These studies provide evidence that once an individual perceives himself to be "moving", the experience of psychological motion activates a motion state, resulting in a propensity to maintain motion. This exhibits itself behaviorally through (1) an increase in the propensity to engage in a subsequent task, and (2) a faster rate of progress through a given task. The relationship between psychological motion and the propensity to maintain that motion was reinforced by showing that when psychological motion is absent, so too is the propensity to maintain motion.

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Self-Image Congruence Models Conceptualized as a Product Affirmation Process

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Marketing scholars understand and account for the process of self-image congruence models—we incorporate products/brands into our self-concepts (e.g., Onkvisit and Shaw, 1987, Prentice, 1987) and often desire those products that match and express to others our self-concept, personality traits, and core values (Dolich, 1969). However, does this desire extend to products that represent both the "good and bad" of who we are? Additionally, can such products affect one's emotions and actually help to change one's self-concept? While self-image congruence models suggest that we tend to seek brands that match our personality, the distinction between the expression of one's actual self (both the "good and bad" aspects of one's self-concept), one's enhanced self (self-concept aspects that others tend to favor) and one's ideal self (the aspects to which an individual aspires but not necessarily to which others aspire) in consumer behavior remains less clear. Solomon (2007) has suggested that the vast amount of consumer research has been mixed regarding the influence of the different types of self-concept traits on product evaluation, and Solomon seems less certain that self-image congruency models can explain preference for simple/functional products, such as a toaster or a day-planner. In an attempt to clarify the mixed evidence regarding self-image congruence models, we sought to apply a robust theory of close relationships, namely the Michelangelo Phenomenon (Drigotas, Rusbult, Wieselquist, and Whitton, 1999, Rusbult et al., 2005), to explain the evaluation of products that match our actual, enhanced, and ideal selves and the effects of these products on one's emotions and personality.

Drigotas and his colleagues developed a model of partner affirmation in close relationships (Drigotas, Rusbult, Wieselquist, and Whitton, 1999). These authors proposed that the process of behavioral confirmation (Darley and Fazio, 1980, Snyder, Tanke, and Berscheid, 1977) is likely to be quite powerful in that close partners exert strong/frequent impact on one another across diverse behavioral domains. Accordingly over time, each person is likely to exert considerable impact on the other's "self"—the other's traits, values, and behavioral tendencies. To the extent that the confirmation process aligns with each person's ideal self, each is likely to enjoy movement toward his or her ideal self, and the relationship will flourish. Affirmation describes the extent to which the partner's perception and behavior aligns with the individual's ideal self. Such affirmation is termed the "Michelangelo Phenomenon." Affirmation has been shown to yield enhanced personal and couple well-being (Campbell, Sedikides, and Bosson 1994; Drigotas et al. 1999).

The process of affirmation seems more intuitive in the context of a romantic relationship than in consumer behavior—indeed, one must be willing to accept that a consumer and a brand can have an interdependent relationship in which each exerts powerful effects on the other. Susan Fournier (1998) put out such a call to researchers to use close relationship theories in psychology to understand the relationship between consumer and brand, conceptualizing the brand as an animated partner to the consumer. At present, we make the argument that products can affirm the consumer's ideal self. Additionally, we offer the presumption that "product affirmation" exerts significantly more powerful effects on a consumer's emotions, personality, and product evaluations than products which verify or enhance one's self-concept (alternatively labeled as "product verification" and "product enhancement" respectively). Furthermore, if our assumption of product affirmation is reasonable, then any type of product which brings one closer to his/her ideal self, whether it is used for hedonic or utilitarian purposes, should yield significant affirmation effects.

We conducted three studies to empirically test the proposition of product affirmation. The first study (study 1) was a simple non-experimental (survey design) study to initially establish the association of product affirmation with changes in a consumer's emotions, personality, and product evaluations. Study 1 used a sample of alumni students of a moderately sized state-funded university in the northeastern United States, and results provided significant support for product affirmation effects. Using college student samples, the second and third studies used experimental manipulations to pit product affirmation effects on a consumer's emotions, personality, and product evaluations against product verification effects (study 2) and product enhancement effects (study 3). Study 2 asked participants