PERCEIVED INFLUENCE, PARASOCIAL RELATIONSHIPS, AND THE POWER OF PRODUCT PLACEMENT

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D. Jasun Carr

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This dissertation is approved by the following members of the Final Oral Committee:

Douglas Malcolm McLeod, Professor, Journalism & Mass Communication

Albert C. Gunther, Professor, Journalism & Mass Communication

Lewis Freidland, Professor, Journalism & Mass Communication

Nancy Wong, Professor, Human Ecology

Daniel Bolt, Professor, Educational Psychology

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D. Jasun Carr

Under the supervision of Professor Douglas M. McLeod

At the University of Wisconsin-Madison

The practice of product placement, the embedding of goods and services within media, has experienced a resurgence of interest in recent years both from the stand point of the practitioner seeking additional avenues by which to reach the elusive consumer, and by scholars seeking to better understand the influence that media have on the consumptive practices of the audience. Many practitioners, and some scholars, have taken the stance that the practice of product placement may currently be the most influential form of advertising and persuasion.

By moving the analysis of product placement effects beyond simple persuasion and incorporating theories addressing the role others, both real and imagined, play in the persuasive process and incorporating individual predispositions toward group-oriented behavior, this dissertation provides a more fully described model for understanding the effects observed from product placements. It also applies more developed survey methodologies to existing measures of parasocial connections, allowing for the disentangling of this key concept.

An initial study (Study 1) was conducted to validate the development of an altered parasocial connection measure, one that disentangles the relationship with the actor from that with the character. Results of this study demonstrate that the revised scale accurately taps into the parasocial relationships in question, and supports the theorized mental division between the actor and character when determining social connections.

The results of an experiment (Study 2) incorporating this scale in conjunction with measures of purchase intention, perceptions of others' exposure and product desire, and individual predispositions toward self-monitoring behavior demonstrated the complex nature of the persuasive process engendered by exposure to product placements. The change in purchase desire was found to be moderated both by our perceptions of our close social group and by our parasocial connections to the character interacting with the product. Additionally, individual levels of self-monitoring mediated the effect of the social group, and significant differences were observed between the impact of the actor and the character. These results have wide-ranging implications for researchers and practitioners.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

To date, the vast majority of product placement research has focused on public perceptions of the practice and the effects of placements within motion pictures (Babin & Carder, 1996; Brennan, Dubas, & Babin, 1999; Gupta, Balasubramanian, & Klassen, 2000; Hall, 2004; Law & Braun, 2000). However, with a few notable exceptions (i.e. Carr, 2007; Jayaraman & Zhang, 2007; Russell, 2002), there has been little research done regarding the practice in the realm of entertainment television. Further limiting our understanding of the technique is the lack of application and testing of existing mass communication, persuasive, and psychological theories to the observed effects. This limitation represents a major obstacle in our understanding of the effects of product placements specifically and the persuasive process in general.

The ability to say that product placements work but not by what mechanism, under what conditions, or according to what additional influences is a question of growing importance. Leaving aside the rate at which the act of product placement has expanded over the last decade, product placements provide a number of benefits unavailable to conventional television advertisements, the most obvious of which is the viewers' inability to avoid exposure due to the product's integration within the program. Advertisers gain goodwill by being associated with popular programs, a benefit not available through conventional advertising (d'Astous & Séguin, 1999). Additionally, product placements provide a very long life span, resulting in nearly unlimited exposure through repeated program airings in syndication and international distribution (Brennan, et al., 1999).

Researchers have spent decades examining the message characteristics and communication techniques which may reduce conventional television advertisement avoidance (Bolls, Muehling, & Yoon, 2003). They concluded that alternative approaches, like product placement, which are as effective as conventional television advertisements should be given high levels of consideration (Gould, 1989). Indeed, it has been proposed that product placements may result in greater cognitive impact due to the relaxed state of mind of the viewer(Solomon & Englis, 1994). Because movies and television programs are viewed as entertainment and not advertising, the viewer may not generate the counterarguments normally associated with conventional television advertising. All things considered, some feel that product placement may be the most powerful mechanism available to insert products into the awareness of the consumer (Solomon & Englis, 1994).

But the question remains: How exactly does product placement work? Are individuals motivated to seek out a product based solely on their exposure? Is product placement the first real evidence for the long maligned "hypodermic needle" theory of media effects? Or is the process more complicated, revolving around the shifting interrelationships of individuals, in-group peers, out-group peers, the social "other," and the fictional "other"?

Drawing from a wide, inter-disciplinary base, this manuscript attempts to address these questions by developing a more targeted methodology for assessing parasocial relationships, the one-sided relationships that develop between audiences and celebrities, and applying theoretical frameworks developed within the fields of media effects and consumer psychology to demonstrate the interrelated nature of the third person effect and influence of presumed influence, parasocial relationships, and predispositions toward self-monitoring. In doing so, it examines not only the impact of and cognitive pathways used by product placements, but also

the role that consumption and relationships play in our creation of a public self, expressed through our consumptive practices.

Outline of this Dissertation

This dissertation begins, in Chapter 2, with a look at the development of the culture of consumption. It identifies the roots of modern consumerism in the late 19th century, the growth of self-fulfillment through consumption in the 1920's, the temporary rejection and eventual resurgence within the mid-20th century, and the current large-scale acceptance of and reliance on consumption as a foundation of self-image and societal relationships.

Chapter 3 provides an overview of the role consumption plays not only in forming identity, but also in mediating social capital, through the work of Putnam (1995, 2000), Bourdieu (1984, 1989), and Schor (1999, 2000, 2007), among others. It also examines how relationships dependent upon the media act to shape our consumptive patterns and provide a secondary influx of social capital. Together, Chapters 2 and 3 provide the historical footing for this dissertation, laying out the evolution of modern consumer society and the philosophical foundations for the proposed interplay between persuasion, self-image, and our various social relationships.

Chapter 4 builds upon this historical foundation and addresses the persuasive power of product placements and how the theories of third-person effect, influence of presumed influence, self-monitoring, and parasocial connections intersect to form a complex model of persuasion. This chapter also lays out the hypothesized relationships, research question, and proposed pathways to be tested and discussed throughout the remainder of the dissertation.

Chapters 5 and 6 present the methods and results from a series of two studies, the first designed to validate a modified and expanded scale for parasocial connections and the latter utilizing this scale to test the previously developed hypotheses and research question and

evaluate the proposed models. In particular, the study presented in Chapter 5 (Study 1) expands the existing Parasocial Interaction Scale (A. M. Rubin & Perse, 1987), disentangling the relationship with the character from the relationship with the actor and testing the validity and differentiation of the revised Parasocial Connection Scales. Additionally, the appendix to this chapter (Appendix 1) presents the expanded scales, as well as the precise wording used in their evaluation.

The study presented in Chapter 6 applies the revised Parasocial Interaction scale, among others, to explore the hypothesized relationships between product placement exposure, perceived peer desire, desire for product, self-monitoring, and parasocial connections with the characters and actors. Additionally, this analysis examines the differing effects between perceived peer exposure and desire, and perceived distal other exposure and desire. Specifically, it employs an experiment designed to evaluate the impact of five different instances of product placement drawn from a variety of scripted television programs on expressed desire for the stimulus products. The roles of self-monitoring, parasocial connection to the character, and parasocial connection to the actor/actress are examined as moderating these effects.

Finally, Chapter 7 concludes this dissertation with a discussion of the implications of these findings for both for practitioners and academics, as well as the identification of potential avenues for further research and important unanswered questions.

Chapter 2

The Development of Consumer Culture

The evolution of the mass media from the early days of the press has had a drastic impact on the social conditions of modern life. As the press developed into a capitalist enterprise, as opposed to a vehicle primarily concerned with reporting the occurrences of the day, it adopted the role of a cultural actor, informing and swaying public opinion and becoming one of the primary gateways through which corporate interests and powerful individuals could directly influence the whole of the public sphere (Habermas, 1989). While early research into the effects of exposure to the mass media as a whole found increased social stratification among the audiences, this same research reveals that exposure to the advertisements and endorsements contained within the primary programming had a leveling effect. The exposure of lower class individuals to the lifestyles and commodities of the upper classes provided a model to which they could aspire, not through actual social, economic, or political advancement but through the symbolic advancement opportunities provided by the adoption of upper class lifestyles and the use of associated goods and services (Habermas, 1989). The invention and widespread availability of the radio, and presumably the later development of motion pictures, television, and the Internet, further advanced this removal of social stratification, fostering a perception of *potential* equality (Cantril & Allport, 1935). Television, as a commercial institution, is invested in producing programming that generates capital for the investors and corporations involved. However, it also produces (and proscribes) social representations and ideas about the world, particularly as they relate to notions of power, place, and identity – all facets of our modern consumptive practices – whether or not that is the intent of the programming (Grindstaff & Turow, 2006), representing the latest stage in the evolution of consumer culture.

The Creation of the Consumer

At the end of the nineteenth century, in the era of the second industrial revolution, falling working hours, rising disposable income, increasing urbanization, rapidly expanding transport networks, and strong population growth resulted in society-wide shifts in entertainment, consumption, leisure activities, and, in many ways, lifestyles in general. No longer were people tied to a specific locale or culture, but rather they were exposed to a range of peoples, goods, and behaviors never before seen by most (McCracken, 1986). The general availability of goods, both mass produced and *couture*, the increasing demands placed on the consumer to consume, and the rise of readily available sources of falsely enhanced income gave birth to three intertwined pillars of the modern consumer society – the department store, the fashion industry, and the credit card – and set the stage for the modern hyper-consumption society.

The Rise of Consumption – 1890's

As department stores developed early in the century, they became core institutions that reassured Americans by their very existence that life was good, that beauty mattered, and that order and stability prevailed. Through displays, demonstrations, lectures, and entertainment spectacles, these stores defined a previously unobtainable way of life while furnishing the necessities and luxuries that it both required and entailed (Leach, 1993). Entering a department store in this era, one would be greeted by a spectacle of indulgence, complete with all the trappings of the upper class. This spectacle of affluence stood in marked contrast to the traditional shopping experience, wherein consumers were in a subordinate role to the shopkeeper and dependent upon his or her whims for the goods available. Rather than asking for an item and having the sole option brought out from the back room, individuals were now free to browse racks upon racks of different styles, colors, patterns, and qualities of good (Leach, 1993).

Perhaps the most prominent and influential of these goods were the fashions now available to the general public. As the newly emergent department stores began to compete amongst each other for the income of the American consumer, new tactics for drawing individuals into the store began to arise (Lears, 1994; Twitchell, 1999). No longer were wares displayed without context or in drab, dingy storefronts. Rather, the show window became an indispensible tool for enticement. Professional gawkers were hired to overcome the publics reluctance to "peep" in windows, drawing attention to the masterful displays developed by L. Frank Baum and his National Association of Window Trimmers (Leach, 1993). But this new form of exposing consumers to the goods available also began a process of disassociation. No longer were they directly exposed to the feel, smell, and craftsmanship of the products, but rather they were separated by a wall of glass, able to look but not touch, to desire but not experience. And nowhere was this desire, rather than experience, more evident than in the world of fashion, where the fashion show windows capitalized on the quest for the new and provided the "merchandise a value over and above its intrinsic worth" (Leach, 1993, p. 91). This value was not, and as we shall see is not, one of lasting value, but rather one of transience (Barthel, 1988). The fashions and goods en vogue in one instance are certainly not those en vogue the next (Twitchell, 1999). The quest for the dream represented by these fashions and the lifestyle goods displayed so temptingly by the department stores and their marketers required a constant chase for the gold, fueled by the earnings, and often future earnings, of society.

This constant flow of consumption gave rise to the backbone of modern consumption: credit (Leach, 1993). The idea of credit was by no means a new one, having been available from peddlers, moneylenders, and shopkeepers for centuries, but the department stores gave credit and installment purchases a new veneer of respectability and anonymity. Consumers found

themselves able to "buy now, pay later" and merchants saw a rise in impulsive and large-scale purchases. Trickling down from the upper class, the use of credit, along with its accompanying problems, soon found its way into the middle-class. The consumer had found a way to live for today, but had not found a way to pay for their dreams. The trappings of high-society – baby grand pianos, furs, and silks – entered into the home and proclaimed the status of the owner, regardless of whether that status was earned or borrowed (Ritzer, 1995).

The Rise of Consumer Culture – 1920's

At the close of the nineteenth century, conspicuous consumption was primarily the province of the idle rich. In the 1920s the middle and lower classes learned to ape their betters. Set against an era of social conflict and monumental growth in production capability, the wide scale emergence of consumer culture occurred. The increasing "Fordizing" (Ewen, 1976) of production, complete with the dehumanization of the worker and lack of social or intellectual stimulation in the workplace, led to the portrayal of consumption as freedom. The idea of freedom was stripped of it's individualistic roots and began to shift toward a more emulative definition (Fox, 1985). Rather than seeking to fulfill yourself as a unique being, individual freedom was "translated into the ability of each person to emulate or aspire to emulate the tastes of the upper classes; 'and what could be a better method of doing this than by consumption'" (Ewen, 1976, p. 94).

In line with this shift, advertising was increasingly focused on informing the consumer not what to buy, but what to dream (Marchand, 1985). The excesses of mechanized production were managed alongside the desires of the consumers, providing an ever-increasing outlet for goods (Lears, 1994). Social differences and conflict began to be defused through consumption;

individuals lived to consume and consumed to live. The transformation from “Class” into “Mass” had begun.

Through the slow erosion of the class into the less restrictive and poorly delineated mass, the individual was urged to locate his or her needs and placate his or her frustrations through the consumption of goods, rather than the quality and social content of life (Marchand, 1985). This alteration of social relations, this democratizing of desire and material fulfillment, had resounding implications on the roles and relations of individuals. No longer was a man’s authority derived from his role as the head of a household, as a businessman, or as a craftsman; rather it now sprung from his ability to provide for his family, to earn, to bring home the wages which could be used to purchase those goods and services that defined their place in society and gave meaning to existence. The woman’s authority shifted as well, from providing the food, clothing, and sustenance of the family to providing security within the household, consuming those goods which her husband’s salary could afford, and maintaining herself in accordance with the norms of society (Goffman, 1979; Twitchell, 1999). Yet this constant striving was not without its perils, nor was this new source of meaning without it’s own inherent and intentional flaws. For if one is able to purchase all that is needed and be perfectly content with ones lot in life, defined increasingly by the possessions one owns, the entire system of capitalism falls apart. An unsatisfied consumer is a constant consumer, always seeking fulfillment from new goods and aspiring towards impossible goals (Lears, 1994). Goals are developed and manipulated not by life experiences or individual self-consciousness, but rather by advertisers devoted to “keep[ing] the masses dissatisfied with their mode in life, discontented with *ugly things* around them.” (Ewen, 1976, p. 39).

Backlash and Cooptation – 1950’s

As the next era of consumer culture began, the schism between the consumer and the individual became increasingly pronounced. Lines were drawn between those structures rebelling against conformity and those with a vested interest in maintaining the arrangement (L. Cohen, 2003). Set against the Red Scare and beginnings of the Cold War, the mainstream view was that to "produce one's own worldview was subversive... to assert the idea that a community might control it's own destiny 'communistic'" (Ewen, 1976, p. 211). The flow of population from the close confines of the metropolis to the suburbs disconnected man from his neighbor, while at the same time the advent of the television erased all distinctions of privacy and refuge. The only connections available between the newly transplanted suburbanites were the joylessness of work and the imagery and spectacle of the 'communal' nightly entertainment and the consumption messages it contained (Packard, 2007).

Yet within this conformity an undercurrent of discontent remained, embodied by an increasing realization of the role consumption and advertising played in society and the inherent inequalities of such a system. Mainstream society, and with it conformity, became the enemy. Individualism and self-creation became the ideal, at least within the counter-culture. And, ironically and inescapably, these groups failed to co-opt and reform society, instead being co-opted and re-integrated into the economic machine they rebelled against (Heath & Potter, 2004). In order for counter-culture individuals to recognize and identify with each other, a common set of visual cues and stylistic language needed to develop, just as it had already developed to differentiate the upper-, middle- and lower-classes (Barthel, 1988; Goffman, 1979).

The most visible, and most easily co-opted, sign of the counter-culture was fashion, that same arena of goods that served as the basis of consumer culture. Rather than escaping the trappings of modern society, each counter-culture group provided the system with a new market

for goods. Each differentiation in style, designed originally to mark individuals as *individuals*, became part of the visual and cultural lexicon, mass-produced and marketed to the masses (Frank, 1997). Individuals on both sides of the cultural divide continued, and continue, to seek their individuality through the mass marketed, mass advertised, and mass mediated goods (Holt, 1997).

Ambivalence to Consumption and the Consumption of Ambivalence – Present

The envelopment of identity, conflict, and ideology within consumption is now taken as a given. Consumerism, not civil society or politics, has created emotional, social, and psychological outlets for needs that previously were harnessed by anti-social actions, authoritarianism, and domination. Shopping has become both leisure and education, with the difference between the mall and the museum, the consumption and the collection of goods, fading rapidly (G. S. Cross, 2000).

Indeed, the formation of identity is no longer constrained by the goods and advertisements one consumes, but now encompasses the goods and advertisements one proliferates (Danesi, 2008). The growth of branding from a means of distinguishing a product to a way of distinguishing ones-self mirrors the shifting meanings of advertisements. While for some (the "Traditionalists") advertisements remain an intrusion into the reality of their experiences, others embrace the message to consume, either due to their belief of invincibility and incorruptibility (the "Cool Kids") or with a desire for information but a rejection of coercion (the "New Simpletons") (Rushkoff, 1999). While the Traditionalist seeks the "authentic" and outwardly rejects the manufactured experience, the Cool Kid and the New Simpleton acknowledge, accept, and proliferate the messages, decoding them while falling prey. Cool Kids and New Simpletons define themselves knowingly through the goods to which they choose to

devote themselves, while the Traditionalist remains on the outside, falling prey to the advertisements while never quite finding the authenticity he or she desires, defining his or her self through goods not fully respected or understood (Lanham, 2006; Rushkoff, 1999).

Certain forms of mass media programming have actively shaped the landscape of consumer culture through the blurring of the line between content and advertising. While the newspaper industry as a whole has striven to differentiate the advertisements from the editorial endorsements, while the early radio and television industry made no such effort, particularly in regards to entertainment programming. In recent years this line has blurred even further, nearly disappearing at times, as product advertisements and endorsements have continued to invade every facet of the television consumption experience, with video news releases, stealth advertising, and product placement becoming more wide-spread as the cost of production, or simply the desired profit, rises beyond the reach of traditional advertising models. But, like conventional forms of advertising, these embedded advertisements seldom seek to create new attitudes or behaviors. Rather, they utilize, and by utilizing canonize, existing behavior patterns, beliefs and preconceptions dating back to the earliest days of consumer culture (Lazarsfeld & Merton, 1948).

Chapter 3

Consuming Capital

Under Foucauldian thought, consumption and production are arranged in an unequal balance. Consumption was conceived of as a primarily private activity, occurring at the home or during play, which creates nothing of value to society or culture. The sole purpose of consumption was to replenish the individual, allowing them to resume their role as producers. This production was the only truly valuable activity in the public domain, adding meaning and worth to human lives. However, as the progression from *modernism* to *post-modernism* occurred, the value of consumption began to change. The consumption act itself became valuable to society; the "working family" began to morph into the "consuming family" (Firat & Venkatesh, 1995) and the act of consumption shifted from one of pure use and personal gratification to an act exerting a direct impact on society as a whole. This shift in the cultural meaning of consumption was mirrored by a growing recognition of the individual meaning(s) embodied by the act of consuming. Consumption itself became a powerful method by which to indoctrinate individuals into the culture, as well as a means by which they make sense of and influence said culture through the attachment of individual meanings to the objects being consumed. As these meanings moved from individuals to the level of the society, goods became the means of transmitting messages, values, and symbols throughout the public. This new symbolic meaning of goods in society is structured, and gives structure to, four differing types of capital: economic, cultural, educational, and symbolic (Bourdieu, 1989); and it is at the intersection of these forms of capital where one finds the individual defined as a socially oriented consumer.

The socially oriented consumer makes use of each of these forms of capital in the pursuit of changing the way in which society is structured. They utilize their *economic* clout to purchase

only those goods and services they deem suited to their vision of society. They work in conjunction with each other to form small sub-*cultures* wherein they can reinforce their own beliefs and meanings. They utilize their own *education* about specific causes and societal discords to inform their purchase decisions and they endow the objects of their consumption, and active non-consumption, with *symbolic* meanings that they broadcast to those around them. In short, the socially oriented consumer seeks to re-appropriate the structure of production and consumption within a culture to make fundamental changes to the culture itself, turning the act of consumption from a destructive and profane act into a sacred and communicative act (Firat & Venkatesh, 1995). Rather than restricting themselves to the traditional use of rhetoric as speech act, these consumers have adopted a rhetorical life-style wherein each act is itself persuasive and communicative. Similarly, producers and cultural influencers, such as the media and advertising industries, have in turn appropriated this trend, using the labels adopted by the socially oriented consumer to advance their own agendas. This power dialectic has built an interesting landscape of shifting power, with both the producer and consumer engaged in a struggle for control of their own meaning and social role.

The Role of the Individual in Consumer Society

"In American society, people often satisfy or believe they can satisfy their socially constituted needs and desires by buying mass produced, standardized, nationally advertised consumer products. This was not always the case nor is it today a universal phenomenon. Why should it be so prominent a characteristic of contemporary American culture?"

-Schudson, 1984, p. 147

The answer to this question lies in the formation of our identity (or, more accurately in this digital age of co-presence, identities). Over time the conceptualization of identity has shifted

from the relatively static entity predetermined by sociological influences such as gender, race, and class to a highly fluid and subjective conceptualization of identity. Individuals no longer adopt a single, all-encompassing self to be projected to the world as a whole. Rather, they must assume a *multiplicity* of roles to deal with the constantly shifting social and cultural interactions (W. Bell & Force, 1956). This multiplicity of roles has given rise to a more holistic view of the individual comprised of three interconnected parts: the actual, ideal, and social selves. As defined by Sirgy (1982), "actual self refers to how a person perceives herself; ideal self refers to how a person would like to perceive herself; and social self refers to how a person presents herself to others" (Sirgy, 1982, p. 287). That is, to navigate the increasingly fragmented social structures inherent in post-modernity, "individuals adjust both appearance and demeanor somewhat according to the perceived demands of the particular setting" (Giddens, 1991, p. 100).

Historically, consumer researchers have worked to differentiate between the influence of actual, ideal, and social selves on purchase behavior. For instance, Landon (1974) examined the complexities of identity by exploring actual self-image, how one views oneself , and ideal self-image, how one wishes to be viewed. His findings suggest that consumers' purchase intentions are more strongly correlated with either their actual self-image or their ideal self-image depending on the unique goals of the purchase behavior. Thus, depending on the situation, both actual and ideal self-image can influence purchase intention.

Hughes (1976) also examined the relationship between the conceptualization of ones "ideal self" and professed brand preference; specifically investigating whether the visibility of a product's consumption was correlated to actual or ideal self-concept. In contrast to prior studies that were unable to find support for a relationship between "the respondent's ideal self-image and the brand image of his most preferred publicly consumed product" (Hughes, 1976, p. 530),

Hughes found strong support for this relationship. That is, highly visible consumer products were found to be more congruent with individuals' ideal self-concepts, while those low in visibility were more congruent with actual self-concept. More recently, Malhotra (1988) examined the various influences of actual, social, and ideal self in his analysis of consumer behavior and attitudes, and found evidence that respondents preferred houses, the purchase and ownership of which is a very publicly visible consumption act, that more closely matched their ideal self-image, as opposed to their actual or social self-images. Although the study only examined one type of consumption object, the findings suggest that "…when a multidimensional view is adopted and the differential role of the self concept components is taken into account, self concept exerts a much stronger influence on preference…In the context of self concept, the goals of the individual could be to maintain (actual self concept), enhance (ideal self concept), or project a certain self concept to significant others (social self concept)" (Malhotra, 1988, p. 21)

This tripartite conceptualization of self is not influenced solely by the social environment being navigated. Individuals can, and do, actively shape each of the three elements of the self, constantly re-evaluating and re-prioritizing different facets and goals as part of the "…*aesthetics of the self*: a conception of the self as a work of art that is freely and continuously re-created over time." (Thompson, 1995, p. 259). In drawing on the representations of others in the media, individuals take the other and make it themselves. Even their own experiences become mediated by the mass media, and individual experiences are not stored as such in the recesses of memory. Rather, they are stereotyped and categorized based on the ideals and images provided by the media. In some cases, these experiences may not be believed until they are confirmed by the experiences of others, most often conveyed to the individual through the mass media (Mills, 1956). In this way the media have "entered into our very existence of our own selves. They have

provided us with new identities and new aspirations of what we should like to be and what we should like to appear to be" (Mills, 1956, p. 395). By expressing, dramatizing, and repeating cultural patterns, both traditional and emergent, the media reinforce tradition and at the same time explain new roles (Breed, 1958).

Consuming Social Capital

In *Bowling Alone: America's Declining Social Capital*, Putnam (2000) surveys the decline of "social capital" in the United States of America since 1950, describing and illustrating what he sees as a reduction in all the forms of in-person social intercourse upon which American society is based. He calls our attention to the methods that formed the fabric of social lives, as well as the ongoing erosion of this fabric, ultimately pointing his finger at the increasing lack of civil engagement as the root cause of the weakening of our social and political structure. Under Putnam's definition of social capital interpersonal, face-to-face interactions are key. It is only in socializing that information can be exchanged, opinions can be formed and tested, and debate occur. He defines social capital as the "connections among individuals – social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them" (Putnam, 2000, p. 19), and provides examples of the role marriages, clubs, and sports teams, including bowling leagues, perform in habituating and socializing individuals, creating and maintaining the structure of society (Putnam, 1995). He calls forth a parade of facts and figures to illustrate the proposed decline in social capital in America: lower levels of trust in government; lower levels of civic participation; decreased membership in groups such as the PTA and Elks Club; and declining church attendance (Putnam, 1995, 2000). But how does this view of an America in decline fit within the greater sociological literature and exploration of society embodied by the work of Bourdieu, Weber, and others? Is Putnam right in claiming that social capital, the connections

between individuals upon which our social and consumptive practices are based, has declined under the framework of these scholars?

In his seminal work *Distinction*, Bourdieu (1984) distinguishes between three forms of capital: economic, cultural, and social. In contrast to Putnam, he defines social capital as the aggregate of the actual or potential resources available via the network of relationships existing between individuals. Within Bourdieu's definition, social capital is an interchangeable and fluid resource, which can be used as a tool by those possessing it. In the same way, cultural capital (which can be viewed as a portion of Putnam's social capital definition) consists of a set of socially rare and distinctive tastes, skills, knowledge, and practices, or the norms and behaviors which regulate interaction (Holt, 1998).

Within Bourdieu's delineation of society, individual actors navigate fields of interaction, or the arenas in which actors compete for placement in the social hierarchy through acquisition of the appropriate or necessary statuses, through the use of *habitus*, a transposable system of schema that both classifies the world and structures action, providing guidelines and rules for both use and conversion of different forms of capital (Bourdieu, 1984; Holt, 1997). Through the *habitus*, cultural capital takes on a distinctive form in each field: for example, in the athletic field, cultural capital may take the form of physical endurance and prowess, while in the academic field it may take the form of research competence and depth of knowledge (Swartz, 1997).

As can be inferred from the above, for Bourdieu social and cultural capital are not resources to be hoarded as in Putnam's definition, but rather to be spent (in conjunction with economic capital) in return for "symbolic capital" (Holt, 1998). And by conceptualizing "social capital" (to use Putnam's terminology) in this way, Bourdieu equates it with, and provides a

mechanism for conversion to, consumption and consumer goods. Indeed, in Bourdieu's analysis of 1960's France, as well as later replications (i.e. Friedland et al., 2007), the interaction and conjunction of these two forms of capital is evident (note: under the analysis conducted by Friedland et al., the axis of social capital has been replaced by communal/individual orientation). As quoted by Friedland et al., "taste classifies and it classifies the classifier. Social subjects, classified by their classifications, distinguish themselves by the distinctions they make" (Friedland, et al., 2007). For Bourdieu and his intellectual supporters it is through the consumption of goods that the social and structural foundations and clusters of society can be observed (Friedland, et al., 2007; Keum, Devanathan, Deshpande, Nelson, & Shah, 2004). Consumption is no longer the result of the interaction of class and culture, but the shaper of both.

And if consumption is no longer shaped by class and culture, but rather shapes both, it follows that the act of consumption now has social significance that can stretch beyond the immediate surroundings and connect one with individuals across time and space (Schor, 2007). In the ongoing race to consume and live the American Dream, Americans create, join, and modify their class, continuously trading economic capital for social at the possible expense of the cultural (Schor, 2000). And it is here that we find the intersection of Bourdieu and Putnam.

The increasing interchange of economic for symbolic capital, driven by shifts in the demographics of society, the increased advertising and media exposure, and the fluid meanings behind individual products (Giddens, 1991), has in Putnam's view led to an overall decrease in the amount of social capital in the system (Putnam, 1995). Lacking any outside source, the overall level of capital in the system must be viewed as closed and finite, allowing shifts from one form to another to occur but no increase in overall quantity. However, by taking a longer view of the arena of social interaction it becomes apparent that Putnam's argument contains a

fatal flaw, evidenced by the multitude of fields available for interaction, from which capital of all types can flow at different rates and with different outcomes. The scope of American society examined by Putnam consists of a limited number of fields, specifically those that encourage and/or rely on face-to-face of physical interaction, in which capital is observed. The broader view encompassing a multitude of fields reveals the system of fields, the entirety of the life-world, which must be examined to trace the flow of capital. As capital flows out of Putnam's vantage point, it must then flow into another field, as the system, not the field, is what contains a finite supply of social, economic, and cultural capital.

It should be clarified that, while Putnam is incorrect in stating there has been a decline in social capital, as we have seen above that capital cannot decline but only shift and transform, he is not necessarily incorrect in his conclusions that the shifts in capital have resulted in a more diffuse social fabric. Social capital is, by and large, the greatest influence on civic engagement, as it is comprised of all actual and potential interpersonal ties. And as economic capital is increasingly used as a substitute for social, and social capital is spread thinner across larger communities or hoarded by those fearful of overextension, the institutions of old shudder and shake. “Slacktivism” and nominal forms of participation become the norm, and individuals donate money rather than time, relying on others to uphold their interests (Schudson, 2007). But social capital simultaneously flows into new crevices and communities that did not exist decades ago (i.e., Internet communities), fostering new connections in a networked society not reliant on location for community and interaction. We may now appear to be bowling alone in our living rooms, but in reality we are competing via the Internet with friends and strangers from down the road, across town and around the world. The culture or society to which the consumer relates is not the culture in which they live, although it may bear a striking resemblance. Consumers are

instead connected to a set of illusory comparative frameworks: their own ideal selves, their perceptions of other consumers, and the fictional character, situation or even culture on screen. Suddenly the "social" connection provided by the consumer good has become a set of mediated social connections, indirect social relations which involve no physical co-presence but instead exist only through the intermediation of information technology and the mass media (Calhoun, 1998; Stever, 2013). In modern societies, the majority of the information individuals have about members of other communities, and in general about people different from themselves, comes not through any direct relationship or experience, but instead comes through the media (Calhoun, 1998).

As the media consumption of each individual is a highly subjective act, the culture received is similarly fragmented into a thousand competing facets and constantly recombined as new information is integrated into the larger framework. But this reliance on the media to provide the hypertext of culture is not enough to provide the entirety of the consumer culture experience. The final piece comes in how the consumer relates to the individuals onscreen, the "fictional others" who are actively engaged in using the product, or at the very least providing it with a certain level of cachet simply though association.

Parasocial Capital

Prior to the advent of widespread media outlets, social interactions and relationships were limited to those individuals with whom an individual shared a real life connection. However, following the boom in literacy and easy access to books, the rise of the radio, the spread of the motion picture theater, and the rapid proliferation of the television, the images and voices of a wide array of people known solely through media became available – and relationships between the self and the disconnected other began to form. Horton and Wohl (1956) recognized this new

form of relationship, which they dubbed “parasocial”, in their examination of early television programs, through which intimate personal information about other people was transmitted. Following their lead, numerous communication scholars (Ang, 1985; Levy, 1979; R. B. Rubin & McHugh, 1987) have expanded upon this initial work, building a solid foundation of support and theoretical backing for this new form of social connection, defining it as “a one-sided interpersonal relationship that television viewers establish with media characters” (R. B. Rubin & McHugh, 1987, p. 280). This definition has been elaborated upon to include the behavior of ”respond[ing] to a media figure as if he/she/it were a real person” (Giles, 2003, p. 188).

Scholars have outlined a number of characteristics which exist in any given parasocial relationship (Giles, 2002, 2003; Hartmann & Goldhoorn, 2011; Horton & Wohl, 1956; R. B. Rubin & McHugh, 1987). Giles (2002) described the three categories of parasocial relationships, one with a fictional character (e.g. Captain James T. Kirk), the second being with an actor as the fictional character (e.g. William Shatner in the role of Captain Kirk), and the third with the actual actor (e.g. William Shatner). Parasocial interactions are often characterized by the social distance between the individual and the object of their fascination, in that the viewer knows the object much better than the viewer is known by said object (R. B. Rubin & McHugh, 1987). While the individual may know almost everything about the celebrity or character, the celebrity object does not know much, if anything at all, about the viewer. As such, the parasocial relationship is always predicated upon a degree of lack of reciprocity (Schramm & Hartmann, 2008). The individual forming the relationship may consume the media associated with a given character or entity, and may even go so far as to attempt to communicate with the character, but no communication is provided in return. This lack of reciprocity can be due to the fictional nature of the character in question, as in most instances fictional characters cannot interact with their fans,

or it may be due to the social gulf between the individual and the subject of their parasocial connection. Indeed, fans of particular celebrities, sports figures, or artists often feel a connection with the object of their fanaticism, yet are stymied from forming a true connection by the higher status of the other individual, most often evidenced by the wealth, fame, or power that drew the fans to the parasocial object (Hartmann & Goldhoorn, 2011).

There can be little doubt that audiences today are different than they were in the past (Schickel, 1985). The media has provided us with nearly unlimited access into the inner sanctums of those deemed celebrities, allowing an increased sense of false intimacy, with modern celebrities now including those individuals worshipped based solely on their personality and the connection fostered with the public, famous only for being famous (Henderson, 2005). Celebrity itself has become a commodity to be manufactured and sold to through the mass media (Gamson, 1994), transforming these individuals from cultural actors to pseudo-actors, people created solely for consumption by audiences (Boorstin, 2012).

Capitalizing on Capital: Placing the Products

Consumer goods, both physical and ephemeral, have become unifying devices for many American consumers. What we eat, drink, and drive, as well as our choices of celebrity and fanaticism, define and link each of us with countless other consumers. This usage of products to help delineate social groups can have beneficial or adverse effects on products. If a product is affiliated with an admired person or social group, it can become a positive status symbol. Conversely, if a product is affiliated with a disliked group, it may be avoided (Solomon & Englis, 1994). As such, public sentiment seems to be on the side of product placement. As a whole, the public claims to dislike conventional television advertisements, although this sentiment may be changing as audiences feel more entertained by the advertisements (Stone,

Besser, & Lewis, 2000). In contrast, research has shown that many consumers like product placements, as they can enhance realism, provide a sense of familiarity, aid in character development, and provide context (Nelson, 2002).

WPP Group's Mediaedge: CIA conducted a survey of 11,300 subjects, utilizing interviews in 20 countries across North America, Asia Pacific, and Europe regarding their attitudes towards product placements in motion pictures. They found that 16-24-year-olds are the most likely to notice product placement, with 57% able to identify products or brands incorporated into motion pictures, followed by 49% of 35-44-year-olds, and 43% of 45-54-year-olds. 16-24-year-olds are the most likely to consider trying products advertised through product placements, with 41% stating they would try a product because of its presence in a motion picture, followed by 28% of 35-44-year-olds and 22% of 45-54-year-olds. Globally, 61% of respondents said they notice brands embedded in motion pictures while 62% stated that they notice conventional television advertising. Within the United States, 26% of respondents stated they would try a product if they saw it in a film (Hall, 2004). A separate study completed by Sharkley (as cited in Solomon & Englis, 1994) found that 20% of consumers report that they actively look for brands in movies. As most consumers are users of multiple media, this attitude likely applies to television programming as well.

But is there an effect?

Despite these positive words, there is little agreement among practitioners and researchers as to what constitutes an effective product placement. Unlike conventional television advertising, there are no rate cards for product placement and no unified standards exist for measuring its effectiveness (Fitzgerald, 2003). Indeed, the bulk of existing research regarding the influence of product placement on brand awareness, recall, and purchase intention is proprietary,

which makes developing a standard of efficiency extremely difficult (Solomon & Englis, 1994). However, many practitioners believe that product placement can have a greater impact on audiences than is normally observed with conventional television advertising (Karrh, McKee, & Pardun, 2003). This belief is reinforced by research showing that product placements in movies can generate recall rates that are 2.5 times higher than those of conventional television advertising (Solomon & Englis, 1994).

Previous studies have generated a number of standards for defining effective product placements. According to Steortz (as cited in Babin & Carder, 1996) a very effective placement is defined as one where over 30% of viewers recall the product or placement after viewing the program. Brennan, Dubas, & Babin (1999) defined an effective placement as one that generates a recognition level greater than or equal to 20%. They also found a significant relationship between effectiveness and product placement type: 28% of creative, or background, placements were classified as effective, while 87% of on-set, or prominent, placements were considered effective.

So while no standard exists as to what exactly constitutes an effective product placement, there is ample evidence available to support the notion that there is an effect. But how is this effect generated and what variables might moderate or mediate the process? Some of these have been identified, including duration and prominence of the placement (Karrh, et al., 2003), the type (audio, visual or audio-visual) of placement used (Brennan, et al., 1999), and the connection of the product to the plot (Russell, 1999). Other factors include audience perception of congruence with scenery, prior consumption experience, the level of empathy for the characters, the level of individual involvement with the story and the awareness of conventional advertising for the brand (Karrh, et al., 2003). Even the tone of the program containing the placement can

influence the impact, with programs that are positive and evoke happier moods tending to provide higher levels of recall than programs which evoke negative feelings (Karrh, et al., 2003; McClellan, 2003). But while these studies have provided some insight into characteristics of the placements and programs that may impact their effects, little is known about the cognitive process engendered in the viewer.

Chapter 4

The Psychology of Product Placement Effectiveness

Product placement is, at its heart, a culture or society based advertising medium. Consumers form an impression of the goods, services, or ideas being promoted not through the reasoned comparison or direct appeal of conventional advertising, but through an indirect and association based appeal. As numerous studies have shown (Brennan, et al., 1999; Carr, 2007; Russell, 2002; Russell & Stern, 2006), consumers are swayed regularly by these appeals, whether they are explicit or subtle. These goods and services have become unifying devices for many American consumers. For example, during the counterculture movements of the 1960's tie-dyed clothing, long hair, and music became badges of recognition, providing members of the movement with a sense of community and shared meaning (Calhoun, 1998). The act of consumption has become central to society, as it is the primary domain through which the individual is realized. Consumers engage with each other via the products they consume, whether that product is a political candidate, TV show, or a t-shirt; shifting consumption from a destructive act to one which is culturally and symbolically creative and meaningful (Deuze, 2008).

The Paradox of Product Placement

Lazarsfeld and Merton (1948) outlined a number of social functions of the mass media, one of which, the *status conferral function*, is of particular note. Defined as the conferral of status on "public issues, persons, organizations and social movements" (p. 233), it follows that the inclusion of consumables, lifestyles, and fictional individuals within this category is not an outlandish, or even notable, addition. The media continue to bestow and legitimize the status of each through the same method described years ago by Lazarsfeld and Merton: recognition. The

mass media both create and perpetuate the images of popular idols (Merton & Lazarsfeld, 1948). In turn, individual publics have countered this appropriation of power by developing their own forms of symbolism, which, once recognized by the larger community, of which the global media conglomerates are themselves a part of, become incorporated into and adopted by the whole (Thompson, 1995).

The endowment of consumption with symbolically creative power is not lost on the researchers investigating socially motivated consumption, nor is it the unifying power of collective action. Rather, what most researchers miss when considering these phenomena is the effect that this collectivistic consumption has on the socially oriented consumer. The rise of global mass communication has given rise to new forms of both publicness and visibility. Individuals are no longer reliant on geographically local groups for definition or inspiration, but rather draw from a worldwide symphony of culture and consumption practices. The increased visibility of and connections with geographically dispersed groups continues to negate the need for a local community, placing the global media outlets at the center of a system which produces both vast amounts of social capital, monetary capital, and symbolic meaning (Thompson, 1995).

Yet the agentic action of the consumer is ultimately derived from actors' class-based institutional roles within consumer society, rather than freedom from them. Agentic behaviors cannot exist apart from the cultural templates that authorize and guide the actions taken. As Bourdieu (1989) and others (e.g., Swidler, 1986) have shown in some detail, culture always shapes peoples' *habitus*, or strategies for action and understanding, and if they live in a consumer culture, those strategies are themselves defined by the act of consumption.

One underlying problem with the agency construct is the impossibility of separating empirically autonomous, or "free," from "determined" behaviors (Loyal & Barnes, 2001). Social

action can only be explained and properly understood when considered in reference to the elements of choice or causation constraining or guiding their actions. In some situations there may be no difference in the characteristics of action that “could have been otherwise” and those that “could not have been otherwise”, to some degree negating the free will and self-expressive aspects of the act, deciding instead in favor of determinism and cultural constraint. In general, however, if people act agentically, they are agentic (Fuchs, 2001). The consumers’ ability to emancipate themselves, to develop reflexive distance from the marketing code by acknowledging its structuring effects and to fend off the marketer-imposed code may be restricted by the actions institutionally authorized, but because markets are an institutional apparatus that can be put to many social ends, they also provide space for progressive political action. This separation is also why some theorists (e.g., Baudrillard, 1998; Firat & Venkatesh, 1995) argue for the predominance of consumption over production in the current economic order.

The lack of direct interaction and mediated presentation of individuals and society gives rise to what some scholars have termed a *Gesellschaft*, “an ‘artificial construction of an aggregate of human beings’” (Bender, 1978, p. 17). In this realm, culture itself is constructed by each individual actor, self-produced based on their exposure and self-consumed based on their desires. Lacking any universally accepted and common codes, there is a cacophony of misunderstood messages, structured only by the underlying hypertext of the media, the only potential source of shared cultural codes and meaning (Castells, 2000).

But this reliance on the media to provide the hypertext of culture is not enough to provide the entirety of the consumer culture experience. As a conscious act, the consumptive practice also exists within the larger framework of everyday interpersonal society. The relationship between the individual, the other, and societal norms, in this case driven by mediated

consumptive practices such as product placement, is in fact at the heart of socially motivated consumption. This phenomenon of social desirability, wherein the individual attempts to conform to the expectations of the group as a whole, drives those who engage in consumption to simultaneously engage in conspicuous consumption, transforming it into a performative act. By placing product placement within the framework of consumer culture, identity, and the social self-concept, it becomes obvious that there is in many cases no “other consumer” to be connected to, resulting in a fundamentally paradoxical relationship predicated upon an illusory reality.

The Un-Real Reality

Early mass media research by scholars such as Herzog (1941) into the relationships of individuals, in this case housewives, with radio serials and the characters in them provides a sound basis from which to begin this discussion. Respondents in this study almost uniformly expressed concern for the characters in the dramas, a clear sign of connection with them, and often stated general desires to be like them. Many respondents even qualified this desire with statements like “but I couldn’t do that.” or “she’s so much braver than I am…” When observed viewing these shows, statements like “No, don’t go in there” and “Kiss him!” were often voiced by the listeners, again a clear sign of the deep, though imaginary, bond between the listener and the shows (Herzog, 1941).

Moving forward in mass media research, Ang (1985) asked regular viewers of the drama "Dallas“, itself a descendant of these early radio serials, to write essays about their reasons for watching the show and the meaning(s) it had for them, and found that viewers "find 'Dallas' 'taken from life'; what happens to the Ewing family is in their own eyes not essentially different from what they themselves (can) experience in life. . . . The concrete situations and complications are regarded as symbolic representations of more general living experiences: rows,

intrigues, problems, happiness, and misery" (Ang, 1985, pp. 44-45). Indeed, later research comparing viewers of “Dallas” and “Dynasty” found that not only are consumers exposed to differing types of consumption practices, the sacred and the secular, but they also pick up on these and make efforts to apply them to their own life (Hirschman, 1988).

Third Person Effect and Influence of Presumed Influence

In one sense, these vehicles of popular culture are removed from real life and real consumption; they are, first and foremost, fantasy narratives populated by imaginary characters confronted by make-believe crises and choices. Yet, in another sense, as Ang's (1985) respondents declared, they are real. As such, the relationships developed with the characters are themselves as potentially real as the ones developed through every day interactions in the “real-world,” for “if men define situations as real, they are real in their consequences” (Thomas, 1931, p. 189). Indeed, for some the reality of these shows is so concrete that it spills directly into their own lives, outside of the realm of consumption, leading them to personally engage with the programming and characters through alternative means (Grindstaff & Turow, 2006).

But television use cannot easily be separated from the rest of everyday life. As Ang (1996, p. 68) observes, “the activity so often simplistically described as ‘watching TV’ only takes shape within the broader contextual horizon of a heterogeneous and indefinite range of domestic practices.” A small insight into one of these broader social interactions, specifically with other consumers and the public at large, can be found through the application of Third-Person Effect/Perceived Influence theoretical framework. The third-person effect, or TPE, states, at the most basic level, that people will estimate greater effects of mass communication on the attitudes and behaviors of others than on themselves. And, even more importantly, “in some cases, a communication leads to action not because of its impact on those to whom it is

ostensibly directed, but because others (third persons) think it will have an impact on the audience" (Davison, 1983, p. 1). Indeed, some TPE researchers have even gone so far as to state that even "the *myth* of media impact is influential, too" (Katz 1986, p. 32, as cited in J. Cohen, Tsfati, & Sheafer, 2008) and suggest that people possess a media effects schema which includes the belief that the media and messages contained within are powerful in their own right and therefore have an effect on the public (Perloff, 1999). The theorized Influence of Presumed Influence (IPI), an extension of TPE, goes one step further and proposes that people perceive some effect of a message on another and then act according to that perception (Gunther & Storey, 2003). So not only do individuals base their consumptive acts on the actions of fictional characters, but they may also base them on the perceived impact those fictional characters have on the culture at large.

Stepping into and out of the black box

One of the few psychological theories which has been applied, though not tested, to product placements is the "sleeper-effect", wherein subjects forget the source of information regarding and attitudes toward products, services, or concepts (Priester, Wegener, Petty, & Fabrigar, 1999). The product or service is simply included in a consideration set for that product category and the source is discarded (Auty & Lewis, 2004). But this application leaves a great deal to be desired in explaining the underlying process of persuasion via product placement, let alone the social dynamics of product choice and purchase behavior.

Given the social implications of consumer goods and services, which can serve to unify and categorize segments of society, it seems remiss to ignore the role of other consumers in the analysis of product placement. Indeed, the motivation to appear like, or even superior to, others is a powerful one (David, Liu, & Myser, 2004). It is the potential role of these others, in

particular their opinions, that suggests the application of perceived influence and third person perception theory to the persuasive process generated by product placements.

There have been two distinct mechanisms proposed by which individuals may perceive others as more vulnerable to negative effects than themselves: *cognitive* and *motivational* (David & Johnson, 1998). The cognitive explanation of TPE states that individuals rely upon faulty or "sloppy" heuristics when estimating the effect on others, placing TPE firmly within the category of social judgment biases. Utilizing a path analysis to discriminate between the perceptual processes, McLeod, Detenber, and Eveland Jr. (2001), found that when assessing the effect on oneself complex and conditional variables play a large role, while when assessing the effect on others individuals rely on naïve schema similar to the "magic bullet".

On the other hand, motivational mechanisms allow for the inclusion of self-preservation, self-maintenance, and self-enhancement as potential underlying factors (David, et al., 2004). These motivational factors outlined above are extremely relevant when applying TPE to the practice of product placement and consumer behavior, as numerous researchers have connected consumer behavior with the identity and self-concept of the consumer (Ahuvia, 2005; Belk, 1988; Susan Fournier, 1998).

The relationship between the individual, the other, the message or product, and societal norms, in this case specifically those relating to consumption, is in fact at the heart of TPE research, which relies on the idea of social desirability, wherein the individual attempts to conform to the expectations of the group as a whole (Eveland & McLeod, 1999). When an intended media stimulus is perceived to lead to socially undesirable attitudes or behaviors, respondents rate others as more vulnerable to the pernicious effects of the media in comparison to self (David & Johnson, 1998; Duck, Hogg, & Terry, 1999; Gunther, 1995; McLeod, et al.,

2001; Price & Tewksbury, 1996; Salwen & Dupagne, 1999; Shah, Faber, & Youn, 1999). In contrast, when respondents are presented with a pro-social message, such as a public service announcement aimed directly at a socially desirable outcome, respondents predict a more positive effect on self in comparison to others (Gunther & Thorson, 1992). Whereas the former is known as the third-person media effect, the latter is known as the reverse third person or first-person effect.

This distinction between anti-social and pro-social message processing presents an interesting challenge when using TPE to assess product placements. On one hand, product placements are, at their heart, merely another form of television advertising, a genre which has been shown in the past to be subject to the TPE (Thorson & Coyle, 1994; Youn, Faber, & Shah, 2000). On the other hand, research into product placement has found that a large segment of the population actively looks for and enjoys product placement, and some even go so far as to seek out products specifically due to their presence in a film (Hall, 2004).

Despite this acceptance of product placement on the part of the consumer, there is existing research in the field of advertising and TPE that provides a solid foundation upon which to proceed. Drawing on the Elaboration Likelihood Model, White (1997) examined the role of message argument strength on TPE and found that that weak arguments were inferred to influence others more, while strong arguments influenced the self more. Of particular relevance is the finding that others are expected to be more influenced by peripheral cues, such as celebrity endorsement, than the individual, leading to the foundational hypothesis.

H1: Individuals will predict others to be more influenced by product placements than themselves.

Of course, finding a third person effect does not inform our understanding of how product placements influence individuals. For that step we need to turn from the TPE to the Influence of Presumed Influence (IPI), which proposes that that people perceive some effect of a message on another and then act according to that perception (Gunther & Storey, 2003). It is not only important that one feels others are affected by the media, but also that said influence is important and matters (J. Cohen & Weimann, 2008). Without this link from attitude to action there can be no influence upon the attitudes, opinions, and actions of the individual from the perceived attitude(s) of the other(s). Numerous studies have confirmed this process, from the actions of politicians based on the perception of media influence (J. Cohen, et al., 2008) to the willingness of individuals to censor or restrict objectionable material (i.e. pornography, violent television, foul language, reality television shows) (Boyle, McLeod, & Rojas, 2008; J. Cohen & Weimann, 2008; Gunther, 1995). This process can be represented as a logical proof: (1) People have a tendency to overestimate the impact of communication on others, (2) People often base their opinions and actions on others, (3) therefore, some portion of their actions must therefore be based on the overestimates (Gunther, 1995). But the opinions of others are not the only influence to be examined. Research has shown that both indirect media effect (presumed influence) and direct effect (personal experience) play a role in the formation of attitude (Chia, 2006; Paek, Gunther, McLeod, & Hove, 2011; Park, 2005).

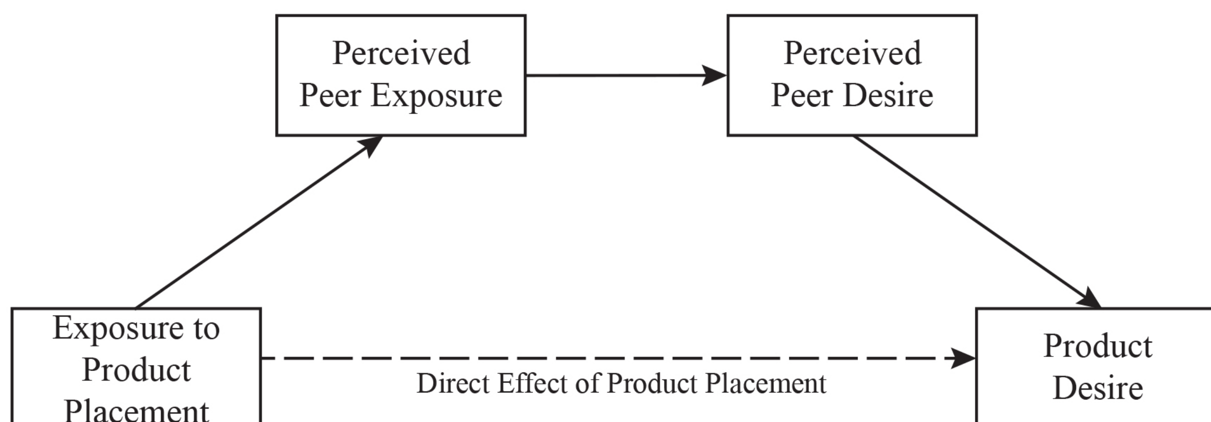
Of course, as with any persuasive process, the path of persuasion will not be without additional influences. A number of personal and societal factors have previously been shown to have moderating or mediating effects on TPE. Returning to our discussion of social desirability, it is important to consider the various social groups present in daily life. Some groups are ones we identify with, while others are ones from which we distance ourselves. This distinction

between proximate peers (those close to you socially) and distal peers (those distant from you) has been shown to have an important role, although not always a consistent one. Overestimation of media effects were found in some cases to be greater when individuals infer the reaction of distal, rather than proximal, others (Gibbon & Durkin, 1995). Yet in other cases perceived impact on proximate, as opposed to distal, peers was greater and led to significant changes in own opinion (Paek & Gunther, 2007). Regardless of where the greater degree of overestimation lies, it is theorized that the perceived opinions of proximate peers will have a greater impact on the opinions of the individual.

Naturally though, in order to presume that any particular stimulus has had an impact, it must also be assumed that one has been exposed to said stimulus or one similar to it. Previous research has found that viewing frequency increases the perceived impact increases (J. Cohen & Weimann, 2008). Extending the reliance on direct exposure as the cause of attitude shift in others, it has been theorized that increases in exposure should correspond with increases in presumed influence (McLeod, et al., 2001).

This theoretical background allows for the construction of a hypothetical path illustrating the proposed direct effects of product placement exposure and the influence of their presumed influence and put forth a number of hypotheses:

Figure 4.1. Hypothesized model of direct and mediated product placement effects on purchase desire.



H2a: A direct effect of product placement on purchase desire will be observed.

H2b: An indirect effect of presumed influence will influence purchase desire.

H3: The perceived frequency of others exposure to product placements will mediate the presumed influence of product placement on others.

H4: The presumed opinion of proximal others will have a greater influence on product desire than the presumed opinion of distal others.

However, this theoretical path is, at the moment, incomplete. The link between the presumed influence on others and our own desire for the product is predicated upon our desire to fit in with a given social group (Chia, 2006).

Self-Monitoring and Group Identity

When an individual's personal self becomes salient, he or she is in an "I" frame of mind and is likely to value being distinct and, thus, accentuate differences from others, resulting in an independent self. However, when a person's social self is active, he or she shifts into a "we" frame of mind and is likely to value being part of a social unit and identify with it through the use of the interdependent self (Kurman, 2001). Thus, changes in self-construal level affect whether information about others is processed with a mind that is set on differentiating the self from others or with a mind that is set on including others in the self or conforming the self to others (Kuhn, 1964; Stapel & Koomen, 2001).

This tendency to switch between different construals of the self has proven ripe territory for consumer behavior researchers, particularly within the realm of brand connections and relationships (Leigh & Gabel, 1992). The flexible notion of relationships embodied by interdependents may help them identify and consider a wider array of potential connections between an extension product, characterized by the addition of new, non-core products under an

existing brand name (e.g., the introduction of the iPhone [cell phone] under the brand umbrella of Apple [computers]), and its parent brand, even when relationships may be somewhat of a stretch. Individuals whose chronic self-construal is based on interdependence, as opposed to independence, have been shown to have a greater ability to tolerate product incongruity than those who are low in interdependence. In particular, whereas independent leaning individuals have been known to increase elaboration in response to incongruity in hopes of resolving it (Meyers-Levy & Malaviya, 1999), high interdependents have been known to demonstrate no increase in elaboration when exposed to incongruent information (Aaker, 1999). As such, high interdependents regard consistency as less important than low interdependents (S. E. Cross, Morris, & Gore, 2002). This relational processing ability has been shown to benefit interdependents when evaluating distant extensions, particularly when they are highly motivated to seek out relationships (Ahluwalia, 2008). However, as the distance between the core brand and the extension shrinks and the connection becomes more obvious, the need for this priming is lessened, and the consumers rely again on their chronic self-construal (Ahluwalia, 2008). Indeed, it has been shown that when an alternate self-construal, i.e. bringing the independent self construal forward in individuals predisposed to be interdependent and vice-versa, is primed, consumers with lower levels of commitment to a product are more likely to rely upon the primed self, while those with higher levels of commitment to the product relied upon the non-primed chronic self-construal (Agrawal & Maheswaran, 2005).

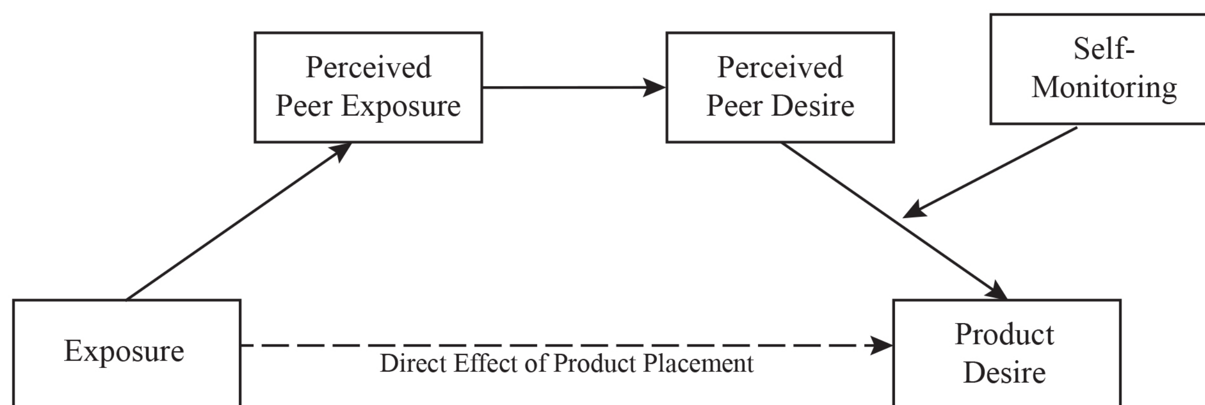
Overall, consumer brand connections are strongest when presented with product images and usages which are consistent with an ingroup, and conversely weakest when presented with images consistent with an outgroup (Escalas & Bettman, 2005; Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001); when presented by an ingroup individual matching the salient identity (Forehand, Deshpandé, & Reed,

2002); and when the product allows the individual to achieve a selected goal (i.e. bringing an interdependent person more in-line with the reference group; providing an independent person an individualizing symbol) (S. Fournier, 1998).

By placing products, services and corresponding behaviors within plausible and ostensibly real situations, high self-monitors (individuals particularly reliant on social and situational cues to guide behavior) will be further encouraged to comport themselves in the same manner as the onscreen reference group and imagined peer group, further cementing their membership within the group (Kleine, Kleine, & Kernan, 1993; Snyder, 1974). Therefore, the model presented above must be adjusted and the individual's level of self-monitoring accounted for, leading to the following hypothesis:

H5: The impact of the presumed influence on peers on the desire for the product will be moderated by individual levels of self-monitoring.

Figure 4.2. Hypothesized model of direct and mediated product placement effects on purchase desire, moderated by self-monitoring.



Layering on the Parasocial Connections

However, the social connections with proximal and distal peers are not the only relationships involved within this process. The parasocial relationships developed between

viewers and the characters within the program may also have an influence on the impact of the product placement – both on oneself and perceived on others.

Scholars have long explored the connections that develop between audience and program, from early radio serials (Herzog, 1941) to modern reality programming (Grubbs, 1997). Relationships with the characters can take many forms, from simple attachment and favoritism to more extreme levels of delusion, emulation, and worship, but are prevalent to some degree within 76.4% of the population (Spitzberg & Cupach, 2007). The desire to interact with individuals develops from three interrelated concepts: interest in the individual, identification with the individual, and connection with the behaviors of the individual (Auter & Palmgreen, 2000). Indeed, research has shown that parasocial relationships are rooted in active engagement with the characters, who are perceived as both real and similar to the viewer (A. M. Rubin, Perse, & Powell, 1985). Viewer motivation has also been shown to impact the formation of parasocial relationships. Those who engage with the program from a social utility perspective (e.g. to have something to talk about at the water cooler or with friends) display lowered levels of parasocial interaction than do those who engage with the program for personally oriented reasons (A. M. Rubin & Perse, 1987). The perceived realism of the program, the attractiveness of the characters, and the enjoyment drawn from the act of viewing all enhance the formation of these parasocial relationships (Grubbs, 1997; Turner, 1993), as can length of viewing (R. B. Rubin & McHugh, 1987). And, although "media attraction can be seen as functional alternatives to interpersonal relationships" (R. B. Rubin & McHugh, 1987, p. 279), there has been mixed support found for the idea that parasocial relationships function as substitutes for actual interactions (Levy, 1979; McDonald & Hu, 2005; Turner, 1993). Regardless of the motivations behind parasocial relationships, their effects are clear. Higher levels of parasocial connection are linked to

increased trust, increased desire to engage with the program, and increased importance placed on what the media figure says or does (A. M. Rubin & Step, 2000). In short, these parasocial relationships carry the same weight and have the same outcomes as one would expect with a real world relationship, wherein friends want to spend time together, trust each others opinion, and, to some extent, emulate the behaviors, opinions, and attitudes of those in their social circle.

As noted above, patterns of consumption remain one of the most publicly visible displays of group membership and connection to others. We seek the latest fashion trends, lavish furnishings, exotic vacations, and the most recent technological innovations. Along this line, research conducted by Fournier and Guiry (1993) revealed that most Americans have an active wish list of things they would like to own and that they anticipate, even dream about, acquiring these things. Moreover, according to *Advertising Age*'s American Consumer Project, even in a down economy consumer desire for new products remains high (Carmichael, 2011). The crux of Schor's (1999) argument is that underlying this shopping addiction, beyond an innate drive for materialism, is perhaps an even stronger drive for status. The acquisition of material goods is seen as one of the strongest measures of social success and achievement and is a key indicator of social positioning, real or aspired (S. S. Bell, Holbrook, & Solomon, 1991; Bourdieu, 1984; Friedland, et al., 2007; McCracken, 1990; O'Shaughnessy, 1992; Packard, 1959). Fueled by a desire to belong, Americans engage in social comparisons with those most proximal to them (Schor, 1999), a practice which should carry over from real world interpersonal relationships to those parasocial relationships with the fictional other, leading to the following hypothesis:

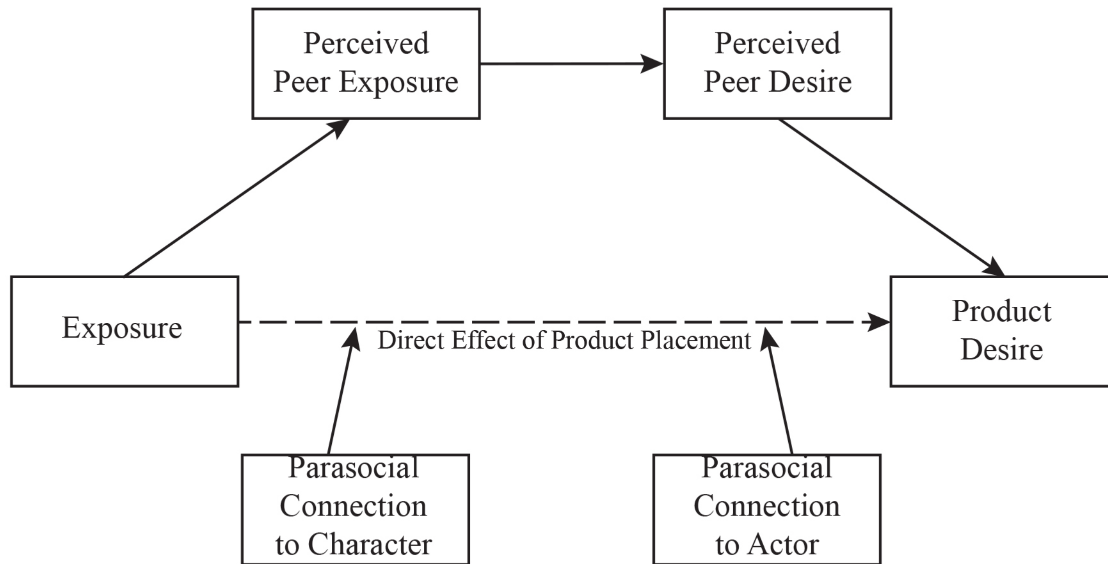
H6: The direct effect of product placement on purchase desire will be moderated by the parasocial relationship to the character.

Furthermore, and drawing from the above research related to proximal and distal peers, it follows that the parasocial connection should be related to the perceived social distance between the viewer and the character. The social groups to which one belongs are, by definition, comprised of proximal peers. By creating relationships with fictional characters, viewers are either bringing themselves closer to the character or bringing the character closer to them in a social sense.

There is, however, one outstanding caveat to the logic applied above: Who, exactly, is the parasocial relationship with? Previous research into parasocial interaction has come from a variety of fields including media studies, sociology, and psychology; and has examined parasocial interactions using a variety of variables and reference points. Researchers have studied the perceived relationships between audiences and newscasters, comedians, television personalities, reality show contestants, and soap opera characters (Auter & Palmgreen, 2000; Cole & Leets, 1999; Grubbs, 1997; Levy, 1979; McDonald & Hu, 2005; A. M. Rubin & Perse, 1987; A. M. Rubin, et al., 1985; A. M. Rubin & Step, 2000; Turner, 1993). However, the scale used for the majority of this research fails to distinguish between the actor and character (see A. M. Rubin, et al., 1985), a distinction that is key to our understanding of the relationship in question, as well as the impact of the product placements. If viewers develop differing levels or types of parasocial relationships with fictional characters and actors, it stands to reason that the effects observed would differ, leading to the following research question:

RQ1: Do parasocial relationships with characters result in different effects than do parasocial relationships with the actor?

Figure 4.3. Hypothesized model of direct and mediated product placement effects on purchase desire, moderated by parasocial connections.



Chapter 5

Study 1: Revising the Measurement of Parasocial Connections

As the purpose of this particular study is to build upon existing persuasive theory, a similar methodological design to past studies shall be used in order to assure parity of results. However, prior to the collection of primary data, a revised scale for the measurement of parasocial connections was constructed and tested to isolate the effects under examination.

Scale Development

As can be expected from this level of existing research, numerous competing scales have been developed. Some of these, such as Rubin A.M., Perse and Powell (1985), Rubin A.M. and Perse (1987), Rubin R.B. and McHugh (1987), and Grubbs (1997) are related scales with minor wording changes to address different parasocial relationships. Others, such as Levy (1979), exist outside of the research thread and present their own unique strengths and weaknesses.

Shortly after the identification of parasocial interactions by Horton and Wohl (1956), Levy (1979) developed the first scale designed specifically to measure the concept. Through interviews with 24 regular news viewers about their perceived connection with newscasters, Levy isolated 7 potential indicators of parasocial relationships: The newscasters are almost like friends you see every day; I like hearing the voices of the newscasters in my house; when the newscaster shows how he feels about the news, it helps me make up my mind about the news item; I like to compare my own ideas with what the commentators say; When the newscasters joke around with each other, it makes the news easier to take; I feel sorry for the newscasters when they make mistakes; and Television shows you what people in the news are really like (Levy, 1979). Levy noted the connections between these propositions and their real-world relationship counterparts of companionship, cognitive interaction, affective support, and

empathy. However, despite laying the groundwork for later research, the propositions developed by Levy (1979) are limited, in that they do not provide multiple measures of all the constructs within the parasocial relationship, do not address any behavioral intentions growing out of the relationship, and provide little insight into the cause of these relationships.

Following the work of Levy (1979), A.M. Rubin, Perse, and Powell (1985) created the first reliable, statistically validated tool designed to measure parasocial interaction. Using the work of Levy (1979) as a base, they included expanded measures of newscaster attractiveness, viewer interaction with the newscaster, and intentions to engage with the newscaster outside of the program (1985). Initially comprised of 29 separate items, statistic and semantic analysis allowed for the elimination of nonsalient and redundant items, resulting in a 20-item Parasocial Interaction Scale (A. M. Rubin, et al., 1985). Further research into parasocial interactions with soap opera characters facilitated the development of the 10-item Revised Parasocial Interaction Scale comprised of the following measures (A. M. Rubin & Perse, 1987):

- My favorite soap opera character makes me feel comfortable, as if I am with a friend.
- I see my favorite soap opera character as a natural, down-to-earth person.
- I look forward to watching my favorite soap opera character on tomorrow's episode.
- If my favorite soap opera character appeared on another TV program, I would watch that program.
- My favorite soap opera character seems to understand the kinds of things I want to know.
- If I saw a story about my favorite soap opera character in a newspaper or

magazine, I would read it.

- I miss seeing my favorite soap opera character when he or she is ill or on vacation.
- I would like to meet my favorite soap opera character in person.
- I feel sorry for my favorite soap opera character when he or she makes a mistake.
- I find my favorite soap opera character to be attractive.

As this scale has been repeatedly validated in relation to a variety of media outlets, including reality television (Grubbs, 1997) and celebrities in general (Laken, 2009), with minor wording changes it will also be used for this analysis. However, unlike previous experiments where the wording was presented as open-ended and generic (e.g. “my favorite soap opera character”), advancements in questionnaire distribution and formulation were used to provide targeted responses to specific parasocial relationships with individual characters and celebrities, allowing for the distinction between attachments to the characters and the actors portraying the characters. Specifically, the items were constructed with targeted language referencing the character by name (e.g. Captain Kirk) rather than the generic “favorite character”. A second bank of questions was then constructed which asked specifically about the connections perceived with the actor behind the character (e.g. William Shatner). (See Appendix A for scale wording)

Scale Validation

Methodology

To validate the above approach, a pre-test was administered to a representative sample of adults in the U.S. using a web-based survey. The data were collected over a three-day period during November 2012. Responses were obtained online through a private company, Amazon.com’s Mechanical Turk, which offers subjects compensation in the form of small

payments or gift cards and discounts for various consumer products. Mechanical Turk maintains an active cache of potential survey respondents who self-select into the database, and employs quota sampling techniques using geographic and demographic parameters to create a representative sample of the U.S. adult population. Previous research has shown that Mechanical Turk samples deviate slightly from the national population, but that in social science research they tend to provide similar estimates as national probability samples (Berinsky, Huber, & Lenz, 2012). Given the preliminary nature of this research, the Mechanical Turk sample therefore provides a reasonable representation of the U.S. adult population, and certainly provides a more representative sample than a student sample taken from a major American university. The data contained 195 completed responses (56.8% male, mean age = 28.1 years), all of whom were exposed to the same survey instrument.

After providing informed consent, participants were instructed to evaluate their existing levels of like or dislike for 15 characters from popular television programs. In the subsequent question banks a random subset of these characters and the actor/actress portraying them, consisting of three character/actor pairs per participant, were inserted into the question prompt or question wording for each measure. To aid in the recollection of the character and actor/actress, contextually appropriate images of each were included.

Results

Parasocial Connection. The Parasocial Connection scale developed above was analyzed via an exploratory factor analysis to assess the dimensionality of the construct. The results validated the use of this measure, with all items scaling onto a single-factor solution (Eigenvalue=2.38, accounting for 79.82% of the total variance). Composite measures of parasocial connection were then calculated for Character Connection ($M=3.43$, $SD=1.62$, $\alpha=.84$)

and Actor Connection (M=3.01, SD=1.88, α=.80).

Pearson's correlation was then used to assess the relationship between the parasocial connections and individual like or dislike of the character. The results show that opinion of the character is strongly related to Character Connection (r=.73, $p < .001$) and Actor Connection (r=.46, $p < .01$). A z-test for the two correlation coefficients demonstrates that the difference is statistically significant (Z=4.22, $p < .001$).

These findings support both the use of this measure, as all items scale onto the same factor, and the theorized distinction between actor and character oriented parasocial relationships. The strong correlation between Character Connection and like/dislike of the character indicates that parasocial connection scale is tapping the appropriate opinion construct, while the significant difference in the correlation between Character and Actor Connection validates the approach of separating out the two constructs. Subjects appear to distinguish between the character they connect with and the actor portraying the character, an important distinction missing in the original parasocial connection scale developed by Rubin, Perse, and Powell (1985), which interspersed questions related to the actor with questions related to the character. The approach taken here allows for the disentangling of the two different fandoms – one aimed at the character and the other aimed at the actor – and the resulting parasocial connections with each.

Chapter 6

Study 2: Analyzing the Effect of Product Placements

Participants and Design

The sample for the experiment was drawn from a nationally representative sample of U.S. adults using the survey firm SSI. Participants comprised 334 individuals (gender: 44.6% female; average age: 43.29 years old, SD = 14.58). Data were collected using an online experiment in the spring of 2013. Participants completed the study in exchange for a small monetary compensation from the survey firm.

Each subject completed a pre-experiment survey containing measures of entertainment media consumption, including amount of time spent, types of media consumed, and method of viewing (i.e. over-the-air broadcasts, streaming media, cable, satellite, DVD, etc.). Following these general media consumption questions, respondents answered specific questions regarding their viewing habits of the programs selected for the stimulus. Respondents also completed a battery of questions taken from Snyder (1974) to address their degree of self-monitoring, an important factor to consider when examining social influences, and batteries of questions addressing their connection with the actors and fictional characters present in the stimulus materials.

Following the pre-experiment survey, the subjects were exposed to a set of clips from a variety of programs, including those heavily watched by young adults (ages 18-34) and older adults (35+). Following this exposure, subjects answered a series of questions regarding the perceived level of exposure for and the impact of product placements, both generally and regarding the products shown in the clips, on themselves, others like them and other people in general. Finally, all subjects answered questions regarding their desire to purchase/own a variety

of products, including those from both sets of clips as well as additional distracter items (see Appendix B).

The stimulus material was drawn from multiple scripted television programs, selected based on a combination of viewership, ensuring that the characters and situations would be well-known to the subjects, and the incorporation of audio/visual product placements associated with individual primary characters. The association of the product placement with a specific on-screen character was necessary to assign attribution for the behaviors and product usage measures, as well as to analyze the effect of character or actor connection on the resultant product attitude and purchase desire. Additionally, drawing from multiple programs spanning a variety of genres and target audiences increased the likelihood of the subjects having strong connections to one or more of the stimulus programs and characters, as well as allowing for a more robust and generalizable set of findings.

To isolate the top-rated, scripted programs on broadcast television, the Nielsen Ratings for each week were compiled from the data available from the Nielsen Top Ten (Nielsen Top Ten) and the more extensive data provided by the articles available from the TV By The Numbers section of zap2it.com (TV By The Numbers). Data was collected from TV By The Numbers on a daily basis, and from the Nielsen Top Ten on a weekly basis, to isolate the top performing programs between January 27th and March 3rd. This data was used to identify those first-run programs that rated highly on the L+7 measure in one or more age groups during the period under analysis, defined as an average rating of 4.0 or higher. This methodology resulted in a total potential pool of 8 programs: *Modern Family*, *How I Met Your Mother*, *Big Bang Theory*, *Grey's Anatomy*, *2 Broke Girls*, *The Following*, *SCANDAL*, *Person Of Interest*, and *Criminal Minds*.

Each of these programs was randomly assigned a number between 1 and 20 through the use of the RANDBETWEEN() function available in Microsoft Excel. To select the programs for inclusion in the experiment, a 20-sided die was rolled until a total of 5 different numbers corresponding with the individual programs were selected. The resulting stimulus programs were *Modern Family*, *How I Met Your Mother*, *Big Bang Theory*, *SCANDAL*, and *Criminal Minds*.

Stimulus Materials

Product placement exposure was manipulated through the use of clips that contained an audio/visual product placement or neutral clips from the same episode involving the same character but lacking in any branded product use or placement. Each clip was selected to be as similar as possible in both length and tone. Each subject was exposed to 5 individual clips, 3 stimulus clips that contained an active product placement and 2 control clips lacking any product placements. Clip order was randomized across conditions to minimize any potential order effects.

The clips utilized, and product placement instances, for each show are as follows:

- Program 1: Modern Family
    - Episode: “Game Changer” (S1-E19)
    - Stimulus: On Phil’s birthday, after obsessing for the entire episode, he receives an iPad as a gift.
        - Runtime: 1 minute, 29 seconds
    - Control: Phil is enjoying his birthday by hitting some baseballs at a local park, and ends up crashing a child’s birthday party.
        - Runtime: 1 minute, 34 seconds
- Program 2: How I Met Your Mother

    - Episode: “Subway Wars” (S6-E4)
    - Stimulus: As Ted, Barney, Robin, Lily and Marshall argue about the quickest way to reach a restaurant, Ted pulls out a Windows-branded laptop and uses Bing to find the distance.
        - Runtime: 2 Minutes, 17 seconds
    - Control: At the end of the race, Barney and Ted share a drink, Robin sees Maury Povich, and Marshall and Lily ride off into the sunset.
        - Runtime: 1 Minute, 49 seconds
- Program 3: Big Bang Theory
    - Episode: “The Good Guy Fluctuation” (S5-E7)
    - Stimulus: After handling a snake, Sheldon repeats “Purrell, Purrell, Purrell” until he can pick up and use the bottle on his desk.
        - Runtime: 2 minutes, 8 seconds
    - Control: Sheldon attempts to prank Howard, but the plan goes awry.
        - Runtime: 2 minutes, 1 second
- Program 4: SCANDAL
    - Episode: “Molly, You In Danger, Girl” (S2-E18)
    - Stimulus: Olivia uses the HTC 8X Windows Phone on screen, complete with close-up of screen.
        - Runtime: 1 minute, 19 seconds
    - Control: Olivia discusses a case with a potential new client.
        - Runtime: 1 minute, 34 seconds

- Program 5: Criminal Minds
  - Episode: “The Middle Man” (S6-E7)
  - Stimulus: “Hotch” receives a tablet PC for use in the briefing room.
    - Runtime: 1 minute, 20 seconds
  - Control: “Hotch” and the other investigators discuss the case.
    - Runtime: 1 minute, 15 seconds

Pre-test Measures

Media Consumption. To assess subjects average media consumption, a bank of eight genre-specific measures was used. Subjects were asked how often, in a typical week, they watched each program type, with responses ranging from “Never” to “Multiple times a week.” Integrated within this bank were fifteen program specific measures, five of which were designed to measure subject’s consumption of the programs included in the stimulus materials. The remaining ten items were specific programs included as distracter items to mask the stimulus-related questions.

Presumed Influence of Product Placements on Self. The perceived impact of product placements on self was measured using two measures asking respondents to rate their agreement with the statement that “Product placements have a powerful effect on me” and quantify “How much influence do you think the programs you watch have on your own purchases and desires?” These two measures were averaged to create a single measure of perceived product placement susceptibility ($M = 3.65$, $SD = 1.51$, $r = 0.698$).

Presumed Influence of Product Placements on Peers. The perceived impact of product placements on peers was measured using the same two items from above, with wording adjusted

to reference friends as opposed to self. These items were averaged to create a single measure of perceived product placement peer effect (M = 5.02, SD = 1.32, r = 0.678).

Presumed Influence of Product Placements on Distal Others. The perceived impact of product placements on others was also measured using the same two items from above, with wording adjusted to reference others as opposed to self or friends. These items were averaged to create a single measure of perceived product placement other effect (M = 5.29, SD = 1.09, r = 0.520).

Self-Monitoring. Individual predispositions toward self-monitoring were assessed using the 18-item measure (M = 3.91, SD = 1.27, α = 0.94) developed by Gangestad & Snyder (1985). Subjects were asked to indicate their agreement with how well the statements fit them on a 7-point Likert Scale (1=Not at all; 7=Extremely Well).

Parasocial Connection to Character. The perceived parasocial connection toward each character that interacted with the product placed within each program was measured using the 10-point scale developed in Study 1 (detailed in Chapter 5). Composite measures for each character were developed based upon these responses (Character 1: M = 4.04, SD = 1.30, α = 0.88; Character 2: M = 3.97, SD = 1.26, α = 0.87; Character 3: M = 4.30, SD = 1.21, α = 0.87; Character 4: M = 4.19, SD = 1.24, α = 0.87; Character 5: M = 3.85, SD = 1.28, α = 0.88).

Parasocial Connection to Actor. Following the same methodology as above, the perceived parasocial connection toward each actor portraying a character that interacted with the product placed within each program was measured using the 10-point scale developed in Study 1. Composite measures for each actor were developed based upon these responses (Actor 1: M = 3.57, SD = 0.91, α = 0.74; Actor 2: M = 3.40, SD = 1.00, α = 0.79; Actor 3: M = 3.46, SD = 0.98, α = 0.77; Actor 4: M = 3.52, SD = 0.95, α = 0.76; Actor 5: M = 3.54, SD = 0.90, α = 0.70).

Post-test Measures Following Stimulus Exposure

Perceived Peer Exposure. Perceptions of peer exposure to the stimulus programs were measured using three program specific items assessing perceived peer behaviors, including whether the subject thinks their friends watch the program, how often they think their friends watch the program, and how many episodes they think their friends have seen, as well as one general measure of perceived uniformity of program exposure between self and peers. These measures were modified from the well-established scale developed by Gunther et al. (2006) to address the programs included in the stimulus materials.

Composite measures of perceived peer exposure to each program were developed utilizing the three program specific items (Program 1: $M = 3.75$, $SD = 1.80$, $\alpha = 0.88$; Program 2: $M = 3.80$, $SD = 1.80$, $\alpha = 0.89$; Program 3: $M = 3.93$, $SD = 1.81$, $\alpha = 0.90$; Program 4: $M = 3.71$, $SD = 1.79$, $\alpha = 0.90$; Program 5: $M = 3.69$, $SD = 1.77$, $\alpha = 0.88$). Due to low levels of correlation with any of the program specific items ($r \leq 0.26$), the general measure of program exposure uniformity was discarded from the analysis.

Perceived Other Exposure. Perceptions of non-peer exposure to the stimulus programs were measured using two of the program specific items used for assessing perceived peer behaviors, with the wording shifted from the proximal peer designation of “friends” to the distal designation of “other people.” Composite measures of perceived other exposure to each program were originally developed utilizing the three program specific items, with the reworded measure of “Do other people, in general, watch [program]” excluded as analysis revealed it to be uncorrelated with the remaining two measures. The resultant measures of other exposure were, therefore, calculated by taking the mean of the remaining two items and analyzed according to Pearson’s r: (Program 1: $M = 4.46$, $SD = 1.38$, $r = 0.476$; Program 2: $M = 4.29$, $SD = 1.31$, $r =$

0.417; Program 3: $M = 4.44$, $SD = 1.33$, $r = 0.37$; Program 4: $M = 4.37$, $SD = 1.42$, $r = 0.508$; Program 5: $M = 4.41$, $SD = 1.31$, $r = 0.375$).

Perceived Peer Desire. The perceived peer desire for the products featured in the stimulus materials was measured using a scale designed to measure the facets identified by the Presumed Influence of Television Series on Others (PITSO) scale used by Noguti and Russell (2013), designed to measure both the perceived desire for the product and the perceived general desire for the lifestyle of the character in question. Composite measures were developed for each product based on the average of the four items (Product 1: $M = 4.10$, $SD = 1.21$, $\alpha = 0.66$; Product 2: $M = 4.02$, $SD = 1.29$, $\alpha = 0.70$; Product 3: $M = 4.22$, $SD = 1.17$, $\alpha = 0.63$; Product 4: $M = 4.12$, $SD = 1.23$, $\alpha = 0.67$; Product 5: $M = 4.07$, $SD = 1.17$, $\alpha = 0.62$).

Perceived Other Desire. Perceived desire of the general other was measured using the same scale as above, with items modified to refer to "people other than your friends." These items were averaged to create composite measures of perceived other desire (Product 1: $M = 3.10$, $SD = 1.02$, $\alpha = 0.54$; Product 2: $M = 3.26$, $SD = 1.07$, $\alpha = 0.55$; Product 3: $M = 3.08$, $SD = 1.02$, $\alpha = 0.55$; Product 4: $M = 3.12$, $SD = 1.06$, $\alpha = 0.57$; Product 5: $M = 3.16$, $SD = 1.07$, $\alpha = 0.58$).

Desire for Product. The primary dependent variable of this experiment was measured using the scale developed by Miniard, Rose, Barone, and Manning (1993), and assessed product opinion and likelihood of purchase both in general and as compared to other, similar products. The four individual items were averaged to construct individual level product desire for each of the five products featured in the stimulus programs (Product 1: $M = 4.11$, $SD = 1.14$, $\alpha = 0.62$; Product 2: $M = 4.07$, $SD = 1.20$, $\alpha = 0.63$; Product 3: $M = 4.16$, $SD = 1.17$, $\alpha = 0.62$; Product 4: $M = 4.12$, $SD = 1.22$, $\alpha = 0.68$; Product 5: $M = 3.95$, $SD = 1.23$, $\alpha = 0.66$).

Results

Evidence of Third Person Effect

Prior to analyzing the potential effects of the third person effect, an analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted on the predicted influence of product placements on self, peers, and the generalized "other." As anticipated, there were significant third-person effects observed, the perceived effect on both peers (M = 5.02, SD = 1.32), $F(12, 321) = 14.76$, $p = .000$, and the generalized "other" (M = 5.29, SD = 1.09), $F(12, 321) = 3.79$, $p = .000$, significantly higher than the perceived effect on the self (M = 3.65, SD = 1.51).

Direct Effect of Product Placement Exposure on Purchase Intention

One-sample t-tests were conducted to assess the impact of product placement exposure on individual purchase intentions and attitudes towards each product. As shown in Table 1, the mean product desire score was significantly higher in every exposure condition as compared to the control conditions for that product.

Table 5.1
Mean Product Desire Scores and t-test Values Across Programs and Conditions

	Stimulus		Control				
	M	*(SD)*	*M*	*(SD)*	*t*-value	df	*p* (one-tailed)
Product 1	4.25	1.21	3.91	1.03	7.56	333	0.003
Product 2	4.16	1.23	3.92	1.13	3.34	333	0.035
Product 3	4.30	1.15	3.95	1.17	7.33	333	0.004
Product 4	4.42	1.15	3.67	1.20	32.35	333	0.000
Product 5	4.16	1.25	3.63	1.15	15.42	333	0.000

Taken together, these results indicate that, by and large, exposure to product placements had a significant impact on the subjects in question, and allows for the further exploration of the mediating factors within this relationship.

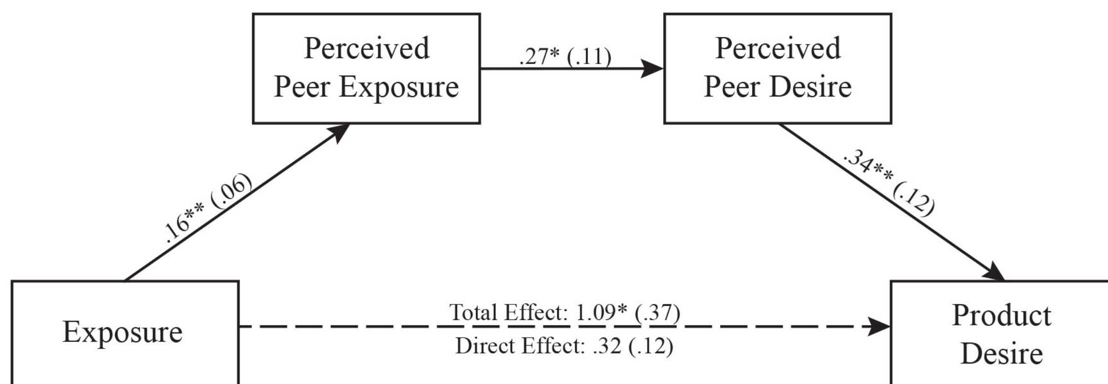
Path Analysis: Influence of Peer Exposure and Desire on Purchase Desire

To develop a mediation model incorporating the hypothesized third person effects and corresponding influence of presumed influence, the PROCESS macro for SPSS was applied to the data. Developed by Hayes (2012), this statistical analysis uses an ordinary-least-squares, regression-based path analysis to estimate direct and indirect effects within complex, multi-variable models. The technique allows for the tracing or conditional indirect effects of multiple mediators and moderators, and implements bootstrap methods to infer indirect effects (see also Hayes; Preacher & Hayes, 2004; Preacher, Rucker, & Hayes, 2007; Rucker, Preacher, Tormala, & Petty, 2011). Separate models were developed to test each product placement exposure individually.

Influence of Presumed Peer Influence: Product 1

The basic model proposed in this paper (diagrammed in Figure 4.1) was found to be significant using the PROCESS macro to obtain a bootstrapped confidence interval (95% CI: {0.1018, 0.5822} with 1000 resamples) and the proportion of total variance explained by the interaction, R^2 = .075, $F(3, 330) = 8.94$, $p = .000$. Within the model, all hypothesized relationships are seen to be significant, with final purchase desire influenced directly by the exposure as well as indirectly via the proposed influence of presumed influence path.

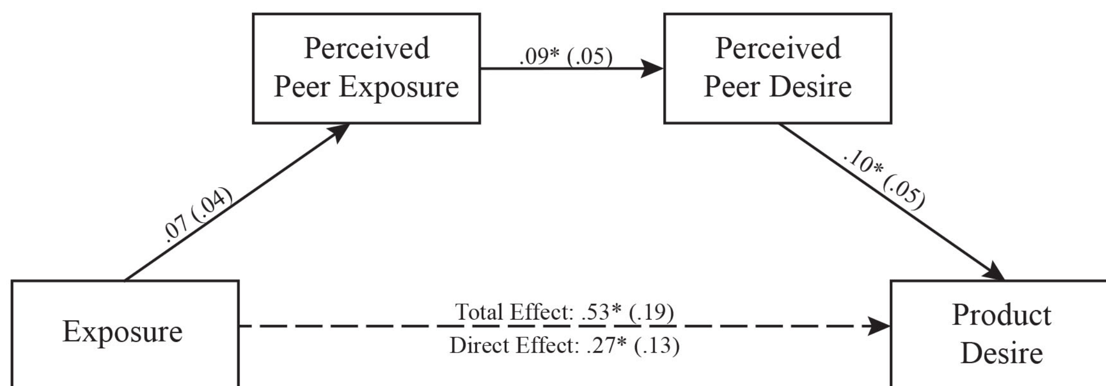
Figure 5.1. Peer oriented Influence of Presumed Influence path analysis of product placement exposure for Program 1.



Influence of Presumed Peer Influence: Program 2

The basic model was found to be significant for Program 2, according to the bootstrapped confidence interval (95% CI: {0.0079, 0.5347} with 1000 resamples) and the proportion of total variance explained by the interaction, R^2 = .038, $F(3, 330)$ = 4.28, p = .005. Again, the hypothesized relationships hold for both a direct and mediated effect of exposure on purchase intention, though the relationship between exposure and peer exposure did not hold as significant.

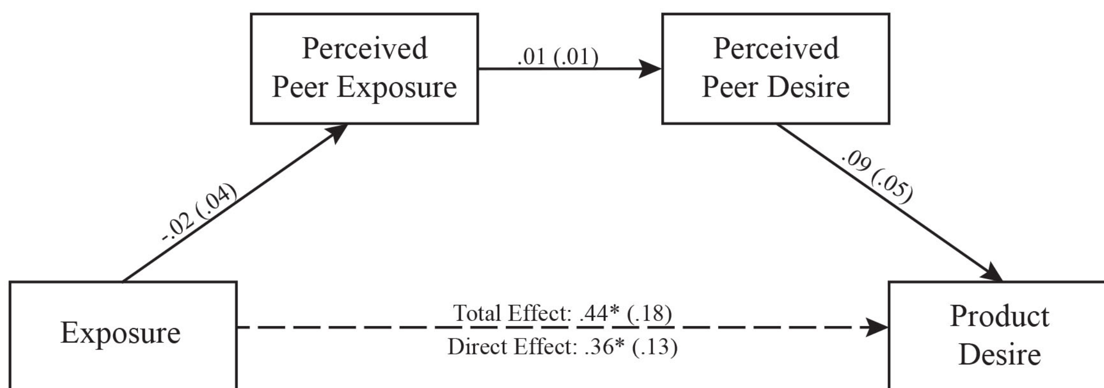
Figure 5.2. Peer oriented Influence of Presumed Influence path analysis of product placement exposure for Program 2.



Influence of Presumed Peer Influence: Program 3

The basic model was found to be significant for Program 3, according to the bootstrapped confidence interval (95% CI: {0.1042, 0.6155} with 1000 resamples) and the proportion of total variance explained by the interaction, R^2 = .030, $F(3, 330)$ = 3.42, p = .018. In this instance, it can be seen that only the direct effect of exposure has a significant impact on purchase desire, with peer exposure and peer desire failing to reach significance.

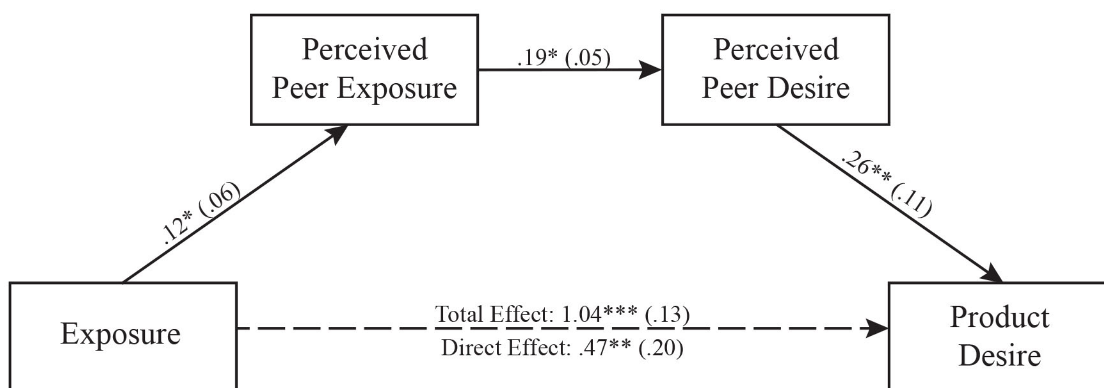
Figure 5.3. Peer oriented Influence of Presumed Influence path analysis of product placement exposure for Program 3.



Influence of Presumed Peer Influence: Program 4

The basic model was found to be significant for Program 4, according to the bootstrapped confidence interval (95% CI: {0.4787, 0.9936} with 1000 resamples) and the proportion of total variance explained by the interaction, R^2 = .097, F(3, 330) = 11.49, p = .000. As with Program 1, the relationships between the factors of the hypothesized model were all significant.

Figure 5.4. Peer oriented Influence of Presumed Influence path analysis of product placement exposure for Program 4.

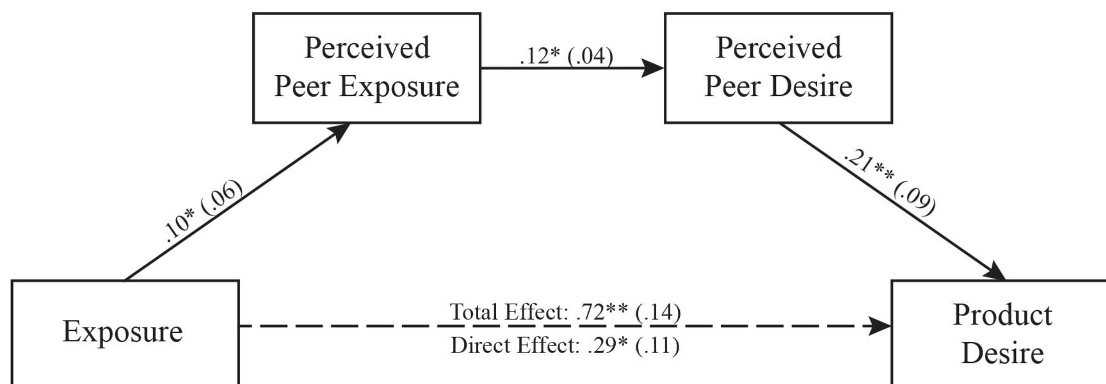


Influence of Presumed Peer Influence: Program 5

The basic model was found to be significant for Program 5, according to the bootstrapped confidence interval (95% CI: {0.2641, 0.7974} with 1000 resamples) and the proportion of total variance explained by the interaction, R^2 = .047, F(3, 330) = 5.37, p = .001. The direct effect and

mediated paths are again significant for this stimulus, with exposure leading to increased perceptions of peer exposure, peer desire for the product, and self-oriented purchase desire.

Figure 5.5. Peer oriented Influence of Presumed Influence path analysis of product placement exposure for Program 5.



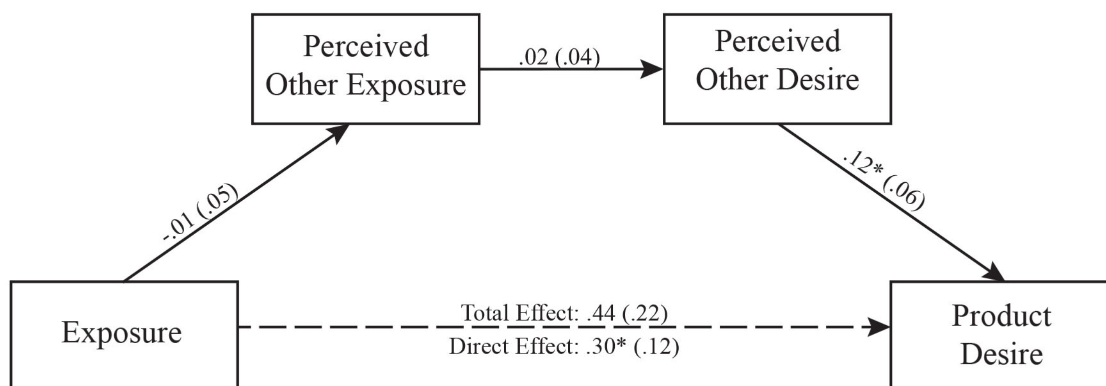
Path Analysis: Influence of "Other" Exposure and Desire on Purchase Desire

The role of distal other program exposure and product desire was analyzed using the same methodology as outlined for the analysis of peer influence, with separate models again developed to test each product placement instance individually.

Influence of Presumed Other Influence: Program 1

The same model used for peer influence was found to be significant based on the bootstrapped confidence interval (95% CI: {0.0987, 0.5902} with 1000 resamples) and the proportion of total variance explained by the interaction, R^2 = .033, $F(3, 330) = 3.79$, $p = .011$. However, unlike the observed influence of presumed influence mapped within the peer oriented analysis, the other oriented analysis did not indicate any significant impact of program exposure outside of the direct effect, though there is a significant relationship between the perceived desire of "others" and purchase desire.

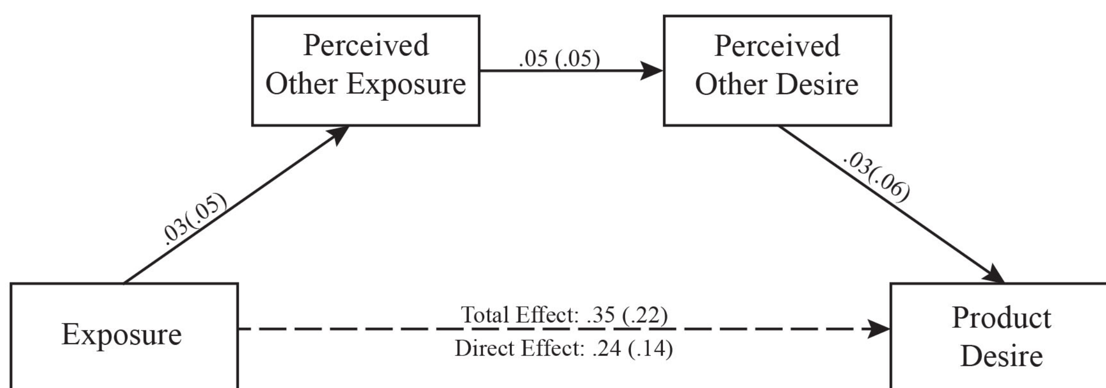
Figure 5.6. Distal Other oriented Influence of Presumed Influence path analysis of product placement exposure for Program 1.



Influence of Presumed Other Influence: Program 2

The basic model was not found to be significant for Program 2, based on an unacceptable bootstrapped confidence interval (95% CI: {-0.0252, 0.5080} with 1000 resamples) and the proportion of total variance explained by the interaction, $R^2 = .012$, $F(3, 330) = 1.32$, $p = .267$. Within the model itself, none of the hypothesized relationships were significant.

Figure 5.7. Distal Other oriented Influence of Presumed Influence path analysis of product placement exposure for Program 2.

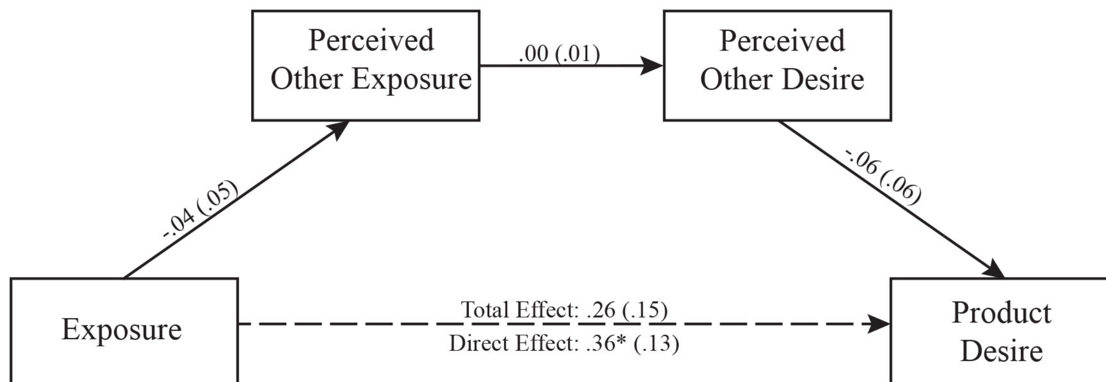


Influence of Presumed Other Influence: Program 3

The basic met the requirements of significance for Program 3, meeting the guidelines for the bootstrapped confidence interval (95% CI: {0.1060, 0.6155} with 1000 resamples) and significance regarding the proportion of total variance explained by the interaction, $R^2 = .027$,

$F(3, 330) = 3.03$, $p = .006$. However, unlike the peer-oriented analyses, the only significant factor within the model was the exposure to the program. Neither Perceived Exposure nor Perceived Desire mediated the effect of the stimulus.

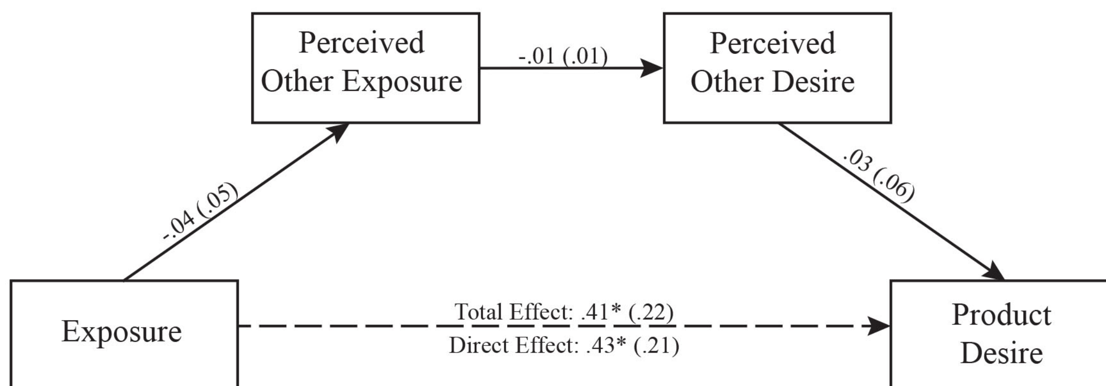
Figure 5.8. Distal Other oriented Influence of Presumed Influence path analysis of product placement exposure for Program 3.



Influence of Presumed Other Influence: Program 4

The basic model was found to be significant for Program 4, according to the bootstrapped confidence interval (95% CI: {0.4864, 1.0019} with 1000 resamples) and the proportion of total variance explained by the interaction, $R^2 = .091$, $F(3, 330) = 11.05$, $p = .000$. Again, as observed within the analysis for Program 3, only exposure exerted any significant influence of the outcome.

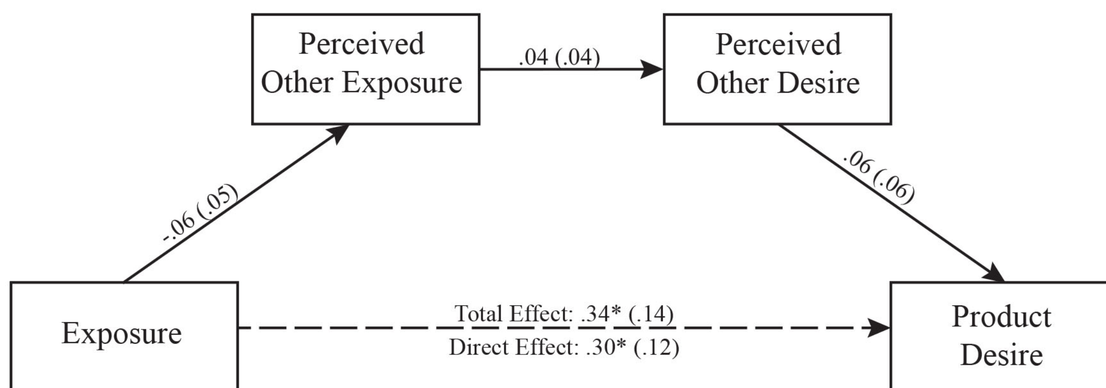
Figure 5.9. Distal Other oriented Influence of Presumed Influence path analysis of product placement exposure for Program 4.



Influence of Presumed Other Influence: Program 5

The basic model was found to be significant for Program 5, according to the bootstrapped confidence interval (95% CI: {0.2535, 0.7854} with 1000 resamples) and the proportion of total variance explained by the interaction, R^2 = .051, $F(3, 330)$ = 5.87, p = .001. As observed above, the only significant factor within the model was the exposure to the program. Neither Perceived Exposure nor Perceived Desire mediated the effect of the stimulus.

Figure 5.10. Distal Other oriented Influence of Presumed Influence path analysis of product placement exposure for Program 5.



Path Analysis: Impact of Self-Monitoring on the Influence of Presumed Influence

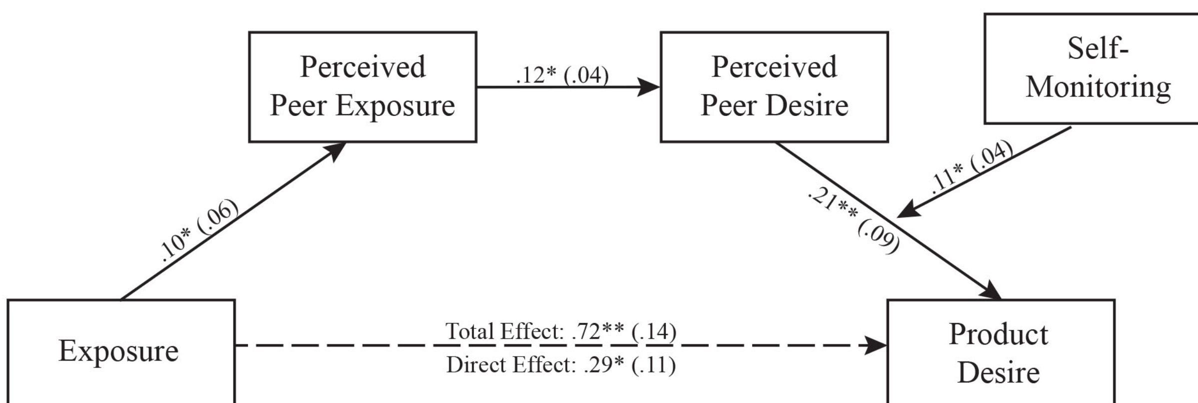
To develop a mediation model incorporating the hypothesized role of self-monitoring on the influence of peers within the proposed model, the PROCESS macro for SPSS was again used to develop models to test each stimulus separately. The model is identical to the analysis above,

with the addition of individual levels of self-monitoring mediating the relationship between the perceived desire of others and the resulting individual purchase desire. The perceived peer exposure and desire measures are included in this analysis while the perceived distal other measures have been excluded, based both on the lack of base model significance demonstrated above and the lack of a hypothesized role of self-monitoring within a non-peer context.

Role of Self-Monitoring on Presumed Influence: Program 1

The modified model, including self-monitoring as a mediating variable, was found to be significant for Program 1 using the PROCESS macro to obtain a bootstrapped confidence interval (95% CI: {0.1007, 0.5817} with 1000 resamples) and the proportion of total variance explained by the interaction, $R^2 = .076$, $F(4, 329) = 6.74$, $p = .000$. As with the initial peer-oriented model, the original path analysis of both the direct effect and mediated effect remains significant, with the individual predisposition towards self-monitoring acting as a significant moderator on the connection between Peer Desire and Product Desire.

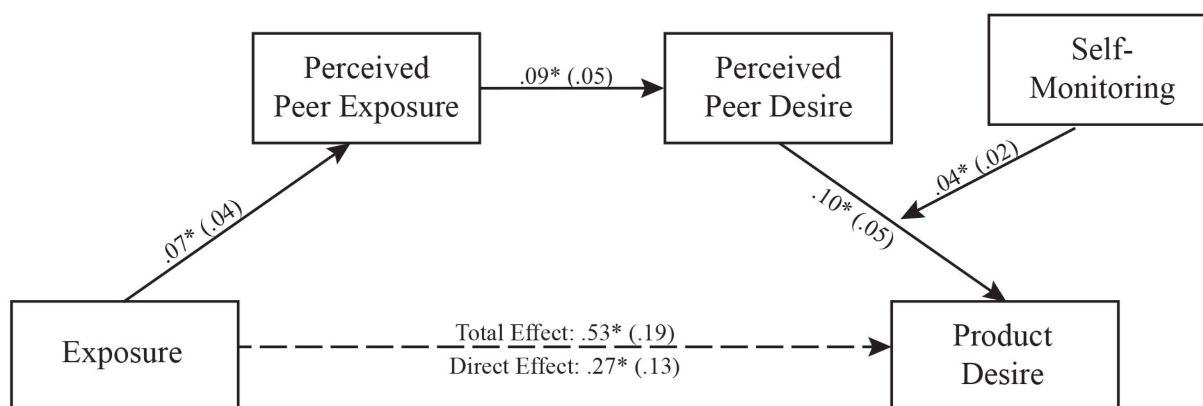
Figure 5.11. Integration of Self-Monitoring into the peer oriented Influence of Presumed Influence path analysis of product placement exposure for Program 1.



Role of Self-Monitoring on Presumed Influence: Program 2

The model including self-monitoring as a mediating variable was found to be significant for Program 2 using the PROCESS macro to obtain a bootstrapped confidence interval (95% CI: {0.0926, 0.5315} with 1000 resamples) and the proportion of total variance explained by the interaction, R^2 = .041, $F(4, 329) = 3.25$, $p = .012$. The peer-oriented model again holds, as does the hypothesis that self-monitoring will moderate the effect of peer desire.

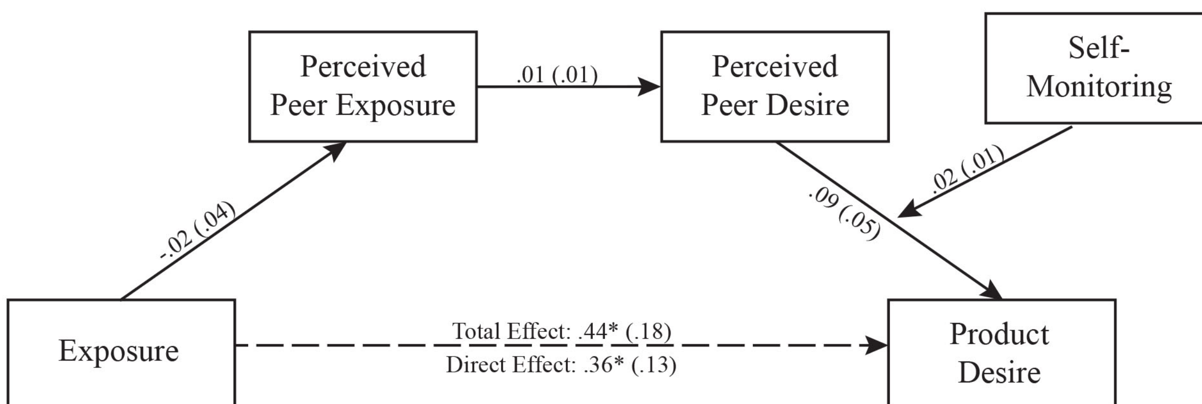
Figure 5.12. Integration of Self-Monitoring into the peer oriented Influence of Presumed Influence path analysis of product placement exposure for Program 2.



Role of Self-Monitoring on Presumed Influence: Program 3

The modified model, including self-monitoring as a mediating variable, was found to be significant for Program 3 using the PROCESS macro to obtain a bootstrapped confidence interval (95% CI: {0.1056, 0.6175} with 1000 resamples) and the proportion of total variance explained by the interaction, R^2 = .032, $F(4, 329) = 2.65$, $p = .033$. However, the influence of self-monitoring fails to be significant within the also non-significant moderated influence pathway.

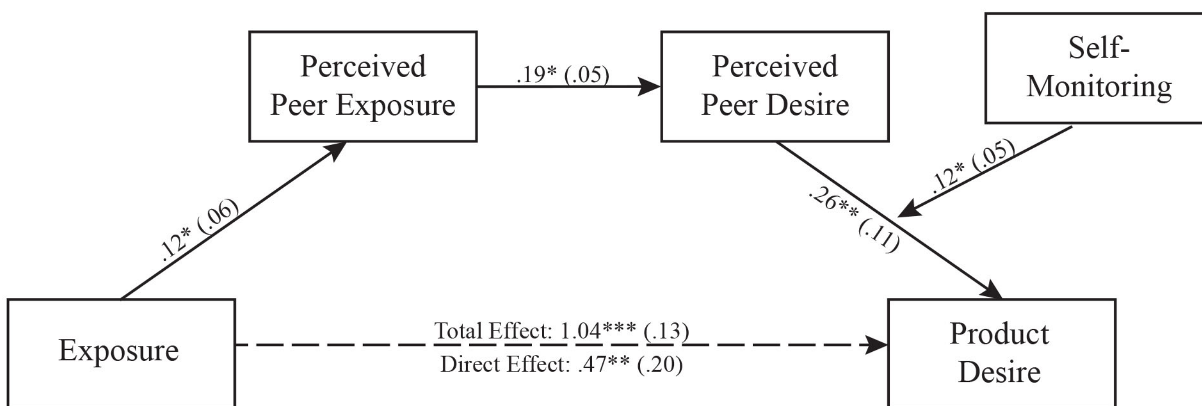
Figure 5.13. Integration of Self-Monitoring into the peer oriented Influence of Presumed Influence path analysis of product placement exposure for Program 3.



Role of Self-Monitoring on Presumed Influence: Program 4

The modified model was again found to be significant for Program 4, with a bootstrapped confidence interval of (95% CI: {0.4760, 0.9916} with 1000 resamples) and based on the proportion of total variance explained by the interaction, R^2 = .096, F(4, 329) = 8.72, p = .000. The peer-oriented model again holds, as does the hypothesis that self-monitoring will moderate the effect of peer desire.

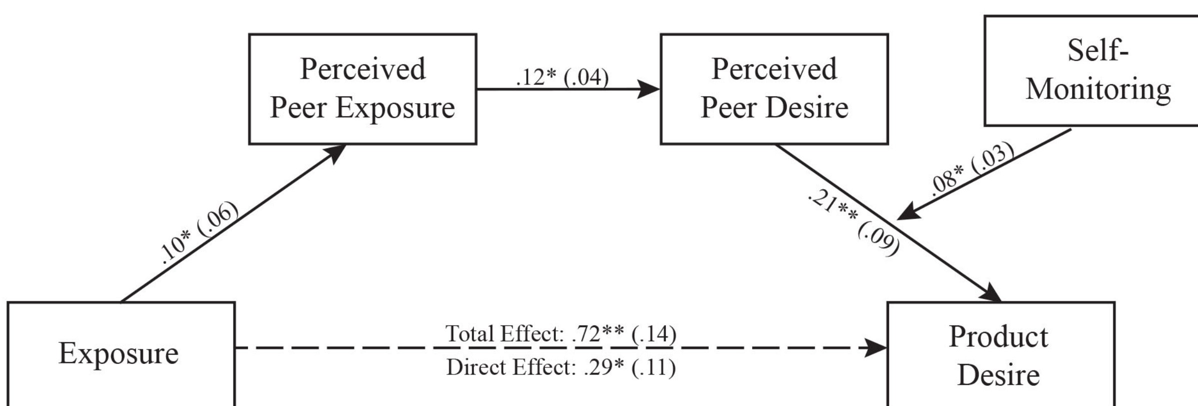
Figure 5.14. Integration of Self-Monitoring into the peer oriented Influence of Presumed Influence path analysis of product placement exposure for Program 4.



Role of Self-Monitoring on Presumed Influence: Program 5

Finally, the model was found to be significant for Program 5 based on a bootstrapped confidence interval (95% CI: {0.2733, 0.8044} with 1000 resamples) and proportion of total variance explained by the interaction, R^2 = .059, F(4, 329) = 5.07, p = .001. As with Programs 1, 2, and 4, the hypothesized model and relationships are significant, with self-monitoring again moderating the path between peer and self.

Figure 5.15. Integration of Self-Monitoring into the peer oriented Influence of Presumed Influence path analysis of product placement exposure for Program 5.



Path Analysis: Moderation of Purchase Desire by Parasocial Connections

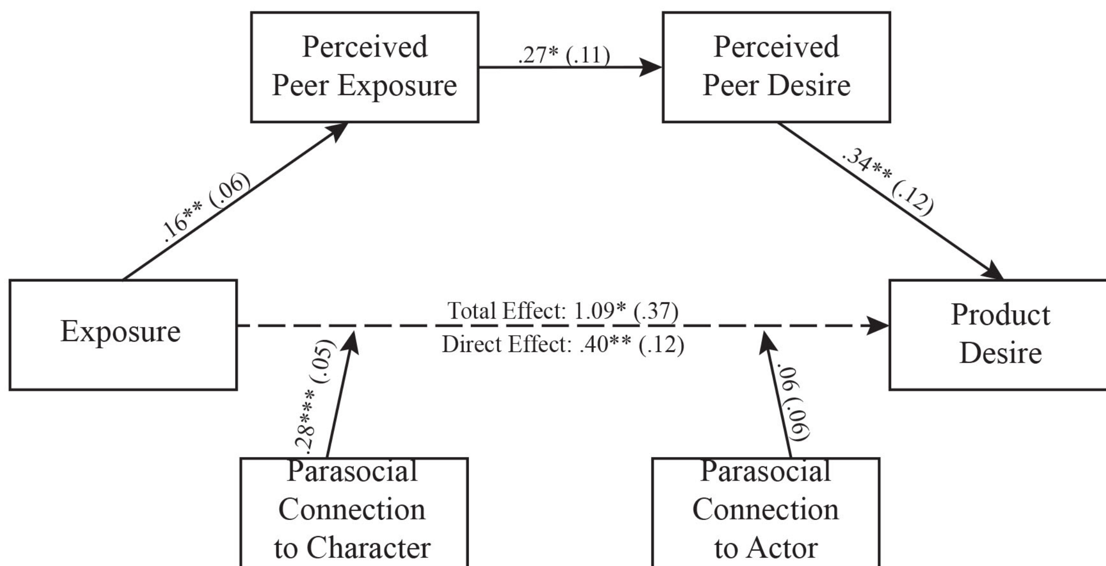
To analyze the hypothesized impact of parasocial connections on the observed influence of exposure on purchase desire, a fourth path analysis model was constructed incorporating the previous statistically significant models, as well as both the character connection and actor connection exogenous variables. The PROCESS macro was again used for the analysis, with each product placement placed within a separate model.

Role of Parasocial Connections on Purchase Desire: Program 1

The specified model, with character and actor connection included as moderators, was found to be significant for Program 1 based on a bootstrapped confidence interval (95% CI:

{0.1664, 0.6256} with 1000 resamples) and proportion of total variance explained by the interaction, R^2 = .17, $F(5, 328)$ = 13.08, p = .000.

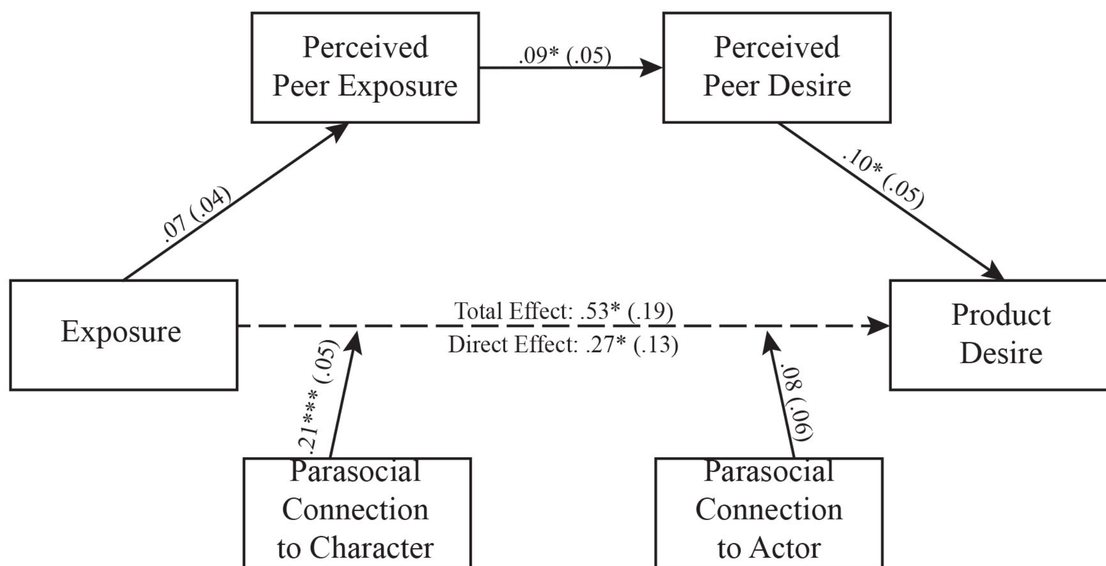
Figure 5.16. Integration of Parasocial Connections into the peer oriented Influence of Presumed Influence path analysis of product placement exposure for Program 1.



Role of Parasocial Connections on Purchase Desire: Program 2

The specified model, with character and actor connection included as moderators, was found to be significant for Program 2 based on a bootstrapped confidence interval (95% CI: {0.0590, 0.5776} with 1000 resamples) and proportion of total variance explained by the interaction, R^2 = .22, $F(5, 328)$ = 5.79, p = .000.

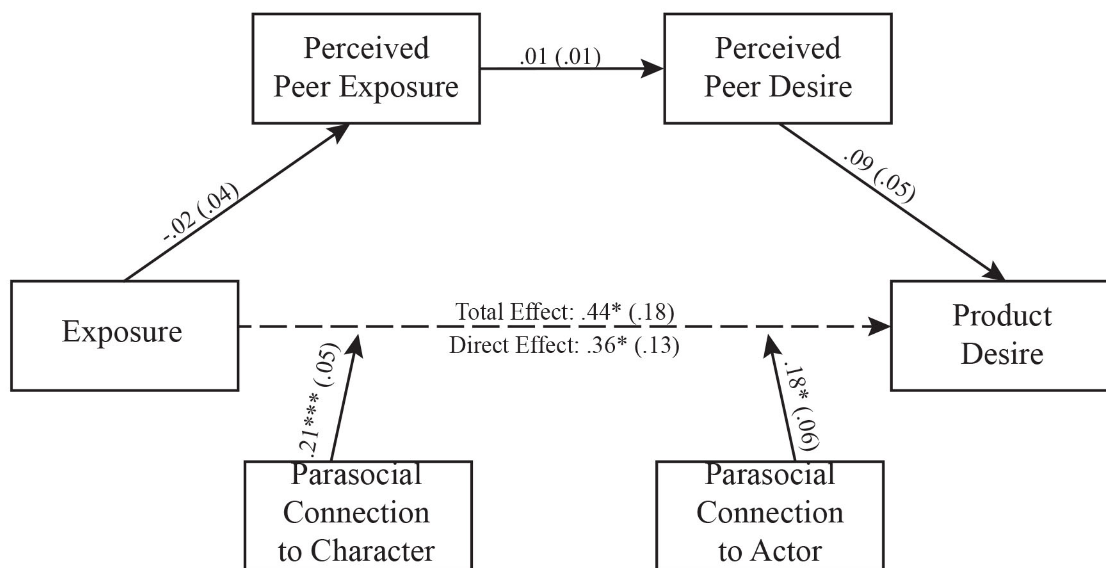
Figure 5.17. Integration of Parasocial Connections into the peer oriented Influence of Presumed Influence path analysis of product placement exposure for Program 2.



Role of Parasocial Connections on Purchase Desire: Program 3

The specified model, with character and actor connection included as moderators, was found to be significant for Program 3 based on a bootstrapped confidence interval (95% CI: {0.1043, 0.5980} with 1000 resamples) and proportion of total variance explained by the interaction, R^2 = .10, F(5, 328) = 7.48, p = .000.

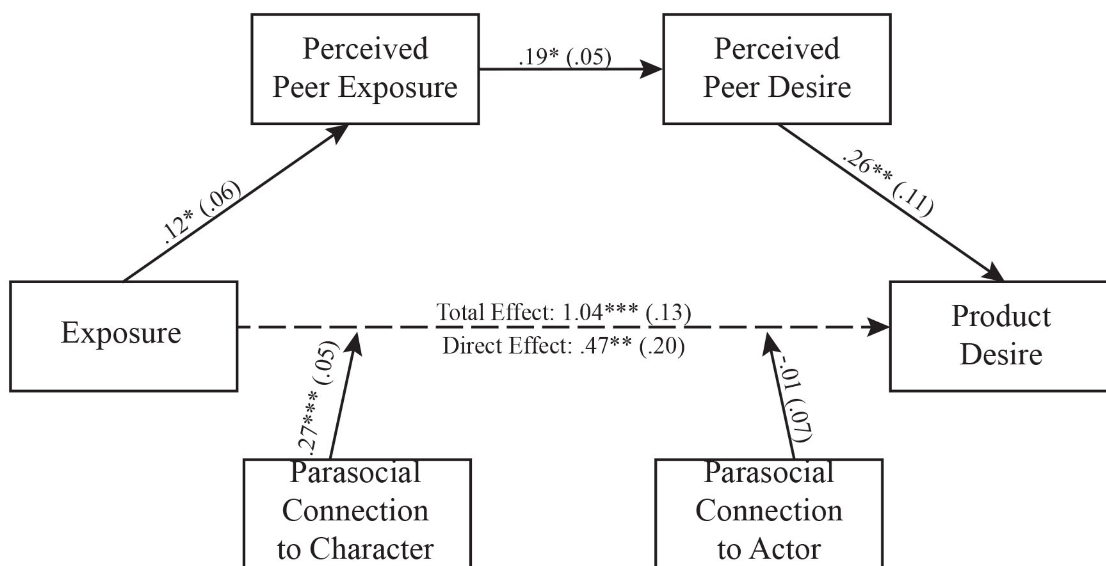
Figure 5.18. Integration of Parasocial Connections into the peer oriented Influence of Presumed Influence path analysis of product placement exposure for Program 3.



Role of Parasocial Connections on Purchase Desire: Program 4

The specified model, with character and actor connection included as moderators, was found to be significant for Program 4 based on a bootstrapped confidence interval (95% CI: {0.4056, 0.9074} with 1000 resamples) and proportion of total variance explained by the interaction, R^2 = .16, F(5, 328) = 12.42, p = .000.

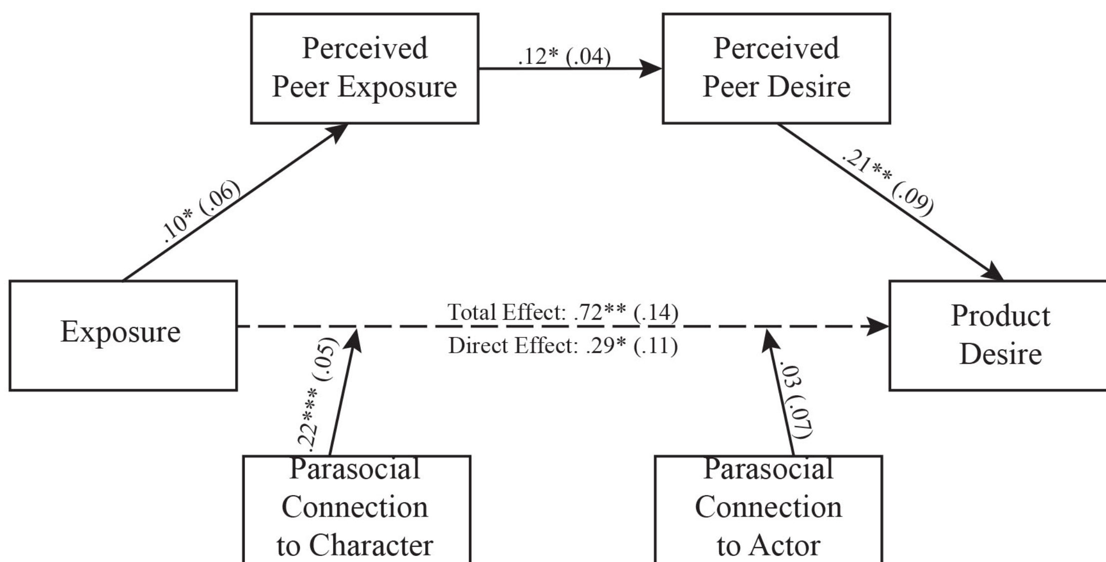
Figure 5.19. Integration of Parasocial Connections into the peer oriented Influence of Presumed Influence path analysis of product placement exposure for Program 4.



Role of Parasocial Connections on Purchase Desire: Program 5

The specified model, with character and actor connection included as moderators, was found to be significant for Program 5 based on a bootstrapped confidence interval (95% CI: {0.2663, 0.7888} with 1000 resamples) and proportion of total variance explained by the interaction, $R^2 = .10$, $F(5, 328) = 7.02$, $p = .000$.

Figure 5.20. Integration of Parasocial Connections into the peer oriented Influence of Presumed Influence path analysis of product placement exposure for Program 5.



Chapter 7

Conclusion

The findings presented here provide valuable insight into the application of multiple theories of attitude formation and social connection to the study of persuasive message effects, specifically audio/visual television product placements, and the resultant purchase intentions and attitudes toward those products. On the most basic level, these findings provide further support for both the direct and indirect influence of product placement as a persuasive approach, as well as further cementing the third person effect and the influence of presumed influence model as primary factors in the persuasive and theoretical landscape.

Unified Theoretical Model

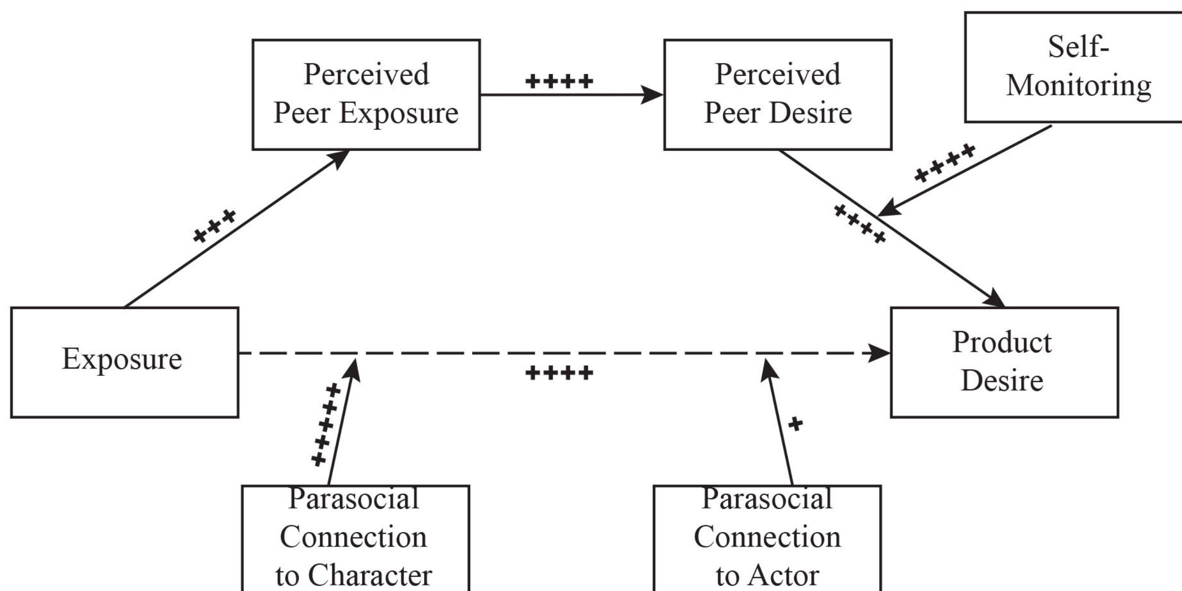
Before examining the program specific results and explicating some of the potential differences that emerged between programs, or addressing the differences between reference groups, let us first examine the trends that are observable across the five stimulus programs. Regarding the simple effect of exposure, results demonstrated support across all conditions for the expected relationship between exposure and purchase intention. Additional support was observed for the hypothesized third person mediation path from exposure through perceived peer exposure to perceived peer desire, with three of the five models indicating a significant path from exposure to peer exposure and four of the five indicating a significant path from peer exposure to perceived peer desire. Isolated analysis of these opinions and perceived opinions provides solid support for the anticipated third-person effect, with peers and others perceived as more influenced by the advertisements than oneself.

The support for a third person effect provides the basis for the hypothesized influence of presumed influence, with significant relationships between peer desire and product desire

observed across four of the models. In addition to being significant on its own, this relationship was also moderated by individual predispositions toward self-monitoring in all four instances.

Finally, in all five of the models developed above, the parasocial connection with the character associated with the product placement was a significant moderator of the direct effect of exposure to the stimulus. In contrast, the parasocial connection with the actor portraying the character was only significant in one instance.

Figure 6.1. Summary model of significant relationships within the unified theoretical model.



This unified model provides the clearest visualization of the overall persuasive method by which product placements influence the viewer both in terms of attitudes and, potentially, behaviors. The initial exposure to the embedded advertisement leads to a strong direct effect, which is then moderated by the connection to the character involved with the cue. High levels of connection with the character led to a more powerful direct effect, with the implicit or explicit character endorsement of the product contributing a powerful cue, amplifying the exposure. Simultaneously, one performs a complex mental calculus, judging the likelihood of peers being

exposed to the program and placement, and estimating the effect on them. This perceived peer opinion leads to an adjustment of our own attitudes, as we seek to stay in line with our peer group and avoid any social or cognitive dissonance. However, this relationship is not unmodified, as our individual predilection toward self-monitoring – our need to conform our behaviors to those we observe in others – moderates this relationship, leading to higher levels of purchase desire among those subjects high in self-monitoring.

Program Specific Results

Although similar results were observed across four of the five stimulus programs, it is worth examining some of the various differences between the models. Perhaps the most obvious difference lies in the effect of the stimulus drawn from *Big Bang Theory*, the only condition wherein a significant effect of peer exposure or desire was not evident. Indeed, within this condition only the direct effect, moderated by the parasocial connection to both the character and the actor, expressed a significant path coefficient. It is the author's contention that this lack of third person effect, leading to a non-significant influence of presumed influence, may be tracked back to the character and behavior associated with the product, as Dr. Sheldon Cooper is portrayed by Jim Parsons as a social misanthrope with difficulty connecting with "normal" people. As such, the internal narrative that others, whether they are peers or distal others, would seek to model his behaviors may have been derailed by the character himself being one who is a subject of laughter and, at times, ridicule. In addition, the product in question (Purell) is the only stimulus product with a pro-social connotation, fulfilling not a material but health-related need. As such, it may be possible that this particular product failed to activate the structures necessary for a third-person effect because it instead activated the pathways associated with the first-person effect, though this remains speculation.

The other notable difference in statistical model lays within the distal other oriented analysis for Program 1, an episode of *Modern Family* featuring the Apple iPad. This model includes the only instance of a significant effect of distal other desire on purchase desire, but appears to be distinct from perceived exposure to the program. Given the iPad's cache in society at large, it is plausible that this effect is distinct from the perceived exposure of the program, representing instead an existing schema of generalized desire for the product that was activated by the embedded advertisement. In other words, it is not that subjects perceived others as swayed by the program, but rather that the level of desire expressed by the character acted as a cue that society as a whole has a near fanatical desire for the product, leading to increased self-desire and purchase intention.

The Power of Reference Groups

At its heart, this experiment highlights the power of reference groups in the impact and processing of advertisements, specifically product placements. As evidenced by the differences in path coefficients between the peer-oriented and other-oriented models, the reference group for the comparison drastically alters the formation and alteration of opinions. When judging against the distal other, the hypothesized connection between exposure, perceived exposure, and perceived desire fails to materialize. This finding is not counter-intuitive, nor is it without precedent, and provides further support to the notion that our consumer behaviors and attitudes are predicated primarily upon the actions of those we judge as being "like us." The opinions and actions of those individuals judged as being socially distant have less impact upon our behaviors, and we are less sure regarding their television viewing habits, making it difficult to predict whether or not they have been exposed to the program in question. In contrast, we know which programs our peers engage with, both from discussions with them and our own projection of our

selves onto their experiences, allowing us to draw a psychological path from our own experiences to theirs and from them to ourselves.

Further buttressing this relationship is the role that parasocial connection plays with the character. Our perceived connection with the character acts in a similar fashion to the role of our peer group, albeit one where we do not have to imagine their using the product. Rather, we know that they have used the product and are pleased with its effect, leading to what amounts to a testimonial of sorts, similar to hearing one of our close “real” friends endorse a product, and carrying a level of interpersonal influence outside of the perceived indirect effect. This effect is, however, separate from the connection to the actor or actress portraying the character, demonstrating the distinctions drawn between the two. Our connection is formed not with the person behind the character, but with the character him or herself, the one we see on television and who invites us into their lives on a regular basis. The actor or actress remains an elusive figure, socially separated from both ourselves and, presumably, the character, and does not generally influence our behaviors.

Theoretical and Marketing Implications

Reflecting upon the above findings, a number of theoretical implications become apparent. Perhaps most notably, this experiment serves to underscore the need for mass communication, consumer culture, and psychological researchers to continue to examine and apply theories stemming from each field across all fields.

This dissertation advances our understanding of the methods by which product placements influence purchase desire by drawing on theories of media effects (Gunther & Storey, 2003), social connections (R. B. Rubin & McHugh, 1987), and personal dispositions (Snyder, 1987), bringing each theory to bear within one model of persuasion. In doing so, it

emphasizes the interconnected nature of the theoretical and research trends, and demonstrates the strong relationship between each. The desire to fit in with a given situation, illustrated by the propensity towards social monitoring, moderates the expected effect of significant peer desire in each case, and provides additional insight into this well established process, with those individuals predisposed towards self-monitoring more greatly affected by the perception of peer desire. Scholars investigating the effects of advertisements and persuasive methods via the third person and influence of presumed influence routes would be well advised to incorporate measures of individual propensity towards behavior modification based on social cues and schema. These individual social predispositions provide a more nuance insight into the alteration of our own behavior based on the perceptions of what others may find desirable.

Similarly, the effect of the parasocial connections with the characters illustrates a need for further unpacking of this relationship, particularly in light of the role played by the media in the formation of consumer culture (Holt, 1997; Mills, 1956; Schor, 1999). It has long been apparent that our connection with the media, as well as our connection with "the Joneses," has a lasting influence on consumption patterns. However, this connection with the media and the effect of the messages contained within is moderated by our connection with those delivering the messages, and may be subject to the same processes observed regarding our real world friends and acquaintances. Much as this dissertation disentangled the roles of "other" and "peer", as well as "character" and "actor," further research should explore the effects of "peer" characters and "other" characters to further illuminate the effects of each.

The impact of a parasocial connection with the character provides further evidence that the context of the product placement is as important as the placement itself (Russell, 2002). While products can serve to provide verisimilitude and link the character to the viewer, the

character using or discussing the item can also provide a stamp of approval for the product. However, the same may not be the case when the actor who portrays the character endorses a product or service. The apparent distinction drawn between the two individuals and the perceived relationship with each illustrates the contextual and multilayered nature of our bond.

Indeed, marketers may be well served using an inherent endorsement from the character through the use of product placements, so long as the product is in line with the individual, but should also explore the potential influence of the actor or actress in their own right, separate from the character. These two separate personas, distinct in the minds of the public, allow for increasingly targeted influence and the possibility of leveraging multiple parasocial relationships, targeting distinct social groups. This distinction between character and actor is perhaps the most intriguing finding from a marketing perspective, as well as the one in the greatest need of unpacking. As an actor shifts from role to role, how does the viewer reconcile their endorsement, whether implicit or explicit, of a product? Further research must be developed, incorporating both academics and practitioners, to untangle the shifting connections and relationships between viewer, character, and actor.

For those involved in creating or selling product placements, this research serves to further support the practice and provide additional insight into how it influences consumers. The strong direct and indirect effects speak directly to the power of this advertising approach, and it's ability to sneak in under our natural defenses, as well as leverage our own desires and predispositions against us. As illustrated previously by the WPP Group's Mediaedge: CIA survey (Hall, 2004), consumers have a conscious desire to engage with the same products featured in motion pictures, and the findings above point to a similar attitude toward television programs, as evidenced by the direct effect of exposure to a product placement and the desire for

the product. Layered on top of this exposure-based desire, the role of others, both real and imagined, provides a second level of power to the product placement. The inherently social nature of consumption (Giddens, 1991; Schor, 2000) leads viewers to infer the reactions of others, and subsequently alter their own reactions based on that idea. Within the confines of this experiment, these others take two forms: the hypothetical peer other who is also exposed to the program, and the character within the program using the product.

Our perception of the effect on our peers leads to an effect on our selves, a relationship that is complicated by our predisposition towards trying to "fit in" by monitoring and adjusting our own behavior to fit the social situation. Individuals more prone toward the act of self-monitoring exhibited a greater change in product desire stemming from the perceived desire of others. Marketers are advised to leverage this effect by placing products in situations conducive to self-monitoring behavior, that is to say situations in which there is a potential to be "judged" based on conformity with the peer group. The inclusion of products in public, as opposed to private, moments may serve to activate this schema, enhancing the impact of the perceived peer desire as the viewers place themselves in similar, imaginary, situations.

Our relationships with the characters on screen can also play a similar role in strengthening the impact of the product placement. Much as we seek to fit in with our peers, we also seek to emulate those characters and celebrities whom we feel connected to or admire. However, one must remain cognizant of the distinctions drawn between the character and the actor, particularly as they seek to leverage the parasocial relationships with each.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this dissertation demonstrates the complex persuasive process activated by television product placements, as well as some of the social and psychological factors under

which individuals are likely to be influenced by the message. Our connections with others, both real and imaginary, serve to enhance our desire for these goods and services, placing them at the center of a complex web of expression, individuality, relationship-building, and consumption. The intertwined nature of these acts serves as a renewed call for the cross-disciplinary study and theorization necessary to understand the role consumerism plays in our relationships, as well as the role relationships play in our consumption. This reflexive process holds particular relevance for all scholars concerned about the changing fabric of society, consumption, and the media, and the implications each have on the others.

Appendix A

Study 1 Questionnaire

Bank of Character Pairs:

Character	Actor/Actress	Character	Actor/Actress
Emma Swan	Jennifer Morrison	Rick Grimes	Andrew Lincoln
Barney Stinson	Neil Patrick Harris	Walter White	Bryan Cranston
Lindsay Funke	Portia de Rossi	Leroy Jethro Gibbs	Mark Harmon
Ron Swanson	Nick Offerman	Richard Castle	Nathan Fillion
Jeff Winger	Joel McHale	Meredith Grey	Ellen Pompeo
Phil Dunphy	Ty Burrell	Tyrion Lannister	Peter Dinklage
Olivia Pope	Kerry Washington	Miles Matheson	Billy Burke
Don Draper	Jon Hamm		

Thinking about _(Character Name)__, please indicate your level of agreement with each of the following statements: (1 = Strongly Disagree; 7 = Strongly Agree)

_____________ makes me feel comfortable, as if I am with a friend.
I see _____________ as a natural, down-to-earth person.
I look forward to watching _____________ on tomorrow's episode.
If _____________ appeared on another TV program, I would watch that program.
_____________ seems to understand the kinds of things I want to know.
If I saw a story about _____________ in a newspaper or magazine, I would read it.
I miss seeing _____________ when he or she is ill or on vacation.
I would like to meet _____________ in person.
I feel sorry for _____________ when he or she makes a mistake.
I find _____________ to be attractive.

Thinking about _(Actor/Actress Name)__, please indicate your level of agreement with each of the following statements: (1 = Strongly Disagree; 7 = Strongly Agree)

_____________ makes me feel comfortable, as if I am with a friend.
I see _____________ as a natural, down-to-earth person.
I look forward to watching _____________ on tomorrow's episode.
If _____________ appeared on another TV program, I would watch that program.
_____________ seems to understand the kinds of things I want to know.
If I saw a story about _____________ in a newspaper or magazine, I would read it.
I miss seeing _____________ when he or she is ill or on vacation.
I would like to meet _____________ in person.
I feel sorry for _____________ when he or she makes a mistake.
I find _____________ to be attractive.

Appendix B

Study 2 Questionnaire

In a typical week, how often do you watch: (1 – Never; 7 – Multiple times a week)

Scripted Daytime Dramas or Soap Operas?
Unscripted Daytime Dramas or Talk Shows?
Scripted Primetime Dramas?
Unscripted Primetime Dramas?
Scripted Primetime Comedies?
News and Current Events Programs?
Late night TV shows (e.g., David Letterman and Jay Leno)?
News satire programs (e.g., The Daily Show, The Colbert Report)?

Now, thinking about specific programs, how often do you watch the following programs in a typical week? (1 – Never; 7 – Multiple times a week)

Big Bang Theory?
Modern Family?
How I Met Your Mother?
SCANDAL?
Criminal Minds?
Once Upon a Time?
2 Broke Girls?
Elementary?
Arrow?
The Middle?
NCIS?
Castle?
The Good Wife?
Revolution?
Person of Interest?

Please indicate how well each of the following statements describes you: (1 = Not at all; 7 = Extremely Well)

I find it hard to imitate the behavior of other people.
At parties and social gatherings, I do not attempt to do or say things that others will like.
I can only argue for ideas that I already believe.
I can make impromptu speeches even on topics about which I have almost no information.
I guess I put on a show to impress or entertain others.
I would probably make a good actor.
In a group of people I am rarely the center of attention.
In different situations and with different people, I often act like very different persons.
I am not particularly good at making other people like me.
I'm not always the person I appear to be.
I would not change my opinions (or the way I do things) in order to please someone or win

their favor.
I have considered being an entertainer.
I have never been good at games like charades or improvisational acting.
I have trouble changing my behavior to suit different people and different situations.
At a party I let others keep the jokes and stories going.
I feel a bit awkward in public and do not show up quite as well as I should.
I can look anyone in the eye and tell a lie with a straight face (if it's for a good cause).
I may deceive people by being friendly when I really dislike them.

Thinking about _(Character Name)__, please indicate your level of agreement with each of the following statements: (1 = Strongly Disagree; 7 = Strongly Agree)

_____________ makes me feel comfortable, as if I am with a friend.
I see _____________ as a natural, down-to-earth person.
I look forward to watching _____________ on tomorrow's episode.
If _____________ appeared on another TV program, I would watch that program.
_____________ seems to understand the kinds of things I want to know.
If I saw a story about _____________ in a newspaper or magazine, I would read it.
I miss seeing _____________ when he or she is ill or on vacation.
I would like to meet _____________ in person.
I feel sorry for _____________ when he or she makes a mistake.
I find _____________ to be attractive.

Thinking about _(Actor/Actress Name)__, please indicate your level of agreement with each of the following statements: (1 = Strongly Disagree; 7 = Strongly Agree)

_____________ makes me feel comfortable, as if I am with a friend.
I see _____________ as a natural, down-to-earth person.
I look forward to watching _____________ on tomorrow's episode.
If _____________ appeared on another TV program, I would watch that program.
_____________ seems to understand the kinds of things I want to know.
If I saw a story about _____________ in a newspaper or magazine, I would read it.
I miss seeing _____________ when he or she is ill or on vacation.
I would like to meet _____________ in person.
I feel sorry for _____________ when he or she makes a mistake.
I find _____________ to be attractive.

Do your friends watch the same television programs that you do?
(1 = very seldom; 7 = all the time)
Do your friends watch_(Stimulus Program)? (Yes = 2; No = 1; Don't Know = 0)
How often do you think your friends watch_(Stimulus Program)?
(0= don't know; 1= Never; 7 = Multiple times a week)
How many episodes of (Stimulus Program) do you think your friends have seen?
(1 = none; 7= all of them)

Do people other than your friends watch the same television programs that you do?
(1 = very seldom; 7 = all the time)

How often do you think other people, in general, watch (Stimulus Program)?
(0 =don't know; 1 = Never; 7 = Multiple times a week)
How many episodes of ___________ do you think other people, in general, have seen?
(1 = none; 7 = all of them)

In your opinion, do you think your friends try to live the same lifestyle as the characters in (Stimulus Program)?
In your opinion, do your friends try to act like the characters in (Stimulus Program)?
In your opinion, do your friends buy the same products they see (Stimulus Character) use?
How much attention do you think your friends pay to the products and services used by (Stimulus Character)? (1 = None; 7 = A lot)

In your opinion, do you think other people try to live the same lifestyle as the characters in __________ (Stimulus Program)?
In your opinion, do other people try to act like the characters in (Stimulus Program)?
In your opinion, do other people buy the same products they see (Stimulus Character) use?
How much attention do you think other people pay to the products and services used by (Stimulus Character)?

Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statement:
Product placements have a powerful effect on my friends. (1 = Strongly Disagree; 7 = Strongly Agree)

How much influence do you think these types of programs have on your friends purchases and desires? (1 = None at all; 7 = Very Much)

Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statement:
Product placements have a powerful effect on me. (1 = Strongly Disagree; 7 = Strongly Agree)

How much influence do you think these programs have on your own purchases and desires?
(1 = None at all; 7 = Very Much)

Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statement:
Product placements have a powerful effect on others. (1 = Strongly Disagree; 7 = Strongly Agree)

How much influence do you think these programs have on other peoples purchases and desires?
(1 = None at all; 7 = Very Much)

My opinion of (Stimulus Product) is? (Very unfavorable=1; Very Favorable = 7)
How likely is it you would buy (Stimulus Product)? (Very Unlikely=1; Very Likely=7)
Compared to the other, similar products, my opinion of (Stimulus Product) is?
(More unfavorable=1; More favorable=7)
How likely is it that you would buy (Stimulus Product) instead of a similar product?

(Most likely buy an alternative=1; most likely buy (Stimulus Product) =7)

What year were you born? (Dropdown)

What is your gender?
Male
Female

What is your race? (check all that apply)
White/Caucasian
Black or African American
Hispanic
American Indian or Alaska Native
Asian
Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander
Other

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