (e.g., mating the opponent's king) are achieved.

Aside from a difference in processes, the antecedent conditions leading to escape and flow are unique for each experience as well. As discussed previously, individuals seek escape when external stressors threaten their well-being. Regardless of the particular activity, stress relief is the end goal of all escape experiences. Goals instantiated during the flow experience, however, are idiosyncratic to the specific flow activity—an artist experiencing flow is focused on painting a picture, and an athlete experiencing flow is focused on scoring the next goal. As such, any one activity may potentially lead to either an escape or flow experience—the goals that an

individual wishes to achieve through the activity become one of the primary determinants that lead to one versus the other.

For example, an individual focused on completing a specific goal while playing a video game (e.g., achieving the high score) is more likely to experience flow, while an individual desiring to escape through a video game seeks stress relief as the end goal itself. This difference across relevant goals leads to the primary distinctions between escape and flow—the distinction between avoidance and approach behavior. While the individual participating in an escape activity seeks the experience as a means of avoiding reality, the individual participating in a flow activity seeks the experience as a means of approaching a predetermined goal.

Apart from escape and flow, recreation represents a third form of consumption that occurs when an individual is neither stressed nor faced with a particular challenge. Akin to Holt's notion of play (1995), recreation is characterized by a consumption experience that is: (1) autotelic (i.e., individuals participate for the sake of experiencing the activity in itself) and (2) characterized by leisure (i.e., an activity that is fun, enjoyable, and pleasurable). A theoretical distinction between recreation and play, however, is required as Holt ascribes a strong communal component to play experiences; while recreation often occurs in a communal setting (e.g., with friends and family members), it is not a prerequisite. Again, in terms of the differences between escape and recreation, antecedent conditions become the primary distinction. While escape seeks stress relief as the end goal, individuals engaged in recreation are seeking the experience as the end unto itself. More specifically, individuals engage in recreation when they believe the experience will directly result in leisure. In contrast, flow is autotelic to the extent that it leads to a sense of accomplishment or self-growth and development.

For instance, an individual listening to music may simply be enjoying his favorite band or artist without a desire to relieve stress. Likewise, an individual might watch *Star Trek* only because he enjoys the stories, characters, and audio-visuals presented by the series. While many instances of recreation may appear outwardly similar to escape, the antecedent conditions that motivate an individual are responsible for determining the type of experience. Although transportation may also occur as a consequence of recreation, individuals engaged in recreation are seeking leisure—not stress relief. Like flow, recreation is an approach behavior in that individuals actively seek the experience for the experience itself. Analogous to the distinctions between passive and active escape, however, flow and recreation differ in that recreation is experienced primarily from a third-person perspective—the consumer is not a first-person participant. Rather, individuals engaged in recreation are passive observers removed from the actual content of the activity (e.g., an individual watching a movie is not part of the movie).

In summation, it is apparent that escape differs from flow and recreation on several dimensions. First of all, escape is an avoidance behavior, while flow and recreation can be categorized as approach behaviors. Additionally, passive escape and recreational activities are experienced from a third-person perspective, while active escape and flow activities are experienced from a first-person perspective. As such, the consumption of entertainment can be divided along the dimensions of orientation (i.e., avoidance vs. approach) and participation (i.e., passive vs. active) to produce a 2 X 2 matrix (Figure 4-1) classifying the four modes of consumption discussed in this research. The following chapter presents an exploratory study seeking to support this framework.

| | | ORIENTATION | |
|---------------|--------------------|--------------------|-------------------|
| | | Avoidance Behavior | Approach Behavior |
| PARTICIPATION | Passive Observer | Passive Escape | Recreation |
| | Active Participant | Active Escape | Flow |

Figure 4-1. Typology of entertainment consumption.

CHAPTER 5 A QUALITATIVE EXPLORATION OF ESCAPE

In the previous chapters, evidence from the existing literature was presented in an effort to provide a general framework in which escape could be examined as a theoretical construct. Although the existing literature often fails to separate escape, flow, and recreation as unique constructs, the preceding review provided clear theoretical grounds for conceptual distinctions. While firsthand accounts of flow and recreation experiences are numerous within the marketing literature, there has yet to be a serious inquiry into the escape experience. Consequently, there is little by way of concrete evidence to support the general framework discussed in the preceding chapters.

As such, the research presented in this chapter was designed to provide a firsthand account of escape experiences to provide initial support for the proposed framework. Is escape necessarily an avoidance behavior? Are threats against control and identity the antecedent conditions for escape to occur? Are transportation and fantasy the mechanisms by which escape occurs? Is a hierarchy of escape behaviors valid? Can escape be distinguished from flow and recreation experientially? The exploratory study conducted in this section seeks to provide direction for these questions by analyzing firsthand accounts of escape experiences.

Apart from providing initial support, this study also seeks to gain insight into behaviors not captured within the scope of the existing framework as a means of further developing and expanding the escape construct. For example, a discussion of the consequences of escape was noticeably lacking in the preceding chapters—does escape actually relieve stress? Are there any negative consequences of escape? How do the consequences of escape differ from those of flow and recreation? Without even a basic understanding of the escape process, there is no basis for

conjecture. Consequently, this study was discovery-oriented in nature and focused on creating a foundation for subsequent inquiry.

Method and Design

The long qualitative interview methodology was employed as a structured approach to qualitative data collection, which encompasses four different steps within the process: (1) review of analytic categories and interview design (i.e., literature review), (2) review of cultural categories and interview design (i.e., self-reflection), (3) interview procedure and the discovery of cultural categories (i.e., data collection), and (4) interview analysis and the discovery of analytical categories (i.e., data analysis). The introductory chapters of this dissertation covered steps (1) and (2), and the study presented in this section articulates steps (3) and (4).

Informants were selected through a snowball-sampling method and screened to maximize the probability of uncovering relevant insights. More specifically, the respondents interviewed on active escape played Warcraft III (hereafter referred to as Warcraft) for several hours each week. In contrast, respondents interviewed on passive escape were screened to maximize variability across individual activities. A total of eight respondents were interviewed for approximately 4-5 hours each, split across two sessions. Interviews were conducted within the home or office environments of each respondent. All respondents were paid \$10 an hour for their time.

The interviews were conducted in two stages: (1) an exploration of the life themes and history of each respondent, and (2) a descriptive account of each respondent's firsthand experience with Warcraft. In a procedure similar to Mick and Buhl's (1992) exploration of meaning-based advertising experiences, the first session of each interview was structured to elicit biographical data from each respondent. Open-ended questions encouraged respondents to

recount early-childhood to adolescent experiences in an autobiographical manner. This information was collected for the purpose of establishing important life themes unique to each respondent. Subsequently, the second session of each interview focused on each respondent's firsthand experience with escape. Again, open-ended questions encouraged respondents to recount the personal nature of their individual experiences.

Results

The interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed through speech-to-text software. The analysis of the interview transcriptions consisted of a five stage process that considered each relevant observation (1) in isolation, (2) within the context of the entire transcript, (3) with respect to the analytic and cultural review, (4) as a component of an emerging theme or pattern, and (5) across the entire set of interviews. Each successive stage required the integration of observations at increasingly broader levels of analysis. A priori coding of observations at each level included a typology of antecedent stressors, felt emotions, and observed consequences. Modifications of the coding scheme occurred as the analysis progressed and relevant dimensions emerged.

The excerpts presented in the following section were selected to summarize the main points of analysis in each interview. For expositional purposes, the case studies focusing on active escape are presented first, followed by the case studies focusing on passive escape. The data collected generally supports the framework of escape presented in the introductory chapters and clarifies the relationship between stress and escape. More specifically, the interviews establish a direct link among life themes, the interpretation of stress, and the nature of escape as experienced firsthand. A summary of the ideographic analysis is presented at the end of this section to refine the proposed framework and establish the basis for subsequent inquiry.

Active Escape Case Studies

The case of Daniel

Daniel is a 28 year-old half Korean-American who manages a small restaurant in Gainesville, Florida. The restaurant he manages has recently undergone major renovations—previously a coffee shop, it is now a Pan-Asian restaurant specializing in Korean cuisine. Also, having just met and married his wife within the span of several months, Daniel is busy adjusting to married life. As expected, the majority of his time is consumed managing the restaurant where he often opens and closes. In his spare time, Daniel serves as the youth pastor for the local Korean church, teaching every Saturday and Sunday morning. Passive by nature, Daniel is of a strikingly calm demeanor, especially given the amount of work he must attend to at any moment.

One of the primary life themes to emerge in Daniel's experience is that of cultural displacement. His father, an American soldier, impregnated his mother while stationed overseas in Korea. Initially abandoning his mother in Korea shortly after she became pregnant, Daniel's father eventually brought them to the United States when Daniel was eight months old. An alcoholic and a heavy drug-user, Daniel's father left military service and was unable to hold down a job for any length of time. As a result, Daniel's family was constantly on the move—Daniel had attended over eleven different schools by the time he finished high school. Initially residing in a culturally diverse region of Virginia, Daniel did not feel out of place as an ethnic minority. Upon moving to Florida in the fourth grade, however, Daniel found himself in a predominantly white area facing racism for the first time.

Down in Naples, there were a lot of Mexicans, but other than that, there were hardly any Asians. I got picked on a lot for being, you know—I was called Chinese, “ching-chong,” Japanese and stuff. No one knew what Korean was. It was a real kind of culture shock to me because I had always saw myself as American. I was like, “Why are you calling me something other than American?” I don't get it. Yeah, it didn't make any sense to me, so that was really difficult.

Compounding Daniel's struggle over identity was his father's prejudice and racism. Despite having a half-Korean son, Daniel's father harbored many prejudices against Asian men that were often directed toward Daniel. Consequently, his father's attitude only served to further undermine Daniel's fragile self-esteem.

My father has really become racist, and he has, you know—the American stereotypes of Asian guys is very effeminate and weak. I was a skinny, frail kid, mostly because I didn't have much to eat, but I was a very skinny kid so my father gave me a hard time about that all the time. Basically, his nickname for me—he would call me “pussy boy.” I really grew to dislike the manly man kind of thing. Not that I became effeminate, but I didn't like hanging out with those kind of people.

Over the next few years, Daniel's family situation became increasingly unstable. His father, constantly in and out of jail, was neither a stable nor constructive influence in Daniel's life. Daniel's mother tried her best to provide a normal childhood for Daniel, but to make ends meet, she often had to work long hours waiting tables. When Daniel reached middle school, his mother began considering the possibility of separating from his father.

I remember, a few times, [my mother] would ask me, if they split up, would I want to live with her, or would I want to live with my father? I would always end up saying, no, no, if I can't live with both of you, I wouldn't want to live with either of you. I still looked up, you know, he was my father. So I said, I would rather live with my grandparents or my best friend Billy. If I can't have both of you, I don't want either one. So my mother stuck with my father. She would sometimes go to Korea for a few months, but she always came back.

By the time Daniel reached high school, however, his attitude had changed. The summer preceding 8th grade, Daniel broke his arm, but his father refused to take him to the hospital. Furious, Daniel's mother stood up for him, only to be beaten by his father. Disillusioned by years of neglect and abuse, Daniel longed to sever his ties with his family as well.

In ninth grade, my mother asked me again, if we separated, who would you want to live with? And I said, I told her, I didn't care. As soon as I turned 16, was old enough to get a job and save some money, I was going to move out and live on my own. I couldn't stand living in the house anymore. So I told her, do whatever you want to. So she did. About a

month later, she took my little sister and ran away. So they separated a good two, three years before they finally got a divorce.

Daniel would later come to blame himself for the suffering his mother endured. Believing that his own weakness as a child kept his mother trapped in an abusive relationship, Daniel continues to struggle with feelings of guilt.

I really carry the burden that my mother had gone through all the suffering because of me. She knew I wasn't old enough or strong enough to take care of myself. So as soon I was strong enough and old enough to understand—at least to understand what was going on—she was able to leave. So I always carry that burden that she went through a lot of suffering just for me. I carry that burden all the time.

From childhood through adolescence, Daniel struggled to find a firm basis for his identity. Culturally, his mixed heritage was a source of confusion—not completely White or Asian, Daniel struggled to identify with aspects of both. Averse to the American machismo typified by his father, Daniel nevertheless had to overcome stereotypes of weakness and femininity tied to his Korean ancestry. For Daniel, watching his mother suffer on his behalf only confirmed his long-held feelings of inadequacy. Furthermore, Daniel's extended family never expected him to transcend the difficulties of his childhood.

Everyone, the rest of my family—my father has a brother and sister, they're all married and have kids—they all expected me to be a screw up like my father. I always kind of saw that...I guess it was always kind of a stigma. Everyone was just waiting for me to fail. Be like my father. I feel that's all people expected from me, so that's all I really expected from myself. I had no self-esteem.

Without much support, Daniel spent the next seven years working to put himself through college. Upon graduating with his bachelor's degree, Daniel became the manager of a local restaurant and the youth pastor of a Korean church. As such, his primary stressors now revolve around his daily responsibilities at work, a welcome change from the stresses of his tumultuous childhood.

At the restaurant, Daniel finds the management of employees to be the most difficult aspect of his job. In particular, keeping his employees motivated and on-task has proven to be

particularly trying. Consistent with his inclination to internalize failure, Daniel believes that poor employee performance reflects his weaknesses as a manager. Instead of attributing his management difficulties externally to problematic employees, Daniel believes that his own lack of leadership skills are to blame.

It's taxing trying to get people to do what they're supposed to do. I know I have always kind of had a weakness in leadership. I'm not a very good motivator. It's always been a big weakness of mine. Administratively, I have more strength, but people who don't want to do something—that I'm merciless on. I'm just like, go, I don't need you here.

As a youth pastor, Daniel faces similar problems at church—keeping children focused during Sunday school in no less a daunting task than managing employees. Again, Daniel interprets his conflict with students as a reflection of his own deficiencies as an effective teacher. More specifically, Daniel believes his own negative attitude toward unmotivated students is inappropriate.

After teaching youth group and working with a lot of kids, I got the attitude—I really only want to teach people who want to learn. If you don't want to learn, I don't want to teach you. That's not a good attitude to have.

In reviewing Daniel's life history and current experience, it is evident that his primary stressors come in the form of threats against his self-esteem. From early experiences with racism to his current responsibilities at work, Daniel tends to internalize conflict as an indicator of his own inadequacies. For example, instead of blaming his father for the mistreatment of his mother, Daniel attributes his mother's suffering to his own inability to let her go. As such, the stress Daniel incurred as a result of his mother's pain became a threat to his self-esteem—it was proof of the weakness his father had ridiculed him for. Had he attributed his mother's pain to his father's actions, Daniel would have framed the stress as a threat to control (i.e., his father being an external factor beyond his influence). Given Daniel's tendency to interpret stressors internally as a function of his identity, positive affirmation has become an important aspect of stress relief.

As such, the means by which Daniel seeks escape are primarily focused on the removal of stressors through the affirmation of his identity.

From an early age, Daniel began using games as a method of escaping the harsh reality of his life at home. Even as a child, Daniel intuitively knew that the hostile environment of his family was fundamentally flawed—he saw very little evidence of love, respect, or sacrifice. As a result, Daniel turned to games such as Dungeons & Dragons to provide what he found lacking at home. Through Dungeons & Dragons, Daniel found himself immersed in a world vastly different from his own.

I didn't really have any role models, so I turned to knights in shining armor, heroes, and stuff like that. I was always really into medieval things – Dungeons & Dragons, fantasy books, or chivalry and righteousness. I really liked the idea of chivalry. King Arthur and the Knights of the Roundtable. You know, those things were important to me because I did see it, but I didn't have it.

Within the fantasy world of role-playing games, Daniel quickly attached himself to a specific archetype for his identity—the Elven Ranger. To Daniel, the Elven Ranger represented an idealized version of himself.

The character which I still like to play the most is the ranger. Rangers are often elves. I like elves because they are slender, agile – they're more physically like I am. They deal with dexterity and agility rather than massive strength. And also, they tend to be long-lived, so they're more wise and more patient than humans. The rangers are usually the lone wolf. He's out there, out in the woods. I grew up like Tom Sawyer, out climbing trees, and he's like the lone warrior. He saves the world and then goes off by himself in the woods. I was always alone, so I was always more akin to that.

While Daniel's physical attributes had become a source of constant belittlement in reality, they became strengths when he assumed the identity of the Elven Ranger. Similarly, the loneliness that Daniel often felt became a defining characteristic of his Elven Ranger persona. Within the fantasy environment of Dungeons & Dragons, Daniel could escape into a world where he was no longer a weak child. Instead, he could become the hero he wished he was in reality.

As an adult, Daniel continues to escape through fantasy role-playing games as a method of stress relief. At the end of a long workday, Daniel typically spends an hour each night playing Warcraft, a strategic role-playing video game set in a fantasy universe similar to Dungeons & Dragons. In Warcraft, the player chooses a hero and builds an army, which is subsequently used to attack enemy camps throughout the game world. Warcraft is often played online, where players across the world can compete over the internet. The winner of multiple design awards, Warcraft has been lauded for its immersive gameplay and innovative game mechanics.

Although Daniel has made the transition from board games to video games, his attachment to the Elven Ranger has persisted. Just as the character provided Daniel with an avenue for escape during his difficult childhood, the Elven Ranger continues to represent an ideal that Daniel uses as a means of affirming and reinforcing his identity.

The last couple of years, I've gone through a lot of depression – my father being in jail, and my grandmother just dying. [The restaurant] was not doing well. We were going out of business, so I had a lot of pressure. I always kind of had that fantasy of *Castaway*. That would be kind of fun. You know, as the ranger, the good rogue that doesn't bend to society's rules. He doesn't worry about presenting himself – communes with nature, does good, doesn't harm, doesn't waste, no need for needless bloodshed. But if you're pushed too far you push back.

Within Warcraft, Daniel is able to live out his fantasy as a hero. As the stressors that Daniel must face each day threaten his self-esteem, assuming the Elven Ranger persona has become a coping mechanism by which Daniel is able to seek relief. Freed from the burdens of reality, Daniel is able to explore the universe of Warcraft without the fear of inadequacy or incompetence.

The case of Adam

Adam is a 19-year-old Taiwanese-American undergraduate student at the University of Florida. Just finishing his first semester as a sophomore, Adam is considering a change in college

majors. Currently a health science major, Adam is considering economics as an alternative. Apart from schoolwork, Adam regularly competes in Ultimate Frisbee tournaments on and around campus. As the youngest of three brothers, Adam does not exhibit the traits commonly associated with last-born children—he is quiet and unassuming, Adam is shy and contemplative. Oftentimes, long stretches of silence would pass during the interview while Adam considered his answers. Speaking deliberately and with little emotion, Adam seemed disengaged as he recounted his early childhood. Upon mention of his brothers, however, Adam seemed to warm up.

Growing up with two brothers, home life was pretty crazy. My parents did give a lot of attention to us. I used to fight with my brothers. Growing up, I don't think I was that close with [my second brother] because we fought a lot. I got mad at him a lot. We would fight over stupid things. I just remember getting chased by him a lot. And then I remember doing stupid things to make him mad at me. Then he would get mad at me and chase me around.

It quickly became apparent that the dynamic between Adam and his brothers played a central role in Adam's formative years. As second-generation Asian-Americans, Adam and his brothers were held to strict academic and athletic standards by their parents, often leading to rivalry between them. Adam described his oldest brother as the smartest of the three—having graduated with a PhD in materials engineering, he is currently working in a national lab as a research scientist. Adam's second brother, on the other hand, is the most athletic—excelling in a number of different sports including tennis and basketball, he is currently pursuing a graduate degree in sports science. With two talented older brothers, Adam felt the constant pressure of high expectations.

I did feel overshadowed. A lot of people knew my big brothers, even here at UF. My parents had expectations based on what [my brothers] had done. Like school work with [my oldest brother]. They would always compare me. [My oldest brother] did well in school, better than I did. Sometimes I would get it from my teachers that knew him...[My second brother] is just athletic all around. He was probably the best at tennis. I guess it

made me feel like I needed to do well at this stuff. Everyone always remembered them. My coach remembered them. People expected stuff. I guess I still carry a little bit of that with me now.

Throughout his childhood, Adam had no choice but to follow in his brothers' footsteps. Instead of forming his own interests, he dutifully pursued the same activities in which his brothers had participated. As a result, Adam often feels that he has no identity apart from his brothers. He reveals that his recent decision to change majors is prompted by a desire to separate himself from them.

[My oldest brother] swam, played a bit of tennis, and he did math club too. I think that's why my parents wanted me to do that stuff. I didn't really like it though. I played tennis, and I did a little bit of math club too. I didn't really choose those things. I think my dad did. I do a lot of the things that [my oldest brother] did simply because he did them. I guess sometimes I do feel like I need to break away from them and distinguish myself. Do my own thing. For example, I was thinking about doing physical therapy, like [my second brother], but I probably want to do something else. That's one way I can assert myself.

Adam readily admits that he has failed to achieve the high standards set by his brothers. In college, Adam continues to compete with his brothers even as he attempts to find his own identity. As he discusses his schoolwork, it is evident that Adam still feels the pressure of his parents' expectations.

Tests are stressful because, if you mess up one time, it's really hard to make it up. If I study wrong, it will have a big impact. I guess in the past, my grades were all about my parents. I don't really care that much about grades, but they do. I guess even now it's still about disappointing my parents. That's why I always thought that my parents liked [my oldest brother] more. That must've been pretty hard on him. I was always being compared to him a lot.

Just as Daniel has struggled with feelings of inadequacy since childhood, Adam has been faced with threats against his self-esteem as well. As a result, Adam seeks the same kind of stress relief that Daniel receives while escaping through Warcraft.

Gaming is definitely one of the ways I do relieve stress. A lot of times I'll play after I'm done studying for a little break. Sometimes I do lose track of time. I guess that usually

happens with most games. When we get finished playing, I feel like I have to go back to the real world. I have to go back to studying.

While Daniel has attached himself to a specific character (i.e., the Elven Ranger), Adam has identified himself through an entire class of characters within the Warcraft universe. Rather than playing as a single character, Adam rotates through a category of characters known as support heroes. Unlike Daniel, who plays Warcraft predominantly online by himself, Adam typically plays in a team with four of his friends. As such, Adam typically chooses a support hero that will be vital to sustaining the entire team.

Well, I guess I like to pick heroes that help out other people. I typically go for the support characters, the ones that heal and stuff. I guess I don't really have a specific hero, just the ones that are able to heal, like Omninknight. I like to help out the rest of the people on my team. I usually like to pick the heroes that will be beneficial to the entire team. Usually, I end up in the support role where I'm able to aid other people. I think that's my favorite way to play. I try to be useful. That's definitely one of my goals while playing.

The implications of his character choices are clear—by selecting a support character, Adam is placed immediately in a role where he is useful and indispensable. In reality, Adam is continually burdened by aspirations that seem insurmountable. Within the universe of Warcraft, Adam becomes an essential element to the success of his team. While the rest of his team is preoccupied with defeating enemies, Adam is making sure that all of them stay alive. Without Adam, the team would fall apart.

Unlike Daniel, Adam does not use a specific hero to affirm his identity. It is clear, however, that Adam also uses Warcraft to cope with stressors that threaten his self-esteem. Just as the Elven Ranger allowed Daniel to see himself as a hero, the support characters allow Adam to feel important and valuable—things he cannot feel in reality as long as he is in the shadow of his brothers. Despite differences in their style of play, both Daniel and Adam seek relief through

escapism as a means of dealing with stressors that undermine their self-esteem. Within the universe of Warcraft, both become more than they are in reality.

The case of Paul

Paul is a 19 year-old Asian-American undergraduate student at the University of Florida. Currently a pre-med major in his sophomore year, the majority of his time is spent studying for core classes such as Organic Chemistry and Physics. Apart from academics, Paul is an active member of his church fellowship. He serves as a mentor to younger members of the congregation, and on occasion, plays the violin as part of the worship team. In his spare time, Paul is at the gym either working out or playing basketball. Physical activity being one of his favorite pastimes, Paul considers his health and conditioning to be a top priority. Possessing a lean, muscular frame, it is evident that Paul is devoted to a rigorous program of weight training.

Like Daniel, Paul began his life overseas in Asia. Born in the Shandong province of China, Paul was raised in Beijing until he emigrated with his family to the United States at the age of nine. Given that he spoke little to no English, Paul initially experienced isolation at school. Within two months, however, Paul was comfortable enough communicating in English to make friends and participate in the classroom. By high school, Paul had reached native speaking fluency, having no problems excelling in his advanced placement classes. Aside from learning English, Paul quickly assimilated to American culture by participating in a wide variety of extracurricular activities and sports. Nevertheless, Paul still identifies strongly with his Chinese heritage, citing the influence of both his parents and his upbringing. As a result, Paul feels that culturally, his identity blurs the line between Chinese and American.

While Daniel experience some degree of confusion with respect to cultural identity, Paul is mostly comfortable with his identity as a Chinese-American. Rather than dwelling in cultural

ambiguity, Paul believes that he has proactively chosen the best aspects of each culture and constructed an identity uniquely his own.

My parents pounded a lot of Confucius into me, but then again, I was also exposed to Christianity, which is a huge part of my life. But definitely, there is a lot Chinese culture in me. I'm more open, but I'm not completely Americanized because I feel like having Chinese culture is somewhat beneficial. I can set a higher standard. I need to study for this, be respectful, and I guess the big thing about Chinese culture is family. Even though I might not like my parents sometimes, I still respect them a lot.

For Paul, differences between Chinese and American culture are resolved by choosing to embrace aspects of both. Paul eliminates potential dissonance by recognizing inherent value in both cultures. As such, the cultural displacement experienced by Paul does not manifest itself as an internal conflict over identity.

While Paul began absorbing American customs and values almost immediately upon arriving in the United States, his parents have largely resisted acculturation. As a result, Paul received a traditional Chinese upbringing despite living in America. The structure of his family is fundamentally patriarchal, and Paul is generally denied the opportunity to make decisions for himself. In contrast, Paul believes that his American counterparts have been given a greater degree of freedom. This dichotomy has become a constant source of stress for Paul, as he perceives his experience inside the home to be vastly different from his experience outside the home. In particular, he finds that a lack of meaningful communication with his parents, coupled with his parents' desire to exercise absolute authority over him, has greatly reduced the amount of control he is able to exercise over his own life. In juxtaposition with the parent-child relationships he typically observes, the dichotomy is magnified.

My parents' attitude is basically, "We're the parents, we just told you to do something, you have to obey us." There's really no discussion about it. It's more like, "I say, you do." I guess a big difference between the Chinese and American cultures is that Americans are very much into asking why. Freedom of speech. Not scared to ask things...I get confused when I see other people my age, and they're really cool with their

parents. I just don't really get it. Their parents are completely different. When they talk to them, they don't feel this pressure.

Although Paul's relationship with his parents would be considered normative in China, Paul's experience growing up in the United States has led him to think otherwise. Rather than accepting the hierarchy of a traditional Chinese family, Paul interpreted the distance of his parents as a lack of warmth and support. This would later influence the expectations he carried into other relationships.

I feel like my parents have been pretty cold to me my whole life, but that made me really strong. That's why, when sometimes people are really nice to me, I feel sort of weird, because I'm so used to my parents being cold to me. I guess that made me mentally really strong, but it killed a lot of my pride over the years...It's very different from American culture where it's like, "I'm going to complement you, even though you need to work on this." Chinese culture is very different. It's like, "You're not good at this, you're not good at this, you better work on this." There are no compliments, so I never really got any from my parents.

While Paul recognizes the authority of his parents, he also believes that his opinion has value. Though he would never consider disobeying his parents, Paul wishes that his parents would, at the very least, acknowledge his aspirations. Most recently, this conflict presented itself when Paul was tasked with choosing his undergraduate major. Despite the fact that Paul has little to no interest in pursuing medicine, his parents left him with no other choice.

They just want me to be a med student. It was sort of weird, because they never really brought this up until college, when I started applying. They were like, "You need to become this"...I mean, we argued. I called my parents, and I was like, "I don't really want to be a doctor." They were like, "No, you have to be." So we were arguing, and people were looking at me...I think I'd rather be more active, maybe in the gym helping people—how to develop their body, how to be more healthy...They knew I was thinking about physical therapy, but being a doctor is still what they want me to be. In their eyes, they think that doctors are more prestigious.

When Chinese-Americans find themselves caught between opposing cultural values, the conflict typically becomes one of internal dissonance—Chinese tradition dictating unconditional obedience and the American ideal encouraging self-determination. The individual must choose

between two systems of cultural values, and fundamentally, the conflict becomes one of cultural identity. Paul, on the other hand, has a clearly ordered system of cultural values. At this stage of his life, honoring the wishes of his parents overshadows his own desires and aspirations. As such, the stress that Paul incurs as a result of cultural displacement is grounded not in issues of identity, but of control. For Paul, there is no question as to which system of cultural values he will subscribe to in this situation—he will become a doctor unless his parents give him permission to pursue a different profession. Hence, Paul’s dissatisfaction stems not from an internal struggle with identity issues, but from an inability to control an external situation. More specifically, Paul is not in a position to dictate his own aspirations, leaving him no choice but to pursue a career path he believes to be suboptimal.

Another source of stress for Paul, aside from the long-standing conflict caused by cultural differences with his parents, has been his father’s battle with cancer. During his sophomore year of high school, Paul’s father developed a rare form of cancer in his nasal passage that eventually spread to his lungs. As a result, Paul’s mother began working full-time to pay the hospital bills, and Paul was given the responsibility of taking care of his father at home. For Paul, watching his father deteriorate was both horrific and demoralizing.

During that time, [my father] had chemo radiation, and it was really painful watching him. Every time I would get home in the summer, I would have to take care of him every day. There were a lot of things that he couldn’t eat. There were a lot of things he couldn’t come in contact with...It’s like you see a person decaying. You see him lose his hair. You see him lose a lot of weight. You see him suffering. It’s not fun. It’s not funny. It’s just painful.

Although his father’s cancer went into remission after several months of chemotherapy and multiple surgeries (including the removal of an entire lung), Paul found that his father’s entire demeanor had changed. Contrary to the inspirational story told by many cancer survivors, Paul believes that his father’s will was permanently broken by the cancer.

It feels really painful to see a person suffer, knowing that you can't do anything about it. At the same time, I think it's even worse seeing this person suffer, heal, and become a totally different person afterwards. His attitude changed, his anger, his communication, the way he looks. It's like he's a totally different person now. He's mentally less stable than he was before, more fragile. He needs that pride to keep him living, but fighting the cancer took him out. It takes a lot out of a person to fight it. They become very fragile afterwards. Supposedly, it makes you strong, but I don't think it makes you strong. I think it makes you weaker because you've been dealing with all this pain.

The victory of Paul's father over cancer was not empowering; rather, it only furthered the staggering loss of control that Paul felt throughout his father's illness. Although the cancer was no longer threatening his father's life, it had taken its toll on him physically and mentally.

Unable to help his father cope, Paul came to identify the loss of control with weakness. Together with an already diminished sense of control stemming from his relationship with his parents, the ability to exercise control has become an important theme in Paul's life. He readily admits that his own obsession with working out reflects not only a desire for health, but also a desire for the power and control that is derived through physical strength.

Since leaving home for college, Paul's primary stressor has been his schoolwork. Taking a full load of pre-med track courses, Paul often finds it difficult to keep up in all his classes. Constantly pressured for time, Paul also finds the subject matter of his classes to be frustrating. Given the broad range of natural sciences that he is required to take, the relationship between his courses and their relationship to medicine in general is unclear to him.

I'm taking [Organic Chemistry], and it's not that I don't like the material, it's just I'm so early in the stage of Organic Chemistry that I'm just learning stuff on purpose, and only learning half of it. We learn about equilibrium equations, but we only learn about the reactions and not the products. Nothing really connects. You feel like you're just memorizing and applying half of it. I guess it falls under being in control of the material, which many times, you're not. It does stress me out sometimes because it doesn't make sense. If you ask the professor something, they explain it to you, but it still doesn't make sense because it's not supposed to. But you have to make it make sense somehow.

For Paul, the stress he incurs from school is, again, framed as a threat to control. Instead of processing the difficulty of Organic Chemistry as a threat to his self-esteem, Paul concludes that the method of instruction is flawed. His inability to understand the material is not an indicator of incompetence, but the consequence of an incoherent presentation. As such, Paul feels a lack of control over both the material and the method by which he is acquiring it.

The theme of control further extends into Paul's attitude toward the medical profession. When asked to expand upon his ambivalence toward medicine, Paul reveals that, for him, the risks outweigh the potential benefits. According to Paul, there are too many variables that are beyond a doctor's control, and when a human life is at risk, such uncertainty is unacceptable. As a result, Paul prefers physical therapy—the risks are much lower, which translates to a greater degree of control over a patient's recovery.

Being a doctor—in order to heal someone—there's a cost, and that cost is the risk of not being to help them. If I were a doctor, I think I'd be living in pain everyday. I would feel extremely pressured...Let's say I'm a surgeon, and I know there is only a 40% chance of recovery, but the person insists on doing it. To some degree, a doctor is just doing what he's being paid to do, but I think I would feel extremely guilty walking into the surgery room knowing that their chances of survival are only 40%...I think that's why I would rather go into physical therapy, where they're at a stage where there are really no risks. Let's say they break their arm and they are trying to get their flexibility back. Even though it's painful watching them daily push back for flexibility, in the end, you know that their arm's not going to be broken. You know that in the end, they will be able to rotate their arm, and you would feel happy for them.

Again, it is evident that the issue of control is deeply rooted in Paul's psyche. Rather than framing his fear of failure internally as a threat to self-esteem (e.g., I might fail as a result of incompetence), Paul fears the unknown circumstances beyond his control. For Paul, physical therapy presents an alternative work environment where the boundaries of success and failure are clearly delineated, and the perceived risks are low.

In reviewing aspects of Paul's life history and current experience, it becomes evident that his primary stressors are grounded in a perceived lack of control. As such, the method by which Paul escapes reflects a need to regain control. As a regular means of relieving stress, Paul also plays Warcraft. Across a variety of situations, Paul finds that Warcraft allows him to detach from reality, granting him temporary relief from stress. Consistent with the definition of escape, Paul's description of the playing experience includes aspects of avoidance behavior, mental absorption, and detachment from reality.

Sometimes, after having a tough day, it's like, man, I'm tired. I just don't want to study right now. I'm going to play some video games to run it off. In my opinion, studying is something I won't understand until later on, so it's boring. I guess for me it's just a way to escape stress. It's like, man, I just finished my reading for Bio and I'm tired. I'm just sitting there, and I'll just play a game of Warcraft to get my mind off of things. It definitely gets your mind off the things you're sort of dealing with currently. It just takes you to the other world...It's like, not only are you inhabiting the world, you're part of the world itself. You can do a lot of things. Like you can't go outside nowadays and be like, car, stop!

Apart from simply taking the focus off his current stressors, Paul is able to regain a sense of control through Warcraft. While a number of different escape activities may potentially offer a route to mental absorption, Warcraft is a particularly potent form of escapism for Paul because it directly addresses the nature of his stress.

In the real world, you can prepare for something like a test for endless hours, and the minute you take it, you're screwed because you have no control over it. It's like, man, I thought I knew this test, and boom! You don't...[While playing Warcraft], I'm definitely more in control. There's not really a time when you're not in control. I guess that's the element that makes it sort of cool. I can tell things what to do. You can control units, build buildings, and build your army. You can set up things, you can develop the timing of your attack, when to attack. I think it's what draws a lot of people to the game because they can do what they want in the game.

The need for control that Paul meets through playing Warcraft is also reflected by the heroes he chooses to use. The specific characters that Paul gravitate toward are those that offer maximum

control over the game environment. In particular, Paul enjoys using the Death Knight—a character that is able to heal his own units and manipulate the actions of his enemies.

The Death Knight is very explosive. He is very strong. He could be like one of the guys from [the movie] 300 who just charges in and has nothing to be afraid of. They know he is the tank. They know he can take the hit. It's satisfying to charge in and scare everyone off and see them run away, or even just annihilate them. It's like the 300 men fighting against the rest of the world. You get to feel the strength. Like, man, I'm awesome.

While each incidence of escape through Warcraft has typically been an isolated response to a specific event (e.g., studying for a test), Paul's pattern of escape behavior was disrupted during his first extended stay at home after leaving for college. Returning home for an entire summer, Paul found that living with his parents restricted the freedom he had enjoyed in college. Although the long-standing conflict between Paul and his parents affected him little on a day to day basis at school, the constant pressure he faced at home soon became overbearing.

When I'm at home with my parents, it's not like being with friends. I feel like just being with them creates a lot of tension. I feel like they're always higher than me, so speaking to them is a scary thing. It's very hard to actually communicate, like a friendly discussion. It's really hard because they imprinted this authority over me. It's really tough. Sometimes I really want to say something, but I just don't want to say it, because I don't want to even think about the consequences. I just feel scared sometimes.

In contrast with the episodic nature of stress he incurred at school, Paul experienced a constant tension with his parents while at home. In response, a persisting need for escape led to an escalation of escape behavior. By the end of summer, Paul was spending the majority of his time playing Warcraft.

When I first started, it was maybe like, two, three hours a day, and then it went to four or five, and then sometimes it went to seven or eight hours. I was pretty much focused on the game unless, you know, I needed to go to the bathroom. If I feel hungry, I might try to finish off a certain part so I would have maybe a minute or two to not worry about the game and run downstairs to make myself a sandwich...I wouldn't even really notice [the conflict with my parents]. Maybe they would come and say "hi," but I might not even remember it. I'm just saying "hi" to get them away from me so I can finish the game.

Just as Daniel and Adam use Warcraft as a means of escape, Paul retreats into the universe of Warcraft whenever he is faced with external stressors. Like Daniel, Paul has attached himself to a specific character within the game (i.e., the Death Knight), but not for the purpose of reaffirming his identity. As Paul has interpreted his current stressors as threats against control, the primary purpose of assuming the Death Knight persona is to regain a sense of control. The basis for his character choice rests not in the degree to which it reaffirms or bolsters his self-esteem, but rather, it rests wholly in the degree to which the character allows him to exert control over the Warcraft universe. The Death Knight character gives Paul maximum control, and hence, it has become the method by which he copes with the loss of control he feels in reality.

The case of James

James is a 24 year-old Taiwanese-American medical intern at a hospital located in Gainesville. Regularly working 80-hour weeks at the hospital, James has little time for other activities. A self-described “nerd,” James’s has a deep interest in science that led him to pursue a medical degree. Having recently finished taking classes in medical school, James is currently rotating through different departments in the hospital. As such, James receives training in a completely different field of medicine every few weeks. The schedule is grueling, and James is often fatigued from lack of sleep. Like Adam, James is quieter and more reserved. Taking time to deliberate each of his answers, James would often seem lost in thoughts during the interview.

Born in Taiwan, James first emigrated with his family to the United States at the age of six. Due to visa issues, however, James would move back to Taiwan at age 8, and back to the United States at the age of 10. Like Paul, James had few problems adjusting to the American culture. In fact, James welcomed the change – he much preferred the significantly more relaxed educational system in the United States.

I was excited to move. I don't actually remember having any difficulties. It was a really happy time. I think I adjusted pretty quick because I was pretty young... School was really just a lot more lax here. In Taiwan, you have long hours, lots of homework, and teachers – they're allowed to beat kids as punishment. You know, hitting on the hand. It was painful. To a kid, those were pretty important reasons. It was definitely much more strict. Being here, I immediately felt more free.

Given the newfound freedom that James experienced in the United States, it was difficult for him to move back to Taiwan. Not only did James have to return to the strict schooling of Taiwan, he had to leave behind many of the friendships he had formed in the United States.

I didn't want to move back. I liked living in the States much more. I think it was mostly because of the educational system. It was a lot more freeing here. But also, there was this disconnect with friends at school. I lived back in Taiwan for another two years, and then came back here when I was 10. It was kind of disconnected. You know, I had good friends back in Taiwan and over here, but I was really young, and there was no Internet, so it was really hard to keep in touch.

While cultural adjustments were not difficult for James, the constant moving nevertheless had a profound impact on James's childhood. Like Raymond, the theme of control began to emerge as James found himself caught between Taiwan and the United States. Having experienced the freedom of the American educational system, James felt stifled in Taiwan. Furthermore, despite his desire to stay in the United States, James had no choice but to move back and forth. As such, the issue of control was quickly established during James's childhood.

I didn't want to go back to Taiwan. I talked to my parents, but they explained to me why we were going back. The paperwork screwed up. [Immigration] is coming after us. I mean I felt like, this sucks. I don't really want to go back, but what choice do we have? My parents are going back, I can't stay here. Moving back and forth was definitely one of the more significant events in my life.

As a medical intern, the primary stressors that James must currently face come in the form of weekly evaluations given by supervising doctors. James is graded on all aspects of his performance at the hospital, and the evaluations will eventually determine where he is able to place as a medical resident. If he performs poorly, he may not even be able to advance. Like

Paul, however, the evaluations are stressful not because they threaten his sense of identity (e.g., I am just not smart enough to be a doctor), but because James feels that he has very little control over the evaluation process.

A lot of the performance is subjective. It's like—how much your attending likes you, how much your resident likes you. It's colored by your personality, how well you match up, or if you clash with anybody. It's especially stressful because it's out of your control, but you try to do your best. Situations pop up. Sometimes you get a bad evaluation, and it may not entirely be your fault

James readily admits that he does not understand the evaluation process. Yet, he is unable to ask for clarification because it signals a lack of knowledge on his behalf. Without any meaningful feedback, James is often frustrated by a complete lack of control.

When we get evaluated, a lot of it is really vague. That's the hard part. One of them is called "professionalism," and that's one of the biggest categories. It's how you treat your peers, your superiors, your patients. It's really vague. You know—act professionally. What does that mean? Of course, be respectful, but what more can I do? On top of that, a lot of times, feedback is just brushed over. You have to make an extra effort. Sometimes, you get feedback, and you're not really sure, and you have to try to figure out, what does that really mean? How can I improve this? Are they suggesting that I should do this? It's not very clear. Sometimes you have feedback, a formal feedback sheet with criteria, competencies. But then they just put numbers in, so it's not very personalized for the most part. You're just kind of left guessing. How can I do better? The whole process is just like a blur. You don't know what's going on.

In response to the stress he incurs at the hospital, James also turns to Warcraft as a means of escape. Like Daniel, James often returns home after a long day at work to play a few rounds online.

I come home after a pretty long day – I mean, on our easier rotations, the minimum is eight or nine hours. Right now I'm doing ten to twelve hours, and then you have call, which is an even longer day every four days. So, if you have a particularly rough or busy day, you come home, you're kind of tired, you don't really want to do anything, you don't want to put any information in your brain. To me that's a great time to see if anyone is playing online.

Again, consistent with the definition of escape, James alludes to mental absorption and a detachment from reality while playing Warcraft.

When you're playing, you're just kind of reacting to the game, so it's a little bit like being on autopilot. I pay less attention to other stuff. Like when somebody says something, it sort of registers, but it's like, did you say something? You pay less attention to everything else. You're trying your best to reach this goal without being killed, so you need a lot of attention. A lot of attention is focused on the game, like being "in the zone." The attention is focused on the game.

Like Paul, however, James is mostly concerned with reclaiming a sense of control when he plays Warcraft. As the hospital is an environment where the rules for success are unclear, James seeks a carefully controlled environment during his escape experience. As such, the aspect of Warcraft that appeals most to James is the ability to exercise control within the Warcraft universe.

Really, the game is just a set of rules. In a way, the game is a replica of reality – it's about performance. Like in the hospital, you have a team, you're trying to do something, and there's stuff that the team is counting on you for. The game space is like a miniature reality, except that I know all the rules and I can function within those rules. Compared to when I am at work, I don't know all the rules. Really, you're just kind of guessing. Should I be doing this? There is a huge contrast. In the game, there are no consequences, no weight of responsibility. You make a change and you see it happen. In the hospital, you're just trying to figure it out. It's about being in control versus not being in control.

James's selection of characters reflects his need for control while playing Warcraft. Like Adam, James does not identify with a specific character. Rather, he also chooses characters out a specific category of heroes – the agility-based characters. Unlike Adam, however, James uses these characters not to bolster his self-esteem, but to maximize the amount of control he is able to exert in the Warcraft universe.

Agility heroes are the ones that are the "carry" heroes – the ones that, later on, get puffed up on items or equipment. They just kill everybody, so I like to play those types of heroes. There's not one specific—I mean, I like mobility in my hero. It's more about function. There are heroes that can teleport short distances. You are a lot less likely to get killed, you can escape like that. I like heroes that have that kind of function. I like the functional heroes because they allow me to maximize on the rules and offer the most control.

Just as Paul chose a character that allowed him to regain a sense of control, James's choice of characters allow him to experience a degree of control that he is unable to feel in reality. When

asked whether or not he personally identified with any of the characters he used within the game, James laughed. For James, the game has little to do with his identity; rather, the escape experienced is centered around control.

Summary of Active Escape Case Analyses

The data collected from the interviews support the various processes outlined in the introductory chapters. As previously discussed, escape is an avoidance behavior; individuals participating in escape seek to avoid the threats of external stressors. As recounted by each respondent, escape behaviors were always initiated as a reaction to stress. For example, Daniel plays Warcraft as a reaction to the stress incurred at work (i.e., difficult employees), and Alex plays Warcraft as a reaction to the stress incurred at school (i.e., difficult study materials). Furthermore, all of the respondents reported mental absorption as the mechanism by which stress relieved. James, for instance, describes the experience as being “in the zone,” while Paul admits to becoming oblivious to his surroundings. Through a shift in awareness, stress emotions were temporarily avoided.

Through the case studies, a clear pattern of behavior specific to active escape becomes evident as well. More specifically, a framework for discussing the relationship between stress and escape begins to emerge from the data (Figure 5-1). As previously discussed, external stressors induce stress emotions when they threaten the perceived control or self-esteem of an individual. As the cases illustrate, however, the interpretation of a specific stressor as either a threat to control or self-esteem can be highly subjective. As such, the interpretation of a specific stressor produces within the individual a corresponding need (e.g., a need to regain control). Subsequently, an individual pursuing escapism as a method of coping will shape the experience

to best fit the need. Individuals experiencing a lack of control in reality will seek to maximize control, and individuals struggling with identity will seek affirmation.

Under this general framework, understanding the antecedents of active escape requires an understanding of the various factors that influence the subjective interpretation of an external stressor. As evidenced by the case studies, life themes emerging from the personal history of an individual appear to moderate the process of interpretation. More specifically, life themes developing during the formative years of an individual's experience seem to create a disposition toward the perception of stressors as either threats against self-esteem or threats against control. In other words, life themes appear to influence the attribution style of individuals.

For example, Daniel's interaction with his father and classmates during his childhood severely affected his self-esteem. As a result, Daniel tends to interpret his current stressors internally as further threats against his identity (e.g., difficult employees indicating poor management skills). Similarly, Adam struggles with low self-esteem as a result of constant comparisons with his brothers. As a result, Adam perceives a large discrepancy between his ideal self (i.e., the standard of his brothers) and his actual self. Consequently, Adam continues to interpret his current stressors internally as evidence of worthlessness (e.g., poor grades in school make him less valuable than his brothers). Because Daniel and Adam both frame stressors as threats against identity, escape becomes a mechanism by which they are able to receive affirmation.

Daniel, for example, centers his escape experiences around the identity of the Elven Ranger. For Daniel, the Elven Ranger represents a combination of traits that represent his actual self (e.g., physical appearance and personality) and ideal self (e.g., strength and wisdom). As such, it becomes a persona that Daniel can immediately identify with despite the fantasy setting.

Within the universe of Warcraft, Daniel's shortcomings are recast as assets, allowing Daniel to experience a degree of heroism that he longs for in reality. Adam, on the other hand, seeks affirmation not through a specific character, but through any character that gives him intrinsic value. Within the universe of Warcraft, Adam becomes useful by choosing support characters that aid his teammates. While he is constantly overshadowed by his brothers in reality, Adam becomes indispensable whenever he plays Warcraft.

While Daniel and Adam interpret stressors primarily as threats against identity, Paul and James have come to interpret stressors as threats against control. Through his interactions with his parents (e.g., choosing a college major and his father's cancer), Paul has come to believe that many events in life are beyond his personal control (i.e., an external locus of control). As a result, Paul has developed an external attribution style—he generally blames negative events on external factors (e.g., poor grades reflect inadequate instruction). Likewise, James's experiences have led him to develop a similar style of attribution. At the hospital, James struggles to understand the work environment and feels that he has little control over the process by which he is evaluated. Consequently, Adam also finds that his primary stressors deplete the level of control that he is able to exercise in reality.

In response to threats against control, Paul and Adam seek to regain control through their escape experiences. In particular, Paul finds that he is able to maximize the degree to which he is able to control the universe in Warcraft by choosing a specific character – the Death Knight. For Paul, playing as the Death Knight gives him a sense of dominance over the game space. Unlike Daniel, Adam does not particularly identify with his game persona, yet he gravitates toward the Death Knight because it meets the need for control generated by his external stressors. In much the same way, James also ends up choosing characters that allow him to maximize control. From

James's perspective, Warcraft can be reduced to a set of clearly defined rules; as such, James is able learn the rules and devise a strategy to achieve success. In contrast, the hospital represents an environment with ambiguous rules preventing James from achieving true success.

Consequently, James chooses agility-based heroes that offer him the most control within the rules prescribed by the game.

Passive Escape Case Studies

The case of Maria

Maria is a 22-year-old Colombian-American pharmacy intern and graduate student at the University of Florida. Having just finished her first year in pharmacy school, Maria currently works a minimum of 40 hours per week at a local pharmacy. Apart from her own responsibilities at school and work, Maria also helps to manage a local restaurant owned by her parents. Having grown up in the restaurant business, Maria routinely handles duties as a waitress, cashier, and delivery person whenever time permits. As the oldest of four children, Maria has also assumed the role of a surrogate mother to her siblings. With her parents constantly preoccupied with the restaurant, Maria has become the primary caregiver for her brother and sisters, responsible for their education and general well-being. Constantly juggling her responsibilities at work and home, Maria seldom has time to pursue any of her own interests.

Originally born in Colombia, Mary immigrated to the United States with her family during middle school. Although her parents owned a successful restaurant in Colombia, increasing threats against their safety (e.g., kidnapping) caused Maria's father to move his family to Mississippi. As a child of privilege in Colombia, Maria suddenly found herself in a foreign environment where the comforts she once knew were taken away.

You know, I was born with a silver spoon in my mouth. My parents had a very successful business and they were able to hire babysitters and employees to help out around the

house. We had maids that did all my laundry, cleaned my room, did my bed. It was so much easier. Colombia is different because the cost of living is so low—my parents could just pay \$300 for a maid each month. She would be there everyday, cleaning. But when we came here, there was a huge discrepancy.

With her entire family placed in the difficult situation of adapting to a new culture, Maria was forced to take on many new responsibilities. In the absence of any ESOL programs at her middle school, Maria learned English on her own by choosing to repeat the sixth grade. Consequently, her parents, who do not speak English to this day, became increasingly reliant on Maria to run the household.

It was probably the hardest time of my life because I had to learn a new language. And not only did I have to learn it for myself, but as soon as I learned, I needed to help my parents. Everything from setting up the cable to handling all the phone calls, taking care of the house, the bills. If they go into the bank, I have to go too. If they're going to a supermarket, I have to go with them. To translate anything, I would have to be with them. I would have to go to the doctor with them. But not only did I have to teach my parents, I had to tutor my younger siblings. I had to help them in their homework too.

For Maria, the dramatic shift in lifestyle created a stressful environment where she constantly felt overwhelmed. While most teenagers find it difficult enough to adapt during a family relocation, Maria was given the additional responsibility of caring for her entire family. Only twelve-years-old at the time, Maria struggled to meet the various demands placed on her.

There was a lot of emotional stress. When I was little, I took care of my siblings of course—I would change diapers and stuff like that. But when I came here, it was pretty much just me taking care of everything. It was at this point that my parents were really depending on me. It's not me depending on them anymore, like when I was young. Since my teenage years, it's always been my parents depending on me. Those years, I cried a lot. I used a lot of tissue paper. I guess it was really just my love for my family that helped me make it through all the sacrifices I would have to make.

When Maria eventually moved to Gainesville for college, she was free from her responsibilities at home for the first time. For Maria, her newfound freedom was refreshing—she finally had the time and opportunity to pursue her own interests.

When I came to college, it was the first year living without my parents. It was tough because I really missed my family, but I did enjoy the freedom. I was able to shop for myself, cook for myself, study by myself. I could hang out with my friends, and that was really nice.

After her first year in college, however, Maria's parents decided to open a new restaurant in Gainesville. With all the problems that come with opening a restaurant, Maria was once again called on to take care of the household. Moving back in with her family, Maria found it difficult to readjust after spending an entire year on her own.

My second year [in college]—it was really hard for me again because my family moved up here to open another restaurant. I started living with my parents again, and my freedom—it was like, wow, what happened? I would have to be at home by 11, or else my mom would be calling everyone. At the beginning, I would have a lot of fights with my parents because they would never see me at home. But that was what I was used to—I was never at home or in my dorm my freshman year. I was either at the library or hanging out somewhere. I guess I got used to again, staying more at home and taking care of my family.

Eventually readjusting to her life at home again, Maria found herself making the same sacrifices she had to make as a child. Even today, as a graduate student and pharmacy intern, Maria is responsible for taking care of her family.

I had no choice but to do less extracurricular activities, and that's how it is even now. I'm still not involved with a lot of other activities outside my family. I'm more involved staying at home, organizing, cleaning up, tutoring my siblings—especially my brother. He has learning disabilities so I spend a good amount of time teaching him the same subject over and over. He has a ADHD and he goes crazy. I have to help out as well in the restaurant.

Since childhood, Maria has struggled to maintain control over the various demands placed upon her by her family, work, and school. Oftentimes, Maria barely has the time to meet all of her responsibilities, and she incurs a great deal of stress as a result. As graduate school has become increasingly difficult, Maria finds that she has even less time than before.

Now, with pharmacy school getting harder, the subjects being so intense, I think I'm having problems prioritizing. I just don't have enough time. When tests come, I have to

cram like crazy. I get no sleep, maybe three hours a night. I'm really learning how to multitask, how to do everything at once.

With so little time on her hands, Maria feels as if she has no control over her life. Although she yearns for social contact with her peers, she knows that her family is depending on her. As a result, Maria sacrifices her freedom for the sake of her parents and siblings.

I do wish that I had more freedom—that way, I probably could have a boyfriend right now. I do wish for more freedom because I feel like I'm more detached from everything else. I don't have time to hang out with a lot of the friends I used to hang out with, and I'm missing a lot. The people I grew up with during college—I'm missing what's going on in their lives because I'm not involved. I don't have time to call them or meet up with them. All of my free time is spent with my family. I do really wish I had more freedom so I could spend time with other people as well. My social life is nonexistent.

From an early age, it is clear that Maria has struggled throughout her life with the theme of personal freedom and control. Ever since she moved to the United States, Maria has been given the responsibility of caring for entire family, and as a result, she often feels as if she is unable to exert any control over her life. As Maria transitions to the role of a working professional, she finds that the same stressors carry over to work. At the pharmacy where she interns, Maria is constantly under the pressure of time, and she struggles to maintain control over the vast amount of information she must learn. Just as Maria struggles with the issue of control in her personal life, she must deal with similar stressors at work.

The pharmacy is all about multitasking as well. It's really fast paced. I never even get time to sit for a moment and think. I'm like a robot—I do this, then I have to do that. I do whatever I'm told to do. I think it's even more tiring than the restaurant. Everything there is new to me, so there are a lot of things I'm learning, and I'm just feeling lost because there's so much information. I'm always trying to catch up. What stresses me the most is that the pharmacists and the technicians expect a lot out of me. It's stressful because I'm constantly multitasking with so much information that I always feel lost.

In response to the stress incurred at work, Maria often seeks escape through television programs such as *Heroes* and *Lost*. For Maria, watching TV has become one of her primary methods of relieving stress.

Right now, with the stress from the pharmacy, I just end up going home and watching TV. I guess I just want to forget about the pharmacy, and I just want a distraction so that I don't need to think about pharmacy. Can you imagine working in the pharmacy all day, and you come home and think about more pharmacy? Watching TV lets me forget about the rest of the day. When I come home, I'm really tired, so I just sit there, and I just turn on the TV and start watching. It's pretty much just to distract myself. If the movie or show is really good, I just stay there and watch. I won't move. I am glued to the TV and I don't do anything else.

As discussed in the theoretical framework, Maria is prompted to seek escape for the purpose of avoiding stress. Through television, Maria is able to preoccupy her mind such that she no longer is aware of the stressors she must face at work. However, Maria acknowledges that certain preconditions must be met for a successful escape experience. More specifically, the particular show she watches must have an engaging narrative.

When I'm stressed, I don't like watching dramatic or sad shows. I usually end up watching shows with a lot of action—shows where you really want to know what's going to happen. Is that person going to get killed or kidnapped? What's going to happen next? Shows like that intrigue me. They bring some problem, and as the problem develops, people are trying to find a solution. That's what's really engaging—shows like *Lost* or *Heroes*. In that show, the bad guys are trying to steal a potion, and I just keep watching because I want to know how the good guys are going to stop them. Is the Japanese guy going to travel in time, or is the super fast girl going to run after them? When I'm watching, I end up forgetting about everything else.

Again, as discussed in the preceding theoretical framework, Maria is able to achieve escape through transportation. When the plot of a show is sufficiently engaging, Maria experiences mental absorption as her attentional resources are preoccupied by the narrative. Consequently, Maria successfully relieves stress by ceasing to be aware of the stressors in her life.

After a long day at work I'm really tired and I just want to sit there and relax. It does make me feel refreshed after I'm done with the show. By watching an engaging TV series, I can just forget about the pharmacy.

The case of Theresa

Theresa is a 24-year-old third grade teacher finishing her second year at a local elementary school. Having just recently graduated with her master's degree in education,

Theresa is still in the process of building a stable curriculum for her classroom and establishing relationships in the community. Given her hectic schedule as a new elementary school teacher, Theresa seldom finds time to pursue interests outside her profession. Fortunately, Theresa's lifelong passion has been to work with children, and she derives great joy and satisfaction from her role as a teacher. Nonetheless, Theresa faces great pressures each day in the classroom, and she often struggles to manage the overwhelming responsibilities of her job.

Growing up, Theresa's childhood was happily uneventful until a sudden illness changed the circumstances of her family life. Originally a middle-class suburban family, Theresa's parents were forced into debt when her father was diagnosed with cancer. With her father unable to work, the medical bills and expenses continued to grow.

Growing up, we were your typical family. Dad worked, mom stayed at home. I loved school, I played, did piano, was in Girl Scouts—we were the typical family. When I was in middle school, my dad got really sick, and his treatment made it even worse. That one situation really affected a lot of different areas of our family life because it changed him 180 degrees. He lost 50 pounds, and it was a really hard time. Everything that I had taken for granted, like our financial security and our standing in society, where we were respected, and my dad was the senior engineer of his company. All that got pulled out like a rug beneath us.

For Theresa, the change was sudden and traumatic—from an early age, the struggle for control emerged as a theme in Theresa's life. Believing that her family could do nothing to prevent or improve her father's condition, Theresa internalized the stress as a threat to her control.

From a stress point of view, it was definitely a control thing. Everything we lost—there's nothing we could have done. It's interesting when I talk to my colleagues and they worry a lot about money. That's never been a huge worry of mine because my I've experienced the extreme point of being without—health, my family. Whenever something in that category gets threatened, I get really stressed out. Things like my mom having surgery last year, or anything concerning my family, like how my parents are doing. I can't control those things. It definitely feels like those things are threatening my control.

As a third grade teacher in the present day, the majority of Theresa's stressors stem from the difficult task of running her classroom. From planning and executing her curriculum to

managing teacher-parent relationships, Theresa must deal with a number of different stressors at any given time.

Everything is so fast-paced and I am always doing three things at the same time. [The children] cut themselves, they get into social conflicts, there are parents who are always worried about their kids' tests, and I have to constantly e-mail them. One time, I was e-mailing when my mom was in the hospital! It's a lot of multitasking under a lot of time pressure, doing a lot of behind the scenes stuff. The little things do add up.

For Theresa, the struggle for control continues to be an important theme in her life. Although it would be easy for Theresa to interpret the stressors faced in her classroom as threats against identity, Theresa tends to internalize her stress as a threat against control. Just as Maria struggled with a loss of personal freedom as a result of time constraints, Theresa is constantly under time pressure that causes her to feel perpetually on the verge of losing control.

I really get stressed out when there are a lot of deadlines all concentrated, which is all the time. One of the hardest things is never having any time—it's always acting on your feet. For example, during the last week of school, I was trying to cram in lessons, but on top of that, there were still some standardized test that I needed to schedule in and get report cards done. Then there are parents. I had to get ready for the last day of school—we had our celebration—and I had to get them gifts. And then there's all the [standardized testing]. I can only have so much control over that. I can only know my kids so well and prepare them.

As a result of the large time demands of her job, Theresa, like Maria, finds that she has no choice but to neglect other areas of her life. Consequently, the stress that Theresa accrues on the job is often compounded by a lack of meaningful interactions in other areas of her life. When she is unable to procure positive results in the classroom, there is little to fall back on for support.

Teaching eats up so much of my time, and it eats up into so many parts of my life—into things that I really love doing before. Not being able to do those things, not being able to be a good friend or help out in ways that I took for granted before. Instead, you put your heart into teaching, and it's really discouraging when day after day there is no resolution—no results. It's like studying for an exam that you keep failing day after day, and the only thing that motivates you to keep on doing it is not any past success, but that you have hope that one day that it will be alright.

In response to stress, one of Theresa's primary strategies for coping involves escape through mail order catalogs, particularly those concerned with home furnishings (e.g., Pottery Barn). When Theresa is unable to find mental distance from her stress after a long workday, she turns to catalogs for relief.

At the end of the day, when the kids leave, I tidy up for the next day, but I don't do anything else, because I'm so tired. I can't make logical decisions, so I try to go home and relax and take a break. Having some quiet time really helps, but sometimes with all the teaching, I just can't let go. Sometimes I just need to turn my attention to something else that I enjoy. I really like flipping through catalogs, because it's just pictures, especially Pottery Barn. I like the colors and the pictures.

Consistent with the definition of passive escape, Theresa flips through catalogs as a means of achieving mental absorption. For Theresa, catalogs provide the visual stimuli required to distract her attention from her responsibilities at work. Additionally, Theresa points out a difference in goals while engaged in escape. During the escape experience, her goal is not to find a particular product; rather, stress relief is her primary motivation.

If I'm not stressed when I get home after a day at school, I will recap on the day and deal with any unresolved anger or frustration so that I'm not channeling it out into something else. But sometimes when I come home and I'm frustrated, flipping through the magazine really does help me feel better. It really helps me to get everything out of my system, to look through all that stuff. When I'm not particularly stressed, I generally am looking for something specific in the catalog. When I am stressed, though, I just want to look at something that I feel is beautiful or meaningful. It's very relaxing.

As a form of passive escape, Theresa's experience with the catalog must include mental absorption in the form of transportation through narrative. Although catalogs do not appear to have narratives at first glance, Theresa's approach to the catalog demonstrates how nontraditional narratives are equally capable of producing mental absorption.

It's interesting because I never really think about how I would like to decorate my house. Most people might look through a catalog and think about that, but I don't take it to that level. That would put me back in the driver seat. I end up approaching the catalog more like a storybook, like there's some sort of conflict that needs to be resolved. I really like seeing how things fit together—the lines, the textures, the proportions, the way they sit in

space... I really like how they solve problems, like if you need to store all this stuff in limited space.

When Theresa flips through a catalog, she approaches each spread as if it were a narrative. Just as a show like *Heroes*, creates an engaging narrative by presenting a conflict and subsequent resolution, the catalog also presents a problem (e.g., fitting furniture in a small living space) and solution (e.g., the designer's layout). When approached in this fashion, the catalog becomes a viable method of eliminating self-awareness through transportation.

I guess it's really like a control freak's way of release, because you can see the resolution in the way the designers thought of all these solutions. There is a gratification in knowing that this kind of resolution exists. It really comes naturally—I don't have to spend any mental effort. It's pure gratification. I'm out of the picture, I don't have to worry about control, because the designers have already done everything for me. I love resolution. It's not about me being in control anymore.

After participating in an escape experience, Theresa often finds that feelings of frustration and anxiety are resolved. As a consequence of mental absorption, Theresa is able to recuperate emotionally when her attention is turned away from her stresses.

After flipping through a catalog, I feel refreshed—like, oh wow, that was really enjoyable, to just have that visual stimuli. It's definitely an escape, because for those moments, I was not thinking about the other stressors, and I walked away with a renewed sense of peace. I was able to relax, and that replenishes my energy to tackle all the unknowns. The emphasis is really on getting away from all the negative things in my life. Afterwards, I'm unusually energized and ready to confront problems. I'm happier. Calm.

The case of Phil

Phil is a 34-year-old golf course manager and associate pastor in a local Gainesville church. As a bi-vocational pastor, Phil splits his time between the demands of his golf course and church—he oversees the day-to-day activities of his golf course during the week and delivers sermons at church on Friday evenings. Having just recently moved to Florida from the Chicago area, Phil is still in the process of adjusting to the region. Apart from their recent relocation, Phil

and his wife are also expecting their first child within the year. With a number of significant transitions on the horizon, Phil is busy preparing for the future of his family.

Growing up in Chicago, Phil was raised primarily by his grandmother—both his parents worked long hours and were rarely at home. With limited interaction between Phil and his parents, the relationship between them was often strained. In particular, Phil had great difficulties dealing with the high expectations placed upon him by his father.

Growing up was kind of interesting. My parents were not always around because they were working a lot. They would go to work before I got up, and come back almost at the time when I would go to bed. My grandmother was pretty much the one who raised me since birth. Because of that, my relationship with my parents wasn't very good, I think. At times, it was really difficult. Especially with my father—there were a lot of high expectations. They were really hard on me, especially my dad.

As a former Olympic athlete, Phil's father had high expectations for Phil in a number of different sports. Although Phil proved to be a talented athlete, Phil's father was never satisfied with his performance.

My father's attitude was always, if this particular sport is not going to take you through college, get you a scholarship, or give you a chance to get to the Olympics, then you shouldn't play at all. He made me quit a few sports. Ice hockey was my favorite sport, even to this day. It was the first sport that I played, since I was eight years old, and I loved it. I loved playing it, but by the time I got to high school, my dad realized that it wasn't going to go anywhere. I was a good player—I would have made the high school team—but I wasn't good enough that he thought I would get a scholarship, so he made me quit. The same thing happened with soccer. He came and saw me playing one game my freshman year, and he said, that's it, you're not playing anymore. The first and only game he ever saw me play.

As a result of his father's disappointment, Phil struggled with his self-image throughout childhood. Raised to believe that anything less than perfection was failure, Paul constantly faced feelings of rejection and inadequacy.

With my dad getting down on me, I would always feel like I failed. This whole image of failing was very difficult for me growing up. And failure was never an option. Not even failure—anything less than perfection was never an option. So every time that I would do

something that wasn't perfect, it was rough for me. I had a lot of self-doubt. I had a lot of self-image problems.

Well into adulthood, Phil still struggles with his self-image on a daily basis. When Phil was recently asked to become the associate pastor of his church, Phil was hesitant because he believed himself to be a failure in the other aspects of his life. As a result of his childhood experiences, Phil internalized stress as evidence of his own failures.

My church recently asked me to be an associate pastor, as a bi-vocational lay pastor. At first, I didn't know—I felt like I wasn't ready. I think the main reason for that was, there were a lot of things in my life that were already very stressful. Trying to be a good husband, which I felt like I wasn't succeeding. I really didn't. I felt like I was failing. I was working [at the golf course], we had bills piled up like a foot high, and I felt like I was failing. So I felt like, how can I go into that kind of position, when in all of these areas, I didn't feel like I was even managing?

Although he eventually accepted the position, Paul is still plagued with self-doubt each time he delivers a sermon. Again, Phil internalizes the stress of his job as a threat to his identity—failure would only confirm his feelings of inadequacy.

Serving at the church, preparing to share and speak on Fridays—that is definitely a huge source of stress, just trying to get myself ready for that. I've never really been a good public speaker. I always grew up being kind of a quiet guy. I never felt like I was any good in public, so getting past that has been difficult. I always have had a fear of getting up in front of people, especially when I need to share more personally... That gets really stressful. I think the preparation gets stressful because I want to—I don't want to use the word, but—succeed. I don't want to be a failure, so I put a lot of stress on myself.

As a strategy for dealing with stress, Phil often watches sporting events on television. For Phil, watching sports gives him the opportunity to turn his attention away from stressors. When stressed, Paul intentionally uses sports as a means of escape.

Watching sports is a great way for me to unwind. I watch all sports, to the dismay of my wife. I don't have an off-season. I watch everything from golf, to tennis, to volleyball if it's ever on, soccer, baseball, football, basketball, I mean every sport I'm interested in. I love to watch sports on TV, and I think a lot of it has to do with just having the opportunity to just forget about things. When I'm stressed, I do it just to get away, just to unwind, just relax.

Consistent with prior accounts of escape, Phil describes a state of mental absorption that occurs while watching sports. During the escape experience, Phil's attentional resources are preoccupied to the extent that he ceases to be aware of his surroundings.

I'm very "tunnel." When I get focused on something, everything fades away. When I'm watching TV, I get completely "tunneled" into it. I get so tuned in that my wife will be saying something to me, and I don't hear her. That's something we've talked about the few times. I'm pretty much so focused on one thing that I phase everything else out. I watch all sports, to the dismay of my wife.

Similar to Maria's account of passive escape, Phil acknowledges that certain preconditions must be met for a successful escape experience. More specifically, Phil must be rooting for a specific team during the sporting event for mental absorption to occur. Otherwise, the sporting event fails to be engaging.

The biggest thing for me is that I need to pull for someone or some team. If I'm watching a sporting event, and I have no tie to anyone, no desire to pull for someone, then I do find myself losing interest pretty quickly. If I have any reason to pull for a team, I'll do it. It makes it much more interesting for me. I look for someone to pull for, and I get into it that way...If there isn't a main character to follow, then I don't have the desire to watch it. Or, somebody that I don't want to see win. Then, all of a sudden, out of default, I will pull for the other guy.

Like catalogs, sporting events may not have a traditional narrative at first glance, but Phil creates a narrative by assigning the role of protagonist (or antagonist) to one of the teams. As such, the match becomes a conflict to be resolved by the "main character" through the competition. In the absence of a protagonist, the sporting event loses its narrative and the "conflict" becomes meaningless. Without an engaging narrative, Phil does not experience mental absorption through transportation while watching sports.

Consistent with previous accounts of passive escape, Phil finds that the experience of watching a sporting event relieves stress by creating mental distance from his stressors. After a

period of mental absorption through transportation, Phil is able to revisit his stressors more effectively.

[Watching sports] does relieve stress—especially for the time being, when you're in the process of doing it. You kind of just zone out and forget about things. At least for the moment, you can forget about [stressors], and a lot of times, doing that puts things into perspective. Afterwards, you get a chance to go back and think, how bad really is it? When I'm watching sports, I don't feel like I am inside the stress. I kind of step outside of it for a little bit, and it helps me to deal with it.

According to Phil, the alleviation of negative affect during escape accounts for a large component of stress relief. By eliminating self-awareness through escape, the negative emotions tied to various stressors become irrelevant. As the negative emotions fade from his consciousness, Phil is better able to evaluate his stress and react accordingly.

I think the big thing about watching sports is that it takes me out of whatever situation I'm in. It takes the stress situation, and it takes the emphasis off of me. When I'm actually playing volleyball, the emphasis is still on me. My emotions end up being one of the biggest things that keep me from succeeding. I get so caught up in the emotion that it elevates the problem and escalates the problem. I think that when you are able to step outside yourself, and not be so emotional about it, and not be so emotionally attached to that situation, you can deal with a lot better. When I end up getting really involved with watching a game, it's an escape from real life stress.

The case of Aaron

Aaron is an 18-year-old undergraduate student at the University of Florida finishing his first year in college. As a mathematics and chemistry double major, Aaron spends the majority of his time studying for classes. Even with his demanding course load, however, Aaron has excelled academically—in just his second semester at the university, Aaron was chosen as the teaching assistant for a chemistry class. Outside his schoolwork, Aaron is also a dedicated musician. Having studied classical piano and viola for the majority of his life, Aaron spends much of his free time playing and listening to music. He hopes to join the university orchestra when he is

able to find the time. Having just finished his first year in college, Aaron is already focusing his efforts on preparing for the new semester.

Similar to Theresa, Aaron's childhood was happily eventful until an illness changed the circumstances of his family life. Originally from Ohio, Aaron's family moved to Florida where he spent his childhood, in which he recalls growing up in household free of family conflict and financial worries. While Aaron was in middle school, however, his father lost his job and suddenly passed away without warning.

I was born in Ohio, and after six years there, I moved to Orlando. I grew up there, I really enjoyed it. Life was comfortable, and we didn't have much in terms of financial difficulties. I had two parents and they loved me, and I enjoyed it. I guess in retrospect, you could say I was a pretty spoiled kid. Around 2000, with the economy not doing so well, my dad lost his job. He went to look for another job, and that took him to Nebraska. He was there for some time while me and my mom were still in Orlando. We were planning to move to Nebraska, except something happened, and my father suddenly just passed away.

Within the course of a month, Aaron's life had completely changed. The comforts he once experienced at home suddenly vanished, and his mother had to work full time to support the family.

After my dad passed away, the financial factors came in, and everything went south. My mom was always telling me how we needed to save money, and how we had to do all these things to keep the family going. We were also in debt at that time. My mom ended up working a lot more, and then I didn't get to see her as often. She always seemed to be busy, and whenever she was stressed, it would come out on me, and I didn't know how to handle that. I don't know how to counsel a parent, especially my own mother, who I would turn to for support. That was a really difficult thing.

Apart from the financial difficulties, Aaron also struggled with the aspect of growing up without a father. With the passing of his father, Aaron felt that a number of new responsibilities forced him to grow up prematurely. Unable to separate the expectations of others from his own identity, Aaron began to struggle with his own self-image. Burdened by the expectations of his family, Aaron often felt that he was a disappointment.

Growing up, especially through adolescence, without a father—it was a real struggle for me. I was 11 at the time. My mom would always say, you are the man of the household now, and I was like, what? I'm a child! People always expected me to help out with my mom, because she was a single parent, so I placed expectations on myself to keep my mom happy. Whenever she was down, I would feel like I screwed up. I must have done something wrong, and I would blame myself for that... Other people would look at me, even as a child. Whenever I was irresponsible or I did something wrong, I always felt like I just let down tons of people. It was tough, trying to live up to expectations, and not knowing how to live up to them. When you don't live up to them, you end up with an identity crisis.

Without the guidance of his father, Aaron also struggled to understand his identity as a young man. Aaron often felt trapped in his situation—everyone expected him to grow up because of his father's passing, yet he had no father to teach him how. As a result, Aaron often felt that he had little direction in his life.

I did ask questions like, what does it mean to be a man? What sort of responsibilities do I have in that capacity? How do I deal with situations, especially in terms of relationships? I never had a father figure to turn to, someone that I could ask, how does this work? Even just in social interactions, I never felt capable of interacting with people properly. I developed this need to seek approval from a father figure, because I didn't get that. I didn't know what it meant to become a man, or a father, or even an adult. I didn't know where I was going to go in life, in terms of what I wanted to do.

Now, as a college freshman, Aaron continues to face similar stressors at school. With his strong academic performance, classmates often come to him for help with assignments and tests. Just as he felt the burden of his family's expectations as a child, Aaron feels the same need to please others in college.

As a child it was always about living up to standards. Up here [at college], it's sort of the same thing, in terms of helping others. People expect for me to have the time to help them study for tests, even when I have my own tests. Just today, I had an exam for math, and some of my friends had an exam in organic chemistry, and they were expecting me to help them. Having to manage all that, it's really draining mentally. I feel like if someone doesn't do well, I feel like I'm responsible for that. For example, I have a friend that's retaking organic chemistry in the summer. Because of that, she really needs to pass the course. I feel obliged to help her pass the course. Even though I had my own tests, I spent three or four hours helping her because it's a very hard subject.

Just as he internalized his stressors as threats to identity during his childhood, Aaron continues to believe that an inability to help others reflects personal failure. Afraid to let his friends down, Aaron is burdened by the responsibility of helping others succeed.

To be personally responsible for someone, you feel like if they're not succeeding, you must be doing something wrong. It's stressful because you think about it often, and it wears you down. It's stressful because I feel like it reflects on who you are. It really comes down to a fear of rejection and the fear of failure. I am afraid to fail. If they don't do well enough, I feel completely inadequate.

As a teaching assistant, Aaron feels the same sort of pressure in the classroom. Again, Aaron does not make external attributions for his stress (e.g., “the students are incapable of learning this material”); rather, he makes internal attributions that call into question his own abilities as a teacher.

As a teacher assistant, you're responsible for getting people to pass, so you spend all this time and energy, and if they don't seem to get it, you feel like you must be screwing up somewhere. I teach one discussion class per week. I have to prepare the material and read ahead a little bit. It's difficult because I feel like it's my responsibility to get these people to pass. That's what teachers are for, so they can learn the material. If the scores aren't good, I feel like I must not be teaching properly, and I feel inferior to other TAs. I put a lot of that on me.

In response to stress, Aaron often turns to music as a strategy for stress relief. As a form of passive escape, Aaron avoids stress by focusing his attentional resources on a piece of music. Consistent with the definition of escape, Aaron seeks the experience of listening to music because it allows him to forget the stressors he faces in real life.

To relieve stress, I get involved in activities that don't require me to think about what's going on in real life. One of my favorite activities is listening to music, which I do quite a bit in my spare time. I listen to classical music, softer stuff, anything that is peaceful. I just forget what's happening. It gives me a chance to breathe in. It's entrancing—very much entrancing. It draws you in. It puts you in this spell. I like listening to orchestral classical stuff, and the music is very flowing, and is very captivating.

Similar to Theresa and Phil's accounts of passive escape, Aaron alludes to narrative character as the element which allows for mental absorption to occur. According to Aaron, the development

of melody and harmony creates a form of narrative—just as a story progresses through a plot, a piece of music progresses through a melody. Without an engaging melody, a piece of music fails to preoccupy Aaron’s attention.

It can't just be a single chord. That would be boring. There has to be some flow in the melody and harmony working together. Primarily, what happens is that, in the melody, the motion of the melody going up and down is what communicates what's going on. It's something that you can follow, and it does progress. Melody is not static. It has an introduction and moves on. Together it paints a complete picture. That’s what keeps me focused on the music.

As an example of narrative within a melody, Aaron gives a vivid description of his personal experience. Through his firsthand account, Aaron’s perception of narrative character within a piece of music becomes evident.

One piece I listen to a lot is the symphony by Shostakovich. It starts out with an introduction, and has these weird intervals with cello and violin. It's almost unrest-like. You follow that through as it develops. Sometimes it sounds like he's sad, like he's in his room pacing back and forth. I get that mental image of a story. We find that the person is anxious, but then is fully resolves into this very icy mood. You see this person alone, you see this person is definitely in a dark time. As the music progresses from the slow, icy section, it proceeds to a faster section, which is a lot more terms of chaos. That's when you see that perhaps the composer is dealing with the situation. Maybe he's dealing with the relationship problem, maybe he's dealing with the government, some sort of battle there. Eventually the piece resolves in a quiet subdued sadness. The composer is lost.

For Aaron, listening to music becomes an effective form of escape when mental absorption occurs. As he experiences transportation through a melody, Aaron is able to take the focus off the stressors in his life.

As I'm listening to music, it gives me this mental image, and that replaces reality. I forget all the other things I have to deal with. TA-ing, relationships, cooking even. For one, your ears are occupied, allowing you to not think about what's going on in the world. Rather, you're thinking about what's going on in the music, and what the music is portraying in terms of the story. It puts you somewhere where you don't have to think about anything, and instead, you just go wherever the music goes.

Like Phil, Aaron finds that escape through music relives stress by alleviating negative affect.

While music does not necessarily produce positive emotions, it reduces the severity of negative

emotions by creating mental distance from stress. After a period of emotional release, Aaron is able to revisit his stressors more effectively without the influence of negative affect.

After I listen to music, I can think of things more clearly. I can focus better because I'm not so involved in what I was going through. It allows me to take a step back from things and see what I need to do to solve these problems. Music is also a huge emotional release. For some people it's movies, talking with people, but for me, music allows me to relieve negative emotions—not necessarily happier, but more calm and not so upset with whatever's going on. It's a great emotional reliever because you don't have to concentrate on those emotions. You concentrate on whatever the music is telling you what the emotions are. When you don't have to think about your emotions, they slowly fade away because you're focused on the music.

Summary of Passive Escape Case Analyses

In contrast with the previous case studies, the data collected in this section illustrates the primary differences between active and passive escape. Although the antecedents to escape were similar in both conditions (i.e., threats against identity and control), the process by which escape occurred differed across the active and passive forms. Even though participants in both conditions exhibited similar patterns of stress interpretation (i.e., the impact of life themes on the interpretations of stressors), participants of passive escape were not focused on affirmation or control. Rather, mental absorption through transportation is the main priority of individuals participating in passive escape. Despite the presence of threats against identity and control, the focus is on the creation of mental distance from external stressors.

For example, just as Daniel developed a poor self-image during childhood, Phil struggled with his self-worth as a result of his father's attitude. However, unlike Daniel, Phil's escape activities (i.e., watching sports) do not provide affirmation—while Daniel feels affirmed while role-playing in Warcraft, Phil's stress relief comes in the form of transportation while watching a sporting event on television. Instead of directly addressing the threats against his identity by seeking affirmation, Phil receives relief only through shifting his attention away from stressors.

Similarly, Maria, who faces constant threats against control as a pharmacist, relieves stress through mental absorption by watching shows such as *Heroes*. Instead of addressing the issue of control, Maria uses escape to avoid the stress altogether. In contrast, James escapes through *Warcraft* by purposefully reclaiming a sense of control within the fantasy game space.

In terms of process, passive escape relies on transportation through narrative to achieve mental absorption. In Maria's case, the narrative character of shows like *Heroes* and *Lost* is obvious. However, in less obvious examples such as music, non-traditional narratives (e.g., a melody) are equally important. Although, the narrative contained within a Pottery Barn catalog may not be readily apparent to most individuals, the fact that Theresa perceives a narrative is sufficient for transportation to occur. As mentioned across all four of the passive escape studies, the most important prerequisite for transportation to occur was the presence of an engaging narrative. In the absence of an engaging narrative, the escape activity failed to preoccupy the attention of the participant.

Although passive escape does not directly address the issues of identity and control, it nonetheless provides stress relief by creating mental distance from external stressors. As described by Phil and Aaron, the escape experience effectively reduces stress in part by alleviating negative affect—with their attention focused on the escape activity, negative emotions tied to external stressors fade from conscious-awareness. Upon completing an escape activity, the alleviation of negative affect allows Phil and Aaron to evaluate their stressors with greater objectivity.

While active escape experiences appear to differ considerably across individuals, passive escape experiences appear quite similar, even across different activities. Regardless of the particular activity (i.e., TV, sports, music, catalogs), each individual's description of the felt

experience shared multiple commonalities. Descriptions of passive escape are nearly indistinguishable across all four individuals, with a heavy emphasis on mental absorption. As such, the case studies in this section suggest that passive escape experiences are relatively undifferentiated across individuals and activities—the most important factor simply being the presence of an engaging narrative inherently interesting to the individual participant. Most likely, this difference across the active and passive form of escape can be attributed to the perspective by which each is experienced. During active escape, participation in fantasy from the first-person perspective allows the individual to shape the experience personally. In contrast, individuals engaged in passive escape observe from a third-person perspective, limiting the degree to which experiences will differ across situations.

Discussion

The conceptual development of escape as a unique construct is supported by the exploratory case studies. When compared with firsthand accounts of flow and recreation, escape distinguishes itself through a strong emphasis on stress relief. While individuals participating in flow and recreation are seeking approach-oriented experiences, it is clear that individuals participating in escape seek to avoid the threat of external stressors. Furthermore, the case studies furnished initial evidence for the efficacy of escape; all respondents in the active escape condition reported on the regenerative properties of escape (i.e., affirmation and empowerment) and acknowledged Warcraft as a viable strategy for coping with stress. Likewise, respondents in the passive escape condition reported on the benefits of mental absorption through transportation. Finally, patterns of behavior emerging from the case studies suggest an escape construct comprised of multiple underlying dimensions, as articulated throughout this chapter.

Summarized in Tables 5-1 and 5-2, ten distinct dimensions stemming from the preceding discussions are identified and defined in relation to escape, flow, and recreation.

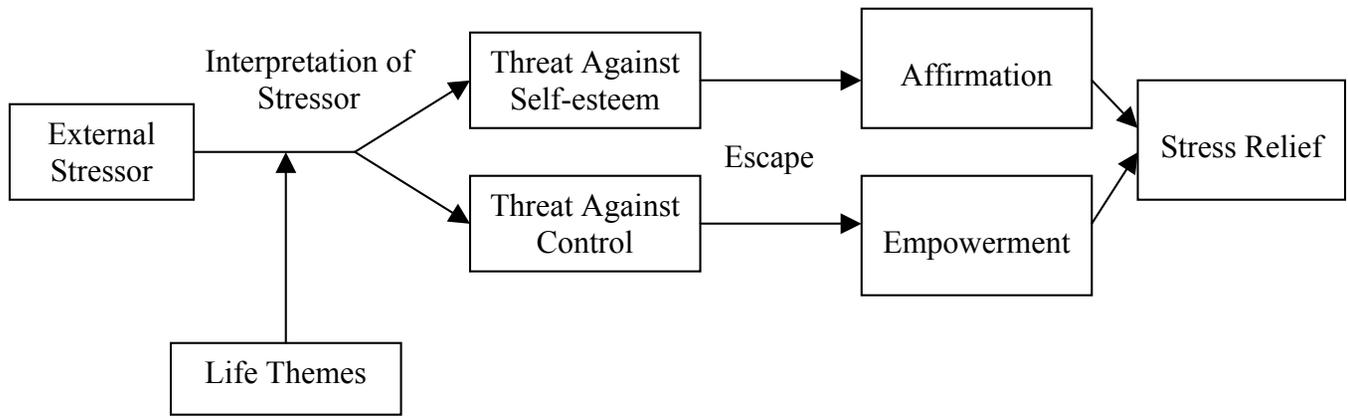


Figure 5-1. Framework for active escape.

Table 5-1. Dimensions of escape: Passive escape and active escape.

| Dimension | Passive Escape | Active Escape |
|--------------------|--|--|
| Avoidance Behavior | <p>Escape is characterized primarily as an avoidance behavior—individuals participating in escape are avoiding stress, reality, responsibilities, etc. Therefore, individuals participating in passive escape will exhibit high levels of avoidance behavior.</p> | <p>Same as passive escape.</p> |
| Stress Relief | <p>Individuals participate in escape when external stressors threaten their well-being. As such, escape is a reaction to stress—the end goal is always the elimination of stress emotions. Therefore, individuals participating in passive escape will exhibit high levels of avoidance behavior.</p> | <p>Same as passive escape.</p> |
| Mental Absorption | <p>During escape, the attentional resources of an individual are completely preoccupied by the escape activity. As a result, individuals are unable to focus on anything other than the activity. In particular, passive escape allows for mental absorption through transportation. Therefore, individuals participating in passive escape will exhibit high levels of mental absorption.</p> | <p>Individuals participating in active escape will also exhibit high levels of mental absorption. However, active escape allows for mental absorption through role-play, rather than transportation.</p> |

Table 5-1. Continued.

| Dimension | Passive Escape | Active Escape |
|--------------------------------|--|---|
| Detachment from Reality | As a result of mental absorption during an escape activity, individuals become unaware of their external surroundings. Consequently, individuals feel separated from the “real world.” Therefore, individuals participating in passive escape will exhibit high levels of detachment from reality. | Same as passive escape. |
| Alleviation of Negative Affect | As a result of mental absorption, individuals no longer focus on external stressors. Consequently, the negative emotions incurred as a result of stress are alleviated. Therefore, individuals participating in passive escape will exhibit high levels of alleviation of negative affect. | Same as passive escape. |
| Immersion into Fantasy World | Individuals participating in passive escape experience the activity from a third-person perspective. As such, individuals do not feel as if they are actually immersed in a fantasy world. Therefore, individuals participating in passive escape will exhibit low levels of immersion into fantasy. | Individuals participating in active escape experience the activity from a first-person perspective. As such, individuals feel as if they have become part of the fantasy world created by the activity. Therefore, individuals participating in active escape will exhibit high levels of immersion into fantasy. |

Table 5-1. Continued.

| Dimension | Passive Escape | Active Escape |
|----------------------------|--|--|
| Participation in Role-Play | <p>Individuals participating in passive escape experience the activity from a third-person perspective. As such, individuals do not assume the role of a character within narrative of the activity. Therefore, individuals participating in passive escape will exhibit low levels of role-play.</p> | <p>Individuals participating in active escape experience the activity from a first-person perspective. As such, individuals are given the opportunity to play the role of a character within the narrative of the fantasy. Therefore, individuals participating in active escape will exhibit high levels of role-play.</p> |
| Empowerment | <p>A sense of empowerment is experienced when individuals are given control within a fantasy. As such, individuals engaged in passive escape do not experience empowerment. Therefore, individuals participating in passive escape will exhibit low levels of empowerment.</p> | <p>During an active escape experience, individuals are given a substantial degree of control over the events in a fantasy. When a loss of control is experienced in reality, the ability to influence the outcome of a fantasy leads to empowerment. Therefore, individuals participating in active escape will exhibit high levels of empowerment.</p> |
| Affirmation of Identity | <p>Affirmation of identity is experienced when individuals experience an increase in self-esteem as a result of participating in a fantasy. As such, individuals engaged in passive escape do not experience affirmation. Therefore, individuals participating in passive escape will exhibit low levels of affirmation.</p> | <p>During an active escape experience, individuals are given the opportunity to assume a different identity while participating in a fantasy. Typically, the fantasy identity will reflect the ideal self of an individual. Consequently, individuals receive a boost in their self-esteem. Therefore, individuals participating in active escape will exhibit high levels of affirmation.</p> |

Table 5-1. Continued.

| Dimension | Passive Escape | Active Escape |
|------------------------------|--|---------------------|
| Challenge-Skill Asymmetry | <p>As individuals participating in escape seek to relieve stress, a challenging activity would be counterproductive. While most passive escape activities do not require skill (e.g., watching television), a high degree of challenge during an active escape activity could end the experience prematurely. Therefore, individuals participating in both forms of escape will exhibit low levels of affirmation.</p> | See passive escape. |

Table 5-2. Dimensions of escape: Flow and recreation.

| Dimension | Flow | Recreation |
|-------------------------|---|--|
| Avoidance Behavior | Flow is an approach behavior—individuals engaged in flow are actively pursuing a goal. Therefore, individuals participating in flow will exhibit low levels of avoidance behavior. | Recreation is an approach behavior—individuals engaged in recreation are actively seeking to experience the activity. Therefore, individuals participating in recreation will exhibit low levels of avoidance behavior. |
| Stress Relief | The main goal during a flow experience is idiosyncratic to the particular activity—individuals generally seek to achieve a high level of performance. Therefore, individuals participating in flow will exhibit low levels of stress relief. | During recreation, individuals are focused primarily on leisure and enjoyment of the activity. Stress relief may be a byproduct of recreation, but it is not the end goal. Therefore, individuals participating in recreation will exhibit low levels of stress relief. |
| Mental Absorption | Mental absorption is experienced during flow as the merging of action and awareness. As a result of balanced challenge and skill, individuals become intensely focused on the activity. Therefore, individuals participating in flow will exhibit high levels of mental absorption. | While mental absorption is not a prerequisite for recreation, activities that contain strong elements of narrative may lead to a preoccupation of attentional resources similar to escape. Therefore, individuals participating in recreation will exhibit moderate to high levels of mental absorption. |
| Detachment from Reality | As a result of intense concentration during a flow activity, individuals often become unaware of external surroundings. Therefore, individuals participating in flow will exhibit high levels of detachment from reality. | Individuals engaged in recreation will experience detachment from reality if mental absorption occurs during the activity. Therefore, individuals participating in recreation will also exhibit moderate to high levels of detachment from reality. |

Table 5-2. Continued.

| Dimension | Flow | Recreation |
|--------------------------------|--|---|
| Alleviation of Negative Affect | <p>Given the delicate balance of challenge and skill during a flow activity, stress may be generated during the experience. However, individuals generally report positive affect derived from feelings of achievement. Therefore, individuals participating in flow will exhibit high levels of alleviation of negative affect.</p> | <p>Individuals participating in recreation activity may experience the alleviation of negative affect as a consequence of leisure and enjoyment. Therefore, individuals participating in recreation will also exhibit moderate to high levels of alleviation of negative affect.</p> |
| Immersion into Fantasy World | <p>Although individuals participating in a flow activity may feel detached from reality, they do not feel as if they have become a part of a fantasy world—flow activities take place in the “real world.” Therefore, individuals participating in flow will exhibit low levels of immersion into fantasy.</p> | <p>Individuals participating in recreation experience the activity from a third-person perspective. As such, individuals do not feel as if they are actually immersed in a fantasy world. Therefore, individuals participating in recreation will exhibit low levels of immersion into fantasy.</p> |
| Participation in Role-Play | <p>As flow activities occur in the “real world,” individuals participate as themselves—not as a character within a fantasy setting. Therefore, individuals participating in flow will exhibit low levels of role-play.</p> | <p>Individuals participating in recreation experience the activity from a third-person perspective. As such, individuals do not assume the role of a character within narrative of the activity. Therefore, individuals participating in recreation will exhibit low levels of role-play.</p> |
| Empowerment | <p>During a flow activity, individuals often report a sense of control resulting from a high degree of skill. In contrast with escape, empowerment during flow stems from personal achievement and not from fantasy. Therefore, individuals participating in flow will exhibit high levels of empowerment.</p> | <p>As individuals engaged in recreation are primarily concerned with seeking leisure and enjoyment, reports of empowerment are not expected. Therefore, individuals participating in recreation will exhibit low levels of empowerment.</p> |

Table 5-2. Continued.

| Dimension | Flow | Recreation |
|---------------------------|---|---|
| Affirmation of Identity | <p>After a flow activity has been completed successfully, individuals often report a sense of personal affirmation. In contrast with escape, affirmation during flow stems from personal achievement and not from fantasy. Therefore, individuals participating in flow will exhibit high levels of affirmation.</p> | <p>As individuals engaged in recreation are primarily concerned with seeking leisure and enjoyment, reports of affirmation are not expected. Therefore, individuals participating in recreation will exhibit low levels of affirmation.</p> |
| Challenge-Skill Asymmetry | <p>The most important antecedent condition of a flow experience is the balance between challenge and skill. For flow to occur, the skills of an individual must be equally matched by the challenge of the activity. Therefore, individuals participating in flow will exhibit low levels of challenge-skill asymmetry.</p> | <p>During a recreation experience, a challenging activity is acceptable to the extent that it remains enjoyable. Therefore, individuals participating in recreation will exhibit moderate to high levels of challenge-skill asymmetry.</p> |

CHAPTER 6

STUDY 1: DEVELOPMENT OF THE EES

In response to the ten dimensions emerging from the exploratory phases of this research, the following chapter focuses on the validation of each dimension through the construction of a measurement scale. Analogous to the Flow State Scale developed by Jackson and Marsh (1996), the Experiential Escape Scale (EES) seeks to provide a means by which escapism can be measured as a multidimensional construct. To achieve this goal, the EES has been conceived to meet three primary objectives: (1) the assessment of escapism in activities related to the consumption of entertainment products and services, (2) the differentiation of passive and active forms of escape, and (3) the differentiation of escape, flow, and recreational experiences.

Method and Design

In the first step of operationalizing the escape construct, a set of scale items was developed to capture each of the dimensions specified in Tables 5-1 and 5-2. Based on data collected during the exploratory studies, 8 items were generated for each of the 10 dimensions, resulting in an 80-item survey. A pilot test was used to identify item redundancy, ambiguity, and wording complexity. Those items flagged during the pilot test were refined to improve clarity, resulting in the final 80-item survey shown in Appendix A.

The 80-item survey was administered to 152 undergraduate business students at the University of Florida. Subjects completed the survey on a computer (in a lab or online) and received extra credit for their participation. The survey sessions took 30 minutes on average.

Prior to the survey administration, subjects completed a priming exercise (Appendix B). In the exercise, subjects were instructed to imagine a scenario based on a randomly assigned condition (escape, flow, recreation). Subjects were asked to picture themselves participating in a specific activity of their choice, paying special attention to details such as their state of mind,

motivations, and affective reactions. Afterwards, subjects were instructed to write a paragraph describing the imagined scenario. The survey was administered immediately following the imagination task, and respondents were asked to complete the survey as if they had actually participated in the imagined scenario. The entire survey session took 30 minutes on average.

Results

For the purpose of validating the proposed dimensions, the 80 scale items were subjected to an exploratory factor analysis. The VARIMAX method of rotation was used, and no restrictions were placed on the number of factors extracted. Although the resulting scree plot showed a noticeable break (e.g., elbow) after the seventh factor, Floyd and Widaman (1995) recommend exploring alternative solutions when two or more factors are near the cutoff. Given the proximity of factors clustered around the elbow, both 6-factor and 7-factor solutions were examined during the confirmatory factor analysis. In the 7-factor solution, only one item loaded significantly (i.e., above .50) on the seventh factor. As per the suggestion of Comrey (1988), identification of a factor requires at least three significantly loading items, and consequently, the 7-factor solution was rejected in favor of a 6-factor solution.

As a result of constraining the 10 initially proposed dimensions to a 6-factor solution, several pairs collapsed into single factors.

Avoidance Behavior and Stress Relief. As stress relief activities are a subset of avoidance behaviors in general, combining the two dimensions into a single underlying construct is conceptually sound. Subsequently, scale items relating to avoidance behavior and stress relief were grouped into the single factor representing both dimensions.

Mental Absorption and Detachment from Reality. Across all three types of behavior examined in this research (i.e., escape, flow, and recreation), detachment from reality is the

direct consequence of mental absorption. By definition, an individual experiencing mental absorption through transportation or fantasy is no longer conscious of his external environment—within the domain of this research, individuals reporting mental absorption will necessarily report detachment from reality as well. As such, the scale items relating to detachment from reality were combined with those relating to the dimension of mental absorption.

Immersion Into Fantasy and Role-Play. As previously defined, immersion into fantasy and participation in role-play are components of the fantasy experience in general. While immersion into fantasy focuses on the settings created through narrative character, role-play represents the element of participation. The results obtained through common factor analysis confirm that both dimensions measure the same underlying construct. Consequently, the scale items relating to immersion into fantasy and role-play were grouped into a single factor representing both dimensions.

Affirmation and Empowerment. While the exploratory studies suggest that individuals participating in active escape are motivated primarily by either a need for affirmation or control, individuals are likely to experience both during a successful escape experience. Although an individual facing threats against identity will seek affirmation, part of the active escape experience includes an enhanced degree of control stemming from the challenge-skill asymmetry. Likewise, an individual facing threats against control will also receive a boost in self-esteem as the result of the role-play experience inherent to active escape. As such, the items relating to affirmation and control were grouped into the single factor representing both dimensions.

For the purpose of assessing unidimensionality and reducing the number of scale items, additional analyses were conducted. First, the loadings of each scale item were examined. Items with loadings less than .50, items cross-loading on multiple dimensions, and items loading on the wrong factor were flagged for deletion. Second, reliability and item-based statistics were considered within each factor. As suggested by Robinson, Shaver, and Wrightsman (1991), items with low inter-item correlations (less than .30) were flagged for deletion. As suggested by Bearden and Netemeyer (1998), items with low item-to-total correlations (less than .50) were also flagged for deletion. Additionally, coefficient alpha estimates were above .90 for each factor. Third, a confirmatory factor analysis simultaneously testing all six factors was conducted to examine standardized residuals (SRs) and modification indices (MIs) for the purpose of scale purification. As suggested by Hair, Anderson, Tatham, and Black (1998), items with large SRs (above 2.57) and MIs (above 3.84) were flagged for deletion. Finally, flagged items were examined individually, and those lacking strong content validity were eliminated, resulting in a purified 42-item scale (Table 6-1).

Table 6-1. Exploratory factor analysis results.

| Dimension | Scale Item | Loading | Inter-Item | Item-Total |
|-------------------------|---|---------|------------|------------|
| Stress Relief | I was motivated by a desire to “get my mind off of things.” | 0.83 | 0.66 | 0.82 |
| | I was driven by a need to “get away from it all.” | 0.79 | 0.64 | 0.79 |
| | I was trying my best to avoid stress during the activity. | 0.66 | 0.50 | 0.61 |
| | I wanted to distance myself mentally from a stressful event or situation. | 0.81 | 0.63 | 0.78 |
| | The main purpose of the activity was to relieve stress. | 0.84 | 0.68 | 0.84 |
| | My goal was to relax by participating in the activity. | 0.76 | 0.62 | 0.76 |
| | I started the activity because I needed to loosen up. | 0.84 | 0.68 | 0.84 |
| | Stress relief was the most important part of the activity. | 0.82 | 0.64 | 0.79 |
| Coefficient alpha = .97 | | | | |
| Mental Absorption | It felt like my mind was being drawn into the activity. | 0.65 | 0.46 | 0.63 |
| | I was not able to concentrate on anything other the activity. | 0.81 | 0.56 | 0.77 |
| | While participating in the activity, there was nothing else on my mind. | 0.69 | 0.48 | 0.65 |
| | My attention was completely preoccupied by the activity. | 0.74 | 0.53 | 0.73 |
| | I felt disconnected from the “real world.” | 0.59 | 0.41 | 0.56 |
| | Reality seemed to fade away from my consciousness. | 0.68 | 0.51 | 0.70 |
| | I was no longer aware of my surroundings. | 0.55 | 0.42 | 0.58 |
| | I stopped paying attention to the world around me. | 0.63 | 0.46 | 0.62 |
| Coefficient alpha = .93 | | | | |

Table 6-1. Continued.

| Dimension | Scale Item | Loading | Inter-Item | Item-Total |
|--------------------------------|---|---------|------------|------------|
| Fantasy and Role-Play | I became an active participant within a fantasy world. | 0.69 | 0.53 | 0.72 |
| | The activity allowed me to experience a world completely different than my own. | 0.70 | 0.52 | 0.70 |
| | The activity created an interactive fantasy world. | 0.79 | 0.57 | 0.78 |
| | The activity placed me in a reality different than my own. | 0.65 | 0.50 | 0.67 |
| | I received a new identity while participating in the activity | 0.82 | 0.59 | 0.79 |
| | I was given the opportunity to adopt a new persona. | 0.70 | 0.49 | 0.66 |
| | I had the chance to become somebody else. | 0.85 | 0.62 | 0.84 |
| | The activity gave me an entirely different identity. | 0.75 | 0.53 | 0.71 |
| Coefficient alpha = .94 | | | | |
| Alleviation of Negative Affect | Feelings of anxiety and worry faded away from my mind. | 0.53 | 0.54 | 0.69 |
| | Participating in the activity put me in a better mood. | 0.63 | 0.49 | 0.60 |
| | My overall mood began to improve when I started the activity. | 0.62 | 0.53 | 0.65 |
| | I was relieved of negative emotions while engaged in the activity. | 0.59 | 0.54 | 0.68 |
| | I felt better emotionally while participating in the activity. | 0.65 | 0.54 | 0.68 |
| Coefficient alpha = .84 | | | | |
| Challenge-Skill Asymmetry | Achieving success in the activity required little effort. | 0.78 | 0.54 | 0.78 |
| | I completed the activity without even trying. | 0.67 | 0.45 | 0.66 |
| | I was not challenged by the activity at all. | 0.67 | 0.46 | 0.67 |
| | Performing well during the activity was effortless. | 0.82 | 0.55 | 0.80 |
| | I did not need to exert myself to complete the activity. | 0.71 | 0.49 | 0.73 |
| Coefficient alpha = .87 | | | | |

Table 6-1. Continued.

| Dimension | Scale Item | Loading | Inter-Item | Item-Total |
|-----------------------------|---|---------|------------|------------|
| Affirmation and Empowerment | I began to think positively about myself during the activity. | 0.70 | 0.50 | 0.71 |
| | The activity boosted my self-esteem. | 0.68 | 0.48 | 0.68 |
| | Participating in the activity gave me more confidence. | 0.70 | 0.51 | 0.73 |
| | The activity allowed me to feel like a better person. | 0.66 | 0.44 | 0.62 |
| | I was the one in charge during the activity. | 0.66 | 0.44 | 0.64 |
| | It felt like I had a great degree of authority. | 0.63 | 0.43 | 0.62 |
| | The activity allowed me to feel in control. | 0.71 | 0.48 | 0.70 |
| | I felt empowered by the activity. | 0.65 | 0.49 | 0.70 |
| | Coefficient alpha = .91 | | | |

CHAPTER 7 STUDY 2: SCALE REFINEMENT

Following the initial purification stage, a second sample of data was collected for the purpose of confirming the proposed 6-factor structure. During this stage of scale development, the primary objectives were: (1) assessing the structure's "goodness of fit," (2) establishing convergent and divergent validity across factors within the model, and (3) producing a finalized version of the EES.

Method and Design

The purified 42-item survey was administered to 248 undergraduate business students at the University of Florida. The same procedure was followed during this stage of data collection, including the priming exercise. Subjects were assigned to one of three conditions (escape, flow, and recreation) and asked to complete an identical imagined-task procedure. Afterwards, individuals were instructed to complete the 42-item survey.

Results

The results of this study were submitted to a confirmatory factor analysis in LISREL 8.80 for the purpose of assessing the model's goodness of fit. Although the fit indices of the proposed 6-factor model passed minimum cutoffs (Table 7-1), scale items relating to the control aspect of the empowerment dimension failed to load significantly on a factor. Consequently, a second model separating the affirmation and control aspects of the empowerment dimension as distinct factors was run. As a result, fit indices improved slightly, and more importantly, scale items loaded significantly on intended factors. Given the considerable improvements, the 7-factor model separating affirmation from the empowerment factor was adopted.

While chi-squared and goodness-of-fit (GFI) indices have traditionally been used to assess the overall fit of a model, a number of studies have suggested that these indices are

oversensitive to variations in sample size, model complexity, and factor loadings (e.g., Hoyle, 1995). As such, the root-mean-square-error-of approximation (RMSEA) has been advocated as a stand-alone index for assessing model fit (Hu and Bentler, 1999). As suggested by Brown and Cudeck (1993), RMSEA levels below .08 indicate an acceptable fit, while RMSEA levels above .10 are considered unacceptable. In addition to RMSEA, the comparative fit index (CFI) and non-normed fit index (NNFI) have also been advocated as improvements over the traditional fit indices. As suggested by Netemeyer (2003), values above .90 for both CFI and NNFI are indicators of acceptable fit. As shown in Table 7-1, the proposed 7-factor model passes the cutoffs for RMSEA, CFI, and NNFI.

To assess the convergent validity of each factor, several analyses were undertaken. First, the magnitude of factor loadings for each item was analyzed. With the exception of one item in the empowerment dimension, all items loaded above .50 on intended factors. Secondly, composite reliability (i.e., internal consistency of items in a scale) was computed for each factor. As shown in Table 7-3, the composite reliability of each factor exceeds the .70 cutoff proposed by Hair, Anderson, Tatham, and Black (1998). Finally, the average-variance-extracted (i.e., the amount of variance captured relative to measurement error) was computed for each factor. As suggested by Netemeyer (2003), values above .50 indicate high levels of internal consistency. Although the values for mental absorption and empowerment are slightly below .50, Netemeyer (2003) suggests that values near the .50 threshold are reasonable for newly developed scales. Taken together, these diagnostic tools indicate acceptable levels of convergent validity within each factor.

Following the assessment of convergent validity, the discriminant validity of each factor was evaluated. Again, several analyses were undertaken in conjunction to establish discriminant

validity. First, the disattenuated correlation (i.e., ϕ) between each pair of factors was examined. According to Anderson and Gerbing (1988), discriminant validity is established if the confidence interval (i.e., two standard errors) around ϕ does not contain the value of 1. As shown in Table 7-2, each factor meets this criterion. Second, the chi-squared statistic for each pair of factors was computed while constraining ϕ to 1. According to Anderson and Gerbing, discriminant validity is established if the chi-squared statistic is significantly lower when ϕ is freely estimated (i.e., unconstrained) as compared to the constrained model. As shown in Table 7-4, each factor meets this criterion. Finally, the AVE of each factor was compared to the squared correlation between each factor pair. According to Fornell and Larcker, discriminant validity is established if the AVE of two factors is greater than the squared correlation between them. As shown in Table 7-5, each factor meets this criterion. Taken together, these diagnostic tools indicate acceptable levels of discriminant validity across the seven factors.

Finally, the 42-item scale was subjected to further purification by reexamining standardized residuals and modification indices. By employing progressively higher cutoffs, scale items were eliminated until 24 questions remained. The final scale (Appendix E) consisted of 4 stress avoidance items, 4 mental absorption items, 4 participation in fantasy items, 3 alleviation of negative affect items, 3 challenge-skill asymmetry items, 3 affirmation items, and 3 empowerment items.

Table 7-1. Fit indices.

| Fit Statistic | 6-Factor | 7-Factor |
|---------------|----------|----------|
| GFI | 0.717 | 0.723 |
| Chi-Square | 1505.570 | 1446.830 |
| p-value | 0.000 | 0.000 |
| RMSEA | 0.072 | 0.070 |
| CFI | 0.920 | 0.924 |
| NNFI | 0.914 | 0.918 |

Table 7-2. Confidence interval for phi (2 standard errors).

| | StrsRlf | MAbsp | FntsyRP | AlvNA | ChlngSk | Afrm | Emp |
|---------|--|------------------|------------------|------------------|--------------------|------------------|-----|
| StrsRlf | | | | | | | |
| MAbsp | 0.2280 ^a 0.2399 ^b | | | | | | |
| FntsyRP | 0.1201 0.1319 | 0.5756 0.5824 | | | | | |
| AlvNA | 0.4354 0.4446 | 0.4268 0.4372 | 0.2448 0.2572 | | | | |
| ChlngSk | 0.4085 0.4175 | 0.0223 0.0357 | 0.0386 0.0514 | 0.1603 0.1737 | | | |
| Afrm | 0.0966 0.0834 | 0.2344 0.2476 | 0.1284 0.1416 | 0.4962 0.5058 | -0.3208 -0.3092 | | |
| Emp | 0.0696 0.0844 | 0.3938 0.4062 | 0.3016 0.3144 | 0.2616 0.2764 | -0.0796 -0.0644 | 0.5310 0.5410 | |

^a Lower-bound of confidence interval ^b Upper-bound of confidence interval

Table 7-3. Reliability and convergent validity.

| Dimension | Scale Item | Loading |
|----------------------------------|---|---------|
| Stress Relief | I was motivated by a desire to “get my mind off of things.” | 0.81 |
| | I was driven by a need to “get away from it all.” | 0.83 |
| | I was trying my best to avoid stress during the activity. | 0.52 |
| | I wanted to distance myself mentally from a stressful event or situation. | 0.80 |
| | The main purpose of the activity was to relieve stress. | 0.85 |
| | My goal was to relax by participating in the activity. | 0.69 |
| | I started the activity because I needed to loosen up. | 0.78 |
| | Stress relief was the most important part of the activity. | 0.78 |
| Coefficient alpha = .913 | | |
| Average variance explained = .58 | | |
| Composite reliability = .92 | | |

Table 7-3. Continued.

| Dimension | Scale Item | Loading |
|-------------------|---|---------|
| Mental Absorption | It felt like my mind was being drawn into the activity. | 0.55 |
| | I was not able to concentrate on anything other the activity. | 0.55 |
| | While participating in the activity, there was nothing else on my mind. | 0.57 |
| | My attention was completely preoccupied by the activity. | 0.50 |
| | I felt disconnected from the “real world.” | 0.69 |
| | Reality seemed to fade away from my consciousness. | 0.63 |
| | I was no longer aware of my surroundings. | 0.74 |
| | I stopped paying attention to the world around me. | 0.76 |
| | Coefficient alpha = .839 | |
| | Average variance explained = .40 | |
| | Composite reliability = .84 | |

Table 7-3. Continued.

| Dimension | Scale Item | Loading |
|--------------------------------|---|---------|
| Fantasy and Role-Play | I became an active participant within a fantasy world. | 0.69 |
| | The activity allowed me to experience a world completely different than my own. | 0.73 |
| | The activity created an interactive fantasy world. | 0.77 |
| | The activity placed me in a reality different than my own. | 0.72 |
| | I received a new identity while participating in the activity | 0.71 |
| | I was given the opportunity to adopt a new persona. | 0.81 |
| | I had the chance to become somebody else. | 0.77 |
| | The activity gave me an entirely different identity. | 0.73 |
| | Coefficient alpha = .905 | |
| | Average variance explained = .55 | |
| | Composite reliability = .91 | |
| Alleviation of Negative Affect | Feelings of anxiety and worry faded away from my mind. | 0.70 |
| | Participating in the activity put me in a better mood. | 0.64 |
| | My overall mood began to improve when I started the activity. | 0.73 |
| | I was relieved of negative emotions while engaged in the activity. | 0.55 |
| | I felt better emotionally while participating in the activity. | 0.79 |
| | Coefficient alpha = .807 | |
| | Average variance explained = .47 | |
| | Composite reliability = .82 | |

Table 7-3. Continued.

| Dimension | Scale Item | Loading |
|---------------------------|---|---------|
| Challenge-Skill Asymmetry | Achieving success in the activity required little effort. | 0.83 |
| | I completed the activity without even trying. | 0.82 |
| | I was not challenged by the activity at all. | 0.78 |
| | Performing well during the activity was effortless. | 0.76 |
| | I did not need to exert myself to complete the activity. | 0.78 |
| | Coefficient alpha = .893 | |
| | Average variance explained = .63 | |
| | Composite reliability = .90 | |
| Affirmation | I began to think positively about myself during the activity. | 0.68 |
| | The activity boosted my self-esteem. | 0.76 |
| | Participating in the activity gave me more confidence. | 0.85 |
| | The activity allowed me to feel like a better person . | 0.61 |
| | Coefficient alpha = .812 | |
| | Average variance explained = .53 | |
| | Composite reliability = .82 | |

Table 7-3. Continued.

| Dimension | Scale Item | Loading |
|-------------|---|---------|
| Empowerment | I was the one in charge during the activity. | 0.55 |
| | It felt like I had a great degree of authority. | 0.70 |
| | The activity allowed me to feel in control. | 0.77 |
| | I felt empowered by the activity. | 0.46 |
| | Coefficient alpha = .687 | |
| | Average variance explained = .40 | |
| | Composite reliability = .72 | |

Table 7-4. Chi-squared statistic for pairwise factors.

| | StrsRlf | MAbsp | FntsyRP | AlvNA | ChlngSk | Afrm | Emp |
|---------|--|---------------------|--------------------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|-----|
| StrsRlf | | | | | | | |
| MAbsp | 629.434 ^a 228.089 ^b | | | | | | |
| FntsyRP | 1026.527 274.761 | 1076.889 353.616 | | | | | |
| AlvNA | 364.995 141.657 | 350.015 151.132 | 481.648 212.787 | | | | |
| ChlngSk | 547.107 116.753 | 680.806 155.508 | 747.567 221.359 | 349.375 70.273 | | | |
| Afrm | 367.818 109.875 | 379.402 140.295 | 454.911 199.778 | 190.799 48.081 | 282.757 48.837 | | |
| Emp | 244.666 106.203 | 274.742 167.877 | 327.822 200.128 | 179.55 59.21 | 205.06 77.611 | 118.472 73.893 | |

^a Constrained Chi-Squared Statistic ^b Unconstrained Chi-Squared Statistic

Table 7-5. Discriminant validity (AVE vs. phi-squared).

| | StrsRlf | MAbsp | FntsyRP | AlvNA | ChlngSk | Afrm | Emp |
|---------|---|----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|-----|
| StrsRlf | | | | | | | |
| MAbsp | 0.05 ^a 0.40 ^b 0.58 ^c | | | | | | |
| FntsyRP | 0.02 0.55 0.58 | 0.34 0.55 0.40 | | | | | |
| AlvNA | 0.19 0.47 0.58 | 0.19 0.47 0.40 | 0.06 0.47 0.55 | | | | |
| ChlngSk | 0.17 0.63 0.58 | 0.00 0.63 0.40 | 0.00 0.63 0.55 | 0.03 0.63 0.47 | | | |
| Afrm | 0.01 0.53 0.58 | 0.06 0.53 0.40 | 0.02 0.53 0.55 | 0.25 0.53 0.47 | 0.10 0.53 0.63 | | |
| Emp | 0.01 0.40 0.58 | 0.16 0.40 0.40 | 0.09 0.40 0.55 | 0.07 0.40 0.47 | 0.01 0.40 0.63 | 0.29 0.40 0.53 | |

^a Phi-squared ^b AVE for dimension on Y-axis of table ^c AVE for dimension on X-axis of table

CHAPTER 8

STUDY 3: EES PILOT TEST

After finalizing the 24-item EES, the scale was administered for the purpose of testing the predictions presented in Table 5-2. As discussed in Table 5-2, individuals engaged in distinct types of activity (e.g., escape and flow) are expected to score differently on the various dimensions of escape. Based on preceding discussions, these predictions can be summarized by the following hypotheses.

- **H1a:** Participants engaged in either form of escape will exhibit a greater degree of stress avoidance than participants engaged in flow and recreation.
- **H1b:** Participants engaged in flow will exhibit the lowest degree of stress avoidance across all activities.
- **H2:** Participants engaged in recreation will exhibit the lowest degree of mental absorption across all activities.
- **H3a:** Participants engaged in active escape will exhibit the greatest degree of participation in fantasy across all activities.
- **H3b:** Participants engaged in flow will exhibit the lowest degree of participation in fantasy across all activities.
- **H4:** Participants engaged in both forms of escape, flow, and recreation will exhibit equal levels of alleviation of negative affect.
- **H5:** Participants engaged in flow will exhibit the lowest degree of challenge-skill asymmetry across all activities.
- **H6:** Participants engaged in flow and active escape will exhibit greater degrees of affirmation than participants engaged in recreation and passive escape.
- **H7:** Participants engaged in flow and active escape will exhibit greater degrees of empowerment than participants engaged in recreation and passive escape.

Method and Design

The 24-item survey was administered to 86 undergraduate business and economics students at Wheaton College. Each participant was assigned to one of four activity conditions

(active escape, passive escape, flow, and recreation). As regular participation in flow and active escape is highly idiosyncratic, a “known group” procedure (e.g., Crano and Brewer, 1973; Fishbein and Ajzen, 1975) was used in assigning participants to the active escape and flow conditions. Fourteen participants self-identified as “video gamers” were placed in the active escape condition, and 21 participants self-identified as “athletes” or “musicians” were placed in the flow condition. The remaining participants were randomly assigned to either the passive escape (n = 21) or recreation (n = 14) conditions.

In the initial pilot test of the scale, participants were subjected to an extended version of the imagined-task procedure used during the scale development phase. In the extended procedure, participants were first given a verbal description of their assigned activity (Appendix C). Participants were then given two minutes to imagine themselves participating in the assigned activity. Afterwards, participants were given five minutes to write a description of their imagined experience. Finally, participants were asked complete the EES in response to the activity they had just imagined. While participants were allowed to proceed at their own pace in previous studies, the extended imagined-task procedure was used to encourage a greater degree of involvement during the study.

Results

The results of Study 3 are presented in Table 8-1 and Figure 8-1. With the exception of mental absorption and alleviation of negative affect, ANOVAs performed at the individual factor level revealed a main effect of activity type on mean score. Subsequently, t-tests were performed for each pair of conditions, and the results are presented in Table 8-2. Although the hypotheses were presented with specific directionalities, two-tailed t-tests were used as a conservative measure.

In support of H1a, participants in the passive escape condition ($M = 4.26$) exhibited a significantly greater degree of stress avoidance compared to participants in the recreation condition ($M = 3.09$), $t(49) = 4.72$, $p < .01$. Additionally, participants in the active escape condition ($M = 4.05$) also exhibited a significantly greater degree of stress avoidance compared to participants in the recreation condition, $t(42) = 42.00$, $p < .01$. In support of H1b, participants in the flow condition ($M = 2.25$) exhibited the lowest degree of stress avoidance, $p < .01$ for t-tests across all relevant comparisons. As the instructions given during Study 3 intentionally manipulated stress as a motivation, the results obtained in both escape conditions can be interpreted as validation of the manipulations. However, as stress was not mentioned in the flow condition, the results suggest that stress avoidance is not a motivating factor during flow activities.

H2 was not supported as participants in the recreation condition ($M = 3.38$) did not exhibit significantly lower degrees of mental absorption compared to participants in the flow ($M = 3.88$), passive escape ($M = 3.37$), and active escape ($M = 3.73$) conditions, $F(3, 82) = 2.37$, $p = .08$. However, as previously discussed, participants in the recreation condition choosing to engage in activities rich in narrative (e.g., watching a movie with friends) are likely to experience mental absorption in the form of transportation. In reviewing the written descriptions provided by participants during the priming task, 12 out of 30 participants in the recreation condition imagined activities involving the consumption of media (e.g., watching a movie, reading a book, or listening to music). Removing those participants yielded significant differences between the recreation ($M = 3.24$) and flow conditions, $t(36) = -2.66$, $p < .05$, as well as the recreation and active escape conditions, $t(29) = -2.12$, $p < .05$.

In support of H3, participants in the active escape condition ($M = 3.93$) exhibited the greatest degree of participation in fantasy compared to participants in the flow ($M = 2.88$), recreation ($M = 2.83$), and passive escape conditions ($M = 2.30$), $p < .01$ for t-tests across all relevant comparisons. Furthermore, while participants in the active escape condition responded positively with respect to the fantasy dimension (i.e., mean score greater than 3), participants in all other conditions responded negatively (i.e., means scores less than 3). This suggests that participation in fantasy is a unique component of the active escape experience.

In support of H4, no main effect of activity type on mean factor score was observed for the alleviation of negative affect dimension, $F(3, 82) = .98$, $p = .40$. This result indicates that, as predicted, the alleviation of negative affect occurs at comparable levels across all four types of activity.

In support of H5, participants in the flow condition ($M = 2.41$) exhibited a lower degree of challenge-skill asymmetry compared to participants in the passive escape condition ($M = 3.60$), $t(40) = 2.94$, $p < .05$. Additionally, participants in the flow condition also exhibited a lower degree of challenge-skill asymmetry compared to participants in the active escape condition ($M = 3.67$), $t(33) = -3.17$, $p < .01$. Despite a non-statistical difference between flow and recreation ($M = 2.96$), $t(49) = 1.42$, $p = .16$, the directionality suggests that balanced skill and challenge is perceived most regularly during flow experiences.

H6 was partially supported as participants in the active escape condition ($M = 3.79$) exhibited a significantly greater degree of affirmation compared to participants in the passive escape condition ($M = 3.06$), $t(33) = -2.38$, $p < .05$. Additionally, participants in the flow condition ($M = 4.13$) also exhibited a significantly greater degree of affirmation compared to participants in the passive escape condition, $t(40) = -4.95$, $p < .01$. However, participants in the

active escape condition did not differ significantly from participants in the recreation condition ($M = 3.94$), $t(42) = .61$, $p = .54$. Likewise, participants in the flow condition also did not differ significantly from participants in the recreation condition, $t(49) = -.99$, $p = .33$. In reviewing the written descriptions collected during the study, many of the participants tasked with imagining a recreational activity reported the involvement of other individuals. In their written responses, participants commented on the positive emotions generated by the presence of friends and family within the imagined scenarios. Consequently, those participants scored higher on the affirmation dimension.

Finally, H7 was partially supported as participants in the active escape condition ($M = 4.05$) exhibited a significantly greater degree of empowerment compared to participants in the passive escape condition ($M = 3.40$), $t(33) = -2.31$, $p < .05$. Additionally, participants in the flow condition ($M = 4.10$) also exhibited a significantly greater degree of empowerment compared to participants in the passive escape condition, $t(40) = -2.57$, $p < .05$. However, participants in the active escape condition did not differ significantly from participants in the recreation condition ($M = 3.66$), $t(42) = -1.64$, $p = .10$. Likewise, participants in the flow condition also did not differ significantly from participants in the recreation condition, $t(49) = -1.76$, $p = .09$. Despite non-significant differences, the directionality and magnitude of the differences seem to suggest that empowerment is experienced to a lesser degree by individuals participating in a recreational activity.

Discussion

The results of Study 3 provide initial support for the proposed distinctions between passive escape, active escape, flow, and recreation. As hypothesized, active escape activities appear to offer many of the benefits provided by flow without requiring the effort of overcoming

challenge. These results confirm the observations collected during the case study phase, suggesting that active escape offers stress relief through affirmation and empowerment. In contrast, passive escape does not provide the same degree of affirmation and empowerment, and thus, relies on a different mechanism (i.e., transportation) to relieve stress.

Inconsistent with H2 (i.e., the mental absorption hypothesis), participants in the recreation condition exhibited levels of mental absorption equal to that of participants in the flow and escape conditions. However, as discussed before, over a third of the participants in the recreation condition reported an activity in which some form of media was consumed (e.g., watching a movie), leading to transportation through narrative. As such, the net result of recreation and passive escape may appear identical with respect to mental absorption when similar activities are engaged; consequently, the goal of stress relief becomes the primary difference between many forms of passive escape and recreation.

Partially inconsistent with H6 (i.e., the affirmation hypothesis), participants in the recreation condition experienced affirmation at levels higher than predicted (i.e., equal to flow and active escape). However, as discussed before, the degree to which affirmation is experienced during a recreational activity appears to depend in part on the presence of friends and family members. With the inclusion of friends and family members, recreational activities offer levels of affirmation comparable to flow and active escape.

Table 8-1. Pilot test: Descriptive statistics by dimension.

| Dimension | Flow n = 21 | Recreation n = 30 | P. Escape n = 21 | A. Escape n = 14 |
|---|--|----------------------|---------------------|---------------------|
| Stress Relief (F = 25.09, p = .00) | 2.25 ^a 0.73 ^b | 3.09 1.03 | 4.26 0.57 | 4.05 0.80 |
| Mental Absorption (F = 2.37, p = .07) | 3.88 0.84 | 3.38 0.65 | 3.37 0.94 | 3.73 0.70 |
| Fantasy and Role-Play (F = 9.65, p = .00) | 2.88 0.97 | 2.83 0.80 | 2.30 0.84 | 3.93 0.97 |
| Alleviation of Negative Affect (F = .98 p = .40) | 4.10 0.74 | 4.20 1.03 | 3.89 0.57 | 4.17 0.80 |
| Challenge-Skill Asymmetry (F = 4.12, p = .01) | 2.41 1.28 | 2.96 1.38 | 3.60 1.34 | 3.67 0.91 |
| Affirmation (F = 8.31, p = .00) | 4.13 0.49 | 3.94 0.74 | 3.06 0.85 | 3.79 0.92 |
| Empowerment (F = 3.15, p = .03) | 4.05 0.74 | 3.66 0.81 | 3.40 0.89 | 4.10 0.85 |

^a Mean ^b Standard Deviation

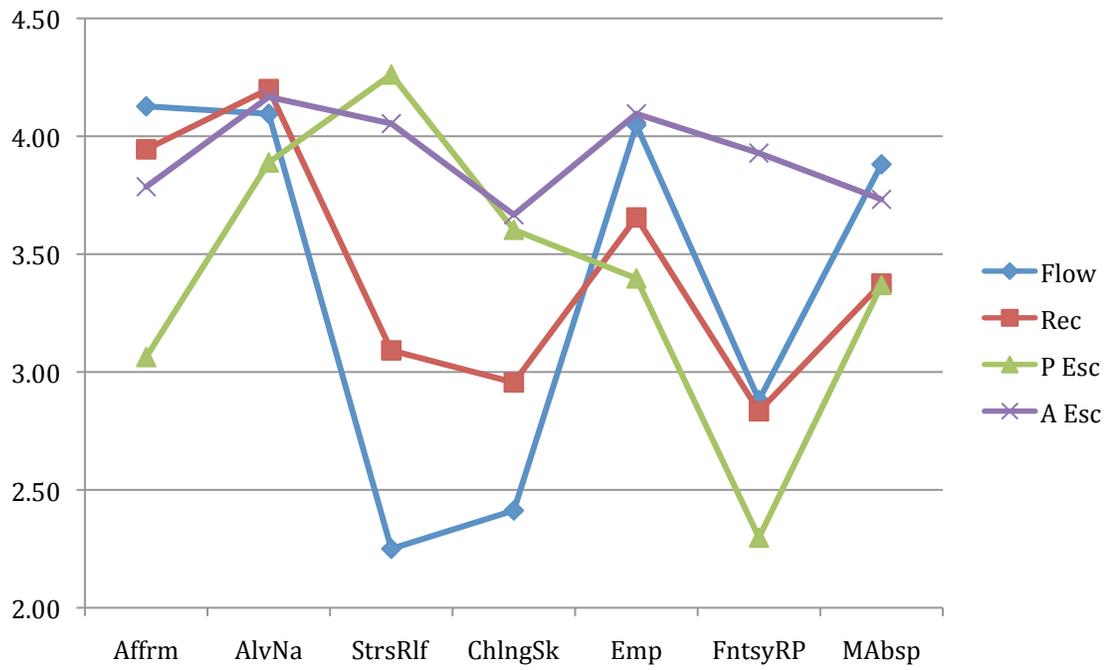


Figure 8-1. Pilot test: Profiles by condition.

Table 8-2. Pilot test: Pairwise t-tests by dimension.

| Stress Relief | | | | | Challenge-Skill Asymmetry | | | | |
|--|---|---------------|---------------|-------|---------------------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|-------|
| | Flow | Rec | Esc P | Esc A | | Flow | Rec | Esc P | Esc A |
| Flow | | | | | Flow | | | | |
| Rec | 49.00 ^a 0.00 ^b | | | | Rec | 1.42 0.16 | | | |
| Esc P | 9.91 0.00 | 4.72 0.00 | | | Esc P | 2.94 0.01 | 1.66 0.10 | | |
| Esc A | 33.00 0.00 | 42.00 0.00 | 0.90 0.37 | | Esc A | -3.17 0.00 | -1.75 0.09 | -0.15 0.88 | |
| ^a t-stat ^b p-value | | | | | | | | | |
| Empowerment | | | | | Fantasy and Role-Play | | | | |
| | Flow | Rec | Esc P | Esc A | | Flow | Rec | Esc P | Esc A |
| Flow | | | | | Flow | | | | |
| Rec | -1.76 0.09 | | | | Rec | -0.19 0.85 | | | |
| Esc P | -2.57 0.01 | -1.07 0.29 | | | Esc P | -2.08 0.04 | -2.30 0.03 | | |
| Esc A | -0.18 0.86 | -1.64 0.10 | -2.31 0.03 | | Esc A | -3.13 0.00 | -3.95 0.00 | -5.27 0.00 | |

Table 8-2. Continued.

| Affirmation | | | | |
|-------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|-------|
| | Flow | Rec | Esc P | Esc A |
| Flow | | | | |
| Rec | -0.99 0.33 | | | |
| Esc P | -4.95 0.00 | -3.93 0.00 | | |
| Esc A | 1.43 0.16 | 0.61 0.54 | -2.38 0.02 | |

CHAPTER 9

STUDY 4: EES FIELD TEST

While Study 3 provides initial evidence to support the hypothesized distinctions between escape, flow, and recreation, real-world implementation of the EES represents the strongest test of the predicted relationships. As such, Study 4 builds on the findings of Study 3 by administering the EES to individuals participating in actual escape, flow, and recreational activities. Given the results obtained in Study 3, the hypotheses tested in Study 4 remain identical with several exceptions. As participants in the recreation condition are likely to seek out activities involving the consumption of media, higher levels of mental absorption are expected. Consequently, H2 has been restated for Study 4.

- **H2:** Participants engaged in both forms of escape, flow, and recreation will exhibit equal levels of mental absorption.

Furthermore, as the level of affirmation experienced within the recreation condition is dependent upon the presence of friends and family members, predictions concerning the recreation condition with respect to affirmation cannot be made a priori. Consequently, H6 has also been restated for Study 4.

- **H6:** Participants engaged in passive escape will exhibit a lower degree of affirmation than participants engaged in flow and active escape.

Method and Design

The 24-item survey was administered to 71 undergraduate business and economics students at Wheaton College. Each participant was assigned to one of four activity conditions (active escape, passive escape, flow, and recreation). As in Study 3, a “known group” procedure was used in assigning participants to the active escape and flow conditions. Twenty participants self-identified as “video gamers” (defined here as participating in at least one extended session of gaming per week) were placed in the active escape condition, and 18 participants self-identified

as “athletes” (defined here as participating in a competitive sport at least once per week) were placed in the flow condition. The remaining participants were randomly assigned to either the passive escape (n = 17) or recreation (n = 16) conditions.

Participants in Study 4 were given a sealed packet containing the EES (Appendix D). The cover sheet provided a brief description of the assigned condition, and participants were given one week to complete the described activity (e.g., play a video game for stress relief). Subjects were instructed to complete the survey contained within the packet immediately following the activity. In contrast to Study 3, directions given to participants in the passive escape condition were slightly modified by constraining the range of qualifying activities to 1) watching TV or a movie, 2) reading a book or magazine, 3) listening to music, or 4) surfing the internet. The addition of this constraint was in response to a small number of participants in Study 3 that chose non-consumption-related activities as passive escape (e.g., taking a nap).

Results

The results of Study 4 are presented in Table 9-1 and Figure 9-1. As seen in Study 3, with the exception of mental absorption and alleviation of negative affect, ANOVAs performed at the individual factor level revealed a main effect of activity type on mean factor scores.

Subsequently, t-tests were performed for each pair of conditions, and the results are presented in Table 9-2. Given the results of Study 3 that support the directionality of proposed hypotheses, one-tailed t-tests were used in the analyses.

In support of H1a, participants in the passive escape condition (M = 3.94) exhibited a significantly greater degree of stress avoidance compared to participants in the recreation condition (M = 3.03), $t(31) = -2.94$, $p < .01$. Additionally, participants in the active escape condition (M = 4.01) also exhibited a significantly greater degree of stress avoidance compared

to participants in the recreation condition, $t(34) = -3.13$, $p < .01$. In support of H1b, participants in the flow condition ($M = 2.38$) exhibited the lowest degree of stress avoidance, although the difference between the flow and recreation conditions was only marginally significant, $t(32) = -1.57$, $p = .06$.

In support of H2, no main effect of activity type on mean factor score was observed for the alleviation of negative affect dimension, $F(3, 67) = .59$, $p = .63$. This result indicates that, as predicted, mental absorption occurs at comparable levels across all four types of activity. In reviewing the written descriptions provided by participants during the priming task, only 2 out of 16 participants in the recreation condition imagined activities not involving the consumption of media. As such, a high level of mental absorption was observed within the recreation condition.

In support of H3, participants in the active escape condition ($M = 3.46$) exhibited the greatest degree of participation in fantasy compared to participants in the flow ($M = 1.82$), recreation ($M = 2.94$), and passive escape conditions ($M = 2.51$), $p < .05$ for t-tests across all relevant comparisons. As observed in Study 3, participants in the active escape condition responded positively with respect to the fantasy dimension (i.e., mean score greater than 3) while participants in all other conditions responded negatively (i.e., means scores less than 3).

In support of H4, no main effect of activity type on mean factor score was observed for the alleviation of negative affect dimension, $F(3, 67) = 1.50$, $p = .22$. This result indicates that, as predicted, the alleviation of negative affect occurs at comparable levels across all four types of activity.

In support of H5, participants in the flow condition ($M = 1.57$) exhibited the lowest degree of challenge-skill asymmetry compared to participants in the passive escape ($M = 4.49$), active escape ($M = 3.47$), and recreation conditions ($M = 3.75$), $p < .01$ for t-tests across all

relevant comparisons. This result indicates that, as predicted, participants engaged in flow experienced levels of challenge equivalent to skill; in contrast, participants engaged in recreation and escape experienced levels of challenge much lower than their respective levels of skill.

In support of H6, participants in the passive escape condition ($M = 3.02$) exhibited a significantly lower degree of affirmation compared to participants in the flow condition ($M = 4.15$), $t(33) = 4.29$, $p < .01$. Additionally, participants in the passive escape condition also exhibited a significantly lower degree of affirmation compared to participants in the active escape condition ($M = 3.62$), $t(35) = -2.17$, $p < .05$. As observed in Study 3, participants in the recreation condition ($M = 3.38$) did not experience a significant difference in affirmation compared to participants in the active escape condition, $t(34) = -.93$, $p = .18$. Again, in reviewing the written descriptions collected during the study, many of the participants engaging in recreational activities reported the involvement of friends and family members.

Finally, in support of H7, participants in the active escape condition ($M = 4.03$) exhibited a significantly greater degree of empowerment compared to participants in the passive escape condition ($M = 3.18$), $t(35) = -3.11$, $p < .01$. Additionally, participants in the flow condition ($M = 3.83$) also exhibited a significantly greater degree of empowerment compared to participants in the passive escape condition, $t(33) = 2.04$, $p < .05$. Furthermore, participants in the active escape condition exhibited greater degrees of empowerment than participants in the recreation condition ($M = 3.15$), $t(34) = -3.14$, $p < .01$. Likewise, participants in the flow condition also exhibited greater degrees of empowerment compared to participants in the recreation condition, $t(32) = 2.08$, $p < .05$. As predicted, there was no significant difference between the flow and active escape conditions, $t(36) = -.77$, $p = .22$, indicating that empowerment was experienced equally by participants in both conditions.

Discussion

The results of Study 4 support the proposed hypotheses and confirm the patterns of data observed in Study 3. Again, the evidence suggests that escape behaviors provide stress relief through mental absorption, and more specifically, that active escape offers the benefits of flow (i.e., affirmation and empowerment) without the effort required by flow. Additionally, in line with the restated hypotheses (H2 and H6), participants in the recreation condition exhibited high levels of mental absorption and affirmation. As seen in Study 3, the majority of participants in the recreation condition consumed some form of media during their chosen activity, leading to a greater degree of mental absorption overall. Likewise, a large number of those participants also reported the involvement of friends and family members, and consequently, greater levels of affirmation were experienced. Finally, marginally significant differences observed in Study 3 were statistically significant under the real-world conditions of Study 4. Most notably, participants in the active escape condition exhibited greater degrees of empowerment than participants in the recreation condition, a vital distinction within the escape framework.

Table 9-1. Field Test: Descriptive statistics by dimension.

| Dimension | Flow n = 21 | Recreation n = 30 | P. Escape n = 21 | A. Escape n = 14 |
|--|--|----------------------|---------------------|---------------------|
| Stress Relief (F = 11.56, p = .00) | 2.37 ^a 1.30 ^b | 3.03 1.11 | 3.94 0.62 | 4.01 0.77 |
| Mental Absorption (F = .59, p = .62) | 3.33 0.94 | 3.11 0.71 | 3.46 0.98 | 3.48 0.93 |
| Fantasy and Role-Play (F = 13.47, p = .00) | 1.82 0.62 | 2.94 0.80 | 2.51 1.04 | 3.46 0.78 |
| Alleviation of Negative Affect (F = 1.50 p = .22) | 4.06 0.86 | 4.08 0.71 | 3.69 1.02 | 3.63 0.66 |
| Challenge-Skill Asymmetry (F = 32.14, p = .00) | 1.57 0.70 | 3.75 1.01 | 4.49 0.76 | 3.47 1.12 |
| Affirmation (F = 6.52, p = .00) | 4.15 0.55 | 3.38 0.85 | 3.02 0.96 | 3.62 0.71 |
| Empowerment (F = 4.57, p = .01) | 3.83 0.92 | 3.15 1.01 | 3.18 0.99 | 4.03 0.68 |

^a Mean ^b Standard Deviation

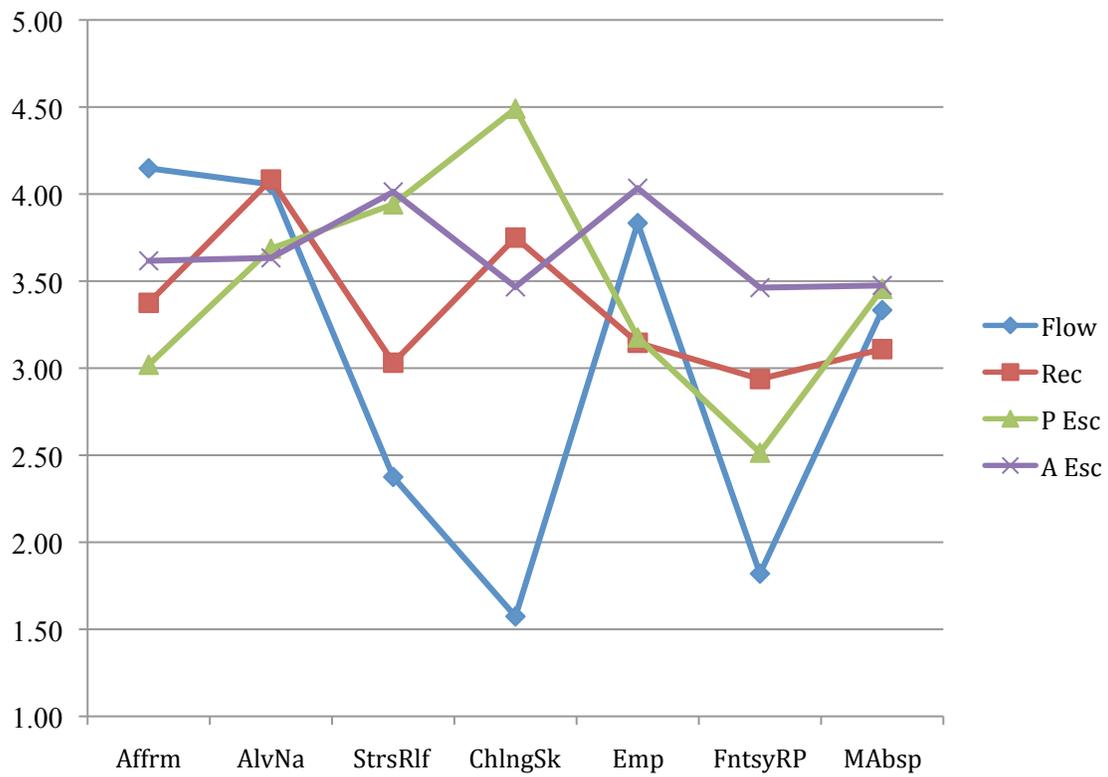


Figure 9-1. Field Test: Profiles by condition.

Table 9-2. Field Test: Pairwise t-tests by dimension.

| Stress Relief | | | | | Challenge-Skill Asymmetry | | | | |
|--|---|---------------|---------------|-------|---------------------------|----------------|---------------|---------------|-------|
| | Flow | Rec | Esc P | Esc A | | Flow | Rec | Esc P | Esc A |
| Flow | | | | | Flow | | | | |
| Rec | -1.57 ^a 0.06 ^b | | | | Rec | -7.37 0.00 | | | |
| Esc P | -4.50 0.00 | -2.94 0.00 | | | Esc P | -11.82 0.00 | -2.39 0.01 | | |
| Esc A | -4.78 0.00 | -3.13 0.00 | -0.31 0.38 | | Esc A | -6.15 0.00 | 0.79 0.22 | 3.20 0.00 | |
| ^a t-stat ^b p-value | | | | | | | | | |
| Empowerment | | | | | Fantasy and Role-Play | | | | |
| | Flow | Rec | Esc P | Esc A | | Flow | Rec | Esc P | Esc A |
| Flow | | | | | Flow | | | | |
| Rec | 2.08 0.02 | | | | Rec | -4.58 0.00 | | | |
| Esc P | 2.04 0.02 | -0.08 0.47 | | | Esc P | -2.42 0.01 | 1.31 0.10 | | |
| Esc A | -0.77 0.22 | -3.14 0.00 | -3.11 0.00 | | Esc A | -7.13 0.00 | -1.98 0.03 | -3.17 0.00 | |

Table 9-2. Continued.

| Affirmation | | | | |
|-------------|--------------|---------------|---------------|-------|
| | Flow | Rec | Esc P | Esc A |
| Flow | | | | |
| Rec | 3.18 0.00 | | | |
| Esc P | 4.29 0.00 | 1.12 0.14 | | |
| Esc A | 2.55 0.01 | -0.93 0.18 | -2.17 0.02 | |

CHAPTER 10 GENERAL DISCUSSION

The implementation of the Experiential Escape Scale, in conjunction with the in-depth case analyses, begins to provide insight into the motivations and psychological processes occurring during escape. The proposed dimensions of escape, emerging from the case-study analyses, were validated in Studies 3 and 4, demonstrating clear distinctions between the constructs of flow and escape.

Although both forms of activity lead to mental absorption, detachment from reality, and the alleviation of negative affect, the mechanisms that underlie each are unique. While mental absorption during flow results from an intense focus on challenging goals, Studies 3 and 4 suggest that individuals engaged in escape activities experience an asymmetry between challenge and skill. More specifically, the balance between high levels of skill and challenge driving the flow experience are absent during escape; rather, individuals participating in escape possess levels of skill well above the challenges inherent to a chosen activity. Consequently, the opportunity to achieve success without the fear of failure becomes the means by which affirmation and empowerment are experienced during escape.

As such, the results of these studies begin to shed light on the reasons why growing number of consumers are seeking stress relief through active escape (i.e., Second Life). While all four types of activity examined in this research provide comparable levels of stress relief (i.e., alleviation of negative affect), only active escape provides high levels of empowerment and affirmation without the additional stress of challenging goals. In essence, individuals participating in active escape temporarily derive the emotional and psychological benefits of flow without exerting the same degree of effort. Although recreation and passive escape are capable of reducing stress through mental absorption, neither meets the need for self-esteem and

control simultaneously. Additionally, the empowerment aspect of recreation appears to emerge only when friends or family members are involved, which is not always feasible.

Consequently, active escape presents itself as a low-cost, high-benefit solution to psychological stress. Video games and virtual communities, continually increasing in popularity, succeed by capitalizing on this property of active escape. Anecdotally, at the time of this writing, the current best-selling video game title is *God of War III*, in which players assume the identity of a Greek god with fantastic powers and abilities. Critical reviews have praised the game's richly detailed environment, capable of providing fully immersive experiences. It is apparent that *God of War III* has been designed to elicit feelings of empowerment and affirmation in the participant. The marketing for *God of War III* speaks directly to this phenomenon through advertisements depicting emasculated men (e.g., a wimpy desk manager) entranced by the game's vivid design.

Herein, however, lies the limitation of this current research. Although Studies 3 and 4 demonstrated the immediate short-term benefits of active escape (e.g., the wimpy manager receives a boost in self-esteem while playing *God of War III*), the long-term effects of habitual escape behavior remain unknown. While Csikszentmihalyi (1990) describes flow as an "optimal experience" leading to long-term happiness and personal growth, these positive benefits are derived from the continuous process of overcoming challenge and improving skill. Ultimately, active escape lacks this crucial component, calling into question the long-term efficacy of active escape. As discussed in the introduction, it appears that habitual escape behavior often leads to addiction and other pathological conditions.

In a recent documentary entitled "Digital Nation" (Dretzin, 2010), an in-depth look at South Korea's widespread gaming culture reveals a darker side of video game consumption. As

the number of video game addicts in South Korea continues to grow exponentially, several government-funded treatment centers have been established. At the present time, these centers are treating video game addiction through a “detox” process focused on physically separating addicts from their games. The treatment’s efficacy, however, has been low. As suggested by this current research, the appeal of active escape lies in its ability to offer instant affirmation and empowerment to participants; without effective strategies for confronting identity- and control-related stressors, addicts are likely to continue their self-destructive behaviors.

The propensity for addictive behavior in individuals participating in active escape might possibly be explained through self-discrepancy theory (Higgins, 1987). As discussed in the literature review, perceived self-discrepancy (i.e., a difference between the actual and ideal selves) produces identity-related stressors that cause individuals to seek out coping mechanisms. Those individuals choosing active escape are able to cope in part by adopting a fantasy persona during the experience. Assuming that the fantasy persona represents the ideal self (e.g., an avatar in Second Life) or elements of the ideal self (e.g., a Greek god with power), individuals participating in active escape are able to instantaneously overcome perceived self-discrepancies.

In contrast, individuals routinely experiencing flow eliminate perceived self-discrepancies by continually improving the actual self through participation in progressively challenging activities. At the end of a flow experience, the individual feels accomplished because a real-life goal has been achieved. Participants in active escape, however, must return to an unchanged actual self upon concluding their activity. Not only does the perceived self-discrepancy remain, that discrepancy might actually increase as a result of prolonged engagement in active escape. Having experienced the ideal self within a fantasy world, the actual

self may appear even more mundane to the individual. Consequently, the individual continually returns to the fantasy world, motivated by a cycle of increasing self-discrepancy.

World of Warcraft, as discussed earlier, capitalizes on this phenomenon through its game design. While most video games have built-in mechanics that allow for character growth within the game, World of Warcraft is centered wholly around this principle. The primary focus of Warcraft revolves around “leveling-up” an avatar that continuously increases in strength and ability. Each new iteration of Warcraft increases the maximum level cap, enticing players to invest even greater amounts of time. In essence, individuals playing Warcraft have ideal selves that can grow and become even more ideal (i.e., through leveling up) while their actual selves remain unchanged. As a result, individuals playing Warcraft may perceive progressively increasing self-discrepancies, driving them back into the fantasy world where affirmation and empowerment can be experienced.

While this present research has identified those motivations that cause individuals to seek escape, the long-term consequences of escape must be examined empirically to provide evidence beyond these anecdotal examples. As escape behaviors become increasingly widespread and integrated within the everyday lives of consumers, the psychological benefits and risks of escape must be clearly understood. As such, future research should focus on exploring the long-term effects of escape behaviors, identifying the potential gains and losses inherent to habitual participation.

APPENDIX A
EES SCALE ITEMS

Avoidance Behavior

1. I felt like I needed to “get away” before starting the activity.
2. I needed to take a break from reality prior to starting the activity.
3. I was motivated by a desire to “get my mind off of things.”
4. I was driven by a need to “get away from it all.”
5. I was trying my best to avoid stress during the activity.
6. I was trying to shift my attention away from a stressful event or situation.
7. I wanted to get my mind off the stressful things happening in my life.
8. I wanted to distance myself mentally from a stressful event or situation.

Stress Relief

9. The main purpose of the activity was to relieve stress.
10. Getting rid of stress was the primary reason I started the activity.
11. My goal was to relax by participating in the activity.
12. The goal of the activity was to de-stress.
13. I started the activity because I needed to loosen up.
14. I started the activity because I wanted to take it easy.
15. Stress relief was the most important part of the activity.
16. Finding time to relax was the only thing I cared about.

Mental Absorption

17. My attention was focused entirely on the activity.
18. It felt like my mind was being drawn into the activity.
19. My thoughts were completely absorbed into the activity.

20. I was not able to concentrate on anything other the activity.
21. I could not focus my thoughts on anything but the activity.
22. While participating in the activity, there was nothing else on my mind.
23. My attention was completely preoccupied by the activity.
24. I was no longer conscious of anything other than the activity.

Detachment from Reality

25. I felt disconnected from the “real world.”
26. It felt like I was no longer a part of the “real world.”
27. The activity allowed me to detach myself from real life.
28. I felt separated from reality while participating in the activity.
29. Reality seemed to fade away from my consciousness.
30. Reality disappeared while I was engaged in the activity.
31. I was no longer aware of my surroundings.
32. I stopped paying attention to the world around me.

Immersion into Fantasy World

33. I became an active participant within a fantasy world.
34. The activity allowed me to experience a world completely different than my own.
35. I was part of an alternate reality for the duration of the activity.
36. The activity created an interactive fantasy world.
37. I was taken to an alternate reality by the activity.
38. It felt like I was mentally transported to a different world.
39. The activity placed me in a reality different than my own.
40. I was given the chance to experience a fantasy world.

Participation in Role-Play

- 41. I received a new identity while participating in the activity
- 42. I was given the opportunity to adopt a new persona.
- 43. I had the chance to become somebody else.
- 44. The activity gave me an entirely different identity.
- 45. The activity allowed me to play the role of a character.
- 46. I took on a different persona for the duration of the activity.
- 47. I participated in the activity using a different identity.
- 48. I temporarily became another person while engaged in the activity.

Alleviation of Negative Affect

- 49. Negative emotions began to disappear during the activity.
- 50. Feelings of anxiety and worry faded away from my mind.
- 51. Participating in the activity put me in a better mood.
- 52. My overall mood began to improve when I started the activity.
- 53. The activity helped me to overcome feelings of anxiety and worry.
- 54. I was relieved of negative emotions while engaged in the activity.
- 55. The activity allowed me to get rid of negative feelings.
- 56. I felt better emotionally while participating in the activity.

Challenge-Skill Asymmetry

- 57. Achieving success in the activity required little effort.
- 58. I had more than enough skill to meet the challenge of the activity.
- 59. I completed the activity without even trying.
- 60. I was not challenged by the activity at all.

- 61. It was easy to perform at a very high level.
- 62. Performing well during the activity was effortless.
- 63. I did not need to exert myself to complete the activity.
- 64. My skill was much greater than the challenge presented by the activity.

Affirmation of Identity

- 65. The activity allowed me to feel good about myself.
- 66. I began to think positively about myself during the activity.
- 67. I liked myself more while I was engaged in the activity.
- 68. The activity boosted my self-esteem.
- 69. I felt affirmed while participating in the activity.
- 70. Participating in the activity gave me more confidence.
- 71. I really believed in myself while participating in the activity.
- 72. The activity allowed me to feel like a better person.

Empowerment

- 73. I was the one in charge during the activity.
- 74. It felt like I had a great degree of authority.
- 75. I had the power to change the outcome of the activity.
- 76. I had the ability to influence the events of the activity.
- 77. The activity allowed me to feel in control.
- 78. I had complete control over what was happening.
- 79. I felt empowered by the activity.
- 80. Participating in the activity gave me a sense of control.

APPENDIX B SCALE DEVELOPMENT STUDY INSTRUCTIONS

Escape Condition Instructions

In this study, I am interested in understanding the phenomenon known as consumer escape. In the context of marketing, consumer escape occurs when an individual uses a product or service as a means of stress relief. During an escape experience, individuals attempt to avoid reality by turning their attention to some form of entertainment. For example, watching an action movie or flipping through a lifestyle magazine are common forms of consumer escape. Oftentimes, there is a feeling of mentally “checking out” or “getting away.”

The goal of my research is to understand the various psychological processes that occur whenever an individual participates in an escape activity. For example – what causes an individual to seek out an escape experience? What kind of things does an individual experience while participating? Are there any consequences?

The survey that you will be asked to complete has been designed to answer some of these questions. For the survey to be most useful, it should be administered right after an individual has actually participated in an escape activity. However, given the difficulty of simulating an escape experience in a laboratory setting, you will be asked to imagine yourself participating in an escape activity instead.

For this to work, you will need to put some effort into imagining the different scenarios that will be described in this survey. I know that this may not be the easiest thing to do, so all I ask is that you do your best. I thank you in advance for your cooperation, and I truly appreciate your willingness to participate!

Before I ask you to imagine an escape experience, I would like for you to take a few minutes to imagine yourself in a stressful situation – as mentioned in the introduction, consumer escape occurs as a reaction to stress. It may be helpful to think of a stressful situation you have encountered recently or expect to encounter in the near future. Some examples might include preparing for a final exam or searching for a job. As you imagine yourself in the scenario, try to make the experience as specific as possible. Afterwards you will be asked to write a short description.

In this part of the experiment, I would like for you to take a few minutes to imagine yourself participating in an escape activity. Preferably, the activity you choose should be something you actually do in real life. As you imagine yourself in the scenario, try to make the experience as specific and realistic as possible. Also, try to imagine the events that led up to your experience as well as how you felt afterwards. Afterwards you will be asked to write a short description.

Flow Condition Instructions

In this study, I am interested in understanding the phenomenon known as flow within the context of consumer behavior. According to psychologists, flow is a mental state that occurs when an

individual is fully immersed in a challenging activity. During flow, individuals experience a state of intense focus and concentration that results in a high level of performance. Often, time appears to slow down and actions seem to become automatic. Some examples of flow might include an athlete “in the zone” during a competition or a musician “in the groove” during a performance.

The goal of my research is to understand the various psychological processes that occur whenever an individual participates in a flow activity. For example – what causes an individual to seek out a flow experience? What kind of things does an individual experience while participating? Are there any consequences?

Recreation Condition Instructions

In this study, I am interested in examining the different ways that consumers participate in recreational activities. More specifically, I would like to study how and why individuals choose to consume entertainment products and services. For example, some of these activities might include watching a movie or attending a concert with friends. While there are many different reasons to seek entertainment, I am particularly interested in situations where an individual simply wants to “have some fun” or “have a good time.”

The goal of my research is to understand the various psychological processes that occur whenever an individual participates in a recreational activity. For example – what causes an individual to seek out certain forms of entertainment? What kind of things does an individual experience while participating? Are there any consequences?

APPENDIX C
PILOT TEST VERBAL INSTRUCTIONS

Recreation Condition Instructions

Whenever we choose to participate in an enjoyable activity like watching a movie, shopping with friends, or playing a friendly game of basketball, we are often motivated by a number of different factors. Sometimes we seek out enjoyable activities because we need to blow off some steam or we are taking a break from work.

Today, however, I am interested in the scenario where consumers participate in an enjoyable activity for the sole purpose of having fun. For example, watching one of your favorite DVDs with a friend just because it's a fun thing to do. Or, playing a game of basketball not because you are trying to stay in shape, but because you find the activity enjoyable in itself.

Escape Condition Instructions

Oftentimes, when we are feeling really stressed or overworked, we will turn to certain activities to relieve that stress or take a break. For example, after a long day of studying, you might play some video games or listen to some music on your iPod. In today's study, I am interested specifically in those stress relief activities that involve some sort of product or service.

Flow Condition Instructions

According to psychologists, flow is a mental state that occurs when an individual is fully immersed in a challenging activity. During flow, individuals experience a state of intense focus and concentration that results in a high level of performance. Often, time appears to slow down and actions seem to become automatic. Some examples of flow might include an athlete "in the zone" during a competition or a musician "in the groove" during a performance. Other examples might include writing a challenging essay for class, or working on the engine of your car over the weekend.

APPENDIX D FIELD TEST INSTRUCTIONS

Flow Condition Instructions

In this study, I am interested in understanding the psychological processes that occur when individuals participate in various athletic activities. More specifically, I am interested in those situations where an athlete is performing at his or her peak level. Oftentimes, we refer to this as being “in the zone” or “on fire.” It’s those moments where you feel as if you’re being pushed to the limit, but you respond by rising to the challenge. This is what psychologists refer to as a “flow experience.”

The survey included in this packet has been designed to capture the mental state of an individual while he or she is engaged in a flow experience. As a participant in this study, I would like for you to complete this survey immediately after you have experienced flow during an athletic activity of your choice. If you are not able to complete the survey right away, please do it as soon as possible.

Finally, please keep this survey sealed until you are ready to complete it. As tempting as it may be, do not open this packet until you have already participated in a flow experience. When you are ready to fill out this survey, please allot 10 minutes in advance for its completion.

Recreation Condition Instructions

In this study, I am interested in understanding the psychological processes that occur when individuals participate in various recreational activities. More specifically, I am interested in those situations where individuals choose to participate in personally enjoyable activities.

Whenever we choose to participate in an enjoyable activity (e.g., watching a movie, shopping with friends, playing a friendly game of basketball), we are often motivated by a number of different factors. For example, we sometimes seek out enjoyable activities because we need to blow off steam after a particularly rough day.

In my research, however, I am interested in studying those situations where individuals participate in an enjoyable activity for the sole purpose of having fun. For example, watching a movie with friends, not because you’re stressed out, but simply because it’s a fun thing to do. This is what psychologists refer to as a “recreational activity.”

The survey included in this packet has been designed to capture the mental state of an individual while he or she is engaged in a recreational activity. As a participant in this study, you will need to set aside some time over the next few days to intentionally have some fun. Following the recreational activity, I would like for you to immediately complete this survey. If you are not able to complete the survey right away, please do it as soon as possible.

Finally, please keep this survey sealed until you are ready to complete it. As tempting as it may be, do not open this packet until you have already participated in a recreational activity. When you are ready to fill out this survey, please allot 10 minutes in advance for its completion.

Passive Escape Condition Instructions

In this study, I am interested in understanding the psychological processes that occur when individuals participate in various activities meant to relieve stress. More specifically, I am interested in those situations where individuals use one of the following activities as a means of stress relief:

1. Listening to music
2. Watching TV or a movie
3. Reading a book or magazine
4. Surfing the internet (not gaming)

There are many reasons why we might participate in one of the above activities. For example, an individual might watch a movie just for fun, or surf the internet because he or she needs to buy something. In my research, however, I am interested in studying those situations where an individual participates in one of the above activities as a direct response to stress.

The survey included in this packet has been designed to capture the mental state of an individual while he or she is engaged in a stress relief activity. As a participant in this study, I would like for you to choose one of the above activities and use it to relax the next time you are feeling stressed. Following the stress relief activity, I would like for you to immediately complete this survey. If you are not able to complete the survey right away, please do it as soon as possible.

Finally, please keep this survey sealed until you are ready to complete it. As tempting as it may be, do not open this packet until you have already participated in a stress relief activity. When you are ready to fill out this survey, please allot 10 minutes in advance for its completion.

Active Escape Condition Instructions

In this study, I am interested in understanding the psychological processes that occur when individuals participate in various activities meant to relieve stress. More specifically, I am interested in those situations where individuals play video games for stress relief.

There are many reasons why an individual might play video games. For example, an individual might play just for fun, or because he or she is hanging out with friends. In my research, however, I am interested in studying those situations where individuals play video games as a direct response to stress.

The survey included in this packet has been designed to capture the mental state of an individual while he or she is engaged in a video game for the purpose of stress relief. As a participant in this study, I would like for you to choose a video game you often play and use it to relax the next

time you are feeling stressed. When you are finished playing, I would like for you to immediately complete this survey. If you are not able to complete the survey right away, please do it as soon as possible.

Finally, please keep this survey sealed until you are ready to complete it. As tempting as it may be, do not open this packet until you have already finished playing. When you are ready to fill out the survey, please allot 10 minutes in advance for its completion.

Survey: Part I

If you are reading this part of the survey, you should have already finished participating in the flow activity of your choice. If you haven't, please put away this survey and come back to it after you have finished.

Before we get to the actual survey, there are a couple of questions that I would like for you to answer.

1. What activity did you choose to participate in? Please provide a brief description of what happened during the activity.
2. When and where did this activity take place? How long did it last?

Survey: Part II

Starting on the next page, you will be asked a series of questions about the activity you just participated in. Please note that, for each question—a score of 1 corresponds to “Strongly Disagree” and a score of 5 corresponds to “Strongly Agree.” Answer all the questions as honestly as you can. After completing the survey, please return this entire packet as soon as possible. Thanks!

APPENDIX E
FINAL 24-ITEM EES

| | <u>Strongly</u> <u>Disagree</u> | | | | <u>Strongly</u> <u>Agree</u> |
|---|------------------------------------|---|---|---|---------------------------------|
| 1. I was motivated by a desire to “get my mind off of things.” | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 2. It felt like my mind was being drawn into the activity. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 3. I became an active participant within a fantasy world. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 4. My overall mood began to improve when I started the activity. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 5. Achieving success in the activity required little effort. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 6. I began to think positively about myself during the activity. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 7. I was the one in charge during the activity. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 8. I was driven by a need to “get away from it all.” | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 9. While participating in the activity, there was nothing else on my mind. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 10. The activity allowed me to experience a world completely different than my own. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 11. I was relieved of negative emotions while engaged in the activity. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 12. I completed the activity without even trying. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

| | <u>Strongly</u> <u>Disagree</u> | | | | <u>Strongly</u> <u>Agree</u> |
|--|------------------------------------|---|---|---|---------------------------------|
| 13. The activity boosted my self-esteem. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 14. I felt better emotionally while participating in the activity. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 15. I did not need to exert myself to complete the activity. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 16. Participating in the activity gave me more confidence. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 17. The activity allowed me to feel in control. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 18. I started the activity because I needed to loosen up. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 19. I stopped paying attention to the world around me. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 20. I had the chance to become somebody else. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 21. It felt like I had a great degree of authority. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 22. I started the activity because I needed to loosen up. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 23. I was no longer aware of my surroundings. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 24. I was given the opportunity to adopt a new persona. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

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BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Andrew Kuo earned a bachelor's degree in marketing from the Warrington College of Business at the University of Florida. In 2004, he entered the marketing PhD program at the University of Florida and graduated in August of 2010. Andrew joined the business faculty at Wheaton College in the fall of 2009 as an assistant professor.