9-25-2015 12:00 AM

Exploring Consumer Relationships with Human Brands: How Reference Groups, Affiliation Motives, and Biological Sex Predict Endorser Effectiveness

Jennifer A. Jeffrey, *The University of Western Ontario*

Supervisor: Dr. Matthew Thomson, *The University of Western Ontario*
A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Doctor of Philosophy degree in Business
© Jennifer A. Jeffrey 2015

Follow this and additional works at: https://ir.lib.uwo.ca/etd

Part of the Marketing Commons

Recommended Citation

This Dissertation/Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by Scholarship@Western. It has been accepted for inclusion in Electronic Thesis and Dissertation Repository by an authorized administrator of Scholarship@Western. For more information, please contact wlswadmin@uwo.ca.

EXPLORING CONSUMER RELATIONSHIPS WITH HUMAN BRANDS:
HOW REFERENCE GROUPS, AFFILIATION MOTIVES, AND BIOLOGICAL SEX
PREDICT ENDORSER EFFECTIVENESS

(Thesis format: Monograph)

by

Jennifer <u>Jeffrey</u>

Graduate Program in Business Administration

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

The School of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies
The University of Western Ontario
London, Ontario, Canada

Abstract

Using a human brand (commonly referred to in popular press as a celebrity) as a product endorser is a popular marketing tool, and a variety of factors have been shown to influence the effectiveness of this technique. Although human brands are traditionally regarded as aspirational others, a concept based on the reference groups literature, researchers have yet to examine whether adopting a reference group framework is of theoretical or substantive value when predicting a human brand's endorsement potential. This dissertation explores the issue, arguing that the traditional conceptualizing of human brands as purely aspirational, while not incorrect, is restrictive. Human brands are evolving, with a greater range of individuals seen as human brands and with those brands engaging in more open communications. As a result, consumers see some human brands as similar others and even friends; these concepts are linked with membership groups. In this thesis, I propose and find support for the premise that predicting a human brand's endorsement potential is best done by assessing both the aspirational and membership elements of the human brand, an approach offering several benefits. To begin, assessing both elements facilitates a deeper exploration of why reference group ratings positively predict endorser effectiveness. I demonstrate that reference group ratings exert their effects by strengthening affiliation motives, and in particular find that whereas aspirational ratings benefit both intrinsic and extrinsic affiliation motives, membership ratings almost exclusively benefit intrinsic affiliation motives. I also find that sex moderates the relative importance of each affiliation motive on behavioural intentions, with females more influenced by intrinsic motives and males more influenced by extrinsic motives. Finally, I investigate how human brands can strengthen their reference group ratings, finding support for the notion that human brands who increase their self-disclosure levels benefit from higher ratings and enhanced persuasiveness as endorsers. I test my propositions across four studies, using a mix of survey and experimental methodologies.

Keywords

Human brands, reference groups, affiliation motives, self-disclosure, celebrity endorsements

Acknowledgments

There are a great many people who have helped me achieve this important milestone, and I will be forever grateful for their assistance. To begin, I would like to thank the members of my thesis proposal and examination committees: Drs. June Cotte, Dante Pirouz, Rod Duclos, Beth Lee, and Antonia Mantonakis. Thank you all for your wonderful comments, suggestions, and feedback on my thesis. Second, thank you to Lisa Bitacola and Andrew Huff for their help in my data collection efforts; I truly appreciate your help. Third, thank you to all my friends, new and old, for their support and encouragement throughout the process, and in particular to the PhD students and marketing faculty at Ivey. Fourth, to my supervisor Dr. Matt Thomson, I cannot imagine completing this thesis with anyone but you as my advisor. Your friendship, assistance, and encouragement have been instrumental in my success. Finally, I want to thank my family. To my parents, for always being in my corner, to my daughters, for helping keep me grounded, and most of all, to my beloved husband and best friend Tom, for his unfailing support and love throughout.

Table of Contents

List of Tables

List of Figures

List of Appendices

Chapter 1

And then Chan says something like this:

"Doing SNL was by far the most terrifying thing that I've ever done, because there is a lot of reading involved, and I don't read that well out loud."

Suddenly you're in love.

- Elaine Lui, well-known columnist, commenting on actor Channing Tatum's June 2015 "Ask Me Anything" discussion on Reddit in which the actor candidly discusses his struggles with reading aloud.

1   Introduction

A human brand is "any well-known persona who is the subject of marketing communications efforts," (Thomson, 2006, p. 104) a holistic description which acknowledges that often these human brands attempt to shape and control the persona put forth to consumers as a way of managing brand impressions. In turn, human brands[1] are often used as a tool by marketing professionals to promote other products or services. In this specific promotional capacity, human brands act as celebrity endorsers, defined by McCracken (1989, p. 310) as "any individual who enjoys public recognition and uses this recognition on behalf of a consumer good by appearing with it in an advertisement."

---

[1] As a general rule I will adopt the term human brand as opposed to celebrity throughout as I feel it is a more accurate representation of my research focus, and also allows for a broader range of human brand types than what most lay people would consider a "celebrity." For example, a fictional character like James Bond is not likely considered a celebrity per se, though he is a well-known persona, and would accurately be categorized as a human brand. Likewise a politician or activist may not be seen by lay people as "celebrities," but again these individuals would typically have some degree of proactive brand image management. However, given that I am also specifically interested in how human brands can increase their endorser effectiveness, my focus is on those human brands who would realistically also engage in celebrity endorsement initiatives; namely, actors, athletes, musicians, and so forth: Individuals that lay people would primarily see as "celebrities."

Human branding researchers have to date has looked at source effects (e.g. Dholakia & Sternthal, 1977; Kahle & Homer, 1985), clarity of human brand persona (McCracken, 1989), and overall parasocial relationship strength, connection, and feelings of attachment (Perse & Rubin, 1989; Russell, Norman, & Heckler, 2004; Thomson, 2006) as factors influencing endorsement effectiveness.   Interestingly, whereas researchers have long argued that human brands are best conceptualized as aspirational others (Choi & Rifon, 2012; White & Dahl, 2006), no research has actually assessed whether the degree to which a consumer perceives a human brand as belonging to his aspirational reference group predicts subsequent endorser effectiveness. In addition, no research has examined whether the underlying assumption that human brands are purely aspirational is even a valid one. In this dissertation I take a first step at addressing these gaps, arguing that adopting a reference group framework to the study of human brands is of both theoretical and substantive value. In particular, I posit that consumers assess human brands not only on the degree to which those human brands seem to fit with the consumers' aspirational groups, but also on the degree to which they fit with the consumers' membership groups. I also propose that the relative importance of positive evaluations on both aspirational fit and membership fit criteria varies based on several moderating factors.

Reference groups are "social groups which are important to a consumer and against which he or she compares himself or herself (Escalas & Bettman, 2003, p. 341). They are usually categorized as either membership, aspirational, or out-group-based (White & Dahl, 2006). Both membership and aspirational reference groups are positively viewed by the consumer, in that she can identify with both groups and sees them both as attractive (White & Dahl, 2006). The difference, however, is that a membership group is one to which the consumer perceives she actually belongs, whereas an aspirational group is one to which the consumer aspires to become a part of but does not actually belong to at present (Escalas & Bettman, 2003).   Researchers tend to position human brands as solely part of a consumer's aspirational group (Choi & Rifon, 2012; Escalas & Bettman, 2003), idols to be looked up to as a reflection of an idealized version of the self and belonging to a different but desirable group of individuals.

While considering the aspirational element of a human brand is not incorrect, central to my thesis is the argument that limiting the scope to the purely aspirational is overly narrow. Instead, I believe that consumers consider both the aspirational *and* membership facets of a human brand when assessing the quality of their relationship. Put another way, I am arguing that part of consumers' assessments of human brands relates to the degree to which those human brands appear to fit with the consumers' actual peer groups and how well those human brands reflect the attitudes and values of actual friends. There are several reasons why both aspirational and membership reference group perspectives should matter: The growing popularity of both reality television and non-traditional media such as YouTube has increased the range of individuals seen as human brands (Keel & Nataraajan, 2012), and the expanding popularity of blogs, Reddit, Twitter, and so forth has enlarged the breadth and depth of information those human brands are sharing with consumers (Escalas & Bettman, 2015). Consumers view current human brands as relatable, and feel that they can form closer, more personal connections with these individuals (Moss, 2014). The result of this relatability is that consumers may view today's human brands as not only idols but also potentially as friends. I argue that this dual perspective on human brands as idols and friends has important implications for not only *how* effective those human brands are as endorsers, but also the underlying reasons *why* celebrity endorsers are persuasive.

Researchers have suggested that human brand endorsers are able to influence consumers via two different mechanisms tied to the value-expressive process: consumers buy endorsed products either to bolster their own egos or to enhance feelings of closeness and connection with the endorser (Park & Lessig, 1977). While these two processes have historically been grouped together under the larger "normative influences" label (Burnkrant & Cousineau, 1975; Childers & Rao, 1992), I argue that they speak to two different mechanisms which deserve differentiation and a clarifying framework. One possibility is the intrinsic-extrinsic affiliation motives continuum (Rempel, Holmes, & Zanna, 1985), which argues that individuals engage in interpersonal relationships for a host of reasons. An individual assesses how rewarding the interaction encounter was based on the specific benefits he was hoping to accrue from the exchange. At the intrinsic end of the spectrum are "we-based" motives for interacting, with a partner focused on both relationship parties equally. Examples of intrinsic affiliation motives include interacting with someone for the pleasure

of their company or the chance to find out more about that person. At the extrinsic end are "me-based" reasons for interacting, with a sole focus on the benefits or rewards linked back to the individual directly, absent any regard for the other individual. Examples of extrinsic affiliation motives include interacting with someone as a way of securing a better job, enhancing status in the community, and so forth (Rempel, et al., 1985).

Given that intrinsic affiliation motives speak to stronger feelings of connection or positive affect (Rempel, et al., 1985), it makes sense that they are reserved primarily for those individuals a consumer already feels close to, as they would a friend. Extrinsic affiliation motives, conversely, express a desire to copy or emulate as a way of bolstering the self (Rempel, et al., 1985), suggesting that the target needs to be someone seen as worthy of emulation in the first place, a somewhat different and better person than the current self. Linking the literatures on reference groups and affiliation motives suggests then that aspirational ratings should more strongly predict extrinsic affiliation motives, whereas membership ratings should more strongly predict intrinsic affiliation motives.

In addition, while I posit that both extrinsic and intrinsic affiliation motives may drive consumers to purchase goods endorsed by a human brand, I anticipate finding differences in the underlying strength of each motivation across several moderators. Of greatest interest is the sex of the consumer, given that literature has demonstrated that there are important sex-based differences in the relative strength of different interpersonal relationship expectations (Hall, 2011). Women are motivated to seek out and also offer their friends relationships built on trust, empathy, support, intimacy, and sharing – ideas congruent with intrinsic affiliation motives (Zarbatany, Conley, & Pepper, 2004).   Men, conversely, are motivated to seek out friendships which offer specific agentic benefits such as status, prestige, and opportunities for self-advancement and self-improvement – ideas congruent with extrinsic affiliation motives (Geary, Byrd-Craven, Hoard, Vigil, & Numtee, 2003). Consumer relationships with human brands share many similarities to their interpersonal relationships (Derrick, Gabriel, & Hugenberg, 2009; Thomson, 2006), so it seems likely that the sex-based differences seen between males and females in their interpersonal relationship expectations holds for consumer-human brand relationships as well. Based on this, I anticipate that the sex of the consumer evaluating the ad moderates the relative importance

of extrinsic and intrinsic affiliation motivation on predicting endorser effectiveness. Sex-based differences in value-expressive influences have yet to be examined in consumer behaviour, yet these findings would build on previous work which has highlighted the moderating role that sex plays on the relative persuasiveness of self-versus-other framing in advertising campaigns (e.g. Winterich, Mittal, & Ross Jr, 2009; Zhang, Feick, & Mittal, 2014).

I also explore whether adopting a reference group framework enables for any interesting extensions to previous work looking at the role of fit between the endorser and product being endorsed. Previous research has established that consumers look for a fit or match between characteristics of the endorser (e.g. attractiveness, expertise) and the product category being promoted (Kamins, 1990; Kang & Herr, 2006). When there is a perceived 'match,' such as an attractive endorser promoting a beauty product, the overall persuasiveness of the endorsement is enhanced (Kamins & Gupta, 1994). Whereas the research done to date has focused on traditional source characteristics, I extend this work by examining whether human brands can be classified as primarily 'aspirational' or 'membership,' and if so, if consumers try to match that classification with the self-congruence of the product being promoted. In particular, I argue that human brands who are rated by consumers more highly on the aspirational than membership dimension should be most effective when promoting products congruent with a consumer's ideal-self, whereas those human brands who are rated more highly on the membership than aspirational dimension should be most effective when promoting products congruent with a consumer's actual-self.

Finally, if I am arguing that positive evaluations on both aspirational and membership reference group dimensions contribute to overall endorser effectiveness, an important question worth exploring is how human brands can best increase their ratings on these two dimensions. Self-disclosure may hold the key. Research demonstrates that engaging in self-disclosure is effective at strengthening interpersonal relationships (Altman & Taylor, 1973; Aron, Melinat, Aron, Vallone, & Bator, 1997). Again, given the parallels between interpersonal relationships and consumer relationships with human brands, it stands to reason that self-disclosure might be beneficial for these relationships as well. Specifically, I

argue that human brands who engage in more extensive and personal self-disclosure with consumers will benefit from higher consumer reference group ratings than their more private human brand counterparts, which should subsequently increase their endorsement effectiveness.

In summary, throughout this dissertation I endeavor to answer the following research questions:

- Although researchers have characterized human brands as aspirational, the field has yet to use reference group ratings as a tool for assessing endorser effectiveness. Do aspirational ratings predict endorser persuasiveness? In addition, is there merit to considering not only the aspirational ratings associated with a human brand, but also the human brand's membership ratings?

- Can human brands actually be seen as more akin to a friend than an idol, and if so, what is the impact of that shift on how consumers evaluate the products those human brands endorse?

- If reference group ratings are effective predictors of endorser potential, how do they exert their effects? Value-expressive reference group effects suggest two different underlying reasons consumers might be persuaded by celebrity endorsements: either to enhance their own egos or out of strong feelings of liking and connection for the endorser. How much do each of these mechanisms actually matter, and are there differences in the relative importance of each based on the sex of the consumer viewing the endorsement?

- Finally, if positive reference group ratings do predict endorser effectiveness, what can human brands do to enhance those ratings as a way of strengthening endorser potential?

The full theoretical model that I am testing in my dissertation is outlined in the figure below:
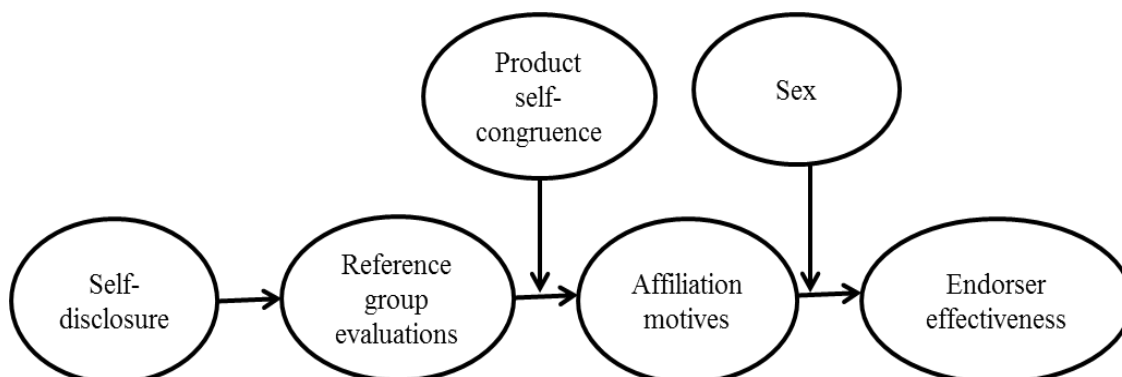
Note: all relationship pathways are positive

Figure 1: General Theoretical Model

My goal in this dissertation is to contribute to the literature on human brands and the factors which affect celebrity endorsement potential, an area which is currently understudied (Keel & Nataraajan, 2012). I do so in several ways. To begin, I demonstrate that adopting a reference group framework to assessing a human brand's endorser potential is of merit, and in particular, that consumer ratings on both aspirational and membership elements contribute to overall potential. I also provide clarity around how these reference group effects exert their influence, demonstrating that affiliation motives operating in interpersonal relationships also apply to consumer-human brand relationships and are a good way of operationalizing value-expressive influence. In addition, I find that sex differences seen in interpersonal relationship expectations also apply to consumer interactions with human brands, and impact the relative strength of different affiliation motives. Finally, I highlight an approach human brands can adopt to strengthen their reference group ratings and subsequently their persuasiveness as endorsers.

The remainder of my dissertation is organized as follows. In chapter 2 I review the literature and advance hypotheses. I also provide a detailed study overview, outlining how the studies I have completed correspond with the hypotheses being tested. In chapter 3, I present the four studies that I conducted using a mix of both structural equation modelling and experimental methodologies. Finally, in chapter 4, I provide additional discussion on

my findings as a whole, highlighting their contributions to the literature and also identifying additional avenues for investigation which build on this research platform.

Chapter 2

2   Literature Review and Hypothesis Development

2.1   Established Determinants of Endorser Effectiveness

Human brands are frequently used in advertising campaigns – a full quarter of all ads feature a celebrity endorser (Silvera & Austad, 2004) – suggesting that they are a popular marketing tool. The study of celebrity endorsers has evolved over time, with early research focusing on spokesperson source effects like attractiveness and credibility (Dholakia & Sternthal, 1977; Friedman & Friedman, 1979; Kahle & Homer, 1985; Ohanian, 1991) and how those source effects subsequently match-up or fit with the paired products being endorsed (Kamins, 1990; Kamins & Gupta, 1994; Kang & Herr, 2006). Researchers subsequently turned to exploring how the bundle of associated meanings tied to the endorser transferred to the goods being endorsed, arguing that simply measuring source effects on a unidimensional scale oversimplified the nuanced associations consumers formed with different human brands (Batra & Homer, 2004; McCracken, 1989; Miller & Allen, 2012). Most germane to the present research, however, is work investigating consumer-human brand relationships, often termed parasocial relationships, and the downstream benefits those relationships can have on endorser persuasiveness.

2.1.1   Parasocial Relationships: An Overview

First conceptualized over fifty years ago (Horton & Wohl, 1956), parasocial relationships are pseudo-relationships – intimacy at a distance – where audience members form one-sided friendships or bonds with individuals they see on television and in movies, read about in magazines, and listen to on the radio. These parasocial relationships can also be thought of as secondary object attachments (Horton & Wohl, 1956), and parasocial relationships have been studied using attachment theory as an organizing framework (Cole & Leets, 1999). Parasocial relationships develop and strengthen over time and with repeated exposure to a human brand (Perse & Rubin, 1989). Consumers place the highest importance on parasocial relationships that are expected to continue over the longer term, anticipating

greater companionship and lasting rewards (A. M. Rubin & Perse, 1987; R. B. Rubin & McHugh, 1987). As these parasocial relationships develop, consumers can come to feel increasingly connected to human brands, seeing them as old friends (R. B. Rubin & McHugh, 1987). Becoming attached to a favoured character can also happen as part of a larger connection consumers can form with television programs (Russell, et al., 2004).

Connecting with human brands provides many of the same benefits to consumers as do interpersonal relationships. For example, these relationships appear to help foster positive mental health and provide emotional support. One study found that participants made to suffer a self-esteem threat by recalling a fight with a close other were subsequently buffered from that threat when given the opportunity to reflect on a favoured television program and its characters, whereas participants who simply reflected on a television program that they had happened upon did not experience the same buffering benefits (Derrick, et al., 2009). The authors hypothesized that thinking about favoured characters and programs helped bolster participants' feelings of belonging or connectedness, similar to what an encounter with actual friends would provide (Derrick, et al., 2009). Thus it appears that favourite human brands help consumers meet some of their fundamental psychological needs (Thomson, 2006). Indeed, consumers report becoming strongly attached to those human brands which satisfy both consumers' need for autonomy (defined as "a person's need to feel that his or her activities are self-chosen, self-governed, and self-endorsed;" (Thomson, 2006, p. 106), and for relatedness (defined as "a person's need to feel a sense of closeness with others;" Thomson, 2006, p. 106). In these instances human brands appear to provide consumers with emotional support and security, consistent with the types of benefits provided by true interpersonal relationships (Hill, 1987).

2.1.2   Parasocial Relationships: Empirical Support

Parasocial relationship strength has relevance within the consumer behaviour context. It appears that just as consumers model their behaviours after favourite characters' behaviours (Russell, et al., 2004), so too do they model character consumption patterns (Russell & Puto, 1999). Parasocial relationship strength seems to play a particularly important role in this effect. For example, one study looking at factors that predict the effectiveness of

product placements in the television sitcom context measured consumer parasocial relationship strength towards the featured character(s), consumer assessments of character attitudes towards the placed products used in the episode, and consumer assessments of the strength of association or fit between the placed products and characters. The results revealed that consumer parasocial relationship strength was a better predictor of subsequent consumer attitudes towards the placed products than either of the other two factors (Russell & Stern, 2006). These findings are consistent with those set in the product brand context, where researchers found that a consumer's attachment to a focal brand was a better predictor of subsequent consumption behaviour than a consumer's general attitudes towards that brand (Park, MacInnis, Priester, Eisingerich, & Iacobucci, 2010). It appears then that across both human and product brands consumer-brand relationship strength and the emotional connection that consumers form with brands are more predictive of consumption outcomes than measures of attitude strength. These results suggest that from a managerial perspective, there are benefits to selecting product endorsers with whom many consumers have strong emotional attachments, as opposed to simply positive attitudes. Interestingly, this approach seems somewhat at odds with what is commonly done in the marketplace, given the importance of more traditional attitudinal measures such as the Q Score to determine how consumers assess and relate to a variety of human brands as a way of selecting appropriate product endorsers (Luo, Chen, Han, & Whan Park, 2010).

Parasocial relationship theory provides an important starting point to a deeper exploration of consumer-human brand relationships, and how those relationships ultimately predict endorser effectiveness. However, in spite of its benefits, it is not without limitations as well. In particular, while the theory posits that audience members can come to form close relationships with human brands, it does not assess these relationships across any meaningful sub-categories. Specifically, parasocial relationship strength has historically been treated as a unidimensional construct, though scale measurement items meant to assess it appear to tap relatively disparate elements of overall relationship strength, ranging from physical attraction to feelings of friendship and goodwill, perceived interest in learning more about the human brand, and a desire for continued exposure to the human brand (A. M. Rubin & Perse, 1987).

One challenge that I have with a unidimensional conceptualization of consumer parasocial relationships is that it may be insufficient to capture the nuanced nature of how consumers view and assess their relationships with human brands, by adopting a simple valence-strength approach to measuring relationships. Just as the early source models were limited in utility by treating all source effects as unidimensional (for example, low to high attractiveness; McCracken, 1989) as opposed to acknowledging that the effects can be distinguished more finely (for example, cute versus sexy), so too is parasocial relationship theory. In particular, it fails to acknowledge that consumers may evaluate their relationships with human brands across a range of dimensions, as they would their interpersonal relationships.

Consumer behaviourists have long argued that consumer measures assessing brand relationships generally strive to capture a diverse range of relationship elements (Batra, Ahuvia, & Bagozzi, 2012; Fournier, 1998). For example, Fournier (1998) suggests that relationship dimensions such as the degree of commitment, intimacy, self-brand connections, and brand partner quality all influence consumer-brand relationships. Variations in each of these areas can lead to differences in how consumers view the brands, with the possibility for many different types of brand relationships (for example, "best friend," "buddy," or "fling;" Fournier, 1998). Given that human brands are simply "one of several operationalizations of the broader conceptualization of a brand" (Thomson, 2006, p. 104), it seems likely that human brand relationships could be similarly varied and assessed across several different dimensions. Simply measuring the degree of relationship strength between a consumer and human brands at a holistic level may thus be insufficient to adequately assess overall relationship strength or allow for accurate predictions on how effective different human brands will be as endorsers.

Overall, parasocial relationship theory provides an important starting point, as it establishes that consumers can form relationships with human brands, and that these relationships in many ways mirror those seen in true interpersonal relationships. It also demonstrates that as consumers come to form positive relationships with human brands, the effectiveness of those human brands as endorsers is also increased, suggesting that there are important benefits to strengthening these relationships accordingly. What it lacks, however, is a

greater delineation of aspects central to consumer-human brand relationships. Specifically, while researchers have clearly established that consumers can form both parasocial relationships (Perse & Rubin, 1989) and strong attachments (Thomson, 2006) with human brands, these are concepts that focus exclusively on the intensity of the relationship (e.g., low to high). This unidimensional approach to categorizing consumer-human brand relationships restricts our ability to anticipate when human brands will be effective endorsers, or what product types would be most appropriate for them to endorse based on how the consumer categorizes their relationship.

I believe one potentially effective solution to better assessing how consumers evaluate their relationships with human brand lies in the reference groups literature, which I hope to demonstrate provides a simple yet effective way to conceptualize these relationships. In addition, I will argue that the underlying motives that drive consumers to purchase products endorsed by human brands depends not only on how the specific endorsers are assessed across different reference group dimensions, but also the way consumers categorize the products being endorsed and also who the consumers are.

2.2   Reference Groups

> I feel really lucky to be a model in the time of social media. We're not just someone that a girl likes because she saw her once in a magazine. We get to be the models that people like because they like the same bands and pizza and mascara as us-that's stuff that we can share through social media. I think that's really cool.

> - Model Gigi Hadid, signed to work with Maybelline due to the size of her Instagram and Twitter following, in an interview with Fashion, May 2015.

A reference group[2] can be thought of as an individual or group of people who have a significant impact on the attitudes and behaviours of a consumer (Bearden & Etzel, 1982; Park & Lessig, 1977) [3]. The consumer turns to this reference group as a source of information and guidance on how to dress, which products to consume, what attitudes to hold, and so forth (Bearden, Netemeyer, & Teel, 1989). A reference group exerts its influence either when the consumer actively seeks out the group's opinions and feedback on a particular choice decision, or when the consumer passively observes the reference group in a particular consumption context and mirrors his behaviours accordingly (Park & Lessig, 1977). Consumers form associations between specific reference groups and the brands that they use, linking the brands with many of the same meanings allocated to the reference groups themselves (Escalas & Bettman, 2005). As the consumers then construct or reinforce their own self-images, they consume brands linked to the reference groups with whom they identify. Some reference groups even exert their influence by showing the consumer what *not* to do, as in the case where a reference group is deemed an out-group by the consumer and the consumer attempts to disassociate accordingly (White & Dahl, 2006).

---

[2] Reference groups literature has its foundations in the larger research stream focused on social identity theory, which examines how individuals categorize themselves in relation to specific groups of 'others' (Howard, 2000). According to identity theory, social groups are relational in nature, in that by being part of a social group, an individual can compare himself both within the group and against individuals outside of that group, along dimensions of value to that individual (Tajfel, 1982). This group either forms a basis of comparison against as a way of basing assessments of one's own position, or as a basis by which to guide norms and values (Turner, 1991). As an extension, an individual's social identity then is "that part of the individuals' self-concept which derives from their knowledge of their membership of a social group (or groups) together with the value and emotional significance of that membership" (Tajfel, 1981, p. 255). Individuals can have many different social identities – banker, parent, male – and the relative importance of each is malleable and dependent on situational and contextual factors (Reed II & Bolton, 2005). For example, by priming a particular relevant identity (such as athlete), consumers will be more influenced by advertising appeals which emphasize that identity-relevant aspect of a brand (Reed II, 2004). Identity theory research has primarily focused on studying differences between in-groups and out-groups (Howard, 2000), whereas I am interested in specifically examining differences between two types of in-groups: membership and aspirational. In addition, whereas the salience of different identities is clearly malleable based on priming and other contextual factors (Reed II & Bolton, 2005), I do not explore that facet in this dissertation. As such, I focus my literature review on the more narrow area of reference groups specifically, for expositional clarity and brevity.

[3] Although the term reference group suggests more than one person, it can be thought of as an individual or referent other. Though I am positioning human brands as part of a consumer's larger reference group as opposed to a solitary reference group entity, either could be technically accurate.

2.2.1   Reference Group Effects – Categorical Distinctions and Related Concepts

Reference groups have traditionally been divided into three different categories: membership groups, aspirational groups, and dissociative or out-groups[4] (White & Dahl, 2006). Both membership and aspirational groups are thought of positively by the consumer, in that the consumer identifies with the groups and feels attracted to them. *The key distinction between the two is that a membership group is one to which a consumer is more likely to feel that they actually belong to* (so family, friends, and the like), *whereas an aspirational group is one to which a consumer aspires to belong to but is unlikely to be currently a member of* (for example, a "nerd" who aspires to be more like the "jocks"; Escalas & Bettman, 2003). Consumers see themselves as equal peers in their membership groups, and the other members their friends. These individuals are socially closer and, as a result, thought of in a more concrete, tangible way (Trope & Liberman, 2003). Conversely, aspirational groups are comprised of individuals consumers often see as superiors; individuals that consumers would hope to become friends with in the future, but do not see as friends in the present (Escalas & Bettman, 2003). The socially distant nature of aspirational groups suggests that they would be thought of on a more abstract level.

Thinking about the membership versus aspirational group distinction is somewhat akin to thinking about the actual versus ideal-self distinction highlighted in the self-concept literature. The self-concept refers to everything that a consumer thinks about himself, including all thoughts, actions, and beliefs as they relate to him (Sirgy, 1982). Within that all-encompassing self is both the self as the consumer thinks he really is (the actual self) and the self as the consumer wishes he could be (the ideal self; Sirgy, 1982). Given that the

---

[4] Dissociative groups are those that individuals actively try to differentiate from or avoid mimicking, as opposed to simply groups that have no impact on consumption whatsoever (Berger & Heath, 2007). They are not the focus of this current research. Note that recent marketing efforts have largely focused on contrasting in-group and out-group effects (e.g. Chan, Berger, & Van Boven, 2012; Escalas & Bettman, 2005; White & Dahl, 2006). In those instances, though technically in-groups contain both membership and aspirational groups, the focus is on membership groups specifically. Given I am contrasting the two types of in-groups specifically, I will not use the ambiguous label "in-group" in this thesis.

actual self reflects a consumer's perceived reality of who he is and what he represents (Malär, Krohmer, Hoyer, & Nyffenegger, 2011), the consumer's actual membership group should be linked back to a consumer's actual self.   Returning to the example used earlier, if a consumer thinks about his actual self as a "nerd," his membership group should likewise consist of other "nerds." The consumer would likely look and dress similarly to the others in his membership group, purchasing products consistent with what they do (Chan, et al., 2012). In that sense, then, individuals that form a consumer's membership group should also be congruent with a member's actual-self, since those people reflect a consumer's day-to-day reality.

The ideal self, conversely, reflects who the consumer desires to become or who he aspires to be (Malär, et al., 2011). Given that it is an aspired-to ideal, it is somewhat abstract or hypothetical in nature, a "best possible scenario" of sorts. When reflecting upon this ideal self, the consumer likely includes in this fantasy relationships with members of his aspirational group.   After all, if a consumer aspires to be a "jock" then it seems likely that part of this aspiration would be to have other "jocks" as friends. These aspirational others, then, are less likely to be congruent with an actual self, being instead more reflective of an ideal-self scenario.

2.2.2   The Relationship Between Aspirational and Membership Evaluations

Given that both aspirational and membership reference groups are highly regarded by consumers, one question that emerges is how the two are related. From a purely theoretical standpoint, it is worth reiterating that these two groups are conceptually distinct. Membership group assessments closely relate to the idea of "fit," in that individuals in a membership group are a fit with the consumer's current self. Put another way, the consumer sees himself as belonging to and fitting in with a membership group (Escalas & Bettman, 2003). Aspirational group assessments, conversely, speak to admiration from a distance, the idea of hoping to one day become more like individuals in the group, but seeing the current self as distinct and removed from that group (Escalas & Bettman, 2003). An individual could admire one of his friends, either globally or on specific traits, but if he

still sees that friend as a fit with his current self then the friend would enjoy higher membership ratings as opposed to aspirational ones.

In the purest theoretical sense, then, the aspirational versus membership distinction could be thought of as an "either/or" type division within the larger in-group category. A consumer is either actively part of a group or is not part of a group but wishes he was; the former situation is a membership group whereas the latter is an aspirational group and in that case the group is a membership one, or a consumer is not part of a group but wishes he was, and in that case the group is an aspirational one (White & Dahl, 2006). Escalas and Bettman (2003) took this approach when contrasting the relative importance that different active self-goals have on which reference group is more important to consumers.

Whereas the two groups should be orthogonal in nature, reality is no doubt murkier. Though researchers have yet to examined this issue either theoretically or empirically, I suspect that it is possible that individuals may rate others highly on both membership and aspirational group elements.[5] For example, a doctoral student may think of senior faculty as akin to both his membership and aspirational group, depending on who he is comparing against and what aspects of the group he is focusing on. Compared with undergraduate students, senior faculty may feel more similar, given that they also engage in scholarly pursuits and share a similar profession. In addition, doctoral candidates frequently interact with senior faculty, encouraging greater membership associations. At the same time, senior faculty would also enjoy tenure, stable and established positions, and a strong publication track record, putting them in a group that the doctoral student likely hopes to become a part of in the future, but does not see himself as fitting with at present. Although this is only one example, there are no doubt countless situations where individuals view others as straddling both groups. It is interesting to note that in the same Escalas and Bettman (2003) study as mentioned above, the authors created the two distinct groups by creating a composite scale, in which participants first provided examples of groups and then assessed them on both

---

[5] Of course, individuals can also be rated low on both elements, which is suggestive that the group is an out-group (White & Dahl, 2006). Given that this is not a focus of my thesis I will not discuss this low-low scenario further.

their aspirational and membership elements. The authors then subtracted aspirational ratings from membership ones and eliminated any participant responses in which the composite fell at roughly the mid-point, as opposed to at one extreme or the other. The outcome of this process was that, of 171 original participants, data was only kept for 46, suggesting that 73% of participants rated the groups as relatively similar on both aspirational and membership elements, making a clear distinction challenging (Escalas & Bettman, 2003).

Other albeit weak support for the notion of the two being related comes from a study by Malär and colleagues (Malär, et al., 2011), which measured consumer ratings of product congruence with either the actual- or ideal-self. Although theoretically distinct concepts, it is easy to imagine that products could be deemed as congruent with both a consumer's actual and ideal self (e.g. Apple products), and it is not surprising then that the authors found across two studies a strong positive correlation between the two factors (r = .62 and .75 respectively; Malär, et al., 2011). This is consistent with the argument that some products fit with both a consumer's actual and aspirational identities (Reed II & Bolton, 2005), an argument which by extension suggests that human brands may be likewise linked with both aspirational and membership group identities.

A related but equally challenging question to address is how aspirational and membership ratings might interact. To this point, researchers have either positioned their work as examining the impact of membership groups on product consumption patterns (e.g. Bearden & Etzel, 1982; Chan, et al., 2012) or focused on aspirational groups (e.g. Batra & Homer, 2004; Choi & Rifon, 2012). In all these cases, however, the source is identified as belonging to one of the groups or the other, either explicitly or implicitly, as opposed to being measured along both the membership and aspirational dimensions. The only exception I know of is Escalas and Bettman (2003), and that research examined the ratings in a series of separate ANOVAs as opposed to in a combined manner. The loosely related study looking at product actual- and ideal-self congruence (Malär, et al., 2011) similarly focused on main effects only, and did not hypothesize or discuss any potential interaction effects. Via personal correspondence with the first author of that study (Malär, 2015), I have learned that no interaction effects were found, suggesting that if a product was rated

highly on both the actual- and ideal-self continuum no amplification benefits ensued. Extrapolating these results to the present context, though tenuous at best, similarly suggests that whereas positive ratings on both membership and aspirational elements associated with a human brand would benefit endorsement potential, these benefits should derive via main effects as opposed to any interaction.

2.2.3   Reference Groups and Product Evaluations - Empirical Support

The majority of marketing studies have focused on contrasting the effects of in-group versus out-group (Chan, et al., 2012; Escalas & Bettman, 2005; White & Dahl, 2006), as opposed to the relative effects of aspirational versus membership groups. As such, empirical support for between-group differences is scant. To begin, Escalas and Bettman (2003) investigated whether the degree to which a consumer forms a self-brand connection with a particular product was moderated by that consumer's perception of fit between the brand in question and a relevant reference group. In this study the authors defined a self-brand connection as "the extent to which individuals have incorporated brands into their self-concept" (340). What they found was that when consumers perceived that a product brand was congruent with either an actual membership group or an aspirational group, the consumer was more likely to form a self-brand connection. As a main effect, perception of brand-reference group congruity was equally predictive of self-brand connections for both reference group types. In other words, consumer self-brand connections were strengthened when consumers perceived that the brand matched or fit well with either type of in-group, suggesting that both membership and aspirational reference group evaluations in regards to a particular brand may be influential factors in a consumer's brand evaluations.

A second set of studies examined the degree to which perceptions of a product fit with actual or ideal self was predictive of emotional brand attachment (Malär, et al., 2011), defined as "the bond that connects a consumer with a specific brand and involves feelings toward the brand" (36). In this case, the researchers found that perceptions of congruence between a brand and a consumer's actual self was predictive of brand attachment, whereas congruence between a brand and consumer's ideal self was not. The authors theorized that the reason that products which represented a consumer's ideal self did not foster feelings of

emotional brand attachment may be the result of consumers feeling disheartened, envious, or some other negative affective response when they reflect on their ideal self and realize that there is a discrepancy between the actual and ideal (Malär, et al., 2011). In essence, the negative affect resulting from any actual-ideal gaps cancelled out affective gains linked back to reflecting on products congruent with an imagined ideal self. In this case there was no explicit reference group involved in the study, though arguably participants may have formed a link between products congruent with an ideal self and with aspirational others, and between products congruent with an actual self and with membership others. Extrapolating somewhat, this research suggests that positive ratings of an endorser in regards to membership group elements may be stronger predictors of product evaluations than aspirational reference group elements, or at a minimum, at least as influential at predicting consumer associations with some paired brand as are aspirational ones.

2.2.4   Reference Group Effects and Human Brands

> After spending the day with the talent and the fans, one thing was clear:
> YouTube celebrities are accessible…these kids want to be friends with their
> fans. They all took the time to say hi, take selfies, and give hugs.
>
> - Caroline Moss of Business Insider reporting on her experience at a YouTube
> convention, September 2014.

Researchers typically position human brands as exclusively representative of aspirational reference groups, as they are well-known, popular, high achieving, and attractive (Choi & Rifon, 2012). Human brands as endorsers are thought to "bring prestige to a [promoted] brand," (Keel & Nataraajan, 2012, p. 691) because they are often "a kind of exemplary, inspirational figure to consumers" (Choi & Rifon, 2012, p. 641). In this sense, then, human brands are conceptualized as modern day heroes that consumers seek out and idolize (Escalas & Bettman, 2015), somewhat akin to the gods of yesteryear. Although human brands have long been seen as aspirational, evaluating human brands as such and using aspirational ratings as a subsequent predictor of endorser effectiveness is not typically done

in the marketing literature[6]. The one exception is a study which measured the degree to which a human brand matched a consumer's ideal self, finding that greater congruity increased evaluations of that human brand as an endorser (Choi & Rifon, 2012).

In many ways, simply considering how aspirational a human brand is makes intuitive sense. After all, human brands are well-known as a result of some type of achievement or skill, and the exclusive nature of fame suggests that while many desire it very few actually achieve it. For example, many human brands possess some type of skill (such as exceptional athletic ability, strong acting skills, a beautiful voice), while others are famous as a result of their unique beauty or enviable achievements in business or politics. Celebrity status has traditionally been reserved for a very few elite individuals – stars such as Elizabeth Taylor or Audrey Hepburn – who for the most part were seen as elusive, glamorous, and above all, unique and special.

However, the last decade has also seen a variety of significant social and cultural shifts which suggest that consumers may be assessing the degree to which human brands conform with both consumers' aspirational and membership groups. To begin, there is a recent shift in who is classified as a human brand (Keel & Nataraajan, 2012). For example, "[r]eality television programs featuring "ordinary" people are supplanting traditional television sitcoms that hired expensive professional actors….[and] with social media tools such as YouTube and Blogger, anybody can be "a web-based reality star" (La Ferla, 2010) and achieve Warhol's "15 minutes of fame" (Keel & Nataraajan, 2012, p. 697). Entire conferences and conventions are now popping up around the world, where interested fans can have a chance to meet and interact with their favourite YouTube stars, individuals unknown to most but very popular amongst their loyal fans (Moss, 2014). These human brands have emerged via nontraditional routes, and are often seen as more accessible and relatable to consumers (Moss, 2014).

---

[6] One could argue that the ideas tied to aspirational reference groups are captured to some extent in concepts such as source attractiveness and credibility, though from my perspective they are quite different. For example, I might view a human brand as credible in regards to promoting vehicles, and yet have no desire to become more like him. Likewise, I might view someone as quite attractive, yet find her unlikeable and again non-aspirational.

In addition to an increasing range of individuals now seen by consumers as human brands, changes are occurring in how human brands interact with consumers. For example, many human brands now engage in active social media campaigns as a way of creating connections with consumers (Escalas & Bettman, 2015). Perhaps inspired by the way in which nontraditional human brands are creating connections with consumers, there is a rise in celebrity blogs even amongst Hollywood A-listers, which offer interested consumers a chance to interact on a more personal level with human brands. While many blogs have some commercial element to them – such as Gwyneth Paltrow's GOOP – they can nonetheless "show us that celebrities are just regular people with problems, dreams, and thoughts not unlike our own" (Burns, 2009, p. 49). Similarly, many human brands seem to be actively trying to position themselves as accessible and similar to "everyday people," using social media platforms to post pictures and videos depicting themselves in a variety of mundane and relatable scenarios such as shopping, eating, sleeping, spending time with their families, and so forth. When human brands try to actively foster closer and more familiar relationships with consumers, I believe that the result is higher ratings for those human brands along the membership dimension of reference groups. In sum, I posit that both aspirational and membership ratings impact the strength of consumer-human brand relationships.

There is some support for this notion; for example, items in the parasocial relationship scale appear to tap both aspirational dimensions of consumer-human brand relationships (such as proximity seeking) and also membership dimensions (such as regarding the human brand akin to a friend; Perse & Rubin, 1985). In addition, as I argued earlier, in interpersonal relationships many individuals appear to identify social groups as belonging to some degree in both categories (Escalas & Bettman, 2003). It seems reasonable to expect that parasocial relationships mimic interpersonal ones in this case as well. Since both reference group ratings are indicative of positive in-group type relationships, and stronger parasocial relationships between consumers and human brand enhance subsequent endorser effectiveness (Russell & Stern, 2006), it seems likely that both aspirational and membership ratings are positive predictors of endorser persuasiveness.

As discussed in an earlier section, no research in interpersonal relationships has investigated the relationship between membership and aspirational reference group ratings, nor whether any interaction effects exist. The same is true for the human brands literature in particular. As such, I have no theoretical reason for predicting any type of interaction effect[7]. Instead, I propose that given both membership and aspirational reference groups have a positive impact on attitudes and behaviours, it seems reasonable that when a human brand is rated more positively across either dimension, that human brand's persuasiveness as an endorser will increase accordingly. Put another way, I predict that positive aspirational ratings will benefit endorser effectiveness, as will membership ratings. More formally:

H1a: Aspirational ratings will positively predict endorser effectiveness.

H1b: Membership ratings will positively predict endorser effectiveness.

2.3   Reference Group Effects – Types of Influence

Both aspirational and membership ratings reflect the strength of association with a particular type of reference group. Previously I argued that consumer ratings of a human brand across both reference group categories subsequently impact that endorser's effectiveness. The logical next step is to examine how reference group effects exert their influence; in essence, exploring why aspirational and membership ratings matter at all from a persuasion standpoint. Reference group influence can be sub-divided into three distinct categories: informational, utilitarian, and value-expressive influences (Bearden, et al., 1989), though the latter two categories are often grouped together and re-labelled normative influences (Burnkrant & Cousineau, 1975). Informative reference group influence is the result of consumers striving to reduce the uncertainty in making a decision by seeking out information on the choice-set, usually provided by an individual or group who the consumer deems both credible and an expert in the area (Bearden & Etzel, 1982). One example of an informative reference group effect is the idea of reading product reviews written by experts

---

[7] While I do not hypothesize an interaction effect, I will test for one in the studies and discuss the findings further.

prior to making a high-involvement purchase of something like a digital camera, in the case of an uninformed consumer. In this situation the individuals writing the reviews would be classified as a reference group of experts who the consumer is turning to for advice on which camera to purchase.

Utilitarian reference group influence stems from a desire on the part of the consumer to comply with the wishes of the reference group, in order to achieve rewards or avoid punishments (Park & Lessig, 1977). The expectation here is that the desired behaviour is explicitly stated or clearly ascertainable, in that the reference group would be able to determine directly whether the individual had behaved in the desired manner (Park & Lessig, 1977). In addition, the reference group must be seen as holding some power or control over the individual in terms of being able to either withhold rewards or administer punishments should the group's wishes not be followed. For example, a new employee adopting the same manner of dress as other employees in an organization may do so as a way of fitting in with the group, so as not to attract negative attention or reprisals from management for being too casual or inappropriately dressed. In this case, the larger employee group is exerting a utilitarian reference group influence on the new hire.

Finally, value-expressive reference group effects arise out of a consumer's desire to "enhance or support his self-concept" (Park & Lessig, 1977, p. 103) by associating with a particular group or even disassociating with one (White & Dahl, 2006). The consumer hopes that, by affiliating with the reference group, he can demonstrate who he is, who he is not, and what matters to him. My research on human brand endorsements will focus on this value-expressive influence, as celebrity endorsements are usually classified as value-expressive in approach (Escalas & Bettman, 2003). Value-expressive reference group effects exert their influence through two different processes. "First, an individual utilizes reference groups to express himself or bolster his ego. Second, an individual is influenced by a value-expressive reference group because of his simple affect (liking) for that group" (Park & Lessig, 1977, p. 103). The first approach suggests a mimicry based process which involves some degree of intention, in that the consumer is trying to imitate or follow the actions of a reference group as a way of feeling better about himself. This is consistent with much of the literature on reference group effects in marketing, and in particular with human

brands (Batra & Homer, 2004). Given that human brands are typically classified as aspirational, it makes sense that mimicking an aspirational reference group is one way for a consumer to bolster his ego or elevate feelings of self-worth (Escalas & Bettman, 2015).

The second mechanism, however, is affect-driven, suggesting that a consumer might affiliate with a reference group because of strong liking or attachment to the group. In this case, the consumer is "responsive to the reference group out of a feeling for it, not because of a desire to be associated with it" (Bearden & Etzel, 1982, p. 182). This speaks to a strong connection or bond with the reference group, and arguably a less conscious or less intentional mimicking effect. Research has provided support for the notion that consumers can come to form strong attachments with human brands (Thomson, 2006), suggesting that this attachment-based affiliation applies to human brands as well. Anecdotally this seems somewhat akin to close friends having similar preferences; part of this similarity could be attributed to these types of value-expressive influences amongst members. For example, your best friend wears yellow, and you in turn wear it simply because it reminds you of her.

2.3.1   Value-Expressive Effects – Two Different Mechanisms

The literature on reference group effects has historically lumped value-expressive effects together, irrespective of whether the motive is driven primarily by a desire to bolster one's ego or a desire to connect more closely with another individual or a larger group. One of the downsides to integrating these two different motivations for explaining reference group effects under an umbrella term of "value-expressive" is that it obscures potentially interesting differences in relative influence of different reference group ratings on activating specific affiliation motives. For instance, reference group effects arising out of a strong liking or attachment to the group suggests a consumer views that reference group as comprised of close others, such as good friends, family, spouse, and so forth. The consumer is mirroring behaviours of the group for the sheer enjoyment of it or as a way of feeling closer or more connected to the group, without attempting to obtain rewards or benefits outside of the relationship (Rempel, et al., 1985). These close others would be made up of individuals, then, that the consumer frequently interacts with; in essence a group that the consumer *already feels that he belongs with*.

On the other hand, reference group effects arising out of a consumer's desire to emulate the group in order to enhance his own sense of self or improve the self presented to others suggests that the consumer does not see the group as representing the self he already is. Instead, the group offers the consumer something that is seen as both positive and more socially distant, even something aspirational. The consumer is copying the group as a way of looking or feeling better about the self, suggesting that a self-presentational type motive is active (Hill, 1987; White & Dahl, 2006) and that the focus is on 'me' as opposed to 'we.' The consumer would mimic the group in this case not because it is one he is part of already, but rather because it is a group the consumer *hopes to become a part of*.

To clarify, though researchers to date have not differentiated value-expressive reference group effects based on how positively an individual or group is rated on both the aspirational and membership dimensions, I anticipate finding that each dimension impacts the strength of value-expressive reference group effects in different ways. Specifically, as membership ratings towards a reference group increase, so too should feelings of attachment and liking, and a stronger desire to connect with the group. Positive membership ratings should primarily operate via the value-expressive element aimed at mimicking a reference group as a way of feeling closer and more connected. Conversely, as aspirational ratings towards a reference group increase, then, so too should the likelihood that a consumer mimics that group for ego-boosting reasons. Positive aspirational ratings should primarily operate via the value-expressive element aimed at enhancing one's image. In order to better determine whether there are actual differences in the relative importance of these two underlying value-expressive motives based on differences in aspirational and membership ratings, it is crucial to have some vehicle for operationalizing both motives. I turn now to affiliation motives, as they offer important insights into why individuals seek out interpersonal relationships and how the benefits of these relationships are typically classified.

2.4   Affiliation Motivation[8]

> She is really funny... :) And so genuine. i love it when she is on Ellen. It seems
> Jennifer Aniston has no problem laughing at herself and poking holes in
> outrageous stories about her. I just think she is the kind of person who would
> help you pick out a cantaloupe at Whole Foods and just be a normal person
> while doing it. :)
>
> - Fan comment on Huffington Post website in response to Jennifer Aniston's
> Smart Water advertisement, which depicts her pregnant with triplets in an effort
> to poke fun at tabloid claims.

All individuals have an innate desire for social contact, a need to develop and maintain
meaningful, long-term relationships with others (Hill, 1987). This drive to form social
connections or bonds may have arisen because of the potential evolutionary benefits it
offered, as forming strong relationships and connections with a close group of others
provides opportunities for reproduction, sharing of resources, and enhanced protection from
predators (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). This universal need to seek out peer interactions has
been termed affiliation motivation (Hill, 1987) or a need to belong (Baumeister & Leary,
1995), and speaks not only to the drive individuals have to establish and maintain
relationships with others but also the motivation individuals have to repair damaged
relationships (Atkinson, Heyns, & Veroff, 1954).   When someone feels that they are not
experiencing the degree of social connection or contact with others they desire, this
deficiency leads them to seek out additional contact opportunities (O'Connor &
Rosenblood, 1996). Researchers suggest that the need to affiliate with others is
fundamental, surpassing simple "wants," in that humans experience negative psychological
consequences when the need is not met (Baumeister & Leary, 1995).

---

[8] My research is limited in scope to same-sex interpersonal relationships (often termed peer relationships;
Vigil, 2007), devoid of a romantic component. Although affiliation motives are not restricted to same-sex
relationships, given my focus for the large part I will also limit my literature review and discussions to that
segment accordingly.

When individuals do interact with others, a range of benefits ensue. The types of benefits an individual hopes to receive when interacting with another or group of others is primarily influenced by the underlying affiliation motivation at the time of social contact, and can be broadly categorized as intrinsic, instrumental, or extrinsic (Rempel, et al., 1985).

2.4.1   Intrinsic, Extrinsic, and Instrumental Affiliation Motivations

Why do individuals enjoy interacting with others? Is it for the pleasure of their company, to stave off boredom, or even as a way to show off? The simple answer to the question is that any of the above reasons – along with a host of others – are all valid explanations for why someone might seek out interaction opportunities (Hill, 1987). What motivates someone to seek out companionship with others depends on what rewards or benefits that individual is hoping to accrue through the process. The degree to which an interpersonal interaction is deemed satisfying, in turn, depends on how well it provides the individual with the hoped-for benefits (Rempel, et al., 1985).

Several researchers have looked at the underlying motives for affiliation, which can be broadly classified along a continuum anchored on one side as intrinsic motives and the other as extrinsic (Rempel, et al., 1985). Intrinsic motives (also termed expressive to reflect the emotionally expressive elements involved in an intrinsically-oriented relationship; Grayson, 2007; Price & Arnould, 1999) can best be thought of as 'we'-based, in that both parties are motivated to interact because of the rewards they obtain directly as a result of engaging in the relationship with the other partner (Rempel, et al., 1985). For example, individuals are intrinsically motivated to affiliate with someone when they do so simply to experience the pleasure of another person's company or enjoy the feeling of closeness with another (Rempel, et al., 1985). In this orientation, the focus is not on one member of the dyad specifically, but rather on how both parties can help and benefit each other, making this the most selfless of the affiliation motives. Perhaps not surprisingly then, individuals will naturally assign intrinsic affiliation motives to their interactions with their closest others (such as romantic partners; Seligman, Fazio, & Zanna, 1980). Intrinsic affiliation motives are also most congruent with the idea that individuals interact with close others out

of an "affective concern for each other's welfare" (Baumeister & Leary, 1995, p. 497), because intrinsically-oriented affiliation motives are affectively-driven.

At the other end of the spectrum are extrinsic motives (also termed instrumental; Price & Arnould, 1999, though note that this idea of instrumentality differs from Rempel et al. 1985's conceptualization to be discussed later). Extrinsic motives are self-focused or 'me'-based, in that the individual seeks out social interactions with a relationship partner purely for the benefits that can be linked back to the self. In addition, the focus is on benefits outside of the relationship dyad, though obtained via the interaction. For example, interacting with someone as a way of increasing one's social status with others is an extrinsic affiliation motive. In that instance, an individual is not interested in what the other can do for him or her directly, but rather how the interaction can help better position him or her in the eyes of others outside of the relationship (Rempel, et al., 1985). Similarly, an individual befriending someone because the other is well-connected in a community of interest is another example of extrinsic affiliation motivation. Again, the perceived rewards achieved through the relationship are not only self-focused, but also link back to some third party. In laymen's terms, extrinsic motivations are somewhat akin to "using someone" for personal gain. In that way, extrinsic affiliation motivation appears to lack sincerity or authenticity, in that someone is hoping to get something from the other without concern for the other, or even feeling the need to repay them. Whereas both extrinsic motivations and exchange-based relationships lack genuine affection, at least the latter assumes some degree of reciprocity between relationship partners (Grayson, 2007).

Somewhere in the middle lies instrumental motivation, a motive to affiliate with someone because of the perceived benefits to the self inside the relationship (Rempel, et al., 1985). This motivation is again 'me'-focused, consistent with an external motivation, in that the focus on interacting with someone is around the rewards that they can provide the self. The difference is that instrumental motives look at the rewards obtained to the self via the relationship partner directly. For example, one might befriend someone else as a way to pass time or for help with homework. In both cases the goal is self-related (fight boredom or strengthen one's school abilities), and yet the scope of the relationship reward is limited to the relationship dyad. No outside third-party benefits are considered in this situation.

2.4.2 Extending the Affiliation Motivation Distinction

The intrinsic-extrinsic distinction is a helpful one, as much of the additional research done on affiliation motivation can arguably be classified as primarily falling into one of the two categories. For example, research attempting to integrate a host of literature on the topic suggested that four underlying affiliation dimensions exist, driving affiliation motivation based on differences in perceived interaction rewards (Hill, 1987). According to this framework, people deem a social interaction rewarding when it provides: 1- positive stimulation, 2 - emotional support or sympathy, 3 - the potential to enhance feelings of self-worth through praise from others, and 4 - the opportunity to reduce ambiguity in a situation by comparing oneself to others (Hill, 1987). Although not explicitly stated as such, the idea of seeking out relationship partners purely for the positive stimulation provided by the interaction closely mirrors the idea of intrinsic motivation, whereas seeking out relationship partners as a way of feeling better about oneself through support, praise, and attention suggests a more instrumental or even extrinsic motivation. According to the Hill (1987) model, situational and dispositional factors will dictate which underlying motivational dimension is salient at a particular point in time. For example, if someone is placed in a novel and uncertain situation, such as a new job, he might volunteer to work on group projects so that he can assess his performance and adapt accordingly by mirroring his peers. Regardless of the motivation, the linking factor across all four dimensions and congruent with other models, is that people consistently assess their interactions with others based on how rewarding they perceive it to be.

2.4.3 Malleable Affiliation Motivations

Most behaviours can be seen as reflecting a variety of potential underlying affiliation motives. For example, if two friends socialize frequently, and one also helps the other with homework on a periodic basis, is the individual who receives the homework help motivated to maintain the relationship for intrinsic or instrumental reasons? Some researchers have suggested that "the friendship role includes the expectation for an exclusively intrinsic orientation" (Grayson, 2007, p. 122). However, a little self-reflection should reveal that most relationships are not quite so black and white, with many offering both intrinsic and

instrumental rewards. For example, a spouse provides the opportunity to enjoy the other's company and the chance to engage in a host of 'we'-based activities, but may also offer individual partners the chance for sexual satisfaction, financial stability, and a sharing of duties – all self-focused benefits. Likewise, "friendships originate in settings in which cooperation and friendly relations serve instrumental goals" (Price & Arnould, 1999, p. 39), again suggesting that relationships can have some fluidity in terms of underlying motivations. Within the business world, this conflict between instrumental and intrinsic motives has been described as "a key tension" (Price & Arnould, 1999, p. 39). It is perhaps not surprising then that scales meant to capture each orientation show a moderate degree of correlation between intrinsic and instrumental motives, as well as a more minor correlation between instrumental and extrinsic measures (e.g. correlation of .48 and .3 respectively; Rempel, et al., 1985, p. 107). These correlations suggest that there are frequently situations where individuals interact with others for both intrinsic and instrumental reasons, and also situations where individuals interact with others for both instrumental and extrinsic reasons.

Researchers also suggest that affiliation motives are malleable, and have demonstrated that they can be experimentally manipulated. For example, one study looking at dating partners had individual partners reflect on the activities and behaviours they had engaged in with the other party, and then rank a list of reasons that they had engaged in those activities (Seligman, et al., 1980). One group was shown a list of intrinsically-oriented activities (e.g., because of having a good time together or shared common interests) and the other group was shown a list of extrinsically-oriented ones (e.g., because friends think more highly of person as a result). When participants then rated their partners, those primed to make extrinsically-oriented attributions reported decreased feelings of love compared to either the control or the intrinsically-oriented groups (Seligman, et al., 1980). By making external motives for interacting with the relationship partner salient, people modified their affectively-oriented ratings about the partners downwards accordingly. This suggests that people are not clear on what their affiliation motives are all of the time, again likely a result of the fact that the same behaviours can have internal or external attributions (Rempel, et al., 1985). It also suggests that priming a consumer on the extrinsically-oriented benefits

associated with an interaction may lessen that consumer's confidence in the strength of his initial intrinsic motivation for the interaction.

2.4.4   Affiliation Motivation and Human Brands

Consumer-human brand relationships have not yet been examined using the intrinsic-extrinsic framework. For example, researchers have demonstrated that consumers who are more connected with their favourite television programs often imitate their favourite characters and model their own behaviours accordingly (Russell, et al., 2004), which is one of the reasons why product placements has become such a popular tool for advertisers hoping to boost product sales (Russell & Stern, 2006). By extension, websites have sprouted up specifically to help consumers search by television show and episode to locate the exact clothing and accessories worn by characters on the show (for example, wornontv.net). What is missing, however, is clarity around whether this modelling of consumption patterns after characters is done by consumers as a way of bonding with the character (an intrinsic motivation), as a way of appearing stylish to others outside the dyad (an extrinsic motivation), or even whether the motivation differs depending on the consumer and context.

Parasocial relationship theory also lacks a clear focus on the underlying motivation driving consumers to form pseudo-relationships with human brands. Given that parasocial relationships are defined as "*affective* interpersonal involvement with media personalities" (A. M. Rubin & Perse, 1987, p. 254, italics added), it seems reasonable to extrapolate that consumers might affiliate with human brands for more intrinsic than extrinsic reasons. However, scale items meant to assess the construct of parasocial relationship strength do not speak to the "why" behind these relationships. For example, the scale asks participants to rate the extent that they look forward to watching their favourite human brands on television. It could be argued, however, that the reasons a consumer might look forward to watching their favourite shows are incredibly varied, and range significantly along the intrinsic-extrinsic continuum. It could be as a means of connecting with a character, to pass the time, or even to have something to talk to coworkers about the next day. Only some of these reasons would actually indicate a close relationship with a character. Indeed, if

consumers really do view their relationships with liked human brands somewhat similarly to their interpersonal relationships, it seems most logical to assume that they affiliate with human brands for a host of reasons, some of which are more intrinsic and others extrinsic. This assertion reinforces the idea that parasocial relationship theory may be insufficient to fully explore consumer-human brand interactions.

2.4.5   Implications of Affiliation Motivation on Reference Groups

Recall that close friendships are primarily intrinsically-oriented (Grayson, 2007; Seligman, et al., 1980). For example, priming people to identify intrinsically-oriented benefits to associating with a loved one has no impact on feelings of love over baseline, whereas priming people to identify extrinsically-oriented benefits significantly decreases feelings of love (Seligman, et al., 1980). These findings suggest that consumers default to intrinsic motives when associating with close others, suggesting a positive correlation between relationship strength and the intrinsic-side of the affiliation motivation continuum.

There are a variety of situations, however, in which individuals could be extrinsically motivated when seeking out interpersonal interactions. For example, if a consumer faces a blow to his self-esteem, he will look for ways to repair that self-esteem and feel better about himself (Leary, 2007). Interacting with others specifically to gain in social status or by making new connections would be one means by which that consumer could repair his damaged self-esteem. Similarly, someone could experience boredom, and actively seek out interaction opportunities as a way of staving off this boredom, by meeting new people and engaging in new activities. Given that close others are typically sought out for primarily intrinsic rewards, then it stands to reason that a subset of socially distant others are more likely targets when someone has an extrinsic affiliation motive active. Put another way, if close others offer intrinsic benefits, some other group of individuals need to be available to offer extrinsic benefits as the need arises, which should de facto be deemed more distant.

There also appears to be some degree of aspiration inherent in many of the questions meant to assess extrinsic affiliation motives. For example, if someone interacts with a relationship partner so that others can envy her, it stands to reason that the relationship partner would

need to be an enviable one to begin with. Similarly, if someone interacts with a peer as a way to meet new and interesting people, the interaction partner chosen would have to be liked by interesting people to start with. If not, then the interaction simply should not be judged as rewarding. Inherent in the idea of extrinsic motivation, then, is that the peer pursued is seen by the individual as offering a host of enviable benefits (attractive, wealthy, well-connected, and so forth). This suggests that when extrinsic affiliation motives are salient, individuals associate not only with socially less-close others, but also those who are perceived favourably and in a somewhat aspirational light.

To reiterate, intrinsic affiliation motives are tied to socially-close others, whereas extrinsic motives appear tied to less socially-close others who may be admired or seen as aspirational in some way. I posit that as membership ratings increase for a particular group, then, so too does the intrinsic motivation to affiliate with that group. Similarly, as aspirational ratings increase for a particular group, so too does the extrinsic motivation to affiliate with that group. Stated formally:

> *H2a: The effects of both membership and aspirational ratings on endorser effectiveness will be mediated by affiliation motives.*

> *H2b: Aspirational ratings will predict extrinsic affiliation motives to a greater extent than intrinsic affiliation motives.*

> *H2c: Membership ratings will predict intrinsic affiliation motives to a greater extent than extrinsic affiliation motives.*

2.5   Moderating Effects of Sex[9] on Affiliation Motives

2.5.1   Evolutionary Differences in Sex and Relationships

While both men and women affiliate with others for both the extrinsic and intrinsic benefits such interaction encounters confer, I also expect to find differences in the frequency and strength of affiliation motives between the sexes.   These differences may be attributable, at least partially, to sex-based evolutionary differences (Geary, et al., 2003; Vigil, 2007). In particular, they may be a result of systematic differences in the migration patterns adopted by our male and female ancestors, and the consequences of these differences on shaping how the sexes went about developing and maintaining friendships. According to Geary and colleagues (2003), "philopatry, or the tendency of members of one sex to stay in the birth group and members of the other sex to migrate to another group, provides an important frame for understanding the social ecology of human evolution" (450). Researchers believe that females have been historically displaced from their own families to a much greater extent than men as a result of partnering up with a mate for reproductive purposes, since it was typically the female that migrated from her family to her partner's family group (S. E. Taylor et al., 2000). While females left their own protective and supportive family environments to join their male partners, the male partners were spared this transition, instead remaining sheltered within their own family-based clans and coalitions.

There were several downstream consequences to these sex-specific migration patterns, many of which appear to have shaped modern day sex-based differences in friendship expectations. To begin, men were able to remain in coalitions with other male kin-members, a situation which typically conferred a greater degree of inherent support, lower expectations for reciprocity, and less aggression and hostility (Geary, et al., 2003). Women, conversely, were forced to purposefully seek out and build non-kin coalitions –

---

[9] Please note that although gender or gender identity is the predominant term used in recent marketing literature, corresponding studies have nevertheless used biological sex as a proxy for gender identity (Winterich, et al., 2009; Zhang, et al., 2014). Given that I also use biological sex and the term gender refers more to the lifestyle roles an individual adopts whereas sex refers to the biological anatomy an individual has (Prince, 2005), I use the term sex as opposed to gender throughout this thesis for clarity and accuracy.

typically with other females who had also been displaced from their birth families – in order to ensure that their own needs and the needs of offspring were met (Vigil, 2007). This unbalanced pattern of migration resulted in women developing specific approaches and mechanisms towards friendship creation and maintenance not adopted by men to the same degree, including a friendship orientation which emphasized sharing, mutual support, empathetic understanding, and so forth (coined "tend and befriend," as opposed to the traditional male "fight or flight" response; S. E. Taylor, et al., 2000). Violations to these shared social norms around friendship and support were not tolerated amongst the female non-kin coalitions to the same degree as they were the male kin-based coalitions, suggesting that females were more likely to adhere to and reinforce the socially prescribed rules around friendship.

Other male-specific factors also appeared to shape modern-day friendship expectations. For example, the males primarily engaged in larger group activities such as hunting or exploration, which necessitated having some type of organizing system for the group. This was achieved via an established leadership structure and hierarchy. Conflicts between group members as to position and rank were settled via conflict and competition, and when resolved the group remained relatively stable (Hall, 2011). Since the end goal of these coalitions was usually purposeful (i.e., to successfully hunt some type of prey or raid a competing tribe), there were also clear benefits to associating with group members who possessed superior skills such as leadership, physical strength, intelligence, and so forth (Geary, et al., 2003; Vigil, 2007). In addition, peers with superior skills and abilities provided males with both instruction and rehearsal opportunities, enabling them to enhance their own skills and rank in the group (Zarbatany, et al., 2004). The direct and indirect benefits of associating with superior others resulted in men placing a greater emphasis on friendships with individuals who could offer them some type of benefit. As a result, whereas females valued equality in their same-sex relationship partners, males preferred superior same-sex friendship partners, primarily because they viewed these partners as conferring benefits back to the self (Vigil, 2007).

2.5.2   Current Differences in Sex-Based Relationships

Recall from the discussion above that displacement and migration necessitated females building strong coalitions with other non-kin females, based on the ideas of sharing, support, and reciprocity. Males, conversely, remained in their kin groups, and the large-group activities they engaged in encouraged friendship coalitions based on the perceived benefits that superior others could offer the self. Assuming these patterns remained stable over time, it stands to reason that there should be differences in modern-day friendship expectations based on sex. Specifically, these differences should manifest in not only how people go about forming friendships but also what friendship elements are most valued in a peer group member. Literature suggests that this is the case. For example, several studies have demonstrated that although both men and women value intimacy in a same-sex relationship and see it as important to friendship development, women are better able to actually achieve intimacy than are male counterparts. Females are more willing to disclose personal and private information and engage in greater personal sharing with relationship partners than males (Caldwell & Peplau, 1982; Fehr, 2004; Reisman, 1990). As a result, female friendships are closer and more intimate than are male friendships.

Another sex-based distinction focuses on the relative weight or priority that men and women place on different friendship benefits. Results of a large meta-analysis of the friendship literature found that across studies females and males differ across relationship sub-dimensions in terms of their relationship expectations (Hall, 2011). In particular, females have greater expectations of symmetrical reciprocity, which includes relationship aspects such as loyalty, support, and trustworthiness, as well as communion, which includes relationship aspects such as emotional availability, empathy, and self-disclosure. Men, conversely, have greater agency expectations, actively regarding "friends as objects from which benefits [such as personal or financial resources, social status and connections, and so forth; Vigil, 2007] can be derived" (Hall, 2011, p. 727). Men appear to place a greater emphasis on the more instrumental aspects of friendship than women (Aukett, Ritchie, & Mill, 1988), actively seeking out friendship opportunities which enable them to bolster self-prominence in a peer group (Zarbatany, et al., 2004). In sum it appears sex-based friendship differences persist, with females having higher expectations of reciprocity,

support, and self-disclosure than males, who conversely have higher expectations of rewards and self-focused benefits than females.

2.5.3   Sex Differences in Marketing Literature

Sex has been examined across a range of areas in the marketing literature, including the role it plays in shaping consumer response to different advertising techniques (e.g. Dahl, Sengupta, & Vohs, 2009; Fisher & Dubé, 2005; Noseworthy, Cotte, & Lee, 2011), how sex shapes shopping expectations and behaviours (Fischer & Arnold, 1990; Fisher & Dubé, 2005), and most germane to this thesis, how sex roles shape consumer behaviours (e.g. Brunel & Nelson, 2000; Meyers-Levy, 1988; Winterich, et al., 2009; Zhang, et al., 2014) . Sex-role based research focuses on the differences between men and women regarding their underlying goals, arguing that males are more focused on agentic goals such as assertiveness, control, and self-efficacy, whereas females are more focused on communal goals such as interpersonal connection and harmony with others (Bakan, 1966; Meyers-Levy, 1988). Extending this into the realm of marketing, researchers have focused on how this self versus other orientation impacts a host of consumer behaviours.

For example, Meyers-Levy (1988) found that advertising appeals highlighting other-oriented benefits are more persuasive for females than males, whereas males are most persuaded by appeals highlighting self-oriented benefits. In addition, females are more likely to take into account others' feedback when making product evaluations than are males, suggesting that the other's perspective matters more for females at a range of consumer decision-points. Similar results were seen when studying the effectiveness of different messages soliciting charitable donations. Appeals which highlight the self-oriented benefits of donating to a specific charity are most persuasive for male consumers, whereas appeals highlighting the other-oriented benefits of donating are most effective for female consumers (Brunel & Nelson, 2000; Winterich, et al., 2009).   Finally, word-of-mouth literature has also found sex-based differences in the relative importance of self and other considerations. Specifically, research shows that females are more willing to share negative product experiences with close others than are males, even when the sharing of those negative experiences might cast them in a negative light (Zhang, et al., 2014). The

authors posited that this greater willingness to disclose on the part of females, in spite of the risk of looking foolish, is due to a greater other-focused orientation.

Although the self-other distinction seen across a range of marketing contexts is not situated in interpersonal relationships per se, it nevertheless has clear links back to the extrinsic-intrinsic affiliation motives literature. Recall from an earlier section that intrinsic affiliation motives are 'we'-based, in that the benefits from the interaction encounter are viewed as communal, or shared between both parties. Consideration for the other person in the relationship dyad is central to the encounter. Extrinsic affiliation motives, conversely, are purely 'me'-based, in that the only partner of focus in the dyad is the self (Rempel, et al., 1985). Linking that back to the self-other distinction suggests that adopting a self-focus is congruent with seeking extrinsic affiliation rewards, whereas adopting an other-focus is congruent with seeking intrinsic affiliation rewards. Extrapolating from the existing marketing research into the present domain suggests that male and female affiliation motives should differ. Specifically, males should be more likely to value affiliation opportunities that confer self-based benefits, whereas females should value affiliation opportunities that confer both self and other-based benefits.

In summary, it appears that while both men and women seek out and value close interpersonal friendships, females are better able to obtain them than males. This is largely due to their willingness and superior ability to engage in empathic understanding, intimate self-disclosure, and ongoing support with a peer relationship partner (Fehr, 2004; S. E. Taylor, et al., 2000). In addition to their relationship abilities, however, women also have greater expectations around ideas of support, loyalty, trustworthiness, and self-disclosure in a same-sex relationship than do men (Hall, 2011). Men, conversely, value peer relationship partners who provide them with agency-related benefits to a greater extent than do females, and seek out friendships which offer something by way of tangible reward (Geary, et al., 2003). From a marketing perspective, men appear to find advertising most compelling when it focuses on self-based benefits, whereas females are most persuaded when at least some of the benefits centre on others (Winterich, et al., 2009). Thought these differences may have originated as a result of sex-based differences in displacement patterns amongst our ancestors, the findings appear to remain relevant in today's society.

Sex-based differences have potentially important implications to my own research, and in particular on the relative strength of both extrinsic and intrinsic affiliation motives at predicting subsequent endorser effectiveness. Intrinsic affiliation motives focus on ideas such as mutual sharing and support, reciprocity, and a desire for the interaction opportunity to strengthen interpersonal closeness with the relationship partner. This appears to be a more important aspect of female peer friendships than it is of male peer friendships. Conversely, extrinsic affiliation motives focus on end goals and benefits obtained to the individual as a result of the interaction opportunity, but outside of the relationship dyad specifically. The emphasis is on identifying relationship partners who confer benefits back to the individual as a result of social status, attractiveness, and so forth; a friendship aspect that appears to be of greater importance for male peer relationships than for female ones. Based on the above, I predict:

> *H3: The relative strength of extrinsic and intrinsic affiliation motives is moderated by sex. For males (females), extrinsic (intrinsic) affiliation motives are a greater predictor of endorser effectiveness than are intrinsic (extrinsic) affiliation motives.*

2.6 Additional Questions Surrounding Reference Groups and Endorser Effectiveness

If human brands can truly be measured and assessed on their aspirational and membership qualities, there are a variety of research questions which could be of interest to marketing researchers. In this present research I limit my focus to two. First, I investigate whether an endorser's effectiveness is affected by how well consumers perceive a fit between the endorser and paired brand, from the perspective of both consumer reference group ratings and product self-congruence ratings. Second, I investigate whether self-disclosure, a well-established approach to increasing feelings of closeness and connection in interpersonal friendships (Altman & Taylor, 1973), is an effective way for a human brand to increase his or her reference group ratings. Each of these elements will be explored in more detail in turn.

2.6.1   Fit Differences in Human Brand Types

> I have no problem with Bond drinking beer, but Heineken? Come on, really?
> No one with any sort of sophistication drinks Heineken.
>
> - April 2012 fan comment on CNN article (Busis, 2012) that James Bond, as
> played by actor Daniel Craig, appears in a Heineken ad as part of larger cross-
> promotional campaign for the movie "Skyfall."

Researchers have examined how issues of fit or match between the characteristics of the endorser and the product being endorsed affect the persuasiveness of celebrity endorsements (Kahle & Homer, 1985; Kamins, 1990; Kamins & Gupta, 1994). Traditionally these studies are housed within the context of spokesperson source effects, such as attractiveness or credibility, and based on the argument that the relative impact of a source effect depends on how much information it provides consumers in relation to the paired product, assessed by the perceived fit between the source and product being promoted (a phenomenon called "the matchup hypothesis"; Kamins & Gupta, 1994). For example, an athlete is more persuasive when endorsing a sports-related product such as an energy bar than when promoting an unrelated product such as a chocolate bar (Till & Busler, 2000). In the former scenario, an athlete's approval of the energy bar is seen as providing consumers with additional relevant information, in that the athlete is seen as an expert in sports-related topics. In the latter scenario, the athlete's approval of the chocolate bar provides very little additional information, since he should be no more or less suited to assessing a chocolate bar's merits than a typical consumer. As a result, the athlete's endorsement matches up or fits better with an energy bar, and is therefore more effective (Till & Busler, 2000). Source-based models have clearly established that consumers need to be able to make a clear link between traits held by the spokesperson and features germane to the linked product in order for endorsement pairing to be optimally effective (McCracken, 1989).

2.6.1.1   Fit between Reference Groups and Product Types

My research aims to extend that done previously in the product-endorser fit literature. Whereas source matchup has been extensively studied, researchers do not know whether perceived fit of the endorser type (primarily a membership group member or primarily an aspirational group member) and the product type (consistent with actual self or ideal self) also impacts the relative persuasiveness of an endorser appeal. Given that membership groups are comprised of individuals who are seen as similar others to a present self, individuals seen as primarily linked to a membership group should also use products that are similar to those used by a present self (Chan, et al., 2012). For example, if everyone in my peer group wears Adidas, I likely wear Adidas too and see the brand as a match to my actual-self. Likewise, aspirational others are those that individuals aspire to be like one day, suggesting that the goods that they are consuming should also be more congruent with an ideal self. For example, if the business leaders I admire all drive expensive foreign brands of cars, these brands will seem like a match with my ideal-self.

This perception of a match or fit between reference group ratings and brand self-congruence should translate into human brand endorsements as well. As an illustration, let us revisit the Jennifer Aniston Whole Foods example provided as a consumer quote earlier in this paper[10]. It appears that the consumer quoted identifies Jennifer Aniston as a friend, given that she calls Aniston "funny and down-to-earth." This would suggest that she while she both likes and admires Aniston, she also likely rates her more highly on the membership dimension than the aspirational one. It also appears that perhaps the consumer shops at Whole Foods – else it would be hard to imagine her bumping into Aniston by the melon section – suggesting the behaviour is consistent with the consumer's actual-self. In this situation, then, an ad featuring Jennifer Aniston endorsing Whole Foods should be deemed

---

[10] "She is really funny... :) And so genuine. i love it when she is on Ellen. It seems Jennifer Aniston has no problem laughing at herself and poking holes in outrageous stories about her. I just think she is the kind of person who would help you pick out a cantaloupe at Whole Foods and just be a normal person while doing it. :)"

a good fit to that consumer. Someone she views as primarily consistent with her membership group is engaging in activities consistent with her actual-self, which should otherwise be the case most of the time with her actual friends. Another consumer, however, might also rate Aniston more highly on the membership dimension than the aspirational one, and yet deem shopping at Whole Foods as something aspirational and consistent with her ideal-self; something that she does not do at present but hopes to do one day. To the second consumer, Jennifer Aniston endorsing Whole Foods should be less effective, since the pairing will seem incongruous. The figure below outlines the general predicted relationship.

Table 1: Fit Hypotheses

Product congruent with:	Human brand primarily seen as part of:	
	Membership Group	*Aspirational Group*
Actual Self	Celebrity product endorsement a good fit → Enhanced persuasiveness	Celebrity product endorsement a poor fit → Diminished persuasiveness
Ideal Self	Celebrity product endorsement a poor fit → Diminished persuasiveness	Celebrity product endorsement a good fit → Enhanced persuasiveness

In addition to the fit between human brand and endorsed product required for a successful endorsement to occur, then, I am also arguing that a fit is needed between how the consumer assesses the human brand along both the aspirational and membership dimensions and how the consumer assesses the endorsed product along the actual- and ideal-self dimensions. More formally:

> *H4: The self-congruence of the product being endorsed should moderate the effectiveness of aspirational and membership ratings on endorser effectiveness. Specifically, human brands rated as primarily aspirational (primarily membership) should be most effective when promoting products congruent with a consumer's ideal (actual) self.*

2.6.2   Enhancing Reference Group Evaluations through Self-Disclosure

> I don't [use] social media, and I feel like that's how people control their
> image. My image, in my mind, is just to disappear…I just want people to
> see the work that I'm proud of…I don't want to be that accessible. I feel like
> you let people touch you when you have Instagram or Twitter, and I don't
> want to be touched all the time. I'm not going to do it – ever.
>
> - Actress Elizabeth Olsen discussing her approach to self-disclosure and
> social media-based activities in an interview with Fashion Magazine, May
> 2015

If both aspirational and membership ratings benefit endorser effectiveness, a question of theoretical and substantive interest is how human brands can go about increasing those ratings. One potential approach to improving reference group ratings may hinge on human brands engaging in intimate self-disclosure.

Intimate self-disclosure is a hallmark of close same-sex relationships (Reisman, 1990), and intimate disclosing plays a pivotal role in friendship development (Caldwell & Peplau, 1982). Relationships evolve as both parties learn more about each other, through both enhanced breadth and depth of disclosure (Altman & Taylor, 1973; D. A. Taylor, 1968). Not only do close others share more about each other across a broader range of categories, but they also share more private or intimate information with each other in those specific categories (Altman & Taylor, 1973; Baack, Fogliasso, & Harris, 2000). Akin to the analogy of "peeling back layers of an onion," as the relationship evolves both parties increasingly share private or privileged information about themselves, including their beliefs, values, feelings, fears, and personality traits (Baack, et al., 2000). Over time, this core information becomes more important when thinking of the other, as compared to the early superficial information. For example, when asked to describe a close other, individuals are more likely to spontaneously provide this type of central information whereas when asked to describe a non-close other they are more likely to mention superficial characteristics such as physical appearance (Prentice, 1990).

2.6.2.1   Intimate Self-Disclosures and Human Brands

Extending this research into the area of human brands offers insights into how human brands might increase their reference group ratings accordingly. Specifically, it suggests that those human brands who choose to interact frequently with consumers – either via social media platforms, traditional media outlets, or a combination of both – are more likely to form stronger and enduring connections with consumers. Not only is frequency of interaction important, however, but also what is communicated. Specifically, human brands need to move past the purely superficial, revealing more about their private selves, including their fears, beliefs, values, and even their own limitations[11]. For example, revisit the quote that Channing Tatum provided in his Reddit AMA[12], where he candidly shares with consumers that he struggles to read well aloud. This type of personal sharing helps to humanize him, likely enhancing consumers' abilities to relate with the star. Of course, consistent with footnote 11 below, the benefits of self-disclosure are bound by the content revealed and likely idiosyncratic at the individual consumer level. Robert Downey Jr., for example, has been open about his past struggles with drug addiction and subsequent incarceration, and yet remains a popular and successful actor. Mel Gibson, conversely, went on a well-publicized anti-Semitic tirade, and saw a major drop in popularity. The difference between the two situations is that the former, though perhaps not a common situation for most consumers, falls within the range of normal and acceptable behaviour for human brands, and paired with Downey Jr.'s subsequent remorse, is forgivable. The latter, however, is likely seen as a serious norms violation or transgression too major to be tolerated (Brauer & Chekroun, 2005). In my thesis, where I advocate for enhanced self-

---

[11] Research in interpersonal relationships suggests that having awareness of specific limitations associated with a spouse makes for stronger and more lasting marriages (Neff & Karney, 2004), as it signifies greater trust on the part of the two partners. While some degree of negative information sharing on the part of human brands could similarly be helpful, it no doubt depends on what information is shared and how controversial the topic. Consistent with interpersonal relationships, minor violations make the human brand seem more "human" and relatable and should be forgiven or overlooked, however major violations damage the overall relationship (Guerrero & Bachman, 2010).

[12] "Doing SNL was by far the most terrifying thing that I've ever done, because there is a lot of reading involved, and I don't read that well out loud."

disclosure, the recommendation is bound by the assumption that the content disclosed is largely positive in valence then, or at minimum, not seen as a social norms violation (Brauer & Chekroun, 2005). Put another way, consistent with the suggestion that business leaders should engage in self-disclosure as a way of building trust with employees, the self-disclosure activities must be "skillfully" done (Offermann & Rosh, 2012).

Both parties have a role in determining the level of intimacy achieved. A very private human brand such as Elizabeth Olsen quoted in the introduction to this section may decide to limit interviews and restrict the amount of personal information discussed, whereas other quite open human brands such as Kim Kardashian or Miley Cyrus might have Twitter and Instagram accounts, do frequent interviews, and look for other ways to interact with the public (in the former's case through a reality television series). Likewise, a dedicated consumer might opt to follow favoured human brands on Twitter and read their interviews, whereas a less interested one might be aware of these potential additional sources of information yet choose to ignore them. Pairing a private human brand with a disinterested consumer should result in a very superficial relationship and little or no feelings of intimacy or social closeness, whereas pairing an open human brand and dedicated consumer should result in the strongest feelings of social connectedness between said consumer and human brand. An important contributor to the degree of evolution in the relationship, therefore, centres on the degree of self-disclosure that the human brand engages in.

From a marketing perspective, this also suggests that a company looking to determine whether a human brand would be a suitable spokesperson should consider the degree to which the human brand is willing and able to engage in self-disclosure of a more private and personal nature. If increasing self-disclosure does bolster reference group ratings, and these in turn enhance endorser effectiveness, there is a strategic benefit to working with a human brand that is willing to forego privacy in exchange for increased likeability.

What is less clear, however, is whether higher self-disclosure will primarily benefit membership evaluations, aspirational evaluations, or both. In interpersonal relationships, high levels of self-disclosure and sharing between same-sex individuals is a hallmark of a good friendship (Aukett, et al., 1988), and individuals who engaged in group-based

activities high in self-disclosure reported having more in common with the other (Aron, et al., 1997). Females in particular view intimate self-disclosure as an important tool to strengthen their friendships, and generally expect high degrees of sharing as a component of close relationships (Hall, 2011). Interpersonal relationship researchers, then, would suggest that self-disclosure should generate heightened feelings of friendship between a human brand disclosing and the consumers who are privy to the information. Membership ratings reflect elements of commonality with others, and ideas of friendship and closeness. As such, it stands to reason that any increases in reference group ratings as a result of heightened self-disclosure should primarily benefit membership ratings as opposed to aspirational ratings.

However, human brands are not like other actual friends. They are individuals that consumers see on television, read about in magazines, and listen to on the radio. They are often attractive, wealthy, and extremely successful, and several of the established unidimensional scales measuring consumer assessments of human brands contain items reflecting idolatry and proximity seeking (i.e., "if I saw a story about [my favourite human brand], I would read it"; A. M. Rubin, Perse, & Powell, 1985). Their unusual success and well-established public persona already provides them with a built-in "hero" or idol-type status (Maltby, Houran, Lange, Ashe, & McCutcheon, 2002), and so depending on what is shared and how it is shared, it seems equally possible that an aspirational human brand engaging in personal self-disclosure will simply seem more aspirational as a result. In the end, self-disclosure results in enhanced feelings of connection with another. If that other is an idol, it could simply act to strengthen overall admiration for that idol, as opposed to enhancing feelings of friendship.

The marketing literature is silent on the issue, but research in the leadership domain lends circumstantial support for this assertion. For example, self-disclosure is positioned as a leadership tool for business executives, by which "skillful self-disclosure can humanize the leader, creating connections between the leader and followers that increase feelings of trust and intimacy, and, in an organizational context, a readiness to work together collaboratively to reach mutual task goals" (Offermann & Rosh, 2012). Similarly, a review of factors which help foster trust within an organization highlights openness and sharing as an

important trust-building tool that leaders can employ (Mayer, Davis, & Schoorman, 1995). In these instances, self-disclosure is not being advocated as a tool by which organizational leaders can become better friends with employees, but instead as a tactic they can implement to enhance or strengthen their leadership position. Given that human brands are frequently seen as aspirational others, it seems possible then that engaging in intimate self-disclosure in this instance may simply increase consumer feelings of admiration and respect accordingly. These feelings of "looking up to" someone best reflect aspirational reference group ratings, and suggest that as human brands engage in intimate self-disclosure their aspirational ratings should increase accordingly.

To reiterate, consumers should feel increasingly connected to human brands who engage in intimate self-disclosure. Whether those connections will translate into greater membership ratings, greater aspirational ratings, or both is less clear. In spite of my uncertainty regarding which aspect of reference group ratings will benefit most from heightened self-disclosure, given that I am arguing that both aspirational and membership ratings confer downstream benefits to endorser effectiveness, any increase in reference group ratings should be desirable. In sum:

>*H5a: Engaging in intimate self-disclosure will increase a human brand's membership ratings.*

>*H5b: Engaging in intimate self-disclosure will increase a human brand's aspirational ratings.*

2.7   The Current Research

In my dissertation, I endeavour to better determine the role that reference group assessments play in the effectiveness of human brands as endorsers (studies 1 and 3), and how those assessments ultimately impact the relative importance of different affiliation motives (studies 3 and 4). In addition, I investigate whether the degree to which a human brand engages in intimate self-disclosure affects that human brand's reference group ratings and endorser effectiveness (study 2). I also examine the potentially important moderating role

that sex plays at predicting whether endorsement effectiveness is primarily driven by extrinsic or intrinsic affiliation motives (studies 3 and 4). Finally, I explore whether assessments of fit between the predominant reference group category and product self-congruence moderate endorsement persuasiveness (study 4).

The studies are set up as follows. Study 1 establishes the basic premise that both positive aspirational and membership reference group ratings predict endorser effectiveness. I test this first hypothesis through the use of a survey methodology, limiting my scope and focus to female university students and providing a range of fictitious advertisements. In study 2 I use an experimental approach again in a female study population, demonstrating that there are benefits to human brands engaging in intimate self-disclosure on subsequent endorser effectiveness, and that these benefits are driven via increasing aspirational ratings. In study 3 I expand on the findings of studies 1 and 2 with a more diverse population and using structural equation modelling, allowing participants to provide their own human brands while maintaining a stable product category. Results of study 3 validate and extend those of studies 1 and 2, demonstrating not only that positive ratings on both reference group categories are important predictors of endorser effectiveness, but also that they are mediated by both intrinsic and extrinsic affiliation motives. In addition, study 3 allows for a sex-based comparison of the effects, providing initial support for the premise that for females, intrinsic affiliation motives are a more important driver of endorser effectiveness than are extrinsic affiliation motives, whereas for males both appear to matter equally. In study 4 I adopt an experimental approach, contrasting the effectiveness of human brands deemed primarily membership against those deemed primarily aspirational. I find that for males, human brands seen as primarily aspirational are more persuasive than human brands seen as primarily membership, and that their effectiveness is mediated via extrinsic affiliation motives. For females, however, human brands seen as primarily membership are more persuasive than human brands seen as primarily aspirational, and that their effectiveness is mediated via intrinsic affiliation motives. I also find, however, that the hypothesized interaction of reference group and product self-congruence is not supported, suggesting that this may not be a currently overlooked aspect of endorser-brand fit.

Chapter 3

3   Studies

I conducted four studies using a mix of survey and experimental methodologies, in order to test my five hypotheses detailed in chapter 2. Appendix A provides a diagrammatic outline of the specific model elements tested in each of the four studies.

3.1   Study 1 (Pilot)

I conducted study 1 as a proof-of-concept study, to provide initial support for hypotheses 1a and 1b. Specifically, my goal in study 1 was to provide baseline evidence for the proposition that both aspirational ratings and membership ratings will positively predict endorser effectiveness. To test these effects, I measured reference group ratings and assessed their impact on a composite behavioural intention score as a proxy of endorser effectiveness. I restricted this study to female participants given the segment has the strongest friendship expectations (S. E. Taylor, et al., 2000), suggesting that membership ratings should be particularly important predictors of endorser effectiveness in this population.

3.1.1   Design

3.1.1.1   Stimuli Development

My first goal was to identify potential human brands who differed from each other on the aspirational and membership dimensions, so that my independent variables had sufficient variation across the two dimensions of interest. Put another way, I wanted to identify human brands to feature in the study which would "create variance on the dimension[s] of [interest]" (Thomson, 2006, p. 107), as opposed to creating a randomized study design. I also wanted to identify well-known product brands. This approach has been recently adopted in other literature assessing celebrity endorsements (Choi & Rifon, 2012).

To achieve this goal, I first pre-tested six potential human brands and four product categories, using the same population of interest as in the actual study (n = 61 females).

Human brand assessments were based on two measures: an attitude measure taken using a scale anchored at -50 = "extremely negative" and 50 = "extremely positive," and a measure assessing consumer perceptions of the human brands along the idol-friend continuum, using a scale anchored at scale anchored at 0 = "idol" and 100 = "friend." I used the idol-friend measure as a proxy of aspirational and membership ratings, with stronger "idol" ratings consistent with a more aspirational human brand, and stronger "friend" ratings consistent with a more membership human brand. Product brand usage willingness was based on a single discrete choice yes/no item assessing whether participants "would use this product."

Among the human brands pre-tested, actresses Angelina Jolie and Jennifer Aniston were selected as appropriate, since participants had positive attitudes towards both human brands ($M_{attitude\_Jolie}$ = 14.6, $M_{attitude\_Anniston}$ = 20.71;) but the two differed significantly on the idol-friend continuum. Specifically, Jolie's ratings were heavily skewed to idol (M = 21.67) whereas Aniston's were closer to the mid-range (M = 45.05, $t_{(59)}$ = 5.93, p<.001). Pretest results also revealed that Maybelline and Dior were both cosmetic brands that the majority of participants (71%) would use.

Based on the pre-test results, I created four versions of the final stimuli ad, pairing the human brands with the product brands (see appendix B for example ads). Aside from differences in the human brands and product brands featured, the ads were relatively consistent, using a black and white image of a non-smiling endorser and a colour image of the endorsed brand.

3.1.1.2   Participants and Procedure

Study 1 was conducted online from computers housed in a behavioural research lab. Female participants (n = 146, M_{age} = 18.09) were randomized to see one of the ads described above. Subsequent to viewing the ad, participants answered a series of dependent variable questions and a series of questions assessing both aspirational and reference group ratings. Finally, I collected basic demographic variables.

3.1.1.3   Measures

Dependent Variables: To assess endorser effectiveness, I measured several items capturing relevant behavioural intentions. Specifically, participants were asked to rate their (1) "likelihood of finding out more about the [cosmetic brand featured]," (2) "trying [cosmetic brand]," (3) "purchasing [cosmetic brand]," and (4) "recommending [cosmetic brand] to a friend," anchored at 1 = "definitely would not" and 7 = "definitely would." Participants were also asked to rate their (5) "interest in the [cosmetic brand]," anchored between "not at all interested" and "extremely interested," again using a 1 – 7 scale. Averaged scores on the items formed the composite outcome (α = .88).

Reference Group Assessments: To assess both aspirational and membership reference group ratings, I created a composite measure of four items assessing each construct (α aspirational = .86; α membership = .83). I have provided extensive detail on both the items themselves and manner of testing them in the write-up for study 3, so I will not reiterate them here[13].

3.1.2   Results

Results of a MANOVA analysis suggest that my goal to introduce variance in the independent variables was somewhat successful. Specifically, the human brands featured did vary significantly on the membership dimension of reference group ratings (M_{JOLIE} = 2.87 vs $M_{ANISTON}$ = 3.61; $F(1,144)$ = 15.82, $p<.001$), however there was no significant variation on the aspirational dimension of reference group ratings (M_{JOLIE} = 4.37 vs $M_{ANISTON}$ = 4.43; $F(1, 144)$ = .07, $p=.79$). In hindsight using a single item scale continuum was likely not an appropriate measure to use during the stimuli development, as it lacks the specificity to identify human brands as truly high on either aspirational or reference group ratings (for example, just because someone is seen as more "friend" than "idol" does not mean that they will subsequently be rated highly on the membership dimension or differ

---

[13] Please note that the studies are reported here in a different temporal order than were conducted in reality. As a result, item refinement measures reported in study 3 were actually used to guide the identification of the measures that were used in all four studies.

from someone else on the aspirational dimension). Subsequent studies which feature specific human brands include stimuli development and pre-testing using the actual aspirational and membership rating measures as opposed to this single-item measure.

To test my hypothesis, I regressed both aspirational and membership ratings, along with their interaction, on my behavioural intentions composite measure, mean centering the independent variables. Given that the human brands and product brands featured in the advertisements varied across participants, the initial analysis also included two dummy-coded covariates to reflect both the human brand and product brands seen by participants. However, since neither covariate was significant (both p>.25)[14], they were subsequently dropped from the analysis and are not discussed further. Summary statistics can be found in table 2 below.

Table 2: Summary Statistics, Study 1

	M	S.D.
Membership	3.36	1.17
Aspirational	4.40	1.36

Results of the regression analysis revealed that the overall model was significant (R^2 = .13, $F_{(3,142)}$ = 6.79, p<.001) and that hypotheses 1a and 1b were supported. Specifically, both aspirational ratings (β = .18; t_{142} = 2.25; p=.026) and membership ratings (β = .20; t_{142} = 2.12; p=.035) positively predicted behavioural intentions in regards to the cosmetic brand featured in the ad. The interaction of the two was not significant (β = .04; t_{142} = .76; p= .446), suggesting that while higher ratings on both scales does confer additional benefits in terms of predicting endorser effectiveness, these benefits are driven via main effects only as opposed to any specific interaction benefits.

A secondary question of interest is whether considering membership ratings in addition to aspirational ratings offers additional explanatory power in terms of predicting endorser

---

[14] Though note the pattern of results largely replicates even when including them, in that both aspirational ratings (β = .18; t_{140} = 2.11; p=.036) and membership ratings (β = .18; t_{140} = 1.77; p=.078) positively predicted intentions.

effectiveness. To determine whether this is the case, I used hierarchical regression to examine the independent impact of adding both membership main effect and the interaction effects to the aspiration main effects model. Details of the analysis are reported in table 3.

Table 3: Results of the Hierarchical Linear Regression, Study 1

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Aspirational	$\beta = .26$	$\beta = .17$	$\beta = .18$
Membership	---	$\beta = .21$	$\beta = .20$
Asp x Mem	---	---	$\beta = .04$
Adjusted R^2	.08	.11	.11
F-Change	14.17	5.26	.58
F-Change Significance	<.001	.023	.446

As the table results highlight, including both aspirational and membership ratings when assessing endorser potential appears to be the most effective approach. Both aspirational and membership ratings positively predict endorser effectiveness, and should be measured and considered jointly when assessing endorser potential.

3.1.3 Discussion

The results of this pilot study provide support for the premise that both aspirational and membership ratings positively predict endorser effectiveness, in support of my first hypotheses. The idea that a human brand can be assessed by consumers on both dimensions runs counter to the notion that a human brand is purely an idol to be worshipped (Maltby, et al., 2002), instead demonstrating that assessing a human brand on membership characteristics is also important when determining endorsement potential. To be clear, I am not arguing that aspirational ratings do not matter; as the summary statistics reveal, in this study aspirational ratings were higher than membership ratings and were a significant predictor of endorser effectiveness. Instead, I am arguing that both aspirational and membership ratings are important. My findings in the first study suggest that positive aspirational and membership ratings confer their benefits to endorsers via main effects only, as I did not find any significant interaction effects between the two. I will continue to test

for an interaction effect in my subsequent studies, however, to hopefully provide greater clarity around the issue.

The finding that consumers assess human brands along both aspirational and membership dimensions is potentially due, in part, to human brands engaging in a more active and forthright approach to communications with consumers (Keel & Nataraajan, 2012). As consumers come to learn more about human brands, they may begin to think about them differently, feeling closer and more connected (Moss, 2014). Open, frequent sharing of personal information between human brands and interested consumers likely increases feelings of intimacy and closeness between the two (Aron & Nardone, 2011), which may contribute to higher reference group ratings in turn. I test this proposition next in study 2.

3.2   Study 2

The results of study 1 suggest that for female consumers, both aspirational and membership ratings positively predict endorser effectiveness. Given these findings, a question of both theoretical and also substantive importance then is *how* human brands can increase consumer ratings on the relevant reference group dimensions. Increased reference group ratings should, after all, translate into enhanced persuasiveness as an endorser.

I designed study 2 then to specifically attempt to increase reference group ratings, by experimentally manipulating the degree to which a human brand engaged in intimate self-disclosure. I wanted to test the premise that, similar to interpersonal relationships (Altman & Taylor, 1973; Aron & Nardone, 2011; Neff & Karney, 2004), when a human brand engages in intimate self disclosure that human brand benefits from a boost in reference group ratings. In addition, I wanted to determine whether the boost in reference group ratings is primarily reflected in aspirational ratings (H5a), membership ratings (H5b), or both.

3.2.1   Design and Procedure

3.2.1.1   Stimuli Development

Given that the purpose of this study was to determine whether a human brand who engages in intimate self disclosure is subsequently more persuasive as an endorser, I needed to first identify an appropriate human brand. My objective was to find someone who was well-known to the target population and who was generally well-liked, but also someone who was seen as relatively private compared to other human brands. This was done for several reasons. To begin, practically speaking, I did not want to create a fictitious Q&A around an extremely open and public human brand, since that would increase the likelihood that something I included in the article ran counter to other information about the human brand well-known to participants, arousing suspicion. Second, and more importantly, intimate self-disclosure increases relationship strength at a diminishing rate (Altman & Taylor, 1973), risking a ceiling effect of additional self-disclosure on enhancing reference group ratings. By selecting a human brand who was not seen as particularly public in sharing of her personal details, I hoped to minimize this risk.

As a first step, participants from the same population as the main study of interest (n = 61 females from the Ivey behavioural subject pool) were asked to list human brands that they were familiar with. Emma Stone was mentioned by 10% of respondents, suggesting that she might be someone known by participants and liked, but not a strong favourite. A follow-up pre-test of a similar population (n = 52 North American females aged 18 – 24) conducted online using a paid panel provided additional support. Specifically, 98% of respondents knew who Emma Stone was, and participants felt quite positive towards her (M = 34.36; with scale anchored at -50 = "very negative" and 50 = "very positive"). Most importantly, participants rated Emma Stone as significantly more private than public (M = 67.23; with scale anchored at 0 = "extremely public" and 100 "extremely private," t_{51} = 6.93, p<.001). As such, I selected Emma Stone as the human brand to be used.

In addition, I also needed to select a product category and brand that was well-known to the population of interest, to be featured in the advertisement. Pandora jewelry was selected

based on the results of a pre-test completed in the same sample population as mentioned above (the female participants from the subject pool), which revealed that only 13.1% of respondents felt the brand was not a match with them, and the remainder rated the brand as relatively equal in terms of its fit with actual and ideal self (M = 4.1 on a 7-point-scale, with 1 = "only a match with my ideal self" and 7 = "only a match with my actual self.")

3.2.1.2   Participants and Procedure

Study 2 was conducted using female students (n = 96; M_{age} = 18.23) recruited through the subject pool, who participated in an online study using the computers in the Ivey behavioural research lab in exchange for course credit. Participants who failed more than one attention check or who had very negative attitudes towards the product category being endorsed (ratings of 2 or below on the composite 1 – 7 attitude scale) were excluded from the analysis, leaving a final sample size of 90. Females were specifically targeted as engaging in self-disclosure is more frequently the norm in this population than with males, and a hallmark of close friendships (Caldwell & Peplau, 1982; Fehr, 2004).

Upon beginning the study, participants were told "To begin, you are going to be shown an article featuring a Q&A with actress Emma Stone, which appeared recently in Cosmopolitan magazine.   Please read through the article carefully." Participants were then randomly assigned to see one of two conditions of the same article in this one-way between-subjects study design (human brand disclosure: high versus low).   Participants in the high intimate self-disclosure condition were told that the article is a "feature interview with Emma Stone about her role in an upcoming Woody Allen movie," whereas participants in the low self-disclosure condition were told that the article is a "feature interview with Emma Stone, about the character she plays in an upcoming Woody Allen movie."[15] The fictitious article was loosely based on actual interviews the actress had granted in the past, and used a similar template and look to actual Cosmopolitan magazine Q&A articles. Both versions featured virtually identical questions and answers, limiting changes to those

---

[15] Thank you to Jodie Whelan for this suggestion.

necessary to make the interview believable in both conditions (see Appendix D for an example article). For example, the question "How did you cope?" was reworded to "How did [the character] cope?"

After reading through the article, all participants were then shown the same advertisement purportedly in development for Pandora jewelry, featuring Emma Stone as an endorser (see Appendix E for the advertisement). After viewing the advertisement, participants completed the same set of five items assessing behavioural intentions as used in the previous study, modified to this context (i.e., "how likely would you be to try Pandora jewelry") and averaged to form a composite score (α=.93). Participants then again completed the same four-item measures of aspirational (α = .86) and membership (α=.85) reference group ratings as used in study 1 and detailed in study 3 (see appendix C), a manipulation check of the high and low disclosure manipulation, and provided basic demographic information. Participants were then debriefed following as to the fictitious nature of the human brand interview they were shown.

3.2.2   Results

3.2.2.1   Manipulation Check

Recall that the initial manipulation was intended to increase consumer feelings of interconnectedness with the human brand through intimate self-disclosure. To determine whether the manipulation was successful, the one-item Inclusion of Other in Self Scale (IOS; Aron, Aron, & Smollan, 1992) was administered. The IOS scale has been used across a variety of studies (Aron, et al., 1997; Aron & Nardone, 2011) to measure the degree to which an individual feels that the other overlaps with the self using pictorial diagrams of two circles either not touching at all (anchored at 1) or completely overlapping (anchored at 7). Results of an independent samples t-test suggest that the manipulation was successful at increasing perceptions of intimacy and social closeness in the high (M_{High} = 2.49) versus low (M_{Low} = 1.98) disclosure conditions (t_{88} = 2.05, p = .043).

3.2.2.2   Study Results

As a first step, I conducted an analysis of variance to determine whether there was a significant difference between the low and high disclosure conditions on behavioural intentions. Though the results were not significant ($M_{LOW} = 4.23$ vs $M_{HIGH} = 4.68$; $F_{(1,88)} = 1.80$, p =.18), they were directionally consistent with the premise that higher disclosure enhances endorser effectiveness. In addition, I conducted a multivariate analysis of variance to determine whether there were differences between the high and low disclosure conditions on aspirational ratings, membership ratings, or both. Results suggest that while membership ratings increased in the direction hypothesized, the overall boost was not significant ($M_{HIGH} = 3.70$ vs $M_{LOW} = 3.37$, $F_{(1,88)} = 1.63$, p = .20). Conversely, aspirational ratings increased significantly in the high disclosure condition as compared with the low disclosure condition ($M_{HIGH} = 4.46$ vs $M_{LOW} = 3.87$, $F_{(1,88)} = 5.63$, p = .02).   These results suggest that self-disclosure primarily enhances aspirational reference group ratings as opposed to membership ratings.

To test for my hypotheses, I conducted a mediation analysis using the PROCESS macro developed by Hayes (2012, model 4, using 1,000 iterations to derive a 95% confidence interval). This model estimates the effect of human brand disclosure levels on the behavioural intentions directly and indirectly through both the aspirational and membership reference group measures. Disclosure levels were dummy coded (1 = low disclosure; 2 = high disclosure). Summary results are included in figure 2, and details listed in table 4.
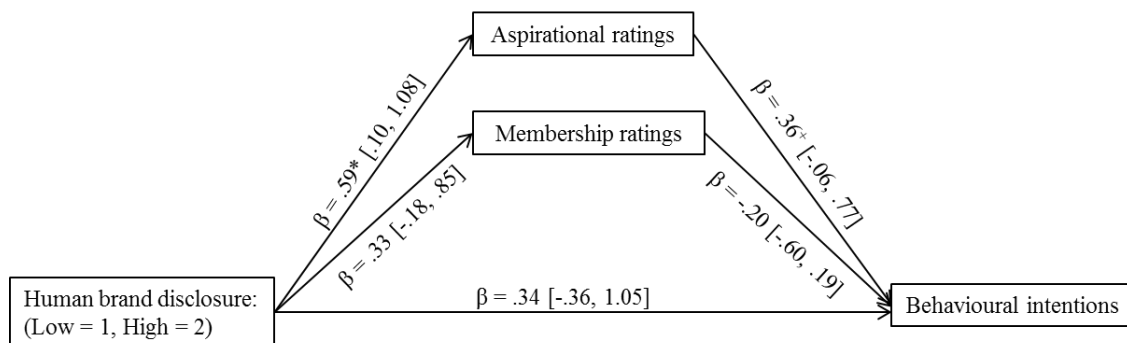
$^{+}$ p<.10; *p<.05

Figure 2: Study 2 Summary Mediation Results

Table 4: Study 2 Mediation Results

	MEDIATOR 1			MEDIATOR 2			OUTCOME Behavioural Intention Composite		
	Aspirational Ratings			Membership Ratings					
Predictors	*Coeff.*	*SE*	*t (88)*	*Coeff.*	*SE*	*t (88)*	*Coeff.*	*SE*	*t (86)*
Constant	3.28	.38	8.52***	3.04	.40	7.51***	3.17	.73	4.32***
Disclosure Level	.59	.25	2.37*	.33	.26	1.27	.34	.35	.96
Aspiration (MED 1)	---	---	---	---	---	---	.36	.21	1.72+
Member (MED 2)	---	---	---	---	---	---	-0.2	.20	-1.01
	R^2=.06, F(1, 88) = 5.63, p = .02			R^2=.02, F(1, 88) = 1.63, p = .20			R^2=.06, F(3, 86) = 1.68, p = .18		

Mediation analyses were run in parallel

+p<.10; *p<.05; **p<.01; ***p<.001

The results of the mediation analysis suggest that higher disclosure levels enhanced endorsement effectiveness, and that the effect was mediated by an increase in aspirational reference ratings (β = .21, S.E. = .16, CI [.003, .671])[16] but not by an increase in membership ratings (β = -.07, S.E. = .10, CI [-.35, .04]). These findings support H5a, in that higher self-disclosure did increase overall reference group ratings, but the actual increase came from a boost to aspirational ratings (H5b) and not via an increase in membership ratings (H5c). I discuss potential reasons for this finding next.

3.2.2.3   Discussion

The results of this study support the premise that self-disclosure on the part of a human brand is an effective way to increase consumer reference group assessments, which confers downstream benefits from the perspective of endorser effectiveness. These benefits seem to derive primarily via a boost in aspiration ratings, as opposed to a boost in membership ratings, though the high disclosure condition did see a directionally consistent, albeit statistically insignificant, increase in membership ratings as well as compared to the low disclosure condition.   These results suggest that engaging in more intimate self-disclosure

---

[16] Given the confidence interval is very close to zero, a reanalysis was done again using 1,000 iterations but with a 90% confidence level for confidence interval, which provided a more robust positive effect (β = .19, S.E. = .14, CI [.025, .526]). The proximity of the lower confidence level to zero in the original analysis suggests a marginally significant effect.

is a method by which human brands can enhance their reference group ratings, which in turn confers positive benefits to their endorsement effectiveness.

It is interesting to note that, although both aspirational and membership ratings enjoyed some degree of boosting via higher self-disclosure, in this case the benefits of self-disclosure on endorser effectiveness was only mediated by higher aspirational ratings. This could be due to several reasons. Leadership research suggests that leaders who want employee support and commitment should engage in self-disclosure (Mayer, et al., 1995). This self-disclosure is not done as a way of making employees feel more like "friends" of the boss, but rather as a way of making the boss seem more accessible and therefore easier to support (Offermann & Rosh, 2012). This suggests that if someone is already viewed as more aspirational than membership, enhanced self-disclosure may strengthen the former ratings more than the latter. This appears to have happened in this study as well, given the relatively larger boost in aspirational ratings than membership ratings in the high disclosure condition. Recall that Emma Stone was selected as the human brand partially because she is "notoriously private about [her] private [life]," (Le Vine, 2015). This suggests that her baseline membership ratings should be relatively lower than her aspirational ratings, which was indeed the case (M_{MEMB} = 3.53 vs M_{ASP} = 4.15; t_{89} = 6.34, p<.001).   In that sense, then, Emma Stone may have appeared more akin to a leader than a group member, and her self-disclosure simply enhanced feelings of admiration.

A second potential reason for the findings could be that it is simply harder to enhance membership ratings, and that the process is slower and more involved. It may be that, had the experiment featured a series of articles, more in-depth interviews, or a television interview that membership ratings would have significantly increased as well. Equally, the results could be in part due to the serious and perhaps somewhat abstract information provided in the fictitious article. In the article, Emma Stone spoke about her extreme anxiety and the challenges she faced in overcoming it, a situation which may have been hard for many of the participants to relate with. I based that context for self-disclosure on actual information in the public domain about Emma Stone, to increase the realism of the article. However, had the article talked about something that more participants could relate to, perhaps the findings would have differed.

For example, if the self-disclosure makes the human brand more relatable, in that consumers can link the self-disclosure back to elements of the current self (for example, if the human brand reveals overcoming a life obstacle that the consumer too has already overcome), potentially membership ratings could increase to a greater extent than aspirational ratings. Conversely, if the self-disclosure makes the human brand seem more aspirational, in that consumers link the self-disclosure back to an ideal self (for example, if the human brand reveals overcoming an obstacle that the consumer hopes to one day overcome but has not yet been able to), one might expect to see the same pattern of results as was obtained in this study. Future research might explore whether the effects of intimate self-disclosure on either aspirational or membership ratings is moderated by the self-relevance or relatability of the content disclosed.

In addition, I only tested the effects of self-disclosure on subsequent behavioural intentions within the female population, and additional research is needed to determine whether the effects exist within the male segment. Recall that, while males engage in less self-disclosure with their peers as a friendship-building tool than females, they nonetheless value it in a friendship and see it as an important driver of friendship development (Caldwell & Peplau, 1982). Given that, I suspect the findings of the study would hold for that population as well, though future research should confirm this finding.

The results of this study are particularly encouraging in this case given that I employed a relatively short manipulation. They suggest that if a company is in the process of selecting an endorser, one of the factors it might consider is the degree to which a human brand is willing to share more intimate details about himself, and whether appropriate outlets exist to disseminate that information. Of course, this consideration no doubt comes with some degree of risk as well. For example, in the study I only included relatively positive or primarily non-controversial information. It is unclear whether the human brand would have benefitted to the same degree had the information been more controversial (for example, revealing a previous abortion or strong political or religious beliefs). Human brands who frequently engage in self-disclosure via social media platforms often also appear to be called out by the media for saying inappropriate or controversial things. In that way, then, self-disclosure may be a double-edged sword. Those risks aside, this study does support the

premise that increasing self-disclosure enhances endorser effectiveness by enhancing reference group ratings.

The results of studies 1 and 2 are interesting, but are not without their limitations. To begin, I restricted the participant pool to females, and so it remains unclear whether membership ratings are equally predictive of endorsement effectiveness in male consumers. In addition, both studies were conducted using university students, a segment which may be particularly prone to developing stronger attachments to human brands (Thomson, 2006). Again, then, it is less clear whether they hold for a potentially more detached population. Whereas there were valid reasons for beginning my investigation in the female student population, at this juncture I situate my remaining studies in a mixed-sex population of North American adults, to increase the generalizability of the findings.

In addition, I have yet to examine the underlying reasons why aspirational and membership ratings positively predict endorser effectiveness. In particular, the question remains as to whether the answer lies in the two value-expressive influences as previously proposed by researchers (e.g. Bearden, et al., 1989; Childers & Rao, 1992; Park & Lessig, 1977), and if so, which of the two value-expressive influences – here operationalized as either extrinsic or intrinsic affiliation motives – is most predictive of endorser effectiveness. In studies 3 and 4 I set out to explore these questions further.

3.3   Study 3

In designing this study I had several objectives. To begin, I wanted to determine which items could best be adapted from the relationship literature and applied to the context of human brands, in relation to both reference group ratings and affiliation motives. This was important for several reasons.

On the reference group rating side, little research exists clearly differentiating groups or individuals based on the aspirational versus membership distinction. The one exception is a study conducted by Escalas and Bettman (2003), which used two and three item scales to assess these constructs. The scale items were created by the authors explicitly for study in an interpersonal context. While they worked successfully across studies and have good face

validity, I was not sure whether they would translate well and adequately capture my underlying constructs of interest in a human brand context, given that they were not created with this purpose in mind. In addition, because there were only a few items, I created additional scale items and wanted to see whether these additional items mapped onto the appropriate constructs without cross-loading onto unrelated ones.

On the affiliation motives side, the items were adapted from the interpersonal relationship literature (Rempel, et al., 1985). In this case, the original measures were again based on interpersonal relationships, and intended to capture the underlying reasons that someone would affiliate with someone else. As such, I had to adapt them to better reflect the underlying reasons that someone would consume a product being promoted by someone else. These are very different measurement questions, and I wanted to ensure the adapted items were appropriate in this new context.

Once scale items were identified, my main objective of this study was to build on the foundation set in study 1. Namely, I wanted to provide additional support for the notion that both aspirational and membership group ratings positively predict endorser effectiveness. In addition, I wanted to determine the relative degree to which intrinsic and extrinsic affiliation motives explained these reference group effects, and whether the benefits of higher aspirational ratings on endorser effectiveness were primarily mediated via extrinsic rewards whereas the benefits of membership ratings were primarily mediated via intrinsic rewards. Finally, I wanted to determine whether sex differences exist in terms of the relative strength of extrinsic and intrinsic affiliation motives at predicting desired outcomes. Formally, then, this study was designed to test hypotheses 1, 2, and 3.

3.3.1   Design and Procedure

American participants ($n = 350$, $M_{age} = 35.4$ (range $19 - 68$), 52% male) were recruited via MTurk and received modest compensation for participating. To begin, participants were randomized to see one of three versions of a prompt asking them to nominate a human brand. Specifically, participants were first shown the following text: "Advertisers often use celebrities to promote products and services. Celebrities can include actors, musicians, athletes, television and movie characters, reality tv stars, and so forth. Many people have

certain celebrities that they…" They were then randomly assigned to see one of the following: (1) "…feel particularly close to or like, as they would a good friend," (2) "…look up to or admire, as they would an idol," or (3) "…are familiar with, but have no special feelings towards." Consistent with study 1 methodology, the randomization of different prompts was again to introduce variation on the aspirational and membership dimensions, as opposed to creating a randomized study design. Participants then entered the name of the human brand they had nominated, and that same name appeared in place of "HBx" in all the measures outlined below. Subsequent to entering the name of a human brand, participants were told to: "Imagine that HBx is endorsing a new line of sunglasses." Sunglasses are an appropriate product category context for the study of endorser effectiveness, given that it is an area individuals use to signal their identities to others (Berger & Heath, 2007). In that capacity, these identity-relevant domains should be particularly influenced by perceptions of what others in one's reference group are wearing and using (Chan, et al., 2012). Participants were then asked to answer a series of survey questions, mapping on to the study variables detailed below, in the following order: dependent variable measures, mediator variables, and independent variables. Finally, participants reported their gender.

3.3.2   Measures

The study employed three sets of measures: reference group assessments, affiliation motives, and behavioural intention measures meant to capture endorser effectiveness. Details of each are outlined in turn below.

Reference Group Assessments (Independent variables)*:* To measure a consumer's perceptions of how he or she relates to a liked human brand, I adapted and expanded on the aspirational and membership scales previously used in the reference groups literature (Escalas & Bettman, 2003), as mentioned in the study introduction. Examples of scale questions assessing membership ratings include items such as "I fit with HBx" and "I belong to the same type of group as HBx," with participants rating their agreement on a 1 – 7 scale anchored at 1 = "not at all" and 7 = "completely." Aspirational group ratings were similarly measured, using items such as "I would like to be more like HBx" and "HBx feels

like an idol to me." The order of questions was counterbalanced, so that some participants assessed membership group fit first and others aspirational group fit. The initial list contained eight items measuring each construct, and the full list of scale items can be found in appendix C.

Affiliation Motives (Mediator variables)*:* Affiliation motives are traditionally assessed for interpersonal relationships, using a scale created by Rempel and colleagues (1985). This scale asks respondents to assess the degree to which they have a relationship with their partner based on a range of motivational items. While this scale was developed for interpersonal relationships, many of the scale items investigating the underlying motivation for interacting with a human appear to adapt well for the purpose of this study; namely, to determine the underlying reason why a consumer would try or purchase a product or service endorsed by a human brand. Put another way, whereas reference group ratings look at how a consumer relates to a human brand directly, the mediator looks at how a consumer relates to an endorsed product, contingent on a specific human brand's involvement as the endorser. In that capacity, the initial prompt asked participants to indicate the degree to which "I would consider purchasing sunglasses endorsed by HBx because" and then had them respond to items such as "it helps me feel close and connected to HBx" (intrinsic reward) and "using a brand endorsed by HBx will impress others" (extrinsic reward). Responses were coded on a 1 – 7 scale anchored at 1 = "strongly disagree" and 7 = "strongly agree," with six items initially selected to represent each construct. Though the original scale examining affiliation rewards was subdivided into three categories – intrinsic, instrumental, and extrinsic (Rempel, et al., 1985) – my objective is to map affiliation motives on to the underlying value-expressive reference group motivations (Park & Lessig, 1977). Given the distinction lies in those motives that are oriented exclusively towards the self versus those that are linked to both the self and relationship partner, items from both intrinsic and instrumental motives were integrated into the intrinsic motives scale. Research has previously demonstrated that these two elements correlate (Rempel, et al., 1985), and as I'll discuss in my analysis of the measurement model subsequently, the items loaded well onto a single latent factor. The full list of scale items can be found in appendix C.

Behavioural Intentions (Dependent variables): To assess endorser effectiveness, I used the same set of questions as in studies 1 and 2, modified for this context. Specifically, participants were asked to rate their (1) "likelihood of finding out more about the sunglasses," (2) "trying the sunglasses," (3) "purchasing the sunglasses," and (4) "recommending the sunglasses to a friend," anchored at 1 = "definitely would not" and 7 = "definitely would." Participants were also asked to rate their (5) "interest in the sunglasses," anchored between "not at all interested" and "extremely interested," again using a 1 – 7 scale. Items were averaged to form a composite (α = .96).

3.3.3   Measurement Model Testing

As mentioned earlier, my first objective in this study was to determine which of the adapted and expanded scale items best reflected the constructs of interest. In addition to testing basic scale development elements such as factor loadings, I also wanted to better determine the nature of the relationship between the constructs. In particular, given that aspirational and membership reference group items are both assessing in-group reference effects, it seemed likely that the two constructs would be correlated (see appendix F for the correlational table of all framework variables), though distinct enough from each other to load onto different constructs. Likewise, while the two affiliation motive scales were created to measure different underlying reasons for affiliating with a human brand, they have certain elements in common (such as positive impressions of the other person and so forth). Given that, I also anticipated that the two scales assessing affiliation motives would be correlated but load onto two distinct factors. Part of the measurement model testing, then, was to establish the nature of the relationship between the two independent variables and between the two mediator variables. Subsequent to establishing the final scale items measuring all four constructs of interest, I used those measures to test the overall model. I used AMOS (version 23) for all analyses.

3.3.3.1   Measurement Model Testing – Reference Group Ratings

Although the initial scales used to assess membership and aspirational groups each had eight items, four items on each scale were subsequently dropped as a result of either low item loading or high item cross-loading, yielding a final four item scale solution for each reference group type (see appendix C). For the membership scale, the coefficient alpha was .89 and all the factor loadings were significant (p < .001). For the aspirational scale, the coefficient alpha was .88 and again all factor loadings were significant (p<.001). Discriminant validity between the two variables was assessed by constraining the correlation between both membership and aspirational constructs to one (Kenny, 2012), which significantly worsened the chi-squared value of the overall model ($\Delta\chi^2$ = 16.60, Δ d.f. = 1, p <.001).

As a next step, I compared three versions of the measurement model, to ensure the two-factor model with correlation (model 2, see figure 3 for diagrams of the three model versions and table 5 for details of the measurement model) was indeed superior in fit to either a one-factor solution or an uncorrelated solution, similar to other measurement model approaches seen in the literature (e.g. Malär, et al., 2011; Thomson, 2006). As compared to the hypothesized best-fitting model (model 2), results of the chi-square analyses for both model 1 ($\Delta\chi^2$ = 191.36, Δ d.f. = 1, p <.001) and model 3 ($\Delta\chi^2$ = 278.16, Δ d.f. = 1, p <.001) were significantly worse. Model 2 had acceptable fit indices (see table 5), whereas fit indices for both models 1 and model 3 were outside of acceptable ranges across all measures, suggesting that model 2 was a superior model to the other two and an appropriate set of scale items to use to measure reference groups as I conduct the structural model analysis of my full conceptual model.
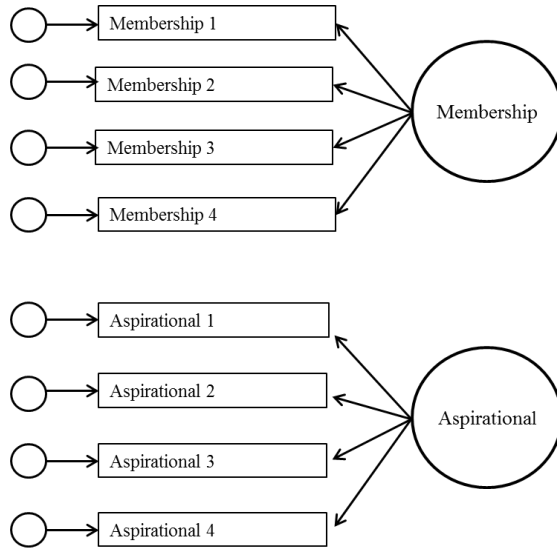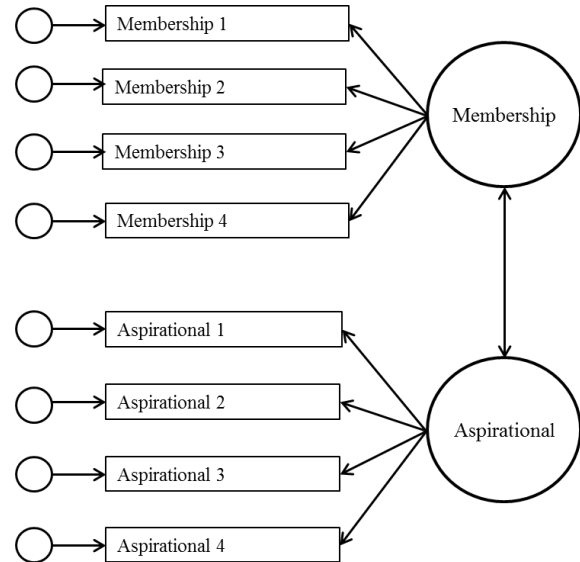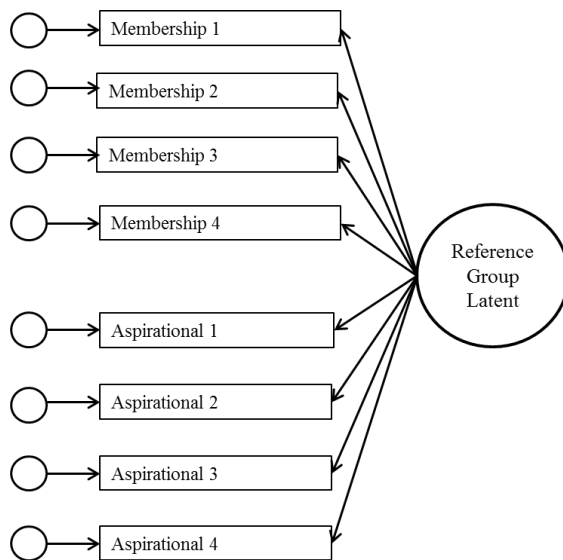
Model 1 – Two factor, no correlation

Model 2 – Two factor, correlation

Model 3 – One latent factor

Figure 3: Diagrammatic representation of three model versions

Table 5: Measurement Model Details for IV Variables across Models

	Mean	Model 1 (no correlation)	Model 2 (correlation)	Model 3 (one latent)
IV Membership Ratings (α =.89)	4.368			
I fit with	4.470	.901	.893	.816
Same type of person	4.120	.847	.853	.802
Would fit in w/ me, friends	4.730	.797	.793	.731
Feels like a friend	4.150	.732	.743	.731
IV Aspirational Ratings (α = .88)	5.185			
Would be honour to meet	5.980	.708	.718	.684
Would like be more like	4.860	.732	.748	.717
Look up to	5.210	.924	.907	.780
Feels like an idol	4.960	.858	.863	.764
Model Indices				
Chi-Square		240.358	49.184	327.350
d.f.		20	19	20
Model p value		.000	.000	.000
CMIN/DF		12.018	2.589	16.367
GFI		.883	.967	.759
CFI		.879	.983	.831
NFI		.869	.973	.822
RMSEA		.178	.067	.210

Notes: Model 2 correlation between membership and aspirational ratings =.720, p<.001

3.3.3.2   Measurement Model Testing – Affiliation Motives

The initial scales used to measure intrinsic and extrinsic affiliation motives consisted of six items each, however two items on each scale were subsequently dropped as a result of either low item loading or high item cross-loading, yielding a final four item scale for each affiliation motive (see appendix C). For the extrinsic affiliation motives scale, coefficient alpha was .93 and all factor loadings were significant (p <.001). For the intrinsic affiliation motives scale, coefficient alpha was .90 and again all factor loadings were significant (p<.001).   Discriminant validity between the two variables was assessed by constraining the correlation between both membership and aspirational constructs to one, which significantly worsened the chi-squared value of the overall model ($\Delta\chi^2 = 64.37$, Δ d.f. = 1, p <.001)

As a next step, I again compared three versions of the measurement model, to ensure that my hypothesized model of two factors with correlation was superior in fit to either a one-factor or an uncorrelated solution, paralleling the comparison of the models seen in figure 3. Mirroring the results of the reference group comparisons, again my hypothesized model of a two-factor solution with correlation (model 5) between the factors was superior to either a no-correlation model (model 4) or a one latent factor model (model 6; see table 6 for details).

Table 6: Measurement Model Details for Mediator Variables across Models

	Mean	Model 4 (no correlation)	Model 5 (correlation)	Model 6 (one latent)
Intrinsic Affiliation Motives (α = .90)	**4.250**			
Fun with	3.810	.763	.771	.722
Like what they like	4.300	.853	.850	.750
Want to support	4.650	.787	.785	.699
Like sharing in common	4.240	.931	.930	.819
Extrinsic Affiliation Motives (α = .93)	**3.356**			
Will impress others	3.470	.893	.892	.863
Meet new people	3.320	.849	.856	.846
Closer dream lifestyle	3.330	.891	.892	.865
Have exciting life	3.310	.887	.883	.852
Model Indices				
Chi-Square		298.258	30.416	326.704
d.f.		20	19	20
Model p value		.000	.047	.000
CMIN/DF		14.913	1.601	16.335
GFI		.868	.978	.750
CFI		.880	.995	.868
NFI		.873	.987	.861
RMSEA		.200	.041	.210

Notes: Model 5 – Correlation between intrinsic & extrinsic motives =.789, p<.001

Specifically, results of the chi-square analyses for both model 4 ($\Delta\chi^2$ = 267.84, Δ d.f. = 1, p <.001) and model 6 ($\Delta\chi^2$ = 296.29, Δ d.f. = 1, p <.001) were significantly worse. Model 5 had acceptable fit indices, whereas fit indices for both models 4 and model 6 were outside of acceptable ranges across all measures, suggesting that model 5 was a superior model to the other two and an appropriate set of scale items to use to measure reference groups as I conduct the structural model analysis of my full conceptual model.

3.3.4 Structural Model Analysis

To test the structural relationships hypothesized in my model I first used a parceling technique to reduce the number of parameters in the model, primarily to simplify overall analysis and interpretation in regards to the relationships between constructs (Little, Cunningham, Shahar, & Widaman, 2002). Parcels were created by forming a composite score for each of the constructs of interest using the average value of all scale items associated with each construct. In addition, the two reference group predictor values were mean-centered, and a third variable was created to reflect the interaction of the two. Finally, I correlated the reference group constructs and the affiliation motive constructs, per the findings in the initial measurement model stages that a correlated model is more appropriate than an uncorrelated one (although for simplicity these correlations are not shown in figure 4). The diagram of the main theoretical model[17] run in AMOS is outlined in figure 4.
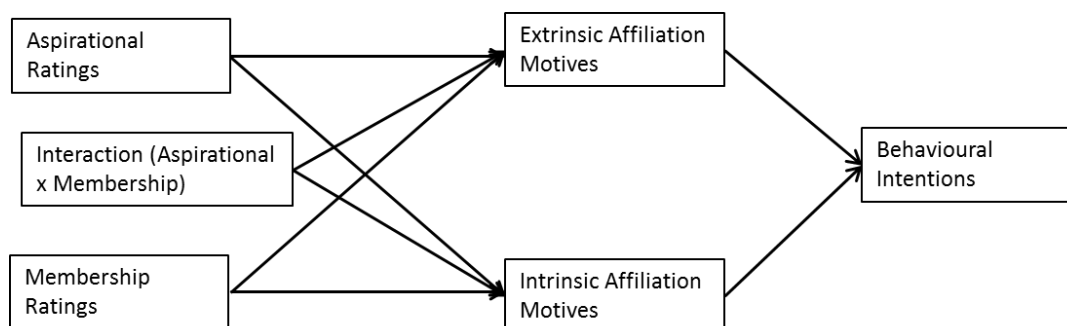

Figure 4: Study 2 Structural Model

3.3.4.1 Results

Results of a MANOVA analysis run in SPSS suggest that the manipulation to introduce variance in the independent variables was largely successful. Specifically, average ratings on both the aspirational ($M_{IDOL} = 5.77$, $M_{FRIEND} = 5.28$, $M_{NOTSPECIAL} = 4.53$; $F_{(2, 347)} = 45.49$,

---

[17] Please note the initial model run was fully saturated (including direct paths from all three independent variables to the dependent variables, as discussed in the results section in more detail). Also note that error terms were included as were the variable correlations but are omitted in the figure for expositional clarity.

p<.001) and membership scales (M_{IDOL} = 4.54, M_{FRIEND} = 4.77, $M_{NOTSPECIAL}$ = 3.80; $F_{(2, 347)}$ = 30.30, p<.001) varied across prompts, though note that the differences between the friend and idol prompt in terms of overall membership ratings was only directionally consistent as opposed to statistically significant. This could be due to a lack of specificity in the idol prompt, given I asked participants to identify a human brand that was admired as an idol, as opposed to someone who was admired from afar, as an idol but not as a friend. Given the goal was simply to introduce a range of responses I do not anticipate this non-significant difference to have any meaningful impact on the analysis.

To begin, I wanted to build on the findings of my pilot test, to provide additional support for hypotheses 1, demonstrating that both aspirational and membership ratings positively predict endorser effectiveness. I also tested for a potential interaction effect, though recall the results from study 1 failed to find a significant interaction and I have no strong theoretical basis to predict one. Nevertheless, I wanted to run a comprehensive analysis and potentially shed some light on a murky research question. As such, I first ran a simple direct effects model using linear regression, regressing aspirational ratings, membership ratings, and the interaction of the two on behavioural intentions. The overall regression was significant (R^2 = .34; $F_{3,348}$ = 58.27; p < .001), supporting H1. Specifically, in addition to aspirational levels positively predicting behavioural intentions (β = .40; t_{346} = 5.31; p<.001), both membership levels (β = .37; t_{346} = 5.65; p<.001), and the interaction of the two (β = .08; t_{346} = 2.68; p=.008) also predicted behavioural intentions. It is interesting to note that in this study, as opposed to study 1, the interaction was significant. Though I have no clear explanation for this finding, one potential reason for the difference could be due to differences in sample size (i.e. power) between the two studies. Figure 5 graphically illustrates the interaction effects using spotlight analysis (+/- 1 s.d.): Though higher membership ratings confer benefits in both cases of low and high aspirational ratings, the greatest benefits occur for those endorsers who are also rated highly on the aspirational element. Put another way, study 3 results suggest that while all human brands can strengthen their effectiveness as endorsers by increasing their membership ratings, it seems the largest gains are for those human brands who already enjoy a position of high aspiration. It is interesting to note that there appears to be no difference in endorser effectiveness between a human brand who is rated relatively lower on the aspirational scale,

and yet highly regarded from a membership perspective, and a human brand rated as highly aspirational with low membership ratings. The traditional approach to using celebrity endorsers is to pick someone aspirational and admired (Choi & Rifon, 2012), yet the results here suggest that if that admired star is not "relatable" to consumers, in that consumers do not feel particularly connected or similar to the human brand featured, the overall persuasiveness of the match will be diminished. While the ideal is to pick someone rated highly from both membership and aspirational perspectives, absent this gold standard high ratings on either of the two categories appears to confer the same benefits.
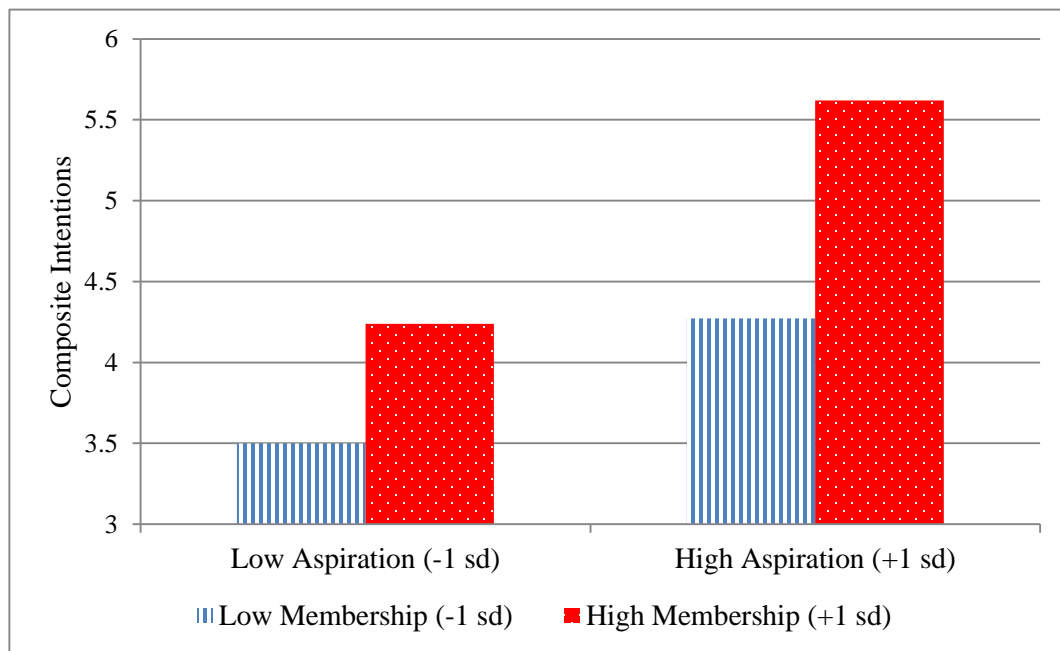

Figure 5: Spotlight Analysis, Study 3 Interaction

I also repeated the same hierarchical linear regression approach as in study 1, to validate the assertion that using the combination of aspirational and membership ratings when predicting endorser effectiveness was superior to simply using aspirational ratings. Results of the analysis are reported in table 7.

Table 7: Hierarchical regression results, study 3

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Aspirational	β =.59	β = .32	β = .40
Membership	---	β = .38	β = .37
Asp x Mem	---	---	β = .08
Adjusted R^2	.26	.32	.34
F-Change	119.12	34.19	7.20
F-Change Significance	<.001	<.001	.008

Consistent with the findings seen in study 1, it appears that assessing human brands based on both their aspirational and membership elements is superior to simply using aspirational ratings as a guide to measuring endorser effectiveness. It is interesting to note that while including the interaction term does increase the variance explained by the model, the overall increase is perhaps substantively less important than including both main effects. Regardless, the results of this study reinforce the findings seen in study 1, in that they again demonstrate that membership ratings are an important factor to consider when assessing endorser effectiveness, in addition to aspirational ratings.

Second, I wanted to test my overall theoretical model. Specifically, I wanted to test the premise that the effects of membership and aspirational ratings on behavioural intentions are mediated by affiliation motives (H2a), and that aspirational ratings predict extrinsic affiliation motives to a greater extent than intrinsic affiliation motives (H2b) whereas membership ratings predict intrinsic motives to a greater extent than extrinsic motives (H2c). Finally, I wanted to determine whether sex differences exist in the relative importance of extrinsic and intrinsic affiliation motives on behavioural intentions (H3).

I used AMOS to test these hypotheses. I began by running the fully saturated model, which included not only the hypothesized mediators but also the direct paths from the three independent variables to the behavioural intention score. Results of the analysis revealed that none of the direct paths were significant when the mediator variables were included (all p>.05), supporting H2a. The benefits of human brand reference group ratings on subsequent endorsement effectiveness are fully mediated by consumer affiliation motives.

Because these direct paths were insignificant when including the mediator variables, I removed them from the model and will not discuss them further. Results discussed below are based on a fully mediated model, with no direct paths.

The overall fit of the model largely met conventional standards, suggesting that the model fit the data reasonably well (Malär et al., 2011; χ^2 = 9.28, d.f. =3, CMIN/DF = 3.09, root mean square error of approximation [RMSEA] = .077, normed fit index [NFI] = .99, and comparative fit index [CFI] = .99). The model, along with parameter estimates and significance values, is detailed in figure 6 below:
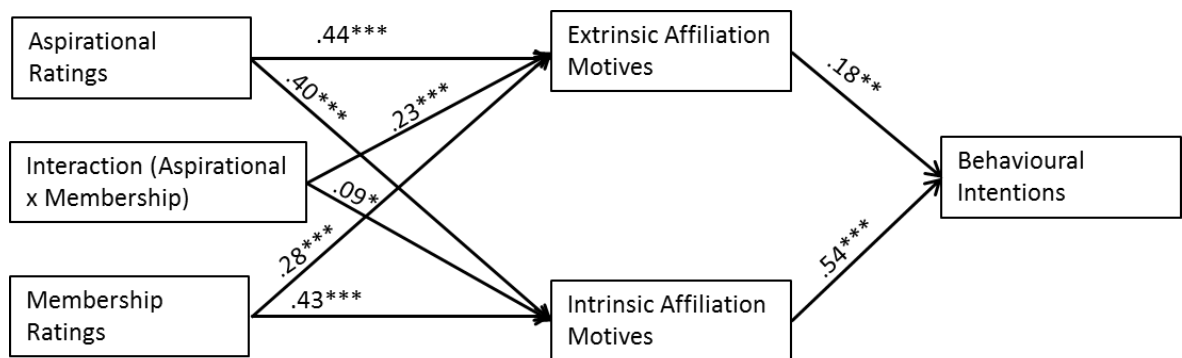
*p<.05 **p<.01 ***p<.001
Note: all path estimates standardized, and shown above their respective paths

Figure 6: Summary of Study 3 Structural Model

As figure 6 highlights, all the path coefficients were positive and significant, suggesting that aspirational ratings, membership ratings, and the interaction of the two positively predict both extrinsic and intrinsic affiliation motives, and that both types of affiliation motives in turn positively predict behavioural intentions.

To test hypotheses 2b and 2c, I next looked at pairwise parameter comparisons between variables of interest[18]. Hypothesis 2b, which argues that aspirational ratings will predict extrinsic affiliation motives to a greater extent than intrinsic affiliation motives, was not

---

[18] AMOS allows for comparison between individual pairs of paths, and provides a critical ratio value or z-score to enable a researcher to statistically determine if the relative magnitude of the effect size differs between the pair.

supported by the data. Specifically, there was no significant difference in the relative magnitude of the path from aspirational ratings to either extrinsic or intrinsic affiliation motives (z=1.19; p=.23). Aspirational ratings had an equally positive impact on both intrinsic and extrinsic affiliation motives.

Hypothesis 2c, which argues that membership ratings will predict intrinsic affiliation motives to a greater extent than extrinsic affiliation motives, was supported. The path from membership ratings to intrinsic affiliation motives was larger than the path from membership ratings to extrinsic affiliation motives (z=2.40; p=.016). These findings suggest that membership ratings have a bigger impact on intrinsic affiliation motives than on extrinsic affiliation motives.

3.3.4.2   Discussion

The results of this study provide additional support for my first hypothesis and largely mirror those seen in the first study, again demonstrating that when assessing a human brand's potential as an endorser, both aspirational and membership ratings are important predictor variables to consider. In this study, I also found that higher membership ratings provide the greatest benefits from an endorser potential perspective to those human brands who are already seen as highly aspirational, suggesting that even the most idolized of human brands should consider ways of enhancing their membership ratings as a means of maximizing their potential value as an endorser.

Results also suggest that the effects of reference group ratings on subsequent endorser effectiveness are fully mediated by consumer affiliation motives, either for the intrinsic or extrinsic benefits that the affiliation affords. This finding provides empirical support for the long-standing belief in the marketing field that human brands exert their influence via value-expressive effects (Bearden, et al., 1989). Finally, they also demonstrate that membership ratings primarily benefit intrinsic affiliation motives. It appears that if consumers come to view human brands as somewhat akin to friends, that these higher membership ratings increase the likelihood that consumers will subsequently consume products those human brands are endorsing as a way of supporting or connecting with the human brands as opposed to for more extrinsically-oriented motives.

The study results also demonstrated, however, that aspirational ratings benefit extrinsic and intrinsic affiliation motives equally, which was inconsistent with my original hypothesis that aspirational ratings would primarily benefit extrinsic affiliation motives. There may be several reasons for this finding. Aspirational ratings reflect an underlying admiration and respect for another individual, and a degree of idolatry. Research has demonstrated that people strive to connect or bond with their idols (Maltby, et al., 2002), and from that perspective it makes sense that as human brands become increasingly aspirational so too does a consumer's desire to form a bond with them. In addition, research has demonstrated that when self-enhancement goals are active in an individual, the individual is particularly drawn to aspirational others as a way of attempting to for a link between the self and idol (Escalas & Bettman, 2003). By connecting with an admired human brand, the consumer may be trying to validate himself as someone worthy of that connection.

3.3.4.3   Structural Model Reanalysis, Males Only

In order to determine whether differences between the sexes existed, I repeated the same analyses as presented above, subdividing by sex. Analysis from the fully saturated model with the male cohort (n = 181) revealed that the direct paths from aspirational reference groups and the interaction of the two reference group types directly to behavioural intentions were insignificant (both p>.05), results consistent with the larger sample, however the direct path from membership ratings to behavioural intentions was significant (p <.01) and as such was retained in the analysis reported below (see figure 7). To clarify, the final model run with the male subsample differed from the full model initially presented, in that only two of the three direct paths from the independent variables to the dependent variables were removed from the final analysis. This suggests that, for male consumers at least, there is some other underlying motivation driving them to purchase and use products endorsed by "friends," aside from the affiliation benefits conferred. The overall model fit the data extremely well ($\chi2$ = .75, d.f. = 2, CMIN/DF = .38, root mean square error of approximation [RMSEA] = .00, normed fit index [NFI] = 1.0, and comparative fit index [CFI] = 1.0). The model, along with parameter estimates and significance values, is detailed in figure 7:
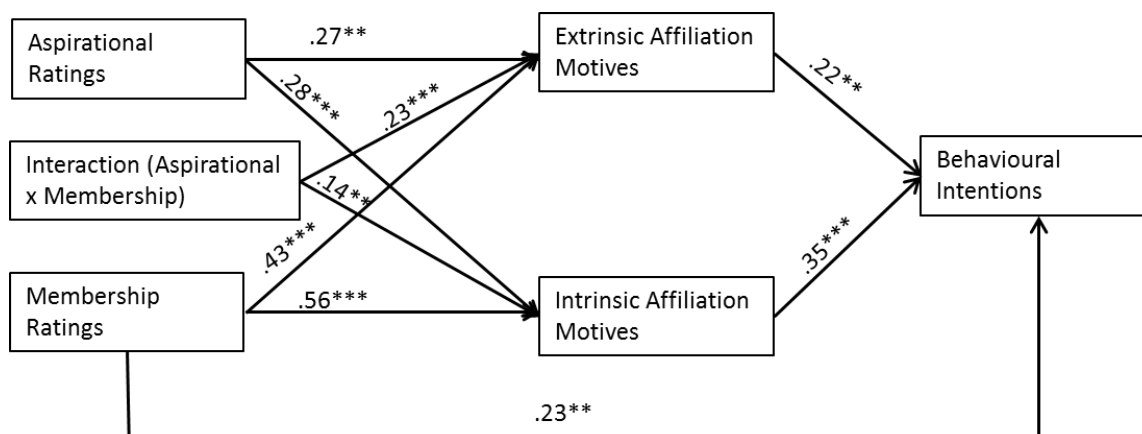
**p<.01 ***p<.001
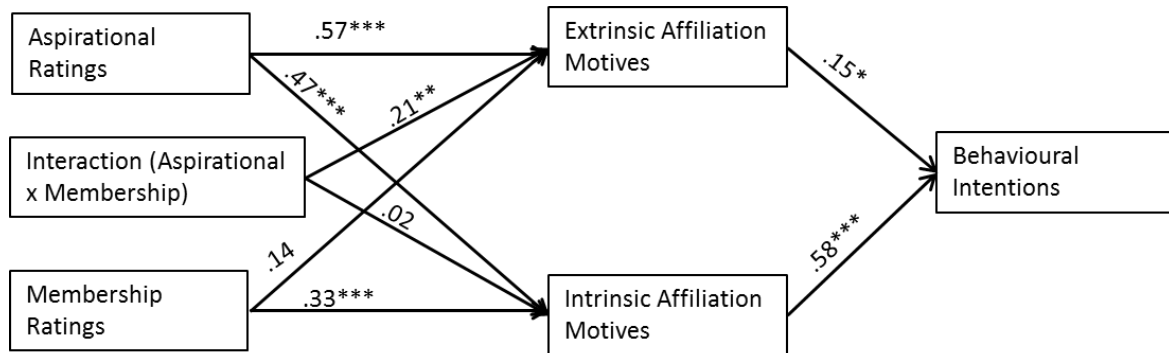Note: all path estimates standardized, and shown above their respective paths

Figure 7: Summary of Study 3 Structural Model, Males Only

As the model highlights, all the path coefficients were positive and significant, suggesting that aspirational ratings, membership ratings, and the interaction of the two positively predict both extrinsic and intrinsic affiliation motives, and that affiliation motives in turn positively predict behavioural intentions. Most relevant to this discussion, there were no significant differences in the degree to which extrinsic and intrinsic affiliation motives predicted behavioural intentions (z=1.05; p = .30), suggesting that for males both affiliation motives are equally important drivers of endorsement effectiveness. These findings are not consistent with the male-specific piece of my hypothesis 3, in that I did not find that for males extrinsic affiliation motives were more predictive of endorsement effectiveness than intrinsic affiliation motives. Instead, these findings suggest that for males both motives were equally predictive of endorsement effectiveness. However, ultimately in my hypotheses 3 I am arguing that sex moderates the relative importance of the two factors, so to some degree the comparison is best made when looking at the relative weighting males place on the different affiliation motives in relation to females. As such, I'll now examine the relative importance of each affiliation motive in the female cohort.

3.3.4.4   Structural Model, Females Only

The structural model was re-run again, this time including only the female cohort (n = 168). In this instance all three direct paths were insignificant (p >.05) and were dropped from

subsequent analysis, suggesting that for the female segment reference group effects on endorser effectiveness are fully explained by affiliation motives. The overall model again fit the data extremely well ($\chi2 = 3.38$, d.f. = 3, CMIN/DF = 1.13, root mean square error of approximation [RMSEA] = .03, normed fit index [NFI] = 1.0, and comparative fit index [CFI] = 0.99). The model, along with parameter estimates and significance values, is detailed in figure 8:

*p<.05 **p<.01 ***p<.001
Note: all path estimates standardized, and shown above their respective paths

Figure 8: Summary of Study 3 Structural Model, Females Only

As the model highlights, most of the path coefficients were positive and significant, though in the case of females membership ratings only predicted intrinsic affiliation motives directly, though the interaction of membership and aspirational ratings did positively predict extrinsic affiliation motives. The interaction effect also had no significant impact on intrinsic affiliation motives, though both direct effects were significant predictors. Contrary to what was found with the male cohort, in the female cohort intrinsic affiliation motives were significantly more influential at predicting behavioural intentions than were extrinsic affiliation motives ($z=2.99$; $p = .003$), though both pathways were positive and significant. This finding provides support for the female aspect of my third hypothesis, in that it appears that for female consumers, intrinsic affiliation motives are a greater predictor of endorsement effectiveness than are extrinsic affiliation motives.

Integrating the results of both sex-based sub-analyses suggest that there is a moderating effect of sex on the relative importance of extrinsic and intrinsic affiliation motives. Specifically, the results suggest that when male consumers assess a celebrity endorsement,

the strength of both their intrinsic and extrinsic affiliation motives are equally predictive of subsequent behavioural intentions. Conversely, when female consumers assess a celebrity endorsement, the strength of their intrinsic affiliation motives is a significantly better predictor of subsequent behavioural intentions than is the strength of their extrinsic affiliation motives. These findings largely support my third hypothesis then, suggesting that sex-based differences exist in the relative importance that extrinsic and intrinsic motivations play at predicting consumer intentions. This is the first research in the consumer behaviour field which has examined the moderating effect of sex on the different value-expressive reference group influences, and may help provide more insights into why, for example, sex differences exist in the relative strength of self-versus-other appeals on behavioural intentions. However, they do not explicitly support my initial assertion that for males extrinsic affiliation motives are a greater predictor of effectiveness than intrinsic affiliation motives. Instead, it appears that for males, both extrinsic and intrinsic affiliation motives are significant predictors of overall endorser effectiveness.

3.3.4.5   Discussion

The results of the between group analyses support my assertion that both aspirational and membership ratings positively predict endorser effectiveness, and that the underlying reasons why these assessments matter differs across the sexes. These findings seem to echo what would be expected in interpersonal relationships as well. In particular, previous interpersonal research has argued that males and females differ in the types of expectations that they put on their same-sex friendships, with females valuing support, loyalty, and empathy to a greater extent than males, and with males placing a premium on wealth, status, attractiveness, and other agency-related aspects of friendship (Hall, 2011; Vigil, 2007). Given that the former elements map more closely with intrinsically-oriented affiliation motives and the latter with extrinsically-oriented ones, it is perhaps not surprising that females are most influenced by intrinsic affiliation motives. It does suggest that for female consumers, the underlying affiliation motives linked with liked human brands closely mirrors affiliation motives linked with real friends. It is worth noting, however, that in this instance at least males were equally influenced by both types of motives, suggesting that the intrinsic affiliation motive measures might be at least partially tapping domains of

friendship both genders find equally important, such as the idea of solidarity amongst friends (Hall, 2011). My findings provide a first step in the consumer behaviour field at examining whether sex influences the relative strength of different value-expressive motivations, and offer a natural extension to existing research outlining sex-based differences in the relative strength of self-versus-other framing of advertising appeals (e.g. Meyers-Levy, 1988; Winterich, et al., 2009; Zhang, et al., 2014). Specifically, the results support the premise that females are more focused on the "other" in a relationship dyad than are male counterparts, even when that "other" is a human brand endorsing some type of product or service.

The results of this study provided additional support for the premise that consumers assess both the aspirational and membership elements of a human brand, and that these human brands are most effective as endorsers when they rate highly on both reference group dimensions. One finding of this study is that irrespective of the prompt first provided in terms of the human brand consumers should nominate (e.g. "think of a friend/idol/someone you have no particular feelings towards"), participants consistently nominated human brands that they rated higher from as aspirational standpoint than a membership standpoint. This suggests that the de facto position human brands occupy is one where they are seen by consumers as more aspirational than membership. An interesting follow-up question is whether there could be situations in which human brands are seen as more membership than aspirational, as opposed to high on both, and what impact that might have on the types of products the endorser is able to effectively promote. This question is explored further in the next study.

3.4   Study 4

I designed study 4 to build on the findings of study 3, using an experimental approach. Specifically, I wanted to gain additional support for the moderating role that sex plays in the relative strength of different affiliation motives, this time in a context where I tried to force human brands into more rigid reference group categories (for example, primarily membership or primarily aspirational, as opposed to high on both elements). I hoped to demonstrate that for male consumers extrinsic affiliation motives are at least as important, if

not more, than intrinsic affiliation motives at predicting behavioural intentions, whereas the reverse is true for female consumers. I also wanted to determine whether I could identify human brands which fit cleanly into only one reference group category – either aspirational or membership, but not high on both – to better determine the differential effects of each reference group type on endorser effectiveness[19]. By doing so, I set out to test my fourth hypothesis; namely, that human brands rated as primarily aspirational should be most effective when promoting products congruent with consumers' ideal selves, whereas human brands rated as primarily membership should be most effective when promoting products congruent with consumers' actual selves.

3.4.1   Design and Procedure

3.4.1.1   Stimuli Development

To determine which human brands and product categories to feature in my experiment, I first conducted a pre-test using an MTurk panel comprising the same population as in the main study (n = 242, M_{age} = 34.6 (range 19 – 70), 58.2 % male). The two objectives of this pre-test were to identify a pair of male and female human brands who were relatively well-known by participants and also clearly distinct from each other in both membership and aspirational group ratings, and to identify a product pair which were also well-known to participants and clearly distinct from each other on actual versus ideal self congruence. A full list of the human brands, product categories, and specific product brands pre-tested can be found in appendix G.

Participants were first asked their sex, and subsequently directed to see the list of eight human brands whose sex was a match to their own (so male participants were only shown male human brands, for example). This matching was done as my thesis is limited in scope

---

[19] Results of studies 1 and 3 clearly demonstrate a benefit to human brand endorser effectiveness when those human brands are rated positively on both aspirational and membership scales ("high-high," as opposed to being rated well on one but not the other). However, in order to better understand the relative benefits of each category of reference group it seemed appropriate to try to force a manipulation pitting a "high-low" human brand against a "low-high" one; though in reality results so far suggest marketing managers would be best served by using "high-high" human brands as endorsers whenever possible.

to same-sex friendships. Each participant was shown the name and picture of each of the eight human brands one at a time, and asked to indicate whether they were familiar with the human brand featured. If respondents answered "yes" to the familiarity prompt they subsequently answered questions pertaining to the degree that the human brand was a fit with their membership group and aspirational group (the same four-items as used in studies 1 and 2, see appendix C for items). If participants answered "no" to the familiarity prompt they skipped to the next human brand on the list, without answering any additional questions.

After providing feedback on the eight human brands being tested, I then asked participants a series of questions related to the product categories I was pretesting, along with specific brands housed within each product category. Specifically, participants were instructed to indicate on a $1 - 7$ scale the degree that the product brand was a match with their self, with $1 =$ "only a match with my ideal self" and $7 =$ "only a match with my actual self." They also had the option of indicating that the brand was not a match with either self.

Within the male participant subsample ($n = 141$), actors Kevin James and Brad Pitt were selected as the primarily membership and aspirational human brands respectively. Participants were largely familiar with both actors, with 83% familiar with James and 95% familiar with Pitt. Paired sample t-tests demonstrated that participants rated James as significantly higher on the membership scale ($M = 4.58$) than the aspirational scale ($M = 3.66$, $t_{114} = 8.314$, $p<.001$), and Pitt as significantly higher on the aspirational scale ($M = 4.54$) than the membership scale ($M = 3.65$, $t_{131} = 6.002$, $p<.001$).

Of the product categories tested, respondents reported the greatest familiarity with chocolates and retail outlets, with almost 84% of participants indicating that they were somewhat or extremely familiar with each of the two categories. The retail category was subsequently selected to avoid any negative associations between the weight of the human brands featured and chocolate, which is typically categorized as an unhealthy or indulgent food (Shiv & Fedorikhin, 1999). The brands selected as consistent with ideal self and actual self were Nordstrom ($M = 3.33$) and Kohl's ($M = 5.29$; $t_{98} = 9.801$, $p<.001$) respectively, with 70% of respondents indicating that both of these outlets were a match

with some version of their self. Although the use of a retail outlet may seem unusual as a 'good' to endorse via human brand, the practice is relatively common, with human brands such as Britney Spears previously endorsing Kohl's, Jennifer Lopez endorsing Macy's, and Justin Timberlake endorsing Target (Farfan, 2015).

Within the female participant subsample (n = 101), actresses Melissa McCarthy and Angelina Jolie were selected as the primarily membership and aspirational human brands respectively. Participants were relatively familiar with both actresses, with 73% familiar with McCarthy and 99% familiar with Jolie[20]. Paired sample t-tests demonstrated that participants rated McCarthy as significantly higher on the membership scale (M = 5.21) than the aspirational scale (M = 4.55; $t_{70} = 4.497$, p<.001), and Jolie as significantly higher on the aspirational scale (M = 4.20) than the membership scale (M = 2.64; $t_{100} = 8.906$, p<.001).

Of the product categories tested, respondents again reported the greatest familiarity with chocolates (95% somewhat or extremely familiar) and retail outlets (92% somewhat or extremely familiar). Retail outlets were again selected, based on the same concerns as outlined above with males. The brands selected as consistent with ideal self and actual self were again Nordstrom (M = 2.89) and Kohl's (M = 5.69; $t_{71} = 13.671$, p<.001), with 71% of respondents indicating that both of these outlets were a match with some version of their self.

3.4.1.2   Participants and Procedure

North American adults (n = 420, $M_{age} = 33.9$ (range 18 – 67), 57.1% male) were recruited via MTurk and received modest compensation for participating. Participants were first asked to indicate their gender, and then randomized to see one of four versions of an

---

[20] A possible concern in the selection of human brands could be that familiarity, or lack thereof, impacted the study results obtained in study 3. However, this does not seem to be an issue in the main study, as only 14 of the 420 study participants (3.3%) indicated no familiarity with the human brand featured in the advertisement they were shown. Although it is unclear exactly why there was such a significant jump in familiarity, both of the lesser known human brands (Kevin James and Melissa McCarthy) appeared in heavily promoted feature films in the period between pre-testing and actual study collection (the former in Paul Blart 2, the latter in Spy).

advertisement in a 2 (human brand: membership vs aspirational) x 2 (product brand: actual self vs ideal self) between-subjects design, with the human brands featured in the advertisements matched on gender to the respondents. Aside from the brand and human brand featured in the ads, every effort was made to keep the remaining elements as consistent as possible between conditions (see ad examples in appendix H).

After seeing the ad, participants were asked the same five items assessing behavioural intentions as have been used in the previous studies, modified only to fit the product context: (1) "how likely are you to find out more about [retailer] and the products the company sells," (2) "how likely are you to try [retailer's] products," (3) "how likely are you to purchase [retailer's] products," (4) "how likely are you to recommend [retailer] to a friend," and (5) "how interested are you in shopping at [retailer]." All items were assessed using the same scale anchors as in studies 1-3, and were averaged to form a composite dependent variable measure of behavioural intentions ($\alpha = .97$). Participants were subsequently asked to indicate the extent of their agreement with statements suggesting that their consideration of shopping at the retailer was due to the extrinsic ($\alpha = .91$) and intrinsic ($\alpha = .93$) affiliation rewards that the experience offered, using the same seven-point scale items used in study 3 and found in appendix C. Participants then rated the human brand endorser featured on both the membership and aspirational reference group scales, which served as a manipulation check on the human brand variable. They also rated the product brand on a 1 – 100 sliding scale, with 1 = "only a match with my actual self (who I am right now)" and 100 = "only a match with my ideal self (who I hope to become)." This measure served as a manipulation check of the actual versus ideal self manipulation. Following these measures, basic demographic variables were collect and participants were debriefed.

3.4.2   Results

3.4.2.1   Manipulation Check

As in previous studies, the four items assessing membership group ratings and the four items assessing aspirational group ratings were averaged to form a composite of membership ($\alpha = .95$) and aspirational ($\alpha = .91$) ratings respectively. Results of a

multivariate analysis of variance reveal that the human brand manipulation was successful, with participants shown an ad featuring the aspirational human brand rating that human brand as significantly more aspirational (M = 3.66) than membership (M = 3.24; $F_{(1,418)}$ = 7.17, p = .008), and participants shown an ad featuring the membership human brand rating that human brand as significantly more membership (M = 3.76) than aspirational (M = 2.73; $F_{(1, 418)}$ = 41.03, p <.001). Results of a univariate analysis of variance also show that the product brand manipulation was successful, with participants shown the ad featuring the actual-self congruent brand rating it as significantly lower on the actual – ideal self continuum scale (M = 46.07) than participants shown the ad featuring the ideal-self congruent brand (M = 57.78, $F_{(1, 418)}$ = 41.13, p < .001). In sum, both manipulations appear to have worked as intended.

3.4.2.2   Study Results, Moderated Mediation

To begin, I wanted to ensure that there were no floor effects as a result of the high familiarity of the retailing brands used in the advertisements, in relation to behavioural intentions. Table 8 contains summary statistics, which show that the behavioural intention composite scores for both men and women across both retailers fell just slightly above the mid-point on the 1- 7 intentions scale, suggesting that floor effects are likely not an issue.

Table 8: Summary Statistics, Study 4

	Kohl's		Nordstrom	
	Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D
Males	3.80	1.68	3.21	1.72
Females	4.43	1.68	4.30	1.68

To test my hypotheses I conducted a moderated mediation analysis using the PROCESS macro developed by Hayes (2012, model 8, using 1,000 iterations to derive a 95% confidence interval) for the indirect effects of human brand and product brand type on behavioural intentions. This model enabled me to explore the direct and indirect effects of both human brand type and product brand type on the behavioural intention composite score (the full model is depicted in figure 9). Human brand type was dummy coded (1 = membership; 2 = aspirational) as was product brand type (1 = actual-self congruent; 2 = ideal-self congruent).
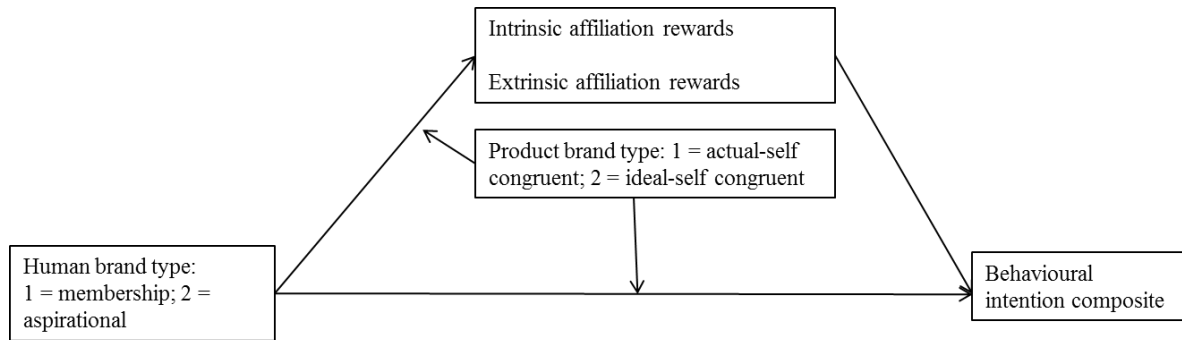
Figure 9: Study 4 Model

Unfortunately, results of the analysis revealed that none of the predictors significantly predicted either extrinsic or intrinsic affiliation rewards, as the 95% confidence interval for the highest order interaction included zero for both extrinsic (β = -.09, S.E. = .08, CI [-.31, .02]) and intrinsic (β = -.23, S.E. = .16, CI [-.60, .03]) affiliation rewards (see table 9). Taken together, these results do not support hypothesis 4. Product brand self-congruence type does not seem to interact with human brand type to influence the relative persuasiveness of an endorsement appeal, mediated by either intrinsic or extrinsic rewards. Although studies demonstrate that consumer perceptions of fit between source characteristics and the products being promoted moderates the effectiveness of an endorsement (Kamins, 1990), these fit considerations do not appear to extend to human brand type and actual versus ideal product self-congruence. Potential reasons for this lack of support for hypothesis 4 will be reviewed in the discussion section.

Table 9: Study 4 model coefficients, mediated moderation

	MEDIATOR 1 **Extrinsic Affiliation Motives**			MEDIATOR 2 **Intrinsic Affiliation Motives**			OUTCOME **Behavioural Intention Composite**		
Predictors	*Coeff.*	*SE*	*t (415)*	*Coeff.*	*SE*	*t (415)*	*Coeff.*	*SE*	*t (413)*
Constant	1.54	0.76	2.03*	2.45	.08	3.07**	.92	.68	1.36
Human Brand Type	.88	0.48	1.84[+]	.57	.50	1.13	.83	.42	1.98*
Product Brand Type	.62	0.48	1.28	.57	.50	1.12	.35	.42	.81
Human x Product Brand Type	-.40	.30	-1.32	-.47	.32	-1.48	-.44	.27	-1.66[+]
Extrinsic (MED 1)	---	---	---	---	---	---	.23	.06	3.64***
Intrinsic (MED 2)	---	---	---	---	---	---	.49	.06	7.97***
	R^2=.01, F(3,415) = 1.78, p = .150			R^2=.01, F(3,415) = 1.27, p = .28			R^2=.41, F(5,413) = 56.81, p = <.001		

Mediation analyses were run in parallel
[+]p<.10; *p<.05; **p<.01; ***p<.001

In addition to testing for the hypothesized interaction effect of human brand type and product brand type, I also wanted to test the direct and indirect effect of human brand type on behavioural intentions mediated by both intrinsic and extrinsic affiliation motives. Given that product brand type was an insignificant variable in the analyses above, I dropped it as a moderator and re-ran a mediation analysis using product type as a covariate. Specifically, I conducted a series of mediation analyses using a 2 way (human brand type: membership vs aspirational) between subjects design, again testing both intrinsic and extrinsic affiliation rewards as potential mediators of the effect of human brand type on behavioural intention measures, but this time I simply included product brand type as a control variable (Hayes, 2012, model 4, using 1,000 iterations to derive a 95% confidence interval). Given that sex moderated the relative importance of extrinsic and intrinsic affiliation motives on outcomes in study 3, not only did I run this model at the group level, including product brand and sex as control variables, but I also ran the model for both men and women separately, again with product brand as a control variable. Results of all three analyses are reported in turn below.

3.4.2.3   Study Results, Mediation with Full Cohort

The results of the full cohort of participants revealed that there were significant positive indirect effects of human brand type on behavioural intentions via extrinsic affiliation motives (see table 10 for details, path diagrams in appendix I; β = .07, S.E. = .4, CI [.01, .18]) but not via intrinsic affiliation motives (β = -.06, S.E. = .07, CI [-.20, .09]). There was no significant direct effect of human brand on behavioural intentions (β = .15, S.E. = .13, CI [-.11, .41]). These results suggest that human brands rated as primarily aspirational make for more effective product endorsers than brands rated as primarily membership, and that their effectiveness is driven by consumer perceptions of extrinsic affiliation rewards. Put simply, consumers are more likely to shop at retailers when Brad Pitt is endorsing an outlet than Kevin James, because they perceive a greater chance of subsequently impressing others as a result. It is surprising, however, that intrinsic affiliation motives had no role in predicting overall behavioural intentions in this case, as that does not mirror the findings seen in study 3. I will revisit this finding in the discussion section.

Table 10: Study 4 Mediation Results, Full Cohort

Predictors	MEDIATOR 1 Extrinsic Affiliation Motives			MEDIATOR 2 Intrinsic Affiliation Motives			OUTCOME Behavioural Intention Composite		
	Coeff.	*SE*	*t (415)*	*Coeff.*	*SE*	*t (415)*	*Coeff.*	*SE*	*t (415)*
Constant	2.22	.39	5.65***	2.81	.40	6.87***	1.15	.36	3.31**
Human Brand Type	.28	.15	1.88+	-.14	.16	-.89	.15	.13	1.13
Product Brand Type	.01	.15	.09	-.14	.16	-.88	-.33	.13	-2.50**
Gender	.16	.15	1.02	.49	.16	3.10**	.59	.13	4.44***
Extrinsic (MED 1)	---	---	---	---	---	---	.26	.06	4.14***
Intrinsic (MED 2)	---	---	---	---	---	---	.47	.06	7.33***
	R^2=.01, F(3,415) = 1.56, p = .20			R^2=.03, F(3,415) = 3.75, p = .01			R^2=.43, F(5,413) = 62.5, p = <.001		

Mediation analyses were run in parallel, product brand type and gender served as controls
+p<.10; *p<.05; **p<.01; ***p<.001

3.4.2.4   Mediation Results, Males Only

Repeating the same analysis with only the male subsample (n = 239) and product brand as a control variable largely replicated the pattern of results reported above (see table 11 for details, and path diagrams for all three mediation analyses in appendix I). There were again significant indirect effects of human brand type on behavioural intentions via extrinsic affiliation motives (β = .23, S.E. = .10, CI [.06, .48] but not via intrinsic affiliation motives (β = .11, S.E. = .08, CI [-.01, .30]). There was no significant direct effect of human brand on behavioural intentions (β = .16, S.E. = .17, CI [-.18, .49]). These findings somewhat replicate those seen in study 3, in that again extrinsic affiliation motives played an important role in predicting behavioural intentions. However, unlike study 3, in this case intrinsic affiliation motives were an insignificant predictor of intentions. I will revisit this finding in more detail in the discussion section, highlighting potential reasons for the discrepancy. These results suggest that for male consumers, human brands seen as primarily aspirational make for more effective endorsers than do human brands seen as primarily membership, and that their effectiveness is due to consumer perceptions of greater extrinsic affiliation rewards.

Table 11: Study 4 Mediation Results, Males Only

Predictors	MEDIATOR 1 Extrinsic Affiliation Motives			MEDIATOR 2 Intrinsic Affiliation Motives			OUTCOME Behavioural Intention Composite		
	Coeff.	*SE*	*t (236)*	*Coeff.*	*SE*	*t (236)*	*Coeff.*	*SE*	*t (234)*
Constant	2.09	.44	4.75***	2.4	0.44	5.43***	1.97	.39	5.11***
Human Brand Type	.55	.20	2.75**	.32	.29	1.59	.16	.17	.92
Product Brand Type	-.07	.20	-.33	-.00	.20	-.02	-.55	.17	-3.31**
Extrinsic (MED 1)	---	---	---	---	---	---	.42	.08	4.89***
Intrinsic (MED 2)	---	---	---	---	---	---	.33	.08	3.92***
	R^2=.03, F(2, 236) = 3.81, p = .02			R^2=.01, F(2, 236) = 1.27, p = .28			R^2=.45, F(4, 234) = 48.25, p = <.001		

Mediation analyses were run in parallel, product brand type served as a control
[+]p<.10; *p<.05; **p<.01; ***p<.001

3.4.2.5 Mediation Results, Females Only

Repeating the same analysis with the female subsample (n = 180) and including product brand as a control variable revealed a different pattern of results to what was found with the male subsample (see table 12, path diagrams in appendix I). Specifically, the indirect effects of human brand type on behavioural intentions was mediated by intrinsic affiliation motives in this instance (β = -.43, S.E. = .15, CI [-.77, -.18]) and not by extrinsic affiliation motives (β = -.01, S.E. = .03, CI [-.13, .03]). In addition, the direction of the effects was reversed, this time favouring the membership human brand over the aspirational human brand. There was no significant direct effect of human brand type on behavioural intentions (β = .14, S.E. = .21, CI [-.27, .56]). Contrary to what was seen with the male sub-segment, in the case of female consumers human brands seen as primarily membership appear to be more effective endorsers than human brands seen as primarily aspirational. In addition, and consistent with what was seen in study 3, for female consumers intrinsic affiliation motives are a greater predictor of endorsement effectiveness than are extrinsic affiliation motives[21].

---

[21] One potential counterargument could be that participants viewed the aspirational human brand used (Angelina Jolie) unfavourably, with results driven by disliking for the aspirational brand as opposed to liking for the membership brand. To rule this out, I re-ran the analysis removing those participants (n = 17) who indicated that they disliked the human brand shown in the ad, which I collected as a control variable. The re-analysis yields the same pattern of results as reported above in the full cohort, with the indirect path again mediated by intrinsic affiliation motives exclusively (β = -.30, S.E. = .15, CI [-.57, -.02]).

Table 12: Study 4 Mediation Results, Females Only

Predictors	MEDIATOR 1 Extrinsic Affiliation Motives			MEDIATOR 2 Intrinsic Affiliation Motives			OUTCOME Behavioural Intention Composite		
	Coeff.	*SE*	*t (177)*	*Coeff.*	*SE*	*t (177)*	*Coeff.*	*SE*	*t (175)*
Constant	2.9	.48	6.00***	4.95	.52	9.60***	1.94	.54	3.62***
Human Brand Type	-.08	.23	-.35	-.75	.24	-3.09**	.15	.21	.68
Product Brand Type	.14	.23	.61	-.29	.24	-1.2	.05	.21	.26
Extrinsic (MED 1)	---	---	---	---	---	---	.06	.1	.67
Intrinsic (MED 2)	---	---	---	---	---	---	.57	.09	6.44***
	R^2=.00, F(2, 177) = .23, p = .79			R^2=.06, F(2, 177) = 5.74, p = .004			R^2=.36, F(4, 175) = 24.4, p = <.001		

Mediation analyses were run in parallel, product brand type served as a control

+p<.10; *p<.05; **p<.01; ***p<.001

3.4.3 Discussion

Several findings from this study are worth highlighting. To begin, the results of the overall analysis did not find that intrinsic affiliation motives significantly mediated behavioural intentions, when human brand type was used as the independent variable. There are several reasons why this may have occurred. To begin, study 3 demonstrated that intrinsic affiliation motives are positively influenced by both aspirational and membership ratings.

In that study, participants were able to select their own human brand, ensuring strong initial familiarity and, for two of the three prompts, strong positive affect towards that individual. The present study, conversely, featured externally-provided human brands, and participant ratings on those brands on both scales was markedly lower as a result (Study 3 $M_{ASPIRATIONAL} = 5.12$, $M_{MEMBERSHIP} = 4.37$; Study 4 $M_{ASPIRATIONAL} = 3.46$, $M_{MEMBERSHIP} = 3.22$). This suggests that, while the manipulation in this study may have worked as intended in that it clearly categorized human brands into either "high-low" or "low-high" distinctions, it was not successful at actually selecting human brands strongly regarded as high from a reference group perspective. Specifically, while I was hoping here to compare a strong idol to a strong friend and use those as proxy measures for strong aspiration and strong membership respectively, the reference group ratings suggest that my manipulations were not really appropriate proxies in this case.

In order to better ascertain whether the pattern of results seen in study 3 did indeed replicate when the reference group ratings were used, I reanalyzed the data for this study using the same approach as I had adopted for study 3. When actual reference group ratings are used as independent variables, the data obtained here largely replicates that seen in study 3, and in particular the relative size and impact of each of the variables (see appendix J for path diagram). This suggests that while the use of a dichotomous "idol versus friend" type label for human brands provides a fast and easily understood distinction, it also fails to adequately capture much of the variance within each human brand in regards to reference group ratings. Much the same way that consumer-product brand relationships are nuanced and somewhat idiosyncratic at the individual consumer level (Fournier, 1998), so too are they at the consumer-human brand level. Attempting to reduce a human brand to a single label of "friend" or "idol" risks incorrectly assessing that human brand's endorser potential, as compared to using the more comprehensive aspirational and membership scales as an assessment tool.

Another interesting finding from this study was that the type of product being promoted did not matter in terms of driving endorser effectiveness. Whereas previous research has demonstrated that there are benefits to matching endorsers with products based on perceptions of fit on dimensions such as credibility and attractiveness (Kamins 1990; Kang and Herr 2006), it does not appear that this particular proposed dimension of fit matters to consumers. There are two potential reasons for this finding that I can think of. The first reason could be a lack of motivation to critically assess the fit on the part of participants in this study. Specifically, the product brands were selected specifically because participants indicated a high baseline familiarity with them, and I wanted to minimize the risk of confounding study results based on low brand awareness. A potential downside to the brands used, however, is that the high baseline familiarity could have reduced participant motivation to process the ad carefully (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986). Other research testing elements of fit between the source and product has found that, under conditions of low cognitive elaboration, positive source characteristics exert a positive effect irrespective of how well they match the paired brand (Kang & Herr, 2006). In this instance, it might be that participants simply lacked the involvement levels needed to encourage advertisement scrutiny and assessments of fit.

A second potential cause for the lack of fit finding was the relatively broad nature of the categories featured. I explicitly selected two large retailer brands (i.e., Nordstrom and Kohl's) as opposed to specific brands and product types (i.e., Docker shoes or Polo shirts) to increase the likelihood that participants were not only familiar with the brands but also more likely to consider consuming products sold at those retailers. A potential downside, however, is that there is a lot more flexibility in terms of the types of products that were thought of, given the range of products sold. It is possible that consumers who saw a pairing of a primarily "friend" human brand with the ideal-self retailer Nordstrom naturally thought of products sold which were more congruent with the actual-self, and primarily "idol" human brands with the actual-self retailer Kohl's similarly thought of more ideal-self congruent products. Future research may wish to explore this issue of fit further by conducting similar studies, both in a context of high involvement and also in a context with a narrower and unambiguous product category, to see whether in either or both instance fit matters then. Also worth exploring is whether differences exist in terms of consumer reactions to membership versus aspirational brands promoting controversial or offensive products not seen as a fit to either consumer self.

Finally, most interesting were the very strong sex-based effects seen in this study, somewhat replicating those seen in study 3 though to a greater extreme. In both studies, intrinsic affiliation motives have been the primary predictor of behavioural intentions for females, whereas extrinsic affiliation motives have been at least as important if not more so for males. Researchers studying gender-based distinctions in same-sex friendships have long argued that females place a greater emphasis on many of the intrinsically-oriented benefits of friendship, including things like mutual support, self-disclosure, and empathy (Caldwell & Peplau, 1982; Fehr, 2004) than do their male counterparts. Conversely, men place a greater emphasis on some of the extrinsically-oriented benefits of friendship, including valuing social status, education, attractiveness, and so forth in their same-sex friendships more than females (Vigil, 2007). Research has demonstrated that consumers can come to form attachments with human brands (Thomson, 2006) just as they would with their interpersonal relationships, and based on the results of these studies it appears that consumers place the same same-sex friendship-type expectations and roles on human brands that they would real friends.

Although the results of study 3 suggest that the best way to maximize endorser effectiveness is to select human brands who rate positively on both aspirational and reference group effects, the results of this study highlight that advertisers should weight the aspirational piece more heavily when selecting male human brand endorsers than with female human brand endorsers, assuming that the advertisement's target audience is also males. Given that males place more emphasis on friendships for the extrinsic benefits they provide than do females, it is important for human brand endorsers to possess qualities that consumers would want to copy or mimic. This finding suggests that for male human brands, many of the traditional source model recommendations (such as attractiveness and expertise; Ohanian, 1991) still likely hold true. However, for females, it appears that priority is being given to intrinsically-oriented benefits of affiliation, diminishing the importance of traditional characteristics such as attractiveness in comparison to relationship-type elements.

For example, in this study, females rated the aspirational human brand as significantly more attractive than the membership human brand ($M_{ASPIRATIONAL} = 7.79$ vs $M_{MEMBERSHIP} = 6.75$, $t_{(127)} = 2.39$, p=.02), and the product category featured is one where attractiveness would be deemed relevant and fit should be a driver (Kahle & Homer, 1985; Kang & Herr, 2006). In spite of the clear benefits in this situation of the aspirational endorser based on established drivers of endorser effectiveness, results of an ANOVA analysis looking at the main effects of endorser type on outcomes shows no significant difference between the two, and if anything directionally favours the membership human brand ($M_{ASPIRATIONAL} = 4.22$ vs $M_{MEMBERSHIP} = 4.52$; $F_{(1, 178)} = 1.39$, p=.24). This finding is particularly noteworthy as it runs counter to current thinking around human brand selection, suggesting that reference group ratings may play a more important role for females in determining endorser effectiveness than traditional source effects. Indeed, it suggests that rather than expend efforts at making an endorser appear more credible or attractive, human brand management teams may be better rewarded by focusing on increasing reference group ratings via approaches such as increased human brand self-disclosure.

4   General Discussion

> Celebrities draw these powerful meanings from the roles they assume in
> their television, movie, military, athletic, and other careers.
>
> - McCracken (1989; p. 315)

McCracken's (1989) central tenant – arguing that human brands are comprised of a bundle of associated meanings which are ultimately linked with an endorsed brand – is not inconsistent with my thesis. However, times have changed. When McCracken's seminal research was published, the Internet was still a fledgling concept, and the world had not heard of Facebook, Twitter, or Instagram. A limitation of the meaning transfer theory, as a result, is a narrow view of human brand meaning as something that is tightly held and controlled by the human brand himself, devoid of any potential for consumer interpretation to shape and modify that meaning (Ligas & Cotte, 1999). In this narrow conceptualization, the human brand persona had little to do with who the human brand was as a person, instead shaped largely by the roles assumed on television, in movies, and so forth.

Consumers are now, more than ever, exposed to human brands in intimate and unexpected ways. Many human brands have social media accounts, posting private pictures for public consumption, responding to consumer comments and questions, and using their celebrity status to promote lifestyle blogs, political parties, and environmental causes. In essence, the bundle of meanings associated with human brands now comprises not only the roles those human brands have assumed and what third party media might report, but also first-hand information about the human brands that the brands themselves have provided. This shift, which may seem relatively subtle, I believe is the underlying reason for the evolution in how consumers relate to and identify with human brands.

I am not arguing that human brands have lost their aspirational status, or that conceptualizing human brands as aspirational is inappropriate. Instead, the results of this research suggest that limiting human brand categorization to strictly aspirational oversimplifies consumer-human brand relationship categories and misses an opportunity to assess a human brand's endorser effectiveness in a more comprehensive manner. Given

that I found across studies a consistently strong positive relationship between membership ratings and behavioural intentions,[22] brand managers looking to identify appropriate product ambassadors would do well to assess both reference group aspects when vetting potential candidates.

The results of this research suggest that, while popular human brands are still viewed as aspirational by consumers, they can also be seen as somewhat akin to friends; individuals who, if given the chance, could fit in with a consumer's peer group. This finding speaks to a certain accessibility factor associated with current human brands potentially lacking with the stars of yesteryear. Previously human brands enjoyed an air of mystery, due to the restricted exposure that consumers had to them via film and select interviews, but that degree of separation may have also limited endorser potential by way of handicapping membership ratings. Additional support for this premise comes from my second study, which demonstrated that by simply engaging in single act of intimate self-disclosure, a liked human brand increased her endorser effectiveness. Social media provides a platform for this type of self-disclosure not accessible to human brands even a decade ago.

4.1   Contributions

My thesis contributes to the consumer behaviour literature in a variety of ways. Researchers have recently argued for more academic study into the topic of human brands (Keel & Nataraajan, 2012), stating that there is yet quite a bit to learn about celebrity endorsement effectiveness. My findings provide an important step towards addressing this gap. To begin, they demonstrate that there is indeed merit to assessing how aspirational a human brand is, as higher ratings positively impact endorsement potential. In addition, however, they also identify the need for ongoing differentiation at the level of in-group within the human brand realm. Just as consumers can come to form a range of relationships with liked product brands (Fournier, 1998), so too it appears with liked human brands. As such, my findings suggest that conceptualizing human brands as purely aspirational is too

---

[22] See appendix K for a summary table of hypotheses and corresponding study findings.

narrow a focus, and that considering both aspirational and membership elements offers a more comprehensive assessment of an endorser's potential. Whereas prior research focused on how to best assess the overall strength of a consumer relationship with human brands generally (e.g. R. B. Rubin & McHugh, 1987; Russell, et al., 2004; Thomson, 2006), here I have focused on how different facets of a consumer's relationship with human brands shape how and why those human brands ultimately influence consumer purchase behaviours. My findings suggest that adopting the reference group framework is a relatively simple yet effective approach to predicting endorser potential.

My research also helps address a long overlooked question in the literature; namely, whether it is appropriate to group the potentially disparate value-expressive influences (Park & Lessig, 1977) into one umbrella concept, and if not, whether differences exist in the relative strength or importance of each element. Here, results suggest that not only are the two value-expressive influences very different from each other, they vary in terms of strength based on consumers' sex. Specifically, while both influences appear to be equally useful in explaining why consumers purchase and use endorsed products when studying the population at a whole, upon closer inspection that approach masks important sex-based differences. For female consumers, intrinsic affiliation motives are a greater predictor of behavioural intentions in regards to endorsed products than are extrinsic affiliation motives, whereas for males extrinsic affiliation motives are at least as influential, if not more so. Given that both aspirational and membership ratings are important predictors of intrinsic affiliation motives, these results suggest that for ads featuring endorsers and targeting female consumers especially, there is merit to trying to select human brands rated highly on both dimensions. These findings were particularly noteworthy in regards to study 4, where for female consumers, a human brand that was rated more highly on the membership dimension than the aspirational dimension was more persuasive at endorsing a large clothing retailer, in spite of the fact that she was also rated as less attractive. Traditional source effects researchers would have proposed the opposite, given that there is a better match between the attractive endorser and the clothing domain (Kamins & Gupta, 1994). I believe this finding speaks to the power of reference group ratings as an endorser assessment tool, especially when examining sex-based differences.

This research is also the first within the consumer behaviour domain to draw parallels between sex-based differences in interpersonal relationship expectations and marketing-relevant consequences. Significant research exists looking at how sex differences in the self versus other distinction shape brand preferences and advertising message receptivity (e.g. Brunel & Nelson, 2000; Fisher & Dubé, 2005; Winterich, et al., 2009), but the self versus other distinction is limited to inanimate product brands. In those instances affiliation motives likely play a lesser role in driving consumption behaviours, particularly with those brands that consumers do not feel strongly attached to. In the case of human brands, however, affiliation motives appear to almost exclusively predict consumption behaviours, suggesting that modeling consumer-human brand relationships after interpersonal relationships is of particular value in this context.

In addition, the self versus other framework is largely based on the agency communion distinction first proposed by Bakan (1966), which argues that males value autonomy and dominance whereas females value cohesion and social connection. Extending this thinking, then, when marketers appeal to males, they should focus on the benefits to the self whereas when they appeal to females, they should focus on the benefits to others. My findings suggest that advertisers do not need to explicitly frame arguments using this self-other distinction. Instead, it appears that absent any self versus other prompts or frames, males will naturally focus on self-benefits to a greater extent than females when evaluating the persuasiveness of an advertisement. Females, conversely, will naturally consider how their actions or responses benefit not only themselves but any other parties involved. Future research may consider testing this proposition in a product brand context, to see if it holds there as well. I suspect it might, as males consider the benefits to the self to a greater extent than females even when evaluating the attractiveness of products to be purchased for others as gifts (Fischer & Arnold, 1990). This suggests that across a variety of consumption contexts and domains, a self-focused schema is relatively more activated for males than females irrespective of explicit advertising cues.

Finally, my research highlights the importance of human brands engaging in self-disclosure as a way of strengthening consumer relationships. Self-disclosure has long been advocated as a technique for strengthening interpersonal relationships (Aron, et al., 1997) and a

management approach for gaining employee support and trust (Mayer, et al., 1995). In addition, marketers have acknowledged that in the new era of social media and online campaigns, successful firms need to engage in open and ongoing communications with would-be consumers, as a way of building trust and customer engagement (Mangold & Faulds, 2009). Whereas there can be challenges for firms trying to engage in self-disclosure on behalf of product brands – who, for example, will be the "face" of the self-disclosure – this challenge does not exist with human brands. Instead, my findings suggest that those human brands who want to maximize their potential as endorsers should actively engage in the practice.

4.2   Unanswered questions and research extensions

The findings of this thesis open the door to a range of potentially interesting research extensions. There are two that I think are particularly noteworthy: the role of self-esteem and the activation of various self-goals as moderators of the sex differences seen around affiliation motives, and the role of construal level and message framing fit with the human brand endorser. These will be discussed in turn.

4.2.1   Self-Esteem, Self-Verification, and Self-Enhancement

Escalas and Bettman (2003) examined the extent to which an active self-goal moderates the degree to which a consumer identifies, or seeks to connect, with either aspirational or membership reference groups and the brands they consumed. What they found was that when a consumer has a self-verification goal active, meaning that he was actively seeking to confirm who he was and maintain a stable self-view (Swann, Pelham, & Krull, 1989), perceptions of brand fit with the consumer's membership group are particularly predictive of self-brand connections. However, when the consumer has a self-enhancement goal active, in that the consumer is actively trying to "increase the positivity or reduce the negativity of [his] self-view" (Kwang & Swann, 2010, p. 264), perceptions of brand fit with a consumer's aspirational group are more predictive of self-brand connections (Escalas & Bettman, 2003). This research finding is consistent with the view that social identities are,

to a degree, malleable, and influenced by a variety of situational and contextual factors (Reed II & Bolton, 2005).

The implication here is that if someone is under a self-esteem threat, facing rejection, or suffering from generally low levels of self-esteem, a self-enhancement goal should become active (Kwang & Swann, 2010). When self-enhancement goals are active, a consumer should be motivated to seek out opportunities to repair self-esteem. One way to do that is by consuming a brand used by aspirational group members. In doing so, a consumer is able to more closely resemble his ideal self and ideal others, allowing him to feel better about himself. However, when self-verification goals are active, self-brand connections should be linked to perceived congruity between a product and the consumer's membership group (Escalas & Bettman, 2003).

There are two potential implications of the findings above for the present research. The more obvious one is that, by priming consumers with either a self-verification or a self-enhancement goal, the relative persuasiveness of either a primarily membership or primarily aspirational human brand should increase accordingly. This finding would provide additional support for the premise that consumers relate to human brands in a similar fashion to their interpersonal relationships, by mirroring the findings previously reported by Escalas and Bettman (2003) vis-vis different reference group effects. A more interesting extension, from my perspective, is an examination of whether a self-esteem threat directed towards female consumers would reverse the pattern of effects reported here in terms of the relative strength of intrinsic versus extrinsic affiliation motives. Specifically, if triggering self-enhancement goals motivate individuals to seek out opportunities to repair self-esteem, one way to do so is to bolster the self in the eyes of others. In that case, then, endorsements should be more heavily weighted based on the potential extrinsic rewards that the consumption experience offers, irrespective of the intrinsic rewards. Put another way, I suspect that activating a self-enhancement goal might act as a boundary condition to the current findings indicating that intrinsic affiliation motives are a bigger driver of behavioural intentions for females than are extrinsic affiliation motives. Future research may want to examine this issue further.

4.2.2   Construal Level and Reference Group Type

A second potential direction for additional research focuses on the link between the reference group types and construal level. Construal level theory argues that people think of objects or events differently, depending on their temporal, spatial, or social distance (grouped together under the umbrella term of psychological distance; Liberman & Trope, 1998). Objects seen as temporally, spatially, or socially close are thought of in very concrete terms, whereas those seen as more distant are thought of at a more abstract level (Liberman & Trope, 1998). For example, studies have shown that participants weigh the pros and cons of job prospects differently for themselves than they do for a stranger, focusing more heavily on feasibility constraints when the job is for themselves and more on desirability when the job is for a stranger (Kray & Gonzalez, 1999). Feasibility focuses on the practical, tangible elements of an issue or option, whereas desirability focuses on the abstract and intangible ones.

As I have argued earlier in this thesis, whereas membership groups are comprised of individuals that someone already affiliates with, aspirational groups are comprised of admired but socially removed others. This distinction has clear links back to the social distance element of construal theory, and suggests that membership group members should be thought of at a lower construal level than aspirational group members. As a result, construal level theory predicts that the membership reference group should be seen in a more concrete and temporally close way than the aspirational group. This is consistent with the idea that aspirational reference groups represent our ideals or what we hope to become, since we often think about our "best selves" in the future in relatively abstract and fuzzy ways, ignoring or minimizing obstacles to achieving that ideal self state (Trope & Liberman, 2003). It makes sense then that cognitions about aspirational selves focus heavily on desirability-oriented or higher order concepts, whereas actual selves and membership groups are more focused on feasibility-type cognitions.

Consumer behaviour research to date has looked at the effectiveness of a range of ads, demonstrating that processing fluency and overall ad effectiveness is maximized when the ad is congruent with its perceived psychological distance. For example, an ad for laundry

detergent shown in a magazine would be viewed as more distant than an ad for that same detergent in the grocery store by the detergent isle; in the former case the ad should focus on core product aspects and overall product desirability, such as its strong cleaning power, whereas in the latter case focus should be directed towards more peripheral feasibility characteristics such as a sale price or easy-to-carry handle (Dhar & Kim, 2007). Extending this into the present research suggests that endorsements featuring different human brand types should consider the frame adopted by their advertisements and the degree to which it is consistent with the endorser used. Advertisements featuring human brands who are seen as primarily aspirational, with low membership ratings, will likely be most effective when accompanied by text highlighting desirability characteristics of the product being featured. Those featuring human brands who are seen as primarily membership, conversely, should be most effective when focusing on feasibility characteristics and more concrete product claims. Though current literature in marketing has examined a range of construal-level implications for the field of marketing (e.g. Alexander, Lynch Jr, & Wang, 2008; Malkoc, Zauberman, & Ulu, 2005), the reference group categorization associated with a product endorser is as of now an unexplored extension.

4.2.3   Interaction Effect

Though not a formal research extension per se, it is worth revisiting the issue of whether aspirational and membership ratings operate via direct effects only or whether an interaction does exist. As I spoke about at length earlier, the literature is silent on the issue from both an empirical and theoretical standpoint, and so I began this thesis research without a clear sense of how the two variables related. Unfortunately, the results here do little to shed light on that research question, given the conflicting data obtained across studies. To begin, in study 1 I found that, while both aspirational and membership ratings positively predicted behavioural intentions, the interaction of the two was insignificant. My study 4 re-analysis, found in appendix J, replicates these results. Study 3, however, did find a significant interaction effect, though it is worth noting that the increase in variance explained by the addition of the interaction was relatively small in relation to the increase in variance explained by the addition of membership ratings. Taken together, these findings suggest that while the interaction effect may be *statistically significant*, the results across my studies

do not provide sufficient evidence for *substantive* or *managerially material* effect. Future research may want to examine this issue further, hopefully providing more clarity and consistency in findings.

4.3   Conclusions

In this thesis I sought to explore a range of questions of both theoretical and substantive interest: does assessing a human brand's endorser potential depend on both aspirational and membership reference group ratings; are both intrinsic and extrinsic affiliation motives equally predictive of behavioural intentions; does sex play a role in consumer-human brand relationships; and finally, does self-disclosure enhance these relationships? Across four studies I have provided support for the notion that assessing the strength of a human brand's endorser potential by adopting a reference group framework is an effective approach, and that reference group effects are largely a result of consumers' affiliation motives. In addition, sex plays a key role in determining why consumers purchase products endorsed by human brands, highlighting that for females in particular, friendship motivations extend from their interpersonal relationships to their relationships with human brands. Finally, for human brands hoping to increase their reference group ratings, increasing self-disclosure is an effective approach to use.

References

Alexander, D. L., Lynch Jr, J. G., & Wang, Q. (2008). As Time Goes by: Do Cold Feet Follow Warm Intentions for Really New Versus Incrementally New Products? *Journal of Marketing Research, 45*(3), 307-319.

Altman, I., & Taylor, D. A. (1973). *Social Penetration: The Development of Interpersonal Relationships*: Holt, Rinehart & Winston.

Aron, A., Aron, E. N., & Smollan, D. (1992). Inclusion of Other in the Self Scale and the Structure of Interpersonal Closeness. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 63*(4), 596.

Aron, A., Melinat, E., Aron, E. N., Vallone, R. D., & Bator, R. J. (1997). The Experimental Generation of Interpersonal Closeness: A Procedure and Some Preliminary Findings. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin, 23*(4), 363-377.

Aron, A., & Nardone, N. (2011). Self and Close Relationships. In M. R. Leary & J. P. Tangney (Eds.), *Handbook of Self and Identity, 2nd Edition* (pp. 520-541): Guilford Press.

Atkinson, J. W., Heyns, R. W., & Veroff, J. (1954). The Effect of Experimental Arousal of the Affiliation Motive on Thematic Apperception. *The Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology, 49*(3), 405-410.

Aukett, R., Ritchie, J., & Mill, K. (1988). Gender Differences in Friendship Patterns. *Sex Roles, 19*(1-2), 57-66.

Baack, D., Fogliasso, C., & Harris, J. (2000). The Personal Impact of Ethical Decisions: A Social Penetration Theory. *Journal of Business Ethics, 24*(1), 39-49.

Bakan, D. (1966). *The Duality of Human Existence: An Essay on Psychology and Religion*: Rand McNally & Company.

Batra, R., Ahuvia, A., & Bagozzi, R. P. (2012). Brand Love. *Journal of Marketing, 76*(2), 1-16.

Batra, R., & Homer, P. M. (2004). The Situational Impact of Brand Image Beliefs. *Journal of Consumer Psychology, 14*(3), 318-330.

Baumeister, R. F., & Leary, M. R. (1995). The Need to Belong: Desire for Interpersonal Attachments as a Fundamental Human Motivation. *Psychological Bulletin, 117*(3), 497-529.

Bearden, W. O., & Etzel, M. J. (1982). Reference Group Influence on Product and Brand Purchase Decisions. *Journal of Consumer Research, 9*(2), 183-194.

Bearden, W. O., Netemeyer, R. G., & Teel, J. E. (1989). Measurement of Consumer Susceptibility to Interpersonal Influence. *Journal of Consumer Research, 15*(4), 473-481.

Berger, J., & Heath, C. (2007). Where Consumers Diverge from Others: Identity Signaling and Product Domains. *Journal of Consumer Research, 34*(2), 121-134.

Brauer, M., & Chekroun, P. (2005). The Relationship Between Perceived Violation of Social Norms and Social Control: Situational Factors Influencing the Reaction to Deviance. *Journal of Applied Social Psychology, 35*(7), 1519-1539.

Brunel, F. F., & Nelson, M. R. (2000). Explaining Gendered Responses to "Help-Self" and "Help-Others" Charity Ad Appeals: The Mediating Role of World-Views. *Journal of Advertising, 29*(3), 15-28.

Burnkrant, R. E., & Cousineau, A. (1975). Informational and Normative Social Influence in Buyer Behavior. *Journal of Consumer Research, 2*(3), 206-215.

Burns, K. S. (2009). *Celeb 2.0: How Social Media Foster our Fascination with Popular Culture*: ABC-CLIO, LLC.

Caldwell, M. A., & Peplau, L. A. (1982). Sex Differences in Same-Sex Friendship. *Sex Roles, 8*(7), 721-732.

Chan, C., Berger, J., & Van Boven, L. (2012). Identifiable but not Identical: Combining Social Identity and Uniqueness Motives in Choice. *Journal of Consumer Research, 39*(3), 561-573.

Childers, T. L., & Rao, A. R. (1992). The influence of Familial and Peer-Based Reference Groups on Consumer Decisions. *Journal of Consumer Research, 19*(2), 198-211.

Choi, S. M., & Rifon, N. J. (2012). It is a Match: The Impact of Congruence Between Celebrity Image and Consumer Ideal Self on Endorsement Effectiveness. *Psychology & Marketing, 29*(9), 639-650.

Cole, T., & Leets, L. (1999). Attachment Styles and Intimate Television Viewing: Insecurely Forming Relationships in a Parasocial Way. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships, 16*(4), 495-511.

Dahl, D. W., Sengupta, J., & Vohs, K. D. (2009). Sex in Advertising: Gender differences and the Role of Relationship Commitment. *Journal of Consumer Research, 36*(2), 215-231.

Derrick, J. L., Gabriel, S., & Hugenberg, K. (2009). Social Surrogacy: How Favored Television Programs Provide the Experience of Belonging. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology, 45*(2), 352-362.

Dhar, R., & Kim, E. Y. (2007). Seeing the Forest or the Trees: Implications of Construal Level Theory for Consumer Choice. *Journal of Consumer Psychology, 17*(2), 96-100.

Dholakia, R. R., & Sternthal, B. (1977). Highly Credible Sources: Persuasive Facilitators or Persuasive Liabilities? *Journal of Consumer Research, 3*(4), 223-232.

Escalas, J. E., & Bettman, J. R. (2003). You Are What They Eat: The Infulence of Reference Groups on Consumers' Connections to Brands. *Journal of Consumer Psychology, 13*(3), 339-348.

Escalas, J. E., & Bettman, J. R. (2005). Self-construal, Reference Groups, and Brand Meaning. *Journal of Consumer Research, 32*(3), 378-389.

Escalas, J. E., & Bettman, J. R. (2015). Managing Brand Meaning through Celebrity Endorsement. In D. J. MacInnis & C. W. Park (Eds.), *Review of Marketing Research* (Vol. 12, pp. 29-52): Emerald Group Publishing Limited.

Farfan, B. (2015). Celebrity Endorsements for U.S. Retail Industry Companies, Chains, Restaurants. *About Money* Retrieved July 20, 2015, from http://retailindustry.about.com/od/bestusretailpromotions/a/Celebrity-Endorsements-For-U-S-Retail-Industry-Companies-Chains-Restaurants.htm

Fehr, B. (2004). Intimacy Expectations in Same-Sex Friendships: A Prototype Interaction-Pattern Model. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 86*(2), 265-284.

Fischer, E., & Arnold, S. J. (1990). More than a Labor of Love: Gender Roles and Christmas Gift Shopping. *Journal of Consumer Research, 17*(3), 333-345.

Fisher, R. J., & Dubé, L. (2005). Gender Differences in Responses to Emotional Advertising: A Social Desirability Perspective. *Journal of Consumer Research, 31*(4), 850-858.

Fournier, S. (1998). Consumers and their Brands: Developing Relationship Theory in Consumer Research. *Journal of Consumer Research, 24*(4), 343-353.

Friedman, H. H., & Friedman, L. (1979). Endorser Effectiveness by Product Type. *Journal of Advertising Research, 19*(5), 63-71.

Geary, D. C., Byrd-Craven, J., Hoard, M. K., Vigil, J., & Numtee, C. (2003). Evolution and Development of Boys' Social Behavior. *Developmental Review, 23*(4), 444-470.

Grayson, K. (2007). Friendship versus Business in Marketing Relationships. *Journal of Marketing, 71*(4), 121-139.

Guerrero, L. K., & Bachman, G. F. (2010). Forgiveness and Forgiving Communication in Dating Relationships: An Expectancy-Investment Explanation. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships, 27*(6), 801-823.

Hall, J. A. (2011). Sex Differences in Friendship Expectations: A Meta-Analysis. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships, 28*(6), 723-747.

Hayes, A. F. (2012). PROCESS: A versatile computational tool for observed variable mediation, moderation,

and conditional process modeling [White paper]. Retrieved February 2015, 2015, from http://www.afhayes.com/public/process2012.pdf

Hill, C. A. (1987). Affiliation Motivation: People who Need People… but in Different Ways. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 52*(5), 1008-1018.

Horton, D., & Wohl, R. (1956). Mass Communication and Para-Social Interaction: Observations on Intimacy at a Distance. *Psychiatry, 19*(3), 215-229.

Howard, J. A. (2000). Social Psychology of Identities. *Annual Review of Sociology, 26*, 367-393.

Kahle, L. R., & Homer, P. M. (1985). Physical Attractiveness of the Celebrity Endorser: A Social Adaptation Perspective. *Journal of Consumer Research, 11*(4), 954-961.

Kamins, M. A. (1990). An Investigation into the "Match-up" Hypothesis in Celebrity Advertising: When Beauty may be only Skin Deep. *Journal of Advertising, 19*(1), 4-13.

Kamins, M. A., & Gupta, K. (1994). Congruence Between Spokesperson and Product Type: A Matchup Hypothesis Perspective. *Psychology & Marketing, 11*(6), 569-586.

Kang, Y.-S., & Herr, P. M. (2006). Beauty and the Beholder: Toward an Integrative Model of Communication Source Effects. *Journal of Consumer Research, 33*(1), 123-130.

Keel, A., & Nataraajan, R. (2012). Celebrity Endorsements and Beyond: New Avenues for Celebrity Branding. *Psychology & Marketing, 29*(9), 690-703.

Kenny, D. A. (2012). Multiple Latent Variable Models: Confirmatory Factor Analysis Retrieved April 22, 2015, from http://davidakenny.net/cm/mfactor.htm

Kray, L., & Gonzalez, R. (1999). Differential Weighting in Choice versus Advice: I'll do this, you do that. *Journal of Behavioral Decision Making, 12*(3), 207-218.

Kwang, T., & Swann, W. B. (2010). Do People Embrace Praise even when they Feel Unworthy? A Review of Critical Tests of Self-Enhancement Versus Self-Verification. *Personality and Social Psychology Review, 14*(3), 263-280.

Le Vine, L. (2015). Emma Stone and Andrew Garfield May Have Broken Up. *Refinery 29* Retrieved May 22, 2015, from http://www.refinery29.com/2015/04/84869/emma-stone-andrew-garfield-break-up

Leary, M. R. (2007). Motivational and Emotional Aspects of the Self. *Annual Review of Psychology, 58*, 317-344.

Liberman, N., & Trope, Y. (1998). The Role of Feasibility and Desirability Considerations in Near and Distant Future Decisions: A Test of Temporal Construal Theory. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 75*(1), 5-18.

Ligas, M., & Cotte, J. (1999). The Process of Negotiating Brand Meaning: A Symbolic Interactionist Perspective. *Advances in Consumer Research, 26*, 609-614.

Little, T. D., Cunningham, W. A., Shahar, G., & Widaman, K. F. (2002). To Parcel or not to Parcel: Exploring the Question, Weighing the Merits. *Structural Equation Modeling, 9*(2), 151-173.

Luo, L., Chen, X., Han, J., & Whan Park, C. (2010). Dilution and Enhancement of Celebrity Brands Through Sequential Movie Releases. *Journal of Marketing Research, 47*(6), 1114-1128.

Malär, L. (2015, July 27). [Discussions regarding 2011 JM paper].

Malär, L., Krohmer, H., Hoyer, W. D., & Nyffenegger, B. (2011). Emotional Brand Attachment and Brand Personality: The Relative Importance of the Actual and the Ideal Self. *Journal of Marketing, 75*(4), 35-52.

Malkoc, S. A., Zauberman, G., & Ulu, C. (2005). Consuming Now or Later? The Interactive Effect of Timing and Attribute Alignability. *Psychological Science, 16*(5), 411-417.

Maltby, J., Houran, J., Lange, R., Ashe, D., & McCutcheon, L. E. (2002). Thou Shalt Worship no other Gods—Unless they are Celebrities: The Relationship between Celebrity Worship and Religious Orientation. *Personality and Individual Differences, 32*(7), 1157-1172.

Mangold, W. G., & Faulds, D. J. (2009). Social Media: The New Hybrid Element of the Promotion Mix. *Business Horizons, 52*(4), 357-365.

Mayer, R. C., Davis, J. H., & Schoorman, F. D. (1995). An Integrative Model of Organizational Trust. *Academy of Management Review, 20*(3), 709-734.

McCracken, G. (1989). Who is the Celebrity Endorser? Cultural Foundations of the Endorsement Process. *Journal of Consumer Research, 16*(3), 310-321.

Meyers-Levy, J. (1988). The Influence of Sex Roles on Judgment. *Journal of Consumer Research, 14*(4), 522-530.

Miller, F. M., & Allen, C. T. (2012). How does Celebrity Meaning Transfer? Investigating the Process of Meaning Transfer with Celebrity Affiliates and Mature Brands. *Journal of Consumer Psychology, 22*(3), 443-452.
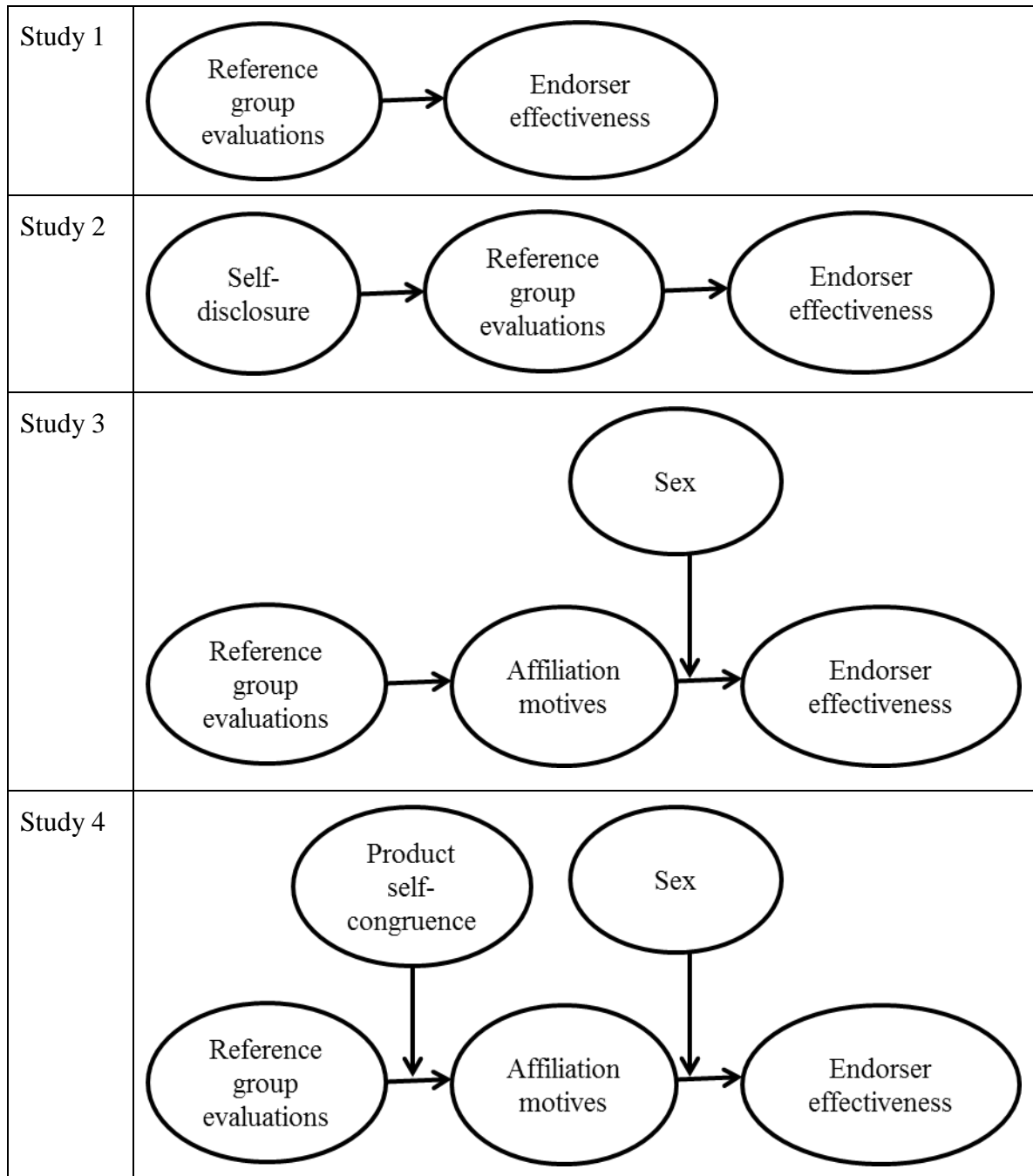
Moss, C. (2014). I Witnessed The New Beatlemania At A YouTube Stars Convention, And It Was Insane

Business Insider Retrieved June 1, 2015, from http://www.businessinsider.com/intour-la-youtube-stars-convention-2014-9?op=1

Neff, L. A., & Karney, B. R. (2004). How does Context Affect Intimate Relationships? Linking External Stress and Cognitive Processes within Marriage. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin, 30*(2), 134-148.

Noseworthy, T. J., Cotte, J., & Lee, S. H. M. (2011). The Effects of Ad Context and Gender on the Identification of Visually Incongruent Products. *Journal of Consumer Research, 38*(2), 358-375.

O'Connor, S. C., & Rosenblood, L. K. (1996). Affiliation Motivation in Everyday Experience: A Theoretical Comparison. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 70*(3), 513-522.

Offermann, L., & Rosh, L. (2012). Building Trust Through Skillful Self-Disclosure. *Harvard Business Review*.

Ohanian, R. (1991). The Impact of Celebrity Spokespersons' Perceived Image on Consumers' Intention to Purchase. *Journal of Advertising Research, 31*(1), 46-54.

Park, C. W., & Lessig, V. P. (1977). Students and Housewives: Differences in Susceptibility to Reference Group Influence. *Journal of Consumer Research, 4*(2), 102-110.

Park, C. W., MacInnis, D. J., Priester, J., Eisingerich, A. B., & Iacobucci, D. (2010). Brand Attachment and Brand Attitude Strength: Conceptual and Empirical Differentiation of Two Critical Brand Equity Drivers. *Journal of Marketing, 74*(6), 1-17.

Perse, E. M., & Rubin, R. B. (1989). Attribution in Social and Parasocial Relationships. *Communication Research, 16*(1), 59-77.

Petty, R. E., & Cacioppo, J. T. (1986). The Elaboration Likelihood Model of Persuasion *Communication and Persuasion* (pp. 1-24): Springer New York.

Prentice, D. A. (1990). Familiarity and Differences in Self- and Other-Representations. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 59*(3), 369-383.

Price, L. L., & Arnould, E. J. (1999). Commercial Friendships: Service Provider-Client Relationships in Context. *Journal of Marketing, 63*(4), 38-56.

Prince, V. (2005). Sex vs. Gender. *International Journal of Transgenderism, 8*(4), 29-32.

Reed II, A. (2004). Activating the Self-Importance of Consumer Selves: Exploring Identity Salience Effects on Judgments. *Journal of Consumer Research, 31*(2), 286-295.

Reed II, A., & Bolton, L. E. (2005). The Complexity of Identity. *MIT Sloan Management Review, 46*(3), 17-23.

Reisman, J. M. (1990). Intimacy in Same-Sex Friendships. *Sex Roles, 23*(1-2), 65-82.

Rempel, J. K., Holmes, J. G., & Zanna, M. P. (1985). Trust in Close Relationships. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 49*(1), 95-112.

Rubin, A. M., & Perse, E. M. (1987). Audience Activity and Soap Opera Involvement: A Uses and Effects Investigation. *Human Communication Research, 14*(2), 246-268.

Rubin, A. M., Perse, E. M., & Powell, R. A. (1985). Loneliness, Parasocial Interaction, and Local Television News Viewing. *Human Communication Research, 12*(2), 155-180.

Rubin, R. B., & McHugh, M. P. (1987). Development of Parasocial Interaction Relationships. *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media, 31*(3), 279-292.

Russell, C. A., Norman, A. T., & Heckler, S. E. (2004). The Consumption of Television Programming: Development and Validation of the Connectedness Scale. *Journal of Consumer Research, 31*(1), 150-161.

Russell, C. A., & Puto, C. P. (1999). Rethinking Television Audience Measures: An Exploration into the Construct of Audience Connectedness. *Marketing Letters, 10*(4), 393-407.

Russell, C. A., & Stern, B. B. (2006). Consumers, Characters, and Products: A Balance Model of Sitcom Product Placement Effects. *Journal of Advertising, 35*(1), 7-21.

Seligman, C., Fazio, R. H., & Zanna, M. P. (1980). Effects of Salience of Extrinsic Rewards on Liking and Loving. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 38*(3), 453-460.

Shiv, B., & Fedorikhin, A. (1999). Heart and Mind in Conflict: The Interplay of Affect and Cognition in Consumer Decision Making. *Journal of Consumer Research, 26*(3), 278-292.

Silvera, D. H., & Austad, B. (2004). Factors Predicting the Effectiveness of Celebrity Endorsement Advertisements. *European Journal of Marketing, 38*(11/12), 1509-1526.

Sirgy, M. J. (1982). Self-Concept in Consumer Behavior: A Critical Review. *Journal of Consumer Research, 9*(3), 287-300.

Swann, W. B., Pelham, B. W., & Krull, D. S. (1989). Agreeable Fancy or Disagreeable Truth? Reconciling Self-Enhancement and Self-Verification. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 57*(5), 782-791.

Tajfel, H. (1981). *Human Groups and Social Categories: Studies in Social Psychology*: Cambridge University Press.

Tajfel, H. (1982). Social Psychology of Intergroup Relations. *Annual Review of Psychology, 33*(1), 1-39.

Taylor, D. A. (1968). The Development of Interpersonal Relationships: Social Penetration Processes. *The Journal of Social Psychology, 75*(1), 79-90.

Taylor, S. E., Klein, L. C., Lewis, B. P., Gruenewald, T. L., Gurung, R. A., & Updegraff, J. A. (2000). Biobehavioral Responses to Stress in Females: Tend-and-Befriend, not Fight-or-Flight. *Psychological Review, 107*(3), 411-429.

Thomson, M. (2006). Human Brands: Investigating Antecedents to Consumers' Strong Attachments to Celebrities. *Journal of Marketing, 70*(3), 104-119.

Till, B. D., & Busler, M. (2000). The Match-Up Hypothesis: Physical Attractiveness, Expertise, and the Role of Fit on Brand Attitude, Purchase Intent and Brand Beliefs. *Journal of Advertising, 29*(3), 1-13.

Trope, Y., & Liberman, N. (2003). Temporal Construal. *Psychological Review, 110*(3), 403-421.

Turner, J. C. (1991). *Social Influence*: Open University Press.

Vigil, J. M. (2007). Asymmetries in the Friendship Preferences and Social Styles of Men and Women. *Human Nature, 18*(2), 143-161.

White, K., & Dahl, D. W. (2006). To be or not be? The Influence of Dissociative Reference Groups on Consumer Preferences. *Journal of Consumer Psychology, 16*(4), 404-414.

Winterich, K. P., Mittal, V., & Ross Jr, W. T. (2009). Donation Behavior Toward In-Groups and Out-Groups: The Role of Gender and Moral Identity. *Journal of Consumer Research, 36*(2), 199-214.

Zarbatany, L., Conley, R., & Pepper, S. (2004). Personality and Gender Differences in Friendship Needs and Experiences in Preadolescence and Young Adulthood. *International Journal of Behavioral Development, 28*(4), 299-310.

Zhang, Y., Feick, L., & Mittal, V. (2014). How Males and Females Differ in their Likelihood of Transmitting Negative Word of Mouth. *Journal of Consumer Research, 40*(6), 1097-1108.

Appendices

Appendix A: Overview of Model Elements Tested across Studies

Study 1	Reference group evaluations → Endorser effectiveness
Study 2	Self-disclosure → Reference group evaluations → Endorser effectiveness
Study 3	Reference group evaluations → Affiliation motives ← Sex → Endorser effectiveness
Study 4	Product self-congruence, Sex → Reference group evaluations → Affiliation motives → Endorser effectiveness

Appendix B: Sample advertisements used in study 1 (pilot)

Appendix C: Scale items tested (final retained items indicated in bold)

Membership Group
(Escalas & Bettman, 2003)

(1) I like HBx; (2) **I fit with HBx**; (3) I belong to the same type of group as HBx; (4) **I consider myself to be the same type of person as HBx**; (5) **HBx feels like a friend to me**; (6) **HBx would fit in with me and my friends**; (7) When I think about HBx, I feel like we could be part of the same group of friends; (8) It would be a pleasure to meet HBx.

Aspirational Group
(Escalas & Bettman, 2003)

(1) I respect HBx; (2) **I look up to HBx**; (3) **I would like to be more like HBx**; (4) I wish I had more friends like HBx; (5) **HBx feels like an idol to me**; (6) HBx would fit in with the kinds of people I wish I fit in with; (7) When I think about HBx, I feel like HBx would be part of a better group of friends than me; (8) **It would be an honour to meet HBx**.

Intrinsic Rewards
(Rempel, et al., 1985)

I would consider purchasing sunglasses endorsed by HBx because: (1) It helps me feel close and connected to HBx; (2) HBx endorses it, and we have the same interests; (3) **I have a lot of fun with HBx**; (4) **I like what HBx likes**; (5) **I want to support HBx**; (6) **I like sharing things in common with HBx**.

Extrinsic Rewards
(Rempel, et al., 1985)

I would consider purchasing sunglasses endorsed by HBx because: (1) **Using a brand endorsed by HB will impress others**; (2) **Being more like HBx will help me meet new and interesting people**; (3) **Using brand x will help me feel closer to the luxurious lifestyle I've always dreamed of**; (4) I want to be more like HBx so others will think more highly of me; (5) **Using a brand endorsed by HBx will help me have a more exciting lifestyle**; (6) Using a brand endorsed by HBx will help me get away from my past and become a new me.

Appendix D: Sample article used in study 2, character version

COSMOPOLITAN   LOVE   CELEBS   HEALTH   CAREER

Q&A: Emma Stone's Latest Collaboration with Woody Allen

October 8, 2014

By Kate Erbland

f   SHARE 18

🐦 TWEET 2

📌 PIN

When Emma Stone talks about the kind of actor that she'd like to be, the conversation inevitably turns to comedy—which is appropriate, since Stone's brief but impressive filmography thus far includes a number of funny movies: *Superbad* (2007), *Easy A* (2010), *Crazy, Stupid, Love* (2011), and *Magic in the Moonlight* (2014), directed by Woody Allen. As a kid growing up, she studied *Saturday Night Live* religiously, and even performed in the local improv theater. She will no doubt be flexing those same acting muscles in her upcoming drama-comedy and second collaboration with Woody Allen, currently filming in Long Island alongside Joaquin Phoenix and Parker Posey. I spoke with the actress about the movie last month.

In this film you play a college student who begins a relationship with your philosophy professor (played by actor Joaquin Phoenix). Is that correct?

Yes, it is. My character (Selina) plays a sophomore student taking philosophy, who ends up being drawn to (Phoenix) for a variety of reasons. She's searching for herself, trying to make sense of her past and the experiences that made her who she is. When she meets (Phoenix), she sees him as holding some of the answers to her questions, and she connects with him in some sense as a way of trying to better connect with herself.

That sounds a little secretive! Can you give us a few more details?

Well, my character is from Arizona, and she had a pretty normal upbringing in many ways. Summers at the beach with her mom and brother, parents happily married, and the usual high-school level heartbreaks along the way. But Selina also has her share of mental-health issues. Early on we learn that Selina suffered from near-crippling anxiety, which made it hard for her to talk in class, meet new people, or even leave the house sometimes.

That sounds terrible. How did she cope?

Well, at first, she didn't. At some point around 15 or 16, Selina meets a new student in her high school, Dane, who introduces her to drugs. She starts with pretty mundane stuff – you know, marijuana – but quickly it snowballs into things like ecstasy and cocaine and other uppers. She keeps taking these drugs because they make her feel more confident, more outgoing, and she feels like they help her overcome her anxieties and phobias. Over time, though, Selina starts to change.

How so?

Well, before the drugs she's a good person, considerate and pretty rule-abiding. As Selina starts down the path of doing more drugs, she becomes reckless, and self-absorbed. The feelings of confidence and invincibility the drugs give her leads to poor choices, regrettable actions. For example, she starts cutting class, lying to her parents, even shoplifting. Over time, Selina starts becoming, if not quite promiscuous, then at least more sexually active than her peers. She does a lot of things that she later regrets.

Let's talk about that for a minute. What caused Selina to realize that she needed to change, if she does?

She does, she definitely does. I'm not sure that it's one big "thing" that makes Selina realize she's become someone she doesn't like or want to be though. Instead, it's more like a series of small events lead her to stop and think, "can I be proud of the person I am now?" When Selina realizes that the answer is no, she stops the drugs and ends her relationship with Dane. She starts apologizing to the people around her that she's hurt, and tries to better herself. It isn't an easy process though, and we still see her struggling with guilty feelings over the past. It's hard, you know?

Appendix E: Advertisement used in study 2

Appendix F: Correlational table of framework variables, study 3

	1	2	3	4
1. Aspirational reference group				
2. Membership reference group	.67			
3. Extrinsic affiliation motives	.52	.51		
4. Intrinsic affiliation motives	.65	.67	.73	
5. Behavioural intentions	.50	.53	.58	.68

All p's <.01

Appendix G: Human brands and product brands pre-tested, study 4

Male Human Brands

- Denzel Washington
- Kevin James
- Christina Bale
- Kevin Hart
- Brad Pitt
- Jimmy Kimmel
- Craig Robinson
- Will Smith

Female Human Brands

- Ellen DeGeneres
- Angelina Jolie
- Queen Latifah
- Halle Berry
- Lupita Nyong'o
- Kelly Clarkson
- Kerry Washington
- Melissa McCarthy

Product Categories and Proposed Brands

1. *Hotel Chains*

   - Super 8
   - Red Roof Inn
   - Hampton Inn and Suites
   - Ritz-Carlton
   - Quality Inn
   - The Westin

2. *Retailers*

   - Neiman Marcus
   - Macy's
   - Nordstrom
   - J.C. Penney
   - Kohl's
   - T.J. Maxx

3. *Bottled Water*

   - Evian
   - Dasani
   - Perrier
   - Nestle
   - Fiji

4. *Chocolate*

   - Reese's Peanut Butter Cups
   - Godiva
   - Toblerone
   - Lindt
   - Hershey's Milk Chocolate

Appendix H: Sample advertisements used in study 4

Party time.

Brad Pitt, Nordstrom Ambassador

Men's clothing, shoes, and more.
Shop.nordstrom.com

NORDSTROM

Party time.

Kevin James, Kohl's Ambassador

Men's clothing, shoes, and more.
Shop kohls.com

KOHL'S

For all that glitters…

Melissa McCarthy, Nordstrom Ambassador

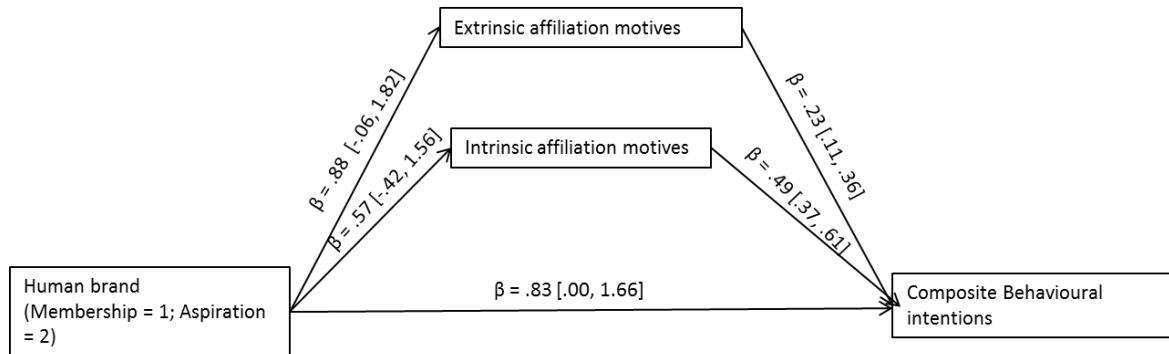Clothing, accessories, and more.
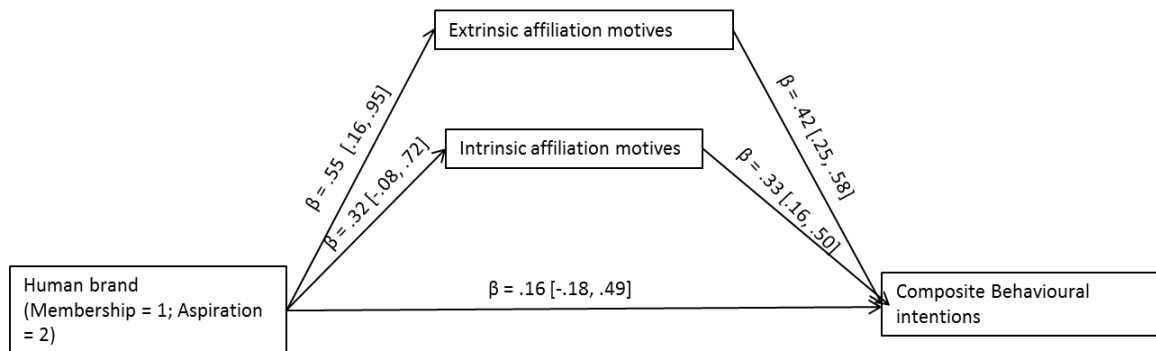Shop.nordstrom.com

NORDSTROM

For all that glitters…

Angelina Jolie, Kohl's Ambassador

Clothing, accessories, and more.
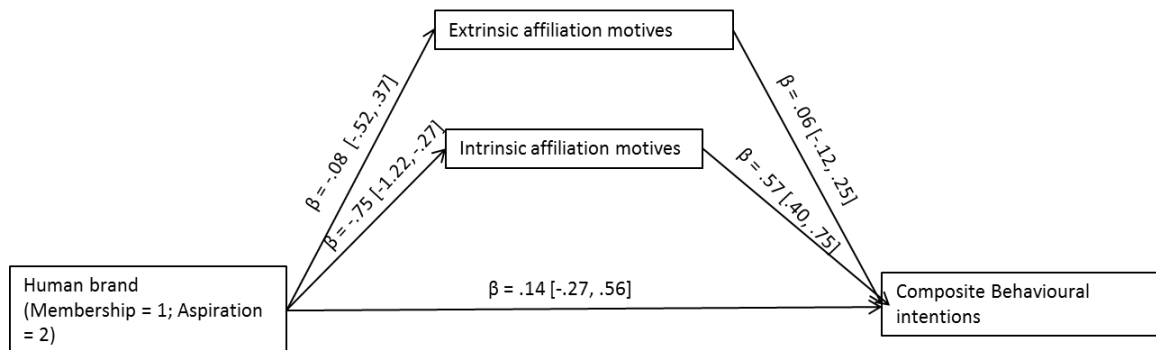Shop kohls.com
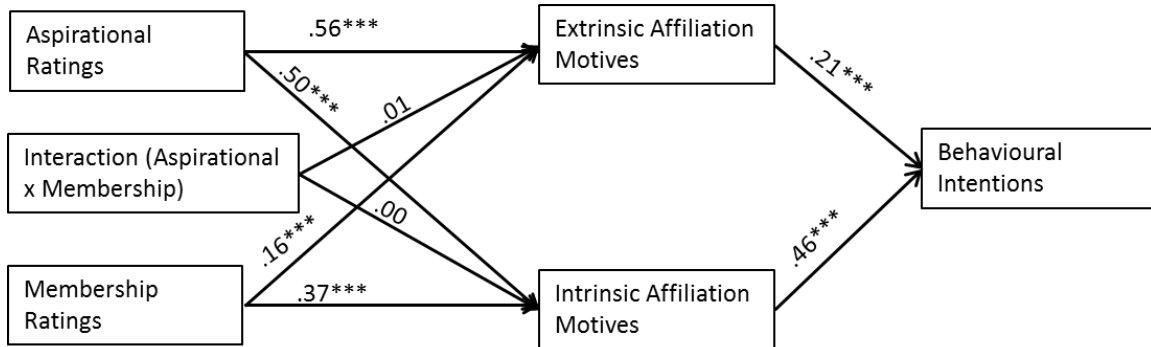
KOHL'S

Appendix I: Path diagrams, study 4

Full Cohort

Males Only

Females Only

Appendix J: Study 4 re-analysis in SEM

*p<.05 **p<.01 ***p<.001
Note: all path estimates standardized, and shown above their respective paths

Appendix K: Hypotheses and Corresponding Study Support

Hypothesis	Study	Supported?
H1a: Aspirational ratings will positively predict endorser effectiveness.	1 3 4	S1: Supported S3: Supported S4: Supported
H1b: Membership ratings will positively predict endorser effectiveness.	1 3 4	S1: Supported S3: Supported S4: Supported
H2a: The effects of both membership and aspirational ratings on endorser effectiveness will be mediated by affiliation rewards.	3 4	S3: Supported S4: Supported, with full cohort effects mediated exclusively via extrinsic affiliation rewards
H2b: Aspirational ratings will predict extrinsic affiliation motives to a greater extent than intrinsic affiliation motives.	3 4 reanalysis	S3: Not supported, aspirational ratings equally predictive of intrinsic and extrinsic motives S4: Consistent with S2 above
H2c: *Membership ratings will predict intrinsic affiliation motives to a greater extent than extrinsic affiliation motives.*	3 4 reanalysis	S3: Supported S4: Supported
H3: The relative strength of extrinsic and intrinsic affiliation motives is moderated by sex. For males (females), extrinsic (intrinsic) affiliation motives are a greater predictor of endorser effectiveness than are intrinsic (extrinsic) affiliation motives.	3 4	S3: Supported, though somewhat mixed. For males, both extrinsic and intrinsic motives were equally predictive, whereas for females intrinsic were more predictive S4: Using the idol/friend distinction as a proxy, results supported
H4: The self-congruence of the product being endorsed should moderate the effectiveness of aspirational and membership ratings on endorser effectiveness. Specifically, human brands rated as primarily aspirational (primarily membership) should be most effective when promoting products congruent with a consumer's ideal (actual) self.	4	S4: Not supported
H5a: Engaging in intimate self-disclosure will increase a human brand's membership ratings.	2	S2: Not supported
H5b: Engaging in intimate self-disclosure will increase a human brand's aspirational ratings	2	S2: Supported

Appendix L: Ethics approval notice

Western Research   Research Ethics

Western University Health Science Research Ethics Board
NMREB Delegated Initial Approval Notice

Principal Investigator: Matthew Thomson
Department & Institution: Richard Ivey School of Business\Ivey School of Business,Western University

NMREB File Number: 105593
Study Title: Human Brands and Reference Groups
Sponsor:

NMREB Initial Approval Date: September 05, 2014
NMREB Expiry Date: July 06, 2015

Documents Approved and/or Received for Information:

Document Name	Comments	Version Date
Instruments	Instruments	2014/07/22
Other	Overview of study design and methodology	2014/07/22
Recruitment Items	Recruiting Materials	2014/07/22
Revised Western University Protocol	Revised Western Protocol Clean PDF Version	2014/08/18
Revised Letter of Information & Consent	Revised Letter of Information, Clean PDF version	2014/08/18

The Western University Non-Medical Research Ethics Board (NMREB) has reviewed and approved the above named study, as of the HSREB Initial Approval Date noted above.

NMREB approval for this study remains valid until the NMREB Expiry Date noted above, conditional to timely submission and acceptance of HSREB Continuing Ethics Review.

The Western University NMREB operates in compliance with the Tri-Council Policy Statement Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans (TCPS2), the Ontario Personal Health Information Protection Act (PHIPA, 2004), and the applicable laws and regulations of Ontario.

Members of the NMREB who are named as Investigators in research studies do not participate in discussions related to, nor vote on such studies when they are presented to the REB.

The NMREB is registered with the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services under the IRB registration number IRB 00000941.

Ethics Officer, on behalf of Riley Hinson, NMREB Chair

Ethics Officer to Contact for Further Information

___ Erika Basile	___ Grace Kelly	___ Mina Mekhail	___ Vikki Tran
ebasile@uwo.ca	grace.kelly@uwo.ca	mmekhail@uwo.ca	vikki.tran@uwo.ca

This is an official document. Please retain the original in your files.

Curriculum Vitae

Name: Jennifer Anne Jeffrey

Post-secondary Education and Degrees:
University of Waterloo
Waterloo, Ontario, Canada
1997-2001 B.Sc. (Hons.)

McMaster University
Hamilton, Ontario, Canada
2001 – 2003 M.B.A.

The University of Western Ontario
London, Ontario, Canada
2010-2015 Ph.D.

Honours and Awards:
Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council Doctoral Award
2012-2013, 2013-2014

S.C. Torno PhD Scholarship, Ivey Business School
2012-2013, 2013-2014

Ontario Graduate Scholarship
2011-2012

Berdie and Irvin Cohen Doctoral Scholarship, Ivey Business School
2011-2012

Related Work Experience
Assistant Professor, Management
King's University College, Western University
2015-

Sessional Instructor, Management
King's University College, Western University
2012-2014

Marketing Manager, EMD Serono Canada Inc.
2007-2010

Pharmaceutical Sales and Marketing, Janssen-Ortho Inc.
2004-2007

Publications:

Thomson, Matthew, Allison R. Johnson, and Jennifer Jeffrey (2015), "What Does Brand Authenticity Mean? Causes and Consequences of Consumer Scrutiny towards a Brand Narrative," in *Review of Marketing Research, Vol 12* (Deborah MacInnis and C. W. Park, Eds.), pp. 1 - 27.

Jeffrey, Jennifer, Dante M. Pirouz, and Jodie Whelan (2014), "Give 'Em a Boost: Descriptive Norms Encourage Booster Seat Use with Low Involvement Parents," accepted for presentation at *Association of Consumer Research Annual North American Conference*, *Baltimore, MD* (competitive paper).

Jeffrey, Jennifer, Matthew Thomson, and Allison R. Johnson (2014), "The Ron Burgundy Effect: Exploring Differences Between Actors and Characters on Endorsement Effectiveness," accepted for presentation at *Association of Consumer Research Annual North American Conference*, *Baltimore, MD* (working paper).

Jeffrey, Jennifer, Dante M. Pirouz, and Jeff Rotman (2013), "Risky Business: The Negative Impact of Ambiguity on Risk Communications," *Association of Consumer Research Annual North American Conference, Chicago, IL* (competitive paper).

Jeffrey, Jennifer, Juan Wang, Dante M. Pirouz, and Matthew Thomson (2012), "Shame on You! Motivating Consumer Behaviour with Shame Appeals," *Association of Consumer Research Annual North American Conference*, *Vancouver, BC* (working paper).

Jeffrey, Jennifer, Dante M. Pirouz and Matthew Thomson (2012), "Stop Freaking Me Out: The Role of Affect on Efficacy and Framing Interactions", *Society of Consumer Psychology Annual North American Conference, Las Vegas, NV* (working paper).

Jeffrey, Jennifer**,** Dante M. Pirouz, and Anne W. Snowdon (2012), "Give 'Em a Boost! Enhancing Risk Perceptions to Increase Booster Seat Use," *AUTO21 Annual Conference* (working paper).