

TOWARDS A THEORY OF PSYCHOLOGICAL OWNERSHIP IN ORGANIZATIONS¹

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Towards a Theory of Psychological Ownership in Organizations

Abstract

Building upon the widespread observation that individuals develop feelings of ownership for a variety of objects (material as well as immaterial), the construct of psychological ownership is conceptually defined and examined in the context of the organization. In addition, the "roots" of psychological ownership and the primary "routes" associated with its development are identified. Finally, a set of research propositions are provided to guide inquiry into the development of psychological ownership in organizations.

Organization scholars have recently focused their attention on *ownership* as a psychological phenomenon as it occurs in organizations. Pierce, Rubinfeld, and Morgan (1991), for example, in their review of the employee ownership literature, theorized that formal ownership may produce its positive social-psychological and behavioral effects by working through psychologically experienced ownership. Subsequently, Kubzansky and Druskat (1995), discussing the strength of the individual-organization relationship, suggested that the creation of a psychological sense of ownership in the organization may be one means by which major changes in the employee's relationship with the organization can be created. In the development of their psychological theory of change, Dirks, Cummings, and Pierce (1996) employed psychological ownership to explain why individuals both promote and resist change efforts in organizations. Most recently, Pratt and Dutton (1998) noted that ownership, as an attitudinal state, attaches itself to issues which organizational members "feel worthy of attentional investment" (p. 4).

In addition, management practitioners and consultants (cf., Stayer, 1990; Peters, 1988; Byham, 1989) have argued that psychological ownership promotes improved quality, productivity, and satisfaction. T. L. Brown (1989), in Industry Week, for example, wrote that "It's psychological ownership that makes the competitive difference" for organizations operating in highly uncertain and turbulent environments. For Pat Carrigan, plant manager of a General Motors components plant, it was the creation of a work environment in which people had a sense of ownership for their jobs that lead to dramatic productivity improvements (Peters, 1988).

While the extant literature does not provide us with an empirical verification for such claims, we are inclined to speculate that there are a number of organizational effects --some positive in nature and some negative that may stem from strong states of experienced ownership. On the positive side of the ledger we envision an organizational member who is willing to make personal sacrifices, assume

of high levels of responsibility, and engage in developmental (nurturing) acts for the organizational target of ownership. There may, however, be a negative side to psychological ownership. A manager, for example, who has strong feelings of ownership for the organization may be unwilling to share her ideas, information and decision making authority --much like the "overly possessive" child who won't share his toys with a younger sister.

While relatively new for the organizational sciences, the examination of ownership as a psychological phenomenon is not new for other disciplines such as sociology and psychology. Acknowledging that as individuals we are able to make introspective observations of things that are in the self and non-self region (cf., James, 1890; Prelinger, 1959) and that some objects are perceived as a part of the self (cf., James, 1890), Etzioni (1991) notes that ownership should be seen as part real and part in the mind, and Heider (1958) notes that it is common for people to have *attitudes of ownership* that they attach to objects that are within the self-region. Scholars interested in advancing our understanding of the formation, development, expression, and maintenance of self-identity, for example, provide us with a rich insight into the psychology of mine. Developmental psychologists suggest that the development of feelings of "mine" and the close connection between "me" and "mine" emerges in conjunction with the toddler's innate effectance motive and object control (cf., Furby, 1991). A continuation of this process unfolds during the adolescent years as strong feelings of ownership develop for those objects through which one expresses his/her identity to others (cf., Csikszentmihalyi & Rochberg-Halton, 1981). Finally, gerontological studies (cf., Cram & Paton, 1993) reveal the debilitating effects that are associated with the separation of the elderly from certain possessions for which individuals have a strong sense of psychological connectedness. Even though scholars working in these fields have provided us with valuable insight into the psychological phenomenon of ownership, there remains a great deal of work yet to be done. As Dittmar (1992) noted, the psychological functions served by experiences of ownership (possession¹) are only partially

understood, as are the dynamics and processes associated with its formation.

Among the central research questions concerning ownership as a psychological phenomenon that need to be addressed are the questions of the meaning of psychological ownership, the genesis of this state, and the conditions under which psychological ownership manifests itself. It is the purpose of this paper to explore these issues in order to advance our understanding of psychological ownership in the organizational context. In order to gain an understanding of this phenomenon, we need to draw upon the writings of scholars working outside of the organizational sciences and to carry the implications of their work into the field of organizational behavior. It is our intention to propose that the psychology of ownership unfolds in the organizational context, much as it operates in other realms of the human condition.

In this paper, we expand past research on the psychology of ownership in two major ways, neither of which have been addressed before. First, after presenting the theoretical foundations for our work, we articulate the "*roots of*" (i.e., the motivation for and/or individual functions served by) psychological ownership. Thus, we address the question *why* organizational members come to feel ownership. Second, we explicate the "*routes to*" psychological ownership, especially as this state emerges within the organizational context. Thus, the questions, *what* factors cause organizational members to experience these feelings, and *how* this psychological state is achieved are explored.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Before we begin the examination of the "*roots of*" and the "*routes to*" psychological ownership in organizations, we briefly review some of the extant research on the psychology of ownership which demonstrates that people tend to experience feelings of ownership for a variety of objects material and immaterial in nature. We then provide a conceptual definition of psychological ownership and suggest that psychological ownership manifests itself in the organizational context, as well as in many others.

Psychological Experiences of Ownership

Empirical and clinical evidence unequivocally confirms that the psychology of possession (i.e., the psychology of me and mine) is well rooted in people, at least, in the Western culture².

Possession, Etzioni (1991) notes, is a "dual creation, part attitude, part object, part in the mind, part 'real'" (p. 466). It is common, according to Dittmar (1992), for people to psychologically experience the connection between self and various targets of possession (e.g., homes, automobiles, space, and other people). Possessions come to play such a dominant role in the owner's identity, that they become a part of the extended self (cf., Belk, 1988; Dittmar, 1992). Jean-Paul Sartre (1943/1960) in his treatise on "being and nothingness" noted that "to have" (along with "to do" and "to be") is one of the three categories of human existence. According to Sartre, "the totality of my possessions reflects the totality of my being ... I am what I have ... What is mine is myself" (p. 591-592). Likewise, James (1890) commented that there is a very fine line between what a person calls "me" and "mine." In this context he commented that:

a man's Self is the sum total of all that he CAN call his, not only his body and his psychic powers, but his cloths and his house, his wife and children, his ancestors and friends, his reputation and works, his land, and yacht and bank account. All these things give the same emotions. If they wax and prosper, he feels triumphant; if they dwindle and die, he feels cast down --not necessarily in the same degree for each thing, but in much the same way for all (p. 291-292).³

While ownership is generally experienced as involving person-object relations, it can also be felt toward non-physical entities such as ideas, words, artistic creations, and other people, as well. Isaacs (1933), for example, observed feelings of ownership among young children through their expression that the nursery rhymes and songs were "theirs" if they heard them first, and no one else had a right to sing or hear them without their permission. Drawing on the work of Isaacs (1933), Heider (1958) suggests that one only needs to witness the plagiarism of one's work, or other

"controversies among scientific men as to the parentage of ideas, discoveries or inventions" (Isaacs, 1933, p. 222) in order to find evidence for the power and emotion associated with this state.

Similarly, James (1890) notes that people feel personally annihilated when the constructions of their hands or brains are suddenly swept away. The loss of possession leads to "... shrinkage of our personality, a partial conversion of ourselves to nothingness" (p. 178). The loss of possessions are linked to depressed feelings, while their growth produces a positive and uplifting effect (Formanek, 1991).

The psychological aspects of ownership have been explored, and evidence has been presented for their existence, by anthropologists, psychologists, social psychologists, geographers, philosophers, animal behaviorists, and students of life-span development. Belk (1988), Cram and Paton (1993), and Dittmar (1992), for example, in their discussion of possessions as part of the extended self, note that it is common to witness the debilitating effects associated with the movement of elderly people from their homes to nursing facilities. Among young children at play, there is the frequent observation of strong reactions -- "My car, Me!" -- when a child picks up the toy of another child (cf., Isaacs, 1933; Levine, 1983). In his study of the ownership effect, Beggan (1992) demonstrated that ownership produces a psychological relationship between the individual and the object which is owned. Possibly as a result of self-enhancing biases, invested effort, exposure, controllability, and social approval, owned objects appear to be more attractive and rated more favorably than objects which are not owned -- people appear to be more attracted and attached to their belongings, even letters of the alphabet (Nuttin, 1987), than to other objects similar in nature (Beggan, 1992). Finally, Porteous (1976) notes that the individuals' emotional investment in, and thus their psychological attachment to the "home" (my home) is often expressed by the individual's preoccupation with interior decoration, the display of personal objects, and the external appearance of the house and lawn. As has frequently been noted, feelings of attachment to the home are often extolled in song, poetry, and proverb (Porteous, 1976).

In summary, past research and social practice provide sufficient arguments and evidence for the existence of feelings of ownership (cf., Allport, 1937; Belk, 1988; Csikszentmihalyi & Rochberg-Halton, 1981; Dittmar, 1992; Furby, 1976, 1978; Heider, 1958; Isaacs, 1933; James, 1890; Kline & France, 1899; Litwinski, 1947; Prelinger, 1959; Weil, 1952). As a result, the issue of the existence of this psychological state will not be examined in greater detail here. Instead we will focus on questions pertaining to the "roots of" (i.e., What condition within the individual gets served by this state?) and the "routes to" psychologically experienced ownership (i.e., What are the experiences that give rise to this state?) First, however, we will conceptually define the state of psychological ownership.

Psychological Ownership Conceptually Defined

Psychological ownership can be defined as that state where an individual feels as though the target of ownership (or a piece of that target) is "theirs" -- (i.e., it is MINE!)⁴. Psychological ownership reflects a relationship between an individual and objects (material or immaterial in nature) where the object is experienced as having a close connection with the self (Furby, 1978a, 1978b; Litwinski, 1942; Wilpert, 1991), becoming according to Belk (1988) and Dittmar (1991) part of the "extended self." Psychological ownership is based on feelings of possessiveness and being psychologically tied to an object. One's possessions, according to James (1890), "are felt to be extensions of the self ... what is mine becomes (in my feelings) a part of ME" (cf., Isaacs, 1933, p. 225) and thus the experienced state of psychological ownership. Kline and France (1899) in their exploration of the psychology of ownership note that when property becomes grounded psychologically it becomes for the individual *mine*, as the individual finds him/herself present in it. "The recognition of things owned by me as mine is the material that makes up much of my personality; and the concept *mine* is the cement to the entire mosaic mass constituting the ego" (p. 466-467).

The Organizational Context

Although most of the work on psychology of ownership has been in fields other than the organizational sciences, there is some work that suggests that feelings of possessiveness and ownership extend into the *organizational context*, as well. As previously suggested, individuals express feelings of ownership for their work (Beaglehole, 1932, p. 300-301), their organization (Dirks, Cummings, & Pierce, 1996; Pierce, Rubenfeld, & Morgan, 1991), their products (Das, 1993), their jobs (Peters & Austin, 1985), and specific issues within organizations (Pratt & Dutton, 1998). For further evidence of the existence of feelings of ownership at the workplace we need only reflect on our social experiences and/or just look around ourselves. It is not uncommon to hear comments suggesting that various objects within the work environment are experienced as belonging to a particular individual or group, such as, a boss' discussion how she will treat "her" direct reports (and acting accordingly), and defensive assertions stating that "those ideas were mine!" In addition, observations reveal possessive and ownership behaviors, such as, an individual personalizing her workspace with pictures and mementos.

Building upon the work of those scholars interested in feelings of ownership and the psychology of mine, as well as on our own experiences, we propose that much like the development and manifestation of psychological ownership in other domains of the human condition, psychological ownership manifests itself within the organizational context. Under certain conditions organizational members are capable of coming to experience psychological ownership for a variety of organizational factors. There are a myriad of potential targets within the organizational context to which organizational members can become psychologically tied by developing feelings of ownership. Through processes yet to be explored, organizational members can come to experience, for example, space, material objects, people/relationships (e.g., subordinates, team members), responsibilities (e.g., work), work outcomes (e.g., programs implemented), mental processes (e.g., ideas), social systems (e.g., organization, department, team), as part of their extended selves. Specifically, we propose:

Proposition 1: It is possible for organizational members to experience psychological ownership toward the organization and various targets in the organization.

THE "ROOTS" OF PSYCHOLOGICAL OWNERSHIP

While the concept "self," according to James (1890), "envelops everything that a man can call his" (p. 228), the motivation (i.e., the "reason-for-being") for the experienced state of ownership remains to be articulated. In this section, we will explore the roots of ownership and its psychological condition. The primary question that is to be explored here is -- What is the motivation and/or function that gets served for the individual by this psychological state?

No comprehensive taxonomy or empirical evidence currently exists that resolves this question. Several scholars have, however, speculated on the motivation for possessions and have suggested that there may be several different loci for the motivation for ownership and its accompanying psychological state. Dittmar (1992) pointing to the complexity of the relationship between people and "their things," noted that things play several important roles. In addition to serving a classical economics utilitarian value, possessions also "shape our consciousness, our self-awareness and our perception of the world" (p. 65). Porteous (1976) observed that there are three territorial satisfactions which derive from ownership: control over space *per se*; personalization of space as an assertion of identity; and, stimulation (the later might be achieved, for example, by thinking about, using, improving, observing, and defending one's possessions/territory). In addition, several scholars (e.g., Ardrey, 1966; Duncan, 1981; Porteous, 1976; Weil, 1952) have suggested that possessions provide the individual with "a place," that symbolically can be captured by the concept of "home" and its capacity to provide the individual with a context in which to dwell, a sense of psychic comfort, pleasure and security (cf., Dreyfus, 1991; Heidegger, 1967).

Some scholars interested in the genesis of the experienced state of ownership have attempted to fix its origin in the individual's innate genetic structure, while others have focused on the

socialization practices traditionally carried out in certain societies. There are those who believe that the human condition can be characterized by an innate need that is related to possession -- having a home (cf., Weil, 1952), having space/territory (cf., Ardrey, 1966; Darling, 1937; Porteous, 1976), and the gathering and holding of various objects as personal possessions (c.f., Burk, 1900; Hall & Wiltse, 1891; Kline & France, 1899; McDougall, 1923/1908). Baldwin (cited by Litwinski, 1942), like many others, suggests that possessive and property-related behavior is an instinct. He wrote: "Even with animals one finds the recognition of *meum* and *tuum* and that not only with regard to other individuals like the young of the family, but equally with regard to things. The bird claims the nest and the whole tree as its own ..." (see Litwinski, 1942, p. 36). "The impulse to collect and hoard various objects," McDougall (1923/1908) wrote, "is displayed in one way or another by almost all human beings, and seems to be due to a true instinct ..." (p. 75).

Beaglehole (1932), on the other hand, in his review of the literature dealing with property, concludes by suggesting that there is very little if any evidence that would support the notion that there is an innate ownership instinct -- possessions appear to serve a variety of functions such as providing security and serving to satisfy such needs as for food, safety, and reproduction, but possession is not an end in and of itself. Rudmin (1990) suggested that private property became an institution with the emergence of agricultural-based socio-economic systems, and Dittmar (1992) based upon her review of the literature suggests that biology may play a role, but not an overriding one. "Social and cultural factors" (i.e., acquired factors) "significantly influence how people relate to their material possessions" (Dittmar, 1992, p. 36). People, Rudmin (1990) concludes, seek to secure their futures through the utility provided by their possessions.

The nurture side of the argument is well articulated by the human development scholars (cf., Furby, 1978b; Lewis & Brook, 1974; Seligman, 1975) who suggest that ownership and its psychological state is experienced early in the development process. As noted by Litwinski (1942),

"The mother carefully inspects the objects that the child brings back. 'Go and look for *your* ball, bring back *your* bucket which the little boy has stolen from you'" (p. 34). According to Litwinski (1942), it is through mother's education that the little child comes to consider objects as their own (cf., Furby, 1991). With maturation and an awareness of social relationships the child builds upon his/her experiences involving self and non-self, with new lessons and experiences of ownership involving more complex three-way relationships (i.e., self-object-other). For the child the differentiation between self and not-self correlates with control (cf., Furby, 1978b; Lewis & Brook, 1974; Seligman, 1975). Objects that can be controlled become considered as part of the self, and those which cannot fall within the domain of not-self. Understanding of three way relationships brings the individual to understand possessions in terms of *meum et tuum* (this is mine and not yours; that is yours and not mine).

Either as a result of effectance motivation and developmental processes, innate possession tendencies, or a combination of the two, there emerges a fine line between what is considered me and that which is considered mine (Furby, 1991; James, 1890). "We feel and act about certain things that are ours very much as we feel and act about ourselves" (James, 1890, p. 29). Having and being, according to Sartre (1943), while distinct are essentially inseparable. People come to know and express themselves through that which they own.

Drawing upon Dittmar (1992), Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton (1981), Porteous (1976), and the above discussion, we suggest that the roots for ownership and its accompanying psychological feelings can be found, in part, in each of the following arenas: (a) efficacy and effectance motivation, (b) self-identity, and (c) "having a place," one or more of which may also serve as a source of stimulation, serve to fulfill some instrumental function, and/or provide security, psychic comfort and pleasure. Thus, from a humanistic perspective, psychological ownership serves a very important function -- it allows individuals to fulfill basic human needs through their work.

Each of the three sources of motivation for psychological ownership (efficacy and effectance, self-identity, and "having a place") will be explored in greater detail below. While each motivational concept will be treated separately, it is not our intention to suggest that they are not interwoven with one another. Exploration of the interrelationships among these motives is, however, beyond the scope of this paper. We will conclude this section by proposing that each of these three motivational states provides the foundation for the emergence of psychological ownership within the organizational context.

Efficacy and Effectance Motivation

Isaacs (1933) states that the desire to own "can only be thought of in terms of power -- or rather, of powerlessness" (p. 225). The motive for possession, according to Isaacs (1933), is in large part, being in control -- having the means to satisfy "my need as *mine*" (p. 225). She goes on to note that possessions enable the person to feel safe when these possessions are "mine to have and to hold" (p. 225). Having, therefore, becomes an end in itself, it becomes an issue of "power or powerlessness" and the psychological consequences of those two experienced states. The ultimate meaning of ownership is the fusing of the target of ownership with oneself -- as to have is to take into oneself, this being the literal and ultimate form of control and possession (cf., Dittmar, 1992).

In her review of individual-centered explanations for the process by which material possessions become a part of the extended self, Dittmar (1992) refers to developmental theory and the work of Furby (1978a, 1978b, 1980) who postulates that the motivation for possession stems from effectance motivation (cf., White, 1959) and the individual's desire to produce desired outcomes in the environment. "Possessions," she notes, "have an instrumental function -- they make possible certain activities and pleasures. In other words, they enable one to effect desired outcomes in one's environment ... The importance of this instrumental factor at all ages ... is provocative ... The results here suggest possession may be one manifestation of effectance motivation in that a central feature of

possession is the ability to affect and control the object in whatever way one wishes" (Furby, 1978b, p. 60).

White (1959) argued that a part of the human condition is revealed by the individual's exploration of its environment. This exploratory behavior is driven by the effectance motive, the individual's motivation to interact effectively with its environment. The effectance motive is aroused by differences in the environment and is sustained when one's actions produce further differences. The motive subsides when a situation has been explored to the point that it no longer presents new possibilities. Feelings of efficacy and pleasure (i.e., the affective side of effectance) stems from "being the cause," having altered the environment through one's control/actions. Exploration of and the ability to control one's environment gives rise to feelings of efficacy and pleasures associated with being the cause. In addition to producing intrinsic pleasure, control over the environment may be instrumental in producing extrinsic satisfaction as certain desirable objects are acquired. Along the same lines is Beggan's (1991) research which provides evidence in support of the notion that possessions serve to satisfy the individual's control motivation.

Furby's (1978) writings suggest that there is both an intrinsic and instrumental function served by possession. She notes that "the motivation for and the meaning of ownership" is embedded in effectance or competence motivation. The desire to experience causal efficacy leads to attempts to take possession of objects in one's environment. Building upon White's (1959) work, she proposes that the control of objects that accompanies ownership is pleasure producing per se, and leads to experiences of personal efficacy. Furby also suggests that possessions come to be a part of the extended self because "they express a person's ability to exert direct control over the social and physical environment" (Dittmar, 1992, p. 58), and Furby (1978a) concludes that possessions are important to the individual because they are instrumental in the exercise of control over the physical environment and over people. Control over the physical environment stems from control of the object,

control over the use of the object, and use of the object as a mechanism to exert control over other parts of the environment. Social control stems from being able to regulate others' access to or use of one's possessions.

In sum, it is being suggested that the motivation for ownership and the experienced state of ownership is, in part, grounded in the motivation to be efficacious in relation to one's environment. Arising out of the effectance motive (i.e., the motivation for feelings of efficacy and competence), the individual is propelled to explore and manipulate the environment. In some situations these person-environment interactions result in the exercise of control and subsequent feelings of personal efficacy (competence). Through this process, Furby (1991) notes that "possessions and self become intimately related" (p. 460).

With regard to the *organizational context*, past research (e.g., Greenberger, Strasser, Cummings, & Dunham, 1989; Heisler, 1974; Sanders & Malkis, 1982) has documented the importance of efficacy, effectance motivation and the related control motive in a variety of dimensions of the individual-organization relationship. For example, Greenberger et al., (1989), in addition to observing a significant relationship of personal control in the prediction of job satisfaction and performance, indicate that control (i.e., the need for and/or the amount possessed) plays a role in participative decision making, reactions to feedback, goal setting, empowerment, and self-management. Karasek (1979) hypothesized that a congruence between the individual's need for control and the amount of control experienced affects the likelihood that job demands (e.g., high work load) produce cardiovascular disease. Providing partial support for this hypothesis, Dwyer and Ganster (1991) report finding a relationship between levels of employee control over their work and work environment, and days lost due to sickness under high psychological demand conditions. In addition, theory and empirical evidence attests to the power and importance of feelings of efficacy in relation to work motivation and task performance (e.g., Bandura, 1977, 1989, Cervone & Wood, 1995). As a

consequence, organizational scholars might propose that the need for efficacy and effectance that serves as an underpinning for the feelings of ownership will operate within the organizational context, as in other realms of human functioning.

Proposition 2: It is possible for organizational members to experience psychological ownership for the organization and various targets in the organization because different aspects of organizations can satisfy their efficacy/effectance motives for this psychological state. Thus, individuals for whom the efficacy/effectance motive is operative will be more likely to experience psychological ownership towards the organization and various organizational targets than those for whom this motive is not operative.

Self-identity

Numerous scholars have suggested that, in addition to serving an instrumental function (efficacy/effectance motive), possessions also serve as symbolic expressions of the self and that there is a close connection between possessions, self-identity, and individuality (e.g., Abelson & Prentice, 1989; Dittmar, 1992; Mead, 1934; Porteous, 1976). Drawing on this research, we propose that ownership helps people come to define themselves, express their self-identity to others, and serve the continuity of the self across time.

Coming to Know Thyself. Identity, according to some, is located at the interface between the individual and society. Each individual's identity arises out of a socio-cultural context. According to Mead's (1934) symbolic interactionism, an individual develops a sense of self-identity as a result of viewing oneself from the perspective of how others see us -- self awareness is said to be the outcome of reflection. Yet the individual is not to be seen as a passive player in the process. Instead, the individual is an active agent, exploring, experiencing, and constructing meaning around the relationship between self and society.

Social constructionism provides additional insight into this developmental process associated with self-identity and its connection with possession. Possessions serve as a vehicle of self understanding (i.e., coming to know thyself) via the shared meaning that people come to give objects (Mead, 1934). Thus, through the socialization process, the individual comes to learn the meaning and importance of certain possessions. Through an interactive, cyclic, and reinforcing process the individual comes to find pleasure and comfort in their relationship with certain objects, and the meaning ascribed by others to them. Accompanying this process, the individual comes to eventually internalize the meaning ascribed to these objects by others as a part of their self-identity. "Personal possessions," according to Dittmar (1992), "come to objectify aspects of self-definition" (p. 85). This is especially true for those objects which can be controlled. It is, in part, the act of controlling the environment that brings objects into the realm of the extended self. Thus, there is an interconnection between the efficacy and effectance, and the self-identity functions of possession.

Addressing the role of efficacy and effectance, the Meadian perspective comments on the importance of psychological nearness. The child according to this perspective (cf., McCarthy, 1984) begins to discover the self through exploration of the environment. Through the exploration process, the environment is experienced and lessons about the self get transmitted. Thus, through the process of experiencing an object we learn something about it as well as about the self as they are closely linked. The owning of objects creates greater "psychological nearness" than merely having contact with them. This nearness suggests that the person and object are one (Dittmar, 1992), and individuals tend to like that which is with or a part of them more than those objects that are not (Beggan 1992; Nuttin, 1987). Therefore, possessions play a major role in the development of self-identity.

In sum, it is being suggested that people appropriate the meaning given to objects to the self (McCracken, 1990). It is through our interaction with our possessions, coupled with our reflection upon their meaning that "... our sense of identify, our self-definitions, are established, maintained,

reproduced and transformed in our relations with our possessions" (Dittmar, 1992, p. 86). It is through the interactive process with one's possessions that they provide a space, comfort, an autonomy, pleasure, and opportunity that facilitates the development and cultivation of one's identity (Saunders, 1990; Kron, 1983) as they are symbols of the self (Cooper, 1976).

Expression of Self-Identity to Others. In addition to objects of ownership (material and immaterial) serving as symbols of identity to the self, they also serve to communicate one's identity to others. Possessions play a significant role in the realm of social interaction, as suggested by researchers in many different fields including anthropology, consumer behavior, and psychology (Dittmar, 1992). In addition to affording power over others, possessions communicate the individual's identity to others, hence achieving recognition and social prestige.

People collect and publicly display a myriad of different objects as *symbolic* expressions of their self-identity (Dittmar, 1992). Among the objects and actions that reflect this public expression of the self include: purchases of clothing and automobiles; location and type of home purchased, along with its interior and exterior decoration; and the pictures, awards, and degrees and certificates that are publicly displayed on office walls and table tops. These possessions are employed to express, for example, our gender, social class, recreational interests, group memberships, education, and accomplishments.

In the realm of consumer goods, the self expression appears to be the most revealing. According to Levy (1959) items that we purchase and display serve as symbols expressing personal values, qualities, attitudes, and social affiliations. Grubb and Hupp (1968) looking into product-user stereotypes have demonstrated that consumers frequently work to match their image with the image of the typical user of that product, and Munson and Spivey (1980) suggest that people will frequently express concern with how others will view them in relation to certain possessions.

Maintain the Continuity of Self-Identity. Several scholars (e.g., Csikszentmihalyi &

Rochberg-Halton, 1981; Kamptner, 1989, 1991) have suggested that possessions are psychologically meaningful for yet another self-identity perspective. People commonly employ objects of ownership as a way of achieving a continuity of the self. As people start to get older their history becomes an increasingly important part of their self-identity. Associated with this process mementos, photographs, diaries, letters, and gifts from others take on an increasingly important role (Cram & Paton, 1993; Rochberg-Halton, 1984). One of their many roles is the maintenance of self-continuity, in that they are concrete reminders of themselves and their life in the past.

Possessions in this domain provide people with feelings of comfort, an emotional connection between themselves and that part of their lives that they have already experienced. There is, according to Dittmar (1992) and Kamptner's (1989) a sense of security afforded by certain possession. Kamptner (1989) goes beyond this, suggesting that there is often an erosion in the sense of self, that accompanies the movement of elderly people, for example, from their home, their connection to themselves and their past through their possessions. This is because the individual is being removed from those "things" that through psychological ownership have become symbolic extensions of the self. "Possessions," according to Cram and Paton's (1993) study, "are repositories of memories of one's self identity in the past, especially when opportunities for the external validation of the self are limited" (p. 19). In similar fashion, Rochberg-Halton (1989) observes that "Objects can objectify the self. In objectively telling us who we are, what we do, and who or what we might become, things can act as signs of the self, and role models for its continued cultivation" (p. 339).

In sum, it is being suggested that the motivation for ownership and the experienced state of ownership is, in large part, grounded in self-identity. Arising out of the dynamics associated with coming to know thyself, expressing that identity to others, and continuing the maintenance of that identity across time people become psychologically attached to objects and integrate them into the self.

In light of the fact that it has been argued that the need for self-identity gives rise to feelings

of ownership in the larger realm of the human condition, organization scholars might propose that this need operates within the *organizational context* as well. In fact, research in the organizational sciences (e.g., Dutton, Dukerich, & Harquail, 1994) has demonstrated that there is a relationship between the organization and the self-identity of some of its members. O'Reilly and Chapman (1986), for example, found a positive relationship between organizational identification (i.e., feeling proud to be a part of a group), and extra-role behavior and intent to remain with the organization. Pratt and Dutton (1998) indicate that the organizational identities reported by organizational members influenced the extent to which they manifested ownership issues. Thus, it might be proposed that self-identity serves as an underpinning for the emergence of psychological ownership within the organizational context as well.

Proposition 3: It is possible for organizational members to experience psychological ownership for the organization and various targets in the organization because different aspects of the organization can satisfy their self-identity motive for this psychological state. Thus, individuals for whom the self-identity motive is operative will be more likely to experience psychological ownership towards the organization and various organizational targets than those for whom this motive is not operative.

Having a Place

To have a place is, according to the French political philosopher Simone Weil (1952), an important "need of the human soul" (p. 41). It has been suggested (cf., Ardrey, 1966; Darling, 1937, 1939; Duncan, 1981; Porteous, 1976; Weil, 1952) that the feelings of ownership are linked to the individual's need to have a place. Weil (1952), for example, claims that property (i.e., private and collective) along with order, liberty, freedom of opinion, truth, obedience, and responsibility are "vital needs of the soul, ... the soul feels isolated, lost, if it is not surrounded by objects which seem to it like an extension of the bodily members" (p. 33)

Ardrey (1966) and Porteous (1976) have argued that the need to possess a certain space (i.e., territoriality) is an innate need. People, according to Ardrey, have an inherent drive to gain and to defend an exclusive property. For Darling (1937, 1939) territory is in essence a psychological expression. It is from this need that people devote significant amounts of time, energy, and resources to acquire, protect, decorate, and display his/her home. Duncan (1981), in her discussion of home ownership, speaks of it as a psychological phenomenon that may have roots in human needs. The home, as seen by Duncan, is an object of ownership (possession) that may serve the human need for having a place -- my place. Similarly, Porteous (1976) suggests that "the home" is important in that it provides the individual with both physical and psychic security. Drawing upon the Jungian concept of the sanctity of the threshold as a universal phenomenon, Porteous (1976) claims that the personification of owned objects (e.g., the home) serves to promote security, identity, and individualism, each of which is important because it represents freedom of self-determination.

Porteous (1976) provides us with insight into the definition of the concept of home and to the three territorial satisfactions (i.e., control over space, personalization of space as an assertion of identity, and stimulation) that derive from the possession of territory. While initially talking about the home in terms of geographical space including four walls on a plot of land, Porteous acknowledges that such places as the village, compound or neighborhood (which he acknowledges as collectively owned) also serve as the home or the home base for some people, thereby helping to fulfill their territorial need. Porteous also suggests that home can also be thought of from the perspective of a fixed point of reference around which the individual structures a significant portion of his/her reality. Psychologically, possessions that come to be experienced as home are those in which the individual has, in all likelihood, made a considerable emotional investment (Porteous, 1976). It might be suggested, therefore, it is those possessions in which an individual finds a strong sense of "identification" that come to be regarded as home -- my place.

In sum, it is being suggested that the motivation for ownership and the experienced state of ownership is, in part, grounded in having a place of one's own (a home). Interpreting the work of Heidegger and Polanyi, Dreyfus (1991) notes that when we inhabit something, a mode of being, that something is no longer an object for us, instead it becomes a part of us. For Heidegger and Polanyi this is called "dwelling in" or "inhabiting." People, according to Polanyi, dwell in, that is, come to feel at home in, their language. Arising out of the dynamics associated with developing one's "home base" people become psychologically attached (e.g., come to feel at home in one's language, in one's country, in one's things) to objects (material or immaterial) and in many of these possessions they may find a special place, one that is their's, one that is familiar, one that provides some form of personal security --in it they find a place to dwell.

Organizational scholars might consider the consequence and role played by organizational members who "come to dwell" within their work (organization). Contemporary society and pop culture has identified some of these people as "workaholics," and organizational scientists (e.g., Lodahl & Kejner, 1965; Rabinowitz & Hall, 1977) have focused on job involvement --it is possible that the work alcoholic and/or the highly job involved person are among those individuals who have come to "find their place in their work" (i.e., "to dwell or to feel at home in their work"). Building upon the thinking of Heidegger, Polanyi, and others, it might be proposed that the active condition of the "need to have a place" (to dwell or inhabit) may operate within the organization context, as it is reasoned to operate within the realm of the total human condition, and in the process come to serve as the foundation for the emergence of psychological ownership for one's work.

Proposition 4: It is possible for organizational members to experience psychological ownership for the organization and various targets in the organization because different aspects of organizations can satisfy their motive for having a place (to dwell or to inhabit). Thus, individuals for whom the motive to have a place is operative will be more likely to experience psychological ownership towards the organization and

various organizational targets than those for whom this motive is not operative.

THE "ROUTES TO" PSYCHOLOGICAL OWNERSHIP

In this section, we focus on the routes (paths) through which ownership develops. Before doing so, we present a preliminary conjecture about the process by which psychological ownership begins to emerge. Figure 1 is employed to highlight the major features associated with this process.

The Emergence of Psychological Ownership

The individual as we have suggested is seen as possessing a set of *latent needs* (e.g., the need for effectance, the need for self-identity, and the need for having a place) that serve as the "roots" for psychological ownership. Each of these needs is seen as playing a role positioning (i.e., making ready) the individual to act upon, engage in a relationship with, or to experience certain objects as part of the extended self and thus the emergence of psychological ownership for that object.

Insert Figure 1 about here

The person (with his/her latent needs) moving through time interacts with a myriad of *potential targets* of psychological ownership. Each of these targets possesses different attributes, of which attractiveness, malleability, and accessibility may play a particularly important role in terms of making these targets a strong candidate as a potential target of ownership. Each target attribute is seen as potentially serving to fulfill one or more of the individual's latent needs. First, the potential target must be visible and attractive to the individual. Unless it is experienced and captures the interest/attention of the individual it cannot end up being a target of ownership. Malleability, suggesting that the target is capable of being shaped and reshaped, is seen as potentially serving the effectance need. Finally, it is being suggested that the target needs to be accessible (open, available)

to the individual. The degree to which the target is open to exploration and knowing, will determine whether the individual will be able to come to weave their self-identity around and to find a "place within" the target. Psychological ownership is, therefore, seen as the natural result of an interaction with an environment that is receptive to the needs, actions and activities of the self.

We suggest that an *event*⁵ occurs in the interaction between the self and the potential target of ownership that brings the latent needs to a manifest state. If through this interaction, the individual comes to control, intimately know, or invest him/herself into the target, the state of psychological ownership for the target develops, as each of these conditions, according to Sartre (1943), enables an object to become a part of the self.

In the remainder of this section we explore the three major routes (paths) to the emergence of psychological ownership (control of the target, coming to know the target intimately, and investment of the self into the target) and examine their manifestation within the context of organizational experiences. We discuss the effects of various organizational factors on psychological ownership and present ideas which can subsequently be employed to guide empirical inquiry into the emergence of this state among organizational members.

Controlling the Target

Sartre (1943), McClelland (1951), Furby (1978a), Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton (1981), and others have suggested that control exercised over an object eventually gives rise to feelings of ownership for that object. Based upon her studies of ownership and possessions, Furby (1978a), proposed that the greater the amount of control a person can exercise over these objects the more they will be psychologically experienced as a part of the self. Furby's control model of ownership, in part derives from the work of White (1959) and McClelland (1951). While White's (1959) work focused on the motive for environmental exploration, control, and subsequent feelings of efficacy, it was McClelland (1951) who proposed that much like parts of the body and control over

them, material objects that can be controlled come to be regarded as a part of the self.

Even though there are individual differences in terms of importance of possessions for personal identity (e.g., Sampson, 1978), Prelinger (1959) provided a partial test and support for the proposition that in general, there is a relationship between self and control exercised over objects. Specifically, he found that objects over which the respondent had control (or could manipulate), and those objects that she/he can be affected by, were more likely to be perceived as parts of the self than items for which neither was the case. Similar findings have been provided by Dixon and Street (1957).

In their studies focused on the semantics of ownership, Rudmin and Berry (1987) found that control appeared to be a key feature. Ownership means the ability to use and to control the use of objects. While Rudmin and Berry's (1987) work did not address the direction of the causal arrow, one interpretation stemming from their work, which is consistent with the thinking of Prelinger (1959), Furby (1978), and Tuan (1984), is that those things over which the individual exercises the most control are those items that are most likely to be experienced as mine as in the sense of ownership. The earlier work of Lewis and Brook (1974) and Seligman (1975) provides support for this notion as well. Based upon their work in the realm of human development, Lewis and Brook (1974) and Seligman (1975) have argued that through the exercise of control objects become associated with the self and those objects which are controlled by others or those which cannot be controlled are not a part of the individual's sense of self.

It was Ellwood (1927) who suggested that a key concept might be "use." Those objects which were habitually used by an individual became assimilated into domain of the self of the user. As noted by Furby (1978a) use of an object can be seen as the exercise of control over that object. She goes on to note that access to use of an object (i.e., control) gives a person control over others and their access to the object -- "That over which I exercise ... control becomes a part of my sense of self"

(Furby, 1978a, p. 322-323).

Within the context of the organization there are several different structures (e.g., social system structure, technology, work design, leader behaviors) and organizational processes (e.g., coordination, planning, communication) through which organizational members are afforded the opportunity to exercise control (influence) over a number of potential targets of ownership, each of which, over a sufficient period of time, is likely to result in the development of psychological ownership. We propose that there will be a positive relationship between the amount of control (influence) exercised over a potential target of ownership (e.g., job, team, social system, project/program) and the level of psychological ownership that the individual experiences for that particular target.

One of the many ways in which individuals are allowed to exercise greater or lesser degrees of control in an organizational context is through *job design*. In the job, for example, the amount of *autonomy* is likely to effect how much control an individual is allowed to exercise. The greater the autonomy the greater the ability to exercise control, and hence the greater amount of psychological ownership that is likely to develop for that job. *Participation in decision making* is another means through which an individual can exercise control. Hence, allowing workers to participate in a decision making process is likely to effect the feelings of ownership for the decision made, and may even effect the amount of psychological ownership for a larger social system (e.g., organization). Both participation and autonomy allow the individual to alter the nature of the target and shape it according to his or her own form. Other practices that operate similarly include self-management opportunities, delegation of authority, and empowerment.

In contrast, organizations also involve numerous factors that tend to remove the possibility for an individual to exert control, and hence impede the development of psychological ownership. Hallmarks of bureaucratic systems, such as centralization and formalization, are particularly noteworthy examples. Centralization and formalization tend to minimize the amount of control that

any single individual can hold, as a result of the placement of power in the structure of the organization. The individual quickly learns that, in such a system, nothing is "hers," because she has no authority to direct or shape the organization, or any part of it.

We must also note one additional factor that allows control -- legal ownership. For example, legal ownership in a law firm (i.e., a partnership) gives that individual a legal right of control. We suggest that the more an individual assumes those rights psychologically, and acts upon them, the more likely he is to develop feelings of ownership for an organization. As Pierce, Rubinfeld, and Morgan (1991) note, psychological ownership is one of the means by which legal ownership is translated into a variety of desirable attitudes and behaviors in employee-owned firms (cf., Van Dyne & Pierce, 1993).

The discussion of the "control of the target" route to psychological ownership leads us to the following proposition:

Proposition 5: There will be a positive relationship between psychological ownership and the amount of control (influence) an individual has over a potential target of ownership (e.g., job, team, decision, system, project, organization). The extent to which an organization employs practices associated with high levels of individual control and influence over potential targets of ownership (e.g., autonomy, participation in decision making) will be positively related to the degree of psychological ownership experienced by its organizational members for the corresponding target.

Coming to Intimately Know the Target

James (1980) suggested that through a living relationship with objects, individuals come to develop feelings of ownership for those objects. He called this the *law of mental association by contiguity*. Supporting the notion that feelings of ownership emerge from the dynamics associated with a lived relationship with objects, Beaglehole (1932), after looking for evidence to support the existence of an instinct for possession, argued that by knowing an object (person or place) passionately (intimately) it becomes a part of the self.

Commenting on the processes through which feelings of ownership are likely to emerge, Weil (1952) states that "All men have an invincible inclination to appropriate in their own minds, anything which over a long, uninterrupted period they have used for their work, pleasure, or the necessities of life. Thus, a gardener, after a certain time, feels that the garden belongs to him" (p. 33). Weil is suggesting that people come to find themselves psychologically tied to things as a result of their active participation or association with things. The gardener, for example, "comes to be rooted in the garden," as a result of working the garden and becoming familiar with its needs. Through this process of active association, knowledge develops and the gardener comes to feel that it is his [hers], that s/he is one with the garden -- grounded in and with it (Weil, 1952, p. 33-35). Sartre (1943) and Furby (1978b) have also suggested that there is an associational aspect to ownership. Something can be mine, in my feelings, by virtue of my being associated and familiar with it.

Building upon this notion, Beggan and Brown (1994) and Rudmin and Berry (1987) suggested that through the process of *association* we come to know objects. The more information possessed about the target of ownership the more intimate becomes the connection between the individual and the object. According to James (1890), a part of our feelings about what is ours stems from living close to, getting to know, and experiencing things around us. Thus, the more *information* possessed about the target of ownership, the more things are felt thoroughly and deeply and in the process the self becomes attached to (one with) the object. Along the same lines was Beggan and Brown's (1994) research which focused directly on association as a psychological justification for ownership. They found that an individual tends to frame issues of ownership as a function of an association between a person and an object.

Rudmin and Berry's (1987) work focused on the meaning associated with ownership. They noted that "ownership is linguistically an opaque concept," its meaning is difficult to grasp outside of looking intra-individually -- "After all, a stolen apple doesn't look any different from any other"

(Snare, 1972, p. 200). As a part of their work they came to see that *attachment* served to provide part of the meaning of ownership. They suggest that attachment breeds familiarity and knowledge. Thus, psychological ownership reflects an intimate relationship or a psychological proximity of the owner to the owned. Citing Horwicz (1878), they noted that we tend to prefer our own possessions to others, even others of a similar kind (cf., Beggan, 1992; Nuttin, 1987) because "we know them better, realize them more intimately, feel them more deeply" (translated by James, 1890, p. 326).

Within the *context of organizations*, there are several different dynamics (processes) that afford the individual with the opportunity to develop a deep and thorough understanding of a number of potential targets of ownership. It is through a close, lengthy, and intimate association that the individual comes to know the potential target of ownership and it gets brought into the citadel of the self. We propose that there will be a positive relationship between the *level of knowing* (i.e., degree of intimacy) of the potential target of ownership (e.g., work, job, team, social system, project/program) and the level of psychological ownership that the individual experiences for that particular target. Knowing of this type and depth comes about, in a general sense, through various acts and processes of association.

We predict that this route could begin to operate by providing the individual with *information* about the target; for example, about its mission, its goals, its activities, and its performance outcomes. In job design, information may come in the form of feedback. Through the information, the individual may come to feel that s/he intimately knows the target (e.g., project, job, team, organization). As psychological ownership begins to develop, access to information reinforces these feelings, as the individual feels the "right" to have that information.

This route may also operate through the number of (psychological and physical) *interactions* the individual has with the target. For example, we predict that through a long association with a target (e.g., a long tenure in the job or as a product manager), an individual may feel that he knows

the target intimately --better than anyone else-- and hence, owns it. The same outcome may also occur more rapidly through frequent and extensive encounters.

In contrast, in organizations where information is withheld or guarded, individuals will be less likely to develop psychological ownership. Ironically, as individuals come to feel ownership over a target, they may protect it from others through these means -- limiting access to information about the target and removing opportunities for others to interact with it. Thus we propose:

Proposition 6: There will be a positive relationship between psychological ownership and the amount of information that an individual has about a potential target of ownership (e.g., kept informed in a timely manner, provided with information frequently, being physically proximal to the target). The extent to which an organizational member is informed about various potential targets of psychological ownership will be positively related to the degree to which organizational members experience psychological ownership for the corresponding target.

Investing the Self into the Target

The work of Locke (1690), Sartre (1943), Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton (1981), among others, provide us with insight into the relationship between work and psychological ownership. They inform us of the importance of it "flowing from the self" as a route to the sense of it being mine. As part of his political philosophy, Locke (1690) argued that we own ourselves, we own our labor, and therefore, we are likely to feel that we own that which we create, shape, and/or produce. Sartre (1943) went so far as to suggest that buying an object was simply another form of creating an object, as might be reasoned by Locke (1690), as it too stems from the fruits of our labor or that which is ours.

The writings of Karl Marx (1976) carry essentially the same message. He reasoned that through our labor we invest our psychic energy into the product of that labor. Thus, that which stems from our labor, be it our work or the widget that we make, much like our words, thoughts and emotions are representations of the self (cf., Rochberg-Halton, 1984, p. 364). Similarly Durkheim

(1957) tends to see "things" as the crystallization of human activity. They are attached to the person who created them because they are the product of the individual, they derive their being and form from his/her efforts. Durkheim goes on to reason that the individual who has created them owns them in much the same way as he/she owns him/herself --one (i.e., the object) is an aspect of the other (i.e., the person). Kline and France (1899) note that the child considers his/her collection of worthless stones as more valuable than the bright and expensive toys, because the collection stems from the child's labor. It "represents his own self" (p. 453).

Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton (1981), based upon their investigations into the meaning of things, note that the investment of an individual's energy, time, effort, and attention into objects causes the self to become one with the object -- this union between self and object emerges because the object has emerged from the self. This "sense of ownership" and link of object with the self can develop between workers and their machines, their work, and the products of their labor --"he calls it his own" (Beaglehole, 1932, p. 300-301). In addition, Beaglehole notes that employees react negatively to criticisms of their work (i.e., the products of their labor) because "They are so linked to his own feelings of self-respect and self-esteem that a negative judgment passed on the product is taken as a direct reflection upon the worker's personality" (p. 301).

Within the context of one's relationship with the *organization* there are a variety of opportunities for an organizational member to invest him/herself into different facet of the organization (e.g., job/work, products, customers, programs/projects, work team, committee assignments). This investment of the self may come in many forms (e.g., the investment of one's time, ideas, skills, decisions and their physical, psychological, and creative energies), resulting in the target of ownership (or a portion of that target) flowing from the self -- creating the conditions where the person comes to see themselves in the target. It is proposed that the more an organizational facets (i.e., potential targets of ownership) absorbs or consumes the individual, the greater will be the strength of the

individual's psychological ownership for that target. We propose that there will be a positive relationship between the degree to which the target of ownership flows from the investment of the self into the target and the level of psychological ownership that the individual experiences for that particular target.

The most obvious, and perhaps the most powerful, means by which an individual invests herself into an entity is to *create* it. Creation involves investing time, energy, and sometimes even one's values and identity, into the entity. For example, as academics we invest all of these into our research, and hence, feel ownership for our ideas. In other vocations, individuals may come to feel ownership for products they create (scientists, product development teams), organizations they found (entrepreneurs), or bills they draft (politicians). The psychological and physical investments allow an individual to see their reflection in the target and/or feel their own sweat in its existence. Like an artist, we leave our personal signature on the things we create.

We can, however, invest ourselves into targets without actually creating them. Some practices allow, or necessitate, individuals to invest themselves more than others. For example, jobs that are more *complex* allow one to exercise more discretion and therefore, invest more of one's own ideas, unique, knowledge, and personal style into the job. Non-routine intensive technologies produce a similar outcome as they provide a greater opportunity for individual discretion. In contrast, jobs with low complexity and routine technologies are associated with standardization, and hence, remove the opportunity for investing oneself into the target.

Lastly, we expect that *responsibility* for a target, either perceived or real, leads to feelings of ownership. As the person is held (or feels) responsible for a target he begins to invest himself into that target through the energy, care, and concern expended. A mentor --protégé relationship is one example of this phenomenon. The mentor feels responsible for the protégé's development, and hence invests his energy, time, emotion, and even his own values, in the protégé. For better or worse, this is

likely to result in the mentor coming to think of the other person in terms of "his" protégé. Social recognition of this relationship tends to further reinforce the fact that people see themselves in the target. The effects of social recognition of responsibility can be witnessed in the use and after-effects of terms such as "Reaganomics" and "the Brady Bill."

To summarize, we offer the following proposition:

Proposition 7: There will be a positive relationship between psychological ownership and the degree to which an individual organizational member invests him/her-self into the potential target of ownership. The extent to which an organization employs practices associated with its organizational members' investment of themselves into the potential targets of ownership (e.g., non-routine, intensive technologies, job complexity, participation in the creation of the target, responsibility for the target) will be positively related to the degree of psychological ownership experienced by organizational members for the corresponding target.

DISCUSSION

"Mine," writes Rudmin (1994), "is a small word ... It is deceptive in its power and importance ... It controls our behavior, but we rarely notice, as we move about our world restricting ourselves to narrow walkways and to those places for which we have keys" (p. 55).

In this paper we have started the development of a theory of psychological ownership, that state where an individual feels as though the target of ownership (or a piece of that target) is "theirs" - (i.e., it is MINE!). In addition to defining the construct conceptually, we articulated the genesis of this state, explicated the intra-individual functions served, identified properties of targets to which these feelings attach, and detailed the processes that are associated with the development of this psychologically experienced condition. Evidence suggesting the robustness of the phenomenon stems from the large number of literatures (e.g., psychology, philosophy, sociology, anthropology, child development, geography, and organizational behavior) that have acknowledged the presence of this powerful psychological state and from which we were able to draw for the development of our

theoretical perspectives on psychological ownership.

For more than a century scholars have studied the role played by possessions and feelings associated with ownership in a variety of contexts. There appears to be widespread agreement that it is common for people, especially those under the influence of Western culture, to develop feelings of ownership for objects that are material and immaterial in nature. Possessions, secured in a box labeled *mine*, emerges in children at a very young age (Kline & France, 1899; Isaacs, 1933). When anchored psychologically the concept "mine" comes to play a major role in the self-identity and relationships among people. In addition, there is widespread agreement that the emotion associated with feelings of ownership can at times be extremely powerful. It has, for example, been associated with insecurity, jealousy, squabbles among young children, lawsuits among people over patent rights, and it has even been claimed that people have gone to war over land that they felt rightfully belonged to them.

There are those scholars who have been interested in the genesis of possessive tendencies, some claiming support for its genetic anchoring, while others have argued that it is the product of the socialization practices carried out in different societies. There have been those who are interested in the psychology of ownership and its role in child development (e.g., Isaacs, 1933; Kline & France, 1899), in consumer behavior (Belk, 1988), among the elderly (Kamptner, 1989; Cram & Paton, 1993), within the customs and practices of different societies (Kline & France, 1899), from the perspective of the holding of land and the having of a house with its four walls (Duncan, 1981; Porteous, 1976), across different socio-economics strata of society (Csikszentmihalyi & Rochberg-Halton, 1981), within the philosophical discussions of "being" (Sartre, 1943; Heidegger, 1967), as well as within the organizational context (Pratt & Dutton, 1998; Dirks, Cummings, & Pierce, 1996).

Building upon this work, we have come to define psychological ownership as that condition where we come to feel as though an object (material or immaterial in nature) is "mine." This state is grounded in possession -- that condition where an individual feels psychologically tied to an object,

while outside of his/her physical self it has come to be experienced as a part of the extended self. We have proposed that as individuals enter organizations they bring with them the same human conditions that characterize their lives outside of the work environment, and thus under certain conditions come to feelings of ownership for different facets of the organization (e.g., work, tools, space, work teams).

A significant part of our inquiry was centered on the question -- What are the roots of psychological ownership? Coming to understand the underlying motives (i.e., intra-individual functions) served by psychological ownership should aid in our understanding of the processes associated with its emergence within the organizational context. Building upon a diverse and rich literature in the realm of life-span development, philosophy, psychology, social psychology, anthropology, and geography, we have come to propose that the roots for psychological ownership are, in part, grounded in three areas -- efficacy and effectance motivation, self-identity, and the need for having a place. These latent conditions become activated at different times and to varying degrees as people interact with a variety of potential targets of ownership within the work environment. The active state of these three needs can subsequently be employed as the conceptual foundation for empirical inquiry into the development of psychological ownership among organizational members.

While it is being suggested that the loci of the functioning of psychological ownership can, in part, be found in the need for efficacy and effectance motivation, the need for self-identity, and the need for the individual to find comfort in their having a place in which to dwell, it is important to consider that psychological ownership needs not be the result of a "need" of the self for anything, although it can be. It might occur simply because the boundaries of the self are intrinsically elastic. The individual possesses the natural ability to expand and contract its boundaries, treating aspects of the environment as if they were aspects of the self. Thus, according to Albert (1995), psychological ownership reflects the natural ability of the self to extend and contract its boundaries, to treat a non-owned aspect of the environment as if it were an aspect of the self within the same feelings, burden of

responsibility, pleasure, rights, and obligations.

We have also been interested in coming to understand the processes through which psychological ownership emerges. It is proposed that psychological ownership is the natural result of control, intimate association, and/or the immersion of the self into the shaping or creation of the target of ownership. It is through each of these processes that the individual will come to feel that they are tied to --one with-- the target. It becomes, according to Dittmar (1992) and Belk (1988) a part of the extended self.

We commented on the emergence of this state within the organizational context. Managers interested in fostering the development of this state should look to their organization and answer the question --What experiences or organizational conditions can be employed to enhance the employee's control over the desired target of ownership, to promote their coming to intimately know that target, and/or to expand the employee's investment of the self into that target. Over time, efforts directed to the development of one or more of these "routes" to psychological ownership should reinforce one or more of the employee's motivations for psychological ownership --efficacy and effectance, self-identity, or "having a place-- the "roots" of psychological ownership.

What has not been addressed in this paper are the consequences of psychological ownership. It should not be interpreted as our intention to suggest that psychological ownership, whether it operates within or outside of the organizational context, is by definition a good or bad state. We believe that it can be both. Since what creates and maintains psychological ownership is, for example, control over things, one can easily envision that "too much control" can lead to organizationally undesirable behaviors. One simply cannot psychologically own everything and the need to do so is one of the pathologies of psychological ownership. While at other times psychological ownership may result in the assumption of responsibility for, as well as, giving care and nurturance to the target. Herein may lie some of the functional consequences associated with psychological ownership.

At this stage we note the need for additional theory construction and empirical inquiry. This paper has attempted to argue that psychological ownership can manifest itself within the organizational context and emerges through control, intimate knowing, and/or the investment of the self into the target of ownership. A number of propositions, anchored within the work and organizational context, were provided that when fully articulated will contribute to the development of a theory of psychological ownership and provide us with a place to launch empirical inquiry into this potentially important individual-organization relationship.

Empirically, it is time for the development and construct validation of a measure of psychological ownership. Subsequently, studies can be undertaken to ascertain the presence of this condition within the organization, the identification of the organizational targets to which psychological ownership affixes itself, and tests of the antecedent conditions and causal processes associated with the emergence of psychological ownership should be undertaken. Upon the development of the theory of the consequences of psychological ownership, organizational scholars can then turn their empirical inquiry to its effects.

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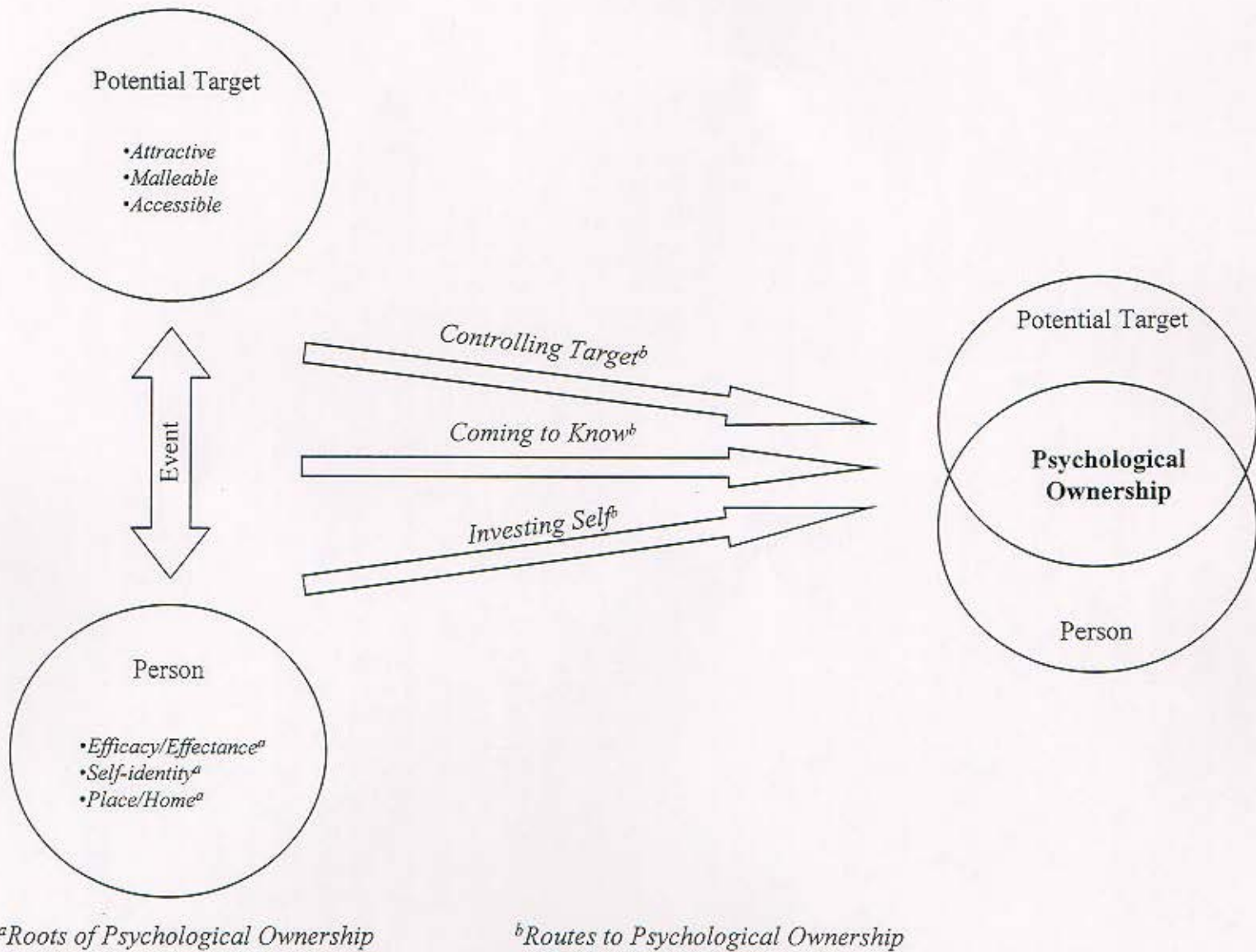
5. The need for self-identity, for example, does not become engaged with each and every target that the individual comes into contact with. The same can be said for the "need for control and effectance motivation" and "having a place." Thus, we suggest that there is some "event" (a person-target interaction that we do not yet understand) that activates one or more of the latent needs, such that through "time" we come to know, create, or have control over the target culminating in the emergence of psychological feelings of ownership.

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FIGURE 1.
ROOTS AND ROUTES OF PSYCHOLOGICAL OWNERSHIP



ENDNOTES

1. Consistent with the work of others (cf., Dittmar, 1992; Furby, 1976, 1978a, 1978b, 1980) we tend to equate feelings of possession with feelings of ownership. Accordingly, in this paper, we use the terms of ownership and possession interchangeably.
2. We acknowledge that the meaning attached to ownership, the linkage between objects and self, and the processes through which ownership developed as discussed in this paper is very much a Western European interpretation. Many native Americans, for example, look upon possessions and ownership very differently and it is these different interpretations that will not be addressed in this work. Scholars have only begun to consider cross-cultural differences in ownership (cf., Furby, 1976; Rudmin, 1994), which leaves us a long way from understanding the boundary conditions that apply to the psychology of ownership across cultures.
3. We note the dated and sexist language in this and other quotations that will appear in this paper. We have included them for their overall conceptual contribution to the theme of our work.
4. We draw a distinction between legal and experienced ownership. Legal ownership is recognized foremost by society, and hence the rights are recognized and protected through the legal system. In contrast, psychologically experienced ownership is recognized foremost by the individual who holds the feelings of ownership. Correspondingly, it is the individual who manifests the "felt rights" associated with psychological ownership (declaring "it is mine," while protecting it). Furby (1980), Isaacs (1933), among others indicate that psychological ownership can exist in absence of legal ownership, as might be evident by children feeling and expressing ownership for toys and nursery rhymes at school. In addition, Van Dyne and Pierce (1993) observed differential effects for legal (i.e., equity ownership stake in an organization) and experiences of ownership on employee behavior and attitudes.

5. The need for self-identity, for example, does not become engaged with each and every target that the individual comes into contact with. The same can be said for the "need for control and effectance motivation" and "having a place." Thus, we suggest that there is some "event" (a person-target interaction that we do not yet understand) that activates one or more of the latent needs, such that through "time" we come to know, create, or have control over the target culminating in the emergence of psychological feelings of ownership.