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CHOOSING AN ENDORSER FOR A WOMEN'S SPORTING EVENT:
THE INTERACTION OF ATTRACTIVENESS AND EXPERTISE

George B. Cunningham

Texas A&M University

Janet S. Fink

University of Connecticut

Linda Jean Kenix

University of Canterbury

Address all correspondence to:

George B. Cunningham, PhD

Laboratory for Diversity in Sport

Department of Health and Kinesiology

Texas A&M University

4243 TAMU

College Station, TX 77843-4243

Phone: (979) 458-8006

FAX: (979) 847-8987

Email: gbcunningham@hlkn.tamu.edu

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Abstract

The match-up hypothesis and associative learning theory was utilized to examine the effects of athlete attractiveness and expertise on attitudes towards an athletic event and purchase intentions. An experimental design was incorporated to test the study's hypotheses with participants (N = 184) from three universities. Results indicate that athlete attractiveness and expertise interact to produce the best endorser-event fit. In terms of athletes with high levels of expertise, there were no differences in athlete-event fit between the highly attractive and less attractive athlete. However, among the athletes with low expertise, the attractive athlete was perceived as a better fit than was the less attractive athlete. Further, attitudes toward the event partially mediated the relationship between fit and purchase intentions, but identification did not act as a moderator. These results held regardless of participant sex. Implications relative to theory and practice are presented.

CHOOSING AN ENDORSER FOR A WOMEN'S SPORTING EVENT:
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Marketers and advertisers spend a great deal of money on celebrity endorsements in an attempt to push their products. In 2005, T-Mobile paid Catherine Zeta Jones a multi-million dollar contract to endorse their product through TV and print advertisements; Brad Pitt earned \$2M from Heineken for starring in a commercial aired once during the Super Bowl; Tiger Woods is the athlete earning the highest amount of money from endorsement income by bringing in \$75M in 2005 alone (Sirack, 2006; Soriano, 2005; Wenn, 2006). Given these figures, it is not surprising that considerable research has been conducted on the use of endorsers to sell various products. Attempts have been made to determine the influence of different spokespeople on the persuasiveness of the message, and subsequently, the most effective spokesperson for a specific product. Most research shows that perceived congruence between the celebrity and the product is essential for effective endorsements (Kamins, 1990; Ohanian, 1991; Till & Busler, 2000). As such, many studies have relied upon the match-up hypothesis to predict outcomes (Agrawa & Kamakura, 1995; Kahle & Homer, 1995; Kamins, 1990; Ohanian, 1991; Till & Busler, 2000; Tripp, Jensen, & Carlson, 1994). Simply stated, the match-up hypothesis contends that the better the match between the celebrity and the product, the more effective the endorsement will be (Till & Busler, 2000).

Fink, Cunningham, & Kensicki (2004) extended this research by examining how the attributes of an athletic spokesperson influenced attitudes toward an athletic event and intent to purchase tickets. Results of their study, which was set in the softball context, indicated that athlete expertise was more important than was athlete attractiveness in determining fit between

the athlete endorser and the event. Further, this fit was predictive of attitudes toward the event and intent to purchase tickets.

In the current investigation, we extend Fink et al.'s (2004) work in several meaningful ways. First, the context of their study (i.e., softball) may have contributed to the emphasis placed on expertise over attractiveness. In other, more "feminine" and "sex appropriate" sports, such as tennis (Kane & Parks, 1990), different patterns may emerge. We examine this possibility. In a related way, while Fink et al. focused on the direct effects of attractiveness and skill level on subsequent attitudes toward the event, we extend their work by investigating the potential interactive influence of these two variables. The match-up hypothesis and associative learning theory were utilized to develop the hypotheses visually demonstrated in Figure 1. Based on principles within these theories, we proposed that athlete attractiveness and expertise influence perceived fit of the endorser with the event and interact to produce the highest fit ratings. Further, we proposed that perceptions of fit lead to intentions to purchase tickets and this relationship is mediated by attitudes toward the event. Finally, we proposed that the relationship between attitudes toward the event and the intent to purchase tickets is moderated by identification with the university's team. In the next section we explain the theoretical foundation of the study and present hypotheses.

Supporting Literature and Hypotheses

Determining the effectiveness of various endorsers has captured the attention of numerous researchers. Effectiveness studies have examined endorser characteristics, product characteristics, as well as the "match" between the two (Mittelstaedt, Riesz, & Burns, 2000). Endorser characteristic studies indicate that the more credible the source, the more effective the endorser (Ohanian, 1991; Weiner & Mowan, 1986), and source credibility has been found to be

enhanced by a variety of factors including attractiveness, expertise, and trustworthiness (Baker & Churchill, 1977; Kahle & Homer, 1985; Ohanian, 1991; Tripp; Jensen, & Carlson, 1994). Others have found that product characteristics are the key to effectiveness (Petty, Cacioppo, & Schumann, 1983) and argue that only low involvement products (i.e., those processed peripherally) can be effectively marketed through endorsements. However, much of the recent literature regarding endorser effectiveness has been dominated by the match-up perspective, which contends that the most effective endorsements are those in which there is a fit between the endorser and the product (Agawal & Kamakura, 1995; Boyd & Shank, 2004; Kammins, 1990; Middelstaedt et al., 2000; Shank, 2005; Till & Busler, 2000). This research has shown that the nexus between the product and the endorser is absolutely key to the success of the endorsement campaign.

The effectiveness of the match-up hypothesis can be explained by associative learning theory (Till & Busler, 2000). The theory suggests that different concepts can be linked in one's mind to form an associated network of memory. Once connected, each concept is gathered every time the other concept is elicited (Anderson, 1983; Till & Shimp, 1998). When endorsers are used to market products, an individual's experiences and attitudes about both is summoned and a link is developed. Over time, the product and endorser become part of one's "association set," and when either of the two is observed, the other immediately comes to mind (Till & Busler, 2000). Most important to the match-up hypothesis, the strength of the association depends upon the fit, or shared schema, between the endorser and the product (Lynch & Schuler, 1994; Till & Busler, 2000).

The match-up hypothesis has been used quite successfully to predict endorser effectiveness. For example, Mittelstaedt et al. (2000, p. 62) found that "perceptions of potential

endorser effectiveness are a function of the unique relationship between the products and the endorsers, rather than just the nature of the product or the endorser.” Similarly, Kamins (1990) found that when an endorser was paired with a product designed to enhance one’s attractiveness (i.e., clothing, skin care, make-up), the attractive endorser was much more effective than was the less attractive endorser. However, when the product was unrelated to attractiveness (e.g., computer), both endorsers were equally effective. Relative to sport celebrity endorsers, Till and Busler (2000) found that athletes were more effective endorsers of energy bars than actors, suggesting that the fit between the product and the endorser was the result of the athlete’s expertise regarding the characteristics of a good energy bar. Chabonneau and Garland (2005) found that four New Zealand athletes were all considered experts when endorsing an unbranded sports drink, yet mean ratings of other traits (i.e., trustworthiness, attractiveness) differed. In a study of young consumers, Veltri, Kuzman, Stotlar, Viswanthan, and Miller (2003) showed that a majority of 10-14 year old consumers were more likely to be influenced by an athlete endorser when he/she was endorsing an athletic product. Additionally, Till (2001) found that an athlete endorsers’ images can be tainted if they endorse an “inappropriate” product, particularly a product found to be a health risk. Obviously, product-endorser fit is key to the formation of positive attitudes and purchase intentions toward a product.

Determinants of Fit

While considerable research has been conducted to determine the best fit for an athlete and a product, Fink et al.’s study (2004) represents the only work to examine the best fit for an endorser selling an actual athletic event. They reasoned that the choice of athlete utilized to promote the athletic event would be just as important to the sale of the event as it would be to the sale of a product. For example, Anna Kournikova has been utilized successfully as an endorser

for Adidas, but is she the best endorser for the United States Open? Fink et al. (2004) found that both athlete attractiveness and expertise were related to perceptions of endorser-event fit. This finding mirrors work of other endorsement research which has found that both attractiveness and expertise are important determinants of source credibility and fit (Kamins, 1990; Ohanian, 1991).

As previously noted, we extend Fink et al.'s work by examining the potential interactive effects of attractiveness and expertise. Given that attractiveness and expertise may both produce a good fit for an athlete endorsing an athletic event, we reasoned that the *combined* effects of attractiveness and expertise would lead to the greatest levels of athlete-event fit. This may be especially true for a sport like tennis. At a baseline level, endorser expertise should be vital to any endorser-event fit equation because the product itself (i.e. the game) relies on upon participant skill. That is, people would typically rather watch a game with highly skilled competitors. However, because tennis, as a "feminine," "sex appropriate" sport (Kane & Parks, 1990), has promoted sex appeal so enthusiastically over the years (Taylor, 2002; Wertheim, 2002), consumers may have come to expect tennis players to be skilled and attractive; thus, the combined effects could produce the best fit. Recent literature in a sporting context supports this notion. Chabonneau and Garland (2005) compared four New Zealand athletes on three attributes of source credibility (attractiveness, expertise, trustworthiness). Study participants rated the athletes on these sources and then also picked which athlete they thought would be the best endorser for a sports drink. Results of the study indicated that the athlete chosen as the best fit actually had the highest mean score for the three attributes combined but not the highest mean score for all three attributes, suggesting that a combination of attributes can be important to fit. Given this rationale, we proposed the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 1: Athlete expertise and attractiveness will interact to predict athlete-event fit.

Attractiveness and expertise may lead to fit, but Till and Busler (1990) found that fit between the endorser and product was the most important factor in influencing brand attitudes and purchase intentions among consumers. Similarly, Fink et al. (2004) found that fit between the athlete endorser and the event predicted positive brand attitudes and purchase intentions even after controlling for attractiveness and expertise. Theoretically, considering the match-up hypothesis and associative learning theory, we would expect this to be true for any event. Attractiveness and expertise may be important antecedents to fit, but athlete-event fit should be an important predictor of attitudes and purchase intentions.

In addition, Madrigal (1995) found that positive attitudes towards a sports event lead to purchase intentions among consumers. This finding is consistent with a number of studies in the sport marketing context, which have demonstrated that positive attitudes toward a team or event serve as a reliable predictor of subsequent consumption behavior (Trail, Anderson, & Fink, 2000). Within the context of the current study, this pattern suggests that athlete-event fit should be positively associated with positive attitudes toward the event, which in turn, should positively influence subsequent purchase intentions. In drawing from this mediating perspective, we proposed the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 2: Attitudes toward the event will mediate, at least partially, the relationship between athlete-event fit and intentions to purchase tickets to the event.

Finally, sport consumer behavior literature is replete with evidence that team identification impacts fan behavior. Mael and Ashforth (1992) suggest that when a person identifies with an organization (or team), he or she observes, “a oneness with or belongingness to the organization, where the individual defines him or herself in terms of the organization(s) of which he or she is a member” (p. 104). Identification has been shown to impact cognitive,

affective, and behavioral reactions among sport fans (Trail, et al., 2000). Particular to this study, highly identified fans are more likely to attend games (Madrigal, 1995; Brancombe & Wann, 1991).

These findings have particular relevance to the current investigation. Specifically, even if people have positive attitudes toward the event, if they do not strongly identify with the team, their purchase intentions may be low. Alternatively, persons with a strong team identification may choose to behaviorally support their team (i.e., purchase tickets to the event), even if their attitudes toward the event are only moderately positive. In short, team identification is thought to influence the relationship between attitudes toward the event and purchase intentions. More formally, we hypothesized:

Hypothesis 3: Team identification will moderate the relationship between attitudes towards the event and purchase intentions.

Study overview

We conducted an experiment to test the study hypotheses. Specifically, following Till and Busler (2000) and Fink et al., (2004), we created a fictional athlete to endorse the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) National Tennis Championship in which the fictional athlete's team was playing. Consistent with Till and Busler (2000), "we chose to sacrifice some ecological validity (by using a fictitious rather than a real athlete), but gained construct validity by minimizing spurious confounds and statistical conclusion validity by minimizing within-group variation with our manipulation" (p. 5). We also choose university athletics, rather than professional athletics for specific reasons. First, we wanted to test the effects of team identification, thus we wanted a team with which participants could identify (e.g., University of _____ Tennis Team). Second, we felt that if we used professional tennis, those more familiar

with tennis would not recognize the athlete making it difficult to manipulate expertise of the athlete. The specific methods and data analytic techniques are outlined below.

Method

Participants

The participants were undergraduate students ($N = 184$) enrolled in sport management and journalism classes in three large mid-western universities. The sample was mostly White ($n = 159, 86.4\%$), and consisted of a relatively even mix of men ($n = 105, 57.1\%$) and women ($n = 78, 42.4\%$). The mean age was 20.76 years ($SD = 2.60$).

Procedures

We employed a 2×2 full factorial design such that participants were randomly assigned to one of four conditions: high attractiveness-high expertise ($n = 45$), high attractiveness-low expertise ($n = 51$), low attractiveness-high expertise ($n = 44$), and low attractiveness-low expertise ($n = 44$). The advertisements included a close range photo of a woman and read: “_____ University NCAA Softball. Come see MARY ENDRIES this week at the NCAA Women’s Tennis Championship.” The university connection differed by the school in which the data were collected. The caption was left of the athlete’s face. The attractive athlete had long blonde hair, a lean face, and light make-up, while the less attractive athlete had shorter brown hair, a slightly heavier face, and no make-up. The high expertise conditions included the following sentences, in addition to the caption above: “Come see #1 tennis player, Mary Endries this week at the NCAA Tennis Championship” and “Mary Endries is: Last year’s NCAA Champion, Voted #1 NCAA player 2002, Voted #1 division player 2001 & 2002, Voted #1 _____ University player 2000, 2001, 2002.” In the low-expertise conditions, these phrases were absent.

The study was conducted during class time, and participation was voluntary. We provided the materials (the one-page advertisement and the subsequent 2 pages with measures) to subjects face down. A brief introduction of the study ensured in which participants were told that they were being employed to ascertain the effectiveness of advertisements for women's sports. Participants had 30 seconds to view the advertisement. Then they completed a 2-page questionnaire. Pilot testing revealed that the manipulation was successful.

Measures

The questionnaire used in the study ascertained demographic variables (age, race, sex) as well as the variables of interest in the study. The mean of the items represented the final score for each measure. Reliability estimates (Cronbach's alpha) for each measure in the questionnaire were calculated and are reported below.

Athlete-event fit. The fit of the athlete with the event was measured using Till and Busler's five item scale (2000). A sample item is "I think the athlete is an appropriate endorser of the NCAA Championships." Items were measured on a 9-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 9 (*strongly agree*), and the reliability estimate was high ($\alpha = .96$).

Attitudes. Similar to Till and Busler (2000), attitudes toward the event were assessed using three semantic differential scales in response to the following phrase, "In general, how do you feel about the event?" The three scales were "strongly dislike-strongly like," "negative-positive" and "unfavorable-favorable." All items were measured on a 9-point scale. The reliability estimate for the measure was high ($\alpha = .91$).

Purchase intentions. Also, Till and Busler's (2000) items (3) were used to measure intentions to purchase a ticket. Participants responded to the following, "How likely is it that you would consider purchasing a ticket to this event?" The phrase was anchored by 9-point semantic

differential scales with endpoints “definitely would not-definitely would,” “unlikely-likely,” and “improbable-probable.” There was a high reliability estimate for the measure ($\alpha = .97$).

Team identification. We used four items from Trail and James (2000) to measure team identification. A sample item is “I consider myself to be a ‘real fan’ of this university’s athletic teams.” The reliability estimate for the measure was high ($\alpha = .93$).

Manipulation checks. To ensure the efficacy of the manipulations, we used Ohanian’s (1990) scale to assess the attractiveness and expertise of the athlete. Items from both scales were preceded by the phrase, “the athlete in the advertisement is...” and utilized 9-point semantic differential scales. For the attractiveness scale, the endpoints were “unattractive-attractive,” “not classy-classy,” “ugly-beautiful,” “plain-elegant,” and “not sexy-sexy.” For the expertise scale, the endpoints were “not an expert-an expert,” “inexperienced-experienced,” “unknowledgeable-knowledgeable,” “unqualified-qualified,” and “unskilled-skilled.” Reliability coefficients for the attractiveness ($\alpha = .97$) and expertise ($\alpha = .95$) measures were high.

Data analysis

We conducted two analysis of variance procedures to assess the efficacy of the experimental manipulations. Means, standard deviations, and bivariate correlations were then computed for all variables. Hypotheses 1-3 were then tested through observed path analysis, using AMOS 7.0 (Arbuckle, 2006). We followed Marsh, Wen, and Hau’s (2004) recommendations to test for interactions among the variables. Consistent with James, Muliak, and Brett (2006), we tested a fully mediated and partially mediated model to test for Hypothesis 3. We then tested competing models—a fully mediated model and a partially mediated model—to test Hypothesis 2 (James, Muliak, & Brett, 2006). As the mediated model is nested within the partially mediated model, we were able to compute the chi-square difference test to determine if

the models statistically varied. We interpreted the root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) and comparative fit index (CFI) to assess model fit. RMSEA values less than .06 and CFI values greater than .95 are generally considered as indicative of close model fit (Hu & Bentler, 1998, 1999; but see also Marsh, Hau, & Wen, 2004, for alternative arguments).

Results

Manipulation checks

Persons in the two high attractiveness conditions perceived the athlete as significantly more attractive ($M = 7.35$, $SD = 1.36$) than did persons in the low attractiveness conditions ($M = 2.65$, $SD = .93$), $F(1, 182) = 737.82$, $p < .001$. Similarly, persons in the high expertise conditions rated the athlete as more skilled ($M = 6.53$, $SD = 1.87$) than did persons in the low expertise conditions ($M = 5.39$, $SD = 2.38$), $F(1, 180) = 12.74$, $p < .001$. Both of these results suggest that the manipulation was successful.

Descriptive statistics

Mean, standard deviations, and bivariate correlations are presented in Table 1. In interpreting the results, readers should remain cognizant that attractiveness was coded as 0 = low attractiveness, 1 = high attractiveness, while expertise was coded as 0 = low expertise, 1 = high expertise. From a direct effects perspective, persons who viewed an attractive athlete perceived her as a better fit for the event ($r = .36$, $p < .001$), had more positive attitudes toward the event ($r = .24$, $p < .01$), and had greater purchase intentions ($r = .21$, $p < .01$). Expertise, on the other hand, was not related to any of those outcomes. Fit perceptions were significantly associated with purchase intentions ($r = .36$, $p < .001$), as were positive attitudes toward the event ($r = .67$, $p < .001$).

Hypothesis testing

We first tested the competing mediated models. Results of the fully mediated path analysis demonstrated a close fit of the model to the data: χ^2 ($n = 184$, $df = 18$) = 32.04, $p < .05$; $\chi^2 / df = 1.78$; RMSEA = .06 (90% C.I.: .03, .10); CFI = .96. The partially mediated model was also a close fit to the data: χ^2 ($n = 184$, $df = 17$) = 21.17, $p = .22$; $\chi^2 / df = 1.25$; RMSEA = .04 (90% C.I.: .00, .08); CFI = .99. The chi-square difference test indicated that the partially mediated model was a significantly closer fit to the data than was the fully mediated model: $\Delta\chi^2$ (1) = 10.87, $p < .01$. Given its superior fit, we interpret the partially mediated model. An illustrative summary is provided in Figure 1. The model explained 18.1% of the variance in athlete-event fit, 12.7% of the variance in attitudes, and 49.0% of the variance in purchase intentions.

For Hypothesis 1, we predicted that attractiveness and expertise would interact to predict athlete-event fit. The direct effects for attractiveness ($\beta = .54$, $p < .001$) and expertise ($\beta = .34$, $p < .001$) were both significant, but so too was the attractiveness \times expertise interaction effect ($\beta = -.32$, $p < .01$). Thus, Hypothesis 1 is supported. The nature of the interaction is depicted in Figure 2. Results indicated that, among the athletes with high levels of expertise, there were no differences in athlete-event fit between the highly attractive and less attractive athlete. However, among the athletes with low expertise, the attractive athlete was perceived as a better fit than was the less attractive athlete.

We also predicted that positive attitudes toward the event would mediate, at least partially, the relationship between athlete-event fit and purchase intentions (see Hypothesis 2). As previously noted, the partially mediated model was the better fit of the two models. Results indicate that athlete-event fit perceptions are positively related to both attitudes toward the event

($\beta = .36, p < .001$) and purchase intentions ($\beta = .19, p < .001$). Attitudes toward the event were also positively associated with purchase intentions ($\beta = .61, p < .001$). These results support Hypothesis 2.

For Hypothesis 3, we predicted that team identification would interact with attitudes toward the event to predict purchase intentions. This hypothesis was not supported as neither team identification ($\beta = -.05, p = .37$) nor the attitudes \times team identification term ($\beta = -.05, p = .40$) was significant.

Supplementary analyses

In addition to testing the aforementioned hypotheses, we were also interested in exploring the possibility of differences between men and women. Specifically, we questioned whether the strength of association among some variables (e.g., attractiveness and athlete-event fit) would be the same across sexes. To examine this issue, we tested for multigroup invariance following Byrne's (2004) methods. The chi-square difference test indicated that the hypothesized and constrained models did not significantly differ from one another: $\Delta\chi^2(7) = 12.70, p > .05$. Thus, the pattern of findings previously outlined held for both men and women.

Discussion

The results of this study expand previous research regarding the best endorsers for women's sports and the match-up hypothesis. Although there were main effects for attractiveness and expertise on fit, the two qualities interacted to produce the best fit for the women's tennis event. Further, endorser fit influenced attitudes towards the event and the model explained nearly half of the variance in purchase intentions. In earlier studies testing the match-up hypothesis, endorser characteristics that more closely aligned with the product or service was found to be the most salient predictor of fit (Fink et al., 2004; Lynch & Schuler, 1984; Till &

Busler, 1998; Till & Busler, 2000). Given that the “product” in this study was an athletic event, one might have expected that the more expert endorser would produce the greatest fit. However, the characteristics of attractiveness and expertise *interacted* to produce the greatest fit, indicating the two characteristics work in synergy to produce the most effective endorser. This finding is similar to Chabonneau and Garland’s (2005), as they discovered the most effective endorser had the highest total score on three endorser characteristics. However, the premise and results of the present study are slightly different. While it may be true that the most attractive and most expert endorser will produce the greatest effect, our results suggest that deficits in the area of expertise can be off-set by higher levels of attractiveness. Thus, our results showed that a less expert endorser may still be effective as long as she is attractive.

Earlier studies in the area of endorser effectiveness indicated that attractive individuals are viewed more positively on a variety of characteristics such as integrity, intellectual competence and social competence (Eagly, Ashmore, Mahuijani, & Longo, 1991). In other words, all other things being equal, attractive people are perceived to possess more positive characteristics than those who are less attractive. Thus, perhaps the attractive endorser in our advertisement was assigned some level of expertise due to her attractiveness.

It would be interesting, however, to determine if this finding would also hold true for male athletes endorsing athletic events. That is, would the same interaction be found; would a less skilled male athlete be considered a good fit if he were attractive? Perhaps women’s sport, and especially women’s tennis, poses a special case. The Women’s Tennis Association (WTA) has a long tradition of utilizing sex appeal in their promotional campaigns (Taylor, 2002; Weirthein, 2002). The match-up hypothesis suggests that the strength of an association set in one’s mind depends upon the match between the product and the endorser. However, perhaps

there is a longitudinal effect on the match-up hypothesis. That is, an attractive (yet less expert) endorser may not, at first, create a strong link with an athletic event in a consumer's mind, but over time and repeated exposure, associative learning theory would suggest the link can be forged. Because promoters of women's sport often attempt to exploit female athletes' sex appeal, athlete attractiveness, expertise, and women's tennis may all be part of the same association set in consumers' minds.

Interestingly, the findings held for both men and women. Other studies relative to athlete endorsers have found sex differences. For example, Boyd and Shank (2004) found that women rated endorsers as more of an expert when there was a match between the product and the endorser; however, this was not true of males in their sample. Peetz, Parks, and Spencer (2004) found that men were more likely to buy products endorsed by a male athlete, but women were likely to buy products endorsed by athletes of either sex. Neither of these studies manipulated endorser attractiveness, however. Intuitively, one might expect most females in the sample to be less affected by the attractiveness of the endorser thereby rendering expertise as the only truly important predictor of fit for females. However, that was not the case for our sample. Regardless of the participant's sex, attractiveness and expertise interacted to produce the best endorser-event fit.

Similar to Fink et al.'s (2004) findings, endorser-event fit was related to positive attitudes toward the event and all were related to purchase intentions. The interaction of attractiveness and expertise explained a large amount of variance in fit (18%), and the model itself explained nearly 50% of the variance in purchase intentions. Thus, it appears that who is chosen as an endorser of a women's tennis event could be quite vital to attendance. Just as not all celebrity

endorsers are successful in marketing a product or service (Mittelstaedt et al, 2000), our results suggest that not all athletes are equal in promoting their sporting events.

It is interesting to note that team identification had no effect on purchase intentions. This finding counters Fink et al.'s (2004) in which identification with the school's athletic teams moderated purchase intentions. In fact, this finding is contrary to much of the extant research focusing on the link between fan identification and purchase intentions (Trail et al., 2000). However, perhaps the fact that tennis is an individual sport explains, at least partially, this finding. Maybe it is easier for individuals to identify with a team sport than an individual sport. We know that individuals are more likely to become identified with a team when it embodies characteristics they ascribe to themselves (Turner, 1985). While the participants in this study had high identification scores ($M = 6.36$; see Table 1), our items measured identification with the university's athletic teams, not the tennis team specifically. Given that a tennis team is made up of a variety of individuals competing in individual matches, those individuals may represent a *variety* of characteristics. In contrast, in a team sport, much more emphasis is placed on the characteristics of the team working toward an end goal, thus individual characteristics are less accentuated. Recent literature (e.g., Kwon, Trail, & Anderson, 2005; Robinson & Trail, 2005; Robinson, Trail, & Kwon, 2004) has begun to examine different points of attachment of sport fans (i.e., team, community, player, coach) but most of it has examined team sports and none has compared points of attachment by individual versus team sports. It stands to reason, however, that fans of individual sports identify with a certain player rather than the team itself. In fact, Robinson et al. (2004) found some support for this contention as they found that identified golf fans were attached to individual players rather than the different golf associations/tours (i.e., PGA, LPGA, and PGA Senior Tours).

Limitations and Directions for Future Research

Using a fictitious endorser and event provided greater internal validity; however, it also limited the study's generalizability to actual endorsers and events. While the results suggest attractiveness and expertise interact to produce the best fit for a women's tennis event, future studies should attempt to use real athletes and events. However, care must be taken to minimize confounding variables in such studies (e.g., athlete personality, race, etc.).

Future studies should also include male athletes as endorsers of their sport to determine whether differences exist across male and female sporting events. Other demographic variables (e.g., age, race) can be manipulated to determine their effects on athlete-event fit. For example, many of the National Basketball Association's marquee players are African American; thus, race may play a role in consumers' ideas of perceived fit.

Athlete characteristics beyond demographic variables may also enhance perceptions of athlete-event fit. For example, an athlete's persona, familiarity, or likeability may influence fit with various events. Lindsay Davenport and Serena Williams often vied for the number one ranking in women's tennis making them both "experts" as endorsers of their sporting events; however, they exhibited very different personas both on and off the court that could influence consumers' perceived fit at different events (e.g., Wimbledon versus the United States Open).

Taking the match-up hypothesis even one step farther, it would be interesting to note how different *consumer* characteristics interact with endorser characteristics to influence athlete/event fit. For example, the WNBA has quite a diverse fan base in terms of sex, gender, age, sexual orientation, and income level (Drehs, 2001; Sports Portfolio -- WNBA Enthusiast, 2005); thus, if targeting different aspects of this fan base (e.g., men versus women), will consumer characteristics interact with endorser characteristics to determine the best fit? While a few

researchers have attempted to determine the effect of consumer gender on athlete endorser effectiveness (e.g., Boyd & Shank, 2004; Peetz et al., 2004), certainly other characteristics could impact perceived fit.

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Table 1

Means, Standard Deviations, and Bivariate Correlations

Table	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Attractiveness	.48	.50	---					
2. Expertise	.52	.50	.03	---				
3. Athlete-event fit	4.70	2.82	.36	.14	---			
4. Identification	6.36	1.88	.09	-.15	.01	---		
5. Attitudes	5.17	1.58	.24	.01	.36	.10	---	
6. Purchase intentions	2.74	1.92	.21	.08	.41	.02	.67	---

Notes. Attractiveness coded as 0 = low attractiveness, 1 = high attractiveness. Expertise coded as 0 = low expertise, 1 = high expertise. $|r| \geq .14, p < .05$.

Figure Captions

- Figure 1. Illustrative summary of partially mediated model
- Figure 2. Effects of attractiveness and expertise on athlete-event fit



