

Exploring Identity Salience and Purchase Intent

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ABSTRACT

This article consists of four studies that broadly examine the identity salience construct in the context of purchase intention formation. Study one demonstrates that identity salience can be triggered by stimulus cues and that exposure to these cues has systematic impact on subsequent purchase intentions toward identity relevant products, but not identity non-relevant products. Study two suggests that this effect is more than a mere “priming” effect because exposure to the stimulus cues causes actual shifts in consumer’s sense of who they are. Building on study one and study two, a third study directly manipulates the self-importance associated with a consumer social identity and shows systematic changes in purchase intent while ruling out affect as an alternative explanation. A fourth study rules out a demand artifact explanation by showing that differential judgments of identity relevant stimuli are a function of both exposure to an identity cue and the consumer’s measured self-importance associated with the identity. These results are discussed in terms of how they build on prior work on social identity and consumer product preference formation.

“We are not one person. There is no ‘I am,’
but many ‘I’s’ coming from numerous places within us.”
- George Ivanovitch Gurdjieff (1866-1949)

INTRODUCTION

In the popular press, it is often easy to find anecdotal evidence of marketers’ attempts to create “symbolic preference formation,” i.e., getting consumers to like a product offering because it embodies “being” some “type” of person that they are or want to be (cf. Levy 1960; Belk, Bahn and Mayer 1982). For example, in “life style” advertising (cf. Plummer, 1974) and certainly in numerous product positioning and market segmentation strategies (cf. Wells, 1975, Kamakura & Mazzon, 1991; Holbrook, 1996); practitioners appear to believe that a consumer’s social identification with a particular subculture, ethnic identity, family, gender, set of peers or even spokesperson can be the basis for a favorable consumer judgment. Therefore, brands and products are often specifically created or positioned to embody a particular social identity oriented lifestyle. The implicit assumption is that consumers who possess or desire to possess that social identity will look upon such lifestyle presentations favorably, connect the life-style to the advertised brand, and generate a favorable judgment toward the brand.

Such a premise is consistent with research on the link between product selection and social identity which points to the fact that many products relate functionally to consumers through a particular social identity they possess (cf. Shavitt, Lowry and Hil-pan 1992). For example, in two studies, Kleine, Kleine and Kernan (1993) demonstrated a strong positive relation between a consumer’s social identity and the particular possessions that enable consumers to enact that identity (study one). The authors also showed that the frequency with which behaviors are enacted in the service of some social identity is influenced by the importance of an identity to a consumer’s self-structure (Kleine, et. al 1993, study two) and

feedback from others on how well the consumer is enacting the social identity (Laverie, Kleine and Kleine, 2001). These results suggest that products are attractive to the extent that they “fit” the consumer as part of a constellation (see Solomon, 1988) of complementary products and “as a facilitating artifact for some identity that is important” (Kleine et. al 1993, p. 229).

Clearly, consumer judgments can be driven by social identification processes (Shavitt, et. al 1992) leading consumers to link products to particular social identities they care about (Kleine, et. al 1993) and even to form particular impressions of consumers who use particular kinds of products (Shavitt and Nelson 2000, see also Baron, Mok, Land and Kang 1989). The notion that a consumer’s sense of who they are should relate to their consumption and choice has been an important idea discussed by several scholars (e.g., Levy 1959); whether in terms of an abstract notion of congruency between the self and a brand (Sirgy 1982), in terms of precise roles that the consumer wishes to enact (Solomon 1983) or in terms of particular personality associations embodied within the brand itself (Aaker, Benet-Martínez and Garolera 2001).

This extremely simple premise is not new. Salient social identities affect consumer judgments. However, the process by which particular bases for consumer social identification become salient is less well understood. Given the differential activation potential of the many possible social identities that may make up a consumer’s sense of who they are, it is proposed here that the mere presence of a particular social identity within a consumer’s social self-schema does not automatically prompt differential processing of new marketing information congruent with that identity—e.g., the likelihood of connecting that identity to a brand and forming a favorable judgment toward it. Rather, differential sensitivity to identity relevant stimuli should be strongest when the relevant social identity is an activated component of the consumer’s social self-schema. When this activation occurs, the consumer is argued to be affected by identity salience - a temporary state during which the consumer’s sense of self along dimensions of the social identity is altered (cf. Forehand and Desphande, 2001).

This article consists of four studies that broadly examine the identity salience construct in the context of purchase intention formation. Drawing upon work from self-concept, social cognition and more recent interests in social identity and inter-group relations, (Tajfel 1981; van Knippenberg and Ellemers 1990) study one demonstrates that identity salience can be triggered by stimulus cues and that exposure to these cues has systematic impact on subsequent purchase intentions toward identity relevant products, but not identity non-relevant products. Study two suggests that this effect is more than a mere “priming” effect (cf. Higgins, Rholes and Jones 1977; Bargh and Chartrand, 2000) because exposure to the stimulus cues causes actual shifts in consumer’s sense of who they are (cf., McGuire, McGuire and Winton 1979; McGuire, McGuire, Child and Fujioka 1978). Building on study one and study two, a third study directly manipulates the self-importance associated with a consumer social identity (cf. Brewer and Gardner, 1996) and shows systematic changes in purchase intent while ruling out affect as an alternative explanation. A fourth study rules out a demand artifact explanation by showing that differential judgments of identity relevant stimuli are a function of both exposure to an identity cue and the consumer’s measured self-importance associated with the identity. Finally, these results are discussed in terms of how they build on prior work on social identity and consumer product preference formation.

STUDY ONE: Exploring Identity Salience and Purchase Intentions through cue exposure

Every consumer has the potential to socially identify with others on a multitude of variables including shared traits, matching avocations, common political affiliations, similar religious beliefs, and common ethnic heritage (cf. Forehand, et. al., 2002; Deaux, Reid, Mizrahi, and Ethier 1995). In fact, throughout the life course, socialization within a culture causes a person to become aware of the infinite number of social identities that may be potential bases for self-definition. Some are more permanent (e.g., mother, daughter, friend, African-American, etc.) while others may be more transitory (e.g., Republican, athlete, graduate student etc.).

Indeed, consumers are exposed daily to marketing stimuli and consumption situations that may heighten a particular basis for social identification. For example, a female consumer in a store full of males might be likely to have her gender identity salient (cf., McGuire, McGuire and Winton 1979; McGuire, McGuire, Child and Fujioka 1978). Or a commercial that shows a concentration of ethnically homogenous individuals may make ethnic identity salient to consumers who view that ad and share that identity (Forehand and Deshpandé 2001; Grier and Deshpandé 2001; Forehand, et. al 2002). According to the argument made earlier, however, the mere possession of a social identity within a consumer's social self-schema is not enough to ensure that the consumer will differentially respond to identity relevant marketing stimuli. Social identities can have little influence on consumer attitudes and behaviors unless social identity information is accessed (Newman, Duff, Schnopp-Wyatt, Brock and Hoffman 1997). Therefore, identity salience can bring to mind attitudes and behaviors consistent with the social identity when a social identity is an activated component of a person's social self-schema (cf. Shih, Pittinsky & Ambady, 1999; Cheryan & Bodenhausen, 2000; Forehand, et. al 2002). If such conjecture is valid then one would expect that heightening the salience) of a social identity—via exposure to an identity cue—should lead to higher (lower) evaluations of an identity relevant (identity irrelevant) product when adopting such an identity provides a favorable basis to respond to the brand.

Procedure

In order to establish the basic effect of identity salience on purchase intent, participants completed two tasks. The first task required participants to complete a visual imagery study that involved evaluating Internet typeface formats for use in electronic communications (e.g., Web page designs). Participants evaluated different multiple typeface formats on several dimensions (e.g., warm, memorable, fun and common) in terms of how a random printed word came across to them. Unbeknownst to the participants, the task was intended to make a social

identity salient or not through exposure to these identity cues. For half the participants, their family social identity was activated by requiring the participants to evaluate the word son or daughter seven different times in seven different typefaces¹. The other half of the participants evaluated another word—the word friend—intended to not make their family social identity salient). After participants completed the first task and after a brief waiting period, a different experimenter administered an ostensibly unrelated new product assessment study.

Participants were asked to evaluate three different new product concepts. The first product was a palm held interpersonal telecommunication product. The second and third products were filler products². For the three products, participants were presented with a picture of the product and a product description. The focal product (interpersonal telecommunication product) was manipulated to be either relevant or not relevant to the social identity made salient by exposure to the identity cues in the first task; by either framing or not framing the interpersonal telecommunication product in terms of the family social identity (e.g., as in a product positioning strategy). In the object relevant to the family (sons and daughters) social identity condition, the focal product description included utilitarian features (e.g., calendar, address book, email) but with an emphasis on the product as a basis for staying connected to parents and family. The object not relevant condition was identical to the relevant condition except it did not mention a connection to family.

Dependent measures

The dependent measures were gathered as part of the second task. After reading the product descriptions, participants indicated the likelihood that they would purchase each of the three products, ranging from (1) Unlikely to (7) Highly likely. To bolster the cover-story, participants also responded to two measures not of direct interest in the study: the likely market success of the products and in open-ended responses, participants also wrote down

reason(s) for buying the product. Finally, participants were subsequently probed in an additional open-ended question to write down any additional reasons.

Experimental Design

Participants in study one were assigned to the cells of a 2 (Family identity salient or not) x 2 (Identity relevance: Relevant – framed in terms of family or Not relevant – framed in terms of features) between participants factorial design. The key dependent measure was purchase likelihood.

Predictions

An identity salience effect predicts that more favorable purchase intentions should be observed in the following condition: after exposure to an identity cue (son and daughter) and when the consumer evaluates an identity relevant product (product framed in terms of the familial identity). If the family social identity is made salient and consumers are thinking about themselves in terms of their family social identity, then they should like the focal product that is framed in terms of their family identity more than the focal product that is not framed in terms of their salient family identity. Salient social identification connects a consumer to the identity-relevant product, leading to more favorable judgments as evidenced in higher purchase likelihood for the identity-relevant focal product. No such interaction of design factors should emerge for purchase likelihood of the filler products because the filler products (held constant across conditions) should have no apparent linkage to the family social identity.

Results

One hundred and seventeen (N=117) participants from a southeastern university were randomly assigned to treatments in study one. An analysis of variance (ANOVA) tested the effects of exposure to an identity cue (family identity made salient, vs. family identity not made salience) and object relevance (object relevant: framed in terms of features + family or object not

relevant: framed in terms of just features) on mean purchase likelihood for the focal product and the two filler products³. The means and standard deviations are presented in table one.

Insert Table 1 about here

The analysis on purchase likelihood for the focal product yielded a significant two-way interaction of identity cue and object relevance, ($F(1,109)=11.10, p < .05$). To better understand the nature of this interaction, a planned contrast was conducted. The identity salience effect predicts that heightening the salience of a social identity through cue exposure, leads to higher (lower) evaluations of an identity relevant (identity irrelevant) product when adopting such an identity would provide a favorable basis to respond to the product. Therefore, the highest purchase likelihood should be observed when a social identity is salient and the consumer evaluates an identity relevant product. To test this hypothesis, the responses of participants who had their family social identity salient and who evaluated an identity relevant product were contrasted against the average responses of all other treatments. Consistent with predictions, participants who had their family social identity made salient through exposure to identity cues and who evaluated an identity-relevant product reported higher purchase likelihood ($M= 5.17$) than participants who had their family social identity made salient, but did not evaluate an identity-relevant product ($M=3.32$), participants who did not have their family social identity made salient but did evaluate an identity-relevant product ($M=3.38$) and participants who neither had their family social identity made salient nor evaluated an identity-relevant product ($M=3.43$); $F(1,115) = 31.32; p < .01$). The latter three conditions were not different from each other ($F < 1$). Additionally, no significant differences of design factors were found on purchase likelihood for the filler products ($F_s < 1$).

Discussion

The results of study one establish the basic identity salience effect. When a social identity was made salient through exposure to identity cues, the likelihood increased that a consumer would more favorably evaluate an identity relevant product. More specifically, study one showed that differences in the salience of a particular social identity led to predictable differences in purchase likelihood (assumed to be guided by attitude formation) such that when a social identity was salient, (conditions in which participants evaluated the words son or daughter), participants responded more favorably to an identity-relevant focal stimulus (product framed in terms of the familial identity) as compared to when the salience of the family social identity was not triggered by exposure to identity cues (conditions in which participants evaluated the word friend). This critical difference in purchase intention was found for the focal product, but not for the two filler products predicted to be unrelated to heightening the salience of the social identities in question.

At this point, some potential methodological and conceptual criticisms can be made regarding study one. Methodologically, one may argue that the effect is the result of demand artifacts (cite). Several aspects of study one can possibly mitigate such concerns. It should be noted that the necessary conditions for responding to experimenter demands are that the participants must (1) encode a demand cue that would alert him/her to the research hypothesis, (2) discern the correct hypothesis or guess another hypothesis that is incidentally correlated with the true hypothesis, and (3) act on the hypothesis. Relative to point 1) and 2) every attempt was made to minimize the perceived connection between the two tasks. Distinct cover-stories were carefully constructed for each task, the two tasks were separated in time, administered by different experimenters and consisted of aesthetically distinct stimulus materials. Moreover, when queried in post experimental inquiries, no participants indicated suspicion that the two tasks were related. Regarding points 2) and 3) artifactual demand is less likely to be an alternative explanation for study one because a higher-order interaction was found (Shimp,

Hyatt & Snyder, 1991) making it difficult in a between subjects design for participants to calibrate responses to the other non-observed experimental conditions. Conceptually, but on a related point, one could argue that the effect demonstrated is nothing more than another example of “priming,” (cf. Bargh and Chartrand) albeit in a purchase decision context. The fundamental premise of classic priming experiments (cf. Higgins, et. al, 1977) is that consciously deliberated attention to environmental stimuli (e.g., asking subjects to rehearse aggression related words) is likely to “activate mental concepts relevant to them” (Todorov and Bargh, 2002; page 55) with this activation continuing to persist later to an ostensibly unrelated task which then results in its “use” in a subsequent situation (e.g. judging an ambiguous behavior in a secondary task as more aggressive –Higgins, 1996; Sedikides and Skowronski, 1991). In this regard, study one can be viewed as nothing more than another example of priming. There are two key points in response to this criticism. First, researchers have noted that the concept of “priming” is often thought of as a proxy for natural influences of context in social situations (Todorov and Bargh, 2002). At a certain level of conceptual abstraction, every experiment that involves treatment manipulations is likely to prime some concept which affects how people respond to some criterion measure. That is what experiments do. The question is how does the effect of identity salience demonstrated in study one illustrate something important beyond the concept of priming? Recall that the theoretical premise of identity salience is that consumers may perceive themselves in terms of various levels of abstractions (Tajfel 1959; Tajfel and Turner 1979; Turner and Oakes 1986) linked to different social identities that can become a part of their working or spontaneous self-concept (Markus and Nurius 1988; Markus and Kunda, 1986; McGuire, McGuire and Winton 1979). Hence, exposure to identity cues should alter a person’s underlying self-conception in the direction of dimensions relevant to that social identity. This kind of change in the temporary structure of a person’s social self-schema can be thought of as not exactly the same thing as priming (i.e., the temporary salience of an idea or

concept) because identity salience should cause deeper underlying changes in self-conception. To test this idea, a second study was run.

STUDY TWO: Identity salience is more than just priming an idea

In order to examine the effects of the identity cues on people's momentary self-conceptions, a holdout sample of one hundred and thirty five (N=135) participants from a southeastern university completed the visual imagery study from study one. Half the participants were randomly assigned to the high salience of the family social identity (evaluated the focal word son or daughter.) The other half were randomly assigned to evaluate the alternative focal word friend. All participants then completed an ostensibly unrelated consumer self-description study (cf. McGuire, et. al 1978), administered by a separate experimenter after a brief 10 minute waiting period. In the second tasks, participants were asked to "please take a minute to describe yourself and to provide as much detail as you wish." This open ended probe was the only instruction given. The percentage was calculated of instances in which participants did or did not mentioned a connection to their family in their self-descriptions (cf. McGuire et al., 1978; 1979). An analysis was performed defining this as the dependent variable and the three treatment groups (son vs. daughter vs. friend) as independent variables. There was an overall effect indicating omnibus differences across treatment groups ($\chi^2=13.83$ $p=0.0010$). In a follow up analysis, a planned contrast showed that more participants spontaneously mentioned some aspect of their family identity when either son was salient (46%) or daughter was salient (53%) as compared to when participants evaluated the focal word friend (16%, $\chi^2=13.45$, $p=0.0002$). In other words, heightening the salience via exposure of the identity cues (son or daughter) shifted participant's self-conceptions (at least temporarily), such that the social identity was an activated identity in their working self-concepts (as compared to when another focal word—friend—was evaluated). Therefore, going beyond a mere priming explanation, these results suggest that exposure to identity cues can lead to differences in how a

consumer views herself. It is important to keep in mind that the dependent measure in study two is very demanding in that differences in familial self-descriptions emerged even though the participants could have talked about absolutely anything in describing themselves. Thus, of all the possible ways they could have presented themselves in the second task, it appears that many chose a self-description that reflected their familial social identity. Further, the propensity to do this was a direct function of exposure to the identity relevant cues.

STUDY THREE: Identity salience as a function of the self-importance of the identity

Social identities are internal, mental representations that can become a basic part of how consumers view themselves. Moreover, a consumer's social identity may be the basis by which consumers think about various actions or judgments (Reed II 2002). For example, a consumer might adopt a social identity (e.g., athlete) and use its associated evaluative content (e.g., perceptions of what an athlete thinks (attitudes) and does (behaviors)) as the basis to form preferences (e.g., attitude toward Nike® sports shoes or attitudes toward exercise). However, it is argued here that merely possessing a social identity (i.e., being affiliated with some basis for social identification) is insufficient to invoke symbolic preference formation (cf. Forehand, et. al 2002). As study one and study two in this article suggest, identity salience triggered by exposure to identity cues is one key factor that is likely to systematically affect consumer judgments by prompting differential processing of identity relevant stimuli.

However, individual difference variables are another type of factor that influences identity salience. Most noteworthy of these variables is the potency of identification that the consumer has with a given social identity. The following thought exercise illustrates this: Consider two consumers who both possess athlete as part of their sense of who they are, but because of past experience, self-affirming reflected appraisals from others (Laverie, et al. 2002) and future aspirations (Markus 1981), consumer A's identity as an athlete might carry more personal meaning to him than consumer B (cf. Kleine, Kleine and Kernan 1993). The fact that

this identity is much more engulfing to consumer A may lead to a higher likelihood that many of consumer A's attitudes will be based on the athlete aspect of his social identity.

The idea of the "depth" by which a person affiliates with a particular identity has been given various names such as "schematicity" (cf. Markus, 198X; Bem, 1981), "strength of identification" (Deshpandé, Hoyer and Donthu 1986) and "self-importance" (cf. Aquino and Reed, 2002) among others. Nonetheless, in the context of this article, it is suggested that self-importance is likely to positively relate to the activation potential (i.e., identity salience) of a particular consumer social identity and should affect reactions to identity relevant marketing stimuli. More specifically, one would expect that heightening the self-importance a social identity should lead to higher (lower) evaluations of an identity relevant (identity irrelevant) product when adopting such an identity provides a favorable basis to respond to the brand.

Overview of Study

In study three, participants expressed purchase intentions under two conditions. First, when a social identity was perceived as being relatively self-important or not. Second, when the social identity was either relevant or not to the object that was to be evaluated (as in study one).

Procedure

In the first task, participants completed a handwriting assessment study that investigated the link between consumer characteristics (e.g., being frugal) and handwriting style. Therefore, as part of the research project, participants were asked to give samples of their handwriting. As part of the cover-story, participants first wrote three neutral sentences in their natural handwriting style in order to provide a baseline. The cover story then indicated that part of the research looked at whether or not what people wrote about was related to their handwriting style. Therefore, participants were instructed to write five independent statements concerning a particular topic.

When participants provided their handwriting samples, they wrote about self-conceptions of their family (Baldwin and Holmes 1987) social identity. Self-importance was manipulated as high (low) by having participants write about a particular self-important experience or event that emphasized the interdependent (independent) nature of their connectedness with their family (cf. Brewer and Gardner, 1996). Therefore, in the high-self importance conditions, participants read the following directions:

We'd like you to write 5 independent statements (complete sentences in your usual handwriting style, i.e., cursive or not) each with about 10 to 15 words. The statements should convey some positive, deeply moving, emotionally involving thoughts and or sentiments that describe the commitment to your relationship with one or both of your parents. Concentrate on how you have maintained your family ties while also **STRENGTHENING** the sense of connectedness as a member of your family.

Participants in the low self-importance conditions read the following instructions:

We'd like you to write 5 independent statements (complete sentences in your usual handwriting style, i.e., cursive or not) each with about 10 to 15 words. The statements should convey some positive, deeply moving, emotionally involving thoughts and or sentiments that describe the commitment to your relationship with one or both of your parents. Concentrate on how you have maintained your family ties while also **STRENGTHENING** a sense of independence as an individual young adult.

Participants then completed a battery of consumer personality measures as well as other cover story-consistent items. After a ten minute delay, a different experimenter then administered the same ostensibly unrelated new product assessment study used in study one (i.e., along with filler products, participants expressed purchase intent toward products that were framed as relevant to the family social identity or framed as not relevant to the family social identity).

Experimental Design

Participants were randomly assigned to the cells of a 2 (Self-importance: High or low) x 2 (Object relevance: Relevant or Not relevant) between participants factorial design. As in study one, the dependent measure was purchase likelihood for the focal product and purchase likelihood for the two filler products.

Predictions

For study three, a significant two-way interaction of design factors on purchase likelihood of the focal product was expected. Purchase intention (toward the focal product) should depend on whether or not a social identity is self-important. When the particular social identity is relevant to the stimulus to be evaluated combined with the heightened self-importance of that social identity should increase the likelihood that the attitude object (new product concept) will be considered in terms of the particular social identity. Hence, there should be a higher likelihood that the evaluative content of the social identity should be the basis for forming a purchase intention. This should lead to higher purchase intentions for the focal product. Null effects of design factors were expected for the identity-irrelevant focal product and all filler products.

Manipulation Checks

To check the self-importance manipulation, a separate pretest was run. Twenty seven (N=27) participants first completed the handwriting assessment study. After completing the handwriting task and after a ten minute waiting period, participants completed an ostensibly unrelated set of personality measures administered by a different experimenter. Buried in this packet of surveys was fifteen manipulation check items intended to assess the effectiveness of the self-importance manipulation (e.g., I strongly identify with my family, Being a member of my family often affects how I tend to view the world around me, etc). Items ranged from 1= Strongly disagree to 5=Strongly agree and four of the items were reverse coded.

Also included in the packet of surveys was a “consumer emotion and mood study” where they responded to the two 10-item mood scales (using momentary instructions) that comprise the Positive ($\alpha=X$) and Negative ($\alpha=X$) Affect Schedule (PANAS) by Watson, Clark and Tellegen (1988). Past research has suggested that identity importance can sometimes be significantly related to both positive and negative emotional reactions (cf. Laverie et. al 2002) when an identity is made salient. For example, an emotion such as pride may inform a consumer that

she is competent at an identity (Scheff 1991) while emotional reactions such as shame may stem from the perception that the self is inadequate in the context of some identity (cf. Schott 1979). In light of these concerns, the PANAS measure was included to assess and or rule out the alternative explanation that mood changes induced by the self-importance manipulation may lead to any observed effects in study three.

The fifteen manipulation check items were collapsed into one measure of self-importance ($\alpha = .78$) and the means of the self-importance measure were calculated as a function of the low and high self-importance conditions. The averages in the low and high self-importance conditions were $M_{lowselfimp}=3.57$, $M_{highselfimp}=4.19$, ($F(1,25) = 29.58$, $p < .001$) respectively, indicating that the self-importance manipulation altered participants perceptions of the self-importance of their family identity. As a function of low and high self-importance conditions, no differences in mood were found on either the positive affect (PA) or negative affect (NA) dimensions of the PANAS scale ($F's < 1$).

Results

In the main study, one hundred and twenty one (N=121) participants from a southeastern university were randomly assigned to experimental treatments. An analysis of variance (ANOVA) tested the main effects and all possible higher order interactions of self-importance of the family identity (low vs. high) and object relevance (relevant: framed in terms of features + family or irrelevant: framed in terms of just features) on mean purchase likelihood for the focal product and the two filler products. Consistent with predictions, for the focal product, main effects of self-importance, ($F(1, 113)=11.30$, $p < .01$), and object relevance, ($F(1,113)=14.28$, $p < .01$) were qualified by a significant two way interaction of self-importance by object relevance ($F(1,113)=4.33$, $p < .05$). Participants' purchase likelihood of the focal product depended on whether or not the self-importance of their family identity was low or high and whether or not the focal product was framed in an identity-relevant or irrelevant fashion. Table

two shows mean purchase likelihood of the focal product and the two filler products as a function of self importance and object relevance.

Insert Table 2 about here

To better understand the nature of the two-way interaction, a planned contrast was conducted. The key prediction is that the highest purchase likelihood should be observed when a social identity is self-important and identity-relevant. To test this hypothesis, the responses of participants who had perceived their family social identity as being highly self-important and who evaluated an identity-relevant product were contrasted against the average responses of all other treatments. Consistent with predictions, participants who perceived their family social identity to be self-important and evaluated an identity-relevant product reported higher purchase likelihood ($M= 5.33$) than participants who had perceived their family social identity as being self-important, but did not evaluate an identity-relevant product ($M=3.63$), participants who did not perceive their family social identity as self-important but did evaluate an identity-relevant product ($M=3.76$) and participants who neither perceived their family social identity as self-important nor evaluated an identity-relevant product ($M=3.28$); $F(1,119) = 30.76$; $p < .01$).

Discussion and limitation(s) of study one, two and three. Past research is consistent with the findings of study three. For example, researchers have found that strength of ethnic identification affects the amount of attention consumers give to ethnic information, the probability that consumers will buy ethnic oriented products, and consumer reactions to ethnic actors in advertising (Deshpandé, Hoyer and Donthu 1986; Saenz and Aguirre 1991; Hirschman 1981; Ellis et al. 1985; Williams and Qualls 1989). However, these studies did not manipulate the self-importance of the social identity in question (ethnicity). More specifically, in the work by Deshpande and his colleagues as well as Kleine and their colleagues, the strength of identification was a measured variable, either dichotomous, (Desphande, et al., 1986) or

continuous (Stayman and Deshpande, 1989; Deshpande and Stayman 1994; Kleine et.al 1993; Laverie, et. al, 2001). Study three in this article builds upon the aforementioned work by causally examining a key factor likely to relate to identity salience (self-importance), in the context of manipulating a consumer's strength of identification with a particular identity. The pattern of data in study three suggests that when people see a particular aspect of their social identification as being relatively self-important, they are more likely to favorably evaluate an identity-relevant object. This pattern was found for the focal product but not for the second filler product that was predicted to be deemed irrelevant to the particular social identity in question. These effects appear not to be confounded with any differential levels of positive or negative affect (cf. Laverie, et. al 2001) that might have been associated with generating high versus low self-importance thoughts. Therefore the amalgamation of studies one, two and three suggests that identity salience can be triggered by exposure to identity cues (which can temporarily alter the salience of that social identity) or by the self-importance of the identity, both of which prompt differential processing of and systematic reactions to identity-relevant marketing stimuli.

Although self-importance may trigger identity salience, these two constructs are conceptually distinct. Self-importance is an enduring association between an individual's sense of self and his or her social identity (cf. Deshpandé, et. al 1986). Salience reflects the momentary activation of a particular social identity. At any given moment, a consumer who strongly associates with an identity is more likely to have that identity activated than is a consumer who weakly associates with the social identity. For example, social identities that are personally significant, such as religious identification (Charters & Newcomb 1958), racial or ethnic group membership (McGuire et. al 1979), etc., may be frequently activated and highly accessible. The subsequent accessibility over time may produce chronic and predictable differences in a consumer's self definitions (Smith & Mackie 1995). However, possessing a strong association

with an identity need not necessitate its salience. Instead, salience is often elicited by factors, cues and situations external to the consumer. While it may be less difficult to elicit salience in a strong identifier, a strong identifier is not necessarily in a constant state of salience. In fact, there is some empirical evidence for the assertion that salience and self-importance are distinct. In two studies, Forehand, et. al (2002) found that when a social identity was made salient by a combination of social distinctiveness and an identity prime, subjects were more likely to spontaneously self-define on the basis of the social identity in question (indicating higher salience). However, no changes were found in terms of the strength by which individuals identified with the social identity in question (similar results were also reported by Grier and Deshpandé 2001 and Forehand and Deshpandé 2001).

The theoretical premise in this article is that the mere presence of a social identity within a consumer's self-structure is insufficient to differentially prompt information processing towards identity relevant stimuli. However, as the aforementioned discussion suggests, there is probably a complex interplay between identity salience and self-importance. Given the operationalization of self-importance in study three, there might be two possible effects. It is possible that the manipulation of self-importance in study two also made the social identity differentially salient, leading to difficulty in distinguishing possible effects of salience and self-importance of participant's family identity on purchase likelihood for the product stimuli. For example, a person's social identity may be accessible in a certain decision situation to the extent that it is contextually 'salient,' or is chronically important to them. However, since any manipulation of self-importance of a social identity is also likely to make that social identity salient, the absence of a manipulation check on salience (as in study three) makes it harder to disentangle differential salience and self-importance effects. A better test of the theoretical premise in this article would involve a study that simultaneously examines both the effects of identity cues and the self-importance construct on identity salience, but with

operationalizations that do not potentially confound the two constructs. Relatedly, a strong association between a brand or product (as was probably created by using the framing manipulations in studies one and three) and an aspect of a social identity may make that identity more salient when the object is encountered in a decision (for example, ethnic food items on a menu may heighten ethnic salience when looking at the menu). Therefore, in the context of identity salience, to more rigorously assess the impact of the identity cues and the self-importance of a social identity, it would be desirable to examine specific cognitive outcomes that are likely to be diagnostic to the judgment, but are not likely to bi-directionally affect the salience of the social identity in question.

STUDY FOUR: Diagnosticity and the interactive effects of Identity cues and self-importance

Suppose a consumer's political identity (e.g., Democrat) is highly salient (e.g., the consumer is attending a political rally) at the time an attitude toward an identity relevant object is called for (e.g., the consumer is asked to assess and sign a petition against estate taxes). As mentioned earlier, the identity cue (in this case a situational cue), the self-importance of her political identity as well as the relevance of the petition to be evaluated are all likely to affect the salience of her political identity. However, suppose that the consumer is asked to either give her attitude toward the estate tax, or judge the readability of the real estate tax petition itself. The first judgment (attitude toward estate taxes) may be highly diagnostic to her Democrat identity (i.e., a clear norm might exist (cf. Kallgren, et. al 2000)) in which case the identity salience of her political identity is likely to affect the response. However, the second judgment (readability of the petition) may be less diagnostic to her political identity, somewhat minimizing the effect of her political identity's salience on her subsequent judgment. Study four is a partial replication of studies one, two and three, but goes beyond those by demonstrating the interactive effect of the self-importance of a social identity coupled with exposure to identity cues in the context of diagnostic and non-diagnostic judgments (cf. Feldman and Lynch 1988).

Several other aspects were included in order to address limitations of the previous studies. For generalizability issues, study four uses a different social identity and a different attitude object than studies one, two and three. Additionally, rather than manipulate self-importance, study four measures self-importance (cf. Deshpande, et. al 1986; Stayman and Deshpande, 1989 Deshpande and Stayman, 1994) allowing for the study to examine the effect of identity cues and self-importance constructs separately without confounding identity salience derived from self-importance and exposure to identity cues. Study four also uses a different sample (non-college undergraduates). Finally, for completeness sake, study four includes a check on the salience of the social identity in question and a manipulation check on the relevance of the attitude object.

Overview of the Study

During the study, participants generated evaluative responses under three different conditions. After exposure to an identity cue, when the attitude object was relevant (not relevant) to the social identity and when the social identity in question was either self-important or not. Finally, to more clearly distinguish differential effects of identity cues and self-importance, the evaluative responses given toward the attitude object were either diagnostic or non-diagnostic cognitive outcomes. More details follow.

Participants and Experimental Design

Participants were drawn from a sample of 140 freshman and sophomore students, ages fourteen to sixteen at a southeastern high school. They participated as part of course credit. The students were 50% White, 30% Black, 15% Hispanic, and 5% other. The sample had an equal number of males and females. In study four, the students were randomly assigned to the cells of a 2 (Salience: High or Low) x 2 (Object relevance: Relevant or Not relevant) between participants factorial design. In addition, participants were classified as either high or low in identification (self-importance) with the social identity.

Procedure

At time one, a pretest was conducted to determine various social identities for this particular sample. Based on their open-ended responses to the prompt describe yourself, a list of various social identities was generated (cf. Rosenberg and Gara 1985). Several weeks later at time two, a series of social identity scales was administered. These measured the self-importance (i.e., whether participants identified with, admired and characterized themselves as being a person who holds the identity) of a subset of social identities generated at time one. Based on a preliminary analysis of the data generated at time two and to avoid ceiling or floor effects, a social identity was chosen (for use in the main study) in which the distribution of self-importance scores was roughly uniformly distributed amongst participants.

Approximately two weeks later at time three, each participant was given a series of various surveys and research tasks. Buried within the tasks was a consumer web-page assessment study. Participants were told that marketers often want to understand the potential persuasiveness of web page content. In order to understand how to create web page media that have the most impact, message content and web page design is often pre-tested on relevant populations. Participants were told that this study would assess their perceptions regarding types of message content, types of web page content, web page ads and or products/services.

Independent Variables

The social identity chosen from the pretest at time 1 and time 2 was “Future College Educated Leaders of America.” Although the social identity chosen for study four represents an aspirational reference group (cite), it is consistent with the work by Markus and Nurius (1986) who argued for how the existence of various “possible selves” reflects motivational aspects of specific hopes, fears, and fantasies (see also Hart, Fegley, & Brengelman, 1993; Markus and Kunda, 1986) which through self-conceptions, can affect judgments. The background information participants read prior to the main study exposed the participants to an identity

cue. Participants were told that research pre-testing on the consumer web-page assessment study had already begun on three market segment clusters that were subsequently described.

In the Identity cue present conditions, the last of three segments read as follows:

“This research has also been conducted on a segment conveniently entitled “Towns and Gowns.” This segment makes up about 1.2% of U.S. households. The towns and gowns segment earns on average about \$57,862. Members of the Towns and Gowns segment typically range from ages 18 to 34. They have been described as college educated, and highly likely to be the future leaders of this country. They are likely to read magazines like Natural History and watch television shows like Good Morning America. Sample ZIP codes include College Station, Texas 77840; Bloomington, Indiana 47401; Ithaca, New York 14850 and Ft. Lauderdale, Florida 33324.”

In the Identity cue not present conditions, the last of three segments read as follows:

“This research has also been conducted on a segment conveniently entitled “Blue Blood Estates.” This segment makes up about 1.2% of U.S. households. The blue blood estates segment earns on average about \$57,862. Members of the blue blood estates segment typically range from ages 18 to 34. They have been described as high school educated, and highly likely to possess reasonable spending power. They are likely to read magazines like Natural History and watch television shows like Good Morning America. Sample ZIP codes include College Station, Texas 77840; Bloomington, Indiana 47401; Ithaca, New York 14850 and Ft. Lauderdale, Florida 33324.”

In the main study, participants examined the target product/service of interest which was a Smithsonian Magazine Association membership. The participants saw an example of the Web page. Participants were then asked to take several seconds to inspect the web page. They were told to read all information carefully. Afterwards, participants read a description of the service that was depicted on the web page.

In the object not relevant condition, the Smithsonian Association membership was described in terms of strict, utilitarian benefits (attributes):

“Why would you want to be a Smithsonian National Associate Member? Just think about the pros and cons! Being a Smithsonian National Associate Member has many advantages. For example, each member receives twelve total issues of the Smithsonian Magazine® at a special rate that has been discounted specifically for Association members. Twelve issues sent directly to your home or office. In addition to book, record and video discounts as well as other discounts at various museum shops, each member is also kept up to date on various notices of important events and intellectual activities going on in your area. Also, members of the Smithsonian National Association receive

eligibility for specially designated travel programs, as well as free admission to a number of the country's best museums and other cultural events. All of these amazing features for just \$26.00 for the entire year! Why don't you just weigh the costs and benefits! How can you lose?"

In the object relevant condition, the Smithsonian Association membership was described in terms of the social identity in question:

"Why would you want to be a Smithsonian National Associate Member? Just think about whom might be likely to possess such a membership? Think about the type of people who would receive the twelve issues of the Smithsonian Magazine® that is included in the membership. What type of person? Individuals who always present themselves with the highest level of intelligence and future success. For example, college educated individuals of this country might keep up to date on various notices of important events and activities going on in their area. These Smithsonian National Association members are the future leaders of this country. The magazines that they read tell others that they appreciate the more culturally involving things in life. Can't you imagine yourself as this type of person, i.e., a college educated, future leader of this country and Smithsonian Associate Member? All of these amazing features for just \$26.00 for the entire year! How can you lose?"

After reviewing the above information, participants rated the web page on various evaluative dimensions and then reported their attitude toward the Smithsonian Associate membership.

Dependent measures

Participants were asked to rate the example web page on the following six dimensions: interestingness, readability, visual appeal, persuasiveness, complexity, and design quality. The main dependent measure asked participants to rate the extent to which they felt favorable or unfavorable toward the Smithsonian Association membership, which ranged from unfavorable (1) to very favorable (7).

Predictions

Of the seven dependent measures that were chosen, three were expected to be highly diagnostic to the salient social identity: interestingness and persuasiveness of the web page as well as overall attitude toward the product depicted on the web page. The other four dimensions: readability, visual appeal, complexity and design quality of the web page are expected to be relatively less-diagnostic. Therefore, the self-importance of a social identity should interact with exposure to an identity cue to affect judgments of an object relevant (object

irrelevant) stimulus—Smithsonian National Associate Membership framed in terms of the social identity—but should be relatively more positively correlated (less correlated) with dimensions that are diagnostic—interestingness, persuasiveness, attitude than dimensions than (nondiagnostic)—readability, visual appeal, complexity and design quality).

Manipulation Checks

A hold out sample was used to check both the salience and the object relevance treatment manipulations. To check the salience manipulation, participants were asked to read the intro and background information to the Web page assessment study. They then answered several cover-story questions. One of the questions asked the participants to indicate at that particular moment, to what extent did the information make them think about their identity as a future college educated leader of America? The scale ranged from Did not make me think about it (1) to Made me really think about it (7). The difference across the high salience and low salience conditions was significant ($N=34$, $M_{highsalience}=4.47$, $M_{lowsalience}=3.53$, $F(1, 32)=4.59$, $p=.04$). To check the object relevance manipulation, participants were asked to read the descriptions of the service. One of the questions asked the participants to indicate to what extent did the service seem relevant to what it means to be a Future college educated leader of America ranging from Not relevant (1) to Very relevant. The difference across the object relevant and object not relevant condition was highly significant ($N=32$, $M_{relevant}=5.25$, $M_{Notrelevant}=2.44$, $F(1, 30)=65.60$, $p < .001$).

Results

The key effects tested in this study were the relationships between evaluative dimensions and the self-importance of the social identity in question.

Evaluative Dimensions

An analysis examined each of the six evaluative dimensions (interestingness, readability, visual appeal, persuasiveness, complexity, and design quality) and the participants

reported attitude toward joining the Smithsonian Associate membership. Self-importance of the social identity that was measured two weeks prior to the main study was included in the analysis as an independent continuous variable. Self-importance of the social identity consisted of the average of three items ($\alpha = .853$). As mentioned earlier, in a prior survey conducted at time two, participants were asked to indicate the extent to which future college educated leaders of America described them ranging from Does not describe (1) to Describes me perfectly (7), the extent to which they identified with that group ranging from Do not identify w/ group in any way (1) to Strongly identify with the group (7), and whether or not they admired the group ranging from Do not admire the group (1) to Really admire the group (7). Predictions were tested in an analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) including main effects of salience and object relevance and all possible 2 and 3 way interactions of self-importance, salience and object relevance.

The analysis revealed a significant three-way interaction of self-importance x object relevance x salience ($F(1, 90) = 18.84, p < .0001$). The effect of self-importance of the social identity on participants perceptions of the interestingness of the web page, depended on two things: whether or not the participant's social identity (future college educated leaders of America) was made salient or not via cue exposure and whether or not the object was relevant (message was framed in terms of the social identity or object features). A separate model was run to investigate the nature of this result. Table three reports slope estimates for each evaluative dimension of the self-importance continuous variable nested in each treatment condition. Corresponding t value(s) are in parenthesis.

Insert Table 3 about here

The effect of self-importance of the social identity is related to the interestingness dimension only when the social identity is salient via cue exposure and when the attitude object is relevant

to the social identity (i.e., when the message has been framed in terms of the social identity). So in the high salience and object relevant condition, every one-unit change in self-importance of the social identity results in a statistically significant, .62 positive unit change in perceptions of interestingness ($t=6.95$, $p < .0001$) of the web page. This is indirect evidence that self-importance of the social identity influences the judgment of this diagnostic evaluative response. As self-importance of social identification increases, so do perceptions of the web page's interestingness, particularly when the social identity was salient.

According to theoretical premise, the self-importance should be related only to evaluatively diagnostic dimensions. It should have no effect (should not interact with the treatment conditions) in determining perceptions of readability or visual appeal. Consistent with predictions, no effects were found to be significant ($F's < 1$).

A significant two-way interaction was found of self-importance x salience for the persuasiveness dimension ($F(1, 90) = 6.53$, $p < .0123$). The effect of self-importance of the social identity on participants' perceptions of the persuasiveness of the web page, depended on whether or not the participant's social identity was made salient or not through cue exposure. A separate model was again run to investigate the nature of this result. Very similar to the interestingness dimension, the effect of self-importance is positively related to this relevant dimension only when a social identity is salient. More specifically, in the low salience condition, every one unit change of self-importance results in a .483 unit change of persuasiveness ($t=5.34$, $p < .0001$) while in the high salience condition, every one unit change of self-importance results in a .729 unit change of persuasiveness ($t=7.23$, $p < .0001$). This is again, consistent with the notion that self-importance influences the formation of a diagnostic evaluative responses. As self-importance of the social identity increases, so do perceptions of persuasiveness of the web page. Participants in these conditions may be relying on social identification as a basis for generating perceptions of message persuasiveness.

Unexpectedly, the analysis revealed a marginally significant three-way interaction of self-importance x object relevance x salience for the complexity dimension ($F(1, 90) = 4.19, p < .0435$). The effect of self-importance of the social identity on participants' perceptions of the complexity of the web page depended on whether or not the participant's social identity was made salient or not via cue exposure, and the attitude object's relevance (i.e., the type of message that they were exposed to). These results are similar to the interestingness and persuasiveness dimensions. However, the self-importance of the social identity influences this dimension only when a social identity is salient and the message is framed in terms of the social identity. In the high salience conditions, perceptions of complexity are correlated with self-importance of the social identity. More specifically, in the high salience condition, every one unit change of self-importance results in a weak, albeit significant .155 unit change of perceptions of complexity ($t=1.81, p<.10$).

An analysis revealed no effects on the design quality dimension. No significant interaction was observed between self-importance of the social identity and the design quality judgment ($F < 1$).

After evaluating the web page on the six dimensions previously outlined, participants were asked to give their attitude (very unfavorable (1) to very favorable (7)) toward the Smithsonian Associate membership. An analysis revealed a significant two-way interaction of self-importance x object relevance for the attitude dimension ($F(1, 90) = 30.84, p < .0001$). The effect of self-importance on participants' attitude toward the Smithsonian membership depended on whether or not the message was framed in terms of the social identity (object relevant) or object attributes (object not relevant). Consistent with predictions, the key result is that the effect of self-importance of the social identity is related to attitudes toward the Smithsonian Associate membership only when the message is framed in terms of the social identity. In the low salience conditions, every one unit change of self-importance results in a

.543 unit change in attitudes toward the Smithsonian membership ($t=4.73$, $p<.0001$) while in the high salience condition, every one unit change of self-importance results in a .6947 unit increase in favorable attitudes toward the Smithsonian membership ($t=5.43$, $p<.0001$). The effect of self-importance of the social identity in these two treatment conditions closely mirrors the pattern of results found for the persuasiveness dimension.

Discussion

The self-importance of the social identity positively co-varied with interestingness of the web page for participants who were led to form an attitude based on social identity and for whom the social identity was made salient through cue exposure. This effect was somewhat stronger for the persuasiveness dimension where an effect of self-importance of the social identity was found when social identity salience was high versus low. Although it was a much weaker effect statistically, the pattern of results for the complexity dimension somewhat mirrored the results for the interestingness dimension. This was not expected.⁴ However, an effect of self-importance of the social identity was also found for the attitude dimension as a function of object relevance. This pattern of slope effects was very similar to the results found for the persuasiveness dimension. In general, this study provides some evidence that the self-importance of social identification (more specifically, the potency of group identification as captured by the self-importance variable) can be related to the formation of responses in conditions where conceptually, a consumer is more likely to be drawn to a salient social identity that provides a basis for a response (message framed in terms of social identity) on measures that are evaluatively diagnostic to the social identity.

GENERAL DISCUSSION

A consumer can think about herself in terms of various social identities that can connect her to a brand, product or behavior. This connection may lead to an attitude or a judgment that is based on social identification. This article contends that the mere presence of a social identity

within a consumer's social self-schema is not sufficient to affect judgments and behaviors. The amalgamation of the results across four studies suggests that when a judgment or attitude is called for, identity salience is likely to be at least one key precursor to determining how the consumer will respond to the product. For example, part of the current research examined the role of a social identity's salience on people's spontaneous self-concepts (McGuire, et. al 1978 1981) and how this influences purchase intentions. It was found that exposure to an identity cue altered the salience of a particular basis for self-definition (sons and daughters). This systematically influenced judgments of purchase likelihood. This is consistent with social cognitions' view that activated concepts can affect judgments, performance and behavior, but goes beyond a mere priming demonstration because much of the evidence in this article reflects incidental changes in self-conceptions as a function of exposure to identity cues (study one and two) or direct changes in self-conception by manipulation of the self-importance of the social identity in question.

Furthermore, these findings are consistent with more recent work in the literature concerning the dynamic nature of constructed judgments and retrieved attitudes (Reed, Wooten and Bolton 2002; Schwarz and Bohner 2000; Wilson and Hodges 1992). For example, Wilson and his colleagues argue that implicit and explicit judgments can co-exist in memory and further point out that "a great deal of research needs to be done to explore further the different types of dual attitudes and the conditions under which they exist" (Wilson, et. al 2000, page 120). The empirical work in this article suggests that different types of dual attitudes may become linked to different compartmentalized selves. In this way, it is possible for incoming information to be parsed and integrated within a particular social identity such that the social identity in question is likely to act as a basis for retrieving the judgment if it is subsequently activated by exposure to identity cues. Therefore, a consumer's response to a brand, product or

company can be markedly different depending on how they are thinking about themselves at the moment they generate a judgment.

Identity salience also appears to be particularly influential when the consumer is exposed to an identity cue (i.e., the consumer is thinking about herself as being that kind of person) and the identity is also self-important (the consumer strongly identifies with that social identity). In the current research, the data also suggest that the extent to which a consumer identifies with a particular social identity (i.e., the self-importance of the social identity) moderates the extent to which the evaluative content of an adopted social identity will influence purchase intentions. When people saw their family identity (Baldwin and Holmes 1987) as relatively more self-important, they were more likely to favorably evaluate a product that was explicitly relevant to their family identity. This finding is in concert with early discussions of identification (Kelman 1958) as a basis for adopting an attitude and the rich literature in social psychology that describes motivational underpinnings of social identification in terms of how objects can be seen as symbolically linked to social identities people value (Katz 1960; Smith, Bruner and White 1956; Shavitt 1990). The results presented here are also consistent with recent work in which researchers have argued that strength of psychological group membership can influence people's attitudes. For example, Terry and Hogg (1996) presented evidence that norms linked to a behaviorally relevant reference group (regular exercisers) influenced intentions to engage in exercise but only for people who identified with the group (see also Ybarra and Trafimow 1998). Therefore, marketers can attempt to link consumer social identities to their product offerings, for example, a soft drink (e.g., Sprite ®) may attempt to position itself as the beverage of choice for some social identity of interest (e.g., Generation-X non-conformists); however, according to the empirical work in this article, consumers are more likely to adopt social identities that they consider to be self-important in terms of a basis for self-definition. Therefore, marketing communications that attempt to connect a brand to some

social identity of interest must consider the extent to which a social identity is valued by consumers in its particular target market. Otherwise, marketing efforts that try to induce social identity based attitude and or judgment formation toward brands and products will be ineffective. Although prior research has measured relationships between self-importance of ethnic identity in quasi-experimental contexts, (Desphande and Stayman, 1994; Stayman and Desphande, 1989) as well as the correlation between self-importance and behaviorally relevant outcomes in cross-sectional surveys (Deshpande et. al, 1986; Kleine et. al 1993; Laverie, et al., 2001), the current work (study two) builds upon those articles by showing direct causal linkages between self-importance of a social identity and differential processing of identity relevant stimuli in an experimental context.

Although consumer researchers have had little statistical success in demonstrating a strong association between people and the products they choose (Kassarjian 1971), part of this can be traced to an insufficient conceptualization of the relation in question (Kleine, et. al 1993). According to self-image congruence models of brand attitude, a consumer is likely to be to attracted to a brand, product (Birdwell, 1968; Dolich 1969; Eriksen and Sirgy 1989; Grubb and Stern 1971; Malhotra 1988) or retail environment (Sirgy, Grewal and Mangleburg 2000) to the extent that there is a cognitive match between value-expressive attributes and a consumer's self-concept. The empirical work presented in this article also highlights and presents evidence that is consistent with this key issue. Even if a social identity is salient via exposure to identity cues and the self-importance of the social identity to the consumer, it might not be a basis to make a judgment. The social identity must be relevant to the object that is to be evaluated. For example, a consumer who sees herself as a working mother, might be attracted to a car that emphasizes safety and practicality. Since a consumer's social self-schema is the sum total of his or her social identities, and at any given moment, a particular social identity can be activated by a variety of social, contextual, and individual difference factors (Forehand, et. al. 2001), when

a social identity is made salient, it is at least temporarily a part of a person's working or spontaneous self-conception (cf. McGuire and Padawer-Singer 1978; Markus and Kunda 1986) and this heightened salience combined with object relevance (i.e., when the particular social identity is relevant to the stimulus to be evaluated) should increase the likelihood that the object will be thought of in terms of the particular social identity, resulting in a judgment likely to be driven by social identification processes.

Lastly, evidence presented here suggests that salience derived from exposure to identity cues that activate self-important social identities are more likely to influence evaluative responses that are diagnostic to the social identity (cf. Feldman and Lynch 1988). In other words, possessing a salient, self-important and object relevant social identity is particularly useful as a guide to judgments if it provides a person with a meaningful basis to respond to some stimulus. Consider a consumer who is evaluating a consideration set of shoe brands. Further suppose that the person's social identity (e.g., Urban Youth) is highly salient at the time an attitude is generated (e.g., the person is watching a program on Black Entertainment Television®). Even if the consumer is evaluating a set of brands (e.g., Sketcher's, FUBU©) that is clearly relevant to her self-important social identity, she may not be clear on which brand best embodies her Urban Youth identity. Her social identity in this case would be evaluatively non-diagnostic relative to evaluating the brands of shoes (cf. Feldman and Lynch 1988). Her social identity as an Urban Youth, and the fact that there is no clear identity-related norm (cf. Kallgren, Reno and Cialdini 2000) provides her with an inadequate basis to respond to the object (i.e., in this example, choosing among the two brands). Hence, if a social identity is evaluatively diagnostic, there is an increased likelihood that the evaluative content linked to that social identity will influence the formation of a consumer attitude. This notion is consistent with recent findings in the attitude recruitment literature (cf. Wilson, Lindsey and Schooler 2000). For example, in a very complex hybrid lab/field study, Cohen and Reed II (2002) showed

that, outside of any obvious pressure to conform, heightening the salience of a particular social identity (women in business) affected the way that people recruited attitudes toward the object (affirmative action). The results of their study suggest that when identity was salient (not salient) attitudes were more aligned with group membership norms (personal attitudes) when the membership group had a clear (unclear) position on the issue (see also, Kallgren, et. al. 2000). Therefore, social identification may be salient, self-important and relevant to a product or brand; but may also leave the consumer unable to generate a judgment if that identity does not provide some direction with regard to how that type of person will or should respond.

CONCLUSION

As the opening quote suggests, a consumer's self-concept is a complex and intricate constellation of various social identities that may become differentially relevant in different consumption situations. Indeed, academic research has demonstrated that classifying consumers on the basis of some social identity leads to differences in the descriptions of how those consumers respond to marketing stimuli (Deshpandé and Stayman 1994; Jaffe and Berger 1988; Jaffe 1991; Meyers-Levy 1988; Forehand and Deshpandé 2001; Grier and Deshpandé, 2001; Wooten 1995; Stayman and Deshpandé 1989; O' Guinn and Meyer 1984; Wallendorf and Reilly, 1983; Hirschman 1981; Saegert, Hoover and Hilger 1985; Deshpandé, Hoyer and Donthu 1986; Meyers-Levy and Sternthal 1991). However, merely knowing that consumers linked to different social identities sometimes respond differently sheds very little light on when and how this is likely to occur. Because recent research has suggested that a consumer's social identity is more likely to affect judgments and behaviors when that identity is an activated component of the consumer's social self-schema (cf. Forehand et. al. 2002; Kleine et. al, 1993), it may be important to examine which internal and external factors are likely to affect identity salience, and hence subsequent responses to identity relevant marketing stimuli. This research attempts to provide additional evidence of the interplay of identity cues and the self-importance of

consumer social identities in determining responses to brands and products that are designed or positioned to embody particular social identity oriented life-styles. Such an understanding is important in marketing because if a brand can connect to the consumer's social identity intensionally and extensionally (Oliver, 1999) in the sense that it represents deeply engulfing, self-defining aspects of the consumer, then the consumer may feel that the brand is "part of me" (Belk, 1988) and is an extension of the self (cf. Kleine, Kleine and Allen, 1995), and that the consumer cannot conceive of him or herself as whole without it (cf. Oliver, 1999). In that regard, the concept of identity salience might be a key construct that can trigger such thoughts, attitudes and consumption behaviors that reflect the "many 'I's' coming from numerous places within us."

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TABLE 1
STUDY 1: EFFECTS OF IDENTITY CUES AND OBJECT RELEVANCE
ON PURCHASE LIKELIHOOD OF FOCAL PRODUCT AND FILLER PRODUCTS

Object Relevance:	Relevant		Not Relevant	
	Cue Not Present Low	Cue Present High	Cue Not Present Low	Cue Present High
Products Evaluated:				
Focal Product	3.38 ^b (1.50)	***5.17 ^a (1.26)	3.43 ^b (1.55)	3.32 ^b (1.72)
Filler Product 1	3.03 ^a (2.10)	2.18 ^a (1.36)	2.29 ^a (1.65)	2.15 ^a (1.60)
Filler Product 2	5.03 ^a (1.93)	5.24 ^a (1.70)	5.07 ^a (1.72)	5.14 ^a (1.76)

Note: N = 117 Participants; Standard deviations in parentheses. Across a particular stimulus (i.e., focal product, filler product 1 and filler product 2), means with different subscripts are different from each other.

*** Significant at .001, reflects the two-way interaction of salience and relevance.

TABLE 2
STUDY 2: EFFECTS OF SELF-IMPORTANCE AND OBJECT RELEVANCE
ON PURCHASE LIKELIHOOD OF FOCAL PRODUCT AND FILLER PRODUCTS

Object Relevance:	Relevant		Not Relevant	
Self-Importance:	Low	High	Low	High
Products Evaluated:				
Focal Product	3.76 ^b (1.38)	***5.33 ^a (1.61)	3.28 ^b (1.89)	3.63 ^b (1.35)
Filler Product 1	**2.45 ^a (1.74)	2.91 ^b (1.94)	**2.21 ^a (1.32)	3.40 ^b (1.89)
Filler Product 2	4.86 ^a (1.79)	5.48 ^a (1.34)	5.62 ^a (1.29)	5.53 ^a (1.38)

Note: N = 121 Participants; Standard deviations in parentheses. Across a particular stimulus (i.e., focal product, filler product 1 and filler product 2), means with different subscripts are different from each other.

*** Significant at .001, reflects the two-way interaction of self-importance by relevance.

** Significant at .05, reflects the main effect of self-importance

TABLE 3
 STUDY 3: EFFECTS OF SELF-IMPORTANCE ON EVALUATIVE DIMENSIONS
 AS A FUNCTION OF IDENTITY CUES AND OBJECT RELEVANCE

Object Relevance:	Relevant		Not Relevant	
	Cue Not Present Low	Cue Present High	Cue Not Present Low	Cue Present High
Evaluative Dimensions:				
Interestingness	-.004 (-.050)	.620 (6.95 ^a)	.114 (1.31)	.003 (.043)
Readability	.111 (1.21)	.018 (.204)	-.106 (-1.26)	-.754 (-.802)
Visual Appeal	-.782 (-.822)	.067 (.757)	-.090 (-1.03)	.112 (1.15)
Persuasiveness	.483 (5.34 ^b)	.729 (7.23 ^a)	-.152 (-1.54)	.091 (.993)
Complexity	-.037 (-.482)	.155 (1.18 ^c)	.098 (-1.18)	-.043 (-.546)
Design Quality	-.046 (-.533)	.088 (1.08)	.048 (.606)	.052 (.591)
Overall Attitude	.543 (4.73 ^b)	.695 (5.43 ^b)	-.039 (-.311)	-.072 (-.623)

Note: N = 140 Participants; t statistics in parentheses

^a Significant at .01.

^b Significant at .05.

^c Significant at .10.

End Notes

¹ This study involves a social identity that has been established in prior work. It is the family social identity that is associated with familial role contexts (cf. Baldwin and Holmes, 1987; Solomon, 1983). Because males and females participated in the study, the family social identity was further broken down into the precise social identities of son and daughter depending on the gender of the participant. In the high salience treatments, participants in the son conditions were all male and evaluated the focal word son while participants in the daughter conditions were all female and evaluated the focal word daughter. However, the son vs. daughter distinction has no theoretical significance because I make no a priori predictions as to differences within the “family” social identity conditions. Therefore, the key effect involves comparisons of participants who had their family identity made salient (evaluated the son vs. daughter focal word in the visual imagery task) with participants who had no identity made salient (participants who evaluated the word friend in the visual imagery task).

² One of the filler products was an electronic portable head-band worn in the summer to keep cool and the other filler product was a flat tire re-filler for automobiles.

³ The effect of gender was included in the model to test for differential reactions of males (who had their son identity salient) vs. females (who had their daughter identity made salient). No such differences were found so this distinction will not be discussed further.

⁴ Participants rated the web page’s complexity immediately following the persuasiveness dimension. Although purely post hoc speculation, it might be argued that the idiosyncratic nature of the sample of participants (high school students) and the close proximity of these two

dependent measures may have led them to infer some kind of relationship between persuasiveness and complexity resulting in unintended carry-over effects.