Self Construal, Reference Groups, and Brand Purchase Behavior

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We've long known that consumers' brand preferences can be influenced by others (Stafford 1966). This study builds on previous research and explores the association between consumer brand purchases and those of one's parents, peers and siblings. Further, it explores whether self-construal is a factor in the relation between reference group purchases and one's own purchase behavior. We find that siblings play a dual role as referents, emulating both family and peers. We also find that self-construal influences perceptions of the importance played by one's self versus others in brand purchases.

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followed by reminding the subjects of their past failure to act in a manner consistent with the advocacy. The juxtaposition of the advocacy and awareness of failure to perform the behavior arouses dissonance. Similarly, a self-prophecy prediction request reminds people of how they should behave and that they have not behaved in that manner. This results in dissonance which can be alleviated via a change in behavior (Spangenberg et al. 2003).

In summary, a self-prophecy prediction request makes people aware of a discrepancy between their actual and normatively ideal states regarding a focal behavior. This discrepancy produces a dissonant state that can be alleviated through subsequent action consistent with social norms (Spangenberg and Greenwald 1999; Spangenberg et al. 2003).

**NORMATIVE SOCIAL IDENTITY ACTIVATION AND SELF-PROPHECY**

In addition to a cognitive dissonance explanation for self-prophecy, there is empirical evidence suggesting the importance of social norms. Sprott, Spangenberg, and Fisher (2003) demonstrate that the effect of a self-prediction is greater when people hold stronger (versus weaker) social norms regarding a particular behavior. Although this finding can be considered consistent with a dissonance-based explanation for self-prophecy (i.e., greater cognitive dissonance is elicited for those with stronger social norms), it also suggests the importance of how closely one identifies with a social norm.

Social identities are self-deﬁnitions that incorporate more general and normative knowledge about a particular group that an individual belongs to or identiﬁes with (Brewer 1991). An individual’s social identity has been found to inﬂuence a wide variety of consumer behaviors and attitudes (Briley and Wyer 2002; Deshpande, Hoyer, and Donthu 1986; Stayman and Deshpande 1989; Wooten 1995), spokesperson response (Deshpande and Stayman 1994), advertising response (Forehand and Deshpande 2001; Forehand, Deshpande, and Reed II 2002), media usage (Saegert, Hoover, and Hilger 1985), and information processing tendencies (Meyers-Levy and Sternthal 1991). Social identities can be especially inﬂuential when that identity is made socially or environmentally salient (Briley and Wyer 2002; Forehand and Deshpande 2001; Forehand et al. 2002; Reed II 2004). Social identities are shaped by a lifetime of experience, social interaction, and self-expression (Belk 1988; Escalas and Bettman 2003, 2005; Fournier 1998; Richins 1994). Social identities are thought to incorporate behavioral and attitudinal information as well (Brewer and Gardner 1996), such that activating a social identity affects the individual’s own self-esteem (Crocker et al. 1994). Thus, when a positive social identity is activated, it is expected that the individual’s own self-esteem should be affected in a positive direction as well. Further, to the extent that individuals use these social identities as indicators of behavior, it is expected that individual should attempt to behave in a way consistent with the activated social identity.

**THEORETICAL PREDICTIONS**

How might a cognitive dissonance explanation and a normative social identity activation explanation be delineated? When making a prediction, one must first activate information related to the behavior. Because the self-prophecy effect works with normative behavior, the definition of normative behavior suggests that most individuals should have that information associated with the self to some extent. Attitudes toward a behavior (e.g., recycling) should be relatively positive regardless of whether or not a self-prophecy prediction is made. This is because the behavior is both positive and normative. When one thinks about recycling, even if one is not making a prediction about performing the behavior, it should be expected that a positive attitude toward recycling would be present. Thus, cognitive dissonance and normative self-identity activation should predict a positive attitude toward recycling following the prediction, as well as the activation of information about the target normative behavior as it relates to that individual’s self- and social identities.

Where the two explanations differ is in their treatment of self-esteem. If self-prophecy is a dissonance-based effect, lower relative self-esteem should be observed for those who make a prediction regarding the normative behavior compared to a control group that does not make a prediction request. This drop in self-esteem is a result of the inconsistency in memory related to the positivity of the normative behavior (e.g., “I know that recycling is positive and I know that I have not recycled.”). On the other hand, if self-prophecy is the result of social identity activation, the opposite effect is expected related to self-esteem. If it is the case that making the self-prediction toward the normative behavior activates the “recycling” social identity, then one’s self-esteem should increase, as the recycling social identity is positive in nature. The link between social identity and self-esteem is well-researched in social psychology (Brewer and Gardner 1996; Brown 1998; Crocker et al. 1994; Greenwald et al. 2002; Greenwald et al. 1988). As such, to the extent that a particular self- or social identity is activated, the valence incorporated into that identity should be activated as well. Therefore, self-esteem should increase for those who make a self-prophecy prediction compared to those who do not make a prediction.

**EXPERIMENT 1**

Experiment 1 tests the hypothesis that making a self-prophecy prediction activates self-recycling identity in memory. To the extent that this self-recycling identity is activated, the positive affect associated with the normative behavior (recycling) should then lead to an increase in self-esteem. From a methodological standpoint, Experiment 1 was designed to ascertain whether the Implicit Association Test (Greenwald, McGhee, and Schwartz 1998) is an appropriate measure to capture these changes in cognitive activation. If activation of self-identity information is the impetus for behaving consistently with the normative behavior, then it is expected that self-relevant knowledge will be observed via the IAT.

**Sample and Procedure Overview.** The sample included seventy-six students from an introductory marketing course at a large west coast university participating for course credit. Subjects completed a set of self-report measures assessing their attitudes toward various normative behaviors. A distraction task followed completion of the questionnaire. Following the distraction task, subjects completed the self-prophecy manipulation task, then immediately completed three IATs: recycling identity, recycling attitude, and self-esteem. Following completion of the IATs, subjects were debriefed and released.

**Explicit Measures.** Subjects completed a battery of self-report measures designed to ascertain the extent to which subjects had a positive attitude toward various normative behaviors, including the target behavior of recycling. Following instructions that there were no right or wrong answers, and that the responses would be anonymous, subjects completed five six-item scales that measured attitudes toward six different target items, one of which was the target behavior (recycling). Different versions of these measures were counterbalanced to avoid order effects.

**Experimental Manipulation.** Following completion of the explicit measures and a distraction task designed to eliminate any
carry-over from completing the explicit measures, subjects completed another self-report questionnaire which included the prediction request. Following instructions that there were no right or wrong answers, and that responses were to be anonymous, subjects recorded a dichotomous response to each of four different scenarios, including a recycling scenario. The specific format of the recycling question was as follows:

“You frequently purchase and use products that come in recyclable packages (e.g., cardboard boxes, aluminum cans).

Do you predict that
a. you will recycle these materials?
b. you will not recycle these materials?”

The control condition differed in procedure such that those subjects did not answer a prediction question related to recycling. Following the manipulation, subjects were then moved to a computer lab in order to complete the IAT.

IAT Procedure. Subjects completed three IATs at PC-based workstations. The IATs were presented in a counterbalanced format, and included a measure of recycling attitude, recycling self-identity, and self-esteem (Farnham, Greenwald, and Banaji 1999). The attitude, self-identity and self-esteem forms of the IAT have been used extensively in prior research.

Results
Implicit Self-Identity. It was hypothesized that subjects who make a self-prophecy prediction about recycling behavior should activate a social identity representing recycling in memory. The activation of that social identity should be revealed in a stronger self-recycling IAT effect compared to a control group. Consistent with this hypothesis, subjects who made a self-prophecy prediction revealed a significantly stronger self-recycling activation compared to a control group ($D_{control}=.23, D_{treatment}=.40; t(73)=2.33, p=.02$).

Recycling Attitude. It was hypothesized that both the treatment and control conditions should have equivalent positive attitudes toward recycling. Recycling is a normative behavior and is generally thought to be positive (DeYoung 1990; Schultz 1998). Thus, most individuals should have a positive attitude toward recycling. Consistent with this hypothesis, subjects who made a self-prophecy prediction were no different in implicitly measured recycling attitude than the control group ($D_{control}=1.0, D_{treatment}=1.1$; $t(76)=.70, p=.49$).

Implicit Self-Esteem. To the extent that a positive social identity is activated in memory, an associated boost in self-esteem was expected. Because individuals tend to reveal overall positive self-esteem (Brown, 1998), positive overall self-esteem in both the treatment and control groups was expected, but greater self-esteem in the treatment condition was expected. Consistent with this hypothesis, subjects who made a self-prophecy prediction revealed significantly stronger self-esteem compared to a control group ($D_{control}=.59, D_{treatment}=.74$; $t(74)=2.14, p=.03$).

Discussion
Experiment 1 provides evidence for the hypothesis that making a self-prophecy prediction activates the relevant social identity in memory. In the current research, it is suggested that making a self-prophecy prediction activates self-knowledge relevant to recycling behavior. By activating a positive social identity (which includes the individual’s self as a member of that social group), it is expected that self-esteem should increase, since the individual is temporarily in a positive self-state.

These results also provide evidence of the inter-relatedness of self-esteem, self- and social identity, and attitudes in memory. Greenwald et al. (2002) suggest that there is a relationship between implicit attitudes, self-esteem, and self-identity. Specifically, Greenwald and colleagues posit that there is a connection between three concepts in memory: (1) self (individually or within the context of a social group), (2) a social object (e.g., recycling), and (3) an attribute (e.g., good or bad). Each of these concepts forms a vertex in a triadic relationship. Similar to Balance Theory (Heider 1958), Greenwald and colleagues suggest that people maintain balance among the relationships between the concepts at each vertex. The social object-self association corresponds to one’s identity, the social object-attribute association corresponds to one’s attitude, and the self-attribute association corresponds to one’s self-esteem. Specific to these results, when a particular self-identity is activated (in this case, the recycling self-identity), the positivity associated with that normative self-identity is reflected in the increase of that individual’s self-esteem.

Further, the lack of significant differences in recycling attitude between the conditions suggests that attitude accessibility is not a compelling explanation for self-prophecy effects. While not the focus of this research, previous findings in a related stream of research—mere-measurement have suggested attitude accessibility as a possible explanation (Morwitz, Johnson, and Schmittlein 1993). To the extent that making a prediction activates information related to the target behavior in memory, the ease of the accessibility of that previously activated information acts as a cue for behavior toward the target behavior. However, these results suggest that there is no difference between the level of activation of attitude information between the treatment and control, suggesting that both groups have equal accessibility to that information following a prediction.

Finally, while prior research has used implicit self-identity measures as independent variables to predict some normative behaviors, such as smoking (Swanson, Rudman, and Greenwald 2001), this is the first time a self-identity IAT has been used as a manipulated variable to assess the effects of an experimental treatment. To the extent that the IAT reflects individual-level changes in specific relational states, and those relational states are representative of theoretical models of social behavior, the IAT becomes a powerful tool to assess the links amongst social and self-associated objects in memory.

EXPERIMENT 2

While experiment 1 provides some evidence supporting a self-identity activation explanation for the self-prophecy effect, further evidence of the effect of social identity activation on self-esteem was warranted. Specifically, it was decided to manipulate self-esteem. Manipulating self-esteem prior to making the self-prophecy prediction was thought to be the strongest test possible of the predicted differences between a social identity and a cognitive dissonance explanation of the self-prophecy effect. Specifically, following a reduction of self-esteem, if a cognitive dissonance explanation for self-prophecy is correct, there should be no recovery of self-esteem following prediction, for the simple reason that making the self-prophecy prediction under the cognitive dissonance explanation should in itself reduce self-esteem. On the other hand, following artificial reduction of self-esteem, the social identity activation explanation of the self-prophecy effect suggests that making the prediction should activate the related normative social identity (e.g., recycling) as well as the associated positive valence associated with that identity, thus allowing self-esteem to recover.

Sample and Procedure Overview. One hundred eighty-two students from an introductory marketing course at a large west coast
university participated in a 2 (self-esteem manipulation: easy/difficult) x 2 (self-prophecy prediction: yes/no) experiment for course credit. Experiment 2 was identical to experiment 1 with the exception of the inclusion of a manipulation designed to temporarily decrease self-esteem. After a brief introduction the experimental session began with a self-esteem manipulation (the Remote Associates Test [RAT], described below). After completion of the RAT, subjects answered follow-up measures relating to their perceived performance on the exercise (see Appendix 3). These measures served to indicate whether the RAT had the intended effect. Subjects then either did or did not make the same self-prophecy prediction described in experiment 1. Following the self-prophecy manipulation, subjects completed the same set of IATs described above. At the conclusion of the IATs, subjects were debriefed and excused.

Experimental Manipulation. The RAT was employed to manipulate self-esteem (McFarlin and Blascovich 1984). The RAT was preferred over other self-esteem manipulations because the RAT does not require any deception or the part of the experimenter. Subjects were instructed that they would be completing a word generation task in which they would be given three related words. The task required the subject to provide an additional fourth word chosen to logically complete the word set. Two conditions (easy/difficult) of the RAT were used that varied in the difficulty of the required fourth word. Subjects were given 10 minutes to complete the RAT exercise. After time had elapsed, subjects were asked to stop with the task regardless of how many answers they had generated, and were informed they would be correcting their own answers. The experimenter indicated the correct responses to the subjects, while the subjects corrected their own paper and clearly marked the incorrect or non-response answers. The subjects then listed the number of correct responses they had generated at the top of the paper. Both the act of answering the questions as well as the public correcting and recording of the score induce an increase or decrease in self-esteem consistent with the difficulty condition, such that those in the difficult condition should reveal a decrease in self-esteem, while those in the easy condition should reveal boosted self-esteem.

Self-Prophecy Manipulation. The self-prophecy manipulation was identical to experiment 1. All subjects responded to a short questionnaire that required them to make predictions about a number of common behaviors, where half the subjects responded to a question specific to recycling behavior.

IAT Procedure. The IAT procedure was identical to experiment 1.

Results

Manipulation Checks. Subjects reported the extent to which they enjoyed the self-esteem manipulation tasks, and how well they felt they did on those tasks. Those in the difficult condition perceived that they did significantly worse than those in the easy condition when indicating the number of word sequence tasks they thought they completed correctly (M_{difficult}=1.87, M_{easy}=3.89; p<.000). Additionally, subjects in the difficult condition reported the task to be significantly less fun than those in the easy condition (M_{difficult}=3.25, M_{easy}=4.79; p<.000). These performance tasks are shown in appendix C. It should be noted that subjects’ self-esteem was not probed prior to the manipulation and IATs in order to minimize the chance of priming the self-concept or self-esteem.

Implicit Self-Identity. Prior to analysis, subjects in the difficult condition who scored higher than the midpoint on the “fun” scale were removed from the analysis. It was thought that these individuals might receive self-related boosts from performing a task that was intellectually stimulating or interesting. This resulted in the removal of sixteen subjects. Similar to experiment 1, subjects who made a self-prophecy prediction about recycling behavior should activate a social identity representing recycling in memory. The activation of that social identity should be revealed in a stronger self-recycling IAT effect compared to the no-prediction group. Consistent with experiment 1, subjects who made a self-prophecy prediction revealed significantly stronger recycling self-identity compared to those who did not (D_{no-prediction}=0.80, D_{prediction}=1.21; F=4.1, p<.05). Further, neither the main effect of the self-esteem manipulation nor the interaction was significant.

Recycling Attitude. Similar to experiment 1, because recycling is a normative behavior and is generally thought to be positive (DeYoung 1990; Schultz 1998), most individuals should have a positive attitude toward recycling. Consistent with this hypothesis, subjects who made a self-prophecy prediction were no different in implicitly measured recycling attitude than the control group (D_{no-prediction}=0.93, D_{prediction}=1.03; F=1.35, p=.25). Further, neither the main effect of the self-esteem manipulation nor the interaction was significant.

Implicit Self-Esteem. It was expected that, consistent with a social identity activation explanation for the self-prophecy effect, making a prediction about a normative behavior (in this case, recycling) should facilitate the recovery of self-esteem following self-esteem threat. Thus a two-way interaction was expected between the difficulty of the task and whether the subject made a self-prophecy prediction. Consistent with this expectation, a marginal two-way interaction obtained (F(1, 166)=2.88, p=.10).

Discussion

The results of experiment 2 suggest that making a self-prophecy prediction can alleviate the effects of prior self-esteem threat to an individual. This is consistent with the social identity explanation for self-prophecy effects, in that a social identity explanation would posit an increase in self-esteem following the activation of a positive social identity following a self-prophecy prediction. On the other hand, if making a self-prophecy prediction induces cognitive dissonance, one would expect that self-esteem would remain low following manipulation.

It was also promising that all of the effects found in experiment 1 were replicated. Consistent with experiment 1, there was no difference in implicitly measured attitudes toward recycling between the conditions. Again this suggests a lack of support for attitude accessibility explanations for the self-prophecy effect, since the results suggest that attitude toward recycling was equivalent across conditions. Further, experiment 2 revealed the expected main effect of social identity on the prediction. This again suggests that recycling social identity is activated following the self-prophecy manipulation. Further, the lack of a significant interaction on the self-recycling IAT suggests that the self-esteem manipulation is not affecting the activation of recycling social identity.

GENERAL DISCUSSION

The results of experiment 1 suggest that completing a self-prophecy prediction request activates related social identity in memory, such that self-knowledge is activated relevant to recycling behavior. The results of experiment 2 suggest that completing a self-prophecy prediction request alleviates the effects of prior self-esteem threat to an individual. These results are more consistent with a social identity explanation for self-prophecy rather than a cognitive dissonance explanation. If making a self-prophecy prediction induces cognitive dissonance, it would be expected that self-esteem would remain low after a self-esteem manipulation.
Using a social identity explanation, the current studies found an increase in self-esteem following the activation of a positive social identity following a self-prophecy prediction request.

These results provide evidence of the inter-relatedness of self-esteem, self-identity, and attitudes in memory (Greenwald et al. 2002). Greenwald and colleagues (2002) posit that there is a connection between the self, a social object (e.g., recycling), and an attribute (e.g., good or bad). As was the case with the current research, when a particular social identity is activated (e.g., recycling), the positivity associated with that normative social identity is reflected in the increase of an individual’s self-esteem.

Finally, and while not the focus of this research, the lack of significant differences in recycling attitude between conditions suggests that attitude accessibility is not a compelling explanation for self-prophecy. To the extent that making a prediction activates information related to the target behavior in memory, the ease of the accessibility of that previously activated information acts as a cue for behavior toward the target behavior. However, this research suggests that there is no difference between the level of activation of attitude information between treatment and control conditions, suggesting that both groups have equal accessibility to that information following a prediction request.

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Social Identity Threat and Consumer Preference
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EXTENDED ABSTRACT
Using social identity theory (e.g., Tajfel and Turner 1979) as a theoretical framework, where social identity refers to the component of the self-concept that is derived from actual or perceived membership in social groups, we tested across four experiments whether exposing consumers to a social identity threat would result in the avoidance of products associated with that identity. In exploring this issue the present research contributes to the marketing and psychology literatures in several notable ways. To our knowledge, this is the first research to examine how consumer preferences are influenced by social identity threat. Second, this research extends previous findings that consumers often demonstrate preferences that are congruent with self-perceptions (Sirgy 1982) and primed self-identities (Mandel 2003; Reed 2004). Third, we build upon social identity theory by highlighting a behavior that is unique to the consumption context—the avoidance of products associated with a threatened identity. Fourth, the present research demonstrates that this avoidance tendency is related to a desire for self-protection and not related to other motives such as self-enhancement and self-verification. Finally, we identify key moderators of this avoidance tendency—self-esteem and ingroup identification.

Social identity theory (Tajfel and Turner 1979) proposes that identity is comprised of two components: personal identity (i.e., identity related to a person’s individual sense of self) and social identity (i.e., identity related to groups to which a person belongs or is affiliated). The theory further purports that situational demands can activate one particular component of identity which will, in turn, impact the way an individual thinks, feels, and behaves. We propose that when one aspect of consumer identity becomes threatened, under certain conditions, consumers will become motivated to avoid products associated with that threatened aspect identity and will instead prefer products associated with an alternative identity. This notion differs from a priming account of shifts in consumer preferences which suggests that priming activates relevant concepts in memory and increases the accessibility of related information when making judgments (Srull and Wyer 1980). Thus, priming often leads consumers to prefer products that are consistent with currently activated concepts. In the present research, we suggest that when consumers are motivated to protect the self from identity threat, they will prefer products that are inconsistent with the threatened aspect of identity.

In study 1, we set out to provide preliminary evidence that consumers will avoid products associated with a threatened aspect of identity. Participants were either presented with information that threatened their gender identity, enhanced their gender identity, or was neutral with regards to their gender identity. Participants then evaluated films that were either related to their own gender identity or that were related to their university as an identity. As predicted, participants who received threatening information about gender as a social identity showed a significantly weaker preference for films associated with their gender than films associated with an alternative identity. Those in the enhance and control conditions did not report more negative evaluations of the gender than the intellectual films.

In study 2 we examine self-esteem as a moderator of reactions to social identity threat. Participants were first provided with information that either threatened gender as a social identity or that was neutral regarding identity. They then made a choice between a publication that was either associated with their own gender or that was associated with being intellectual. People low in self-esteem tended to avoid choosing a product associated with a threatened facet of identity, whereas product choice was not influenced by social identity threat when people were high in self-esteem. This effect was mediated by a desire to protect the self.

In study 3 we investigated the moderating role of ingroup identification. Participants’ gender identity was either threatened or not threatened and they were asked to choose between a publication that was associated with their own gender identity or that was neutral with regards to gender identity. In addition, participants completed a measure of ingroup (i.e., gender) identification. When social identity threat was present consumers low in ingroup identification were more likely to choose a neutral product over a gender related product, but when no social identity threat was present these consumers selected the gender related product. In contrast, those participants high in collective self-esteem maintained their preferences for the gender related product regardless of the presence of a threat.

Finally, in study 4, to enhance the generalizability of the findings, a threat to a new identity was examined—nationality. Participants either received threatening information about their nationality or neutral information about their nationality. In addition, participants were either given or not given the opportunity to affirm values that are important to the self. Past research shows that such a task enables people to deal with threat, and thus not use other means to cope. Participants then reported their consumption intentions regarding National Hockey League teams that were either highly associated with a Canadian identity or not. Finally, participants completed a measure of ingroup (i.e., Canadian) identification. Those participants who did not self-affirm showed less of a preference for a Canadian option when they were low as compared to high in Canadian identification. However, when participants were given the opportunity to self-affirm those low and high in Canadian identification showed a similar preference for the Canadian option.

The current research builds on social identity theory by demonstrating a unique response to social identity threat—shifts in product preferences and choices. Consumers who were low in self-esteem and low in ingroup identification were particularly likely to avoid products associated with a threatened identity, whereas those consumers high on these two traits were more likely to prefer the product associated with a threatened identity. The implications for both theory and practice are discussed.
ABSTRACT

We’ve long known that consumers’ brand preferences can be influenced by others (Stafford 1966). This study builds on previous research and explores the association between consumer brand purchases and those of one’s parents, peers and siblings. Further, it explores whether self-construal is a factor in the relation between reference group purchases and one’s own purchase behavior. We find that siblings play a dual role as referents, emulating both family and peers. We also find that self-construal influences perceptions of the importance played by one’s self versus others in brand purchases.

We’ve long known that consumers’ brand preferences can be influenced by others (Stafford 1966). This study builds on previous research and explores the association between consumer brand purchases and those of their parents, peers and siblings. Further, it explores whether self-construal is a factor in the relation between reference group purchases and one’s own purchase behavior. We first discuss previous research concerning types and sources of reference group influence and the concept of an individual’s interdependent and independent self-construal.

Types of Reference Group Influence

An early study on reference group influence presents a matrix categorizing influences on purchase of a variety of products and brands (Bourne, 1957). With this framework Bourne shows a strong reference group influence for public/luxury product or brand decisions and a lower reference group influence for private/necessity product or brand decisions. Building on this research, Park and Lessig (1977) define reference group as, “an actual or imaginary individual or group conceived of having significant relevance upon an individual’s evaluations, aspirations, or behavior” (p.102). Based on this definition and research, three “motivational influences” of reference groups were identified: informational, utilitarian, and value-expressive (Deutsch and Gerard 1955 and Kelman 1961 in Park and Lessig 1977). Using a 14 question scale given to housewives and students the researchers determine that students were more susceptible than housewives to influence by reference groups in their brand and model decisions. In their study, Park and Lessig use the term “reference group” generally and the type of reference group in the questionnaire was not examined.

Bearden and Etzel (1982) expand this research by examining how reference groups influence the purchase of luxury versus necessity product categories and of public versus private goods. Using 13 of Park and Lessig’s 14 item scale, the results indicate there are differences in reference group influence with regard to public/private goods and luxury/necessity items. More utilitarian and value-expressive influence occurs for public necessity purchases, while private luxury purchases involve more informational influence. Although their research highlights the need to consider the varying degrees of reference group influence in purchase decisions, the sources of the influence are neglected.

Sources of Reference Group Influence

It is evident from recent literature that intergenerational influence plays a role in brand preference. Intergenerational influence (IG influence), “refers to the within-family transmission of information, beliefs, and resources from one generation to the next” (Moore, Wilkie, and Lutz 2002, 17). Derived from the notion that reference group influence would be better understood by examining the individuals in the relationship, research by Moore, Wilkie and Lutz (2002) focuses on a dyad, specifically a mother-daughter pair. In this quantitative and qualitative study, they found a link between IG influence and brand equity of consumer packaged goods. Using a dyad-specific analytic method they determined that 69% of the time daughters correctly reported their mother’s brand, although the results were lower for household maintenance brands. They also found that IG influences continue to occur in adulthood, albeit they may be affected by disruptive and sustaining forces. For instance, roommates and peers may have a disruptive potential, while ethnic identity or an individual’s proximity to parents appear to be sustaining forces for IG influences.

What is not clear from the literature is what product types are most influenced by intergenerational reference groups. Moore, et al. (2002) findings build upon previous research by Moore and Lutz (1988) which demonstrates that consumers have a greater intergenerational preference associated with products visible in the home. Other studies indicate that there is a stronger impact of family on convenience items as compared to shopping goods (Heckler, Childers and Arunachalam 1989). Yet, Moschis (1985) hypothesized that parents influence their children’s preferences for brands and stores and that parental influence is greater for shopping goods than convenience or specialty goods. While these studies show conflicting findings, what is clear is that direct and indirect reference group influence is important in issues of family communication and consumer learning.

Drawing on Bearden and Etzel’s work (1982), Childers and Rao (1992) extend the concept of a reference group to differentiate between non-family or peer-based influence and family influence, particularly intergenerational influence. Examining Thai and U.S. subjects, their findings highlight the importance of culture on reference group influence. Two referents were used to determine whether intergenerational reference group influence resulted from direct interaction or an indirect interaction. Similar to previous research, findings indicate that the peer-based influence was stronger for public necessities and family-based influence was stronger for private necessities. In addition, Thai subjects showed more influence from family for private and public products, while the U.S. subjects showed a larger family influence for private goods as opposed to public goods.

Another study by Feltham (1998) also explores the change over time in family and peer influence on brand purchase. Focusing on parental influence, Feltham studied first year and fourth year college students and determined that parental influence was important, yet it appeared to decline as a function of their year in college. She then examined the influence of roommates on personal care product purchases and found that roommate influence increased as a function of more years in college.

Previous research identifies family and non-family relationships and culture as a source of reference group influence; however, very few studies examine the intragenerational relationships and their influence on purchase behavior or brand preference. For instance much of the research on sibling influence on consumption has focused on negative or deviant behaviors, as highlighted by

1The authors wish to thank Daniel Blake for his advice.
Dunn’s (2005) commentary in a special issue of the Journal of Family Psychology. Cotte and Wood (2004) used structural equation modeling on data from triadic relationships (one parent and two siblings over 18 years of age) to show that intergenerational and intragenerational family influences account for 29% of an individual’s innovativeness. The parent was more influential than the sibling, accounting for 65% of the variance in familial influence (three exogenous variables). The sibling accounted for 24% of the variance and birth order accounted for 11%, with later-born (typically second-born) siblings exhibiting greater innovativeness. Siblings have not really been examined in terms of their influence on consumer behavior in general or brand purchase more specifically. These findings lead us to predict that young adults will be most influenced by their parents, then by siblings, and then by close friends.

_Hypothesis 1:_ Brand purchases will be most closely associated with parents’ brand purchases, followed by siblings, and finally by close friends.

**Independent and Interdependent Self-Construals**

Childers and Rao’s (1992) study stresses the importance of intergenerational influence on product consumption. In their consideration of intergenerational influence they note a distinction between nuclear families and extended families, addressing the notion of intragenerational influence. They also note differences between communalistic societies (those that typify extended families) and individualistic societies (those that typify nuclear families). Therefore, they postulate that family influence in cultures with extended families will be relatively strong, since there are more family members to reference, whereas in individualistic societies, the individual self may play a larger role.

Triandis (1988) discusses cultural variables of self by describing concepts of individualism and collectivism, where an individual prioritizes personal goals versus subordinating their personal goals to others. This line of research discusses the influence of culture on behavior and conceptualizes three self views: the private self, the public self, and the collective self. Triandis posits that these three views of self help determine the cognitions an individual uses in social situations. Important here is that these views of self are not distinct and that an individual utilizes one or all of them depending on the situation.

Other studies explore independent versus interdependent views of self. Markus and Kitayama (1991) address two views of self and the influence is evident in differences among cultures. For instance, the independent view of self is considered more separate or unique and focuses on internal attributes, as demonstrated by people from the West (North American cultures), while the interdependent self-view is seen as more connected and concerned with social contexts, as shown in many people from non-Western backgrounds (Asian, Latin American, African and many Southern European cultures).

Useful for research on the self within peer and family influence is Singelis’s (1994) research on a “dual self” (p. 581). In this concept he argues that an individual has two well-developed self-construals and uses one or both in a variety of situations. Self-construal is defined as “thoughts, feelings, and actions concerning one’s relationship to others, and the self as distinct from others” (p. 581). To measure this dual self, he developed a theoretical and empirical scale, measuring independent and interdependent self-construals. His study used questions from a variety of instruments measuring self concepts as well as his own questions to develop a scale (Self-Construal Scale or SCS) that effectively measures undergraduate students’ experiences and behaviors focusing on self-construal (Kuhn and McPartland, 1954; Triandis, Mcclusker, and Hui 1990; Yamaguchi, Kuhlman, Sugimori 1992; Cross and Markus 1991; Bhawuk and Bristlin 1992). The findings demonstrate the validity of the SCS and confirm that individuals are “two-sided,” yet it asserts that when the unit of analysis is the individual, these two selves must be considered separately (Singelis 1994, p. 588).

Based upon the previous work on self construal, we expect brand purchases to be influenced by one’s dominant self-construal. Thus, we posit:

_Hypothesis 2:_ High Interdependent individuals will report greater influence by others (family or close friends) than the self, while High Independent individuals will report greater self influence.

Cross cultural research on the self has demonstrated that Western (e.g. United States) subjects tend to have independent self-construals while those from non-Western cultures tend to have interdependent self-construals (i.e., Lee, Aaker and Gardner 2000). As some nations become more culturally diverse (cf., Ramirez and de la Cruz 2003), we are likely to find significant differences in dominant self-construal as individuals acculturate to the adopted culture. With this in mind, we posit the following about a sample of respondents in one culture, the United States:

_Hypothesis 3:_ Subjects who have more recently immigrated to the U.S. are more likely to have interdependent self-construals, while those who have resided in the U.S. longer will be more likely to have independent self-construals.

**METHOD**

**Participants.** Two hundred and fourteen undergraduate students from a large public university in the western United States took part in the study for extra credit in introduction to marketing courses. Data were collected from students in two different sections of marketing via an online survey. Seven respondents’ surveys were incomplete and those respondents were dropped from the analysis, leaving a total of 207 participants.

The remaining 207 survey respondents are a diverse group. Of the 207 participants in the final sample, 32% described themselves as the first-generation in their family to live in the United States. Twenty-one percent described themselves as second-generation, 12% described themselves as third generation, and 21% said their great-grandparents were in the United States so they are at least fourth-generation family members in the U.S. Ten percent answered “don’t know” to our inquiry regarding the number of generations their family has been in the United States and four percent were attending the University as international students.

We asked respondents what language(s) they speak at home. A language other than English was reported as the primary language spoken at home for 35% of our respondents. There was a great deal of variation in the foreign languages spoken in those homes. Sixty-five percent of the respondents said English is the primary language in their home, although additional language(s) are also spoken in 22% of the homes.

Fifty-eight percent of the respondents are female (42% are male) and 54% are the traditional age of undergraduates (18-24). Thirty-three percent are age 25-34, 10% are 35-44, and 3% are 45-54 years of age. Most of the respondents (69%) are single, 28% are married or in a committed partnership and 3% are divorced. There is also diversity in their living arrangements. Forty-three percent live with parents, 28% with siblings, 25% with a spouse/partner, 12% with children, 12% with a roommate or roommates who is/are close friend(s), 8% with a roommate or roommates who are not
close friends, 4% with grandparents, 4% with in-laws, 2% with uncles/aunts, and 2% with cousins.

Procedure. Respondents completed an online survey at their leisure over a four-day period. The first question assessed respondents’ usual brand purchase/usage by asking them to “name the brand [they] usually buy/own/use” for each of 26 different product categories. Product categories varied from household items (e.g., laundry detergent and household cleaners), to shopping goods (e.g., computers and mp3-type player), to service providers (e.g., airline and fast food restaurant) and media (e.g., magazine and morning news show). The order in which the product categories appeared in the survey was randomized across the respondents. If a respondent doesn’t buy/use a product in the category then she was asked to write “DB” for “don’t buy/use/own” and she was asked to write “DK” if she didn’t “know, don’t remember, or don’t have a usual brand.”

The next three questions measured the brand match between the respondent and close friends, family, and siblings. For each of the 26 product categories, the respondents indicated their level of agreement (where 1=strongly disagree and 7=strongly agree) with the 26 product categories, the respondents indicated their level of agreement (where 1=strongly disagree and 7=strongly agree) with the following statements, “My close friends buy/own/use the same brand as I do,” “My parents buy/own/use the same brand as I do,” and “My siblings buy/own/use the same brand as I do.” Respondents could also indicate “not applicable” for each measure.

Self construal was measured with Singelis’s (1994) 24-item Self Construal Scale. Following the Self Construal Scale, respondents were asked to “Imagine you are going to buy each of the following products for the first time. Who would you most look to for help in making your choice? Of yourself, your family and your close friends, who is the most important, second most important, and least important (of the three) in helping you make this choice?” They used a pull-down menu to indicate level of importance of family, friends, and self, for each of the 26 product categories. This measure was followed by demographic measures of gender, age, ethnic identification, race (multiple answers possible), marital status, people with whom one lives now, people with whom one lived growing up (a measure of extended family), primary language spoken in the home now, and the number of generations in which the respondent’s family has been in the United States (from 1=respondent is the first generation in the U.S. to 4+=great grandparents were in the U.S. Respondents could also answer “don’t know.”)

RESULTS

Measuring Self-Construal

Self-construal was determined by creating a median split for both of the self-construal subscales, Interdependence and Independence, then identifying subjects as High-Interdependent-Low Independent (n=35), Low Interdependent-High Independent (n=36), High Interdependent-High Independent (n=69) and Low Interdependent-Low Interdependent (n=67). For analyses considering Self-Construal, we only included subjects with High-Interdependent-Low Independent (Interdependent) and with Low Interdependent-High Independent (Independent) (cf. Escalas and Bettman 2005).

Hypothesis 1: Association of Brand Preferences

Hypothesis 1 predicted that the greatest match among product choice would occur with parents, then with siblings, and finally with friends. A two-way ANOVA within subjects design of product X source of product match (close friends, parents, and siblings) was conducted. Data for respondents without siblings were omitted from those cells. The results presented a significant product X source of product match interaction (F=1.516, p<.05). The means are reported in Table 1.

Perhaps not surprisingly, respondents had strong agreement that their siblings bought/owned/used the same brand as did they in most categories. In most categories, the agreement pattern was similar to that of parents, but in several categories, patterns of agreement with siblings looked similar to friends, not parents. This was particularly true in fashionable products (i.e. watch, MP3-type player, and shoes). While our data do not permit analysis of direction of influence, and it is likely that siblings are rated high in the match because they are similarly influenced by parents, these results are intriguing because they demonstrate the dual role that siblings play as family members and peers.

Hypothesis 2

Hypothesis 2 predicted that subjects who have interdependent self-construals will be more likely to rely upon others for influence in brand choice, while those with independent self-construals will be more likely to report self as most important in the decision. Responses for “close friends” and “family” were combined to form “others” as a source in the analysis of degree of influence.

A Chi-square analysis was performed on the self-reported source of most important influence (others or self) by self construal (interdependent, independent) for each product category. Subjects who reported not using or not owning the product, or who didn’t know the brand they own or use were omitted from the analysis. Significant differences in the predicted direction occurred for four product categories: Computer (X^2 (1)=5.161, p<.05), Automobile (X^2(1)=10.482, p<.01), Pet (X^2(1)=3.60, p=.05), and TV (X^2(1)=3.60, p<.05). In all of these cases, interdependent respondents were more likely to rely on others than were independent respondents, who were more likely to report self as having the most influence on brand choice (see Table 2). These categories represent products that are likely to be high involvement decisions due to their importance, durability, high cost, and risk.

Hypothesis 3

Hypothesis 3 predicted that respondents who had more recently immigrated to the United States would be more likely to be interdependent while those who had resided longer in the United States would be more likely to have independent self construals. A Chi-square analysis was performed on the frequency data (reported in Table 3).

Although the results were not significant (X^2 (3)=3.806, ns), the pattern is consistent with our hypothesis. Analysis of the self-reported ethnic and racial origins may provide greater insight; however, our sample sizes were too small.

DISCUSSION

Consumer research on social influence on product and brand preferences and choice has evolved to include different forms of influence and to consider cultural orientation. In this paper, we have considered the association with siblings, parents and peers on brand preferences. While our data did not permit us to examine the direction of influence but only the “match” in brand preference, our data demonstrate an interaction among product type and association. It is interesting to note that siblings are associated with the greatest degree of similarity in brand purchases, and that their pattern emulates both parents (perhaps reflecting common parental influence) and peers, particularly for fashionable products.

Additionally, we examined the role of self construal on self-reported influence on brand choice. The significant findings, while for only four of the product categories, were nonetheless interesting
because they showed the predicted effect for particularly important decisions.

Our analysis was somewhat limited by the sample size, particularly when analyzing “interdependent” versus “independent” self construals, given the way in which we classified respondents. Our pattern of results lend support for a continued exploration into the area of social influence on brand and product preferences. Although not analyzed in this paper due to sample size and coding challenges, we are hopeful that a more detailed analysis of self-reported brand names, of types of products, and of ethnic and racial orientation will provide a richer understanding of this complex relationship.

REFERENCES

### TABLE 1
MEAN COMPARISONS FOR PRODUCT MATCH

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Product Category</th>
<th>Friends</th>
<th>Parents</th>
<th>Siblings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Laundry</td>
<td>4.9</td>
<td>5.7</td>
<td>5.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peanut Butter</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>5.4</td>
<td>5.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pain Reliever</td>
<td>5.5</td>
<td>5.7</td>
<td>5.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coffee</td>
<td>4.7</td>
<td>4.6</td>
<td>4.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Toilet Paper</td>
<td>4.6</td>
<td>5.5</td>
<td>5.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Catsup</td>
<td>5.5</td>
<td>6.0</td>
<td>6.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Household Cleaner</td>
<td>4.6</td>
<td>5.5</td>
<td>5.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>4.7</td>
<td>5.6</td>
<td>5.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Soap</td>
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</tr>
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<td>4.8</td>
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<td>MP3 Type Player</td>
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<td>5.4</td>
</tr>
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<tr>
<td>Television</td>
<td>4.4</td>
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</table>

**NOTE:** respondents indicated their level of agreement (where 1=strongly disagree and 7=strongly agree) with the following statements, “My close friends buy/own/use the same brand as I do,” “My parents buy/own/use the same brand as I do,” and “My siblings buy/own/use the same brand as I do.”
### TABLE 2
**FREQUENCY (N) OF MOST INFLUENCE BY SELF VS. OTHERS**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Product Category</th>
<th>Interdependent</th>
<th>Others</th>
<th>Independent</th>
<th>Others</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Laundry</td>
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<td>23</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>16</td>
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<td>Peanut Butter</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>24</td>
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<tr>
<td>Pain Reliever</td>
<td>16</td>
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<td>15</td>
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<td>20</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>18</td>
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<td>Toilet Paper</td>
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*<.05

### TABLE 3
**IMMIGRATION RECENCY AND SELF-CONSTRUAL**

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<td>4</td>
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