

The authors document consistent discrepancies among consumers' predicted, actual, and remembered feelings related to indulgence episodes and conceptualize the underlying processes. Consistent with previous research, consumers expect more negative and less positive feelings when they indulge without a reason than when they indulge with a reason (Study 1) or when they indulge as a consolation for poor performance than when they indulge as a reward for high effort (Study 2). However, episodic reports pertaining to the last indulgence episode show no influence of having versus not having a reason (Study 1), nor do concurrent reports show a difference between indulging as a consolation and indulging as a reward (Study 2). When asked how they "usually" feel when indulging with versus without a reason (Study 3), consumers' global memories are consistent with their expectations rather than with their actual experiences. These findings have implications for the conditions under which consumers learn from experience.

Keywords: consumer indulgence, reason-based judgment and decision making, hedonic experiences, emotional self-reports, affective forecasting

Do We Really Need a Reason to Indulge?

Consumers often seek reasons to justify their decisions or choices (Shafir, Simonson, and Tversky 1993), in particular when the decision is difficult (e.g., when choosing between equally attractive options) or when it conflicts with their personal values. A consumption decision that may give rise to value conflicts is the decision to spend on luxury items rather than on necessities. Indulging in luxury items may be construed as wasteful and is likely to evoke guilt and (anticipated) regret, both before the decision and after the decision has been made (Kivetz and Simonson 2002a; Lascau 1991; Okada 2005). Thus, consumers are more likely to indulge when they have a good justification for doing so (Kivetz and Zheng 2006). Previous research has suggested several reasons that spending on indulgences and luxury goods is more likely to require justifications than spending on necessities. In general, indulgences and luxury goods rank lower in the hierarchy of needs than

necessities (Maslow 1970) and provide few functional benefits. Moreover, American culture endorses a Protestant ethic (Weber 1958) that values working hard and spending frugally. Spending on indulgences violates these ethical obligations, in particular when the indulgence is not "earned" by hard work.

Conversely, hedonic indulgences provide people with experiential enjoyment, satisfying both psychological and physiological needs that necessities may not meet. Consequently, consumers are motivated to pursue opportunities that allow them to indulge themselves in ways that mitigate the resultant conflict and guilt. A way to achieve this is to justify indulgences with good reasons. For example, Kivetz and Simonson (2002a) examine consumers' use of bonus points in loyalty programs. They find that consumers are more likely to redeem points for hedonic rewards (e.g., a cruise, a pampering massage) than for utilitarian rewards (e.g., cash, necessities) if they made a greater effort, presumably because this greater effort offsets the guilt associated with choosing luxuries over necessities. Similarly, Strahilevitz and Myers (1998) observe that donations to charities are better bundled with hedonic or frivolous products than with utilitarian or practical ones because people enjoy rewarding themselves with hedonic pleasure for their altruistic behavior. Such findings suggest that consumers believe that they need a good reason to permit themselves to indulge to minimize the guilt and/or regret they experience throughout the decision-making, consumption, and postconsumption evaluation phases. These beliefs were evi-

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dent in a focus group, which we describe in greater detail subsequently. When asked, "When do you usually pamper yourself?" focus group participants described situations such as "after exams," "after accomplishments," or "on a special event, such as graduation." They reported that they rarely indulge without good reasons because doing so would elicit feelings of guilt and regret. Similarly, they contended that they are unlikely to enjoy an indulgence when it is unearned because they would feel bad if it is not justified (given their limited financial resources). This suggests that consumers believe that "unearned" indulgences are less enjoyable than "earned" indulgences.

Recent research has further suggested that some consumers find it so difficult to justify luxury purchases and indulgences that they may suffer from insufficient indulgence and a deprivation of pleasurable experiences (Kivetz and Zheng 2006; Thaler 1985). Prior research has also indicated that some consumers may realize that they have a tendency to overspend on necessities and to underspend on luxury items, prompting them to manage this tendency by precommitting to hedonic purchases (Kivetz and Simonson 2002b). For example, in Kivetz and Simonson's (2002b) experiments, consumers preferred to receive indulgence items rather than cash as a reward (lottery prize), especially when the chance to win was small. In addition, consumers preferred to choose indulgence rewards over necessities when the perceived effort was high and they received excellent feedback on an effort task, but only when an opportunity for a monetary exchange was not suggested (Kivetz and Zheng 2006). It seems that though consumers realize that they may not indulge enough, expected guilt and regret nevertheless prevent them from committing to indulgence.

However, there is no direct evidence that consumers' expectations are correct. All the available research is based either on consumers' predictions or reported preferences (e.g., Khan and Dhar 2006; Kivetz and Simonson 2002b; Strahilevitz and Myers 1998) or on purchase behavior (e.g., Kivetz and Simonson 2002a; Kivetz and Zheng 2006). What is missing are assessments of consumers' actual affective experiences during indulgences for which they perceive or do not perceive a legitimate reason. Such assessments are important because both preferences and purchase decisions are based on hedonic predictions (March 1978)—that is, consumers' expectations of how they would feel. As an increasing number of studies have indicated, such expectations are often wrong and fail to capture people's actual experiences (e.g., Novemsky and Ratner 2003; Schwarz, Kahneman, and Xu 2009; Xu and Schwarz 2007). If so, consumers' decisions may often be suboptimal. Expecting guilt when they indulge without a good reason, consumers may deprive themselves of experiences they may actually enjoy. Thus, the question we address in this article is, Are consumers' intuitions right? Do consumers actually experience more guilt and/or less enjoyment when they consume hedonic items without a good reason than when they consume such products with a good reason?

We conjecture that consumers enjoy their indulgences as much when they have a legitimate reason as when they do not, in contrast to what their own naive theories would predict. Our basic premise is that when people consume hedonic goods or services, their attention is drawn to aspects of

the consumption, such as features of the goods, services, or consumption environment. In contrast, when making a decision or when evaluating decisions after they have been made, people base their judgments on accessible general knowledge and beliefs because they have no direct access to details of the hedonic experience of past or future consumption episodes.

Next, we review evidence that consumers' hedonic predictions are often erroneous. Subsequently, we address why consumers are unlikely to notice errors of prediction. In the case of indulgences, the expected guilt and regret may prevent them from indulging in the first place, thus depriving them of an opportunity to realize that their predictions were erroneous. Moreover, as time passes, they may reconstruct memories of previous indulgence experiences from the same general knowledge and beliefs that inform their predictions, resulting in reconstructive memories that apparently confirm what they predicted. However, methods that avoid the confirmatory bias of reconstructive memory by relying on concurrent or episodic reports of indulgence experiences may paint a different picture. We conceptualize the relationship among predictions, experience, and episodic and global memories within Robinson and Clore's (2002) accessibility model of emotional self-report.

Consistent with our conceptual analysis, we observe that consumers expect less enjoyment when they indulge without a reason than when they indulge with a reason (Study 1) or when they indulge as a consolation for poor performance than when they indulge as a reward for high effort (Study 2). However, episodic affect reports pertaining to the last indulgence episode show no influence of having versus not having a reason (Study 1), nor do concurrent affect reports show a difference between indulging as a consolation and indulging as a reward (Study 2). When consumers are asked how they "usually" feel when indulging with versus without a reason (Study 3), however, their global memories are consistent with their expectations rather than with their actual experience. We conclude with a discussion of the conditions under which consumers learn or do not learn from experience and highlight the methodological implications for our findings for the assessment of consumption experiences.

ERRONEOUS PREDICTIONS AND MEMORIES OF HEDONIC EXPERIENCE

A large body of literature indicates that consumers are not good at predicting their hedonic experiences. Several different, and not mutually exclusive, processes contribute to consumers' errors (for a review, see Hsee and Hastie 2006). When making a prediction, people usually attend to the focal features of the activity at the expense of other information (Schkade and Kahneman 1998), which results in an overestimation of the likely impact of the focal features (e.g., Kahneman et al. 2006). Moreover, people tend to neglect their ability to adapt when forecasting their emotional reactions to future events and thus overestimate the likely duration of their affective reactions (e.g., Gilbert et al. 1998). People may also underweight attributes that are difficult to articulate but exert an important influence on the experience (Wilson and Schooler 1991). In addition, predictions are often based on comparisons among several choice alternatives, whereas only the chosen alternative is

experienced, and little attention may be given to other options during consumption (Hsee and Hastie 2006; Hsee and Zhang 2004). When the activity is emotionally involving, people may be in different affective states at the time of prediction than at the time of experience, resulting in cold-hot empathy gaps (Loewenstein and Schkade 1999). Finally, people may hold incorrect beliefs about how they will feel in certain consumption situations, and those beliefs may be rarely updated, for reasons we discuss subsequently (Kahneman and Snell 1990; Novemsky and Ratner 2003; Ratner, Kahn, and Kahneman 1999; Robison and Clore 2002).

Previous research has also documented numerous errors in people's memories of past experience. These errors can typically be traced to the influence of domain-relevant beliefs on people's reconstruction of what the past must have been like (for reviews, see Ross 1989; Schwarz 2007). For example, McFarland, Ross, and De Courville (1989) asked women to keep daily diaries of their affect and physical symptoms. Following the diary period, the women were asked to recall their affect and physical symptoms for a particular day during either their menstrual or their intermenstrual phase. A comparison of their concurrent diary data and their retrospective reports showed a pronounced impact of their beliefs about menstruation. Women who considered their menstruation a distressing event recalled feeling worse during the menstrual phase than they reported concurrently, whereas these beliefs did not bias recall for a day during the intermenstrual phase. Similarly, Braun (1999) observed that retrospective reports of consumption experiences were affected by postexperience information that could guide consumers' reconstruction. In her studies, consumers' memory for a taste experience was altered by the advertisement they viewed after the experience, bringing the memory in line with the claims of the advertisement. Findings of this type highlight the notion that reconstructed experiences are often a function of domain-relevant beliefs, with the unfortunate consequence that the reconstructed memory seems to confirm a person's expectations, thus impeding learning from experience.

On the methodological side, the confirmation bias inherent in reconstructive memory implies that retrospective reports of affective experience are more indicative of people's beliefs than of the feelings they actually had (for reviews, see Robinson and Clore 2002; Schwarz 2007). Next, we turn to different types of affective self-reports and address their relationships to one another, noting the methodological implications of relevance to studies of indulgence.

A CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

How people report on current and past affective experiences has been conceptualized in Robinson and Clore's (2002) accessibility model of emotional self-report. We review core aspects of their model and add a prediction component, which was not part of their theorizing.

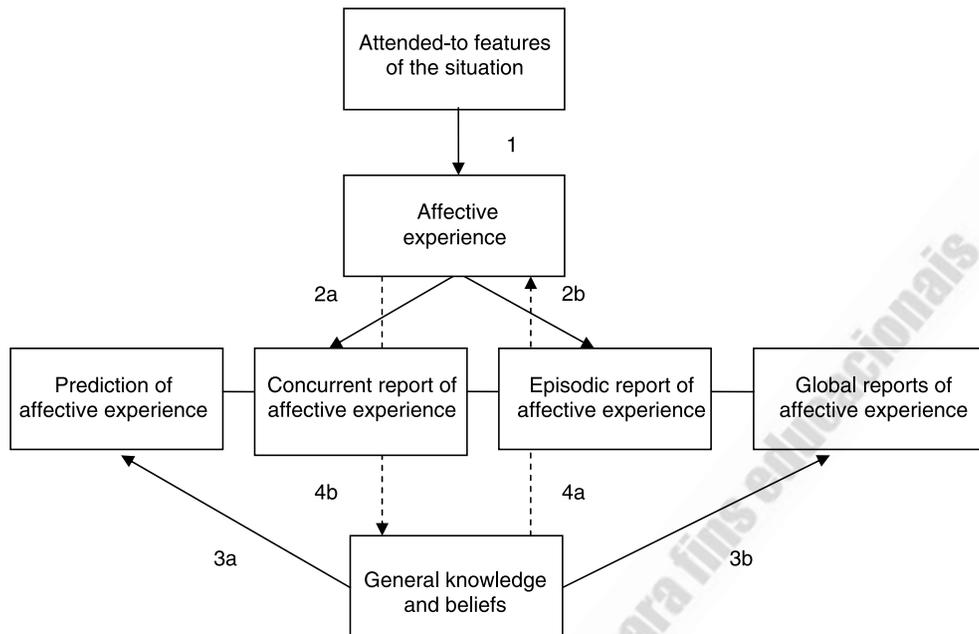
Robinson and Clore (2002) assume that people's affective experiences are a function of what they attend to at a given moment. During an episode of indulgence, for example, people's attention is likely to be captured by characteristics of the consumption episode and the hedonic pleasures it provides. When people are asked to report on their cur-

rent feelings, the feelings themselves are accessible, enabling people to provide accurate reports on the basis of experiential information. However, affective experiences are fleeting and not available for introspection after the feeling has dissipated. Thus, past affective experiences need to be reconstructed from episodic or semantic information. When the affect report pertains to a specific recent episode, people can draw on episodic memory, retrieving specific moments and details of the recent past. These detailed memories involve attention to core characteristics of the actual episode and can reinstantiate the feelings people experienced, as observed in studies that have used episodic recall to change people's current affective state (e.g., Schwarz and Clore 1983). Moreover, the episodic memories may include valid cues that enable a person to reconstruct the feelings he or she had, such as the memory that "we laughed throughout the dinner." Thus, reports based on detailed episodic memories can often recover the actual experience with some accuracy (Robinson and Clore 2002). In support of this assumption, Kahneman and colleagues (2004) observe that detailed episodic reconstructions of the affect experienced in specific situations of the previous day mapped onto the pattern of concurrent reports, assessed with experience sampling methods (see also Stone et al. 2006).

In contrast, predictions of future feelings and global retrospective reports of past feelings are based on general semantic knowledge. When people are asked how they would feel during a particular future activity, specific episodic details are not yet available, and thus they draw on their general knowledge about the activity and its attributes to arrive at a report. This process is subject to the biases we reviewed previously. The same general knowledge is used when people are asked how they "usually" feel during this activity, giving rise to similar biases in reconstructive memory. The actual experience does not figure prominently in global retrospective reports, because the experience itself is no longer accessible to introspection and episodic reconstruction of specific instances is not used to answer a global question. As a result, predictions and global retrospective reports typically show good convergence, and people's general memories seem to "confirm" their predictions. However, both predictions and global memories frequently deviate from concurrent or episodic reports of affective experience (for reviews, see Robinson and Clore 2002; Schwarz, Kahneman, and Xu 2009; for examples, see Kahneman et al. 2004, 2006; Xu and Schwarz 2007).

Figure 1 summarizes this logic. People's actual affective experiences are largely a function of what they attend to in a given situation (see Arrow 1). For example, when people indulge in a luxurious dinner, their attention is likely to be focused on the presentation and taste of the food, the elegant setting, and the good company. Whether they had a good reason to have a luxurious dinner is unlikely to be on the diners' minds, even when it played a role in the preceding decision process. When asked how they feel right now, diners can draw on their momentary feelings to provide a concurrent report (see Arrow 2a). Retrieving detailed memories of a specific recent luxurious dinner brings the core features of the episode back to mind, and attending to them reinstantiates related feelings (see Arrow 2b). Thus, episodic and concurrent reports are likely to converge

Figure 1
AN INTEGRATED ACCESSIBILITY MODEL OF EMOTIONAL SELF-REPORT



(Kahneman et al. 2004; Stone et al. 2006). In contrast, predictions and global retrospective reports are based on general knowledge about the respective activity (see Arrows 3a and 3b). Even if a recent episode is accessible, it may not be deemed representative of specific future episodes or of a person's "usual" experience. Instead, reports are derived from beliefs about the general characteristics of the type of activity and their likely affective impact. Considerations that come up during the predecision stage, such as whether there is a good reason to indulge in a luxurious dinner, may figure prominently in this context, and diners may miss the idea that such considerations will not be on their minds when the food arrives. As a result, predictions and global retrospective reports of affective experience also show good convergence (Schwarz, Kahneman, and Xu 2009; Xu and Schwarz 2007), but they diverge from concurrent and episodic reports.

Our hypothetical diners' experience may be spoiled if someone asks, "Do you really think you deserve this indulgent dinner?" By drawing attention to the belief that unjustified indulgences come at the price of later guilt and regret, the question may undermine the pleasure of the moment (as shown by the dashed line [Arrow 4a] from beliefs to feelings in Figure 1). This possibility is consistent with prior research that highlights the role of expectations in consumers' product experiences (e.g., Allison and Uhl 1964; Levin and Gaeth 1988; Shiv, Carmon, and Ariely 2005). Furthermore, when semantic knowledge or beliefs are updated on the basis of actual experiences (as shown by the dashed line [Arrow 4b] from feelings to beliefs), future predictions and global reports may be more consistent with actual experiences. However, such updating may require specific prompts to consider the implications of the experi-

ence for a person's general beliefs, just as the beliefs may only spoil the experience when brought to mind.

THE CURRENT RESEARCH

Applied to consumers' enjoyment of indulgence, this rationale suggests that reasons and justifications loom larger in consumers' hedonic predictions and global memories than in their actual hedonic experiences. When asked to predict their hedonic enjoyment, consumers presumably draw on general knowledge about the to-be-evaluated act of consumption. Beliefs about enjoyment are part of this knowledge and figure prominently in prediction, paralleling the role of beliefs in other domains of affective self-report (Robinson and Clore 2002). The same general knowledge is used when consumers report on their "usual" experiences. Conversely, consumers' actual consumption experiences are likely to be determined by the inputs they attend to at the moment (i.e., the experiential components of the consumption act itself) and may not be systematically affected by their beliefs (Hoch and Deighton 1989), unless those beliefs are brought to mind in the given context. Thus, we expect that the availability of good reasons and justifications enters consumers' predictions and global retrospective reports but plays only a minor role in consumers' experiences.

Study 1 assesses consumers' experiences by asking for episodic reports of the feelings they experienced in a recent consumption situation. Our assessment method is modeled after Kahneman and colleagues' (2004) day reconstruction method, which has been validated against experience sampling data (Kahneman et al. 2004; Stone et al. 2006). Consistent with Robinson and Clore's (2002) accessibility model of emotional self-report, episodic reports of affective

experience pertaining to a specific and recent instance can capture the actual experience with some accuracy and provide a feasible approximation to concurrent measurement, which we use in Study 2.

In Study 1, we compare consumers' predictions and episodic reports of their affective experiences in consumption situations in which they indulged with a reason versus without a reason. We expect, and find, that consumers predict greater enjoyment when they have a reason to indulge, as has been observed in prior research. However, we further expect, and find, that this prediction is not supported by differences in the actual experience, as reflected in episodic reports.

Study 2 extends this analysis by comparing situations in which consumers indulge as a reward for previous effort or indulge as a consolation for poor performance. We expect, and find, that consumers predict greater enjoyment when the indulgence serves as a reward than when it serves as a consolation. However, again, this difference in prediction is not supported by actual differences in experience, as reflected in concurrent reports collected during consumption.

These discrepancies between consumers' hedonic predictions and their actual experiences lead to the question, Why don't consumers learn from their experiences? At least part of the answer is that consumers' global memories tend to "confirm" their predictions, leaving them with the impression that their predictions were correct all along. Study 3 addresses this hypothesis by assessing global retrospective reports of indulgence episodes. We predict, and find, that consumers' global memories confirm their expectations.

STUDY 1

The literature on indulgence (e.g., Kivetz and Simonson 2002a, b; Kivetz and Zheng 2006; Lascu 1991; Okada 2005) suggests that consumers are likely to believe that consuming hedonic items without a reason is associated with less positive and/or more negative affect (e.g., guilt and regret) than consuming them with a reason (e.g., as a reward for hard work). To explore this belief in more detail, we first ran a focus group. Eight undergraduate students (four men and four women, ages 20 to 21) at a large midwestern university were recruited for a semistructured focus group interview. Participants reported that they give themselves a nice treat after a major exam or hard work, though there appears to be some gender differences in how they prefer to pamper themselves. For example, male students tend to enjoy meals at a nice restaurant and drinks at bars, whereas female students are more likely to indulge themselves with a pampering massage or deluxe ice cream or brownies. The students also claimed that they rarely indulge themselves without any reasons because of financial constraints and that they associate guilt and regret with indulgence purchases.

Of key interest is whether these expectations and beliefs are reflected in consumers' actual consumption experiences. We address this question in Study 1 and predict that consumers do not experience more negative and/or less positive affect when consuming hedonic indulgences without a reason than when consuming them with a reason, in contrast to what they believe and predict.

Method

One hundred eighty-four undergraduate students at a major midwestern university participated in this study in exchange for partial course credit. Participants assigned to the prediction-with-reason condition were first asked to imagine that they had just finished their final exams and were looking for something to reward themselves. They were asked to select one of several consumption activities presented to them (e.g., dinner at a nice restaurant, spa treatment). The choice items were selected on the basis of the results from the focus group interview. Participants were then asked to indicate their expected affective experiences on a seven-point rating scale, imagining that they had consumed the item they chose ("How would you feel during this particular experience?"). Participants assigned to the prediction-without-reason condition were first instructed to imagine that they were giving themselves a treat (e.g., dinner at a nice restaurant, a spa treatment) without any reason (e.g., finish exams) and then to indicate their expected affective experiences. In both prediction conditions, respondents were asked at the end of questionnaire to indicate whether they were thinking about a particular instance while answering the questions and, if so, to describe it. The collection of demographic information completed the questionnaire.

In the episodic-recall conditions, participants were asked to recall the most recent time they had given themselves a nice treat (e.g., dinner at a nice restaurant, a spa treatment). They were then asked to recall the details associated with that consumption episode (e.g., when, where, who they were with) and to report the feelings they had experienced during the consumption episode along the same affect dimensions. Finally, the participants indicated whether there was a particular reason (e.g., finish exams) for that consumption and, if so, described the occasion. They also reported how much they spent on that indulgence and who paid for it. For comparison with the prediction conditions, participants were grouped according to whether they reported that they had a reason versus did not have a reason to indulge.

The following 18 affect descriptors (9 positive and 9 negative) served as dependent variables: "Happy," "excited," "pleased," "fun," "enjoyable," "in high spirit," "joyous," "thrilled," and "energized" represented positive emotions, and "frustrated," "depressed," "disappointed," "guilty," "angry," "worried," "bored," "uninterested," and "annoyed" represented negative emotions. Each feeling was reported on a scale ranging from "not at all" (0) to "very much" (6).

We deleted 8 respondents from the analysis because of incomplete answers, leaving a usable sample of 178. We computed positive and negative affect indexes by averaging all positive and negative items.

Results

Justifications. Participants assigned to the episodic-recall conditions indicated whether they had a reason to indulge. Consistent with the extant literature, more participants indicated that they had a reason than that they had no reason to indulge ($N = 57$ versus $N = 34$; $\chi^2(1) = 5.81$, $p < .05$), indicating that people may find it easier to indulge when they

have a reason. The reasons identified by the participants were coded as “finishing exams” (31.6%), “special events” (e.g., graduation, parents in town; 43.9%), “birthday” (17.5%), and “other” (7%).

Predicted and experienced affect. Our theorizing predicts that having versus not having a reason to indulge exerts more influence on participants’ predictions than on their actual experience; this should be reflected in interaction effects of reason and report type. We obtained these interaction effects for summary scores of positive ($F(1, 176) = 2.25, p < .10$) and negative ($F(1, 176) = 5.10, p < .01$) affect, and they were particularly pronounced for reports of guilt ($F(1, 176) = 26.65, p < .001$); the corresponding means appear in Figures 2 and 3.

As we expected, participants predicted that they would experience more positive (for the simple main effect, $F(1, 176) = 3.92, p < .05$) and less negative (for the simple main effect, $F(1, 176) = 10.84, p < .01$) feelings when there was a reason to indulge than when there was not. This difference was most pronounced for feelings of guilt (for the simple main effect, $F(1, 176) = 68.33, p < .001$). The observed impact of reasons on predicted feelings is consistent with the extant literature (e.g., Prelec and Loewenstein 1998; Thaler 1985).

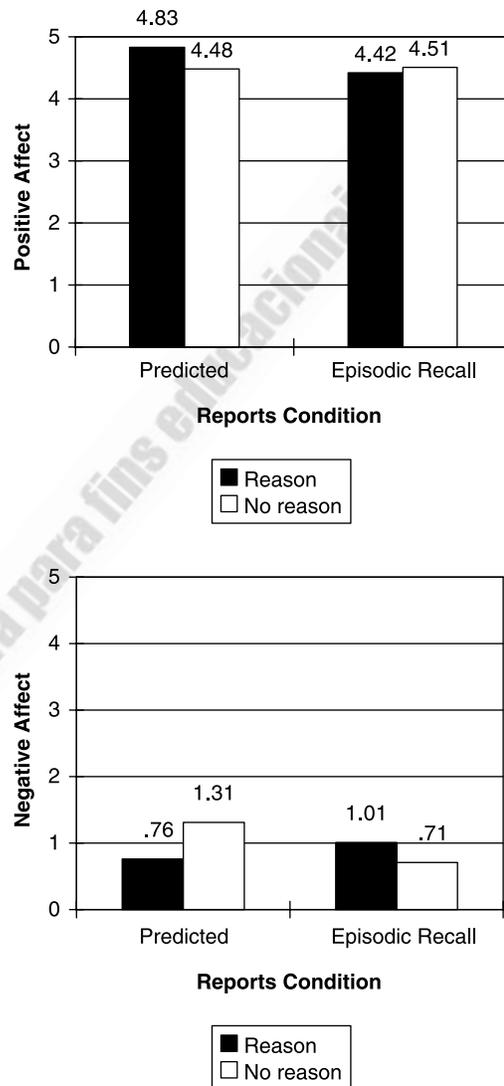
However, despite participants’ clear expectations, the presence or absence of a reason to indulge made no difference when participants recalled a specific, recent episode of indulgence. As we hypothesized, participants’ episodic reports indicate that they did not experience more positive affect when they indulged with a reason than when they indulged without a reason ($F < 1$), nor did they experience significantly more negative affect when they indulged without a reason than when they indulged with a reason ($F(1, 176) = 3.09, p > .05$). Furthermore, indulging without a reason was not accompanied by more guilt than indulging with a reason ($F < 1$), despite the prominent role of reasons in predicted guilt. In general, participants experienced only a minimal amount of negative feelings in both episodic conditions, with a mean of .90 on a scale from 0 to 6.

Additional analyses. The instructions for the prediction condition provided participants with a specific reason (indulging after finals), whereas the episodic-recall conditions did not. Thus, it might be asked whether the observed discrepancies between predicted and recalled affect when indulging with a reason were due to differential reasons for indulgence.¹ To address this possibility, we conducted an internal analysis of the episodic-report/with-reasons condition and explored whether different reasons were associated with different affective experiences in this condition. Empirically, this was not the case (for positive affect, $F(3, 53) = 1.01$, not significant [n.s.]; for negative affect and guilt, $F < 1$). This internal analysis indicates that the specific reason for indulgence is as irrelevant to consumers’ actual indulgence experiences as whether there is any reason in the first place.

Discussion

In summary, the results of Study 1 suggest that consumers do not experience more negative affect and/or less

Figure 2
STUDY 1: PREDICTED AND EPISODIC RECALL OF INDULGING EXPERIENCE (MEASURED AS POSITIVE AND NEGATIVE AFFECT) WITH OR WITHOUT REASON



Notes: The y-axis represents mean ratings of overall positive and negative affect. Overall positive and negative affect ratings in the predicted- and episodic-reports conditions are computed by averaging six positive and negative affect items, respectively.

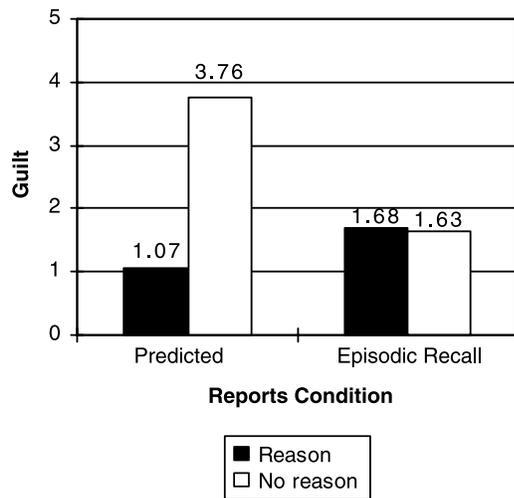
positive affect when indulging without a good reason than when indulging with a good reason (e.g., as a reward for hard work). This provides initial support for our conjecture that a lack of justification does not limit the actual enjoyment of an indulgence, in contrast to what consumers expect.

However, Study 1 has several limitations. Most notably, we randomly assigned participants asked to make predictions to the reason versus no-reason conditions. Such an assignment was not feasible in the episodic-reports condition because it would have brought the respective beliefs to

¹We thank a reviewer for raising this concern.

Figure 3

STUDY 1: PREDICTED AND EPISODIC RECALL OF GUILT WITH OR WITHOUT REASON



Notes: The y-axis represents mean ratings of guilt.

mind, thus increasing the likelihood that participants would draw on these accessible beliefs rather than on episodic details in reconstructing their hedonic experiences. In other words, the episodic-report participants self-selected into the reasons condition, and it is conceivable that those who reported that they indulged without a reason differ from those who had a reason for their indulgence. Most important, those who indulged without a reason may have enjoyed their indulgence simply because they do not believe that indulgence requires a reason in the first place. Study 2 does not suffer from this ambiguity.

Another limitation of Study 1 is less problematic because it works against our hypotheses. Specifically, we asked participants to recall the most recent episode of indulging themselves. Unfortunately, 43% of the participants reported that the most recent time they had purchased indulgence items was more than two weeks ago, implying that their episodic memory of the actual experience may already have decayed. Theoretically, this works against the expected and obtained results because the recall of affective experiences becomes increasingly theory driven over time, as episodic memory traces become less accessible (Robinson and Clore 2002). If anything, this shortcoming would attenuate the observed discrepancies between predicted and experienced feelings. Study 2 addresses this limitation by measuring participants' online experiences.

STUDY 2

In Study 2, some participants were asked to predict how they would feel while consuming an indulgence (chocolate truffles), whereas other participants actually indulged and then reported how they felt while eating the truffles. In addition, Study 2 distinguishes between two justifications for indulgence. Specifically, consumers may indulge either to reward themselves (e.g., after they passed an exam) or to

console themselves (e.g., after they failed an exam), as suggested by previous research into reason-based choice (Shafir, Simonson, and Tversky 1993). It seems likely that consumers take these different reasons into account when they predict their enjoyment and infer that they would enjoy truffles more as a reward for success than as a consolation after failure, consistent with the rationale of the Protestant ethic (Weber 1958).

However, an additional factor may complicate participants' predictions. As observed in mood induction studies (e.g., Böhner et al. 1988), success usually elicits a good mood, whereas failure usually elicits a sad mood. On the one hand, participants may take their likely upbeat or depressed mood into account when they predict their future enjoyment. This should contribute to expectations of higher enjoyment after success than after failure, consistent with the usually observed positive (negative) influence of happy (sad) moods (for reviews, see Pham 2004; Schwarz and Clore 2007). On the other hand, prior studies have shown that people in a bad mood are motivated to seek certain types of food (e.g., chocolate) to repair their mood (Andrade 2005; Greeno and Wing 1994; Thaler 1989; Tice, Bratslavsky, and Baumeister 2001). This suggests that people believe that certain foods act as mood lifters, and some findings indicate that women hold this belief more than men (Macht 1999; Steptoe, Pollard, and Wardle 1995). If so, participants may predict that they would enjoy truffles more after failure than after success, unless they account for the impact of their likely negative mood. The prediction conditions of Study 2 identify whether participants expect more enjoyment after success or after failure, and further research could fruitfully explore the role of participants' beliefs about the likely impact of their mood in these predictions. More important, our rationale predicts that the specific reason for indulging—namely, as a reward for success or as a consolation for failure—looms large in participants' predictions of hedonic enjoyment but exerts a negligible influence on their actual online experiences.

Method

Study 2 follows a 2 (reports type: prediction versus experience) \times 2 (reason: reward versus consolation) between-subjects design. One hundred forty-seven business undergraduate students at a major midwestern university participated in this study in exchange for course credit.

Participants in the consolation condition worked on ten difficult Graduate Management Admission Test (GMAT) math problems (selected from *Cracking the GMAT* by the Princeton Review [2004 ed.]) and were told that these problems were indicative of their success at a future GMAT test. We expected participants in this condition to feel bad about their performance and to seek indulgence as a consolation. We believed that business major undergraduates would place high importance on doing well on the GMAT, a test critical to applying to MBA programs (something they were serious about at the time). Participants in the reward condition worked on the same math problems but were told that these were difficult problems, written for students majoring in mathematics, and were asked to give it a shot. We expected them to feel good about their performance and to seek indulgence as a reward. All participants received feed-

back (right or wrong) after finishing each individual problem.

Participants were then asked to choose between two items—namely, two pieces of chocolate truffles or a package of toothpaste (equated for dollar value)—as a token of appreciation for their participation. Participants in the prediction condition were asked to imagine that they were consuming the truffles (only those who chose the truffles) and to predict their affective experience, using the 18 affect items used in Study 1. Participants in the experience condition actually received their chosen item. Those who chose to have chocolate truffles were told to eat as much as they wanted and reported their affective experience while eating the truffles along the same affect scales. Participants also completed several additional questions, pertaining to the difficulty of the test, their performance on the test, and their feelings about the test result on a seven-point scale ranging from “not at all” (0) to “very much” (6).

Results

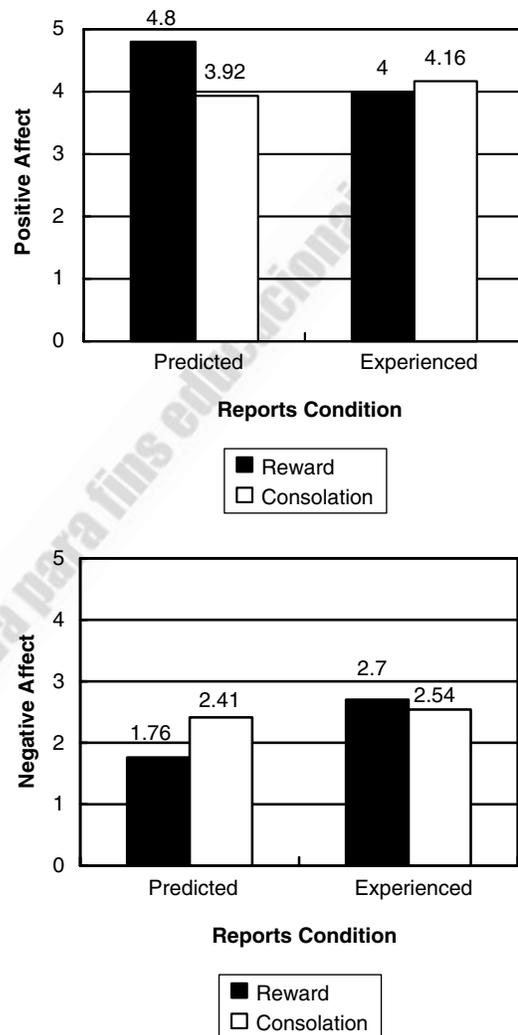
Performance and choice. Consistent with previous work (Shafir, Simonson, and Tversky 1993), participants were as likely to indulge (i.e., choose the truffles) when they thought they did well on the test (i.e., reward condition) as when they thought they did poorly (i.e., consolation condition). Specifically, 82.4% of participants in the reward condition and 82.2% of participants in the consolation condition chose the chocolate truffles ($t < 1$).

Participants who worked on the alleged GMAT problems (consolation condition) reported lower satisfaction ($M = 2.73$) and lower happiness ($M = 2.96$) with the results than those who worked on the same problems (reward condition) presented as difficult math problems ($M_s = 3.3$ and 3.88 ; $F(1, 145) = 4.94, p < .05$; $F(1, 145) = 15.08, p < .001$, respectively). In addition, the two groups reported putting similar amounts of effort into solving the problems ($M_s = 3.26$ and 3.16 , n.s.), and both got about half of the questions right ($M_s = 4.75$ and 4.64 , n.s.).

In short, participants who worked on the so-called difficult math problems made the same effort but felt better about their results than those who worked on the so-called GMAT problems. These results indicate that our manipulation of the reward versus consolation condition was successful. Thus, the former participants are more likely to use indulgences as a reward for their good performance and hard work, whereas the latter are more likely to use indulgences to console themselves for not doing well (though they tried hard).

Expectations versus experience. Figure 4 shows the results. As we predicted, participants who were asked to predict their enjoyment expected to experience more positive and less negative affect while eating the truffles when viewed as a reward than when viewed as a consolation (for the simple main effects, $F(1, 117) = 8.06, p < .01$; $F(1, 117) = 5.65, p < .05$, respectively). As in Study 1, however, the predictors' expectations were not matched by the experiences of those who actually ate the truffles. Specifically, experiencers in the reward condition reported the same level of positive and negative feelings as those in the consolation condition (both $F_s < 1$). This pattern is reflected in the interactions between type of reasons (reward versus consolation) and type of report (prediction

Figure 4
STUDY 2: PREDICTED AND EPISODIC RECALL OF INDULGING EXPERIENCE (MEASURED AS POSITIVE AND NEGATIVE AFFECT) AS REWARD OR CONSOLATION



Notes: The y-axis represents mean ratings of overall positive and negative affect. Overall positive and negative affect ratings in the predicted and experienced conditions are computed by averaging six positive and six negative affect items, respectively.

versus online experience) (for negative and positive feelings, $F(1, 117) = 4.20, p < .05$; $F(1, 117) = 2.61, p = .11$, respectively).

In summary, the findings of Study 2 show that people expect to enjoy an indulgence more when it is a reward than when it is a consolation, but their actual enjoyment does not differ across the two types of reasons. This result supports our expectation that beliefs about enjoyment figure prominently in prediction but do not affect actual hedonic experience. We obtained these results from a random assignment to all conditions, real choice, and concurrent reports of participants' momentary experiences, thus eliminating the ambiguities of Study 1.

STUDY 3

Thus far, our results indicate that consumers' actual hedonic experiences do not match their expectations. This leads to the question, Why are these expectations maintained in light of contradictory experiential evidence? We propose that this is the case because consumers rarely draw on specific episodes to evaluate their expectations. Hedonic expectations pertain to classes of events and are likely to be evaluated on the basis of global memories pertaining to the same class rather than on the basis of episodic memories pertaining to a specific recent instance. However, global memories are reconstructed from the same semantic information that serves as input into predictions (Robinson and Clore 2002). As a result, consumers' global memories appear to "confirm" their expectations, leaving consumers with the impression that their expectations were correct all along.

To address this hypothesis, Study 3 assesses global retrospective reports of how consumers felt while indulging without any reason, as a reward for an accomplishment, or as a consolation for failure. We expect that global memories converge with predictions. If so, consumers may rarely have a reason to revise their expectations and beliefs, which prevents them from learning from experience.

Method

One hundred seventy-six undergraduate students at a major midwestern university participated in this study in exchange for partial credit. They were randomly assigned to one of three conditions: indulging as a reward, indulging as a consolation, and indulging without a reason. Participants assigned to the indulging-as-a-reward condition were first asked to think back to times when they had indulged themselves as a reward for hard work or achievement; they subsequently reported how they felt in general during such pampering experiences. Those assigned to the indulging-as-a-consolation condition were asked to think back to times when they had indulged to console or comfort themselves because of some failure (e.g., doing poorly on an exam); they subsequently reported how they felt in general during such pampering experiences. Participants assigned to the indulging-without-a-reason condition were asked to think back to times when they had indulged for no particular reason; they subsequently reported how they felt in general during such pampering experiences.

All participants rated their affective experience on the same affect scales used in Studies 1 and 2. Participants also reported whether they thought of a particular instance of indulging while answering the earlier questions; if so, they were asked to report the details associated with that occasion (e.g., when, what, how much, and who paid for it). Demographic information was collected at the end.

Results and Discussion

As we predicted, participants' global memories were consistent with the predictions of their peers in the preceding studies. Participants who were asked to think of times when they had indulged to reward themselves recalled the highest positive affect ($M = 5.09$), whereas those who were asked to think of times when they had indulged to console themselves reported the lowest positive affect ($M = 3.25$); those who thought of times when they had indulged with-

out a reason fell in between ($M = 4.60$; for the main effect, $F(2, 173) = 48.86, p < .001$). Post hoc tests show that each group was significantly different from the other groups ($ps < .05$). Similarly, participants who were asked to think of times when they had indulged to reward themselves recalled the least negative affect ($M = .68$), whereas those who were asked to think of times when they had indulged to console themselves reported the highest negative affect ($M = 2.19$); those who thought of times when they had indulged without a reason fell in between ($M = 1.06$; for the main effect, $F(2, 173) = 40.77, p < .001$). Again, post hoc tests show that each group was significantly different from the other groups ($ps < .05$).

In summary, justifications figured prominently in consumers' global memories of indulgence experiences, apparently confirming their expectations that justifications influence how much they enjoy indulgences. Yet concurrent and retrospective episodic reports, which we assessed in the preceding studies, indicate that consumers' actual experiences are not systematically affected by justifications.

GENERAL DISCUSSION

Previous research has shown that reasons and justifications figure prominently in consumers' decisions to indulge (e.g., Khan and Dhar 2006; Kivetz and Simonson 2002a, b; Kivetz and Zheng 2006; Okada 2005; Strahilevitz and Myers 1998). Consistent with this observation, our findings show that consumers expect to experience more negative and less positive affect when they indulge without a reason than when they indulge with a reason (Study 1) or when they indulge to console themselves than when they indulge to reward themselves (Study 2). Moreover, when asked how they usually feel in the respective indulgence situations (Study 3), consumers' global memories apparently confirm these expectations. These converging patterns of (1) predictions (Studies 1 and 2), (2) actual behavior (Khan and Dhar 2006; Kivetz and Simonson 2002a; Kivetz and Zheng 2006), and (3) memories (Study 3) seem to make a compelling case: If you want to indulge, you better have a good reason or else you may not enjoy it. Yet this converging evidence across predictions, behavioral decisions, and memories may be less compelling than it seems. From a cognitive perspective, all these variables are driven by the same inputs: consumers' beliefs. These beliefs figure prominently in making hedonic predictions, which in turn serve as the basis for behavioral decisions (March 1978) and the reconstruction of global memories (Robinson and Clore 2002). To determine whether consumers' beliefs are accurate, their actual hedonic experiences in indulgence situations need to be assessed. This crucial piece of data was missing from the indulgence literature, and we designed our studies to fill this gap.

Reiterating observations in other domains (e.g., Novemsky and Ratner 2003; Xu and Schwarz 2007), we observed that consumers' actual hedonic experiences diverged from their expectations. In Study 1, consumers provided retrospective episodic reports of how they felt during a recent indulgence episode. Previous research has shown that such episodic reports approximate the findings of concurrent reports (Kahneman et al. 2004; Stone et al. 2006). In contrast to their expectations, consumers enjoyed their indulgences just as much when they had a reason for them as

when they did not. In Study 2, consumers provided concurrent reports of their feelings while indulging in chocolate truffles. Again, they enjoyed the truffles just as much when they were a reward for good performance as when they were a consolation for poor performance, in contrast to consumers' predictions. These findings are consistent with the assumption that actual enjoyment is driven by features of the consumption act itself, which are in the focus of consumers' attention, rather than by consumers' a priori beliefs.

Erroneous Beliefs and Consumer Learning

In combination, our findings suggest that consumers' beliefs are erroneous. Indulgence is enjoyable independent of the presence or absence of a good justification or of the specific reason (e.g., reward versus consolation) used as a justification. Yet feelings and sensory pleasures are accessible to introspection only while they are experienced and need to be reconstructed from episodic or semantic information after they have dissipated (Robinson and Clore 2002). When thinking about indulgence, consumers are apparently unlikely to relive recent episodes in memory and instead draw on global memories, which are based on beliefs and semantic information (Robinson and Clore 2002). As a result, their memories seem to confirm their beliefs, and this confirmation is likely to impede learning from experience.

In a perfect world, consumers should go through four stages of a learning process: (1) hypothesis formation based on existing beliefs, (2) exposure to relevant evidence, (3) encoding of that evidence, and (4) integration of the evidence into their general knowledge, with a revision of prior beliefs (Hoch and Deighton 1989). However, as Hoch and Deighton (1989, p. 1) note, "learning from self-generated experience with a product or service is not a simple process of discovering objective truth. It is, to a greater or lesser extent, open to influence." Indeed, consumers may notice a discrepancy between their beliefs and experiences only when the beliefs are brought to mind in the actual situation. However, this may rarely occur because their attention is absorbed by the activity in which they are engaged. Instead, the beliefs may not come to mind until they are considering a similar decision in the future, at which point they may reconstruct their then-distant experience from those same beliefs, concluding that their experience was consistent with what they expected in the first place.

A way to help consumers update their expectations is to encourage them to register theory-inconsistent experiences in memory and to make adjustments on the spot (see Figure 1, dashed Arrow 4b). Although consumers are unlikely to engage, voluntarily or automatically, in theory testing or comparative analysis in natural consumption settings, especially when theories or beliefs are strongly held, marketers or policy makers can adopt strategies that motivate consumers to focus on the experiential details and promote learning from experience (Hoch and Deighton 1989; Hoch and Ha 1986). Our results indicate that some of the classic reward themes frequently used in advertising may need a revision. For example, slogans such as L'Oréal's "Because you are worth it" and Budweiser's "This Bud's for you, for all you do" aim to provide consumers with a sense of entitlement to indulge. However, these slogans also reinforce

the notion that indulgences need to be earned and are likely to keep this belief accessible. As a result, people may believe that they do not deserve the treat and may (erroneously) expect that they will feel guilty if they consume it. Perhaps a better way to encourage people to enjoy life's little pleasures is to educate consumers that small indulgences do not require special reasons (rather than reinforcing the justification-indulgence association). Slogans such as "Loving someone does not need reasons, nor does loving XXX chocolate" or "Pleasure does not come from justification" are actually more consistent with consumers' experiences, albeit not with their beliefs.

Justifications Can Be Adaptive

Unfortunately, consumers' erroneous beliefs may deprive them of many enjoyable experiences. At least for the relatively small and inexpensive indulgences of everyday life, such as a fine dinner or chocolate truffles, the anticipated guilt and regret are unlikely to be part of the consumption experience. This may change when the indulgence involves major expenses, in which case a luxury cruise or vacation may be tainted by worries about the incurred debt. The justification mechanism may serve some adaptive function when it comes to spending on big-ticket luxury items (e.g., jewelry, an expensive car) and addictive behavior. Our results, along with those of previous research, suggest that consumers hesitate to engage in luxury spending because they often cannot find compelling reasons to do so and expect to feel guilty. In addition, indulgences involving large financial commitments may indeed affect consumers' momentary enjoyment if the cost is on their minds during the experience. In other contexts, the need to justify indulging in pleasurable but risky behaviors (e.g., consumption of alcohol and recreational drugs, unprotected sex) may help consumers exert self-control. Although the concurrent sensory pleasure people derive from such behaviors may not be affected by their beliefs, later regret and adverse health consequences may outweigh any utility of the momentary experience.

Further Research

The reported studies are an initial attempt to investigate discrepancies among consumers' hedonic predictions, global memories, and actual experiences in indulgence situations. Previous research has suggested that consumers are unlikely to commit to indulgence when they do not perceive good reasons to justify it. Yet our findings consistently indicate that consumers' actual enjoyment of (small) indulgences is independent of justification, in contrast to what they may believe. Although documenting these discrepancies is an important first step, further research should employ our conceptual framework to address likely moderators and mediators.

As Figure 1 shows, our conceptual rationale assumes that consumers' actual hedonic experiences are a function of what they attend to in the consumption situation. In most cases, they will attend to features of the indulgence, and the more they do so, the more involving the situation will be (e.g., a luxurious dinner with friends versus one eaten alone); however, their enjoyment of the indulgence will be impaired when concerns about its justification come to

mind. Accordingly, discrepancies between consumers' actual experiences and their predictions and global memories should be more pronounced for high-involvement than low-involvement indulgences, reflecting the differential likelihood that beliefs about justification come to mind. Conversely, these discrepancies should be attenuated when concerns about the justification of the indulgence are highly accessible, thus bringing the experience in line with beliefs. For example, we would assume that consumers are more likely to pay attention to the incurred cost as the extravagancy of the indulgence increases, potentially interfering with their online enjoyment. Similarly, concerns about diet or health may be sufficiently accessible for some consumers to interfere with the enjoyment of indulgences that threaten health and diet goals. Moreover, unfortunate remarks of coindulgers may be sufficient to bring negative beliefs to mind, spoiling the enjoyment a person might otherwise have had. Even under such conditions, however, we would expect that justifications loom larger in predictions and global memories than in actual experience, consistent with the extant literature on focusing effects (e.g., Kahneman et al. 2004; Schkade and Kahneman 1998).

Finally, our findings raise the question of the conditions under which consumers learn from experience. It seems safe to assume that the college students in our studies repeatedly enjoyed indulgences for which they did not have a good justification, but they failed to revise their beliefs in light of their experiences. We assume that such revisions are likely only when attention is drawn to the discrepancy between a person's experience and his or her beliefs while the experience is highly accessible. Even under such conditions, however, the chance for learning may be small; when the beliefs come to mind, enjoyment may be impaired, thus confirming the beliefs, or the enjoyment may be reframed as a rare exception. After time has passed, theory-driven reconstructive memory will do its job, bringing global memories in line with what was expected in the first place.

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