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## **Egocentric Biases In Consumer Judgment of Products With and Without Target Market Labels**

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**EGOCENTRIC BIASES IN CONSUMER JUDGMENT OF PRODUCTS WITH  
AND WITHOUT TARGET MARKET LABELS**

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## **DEDICATION**

To my father and mother, James and Marguerite Norton, who fostered my curiosity and allowed me to take paths of my own volition. Much of my own “self-positivity” comes from you allowing me to be me.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I have been incredibly fortunate that my academic career has been shaped by many wonderful individuals. I must someday find a suitable way of thanking them all, but for the sake of brevity I will confine this note to the appreciation of those who most helped my doctoral studies culminating in this paper.

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## **ABSTRACT**

Consumer research to date has posited that if we are cued to think of others, then we are likely to be influenced by the type of others we consider. Thus, research on product evaluations has focused on motivational accounts of either favoring or disfavoring a product contingent upon which specific reference group the product is associated with. In this dissertation I advance the theory that product evaluations are also cognitive in nature. Due to egocentric biases of self availability and self positivity I propose that the cueing of an “other” lowers the valence of thoughts available (relative to thoughts of the self only) at the time of judgment, resulting in less favorable product evaluations. Across six studies with multiple product categories and multiple specified-market labeling methods, I show that consumers’ attitude toward and willingness to pay for products with specified-market labels are less favorable than for products without specified-market labels. I provide evidence that these effects occur even when a motivational explanation would predict otherwise.

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## **CHAPTER 1**

### **INTRODUCTION**

The presence of other consumers in a retail context can have strong influences on an individual's buying behavior, influencing the brands one buys, the time spent examining products, etc. (Argo and Main 2008; Bearden and Etzel 1982). In fact, the mere presence of other consumers can influence an individual's shopping behavior and brand preferences even when these others do not interact with the individual (Argo, Dahl, and Manchanda 2005; Naylor, Lamberton, and West 2012). Recent research has also suggested that another person need not be physically present to alter one's evaluations of a product (Fitzsimons and Bargh 2003; Shah 2003); the mere thought of a significant other is enough to impact how we consume. However, a significant other is a highly specific referent. Specific others may be more easily categorized than abstract others meaning that using prior information about these others we may more easily put them into groups (e.g., "favorable" or "unfavorable") if they are identified.

In fact consumer research to date has posited that if we are cued to think of specific others, then the influence these others may have on us depends on what type of others they are (Berger and Heath 2007, 2008; Escalas and Bettman 2003, 2005; White and Dahl 2006, 2007). For example, if we are cued to think of favorable others using a product we may be influenced to have favorable evaluations of that product (Bearden and Etzel 1982; Escalas and Bettman 2003). Thus, research on the influence of reference

groups has focused on specifically defined reference groups (i.e., reference groups that are clearly aspirational or dissociative for a target consumer). Prior research does not speak to the influence other consumers have on an individual when the group of “others” is not clearly defined as may be the case in many marketing situations (e.g., when a label indicates a product is “one-size-fits-all”).

In this dissertation I examine the impact on product evaluations of associating a product with other consumers from a different perspective. Instead of the relative comparison of one group of identified others versus another group of identified others (e.g., Group A vs. Group B), I compare thought valence of the self alone versus thoughts of the self in addition to others (e.g., “Me” vs. “Me” plus Others) and the impact this has on product evaluations. I suggest that product evaluations are not driven exclusively by a motivation to associate or dissociate from reference groups, especially in instances when consumers are unable to identify whether or not others are favorable or unfavorable. Instead, I adopt a cognitive perspective to explain how references to others in marketing communications may affect product evaluations relative to an egocentrically anchored evaluation. To do so, I adopt an availability-valence theoretical framework (Hannah and Sternthal 1984). To the extent that overall thoughts (which may include thoughts about the self and others in addition to thoughts about a product) are less positive at the time of judgment product evaluations will be less favorable. This prediction produces a similar outcome to previous motivational work (Berger and Heath 2007, 2008; White and Dahl 2007; McFerran et al. 2009) which suggests if a product is associated with a dissociative reference group, the association with this specified group would lead to negative thoughts about the product.

However, due to egocentric biases like the self-positivity bias (Alicke 1985; Brown 1986; Dunning, Meyerowitz, and Holzberg 1989; Kruger and Dunning 1999; Raghurir and Menon 1998) I expect “others” to lower the valence of total thoughts available (relative to thoughts of the self only) at the time of judgment, rendering product evaluations less favorable even when products are associated with highly positive groups. This produces a different outcome than would be predicted by motivational accounts.

Consumer research has shown that the effects of “others” are moderated by whether these others are members of an aspirational or dissociative group (Berger and Heath 2007, 2008; Escalas and Bettman 2003, 2005; White and Dahl 2006, 2007). Research suggests that by utilizing celebrity endorsers, companies may tap into consumers’ symbolic association to an aspirational reference group, as they (celebrity endorsers) are perceived as dynamic, attractive and likable (Assael 1984; Atkins and Block 1983; Kamins 1990). Advertisements featuring celebrities produce more favorable evaluations than non-celebrity ads (Atkins and Block 1983). Conversely, dissociative reference groups are groups to which consumers do not wish to belong and with which they do not want to be identified. For example, White and Dahl (2006) showed that men in a restaurant were less likely to order a steak when it was labeled “ladies cut” than when it was named the “chef’s cut.” Consumers are likely to seek out products that are favored by an in-group and avoid products that are associated with out-groups (Berger and Heath 2007, 2008), for example, abandoning trendy wristbands when they were adopted by the geeks next door (Berger and Heath 2008). Similarly,

participants ate less candy when they saw a confederate who appeared to be obese choose a lot of it (McFerran et al. 2009).

The intention of this inquiry is not to dispute the findings of this previous work. Instead I focus my examination on the differences between an egocentric evaluation of a product (i.e., an evaluation of a product from the perspective of the self alone) and the evaluation of a product when thinking of others in addition to the self. I also find support for the notion that the relative difference in favorability of product evaluations depends on the valence of the referenced group. However, where previous studies have focused on the relative differences induced by associating a product with a positively or negatively valenced reference group, I focus on a different question: How does including thoughts of others influence product judgments relative to strictly self-centric product judgments? In other words, will consumers evaluate a product differently if they are thinking only of themselves when evaluating the product or if they are thinking about themselves as well as others?

Consumers may evaluate products from a more or less egocentric perspective due to marketing actions. For instance, marketers may influence whether consumers think about the self alone or the self plus others when evaluating their products through the use of their target market labeling practices. When no labels are used that can cue the intended target market for a product, consumers anchor egocentrically, that is, consider themselves and their preferences as a starting point for evaluating the appropriateness of a product (Naylor, Lamberton, and Norton 2011). Such egocentric biases have been shown to influence prediction of others' product preferences (Irmak, Vallen, and Sen 2010; West 1996) as well as to increase the salience of one's own actions (Gilovich,

Medvec, and Savitsky 2000). Thus, when a product has no information on its label to indicate its target market, consumers are likely to evaluate the product from their own perspective, forming their attitude toward the product based on the chronically highly accessible anchor of the self (Mussweiler and Strack 1999) and the thoughts associated with that anchor. As a result, consumers are less likely to think about other consumers who may also purchase the product and more likely to depend on the valence of their egocentric thoughts.

However, frequently marketers do place intended target market information on product labels (e.g., Dove for Men). When intended target information is present on a label, consumers are likely to be reminded about other consumers who may also purchase the product. Importantly, because of the all-encompassing nature of some of these labels (e.g., “one-size-fits-all”), consumers may find themselves included in a group that they prefer to avoid. Prior research has adopted a motivational explanation-- that consumers avoid products or behaviors associated with dissociative reference groups or groups with whom they want to avoid being confused (Berger and Heath 2007, 2008; Simmel 1904/1957; White and Dahl 2006, 2007). Thus, a product label that specifies an intended target may drive people away from the product as it cues consumers to think about other reference groups with whom they do not want to be associated. As a result, consumers’ attitude toward and purchase likelihood for these products may be adversely impacted. Thus, while marketers try to specify the target market of a product by including a label, they may in effect be lowering the attractiveness of their product to some consumers.

In this research, however, I adopt a different explanation of these less favorable evaluations based on the availability-valence hypothesis (Hannah and Sternthal 1984).

Availability-valence (Hannah and Sternthal 1984; Kisielius and Sternthal 1984; Tybout, Sternthal and Calder 1983) is a memory based theory with the central tenet that “individuals’ attitudinal judgments are determined by the favorableness—or valence—of the issue-relevant information available in memory at the time of judgment” (Hannah and Sternthal 1984, p. 633). I show that the presence or absence of specific target market information on a product label impacts the availability of thoughts of others. The increased availability of thoughts of others influences product evaluation as those thoughts tend to be, on average, less favorable than egocentric thoughts.

If no product label information is present that specifies for whom a product is intended, then the most available thoughts for judgment are thoughts of the self (Mussweiler and Strack 1999). Consumers exhibit a high self-positivity bias or illusory superiority (i.e., consider themselves to be better than others) (Alicke 1985; Brown 1993; Dunning, Meyerowitz, and Holzberg 1989; Kruger and Dunning 1999; Raghurir and Menon 1998). Hence, if the thoughts most available at the time of product judgment are thoughts of the self and consumers’ thoughts of the self are positive, then it should follow that judgments made with such positive thoughts available should also be positive. If, however, the thoughts available are thoughts of the self *and* thoughts of others these thoughts are likely to be less positive on average (i.e., diluted) relative to thoughts of the self (because thoughts of others, even positively evaluated others, tend to be less positive than thoughts of the self). Therefore judgments made with less positive thoughts should be less positive (Hannah and Sternthal 1984).

I should be clear that the self positivity bias does not represent a motivational explanation. Whereas White and Dahl (2006) believe that consumers are motivated to



positively differentiate the self from out-groups (i.e., self-enhancement motives), self positivity bias results from egocentric availability of thoughts. For instance, Ross and Sicoly (1979) suggest that the reason people claim a disproportionate amount of credit for tasks is that their accomplishments are more easily recalled than those of another individual.

In order to test these theories I conduct several experiments where I manipulate product labels so that the target market is either clearly specified (e.g., “for all ages”) or left unspecified. Across six studies with eleven different products and four different specified-market labeling methods, I show that consumers’ evaluations of products with specified-market labels are less favorable than products without specified-market labels. Further, I provide evidence that these effects are dependent on the availability of thoughts and the valence of these available thoughts. I further provide evidence that these effects occur even when a motivational explanation would make an opposing prediction.

In study 1, I present participants with products that are either labeled as for men, for women, for men *and* women (i.e., “unisex”) or left unlabeled such that the product’s gender appropriateness is not specified. I show that consumers evaluate products without specified target market labels more favorably than products with labels that specify a target market.

In study 2 I use three new products and show that products labeled “one size fits all” are evaluated less favorably and are less likely to be purchased compared to those without such labels. Further, I show that priming “others” (i.e., increasing the availability

of other related thoughts) before evaluation attenuates the effect demonstrating evidence for the first stage of the availability-valence explanation.

Study 3 provides evidence that the differences I see are cognitively driven. Using measured self-esteem I demonstrate that consumers who have high self-esteem exhibit more favorable product evaluations when making judgments using egocentrically available thoughts. However, the effect is attenuated for those consumers with low self-esteem, such that there is little difference between the evaluations of products that carry no label and products that carry a label indicating others. Motivational explanations would suggest consumers with low or high self-esteem are equally likely to associate with or dissociate from out-groups. While the availability-valence account I propose explains the difference across low and high self-esteem consumers because the valence of self-related thoughts differs across the two groups.

In study 4, I demonstrate (within an English speaking population) that a product with a label written in English and Spanish (i.e., more specified with respect to the target market) generates less favorable attitudes than an equivalent product with a label written in English only. This study demonstrates that labels can suggest target markets without directly referring to the groups for whom the product is appropriate. Thus, studies 1-4 demonstrate the robustness of the same effect using different labeling practices.

In study 5, I provide evidence that is an interesting contrast to motivational processes suggested in the current literature. Specifically, a motivational explanation would predict that evaluations of a product with a label indicating an aspirational group should be more favorable than an unlabeled product. In contrast to this prediction, I

continue to see less favorable evaluations of specified-target labeled products (relative to an unlabeled product), even when these labels indicate an aspirational reference group.

Study 6 more closely looks at the process by which these differential evaluations are obtained. I test the accessibility of thoughts by utilizing both spontaneously generated thought listings and reaction times to self-relevant descriptors to understand what thoughts are available at the time consumers are evaluating the products. This is coupled with a self-esteem measurement to understand the interaction of thought accessibility and valence on product judgments.

Additionally, across these studies I measure consumer uniqueness motives and intrinsic values of the products and find no significant effects of label types on these variables. I also allow for product customization to take place and still obtain my hypothesized results. Overall, these results suggest that it is self thought availability and positivity rather than perception of low fit, need for uniqueness, lack of customization, or motivation to dissociate from reference groups that drives the negative effect of specified-market labels on consumer reactions to products with such labels.

In the following chapters I present a literature review on the psychological phenomena of egocentrism and self positivity and how these biases provide the basis from which the product evaluation effects emerge. I use a relevant moderator from the self domain (i.e., self-esteem) that helps provide further evidence that self-centered evaluations are the preferred explanation for these effects. I conclude with a discussion of how the interaction of these theoretical domains with the practical domain of product

labeling combine to produce novel and interesting results for both marketing practitioners and scholars alike.

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

In this chapter I will explain why consumers evaluate products less favorably when marketer provided target market information is present. In the case of a label that does not provide specific target market information, egocentric biases lead one to consider only the available self thoughts in addition to thoughts about the product. Product judgments are thus made from an egocentric perspective. The favorability of these judgments are based on the relatively greater favorability of the thoughts one has about the self (versus thoughts about others), so I detail literature about the cognitive biases people hold when judging themselves relative to others. When specific target market information is provided, however, less egocentrically based judgments are made based on increased availability of thoughts of others. That is, the evaluation perspective shifts as separate associative networks are engaged. The literatures relevant to the availability-valence theory and positivity biases are discussed in order to understand how thoughts of others may impact these judgments.

#### **Egocentrism**

Egocentrism is the tendency for an individual to regard themselves or their ideas as most important (Epley et al. 2004). According to theory on the egocentric bias, the self is the genesis of all thoughts, and thoughts and ideas that are external to the self tend to use the self as a reference point. Egocentrism is characterized as a limitation borne in

children that arises due to the incapacity to psychologically distinguish the self from others (Piaget 1971). However, some recent work characterizes all individuals as having initial egocentric tendencies that, as we mature, seem to dissipate because of our ability to recognize and correct for this bias (Epley, Morewedge, and Keysar 2004).

Egocentrism is a strong human trait that arises due to an inability to take the perspective of others. Children under the age of four are unable to distinguish between what they know and what others in the room may know (Perner 1991; Wimmer and Perner 1983). For example, if a child is aware of the location of a hidden piece of candy, the child assumes that another individual who subsequently enters the room must also know the location of the candy, even when the other individual was not present during the hiding. Young children also lack the ability to take others' sensory perception into perspective as well. Children who are asked to draw a three-dimensional object as if they were "looking through the experimenter's eyes" continue to draw objects from their own perspective (Flavell 1986). In another experiment, children fail to identify objects that are obscured to the experimenter because the children's' own view was not so obscured (Piaget 1971).

Clearly, the above examples are not ones we would expect to manifest themselves in adults. However, adults are not immune to egocentric tendencies. Adults fall prey to the false consensus effect or the tendency to overestimate the extent to which others share their own attitudes and feelings (Krueger and Clement 1994; Ross, Greene, and House 1977). For example, in Krueger and Clement's (1994) work, participants were given a list of belief statements and asked to indicate their opinions. The participants were subsequently asked what percentage of the population (from 0-100%) they thought also

held their same beliefs. The estimates of shared beliefs were significantly higher than actual shared beliefs (Krueger and Clement 1994).

Adults also believe that other people have more access to their internal states than others actually do (Gilovich, Savitsky, and Medvec 1998), use their own knowledge as a guide to estimating others' knowledge (Keysar 1994), use themselves as a standard when evaluating others (Alicke 1993; Dunning, Meyerowitz, and Holzberg 1989), and focus excessively on their own experience when anticipating how they will be evaluated by others (Savitsky, Epley, and Gilovich 2001; Gilovich, Medvec, and Savitsky 2000; Kenny and DePaulo 1993; Savitsky, Epley, and Gilovich 2001).

### **Effortful correction of egocentric biases**

Over time, adults are better able to correct for egocentric tendencies. This may be so for two reasons. First, adults are able to engage in perspective taking at a meta-cognitive level. They may acquire domain specific ideas about how they think given historical precedent (Gopnik and Wellman 1992). For example, a student may approach his exam with pessimism with respect to its outcome. However, the student may reflect on past successes that began with similar pessimism and consequently adjust his confidence toward the current exam. Similarly, if we know that in certain domains we tend to be more likely to process egocentrically, then we are better prepared to correct for this tendency when subsequently presented with the domain in question.

The second way in which adults may be better able to correct for egocentric perspective is a matter of degree. Epley and colleagues (2004) suggest that perhaps the

difference in egocentric tendencies from children to adults is merely a manifestation of one's ability to correct for this bias. Just as children eventually, with practice, grow more dexterous, so too do they become more adept at taking the perspective of others. In this way, adults are simply better at correcting for this initial automatic default (Epley et al. 2004). One potential explanation for this is that adults possess an expanded cognitive capacity versus children.

This cognitive ability to correct for egocentric tendencies should be engaged only when sufficient information is present that indicates an egocentric evaluation is not appropriate. That is, when one is presented with available information that indicates perspective taking is appropriate, they engage in perspective taking. The literature in consumer behavior reveals few papers that address this correction process. One notable exception is West's (1996) work on agent recommendations. When agents are tasked with making surrogate purchases, they tend to make egocentrically-driven recommendations (West 1996). In other words, they use themselves and their own preferences as a starting point for considering a suitable recommendation because they lack diagnostic preference information. However, when they are given the opportunity to learn from their successes and failures, they do not exhibit the same projection of their own preferences onto others (West 1996).

Other consumer research seems to echo the suggestion that the lack of available disconfirming information is the driving force behind egocentric projective tendencies. Naylor and colleagues (2011) show that when consumers encounter an ambiguous product reviewer they tend to perceive the reviewer's characteristics (both demographic and psychographic) as very similar to their own, a term they call egocentric anchoring.



That is, these consumers tend to project their own characteristics onto the “blank slate” provided by the ambiguity of the reviewer. However, when alternate anchors are present (thinking about others in a priming task) or when provided with cues that may signal that an egocentric perspective is inappropriate (e.g., a website name that indicates a heterogeneous population), this egocentric tendency is reduced (Naylor et al. 2011).

These egocentric biases reflect the self-centered basis of social judgment and are conceptually distinct from motivational egoistic biases that reflect a self-serving motivation to think highly of oneself or one’s group (Kruger and Dunning 1999; Kunda 1990). That is, egocentric biases carry with them no desire to consciously distinguish the self from others. The desire to positively distinguish the self from others is a central tenet of social identity theory (Tajfel and Turner 1986) and motivational theories like self-enhancement biases (Beauregard and Dunning 1998; Sedikides 1995). Whereas a self-centered evaluation may sometimes lead to a self-serving judgment, the former need not lead to the latter in all cases. However, the two concepts can interact due to the availability of self related thoughts in egocentric judgment. For instance, people are more aware of their own contributions to a group project than they are of others’ contributions (Brawley 1984). This can lead people to overestimate their responsibility for the good things that happen within their group but it can also lead to the overestimation of their responsibility for the bad things that occur (Ross and Sicoly 1979). Because the self is chronically accessible (Mussweiler and Strack 1999) people are also more likely to notice and attend to their own behavior and emotional states than to others’ behavior and emotional states. This can lead to a “spotlight effect,” where people overestimate the extent to which others notice and attend to their desirable behavior but also to

overestimate the extent to which others are noticing their undesirable behavior and judging them harshly as a result (Gilovich, Kruger, and Medvec 2002). The key to understanding *egocentric* biases in everyday judgment is not that people are motivated to think well of themselves compared with others, but rather that self information is likely to be more accessible than information about others. Thus, I am proposing a two-part process in the judgment of an egocentrically encountered product. First, egocentric biases makes thoughts of the self most available. Second, some valence value is attached to those highly available thoughts. This second part of the process is discussed further in the next section on the self-positivity bias.

### **Self-positivity bias**

Among the most robust findings in research on social psychology over the last two decades is that people tend to believe that their chances of experiencing negative events are lower than those of other people, whereas their chances of experiencing positive events are higher. This tendency is known alternately as “unrealistic optimism” (Weinstein 1980), or the “self-positivity bias” (Raghubir and Menon 1998). Similarly, judgments of oneself tend to be more positive than judgments of others (e.g., “illusory superiority” Buunk and Van Yperen 1991; the “better-than-average effect” Alicke and Govorun 2005), which also suggests a pervasive cognitive bias that positive thoughts are attached to the self and less positive thoughts are attached to others. I will refer to this notion hereafter as the self-positivity bias, that people generally have more positive self thoughts relative to thoughts of others.

Raghubir and Menon's (1998) research represents the only examination of this phenomena in the consumer setting. They specifically look at risky behaviors and find that individuals perceive that they are less likely to contract the HIV virus than are others. Only when confronted with an advertisement that promotes safe sex do these individuals increase their perceptions of their risk of contracting HIV, again suggesting that the self-centered perspective is the default. Additional psychological research confirms the disposition for individuals to believe that their chances of experiencing negative events are lower than those of other people (Perloff and Fetzner 1986), but the research on self-positivity is not limited to expected outcomes of events happening to the self. It also concerns self-evaluation.

An important manifestation of self-positivity bias is that people perceive themselves as being above average on a wide variety of desirable traits (Brown 1993; Dunning, Meyerowitz, and Holzberg 1989; Taylor and Brown 1988). Weinstein (1980) found that college students believe that they are significantly more likely than other undergraduate students to like their post graduation jobs, own their own homes, earn a relatively high starting salary, travel to Europe, receive a work-related award, have their houses double in value within the first 5 years of ownership, live past 80, and have a mentally gifted child.

Indeed the tendency to evaluate oneself more favorably than others is a stable finding in social psychology. This bias has been demonstrated on both trait ratings (Alicke 1985; Dunning, Meyerowitz, and Holzberg 1989) and behavior ratings (Allison, Messick, and Goethals 1989; Messick, Bloom, Boldizar, and Samuelson 1985). Allison and colleagues (1989) specifically compare self-other judgments of fair versus unfair behaviors. These

researchers demonstrate that individuals think of themselves as considerably more moral (i.e., more fair and less unfair) than others. Self positivity bias research provides compelling evidence that people maintain unrealistically positive images of themselves relative to others. One potential reason for this bias is the relatively high availability of self-related thoughts we hold in memory.

The availability heuristic (Tversky and Kahneman 1973) may be a factor driving higher self-evaluations. Simply put, when people judge themselves and others, the criteria that are most easily brought to mind might be the particular behaviors that they themselves perform, or the unusual skills that they possess. Ease of recall has been shown in one form of self-serving bias (Ross and Sicoly 1979). In a series of studies, Ross and Sicoly (1979) discovered that people attribute to themselves an unwarranted degree of credit and responsibility for joint projects. For example, a husband and wife might each claim to do a majority of the housework and financial chores. Ross and Sicoly (1979) proposed that both individuals claim an undue share of responsibility because their own efforts and accomplishments are more easily recalled than those of the other individual.

### **The Availability-Valence Theory**

The availability-valence hypothesis interprets the learning and evaluation of persuasive communications, such as advertisements, in terms of memory. The availability-valence hypothesis is an extension of the concept of the availability heuristic that was advanced by Tversky and Kahneman (1973). The availability heuristic was defined in terms of the "ease with which instances or associations could be brought to

mind" (Tversky and Kahneman, 1973, p. 208), but it did not specify the nature of the relationship between the associations and the process that "brings them to mind." The availability-valence hypothesis is more informative regarding the processes by which information becomes available. Additionally, the objective of the availability-valence hypothesis differs from that of the availability heuristic. The goal of the availability heuristic is to explain frequency judgments, whereas the goal of the availability-valence hypothesis is to explain evaluative judgments (Hannah and Sternthal 1984).

The availability-valence hypothesis (Hannah and Sternthal 1984; Kisielius and Sternthal 1984; Tybout et al. 1983) is a memory-based approach with the central tenet that "individuals' attitudinal judgments in response to a persuasive message are determined by the favorableness—or valence—of the issue-relevant information available in memory at the time of judgment" (Hannah and Sternthal 1984, p. 633). According to the availability-valence theory, the evaluation of an object depends on the availability of information associated with the object (Hannah and Sternthal 1984). The hypothesis suggests that the degree to which information is available depends on two factors. One is the cognitive elaboration of the information conveyed about an object or event. Cognitive elaboration refers to the number of pieces of information that are stored in multiple locations and the number of retrieval pathways that are associated with the information (Bower 1972; Nisbett and Ross 1980). According to the hypothesis, the greater the cognitive elaboration of the information being processed, the greater will be the availability of that information. Availability also depends on the recency of the information processed such that the more recently processed information is more available. In support of the importance of recency in the processing of information, one

study (Higgins, Rholes, and Jones 1977) found that exposure to positive or negative adjective word lists subsequently affected the evaluation of a person. Participants exposed to the positive words evaluated the person more favorably than those exposed to the negative words.

This Higgins et al. (1977) study also demonstrates that the evaluation that is formed about an object depends not only on the availability of information about the object but also on the valence of the non-object information that is available. So while evaluations of a product may depend on the available thoughts about the product itself, evaluations are also dependent on the non-product thought availability and valence as well. Valence refers to the affective value of information, which can be varying degrees of positive, negative, or neutral. For any particular object, the more available positive information is, the more favorable the evaluation of the object. This parallels the above literature on egocentric and self positivity biases in that egocentric biases imply that self related information is chronically available (Mussweiler and Strack 1999) and generally positive (Dunning et al. 1989).

In addition to the recency with which it was acquired other attributes of information may make it more or less available in memory. For instance, more substantial information (e.g., compliance with a large versus small request) is more readily available than less substantial information due to the greater number of associations and linkages in memory for such behavior (Bower 1972). Further, more recently processed information is retrieved from memory more readily than is more distal information, particularly when memory is accessed soon after learning (Kisielius and Sternthal 1984). Therefore, when

an environment is information-rich, recently provided information is likely to impact judgments due to its availability when the judgment is being made.

The availability-valence framework also provides insights on why egocentrically processed information may be more salient. The reason these effects manifest is likely due to the deeper encoding of self-related information when it is initially encountered (Rogers, Kuiper, and Kirker 1977). The Self-Referential Encoding effect holds that information related to the self is preferentially encoded and organized above other types of information (Rogers et al. 1977). This was first tested by Rogers and colleagues (1977) in an extension of Craik and Tulving's (1975) classic depth-of-processing study. Participants rated 40 descriptive adjectives on one of four tasks: Structural (Big font or small font?), Phonemic (Rhymes with xxx?), Semantic (Means same as xxx?), or Self-reference (Describes you?). Participants are then asked, without prior warning, to recall as many of the words they have seen as possible within a given time limit. Craik and Tulving's (1975) original experiment showed that structural and phonemic tasks lead only to "shallow" encoding, while the semantic task lead to "deep" encoding and resulted in better recall. Rogers et al. (1977) hypothesized that information with reference to the self would have even deeper encoding. They found a main effect for self-reference items to be recalled at least twice as well as semantic-encoded items.

The increased performance on tasks involving self-related information is due to the organization and elaboration of this information within memory (Symons and Johnson 1997). Kihlstrom et al. (2002) suggest that the self consists of a mental representation of the knowledge individuals possess about their life; their past, present and future, as well as the beliefs and personality traits that they hold. This highly

structured self-schema would allow individuals to select and filter relevant information and then to process that information faster than information that is not relevant to the self.

Availability of self related thoughts however, does not fully explain why those thoughts should necessarily be more positive than thoughts of others. However, if I consider the notion that adding thoughts of others dilutes self thoughts we may better understand how this process works. Past work demonstrates the pervasiveness of processing that results in an averaging pattern when forming impressions of persons (e.g., Anderson 1965, 1968; Eagly and Chaiken 1993) as well as product bundles (Yadav 1994). The goal of forming a coherent and unified impression of a product induces a focus on the whole and requires evaluators to blend the components into one summary judgment. Such a focus on the “big picture,” or the whole, as opposed to the individual components or the parts, has been referred to in the literature as holistic processing (e.g., Monga and Roedder John 2007; Srivastava and Raghurir 2002). Past work assessing how people in evaluative roles form impressions of multi-attribute decision alternatives shows that, as adding warm water to hot water leads to water of a more moderate temperature, adding information that is moderately positive to information that is highly positive frequently leads to judgments that are evaluatively intermediate (Anderson 1965; Eagly and Chaiken 1993; Yadav 1994).

The decrease in the positivity of evaluations with the addition of moderately positive (or negative) stimuli that is brought about by such big picture or holistic processing results in an averaging rather than an adding pattern. In one demonstration, Yadav (1994) asked consumers to rate the favorability of different sets of furniture items containing varying numbers of pieces. Consumers in the individual item condition read information



about a bed that pretest participants had rated as excellent. Those in the two item bundle condition rated a set consisting of two items: The same highly favorable bed plus a chest that was described as moderately favorable. Consumers' ratings of the furniture sets showed a pattern that resembled averaging. They gave higher favorability ratings to the set containing the bed alone than they gave to the set containing both the bed and the moderately favorable chest. A similar averaging-like pattern was observed in ratings of a highly favorable computer as compared to a bundle containing the same computer plus a moderately favorable printer. When evaluators mentally combine attributes that vary in their positivity, this combination process produces judgments that portray an averaging pattern.

The availability-valence hypothesis provides some explanations as to why egocentric biases may manifest without corrective measures. Since self-referential information is encoded more deeply (Rogers et al. 1977) it becomes more chronically accessible (Mussweiler and Strack 1999). Therefore, without recent or significant information, self-related thoughts are likely to be most accessible. The self-positivity bias literature serves to suggest that thoughts about the self are likely to be fairly positive, especially when viewed in relation to thoughts about others (Dunning et al. 1989). However, the availability-valence hypothesis also suggests that more recently processed information will be highly salient in making judgments. Thus, information suggesting the presence of others in the environment should make thoughts of others salient. If others are evaluated less favorably than the self, then a judgment based on the amalgamated thoughts of others and the self should be less favorable than a judgment based solely on thoughts of the self. The next chapter outlines a particularly interesting marketing context in which to test this

theory. I continue by addressing the marketing decision of labeling a product with a specified target market or leaving a product's intended target market unspecified. I then develop hypotheses based on the theory above as to how consumers may respond to products with or without such labels.

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **STUDY CONTEXT AND HYPOTHESES DEVELOPMENT**

For the purposes of this dissertation I have chosen to study these egocentric effects in the marketing context of product labeling. I have done so for multiple reasons. First, the context provides an excellent arena to test the theories of egocentric processing in conditions where target market information is provided or not. Product labels can be manipulated in such a way that they specify for whom a product is intended or can be left completely unspecified. Second, product labels represent a break from the existing consumer behavior studies on egocentrism that have focused on agent recommendations and persuasion. Finally, product labels are easily manipulated by managers. It is easy to change a label without having to alter the formulation of the product itself. The next section gives an overview of how marketers use product labels and then develops hypotheses regarding how the presence or absence of various target market cues through labeling may lead to more or less egocentrically driven evaluations of a product.

#### **Product Labeling**

First-year marketing students are introduced to the concept of target marketing. Since marketers cannot satisfy every potential customer equally well with the same product offering, they engage in the activity of dividing the market into segments,

identifying which segments may be most attractive, developing products to appeal to those segments, and then intentionally pursuing exchange with a specific group through advertising or other marketing activities (Kotler and Armstrong 2009). Marketing positioning activities are designed and executed to be more appealing to the target market than to people in other segments (Ringold 1995).

Positioning may be operationalized in a variety of ways. For example, marketers may use differential intensity of ad placement in media with different readers or viewers, or customize marketing content to a specific group. Positioning may be tacit, such that the intended market is explicitly stated. For example, Coach does not explicitly label their purses “for women.” Conversely, marketers may use very explicit labeling practices in order to specifically identify their intended target market. Examples abound: Dove for Men body wash is a soap differentiated on the basis of gender. One can even construe sizing labels on garments as a positioning strategy on the basis of body size (i.e., while a “small” person may wear an “extra large” t-shirt, the marketer is suggesting an appropriate market with the inclusion of a size on the label). These labeling practices may provide an extrinsic cue that influences a consumer’s perception of a product.

Consumers rely on both intrinsic and extrinsic cues to shape their opinions of expected product quality (Lee and Lou 1996; Szbillo and Jacoby 1974; Van Trijp and Schifferstein 1995). Intrinsic cues are product attributes inherent to the objective nature of the product itself (e.g., the specific chemical formulation of a laundry detergent); conversely, extrinsic cues are any product characteristics that can be altered without influencing the objective nature of the product or service. In spite of the lack of any real effect on product quality, a number of extrinsic cues have been found to significantly

influence consumer perceptions of product performance and quality (Veale and Quester 2009). Consumers tend to rely on extrinsic cues in product evaluations to reduce the risks in purchasing (Lee and Lou 1996). Therefore, a review of past studies suggest that consumers rely on many extrinsic cues such as country of origin image (Johansson, Douglas, and Nonaka 1985; Veale and Quester 2009), price perceptions (Varki and Colgate 2001), advertising content (Sing and Smith 2005), brand name (Allision and Uhl 1962), and packaging (McDaniel and Baker 1977). Judgments of quality can also be influenced by characteristics implied through labeling, or simply inferred by consumers to exist (Bredahl 2003; Lans et al. 2001; Raghunathan, Naylor, and Hoyer 2006; Richardson et al. 1994). These extrinsic cues often lead to a difference in perceived product quality, yet little research has been conducted on the impact on product evaluations of extrinsic cues that are uncorrelated with perceptions of intrinsic attributes. Perhaps, this research has been handcuffed by the notion that in order to change evaluations of a product one must influence the intrinsic nature of the product. Although no specific research that speaks to this notion exists, it is reasonable to assume that the extrinsic product labels may influence the available thoughts when making judgments, which I will show has important implications for product evaluations without changing the perception of the product itself.

Product labels may vary in their specificity. For example, in labeling a product marketing managers have an opportunity to position a product by identifying a specific target market (e.g., “Calvin Klein for men”), to leave the product’s positioning unspecified (e.g., no such labeling information), or to position a product as all-encompassing with regard to a specified target market (e.g., “Unisex cologne by Calvin

Klein”). In all of these cases a male consumer may correctly assume that the product is appropriate for his purchase. However, what is presently unclear is how these different labeling tactics impact the availability of thoughts of the self or others and how these thoughts impact product evaluation. Using the literature outlined previously I advance hypotheses about how consumers may respond to specified-market labels (i.e., labels where an intended target is explicitly stated) versus unspecified labels (i.e., labels where no target market is specified).

### **Theoretical Development and Hypotheses**

The availability-valence framework relies on associative network theory to explain product evaluation in terms of processes. This framework contends that evaluations depend on two things: First, what thoughts are available and second, how positive or negative those thoughts are. If highly positive thoughts are available then evaluations of a product are going to be positive. This relates to thoughts about the self alone (i.e., egocentric thoughts) versus thoughts of the self plus others in that past research in egocentrism suggests that self thoughts are chronically accessible (Mussweiler and Strack 1999). If these self thoughts are always relatively available, then the default state of evaluations is highly dependent upon these self thoughts. Previous work in marketing empirically supports this notion of high default self availability. In work done by Naylor and colleagues (2011) they demonstrate that there is no difference in response time when participants were asked to respond to items about the self when consumers are primed with the self versus a control condition where they are not primed. This means that people essentially default to thinking about the self. They are

thinking as much about the self when undirected as they are when they are actively directed to through priming.

Second, when a consumer thinks about themselves, these thoughts are generally positive. The self-positivity bias suggests that on average thoughts about ourselves are more positive than thoughts of others. So if a consumer is only thinking about the self when he or she encounters a product, according to the availability-valence theory product evaluations will be relatively positive. I suggest this is the default scenario, unless a consumer encounters a label that induces the consumer to think about others (e.g., “one-size-fits-all”). When a consumer encounters a label like this, they are still going to have highly accessible thoughts about the self, and these thoughts are still going to be positive, but now the consumer is also going to have thoughts about others.

Encountering a one size fits all label makes thoughts about others available. Since past research suggests that thoughts of others are relatively less positive than thoughts about the self, I predict that when a product has a label that specifies a target market (therefore causing a consumer to think of others) product evaluations will be less favorable relative to the same product without this type of label. Note that consumers will still have thoughts about the product in both cases; the nature and type of product thoughts do not change. Differences in product evaluations are driven by the difference in thoughts about the relevant people the label cues (the self alone or the self plus others). More formally, I hypothesize:

**H1:** Consumers will generate more favorable product evaluations when product labels do not cue others (vs. when labels cue others).

If this line of thinking is correct and this effect is due to the availability of thoughts and how positive or negative those thoughts are, then this effect should be moderated in two ways: First, the effect should be reduced when thoughts of others are made more available via a priming task. Recall that more recently processed information is more available (Higgins et al. 1977). Exposure to certain terms or anecdotes (i.e., priming) may increase the accessibility of related mental associations (Berger and Fitzsimons 2008). Thus, I propose that priming thoughts about others will disrupt the high availability of self thoughts because others are more recently processed.

I suggest that in the case of an unspecified label (i.e., the label does not cue others) the thoughts that are most available are thoughts of the self, and in the case of a specified label while thoughts of the self are still present, thoughts of others are cued and therefore become more available. If priming manipulates the availability of thoughts of others, then when consumers encounter a product with an unspecified label thoughts of others as well as thoughts of the self are available for input into the evaluation. I should therefore observe a decrease in the difference in the evaluations across conditions.

**H2:** The difference in evaluations between products with a label which cues others and without labels which cue others will be attenuated when “others” are primed before product evaluation.



The second part of my theoretical explanation relies on a relative difference between the valence of the thoughts generated when consumers are thinking just about the self versus when they are thinking about themselves and others. I propose that the overall positive valence of thoughts about the self is diluted when these relatively positive thoughts are mixed with thoughts of others, which are less positive. However, it is possible that consumers' thoughts about themselves vary and are not uniformly positive. Although the self positivity bias is pervasive, a number of moderating variables that reduce this bias have been identified. For one, people exhibit the bias less on traits that are perceived as relatively uncontrollable, such as intellectual ability, than on traits that are relatively controllable, such as fairness (Alicke 1985; Allison et al. 1989). Second, the bias is greater when people provide their own definitions of ambiguous trait dimensions (Dunning et al. 1989). These reflect motivated reasoning definitions that are typically favorable to the individual rating himself. A third variable may be the launching point at which an individual begins comparisons, namely their own self-esteem.

Despite the colossal literature that has accumulated, a clear consensus as to the meaning of self-esteem is still lacking. Some researchers (e.g., Rosenberg 1965) propose a global concept (comprising self-evaluations of such items as adequacy, worth, goodness, health, appearance, skills, sexuality, and social competence) while others prefer a multifaceted model (Fleming and Courtney 1984) made up of area-specific self-evaluation among different contexts (e.g., emotional, social, physical, and academic). I prefer to use the former conceptualization in this research as 1) it is more widely used and 2) a more broad based view of self-esteem is more appropriate when associations with the self are not confined to certain domains. I am assuming that people are using their most

available thoughts to make judgments and that those thoughts should not be confined to a specific context.

This global view of self-esteem is also reflected in its measurements. Rosenberg (1965) took an integrated approach to self-esteem, including both affective and cognitive-evaluative aspects of the self in his conceptualization of self-esteem. Since its introduction, the Rosenberg Self-Esteem scale (Rosenberg 1965) has become the most commonly used measure of self-esteem and has received more than 3000 citations (see Kwan and Mandisodza 2007, for a review).

If the difference between self-evaluation and the evaluation of others (i.e., the self-positivity bias) is driving the differences in product evaluations across labeling types as I predict, then an increase or decrease in self-esteem becomes influential in the evaluation of a product. Conceptually, the difference in labeling effects I predict exists because of the difference between evaluations of the self and evaluations of others. Consequently, if a consumer's self-esteem is low then the difference between evaluations of the self and evaluations of others is likely to be negligible. Therefore, I expect that the difference between evaluations of products with specific target market labels and products without such labels should be attenuated when consumers have a low self-esteem. Stating this moderation effect more formally:

**H3:** The difference in evaluations between products with a label which cues others and without labels which cue others will be attenuated when self-esteem is less positive.

Differences in thought valence of the self versus thought valence of the self plus others should depend on the valence of thoughts generated when thinks about others. Previous research uses this notion to suggest a motivational mechanism underlies these differential product evaluations. Namely, that people recognize that others are present and consciously try to avoid being associated with others who are seen as unfavorable. The literature on reference groups and the influence that these reference groups exert on judgment will illuminate this potential explanation.

### **Reference Groups and Target Markets**

If we are cued to think of others, then we are likely to be influenced by the type of others we consider. Research on reference groups is focused on motivational accounts of consumers either approaching or avoiding associations with a reference group to which consumers do not currently belong.

White and Dahl (2006), however, believe that consumers are not only motivated to differentiate themselves from out-groups but, rather, that they are motivated to *positively* differentiate the self from out-groups. That is to say that when people differentiate they do so in such a way that the out-group is seen as more negative than the self in order to preserve self-esteem. That people strive for positive distinctiveness from out-groups is a key postulate of social identity theory (Tajfel and Turner 1986). People often are motivated to achieve a positive social identity (and avoid a negative social identity) and use a variety of strategies to do so, such as decreasing affiliations

with groups that do not confer positive associations (Jackson et al. 1996), and avoiding products associated with negatively viewed social identities (Tepper 1994; White and Argo 2009; White and Dahl 2006). Thus, consumers are particularly motivated to consume in a way that avoids unfavorable associations. And so, it seems likely that if a cue suggests that a product is for some dissociative group, then evaluations of the product should be low. However, this theoretical perspective would argue the opposite if a cue indicated that a product is associated with an aspirational group. Aspirational groups are circles that one wishes to be a part of. Given the desire to dissociate from negative reference groups, it seems reasonable that a consumer would welcome the positive associations of belonging to an aspirational group. Therefore a motivational explanation may predict a similar result to the availability-valence generated hypotheses for a dissociative reference group but would predict the opposite result for an aspirational reference group.

The availability-valence theory suggests a similar outcome. If the valence of thoughts generated by encountering a product associated with a dissociative group is less positive than the valence of thoughts associated with an aspirational group, the evaluation of a product should be less favorable:

**H4:** Consumers will generate more favorable product evaluations when product labels indicate a product association with an aspirational reference group versus when labels indicate an association with a dissociative reference group.

Reference group literature suggests that if products are associated with an aspirational group, that the resulting evaluations of the products should be more favorable. This research suggests that the desire to be identified as a member of these aspirational groups causes consumers to generate more favorable evaluations. However, these studies do not examine the valence of the thoughts that are made available when thinking about these aspirational reference groups. It is my contention that the desire to be identified as an aspirational group member and the thoughts generated when thinking about aspirational group members are theoretically distinct. Since the self-positivity bias suggests self thoughts are generally more positive than thoughts of others I expect that products evaluated from an egocentric perspective will be more favorable even when compared to products associated with aspirational reference groups. Therefore, I expect:

**H5:** Consumers will generate more favorable product evaluations when product labels do not indicate others versus when product labels indicate an association with an aspirational reference group.

Studies 1 and 2 in this dissertation suggest evidence for H1 and H2, that consumers evaluate products more favorably whose labels do not suggest an intended target market compared to products that carry a label suggesting a specific target market. Study 1 tests H1, as I present participants with products that are either labeled as for men and women (i.e., “unisex”) or labeled with no gender related target market information. In study 2, I use three different products to show that products labeled “one size fits all” are less likely to be favorably evaluated compared to those without such labels. Further, I

show that when thoughts of others are made more accessible through priming the differences in product evaluations goes away. In study 3 I demonstrate that the amount of dilution of self thoughts impacts product evaluations. Study 4 provides additional evidence that the difference in valence of self thoughts and thoughts of others impacts product evaluations. Study 5 more directly tests the process of thought availability and valence using spontaneously generated thought protocols and response latency measures. Finally, study 6 provides support for H5 that suggests a motivational account for these effects is insufficient.

## **CHAPTER 4**

### **STUDY 1**

Product positioning labels may be unspecified (i.e., target market information is not included in product packaging or labels) or specified in numerous ways (e.g., a product may be labeled as “for men”, “for women”, or “unisex”). Marketers may take for granted the decision of whether or not to label a product with a specific target market. However, as a foundational study, study 1 is intended to examine the presumption that specific labeling is a beneficial practice with regard to consumer evaluation of a focal product. More specifically, I test H1 to understand whether or not there is a difference between consumer evaluations of a product whose label specifies a target market and one whose label does not specify a target market.

### **Method**

#### **Design and Participants**

One hundred ninety-one undergraduates (122 female, 69 male) at the University of South Carolina participated in the study to fulfill a course requirement. These students were randomly assigned to one of sixteen conditions made up of two factors: the label on the product, and the order in which four separate products were presented. The potential existed for participants to fatigue through the study and therefore rate later products less carefully than earlier products; so I chose to counterbalance the order in which four

products were presented such that each product was seen as the first, second, third, or fourth product in different conditions. Thus the design for this study is a 4 (Labeled Target Market: Unspecified vs. Specified “Male” vs. Specified “Female” vs. Specified “Unisex”) x 4 (Product Order: ABCD vs. DABC vs. CDAB vs. BCDA) between-subjects design.

## **Procedure**

This study was conducted in a computer laboratory setting with individual computer stations. On each computer MediaLab research software (version 2006) was preloaded. Participants were provided with an onscreen picture and description of one of four products (all product descriptions appear in Appendix A). They were then directed to answer questions related to the product they just viewed before moving on to perform the same tasks for products 2, 3, and 4. Each of the four products had a separate description accompanying the image of the product. An example of the Calvin Klein CK One fragrance description is below:

*“A long-lasting fragrance with a blend of green lemon, sheets of cedar, tangerine, neroli, lily of water, sheets of violet, musk, and wood of amber.”*

In all conditions the photographic image of the fragrance and the description were identical. The only difference across conditions was whether the description was entitled “A Fragrance by Calvin Klein” (in the unspecified condition), “A Fragrance for Men by Calvin Klein” (Specified “Male” condition), “A Fragrance for Women by Calvin



Klein” (Specified “Female” condition), or “A Unisex Fragrance by Calvin Klein” (Specified “Unisex” condition).

### **Measures**

After reading about the fragrance, participants were asked two measures to capture product attitude: how much they like the product (1 = Not at all, 7 = Very much) and their overall impression of the product (1 = Very negative, 7 = Very positive). Participants also responded to a behavioral intention question about how likely they would be to purchase the product (1 = Very Unlikely, 7 = Very likely). As these three items exhibited high reliability and reflect the same underlying construct ( $\alpha$  range from .85 to .89) they were averaged to form the dependent variable in subsequent analyses, attitude toward the product. Participants were also provided with a typical range of prices for each product and asked how much they would pay for the product. Participants then responded to questions regarding their frequency of usage and frequency of purchase for each product, so that I can control for potential effects of these variables on the dependent variable. Even though all four products are often positioned toward either men or women, some participants may feel that a certain product is more generally suitable for one gender over another. This may impact their product evaluations and therefore participants were asked “In general, [fragrances] as a product category fits ...” (1 = women only, 4 = equally to women and men, 7 = men only) and indicated the femininity (1=Not at all feminine, 7 = Very Feminine) and masculinity (1=Not at all masculine, 7 = Very

masculine) of each product. Participants also reported their gender in order to account for these effects across gender.

### **Analysis and Results**

First, the key dependent variables were analyzed using ANOVA with the product order factor as an independent variable in an effort to determine whether or not there were any differences that arose in the dependent measures due to order of presentation of the four products. No significant differences emerged (all  $ps > .05$ ) across the four order arrangements for attitude toward the product. Further, when included as an independent variable, order has no interactive effect with label (all  $ps > .29$ ). Therefore, I proceeded with subsequent analyses by collapsing across the order factor.

Because the labels used in describing the stimulus (i.e., “unisex,” “for women,” etc.) were sensitive to gender effects I used gender as another factor in my analyses. I conducted an ANOVA with label factor and gender as the independent variables predicting product attitude and willingness to pay. No significant main effects for label (all  $F_s(3,3) < 3.14, ps > .05$ ) or gender (all  $F_s(1,3) < 4.16, ps > .05$ ) emerged.

*Unisex vs. Unspecified.* An ANOVA with label and gender as the independent variables and attitude toward the product as the dependent variable revealed only a significant effect of label such that when the item was described as unisex it was less liked by the participants ( $F(1, 95) = 4.28, p < .05, M_{\text{unisex}} = 3.99, M_{\text{no-label}} = 4.49$ ). These results indicate a significant difference in attitude toward the product based simply on the label used to describe it.

Further, an ANOVA with label and gender predicting beliefs about the fit between the fragrance product category and two genders revealed a significant interaction of label and gender ( $F(1, 95) = 5.24, p < .05$ ) indicating that when the fragrance was labeled as “unisex” there was no difference between the fit beliefs of men and women ( $M_{\text{women}} = 3.50, M_{\text{men}} = 3.47, p > .90$ ) (Note that these means tend to be centered around the midpoint of the scale which indicates “equally toward men and women”); whereas when the item had no such label (i.e., unspecified) participants perceived the fragrance category as more appropriate to their own gender ( $M_{\text{women}} = 3.13, M_{\text{men}} = 4.13, p < .01$ ). In line with existing egocentric theory, these results suggest that when there is no label indicating the product’s target market individuals are more likely to use themselves as an anchor. However, when the product label cues others this tendency is reduced.

## **Discussion**

The results of study 1 support the notion that consumers approach purchase situations in an egocentric manner, evaluating products with self thoughts until a label cues them to think of others. I suggest that a specified target market label interferes with this egocentric approach, shifting people’s thoughts away from the self. This shift away from an egocentric perspective leads to a less favorable attitude toward the product.

There are several issues left uncovered in study 1. First, the main effect of differences seen by label condition could be driven by a number of different factors, such as cueing the thoughts of an undesired group. Similar to the results shown in White and Dahl (2006), the “unisex” label could suggest to participants that the fragrance is also appropriate for the opposite gender. To the extent that participants wanted to avoid

associations with the opposite gender, they could have evaluated the fragrance less favorably. Second, the measure of appropriateness for a specific gender suggests that these participants thought an unlabeled product was more appropriate for their specific gender. This does not necessarily suggest that self-related thoughts are more accessible when no target market information is presented. I argue that when no target market information is present egocentric thoughts will be the most available thoughts and providing target market information will make available thoughts of others. I test this contention in study 2. If I diminish the egocentric tendency (i.e., make thoughts of others more accessible), then the differential evaluation effect should diminish.

## **CHAPTER 5**

### **STUDY 2**

Study 2 has several objectives. First, I contend that the differences in evaluation for products without a specified target market label are due in part to the availability of different thoughts. I suggest that in the unspecified label conditions the thoughts that are most available are thoughts of the self, and in the specified label conditions while thoughts of the self are still likely present, thoughts of others are cued and therefore become more available. If I can manipulate the availability of thoughts of others in the unspecified label conditions so that thoughts of others are accessible, I should observe a decrease in the difference in the evaluations across conditions. In order to test this moderation hypothesis (H2) I prime participants of study 2 with either “self” or “others” and expect to see the effect of label (specified vs. unspecified) on consumer reactions to be attenuated when participants are initially primed by others, and replicated when they are primed by self (because priming thoughts of self should mimic a naturally egocentric disposition where thoughts of self are the most accessible).

Second, I measure participants’ need for uniqueness (Tian, Bearden, and Hunter 2001) to rule out a need for uniqueness based account for my findings. Specified target market labels (especially all-inclusive labels like “unisex” and “one-size-fits-all”) may signal to consumers that the product is not unique. Since these consumers place a high desirability on products that express their individualism (Tian et al. 2001), if they

perceive that others are able to purchase the exact same product they should be more negatively influenced by such labels. Finally, I employ a different specified target market label (i.e., “one size fits all”) and two new products to extend the generalizability of the findings across labeling schemes and product categories.

## **Method**

### **Design and Participants**

Two hundred and fourteen undergraduate students at the University of South Carolina participated in this study for course credit. I chose to counterbalance the order in which three products were presented such that each product was seen as the first, second, or third product in different conditions. As such, participants were randomly assigned to one of eighteen conditions in a 2 (Labeled Target Market: Unspecified vs. Specified “One-size-fits-all”) x 3 (Prime: self vs. other vs. control) x 3 (Product Order: ABC vs. CAB vs. BCA) between-subjects design.

### **Procedure**

This study was conducted in the behavioral research computer lab with individual computer terminals. Participants again used MediaLab software to complete this study. In the beginning of the study, the participants assigned to the self-prime conditions were asked to write an e-mail introducing themselves. Specifically, they were instructed:

*In the space below, we would like you to COMPOSE AN E-MAIL TO INTRODUCE YOURSELF TO SOMEONE. Please describe yourself as you would to someone who has never met you.*

Participants in the others-prime conditions were instructed:

*In the space below, we would like you to DESCRIBE THE WAYS IN WHICH THE PEOPLE IN THIS ROOM ARE DIFFERENT FROM YOU AND FROM ONE ANOTHER. Please describe them as you would to someone who has never seen them.*

Participants in the control conditions were not asked to complete either writing task. Then, in an ostensibly unrelated task, participants were shown pictures and short descriptions of three different products (a baseball cap, a travel pillow, and a Snuggie). The descriptions and products can be seen in Appendix B. All three of these products were chosen specifically because they are positioned in the marketplace as “one-size-fits-all” products. The order of the presentation of these products was counterbalanced in order to control for order effects. In accordance with the label condition, all three products were either labeled as “one-size-fits-all” (specified label) or had no such label (unspecified).

## Measures

After viewing each product, participants responded to a measure of how much they like the product (1 = Not at all, 7 = Very much) and a behavioral intention question about how likely they would be to purchase the product (1 = Very Unlikely, 7 = Very likely). As these items were highly correlated ( $r$ s range from .53 to .65) they were averaged to form the dependent variable in subsequent analyses, attitude toward the product. Participants were also provided with a typical range of prices for each product and asked how much they would pay for the product. Participants then responded to questions regarding their frequency of usage and frequency of purchase for each product, so that I can control for potential effects of these variables on the dependent variable.

The potential exists that a specified target market label like “one-size-fits-all” will influence consumers’ valuation of the product’s intrinsic attributes. That is, a consumer may deem a product with such a label as inferior with regard to fit (If the product is “one-size-fits-all” then it may not fit very well thus inducing less favorable evaluations). Therefore, participants were asked how well they expect each product to fit themselves (1 = extremely poorly, 7 = extremely well) to rule out the possibility that specified target market labels lead to less favorable attitudes due to a perception of alteration in the intrinsic nature of the product itself. Finally, participants responded to the short form of Consumers’ Need for Uniqueness scale (Ruvio, Shoham and Brencic 2008). This scale consists of 12 items that ascertain a consumer’s desire to feel and project uniqueness from the products they buy. Examples of item statements are: “When a product I own becomes popular among the general population, I begin to use it less.” or “I often try to find a more interesting version of run-of-the-mill products because I enjoy being



original.” These items are measured on a 7-point scale with endpoints labeled 1=Strongly Disagree, 7= Strongly Agree. All scale items can be found in Appendix F.

## Analysis and Results

First, the key dependent variables were analyzed using ANOVA with the product order factor as an independent variable in an effort to determine whether or not there were any differences that arose in the dependent measures due to order of presentation of the three products. No significant differences emerged (all  $ps >.20$ ) across the three order arrangements for attitude toward the product. Similarly, for the willingness to pay measure no significant differences emerged (all  $ps >.08$ ) across the three order arrangements. Therefore I proceeded with subsequent analyses by collapsing across the order factor.

To test my predictions for the baseball cap I first conducted a MANOVA (since the two dependent variables are likely correlated) with label and prime as the independent variables and attitude toward the products and willingness to pay as the dependent variables. The results revealed a significant main effect of label ( $F(2, 207) = 40.912, p < .0001$ ) and a significant interactive effect of label and prime ( $F(4, 414) = 4.419, p < .01$ ). Follow-up analyses showed that unspecified market labeling (vs. one-size-fits-all labeling) led to more positive attitude ( $M_{\text{Unspecified}} = 5.47$  vs.  $M_{\text{OSFA}} = 4.66, F(1,69) = 10.45, p < .01$ ) and higher willingness to pay ( $M_{\text{Unspecified}} = \$17.33$  vs.  $M_{\text{OSFA}} = \$10.14, F(1,69) = 43.30, p < .001$ ) when participants were primed to think about the self. However, in the condition where participants were primed to think of others, there was no

significant effect of labeling on consumer attitude ( $M_{\text{Unspecified}} = 4.69$  vs.  $M_{\text{OSFA}} = 4.61$ ,  $F(1,70) = 0.08$ ,  $p = .78$ ) or willingness to pay ( $M_{\text{Unspecified}} = \$14.83$  vs.  $M_{\text{OSFA}} = \$12.72$ ,  $F(1,70) = 2.51$ ,  $p = .12$ ). Results in the control-unspecified label condition were not significantly different from those of the self prime condition ( $M = 5.51$  and  $M = \$17.61$ ; Attitude:  $t(70) = -.17$ ,  $p = .867$ ; WTP:  $t(70) = -.30$ ,  $p = .762$ ) suggesting that the thoughts available when consumers are not primed tend to mirror the thoughts available when consumers are specifically directed to think about the self (Note: this is consistent with findings by Naylor et al. 2011). These patterns largely hold for the travel pillow and Snuggie blanket as well (Table 1 shows all means for each product by prime and label type).

TABLE 1

**STUDY 2: Attitude and Willingness to Pay by Prime and Label Type**

<b>Attitude (Baseball Cap)</b>				<b>Willingness to Pay (Baseball Cap)</b>			
	<u>Self</u>	<u>Others</u>	<u>No Prime</u>		<u>Self</u>	<u>Others</u>	<u>No Prime</u>
Unspecified	<i>n</i> =36 5.47	<i>n</i> =36 4.69	<i>n</i> =36 5.51	Unspecified	<i>n</i> =36 \$ 17.33	<i>n</i> =36 \$ 14.83	<i>n</i> =36 \$ 17.61
	(1.007)	(1.179)	(1.099)		(4.440)	(5.818)	(3.218)
One-size-fits-all	<i>n</i> =35 4.66	<i>n</i> =36 4.61	<i>n</i> =35 4.71	One-size-fits-all	<i>n</i> =35 \$ 10.14	<i>n</i> =36 \$ 12.72	<i>n</i> =35 \$ 10.07
	(1.117)	(1.369)	(0.678)		(4.766)	(5.470)	(4.618)

  

<b>Attitude (Travel Pillow)</b>				<b>Willingness to Pay (Travel Pillow)</b>			
	<u>Self</u>	<u>Others</u>	<u>No Prime</u>		<u>Self</u>	<u>Others</u>	<u>No Prime</u>
Unspecified	<i>n</i> =36 4.69	<i>n</i> =36 3.63	<i>n</i> =36 4.53	Unspecified	<i>n</i> =36 \$ 13.06	<i>n</i> =36 \$ 11.75	<i>n</i> =36 \$ 12.92
	(1.084)	(1.675)	(1.062)		(3.718)	(5.798)	(3.628)
One-size-fits-all	<i>n</i> =35 3.63	<i>n</i> =36 3.64	<i>n</i> =35 3.73	One-size-fits-all	<i>n</i> =35 \$ 9.76	<i>n</i> =36 \$ 11.61	<i>n</i> =35 \$ 9.69
	(1.196)	(1.747)	(1.190)		(4.821)	(5.228)	(4.391)

  

<b>Attitude (Snuggie)</b>				<b>Willingness to Pay (Snuggie)</b>			
	<u>Self</u>	<u>Others</u>	<u>No Prime</u>		<u>Self</u>	<u>Others</u>	<u>No Prime</u>
Unspecified	<i>n</i> =36 4.44	<i>n</i> =36 3.58	<i>n</i> =36 4.60	Unspecified	<i>n</i> =36 \$ 15.36	<i>n</i> =36 \$ 13.28	<i>n</i> =36 \$ 9.36
	(1.585)	(1.615)	(0.984)		(6.284)	(6.448)	(9.172)
One-size-fits-all	<i>n</i> =35 3.70	<i>n</i> =36 3.60	<i>n</i> =35 3.61	One-size-fits-all	<i>n</i> =35 \$ 11.23	<i>n</i> =36 \$ 12.61	<i>n</i> =35 \$ 11.09
	(1.436)	(1.589)	(1.119)		(5.902)	(6.235)	(5.490)

Finally, an ANOVA predicting perceived fit with label and prime did not show any significant effects (all  $p > .08$ ) though when perceived fit was used as a covariate in the model, it was significant ( $p < .01$ ) suggesting that while fit impacts evaluations, the specified market label is not directly influencing perceptions of fit. Similarly, when the same analyses were conducted for the Consumer's need for uniqueness measure ( $\alpha = .86$ ), the effects were non-significant (all  $p > .34$ ), suggesting that need for uniqueness is not an influential factor in the observed effect.

## Discussion

These results suggest that specified-market labels (vs. unspecified labels) reduce consumers' purchase likelihood by increasing the availability of thoughts of others at the time the judgment is being made. Consumers are by default in an egocentric state (i.e., their available thoughts are about the self) as suggested by the similarity of the control condition where there was no prime and the condition where consumers were explicitly directed to think about the self. Only when primed with thoughts of others did a reduction in product attitudes and willingness to pay result, suggesting that when thoughts of others are introduced (i.e., made more available) they negatively impact product evaluations.

Further, uniqueness motives do not play a significant role in the reduction of attitudes. One may suspect that consumers see a label that reads, "one-size-fits-all" and conclude that therefore the product may not be apt to express their unique identity. However, the opposite could in fact be true. If a consumer has a high need for

individuality and notices that other consumers are not wearing or using products that are “one-size-fits-all,” then use of that product demonstrates uniqueness.

Additionally, I find no evidence that a specified market label alters consumers’ perceptions of intrinsic product attributes. While how well a product fits a consumer certainly has an impact on their evaluation of the product, a “one-size-fits-all” label does not change consumers’ perceptions of how well these products will fit them versus no label. The non-significant results pertaining to fit perceptions somewhat alleviate the concern about consumers perceiving products with specified target market labels as less tailored to their own preferences. However, in study 4 I intend to test this again to examine the robustness of my conclusion that fit does not explain the result.

Study 2 suggests support for the first dimension of my preferred theoretical explanation; that is, product evaluations depend on the overall thoughts available at the time of judgment. If a label cues thoughts of others then those thoughts of others become more available. However, I have not yet explored the second piece of this theory which suggests that product evaluations are dependent not just on the available thoughts, but also how positive or negative those thoughts are. Study 3 examines this dimension.

## **CHAPTER 6**

### **STUDY 3**

The purpose of study 3 is three-fold. First, I measure participants' reported self-esteem using the Rosenberg Self-esteem scale (1965) in order to test H3, that the egocentric effect of more favorably evaluating a product with no specified target market label will be attenuated when one's self evaluation is low. The differences between products without specific target market labels and with specified target market labels should be larger for individuals with high self-esteem and lower for individuals with low self-esteem. Second, this study is designed to further test a new specification strategy that marketers may use in labeling their products. This study will employ the label "for all ages" to further examine the robustness of this effect. Finally, this study uses a sample that is different from the undergraduate population in order to contribute to the ecological validity of these findings.

#### **Method**

##### **Participants and Design**

Two hundred and twenty-nine participants were recruited through Amazon.com's Mechanical Turk website for this study. The sample was 54% male and the average age of the participants was 32. The design of this study is a 2 (Label: Unspecified vs. Specified "For all Ages") x 2 (Self-esteem: measured) between-subjects design.

## **Procedure**

This study was conducted using the Qualtrics survey programming software. Participants were invited to click an Internet link that directed them to the questionnaire online. Participants saw two separate product descriptions. The first was for a fictitious board game called “Blargh!” It was described as “the outrageous, award-winning board game packed with fun! Use your eyes, ears, and fingers to score as many points as you can. When you play Blargh!, you will use your brain in ways you never imagined and find yourself doing the unexpected.” The second product was a symphony concert featuring cinema scores. This concert was described: “Coming Soon! At the movies, nothing heightens the suspense, enhances the romance, and ratchets up the thrills more than the music. From the earliest days of the cinema, filmmakers have turned to composers to help bring their art to life. Now you can hear that music performed as part of this new National Symphony Orchestra festival.” Those individuals in the specified target market condition saw these same products labeled as “for all ages,” both on the package (or in the case of the concert tickets on the photo of the tickets themselves) and at the end of the above descriptions. The unspecified condition had no label indicating an intended target market. This represents the only difference between the two conditions.

## **Measures**

Similar to study 2, participants were asked to evaluate each product and indicate how much they would like the board game (1 = Not at all, 7 = Very much), their likelihood of purchase (1= Not at all, 7 = Very likely), and their willingness to pay for

each item. The two scaled measures were highly correlated ( $r$ 's ranged from .80 to .86), so they were averaged to form the dependent variable product attitude. Participants also indicated how important these products were to them, how familiar they were with each product, and how often they used each product (1= Not at all, 7= Very important/familiar/often). Next, participants self-reported their self-esteem using the Rosenberg self-esteem scale (1965). This scale consists of 10 statements (both positively and negatively worded) about an individual's personal evaluation of themselves (e.g., "I feel that I have a number of good qualities", "At times I think I am no good at all"). These items are scored on a 4-point scale (1= Strongly disagree, 4=Strongly agree). Finally, participants indicated their gender and age.

## **Analysis and Results**

Two participants were removed from these analyses because their responses fell outside a plus or minus two standard deviation range from the sample mean. Further examination revealed straight line responding patterns where these participants clicked all "1" answer choices for the entire survey. Subsequently these participants were deleted from the dataset and analyses are reported with the remaining two hundred twenty-seven participants.

Preliminary results show some main effects of propensity to play games or attend concerts on the dependent variable, but these measures do not interact with the independent variable (product label). I conducted regression models predicting attitude toward the product, and willingness to pay with label (-1 = Unspecified label, 1 =



Specified “For all Ages” label), and self-esteem (mean-centered). I report the results for attitude toward the board game “Blargh!,” although the attitude measure for the concert tickets showed a similar pattern of results (see Table 2). The results revealed a significant main effect of label ( $\beta = -.24$ ,  $t(226) = -2.42$ ,  $p < .05$ ) as well as a significant interaction of label and self-esteem ( $\beta = -.29$ ,  $t(226) = -2.24$ ,  $p < .05$ ). I then conducted a spotlight analysis (Aiken and West 1991; Fitzsimons 2008) one standard deviation below and above the mean of self-esteem to assess differences in product attitude based on the label at low versus high levels of self-esteem. The planned contrast for those whose self-esteem is low revealed no significant effect of label ( $\beta = -.02$ ,  $t(226) = -.11$ ,  $p = .91$ ); these individuals’ attitude toward the board game did not differ based on the label of the product. The planned contrast for those who are high in self-esteem did demonstrate a negative effect of label ( $\beta = -.47$ ,  $t(226) = -3.28$ ,  $p < .01$ ), such that these individuals liked the board game less when it was labeled “for all ages.”

Table 2

THE INFLUENCE OF LABEL ON ATTITUDE AND WILLINGNESS TO PAY FOR  
BOARD GAME AND CONCERT TICKETS

Label	Blargh! Board Game		Concert Tickets	
	Attitude	WTP	Attitude	WTP
No Label	4.20 (1.73)	\$14.06 (4.78)	3.99 (1.74)	\$13.44 (5.48)
"For all ages"	3.74 (1.58)	\$13.79 (4.33)	3.54 (1.71)	\$11.62 (5.11)

Predictors	Blargh! Board game					
	Attitude			WTP		
	Beta	t(226)	<i>p</i>	Beta	t(226)	<i>p</i>
Label	-0.244	-2.42	0.016	-0.130	-0.43	0.668
Self-esteem	0.811	6.342	< .001	-0.504	-1.306	0.193
Label x self-esteem	-0.286	-2.238	0.026	-0.167	-0.434	0.665

	Concert tickets					
	Attitude			WTP		
	Beta	t(226)	<i>p</i>	Beta	t(226)	<i>p</i>
Label	-0.228	-2.005	0.046	-0.901	-2.556	0.011
Self-esteem	0.057	0.39	0.697	-0.563	-1.257	0.21
Label x self-esteem	-0.283	-1.956	0.052	0.072	0.161	0.872

## Discussion

The results of this study suggest evidence for the valence aspect of my proposed theoretical account (H3). When the self is seen as positive (i.e., the individual has a high self-esteem) I observe the effects that an unspecified label produces more favorable evaluations than a product with specific target market information. However, when an individuals' own perception of self-esteem is low, the difference in product evaluations when they are thinking only about themselves and when they are thinking about themselves plus others attenuates significantly. Overall, the thoughts available when one has a low self-esteem are less positive than when an individual has high self esteem. This is manifested in more favorable product evaluations in the condition where consumers are thinking only about the self. However, when the product label cues consumers to think about others, the effect of self-thoughts becomes diluted by less favorable thoughts of others.

The self-positivity bias is characterized by a relative difference in one's self-evaluation and evaluation of others. Study 3 suggests that this difference can be mitigated when one's self evaluation is low thereby creating little difference in the valence of self thoughts and the valence of thoughts of others. However, differences in thought valence between the self and others can happen in multiple ways. Not only can there be a difference in self evaluation, but there can be a difference in others evaluation. Study 4 examines how the thought valence of the others that are cued may also influence evaluations of a product.

## **Chapter 7**

### **STUDY 4**

Study 4 has three main objectives. First, it is possible that the labels I employ are doing more than cueing thoughts of others. One could argue that if a consumer encounters a product label that indicates it is “one size fits all,” the consumer may generate an inference that the product is less customized to their desires. Previous literature suggests that customization can have a profound effect on a consumer’s attitude and intention to purchase a product (Franke and Schrier 2008). In this study I manipulate whether or not consumers are able to customize a product to their liking to investigate whether specified target market labels show the same negative effect on consumer reactions even when the product is customized to a consumers’ particular desires. If the differences in product evaluations are driven solely by perceptions that a specified target market label leads to some perceived change in the product’s intrinsic nature (e.g., it fits better, it tastes different), then I should not observe a negative effect of specified target market labeling on attitude toward the product when the product is customized to their specifications. However, if after I control for the effects of customization I still obtain a significant difference in specified vs. unspecified target market labels, I can be confident that perceptions of customization are not the sole driving force behind the differences I see.

Second, I seek to test the notion that the valence of the thoughts about others that are available when a judgment is being made is important in shaping the overall judgment of a product. To do this I measured consumers' aversion toward the group of customers that is implied as the target market of the product by the label. Specifically, I expect the differential effect of labels on attitudes to be more pronounced for those consumers who are higher (vs. low) in aversion to the consumer segment implied by the label. That is, if a label brings to mind thoughts of people to which I am more averse, my attitude toward the product should be even less favorable.

Finally, I employ a new method of cueing thoughts of others through labels. In the previous three studies the specified market label explicitly informs consumers to whom a product is marketed. In this study I will use a foreign language to subtly cue consumers to think of others. Specifically, English speaking consumers will be cued to think of other people when they see stimuli in both English and Spanish languages. This should serve as evidence that marketers are able to cue thoughts of others in a variety of ways, and not just through explicit labeling practices.

## **Method**

### **Participants and Design**

Two hundred and forty-three undergraduates at the University of South Carolina participated in the study, which had a 2 (Customization: no-customization vs. customization) x 2 (Label: English only vs. English + Spanish) x 2 (Aversion to Hispanics: measured) between-subjects design. Participants were randomly assigned to

one of the four manipulated conditions. Aversion to Hispanics was a measured variable using an adapted seven-item seven-point scale (Henry and Sears 2002).

## **Procedure**

This study was conducted in the behavioral research lab at the University of South Carolina using Qualtrics online research software. Students were brought into a computer lab with individual computer stations where the software randomly assigns them to one of the four conditions. Participants were told to imagine they go to a nationwide frozen yogurt retailer (“Tutti Frutti”) that allows consumers to pick and choose different yogurt and topping combinations. Participants were then presented with 18 different topping choices (e.g., almonds, strawberries, mango, etc.). In the customization condition, participants were able to select from the 18 different items to create their own frozen yogurt concoction. In the non-customization condition participants were presented with the list of potential menu items, but did not actually select any items. In the English and Spanish condition, menu items were listed in both English and Spanish (e.g., “strawberries/ fresas”), whereas in the English only condition menu items were presented only in English. Participants then answered questions about their yogurt concoctions.

## **Measures**

Similar to study 2, participants were asked to evaluate how much they would like their frozen yogurt (1= Not at all, 7= Very much) and indicate their likelihood of

purchase (1=Very unlikely, 7=Very likely). Since these items were highly correlated ( $r = .67$ ) and reflect the same latent construct, I combined them to form the dependent variable used in subsequent analyses, product attitude. In addition, participants were asked how much they would be willing to pay for a cup (8 oz.) of their frozen yogurt. They also answered a single item about the intrinsic nature of the product (“How good do you expect the yogurt to taste?” 1=Extremely Bad, 7= Extremely Good). Participants answered questions regarding familiarity with the product and how often they purchase yogurt products like the one shown in the stimuli. Next, aversion to Hispanics was measured using an adapted seven-item seven-point scale (Henry and Sears 2002) that includes items such as “I dislike Hispanic associations” and “I want to avoid being associated with Hispanic people” (1 = Strongly disagree, 5 = Strongly agree). These items were averaged to create a composite measure of aversion to Hispanics ( $\alpha = .85$ ). Finally, participants responded to questions regarding their familiarity and involvement with frozen yogurt and reported their gender, age, ethnicity, and whether or not they are fluent in Spanish.

## **Analysis and Results**

Preliminary analyses showed no significant effects of familiarity, involvement or gender on the dependent variables. In addition, thirteen participants identified themselves as being fluent in Spanish thus were excluded from the dataset because if they were assigned to the English and Spanish language condition the manipulation may not cause

them to think of others as intended. These participants were not disproportionately assigned to any condition ( $\chi^2(3) = 1.45, p = .694$ ).

I conducted regression models with the remaining two hundred thirty participants predicting attitude toward the product and willingness to pay with label (1 = English and Spanish label, -1 = English label), customization (1 = customized, -1 = not customized), and aversion to Hispanics (mean-centered). I report the results for attitude toward the product dependent variable, although the willingness to pay variable showed the same significant pattern of results. The results revealed significant main effects of customization ( $\beta = .22, t(229) = 4.22, p < .001$ ), label ( $\beta = -.64, t(229) = -12.35, p < .001$ ) and aversion to Hispanics ( $\beta = -.66, t(229) = -10.50, p < .001$ ) as well as a significant two-way interaction of label and aversion ( $\beta = -.58, t(229) = -9.11, p < .001$ ). No other effects were significant (all  $p > .15$ ). To test my predictions, I first examined the slopes of the aversion to Hispanics variable at each level of label. As expected, when the product is described in both English and Spanish, the slope of aversion to Hispanics was negative and significant ( $\beta = -1.24, t(117) = -10.74, p < .0001$ ); as aversion to Hispanics increased there was a decrease in attitude toward the product. On the other hand, when the product is described only in English, aversion to Hispanics did not have a significant impact on attitude toward the product ( $\beta = -.022, t(119) = -.25, p > .80$ ). In addition, I conducted a spotlight analysis (Aiken and West 1991; Fitzsimons 2008) one standard deviation below and above the mean of aversion to Hispanics to assess differences in the product attitude based on the label at low versus high levels of aversion to Hispanics. The planned contrast for those whose aversion to Hispanics is low revealed no significant effect of label ( $\beta = -.068, t(229) = -.72, p > .40$ ); these individuals' attitude toward the yogurt did



not differ based on the label of the product. The planned contrast for those who are highly aversive to Hispanics did demonstrate a negative effect of label ( $\beta = -1.28$ ,  $t(229) = -13.51$ ,  $p < .0001$ ), such that these individuals liked the yogurt less when it was described both in English and Spanish (vs. only in English).

Finally, a regression predicting taste perceptions with language and customization showed only a significant effect of customization ( $F(1,226) = 33.94$ ,  $p < .001$ ). When consumers are allowed to customize their own yogurt they perceive that a change in the intrinsic nature of the product (i.e., taste) has taken place. However, the ingredients listed in both English and Spanish does not change the way they perceive the yogurt will taste ( $F(1,226) = 2.06$ ,  $p = .153$ ). It is interesting to note that a very small difference between the customization and no customization conditions produces these results. Where in the customization condition participants actively select ingredients, in the no customization condition the participants are still able to see the variety of ingredients and could therefore still be thinking of their “perfect combination.” As such, this customization manipulation represents a conservative test of the phenomena, yet still yields significant results.

## **Discussion**

Unsurprisingly, when consumers are allowed to customize a product to their own specifications their attitudes are more favorable. However, even after accounting for these effects a label effect persists, such that a label which brings to mind other people (in this case Spanish speaking individuals) will result in less favorable evaluations of a

product. Further, while customization influences consumers' perceptions of the intrinsic nature of products and this in turn influences attitudes (i.e., customization makes yogurt taste better, which makes consumers like it more), a cue to think of others does not impact the intrinsic value of the product. This finding, coupled with previous findings from study 2, indicate that the less favorable evaluations are not driven by the perception of some flaw with the product itself. Rather, I find consistent evidence showing that consumers make differential evaluative judgments about the product based on the valence of thoughts about the individuals either specified or suggested by a product label. Consumers seem to be quite adept at gleaned this information from the labels they encounter. However, in this study I examine one reference point in the relative comparison of the self and others. I look at varying degrees of valence for others—along some continuum of affinity or aversion to Hispanic individuals.

One characteristic of the all-inclusive labels I have used thus far in experiments is that they exhibit a high potential to connote dissociative others. That is, when a consumer sees a “one-size-fits-all” label, it may be easy to call to mind a dissociative other (e.g., an obese person). Thus, in these cases the dissociative reference group hypothesis may still hold. However, specified-market labels need not include only potentially aversive other consumers. A label may indicate that potentially aspirational reference group members may be included in the target market, thereby increasing the average valence of thoughts available for judgment. For example, if a current student from this university sees a product labeled “Gamecock Students and Alumni,” the inclusion of alumni (something to which current students aspire) may increase the valence of the thoughts available, thereby increasing the evaluations of the product itself. However, if we evaluate others in line

with theories on the self-positivity bias, any included other (regardless of whether or not they are from an aspirational group or a dissociative group) should lower the total valence of the thoughts available. That is, self-positivity bias predicts perceptions of superiority over even aspirational others. This should result in a less favorable evaluation of the product marketed toward this group as compared to a product evaluated from an egocentric perspective. These contentions are tested in study 5.

## **Chapter 8**

### **Study 5**

Previous work in consumer research adopts a motivational explanation for product evaluations, such that consumers attach the valence of thoughts about a specified reference group to products associated with that reference group. Therefore, identical products associated with more or less favorable reference groups will be evaluated more or less favorably. Few of these studies employ a control condition and most past work relies on a comparison across different reference groups (e.g., Escalas and Bettman 2007; Bearden and Etzel 1982). Study 5 is designed to understand the impact of others in relation to the self. While study 3 explores the impact that the valence of self-thoughts has on evaluations, this study seeks to further explicate the notion that the driving force behind differences in product evaluations is due to the valence of total thoughts available. Whereas in study 3 the valence of the available thoughts is measured, in this study I will manipulate the valence of thoughts and still expect to find differences in product evaluations.

### **Method**

#### **Participants and Design**

One hundred ninety-two students at the University of South Carolina took part in this study for extra credit. Participants were randomly assigned to one of three conditions. This is a one-factor three level between-subjects design such that the three conditions are: Unspecified target market, Dissociative group target, and Aspirational group target.

## **Procedure**

Participants were presented with images and descriptions of a new brand of cookie purportedly being tested on the market. Pretests were conducted to find an image of cookies that was seen as moderately high in appeal, so as to avoid ceiling effects. Minimal information about the ingredients or taste of the cookies was given in order to focus participants' thoughts on the intended manipulation of potential target market. Participants in the dissociative group condition saw an image of cookies with the label "For Clemson Tigers students and Alumni" (It is important to note that Clemson University is the primary rival school for the students involved in this study). Participants in the Aspirational group condition saw the same image of cookies with the label "For South Carolina Gamecocks students and Alumni" while participants in the unspecified condition saw the cookies without either label. The participants then answered the dependent variables described below.

## **Measures**

Similar to previous studies, participants were asked to evaluate the cookies and indicate their likelihood of purchase on the same seven-point scales. In addition, participants were asked how much they identified with being a student at USC, how much they desired to become a graduate of USC, as well as their liking for Clemson students and their beliefs that Clemson students and alumni were "a group that they did not want to be associated with." All of these scales were anchored by 1- not at all and 7- very much. Finally, participants responded to questions regarding their familiarity and involvement with cookies and reported their gender, age, classification year, ethnicity and

whether or not they are from the state of South Carolina (as potentially out-of-state students may have less experience with the Clemson-South Carolina rivalry).

### **Analysis and Results**

Gender, age, classification year, and state of residence had no significant impact on the dependent variables. An ANOVA with label as the independent variable and attitude toward the cookies as the dependent variable revealed a significant overall effect of label ( $F(2, 190) = 18.22, p < .01, M_{\text{Unspecified}} = 5.76, M_{\text{Gamecock}} = 4.49, M_{\text{Tiger}} = 2.86$ ). These results indicate a significant difference in attitude toward the product based simply on the label used to describe it. Planned contrasts indicate significant differences between the unspecified label and the dissociative label conditions ( $F(1,63) = 23.23, p < .01$ ). Most interestingly, there is also a significant difference between the unspecified label and the aspirationally labeled cookies ( $F(1,63) = 6.19, p < .05$ ).

### **Discussion**

The results of this study are contrary to what would be predicted using a motivational account. I observe significant differences in product evaluations between a product associated with an aspirational reference group and the same product associated with a dissociative reference group. However, I also observe significant differences between an egocentric evaluation of a product and evaluation of a product whose label cues other consumers. The results of studies 4 and 5 suggest that the overall valence of thoughts can be impacted by the composition of the others indicated by a product's label. However, these studies also demonstrate that this relationship is not binary. The relative

positivity or negativity of thoughts associated with different reference groups impacts the positivity of overall thoughts. The same can be true for availability. Availability should not be construed as a binary occurrence (thoughts of others are either available or they are not available). Rather, thought availability occurs along a continuum as well. Study 6 examines more closely the impact of having self thoughts relatively more or less available in an attempt to test both aspects of the availability-valence theory together in a single study.

## **Chapter 9**

### **STUDY 6**

The purpose of study 6 is to measure more directly the process by which a specified target market label leads to a less favorable product evaluations. It is my contention that a specified target market label leads to generation of thoughts of others and this shift away from an egocentric perspective has detrimental effects for product evaluations. In study 6 I test whether such a decrease in the accessibility of thoughts of the self mediates the relationship between specified/unspecified target market labels and subsequent evaluations.

Previous research has used multiple methods to examine shifts from an egocentric anchor. Some have championed thought listing techniques as a way to infer information about cognitive structures which may otherwise go unmeasured (Cacioppo, von Hippel, and Ernst 1997). Naylor and colleagues in their study 3 (2011, p.626) used thought listings to demonstrate that egocentrically anchored participants generate thoughts of similarity to ambiguous reviewers. In a pretest Naylor et al. (2011) also examined self-thought availability through a response latency task. In this task, participants were asked to indicate how well 20 self-relevant items (e.g., “friendly,” “creative,” “lazy”) described them. Participants were faster in responding to these items when they were exposed to stimuli similar to the self than they were when exposed to stimuli which indicated that an



egocentric anchor was inappropriate. This suggests that when only self thoughts are available response times to self-relevant items are faster than when thoughts of the self and others are available. My predictions rely on the premise that thoughts of the self are chronically highly accessible and that thoughts about others become more accessible only when one is exposed to product labels that cue others. Therefore, self thoughts should be relatively less accessible (as would be indicated by slower response times to self-relevant descriptors) after exposure to a label that generates thoughts of others. This difference in self thought accessibility should mediate the relationship between label type and product evaluations. Additionally, the nature of the impact of self thought accessibility on product evaluations should change at different levels of self-esteem. That is, self-esteem should moderate the relationship between self thought accessibility and product evaluations.

## **Method**

### **Design and Participants**

One hundred ninety undergraduate students at the University of South Carolina participated in this study for course credit. Participants were randomly assigned to one of two conditions in a 2(Labeled Target Market: Unspecified vs. Specified “For all ages”) x 2 (Self-esteem: measured) between-subjects design.

### **Procedure**

This study was identical to study 3 (where participants evaluated both a board game, Blargh!, and a pair of concert tickets) with two additions: After the dependent

measures participants were asked to list what thoughts, feelings, and reactions they had while viewing the stimuli (Note that this procedure mirrors previous work on thought listing techniques from Cacioppo et al. 1997). Next participants were introduced to the 20 self-relevant descriptor items from Naylor et al. (2011) (see Appendix F) and were instructed to respond as “quickly as possible” to how well these items described them (1 = Not at all, 7 = Very well). Participants were unaware that the Qualtrics software was recording response latencies to these items. These response times were summed across all 20 items to form the self-thought accessibility measure.

### **Measures**

After viewing each product, participants responded to a measure of how much they like the product (1 = Not at all, 7 = Very much) and a behavioral intention question about how likely they would be to purchase the product (1 = Very Unlikely, 7 = Very likely). As in previous studies these items were averaged (*rs* range from .51 to .87) to form the dependent variable in subsequent analyses, attitude toward the product.

Participants were also provided with a typical range of prices and asked how much they would pay for the board game and the concert tickets.

### **Analysis and Results**

*Pretest.* In order to test that the labeling scheme I employ is having the intended effect of cueing the thoughts of others, I conducted a preliminary test using the labels

from study 3 (i.e., “for all ages” and no specified market label). The measurement of these manipulations may generate greater accessibility of thoughts of others which should influence the outcome of the study. Therefore, I conducted a simple pretest to examine the suitability of my manipulations. Forty-two undergraduate students participated in this pretest. They were randomly assigned to one of two label conditions (Specified “for all ages” vs. Unspecified). They were presented with a picture of the board game Blargh! that was either emblazoned “For all Ages” (Specified label condition) or had no such label (unspecified condition). Participants were then asked to what extent they were thinking about others (1= Not at all, 7= Very much). Participants in the specified label condition ( $M = 4.48$ ) thought more about others than did participants in the unspecified label condition ( $M = 2.15$ ) ( $F(1,41) = 36.98, p < .001$ ), suggesting the labels manipulate thoughts about others as intended.

*For all ages vs. Unspecified.* To test my predictions for the board game I first ran a regression with label (-1 = Unspecified, 1 = “For all ages”) and self-esteem (mean centered) as the independent variables and attitude toward the product as the dependent variable. The results reveal a main effect of label ( $\beta = -.23, t(189) = -1.93, p = .06$ ), a main effect of self-esteem ( $\beta = .60, t(189) = 2.12, p < .05$ ), and an interactive effect of label and self-esteem ( $\beta = -.68, t(189) = -2.44, p < .05$ ). The results suggest that attitudes toward the board game are dependent on the combined effect of the label and a person’s self evaluation. This pattern of results is similar for the concert tickets as well (see Table 3).

Table 3

THE INFLUENCE OF LABEL ON ATTITUDE AND WILLINGNESS TO PAY FOR  
BOARD GAME AND CONCERT TICKETS

Label	Blargh! Board Game		Concert Tickets	
	Attitude	WTP	Attitude	WTP
No Label	5.10 (1.75)	\$13.94 (2.67)	4.51 (1.53)	\$14.35 (6.00)
"For all ages"	4.59 (1.64)	\$12.14 (3.48)	3.98 (1.44)	\$12.27 (4.95)

Predictors	Blargh! Board game					
	Attitude			WTP		
	Beta	t(186)	<i>p</i>	Beta	t(186)	<i>p</i>
Label	-0.234	-1.931	0.055	-0.920	-4.09	< .001
Self-esteem	0.595	2.123	0.035	-0.578	-1.113	0.267
Label x self-esteem	-0.682	-2.435	0.016	-0.667	-1.286	0.200

  

Predictors	Concert tickets					
	Attitude			WTP		
	Beta	t(186)	<i>p</i>	Beta	t(186)	<i>p</i>
Label	-0.256	-2.425	0.016	-1.011	-2.53	0.012
Self-esteem	0.328	1.349	0.179	1.096	1.189	0.236
Label x self-esteem	-0.793	-3.257	0.001	-0.512	-0.556	0.579

*Mediation Analysis.* I conducted a mediation analysis to investigate whether the effect on label of product evaluations is mediated by self-thought accessibility (using the response times to the 20 self-relevant items). I expect greater self-thought accessibility to favorably influence product evaluations only when self-esteem is high. Thus, I predict mediated moderation where self-esteem moderates both the independent-dependent and mediator-dependent variable relationships.

In line with Baron and Kenny (1986) I conducted a series of regression models. The first regression model predicting product attitude with label (-1 = Unspecified, 1 = “For all ages”) reveals a significant effect of label ( $\beta = -.25$ ,  $t(189) = -2.05$ ,  $p < .05$ ). A second regression model predicting self-thought accessibility with label revealed a significant effect of label ( $\beta = 3.01$ ,  $t(189) = 8.49$ ,  $p < .0001$ ). Finally, when I regressed product attitude on label and self-thought accessibility, self-thought accessibility was significant as a factor ( $\beta = -.13$ ,  $t(189) = -5.48$ ,  $p < .001$ ), while the effect of label was non-significant ( $\beta = .14$ ,  $t(189) = 1.02$ ,  $p = .31$ ), indicating that the effect of label on product attitude was fully mediated by self-thought accessibility. This mediation was confirmed by a Sobel test ( $z = -4.54$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Further, I conducted a bootstrapping analysis using 1,000 bootstrap samples and following the procedure recommended by Preacher, Rucker, and Hayes (2007) using their PROCESS SPSS macro. I found a significant indirect effect of self-thought accessibility on product attitude ( $b = -.39$ , bootstrapped 95% CI: -1.23 to -.15).

Since I propose that the effect of self-thought accessibility is also moderated by self-esteem, I followed the analysis plan for mediated moderation (model 15) from Preacher and colleagues (2007). As reported before, a significant self-esteem x label interaction emerged when regressed on the dependent variable, indicating self-esteem moderated the effect of label on product attitude. Of central interest, I observe a significant self-esteem x self-thought accessibility interaction (dependent variable model:  $b = -.42$ ,  $SE = .10$ ,  $t(189) = -4.36$ ,  $p < .001$ ), indicating that the effect of self thought accessibility on product attitude is also moderated by self-esteem. Additional analyses reveal that conditional direct effects occur only for high self-esteem ( $b = .78$ ,

bootstrapped 95% CI: -1.54 to -.68) but not for low self-esteem ( $b = -.01$ , bootstrapped 95% CI: -1.01 to .27). This provides process evidence consistent with my theorizing that self thought accessibility effects occur when self-esteem is high but not when self-esteem is low.

*Thought listings.* Two independent raters, both blind to my hypotheses coded the thought listings. The raters counted all thoughts about the product (e.g., “Symphonies are long”), the self (e.g., “how much fun I would have playing the game”), and others (e.g., “bunch of screaming kids there”), and further coded the valence of these thoughts (+1 for positive thoughts and -1 for negative thoughts). The raters had a high degree of agreement for this task (Cohen’s kappas for product, self, and others agreement ranged from .68 to .82; for valence Cohen’s kappa = .93), and a third rater (also blind to study hypotheses) resolved any disagreements.

I conducted several ANOVA analyses to understand if there were differences in thought listings by label condition. First, there were no significant differences in total thoughts elicited ( $M_{Unspecified} = 2.91$ ,  $M_{Specified} = 3.16$ ,  $F(1,188) = 1.43$ ,  $p = .23$ ), nor were there significant differences for number of product thoughts ( $M_{Unspecified} = 2.34$ ,  $M_{Specified} = 2.29$ ,  $F(1,188) = .119$ ,  $p = .73$ ). There were also no significant differences across the label conditions for number of self thoughts elicited ( $M_{Unspecified} = .44$ ,  $M_{Specified} = .37$ ,  $F(1,188) = .754$ ,  $p = .386$ ). However, participants in the specified market label condition generated more thoughts about others ( $M = .51$ ) than did participants in the unspecified target market label condition ( $M = .13$ ;  $F(1,188) = 17.37$ ,  $p < .001$ ) suggesting that the label “for all ages” influenced consumers to think about others. In order to test for mediation I conducted the same series of regressions as above. Recall that label type had

a significant influence on product attitude. However, when I conducted a regression analysis with product attitude as the dependent variable and label type and number of thoughts of others as the independent variables, the thoughts of others variable was non-significant ( $\beta = -.31$ ,  $t(189) = -1.547$ ,  $p = .13$ ), indicating that these data do not show sufficient support for mediation.

## **Discussion**

Study 6 demonstrates that consumers who are exposed to a specified target market label on a product are likely to generate thoughts of others. The spontaneous generation of thoughts in the coded thought protocols indicates that directionally fewer thoughts of the self are recalled when a label cues others. This matters only to the extent that these self thoughts are positive. As a person's overall average thought valence is reduced their evaluation of a product becomes less favorable. Additionally, response times to self-relevant items become slower when consumers view labels that cue thoughts of others. Mediation analyses show that this reduced self-thought availability impacts product evaluations only when coupled with valence information (higher self-esteem). Effectively, those individuals with lower self-esteem do not exhibit or exhibit to a lesser extent the self-positivity bias. That is, the difference between their own self-evaluation and the evaluation of others is relatively small when compared to the same difference for a high self-esteem individual.

This study provides process evidence that is in line with the availability-valence perspective. Marketer-provided labels can cue thoughts of others. These thoughts of

others on average are less positive than strictly egocentric (thoughts of the self) thoughts.

This is especially true of consumers with a high self-esteem.



## CHAPTER 10

### GENERAL DISCUSSION

Across six studies I show that specified target market labels may hurt, rather than help a product's success. In study 1, I demonstrate that products labeled as unisex are less liked by both males and females as opposed to the same products with labels that do not specify the gender of the target market. In study 2, I show that leaving the label unspecified leads to more positive consumer attitudes when compared to a more specific "one-size-fits-all" label. Further, the differences between the two labeling strategies was attenuated when people were primed by others, suggesting that specified target market labels remind consumers that other consumers may purchase the product, thus heightening the availability of the thoughts of others when the judgment is being made. In study 3, I moderate the effect using measured self-esteem, testing the second part of the availability-valence hypothesis that indicates when the available thoughts are lower in valence the resulting evaluation is less favorable. I also demonstrate that the negative effect of specified target market labels is not solely due to a motivational account of distancing oneself from a negatively perceived reference group. Rather, the effects that these reference groups possess stem from the valence of the thoughts associated when thinking about these groups. Finally, I use response latency measures to further examine the process through which product evaluations are made. Evaluations first depend on the availability of self and others thoughts. To the extent that self-thoughts are more available

resulting product evaluations are more favorable provided that the individuals have high self-esteem.

### **Theoretical Implications**

These findings contribute to the research on egocentrism in marketing (e.g., Naylor et al. 2011) by demonstrating that consumers evaluate products egocentrically unless they are provided with a cue to think of others. Specified target market labels act as such a cue, interrupting an egocentric perspective, resulting in negative consumer reactions to products with such labels. The negative effect of specified target market labels on consumer reactions can stem from the notion that they remind consumers about other potential customers and that they prevent consumers from using the default anchor (i.e., the self) when they process product information. Previous findings in work on egocentrism in marketing suggest that a shift from an egocentric anchor results in less perception of similarity to another person (Naylor et al. 2011). However, these findings rely on motivational theories to suggest how these decreased perceptions of similarity may influence product judgments. The implication is that when I judge some other person to be more similar to myself, then I should be motivated to comply with requests that others make.

A major contribution of this work is that my findings suggest additional insight beyond motivational theories into how thinking of others will impact consumer behavior. First, previous work has relied on the fact that others must be identified in order for one to aspire or dissociate oneself from a specific reference group. Naylor and colleagues (2011) use ambiguous others in their stimuli, but they suggest that consumers make

inferences about who those ambiguous others are, and therefore can choose to associate or dissociate from these others through their compliance with recommendations. In my studies, identification of others is only necessary at a much broader level of abstraction. In essence, the identification need only be “me” or “not me” to show an impact on product evaluations. This represents a break from previous work that assigns much more specific attributes to reference groups.

The property of “others” being more specifically identified may shift consumers into a more explicit comparison process. That is, if “others” are identified, consumers may be aware of their presence and make consciously motivated decisions of whether to adopt favorable associations or dissociate from unfavorable associations. This has been shown to be the case in much work on reference group influence (e.g., White and Dahl 2006, 2007). My work suggests a more implicit process, where the impact of “others” has a much less conscious and more automatic impact on product evaluations. This suggests some interesting insights that consumers may switch from more implicit processes of product evaluations to more explicit evaluation methods as “others” become more identifiable.

Finally, my research suggests that it is the positivity of the total thoughts generated when one is thinking about others that drives product evaluations. While others consider relative comparisons between two disparate groups, they neglect to consider the simultaneous impact of the valence of self-thoughts on evaluations. As the egocentrism literature suggests, these thoughts are chronically available when consumers make judgments and therefore have an immense impact on product evaluations. I suggest that is

important to understand the extent that these highly positive self-thoughts are diluted by less positive thoughts of others in determining how a consumer will evaluate a product.

### **Managerial Implications**

If product evaluations depend upon the total thought valence at the time of judgment of a product, then marketing managers should focus their attention on increasing the valence of total thoughts associated with their products. Marketers are likely aware that increased thoughts about the product itself will induce more favorable evaluations, but they may be less aware of the impact that non-product thoughts may have. Some more savvy marketers may focus on generating positive thoughts through association with aspirational reference groups. However, I suggest that this strategy does not go far enough. In order to maximize the positivity of total thought valence, I suggest marketers should focus consumers' thoughts on thoughts of themselves, as these thoughts tend to be most positive. I suggest that managers may be able to do this through product labeling in a manner which is counter to what prevailing wisdom may suggest.

Marketers often use product labels to position a single product as attractive to multiple segments of consumers. For instance, Calvin Klein's fragrance CK1 is marketed as "unisex", targeting both men and women. APG's Snuggie is labeled as "one size fits all" where the same blanket can accommodate a range of adult body types. Such all-inclusive labels point to the "all-fitting" aspect of the product, thereby resulting in the expansion of the potential customer pool. However, I argue in this research that marketers may unintentionally be driving customers away with their omnibus labeling

practices because all-inclusive labels may generate thoughts of others. If these thoughts of others dilute the valence of already positive self-thoughts, then resulting product evaluations are negatively impacted. Marketers should, therefore, refrain from positioning products in such a way that causes consumers to think of others. To some extent this may not always be possible, but as I demonstrate in this research, simply leaving an “all-inclusive” label off of a product is enough to generate more favorable product evaluations.

Marketers can also take an active role in increasing the availability of positive self-thoughts. Apple, for instance, brands its products as the “iPod” or “iPhone” likely inducing consumers to think about “I” instead of “you.” Using self-referential terms in marketing is not a new suggestion (see Burnkrant and Unnava 1989), but this research suggests new ways of achieving highly available self-thoughts. The recency with which thoughts have been generated impacts the availability of those thoughts for input into judgment. So even if a marketer does well to reference the self in communications to the consumer, unless those self-referential communications are present at the location of judgment they may be moot. This suggests that retail environments be crafted to be self-referential. Or, in the case of Apple, the brand name of the product itself should be self-referential.

### **Limitations and Future Directions**

The findings of this work suggest that two things must be operating in order for the effects to obtain, that thoughts of the self are chronically available and that these thoughts on average are more positive than thoughts of others. One of the problems with

this paradigm is that it is difficult to actually tell what thoughts are available in a control condition or a default state. Because consumers are always thinking about the self or using the self as a filter for new information they may find it difficult to recognize that they are processing information egocentrically. Therefore, I rely on the relative difference in availability of thoughts of others to show my proposed effects. I also demonstrate self-thought availability by using a proxy measure of response latency to self-relevant items.

Further, I employ the use of a measured account of self-esteem as an indication of the valence of self-thoughts. I could potentially add to the robustness of these effects by demonstrating that self-thought valence can be manipulated as well. I expect that my results would hold for consumers who were manipulated to think positively of themselves versus those who were manipulated to think less positively of themselves. However, this manipulation may suggest avenues for marketing managers to increase the overall favorability of product evaluations.

These findings may help to explain effects from previous studies in consumer behavior. One particularly interesting case is work on the endowment effect (Thaler 1980). The endowment effect is characterized by the discrepancy between a person's willingness to pay for a good versus their willingness to accept compensation for it once their property right to it has been established. Once a product has been accepted into a consumer's endowment it becomes part of them. Egocentrically positive thoughts may then be transferred to the item causing one to evaluate the product more favorably (and thus value it higher).

The research on egocentrism can inform emerging research streams as well. For instance, studies of an individual's power suggest effects very similar to egocentric effects; that when an individual is in a state of high power they tend to behave very egocentrically, and the reverse when an individual's sense of power is lessened. For instance, Galinsky and colleagues (2003) suggest that power attunes one to their own inner thoughts and feelings and allows them to ignore external stimuli. If this is the case, then one would expect high power individuals to evaluate products more favorably than low power individuals. To the extent that marketers can manipulate a consumer's sense of power they may be able to increase product evaluations through a focus on positive egocentric thoughts.

Finally, my research suggests that because thoughts about the self are generally more favorable than thoughts of others, any marketing action that shifts consumers away from an egocentric perspective leads to less favorable product evaluations. This notion lends itself to extensions of inquiry into other domains of marketing action. Are there other areas in which marketers are taking action when inaction may be a better strategy?

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## APPENDIX A

### Study 1 Stimuli

#### Bracelet



Magnetic Therapy  
Slim and Comfortable  
Shiny Finish Gold tone  
2 Magnets with 2000 Gauss each

#### Cap



A structured black cap made of sturdy, durable brushed canvas. 100% cotton breathes for year-round comfort. Adjustable closure with a low profile crown. Look cool on bad hair days or when shading your eyes from the sun. One size fits most.



## Sunglasses



This pair of glasses comes with a fashionable look that is made with durable plastic acetate for lighter weight and longer lasting wear. The lenses block 100% of UV-B radiation.

## A Fragrance by Calvin Klein

**CK One Electric**  
**Eau De Toilette Spray 3.4 OZ**



A long-lasting fragrance with a blend of green lemon, sheets of cedar, tangerine, néroli, lily of water, sheets of violet, musk, wood of amber.

## APPENDIX B

### Study 2 Stimuli

Neck Pillow



One Size Fits All

The Foam Neck Support Pillow provides the support your head and neck need whether you are at home, in the office, or on the go in the car. This one-size-fits-all pillow stabilizes and supports the neck and head, keeping them in proper alignment while relaxing your neck muscles and putting you at ease.



One size fits all

A structured black cap made of sturdy, durable brushed canvas. 100% cotton breathes for year-round comfort. Adjustable closure with a low profile crown. Look cool on bad hair days or when shading your eyes from the sun. One size fits all.

Snuggie



One size fits all

The blanket with sleeves! One size fits all! Curl up with a good book and your favorite warm beverage while wrapped in the comforting warmth of this Snuggie Fleece Blanket. This unique blanket with sleeves keeps you warm from head to toe, yet gives you the freedom to use your hands.

## APPENDIX C

### Study 3 and 6 Stimuli



The outrageous, award-winning board game packed with fun! Use your eyes, ears, and fingers to score as many points as you can. When you play Blargh! you'll use your brain in ways you never imagined and find yourself doing the unexpected. For all ages!



Coming Soon! At the movies, nothing heightens the suspense, enhances the romance, and ratchets up the thrills more than the music. From the earliest days of the cinema to today's blockbusters, filmmakers have turned to composers to help bring their art to life. Now you can hear that music performed as part of this new National Symphony Orchestra festival. For ALL ages.

## APPENDIX D

### Study 4 Stimuli



Tutti Frutti is a nationwide specialty frozen yogurt retailer that allows you to pick and choose different yogurt and topping combinations.

Imagine you go to Tutti Frutti and are looking at the menu options. Click as many or as few options as you wish to create your own frozen yogurt.

- |   |   |   |
|---|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Chocolate yogurt/yogur de chocolate      | <input type="checkbox"/> Coconut/coco           | <input type="checkbox"/> Banana/banano                        |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Vanilla yogurt/yogur de vainilla         | <input type="checkbox"/> Almonds/almendras      | <input type="checkbox"/> Strawberries/fresas                  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Strawberry yogurt/yogur de fresa         | <input type="checkbox"/> Raspberries/frambuesas | <input type="checkbox"/> Blackberries/moras                   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Pineapple yogurt/yogur de piña           | <input type="checkbox"/> Blueberries/arándanos  | <input type="checkbox"/> Chestnuts/castañas                   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Passion fruit yogurt/yogur de granadilla | <input type="checkbox"/> Toffee/caramelo        | <input type="checkbox"/> Mango/mangos                         |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Lemon yogurt/yogur de limón              | <input type="checkbox"/> Granola/granola        | <input type="checkbox"/> Chocolate chips/chispas de chocolate |

**APPENDIX E**

**Study 5 Stimuli**



“Big Game” Cookies

For South Carolina Gamecocks and Alumni