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Holiday Retail Hype

By Collette Fischer

Remember the Tickle-Me-Elmo doll? In 1996, this little stuffed animal triggered an enormous holiday craze; it caused people to push and stampede in toy stores and some consumers even paid as much as \$2,000 just to get one. What is it that puts holiday consumers into such a crazy mob mentality? It is quite amazing how marketers and advertisers are able to use simple psychological methods to manipulate consumers into wanting and needing all sorts of things.

During the Christmas season, consumer brain-washing is at its finest as retailers are anxious about reaching their annual goals. Consumers usually don't even realize that their buying habits are dependent on creative advertising campaigns. In the case of Tickle-Me-Elmo, it was TV personality Rosie O'Donnell who initiated the Elmo frenzy. In June of that year, marketing executives from Tyco Toys, the marketing company for the doll, sent

200 Tickle-Me-Elmo dolls to Rosie's producers and another doll to her one-year-old son. Rosie would throw the Elmo dolls into the audience as prizes and, subsequently, her TV audience (which was mostly made up of stay-at-home moms) began to realize that this was the toy to have.

Today, when TV personality Oprah Winfrey tapes her annual episode called "Oprah's Favorite Things," some viewers don't even pause to think that maybe there



is a grand marketing scheme behind all of the "must-have" gadgets. Ironically, Oprah airs this episode right before the holiday shopping rush, leaving viewers with just enough time to figure out what to put on their personal wish lists. Such media tactics are great at persuading and ultimately conditioning viewers to be drawn towards particular products. This year,

Oprah's wish list was almost entirely full of items backed by big brands like Ugg Boots, Apple, Nike, and Ralph Lauren. Even the elves who delivered the items to the studio audience were sponsored by UPS.

So, when you are shopping for must-haves this holiday season, pay careful attention to avoiding the holiday hype and don't let yourself buy into needless fads.

Remember the 1996 Tickle-Me-Elmo that some people paid \$2,000

dollars for? Elmo can now be found on eBay for \$15.99. This \$1,984.01 price drop just

goes to show how ridiculous the retailer-consumer game can get. At the end of the day, when we consumers are all sitting at home with boxes full of Beanie Babies, Cabbage Patch Dolls, and Giggling Sesame Street Characters, it is the retailers who get the last laugh.

Combating Holiday Stress

By Jake Foster



“The holidays do bring a certain amount of stress for everyone, but there are also simple things one can do to combat that stress.”

The holidays are finally upon us, but they might mean different things to different people. For most of us there is a definite joy that comes with the holiday season. For others it is just added stress that they do not want. The suicide rate even shows a rise during the holidays. The holidays do bring a certain amount of stress for everyone, but there are also simple things one can do to combat that stress.

There are many different ways stress can be brought on. There are even factors that can be stressful that are totally unrelated to the holidays. Every college student knows the end of the semester means tests, papers, and presentations. That can be enough stress in itself to be bestowed upon anyone. In addition, the countless shopping trips, hanging of decorations and all the family gatherings are enough to drive anyone crazy. But there is still hope. Here are a few simple things you can do to make the holidays more enjoyable and less stressful.

First of all, just staying organized can help quite a bit. It can also help in remembering tasks at hand. With good planning and organization everything can go more smoothly. In staying organized it is also a good idea to take things step

by step. Do not try to do too much at once. It can be very overwhelming to look at long term goals without being able to do much to work towards that goal on a daily basis. It can also save a lot of time for relaxation or even to get more things done.

Taking time for some exercise is also a good way to combat the holiday demands. Even taking a brisk walk can help relieve a lot of stress. There are many different ways to exercise. Any sporting activity could be a good way to take your mind off of whatever may be bothering you. Humor, which could be considered an exercise in itself, can also be very useful to deal with stressful situations.

Laughing seems to always put one in a better mood. Just like working out, humor can take your mind off what is bothering you. Just about everyone can agree that laughing and smiling is a much more pleasant atmosphere than yelling and screaming. A way to stay in good spirits is to make strong connections or reestablish relationships.

Not only do close relationships provide love in one's life, but family and friends can help you alleviate stress. They can be that helpful shoulder to cry on,

or they can even provide you with good advice. You should try and view winter break as a way to reconnect with friends and family. Most importantly, winter break can be a good time to reconnect with you and to remember that you need to take care of yourself.

Do not put yourself through too much that would be bad for you in the long run. Try and partake in activities that are relaxing and as stress free as possible. When you have too many activities and responsibilities it is easy to forget about your own overall health. Try and avoid using unhealthy ways of dealing with stress in the short-term, such as drinking too much alcohol, using tobacco, over eating, etc. Eating right and exercise can also help you feel better about yourself and alleviate stress linked with self-esteem.

In conclusion the holidays are meant to share love with family and friends. They are supposed to bring joy to you and your loved ones. They are by no means meant to be a burden or unpleasant. That the holidays can indeed be stressful, but doing these few simple things can help lessen that strain and make the season more enjoyable for everyone. Have a fun and safe vacation!



The Psychology of Gift Giving

By Lisa Egan

A pink or purple sweater? Large or extra large? Something practical or something funny? Should I spend a lot or a little; I wonder what they will spend on me? These questions are only some of many that are swarming in the heads of frantic shoppers as they hurry to complete their Christmas gift list. Why do we allow ourselves to stress out so much trying to ensure the success of only one day of the year?

The answer lies in the psychology behind giving gifts. When we give gifts to our friends and family, we are doing more than just ex-

changing material things. There is a personal meaning behind our gift-giving, as we are attempting to show our loved ones that we care about them and thought about them enough to pick out a special gift that we thought represented them best. This puts a lot of pressure on us to pick out the right thing, as we don't want our representation to somehow offend the receiver (Vreeland 1998).

Unfortunately, many of us try and get it wrong. According to Leslie Vreeland from [Psychology Today](#) (1998), Americans spend "over \$40 billion for holiday

presents...and up to \$4 billion of that money goes for gifts that recipients don't appreciate." Knowing all this, the stress of the season can be better understood. In order to make the Christmas season a little less stressful, here are some helpful hints Vreeland suggested:

- * Set limits. Cap the number of gifts one person can give to another or the amount of money that can be spent per present.

- * Pick family names out of a hat: each member buys a gift only for the person on the slip.

- * Prepare a list of what each

family member wants, along with their sizes.

- * Pool money to purchase one big gift for each person.

- * Shop early. Pick up a present when something catches your eye as right for a person and put it away in the closet till Christmas.

- * Use your imagination. Arrange for theater tickets, a special day's outing (a visit to a spa, say) or a weekend trip.

And when all else fails, simply grin and bear it. Remember Christmas is but one day-and you've got 365 days until next year's giving ground.

Holiday Traditions:

By Nicole Fritz

The Importance of Family Bonding

Whether your holiday of choice is Christmas, Hanukkah, Ramadan, or Kwanza, among others, you most likely have a tradition that has gone on in your family for generations. Holiday traditions are practiced by people of all cultures, all religions, and all socio-economic backgrounds. Most traditions involve spending time with family or friends, but we rarely recognize how important the traditions are to the psychological bonds of these relationships.

A study by Fiese and Tomcho discovered that holiday traditions, especially religious traditions, confirm relationships, connect beliefs and values, and bring out the meaning in rituals (2001). Their research found that couples had higher marital satisfaction when

traditions were routinely practiced as a family. They tested their theories on married couples, but generalized their results to apply to other family members as well.

A study by Hammond also found that consistent family traditions affected the development of identity and self-concept in late adolescence (2001). Family cohesiveness and expressiveness, both concepts related to family traditions, were positively related to the development of adolescents' identity. The study also found that religious traditions were especially important in developing a sense of one's identity.

Other research has found that the practice of family traditions

keeps families close, makes relationships stronger, and gives family members a sense of belonging. Together, these factors promote health and well-being in individuals. Research has also suggested that family traditions are an effective coping method for individuals dealing with death or divorce (Thouin 2003).

So whether your holiday traditions involve spinning dreidels or wearing that Santa sweater your grandma gave you, remember how truly important the traditions are in creating lasting bonds between family and friends.

CSB/SJU Psychology Departments

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Should Parents Lie About Santa Claus?

By Nate Dick

Many times parents debate about whether or not they should mislead their children about the story of Santa Claus. He has been a very influential, yet fictional, character in the mystique of Christmas. There is also the question that comes about if parents do choose to tell the white lie about St. Nick to their kids. How long should parents deceive their children about him? Los Angeles child Psychologist, Robert R. Butterworth, Ph.D, warns that children who believe in Santa past the age of 8 are most likely going to find out about his phoniness in a mean and insulting way from his/her peers, instead of their parents breaking the news to them gently. Most children know about the fallacy of the story by the age of 8. Also, parents should answer any questions from their children in a way that is not insulting of their age

or intelligence. For instance, when the child reaches third grade they are old enough to comprehend the fact that Santa's story is logically impossible. This means that it should be a cut-off point. For sure, the child should know Santa is unreal by this time. According to Dr. Butterworth, a study that was conducted said 25% of eight year olds believe in Santa. Also, 55% of them are unsure if they truly believe he is real. About 85% of children ages 4-7 said they were "strong believers in Santa."

It is said that if a child believes in Santa until age 8 or after, it could be damaging to a child's social development. Part of the reason for this is because of the evident abuse a child would receive from his/her peers. The last thing kids need is to be put down by the people whose opinion they care most about. When

the child is finally told, the parents need to make sure that it is explained that Santa is not real, but he is part of the spirit of Christmas and he lives in each of us. This is to reassure the trust between the child and the parents. With Santa clarified like this, the parents seem like they didn't actually lie, rather they kept alive a tradition that has been around for many generations.

Pretending, or make-believing, is a vital part of cognitive and social growth according to Dr. Butterworth. However, if a child's fantasies differ drastically from that of his/her peers, there could be confusion or conflict for the individual which can cause damage to the child. For more on this issue you can research Dr. Butterworth's other works on this topic, or you can email him at: robert@drbutterworth.net.