University of Alberta

TO BE, OR TO BE ANOTHER ME: AN INVESTIGATION OF SELF-CONCEPT CHANGE IN CONSUMERS

by

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A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

Marketing

Faculty of Business

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ABSTRACT

In two essays I investigate two antecedents of self-concept change in consumers: Threats to the self and the activated self-construal and its effect on goal conflict resolution.

In the first essay, I explore identity strictly as consumers define themselves in terms of the possessions with which they associate. I argue that ironically the very effort to maintain self-consistency through living up to the value of materialism after facing a mortality salience threat can actually undermine consistency on the level of the extended self of highly materialistic consumers. Specifically, when faced with a mortality salience threat, the consistency of highly materialistic consumers' self-concept is disrupted in which they not only detach from formerly intrinsic possessions, but also make formerly extrinsic possessions a more central part of the extended self-concept. I further argue that consumers can be protected from a disruption to self-concept consistency through the process of self-affirmation.

In the second essay, I explore how the activated self-construal impacts whether consumers maximize pleasure or engage in self-presentational behavior after they have been invited to choose a gift for themselves. I demonstrate that consumers with an independent (interdependent) self-construal make more indulgent (modest) gift choices for themselves, and that this effect is driven by the activation of a goal to maximize pleasure (behave normatively appropriate). I also identify a boundary condition: When consumers are able to satisfy their activated goal before selecting a gift, the effects cease to exist.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES

CHAPTERS

ONE   INTRODUCTION

TWO   SELF-CONCEPT CHANGE

LIST OF FIGURES

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

The Nature of the Research Problem

The history of the human species is marked by change. In fact, one of the most remarkable traits of mankind is our ability to not only rely on our genetically inherited *hardware*, but to be able to change our habitat and shape our environments to suit our needs, and in the process update our *software* and develop culture. Since somewhere in Africa, around 200,000 years ago, when birth was given to homo sapiens, our species has gone through some radical changes. The agricultural revolution, which started around 10,000 years ago in the Middle East, was the first of such radical changes, enabling mankind for the first time to generate food surpluses and thereby shifting human awareness from a mere focus on everyday survival to the development of societies with diverse forms of labor. Since then, cultural evolution has happened at a much faster pace than in the previous 190,000 years leading to the economic and political systems and the technological achievements of our modern times.

As new technologies are developed, one of the cornerstones of marketing research has been to investigate how those technologies are adopted, thereby observing patterns of change in the markets (e.g., Bass 1969; Rogers 1983). Understanding change is fundamental for marketing success and has therefore inspired some of the most important work in the field of marketing. For example, the study of the diffusion of innovations allowed researchers to identify how new

technologies spread through the market, which factors are desirable for a new product to succeed, and how the population can be classified in terms of the response to new technologies. This knowledge is now widely used in forecasting of product and technology success. Another example is that as technologies like the internet are developed that have a major impact on the way people live, many new topics in marketing research arise to investigate how the new technologies affect consumption patterns and whether traditional models of marketing still hold true or whether they need to be modified to fit the new consumption realities. Also here, change, or more specifically the effects of change are the topic under investigation and the results help to improve business practice in the new consumption environment.

While change on the technological, cultural, and societal level has spurred tremendous amounts of marketing research, literature on change on the level of the consumer as an individual is rather scarce. This is surprising given the centrality consumers' self-concepts play in their everyday consumption activities (Belk 1988; Elliot 1997; Gabriel and Lang 1995; Gergen 1991; Kleine, Kleine, and Allen 1995; Levy 1959; Sirgy 1982). The consumer research that has studied self-concept change has investigated consumption changes that that arise as consumers go through important life transitions (Gentry, Kennedy, and Paul 1995; McAlexander 1991; McAlexander, Schouten, and Roberts 1992; Pavia and Mason 2004; Price, Arnould, and Curasi 2000; Roberts 1991; Schouten 1991) and how in the process of those life transitions, the meaning of products to a consumer can

change from something sacred to something profane (Belk, Wallendorf, and Sherry 1989).

But self-concept change does not only occur during major life transitions. The self-concept is a dynamic construct that allows for change to happen at any given time through the activation of different self-conceptions. This malleability of the self-concept has received some attention in the marketing literature, covering topics like the influence of the malleable self-concept on consumer attitudes (Aaker 1999), and the effect of self-construal priming on risk-taking behavior (Mandel 2003).

However, while this research has demonstrated that changes of consumers' self-concepts have effects on consumption patterns, there are still considerable gaps in our understanding of the effects and what exactly the antecedents of self-concept changes are that lead to changed consumption patterns. This dissertation aims to help fill some of that gap by investigating two of those antecedents: 1) Threats to the self and 2) self-construal and goals associated with the two distinct types of self-construal (pleasure maximization vs. self-presentation). This is particularly relevant as the investigated causes of self-concept change are part of everyday life in today's world.

Organization of this Document

The remainder of this document is divided into four chapters. Chapter Two reviews and integrates the literature on self-concept change in both marketing and social psychology. Chapter Three is comprised of the first essay of

this dissertation: *Break Me, Shake Me and Make Me New: Mortality Salience Disrupts Self-Concept Consistency.* Chapter Four presents the second essay of this dissertation: *The Lucky Man's Dilemma: How Do Consumers Choose When Being Invited.* Chapter Five concludes this dissertation with a general discussion of the findings.

CHAPTER TWO

SELF-CONCEPT CHANGE

The Self

Human beings have the capacity to become the object of their own attention, in which a person actively identifies, processes, and stores information about the self (Duval and Wicklund 1972). At the very core, this understanding of the self being differentiated from its surroundings manifests itself in the bodily awareness humans have, and in their sense of agency (de Vignemont and Fourneret 2004). This *sense of self* is unfortunately a rather nebulous concept, one that in its totality points to the whole realm of deliberate and nondeliberate conduct and reflexive experience (Toulmin 1986). As such it is rather problematic to operationalize the construct of a *sense of self* (Reed 2002) as the self is elusive and always seems to escape from introspection. Or as Hume (1739) noticed, when one looks deep into the self, one only finds a bundle of perceptions, but never finds the self.

While the question of what the self is has been an important question in philosophy (and more recently is investigated in the field of cognitive neuroscience), the social sciences have given more attention to the self-concept (i.e., the accumulation of beliefs and knowledge that a person has about her/himself). Markus and Wurf (1987) postulate that a person's self-concept consists of multiple representations that can vary in their centrality or importance,

their reflection of actual or potential achievements and accomplishments, their temporal orientation, and their valence.

Review of Self-Concept One of the earliest accounts of the self-concept comes from William James (1890), who defined the self-concept as all that a person is tempted to call by the name I, referring to pure experience, or me, referring to the contents of that experience. James claimed that the self-concept consists of four components: the spiritual self, the material self, the social self, and the bodily self.

After James' work, research on the self has diffused and can be found in virtually all psychological domains including behaviorism, which looks at the self as a repertoire of behaviors directed by a history of environmental contingencies (e.g., Skinner 1953; Thorndike 1932); psychoanalysis, which sees the self-concept as the result of intrapsychic conflicts (Freud 1923, 1946); social cognition, which views the self as "a conceptual system processing information about the self" (Kihlstrom and Klein 1994); and symbolic interactionism, which looks at the self-concept as a reflexive mirror born out of the interaction of the individual with his/her social milieu (Cooley 1902).

By far, most consumer research has focused on the self-concept in the tradition of William James' material self (1890). Consumers are thought to define themselves through the products they consume (e.g., Belk 1988; Levy 1959; Katz 1960; Munson and Spivey 1981). In addition, some consumer research had investigated the self-concept in the tradition of social cognition. For instance,

Sirgy (1982; 1985) postulated self-image/product-image congruity theory which links consumers' association between a particular self-image and a particular product and consumers' value of that self-image to predict purchase motivation. Burnkrant and Unnava (1995) investigated the effects of self-referencing on persuasion and find that increasing self-referencing through the content of an ad copy increases message elaboration and increases persuasion when the arguments in the ad are strong. Finally, Myers-Levy and Peracchio (1996) report that the effect of self-referencing on persuasion has a reverse U-shaped effect when consumers are highly motivated: a moderate increase in self-referencing enhances persuasion while a high increase of self-referencing undermines persuasion. They found no effect of self-referencing on persuasion when consumers' motivation is low.

In addition, consumer researchers have investigated how social aspects contribute to consumers' formation of identity (e.g., Solomon 1983; Kleine, Kleine, and Kernan 1993; Laverie, Kleine and Kleine 2002; Berger and Heath 2007). One important stream of identity research stems from social identity theory (Tajfel and Turner 1979; also see White and Argo 2009; White and Dahl 2007) which captures aspects of intergroup and intragroup processes which are linked to collective social identities. Individuals define themselves not only in terms of who they are as an individual, but also who they are as members of specific groups "together with the value and emotional significance attached to that membership" (Tajfel 1981). The theory argues that human interaction ranges from being entirely interpersonal, which involves people relating purely as individuals with

no awareness of social categories, to being completely intergroup oriented, which involves people relating with each other entirely as group representatives. The mere process of making category distinctions like "us" and "them" salient is enough for people to enhance similarities within the group and enhance differences among the groups. This categorization also changes the way people perceive themselves as it activates different aspects of the self-concept. At the interpersonal level, people see themselves in terms of a personal identity, defined by their own behaviors, attitudes, memories, or emotions. At the intergroup level, the activated parts of the self are mostly comprised of a social identity, defined by group memberships as well as the emotional, behavioral, and evaluative consequences of these group memberships (Tajfel and Turner 1979).

While research on the self-concept has received considerable attention in the literature, empirical research on self-concept change is rather scarce. In the following sections I will give an overview on the dynamic nature of the self-concept, starting with its development and forces shaping its structure and content.

The Development of the Self-Concept

Evolutionary models of the development of the self-concept stress the importance of the social environment. For example, Gallup (1997) states that our arboreal ancestors were too busy monitoring their complex movements through the trees to develop a self-concept and that the self-concept could only emerge when those ancestors came down from the trees to live in the Savannah. Sedikides

and Skowronski (2002) describe, how ecological pressures through the complex interactions that hominids had with their changing habitat led to the evolution of the self. Further, the symbolic self largely emerged out of complex social interaction processes like the need for perspective taking or role taking.

There is little doubt that the social environments in which people grow up are a major contributor to a person's self-concept. Cross-cultural evidence suggests that people's self-concepts are deeply shaped by values, beliefs, and practices of the social institutions to which they belong (Cross and Gore 2003). When a certain cultural identity is made salient, people tend to think of themselves as having characteristics that are representative of that culture (Brewer 2003).

For the ontogenesis of an individual and the development of the self, social interactions are necessary. From early on, infants and caregivers engage in nonverbal social interactions which allow the infant to differentiate itself from others (Butterworth 1992, 1995; Legerstee 1999; Neisser 1997). During those early interactions, infants and caregivers react to one another by smiling and vocalizing. The infant's behavior initiates responses from the caregiver, which motivate the baby to respond again, and so forth. This enables the infant to gradually understand that it (the self) can produce effects in the (social) environment and that the self represents an independent entity in the world. The child's perception of the correspondence between the self and other people informs the self about itself (Butterworth 1995). Through this interactive process

the infant also learns to anticipate behaviors in other people which leads to the development of the self as a social agent.

Social Forces Shaping the Self-Concept

Throughout the lifespan, people learn about their selves through social processes. Other people regularly comment on or react to one's personal characteristics and behaviors. Those reflected appraisals (Cooley 1902) allow a person to learn about oneself. One of the most important conceptualizations of Cooley's work on the social self (1902) is what he called the looking-glass self. He used the metaphor of a mirror to describe how people's self-concepts are influenced by their thoughts of how they are perceived by others. Cooley distinguished between the imagination of our appearance to the other person, the imagination of his/her judgment of that appearance, and some sort of self-feeling such as pride or mortification. Cooley thought that much of an individual's experience of the self is an emotional response to the assumed evaluations of others, especially significant others. Mead (1934, 1964) elaborated on Cooley's work in his development of the notion that human beings have the ability to take the role of others. Confrontations with others motivate individuals to take others' perspectives to gain an "objective" point of view of themselves. Mead assumed that role-taking is the process by which a unified self emerges through interaction (Mead 1934, 1964).

Furthermore, people engage in social comparisons (Festinger 1954) to gain information about themselves. As Festinger stated, individuals are driven by

a desire for self-evaluation, a motivation to establish that their opinions are correct and to know what they are capable of doing. In order to satisfy the fundamental motives of the self, self-knowledge and self-enhancement (Banaji 1994), people engage in social comparisons to evaluate, enhance, verify, and improve themselves (Taylor and Lobel 1989). While Festinger (1954) proposes that people have the desire to get to know their own self through social comparisons, this desire seems to be biased in the way that people tend to choose interaction partners who see them as they see themselves (Swann 1987). People tend to use two general strategies in this self-verification process. First, they create environments which confirm their self-views by choosing appropriate interaction partners. Second, they interpret and remember their interactions as confirming their self-views. According to Swann (1987), the desire for self-verification is rooted in the wish to maintain perceptions of predictability and control.

Influences of Culture on the Self-Concept

On a broader level, the culture in which people live also has an important effect on the self (Markus and Kitayama 1991). People in western cultures like in North America or Western Europe are more likely to have an independent self-construal which is characterized by values such as being unique, asserting oneself, expressing one's inner attributes, attitudes, emotions, and promoting one's own goals. People in Asia on the other hand are more likely to have an interdependent self-construal which is characterized by values such as belonging to others, fitting

in, maintaining harmony, and restraining oneself and promoting other's or the group's goals (Markus and Kitayama 1991). While some cultures may promote one self-construal over the other, it is important to note that in every individual self-concept, elements of both independence as well as interdependence are present, and that those elements are differently pronounced in each individual (Fiske, Kitayama, Markus, and Nisbett 1998). Further, interdependent selves do not necessarily attend to the needs of all others. In fact, the interdependent self is "highly selective and will be most characteristic of relationships with 'in-group' members" (Markus and Kitayama 1991).

Various effects of self-construal on consumption behaviors have been reported. For example, Mandel (2003) reports that people who receive a prime for an interdependent self are more likely to take risks in financial choices whereas they are less prone to take risks in their social choices as compared to consumers who receive a prime for an independent self. Escalas and Bettman (2005) report that consumers with an independent self-construal have a stronger need for self-differentiation than consumers with an interdependent self-construal. Therefore, consumers with an independent self-construal form self-brand connections to a lesser degree than consumers with interdependent selves when a brand has images consistent with an out-group. Further research has also examined the connection between self-construal and brand evaluations (Swaminathan, Page, and Gurhan-Canli (2007), the effect of self-construal on spatial judgments (Krishna, Zhou, and Zhang 2008), and the influence of self-construal on compulsive consumption

(Zhang and Shrum 2009). This indicates that self-construal can indeed have important effects on consumer bahaviour.

Evolution of the Self-Concept in the Context of Society

Throughout the lifetime of an individual, the self-concept goes through multiple important and enduring changes. New self-conceptions are added periodically, self-conceptions change in meaning, and the relationship among self-conception changes (van Gennep 1960). Those changes are particularly pronounced during role transitions, such as between childhood and adolescence (Schouten 1991)), when changing jobs (Roberts 1991), after a divorce (McAlexander et. al. 1992), or after the death of a beloved person (Gentry et. al. 1995). The form these new roles take are often prescribed by the social context in which the person lives and role transitions are often marked by rituals (i.e., *bar mitzvah* to celebrate coming of age in the Jewish tradition). The completion of the rituals gives the individual a new status in society that comes with the new role.

This process of identity reconstruction is described by the concept of rites of passage (van Gennep 1960). According to van Gennep (1960), the passage from one self into a new, refined self consists of three stages - separation, transition, and incorporation. In the separation phase, the individual leaves her former environment or role and enters into a very different routine to which s/he has to adjust. In the transition phase, the individual learns the appropriate behavior for the new role s/he is entering. In the incorporation phase, the

individual is formally admitted into the new role (i.e., the new role has been integrated into the self).

Rites of passage are often accompanied by ceremonies intended to mark personal transitions between important stages in life. These transitions are generally highly emotionally-charged (Schouten 1991). In most cultures, the important and naturally occurring life transitions are considered to be birth, the onset of puberty, marriage, parenthood, and finally death. The ceremonies accompanying such transitions would be baptism, school graduation ceremonies, weddings, and funerals. The ceremonies are thought to help the person move through the emotionally charged time and make the transition. In addition to their role in marking the transition between a person's life stages, rites of passage also reinforce the dominant religious views and values of a culture.

It is important to realize that the self-concept does not only change over time during the course of important life-transitions. One fundamental trait of the self-concept is that it is a pliable construct, a cognitive structure that is inherently dynamic and that is changing and evolving throughout lifetime. This evolution of the self-concept can happen naturally during the course of role transitions, but also through the active participation of the individual as it perceives some lack or incompleteness and strives to change or negotiate the self (Schouten 1991). In the next section I will review literature discussing the dynamic nature of the self-concept at a given point in time.

The dynamic self-concept

The self-concept is arguably one of the most developed concepts that reside in memory (DeSteno and Salovey 1997). As defined throughout the literature, the self-concept is the conscious and reflective personality of an individual. It is a representation of all that one is and as such is tied to all processes that involve self-knowledge. As an accumulation of knowledge that a person has about him/herself, the self-concept is bound to the same psychological mechanisms that all knowledge structures are bound to. Empirical investigations have demonstrated that self-knowledge is stored in memory just as "ordinary" knowledge (Greenwald and Banaji 1989; Klein and Kihlstrom 1986).

In the literature two opposing views discuss how the self is described. Some researchers describe the self as a very stable structure that endures over time and is averse to change. The self is seen as only determined by an individual's personality and very consistent across different contexts (e.g., Greenwald 1980; Mortimer and Lorence 1981; Swann and Read 1981). Other researchers focus more on the fact that many different selves are presented in different environments and as such infer that the self-concept is determined by the social environment a person faces (Gergen 1967; Savin-Williams and Devo 1983).

Later theorizations acknowledge that the self-concept, like any concept, is "a temporary construction in working memory, derived from a larger body of knowledge in long-term memory to represent a category" (Barsalou 1993). As such, a concept can change through the activation of different knowledge from

15

long-term memory. Models about the self-concept have included this notion that not everything that is known about the self is in awareness or is in use at any given time (Harter 1988; Linville and Carston 1994; Markus and Kunda 1986; Markus and Wurf 1987). Those models allow for a number of possible working self-concepts to exist and they are thought to be activated by specific cues in the environment, combined with an individual's personal agenda and needs. Since multiple representations of the self coexist in memory, the self can be understood as a family of selves with some overlapping resemblances, and some selves being more prominent, elaborated, and accessible than others (Cantor and Kihlstrom 1987; Hinkley and Anderson 1996; Kihlstrom and Canter 1984; Linville 1985; Markus and Wurf 1987). Within this multifaceted self, there are some components that are relatively stable, and others that are more malleable and contextually-based (Markus and Wurf 1987).

As such, the perspective of the self-concept as a malleable construct (Aaker 1999; Markus and Kunda 1986) integrates earlier, seemingly opposing theories of the self. The perspective of a malleable self-concept acknowledges the stable nature of the self by proposing that the self is defined by a set of self-conceptions (the chronic self-concept). At the same time it allows for the self to be dynamic by introducing the concept of a working self. The working self is made up of any number of self-conceptions that can be made accessible at a given moment. Within the framework of the malleable self, it is possible to distinguish between relatively stable core conceptions, and more malleable and contextually based self-conceptions. As such, many theorists have argued that self-knowledge

is organized hierarchically, with global conceptions of the self at the top, and specific, situationally bound information at the bottom (Epstein 1973; Greenwald 1981; Markus and Wurf 1987). Long-term changes of the self-concept occur only when global self-conceptions change (Swann 1987). In contrast, transitory fluctuations in self-views occur, when specific, situationally bound self-conceptions change. This can explain why people act differently in different situations, as relatively conflicting traits may exist in a person's chronic self-concept.

One important situational variable that can prompt the working self-concept to change is the social context in which the individual is situated (Banaji and Prentice 1994; Ethier and Deaux 1994; Linville and Carlston 1994; McGuire and McGuire 1998). Self-definition is in many ways interpersonal (Brewer 1991; Markus and Kitayama 1991; Triandis 1989) and the interpersonal context has important effects on how a person evaluates herself (Baldwin; Carrel, and Lopez 1990; Baldwin and Holmes 1987), but also on how the person presents the self to others (Baumeister 1982; Leary and Kowalsky 1990; Spears and Lea 1994). Prior research identified the availability of social comparison targets as one antecedent of self-concept malleability. For example, children are especially likely to mention aspects of the self that distinguish themselves from others in their immediate social surroundings when asked to describe themselves (McGuire and McGuire 1981). Further, explicit feedback can have an important impact on how people appraise themselves (Kernis and Johnson 1990). Sometimes people accept the implications of positive and negative feedback and incorporate it into their

self-representations. Finally, a person's actions can induce variability in how he sees himself. Performing a particular action can generate behavioral evidence that may lead people to see what they are doing as an accurate representation of their true self (Bem 1972, Tice 1992).

The notion that the self is a dynamic construct which can take a variety of different forms depending on the activated self-conceptions is of particular interest to consumer researchers as the self plays a major role in generating and regulating action (Cross and Markus 1990; Hull, Slone, Meteyer, and Matthews 2002). Indeed, Cross and Markus (1990) note, "connecting an idea or an action with the self implies making it self-relevant, moving it from the vague, the global, or the abstract to the personal, the individual, or the concrete" (p. 727). There exists a considerable amount of research that emphasizes the importance of the working self-concept in directing attention, perception, motivation, and information processing (e.g., Higgins 1987; Kihlstrom and Cantor 1984; Markus and Nurius 1986; Ruvolo and Markus 1992).

In the next sections I will discuss material objects as part of the extended self concept, followed by an introduction of the two antecedents of self-concept change and how they connect to the empirical research articles in this dissertation. Specifically, in essay one I will examine the role of threats to the self as an antecedent for self-concept change. The second essay will discuss how in the context of being invited to select a gift for one self, self-construal and the associated activated goals (pleasure maximization for independent selves vs. self-presentation for interdependent selves) will influence consumers' choice.

Material objects as part of the self-concept

In his classic account of the self, James (1890, pp.291-292) maintains that "in the widest possible sense, a man's self is the sum total of all that he can call his, not only his body and psychic powers, but his clothes and his house, his wife and children, his ancestors and friends, his reputation and works, his land and horses, and yacht and bank account. All these things give him the same emotions. If they wax and prosper, he feels triumphant; if they dwindle and die away, he feels cast down, not necessarily in the same degree for each thing, but in much the same way for all."

Within the consumer behavior literature, one of the earliest accounts for treating material objects as part of the self-concept comes from the product symbolism literature (Gardner and Levy 1955; Levy 1959). It was then recognized that consumption patterns in the United States had gone through an important change by consumers no longer acquiring products only to satisfy basic needs (like food or shelter) but also to express a certain role. People buy products not only because of their utility, but also because of their meaning (Levy 1959). Consumers were defining themselves through the products they purchased – they were thought to maintain a congruence between the lifestyle they chose and the symbolic meaning of the products they purchased (Levy 1963). Marketers connected their products and/or brands with some symbolic meaning to "support" consumers in expressing who they are through the products they consume (e.g., Hirschman 1985).

In our contemporary society, which has in many ways become a consumer culture, endeavors to create the self have become inseparable from consumption (Elliot 1997; Gabriel and Lang 1995; Gergen 1991). Consumers use products and possessions not only to create and maintain a certain identity, but also to locate themselves in their social system (Kleine, Kleine, and Allen 1995). The products consumers purchase, or the activities in which they engage communicate who they are and with whom they identify. In that sense, "shopping is not merely the acquisition of things: it is the buying of identity" (Clammer 1992).

The self-concept is the conscious and reflective personality of an individual – it is a person's attempt to make some sense of his/her existence, an attempt for meaningfulness in the pursuit of being. Consumption in contemporary society has become one way in which this meaningfulness can be symbolically acquired. Belk (1988) argues that "we are what we have is perhaps the most basic and powerful fact of consumer behavior." In that sense, material possessions are a major contributor to and reflection of our identities. Belk (1988) reports that the extended self is comprised of external objects to which consumers are emotionally attached, and which they consider part of who they are. Those products that symbolize key elements of the self are incorporated into the extended self. Evidence that possessions are indeed part of the self can be found when consumers lose possessions (e.g., through theft) and the devastated feeling they report after such incidents (or as Fromm (1976) puts it: "If I am what I have and if what I have is lost, who then am I?", p. 76).

Conceivably, consumers include everything that they perceive as theirs into their self-concepts. Products become part of the extended self when consumers perceive that they have created, controlled, or known them (Sartre 1998). Csikszentmihaly and Rochberg-Halton (1981) state that in order to create, control, or know anything, "psychic energy" (e.g., effort, time, attention) which emerges from the self has to be invested. The result of this investment is the extension of the self into products. Possessions then become meaningful landmarks in the lives of consumers. They give consumers a sense of history by being reminders of the past (Belk 1988; McCracken 1988). They can symbolize personal achievements that allow consumers to reflect on their histories and become the object of life narratives (Belk 1988).

Consumers are active participants in the creation of meaning and in the construction of their own self-concept. A considerable body of literature suggests that consumer products are one major source of symbolic meaning for the creation of the self (Csikszentmihaly and Rochberg-Halton 1982; Dittmar 1992, Douglas and Isherwood 1996; McCracken 1988; Richins 1994). As Gabriel and Lang (1995) remark, "Whether one is looking for happiness, identity, beauty, love, masculinity, youth, marital bliss, or anything else, there is a commodity somewhere which guarantees to provide it." Without consumer goods, certain acts of self-definition and collective definition in this culture would be impossible (McCracken 1988). Through the act of purchasing goods, consumers can "magically" acquire a different persona (Dittmar 1992).

Consumers differ in the extent to which they place importance on the ownership and possession of material objects. This difference is captured by consumer's level of materialism (Burroughs and Rindfleich 2002). Highly materialistic consumers believe that their personal well-being can be increased through the quantity and quality of extrinsic possessions (i.e., possessions that help them to achieve status; Kashdan and Breen 2007). Further they place a high priority on the pursuit of possessions (Bredemeyer and Toby 1960). This pursuit of ever newer and better material objects can be a self-defeating cycle (Richins 1995) and the desire for new possessions may become insatiable. The joy and satisfaction that a new possession can bring is quickly forgotten and replaced with a desire for more (Brickman and Campbell 1991). In contrast, consumers who are low in materialism do not place much value on the acquisition and ownership of material goods. They may value possessions, but this value is related to the intrinsic properties of possessions (i.e., possessions that symbolize who they are).

In the following paragraph I argue that threats to the self can induce highly materialistic consumers to live up to the value of materialism and in the process cause a disruption of the consistency of their extended self-concept.

Threats and disruption of self-concept consistency

In the following section I will outline how threats to consumers' selves may disrupt self-concept consistency. Terror Management Theory (Greenberg et. al. 1986) argues that cultural worldviews and self-esteem can serve as an anxiety buffer against the paralyzing anxiety that arises through the awareness of

mortality. Typically, this awareness is kept out of conscious awareness, but through reminders of mortality, such as a news story, this anxiety can become acute (Pyszczynski et al. 2004). As a response to such reminders, people are then especially likely to defend their cultural worldviews and live up to values from which self-esteem is derived. Thus, Terror Management Theory argues, consistency among cognitions is necessary for faith in an orderly and stable conception of reality (Pyszczynski, Greenberg, and Solomon 1997). Without consistency, there would be no basis for cultural worldviews to provide feelings of safety and security, and there would be no basis for valuing oneself. One cultural worldview for many people in today's society is materialism. As discussed in the previous paragraph, high materialism is linked to a desire for acquiring ever new and better products (Richins 1995) and there is a constant desire for more (Richins and Dawson 1992). Further, while highly materialistic consumers pursue the acquisition and ownership of possessions with extrinsic properties, they do not place much value on possessions with intrinsic properties (Kashdan and Breen 2007). In essay 1, I argue that ironically the very effort of highly materialistic consumers to maintain consistency by living up to the value of materialism can actually undermine consistency on the level of the extended self. Specifically, I argue that when highly materialistic consumers are faced with a mortality salience threat, they will detach from previously intrinsic possessions, while previously more extrinsic possessions will become a more central aspect of the self-concept.

Since prior research has established that an inconsistent self-concept can have adverse effects on well-being (e.g., Sheldon, Ryan, Rawsthorne, and Ilardi 1997), it is important to identity a mechanism by which highly materialistic consumers can be protected from the adverse consequences of a mortality salience threat on self-concept consistency. One such mechanism may be found in self-affirmation (Steele 1988).

Self-affirmation Theory

People in today's society experience a number of self-threats, for instance failure in jobs, illness, unaccomplished goals, rejection in a relationship, negative feedback, loss of a loved one, or challenges to long-held beliefs. There exist numerous accounts in the literature suggesting that in the face of such threats, people often employ defensive strategies. For example, people dismiss health information suggesting that they engage in risky behavior (Kunda 1987), and they are overly optimistic when predicting their own future success or when estimating their current knowledge and competence (Dunning, Griffin, Milojkovic, and Ross 1990; Kruger and Dunning 1999).

However, there exists another mechanism through which people can cope with self-threats – self-affirmation. Self-affirmation theory (Steele 1988; Aronson, Cohen, and Nail 1999; Sherman and Cohen 2002) focuses on how people cope with threats to the self by taking into account the dynamic nature of the self-concept. The theory proposes that the overall goal of the self-system is to protect an image of its integrity (i.e., the sense that overall, one is a good and appropriate

person). When the integrity of the self is threatened, people respond in ways to restore their self-worth. Defensive responses, such as the distortion of information (e.g., Argo, White, and Dahl 2006), or the avoidance of product associated with one's identity (White and Argo 2009) are seen as one way to restore self-worth by directly reducing the threat.

Another mechanism to restore self-worth is through affirming alternative sources of self-integrity that are unrelated to the threat, such as reflecting on important aspects of one's life that are unrelated to the threat, or engaging in activities that make values that are important, but unrelated to the threat more salient (Steele 1988). When trying to restore self-worth through self-affirmation, people realize that their integrity is not only tied to the one aspect that is currently under threat. They then have less need to use defensive strategies to cope with the threat and can respond to the threat in a more open and even-handed manner. In the first essay, *Break Me, Shake Me and Make Me New: Mortality Salience Disrupts Self-Concept Consistency*, I argue that self-affirmation can protect highly materialistic consumers from a disruption to their self-concept consistency caused by a mortality salience threat.

Self-construal and goal conflict resolution

Whether it is in the context of role transitions or in the several roles that an individual serves in everyday life, roles are linked to certain societal or social group expectations. Different cultures have different demands on the individual. As such, two distinct ways in which an individual constructs the self in relation to

others have been identified. According to self-construal theory (Markus and Kitayama 1991), people with an independent self-construal place a high emphasis on autonomy and uniqueness. They strive to develop and express distinctive values, needs, rights, capacities and preferences. People with an interdependent self-construal on the other hand emphasize interpersonal connections and shared characteristics. They view themselves with respect to other group members and as part of an encompassing social relationship and recognize that their behavior is determined on the thoughts, feelings, and actions of others (Markus and Kitayama 1991). Both distinct types of self-construal co-exist within every individual and as such can be activated and influence an individual's actions (Gardner, Gabriel, and Lee 1999). I investigate the role of self-construal on self-concept change in the context of gift-giving, specifically, when consumers are invited to select a gift for themselves. Following prior research on self-construal and goal-activation (Holmberg, Markus, Herzog, and Franks 1997; Lee, Aaker, and Gardner 2000), I propose that a goal conflict arises in consumers when they are invited to choose a gift for themselves. On the one hand, consumers could pursue a goal of maximizing pleasure in such a consumption situation by choosing an indulgent gift for themselves. On the other hand, consumers could pursue a goal of behaving normatively appropriate and appearing sensitive towards the donor by choosing a modest gift for themselves. I propose that the activated self-construal can determine how this goal conflict will be resolved and which of the two goals will be pursued.

Those consumers with an activated independent self-construal are concerned with being autonomous and self-reliant. One result of this is that they form preferences by looking at their own attitudes and attributes and by forming those preferences that enhance the self and help them to maintain autonomy and uniqueness. They strongly focus on the wants and needs of their individual selves, not taking the social context into account. In general, the ultimate goal of their consumption decisions can be described as trying to maximize benefits while at the same time minimizing costs. When in the context of an invitation the monetary cost of an object will fall away, as consumers with an independent self-construal are not likely to take the perceptions of the donor into account when making their decisions. I therefore predict that when a consumer with an independent self-construal is invited, a goal of maximizing pleasure through the chosen gift will be activated and influence her/his choice of the gift for her/himself.

Consumers with an interdependent self-construal have a general motivation of being connected to others and thus to avoid social disapproval (e.g., Kim and Markus 1999). I propose that because of this fundamental need for belongingness and desire to seek positive evaluation (e.g., Baumeister 1982), consumers with an interdependent self-construal will behave strategically in ways the audience favors. Symbolic interactionists like Mead (1934) or Cooley (1902) posited that social actions carry symbolic meanings that influence how others respond to the self. Goffman (1959) expanded on this view by arguing that all of social behavior is a (theatrical) performance in which people project their

identities to others and engage in activities that are governed by social rules and rituals (Schlenker 2003). As such, self-presentation encompasses a variety of different behaviors and strategies that are linked by the idea that social behavior is a performance that communicates some information about the self to others.

Self-presentational behaviors are often activated automatically by cues in the social environment and by one's own interpersonal goals (Jones 1990, Schlenker 1980). As such, people actively negotiate an identity to achieve their goals. Certain self-conceptions are activated and presented to another person. Which self-conceptions are activated and which identity is presented is determined by intrinsic factors, like the actor's personality, but also by situational and audience factors (Schlenker and Pontari 2000).

An interdependent self-construal is linked to a general motivation to be connected to others and to avoid social disapproval (Kim and Markus 1999). Thus, those individuals are more likely to present themselves to others as being sensitive and normatively appropriate (Lalwani and Shavitt 2009). I propose that by being invited to choose a gift for themselves, the self-presentational goal of behaving normatively appropriate and appearing sensitive will be activated in consumers with an interdependent self-construal which will then in turn influence the choice of gift for themselves.

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CHAPTER THREE

BREAK ME, SHAKE ME AND MAKE ME NEW: MORTALITY

SALIENCE DISRUPTS SELF-CONCEPT CONSISTENCY

Abstract

Three studies are presented to investigate the influence of a mortality salience threat on self-concept consistency. Specifically, I demonstrate that the very effort to maintain consistency by living up to the value of materialism may ironically disrupt self-concept consistency for highly materialistic consumers. When these consumers experience a mortality salience threat, they will temporarily detach from previously intrinsic possessions and make previously extrinsic possessions a more central aspect of the self. I further explore a boundary condition for this effect: When highly materialistic consumers are given the opportunity to self-affirm, the effects of a mortality salience threat on self-concept consistency will cease to exist.

'Because that's not the way the media wants to take it and spin it, and turn it into fear, because then you're watching television, you're watching the news, you're being pumped full of fear, there's floods, there's AIDS, there's murder, cut to commercial, buy the Acura, buy the Colgate, if you have bad breath they're not going to talk to you, if you have pimples, the girl's not going to fuck you, and it's just this campaign of fear, and consumption, and that's what I think it's all based on, the whole idea of 'keep everyone afraid, and they'll consume.' (Marilyn Manson, Bowling for Columbine)

Consumers in the United States are ever increasingly exposed to news coverage about topics of crime, murder, and terrorism. During the period from 1990-1998 alone, while the total number of murders in the US decreased by 20 percent, media coverage on network newscasts about stories on the topic increased by an astonishing 600 percent (Glassner 2004). Similarly media coverage about threats related to terrorism skyrocketed with the Bush administration's realization of the persuasive power of the fear of terrorism within the American public in the wake of the 9/11 attacks (Matsaganis and Payne 2005). Furthermore, the introduction of the "threat meter", an advisory system by homeland security about the national threat level in the US, reminds Americans, every single day that terror and death are just around the corner. Ironically, in spite of the introduction of terror related legislation and laws such as the PATRIOT act, the domestic spying program and the Military Commissions act,

according to a scientific poll commissioned by Hart/Newhouse and released by The Wall Street Journal and NBC News (Roberts 2006), the majority of Americans feel less safe now than they did prior to the 9/11 attacks.

Despite the prevalence of fear within society, it is surprising that little is known about its effects on consumers. To date, the limited research that has studied the impact of fear in consumption has largely drawn from Terror management theory (Greenberg, Pyszczynski, and Solomon 1986), which argues that the existential terror that comes with the knowledge of the inevitability of death is managed by a dual-component cultural anxiety buffer which consists of an individual's cultural worldviews and self-esteem. Cultural worldviews are a set of concepts for understanding the world and one's place in it and they help an individual to attain a sense of personal value. Self-esteem, the belief that overall one is a good and valuable person, is cultivated by the belief that one is living up to the standards of value that are part of the cultural worldview. Prior consumer research has investigated the effects of reminders of mortality on consumers' acquisition of luxury and indulgent products (Mandel and Heine 1999, Ferraro, Shiv, and Bettman 2005), consumption quantities (Mandel and Smeesters 2008), and self-brand connections (Rindfleisch Burroughs, and Wong 2009). In this dissertation I aim to build upon this previous work by investigating how a mortality salience threat can undermine the consistency (e.g. a stable conception of what provides meaning in an individual's life) of materialistic consumers' extended self.

Numerous theories about the self have emphasized the importance of consistency and that people try to minimize inconsistencies to sustain a positive self-image (Cooper and Fazio 1984; Festinger 1957; Steele 1988; Swann 1983). Terror Management Theory also argues that consistency among cognitions is necessary for faith in an orderly and stable conception of reality (Pyszczynski, Greenberg, and Solomon 1997). Without consistency there would be no basis for valuing oneself and feeling safe and secure. Thus, once an individual identifies with a particular worldview, s/he becomes motivated to maintain faith in it. When people are reminded of their own mortality, people are then especially likely to defend their cultural worldviews, or live up to values from which they derive self-esteem in order to cope with the threat and prove that they are member of a meaningful universe.

One cultural worldview that exists for many people in contemporary society is materialism - the importance consumers' place on the possession and acquisition of goods (Burroughs and Rindfleisch 2002). Possessions can be an important part of the extended self-concept (i.e., the self that consumers' experience through manifest entities including people, places, and material objects, rather than abstract ideas about who they are; Belk 1988) and people use them to define and create their identities (Belk 1988). Highly materialistic consumers believe that greater life satisfaction can be achieved through the quantity and quality of *extrinsic* possessions (i.e., possessions that help them to achieve and communicate status, like expensive cars, clothes, or watches; Kashdan and Breen 2007) rather than possessions with *intrinsic* properties (e.g.,

possessions that symbolize who they are, such as heirlooms). The pursuit of owning and acquiring things takes on a priority in life (Bredemeier and Toby 1960) which can lead to a self-defeating cycle where the desire for acquiring ever new and better objects can be insatiable (Richins 1995). In this dissertation, I argue that the very effort to maintain consistency through the defensive strategy of living up to the value of materialism after facing a mortality salience threat can ironically undermine consistency on the level of the extended self and the possessions with which consumers identify. Specifically, I demonstrate that in face of a mortality salience threat, the consistency of highly materialistic consumers' self-concept is disrupted and they detach from previously *intrinsic* possessions, while possessions that were previously a more *extrinsic* aspect of the self-concept will become more central. The disruption of self-concept consistency may then ultimately affect consumers' acquisition and disposition decisions. Further, I also explore a boundary condition for my predictions. Specifically, I propose that no altered conception of the extended self will be activated for highly materialistic consumers when they first have an opportunity to self-affirm.

According to self-affirmation theory, individuals are motivated to maintain self-integrity and self-worth (Steele 1988). Under certain conditions, however, this integrity can become threatened through the perception of a real or perceived failure on the part of the individual to satisfy cultural or social standards (Leary and Baumeister 2000). In these instances an individual attempts to restore self-integrity to protect the self from the threat (Sherman and Cohen 2006). Self-affirmation proposes that rather than relying on defensive strategies,

people may implement indirect psychological adaptations by affirming core elements of the self (i.e., qualities that are central to how people see themselves) not threatened. This allows them to see themselves within a broader perspective of the self and anchor their sense of self-integrity. Through self-affirmation, individuals no longer have to prove their self-worth and do not have to engage in defensive strategies to protect their ego (Sherman and Cohen 2006). I demonstrate that giving highly materialistic consumers the opportunity to self-affirm prevents the disruption of the consistency of their self-concept. Across three laboratory studies I test the prediction that when presented with a mortality salience threat consumers' effort to maintain consistency of the self by living up to material values can actually undermine self-concept consistency (i.e., by detaching from intrinsic possessions and integrating extrinsic possessions) by using the products with which consumers identify. Study 1 examines whether previously intrinsic possessions are excluded from the self-concept following a mortality salience threat for consumers high in materialism. Study 2 demonstrates a shift in the source of possession meaning for those possessions that are retained in the self-concept after a mortality salience threat for consumers who are highly materialistic. Study 3 investigates whether self-affirmation can prevent highly materialistic consumers from the disruption of the consistency of the extended self-concept.

This research makes a number of notable contributions. Foremost it is the first to demonstrate that in response to a threat, consumers who live up to an important value in an effort to maintain consistency may ironically undermine

self-consistency and in the process temporarily change the extended self. Using terror management theory as a theoretical framework, I argue that when consumers are exposed to a threat (i.e., mortality salience is high) they will try to restore and maintain consistency by living up to an important value (i.e. materialism) and in the process change the extended self-concept by utilizing possessions that are a part of the extended self to respond to this threat. Thus, this finding contributes to research on Terror Management Theory (Greenberg et. al. 1986), which stresses the importance of consistency and argues that when under threat, people engage in elaborate acts to restore and maintain self-consistency, by demonstrating a behavioral implication of consumers' need to retain integrity and highlighting the malleability of the self under conditions of threat.

In addition, I demonstrate that specific characteristics related to the possessions (i.e., the degree to which they are intrinsic vs. extrinsic) are critical in determining to what extent self-consistency can become threatened. I find that when faced with a threat, an alternative conception of the extended self is temporarily created by not only detaching (incorporating) from previously intrinsic (extrinsic) possessions to the self but also indicating a higher likelihood of disposing (acquiring) of intrinsic (extrinsic) possessions. This finding is noteworthy for at least two reasons. Although over two decades ago Holbrook (1987) argued that consumption involves not only the acquisition of products but also their usage and disposal, limited research has focused on the disposition of possessions (for exceptions see Lastovicka and Fernandez 2005; Price, Arnould, and Curasi 2000). In addition, my research integrates previous work that has been

conducted on the implications of mortality salience threats on acquisition with insights into disposal behaviors to present a more complete picture of consumption and consumers' relationships with products.

I also add to the literature on materialism (Burroughs and Rindfleisch 2002), which discusses the importance of a stable self-concept for psychological well-being (Allport 1937, Donahue, Robins, Roberts, and John 1993; Funder 1995; Lecky 1945; Sheldon, Ryan, Rawsthorne, and Ilardi 1997). I achieve this by demonstrating that living up to one's material values can actually activate an altered self-concept as defined by the material objects with which consumers identify. Thus, the current research has the potential to provide insight into why consumers with high materialistic values have repeatedly been reported to have lower life-satisfaction and well-being (Burroughs and Rindfleisch 2002; Chaplin and John 2007).

Finally I demonstrate that self-affirmation (Steele 1988) can protect consumers from engaging in materialistic behaviors which can temporarily undermine self-consistency. Taken together the previous contributions, this bears importance as it suggests that the affirmation of alternative resources of the self unrelated to materialism may be a practical mechanism by which consumers' well-being can be increased.

In the next section, I review research on the self, focusing on self-affirmation theory, and delineate the direction of the three experiments that comprise the present research.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

The Self. The self has been referred to in a multitude of ways but is generally discussed as the conscious and reflective personality of an individual (James 1890, Mead 1934). Moreover it is the entity that a person refers to when s/he thinks about what defines her/him as an individual. These self-definitions are not necessarily constant and as such, the self is not permanently defined. Indeed, Markus and Kunda (1986; see also Aaker 1999) have demonstrated that the self is a malleable construct such that it includes a working self-concept that allows for any number of self-conceptions to be accessible at a given moment in time. This explains why people act differently in various situations. Furthermore, research has found that the self evolves over time. Transitions from one self into a new, redefined self can occur naturally (e.g., from childhood to adolescence) or during stressful life events (e.g., death or divorce; Gentry, Kennedy, and Paul 1995; McAlexander 1991).

While research has shown that the self is adaptive and malleable this is not to say that individuals do not seek self-consistency. In fact the opposite is true, as people are motivated to protect the perceived integrity and worth of the self from information that is inconsistent with the self-concept. Indeed according to Steele (1988) everyone has a "self-system" with the purpose of "maintaining a phenomenal experience of the self … as adaptively and morally adequate, that is, competent, good, coherent, unitary, stable, capable of free choice, capable of

controlling important outcomes" (p. 262). One theory that stresses the importance of self consistency is Terror Management Theory (Greenberg et. al. 1986).

Terror Management Theory. Terror Management Theory (TMT, Greenberg et al 1986) is based on the work of Ernest Becker (1973) who argued that like animals, humans have an instinctive will to survive. However, differing from animals, humans have the ability to think symbolically which enables them to have a conception of the future. Therefore the conscious, self-aware human must integrate both, the instinctive will to survive with the awareness of the inevitability of death into their existence. Typically, people keep the knowledge of the ultimate cessation of existence outside of awareness, because this awareness can lead to a paralyzing anxiety (Pyszczynski, Greenberg, and Solomon 1999). But triggers (i.e., mortality reminders) such as passing a graveyard, viewing pictures of an accident, or seeing an elderly person, may cause this anxiety to become acute (Pyszczynski et al. 2004).

Reactions to a conscious reminder of death follow a common pattern. First people try to repress the gloomy thoughts through practical, rational attempts to remove the source of the threat such as reminding the self that "I'm still young and healthy", or "Luckily I'm far away from any war". These proximal defenses are then followed by distal defenses, which are triggered once the mortality reminder leaves conscious awareness. It is during the activation of distal defenses that terror management begins to operate (Pyszczynski, et. al. 1999). In particular, to ensure that mortality does not imply insignificance, individuals become motivated to prove to themselves that they are an important part of a meaningful

universe (Pyszczynski et al. 1997). They achieve this by using one of two mechanisms: 1) defending their cultural worldviews to allow them to be a part of something larger and create a sense of symbolic immortality or 2) living up to standards of value from which they derive self-esteem so they can reinforce the sense of being a valuable individual (Greenberg et. al.1986; Pyszczynski, et. al. 2004). From a TMT perspective, consistency among cognition is necessary as this enables a stable conception of reality to exist. Once people identify with a certain worldview or value as a basis for security, they become motivated to maintain faith in it. People therefore seek out information consistent with their existing worldviews, while trying to avoid or explain away inconsistent information as this could potentially undermine the functioning and the existence of that conception of reality (and with that all that brings stability into people's lives).

To date, a variety of effects that support the worldview and the self-esteem hypotheses of TMT have been demonstrated. When mortality is salient, people show more positive reactions towards others with the same religious background (Greenberg et al. 1990), greater reluctance to handle culturally valued artifacts in sacrilegious ways (Greenberg et. al. 1995), greater aggression towards others with different political beliefs (McGregor et al 1998), and increased risky driving among those who value their driving ability as a source of self-esteem (Ben-Ari, Florian, and Mikulincer 1999). Within the consumer domain, mortality salience has been shown to influence consumers' choice of an indulgent option (Ferraro, et. al.2005), interest in a luxury item (Mandel and Heine 1999), consumption quantities (Mandel and Smeester 2008), and estimation of future financial worth

(Kasser and Sheldon 2000). Based on the findings in consumer behavior it appears that one important value consumers may try to live up to in order to maintain self-consistency in the face of a mortality salience threat is materialism (also see Arndt et. al. 2004). In this dissertation I demonstrate that consumers' attempt to maintain self-consistency by living up to material values ironically undermines the consistency they seek to maintain on the level of the extended self and that an alternative conception of the self is temporarily created. In order to investigate this possibility I will now discuss possessions as part of the extended self and materialism as a value.

Extended Self and Materialism. Possessions are an integral part of the self and as such consumers use the products they consume to create and define their identities, creating in essence an extended self (e.g., Belk 1988; Pavia and Mason 2004; Price, Arnould, and Curasi 2000). The extended self is defined as the self that consumers experience through manifest entities including people, places, and material objects (Belk 1988). In that sense, those manifest entities can be seen as identity markers, informing consumers through the experience of them about who they are. While the notion that the extended self contains material objects applies to all consumers, the extent to which they place importance on acquiring and owning things can vary. One value (i.e., beliefs that certain behaviors or outcomes are desirable or good) that captures how important the ownership and acquisition of possessions is to a consumer is materialism (Burroughs and Rindfleisch 2002). In general, consumers who are highly materialistic assign great importance to possessions and the belief that personal well-being can be enhanced or achieved

through their relationship with their possessions. They use the quantity and quality of *extrinsic* possessions (e.g., possessions that help them to achieve and communicate status, like expensive cars, clothes, or watches) to define success in life (Kashdan and Breen 2007). As such, they are more likely to seek out the consumption of luxury goods and objects that have public rather than private visibility. The possessions they own are likely to be valued because of their costliness, prestige, and public visibility (Holt 1995; Kasser 2002; Richins 1994; Tatzel 2002; Wong 1997). As such, materialism and the striving for material possessions that symbolize status can be regarded as an extrinsic goal orientation, because it is contingent on reactions of others. Materialism generally does not provide satisfaction in and of itself, but its attraction lies in the real or imagined admiration from others, or at least in the culturally derived sense of worth that can be derived from it (Kasser and Ryan 1996).

In contrast, those low in materialism do not consider the acquisition and ownership of material objects as central aspects of their lives and instead orient themselves more toward collective values such as benevolence, universalism, religious values, family values, or community values (Burroughs and Rindfleisch 2002). This is not to say that consumers with low material values do not value any possessions. Instead, the value they derive from a possession is related to its *intrinsic* properties (e.g., possessions that symbolize who they are, such as heirlooms; but also possessions that bring pleasure or are associated with loved ones; Richins 1994; Tatzel 2002).The value of intrinsic possessions is not contingent on the approval of others. They are inherently valuable and satisfying

to the individual. They can be seen as being more representative of an intrinsic goal orientation – an orientation towards self-actualization and self-acceptance. Intrinsic possessions can then be seen as identity markers symbolizing the satisfaction of basic and inherent human needs (Kasser and Ryan 1996).

Incorporating materialism into my earlier discussion, recall that TMT argues that after mortality reminders, individuals live up to values from which they derive self esteem. In line with previous research (e.g., Arndt et. al. 2004; Ferraro et. al. 2005; Kasser and Sheldon 2000; Mandel and Heine 1999) I argue that when faced with a mortality salience threat, those consumers with high material values will engage in materialistic behavior to reaffirm their existing belief system and maintain self-consistency. In particular, for consumers with high material values the pursuit of possessions takes on a priority in life, structuring and orienting their everyday behaviors (Bredemeier and Toby 1960). One of the reasons for the centrality of acquiring things in highly materialistic consumers' lives is the belief that *extrinsic* possessions are essential contributors to their satisfaction and well-being in life (Belk 1984). However, Richins (1995) argues how the pursuit of material possessions can be a self-defeating cycle. A materialistic person that just bought a new car may at first like the new purchase. However, as the person acclimates to it, a new desire for a better, more prestigious car may be spawned. The desire for acquiring ever new and better objects can be insatiable – the joy and satisfaction that a new acquisition brings are quickly forgotten – and replaced with a desire for more (Brickman and Campbell 1971; Richins and Dawson 1992). Further, as consumers with high

material values pursue acquiring and owning possessions with *extrinsic* properties, possessions with *intrinsic* properties become less central aspects of those consumers' lives. Thus, I propose that when faced with a mortality salience threat, highly materialistic consumers will detach themselves from previously *intrinsic* possessions. At the same time, possessions that were previously a more *extrinsic* aspect of their self-concept will become more central.

Consumers with low material values on the other hand tend to be individuals who take action towards more *intrinsic* goals such as personal growth, meaningful connections with others, or being a moral person (Diener and Seligman 2004; Sheldon Elliot, Kim, and Kasser 2001) which may be reflected in the possessions those consumers value, like material objects that symbolize who they really are (such as heirlooms). On the other hand, *extrinsic* possessions do not play a central role in their lives. However, while consumers low in materialism may place value on some types of possessions, given that the acquisition and ownership of possessions is not central to them in the first place, they are not expected to change their relationship with existing possessions in the face of a mortality salience threat. More formally,

> **H1a:** Consumers high in materialism will detach themselves from previously intrinsic possessions when mortality salience is present (vs. absent).

H1b: Consumers high in materialism will incorporate previously extrinsic possessions as more central parts of their self-concept when mortality salience is present (vs. absent).

H2: Consumers low in materialism will not change in their relationship with possessions, regardless of whether mortality salience is present (vs. absent).

The changes in highly materialistic consumers' relationship with their possessions have important implications for self-consistency. While the very act of living up to one's material values is an attempt to maintain self-consistency and an orderly and stable conception of reality, I propose that this act at least temporarily undermines self-consistency on the level of the extended self. This threat to self-consistency occurs through the creation of an alternative conception of the self in which highly materialistic consumers detach from previously intrinsic possessions and make extrinsic possessions a more central aspect of the self-concept. Based on my previous discussion of our inherent need for consistency, it is important to identify mechanisms that can prevent highly materialistic consumers from activating inconsistencies in the self that would arise from living up to material values after mortality reminders. One possible mechanism may be self-affirmation.

Self-affirmation theory. The basic premise of self-affirmation theory is that individuals are motivated to protect the perceived integrity and worth of the self

(Steele 1988). However, under certain conditions self-integrity and self-worth can become threatened through the perception of a real or perceived failure on the part of the individual to satisfy cultural or social standards (Leary and Baumeister 2000; Sherman and Cohen 2006). To restore self-integrity and thus protect the self (Sherman and Cohen 2006) individuals may accommodate the threat (i.e., accept it) or incorporate various defensive cognitive strategies (i.e., rationalizations or justifications) to ameliorate a threat to the self. In addition, they may also engage in the process of self-affirmation (Aronson, Cohen and Nail 1999; Sherman and Cohen 2002; Steele 1988). More specifically, rather than rely on defensive biases people may implement indirect psychological adaptations by affirming core elements of the self (i.e., qualities that are central to how people see themselves) not threatened to allow them to view themselves within a broader perspective of the self. When faced with a threat, being reminded of one these core qualities can provide people with a perspective about who they are and anchor their sense of self-integrity. Through this act of self-affirmation, individuals no longer feel the need to prove their self-worth to themselves or others and do not have to engage in defensive strategies to protect their ego (Sherman and Cohen 2002).

Based on this, I propose that when highly materialistic consumers are able to self-affirm one of their core qualities, they will no longer try to live up to material values when faced with a mortality salience threat. As such, self-affirmation may prevent these consumers from engaging in behaviors which temporarily undermine the consistency of their extended self-concept, such as

creating an altered conception of the self through the use of possessions. More formally,

H3a: When highly materialistic consumers are able to self-affirm (vs. not self-affirm), the effect of the presence (vs. absence) of mortality salience on the likelihood to detach of intrinsic possessions will be attenuated.

H3b: When highly materialistic consumers are able to self-affirm (vs. not self-affirm), the effect of the presence (vs. absence) of mortality salience on the likelihood make extrinsic possessions more central parts of their self-concept will be attenuated.

Three studies are presented to test the impact of mortality threats on the consistency of consumers' self-concepts. The first two studies will investigate whether a change of the extended self-concept can indeed be observed for materialistic consumers after encountering a mortality salience threat. The third study will examine whether self-affirmation can protect those consumers from this defensive tendency.

STUDY ONE

As implied in my previous theorizing, I propose that through engaging in materialistic behaviors, a temporary change in a consumer's extended self-concept can occur when faced with a mortality salience threat. In this study I test

64

hypotheses 1a, and 2 by examining whether a mortality salience threat can cause consumers to actually separate the self completely from a once previously important possession. A further aspect of study 1 is to investigate the role of consumers' self-esteem. Prior research on TMT has established that high levels of self-esteem can protect against the terror of a mortality reminder (Greenberg et. al.1986; Harmon-Jones et al 1997; Pyszczynski, et. al. 2004). Further, previous research has found a negative correlation between materialism and self-esteem (e.g., Burroughs and Rindfleisch 2002; Chaplin and John 2007). Thus, it is possible that the effect proposed in Hypothesis 1a, 1b, and 2 are due to low trait self-esteem rather than high materialism. To control for this possibility, consumers' self-esteem is assessed and incorporated into the analysis. Finally, a novel threat (i.e., the end of a friendship) is used as a control condition for the mortality salience threat. This change is incorporated into the study design, because all participants complete the control condition that is commonly used in the literature in a baseline assessment before encountering one of the two threats (mortality salience/end of friendship) one week later. To make the two conditions more comparable and reduce potential noise, a topic to write an essay about that was different from the topic in the baseline condition was used in the *mortality salience: present* and *absent* conditions. Further, the end of a friendship can be seen as a threat to an important identity marker, which makes it comparable to a mortality salience threat. Previous research has established that threats will not produce the same effects as a mortality salience threat (Ferraro et. al. 2005).

A pretest was first included to establish a measure for the source of possession meaning (intrinsic vs. extrinsic). This measure will allow participants to intuitively indicate possessions that they consider part of their extended self and at the same time indicate whether the possession has intrinsic versus extrinsic sources of meaning.

PRETEST

Procedure. Thirty participants (males = 13, females = 17, average age = 23.91) completed the pretest as part of a study bundle in exchange for a $10 honorarium. Participants were provided with a 17x11 inch sheet of paper, on which nested circles were printed. The innermost circle was labeled "SELF" and the subsequent rings, which were labeled "A" to "H", were described as elements in a participant's life ranging from "very closely related to your self" (A) to "not at all related to your self" (H). Participants were asked to place six of their possessions into the drawing, taking into account how closely related to their self they considered the possession to be. They were asked to mark the exact position with a 'X' and write the name of the possession into the drawing. Then the distance in *millimeters* from the center of the self to the 'X' was measured.

Participants then continued with the study online. On the first screen they were instructed to enter the six possessions they had written into the circle into six text fields. On the subsequent screens, the degree to which each possession was intrinsic and extrinsic was assessed. In particular, for each possession they

indicated on seven-point scales (1=not at all, 7 = very) the extent to which the possession helped them "achieve admiration from other people around me."; "achieve social status."; "achieve envy from other people around me."; and "achieve recognition from other people around me." The four items were combined and averaged together to create an *extrinsic* index ($\alpha = 0.98$). Participants were also asked to indicate the extent to which each possession helped them "achieve my own personal goals."; "achieve self-fulfillment (e.g. it helps me to become who I really am)."; "to live up to my potential."; and "live a meaningful life." The items were combined and averaged together to create an *intrinsic* index ($\alpha = 0.96$).

      Results. For each of the possessions, a difference score was calculated by subtracting the *intrinsic* index from the *extrinsic* index to create a variable called *source of possession meaning* (i.e., high values indicate a high degree of extrinsicness). A linear regression was conducted with the distance of the possession to the center of the self as the dependent variable and *source of possession meaning* as the independent variable. Results produced a significant main effect for *source of possession meaning* (t=2.153, p<0.05, β=2.132) indicating that a possession is a more extrinsic part of the self, the further away it was marked from the center of the self in the circle drawing.

STUDY ONE

      Design. Study 1 used a 2 (mortality salience present vs. absent) x (source of possession meaning) x (materialism) experimental design. Mortality salience

was manipulated between-subjects, while both source of possession meaning and materialism were measured. The key dependent variable was a binomial variable that indicated whether a possession was reported as part of the self on two temporally distinct occasions (one time when a threat was absent and one time when a threat was present). Eighty participants (males = 33, females = 47, average age = 23.62) from a major North American university completed the study in exchange for course credit.

Procedure. Participants were asked to come to the laboratory for two sessions, one week apart. In one of the sessions, a baseline assessment of possessions that participants considered part of their self and their respective importance to the self were assessed. This session also served to assess participants' levels of material values and trait self-esteem. In the other session, the *mortality salience* manipulation was achieved, followed by another assessment of possessions that participants included in their self-concept. This was done to investigate whether a mortality salience threat has a systematic influence on which possessions participants consider to be part of their self-concept.

The procedure in the *baseline* session went as follows: Upon entering the laboratory, participants were asked to complete an 'Innovative Personality Assessment' (IPA, Arndt et. al. 2002). In this IPA, participants were asked to respond to two open-ended questions focusing on dental pain (i.e., "Please briefly describe the emotions that dental pain arouses in you." and "Please jot down, as specifically as you can, what happens to you when you experience dental pain.").

68

This IPA was used in previous studies on Terror Management Theory as a control condition (Arndt et. al. 2002). In order to confirm that none of the effects are related to different mood states, participants then responded to the twenty-three-item PANAS scale (Watson et al. 1988). The responses to the PANAS scale were mean-centered and combined to create a continuous variable called *mood* (α =0.88).

Next, consistent with previous research on TMT (Pyszczynski, et. al. 1999) participants completed a distraction task. In this study the task asked participants to identify six differences between two very similar pictures.

Next, the possessions that were part of the self, and their respective source of meaning were assessed. Participants were provided with the 17x11 inch sheet of paper, on which nested circles were printed as described in the pretest. The instructions were identical to the pretest with the exception that participants were asked to place as many of their possessions as they could think of into the drawing, taking into account how closely related to their self they considered each possession to be. The source of possession meaning was determined by its distance in *millimeters* from the center of the self (with possessions with intrinsic sources of meaning being close to the center of the self and possessions with extrinsic sources of meaning being further away from the center of the self). This measurement was mean-centered and treated as a continuous variable called *source of possession meaning*.

Then, participants completed the eighteen-item material values scale to assess their degree of material values (Richins and Dawson 1992) using seven-

point scales. Example items of the scale are "Some of the most important achievements in life include acquiring material possessions.", "I like to own things that impress people.", and "I have all the things I really need to enjoy life." Responses were combined, averaged, and mean-centered, to create a continuous variable called *materialism* (α =0.72). Participants then responded to the ten-item Rosenberg self-esteem scale (Rosenberg 1965), which uses five-point scales to assess trait self-esteem. Some example items for the scale are: "I feel that I'm a person of worth, at least on an equal basis with others.", "I am able to do things as well as most other people.", "I feel I do not have much to be proud of." (reverse-scored), and "I wish I could have more respect for myself." (reverse-scored). Responses to the scale were combined, and averaged together, and mean-centered to create a continuous variable *self-esteem* (α =0.81). Finally, participants indicated their age and gender. Since these two demographic variables did not predict significant variance in any of the dependent measures in this study and subsequent studies, they are not discussed further.

The procedure of the *experimental* session was the same as that described for the baseline session except for the following changes: First, *mortality salience* was manipulated. In the *present* condition, similar to previous research, participants were required to respond to two open-ended questions focusing on thoughts about their own death (i.e., "Please briefly describe the emotions that the thought of your own death arouses in you." And "Please jot down, as specifically as you can, what you think will happen to you physically as you die and once you are physically dead."; Arndt et. al. 2002). Participants in the *absent* condition

were asked to write about thoughts and feelings regarding another unpleasant experience unrelated to death - the ending of a friendship. The instructions for the two essays in this condition read: "Briefly describe the emotions that the thought of your best friend ending his/her friendship with you arouses in you." and "Jot down, as specifically as you can, what happens to you when your best friend ends his/her friendship with you." After completing the PANAS scale and the distraction task, participants were provided with a fresh sheet of paper on which the nested circles were printed. They were again asked to place as many of their possessions as they could think of into the drawing. The order in which participants completed the two sessions was randomly determined.

Results

Preliminary Analyses. Analysis was conducted to assess whether the *type of threat* treatment, alone or differentially as a function of *source of possession meaning* and *materialism*, had any effect on self-reported mood as measured by the PANAS scale (Watson et. al. 1988). A 2 (mortality salience) x (source of possession meaning) x (materialism) generalized mixed effects model with *mood* as the dependent variable indicated that none of the main effects and interaction terms significantly predicted mood (all ts < 1), which suggests that, as with previous terror management research (i.e., Arndt et. al. 2002), self-reported mood was not involved with any of the effects.

Main Analysis. To investigate whether consumers separate the self completely from a previously intrinsic possession, a 2 (mortality salience) x

source of possession meaning x materialism binomial GLM was conducted. The

dependent variable was a binomial variable that captured whether participants

listed a given possession across two time periods as part of their self. Results

produced a significant main effect for source of possession meaning (z=4.458,

p<0.001, β=0.673), a two-way interaction between source of possession meaning

and materialism (z=2.226, p<0.05, β=0.385), and most importantly, a three-way

interaction amongst mortality salience, source of possession meaning, and

materialism (z=-1.989, p<0.05, β=-0.502, see figure 3-1).
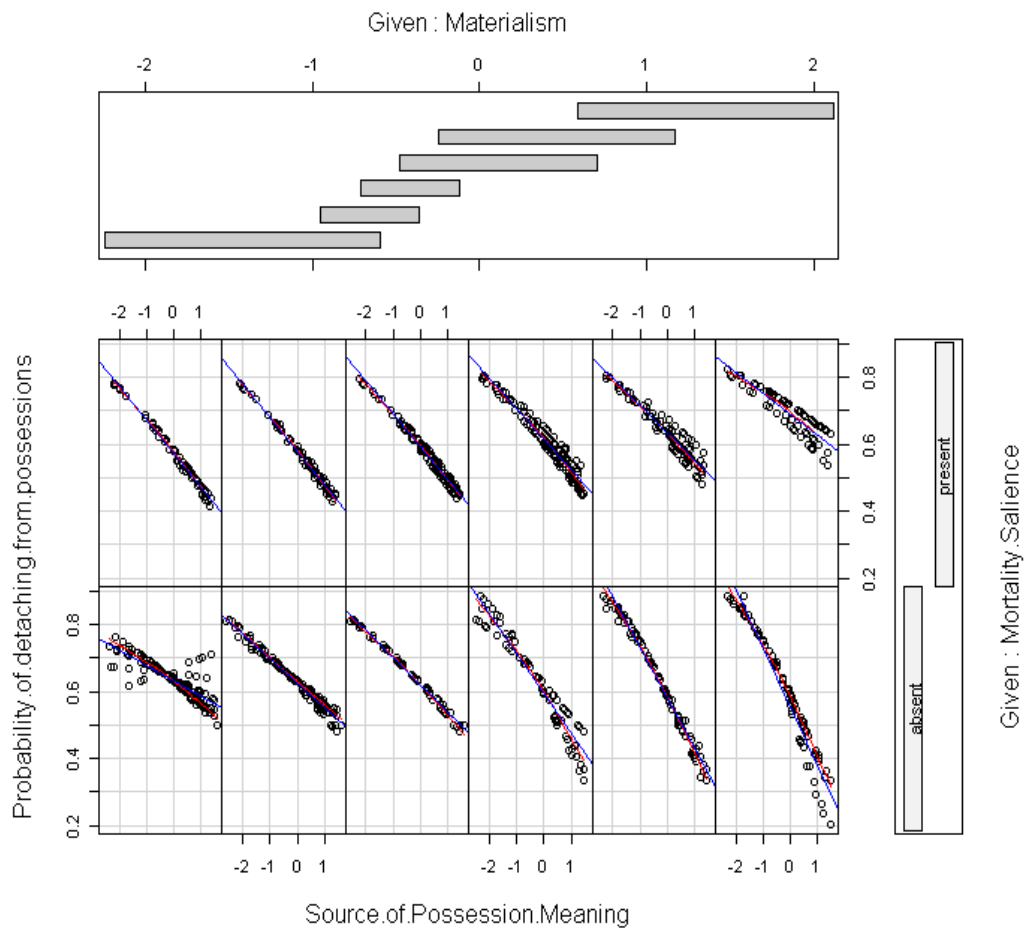
Figure 3-1: In all twelve subplots, the y-axis is the predicted probability of
consumers completely detaching from a possession (i.e., not including identifying

them as part of the self in the experimental session). The top row represents plots in the mortality salience: present condition, while the bottom row shows the plots in the mortality salience: absent condition. On the x-axis the source of possession meaning (mean centered) is displayed. The columns show overlapping segments of material values (mean centered). The column on the left represents consumers' with the lowest material values, while the column on the right represents consumers with the highest material values. The six horizontal bars show the range of material values represented in each of the six columns. Lines in the diagram represent predicted regression lines for each of the cells.

To probe the nature of the three-way interaction, simple slope tests were conducted following the procedures outlined by Aiken and West (1991). Simple slopes were examined at low/high levels of materialism (one standard deviation below/above the mean), and extrinsic/intrinsic sources of possession meaning (one standard deviation below/above the mean). First, lending support to hypothesis 1a, consumers high in materialism were more likely to detach from previously intrinsic possessions when *mortality salience* was *present* (vs. *absent*; $z=-1.948$, $p<0.05$, $\beta=-1.067$). In contrast, no effect for detaching from previously intrinsic possessions was found for consumers low in materialism when *mortality salience* was *present* (vs. *absent*; $z=0.888$, $p>0.3$, $\beta=0.484$). Further, in the *mortality salience present* condition, consumers high (versus low) in materialism were significantly more likely to completely detach from previously intrinsic possessions by not including them into their self-concept ($z=-1.977$, $p<0.05$, $\beta=-0.505$), while in the *mortality salience absent* condition, no differences arose between consumers high versus low in materialism for the probability of detaching from intrinsic ($z=0.27$, $p>0.3$, $\beta=0.887$) possessions.

Prior research on Terror Management Theory has identified the important role of self-esteem in moderating mortality salience effects (Pyszczynski, et. al.

73

2004). Given the relationship between high levels of materialism and low trait self-esteem, it is conceivable, that the observed effects are actually driven by participant's levels of trait self-esteem. To investigate this possibility, an additional GLM was conducted, adding self-esteem as a covariate. No significant effects for self-esteem were realized, neither as a main effect ($z=0.98$, $p>0.3$, $\beta=0.24$), nor in the 3-way interaction term between mortality salience, source of possession meaning, and self-esteem ($z=-1.38$, $p>0.15$, $\beta=-0.38$). On the other hand, the 3-way interaction between mortality salience, source of possession meaning, and materialism was still found to be significant ($z=-2.337$, $p<0.05$, $\beta=-0.66$). However, consistent with prior research (e.g., Burroughs and Rindfleisch 2002; Chaplin and John 2007), a marginally significant negative correlation between materialism and self-esteem was observed ($r=-0.24$, $p=0.07$).

Discussion. The first study demonstrated that mortality salience can cause a disruption in the consistency of highly materialistic consumers' extended self-concept by temporarily activating an altered conception of the self. In particular, materialistic consumers tend to exclude previously intrinsic possessions from their self-concept when they face a mortality salience threat as compared to when they encounter a non-mortality related threat (i.e., the end of a friendship). These effects are not observed for consumers who are low in materialism. One limitation of this study pertains to its design of. Since the order in which the *baseline* condition and the *experimental* condition was counterbalanced, it is not possible to make claims about any lasting effects of a self-concept change. The results are more suggestive of a temporary activation of an altered conception of the self. A

further limitation of this study is that it only captures part of the proposed cycle by demonstrating that materialistic consumers detach from intrinsic possessions after encountering a mortality salience threat (H1a). However, the hypothesis that extrinsic material objects become more central aspects of the self-concept could not be tested (H1b). In the second study, I address this latter shortcoming by examining the shifting of the source of possession meaning for all those possessions that are retained in consumers' selves across two sessions.

STUDY TWO

In the second study, I strengthen my initial findings by employing a different method to observe changes of consumers' selves. In this study I test hypotheses 1a, 1b, and 2 by observing what happens within consumers' selves for those possessions that are retained after consumers encounter a mortality salience threat as compared to a baseline. If the main premises of the present research are correct, I expect that for those consumers, who have high material values, mortality salience disrupts the self and thus possessions that were formerly an intrinsic aspect of the self become less important. At the same time, possessions that were an extrinsic part of the immediate self will become more central aspects for these consumers. The dependent variable in this study is therefore the shifting of the source of possession meaning.

Design. Study 2 employed a 2 (mortality salience: present vs. absent) x (source of possession meaning) x (materialism) mixed experimental design.

Mortality salience was a within-subjects factor while source of possession meaning and materialism were measured. The dependent measure consisted of the difference of the relative distances of a possession from the center of the self in the mortality salience p*resent* condition minus that distance in the mortality salience *absent* condition. Forty-three undergraduate students (males=19, females = 24, average age = 24.15) from a major North American university completed the study in exchange for a $10 honorarium.

    Procedure. The same procedure described in study 1 was used in the present experiment with two noteworthy changes. First, only the *mortality salience present* condition (not the *mortality salience absent* condition) was included. The other change occurred on the second day of the sessions when participants were given the paper on which the nested circles were printed. Unlike study 1 in which participants did not receive the opportunity to revisit the list of possessions they had identified in the first session, in this study after participants had been given the opportunity to position any possessions that came to mind into the drawing they were subsequently provided with a list of the possessions they had indicated in their drawing during the initial session (minus information pertaining to the possessions' original placement). They were then asked to complete the circle with any of the possessions they had not listed but would still like to list using a different colored pen. This provided more complete information such that it was possible to compare the relative distances from the self that the possessions comprised both in the presence and absence of a

mortality threat. The order in which participants completed the sessions was counterbalanced.

Results

Main Analysis. A (source of possession meaning) x (materialism) GLM was conducted with the relative change in participants' possession importance as the dependent variable. Results revealed significant main effects for source of possession meaning (t(278) = 7.263, p<0.001, β=-0.283) and materialism (t(38) = 3.15, p<0.01, β=-0.123), and importantly a two-way interaction between source of possession meaning and materialism (t(278)=2.953, p<0.01, β=0.120, see figure 2). Results reveal that consumers high in materialism distance themselves from once intrinsic possessions (t(278) = 6.715, p<0.001, β=-0.517) and incorporate possessions into the self that were once extrinsic (t(278) = 3.631, p<0.001, β=0.003) when faced with a mortality salience threat. In contrast, for those low in materialism, neither the effect of distancing from formerly intrinsic possessions (t(278) = 0.054, p>0.5, β=-0.031), nor the effect of incorporating formerly extrinsic possessions into the self-concept (t(278) = 0.374, p>0.5, β=-0.031) were significant.
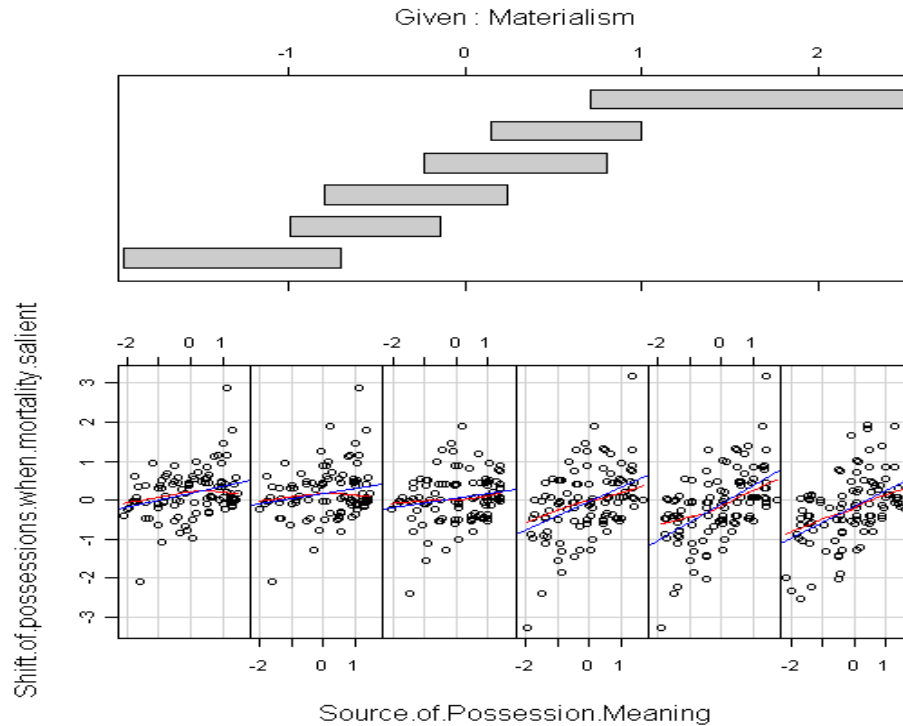
Figure 3-2: The y-axis represents the shift of the possessions in consumers' self when mortality is salient. Negative numbers indicate that a possession became a more important aspect of the self; positive numbers indicate that consumers distance themselves from those possessions. On the x-axis is the source of possession meaning (mean-centered). The diagrams from left to right show increasing, overlapping segments of material values, represented by the bars above the diagrams. Lines in the diagram represent predicted regression lines for each of the cells.

As in study 1, further analysis was conducted to identify whether consumers' self-esteem plays a role in the observed results. To investigate this possibility, an additional GLM was conducted, that included self-esteem as a covariate. No significant effects for self-esteem were realized, neither as a main effect (t=0.95, p>0.3, β=0.04), nor in the 2-way interaction term between source of possession meaning and self-esteem (t=0.703, p>0.3, β=0.027). On the other hand, the 2-way interaction between source of possession meaning and materialism was still found to be significant (t=-2.85, p<0.01, β=-0.118). Consistent with prior research (e.g., Burroughs and Rindfleisch 2002; Chaplin and

John 2007), a significant negative correlation between materialism and self-esteem was observed (r=-0.31, p=0.05).

Discussion. In the second study I further investigate the possibility of highly materialistic consumers' temporarily activating an altered self-concept after encountering a mortality salience threat. I demonstrated that when mortality is salient, consumers who strongly identify with their material possessions shifted the source of possession meaning within their extended self-concept. When mortality was salient, consumers detached from formerly intrinsic possessions, while possessions that were formerly an extrinsic part of the self became more central aspects of consumers' self-concept. While this study captures the cycle of previously intrinsic possessions losing importance and formerly extrinsic possessions becoming more central as a result of living up to material values after a mortality salience threat it is important to examine whether this temporary activation of an altered self-concept has downstream implications for consumers' behavioral intentions of acquiring new objects and disposing old objects. In study 3 I seek to observe those behavioral intentions.

One limitation of the study 2 is that the measurement tool that was used to assess whether highly materialistic consumers detach from previously intrinsic possessions and make formerly extrinsic possessions a more central aspect of the self was the same tool that was used to assess the degree of intrinsicness and extrinsicness of a possession. This procedure was selected because it allowed study participants to intuitively construct a map of their selves without the process

79

being very repetitive. At the same time, this procedure provided a very rich and elaborate dataset that in a concise manner allowed me to observe all the possessions that participants considered to be part of their currently activated self-concept. A downside of this approach was that the data was essentially qualitative in nature, quantified only by a single measure (e.g., the distance of each possession from the center of the self). As a result, construct validity and reliability of the constructs could not be assessed. Therefore, study 3 employs a more traditional approach of operationalizing the constructs of the extrinsicness/intrinsicness of a possession, as well as observing an altered self-concept after encountering a mortality salience threat.

STUDY THREE

As discussed in the previous paragraph, in study 3 I seek to establish that the change of the extended self-concept that was observed in studies 1 and 2 transfers into behavioral intentions of disposing previously important possessions and acquiring new extrinsic products.

In addition I aim to demonstrate that self-affirmation can indeed protect materialistic consumers from temporary changes to the extended self-concept after encountering a mortality salience threat. To recap, I predict that when consumers are allowed to self-affirm, the effects that I observed in the previous two studies should disappear.

Design. Study 3 used a 2 (mortality salience: present vs. absent) x 2 (self affirmation: present vs. absent) x 2 (source of possession meaning) mixed

experimental design. Source of possession meaning was a within-subjects factor while mortality salience and self-affirmation were manipulated between-subjects. All participants encountered a high materialism prime. The dependent measures consisted of a number of items that assessed consumers' intentions to dispose of their possessions and acquire new possessions. One hundred and eighteen North American participants (males = 28, females = 90, average age = 38.2) from a large online research panel completed the study in exchange for a $5 honorarium.

Procedure. At the beginning of the study participants were asked to complete the ten-item self-esteem scale (Rosenberg 1965). The scores on the ten items were combined and averaged together to create a *trait self-esteem* index (α = 0.90). Next, participants were asked to list four possessions. Participants then encountered the materialism prime. Specifically, all participants were asked to read the following short essay about a successful and highly materialistic business person: "*Paul J. Larson (born February 21, 1969) is an American businessman and philanthropist.*

Even as a child Larson displayed an interest in making and saving money. He went door to door selling chewing gum, Coca-Cola, or weekly magazines. While still in high school, he carried out several successful money-making ideas: He started assembling personal computers and edited one of the first computer game newsletters. Filing his first income tax return at age 14, Larson already owned several computer systems. At age 15, Larson and a friend spent $250 to purchase a used coin-operated video game machine, which they placed in a local pub. Within months, they owned several machines in different pubs. After seeing

Bill Gates featured on the cover of Time Magazine, he decided to purchase

Microsoft shares with his income – an investment that paid off quickly. At age 16,

Larson purchased his first car – a 1980 Corvette. He also invested in a business

owned by his father and at age 18 he bought a 5-bedroom stucco home.

After graduating from high school, he enrolled at Columbia University

and received a M.S. in Computing Science in 1990. At that time he already had

accumulated personal savings in excess of $11.4 million, which he used to start

his own video game company. Today Larson is married and has 2 children. His

net worth is in excess of $1 billion. He enjoys his personal collection of sports

cars and likes to spend his summers on his sailboat in the Mediterranean sea. In

February 2010, Larson announced that he considers himself so blessed with a

loving family, a vast fortune, and material wealth that he wants to give something

back to society. He established the Paul J. Larson trust which awards

scholarships to outstanding students in the fields of Business, Economics, and

Computing Science." This priming manipulation was pretested and found to

significantly increase levels of materialism as measured with the Richins and

Dawson (1992) scale (t(58)=2.31, p<0.05).

Following the high materialism prime, participants were then asked to

rank a list of twelve values and personal characteristics in order of personal

importance (see Cohen, Aronson, and Steele 2000). The self-affirmation

manipulation was then achieved by asking participants to write a short essay

about one of the values they provided. Participants were randomly assigned to one

of two conditions: In the self-affirmation *present* condition, participants were

asked to write a short essay about why their most important value from the value

ranking form was important to them and a time in their lives when it had been

particularly important. In the self-affirmation *absent* condition, participants were

asked to write a short essay about why the value they indicated ninth might be

important to other people (White and Argo 2009).

To achieve the mortality salience manipulation, participants were then

asked to complete an IPA similar to the one in study 2. Immediately following the

mortality salience manipulation, participants completed the 23-item PANAS scale

(*mood*: $\alpha = 0.89$).

In line with previous research on TMT, a distraction task was completed

next (Pyszczynski et. al. 1999). The distraction task which was also conducted on

the computer required participants to complete fifty trials. Three keys on the

keyboard ("B", "N", "M") were assigned to three positions on the screen ("left",

"middle", "right", respectively). During each trial, three randomly chosen letters

were presented on the computer screen and participants were instructed to

indicate by pressing one of three keys, which of the letters appears first in the

alphabet. Upon completion of this task, the key dependent measures were

assessed.

First, participants were asked questions using eleven-point scales (1 – not

at all likely; 11 –very likely) about the likelihood of disposing the four

possessions they indicated earlier in various ways. For each object they were

asked: "Please imagine that you are planning to sell your ____. Please indicate,

how likely you are to post a classified ad (e.g., on Craigslist) for ____."; "Please

indicate, how likely you are to put _____ on eBay.”; The items were combined and averaged together to create an *intention to dispose* index (α = 0.73).

Participants then completed items assessing their desire to acquire a new possession. Specifically, they were asked the extent to which they would like to buy a new car using eleven-point scales (1 – not at all; 11 –very). The items included: “I would like to purchase a new car.”, “It is likely that I will buy a new car soon.”, “I have a high willingness to buy a new car.”, “I would like to own a new car.”, “My life would be better if I owned a new car.”, and “I would enjoy driving more with a new car.” The items were combined and averaged together to create an *intentions to acquire a new car* index (α = 0.88).

Following the dependent variables, participants were then asked to rate each of the possessions on their degree of extrinsic and intrinsic value using eleven-point scales as described in the pretest (extrinsic index: α = 0.97; intrinsic index: α = 0.96).

Following prior research on self-affirmation (Schmeichel and Martens 2005), participants then completed a state self-esteem scale (Heatherton and Polivy 1991) which includes 20 items using 5-point scales (1 – *not at all* – 5 – *extremely*). Some of the items in this scale include: “I feel confident about my abilities.”, “I feel that I am having trouble understanding things that I read.” (reverse-scored), “I feel self-conscious.” (reverse-scored), “I feel confident that I understand things.”, and “I feel like I'm not doing well.” (reverse-scored). The items were combined and averaged together to create a *state self-esteem* index (α = 0.93).

Results.

       Preliminary Analyses. As in study 1, an analysis was conducted to assess

whether the *mortality salience* treatment, alone or differentially as a function of

self affirmation and *source of possession meaning*, had any effect on self-reported

mood as measured by the PANAS scale (Watson et. al. 1988). A 2 (mortality

salience) x (self-affirmation) x (source of possession meaning) GLM with *mood*

as the dependent variable indicated that none of the main effects and interaction

terms significantly predicted mood (all *t*s < 1), which suggests that, as with

previous terror management research (i.e., Arndt et. al. 2002), self-reported mood

was not involved with any of the effects.

Main Analysis.

       Intentions to dispose. A 2(mortality salience) x 2 (self-affirmation) x

(source of possession meaning) generalized mixed effects model was conducted,

with participants intention to dispose of a possession as the dependent variable.

Results produced significant main effects for *self-affirmation* (t=-2.235, p<0.05,

β=-0.975) and *source of possession meaning* (t=2.436, p<0.05, β=0.623), such

that participants indicated a smaller likelihood of disposing of possessions when

they were able to self-affirm (vs. not self-affirm), and a greater likelihood of

disposing of possessions with extrinsic (vs. intrinsic) sources of meaning. More

importantly, a significant three-way interaction between *mortality salience*, *self-

affirmation*, and *source of possession meaning* was realized (t=2.203, p<0.05,

β=1.416, see figures 3-3 and 3-4). The nature of this interaction is described in the next paragraph.

To probe the nature of the interaction, simple slope analysis was conducted (Aiken and West 1991). Simple slopes were conducted at low/high levels of *source of possession meaning* (intrinsic/extrinsic; one standard deviation below/above the mean).

Results reveal that for possessions with intrinsic sources of meaning, when participants were not able to self-affirm, the presence (vs. absence) of a mortality salience threat significantly increased their intentions to dispose of intrinsic possessions (t(464)=2.014, p<0.05, β=0.695). However, when participants were able to self-affirm, the presence (vs. absence) of a mortality salience threat did not significantly influence participants' intentions to dispose (t(464)=-1.457, p<0.05, β=-0.52). Further, giving participants the opportunity to self-affirm (vs. not self-affirm) did not significantly influence participants' intentions to dispose of intrinsic possessions when mortality was not salient (t=0.319, p>0.5, β=0.206). However, when mortality was salient, giving participant the opportunity to affirm the self (vs. not self-affirm), significantly reduced participants' intentions to dispose of intrinsic possessions (t=-2.448, p<0.05, β=-1.490).
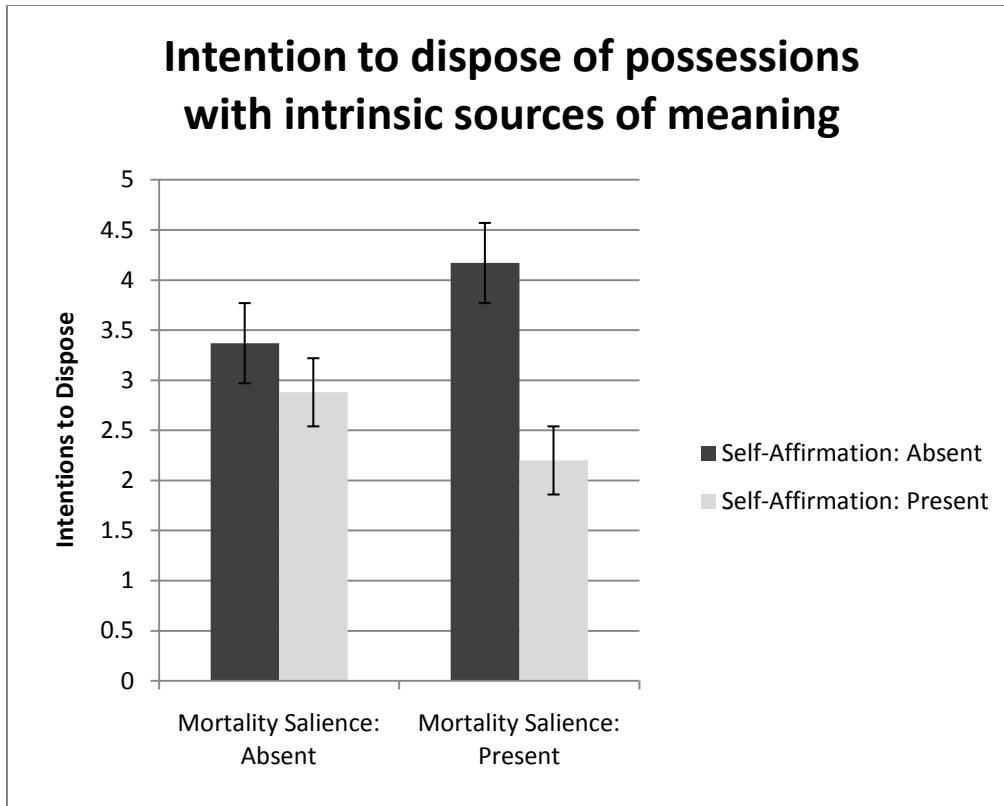
Figure 3-3: Intention to dispose of possessions with intrinsic sources of meaning (1 standard deviation below the mean).

The results of the simple slope analysis for possessions with extrinsic sources of meaning reveals, that when participants were not able to self-affirm, the presence (vs. absence) of a mortality salience threat did not significantly increased their intentions to dispose of extrinsic possessions ($t(464)=-0.29$, $p>0.5$, $\beta=-0.175$). However, when participants were able to self-affirm, they indicated a significantly smaller intention to dispose of extrinsic possessions when the mortality salience threat was absent (vs. present) ($t(464)=-2.364$, $p<0.05$, $\beta=-1.552$). Further, giving participants the opportunity to self-affirm (vs. not self-affirm) did significantly influence participants' intentions to dispose of intrinsic possessions when mortality was not salient ($t=-1.49$, $p<0.05$, $\beta=1.49$). However,

when mortality was salient, giving participant the opportunity to affirm the self (vs. not self-affirm), did not influence participants' intentions to dispose of extrinsic possessions (t=-0.319, p>0.5, β=-0.20).
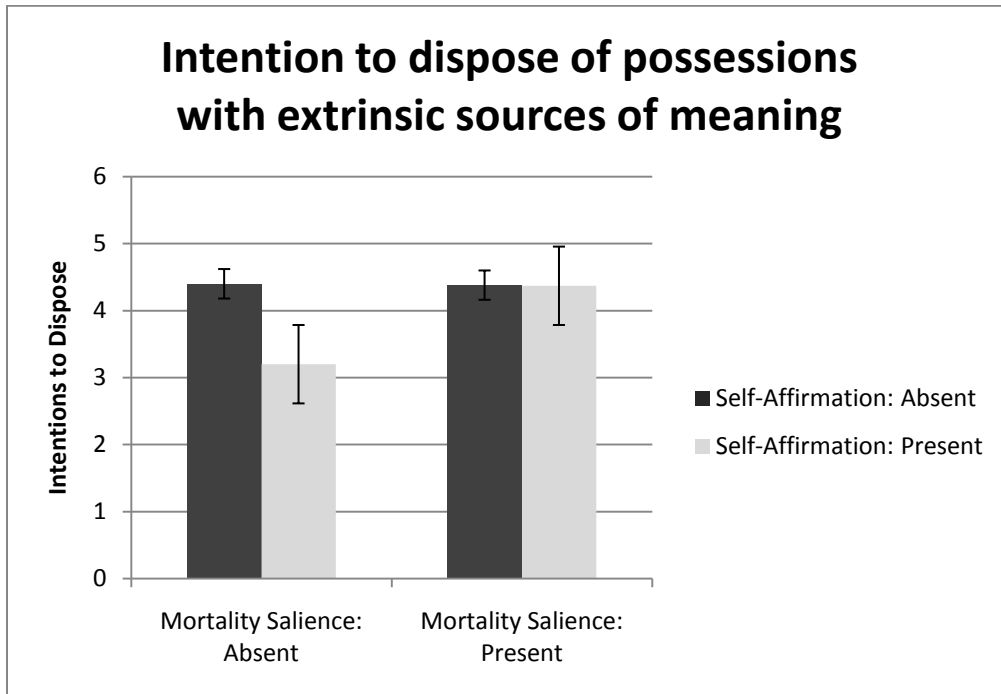
Figure 3-4: Intention to dispose of possessions with extrinsic sources of meaning (1 standard deviation above the mean).

Intentions to acquire: A 2(mortality salience) x 2 (self affirmation) linear model was conducted, with participants intention to acquire a new car as the dependent variable.

Significant main effects for *mortality salience* (t=2.374, p<0.05, β=0.86) and for *self-affirmation* (t=2.872, p<0.01, β=1.02) are realized. These effects are qualified by a significant 2-way interaction between *mortality salience* and *self-affirmation* (t=-3.574, p<0.001, β=-1.81; see figure 3-5). When self-affirmation was absent, the presence (vs. absence) of mortality salience significantly increased participants' desire for a new car. This effect was reversed when participants were

given the opportunity to self-affirm (t=-2.683, p<0.01, β=-0.95). Further, when

mortality was salient, giving consumers the opportunity to self-affirm

significantly reduced their desire for a new car (t=-2.872, p<0.01, β=-1.02).
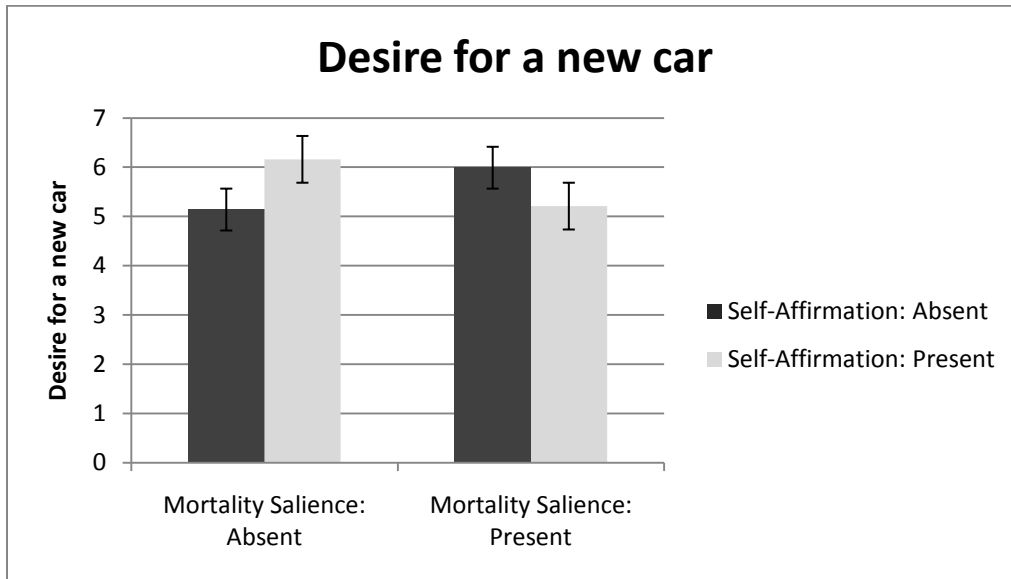
Figure 3-5: Consumers desire for a new car.

The presence of self-affirmation in the mortality salience absent condition

had an effect on both – participants' intentions to dispose of possessions with

extrinsic sources of meaning, as well as participants' desire for a new car. While

this effect was not part of the hypotheses, it was not unexpected as prior research

has established that the mere presence of self-affirmation can actually bolster

cultural worldviews (Schmeichel and Martens 2005).

Self-esteem analysis: Additional analysis was conducted to investigate

whether self-esteem can explain some of the observed effects. Neither the

mortality salience manipulation (t=-1.561, p>0.1, β=-0.17), nor the self-

affirmation manipulation (t=0.12, p>0.1, β=0.125) had a significant effect on

participants state self-esteem. Further, including self-esteem into the model, self-esteem has no significant effect on participants intentions to dispose (t=-1.226, p>0.1, β=-0.665), and the observed 3-way interaction between mortality salience, self-affirmation, and source of possession meaning remains significant (t=2.167, p<0.05, β=1.45).

Discussion. In the third study I broaden the results by demonstrating that the effects on the disruption of the self-concept observed in studies 1 and 2 can also be observed in highly materialistic consumers' intentions to dispose of intrinsic possessions and to acquire new extrinsic possessions. This finding is noteworthy, especially given that the possessions that consumers indicated within the intrinsic category were often very personal belongings, such as a 'Wood chest that was my grandfather's, 'photographs', 'stuffed animal from childhood', 'a photograph of me hugging a dolphin', 'old wedding ring', 'my grandmothers bible'. This indicates that when materialistic values are salient, and consumers are reminded of their death, they are indeed more likely to dispose of identity markers.

Given this, it is important to note that I find that self-affirmation can indeed serve as a protective mechanism against the effects of a mortality salience threat on the temporary disruption of consumers' self-concept. Giving participants the opportunity to affirm the self significantly lowered their intentions to dispose of intrinsic possessions, while at the same time lowering their intentions to

acquire new extrinsic possessions, thereby protecting consumers' self-consistency.

One limitation of study 3 is that it does not provide a complete design, but employs a high materialism prime for all participants. A number of considerations went into this choice of research design. First, the previous two studies have already investigated consumers low in materialism and have demonstrated that no effects of a mortality salience threat on the temporary activation of an alternative self-concept could be observed. As the focus of the current research is on consumers high in materialism, the inclusion of low materialistic consumers was not deemed necessary, especially given the complexity of four interacting independent variables as well as the requirements of statistical power to observe four-way interactions. Further, since self-affirmation theory (Steele 1988) argues that giving consumers the opportunity to affirm the self before encountering a mortality salience threat should eliminate the effects of the threat (e.g., living up to the value of materialism), this condition can be viewed as a control condition. A further reason for the use of the prime was that in the previous two studies, materialism as assessed with the material-values scale (Richins and Dawson 1992), was negatively correlated with trait self-esteem. The use of the high materialism prime allowed me to activate consumers' value of materialism without influencing their self-esteem. The pretest of the materialism prime confirmed that it significantly increased consumers' levels of materialism $(t(58)=2.31, p<0.05)$, while the level of self-esteem was unaffected $(t(58)=0.901, p>0.3)$. Finally while one could argue that the content of the prime (e.g., a

successful individual who acquired prestigious objects) might have influenced consumers' intentions to acquire a new car, the main contribution of this research, namely the finding that highly materialistic consumers actually detach from previously intrinsic possessions and indicate a higher likelihood to dispose of them, is not linked to the content of the materialism prime.

GENERAL DISCUSSION

The present research builds on Terror Management Theory and argues that mortality reminders can have an important effect on the consistency of highly materialistic consumers' self-concepts. Overall the results demonstrate that in face of a mortality salience threat, the consistency of materialistic consumers' self-concepts is temporarily compromised and that those consumers create an altered conception of the self-concept through utilizing the relationship with their possessions. In the first study, I demonstrate that a mortality salience threat (vs. a threat unrelated to mortality salience) causes highly materialistic consumers to exclude formerly important possessions from their self-concept. This effect is not observed for consumers low in materialism. In the second study, I present further evidence that self-consistency may be compromised in the face of a mortality salience threat. I demonstrate that when mortality is salient, consumers who strongly identify with their material possessions shift the source of possession meaning within their extended self-concept. In particular, when mortality was salient, consumers detached from formerly intrinsic possessions, while

possessions that were formerly more extrinsic parts of the self became more central aspects of consumers' self-concept. In the third study I showed that the effects of a mortality salience threat on highly materialistic consumers' extended self-concepts translate into an increased likelihood to dispose of intrinsic possessions and acquire extrinsic possessions. I further demonstrate that giving those consumers the opportunity to self-affirm can protect them from the effects of a mortality salience threat on their self-concepts.

The results of the three studies indicate that when highly materialistic consumers are exposed to a mortality salience threat, they will try to maintain and restore consistency by living up to an important value (i.e., materialism). Ironically, in the process they temporarily undermine consistency on the level of the extended self by utilizing the relationship with their possessions to reconstruct their extended self-concept. Specifically, they are more likely to detach from intrinsic possessions, and make extrinsic possessions a more central aspect of the self-concept. Those intrinsic possessions can be important identity markers by being reminders to consumers about who they really are as individuals. Extrinsic possessions on the other hand cannot serve this role as they are primarily means to communicate status to others.

A limitation of the current research is that it only provides a snapshot image of the self after encountering a threat at a single point in time. While studies 1 and 2 investigate the phenomenon at two distinct points in time, one week apart, they do not provide insight as to whether the newly created self-concept after encountering a mortality salience threat will lead to a permanently

altered conception of the self, or whether it is only temporary in nature. Thus, while this dissertation demonstrates a temporary short-term effect of a mortality salience threat on materialistic consumers' self-concept, it remains silent as to the long-term effects of such a theat. It is possible to argue that when after the encounter of a mortality salience threat, an alternative conception of the self is activated, highly materialistic consumers may have a higher propensity for acquiring new extrinsic possessions or disposing of intrinsic possessions. If this propensity leads to such action, a permanent alteration of the self-concept may transpire. However, if no action is taken, highly materialistic consumers may return to the precious state of their self-concepts. Thus, it is important for future research to investigate the long-term effects of ongoing mortality reminders on consumers' self. While studies on the effects of aging, grief, or a possibly terminal illness on consumers' self suggest that consumers may use the relationship with their possessions to go through a transition of one self to a new, redefined self after mortality reminders (Gentry, Kennedy, and Paul 1995; Pavia and Mason 2004; Price et. al. 2000), it could be argued that these changes are due to a strongly changed external reality of being. When studying long-terms effects, it would also be interesting to examine whether ongoing mortality reminders set a transition from one self to another in motion, which is concluded once the new self is achieved, or whether the self-concept would be in a constant modus of change, always changing into something new rather than finding a (temporary) end point.

The temporary change of consumers' extended self-concept may have important implications for consumers' well-being. Previous research has established that self-concept consistency is necessary for maintaining the integrity of the self (Allport 1937; Lecky 1945). A consistent self-concept further indicates successful adaptation and good mental health (Funder 1995) and it is related to higher levels of well-being (Block 1961; Donahue, Robins, Roberts, and John 1993; Sheldon, Ryan, Rawsthorne, and Ilardi 1997). Interestingly, only highly materialistic consumers reconstruct their self-concepts through the use of possessions. As such, the current findings may shed light as to why previous research has established that consumers with higher material values have consistently reported lower levels of well-being (Kashdan and Breen 2007). Compared with their low materialistic counterparts, highly materialistic consumers tend to be less satisfied with their relationships (Richins and Dawson 1992), are more inclined to believe that they suffer from financial problems (Dean, Carroll, and Yang 2007), and believe that they need more income to satisfy their daily needs (Richins and Dawson 1992). In addition, higher levels of materialism are positively correlated with negative emotions, experiential avoidance, social anxiety, and depressive symptoms, while being negatively correlated with meaning in life, relatedness to others, feelings of competence, autonomy, and gratitude (Kashdan and Breen 2007). The results of this dissertation suggest that the disruption of self-concept consistency may be one reason for materialistic consumers' low levels of well-being. Future research

might seek to expand on this notion by further exploring the antecedents of lower levels of well-being in materialistic consumers.

Considering the vast amount of mortality reminders on TV and the viewing habits of North Americans, as well as the prevalence of materialism as a value in contemporary society, my findings appear quite disturbing. Given the need for self-consistency, it is important to identify mechanisms by which materialistic consumers can be protected from living up to material values after mortality reminders. The results of the present research indicate that giving consumers the opportunity to self-affirm by thinking about alternative important sources of self-integrity minimizes the effects of mortality salience on the consistency of highly materialistic consumers' self-concepts. The self-affirmation process may have some managerial implications in the area of fund-raising. The devastating images and death toll numbers of major disasters like the 2010 Haiti earthquake may serve as triggers for mortality salience effects. As I argue throughout this dissertation, these reminders may induce consumers to live up to their material values and acquire new products, that is, spend money on themselves. However, giving consumers the opportunity to affirm alternative important life values can mitigate and even eliminate mortality salience effects. By finding innovative ways to allow consumers to self-affirm, fund-raising managers may be able to collect donations more successfully. Further research could be conducted to explore this possibility.

In this dissertation, I only investigated a temporary disruption of the self-concept of highly materialistic consumers' by looking at consumers' relationship

with their possessions. There are other entities associated with material values, such as brands. Rindfleich et. al. (2009) argue that mortality salience may lead materialistic consumers to seek strong connections with their brands. It is possible to argue that while materialistic consumers may be weakly connected to their possessions, and are constantly looking for 'better' possessions, they may use self-brand connections in an attempt to maintain consistency and find meaning through a symbolic replacement of interpersonal relationships with self-brand connections (Micken and Roberts, 1999; Rindfleisch and Burroughs 2004). Future research could test this explanation and reconcile the findings of Rindfleisch, Burroughs, and Wong (2009) with the seemingly opposing findings of the current research.

Through news media, consumers are exposed to numerous threats that stand in no relation to the small magnitude of threats that consumers may encounter throughout their lives. Little research has been conducted on the effects of this kind of fear mongering on consumer behavior and well-being. While previous research identified that consumers have a greater desire to acquire luxury products, I also find that product disposition decisions are affected by mortality salience threats. Underlying these decisions is a temporary creation of an altered conception of the self – caused by a disruption of self-concept stability through a mortality salience threat. The current research serves as a first step in examining how threats can disrupt materialistic consumers' self-concept and thereby potentially decrease consumers' well-being. I also demonstrate that self-affirmation can protect the consistency of consumers' self-concepts.

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CHAPTER FOUR

THE LUCKY MAN'S DILEMMA: HOW DO CONSUMERS

CHOOSE WHEN BEING INVITED

Abstract

Four studies are presented to investigate the influence of an invitation and self-construal on consumers' choices. Specifically, I demonstrate that when consumers with independent self-construal are invited, they tend to choose a more expensive item as compared to when they pay for an item themselves. In contrast, consumers with an interdependent self-construal choose a less expensive item when they are invited as compared to when not invited. I demonstrate that the invitation to select a gift for oneself activates different goals depending on consumers' levels of independent versus interdependent self-construal. Whereas an invitation leads those with an independent self- construal to focus on achieving personal gains, those with an interdependent self-construal seek to present themselves as sensitive and normatively appropriate. I finally investigate a boundary condition for the proposed effects: When consumers are able to satisfy their goals before selecting the gift for themselves, the effects will cease to exist.

INTRODUCTION

Imagine the following situation: A consumer goes out for dinner with a friend. Before browsing through the menu, the friend announces that s/he will take care of the bill that night and pay for the consumer's meal. While examining the menu, the consumer encounters a variety of options, each one providing a different amount of anticipated pleasure or indulgence, which are assumed to be correlated with the option's price. Which meal will the consumer choose? Will s/he choose an expensive dish to maximize pleasure without having to pay the monetary price? Or, will s/he make a modest choice by selecting an inexpensive option in order to appear sensitive and normatively appropriate toward the donor? An invitation to a restaurant is but one example of a situation in which consumers are invited by a donor to select a gift for themselves. In many gift-giving occasions, be it Christmas, birthdays, weddings, graduation, or Valentine's Day, consumers are regularly asked which kind of gift they would like to receive. Given the prevalence of such situations, in the current dissertation I seek to understand how consumers make choices when they are invited to choose a gift for themselves.

Gift-giving has been studied in the consumer research literature covering many aspects of the gift-giving process (Sherry 1983), including the gift selection by the donor (Otnes, Lowrey, and Kim 1993), the donors' anxiety during the actual gift exchange (Wooten 2000), and the strengthening of social ties after the gift exchange (Ruth, Otnes, and Brunel 1999). However to date, research has only

studied gift-giving from the perspective of the donor, not from the perspective of the recipient. This is surprising because the occasions during which the recipient selects the gift to be received are quite frequent (Belk 1979; Sherry 1983). To understand the process by which gift recipients choose their gift, it is important to recognize that gift-giving is an inherently social process. Previous research identified that as such, donors try to manage interpersonal impressions through the gift-giving process (Sherry, McGrath, and Levy 1993, Wooten 2000). Those self-presentational aspects often reveal themselves by social anxiety of the donor as a result of high motivations to elicit a desired reaction in the recipient and a pessimistic outlook on the probability of succeeding (Wooten 2000). By transferring the gift selection task to the recipient, the donor can avoid the potential failure of the gift-giving exchange. At the same time, the self-presentational concerns may be transferred to the recipient.

I propose that the gift recipient then faces the dilemma of pursuing one of two conflicting goals: The goal to maximize pleasure and the goal to behave normatively appropriate. Which of the two goals dominates may depend on the gift recipient's sense of self in relation to others. On the one hand, assuming that the ultimate goal of decision-making is to maximize benefits and pleasure, while at the same time minimizing costs, making all the options available at zero cost and emphasizing a focus on the self, the consumer should choose the most pleasurable and indulgent option. On the other hand, emphasizing a focus on the self in relation to the donor, a consumer may be motivated to make a more modest choice in terms of the monetary cost of the gift. In the latter instance, such a

choice enables the gift recipient to signal to the donor that s/he is sensitive and behaves normatively appropriate. Based on this reasoning I argue that self-construal theory (Markus and Kitayama 1991) can explain which of the two goals consumers choose to pursue when they are invited to choose a gift for themselves.

According to self-construal theory, consumers with an independent self-construal emphasize autonomy and uniqueness, while those with an interdependent self-construal emphasize interpersonal connections and shared characteristics. Further, self-construal has important implications for the activation of goals (Holland et. Al 2004). Consumers with an independent self-construal are more likely to pursue goals that help them to distinguish themselves from others, often focusing on gains in situations (Holmberg, Markus, Herzog, and Franks 1997; Lee, Aaker and Gardner (2000). In contrast, consumers with interdependent selves are more likely to pursue goals that help them to fit in with others, focusing on the fulfillment of social roles and the avoidance of social mishaps (Lee et. al. 2000).

Extending this to the present research, I argue that consumers with an independent self-construal will make more indulgent choices (i.e., they will choose a more expensive item), as they will be focused on gains and benefits to themselves, when they are invited to choose a gift as compared to when they are not invited. In contrast, consumers with an interdependent self-construal are expected to make more modest choices (i.e., they will choose a less expensive item) as they will be concerned with behaving normatively appropriate and will want to avoid making a negative impression on the donor, when they are invited

to choose a gift as compared to what they would choose if they were to purchase the item for themselves.

Using the country in which the study is conducted as a proxy for self-construal in study 1, and an individual difference scale measuring chronic self-construal in study 2, I demonstrate that self-construal predicts whether consumers make an indulgent or a modest choice (as implied by the price of the chosen option) when they are invited. In the final two studies I manipulate self-construal and demonstrate that self-presentational concerns mediate this effect for interdependent consumers (study 3), and that the effect is driven by differential goal activation for consumers with an independent vs. interdependent self-construal (study 4), and test a boundary condition for the effects (study 4).

This research contributes to our understanding of gift-giving in a number of ways. First, it extends previous research on gift-giving which has primarily focused on gift selection by the donor and the underlying processes (e.g., Otnes, Lowrey, and Kim 1993; Sherry 1983; Sherry, McGrath, and Levy 1993, Wooten 2000). It achieves this by investigating the process by which gift recipients choose gifts for themselves and by exploring an important factor that moderates the effect of an invitation on gift choice - self-construal. I demonstrate that when consumers are invited to select their own gift as compared to when they pay for the item themselves, those with an independent self-construal make a more indulgent choice, while those with an interdependent self-construal make a more modest choice. Second, it explores the underlying processes for the observed effects. I argue that differential goals are activated for consumers with an independent and

interdependent self-construal. Specifically, I argue that a goal of achieving gains and maximizing pleasure is activated for consumers with an independent self-construal, whereas a self-presentational goal of appearing sensitive and behaving normatively appropriate is activated for consumers with an interdependent self-construal. Third, I test a boundary condition for the interactive impact of an invitation to choose one's own gift and self-construal on the monetary value of the gift that consumers' choose for themselves. I argue that when consumers have an opportunity to satisfy their respective goals of indulgence or self-presentation through an alternative means, the patterns I observed in the previous studies cease to exist.

In the next section, I review the literature on gift-giving, self-construal, and self-presentation. I then report the findings of four studies that systematically test my theorizing. I conclude with a general discussion of the findings, highlighting implications and offering directions for future research.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Gift-giving. Gift-giving is a cornerstone of cooperative human societies; it transcends through all aspects of culture, becoming a "total social fact that affects the economic, legal, political, and religious spheres of society and fulfills important functions in their development and continuity" (Giesler 2007, p. 283). Gifts help to create and maintain social bonds, they can be used to form new relationships as well as to change or maintain old ones. Consumer research on

gift-giving has largely built on Sherry's (1983) model of gift-giving (Belk and Coon 1993; Fischer and Arnold 1990; Garner and Wagner 1991; Giesler 2007; Joy 2001; Lowrey, et. al. 2004; Otnes et. al. 1993; Ruth et. al. 1999; Wooten 2000). In his model, Sherry (1983) describes three stages of the gift-giving process: gestation, prestation, and reformulation. The gestation stage incorporates all behavior antecedent to the actual gift exchange. Sherry (1983) describes this stage as the "prelude to creating or strengthening a social bond" (p. 164). During the process of gift selection, the donor considers aspects of the self and the other in order to find an appropriate gift. The actual gift exchange occurs during the prestation stage. Donor and recipient are both attentive to the time and place and mode of transaction. The partners monitor each other's reactions to infer the internal response to the gift. In the reformulation stage, the relationship is realigned. Attention is focused on the disposition of the gift. Whether and how the gift is consumed, put on display, put away for storage, or even exchanged or rejected can affect whether the social bond between the donor and the gift recipient is strengthened, affirmed, attenuated, or severed (Sherry 1983).

During all three stages of the gift-giving process, self-presentational concerns arise (Sherry 1983, Sherry et. al. 1993; Wooten 2000). Sherry, McGrath, and Levy (1993, p.237) state that "gifts create internal stress by requiring an examination of the canon of propriety and a negotiation of identity." During gift selection, concerns arise about the appropriateness of the various gift options, and what meaning each of them communicates to the gift recipient about the donor's intentions and perceptions of the other (Sherry 1983). In the prestation stage, self-

114

presentational concerns exist for both the donor and the recipient. The donor often carefully chooses the time and place of the gift exchange, with each of these aspects communicating something about the donor's intentions. In addition, the "imagined" self-presentational aspects from the gestation stage now become reality. During the reformulation stage, self-presentational concerns are mostly present for the gift recipient, as her reaction to the gift and the manner in which s/he disposes of the gift communicates meaning to the donor.

Previous research has exclusively treated the person selecting the gift as the donor. However, this does not reflect all forms of the gift-giving process. From early on, young children perform the yearly ritual of writing to Santa, endowing him with the unlimited capacity to fulfill requests for toys and other personal gifts (Richardson and Simpson 1982). Once the discrepancy between myth and observed reality results in the discovery that there is no Santa, children continue to voice their Christmas wishes to their parents. This voicing of gift wishes continues into adulthood, for example when to-be-married couples circulate lists of suggested presents and use gift registries, or when partners in a relationship voice their wishes for Christmas, birthdays, or other special events. In many cases, the gift donor actually asks the recipient about her wishes, be it in the examples described above, or in a situation as simple as an invitation to dinner, when the gift recipient has to decide on a particular item from the menu.

If it is up to the recipient to choose the gift, many of the gift donor's self-presentational concerns during the gift selection process are diminished. The donor may then transfer most of these concerns to the recipient. For example, in

the case of inviting somebody out for dinner, the donor may have to negotiate about the particular restaurant to go to. However, once in the restaurant, self-presentational concerns transfer to the recipient. Will s/he choose an expensive or a moderately priced dish? Will s/he order an appetizer and/or desert, or does an entrée suffice? What is being communicated to the donor by the choice of dish? Does the recipient take advantage of the donor's generosity? Those questions point out two conflicting goals that the gift recipient could pursue: Will s/he maximize pleasure by choosing a more expensive item, or will s/he aim to appear sensitive and normatively appropriate by choosing a rather inexpensive item?

Goal Conflict. A goal conflict describes the simultaneous arousal of two incompatible goals within an individual. Lewin (1935) identified three types of goal conflict. First, an approach-approach conflict describes situations in which individuals have to decide which of two desirable goals to pursue. Second, an avoidance-avoidance conflict describes situations in which individuals have to decide between two undesirable options. Third, goals often have positive and negative features. In an approach-avoidance conflict, the individual is both attracted and repelled by the same goal. In a double-approach-avoidance conflict, an individual is faced with choosing between two goals, each of which has attracting and repelling aspects. A situation in which consumers are invited to select a gift for themselves can arouse such a double-approach-avoidance conflict. In particular, consumers can choose a very attractive and expensive gift but doing so runs the risk of potentially upsetting the donor and violating a social norm.

Conversely, consumers can live up to the normative expectations and fulfill their social obligations by choosing a modest and inexpensive gift at the cost of forgoing personal pleasure.

Prior research that has examined how people resolve a goal conflict has argued that when consumers are aware of the competing goals, they may consider the trade-offs between the goals when making a decision (Dhar and Simonson 1999), or they may simply consciously decide to pursue a specific goal (Chartrand et. al. 2008). A goal-conflict may also be resolved through the nonconscious activation of one of the goals. Prior research has demonstrated that specific cues in the environment such as words or brand names, can nonconsciously activate goals, such as impression formation and memorization goals (Chartrand and Bargh 1996), thrift and prestige goals (Chartrand et. al 2008), or achievement, helping and understanding goals (Fitzsimons and Bargh 2003). In addition, individual differences can influence the activation of goals. One individual difference that has been shown to affect goal activation is self-construal (Lalwani and Shavitt 2009; Lee et. al. 2000). Individuals with an independent self-construal were found to pursue goals that bolster their selves, whereas those with an interdependent self-construal showed a tendency to present themselves as socially sensitive. I propose that self-construal also has an important influence on which goal gift recipients pursue when they are invited to select a gift for themselves.

Self-Construal Theory. Self-construal theory (Markus and Kitayama 1991) contrasts independent and interdependent self-construal as ways in which

117

individuals construe their selves in relation to others. In general, people with an independent self-construal place a high emphasis on autonomy and uniqueness. They strive to develop and express distinctive values, needs, rights, capacities and preferences. Conversely, people with an interdependent self-construal emphasize interpersonal connections and shared characteristics. They view themselves with respect to other group members and as "part of an encompassing social relationship and recognize that one's behavior is determined on the thoughts, feelings, and actions of others" (Markus and Kitayama 1991, p. 227).

A number of studies have investigated how self-construal affects consumption behaviors and decision-making (e.g., Aaker and Maheswaran 1997; Hoshino-Browne et. al. 2005; Iyengar and Lepper 1999; Kim and Markus 1999; Mandel 2003; Zhang and Shrum 2007). These studies have found that consumers with an independent (interdependent) self-construal are less (more) risk-seeking in financial choices, but less (more) risk-averse in social choices (Mandel 2003); less (more) motivated to engage in a task that others chose for them, but more (less) motivated to engage in tasks that they chose for themselves (Iyengar and Lepper 1999); experience more dissonance after choosing for themselves (versus for an in-group other) (Hoshino-Browne et. Al.2005); prefer things that deviate from (conform to) what others choose (Kim and Markus 1999); and less (more) likely to include others' opinions into their own (Aaker and Maheswaran 1997). These findings suggest that the activated self-construal can have important effects on consumers' decisions.

Self-construal has also been studied in the domain of gift-giving and has revealed diverging norms for the gift-giving process in independent cultures as compared to interdependent cultures (e.g., Green and Alden 1988; Joy 2001). In general, people in interdependent compared to independent cultures seem to give gifts on more occasions to a broader spectrum of people as gifts are one important means to manage their social roles and to solidify their relationships (Green and Alden 1988). Further, from the perspective of the gift donor, consumers with an independent (interdependent) self-construal are less (more) attentive to the choice set when choosing for others, like items chosen for them by others less (more), and are more (less) attentive to the choice set when choosing for themselves and like those items more (less) (Pöhlmann, et. al. 2007). The implications of the two types of self-construal on human behavior go far beyond consumer decision-making and gift-giving. The activated self-construal has important effects on self-evaluations (Staple and Koomen 2001), judgments and values (Gardner, Gabriel, and Lee 1999), and information processing (Hannover and Kuhnen 2004).

Of particular relevance is that self-construal can also have an important effect on the activation of goals (Holland et. al. 2004). Lee, Aaker and Gardner (2000) suggest that consumers with an independent self-construal are more likely to pursue the goals of being positively distinct from others, emphasizing achievement and autonomy. Those consumers aim to positively distinguishing themselves from others, focusing on positive features of the self and gains in situations (Holmberg et. al. 1997; Lee et. al. 2000). In contrast, the goal of consumers with interdependent selves on the other hand can be described as

119

harmoniously fitting in with others, emphasizing the fulfillment of social roles and obligations and trying to avoid social mishaps (Lee et. al. 2000). An activated independent or interdependent self-construal enhances a person's readiness to present her/himself in line with these goals. It is important to note, that both distinct types of self-construal co-exist within every individual (Gardner, Gabriel, and Lee 1999). As such, both goals I described in the previous section can be active at the same time. Which of the two goals is pursued is determined by the self-construal that is salient at a given time.

Building on this, considering an invitation to select one's own gift and self-construal together, I predict that consumers with an independent self-construal will make a more indulgent choice when they are invited as compared to when they are not invited. In contrast, consumers with an interdependent self-construal will make a more modest choice in order to appear more sensitive and behave normatively appropriate when invited as compared to when they are not invited. More formally,

H1a: Consumers with an independent self-construal will make a more indulgent (i.e. a more expensive) choice when they are invited (vs. not invited).

H1b: Consumers with an interdependent self-construal will make a more moderate (i.e., a less expensive) choice when invited (vs. not invited).

Goals.

I argue that two types of goals are related to the two types of self-construal: The self-presentational goal of behaving normatively appropriate for consumers with an interdependent self-construal, and the goal to maximize pleasure for consumers with an independent self-construal. These two goals will be discussed in more detail in the subsequent sections.

Self-presentation. As implied in the previous theorization, I expect that for consumers with interdependent selves, self-presentational concerns will mediate the predictions. Goffman (1959) discusses the presentation of the self in terms of theatrical analogies. According to this dramaturgical perspective, social interaction is akin to a theatrical performance. People are thought to gauge the responses of behavior and alter it to create a desired impression for an audience. As Goffman (1959) states, "when an individual plays a part he implicitly requests his observers to take seriously the impression that is fostered before them. They are asked to believe that the character they see actually possesses the attributes he appears to possess…". People try to maintain this impression by consistently acting out these behaviors. The particular self-presentational behaviors that are acted out by a person are often activated automatically by situational and audience related cues in the environment, but also by one's personality and one's own interpersonal goals (Jones 1990, Schlenker 1980, Schlenker and Pontari 2000).

Self-presentation theories state that people's behavior in the presence of others is strongly influenced by a fundamental goal to avoid censure and to seek positive evaluation (e.g., Baumeister 1982, Leary and Kowalsky 1990). People

strategically behave in ways they know the audience favors but often do not engage in these behaviors as long as they are anonymous (Deutsch and Gerard 1955, Leary and Kowalski 1990). Self-presentation as such can be seen as being tied to the identity of the particular self being presented, and to the norms of the audience (Spears and Lea 1994). In addition to the interpersonal aspects, self-presentation is an important part of an individual's goal to establish a desired self-concept. Both, the interpersonal and intrapersonal effects of self-presentation, help to create a self-concept that is in line with a person's goals and values (Leary and Kowalski 1990, Lelwani and Shavitt 2009). Many consumption behaviors can be seen as an effort to define and present the self to others. Products and brands are chosen to communicate a given identity or to communicate a wanted meaning (Thompson and Hirschman 1995). I argue that self-presentational tendencies are more likely to be observed in consumers with an interdependent self-construal.

An interdependent self-construal is associated with a general motivation to be connected to others and thus to avoid social disapproval (e.g., Kim and Markus 1999). Lalwani and Shavitt (2009) show that interdependent consumers are thus more likely to be striving towards presenting themselves to others as being sensitive and normatively appropriate. As such, I predict that when consumers with an interdependent self-construal are invited to choose a gift for themselves (as compared to not invited), their self-presentational concerns will be high and thus, they will make a choice that is more modest. More formally:

H2a: For consumers with an interdependent self-construal, the effect of invitation and self-construal on choice will be mediated by their goal of self-presentation.

Indulgence. The focus on the self in relation to others as described for consumers with an interdependent self-construal is not as prevalent in those with an independent self-construal. Consumers with an independent self-construal tend to be concerned with being self-reliant. As a result they form preferences by looking inward (i.e., their own attitudes and attributes) and by forming preferences to enhance the self and to maintain autonomy and uniqueness. One of the consequences of such self-enhancing strategies is an increased likelihood for egocentric behavior (Mikulincer and Shaver 2005). Egocentrism is defined as a strong focus on the self with only an incomplete perception, understanding, and interpretation of the world in terms of other people.

The ultimate goal of consumption decisions can be described as trying to maximize benefits while at the same time minimizing costs. When consumers are invited, the monetary component of the cost falls away. While consumers with an interdependent self-construal focus on the social cost of choosing a normatively inappropriate option, consumers with an independent self-construal are not likely to take the perceptions of the donor into account when making their decisions. I therefore predict that when a consumer with an independent self-construal is invited to choose a gift for her-/himself, her/his hedonic goal of maximizing pleasure through the chosen gift will mediate the predictions. More formally:

H2b: For consumers with an independent self-construal, the effect of invitation and self-construal on choice will be mediated by their goal to maximize pleasure through the chosen option.

Four studies are presented that test the hypotheses.

STUDY 1

Study 1 was designed to test H1a, namely that consumers with an independent self-construal will take advantage of a situation in which they are given the opportunity to choose their own gift. This study was a field study, conducted in a restaurant in North America. Prior research has identified that North Americans tend to have an independent self-construal (Fiske et. al. 1998). Thus, it is hypothesized that in this context those consumers who are not paying for their own meal will be more likely to choose an expensive item than consumers who pay for their own meal.

Design. The hypothesis was tested using a one-factor (Invitation: yes/no) between subjects design. The dependent variable was the price of the dish that participants chose.

Participants. Ninety restaurant patrons participated in the study.

Materials and Procedure. The study took place in a restaurant during lunch hours. In order to avoid couples who share the same bank account, only restaurant patrons that arrived in pairs of the same gender were selected as potential study participants. Patrons were greeted by the server and directed to their tables. After a short wait the server came and brought the menus. Patrons were given a few minutes to decide on the items they were going to choose. The server then returned to take their orders. After bringing the orders to the kitchen, the server returned to the table and asked the patrons if they were willing to participate in a short survey in exchange for a $10 gift certificate. If both patrons in a party agreed, each was given a survey and a pen and they were left alone for a few minutes to complete the survey. In the survey patrons were asked to indicate what item they ordered and whether they were paying for their own meal. If participants indicated that they were not paying for their own meal, they were also asked whether the other person offered to pay before or after their orders were taken.

After returning the survey, participants were thanked and given the gift certificate. Once participants paid for their meal, the server attached a copy of the receipt to the surveys, so the item patrons ordered could be confirmed and the price of the items could be determined.

Results. Of the twenty-nine pairs of patrons in which one patron invited the other for the meal, only the responses of the invitee were included in the analysis. This was done as being a donor may result in different choices as

compared to simply paying for one's own meal without inviting another person. In addition, only invitees who indicated that they were aware of the invitation before ordering were included in the analysis. This left 49 respondents (17 of which were invited), excluding 12 respondents who were invited, but only learned so after they had ordered their meals, and 29 donors.

The data was analyzed using a t-test, comparing the prices of the chosen dishes when patrons were invited versus when patrons paid for the meal themselves.

The effects were highly significant ($t(47) = 3.807$, $p<0.001$). When participants were paying for their own meal, the average price for the meal they chose was $10.54. In contrast, when participants were invited, they chose a meal that cost on average $15.02. Finally, the average price of the donors' chosen dishes was $10.59.

Discussion

The result of the first study supports H1a. In fact, when consumers were invited for a meal, they chose an item that was on average almost 50% more expensive than the items that consumers selected when they were paying for their own meal. Of course, the study is limited by the fact that the country in which the study was conducted was used as a proxy for independent self-construal, which – while often done in cross-cultural research – will be addressed in the following studies by either measuring chronic self-construal in study 2, or by experimentally manipulating the activated self-construal in studies 3 and 4. Because the study

was only conducted in a North American restaurant, it is also not possible to draw any cultural conclusions from this study. Further limitations of the study are that the relationship status between the pairs and the occasions for going out for lunch together are unknown, and as such, the observed effects may be attributed to a number of reasons. While efforts were taken to make the pairs as similar as possible, it is conceivable that those pairs in which one person invites the other are fundamentally different than the pairs in which each patron pays for his own meal (e.g., parent/child, or employer/employee). The following three studies therefore aim to investigate the hypotheses more rigorously.

STUDY 2

The purpose of study 2 was to test H1a and H1b. While study 1 suggests that consumers with an independent self-construal are more likely to indulge when they are invited, it did not provide any information on people with an interdependent self-construal. The following study is also based on a restaurant setting; however it is scenario-based. This allows for the random assignment of participants to whether they were invited or whether they paid for their own meal. In addition, chronically accessible self-construal was assessed. It is hypothesized that consumers with an independent (interdependent) self-construal will choose a more (less) expensive item when they are invited as compared to when they have to pay for their own meal.

Design: The hypothesis was tested using a 2 (invitation: yes vs. no) x (self-construal) between subjects experimental design. The dependent measure was the price of a dish participants chose from a multi-item menu.

Participants: One-hundred respondents (males = 34, females = 66, average age = 31.3) from an online consumer research panel participated in the study in exchange for a $5 honorarium.

Procedure. Participants were sent a recruitment email that provided some general information about the study and their honorarium. Upon following a link in the email, participants were directed to the actual study. First, participants were informed that the study required them to complete a hypothetical scenario. They were then asked to provide the name of a friend. The scenario began on the next screen. In particular, the scenario described a situation in which the participant goes to a restaurant with the friend s/he previously indicated. To achieve the *invitation* manipulation in the *yes* condition participants read "*Before you start browsing the menu, xxx announces that s/he will take care of the bill and that you are invited tonight*" while in the *no* condition they read "*Before you start browsing the menu, you agree that each of you will pay for his/her own dinner tonight*". Participants then continued to the next screen on which they encountered a menu. The menu contained four vegetarian dishes, four chicken dishes, and four seafood dishes which were presented in clusters. The presentation order of the three categories was randomized as was the presentation order of the four dishes within each category. In addition, each dish was randomly assigned a price (a

random dollar amount between $10 and $18 plus 95 cents). Participants indicated their choice by clicking on a button at the end of each menu line.

They then were instructed to complete the self-construal scale (Singelis 1994) indicating their agreement with the items in a 7-point Likert-type format (1 – strongly disagree, 7 – strongly agree). Some sample questions of the 12-item subscale that assesses independence (α=0.779) include: "I am comfortable with being singled out for praise or rewards.", "I enjoy being unique and different from others in many respects.", or "I try to do what is best for me, regardless of how that might affect others.", while examples of items of the 12-item subscale that assesses interdependence (α=0.764) include: "I respect people who are modest about themselves.", or "My happiness depends on the happiness of those around me." The two indices for the subscales were calculated individually and the index for interdependence was then subtracted from the index for independence to form an overall index for self-construal (i.e., highly positive values represent an independent self-construal, while negative values represent an interdependent self-construal; see Ferraro et. Al. 2008; Pohlmann et al. 2007). To establish that reported self-construal was not influenced by the invitation manipulation, a linear regression model was conducted. Findings revealed no significant effects ($t(98)$=1.58, p>0.1, β=0.16). Finally, participants indicated their age and gender. Since these two demographic variables did not predict significant variance in any of the dependent measures in this study and subsequent studies, they are not discussed further.

Results. The data was analyzed using a linear regression model with the price of the food choice as the dependent variable and invitation, self-construal, and their interaction as the independent variables. A significant two-way interaction between invitation and self-construal ($t(96)=2.30$, $p<0.05$, $\beta=0.45$; see figure 4-1) was found. To probe the nature of the interaction, simple slope tests were conducted following the procedures outlined by Aiken and West (1991). Simple slopes were examined at independent/interdependent levels of self-construal (one standard deviation above/below the mean). Results revealed that consistent with H1a, when consumers with an independent self-construal are invited, they tend to choose more expensive items as compared to when they are not invited ($t(96)=1.87$, $p<0.1$, $\beta=0.83$). Consistent with H1b, results also revealed that consumers with an interdependent self-construal choose a less expensive dish when they are invited as compared to when they are not invited ($t(96)=2.27$, $p<0.05$, $\beta=-0.98$). Further analysis shows that when invited, the difference in the price of dish consumers with an independent vs. interdependent self-construal select becomes highly significant ($t(96)=3.54$, $p<0.001$, $\beta=0.45$). However, there is no significant difference in the price of dish consumers with an independent vs. interdependent self-construal select when they are not invited ($t(96)=0.03$, $p>0.5$, $\beta=-0.01$).
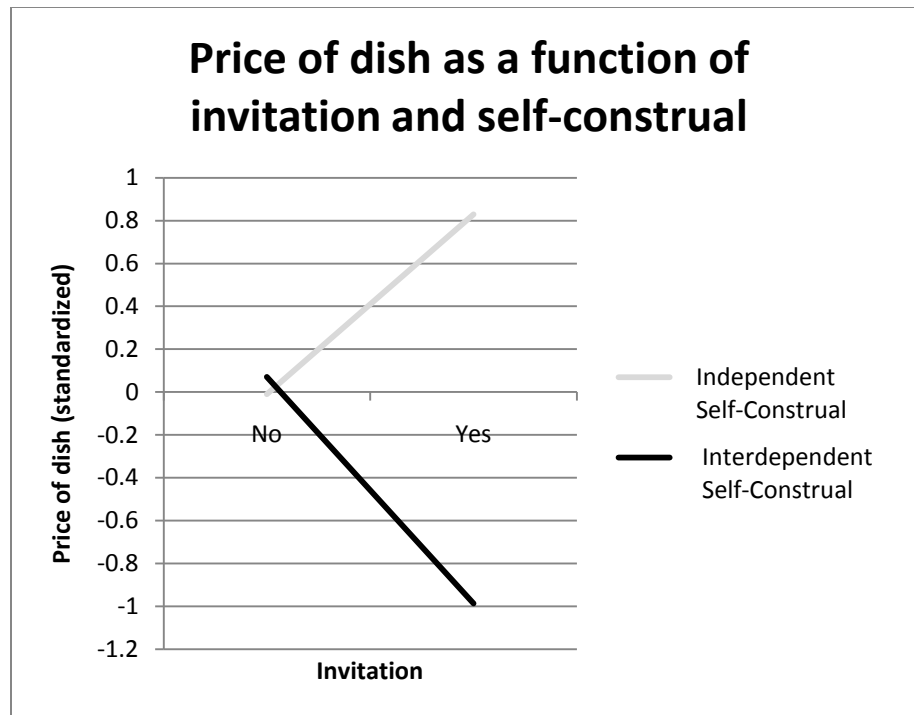
Figure 4-1: The figure shows the interactive effect of invitation and self-construal on the price of the chosen dish. As can be seen, consumers with an independent self-construal select a more expensive dish when invited vs. not invited. In contrast, those consumers with an interdependent self-construal select a less expensive dish when invited vs. not invited.

Discussion. This scenario-based study indicates that self-construal plays

an important role for consumers when they were choosing a gift for themselves. I

found that consumers with an independent self-construal tend to indulge when

they are invited (as compared to when they had to pay for the meal) by choosing

an item that is more expensive. In contrast, consumers with an interdependent

self-construal make a more modest choice when they are invited (vs. not invited)

by selecting an option that was less. Of course, scenario-based research has

limitations as it is possible that the way consumers think they behave may be

fundamentally different from the way they actually behave. However, this

approach may have provided a more stringent assessment of consumers' choice in

the context of being invited, as neither the self-presentational goal of behaving normatively appropriate, nor the goal of maximizing pleasure should be activates as strongly in an anonymous internet-based study, as in a real consumption situation with co-consumers present. Since reservations about scenario-based studies exist, the hypotheses will be tested in real consumption situations in the remaining two studies.

STUDY 3

In the next study I aim to build on study 2's findings and achieve this in a number of ways. First, I test my hypothesis in a controlled laboratory environment involving real consumption behavior. In addition, I directly manipulate self-construal rather than rely on the self-construal scale (Singelis 1994). I further seek support for the theoretical framework by testing H2a which proposes that for consumers with an interdependent self-construal the observed effect of self-construal and invitation on consumers' choice is mediated by self-presentational concerns, and H2b which predicts that for consumers with an independent self-construal the observed effect is mediated by their goal to maximize pleasure. Finally, I also seek to rule out an alternative theoretical explanation for H2a - consumers' empathy with the donor.

Empathy has been referred to in the previous literature in two distinct ways. First, empathy has been viewed as a person's affective reactivity to others, that is, a person's ability to experience the emotions of others (Davis 1996,

Mehrabian and Epstein 1972, Stotland 1969). A second account of empathy reflects an individual's capacity of cognitive role-taking, or "the imaginative transposing of oneself into the thinking, feeling, and acting of another." (Dymond 1949).

Given that consumers with an interdependent self-construal are generally motivated to feel connected to others and they define themselves as part of a social relationship and recognize that their behavior is influenced by the thoughts, feelings, and actions of others (Markus and Kitayama 1991), it is possible that the effect observed in study 2 is driven by a higher level of empathy among consumers with an interdependent self-construal rather than differences in self-presentational concerns.

Specifically, in a situation in which interdependent consumers are invited, this connectedness could reveal itself through higher levels of empathy, such as the invitee experiencing the donors 'pain' when having to pay more for the gift, but also in the invitee thinking about how it would feel for the donor to have to pay more (less) for a gift. Thus, I will test empathy as an alternative explanation for the findings in study 3.

Design. The hypothesis was tested using a 2 (Invitation: yes/no) x 2 (Self-construal: independent vs. interdependent) between-subjects design. The dependent variable was the price of the item selected.

Participants. One hundred undergraduate students (males = 41, females = 59, average age = 24.19) participated in the study in exchange for an honorarium of $10.

Materials and Procedure. Participants were run individually. The first part of the study was conducted in a small room in which the self-construal and the invitation manipulations took place. The second part of the study took place in a computer-mediated environment in which participants were asked to respond to a survey. Upon arrival at the laboratory, the experimenter introduced himself and explained that the study consisted of multiple unrelated tasks.

Self-construal manipulation: Participants took a seat at a table in the laboratory to start the first survey. The survey contained the self-construal manipulation (Mandel 2003, Trafimow, Triandis, and Goto 1991). This manipulation required participants to read a short story. For both conditions, the story started as follows:

"Sostoras, a warrior in ancient Sumer, was largely responsible for the success of Sargon I in conquering all of Mesopotamia. As a result, he was rewarded with a small kingdom of his own to rule.

About 10 years later, Sargon I was conscripting warriors for a new war. Sostoras was obligated to send a detachment of soldiers to aid Sargon I. He had to decide who to put in command of the detachment. After thinking about it for a long time, Sostoras eventually decided on Tiglath who was a …"

In the independent condition, the story then continued: "…talented general. This appointment had several advantages. Sostoras was able to make an

134

excellent general indebted to him. This would solidify Sostoras's hold on his own dominion. In addition, the very fact of having a general such as Tiglath as his personal representative would greatly increase Sostoras's prestige. Finally, sending his best general would be likely to make Sargon I grateful. Consequently, there was the possibility of getting rewarded by Sargon I."

In the interdependent condition, the story continued with: "…member of his family. This appointment had several advantages. Sostoras was able to show his loyalty to his family. He was also able to cement their loyalty to him. In addition, having Tiglath as the commander increased the power and prestige of the family. Finally, if Tiglath performed well, Sargon I would be indebted to the family."

Finally, after reading the story, all participants answered the question "Do you admire Sostoras? Circle the appropriate answer." The possible answers were yes, no, and not sure.

After completing this questionnaire, participants were told that momentarily they would be asked to evaluate television commercials and that because I was interested in how the purchase and consumption of snack foods can influence consumers' evaluation of commercials, they would have a chance to select some snacks. They were then instructed to go to a snack booth which was set up in the laboratory and select which snack items they would like to purchase. All the snack items were offered at a substantial discount compared to their typical retail price. Participants were informed that the amount they spent on the snack items would be deducted from their honorarium at the end of the study.

There were 17 different snacks (sweet and savory) and drinks available, including small chocolate bites, granola bars, 100 calorie bags of chips and popcorn, as well as 200ml servings of orange and apple juice. The prices of the snacks ranged from $0.10 - $0.30.

Invitation manipulation: When the participant went to the snack booth, the invitation manipulation was achieved. In the *yes* condition, before selecting the snacks, the experimenter announced to the participant that he will pay for the snacks. Specifically, the experimenter announced: "Please don't worry about money – I'll take care of that and pay for the snacks for you with my own money. So the snacks are a gift. Just select whichever snacks you like." In the *no* condition, the participant was simply asked to select her/his snacks.

Dependent variable: The experimenter noted the price as well as the number of items that participants selected. The experimenter then directed the participant to the second room in which s/he completed the remainder of the study on a computer.

First, in order to assess self-presentational concerns, participants were instructed to think back to when they were deciding which snacks to select at the shopping booth. They were then asked five modified items using seven-point scales (1 - not at all; 7 – extremely) based on the fear of negative evaluation scale (Leary 1983). The questions were: "I worried about what the research assistant would think of me even when I know it doesn't make any difference", "I was afraid that the research assistant would not approve of me", "I was afraid that the research assistant would find fault with me", "I worried about what kind of

impression I made", and "I may have been too concerned with what the research assistant might have thought of me". The items were combined to form an overall index for self-presentational concern (α=0.89). They then answered eight questions using seven-point scales (1 - not at all; 7 – extremely) to assess how the degree to which their snack choice was based on a motive to maximize pleasure. The items were: "I chose the snack(s) that appealed the most to me", "I tried not to choose the most expensive item, even if that meant not choosing my favorite snack(s)", "I chose the snack(s) that I expected to taste the best", "I chose the best snack(s), regardless of its/their price", "While I like the snack(s) I chose, it was not my favorite from the selection", "I didn't think much about choosing the best snack(s)", "I chose the snack(s) I knew I would enjoy the most", and "I chose my snack(s) randomly, not worrying much about whether I like it/them the most". The items were combined to form an overall index for maximizing pleasure (α=0.77).

Participants then completed twenty-two items to assess their empathetic reaction towards the experimenter (Batson 1991; Batson et. al. 1997). The ratings were made on 7-point scales (1 – not at all; 7 – extremely). The first eleven items assessed a cognitive empathy component (e.g., whether participants could take the experimenters perspective). Examples of the items were: "I didn't think much about how the research assistant would feel.", "I tried to tune in to the feelings of the research assistant.", and "I was able to put myself in the research assistant's shoes." The items were combined to form an overall index for cognitive empathy (α=0.87). The next eleven items assessed an emotional empathy component.

137

Examples of the items were: "I felt empathetic toward the research assistant.", "I felt softhearted toward the research assistant.", and "The research assistant's feelings did affect me strongly". The items were combined to form an overall index for affective empathy (α=0.81).

As the instructions that participants received at the beginning of the study stated that participants were to watch a commercial while consuming snack foods, participants then proceeded to watch the commercial and eat their snacks in order to not raise any suspicions. After the commercials, participants completed five items about the commercial. Because the context involved food consumption, participants then completed the Restrained Eating Scale which consisted of eleven items (Herman, Polivy, Pliner, Threlkeld, and Munic 1978, α=0.49) and the Body Self-Esteem Scale consisting of six items of the state self-esteem scale (Heatherton and Polivy 1991; α=0.81).

Results:

Using a linear regression model I analyzed the impact of invitation, self-construal, and their interaction term on the total price of participant's chosen snacks. The results produced a marginally significant main effect for invitation (t(93)=1.70, β=0.13, p<0.1). More important, this effect was qualified by a significant two-way interaction between invitation and self-construal (t(93)=2.30, β =-0.25, p<0.05, see figure 4-2).

Price of selected items as a function of invitation and self-construal

Figure 4-2: The figure shows the interaction between invitation and self-construal. As can readily be seen, consumers with an independent self-construal select items with a higher overall price when invited (M=$0.83) as compared to when they are not invited (M=$0.69). In contrast, consumers with an interdependent self-construal select items with a lower overall price when invited (M=$0.48) as compared to when they are not invited (M=$0.60).

Planned contrasts were conducted to further examine the nature of the interaction. Consistent with hypothesis 1a, participants who were primed with an independent self-construal chose more expensive items when invited (vs. not invited; $t(93)=1.70$, $\beta =0.13$, $p<0.10$). Also, consistent with hypothesis 1b, those who were primed with an interdependent self-construal made less expensive choices when invited (vs. not invited; $t(93)=1.68$, $\beta =-0.25$, $p<0.10$). Furthermore, when invited, consumers with an independent self-construal select significantly more expensive items than consumers with an interdependent self-construal ($t(93)=4.51$, $\beta =0.35$, $p<0.001$). However, when not invited, no significant

difference between consumers with an independent vs. interdependent self-construal (t(93)=1.23, β =0.10, p>0.2) arose.

To examine whether self-presentational concerns underlie the effects for participants with an interdependent self-construal, mediation analysis was conducted (Baron and Kenny 1986). Regression results revealed that invitation significantly impacted the overall price of the chosen items (t(47)=2.18, β =-0.12, p<0.05) and participants' self-presentational concerns (t(47)=2.77, β =0.74, p<0.05). The inclusion of self-presentational concerns as a covariate in the original analysis for overall price of the chosen items produced a main effect for self-presentational concern (t(47)=2.01, β =-0.08, p<0.05), and, more important, the effect of invitation fell in significance (t(44)=1.83, β =-0.07, p<0.1; Sobel's test z=1.67, p<0.1). Therefore, consistent with hypothesis 2a, self-presentational concerns partially mediates the impact of *invitation* and *self-construal* on the overall price of the chosen items. The mediation is visualized in figure 4-3.

Self-presentational concerns mediate the impact of Invitation on the Price of the chosen items for consumers with an interdependent self-construal

Self-presentational Concerns

0.74*

.08*

Invitation

Price of items chosen

-.07*

Sobel Test: z=1.67, p<0.10
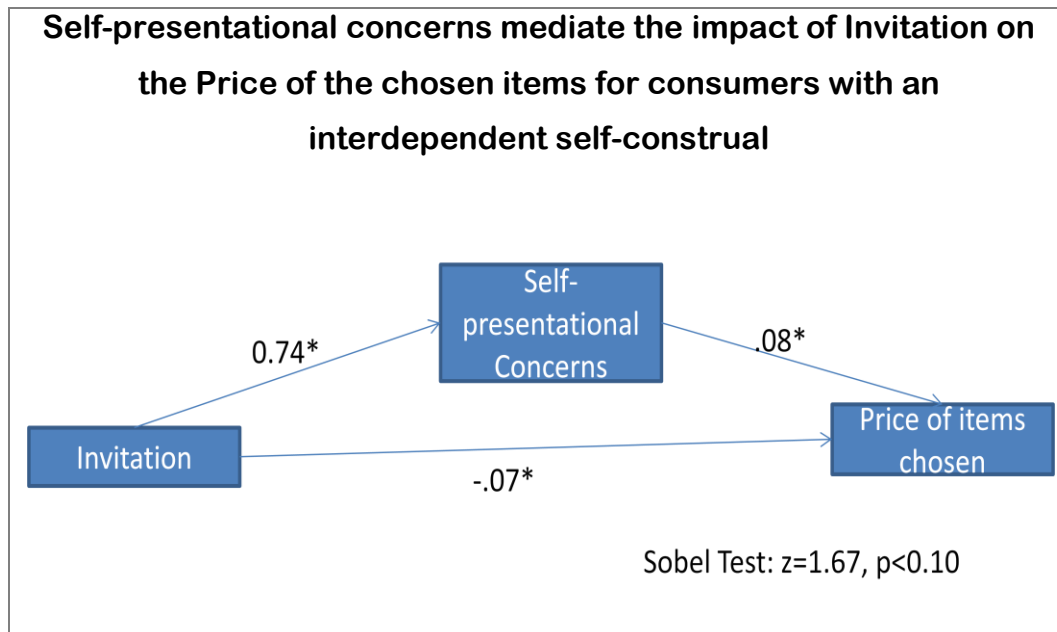
Figure 4-3: The figure shows how self-presentational concerns serve as a partial mediator for the effect of invitation on the overall price of the chosen items.

In addition, mediation analysis was conducted to assess whether the goal to maximize pleasure mediates the impact of invitation on the overall price of the chosen items for consumers with an independent self-construal. While invitation significantly affected the price of the chosen items (t(46)=2.30, β =0.133, p<0.05), there was no significant effect of invitation on participants' intention to maximize pleasure (t(46)=1.49, β =0.40, p>0.3) and the inclusion of participants' intention to maximize pleasure as a covariate in the original model did not produce a significant main effect for that variable (t(45)=0.32, β =0.02, p>0.5). Therefore participants' intention to maximize pleasure did not act as a mediator for participants with an independent self-construal.

Further, mediation analysis was conducted for participants with an interdependent self-construal to examine whether empathy serves as an alternative mediator which underlies the effect. Analysis was conducted for both, cognitive

empathy as well as affective empathy. While results revealed that *invitation* significantly affected both, cognitive empathy ($t(47)=3.81$, $\beta =0.94$, $p<0.01$), and affective empathy ($t(47)=3.30$, $\beta =0.76$, $p<0.01$), but the inclusion of cognitive or affective empathy as a covariate in the original model did not produce a significant main effect for those variables ($t(46)=0.62$, $\beta =-0.02$, $p>0.5$; and $t(46)=1.03$, $\beta =0.03$, $p>0.3$). This implies that neither cognitive, nor affective empathy can explain the effect of an *invitation* on the overall price of the chosen items for consumers with an interdependent self-construal.

Finally, restrained eating and body self-esteem were probed as covariates in the existing model. However, no significant main effect or interactions with the other variables emerged.

Discussion

In study 3 I was able to replicate the findings of the previous studies in a controlled laboratory environment. Participants who were primed with an independent self-construal made more indulgent choices, whereas those who were primed with an interdependent self-construal made more modest choices when being invited (as compared to not invited). I also identify that self-reported self-presentational concerns mediated the effect of an invitation on the overall price of the chosen items for those participants with an interdependent self-construal and that empathy cannot serve as an alternative explanation. However the goal to maximize pleasure was not identified as a mediator for those with an independent self-construal. There may be two reasons for the absence of an effect: First,

looking at the variable for maximizing pleasure, participants in all four cells report very high mean indices for their intention to select the most favorable items ($M_{\text{not invited/independent}}$=5.29, $M_{\text{invited/independent}}$=5.69, $M_{\text{not invited/interdependent}}$=5.53, $M_{\text{invited/interdependent}}$=5.38). This may indicate that those participants who selected items with a lower overall price may justify their selection to themselves in hindsight as the best possible option.

A second explanation for this finding may be that participants with an independent self-construal simply indulged by choosing more items than participants in the other groups. A generalized linear model with the number of chosen items as the dependent variable and invitation, self-construal, and their interaction term as the independent variables supports this explanation. A marginally significant two-way interaction between invitation and self-construal is realized ($z(93)$=-1.65, β =-0.37, p=0.099). When invited, consumers with an independent self-construal select significantly more items than those with an interdependent self-construal ($z(93)$=3.56, β =0.56, p<0.01). Further, those with an independent self-construal selected marginally more items when invited, as compared to when not invited ($z(93)$=1.65, β =0.37, p=0.099), ($M_{\text{not invited/independent}}$=3.63, $M_{\text{invited/independent}}$=4.54, $M_{\text{not invited/interdependent}}$=3.00, $M_{\text{invited/interdependent}}$=2.60). This indicates that a goal to maximize pleasure may be active for those with an independent self-construal. In study 4 I further examine whether the goal to maximize pleasure and self-presentational concerns drive the effects for independent/interdependent consumers.

STUDY 4

Study 4 is designed to examine whether the effect of self-construal on choice when invited is indeed driven by the activation of different goals. I hypothesized that in a situation of being invited, an independent self-construal is linked to the goal of seeking pleasure and choosing an indulgent option, whereas an interdependent self-construal is linked more to the self-presentational goal of behaving normatively appropriate and choosing a moderately priced item.

To further investigate this possibility, I draw from an experimental technique used in previous studies on goal pursuit (Chartrand et. al. 2008). The rationale behind those studies is that goals decrease in their strength once the goal has been satisfied (Atkinson and Birch 1970). Put into the context of the present research, if consumers with an independent (interdependent) self-construal had the chance to satisfy their goal of indulgence (appearing normatively appropriate) prior to an invitation, they will be less likely to choose an indulgent (modest) option when invited than those consumers who were not able to previously satisfy that goal.

> **H3:** If consumers with an independent (interdependent) self-construal are able to satisfy their goals of maximizing pleasure (self-presentation), as compared to not previously satisfying their goal, they will be less likely to select a more (less) expensive item when invited.

Design. The hypothesis was tested using a 2 (Goal satiation: yes vs. no) x 2 (Self-construal: independent vs. interdependent) between-subjects design. All participants in this study were invited. The main dependent variable was participants' choice of a pen (*expensive* vs. *inexpensive).*

Participants. One hundred and seven undergraduate students (males = 43, females = 64, average age = 24.18) participated in the study in exchange for an honorarium of $10

Procedure. The general procedure was similar to that described in study 3 with two exceptions. First, all participants were invited by the experimenter. Second, goal satiation was manipulated. In particular after completing the self-construal manipulation the goal-satiation manipulation was achieved. Participants were told that "In the next part we are interested in the effects of eating chocolate on solving logical problems. Being confronted with logical problems, many people experience increased physical tension and discomfort. Prior research has established that eating chocolate releases endorphins in the brain, which may act as stress-relievers. In addition, eating sugar may replenish self-regulatory resources, which helps people to concentrate and stay focused for a longer time."

For participants with an independent self-construal, the instructions continued: "You have been assigned to the control group, which means that your responses will be used as a baseline against which the responses of study participants who have eaten chocolate will be compared. We would therefore like to ask you to not eat any chocolate. You will have 60 seconds to solve as many problems as you can." For participants with an interdependent self-construal, the

145

instructions continued: "We would therefore like to ask you to consume as many small chocolate bites as you like. After you have eaten the chocolate, the experimenter will hand you the problem solving tasks. You will have 60 seconds to solve as many problems as you can."

The goal satiation manipulation was achieved as follows: In the *goal satiation = no* conditions, participants simply continued as outlined in the instructions of the 'chocolate task' such that participants primed with an independent self-construal proceeded without eating any chocolate, while participants primed with an interdependent self-construal proceeded with eating a small amount of chocolate. In the *goal satiation = yes* conditions, after participants finished reading the instructions, participants who were primed with an independent self-construal were told by the experimenter that some more participants were needed for the 'chocolate eating' condition, and they were asked whether they would like to eat some chocolate before solving the logical puzzles. That way, the experimenter gave participants the choice of entering into a more indulging experimental condition. Participants who were primed with an interdependent self-construal were told by the experimenter that more participants were needed for the 'control condition' and asked whether they would be willing to proceed without eating any chocolate. Thus, the experimenter gave those participants an opportunity to behave normatively appropriate (e.g., helping the experimenter) by entering into a less indulgent condition. It is important to note that all participants in the goal-satiation condition were given a free choice as to whether they are willing to switch from the 'control' to the 'chocolate eating'

146

condition (or vice versa). Those participants who consumed some chocolate were then asked to select some chocolate from a small assortment of bite sized chocolates. All participants then continued with the logical problems. They were presented with 10 number sequences (e.g., 5, 7, 9, 11, 13, 11, 9, 7, ___) and instructed to complete as many as they could within 60 seconds.

After that, participants were informed that the next task would be a writing task. All participants in this study performed this writing task with a brand new pen. Participants were informed that they would buy a pen from a small shop in the laboratory, and that the cost of the pen will be deducted from their honorarium. Participants had the choice between two pens, one somewhat more expensive than the other, but both priced substantially below retail price ($0.50 vs. $1.00). Upon arrival at the shop, the experimenter announced that he would invite participants and pay for their pen. Specifically, the experimenter stated: "These are the two pens we offer. Please don't worry about money – I'll take care of that and pay for the pen for you with my own money. So the pen is a gift. Just select whichever pen you like." Participants were then guided to the second lab in which the remainder of the study was conducted. They were first asked to write a short paragraph outlining their plans for the summer with the pen. Participants then proceeded to fill out some survey questions on the computer.

After evaluating the pen on five dimensions (not useful – useful; unsatisfactory – satisfactory; bad – good; not worth owning – worth owning; not valuable – valuable), participants were asked to fill out the 23-item PANAS scale (Watson, Clark, and Tellegen 1988) in order to test whether the consumption of

chocolate had any effects on participants' mood. Finally, gender and age was assessed and a suspicion probe was conducted. No participant recognized the link between the experimental manipulations and the hypotheses of this study.

Results:

Using a binomial generalized linear regression model I analyzed the impact of goal satiation, self-construal, and their interaction term on participant's chosen pen (expensive vs. inexpensive). The results produced a significant main effects for both goal satiation ($z(103)=2.60$, $\beta=1.58$, $p<0.01$) and self-construal ($z(103)=2.60$, $\beta=1.58$, $p<0.01$). More important, these effects were qualified by a significant two-way interaction between goal satiation and self-construal ($z(103)=-3.186$, $\beta=-2.64$, $p<0.01$, see figure 4-4). Planned contrasts were conducted to further examine the nature of the interaction. Consistent with hypothesis 3, participants who were primed with an independent self-construal chose less expensive items when they could satiate the goal of maximizing pleasure before choosing the pen (vs. no goal satiation; ($z(103)=2.60$, $\beta=1.58$, $p<0.01$). In particular, 40.74% (vs. 76.92%) of participants who were primed with an independent self-construal chose the expensive pen when they were able to satiate the goal of maximizing pleasure (vs. no goal satiation). Also, consistent with hypothesis 3, those who were primed with an interdependent self-construal chose the expensive pen more often when they could satiate the goal of behaving normatively appropriate (vs. no goal satiation; $z(103)=1.89$, $\beta=1.07$, $p<0.10$). Specifically, 66.67% (vs. 40.74%) of participants who were primed with an

interdependent self-construal chose the expensive pen when they were able to satiate the goal of behaving normatively appropriate (vs. no goal satiation). Furthermore, when no goal satiation was present, a significant difference between consumers with an independent vs. interdependent self-construal ($z(103)=2.60$, $\beta=1.58$, $p<0.01$) arose. In addition, when goal satiation is present, a marginally significant difference between consumers with an independent vs. interdependent self-construal emerged ($z(103)=1.89$, $\beta=1.07$, $p<0.10$). Figure 4 visualizes the results.
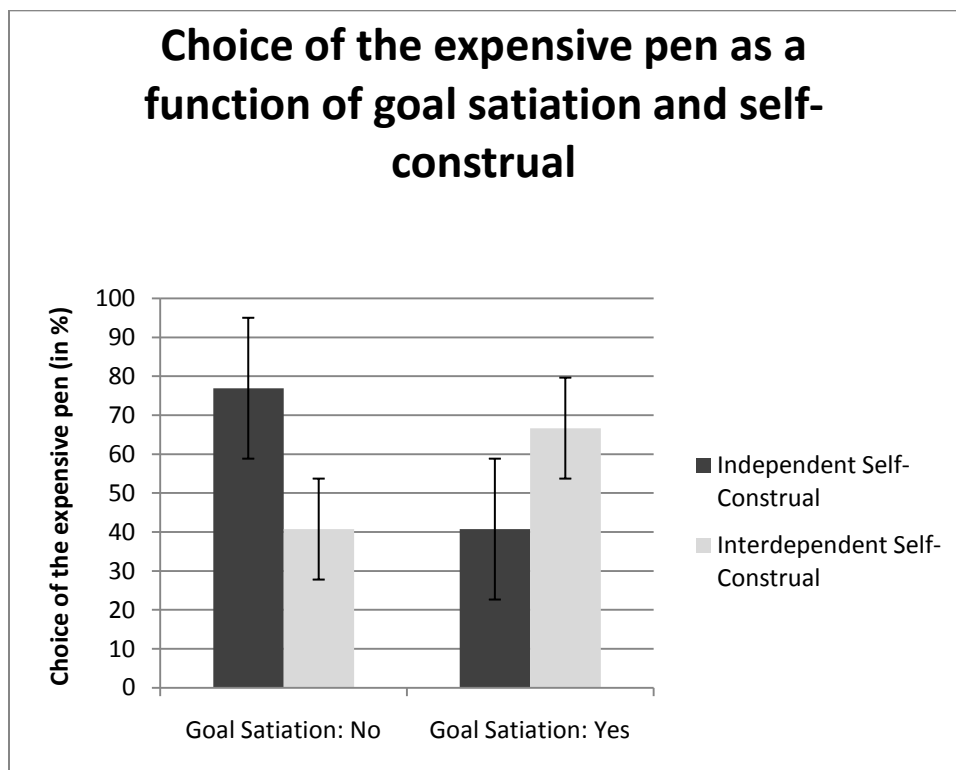
Figure 4-4: The figure shows the interactive effect of goal satiation and self-construal on consumers' choice of a pen.

Since only half of the participants in the study consumed chocolate, it is conceivable that participants' mood could be an alternative explanation for the

observed findings. However, linear regression analysis reveals that neither self-construal ($t(103)=-0.83$, $\beta=-0.11$, $p>0.3$), goal satiation ($t(103)=-1.02$, $\beta=-0.14$, $p>0.3$), nor their interaction ($t(103)=0.66$, $\beta=0.13$, $p>0.3$) have a significant effect on participants' mood.

Discussion

The findings of study 4 suggest that self-construal activates different goals, and that goals drive consumers' choices when they are invited. Those participants with an independent self-construal who were able to satiate the goal of maximizing pleasure before selecting a pen were significantly less likely to choose a more expensive pen. On the other hand, participants with an interdependent self-construal who were able to satiate the goal of appearing normatively appropriate before selecting a pen were significantly more likely to choose the expensive pen.

GENERAL DISCUSSION

In four studies I demonstrate that being invited to select one's own gift and consumers' activated self-construal have an important effect on the choices that consumers make. In the first study which was conducted in a restaurant, I found that Canadian consumers who predominantly have an independent self-construal chose significantly more expensive items when they were invited as compared to those consumers that were not invited. In the second study I

replicated the effect from study 1 and further showed that those consumers with an interdependent self-construal make significantly more moderate choices when they are invited as compared to when they are not invited.

In the third study I replicated that effect in a laboratory setting and further demonstrate that the effects I observe are partially mediated by the goal of appearing normatively appropriate and sensitive for consumers with an interdependent self-construal. I further ruled out an alternative explanation – consumers' empathy. Finally in the last study I showed that self-construal activates self-presentational and pleasure maximizing goals and that once these goals are satisfied, the effects I observed in the previous studies disappear.

This research contributes to the existing gift-giving literature in a number of ways. First, it extends the substantial body of research on gift-giving and gift selection, which has focused on the process of gift-selection from the perspective of the donor (e.g., Otnes, Lowrey, and Kim 1993; Sherry 1983; Sherry, McGrath, and Levy 1993, Wooten 2000). The present dissertation explores both, *what* kind of choices a gift recipient makes when s/he is invited to select his/her own gift, and *why* gift recipients select those gifts. To address the *what* question, I argue that self-construal plays an important role as a moderating factor, as consumers with an independent (interdependent) self-construal make a more indulgent (modest) choice when they are invited as compared to when they have to pay for the item themselves. As to the "why", I argue that the two different kinds of self-construal activate two different goals. Consumers with an independent self-construal are more likely to pursue a hedonic goal, striving for gains and

maximizing pleasure, while those consumers with an interdependent self-construal are more likely to pursue the self-presentational goal of appearing sensitive and behaving normatively appropriate. This is an important finding contributing to the literature on self-construal by illuminating the process by which self-construal can influence consumers' choice. While previous research has identified that self-construal can have an effect on goal activation (Lalwani and Shavitt 2009; Lee et. al 2000), this dissertation is the first to make the link between self-construal, goals, and choice. Finally, I identify a boundary condition for the observed effects: when consumers are able to satiate their respective goals before selecting a gift for themselves, the interactive effect of an invitation and self-construal cease to exist.

A substantial body of literature suggests the important influence of self-construal as a personality variable on a variety of consumption behaviors, such as decision-making (Iyengar and Lepper 1999; Hoshino-Brown et.al. 2005; Kim and Markus 1999) risk-taking behavior (Mandel 2002) and impulsive consumption (Zhang and Shrum 2009). This research is the first in the consumer literature linking self-construal and goal pursuit to choice. This is of particular relevance, as simple cues can be used to make one or the other type of self-construal more salient (like reading the words *I, me, mine* vs. reading *we, us, our*) and thus can also have an influence on the consumption goals being pursued and actual choice. In particular, when an independent self-construal is salient, goals focusing on achievement and personal gain will be activated and consumers are likely to engage in more self-indulging consumption activities. On the other hand, a salient

interdependent self-construal will activate self-presentational goals and result in more normatively appropriate consumption activities.

Many factors have been suggested to influence self-presentational strategies, such as one's familiarity with the audience (Tice et al. 1995). When presenting to strangers, self-presentational strategies tend to be more self-bolstering whereas self-presentational strategies with friends tend to be more modest. Future research could address how the relationship between donor and gift recipient impacts gift selection. Other variables of interest that fall into the same realm are whether the donor uses his own money, or an expense account (for example faculty dinner with a job candidate), but also the comparative wealth between donor and gift recipient. While the self-presentational goals of consumers with interdependent selves may be activated and influence their choices in all such situations, consumers with an independent self-construal may be differentially influenced by such situation. For example the job candidate pursuing the 'superior' goal of getting the job may behave normatively appropriate as well. Also, knowing that a donor is short on money may make it less likely for consumers with an independent self-construal to indulge. Further research could examine how comparative wealth and the source of the money can influence consumers' selection when they are being invited.

Further, one important element of gift-giving systems is reciprocity (Sherry 1983), that is, the gift recipient will return a gift to the donor at a later occasion. An interesting research question would be to examine how the understanding of the reciprocity of a gift exchange will influence recipients'

choice when they are invited by the donor to select their own gift. I would not expect the observed effect to change for consumers with an interdependent self-construal, as the normatively appropriate thing to do would still be to make a modest choice. Consumers with an independent self-construal on the other hand may not be as indulgent in their selection as this may backfire once they are the donor at a later point in time.

Another interesting route for future researchers would be to investigate how the gift selection by the recipient influences the impression of the recipient to the donor. Within Sherry's (1983) framework of the gift-giving process, this impression would have an important effect on the relationship realignment in the *reformulation stage*. Some questions that can be addressed here are whether donors with an independent self-construal will appreciate the indulgence of a recipient with an independent self-construal as an expression of the recipients' unique self, or whether they would feel annoyed because it affects their own wallet? Similarly, will donors with an interdependent self-construal happily treat an indulging recipient as a service of friendship, or will they feel annoyed by it, as it violates social norms?

In addition, future research could examine the role of other social norms that consumers might conform to when they are being invited. While the present research investigates how some consumers select less expensive self-gifts in order to appear socially sensitive, there may also exist a floor effect. Specifically, consumers may want to select an item that is not too inexpensive, as this may potentially insult the donor who wants to treat the gift recipient to a nice gift.

Lastly, the third study of this dissertation raises an interesting research question in the area of self-construal research. By testing whether self-presentational concerns or empathy mediate the observed effects, I implicitly also examine whether the behavior of people with an interdependent self-construal is driven by the concerns about the self in relation to others, or by a real concern about the other. This is an interesting issue as it asks the question whether individuals with an interdependent self-construal are intrinsically egoistic, or altruistic. In other words, do individuals with an interdependent self-construal behave altruistically because it benefits themselves as this behavior reflects the reward structure in which they grew up? Or, are they *true* altruists, who indeed put the concern for the group ahead of the concern for themselves. The proposed study 3 of this dissertation cannot answer this question conclusively, but I think it is a promising avenue for future research. One limitation of the current research is that self-construal is examined only in North American culture. While every individual has independent and interdependent elements in the self, it is possible that consumers who grow up in an interdependent culture may have different motivations to engage in certain behaviors. It is possible that Asian consumers are indeed more driven by altruistic motives rather than self-presentational concerns when they select a gift for themselves after being invited. Thus, the current research cannot make any claims about cultural effects.

One managerial implication of the findings would be that marketers can somehow influence the gift recipient's decisions. Many occasions are associated with gift-giving such as, Valentine's Day, Mother's day, Father's day, and

Christmas. As every consumer's self contains elements of both kinds of self-construals, in-store displays could make an independent or an interdependent self-construal more salient. For example, by making the words *I, me, mine* vs. *we, us, our* salient, marketers may be able to influence whether consumers make more indulgent, or more normatively appropriate choices. Examples for this could include a display featuring a single person with a slogan like "Today is my day!" versus a display featuring a couple or a family with the slogan "Today is for us!". These cues could be even more subtle, for example the name of a restaurant or nightclub such as "Friends" versus "Cowboy Ciao".

Recipients' choices could also be influenced through the goal-satiation process. For example, in a restaurant setting during busy hours, the server could tell two waiting parties that only one table is free at the moment. By offering the other party to go first, consumers could satisfy their goal of behaving normatively appropriate and modest. When seated at the table, those consumers may then make more indulgent choices.

In conclusion, through the use of multiple methods (a field study with high external validity, a scenario study with high internal validity, and laboratory studies), participant samples (student population as well as the general consumer population) to examine how recipients choose their own gift when they are invited by a donor, I provide evidence that being invited and consumers' self-construal have an important effect on consumers' goal pursuit and in turn on gift recipients' consumption decisions. The present research is the first to examine gift recipients' decision-making and there exist many opportunities for future research.

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CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSIONS

General Discussion

The purpose of this dissertation was to investigate antecedents that lead to change in consumers' self-concept and the effect that this self-concept change has on consumption behaviors. This dissertation consists of two essays which take two different approaches to investigate self-concept change.

In the first essay, *Break Me, Shake Me and Make Me New: Mortality Salience Disrupts Self-Concept Consistency*, I look at identity strictly as consumers define themselves in terms of the possessions with which they associate. As alternative conceptions of the self are activated, highly materialistic consumers detach from possessions that are an important part of their self-concept and incorporate new possessions into their identity. In that sense, the notion of the self-concept under investigation is closely related to James' (1890) definition of the material self and Belk's (1988) treatment of possessions as part of the extended self.

Essay 1 is embedded into the theoretical framework of Terror Management Theory (TMT, Greenberg, Pyszczynski, and Solomon 1986). The basic premise of TMT is that when people experience a self-threat by being reminded of their own mortality, they cope with the threat by defending their cultural worldviews, or living up to values from which they derive self-esteem. In the first essay I argue that when being reminded of mortality, the consistency of

the self-concept is disrupted in certain types of consumers. Given that in this essay, self-concept is investigated in the context of possessions, the changes of the self-concept are expected to arise for consumers high in materialism. Highly materialistic consumers believe that life satisfaction can be achieved through the acquisition and possession of extrinsic possessions (i.e., possessions that help to communicate status) rather than intrinsic possessions (i.e., possessions that symbolize who they are). This pursuit of ever newer and better possessions can be insatiable (Richins 1995). In this dissertation, I argue that in face of a mortality salience threat, highly materialistic consumers will detach from previously *intrinsic* possessions, while possessions that were previously a more *extrinsic* aspect of the self-concept will become more central. This newly created self-concept is then expected to impact consumers' acquisition and disposition decisions. I further explore a boundary condition for this effect. To achieve this I draw from self-affirmation theory (Steele 1988) which proposes that people can cope with a threat by affirming qualities that are central to how people see themselves which allows them to see themselves within a broader perspective of the self (Sherman and Cohen 2002). Through self-affirmation, people no longer have to engage in defensive strategies to protect their ego. Thus, I argue that providing highly materialistic consumers with the opportunity to self-affirm can serve as a protective mechanism against the effects of mortality salience on the disruption of consumers' self-concept.

167

The findings contribute to Terror Management Theory which stresses the importance of consistency by demonstrating a behavioral implication of consumers' need to retain integrity and highlighting the malleability of the self under conditions of threat. I further integrate previous work that has been conducted on the implications of mortality salience threats on product acquisition (Ferraro, Shiv, and Bettman 2005, Mandel and Heine 1999, Mandel and Smeesters 2008) with insights into consumers' intentions to dispose, to present a more complete picture of how a mortality salience threat can affect consumers' relationships with existing products. Further, the research provides some insight into why consumers with higher levels of materialism have been reported to have lower levels of well-being (Chaplin and John 2007) by demonstrating that living up to the value of materialism can actually undermine self-concept consistency. Finally, I demonstrate that self-affirmation (Steele 1988) can protect consumers from engaging in materialistic behaviors which can undermine self-consistency.

In the second essay, *The Lucky Man's Dilemma: How Do Consumers Choose When Being Invited,* I look at a second type of self-concept change. Specifically, I investigate how the activated self-construal (i.e., independent vs. interdependent) determines how a goal conflict between maximizing pleasure and appearing normatively appropriate is resolved when consumers are invited to choose a gift for themselves. Prior research has established that self-construal can have an important effect on goal activation (Holland et. al 2004). Specifically, people with an independent self-construal are more likely to pursue goals that help them to positively distinguish themselves from others, with a focus on

168

personal gains, whereas consumers with an interdependent self-construal are more likely to pursue goals that help them to fulfill social roles and obligations (Lee, Aaker, and Gardner 2000). In this essay I hypothesize that consumers with an independent self-construal, which is characterized by an emphasis on autonomy and uniqueness and which has been demonstrated to be related to egocentricity (Mikulincer and Shaver 2005), will pursue a goal of maximizing pleasure and will thus make more indulgent choices when they are invited to choose their own gift, as compared to paying for the item themselves. Consumers with an interdependent self-construal on the other hand, which is characterized by an emphasis on interpersonal connections and shared characteristics, are expected to pursue the self-presentational goal of behaving normatively appropriate and will thus make more modest choices when they are invited to select a gift for themselves. This essay contributes to the existing literature by first extending previous research on gift-giving which has primarily focused on gift selection by the donor and the underlying processes (e.g., Otnes, Lowrey, and Kim 1993; Sherry 1983; Sherry, McGrath, and Levy 1993; Wooten 2000). I investigate the process by which gift recipients choose a gift for themselves and I introduce an important factor that moderates the effect of an invitation on gift choice: self-construal. I show that consumers with an independent self-construal make a more indulgent choice, while consumers with an interdependent self-construal make a more modest choice when they are invited to select their own gift as compared to when they pay for the item themselves. Second, I explore the underlying processes for the observed effects. I propose that the activated self-construal

169

influences how the goal conflict between maximizing pleasure and appearing normatively appropriate is resolved. Specifically I propose that the hedonic goal of achieving gains and maximizing pleasure is activated for consumers with an independent self-construal, whereas the self-presentational goal of appearing sensitive and behaving normatively appropriate is activated for consumers with an interdependent self-construal. Third, I propose to test a boundary condition for the interactive impact of an invitation to choose one's own gift and self-construal on the monetary value of the gift that consumers' choose for themselves: When consumers are able to satisfy their goals before selecting the gift for themselves, the effects will cease to exist. A combination of various methodologies including field studies with high experimental realism and scenario studies with high experimental control give strong support to the results by providing both, internal and external validity.

This dissertation contributes to the consumer research literature in a number of important ways. Despite the importance of the self-concept in everyday consumption decisions, relatively little research on the factors that induce a change of the active self-concept has been conducted. In this dissertation, changes of the self are examined in two different contexts - when consumers experience a threat, and when consumers are invited to select a self-gift. I demonstrate that self-concept change has important effects on consumers' disposition and acquisition decisions.

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Material Values Scale (Richins and Dawson 1992) (Studies 1 and 2)

Please indicate the extent to which the following statements apply to you by circling the appropriate number for each item.

1. I admire people who own expensive homes, cars, and clothes.

 Totally Disagree   **1**   **2**   **3**   **4**   **5**   Totally Agree

2. Some of the most important achievements in life include acquiring material possessions.

 Totally Disagree   **1**   **2**   **3**   **4**   **5**   Totally Agree

3. I don't place much emphasis on the amount of material objects people own as a sign of success.

 Totally Disagree   **1**   **2**   **3**   **4**   **5**   Totally Agree

4. The things I own say a lot about how well I'm doing in life.

 Totally Disagree   **1**   **2**   **3**   **4**   **5**   Totally Agree

5. I like to own things that impress people.

 Totally Disagree   **1**   **2**   **3**   **4**   **5**   Totally Agree

6. I don't pay much attention to the material objects other people own.

 Totally Disagree   **1**   **2**   **3**   **4**   **5**   Totally Agree

7. I usually buy only the things I need.

Totally Disagree　　　**1**　　**2**　　**3**　　**4**　　**5**　　Totally Agree

8. I try to keep my life simple, as far as possessions are concerned.

Totally Disagree　　　**1**　　**2**　　**3**　　**4**　　**5**　　Totally Agree

9. The things I own aren't all that important to me.

Totally Disagree　　　**1**　　**2**　　**3**　　**4**　　**5**　　Totally Agree

10. I enjoy spending money on things that aren't practical.

Totally Disagree　　　**1**　　**2**　　**3**　　**4**　　**5**　　Totally Agree

11. Buying things gives me lot of pleasure.

Totally Disagree　　　**1**　　**2**　　**3**　　**4**　　**5**　　Totally Agree

12. I like a lot of luxury in my life.

Totally Disagree　　　**1**　　**2**　　**3**　　**4**　　**5**　　Totally Agree

13. I put less emphasis on material things than most people I know.

Totally Disagree　　　**1**　　**2**　　**3**　　**4**　　**5**　　Totally Agree

14. I have all the things I really need to enjoy life.

Totally Disagree　　　**1**　　**2**　　**3**　　**4**　　**5**　　Totally Agree

15. My life would be better if I owned certain things I don't have.

Totally Disagree　　　**1**　　**2**　　**3**　　**4**　　**5**　　Totally Agree

16. I wouldn't be any happier if I owned nicer things.

 Totally Disagree   **1   2   3   4   5**   Totally Agree

17. I'd be happier if I could afford to buy more things.

 Totally Disagree   **1   2   3   4   5**   Totally Agree

18. It sometimes bothers me quite a bit that I can't afford to buy all the things I'd like.

 Totally Disagree   **1   2   3   4   5**   Totally Agree

Trait Self-Esteem Scale (Rosenberg 1965) (Studies 1-3)

Please indicate the extent to which you agree with the following statements by writing the appropriate number in the blank next to each item. Use the following scale:

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	**Disagree**	**Neutral**	**Agree**	**Strongly Agree**

_____ 1. I feel that I'm a person of worth, at least on an equal basis with others.
_____ 2. I feel that I have a number of good qualities.
_____ 3. All in all, I'm inclined to feel that I am a failure.
_____ 4. I am able to do things as well as most other people.
_____ 5. I feel I do not have much to be proud of.
_____ 6. I take a positive attitude toward myself.
_____ 7. On the whole, I am satisfied with myself.
_____ 8. I wish I could have more respect for myself.
_____ 9. I certainly feel useless at times.
_____ 10. At times I think I am no good at all.

State Self-Esteem Scale (Heatherton and Polivy 1991) (Study 3)

Using the following scale, place a number on the line to the right of the statement that indicates what is true for you at this moment:

1 = not at all, 2 = a little bit, 3 = somewhat, 4 = very much, 5 = extremely

1. I feel confident about my abilities.

   _____

2. I am worried about whether I am regarded as a success or failure.

   _____

3. I feel satisfied with the way my body looks right now.

   _____

4. I feel frustrated or rattled about my performance.

   _____

5. I feel that I am having trouble understanding things that I read.

   _____

6. I feel that others respect and admire me.

   _____

7. I am dissatisfied with my weight.

   _____

8. I feel self-conscious.

   _____

9. I feel as smart as others.

   _____

10. I feel displeased with myself.

   _____

11. I feel good about myself.

    _____

12. I am pleased with my appearance right now.

    _____

13. I am worried about what other people think of me.

    _____

14. I feel confident that I understand things.

    _____

15. I feel inferior to others at this moment.

    _____

16. I feel unattractive.

    _____

17. I feel concerned about the impression I am making.

    _____

18. I feel that I have less scholastic ability right now than others.

    _____

19. I feel like I'm not doing well.

    _____

20. I am worried about looking foolish.

    _____

Self Affirmation – Value Ranking Task (Cohen, Aronson, and Steele 2000)
(Study 3)

Below is a list of characteristics and values, some of which may be important to you and some of which may be unimportant. Please rank these values and qualities in order of their importance to you, from 1 to 12. Please use each rank only once.
1 = most important item, 12 = least important item. Use each number only once.

Artistic skills/Aesthetic appreciation   _____

Sense of humor   _____

Relations with friends/family   _____

Spontaneity/living life in the moment   _____

Social skills   _____

Athletics   _____

Music   _____

Neatness/Tidiness   _____

Physical Attractiveness   _____

Creativity   _____

Environmental Values   _____

Romantic Values   _____

Innovative Personality Assessment (Studies 1-3)

In the space provided, please briefly describe the emotions that the thought of your own death arouses in you.

_____

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In the space provided please jot down, as specifically as you can, what you think will happen to you physically as you die and once you are physically dead.

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Innovative Personality Assessment (Studies 1-3)

In the space provided, please briefly describe the emotions that dental pain arouses in you.

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In the space provided please jot down, as specifically as you can, what happens to you when you experience dental pain.

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Innovative Personality Assessment (study 2)

In the space provided, please briefly describe the emotions that the thought of your best friend ending his/her friendship with you arouses in you.

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In the space provided please jot down, as specifically as you can, what happens to you when your best friend ends his/her friendship with you.

_____

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_____

PANAS scale (Watson, Clarke and Tellegen 1988) (Studies 1-3)

This scale consists of a number of words that describe different feelings and emotions. Read each item and mark the appropriate answer in the space next to that word that best indicates how you feel right now. Use the following scale to record your answers.

1	2	3	4	5
very slightly or not at all	a little	moderately	quite a bit	extremely

_____ interested   _____ irritable

_____ distressed   _____ alert

_____ excited   _____ ashamed

_____ upset   _____ inspired

_____ strong   _____ nervous

_____ guilty   _____ determined

_____ scared   _____ attentive

_____ hostile   _____ jittery

_____ enthusiastic   _____ active

_____ proud   _____ afraid

_____ worried   _____ troubled

_____ uneasy

Distraction Tasks (Study 1+2)
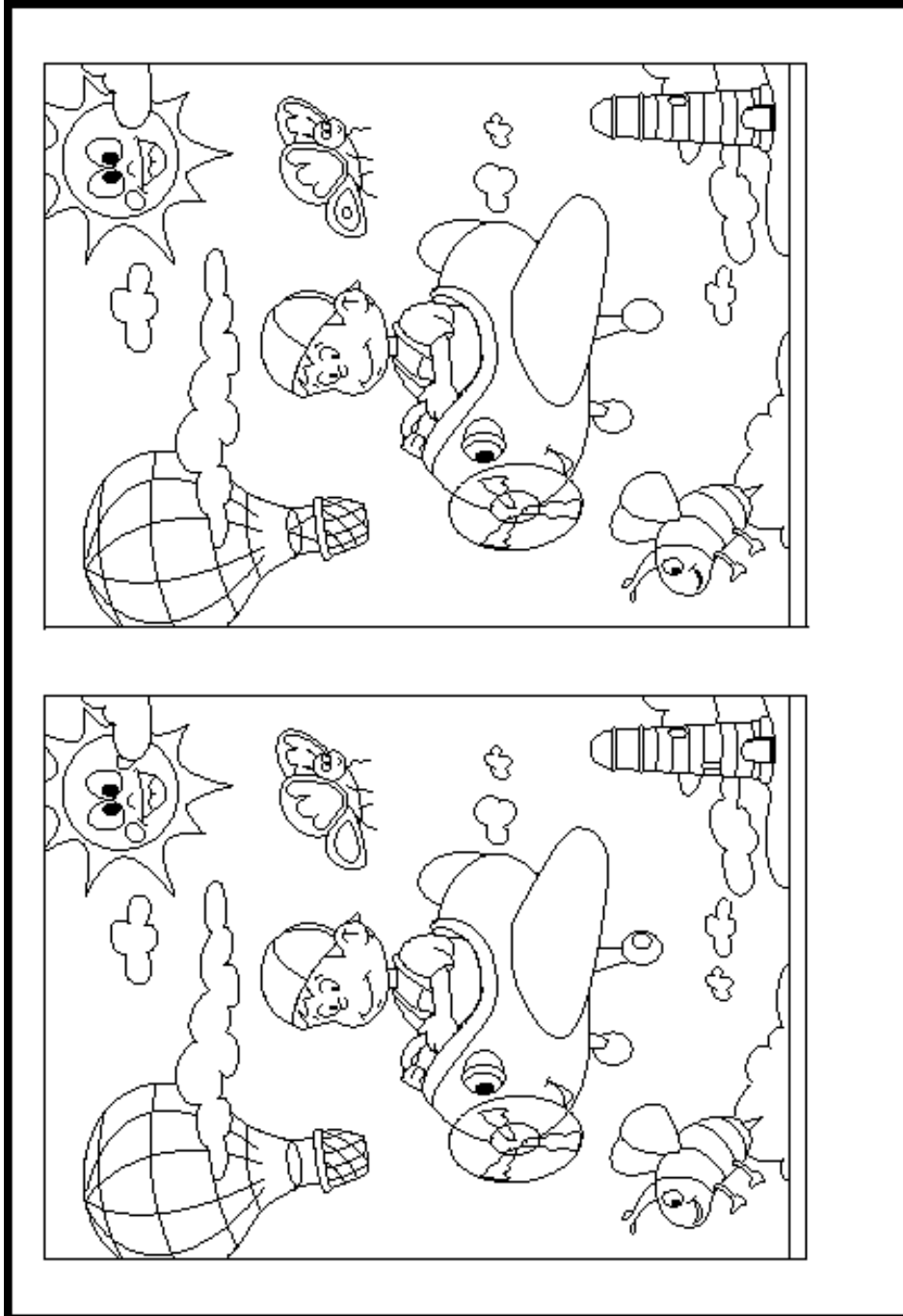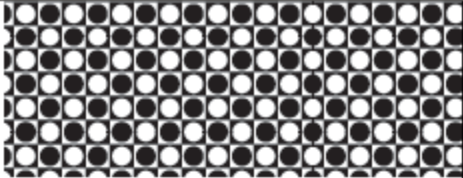
Please find and circle the seven differences between the two pictures
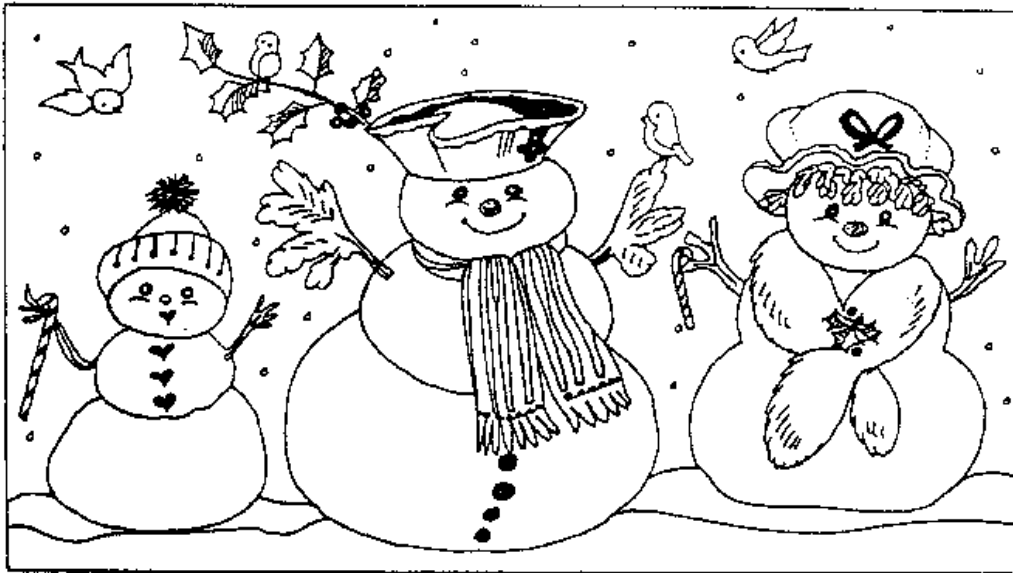
Please find and circle the six differences between the two pictures

APPENDIX B: THE LUCKY MAN'S DILEMMA: MATERIALS OF

CONDUCTED STUDIES

Outside of Guest survey in study 1

PLEASE READ THE FOLLOWING INFORMATION CAREFULLY:

Table #_____   Time _____
Date _____

GUEST SURVEY

RESEARCHERS AT THE UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA TOGETHER WITH EAST SIDE MARIO'S SHERWOOD PARK ARE REQUESTING YOUR ASSISTANCE IN COMPLETING THIS SHORT SURVEY IN EXCHANGE FOR A $10 GIFT CERTIFICATE FOR EAST SIDE MARIO'S SHERWOOD PARK REDEEMABLE UPON YOUR NEXT VISIT. YOUR RESPONSES WILL BE ANONYMOUS AND NO IDENTIFYING INFORMATION WILL BE RETAINED. IF YOU AGREE TO PARTICIPATE PLEASE PLACE A CHECK MARK IN THE BOX BELOW.

East Side Mario's
Sherwood Park

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Inside of Guest Survey Study 1:

1. WHAT WAS YOUR FIRST IMPRESSION OF THE RESTAURANT WHEN YOU FIRST WALKED IN THE DOOR? _____
_____
_____

2. WHAT IS THE AVERAGE PRICE YOU WOULD EXPECT TO PAY:
FOR LUNCH AT EAST SIDE MARIO'S SHERWOOD PARK? _____
FOR DINNER AT EAST SIDE MARIO'S SHERWOOD PARK? _____

3. WHAT ITEMS DID YOU ORDER TODAY?
_____

4. WHAT IS YOUR FAVORITE ITEM ON THE MENU?
_____

5. ARE YOU PAYING FOR YOUR OWN MEAL?

O YES   O NO   O DON'T KNOW

IF NO, WHEN DID YOU LEARN THAT THE OTHER PERSON WOULD BE PAYING?

O BEFORE YOU ORDERED
O AFTER YOU ORDERED

6. WILL YOU BE REDEEMING A COUPON IN THE RESTAURANT TODAY?

O YES   O NO

7. HAVE YOU EATEN HERE BEFORE?

O YES   O NO

IF YES, HOW OFTEN ON AVERAGE DO YOU EAT AT EAST SIDE MARIO'S SHERWOOD PARK?

O AT LEAST 1/WEEK   O 1/TWO MONTHS
O 1 OR 2 TIMES/MONTH   O 1/SIX MONTHS

IF NO, WHY HAVEN'T YOU EATEN HERE BEFORE?
_____
_____

8. WHY DID YOU DECIDE (WHAT WAS YOUR MOTIVE) TO EAT AT EAST SIDE MARIO'S SHERWOOD PARK TODAY?
_____
_____

9. WHAT IS YOUR RELATIONSHIP TO THE PERSON WITH WHOM YOU ARE DINING?

O CO-WORKER   O BOSS
O FRIEND   O FAMILY MEMBER
O OTHER _____

10. DO YOU HAVE A JOINT BANK ACCOUNT WITH THE PERSON YOU ARE DINING WITH?

O YES   O NO

11. DO YOU READ A NEWSPAPER OR A COMMUNITY PAPER?

O YES   O NO

IF YES, WHICH ONES?
_____

12. DO YOU LISTEN TO THE RADIO?

O YES   O NO

IF YES, WHICH STATIONS?
_____

13. YOUR GENDER:

O FEMALE   O MALE

14. YOUR ANNUAL INCOME

O LESS THAN $30,000   O $30,000-$50,000
O $50,000-$70,000   O $70,000-$90,000
O MORE THAN $90,000

191

Self-Construal scale (Singelis 1991)

I have respect for the authority figures with whom I interact.

strongly disagree   1   2   3   4   5   6   7   strongly agree

I'd rather say "No" directly, than risk being misunderstood.

strongly disagree   1   2   3   4   5   6   7   strongly agree

It is important for me to maintain harmony within my group.

strongly disagree   1   2   3   4   5   6   7   strongly agree

Speaking up during a class is not a problem for me.

strongly disagree   1   2   3   4   5   6   7   strongly agree

My happiness depends on the happiness of those around me.

strongly disagree   1   2   3   4   5   6   7   strongly agree

Having a lively imagination is important to me.

strongly disagree   1   2   3   4   5   6   7   strongly agree

I would offer my seat in a bus to my professor.

strongly disagree   1   2   3   4   5   6   7   strongly agree

I am comfortable with being singled out for praise or rewards.

strongly disagree   1   2   3   4   5   6   7   strongly agree

I respect people who are modest about themselves.

strongly disagree   1   2   3   4   5   6   7   strongly agree

I am the same person at home that I am at school.

strongly disagree   1   2   3   4   5   6   7   strongly agree

I will sacrifice my self-interest for the benefit of the group I am in.

strongly disagree   1   2   3   4   5   6   7   strongly agree

Being able to take care of myself is a primary concern for me.

strongly disagree   1   2   3   4   5   6   7   strongly agree

I often have the feeling that my relationships with others are more important than my own accomplishments.

strongly disagree   1   2   3   4   5   6   7   strongly agree

I act the same way no matter who I am with.

strongly disagree   1   2   3   4   5   6   7   strongly agree

I should take into consideration my parents' advice when making education/career plans.

strongly disagree   1   2   3   4   5   6   7   strongly agree

I feel comfortable using someone's first name soon after I meet them, even when they are much older than I am.

strongly disagree   1   2   3   4   5   6   7   strongly agree

It is important to me to respect decisions made by the group.

strongly disagree   1   2   3   4   5   6   7   strongly agree

I prefer to be direct and forthright when dealing with people I've just met.

strongly disagree   1   2   3   4   5   6   7   strongly agree

I will stay in a group if they need me, even when I'm not happy with the group.

strongly disagree   1   2   3   4   5   6   7   strongly agree

I enjoy being unique and different from others in many respects.

strongly disagree   1   2   3   4   5   6   7   strongly agree

If my brother or sister fails, I feel responsible.

strongly disagree   1   2   3   4   5   6   7   strongly agree

My personal identity independent of others is very important to me.

strongly disagree   **1**   **2**   **3**   **4**   **5**   **6**   **7**   **strongly agree**

Even when I strongly disagree with group members, I avoid an argument.

strongly disagree   **1**   **2**   **3**   **4**   **5**   **6**   **7**   **strongly agree**

I value being in good health above everything.

strongly disagree   **1**   **2**   **3**   **4**   **5**   **6**   **7**   **strongly agree**

Restrained Eating Scale (Herman and Polivy 1980) (Study 3)

Please respond to the following questions.

1. How many pounds over your desired weight were you at your maximum weight? _____

2. How often are you dieting? (please check)
   _____ Rarely _____Sometimes _____ Usually _____Always

3. Which best describes your behaviour after you have eaten a "not allowed" food while on your diet? (please check)

_____ return to diet
_____ stop eating for an extended period of time in order to compensate
_____ continue on a splurge
_____ eat other "not allowed" foods

4. What is the maximum amount of weight that you have ever lost within 1 month? _____

5. What is your maximum weight gain within a week? _____

6. In a typical week, how much does your weight fluctuate? Max = _____   Min = _____

7. Would a weight fluctuation of 5 pounds affect the way you live your life?
____not at all   ____ slightly ____ moderately____ very much

8. Do you eat sensibly before others and make up for it alone?

____ never ____ rarely ____ often____ always

9. Do you give too much time and thought to food?

____ never ____ rarely ____ often____ always

10. Do you have feelings of guilt after overeating?

____ never ____ rarely ____ often____ always

11. How conscious are you of what you're eating?

____not at all   ____ slightly ____ moderately   ____extremely

Body Self-Esteem Scale (Heatherton and Polivy 1991) (Study 3)

Please read each of the statements below, and CIRCLE the number (from 1= not at all to 5=extremely) that best describes you, using the scale below.

not at all   a little bit   somewhat   very much   extremely
  1   2   3   4   5

1. I feel satisfied with the way my body looks right now.

      1   2   3   4   5

2. I feel that others respect and admire me.

      1   2   3   4   5

3. I am dissatisfied with my weight.

      1   2   3   4   5

4. I feel good about myself.

      1   2   3   4   5

5. I am pleased with my appearance right now.

      1   2   3   4   5

6. I feel unattractive.

      1   2   3   4   5

Empathy Scale (Cognitive) (Study 3)

Read each statement and indicate how strongly it applied to the situation.

I didn't think much about how the research assistant would feel
Not at all   1   2   3   4   5   6   7   Extremely

It made me happy being nice to the research assistant
Not at all   1   2   3   4   5   6   7   Extremely

I tried to tune in to the feelings of the research assistant
Not at all   1   2   3   4   5   6   7   Extremely

I felt good doing something nice for the research assistant
Not at all   1   2   3   4   5   6   7   Extremely

I was worried about upsetting the research assistant
Not at all   1   2   3   4   5   6   7   Extremely

I could not stand the thought of the research assistant feeling bad
Not at all   1   2   3   4   5   6   7   Extremely

I thought about how I would make the research assistant feel
Not at all   1   2   3   4   5   6   7   Extremely

I tried to take the research assistant's perspective
Not at all   1   2   3   4   5   6   7   Extremely

What was going on within the research assistant's mind was no concern of mine
Not at all   1   2   3   4   5   6   7   Extremely

I thought about how I would feel if I was in the research assistant's position
Not at all   1   2   3   4   5   6   7   Extremely

I was able to put myself in the research assistant's shoes
Not at all   1   2   3   4   5   6   7   Extremely

Empathy Scale (Affective) (Study 3)

Read each statement and indicate how strongly it applied to the situation.

I felt empathic toward the research assistant (i.e. I understand him/her)
Not at all   1   2   3   4   5   6   7   Extremely

I felt concerned about the research assistant
Not at all   1   2   3   4   5   6   7   Extremely

I felt moved by the situation of the research assistant
Not at all   1   2   3   4   5   6   7   Extremely

I felt vengeful toward the research assistant
Not at all   1   2   3   4   5   6   7   Extremely

I felt sympathetic to the research assistant
Not at all   1   2   3   4   5   6   7   Extremely

I felt compassionate toward the research assistant
Not at all   1   2   3   4   5   6   7   Extremely

I felt softhearted toward the research assistant
Not at all   1   2   3   4   5   6   7   Extremely

I felt touched by the research assistant
Not at all   1   2   3   4   5   6   7   Extremely

I felt hostile toward the research assistant
Not at all   1   2   3   4   5   6   7   Extremely

The research assistant feelings did affect me strongly
Not at all   1   2   3   4   5   6   7   Extremely

I felt deeply for the research assistant
Not at all   1   2   3   4   5   6   7   Extremely

Scenarios (Study 2)

Invitation = yes

Imagine one evening you are going to dinner at Al Capone, a good Italian restaurant with _____. Before you start browsing the menu, _____ announces that s/he will take care of the bill and that you are invited tonight.

Invitation = no

Imagine one evening you are going to dinner at Al Capone, a good Italian restaurant with _____. Before you start browsing the menu, you agree that each of you will pay for his/her own dinner tonight.

Example of Menu (Study 2)

Al Capone Menu Selection

Chicken

Chicken Giardino	Fresh vegetables and chicken tossed with farfalle pasta in a lemon-herb sauce	$ 13.95	○
Roasted Breast of Chicken	Stuffed with Foie Gras, Mushroom Ragout, Wilted Spinach and Thyme Jus	$ 14.95	○
Garlic-Herb Chicken with Broccoli	Rosemary-seasoned chicken breasts sautéed with fresh broccoli in a garlic cream sauce over orecchiette pasta	$ 16.95	○
Tuscan Garlic Chicken	Pan-seared chicken breasts with roasted garlic, red peppers and spinach in a white wine and garlic cream sauce, tossed with curly fettuccine	$ 12.95	○

Vegetarian

Eggplant Parmigiana	Lightly breaded eggplant, fried and topped with marinara sauce, mozzarella and parmesan cheese	$ 12.95	○
Fettucine Alfredo	Parmesan cream sauce with a hint of garlic, served over fettuccine	$ 13.95	○
Ravioli di Portobello	Portobello mushroom-filled ravioli in a creamy smoked cheese and sun-dried tomato sauce	$ 10.95	○
Capellini Pomodoro	Roma tomatoes, garlic, fresh basil and extra-virgin olive oil tossed with capellini	$ 15.95	○

Seafood

Lobster Ravioli	Green Asparagus, Roasted Red Pepper, Tomato Confit, Light Cognac Bisque Sauce	$ 18.95	○
Mixed Seafood Grill	with a Selection of Mussels, Scallops, Shrimp & Fresh Market Fish in a Basil Infused Lobster Broth	$ 15.95	○
Grilled Tiger Shrimp & Scallops	with Mediterranean Couscous, Ratatouille & Pernod Beurre Blanc	$ 16.95	○
Herb Crusted Atlantic Salmon	with Warm grilled Vegetables & Soya-Marin Glaze	$ 15.95	○

Logical Problems (Study 4)

What is the next number in the following sequences?
You have 60 seconds to solve as many sequences as you can.

5   7   9   11   13   11   9   7   _____

2   4   8   16   32   64   128   _____

15   12   16   13   17   14   18   _____

0   -1   1   0   2   1   3   2   4   _____

4   5   10   11   22   23   46   47   _____

40   20   22   20   10   _____

3   7   11   15   19   23   27   _____

3   9   18   30   45   63   84   108   _____

2   6   8   12   14   18   20   _____

2   3   5   7   11   13   17   19   _____