

Goal Management in Sequential Choices: Consumer Choices for Others Are More Indulgent than Personal Choices

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What are the differences in exerting self-control in sequential choices when consumers choose for others (family or friends) rather than for themselves? Sequential choices represent an opportunity to manage the pursuit of one's multiple personal goals. Consumers typically manage these personal goals by combining indulgent and virtuous choices. When choosing for others, however, this is not the case. Consumers then focus on a pleasure-seeking goal, which leads to indulgent choices for others. Six experiments demonstrate this phenomenon and uncover conditions that encourage more virtuous choices for others.

Sequential choices of food are common. Consumers choose food items sequentially while grocery shopping, ordering at a restaurant, or shopping for a party. While these choices are personal, many times consumers also make choices for family members and friends. This research investigates differences in consumers' sequential choices when choosing for themselves versus for others. Based on the self-control and goal-pursuit literature, I examine whether there are differences in the degree of indulgence of these choices.

Theories of self-control have uncovered several factors that lead to a healthy or unhealthy lifestyle (Baumeister et al. 1998; Keinan and Kivetz 2008; Kruglanski et al. 2002). However, these conceptualizations are silent about the differences between people's choices for themselves versus others. I demonstrate that people's choices for themselves and others can be explained by goal focus. Consumers are likely to attempt to manage multiple goals when making personal choices: consumers attempt to perform self-control, through the choice of virtuous behaviors, while still being able to enjoy life, by combining these behaviors with indulgent behaviors. This idea is consistent with evidence that people try to make progress on alternative goals once they have made progress on a focal goal (Dhar and Simonson

1999; Fishbach and Dhar 2005; Laran and Janiszewski 2009) and frequently pursue alternative goals even if a focal goal has not actually been fulfilled (Wilcox et al. 2009). When making choices for others, consumers are likely to focus on a pleasure goal. Self-regulation through the pursuit of multiple goals is a skill that consumers acquire with training, facilitated when consumers make a series of personal choices. It is unlikely that consumers making choices for others will spontaneously infer that others will resist temptation and manage multiple goals. A secondary objective of this research is to uncover conditions that encourage goal management in choices for others.

I present a series of studies testing my predictions. Study 1 shows that consumers tend to balance their personal choices and make more indulgent choices for others but that goal management can be encouraged through priming. Study 2 shows that this effect is the result of a pleasure-seeking focus when people make inferences about the goals of others. Study 3 shows that awareness about a single, self-control (pleasure) goal may influence choices for others (oneself). Additional evidence shows that this effect is driven by the accessibility of different goal concepts. Studies 4A and 4B show that a future temporal frame may encourage more balanced choices for others. Study 5 shows in a field investigation that consumers' food choices for others in a grocery store may be more indulgent than consumers' personal food choices.

MULTIPLE GOAL MANAGEMENT IN SEQUENTIAL CHOICES

Research on goal pursuit in sequential choices has mostly focused on conditions under which an initial choice will lead to similar versus distinct subsequent choices (Huber,

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Goldsmith, and Mogilner 2008). Novemsky and Dhar (2005) show that a good experience with an initial choice (e.g., a good entrée) shifts the standard of goal satisfaction up and leads to riskier, possibly more gratifying subsequent choices (e.g., a dessert that could be much better or much worse than a consistently good dessert). Fishbach and Dhar (2005) show that when an initial choice (e.g., a healthy entrée) signals progress on a focal goal, people tend to make inconsistent subsequent choices (e.g., a fatty dessert). When the initial choice signals commitment to a focal goal, people tend to make consistent subsequent choices (e.g., pass on the dessert). Implicit in these demonstrations is the idea that an initial choice leads to consideration of one's goal standard, which leads to choices consistent with the same focal goal or with an alternative goal.

Fishbach and Dhar (2005, 376) postulate that people have an underlying tendency to balance across multiple goals in a sequence of choices. Balancing allows consumers to solve self-control conflicts associated with a desire to indulge, while there is a concurrent need to exert self-control. Congruent with this idea, I postulate that the presence of alternatives associated with both self-control and pleasure-seeking goals (i.e., virtues and vices), coupled with the opportunity to make multiple choices, will encourage a goal management focus. Goal management occurs when a consumer pursues self-control while still being able to enjoy pleasurable behaviors and reach a balanced life (Laran 2010; Laran and Janiszewski 2009; Laran, Janiszewski, and Cunha 2008). A sequence of choices involving diverse food items presents the consumer with the perfect opportunity to manage multiple goals rather than to single-mindedly focus on one goal. This idea is supported in the work on balancing, which shows that the presence of multiple goals motivates consumers to pursue each of these goals with each behavior in a sequence (Dhar and Simonson 1999); in the work on depletion, which shows that acts of self-control are frequently followed by acts of indulgence (Vohs and Faber 2007); and in the work on variety seeking, which shows that consumers seek a set of varied options even when they have clear preferences for specific options (Inman 2001; Ratner, Kahn, and Kahneman 1999).

WHEN CONSUMERS CHOOSE FOR OTHERS

There has not been much research on consumer's choices for others. One important exception is the work on lay theories of self-control (Mukhopadhyay and Johar 2005; Mukhopadhyay and Yeung 2010). This work proposes that choices for others depend on the extent to which people believe that self-control is a resource that can increase with training. Mukhopadhyay and Yeung (2010) show that parents who believe that self-control is a limited resource that can increase with training tend to make healthy choices for their kids. Parents who believe that self-control is a large resource or that it cannot increase with training tend to make more indulgent choices for their kids. An alternative pre-

diction is based on the false consensus effect (Ross, Greene, and House 1977), which posits that people exaggerate the extent to which others share their own preferences and choices. Although mostly applied to people's accuracy when predicting the attitudes of others (Hoch 1987), the false consensus effect could play a role when people make choices for others. This would imply that choices for others are similar to personal choices.

I acknowledge that these mechanisms may influence consumers' choices for others. I do believe, however, that if one's goal focus can influence personal choices involving virtues and vices, a goal focus can also influence choices for others. The issue is whether these choices are consistent with a goal management focus, characterized by the pursuit of multiple goals, or by a narrower focus, characterized by the consideration of a single goal. I predict that a sequence involving choices for others will encourage a pleasure-seeking focus and indulgent choices. This focus is the result of consumers' belief that others will not manage multiple goals and exert self-control. Multiple goal management is an important self-regulatory skill that needs to be learned. The vast literature on self-control failures (e.g., depletion, overeating) demonstrates that consumers find it difficult to resist temptation and face self-control conflicts on a daily basis (Wansink and Chandon 2006). While consumers may know that it is in their best interest to choose healthy food items, a likely cause of many self-control failures is that indulgent items are highly desirable and associated with pleasure seeking. When making sequential choices, consumers solve their self-control conflicts by choosing items associated with multiple goals. When making choices for others, however, consumers do not need to solve self-control conflicts (i.e., self-control conflicts are personal) but rather make an inference about the goals of others. This inference draws on beliefs about whether others will manage multiple goals and exert self-control. Consumers know that resisting temptation is a difficult task and that indulgent food items are more strongly associated with pleasure than healthy food items. For these reasons, consumers' most likely inference about the behavior of others is that others will indulge and not exert self-control. Then, a two-step process initiates.

First, an indulgence goal becomes more accessible. Second, choices for others become highly indulgent as a consequence of this increased accessibility. The belief that others will not exert self-control implies that even when consumers are personally aware of multiple goals, they will choose to focus on indulgence when choosing for others. The operation of this process can be investigated in three different ways. One possibility is to examine whether people make an inference that seeking pleasure is a goal that others will most likely pursue. A second possibility is to examine how a predicted goal focus influences goal concept accessibility. A goal management focus should activate both self-control and indulgence, while a pleasure-seeking focus should activate indulgence and inhibit self-control. A third possibility is to examine people's choices. If people manage multiple goals for themselves but not for others, they should choose a sim-

ilar number of healthy and indulgent food items for themselves but a higher number of indulgent food items for others. The following studies investigate these three issues.

STUDY 1

Study 1 tests my goal focus hypothesis and proposes a way in which a goal management focus can be encouraged in choices for others. Consumers made four choices of food items for themselves or for a friend. I anticipated that people who chose for themselves would seek a balance between indulgent and healthy food items. People who chose for a friend would not have a goal management focus and choose a larger quantity of indulgent items. In a second condition, however, I primed the concept of “management” using a scrambled sentence task. I anticipated that making the concept of management accessible would encourage a goal management focus and lead to balanced choices for others.

Method

Participants and Design. Participants were 154 undergraduate business students at the University of Miami who participated in exchange for course credit. The design was a 2 (goal management: control vs. primed) \times 2 (choice context: personal vs. other) between-subjects design.

Procedure and Stimuli. Participants entered the behavioral lab, were seated in front of personal computers, and were told that they would now participate in two studies. The first study purportedly investigated cognitive processes associated with unscrambling sentences but was, in fact, a scrambled sentence task aimed at priming the concept of management (Srull and Wyer 1979). Participants were presented with sets of four words and asked to form sentences by unscrambling those words. Each sentence contained a word related to one type of information. In the control goal management condition, participants unscrambled sets of words such as “see will he this,” for which the solution is “he will see this.” In the management prime condition, participants unscrambled sets of words such as “manage will he this,” for which the solution is “he will manage this.” The management prime condition had 10 sentences including the following words: manage, handle, administer, responsible, supervise, conduct, guide, take care, direct, and deal. The second study was called a “food choice study.” Participants were presented with 16 food options and the following instructions in the personal choice condition: “Imagine that you went grocery shopping and you are selecting snacks. Please select one of the following snacks.” After participants made a choice, they clicked on a continue button at the bottom of the screen to advance to the next screen. The next screen showed the same options and the following instructions: “Now imagine that you continue to shop for snacks. Please select one of the following snacks. Note that you can choose the same or a different snack.” This procedure was repeated two more times for a total of four choices. In the choice-for-other condition, the instruc-

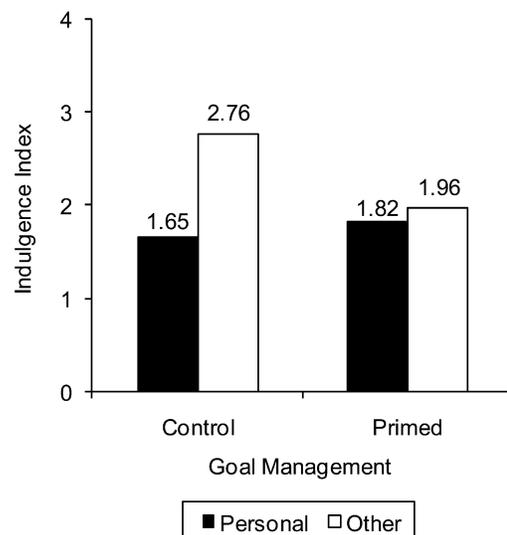
tions read: “Imagine that you went grocery shopping and one of your friends asked you to select snacks for him/her. Please select one of the following snacks for your friend.” This procedure was also repeated for a total of four choices.

Results

Pretesting. I conducted a pretest to certify that the healthy food items (raisins, celery sticks, Cheerios, low-fat yogurt, baby carrots, granola bar, rice cake, and apple) were perceived as healthier than the tasty food items (chocolate bar, Chips Ahoy cookies, cheese curls, Doritos chips, ice cream, doughnuts, Oreos, and fruit roll-ups). I asked a separate sample ($N = 25$) of participants to indicate how healthy they perceived the snacks to be ($-4 =$ very unhealthy to $+4 =$ very healthy). The healthy food items were perceived to be healthier ($M = 3.27$) than the tasty food items ($M = -3.01$; $F(1, 24) = 682.45$, $p < .01$).

Choices. I coded each choice of a healthy snack as zero and each choice of a tasty snack as one to form an indulgence index for each participant. The indulgence index could vary from zero, when all choices were healthy, to four, when all choices were indulgent. (Results are presented in fig. 1.) An ANOVA on the indulgence index showed an interaction between the goal management and choice context factors ($F(1, 150) = 7.15$, $p < .01$). In the control goal management condition, personal choices ($M = 1.94$) were less indulgent than choices for another person ($M = 3.02$; $F(1, 150) = 15.77$, $p < .01$). In the primed goal management condition, personal choices ($M = 2.00$) were as indulgent as choices for another person ($M = 1.84$; $F < 1$). Importantly, while personal choices did not vary between goal management conditions ($F < 1$), choices for another person became less

FIGURE 1
STUDY 1 RESULTS



indulgent in the primed goal management condition compared to the control condition ($F(1, 150) = 10.41, p < .01$).

Analysis of First Choice. I analyzed participants' first choice in order to investigate whether a goal management focus was encouraged by the opportunity to make a sequence of choices. This analysis did not show a systematic difference between conditions. In the control goal management condition, participants were equally likely to make an indulgent first choice for themselves (61.6%) as they were for another person (64.1%; $\chi^2(1) = .06, p = .48$). In the primed goal management condition, participants were also equally likely to make an indulgent first choice for themselves (57.6%) as they were for another person (62.9%; $\chi^2(1) = .14, p = .40$).

Alternative Explanations. It could be argued that the reason why people make more balanced choices for themselves is that these choices are more relevant, which would lead to higher involvement and more careful choices. In support of this idea, the advice-giving literature proposes that people look at a higher number of attributes when making choices for themselves than when giving advice to others (Kray and Gonzalez 1999). Of course, these explanations are partially ruled out by the fact that they do not predict that the management priming manipulation would influence choices. To further investigate these alternative explanations, I also measured involvement with the task (Zaichkowsky 1985, 1994) and decision times. An ANOVA on the involvement variable showed no main effects or interactions (all F 's < 1). In the control condition, participants indicated that the task was equally relevant to them in the personal ($M = 3.48$) and in the other condition ($M = 3.61; F < 1$). In the management priming condition, participants also indicated that the task was equally relevant to them in the personal ($M = 3.60$) and in the other condition ($M = 3.86; F < 1$). An ANOVA on the average decision time in each condition also showed no main effects or interactions (all F 's < 1). In the control condition, participants spent an equal amount of time making each decision in the personal ($M = 10.92$ seconds) and in the other condition ($M = 11.36$ seconds; $F < 1$). In the management priming condition, participants also spent an equal amount of time making each decision in the personal ($M = 11.29$ seconds) and in the other condition ($M = 11.83$ seconds; $F < 1$). Therefore, it is unlikely that the task was more relevant to participants in the personal choice condition or that participants were simply more careful when making these choices.

Discussion

The results of study 1 suggest that a goal management focus influences a sequence of choices when people make personal choices but not choices for others. People combined indulgent and healthy food items when making choices for themselves but chose more indulgent items when making choices for another person. Although participants seem to erroneously believe that others will not exert self-control, a

goal management focus can be encouraged by priming the concept of management. Finally, the analysis of first choices demonstrated that a goal management focus in personal choices is a function of the opportunity to make several choices and not of simply trying to make personal choices that are healthier than choices for others. In study 2, I test the prediction that these results are influenced by people's erroneous beliefs that others will not exert self-control.

STUDY 2

I argue that people make more indulgent choices for others because they make an inference about the goals of others. Because consumers do not believe that others will exert self-control, this inference focuses on pleasure seeking rather than on the management of multiple goals. In order to test this prediction, participants were asked to predict their own choices versus the choices of another person. More specifically, I told participants to imagine that they (someone else) had just performed an indulgent or a regulatory behavior. I then asked them to predict their (or someone else's) subsequent behavior. Because people have a goal management focus when thinking about their own behavior, participants should predict that they would perform self-control (indulge) after having performed an indulgent (regulatory) behavior. Because people have a pleasure-seeking focus when thinking about someone else's behavior, participants should predict that the other person would indulge regardless of the initial behavior.

Method

Participants and Design. Participants were 368 undergraduate business students at the University of Miami who participated in exchange for course credit. The design was a 2 (choice context: personal vs. other) \times 2 (initial behavior: indulgence vs. self-control) between-subjects design.

Procedure and Stimuli. Participants read a hypothetical scenario adapted from Dhar and Simonson (1999). In this scenario, participants were told about an initial behavior performed by themselves or by "Mr. A." The initial behavior involved either indulging or performing self-control. The scenario read, "Assume that you [Mr. A] got home and found a granola bar and a chocolate truffle you [he] had left in the kitchen. You [he] wonder[s] whether you [he] should eat the low-fat, healthy food item or the rich, tastier food item. You [he] decide[s] to eat the chocolate truffle." In the self-control condition, participants [Mr. A.] ate the granola bar. After reading these instructions and clicking on a continue button, participants read the following instructions: "Now, assume that you [Mr. A] are [is] still looking for food. The following two items are available at home. Which item would you [Mr. A] choose?" The options were "low-fat, healthy food item" and "rich, tastier food item." This choice was used as the dependent measure of the study.

Results

Choices. Results are presented in figure 2. A binary logistic regression showed an interaction between the choice context and the initial behavior factors (Wald $\chi^2(1) = 4.10$, $p < .05$). When the initial behavior was indulgence, participants estimated that another person would be more likely to choose a tasty snack (58.6%) than themselves (32.1%; $\chi^2(1) = 15.70$, $p < .01$). When the initial behavior was self-control, participants estimated that another person would be as likely to choose a tasty snack (62.7%) as themselves (58.1%; $\chi^2(1) = .31$, $p > .35$).

Inferences. Because I predicted that the scenario in the main study generated different inferences about the goals of others versus personal goals, a separate sample ($N = 217$) of participants was shown the same scenarios as those of the main study and, instead of asking them to make a choice, they were asked to what extent “healthy eating” or “indulging” was a goal that they (Mr. A) would likely have after performing the initial behavior. I also tested the possibility that goals were not involved in participants’ choices by adding a “none” option and instructing participants to check “none” if they did not believe they (Mr. A) would have any of those goals. When the initial behavior was indulgence, participants estimated that another person would be more likely to have a subsequent indulgence goal ($M_{\text{Ind}} = 79.4\%$, $M_{\text{Health}} = 7.9\%$, $M_{\text{None}} = 12.7\%$) than themselves ($M_{\text{Ind}} = 36.2\%$, $M_{\text{Health}} = 60.3\%$, $M_{\text{None}} = 3.5\%$; $\chi^2(1) = 15.70$, $p < .01$). When the initial behavior was self-control, participants estimated that another person would be as likely to have an indulgence goal ($M_{\text{Ind}} = 63.5\%$, $M_{\text{Health}} = 30.8\%$, $M_{\text{None}} = 5.7\%$) as themselves ($M_{\text{Ind}} = 61.4\%$, $M_{\text{Health}} = 31.8\%$, $M_{\text{None}} = 6.8\%$; $\chi^2(1) = 15.70$, $p < .01$).

Discussion

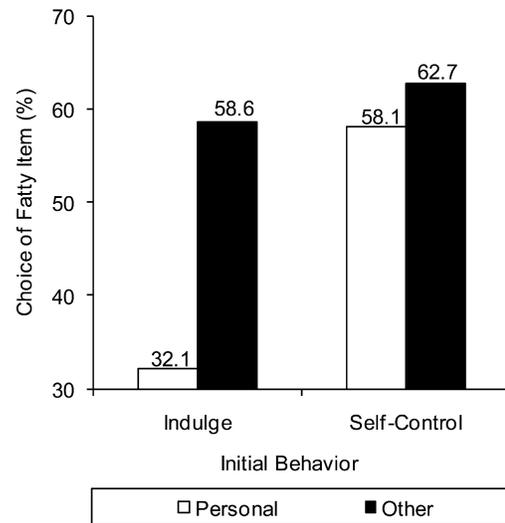
Study 2 shows that consumers believe that others do not exert self-control when facing choices between healthy and indulgent food items. Therefore, they switch from a multiple goal management focus to an inference about pleasure-seeking goals when predicting the choices of others. These results raise the question of whether there are situations in which personal choices are as indulgent as choices for others. Study 3 examines this issue.

STUDY 3

Study 3 investigates situations in which personal choices and choices for others converge. I highlighted multiple goals (i.e., pleasure seeking plus self-control) or a single goal (i.e., pleasure seeking or self-control) after participants made each choice. When highlighting multiple goals, I expected that people’s choices for another person and for themselves would follow the same pattern as that of the previous experiments: more indulgent choices for others. Thus, individuals may be personally aware that others may have multiple goals but still choose to focus on pleasure seeking.

FIGURE 2

STUDY 2 RESULTS



When highlighting indulgence, self-control should become overshadowed: people’s choices for themselves should be as indulgent as choices for others, while choices for others should remain the same (i.e., these choices are already considering an indulgence goal). When highlighting self-control, indulgence should become overshadowed: people’s choices for others should be as balanced as personal choices, while personal choices should remain the same (i.e., these choices are already considering a self-control goal). This study also manipulated the choice context within subjects so that I could examine whether allowing participants to see the contrast between their personal choices and choices for others would encourage a different goal focus. A within-subjects design is commonly used to increase awareness about a study’s manipulations (Poulton 1989; Wang, Novemsky, and Dhar 2009).

Method

Participants and Design. Participants were 108 undergraduate business students at the University of Miami who participated in exchange for course credit. The design was a 2 (goal awareness: multiple, pleasure, self-control) \times 2 (choice context: personal vs. other) mixed design. The goal awareness factor was manipulated between subjects while the choice context factor was manipulated within subjects.

Procedure and Stimuli. The experiment had the same procedure as that of study 1 with two exceptions. First, participants made four choices for themselves and four choices for their friend. The order in which each set of four choices was made was counterbalanced. Second, after participants made each choice, they were asked to judge how indulgent their choice was, using a 1–9 scale. This measurement allowed for a strong manipulation of the acces-

sibility of a single or multiple goals. In the multiple goal awareness condition, the ends of the scale were 1 = very healthy and 9 = very indulgent. In the pleasure goal awareness condition, the ends of the scale were 1 = not indulgent at all and 9 = very indulgent. In the self-control goal awareness condition, the ends of the scale were 1 = very healthy and 9 = very unhealthy.

Results

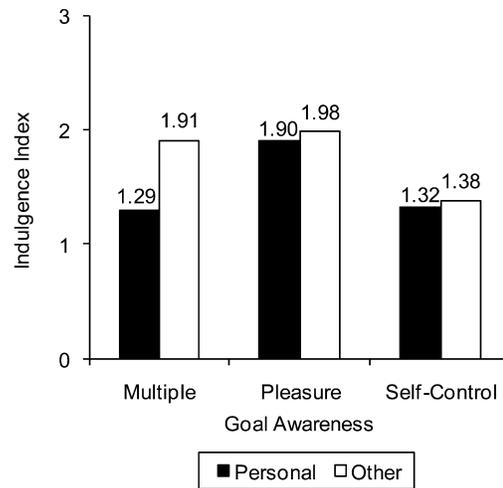
Results are presented in figure 3. The order in which participants made choices (first for themselves vs. first for others) did not influence the results ($F < 1$). Because the manipulation could only have an effect after the first choice, I did not use this choice in the indulgence index (this index could vary from zero to three). An ANOVA showed an interaction between the goal awareness and choice context factors ($F(2, 102) = 2.93, p < .05$). In the multiple goal awareness condition, personal choices ($M = 1.29$) were less indulgent than choices for another person ($M = 1.91$; $F(1, 102) = 11.78, p < .01$). In the pleasure goal awareness condition, personal choices ($M = 1.90$) were as indulgent as choices for another person ($M = 1.98$; $F(1, 102) = 1.85, p > .17$). In the self-control goal awareness condition, personal choices ($M = 1.32$) were as healthy as choices for another person ($M = 1.38$; $F < 1$).

It is important to compare choices within each choice context condition in order to understand how the baseline goal awareness condition (multiple goal awareness) compares to the other goal awareness conditions in personal choices versus choices for others. In the personal choice context condition, choices in the pleasure goal awareness condition were more indulgent than choices in the multiple goal awareness condition ($F(2, 102) = 4.34, p = .01$). Choices in the self-control goal awareness condition were as healthy as choices in the multiple goal awareness condition ($F < 1$). In the choice-for-other context condition, choices in the pleasure goal awareness condition were as indulgent as choices in the multiple goal awareness condition ($F < 1$). Choices in the self-control goal awareness condition were healthier than choices in the multiple goal awareness condition ($F(2, 102) = 2.99, p = .05$).

Additional Evidence

In the pleasure and self-control awareness conditions, choices followed the most accessible goal independently of choice context. In the multiple goal awareness condition, however, choices for others differed from personal choices, which provides an opportunity to examine differences in goal accessibility between the personal choice and the choice-for-other condition. When making choices for others, an indulgence goal should become more accessible, even when participants are personally aware of both goals. I ran the same design as that of the multiple goal condition and had participants ($N = 77$) perform a lexical decision task after each sequence of choices (for themselves vs. others). I showed participants 10 words related to indulgence, 10

FIGURE 3
STUDY 3 RESULTS



words related to self-control, and 10 neutral words and measured latencies to see how accessible each type of word was at the moment (see complete set of words and instructions in study 4B). A repeated-measures ANOVA revealed an interaction between type of choice and word type ($F(2, 150) = 6.10, p < .01$). After making personal choices, words associated with indulgence ($M = 653$ milliseconds) were more accessible than neutral words (684 milliseconds; $F(2, 74) = 4.30, p < .05$), as were words associated with self-control ($M = 647$ milliseconds; $F(2, 74) = 6.47, p = .01$). Words associated with indulgence and self-control were equally accessible ($F < 1$). After making choices for others, words associated with indulgence ($M = 635$ milliseconds) were more accessible than neutral words ($M = 666$ milliseconds; $F(2, 74) = 4.34, p < .05$), and neutral words were more accessible than words associated with self-control ($M = 696$ milliseconds; $F(2, 326) = 4.48, p < .05$). Importantly, words associated with indulgence were equally accessible after each type of choice ($F < 1$), while words associated with self-control were more accessible after personal choices ($F(1, 75) = 4.31, p < .05$). These results are evidence that participants were focusing on both goals when making personal choices but mostly on indulgence when making choices for others.

Discussion

The results of study 3 demonstrate that consumers' personal choices can be similar to their choices for others depending on which goals are accessible at the time of choice. In addition, when people are personally aware of multiple goals, they still seek to manage their own multiple goals while focusing on the pleasure-seeking goal of others. It seems that personal awareness of multiple goals does not change the erroneous belief that others will not exert self-

control, even when people made choices both for themselves and for others (i.e., within-subjects design). The results in the indulgence awareness condition suggest that choices for others were already quite focused on indulgence; the manipulation did not influence these choices. The results in the self-control awareness condition suggest that personal choices were already quite focused on self-control; the manipulation did not influence these choices. Finally, the accessibility evidence indicates that people not only choose to focus on pleasure seeking when making choices for others but also inhibit self-control in this process.

STUDY 4A

Study 4A examines the role of temporal distance in encouraging a goal management focus. Temporal distance research finds that choices for the present tend to be indulgent, while choices for the future tend to be virtuous (Metcalfe and Mischel 1999). Recent research shows that a possible underlying reason for this phenomenon is that a large temporal distance encourages a goal management focus (Laran 2010). If this is also true in choices for others, making choices for the future should lead to healthier choices for others than making choices for the present. I predict that because goal management is salient when consumers choose multiple items for personal consumption even in the present, the goal management focus that emerges when thinking about the future will have a greater impact on choices for others than on personal consumption.

Method

Participants and Design. Participants were 85 undergraduate business students at the University of Miami who participated in exchange for course credit. The design was a 2 (time frame: present vs. future) \times 2 (choice context: personal vs. other) mixed design. The time frame factor was manipulated between subjects while the choice context factor was manipulated within subjects.

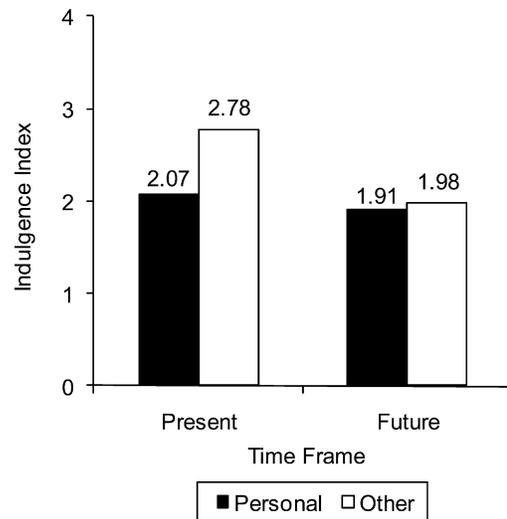
Procedure and Stimuli. The experiment followed the procedure of study 1 with one exception: participants in the present time frame condition were told that they were making food choices to be consumed today, while participants in the future time frame condition were told that they were making food choices to be consumed during the course of the month.

Results

Results are presented in figure 4. An ANOVA showed an interaction between the goal management and choice context factors ($F(2, 81) = 3.69, p < .05$). The order in which participants made choices (first for themselves vs. first for others) did not influence the results ($F < 1$). In the present goal management condition, personal choices ($M = 2.07$) were less indulgent than choices for another person ($M = 2.78; F(1, 81) = 11.04, p < .01$). In the future goal

FIGURE 4

STUDY 4A RESULTS



management condition, personal choices ($M = 1.91$) were as indulgent as choices for another person ($M = 1.98; F < 1$). Looked at differently, the time frame manipulation did not influence personal choices ($F < 1$) but made choices for another person less indulgent ($F(1, 81) = 6.59, p = .01$).

Discussion

The results of study 4A demonstrate that framing “choices as choices for the distant future” may help consumers make more balanced choices for others. While a goal management focus in personal choices seems to be independent of time frame, it seems that making choices for the future helps consumers broaden their goal focus when making an inference about the goals of others, shifting it from pleasure seeking to self-control. What exactly causes this shift deserves attention in future research. For example, it might be the case that consumers are more optimistic that others will be able to exert self-control in the future and for this reason make more balanced choices for others.

STUDY 4B

I predicted that, in study 4A, participants chose to focus on multiple goals when making choices for others for the future but not for the present. If this is correct, an indulgence and a self-control goal should be equally accessible when people make choices for others for the future. In choices for the present, an indulgence goal should be more accessible than a self-control goal. I test this predicted pattern of accessibility in the choice-for-others context using a lexical decision task.

Method

Participants and Design. Participants were 64 undergraduate business students at the University of Miami who participated in exchange for course credit. The design was a 2 (time frame: present vs. future) × 2 (word type: indulgence vs. self-control) mixed design. The time frame factor was manipulated between subjects while the word type factor was manipulated within subjects.

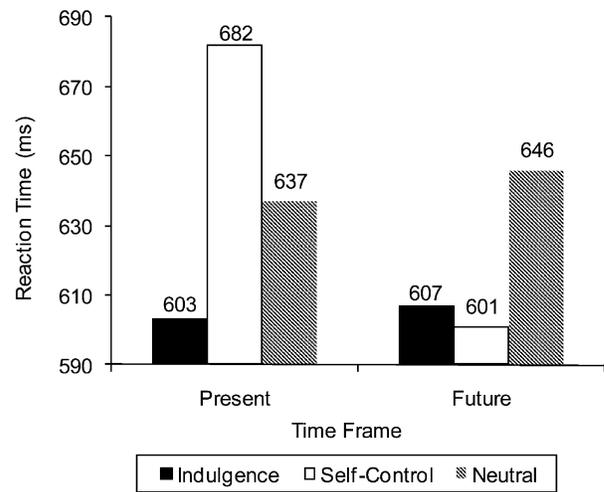
Procedure and Stimuli. The procedure was similar to that of study 4A with a few changes. Participants did not make choices but imagined themselves doing so. The cover story was that I was investigating how intense shopping imagination is. Participants received the following instructions: “We are investigating how intense shopping imagination is. Imagine that you went grocery shopping to purchase some food items for a friend. Think about the things that you would purchase for your friend, such as things that they need and would like to eat. We will give you a minute for this task.” After participants were done, I asked them how intense the task was and, to keep the cover story, told them that they were done with the first study and moved to the second study.

The second task was an attentional task supposedly designed to investigate people’s capability to identify words quickly and accurately. Participants were told that letter strings would be shown on the screen and their task was to identify, as quickly and accurately as possible, whether the string was a word or not (press “1” for words, “0” for nonwords). Several Xs were shown on the screen center and, after 2 seconds, the letter string. Thirty nonwords, 10 words related to indulgence (delicious, enjoy, gourmet, delight, pleasure, savory, good, desire, indulge, juicy), 10 words related to self-control (calories, slim, regimen, fresh, weight, control, fit, health, exercise, workout), and 10 neutral words (cartoon, spoon, picture, flower, sink, forest, notebook, computer, binder, printer) were shown. These 60 trials were presented in a randomized order.

Results

The responses from the lexical decision task were prepared for analysis by removing incorrect identifications of words as non words (4.8%). I performed a natural log transformation of reaction times for correct identifications of words. Those that exceeded three standard deviations from their cell mean (.7%) were eliminated from the analysis (Bargh and Chartrand 2000; Fazio 1990). I averaged the reaction times for each type of word for each participant. Means are presented in figure 5. A repeated-measures ANOVA revealed an interaction between the time frame and word type factors ($F(2, 124) = 6.35, p < .01$). In the present time frame condition, words associated with indulgence ($M = 603$ milliseconds) were marginally more accessible than neutral words ($M = 637$ milliseconds; $F(2, 61) = 3.60, p = .06$), and neutral words were more accessible than words associated with self-control ($M = 682$ milliseconds; $F(2,$

FIGURE 5
STUDY 4B RESULTS



61) = 4.72, $p < .05$). In the future time frame condition, words associated with indulgence ($M = 607$ milliseconds) were more accessible than neutral words ($M = 646$ milliseconds; $F(2, 61) = 4.30, p < .05$), as were words associated with self-control ($M = 601$ milliseconds; $F(2, 61) = 4.07, p < .05$). Words associated with indulgence and self-control were equally accessible ($F < 1$). Importantly, the accessibility of words associated with indulgence did not change as a function of time frame ($F < 1$), but words associated with self-control became more accessible in the future time frame condition ($F(1, 62) = 11.51, p < .01$).

Discussion

The results of study 4B show that decisions for others make an indulgence goal more accessible than a self-control goal. Importantly, a self-control goal becomes highly accessible when these decisions involve the distant future. As study 4A and previous research has shown, decisions for the future tend to be more virtuous than decisions for the present. The results of study 4B show that this phenomenon can be a consequence of a goal management focus (both indulgence and self-control goals are accessible) when people make decisions for the future.

STUDY 5

Study 5 tests my goal focus hypothesis in a field study. Supermarket customers were intercepted on their way out of the store and asked if they were making purchases only for themselves or also for others. I then analyzed their actual purchases. I predicted that customers purchasing for others would purchase more indulgent food items than those purchasing for themselves only.

Method

Participants and Design. Participants were 135 supermarket customers (64% female, 41.9 years of age on average) who agreed to participate in a “consumer behavior study.” The design had one factor (choice context), featuring two levels (personal vs. other).

Procedure and Stimuli. Participants were intercepted outside of a major supermarket chain, in the course of 4 different days of the week, between 1:00 and 6:00 in the afternoon. Participants were asked to volunteer for a consumer behavior study and, in case they agreed, were asked whether they were purchasing food items for themselves only or also for other people during that shopping trip. If they were purchasing for other people, they were asked who these people were (i.e., friends, roommate, family, or others). After responding to this question and two demographic questions (age and gender), they were asked whether they were willing to release their store receipt so their food purchases could be analyzed for our consumer behavior study. I kept the data from those who agreed to release their receipts. Participants were then informed of the purpose of the study and thanked for their participation.

Results

Thirty-five percent of the sample were buying for themselves only, while 65% were buying for themselves and others. Among the people buying for others, 12.4% were buying for a friend, 6.2% were buying for a roommate, 64.9% were buying for their family, and 16.5% were buying for other people (e.g., a party). I eliminated people buying for a party from the analysis since buying for a party could bias the results in favor of more indulgent choices for others. The final sample had 126 customers. Two coders rated each purchased item on a scale ranging from 1 = very healthy to 10 = very indulgent. Agreement was above 75%, and disagreements were resolved through discussion. To avoid the influence of quantity of purchased items on the results, the ratings were averaged so I could have one indulgence index per participant. An ANOVA indicated that personal choices ($M = 5.19$) were less indulgent than choices for others ($M = 6.54$; $F(1, 124) = 38.62, p < .01$). These results did not vary as a function of whether people were buying for a friend ($M = 6.69$), roommate ($M = 6.53$), or family ($M = 6.33$; $F < 1$).

Discussion

Study 5 offers evidence that consumers make choices for others that are more indulgent than their choices for themselves. Although there could be alternative explanations for the results (e.g., others asked people to purchase indulgent items, people were trying to look good in front of the experimenter), it seems reasonable to contend that people do not manage multiple goals when making choices for others.

This field evidence supports the evidence presented in the series of laboratory experiments.

GENERAL DISCUSSION

Previous investigations have focused on how the presence of others influences an individual’s decision making (Ariely and Levav 2000) and on how groups make decisions (Corfman and Lehmann 1987). The current investigation shifts the spotlight from the influence of others on decision making to the content of people’s choices for others. I find that consumers tend to make more indulgent choices for others than for themselves (studies 1 and 5), unless the concept of management is highly accessible (study 1) or people are making choices for the distant future (study 4A). This phenomenon is influenced by distinct beliefs about personal and other people’s goals (study 2). The different goal focus in personal choices versus choices for others influences the accessibility of an indulgence and a self-control goal (studies 3 and 4B). Raising awareness about self-control results in healthier choices for others but not for oneself, while raising awareness about pleasure results in more indulgent choices for oneself but not for others (study 3).

An important question concerning these results is where the belief comes from that others will not exert self-control. I argue that consumers show frequent self-control failures because indulgent items are highly desirable and they use the opportunity to make several choices in a sequence to manage multiple goals and solve a possible self-control conflict. Consumers do not experience a self-control conflict when choosing for others. Therefore, they believe that others will simply choose the highly desirable indulgent items and not exert self-control. There may be several alternative causes for the belief that others will not exert self-control. First, this belief might be a better-than-average effect through which people believe that they are better than others when making social judgments (Chambers and Windschitl 2004). Thus, consumers might think that, while they are able to manage multiple goals, other people are not because they are not as good at resisting temptation. Second, consumers might believe that others’ emotional experiences are less intense than their own. Thus, consumers might manage multiple goals to avoid experiencing an emotion, such as guilt, when choosing for themselves but choose indulgence for others because they do not believe others will experience guilt to the same extent. Third, consumers might believe that others’ satiate from indulgent experiences at a slower rate than themselves. Thus, consumers might combine the highly desirable indulgent items with healthy items for themselves because they believe that they will satiate fast from indulging repeatedly, while others will be able to keep indulging. These and other possible causes for the effects found here deserve investigation in future research.

This research helps clarify which basic processes influence whether consumers pursue multiple goals or highlight a single goal (Dhar and Simonson 1999). The choice context (i.e., are consumers purchasing for themselves only or for other people?) might determine which dynamics are used.

Interestingly, one would think that participants would be more committed to their own goals than to the goals of others. Fishbach and Dhar (2005) find that when people are highly committed to a goal, they tend to highlight a single goal. Although I cannot be sure that my manipulations influenced commitment, or that people were more committed to their own choices, the results suggest that increased commitment may also lead to a balanced pattern of choices. Future research could investigate whether this result is specific to the context of personal choices versus choices for others or whether there are conditions in which increased commitment systematically leads to multiple pursuits rather than single goal pursuit.

The population is increasingly interested in leading a healthier lifestyle. Nevertheless, life seems to push consumers toward indulgence numerous times a day. The finding that people try to pursue both goals when making choices for themselves may signal a new type of product variety. In this case, variety-seeking behavior is characterized by searching for options that, rather than being simply different (e.g., flavors, colors), offer an opportunity for people to achieve multiple goals (e.g., taste, health). Instead of offering mere variety in an assortment, marketers may benefit from offering “self-control variety” and capitalizing on consumers’ need to feel good about their choices, through the purchase of virtuous products, while still being able to enjoy life, through the purchase of indulgent products.

Consumers make choices for others in a variety of settings. These choices might occur for personal reasons (i.e., what I am cooking for my dinner party tonight?) or professional reasons (i.e., what will I include in the menu in the cafeteria this week?). Although I uncovered some factors, it is important to understand how other factors can help consumers make healthier choices for others. For example, the choice options in a sequence might be organized in a way that the options consumers are exposed to first are healthy options. Based on goal activation by means research (Kruglanski et al. 2002), these items should activate a self-control goal, which may inhibit the operation of an indulgence goal as consumers are exposed to indulgent means (Fishbach, Friedman, and Kruglanski 2003). In addition, marketing communications could help consumers use their multiple goal management skills when making choices for themselves and for others. For instance, a slogan in a supermarket that says “your family’s health is the result of the choices you make” could make a multiple goal management focus accessible and motivate balanced choices when a customer is grocery shopping for the family.

If people seek the management of multiple goals when making sequential choices, we need to understand why consumers still indulge so much. Could it be the case that choices made for and by other people are so common that a great deal of our indulgent behavior is caused by the presence of others? Understanding the influence of pleasing a buying agent as a source of indulgent behavior could offer a theoretical contribution to the literature on the role of social groups in food consumption (Ariely and Levav 2000; Wan-

sink 2007) and also help people avoid the trap of going against their best interests just to please others.

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