When Brand Personality Matters: The Moderating Role of Attachment Styles

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This research examines the moderating role of consumer's attachment style in the impact of brand personality. Findings support our hypotheses regarding the manner in which brand personality and attachment style differences systematically influence brand outcomes, including brand attachment, purchase likelihood, and brand choice. Results show that anxiously attached individuals are more likely to be differentially influenced by brand personalities. Further, the results indicate that the level of avoidance predicts the types of brand personality that are most relevant to anxious individuals. Specifically, under conditions of high avoidance and high anxiety, individuals exhibit a preference for exciting brands; however, under conditions of low avoidance and high anxiety, individuals tend to prefer sincere brands. The differential preference for sincere (vs. exciting) brand personality emerges in public (vs. private) consumption settings and in settings where interpersonal relationship expectations are high, supporting a signaling role of brand personality in these contexts.

That brands have personalities or human characteristics is now well established in the literature, as is the idea that brand personality is a vehicle of consumer self-expression and can be instrumental in helping a consumer express different aspects of his or her self (Aaker 1997; Belk 1988; Escalas and Bettman 2005; Johar, Sengupta, and Aaker 2005). Humanizing a brand empowers it to play a more central role in the consumer's life, potentially enabling the consumer to project an aspect of his or her self that might be desirable for relationships he or she seeks (Aaker 1997; Wallendorf and Arnould 1988) or possibly even give him or her a sense of comfort at having found a brand that "fits" with his or her self-concept (Aaker 1999; Sirgy 1985; Swaminathan, Page, and Gürhan-Canli 2007). In order to harness the potential of brand personality, it is important from both a managerial and a theoretical point to understand the underlying mechanisms invoked under different circumstances and to identify moderators that provide more specific insights into which brand personality traits are going to matter to consumers. We adopt an attachment theory (Bowlby 1980) perspective to provide a richer understanding of the role of brand personality in influencing consequential branding outcomes such as brand attachment, purchase likelihood, and brand choice, especially under marketplace settings where consumers are not explicitly directed to pay attention to the brand's personality.

Attachment theory has identified two dimensions of attachment style based on the individual's view of self and view of others, that is, anxiety and avoidance, respectively, which are expected to influence the type of relationships one engages in and the potential for forming attachments in the interpersonal domain (Bartholomew and Horowitz 1991; Bartz and Lydon 2004; Collins and Read 1994; Pierce and Lydon 1998). We propose that a consumer's attachment style (based on these two dimensions) will moderate the effect of brand personality on crucial marketing outcomes such as brand attachment, purchase likelihood, and brand choice.

Our research suggests that not all consumers are equally sensitive to a brand's personality, especially in marketplace settings that do not direct them to explicitly focus on this aspect of the brand. Importantly, interpersonal attachment styles are shown to determine what types of consumers are most likely to be influenced by a brand's personality. Our

research also reveals that different personalities (exciting vs. sincere) are likely to appeal to consumers who vary in their attachment styles.

Our conceptual framework provides new insights regarding the role, potential impact, and limitations of brand personality. It is the first framework to examine interpersonal attachment styles as the moderators of brand personality effects and help highlight the relevance of attachment theory to consumer behavior, in general, and branding literature, in particular. In addition, it also extends the attachment theory perspective by demonstrating that the use of certain (brand) personalities can enhance the brand attachment level and brand preferences of even those individuals whose attachment styles are known to handicap them with the lowest potential for attachment in the interpersonal relationship context.

We examine these issues across a series of three studies. We now turn to an outline of the conceptual framework, which is followed by the empirical work and a discussion of the theoretical and managerial implications of the findings.

THEORY AND HYPOTHESES

Brand Personality

In consumer behavior research, considerable attention has been given to the brand personality construct (Aaker 1997; Johar et al. 2005). Specifically, consumer behavior researchers have suggested that brand personality is a vehicle of consumer self-expression and can be instrumental in helping consumers express their actual self, ideal self, or specific aspects of the self (Belk 1988). Aaker (1997) developed a framework of brand personality and highlighted its five dimensions (sincerity, excitement, competence, sophistication, and ruggedness). Among these five dimensions, sincere and exciting brand personalities appear to capture much of the variance in personality ratings of brands (Aaker 1997) and have been the focus of the work on brand personalities (Aaker, Fournier, and Brasel 2004). Exciting and sincere brand personalities are particularly interesting because they map onto the key three ideals that Fletcher et al. (1999) note as being important in interpersonal relationships: that is, warmth, vitality, and status. According to Aaker (1997), nurturance, warmth, family orientation, and traditionalism are characteristics of sincere brand personalities. Further, exciting brand personalities convey vitality, uniqueness, and independence. Based on this, we focus on exciting and sincere brand personalities in our research.

Attachment Theory

Attachment theory has its roots in the work of Bowlby (1969, 1980), who suggested that interactions with caregivers in early childhood form the foundation for systematic differences in relationships formed in later life. Further, research by Hazan and Shaver (1987) suggested that the emotional bond that develops between romantic partners is based on the same motivational system that gives rise to the bond between infant and caregiver. Since Hazan and Shaver's seminal work, further research has shown that other kinds of relationships, including friendships and familial bonds, are also governed by attachment theoretic principles (Ainsworth 1989; Trinke and Bartholomew 1997).

Following Bartholomew and Horowitz's (1991) development of the four attachment styles model, recent research on attachment theory focuses on classifying individuals based on two dimensions—anxiety and avoidance (Brennan, Clark, and Shaver 1998). The anxiety dimension refers to the extent that a person's view of self is positive or negative, whereas the avoidance dimension is based on the extent to which a view of others is positive or negative. Importantly, past research (Brennan et al. 1998; Pierce and Lydon 1998) has shown these dimensions to be orthogonal.

Four attachment styles have been identified (Bartholomew and Horowitz 1991) that correspond to varying levels of anxiety and avoidance: secure (low anxiety and low avoidance), dismissing (low anxiety and high avoidance), preoccupied (high anxiety and low avoidance), and fearful (high anxiety and high avoidance). We now highlight characteristics of the two attachment dimensions.

Anxiety Dimension. The anxiety dimension (self view) assesses the degree to which the self is perceived as being worthy or unworthy of love (or one's lovability). Anxious individuals, who are perpetually preoccupied with their self-worth and self-esteem concerns, are known to direct excessive attention toward attachment figures by using a defensive strategy known as hyperactivation (Mikulincer and Shaver 2003). Hyperactivation implies greater vigilance of relationship-related behaviors and information as well as greater persistence in seeking comfort, reassurance, and support from relationship parties.

Anxiety is also highly related to a negative model of self (characterized by an individual's belief that he or she is not worthy of love), low self-esteem (Griffin and Bartholomew 1994), and self-criticism (Murphy and Bates 1997). Anxious individuals' negative view of self generates feelings of uncertainty regarding their relationship partners and a fear of abandonment by loved ones, leading them to strive for acceptance by others (Bartholomew and Horowitz 1991). Anxious attachment types, who are lower in self-esteem, tend to use external help to enhance their self-worth and deal with relational problems (Birnbaum et al. 2006; Cicirelli 2004). For these reasons, we expect high anxiety types to be more sensitive to and more likely to direct attention to brand personality.

In contrast, individuals with a less anxious attachment style have a more positive view of self and relational self-worth. Given their higher feelings of self-worth, these individuals are less likely to rely on external means (e.g., brand names) to help enhance their appeal and image in the interpersonal domain. In other words, less anxious individuals, for whom self-worth concerns are not chronically activated, may be less disposed to zero in on a brand's personality unless explicitly directed to it.

How can brand names be helpful to individuals who have

a highly anxious attachment style? Past research in consumer behavior shows that brand names are symbolic entities that can help consumers in signaling important attributes to others (Belk 1988; Levy 1959; Wallendorf and Arnould 1988). For instance, the symbolic interactionism school of thought (Schenk and Holman 1980) suggests that individuals will choose brand names in accordance with the particular self they choose to express in a given social situation.

As such, the particular self that individuals decide to signal through brands may be either consistent with their actual self-concept or their ideal self-concept (Landon 1974). Past research (Belch 1978) suggests that individuals who are more concerned with social interaction and who require constant feedback from their environment in order to gain acceptance are more likely to be guided by their ideal self-concept. Brand personality endows a brand with humanlike traits and has been shown to be influential in understanding consumer brand relationships (Aaker et al. 2004). We expect a brand's personality to fulfill a signaling role for anxious individuals by helping them project their ideal self-concept (Dolich 1969; Landon 1974) to others (also recall that their actual self-concept is negative).

In sum, anxious attachment style individuals are expected to use the brand as a means toward the goal of signaling oneself as a desirable individual. This implies that anxious individuals will project attributes they consider important from the perspective of their ideal self-concept. However, consumers are likely to vary in what attributes they value (ideal self-concept) and, therefore, want to project to others. These differences in their ideal self-concept are likely to be influenced by the demands of their particular interpersonal relationships (Landon 1974). Next, we discuss the avoidance dimension of attachment style that focuses on an individual's view of others and provide insights relating to this issue. It will help to delineate the specific brand attributes that different types of anxious individuals are likely to find most appealing, based on their avoidance style.

Avoidance Dimension. The avoidance dimension of attachment captures the individual's view of others. Avoidant style individuals have a negative view of others (e.g., untrustworthy). They are characterized by a high degree of self-reliance and desire for autonomy (Mikulincer and Shaver 2003). Since avoidant individuals are reluctant to rely on others, they tend to maintain a greater degree of emotional distance in their interpersonal relationships. In other words, avoidant style individuals tend to have relationships characterized by lower levels of emotional involvement, trust, and satisfaction (Collins and Read 1990; Hazan and Shaver 1987; Kirkpatrick and Davis 1994; Shaver and Brennan 1992). It should be noted that the extant research does not suggest that avoidant individuals shun social contact altogether; rather, they avoid intimacy in relationships (Bartholomew and Horowitz 1991) and, therefore, end up with a qualitatively different type of relationship compared to the low avoidant types. In this regard the literature notes that avoidant individuals tend to form shallow, less stable, short-term relationships (Bartholomew and Ho-

rowitz 1991; Brennan and Shaver 1995; Collins and Read 1990; Hazan and Shaver 1987; Pierce and Lydon 1998). Hence, despite their independent nature and lower level of interest in close intimate relationships, we expect those with a negative view of self (i.e., high anxiety) and a negative view or others (i.e., high avoidants) will be interested in signaling a desirable image to others, in particular, if they expect relational exchanges with them in the future.

Because avoidant consumers value independence and self-reliance and are not desirous of intimate relationships, an exciting brand personality is most likely to reflect and be consistent with his or her ideal self-concept and the relationship ideals important to him or her. This rationale is consistent with past research on brand personality (Aaker, Benet-Martinez, and Garolera 2001), which indicates that consumers who value self-assertion and independence tend to have a higher preference for brands that reflect the exciting personality trait. Therefore, we expect high anxiety, high avoidance types to exhibit preference for exciting brands.

In contrast, low avoidant style individuals have a favorable view of others and are interested in pursuing intimate and close relationships with them (Collins and Read 1990; Hazan and Shaver 1987). The low avoidants who are also low on self-worth (high anxiety type) constantly strive for acceptance by valued others. Therefore, sincerity, expressed by attributes such as down-to-earth, real, sincere, and honest, is likely to resonate with them and also most likely to symbolize the ideals that they would like to signal to potential relationship partners. Therefore, we expect that sincere brands would appeal more to the high anxious/low avoidant types because sincerity is likely to be consistent with their ideal self-concept, since it also characterizes the qualities they seek in relationships.

Predictions

Interpersonal attachment style is expected to moderate the relationship between brand personality and consequential brand outcomes (brand attachment, purchase likelihood, or brand choice). Specifically, those with a high anxiety style of attachment are likely to tune in to brand personality information with a view to using it as a means for signaling their ideal self-concept to others for managing relationships with them. In this regard, high anxious types whose attachment styles are low in avoidance will be more receptive to brands that are perceived as having sincere brand personalities (relative to exciting brand personalities). In contrast, anxious consumers whose attachment styles are high in avoidance will demonstrate higher preference for brands that are perceived as having an exciting (vs. sincere) brand personality. Further, we suggest that these effects will be mediated by the ideal self-concept connection.

As postulated previously, low anxiety types are less likely to be concerned about their self-worth (given that it is already positive) and projecting a favorable image to others, hence, they are less likely to use brand personality as a signaling device. Therefore, we do not expect them to dem-

onstrate differential preferences for sincere versus exciting brand personalities.

We test our predictions and the underlying processes implicated in our model using a series of three studies. It is important to note that our key outcome measures are brand attachment (study 1), purchase likelihood (study 2), and brand choice (study 3), consistent with the recent focus of managers to move beyond persuasion metrics to those that capture consumers' attachment to and purchase of brands. The first study uses brand attachment as the outcome measure for these reasons as well as this variable's ability to enhance the comparability of our findings obtained in the branding domain with past findings based on the attachment styles framework in the interpersonal domain (where strength of interpersonal attachments is a key outcome). The next two experiments (studies 2 and 3) examine generalizability of the pattern of effects obtained with brand attachment to measures that closely map onto consequential behavioral outcomes (purchase likelihood and brand choice). These experiments also attempt to zero in on the underlying processes, test for the mediating role of ideal self-concept connection, as well as identify boundary conditions for the effects.

STUDY 1

The goal of this study was to test the basic predictions of our framework. Attachment style and brand personality were manipulated in a lab context using the context of a brand extension. The target category chosen was athletic shoes because it is a product relevant to the target population (i.e., undergraduate students) and has been used extensively in previous branding research (Ahluwalia, Burnkrant, and Unnava 2000; Swaminathan et al. 2007). The key dependent variable was brand attachment.

Method

Procedure.   Two hundred participants were randomly assigned to one of eight conditions in a 2 (relationship anxiety: high vs. low) × 2 (relationship avoidance: high vs. low) × 2 (brand personality: sincere vs. exciting) between-subjects design. We followed recent research in social psychology (Bartz and Lydon 2004) to manipulate attachment styles (anxiety and avoidance). Participants were given the cover story that they would be participating in two unrelated studies. The first study was ostensibly a relationships survey that contained the attachment style manipulations, as described later. In the second study, participants were asked to view an ad and provide their reactions to it. Brand personality (exciting vs. sincere) was manipulated between subjects via the ad. After viewing the ad, participants were asked to provide their responses on several dependent variables, including brand attachment and process measures. The study concluded with a brief demographic section and an open-ended suspicion probe.

Development of Stimulus Materials.   A series of pretests was run to develop the study materials. In the first pretest ($n = 33$) respondents were asked to rate several athletic shoe brands on the exciting and sincere personality dimensions (7-point scales); they also reported their attitude and attachment toward these brands (7-point scales). New Balance emerged as a brand name that elicited favorable brand attitudes ($M = 5.21$) but was neither strongly associated with an exciting nor a sincere personality, having moderate, but similar, associations with both of them ($M_{sincere} = 4.42$, $M_{exciting} = 4.27$; $t = 0.56$, NS). A review of advertising for the New Balance brand confirmed that it is not explicitly positioned as either a sincere or an exciting brand personality. This allowed us to manipulate brand personality (sincere vs. exciting) in the lab setting for a new brand extension of the New Balance brand name.

A second pretest ($n = 32$) was run to test the favorability of the potential names for the new subbrand. It revealed that the "Astra" name had a moderate degree of likability ($M = 3.53$ on a 7-point scale) with few, if any, negative connotations (only two out of 32 open-ended responses indicated negative association). "Astra" by New Balance was selected as the target brand for this study.

Two print ads, each with a distinct brand personality (sincere or exciting), were developed using the procedure outlined in Aaker et al. (2004). Consistent with Aaker et al. (2004), brand personality was manipulated via taglines and brand elements to convey either a sincere or an exciting brand personality. The tagline in the sincere condition was "because life is too meaningful to let it pass you by," whereas in the exciting condition it was "because life is too exciting to let it pass you by." In addition, in the sincere condition, the ad featured individuals interacting with friends, family, and in the work environment. In the exciting condition, the ads featured individuals engaging in activities such as rock climbing or bungee jumping and were featured with a romantic partner. The stimuli are provided in the appendix.

In a pretest ($n = 32$) of the two ads, participants who viewed the sincere version of the ad rated the brand as significantly more sincere than exciting ($M_{sincere} = 4.19$, $M_{exciting} = 2.69$; $t = 5.48$, $p < .01$), whereas those exposed to the exciting ad rated the brand as significantly more exciting than sincere ($M_{sincere} = 3.38$, $M_{exciting} = 4.88$; $t = 3.59$, $p < .01$). Additionally, the sincere ad led to a significantly greater association of the target brand with a sincere personality than the exciting ad ($t = 2.29$, $p < .05$), and the exciting ad led to stronger associations to the exciting personality trait than the sincere ad ($t = 5.04$, $p < .01$).

Attachment Styles Manipulation.   Attachment styles were manipulated following recent research in social psychology. For instance, Andersen and Chen (2002) suggest that by activating a specific relationship, some aspects of the self in relation to significant others become activated. This leads to a shift in the self-concept such that the working self-concept is influenced by the specific relationship that is contextually activated, and the sense of self is momentarily shifted to reflect one's relationship with that person

rather than to reflect one's self in relation to all of one's relationships. This notion has led to the development of the relationship visualization metaphor to activate the working self-concept and thereby prime attachment styles (Bartz and Lydon 2004; Mikulincer and Shaver 2001; Mikulincer et al. 2001). In this study, we employ the priming procedure used by Bartz and Lydon (2004) to manipulate attachment style.

Specifically, respondents were asked to think about a relationship that fit the description provided to them and to picture in their mind a person with whom they had this type of relationship. Note that each description manipulated both the anxiety and the avoidance dimensions of attachment styles. There were four descriptions (2 anxiety × 2 avoidance). The relationship descriptions are provided in the appendix.

Participants were asked to generate a visual image of this person in their mind. They were further directed to think about how they felt being with him/her, recall a time when they were with the person, imagine conversations/interactions with this person, and so forth, and then write a sentence or two about their thoughts and feelings regarding themselves in relation to this person. When asked whether they were able to think of someone who fit the described relationship, 91% of the respondents replied in affirmative. Respondents who could not think of a relationship that fit the described relationships were deleted from the analysis, leaving 182 respondents to be used in the analysis.

Dependent Variables.   Brand attachment was assessed by asking respondents to indicate the extent to which the words "connected," "bonded," and "attached" described their typical feelings toward the brand. This scale was anchored at "not at all" and "very well" ($\alpha = .70$). Our brand attachment measure focused on the "connection" dimension, which captures the strength of connection between a consumer and a brand (which is potentially driven by ideal self-concept connections). Three dimensions of brand attachment (affection, passion, and connection) have been identified in the literature (Thomson, MacInnis, and Park 2005). In contrast to the "connection" dimension used by us, "affection" refers to feelings of warmth and friendship that a consumer has toward a brand and may typically be associated with sincere brands, whereas "passion" refers to intense, fleeting, and aroused positive feelings toward the brand that are generally associated with exciting brands. It is important to note that we chose to focus on the connection dimension because brand personality differences are not likely to be significant for this attachment dimension—both exciting and sincere brand personalities may elicit high levels of connection.

In order to develop a better understanding of processes underlying these effects, we also included measures of ideal self-concept connection (this brand makes a statement about what is important to me in life) and actual self-concept connection (this brand's image and my self image are similar in a lot of ways). The participant's level of agreement with these statements was assessed on 7-point scales.

Results

Brand Attachment.   The predictions were tested using ANOVA including main effects of avoidance, anxiety, brand personality, and all possible two- and three-way interactions of the attachment style dimensions and brand personality ratings. Consistent with previous research in the attachment literature (Collins 1996; Kirkpatrick and Davis 1994), gender was included as a covariate to ensure that our results were not accounted for by gender differences.
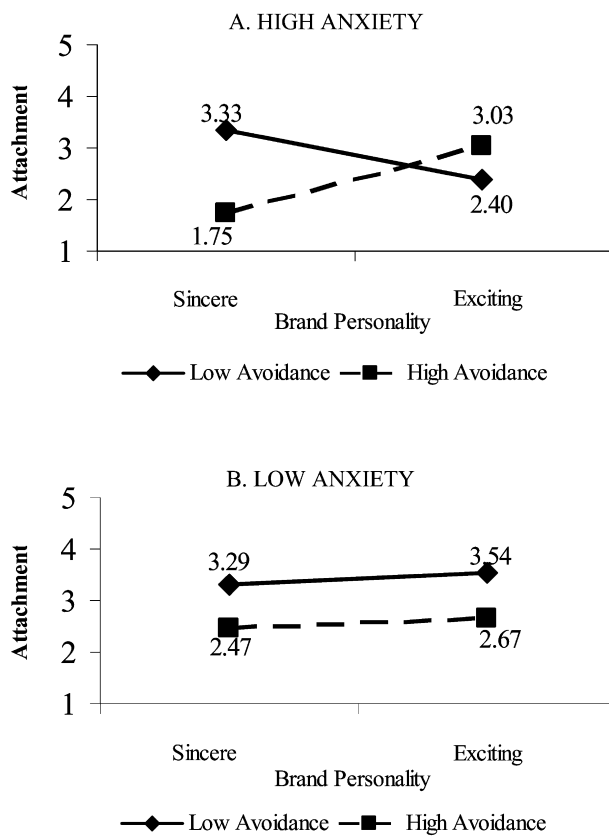
The results showed a significant effect of avoidance ($F(1, 173) = 7.37, p < .01$) and a significant two-way interaction between avoidance and brand personality ($F(1, 173) = 4.95, p < .05$). These effects were qualified by a significant three-way interaction between brand personality, avoidance, and anxiety ($F(1, 173) = 5.32, p < .05$) on brand attachment.

Further analysis of the three-way interaction was conducted to examine support for the hypotheses. For the participants primed with a high anxiety relationship, the interaction between brand personality and avoidance was significant ($F(1, 173) = 5.20, p < .01$). Examination of the pattern of cell means reveals that the high avoidance participants reported significantly higher levels of brand attachment in the exciting, as compared to the sincere, ad conditions ($M_{exciting} = 3.03$, $M_{sincere} = 1.75$; $F(1, 173) = 5.90, p < .01$); however, a reverse pattern emerged for the low avoidance participants, with the sincere ad leading to higher brand attachment than the exciting version ($M_{exciting} = 2.40$, $M_{sincere} = 3.33$; $F(1, 173) = 3.94, p < .05$). This pattern of results is consistent with expectations based on our conceptual framework.

For participants primed with low anxiety relationship style, the interaction between brand personality and avoidance was not significant ($F(1, 173) = 1.10, p > .05$). Cell means revealed no significant differences in mean brand attachment reported in response to the exciting versus the sincere ad for those in the low avoidance ($M_{exciting} = 3.54$, $M_{sincere} = 3.29$; $F(1, 173) = .29$, NS) as well as the high avoidance conditions ($M_{exciting} = 2.67$, $M_{sincere} = 2.47$; $F(1, 173) = .16$, NS). However, a simple main effect of avoidance on attachment emerged, indicating that low avoidance types had significantly higher levels of attachment than their high avoidance counterparts (low vs. high avoidance: $M = 3.42$ vs. 2.57; $F(1, 173) = 6.29, p < .05$). This finding is consistent with past literature, which suggests that respondents with a secure attachment style (low avoidance, low anxiety) are likely to have the highest potential for developing strong attachments, whereas those with an avoidant style are significantly less likely to form strong relational attachments (Collins and Read 1990; Hazan and Shaver 1987; Kirkpatrick and Hazan 1994). These patterns of data are graphed in figure 1.

We now compare these results for brand attachment to the pattern of attachment strengths typically found in the interpersonal relationship literature. According to Bartholomew and Horowitz (1991), who developed the four attachment style models, relationship strength generally fol-

FIGURE 1

AVERAGE BRAND ATTACHMENT SCORES CELL MEANS
(STUDY 1)

it appears that using the appropriate brand personality has the potential to enhance brand attachment for groups that are typically associated with lower levels of attachment in the interpersonal context (high anxiety types) to the level of groups known to have the highest attachment potential. This is an especially insightful finding for the high anxiety/ high avoidance individuals who tend to have the lowest levels of attachment potential and relationship quality (Bartholomew and Horowitz 1991). This analysis also suggests that the tendency to form brand attachments may deviate from the findings obtained in the interpersonal domain.

Process Measures. The above results suggest that brand attachment differences based on sincere and exciting brand personalities are not likely to emerge for consumers who are low on anxiety. High anxiety individuals, however, are likely to be more sensitive to a brand's sincerity if they are low in avoidance and more influenced by its ability to be exciting if they have an avoidant style. We expect these differences because brand personality may help convey attributes that represent the ideals (ideal self-concept) of low anxiety individuals. Recall our framework hypothesizes that ideal self-concept connection (what is important to them), and not the actual self-concept match (what they actually are), is likely to mediate these effects.

The actual and ideal self-concept connection items were each subjected to three-way ANOVAs. Consistent with our theorizing, the ideal self-concept connection measure revealed a significant three-way interaction between brand personality, avoidance, and anxiety ($F(1, 173) = 6.95$, $p < .01$). Further analysis of the results was conducted to examine whether the pattern of results for ideal self-concept connection was consistent with the results for brand attachment. For the participants primed with a high anxiety relationship, the interaction between brand personality and avoidance was significant ($F(1, 173) = 8.43$, $p < .01$). Examination of the pattern of cell means reveals that the high avoidance participants reported significantly higher levels of ideal self-concept connection in the exciting as compared to the sincere ad conditions ($M_{exciting} = 2.78$, $M_{sincere} = 1.77$; $F(1, 173) = 4.21$, $p < .05$); however, a reverse pattern emerged for the low avoidance participants, with the sincere ad leading to higher ideal self-concept connection than the exciting version ($M_{exciting} = 2.27$, $M_{sincere} = 3.32$; $F(1, 173) = 4.60$, $p < .05$). For the participants primed with a low anxiety relationship, the interaction between brand personality and avoidance was not significant ($F(1, 173) = .53$, $p > .40$). This pattern of results mirrors the effects for brand attachment.

In contrast, the three-way interaction between brand personality, avoidance, and anxiety did not even approach significance for the actual self-concept connection ($F(1, 173) = .49$, $p > .40$). Only a significant effect for avoidance emerged ($F(1, 173) = 6.24$, $p < .05$). Cell means revealed no significant differences in mean brand attachment reported in response to the exciting versus sincere ad for any of the attachment styles.

lows the descending order of secure (low anxiety/low avoidance), preoccupied (high anxiety/low avoidance), dismissing (low anxiety/high avoidance) and fearful (high anxiety/high avoidance). Since the low anxiety/low avoidance types typically tend to form the deeper and longer lasting attachments, their attachment scores could be used as reference points to understand the relative magnitude of brand personality effects for the high anxiety participants in this study. Post hoc contrasts of the high anxiety participants with the comparison group that has the highest attachment potential (low anxiety/low avoidance), indicate that for the high anxiety/high avoidance individuals (lowest attachment potential), positioning the brand as exciting can enhance attachment to a level equivalent to the comparison group ($M = 3.03$ vs. 3.5; $F(1, 173) = .82$, $p > .30$), while use of a sincere personality leads to significantly lower attachments ($M = 1.75$ vs. 3.29; $F(1, 173) = 15.43$, $p < .01$). However, for the high anxiety/low avoidance group, associating the brand with a sincere personality enhances brand attachment to the level of the comparison group ($Ms = 3.33$ vs. 3.29; $F(1, 173) = .06$, $p > .80$), whereas the exciting positioning results in significantly lower level of attachment ($M = 2.40$ vs. 3.54; $F(1, 173) = 15.43$, $p < .01$). In other words,

Mediational Analyses. Regression analyses were run to test for the mediating role of ideal self-concept connection. In step 1, we estimated a regression with attachment style, brand personality, and their interaction as the independent variables and brand attachment as the dependent variable. The three-way interaction of anxiety, avoidance, and brand personality was significant ($\beta = .40$, $p < .05$). In step 2, the three-way interaction of anxiety, avoidance, and brand personality (independent variable) was tested as a predictor of the mediating variable (ideal self-concept connection). The attachment style and brand personality interaction significantly predicted the ideal self-concept connection item ($\beta = .47$, $p < .01$). In step 3, the mediator was regressed on the dependent variable (brand attachment). Ideal self-concept connection emerged as a significant predictor of brand attachment ($\beta = .39$, $p < .01$). Finally, in step 4, both the three-way interaction of anxiety, avoidance, and brand personality (independent variable) and mediator were included in the model predicting brand attachment levels (dependent variable). The three-way interaction term became nonsignificant ($\beta = .24$, $p > .10$). The Sobel's Z confirmed that the mediation by ideal self-concept connection was significant ($Z = 2.33$, $p < .05$).

Discussion

The participants primed with low anxiety style were not influenced by the brand's personality in the formation of their brand attachments: their attachment level did not differ in the sincere versus the exciting ad conditions. In contrast, the participants primed with a high anxiety attachment style became very sensitive to brand personality, demonstrating significant differences in response to the sincere versus exciting ads. Importantly, the mediational analyses revealed that the differential preference of high and low avoidance groups for the sincere and exciting personalities results from differences in the level of importance they associate to these traits (ideal self-concept connection). As such, if consumers value these traits, they are attracted to brands associated with them which can be instrumental in signaling this image/personality, presumably enhancing their appeal in the eyes of potential relationship partners. In other words, high anxiety consumers, who typically have a lower self-esteem and a greater fear of rejection (Bartholomew and Horowitz 1991), may find the brand to be a helpful aid in associating themselves with desirable personality traits, enhancing their potential attractiveness to others.

The above line of reasoning suggests that brand personality effects that we obtain in our research should be limited to the context of products that are publicly consumed; the signaling role of brand personality, as described above, is likely to be restricted in the case of private goods that are typically consumed in settings where others might not get an opportunity to view them (Bearden and Etzel 1982; Sirgy 1982).

The next experiment will therefore attempt to manipulate the consumption context (i.e., private or public consump-tion) with a view to not only examining this boundary condition but also gathering stronger support for the underlying process driving the pattern of effects obtained in study 1 for the high anxiety consumers. A different product category (clocks) was used, and brand personality was manipulated in the context of a fictitious brand.

STUDY 2

Method

Participants and Design. Since only the high anxiety participants demonstrated sensitivity to brand personality in the previous study, we limit our focus to the high anxiety attachment styles in the current study. One hundred seventy-nine participants (46% male) were randomly assigned to one of eight conditions in a 2 (avoidance: high vs. low) × 2 (brand personality: sincere vs. exciting) × 2 (consumption situation: public vs. private) between-subjects design.

The procedure followed the previous study, with a few changes, as noted. Respondents first completed the relationship study (in which the attachment style manipulation was administered). Note only the two high anxiety conditions were included (corresponding to high vs. low avoidance). Twelve respondents, who indicated that they could not think of an example of the requested relationship, and eight respondents, who provided relationship descriptions inconsistent with the requested relationship type, were removed. Respondents were told that the second (purportedly unrelated) study would deal with evaluation of a new product: Mardi portable clocks. All subjects viewed a brief description of the product and were then assigned to either a public or private consumption condition. After the consumption situation manipulation, participants were exposed to an ad for this product, which conveyed either a sincere or an exciting brand personality. They completed the dependent measures and an open-ended suspicion probe.

Note that we used a fictitious brand in this study for two reasons: (*a*) it allowed us to cleanly manipulate both the consumption situation and brand personality, while controlling for the brand name and product category across conditions; (*b*) it enabled us to test if the interaction between brand personality and attachment styles was robust enough to emerge in the context of relatively unknown or new brands. A limitation, however, of using a fictitious brand is that brand attachment ceases to be a viable dependent variable, since strong attachments tend to develop over time based on repeated interactions (Hazan and Shaver 1994) and therefore necessitate some level of prior exposure. As explained earlier, our focus on brand attachments in the initial study was driven by its potential comparability to interpersonal attachment styles literature. Moving forward, in this study we use a more meaningful and relevant outcome measure for the fictitious brand setting—purchase likelihood of the brand.

Consumption Situation Manipulation. The target product was a fictitious brand in the clocks product category

(Mardi portable clocks). All respondents were provided with the same background information about the product, which was followed by the consumption situation manipulation. In the private consumption condition, the participants were informed that its portable and compact design enabled them to place it anywhere in their home or apartment where it would be convenient for them to view. Therefore, consistent with past research in this area (i.e., Bearden and Etzel 1982, Ratner and Kahn 2002), the description stressed product consumption in their home by themselves where product consumption would be inconspicuous. In contrast, the public condition stated that its portable design enabled them to attach it easily to their backpack, jeans, or belt, and take it with them wherever they go, so that they as well as others could view it, highlighting the public nature of the consumption situation.

Brand Personality Manipulation. Following the consumption situation manipulation, participants were exposed to an ad featuring the product. Similar to study 1, brand personality was manipulated via the taglines and brand elements in an ad to convey either a sincere or an exciting brand personality. The tagline in the sincere condition was "because life is too meaningful to let it pass you by," whereas in the exciting condition it was "because life is too exciting to let it pass you by." The sincere condition featured individuals interacting with friends and family, whereas the exciting condition pictured individuals engaging in activities such rock climbing or dancing. Please see the appendix for stimuli.

Dependent Variables. Ideal self-concept connection and purchase likelihood were the key dependent measures. Ideal self-concept connection was measured as in study 1. Participants' purchase likelihood of the brand was also assessed on a 7-point scale. A series of manipulation checks were included to test for the consumption situation and brand personality manipulations. Participants stated their level of agreement on 7-point scales with the following statements: "This product will typically be used in the home" and "This product can be used in public." To check the brand personality manipulation, participants were asked to rate the degree to which they agreed that "sincere" and "exciting" described the brand on a 7-point scale.

Results and Discussion

Manipulation Checks. An ANOVA including main effects of consumption situation, avoidance, and the two-way interaction for each item in the manipulation check revealed a main effect of consumption situation for both items. Specifically, respondents in the public condition were more likely to agree that the product would be used in public than those in the private condition ($M_{public} = 5.50$, $M_{private} = 4.04$; $F(1, 153) = 16.27$, $p < .01$), whereas those in the private usage condition were significantly more likely to agree that it would be used at home than those in the private con-

dition ($M_{public} = 3.82$, $M_{private} = 5.88$; $F(1, 153) = 27.54$, $p < .01$). No other effects were significant.

The ANOVA for brand personality manipulation check revealed a main effect of brand personality condition for both items. Specifically, respondents in the sincere ad condition were more likely to agree that the product was perceived as sincere than those in the exciting ad condition ($M_{sincere} = 4.72$, $M_{exciting} = 4.08$; $F(1, 149) = 14.93$, $p < .01$), whereas those in the exciting ad condition were significantly more likely to perceive the product as exciting than those in the sincere ad condition ($M_{sincere} = 3.19$, $M_{exciting} = 5.30$; $F(1, 149) = 81.13$, $p < .01$). Additionally, there was a main effect of consumption situation on the degree to which the brand was perceived as exciting. Specifically, those in the public condition perceived the brand to be less exciting. As we expect the brand personality to matter more in the public condition, this would lead to a more conservative test of our hypotheses. No other effects were significant.
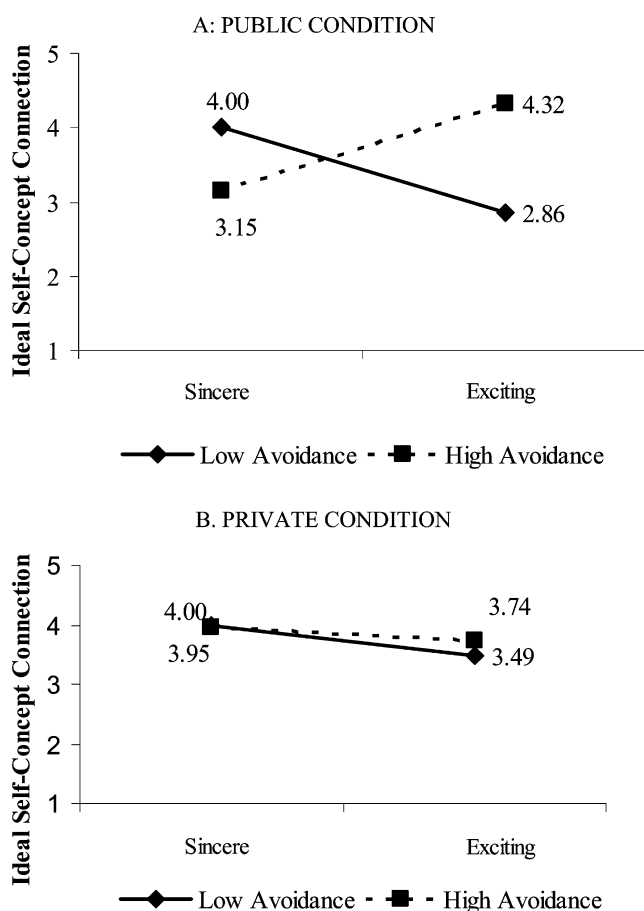
Ideal Self-Concept Connection. An ANOVA including main effects of avoidance, brand personality, usage condition, all possible two-way interactions, and the three-way interaction was estimated. Gender was included as a covariate. Recall that in this study we only manipulated the high anxiety conditions. There was a significant two-way interaction between avoidance and brand personality ($F(1, 149) = 7.14$, $p < .01$). Consistent with our expectations, this interaction was further qualified by a significant three-way interaction between avoidance, brand personality, and usage situation ($F(1, 149) = 4.28$, $p < .05$). No other effects were significant.

In order to explore the three-way interaction of avoidance, brand personality, and usage situation, further analyses were conducted. For those in the public consumption condition, the interaction between brand personality and avoidances style was significant ($F(1, 149) = 9.28$, $p < .01$). The participants primed with the low avoidance attachment style reported significantly higher ideal self-concept connection when exposed to the sincere versus the exciting ad ($M_{sincere} = 4.00$, $M_{exciting} = 2.86$; $F(1, 149) = 4.23$, $p < .05$). In contrast, those primed with the high avoidance style reported higher ideal self-concept connection in the exciting as compared to the sincere condition ($M_{exciting} = 4.32$, $M_{sincere} = 3.15$; $F(1, 149) = 4.87$, $p < .05$). This pattern of results is consistent with our rationale and the results obtained in study 1.

On the other hand, in the private consumption setting, the interaction between brand personality and avoidance styles failed to approach significance ($F(1, 149) = .25$, $p > .60$). There were no significant differences in the reported ideal self-concept connection of those in either the low avoidance ($M_{exciting} = 3.49$, $M_{sincere} = 4.00$; $F(1, 149) = 1.16$, NS) or the high avoidance condition ($M_{exciting} = 3.74$, $M_{sincere} = 3.95$; $F(1, 149) = 0.35$, NS), in response to exciting versus sincere ads. These patterns of data are depicted graphically in figure 2.

FIGURE 2

IDEAL SELF-CONCEPT CONNECTION CELL MEANS (STUDY 2)

A: PUBLIC CONDITION

B. PRIVATE CONDITION

Purchase Likelihood. Consistent with results for the ideal self-concept connection, for the purchase likelihood measure, a significant two-way interaction of avoidance and brand personality ($F(1, 149) = 5.07$, $p < .05$), qualified by a three-way interaction of avoidance, brand personality, and usage situation ($F(1, 149) = 4.54$, $p = .05$), was obtained. In the public condition, the interaction between brand personality and avoidance style was significant ($F(1, 149) = 7.33$, $p < .05$). Low avoidance participants reported a higher purchase likelihood of the sincere as compared to the exciting brand ($M_{exciting} = 2.23$, $M_{sincere} = 3.33$; $F(1, 149) = 4.05$, $p < .05$), whereas high avoidance subjects had a marginally higher purchase likelihood in response to the exciting as compared to the sincere ad ($M_{exciting} = 3.08$, $M_{sincere} = 2.16$; $F(1, 149) = 3.07$, $p < .10$). In the private condition, the interaction between brand personality and avoidance style failed to approach significance ($F(1, 149) = .08$, $p > .70$), and, similarly, none of the contrasts were significant (all p's $> .10$). Next, mediational analyses (Baron and Kenny 1986) were conducted to empirically test the role of ideal self-concept connection in predicting purchase likelihood.

Mediational Analysis. In step 1, we estimated a regression with avoidance, brand personality, and consumption situation; all possible interactions as independent variables; and purchase likelihood as the dependent variable. The three-way interaction of avoidance, brand personality, and consumption situation was significant ($\beta = .38$, $p = .05$). In step 2, the three-way interaction of avoidance, brand personality, and consumption situation (independent variable) emerged as a significant predictor of the mediating variable (ideal self-concept connection; $\beta = .41$, $p < .05$). In step 3, the mediator (ideal self-concept connection) was regressed on the dependent variable (purchase likelihood; $\beta = .45$, $p < .01$). Finally, in step 4, when both the three-way interaction of avoidance, brand personality, and consumption situation (independent variable) and mediator (ideal self-concept connection) were included in the model predicting purchase likelihood (dependent variable), the three-way interaction term was no longer significant ($\beta = .21$, $p > .10$), although ideal self-concept was ($\beta = .41$, $p < .01$). The Sobel's Z confirmed that the mediation by ideal self concept was significant ($Z = 1.96$, $p = .05$).

Discussion

The results of study 2 not only lend stronger support for the hypothesized mechanism driving the effects of brand personality and attachment styles on brand-related outcomes but also identify a boundary condition for these effects. The results indicate that high anxiety individuals are likely to focus on a brand's personality only when the product is consumed in a public situation, allowing them the opportunity to manage their impressions and convey their personality to others via their association with the brand. The brand's personality dimension apparently loses its importance and meaning for these consumers when the situation does not allow them to harness its perceived advantages.

Our discussion of the signaling role of brand personality has thus far focused on the consumer approaching a brand that presents a match between self-concept and brand personality. However, as noted by an insightful reviewer, a closer examination of the means for purchase likelihood in the public versus private conditions suggests that the brand personality outcomes in the public condition may also have the potential of being driven by the consumer avoiding a product that presents a mismatch between the ideal self-concept and brand personality. Specifically, when avoidance is low, the presence of an exciting brand weakens evaluations in a public context relative to a private context (M's $= 2.1$ vs. 3.5; $F(1, 149) = 6.92$). Similarly, when avoidance is high, the presence of a sincere brand weakens evaluations in a public context relative to a private context (M's $= 2.2$ vs. 3.0; $F(1, 149) = 3.63$). Further, when avoidance is high, for an exciting brand, there is no significant difference between a public and a private context (M's $= 3.0$ vs. 3.6; $F(1, 149) = 1.44$). Specifically, these results suggest that mismatches may have the potential to hurt the brand in a signaling context. In other words, the high anxiety types appear to be

tuning in to a brand's personality primarily to minimize the risk of being viewed as unattractive by others by avoiding certain types of brands based on the personality of the brand. Their affinity for the brand is less likely to be driven by the extent to which it matches their own self-concept and more likely to be driven by minimizing the risk associated with mismatches.

Thus far, our theory supports the view that brands help certain types of consumers (i.e., high anxiety) by helping them signal important attributes via the symbolic use of sincere and exciting brand personalities, especially in public consumption contexts. However, these results do not allow us to ascertain whether, by associating themselves with particular brands, individuals are engaging in general impression management, attempting to bolster their self-esteem, or managing impressions with the specific goal of signaling to potential relationship partners. Therefore, it is unclear whether the ideal self-concept connection would be predictive of branding outcomes in all impression management situations or only for those which involve relationship potential. In sum, a stronger and more direct test of the signaling role of brand personality for the high anxiety types would be desirable. This would be valuable especially for the high avoidant/high anxiety types who are least likely to desire close intimate relationships. Study 3 was designed with these goals in mind.

STUDY 3

Method

Participants and Design. Similar to study 2, this experiment focused on the high anxiety attachment styles. One hundred twenty-four participants were randomly assigned to one of four conditions in a 2 (avoidance: high vs. low) × 2 (relationship expectation: low vs. high) between-subjects design.

Respondents first completed the relationship study (in which the attachment style manipulation was administered). Twenty-five respondents who indicated that they could not think of an example of the requested relationship were removed. Respondents were introduced to the second (purportedly unrelated) study about consumer products. They read a consumption scenario (through which the relationship expectation was manipulated) and were then asked to choose one brand of jeans from the two presented (symbolizing exciting vs. sincere brand personality) that they would be most likely to wear in the preceding scenario. They completed the dependent measures questionnaire and were debriefed.

Relationship-Expectation Manipulation. Two scenarios were developed to manipulate relationship expectation (low vs. high). In both scenarios participants were asked to imagine that they were getting ready to head to a class where they would be making a presentation to their classmates. In the high relationship expectation condition, students were informed that it was the beginning of the se-

mester. They were also told that the class would involve several group projects throughout the semester, suggesting a high level of potential interaction with their classmates in the near future. In the second version of the scenario, which represented our baseline condition, the relationship expectation was kept low by informing participants that it was the end of the semester. They were also told that after this semester they would be transferring to another school in a different city to complete their degree. Details of the scenarios used are presented in the appendix.

In a pretest, participants ($n = 47$) read one of the two scenarios and stated their level of agreement to statements that assessed their relationship expectation ("expected to have a high level of future interaction with the classmates to whom I would be making the presentation," "expected to meet the classmates on a regular basis and possibly build a relationship with some of them") as well as the level of general impression management concern elicited by the scenario ("made me aware of how I would present myself to the others in the class," "concerned about how I would appear to others in the class"). The high relationship expectation scenario led to significantly higher expectations (as compared to the baseline scenario) regarding future interaction (M's = 5.58 vs. 3.04; $F(1, 46) = 65.08, p < .01$) and higher expectation of future relationships (M's = 5.58 vs. 2.75; $F(1, 46) = 55.16, p < .01$). However, both the high expectation and baseline scenarios elicited similar levels of general impression management concerns (M_{aware}'s 6.17 vs. 5.75; $F(1, 46) = 2.00$, NS; M_{appear}'s 5.79 vs. 5.83; $F(1, 46) = .01$, NS). In other words, both scenarios elicited a similar level of impression management concerns but varied in the extent of future relationships/interactions that participants anticipated. Note that embedded in the context of both scenarios was a strong situational cue (in-class presentation) favoring the sincerity trait.

Brand Personality. Two existing brands of jeans were selected for this study on the basis of a pilot study that revealed that one was perceived as more sincere than exciting (Gap) while the other was rated as more exciting than sincere (Abercrombie and Fitch).

Please note that if a general impression management concern was the underlying mechanism, then we would simply obtain a main effect of personality type, with the sincere brand always dominating the exciting (given the strong situational cue favoring sincerity). If self-esteem enhancement were driving the brand personality effects, a main effect of avoidance level would emerge—with low avoidants always preferring the sincere brand and high avoidants choosing the exciting one (since these personalities would be more consistent with their ideals and help enhance their self-worth); however, if brands are being used for signaling to potential relational partners by the high anxiety types, then an interaction effect would emerge, such that both groups would prefer the sincere brand (Gap) in the baseline condition (where situational cues favor sincerity, but no relationship is expected), but their choices would differ in the high relationship expectation condition where relational ex-

pectations would guide the signaling role of brand personality (sincere for low avoidants and exciting for high avoidants). Note that we deliberately chose a baseline scenario that favored the sincere brand, so that the choice of the exciting brand by the high avoidants in any condition would represent a strong reversal and a conservative test of underlying mechanism.

Dependent Variables. The key dependent variable was brand choice. Ideal self-concept connection was assessed via a three-item measure ("this brand makes a statement about what is important to me in life," "this brand says a lot about the kind of person I would like to be," "this brand makes me similar to people I aspire to be like"; coefficient alpha Gap = .91, Abercrombie and Fitch = .96). Manipulation checks for brand personality followed previous studies: participants were asked to rate the degree to which they agreed that "sincere" and "exciting" described each brand on a 7-point scale.

Results

Manipulation Check. An ANOVA for brand personality manipulation check revealed a main effect of brand for both items. No other effects were significant. Specifically, respondents rated Gap as more sincere than exciting (M's = 4.58 vs. 3.25; $F(1, 91)$ = 37.42, $p < .01$), and Abercrombie and Fitch as more exciting than sincere (M's = 3.55 vs. 2.98; $F(1, 91)$ = 6.42, $p < .01$). Additionally, Gap was perceived as significantly more sincere than Abercrombie and Fitch (M_{Gap} = 4.58, M_{AF} = 2.98; $F(1, 91)$ = 13.74, $p < .01$), but Abercrombie and Fitch was viewed as significantly more exciting than Gap (M_{Gap} = 3.25, M_{AF} = 3.55; $F(1, 91)$ = 4.81, $p < .01$).

Brand Choice. In order to model brand choice (Gap vs. Abercrombie and Fitch) as a dependent variable, a logistic regression including main effects of avoidance, relationship expectation, and the two-way interaction was estimated. Gender was included as a covariate. A significant two-way interaction between avoidance and relationship expectation (χ^2 = 4.61, $p < .05$) as well as a significant main effect of avoidance (χ^2 = 4.60, $p < .05$) emerged. No other effects were significant.

To explore the two-way interaction of avoidance and relationship expectation, further analyses were conducted. Consistent with the signaling mechanism predictions, there was no effect of avoidance in the baseline condition, where the sincere brand was preferred equally by both high and low avoidants (sincere = 73.0%, χ^2 = .005, NS). However, a main effect of avoidance emerged in the high relationship expectation condition (χ^2 = 15.57, $p < .01$), revealing significant differences in brand choice between the high and low avoidance groups. The high avoidants were less likely to choose the sincere brand than the low avoidants (37.5% vs. 82.1%). In other words, the high avoidants demonstrated a higher choice for the exciting brand than the low avoidants (62.5% vs. 17.9%). This difference in preference for the

sincere versus the exciting brand based on avoidance level was statistically significant (χ^2 = 9.03, $p < .01$). Most importantly, note that, compared to the baseline, a reversal of brand choice emerged for the high avoidants in the relationship expectation condition—they were now significantly less likely to choose the sincere (vs. exciting) brand relative to the baseline (37.5% vs. 73%, χ^2 = 6.04, $p < .01$).

Mediation by Ideal Self-Concept Connection. Next we examine the mediational role of ideal self-concept. Given that the outcome was participant's choice between the sincere brand versus the exciting brand, a difference measure was computed for ideal self-concept connection (difference between the ideal self-concept connection of each participant with the sincere versus the exciting brand). We test whether this ideal self-concept difference mediates the relationship between participants' avoidance style and brand choice, separately for each of the relationship expectation conditions.

Consistent with the approach of Baron and Kenny (1986), we estimated the following models for each relationship expectation condition: (1) the impact of avoidance on ideal self-concept connection difference, (2) the influence of ideal self-concept connection difference on choice, and (3) the joint impact of both ideal self-concept connection difference and avoidance on choice. Gender is included as a covariate in all the models. The results of these estimations are summarized in figure 3.

In the relationship expectation condition, we find a significant impact of avoidance on ideal self-concept connection difference (b = −.37, $p < .01$). Further, the ideal self-concept connection difference predicts brand choice (b = .75, χ^2 = 6.99, $p < .01$). Next, the logistic regression suggests that avoidance has a significant impact on choice (b = 1.04, χ^2 = 7.78, $p < .01$). However, when ideal self-concept connection is included in the regression, the impact of avoidance is no longer significant at conventional levels (b = .52, χ^2 = 3.33, $p < .07$), whereas the ideal self concept difference term continues to be significant (b = .60, χ^2 = 4.35, $p < .05$). These results suggest that the ideal self-concept connection difference mediates the impact of avoidance style on choice when the relationship expectation is high.

As can be seen from figure 3, none of the effects is significant in the low relationship expectation conditions, suggesting lack of mediation by ideal self-concept connection. The pattern of results for both mediational analyses, taken together, suggest that the high anxiety types tend to use brands to signal their ideal self-concept to potential relationship partners; however, this signaling role appears to be limited to settings where relational expectations are high, suggesting that it is motivated by relational concerns, even for the high avoidance types.

GENERAL DISCUSSION

Brand personality can influence consumer preferences and choices in various ways. By humanizing the brand, brand personality provides opportunities for building strong con-

FIGURE 3

MEDIATIONAL ANALYSIS (STUDY 3)
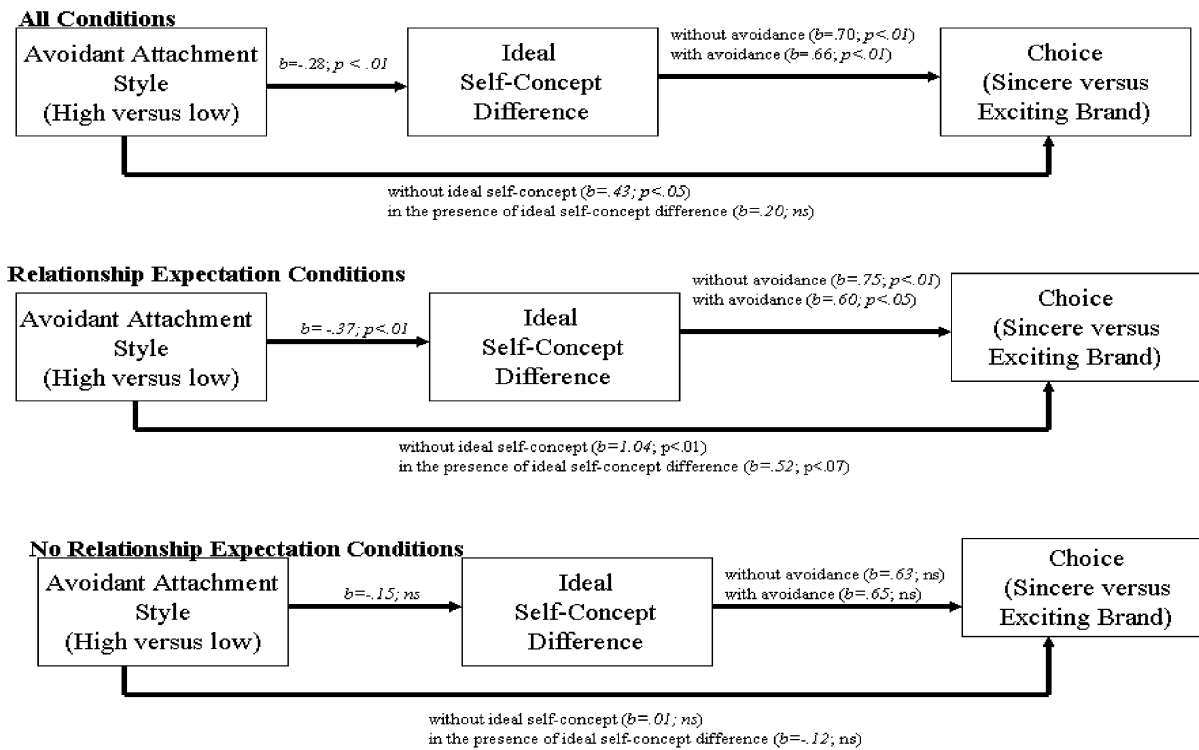
sumer brand relationships. Further, by signaling important attributes in social settings, brand personality can allow brands to be used by consumers in an instrumental manner for facilitating social interactions and building interpersonal relationships. Our research focused on the latter role of brand personality and introduced a new moderator of brand personality effects—individual's attachment style.

Through a series of three studies, our research demonstrates that individuals' attachment styles (view of self and view of others) delineate conditions under which brands are likely to serve in a signaling role. Our research reveals that individuals who have an anxious attachment style (negative view of self) are more likely to discriminate between brands based on their personality than those who are less anxious about relationships. For the anxious attachment types, when the brand is associated with a personality trait that the individual considers important or relevant for maintaining relationships with others, brand attachment, purchase likelihood, and brand choice are enhanced. This occurs because these individuals use the brand as a means for signaling their ideal self-concept to potential relational partners. In this regard, our research reveals that high anxiety types who tend to avoid relationships are likely to prefer exciting brands, whereas high anxiety individuals who are low on relationship avoidance are attracted to sincere brands. Importantly, this pattern of effects is replicated across different product categories (shoes, clocks, and clothing), in the do-

main of well-known brands to brand extensions of existing brands as well as new and unfamiliar brands, and for outcomes varying from brand attachment to purchase likelihood to brand choice.

As such, our research points to an interesting but counterintuitive finding: brand personality can be most useful for forging consumer brand connections in a domain where past literature in the interpersonal relationship context suggests brand attachments are most unlikely (high anxiety/high avoidance consumers). Interestingly, brand personality might hold the key to forming attachments with and enhancing the purchase likelihood of these consumers. Specifically, although high anxiety and high avoidance types of individuals (fearfuls) have been shown to demonstrate the lowest levels of attachment potential in past literature (Bartholomew and Horowitz 1991), the use of an exciting brand personality led them to exhibit brand attachment levels similar to low anxiety/low avoidance (secure) individuals, associated with highest attachment potential in the interpersonal domain. Furthermore, it appears that brand personalities are attractive to these high anxiety consumers to the extent that they enable individuals to project or signal a certain image. The brand personality effects become stronger for these consumers as the situation provides more potential for relationship formation.

At this point, it is important to note that several potential roles of brand personality have been discussed in the lit-

erature (Aaker 1999; Fournier 1998), ranging from a match with the consumer's actual self-concept, to signaling a desirable image via brand personality as a means for developing positive interpersonal relationships, to possibly even the use of brands as relationship partners. However, the literature is not very clear regarding which of these effects is most likely to emerge under what circumstances. We suggest that brand personality can play different roles, depending on the way in which we examine the universe of consumers. Our research provides insights on this issue from the perspective of individuals' attachment styles.

Our conceptual framework postulated that a match between actual self-concept and brand personality was unlikely to be the driving factor for the brand personality effects expected for high anxiety types since the actual self-concept of these individuals tends to be negative (low self-worth and lovability). Consistent with this rationale, results from experiment 1 demonstrate that ideal self-concept, instead of actual self-concept, mediates the brand personality effects obtained for high anxiety types.

Similarly, another possibility is that brands could serve as relational partners, in particular, for individuals with a low level of self-worth (high anxiety types). However, data from experiments 2 and 3 suggest that this possibility is unlikely to account for the brand personality effects obtained for the high anxiety types. Specifically, in study 2, differential preferences for exciting versus sincere brands emerged only in the public (not private) consumption settings. Note that if the brand were being used as a relational partner, these effects would be expected in both conditions. Importantly, study 3 demonstrates that the differential preference for brands, based on their personalities, emerges for the high anxiety types only in contexts where relationships with others are expected (vs. where they are not expected).

An interesting finding from this research is that the results for brand personality appear to be driven more by a desire by consumers to avoid mismatches with certain brand personalities than by a desire to be associated with certain brand personalities. Recall that we found in study 2 that high anxious/avoidant types would prefer to avoid purchasing sincere brands in a public consumption context, and high anxious/less avoidant types would prefer not to purchase exciting brands in a public consumption context. This finding is worthy of future research. For instance, examining conditions under which consumers actively seek to be associated with certain brand personalities in order to enhance their attractiveness is a worthy area for future research.

Together these data provide direct support for the notion that brand personality is used by high anxiety types as a means for managing relationships with others and not as an end in itself (or a relational partner). Note, however, that our research does not suggest that brands cannot serve as relationship partners, only that in the current context (high anxiety types) they do not seem to. Future research should identify conditions under which brand personality is likely to be instrumental in motivating consumers to develop deep partnerlike relationships with brands.

In addition to providing strong support for the notion that attachment styles are likely to influence brand personality outcomes via a signaling mechanism, our research also sheds light on the processes underlying the signaling role. We find that avoidance of mismatches is the key process that underlies how a consumer's ideal self-concept and a brand's personality jointly influence the likelihood of the brand being used as a signal. Most importantly, consistent with our theorizing, such symbolic use of brands with a view to signaling to others became more important when the consumption took place in public rather than private settings (study 2) and when the situation demanded greater potential for relationship building (study 3). Although we do not explicitly examine the role of actual (rather than ideal) self-concept connection, it is possible that it could play a significant role in relationship building, in particular, for those who are low in anxiety. Future research should examine how actual self-concept connection plays a role in helping consumers with varying attachment styles build brand relationships.

An interesting avenue for further research is examining the potential role of the other individual with whom the person is trying to form a relationship. The results from this research suggest that individuals who are high in anxiety and high in avoidance prefer brands with an exciting personality. However, an interesting follow-up question may be the extent of and the circumstances under which this preference could be moderated by the personality of the other person in an interpersonal relationship. In other words, it may be fruitful for future research in this area to examine when and to what extent the personality of the potential relationship partner (the target of the impression management efforts) is likely to moderate the brand personality effects demonstrated in our research.

This research is not without limitations. For instance, using a single item measure for ideal self-concept in studies 1 and 2 may be a limitation. However, it is particularly reassuring that we are able to obtain similar results when using a multi-item measure for ideal self-concept connection in a subsequent study, suggesting that the single-item measure is reasonably valid (Bergkvist and Rossiter 2007). Further, since the ideal self-concept connection and dependent variables were measured within close proximity, some possibility for carryover may exist. Some concerns could also be raised with the manipulations of brand personality used in our experiments. First, it could be argued that the brand personality (e.g., sincere vs. exciting) manipulation may also prime independence (vs. interdependence) self-construal (e.g., unique for exciting and togetherness for sincerity). In light of this potential concern, great care was taken in developing the experiment 2 stimuli (Mardi clocks) to ensure that the visual images depicting exciting versus sincerity were matched on the number of people, number of group situations depicted, and the togetherness implications of the pictures, to minimize any possible concerns on this dimension. Similarly, it is possible that manipulations for sincere (vs. exciting) brand personality may be confounded with public (vs. private) consumption. However, the manipulation checks in study 2 rule out this possibility by demonstrating that the sincere and exciting ads do not also manipulate public (vs. private) consumption. Therefore, we are reason-

ably confident that the manipulation of brand personality is sufficiently valid.

While brand personalities have been shown to be influential in guiding relationship expectations (Aaker et al. 2004), our research sheds light on an important, yet overlooked factor, that is, attachment styles. By illuminating the important role of attachment styles, this research may serve to encourage scholars to rethink some of the fundamental notions of the universality of brand personality traits and their meaningfulness across groups of consumers differentiated based on attachment styles. This research contributes to the literature by demonstrating the important role of consumers' view of self and view of others, which, developed during infancy, influences how consumers seek brands with personality traits that are consistent with their ideal self-concept.

Past research indicates that some segments of the population may be more related to an anxiety orientation in relationships than others (e.g., teenagers tend to fear rejection and are more anxious about acceptance and relationships than are older individuals; singles and recently divorced/separated individuals are also likely to be more anxious than those in stable relationships). Similarly, some demographics may be more desirous of and therefore likely to approach relationships than others (e.g., women tend to be more relationship oriented than men; consumers with an interdependent self-construal are more likely to approach relationships). Our research suggests that understanding the brand attachment potential of different demographics may provide interesting insights for branding strategy. For instance, teenage females are likely to have a potential for developing strong brand attachments and greater likelihood of brand usage if the brand is positioned on sincerity, whereas male teenagers might be more attracted to brands with an exciting personality. Expectations, however, might differ across cultures that vary on the extent to which people approach/avoid relationships. For instance, teenage men in interdependent cultures (e.g., China), which are low on relationship avoidance, might be more receptive to sincere brand personalities than those in more relationship avoidant independent cultures (e.g., United States), who might be more open to exciting brands. Further research exploring these differences as well as the effectiveness of appeals to segments that are less willing to form brand attachments will be beneficial.

APPENDIX

I. ATTACHMENT STYLE MANIPULATIONS

Please think about a relationship that you have had that fits the description given below and *picture in your mind the person with whom you have had that relationship*. Please make sure that the person and the relationship you have chosen to focus on is *meaningful* and *important* to your life. After reading the relationship description, turn to the next page. [Subjects in each of the four conditions read one of the following four descriptions.]

Low Anxiety/Low Avoidance

Please think about a relationship you have had in which you have found that it was relatively easy to get close to the other person and you felt *comfortable* depending on the other person. In this relationship *you didn't often worry about being alone or abandoned by the other person* and you *didn't worry about the other person getting too close to you* or not *accepting* you.

Low Anxiety/High Avoidance

Please think about a relationship you have had in which *you did not want to be emotionally close* to the other person and *didn't worry about being alone or abandoned by the other person*. In this relationship *you felt that it was very important to be independent and self-sufficient* and you *preferred not to depend on the other person or have the other person depend on you*.

High Anxiety/Low Avoidance

Please think about a relationship you have had in which you have felt like you *wanted to be completely emotionally intimate with the other person* but felt *that the other person was reluctant to get as emotionally close* as you would have liked. In this relationship, you felt *uncomfortable being alone* but *worried that the other person didn't value you* as much as you valued them.

High Anxiety/High Avoidance

Please think about a relationship that you have had in which [you] *did not want to be emotionally close to the other person*. In this relationship *you felt that it was difficult to trust the other person completely*, or to depend upon them. In this relationship, *you worried that the other person was not willing to accept you and you would be hurt if you allowed yourself to become too emotionally close to the other person.*

After reading one of the above descriptions, participants were asked the following questions:

Now, take a moment and try to get a visual image in your mind of this person. What does this person look like? What is it like being with this person? You may want to remember a time you were actually with this person. What would he or she say to you? What would you say in return? How do you feel when you are with this person? How would you feel if they were here with you now? After the visualization, write a sentence or two about your thoughts and feelings regarding yourself in relation to this person.

II. BRAND PERSONALITY MANIPULATIONS

Study 1

FIGURE A1

NOTE.—Brand personality (sincere and exciting) was manipulated in ads that varied along the lines suggested by Aaker et al. (2004). Specifically, the taglines and images used in the ads conveyed either a sincere or an exciting brand personality. Color version available as an online enhancement.

Study 2

NOTE.—Brand personality (sincere and exciting) was manipulated in ads that varied along the lines suggested by Aaker et al. (2004). Specifically, the taglines and images used in the ads conveyed either a sincere or an exciting brand personality. Color version available as an online enhancement.

III. CONSUMPTION CONTEXT MANIPULATIONS (STUDY 2)

Public Consumption

Mardi portable clocks is a new brand name in clocks designed for modern living. It automatically sets and updates time/day/date with the U.S. atomic clock. *In addition, its portable design enables you attach it easily to your backpack, jeans or belt and take with you when you go to school, when you are exercising or when you are traveling.*

Private Consumption

Mardi is a new brand name in compact clocks designed for modern living. It automatically sets and updates time/day/date with the U.S. atomic clock. *In addition, its compact space saving design enables you to place it anywhere within your home or apartment whether beside your bed, on your desk or on your dresser.*

IV. RELATIONSHIP EXPECTATION MANIPULATIONS (STUDY 3)

In the *high relationship expectation* situation, we presented participants with the following scenario:

> Imagine yourself at the start of a new semester. You are checking your email before classes begin and find a message from one of your instructors. He informs you that at the start of each semester, he randomly selects one student to give a brief talk to the class about his/her experiences at your University. The computer has randomly selected you to give the talk this semester! You have put together a brief presentation for this class and are now in the process of getting dressed to head out for it. You recall looking through the class syllabus at an earlier point in time and noticing that it involved several group projects. Well, this class seems to be calling for a lot of interaction with your classmates during the semester! You look through your wardrobe, trying to decide what to wear, and notice several options.

In contrast, those in the *low relationship expectation* situation were presented with the following scenario:

> Imagine yourself at the end of a semester. Assume also that you are transferring to another school in another city at the end of this semester to complete your degree. You are checking your email and find a message from one of your instructors. He informs you that at the end of each semester, he randomly selects one student to give a brief talk to the class about his/her experiences at your University. The computer has randomly selected you to give the talk this semester! You have put together a brief presentation for this class and are now in the process of getting dressed to head out for it. You look through your wardrobe, trying to decide what to wear, and notice several options.

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