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Marketers regularly remind consumers of valued social relationships (e.g., close friends, family, romantic couples) to influence choice and consumption. However, the author's research reveals that such relationship reminders can backfire when consumers lack or no longer have these highlighted relationships. The author shows that reminding consumers of relationships they lack reduces their perceptions of deservingness and causes them to restrict indulgent consumption. Five studies establish the effect of relationship reminders on indulgence and provide support for the underlying process by both measuring and manipulating perceptions of deservingness.

Keywords: deservingness, indulgence, relationships, self-assessment, consumption and product choice

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Because I (Don't) Deserve It: How Relationship Reminders and Deservingness Influence Consumer Indulgence

Marketers regularly remind consumers of relationships in promoting their brands. Campaigns promoting foods (e.g., Nestlé), clothing (e.g., Bloomingdale's), accessories (e.g., Tiffany & Co.), and personal care products (e.g., Procter & Gamble) frequently feature the "happy togetherness" of close friends, family, and romantic couples. In general, marketers and advertisers employ relationship reminders as a way to generate positive feelings toward the brand and encourage consumption. Yet relatively little is known about how such relationship reminders influence consumption. Indeed, I show that such relationship reminders can backfire. Drawing on prior work on deservingness and indulgence, I

predict and find that reminding consumers of relationships they do not have causes them to restrict their own indulgence because they do not feel deserving.

The notion of deservingness has existed in the marketing field, and particularly advertising, for quite some time. Marketers often strategically and directly appeal to consumers' feelings of deservingness in their communications. Marketers have encouraged consumption with slogans such as "You deserve a break today" (McDonald's), "You deserve a car this good" (General Motors), and "Because you're worth it" (L'Oréal). Deservingness plays a particularly prominent role when promoting indulgent products, such as higher-calorie foods or higher-end products. However, relatively little is known about what shapes consumers' perceptions of their own deservingness and how deservingness might influence consumers' propensity to indulge or to restrict indulgence. This article examines how reminding consumers of the valued relationships they do versus do not have (e.g., close friends, romantic relationships) affects their perceived deservingness. In particular, I show that reminders of valued relationships that consumers do not have can lower perceived deservingness and cause consumers to restrict indulgent consumption.

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Deservingness is a judgment of whether a person is “worthy of being treated in a particular way” (*New Oxford American Dictionary* 2010). Previous scholarly efforts to shed light on the role of deservingness have focused largely on negative outcomes for others (e.g., fines, jail time) rather than positive outcomes for the self. This article systematically examines how consumers’ perceptions of their own deservingness affect whether they choose positive outcomes for themselves, showing that lower perceived deservingness reduces indulgence. By examining perceived deservingness as a driver of indulgent consumption decisions, I also add to the extant literature on indulgence by contributing an important mechanism explaining when and why consumers indulge.

Previous efforts to shed light on indulgence have focused on goals, individual differences, and specific types of emotion (e.g., Cavanaugh et al. 2011; Keinan and Kivetz 2008; Laran 2010; Ramanathan and Williams 2007). Prior research has commonly linked negative consumer feelings with increased indulgence (e.g., Cornil and Chandon 2013; Cryder et al. 2008; Garg, Wansink, and Inman 2007). I add an important distinction to this existing wisdom, showing that consumers who feel undeserving reduce rather than increase indulgence.

The current research offers a theory and framework for predicting when consumers will engage in or restrict indulgence. It demonstrates that reminding consumers of valued social relationships that they do versus do not have affects their perceived deservingness and identifies deservingness as an important but previously unrecognized driver of indulgent choices. This research also shows that the relationship reminders that marketers use may have substantial negative consequences if they remind consumers of relationships they do not have.

Five experimental studies test my novel hypotheses and framework. Across these studies, I demonstrate, using a variety of contextual, marketing-relevant relationship reminders (i.e., greeting cards, popular press articles, and advertisements), that such reminders affect indulgent choice and perceived deservingness. I also manipulate deservingness independent of the relationship context and demonstrate its role in driving indulgent choice. Furthermore, I assess indulgence across a range of product categories (e.g., personal care products, clothing, accessories) to demonstrate the robustness of the effect of deservingness on indulgence.

CONCEPTUAL BACKGROUND: THEORY AND HYPOTHESES

Social relationships are an important contributor to a person’s feelings of self-worth (Baumeister and Leary 1995; De Vries 1991; Diener and Seligman 2002; Taylor et al. 2001; Voss, Markiewicz, and Doyle 1999), and people are sensitive to cues regarding relationships (Baumeister and Leary 1995; Leary and Baumeister 2000). Society, marketing communications, and the media commonly value, endorse, and celebrate certain types of relationships (e.g., committed romantic relationships, close friendships) and social entities (e.g., close families). As a result, consumers frequently encounter reminders of certain relationships, some of which they have, and others that they do not or no longer have. I argue and show that encountering such relationship

reminders momentarily alters consumers’ own perceptions of deservingness. Why is this the case?

Humans are social beings, and as a result, societal norms are that healthy people have close relationships (Cacioppo and Hawkey 2009; Conley and Collins 2002; DePaulo and Morris 2005; Koball et al. 2010). Having close relationships demonstrates that others accept, respect, and value one as a person (i.e., that one’s relationship “fitness” or relational value is high; Leary and Miller 2012) and show that one belongs (see, e.g., Baumeister and Leary 1995). Highlighting people’s valued relationships or relationship status (e.g., being married, having a best friend, having a close family) may heighten their perceived deservingness by focusing their thoughts on having achieved those relationships and being valued by others. However, when relationship reminders focus consumers on the personally and socially desirable relationships they lack, they are likely to feel self-conscious about not belonging (Baumeister and Leary 1995). They may also feel inadequate and responsible for failing to achieve that type of close relationship. This critical self-assessment may cause them to feel undeserving of rewards. In line with prior theory (Kahneman and Tversky 1979), the effect of not having a relationship is expected to loom larger in the minds of consumers than that of having a relationship.

Marketers at times may employ relationship reminders that reference relationships in general (e.g., having friends, being part of a community) and at other times may reference more specific relationships (e.g., having a best friend, being married). More general relationship reminders are more ambiguous and open to interpretation, giving consumers greater leeway in determining whether they possess such relationships. In line with positivity biases (Campbell and Sedikides 1999), consumers faced with general relationship reminders will be more likely to conclude that they indeed have such relationships, and thus, deservingness is unlikely to be reduced. More specific relationship reminders, however, are less open to interpretation. When consumers are faced with specific reminders about a relationship they do not have, they are likely to experience a reduction in feelings of deservingness.

Deservingness

Deservingness has received scant attention in the marketing and consumer behavior literature streams. The majority of prior work has focused on understanding when others are perceived to be deserving of negative outcomes. For example, previous efforts have examined how perceived deservingness influences penalty assessments for crimes (Feather 1999) or judgments of punishment appropriateness (Callan, Sutton, and Dovale 2010; Newheiser, Sawaoka, and Dovidio 2012; Van Dijk et al. 2005). A few scholars, however, have examined perceived deservingness for positive outcomes for others, namely, how perceived deservingness of others influences support for foreign aid, social welfare programs (e.g., Appelbaum 2001), and the election or promotion of others (Feather 2008).

Even fewer studies have focused on deservingness related to positive outcomes for the self. Prior efforts have shown that people with low self-esteem tend to feel less deserving of positive outcomes and positive moods than people with high self-esteem (Wood et al. 2009). Further-

more, those experiencing certain, discrete emotions (e.g., guilt) also tend to experience less deservingness (Feather 2006; Feather and McKee 2009; Feather, McKee, and Bekker 2011). However, surprisingly little work has examined the relationship between deservingness and self-chosen outcomes. Specifically, little is known about (1) people's judgments of their own deservingness and (2) how one's own perceived deservingness influences outcomes chosen for the self (e.g., choices consumers make for themselves). The current research addresses this important gap in the literature, suggesting that feeling undeserving should lead consumers to restrict consumption of items they like and want (i.e., reduce indulgence).

In summary, deservingness is inherently linked to a rationale for why someone is worthy of a particular treatment or outcome. In general, situations that emphasize a valued quality or achievement that people possess or have done make them feel worthy of rewards, whereas situations that make people aware of a quality or achievement they do not have or have not done make them feel unworthy of rewards. In a consumption context, rewards can be the options consumers choose. I argue that the relationships that a person has been able to establish and preserve may be viewed as such an achievement and rationale for indulgence.

Indulgence

In the spirit of prior research on indulgence emphasizing an unnecessary quality or delight (Berry 1994), I define indulgence in the context of consumer choice as allowing oneself to select and enjoy the pleasure from an option that is considered a treat compared with the alternative option(s). People can make indulgent choices across a range of consumption domains (e.g., food, travel, clothing, personal care), which could include the use of better ingredients and materials or offer more amenities at a higher cost. Furthermore, although consumers certainly indulge by purchasing expensive items or experiences, such as cars or vacations, they also frequently indulge in relatively smaller but more common ways, such as by buying a branded product, selecting a higher-end item or model, ordering a specialty coffee drink or cocktail, or eating ice cream or chocolate. Any of these options could be considered an indulgence if the consumer considers the choice a treat.

Prior work has suggested that indulgence is greater for certain types of consumers (e.g., Haws and Poynor 2008; Kivetz and Simonson 2002a, b; Ramanathan and Williams 2007; Sengupta and Zhou 2007) and more likely when cognitive resources are diminished (e.g., Shiv and Fedorikhin 1999), when particular goals are active (e.g., Laran 2010), and when consumers feel certain emotions (e.g., Cavanaugh et al. 2011; Cryder et al. 2008; Keinan and Kivetz 2008; Winterich and Haws 2011) or want to repair their moods (Hirt and McCrea 2000; Lyman 1982). The current research adds to this literature stream by introducing a novel mechanism underlying consumer indulgence.

Existing literature has suggested that consumers need to justify indulgent consumption choices (e.g., Levav and McGraw 2009; Okada 2005), for example, by using the presence of a discount as justification (Mishra and Mishra 2011). When choices do not seem justifiable, consumers demonstrate less willingness to indulge (e.g., Levav and McGraw 2009). The current research builds on this notion

and highlights an important source of justification for indulgence: consumers' perceptions of deservingness. Feeling deserving (e.g., because the consumer has a relationship) may provide a justification for indulgence and thus increase indulgence. In contrast, not having a relationship is expected to make consumers feel undeserving and reduce indulgence. Formally,

H₁: When consumers are reminded of a valued relationship they do not have, they restrict indulgence (e.g., choose lower-end brands of products, lower calorie foods) relative to those who are reminded of a valued relationship they do have.

H₂: Perceptions of deservingness mediate the relationship between these contextual reminders of valued relationships and indulgence.

These predictions and findings regarding perceived deservingness as a driver of indulgence run counter to what extant theories might predict about the salience of social relationships and indulgence. It is commonly assumed that when people lack valued relationships, they will feel lonely or sad and indulge more (e.g., through shopping, eating). Research showing that sad consumers spend more (Cryder et al. 2008) and eat more hedonic food (Cornil and Chandon 2013; Garg, Wansink, and Inman 2007) supports part of this notion. The logic is that consumers may indulge to enhance the self (Cryder et al. 2008), compensate for something (Sivanathan and Pettit 2010), or ameliorate negative feelings (Raghunathan and Pham 1999), consistent with "mood repair" motivations (Hirt and McCrea 2000, p. 180; Lyman 1982). These theories would suggest that people who are reminded of relationships they do not have should feel sad and indulge, but those reminded of relationships they do have should not feel sad and not indulge.

A theory based on deservingness suggests a different pattern of behavior. It posits that people choose in ways consistent with their perceptions of deservingness. That is, when people are reminded that they do not have a valued relationship, they will feel less deserving and subsequently will indulge less (i.e., in higher-end products and higher-calorie foods). In contrast, those who have the valued relationship will feel relatively more deserving of indulging themselves. I further discuss this difference between my results and those from prior research in the "General Discussion" section.

RESEARCH OVERVIEW

Across five experiments and two additional replications, I provide evidence that relationships often depicted in marketing and advertising (e.g., romantic relationships, close friendships) influence consumers' perceptions of their own deservingness. Furthermore, I show that deservingness has direct consequences for the extent to which consumers indulge versus restrict indulgence. Study 1 demonstrates that highlighting a relationship consumers lack reduces indulgence compared with those who have that relationship. Study 2, using the same type of relationship, shows that highlighting the absence of the relationship reduces perceived deservingness. Studies 3 and 4 broaden the context of valued relationships from romantic (Studies 1 and 2) to platonic relationships (i.e., close friendships), showing that highlighting platonic relationships that people lack or no longer have also reduces perceptions of deservingness,

which leads to restrictions of indulgence. Study 5 manipulates deservingness directly and independently of having/not having a relationship and finds further support for the influence of deservingness on indulgence. Together, these studies support the hypothesis that perceived deservingness drives indulgent choice and highlight the important role of relationship reminders in affecting deservingness.

STUDY 1: RELATIONSHIP REMINDERS AND INDULGENCE

Study 1 examines the effect of reminding consumers of different types of relationships when making multiple personal care product choices. Recall that a mood repair motivation would predict that people who are reminded of relationships they lack should indulge (i.e., choose more higher-end products) to enhance the self. In contrast, the proposed deservingness mechanism predicts that they will restrict indulgence (i.e., choose fewer higher-end products).

Method and Procedure

Participants and design. Participants were drawn from a national panel of U.S. consumers provided by a research firm. The sample consisted of 149 adults who participated in a 15-minute online study during the week prior to Valentine's Day, a holiday closely tied to relationship reminders emphasized by marketers. The sample consisted of men (39.6%) and women (60.4%) ranging in age from 18 to 32 years ($M = 25.6$, $SD = 4.4$). Study 1 used a 2 (relationship reminder [manipulated]: romantic, platonic) \times 2 (partnership status [measured]: single, coupled) design. Participants were told that they would be choosing items for themselves.

Relationship reminder manipulation. Participants were asked to evaluate a series of pretested electronic greeting cards from American Greetings that emphasized one of two relationship types: romantic (cards from a romantic partner) or platonic (cards from a very close friend) (for pilot study and manipulation details, see the Web Appendix). All participants were asked to imagine receiving the cards from an important person in their lives. After viewing the cards, and to maintain the cover story, participants were asked which card they liked best and how much they enjoyed that card.

Personal care product choices. Immediately after evaluating the greeting cards, participants completed a separate shopping task. They were presented with a series of gender-neutral personal care items. The four categories were lip balm, shampoo, hand cream, and fragrance. Choice sets consisted of economy, mid-range, and higher-end brands of functionally equivalent items (e.g., lip balm: ChapStick [\$1.49], Nivea [\$2.99], Kiehl's [\$9]; hand cream: Vaseline [\$4.99], Aveeno [\$6.99], Bliss [\$18]). The products and price points were generated from listings provided by two online retailers (DrugStore.com and Sephora.com). Items were displayed using color photographs, brand names, matched descriptions (e.g., lip balm with SPF, 3 fl. oz. hand cream), and prices. The probability of choosing higher-end products in each of the categories (four product choices as replicates within subject) constituted the dependent measure.

Partnership status. After making their choices, participants indicated whether they were currently involved in a romantic relationship ("no/yes") and, if so, characterized the romantic relationship as dating casually, dating exclusively, engaged to be married, married, or other. The various

types of romantic, coupled relationships did not differentially affect dependent measures and thus are not discussed further.

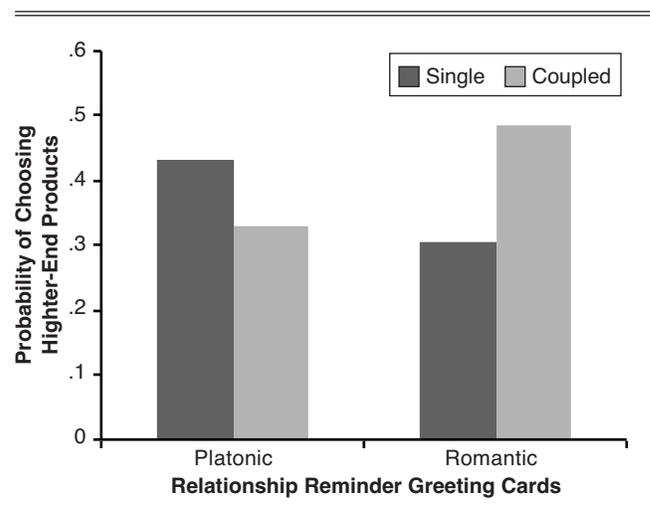
Results and Discussion

Preliminary analyses revealed no gender effects; thus, gender will not be discussed further. A repeated-measures logistic regression analysis was conducted with relationship reminder type, partnership status, and their interaction as predictors. The choice of higher-end versus economy products in each of the four choice sets was the dependent variable (higher-end product = 1, lower-end product = 0). The analysis revealed a significant interaction of relationship reminder condition and partnership status ($B = 1.22$, $Z = 2.62$, $p < .009$). This interaction (see Figure 1) suggests that relationship reminders differentially influenced product choices made by single and coupled consumers. Consistent with the prediction (H_1), people reminded of a relationship they lack restricted indulgence relative to those reminded of a relationship they have. After being reminded of a romantic relationship, single people (who, by definition, do not have that relationship) were less likely to choose higher-end brands than coupled people ($B = -1.09$, $Z = -3.57$, $p < .0004$). However, after being reminded of a close friendship, a relationship they tended to have, single people were more likely to choose higher-end brands than singles who received the romantic reminders ($B = .86$, $Z = 2.32$, $p < .02$). Single and coupled participants did not differ in their choices when receiving reminders of a close friendship ($B = .44$, $Z = 1.33$, $p < .18$). However, coupled people who received reminders of a romantic relationship were more likely to choose higher-end brands than those who received reminders of a close friendship ($B = .66$, $Z = 2.62$, $p < .01$).¹

Study 1 shows that reminders of romantic relationships caused single consumers to restrict indulgence, that is, to choose fewer high-end personal care products than their

¹The patterns of results and statistical significance are the same when the data are analyzed as the sum of indulgent choices.

Figure 1
STUDY 1: RELATIONSHIP REMINDERS INFLUENCE
PROBABILITY OF CONSUMER INDULGENCE



coupled counterparts. Importantly, when reminded of close platonic relationships, singles did not restrict indulgence compared with coupled participants. Notably, reminders of platonic relationships (i.e., a close friendship) caused coupled consumers to indulge significantly less than those who viewed the romantic reminders. Note that my framework would predict this pattern of results if coupled people lacked that type of close platonic relationship and thus were reminded of relationships they no longer have. Indeed, prior research has suggested that coupled people often invest heavily in one romantic relationship at the expense of other supportive relationships (i.e., close friendships) (DePaulo and Morris 2005), which may be the case in this sample. However, this pattern may be more true for nonstudent populations, in which relationships with friends may be more likely to have languished as a result of greater investments of energy in romantic relationships over time (e.g., marriages, cohabitating couples) than in student populations (e.g., Oswald and Clark 2003). Indeed, a replication study (Study 1b; see the Web Appendix) using the same design but with different product choice measures (clothing and accessories) and a student sample ($N = 107$) again showed that when exposed to romantic relationship reminders, single people restrict indulgence. The student study replicated all findings with one exception: no significant difference was found between the platonic and romantic reminders for coupled people ($B = .53, Z = 1.15, p < .25$), arguably because the college campus experience fosters close friendships for most students regardless of partnership status.

These results provide a demonstration of how relationship reminders influence indulgence. The results are consistent with the idea that reminders of valued social relationships that consumers have versus do not have influence the extent to which they feel deserving of indulgence; however, the findings do not provide direct evidence for the mechanism. The following studies test the proposed deservingness mechanism explicitly using different study designs and stimuli. Whereas Study 1 examined the proposed framework in an externally valid but arguably particular situation (i.e., viewing greeting cards), Study 2 explores whether relationship reminders regularly found in marketing and advertising influence consumers' perceptions of deservingness and indulgent choices, thus investigating the proposed process.

STUDY 2: RELATIONSHIP REMINDERS IN ADVERTISING INFLUENCE DESERVINGNESS

In Study 2, participants were exposed to advertisements featuring different relationship themes commonly found in marketing and advertising (e.g., romantic relationships, friendships) to examine how such relationship reminders affect perceived deservingness. The following subsections detail the study method and findings.

Method and Procedure

Participants and design. One hundred sixty-four adults completed a ten-minute online study. The sample consisted of men (41.4%) and women (58.6%) ranging in age from 19 to 63 years ($M = 33.8, SD = 10.9$) who were told that they were participating in a study on magazine advertisements. The study consisted of a 3 (relationship reminder: control,

friendship, romantic) \times 2 (partnership status: single, coupled) design. Participants were randomly assigned to one of the three relationship type reminder conditions: friendship, romantic, or control ads.

Relationship type manipulation and advertisement characteristics. Each participant viewed 12 advertisements (2 nontarget advertisements and 10 advertisements that featured the focal relationship type). Across conditions, the advertisement layout and tagline were held constant; only the image featured in the advertisement varied. In each of the relationship conditions, the ads featured people, either in images of friendships or romantic relationships. In the control condition, the image consisted of the product or product environment, but no people were featured. For sample advertisements, see Appendix A.

After each advertisement, participants rated the extent to which the advertisement featured the brand, romantic relationships, and friendships. Participants also indicated the extent to which they would enjoy viewing the advertisement in a magazine. Participants rated all items on a seven-point scale (1 = "not at all," and 7 = "very much").

Deservingness. Deservingness can justify different outcomes (i.e., positive and negative) directed toward different people (i.e., self and others). Therefore, prior literature has specified the referent to avoid ambiguity (e.g., Appelbaum 2001; Callan, Ellard, and Nicol 2006; Wood et al. 2009).² Similarly, participants were asked, "After viewing those ads, how deserving did you feel of treating yourself?" Participants also responded to four additional items. Specifically, "After viewing those ads, to what extent did you feel you deserve to..." (1) "...reward yourself," (2) "...treat yourself to nice things," (3) "...indulge yourself a little," and (4) "...buy something special for yourself." Participants rated all responses on a seven-point scale (1 = "not at all deserving," and 7 = "extremely deserving"). Items were combined into one deservingness measure ($\alpha = .97$). Partnership status was measured as described previously.

Results and Discussion

Manipulation checks. The results confirmed that the magazine advertisements had the intended effect of reminding consumers of specific types of relationships. Participants reported that the platonic friend ads ($M_{\text{friend}} = 6.47$) more prominently featured friendships than the romantic ($M_{\text{romantic}} = 4.28; F(1, 162) = 101.05, p < .0001$) or control ads ($M_{\text{control}} = 1.52; F(1, 162) = 539.90, p < .0001$). In addition, the romantic ads ($M_{\text{romantic}} = 6.16$) more prominently featured romantic relationships than the friend ($M_{\text{friend}} = 1.23; F(1, 162) = 1,507.60, p < .0001$) or control ads ($M_{\text{control}} = 1.65; F(1, 162) = 1,305.26, p < .0001$). The ads, however, did not differ in the extent to which they featured the brand or the reported enjoyment in viewing (all $F_s < 1$) across conditions. For complete details, see Table 1.

Deservingness. A model predicting deservingness was estimated with relationship reminder, partnership status, and their interaction as predictors. Analyses revealed a signifi-

²Some examples follow: "To what extent do you believe that David deserved to be in the accident?" (Callan, Ellard, and Nicol 2006); "How deserving of aid do you think physically handicapped people are?" (Appelbaum 2001); "I deserve to keep feeling bad" (Wood et al. 2009) (italics added).

Table 1
STUDY 2: ADVERTISEMENT FEATURES AND ENJOYMENT BY CONDITION

	Control Ads		Friend Ads		Romantic Ads		F
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	
The brand	5.46	1.01	5.44	.80	5.55	.89	.23
Romantic relationships	1.65	.82	1.23	.36	6.16*	.69	31.79
Friendships	1.52	.77	6.47*	.61	4.28	1.71	271.93
Enjoy viewing	4.06	1.30	4.29	.95	4.17	1.34	.50

* $p < .0001$ for comparisons with the other two ad types within the row.

cant relationship reminder \times partnership status interaction ($F(2, 158) = 5.51, p < .005$; see Figure 2). After viewing either the control ($M_{\text{single}} = 4.96, M_{\text{coupled}} = 4.54; F(1, 158) = 1.17, p < .28$) or the friendship-focused ($M_{\text{single}} = 4.58, M_{\text{coupled}} = 4.46; F < 1, n.s.$) ads, both single and coupled people felt equally deserving. However, after viewing the romantic ads, which reminded singles of a relationship they do not have, singles reported significantly lower feelings of deservingness than coupled participants ($M_{\text{single}} = 3.44, M_{\text{coupled}} = 4.83; F(1, 158) = 10.66, p < .001$). In addition, the singles exposed to romantic advertisements reported lower deservingness relative to the singles exposed to friendship ($F(1, 158) = 5.59, p < .02$) and control advertisements ($F(1, 158) = 10.75, p < .001$).

Study 2 shows that advertisements that remind consumers of relationships they do not have can influence their perceptions of deservingness. Specifically, reminding consumers of relationships they do not have (i.e., reminding singles of romantic relationships) significantly reduces their feelings of deservingness relative to control. In contrast, reminding consumers of relationships they do have (i.e., friendships) affirms their general propensity to feel deserving.

Arguably, the measures taken in Study 2 drew respondents' attention to the content of the ads, particularly the specific relationship depicted. One may therefore wonder whether the finding would still hold if participants viewed the ads without rating or evaluating them. A follow-up study conducted online (Study 2b) with an adult sample ($N = 117$)

of men (45.4%) and women (54.6%) ranging in age from 18 to 78 years ($M = 34.2, SD = 13.2$) examined this concern. Participants viewed the same set of romantic ads used in the main study (see the Web Appendix); importantly, however, they were not asked any direct questions about the ad content. Immediately following the magazine viewing task, they responded to the measure of deservingness. After viewing the romantic ads that reminded them of a relationship they lack, singles reported significantly lower feelings of deservingness than coupled participants ($M_{\text{single}} = 4.40, M_{\text{coupled}} = 5.03; F(1, 115) = 4.27, p < .04$). This finding provides a replication of the key finding reported previously in Study 2 but in a more naturalistic context, adding support for the robustness of the effect.

Unlike Study 1, in which coupled people restricted indulgence when exposed to close friendship reminders, coupled respondents in Study 2 did not feel less deserving when exposed to general friendship reminders. As discussed previously, the likelihood that people will restrict indulgence depends on whether they lack a certain relationship. Furthermore, the effect of relationship reminders is likely to be stronger when flexibility in consumer interpretation is limited. Advertisements featuring friendships or platonic relationships more broadly (as in Study 2) may provide greater degrees of freedom in interpretation than situations that highlight a particular relationship (e.g., a very close friendship such as that highlighted in Study 1) that the consumer does not have; thus, they may be less likely to reduce deservingness or indulgence.

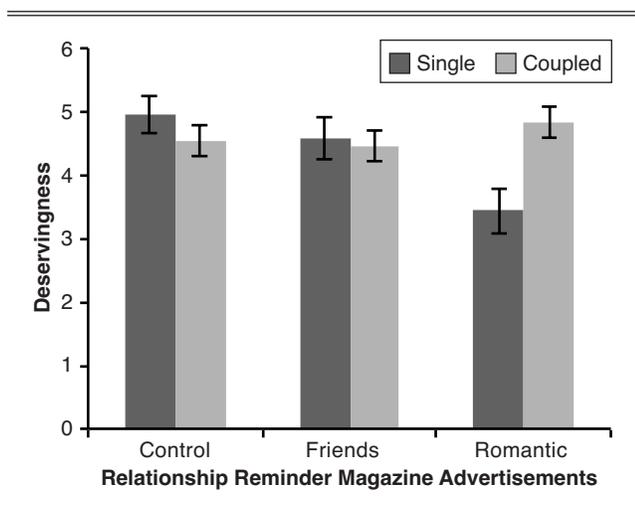
Romantic relationships have qualities that can lead to unique choices (Griskevicius et al. 2007) and affect consumers in a way that other relationships would not. To broaden the context of relationship reminders that directly reduce perceptions of deservingness, Study 3 explicitly tests how reminders of specific, more exclusive platonic relationships influence deservingness. Reminding consumers of a specific valued relationship that they lack should influence perceptions of deservingness and indulgence regardless of whether the reminder highlights a relationship with a romantic partner or a very close friend. Study 3 explicitly tests how reminders of a specific valued platonic relationship—a best friend—that people do or do not have influence perceived deservingness and indulgence. Study 3 also tests whether the effect of relationship reminders on indulgence is mediated by perceived deservingness.

STUDY 3: BEST FRIENDS, DESERVINGNESS, AND INDULGENCE

Study 3 tests whether not having (vs. having) a different type of specific valued relationship (i.e., a best friend) simi-

Figure 2

STUDY 2: RELATIONSHIP REMINDERS IN ADVERTISING INFLUENCE DESERVINGNESS



larly influences perceived deservingness and indulgence as evidenced in the previous studies. In particular, Study 3 examines the question of when reminders of platonic relationships are likely to reduce consumer indulgence, as found with coupled participants in Study 1.

Method and Procedure

Participants and design. One hundred forty-seven people participated in a five-minute lab study for either class credit or payment. The sample consisted of men (56.1%) and women (43.2%) ranging in age from 18 to 62 years ($M = 22.9$, $SD = 7.7$). Study 3 consisted of a three-group design using the best friend relationship (do not have, have, control) and manipulating relationship reminder with a reading task.

Relationship reminder manipulation. Participants were randomly assigned to read one of two articles: an article titled “The Power of Best Friends” (treatment) adapted from a lifestyle magazine (*O Magazine*) or an article titled “The Power of General Education” (control) from the *Journal of Higher Education* that were matched in length (see Appendix B). After reading the assigned passage, participants were asked, “Do you have a relationship [an education requirement] like this in your life?” (“no/yes”). As expected, all respondents in the control condition responded “yes” (i.e., that they all had a general education requirement). From participants’ responses in the treatment condition, the sample was split into two treatment groups: those that have versus those that do not have a best friend. The resulting three groups were analyzed accordingly.

Fragrance preference and deservingness. After completing the reading task, participants read a product choice scenario adapted from Laran (2010), which read,

You walk into the store and see that they have two types of fragrance (i.e., perfume or cologne). You wonder whether you should buy the low-price, economical item or the higher-price, indulgent item. Which item would you choose for yourself?

(A) Low-price, economical item

(B) Higher-price, indulgent item

Participants indicated their response on a seven-point scale (1 = “definitely the low-price, economy fragrance,” and 7 = “definitely the higher-price, indulgent fragrance”). They concluded the study by completing the perceived deservingness measures described previously ($\alpha = .96$).

Results and Discussion

Analyses revealed no difference in product preferences for those having a best friend ($M = 4.87$) and control ($M = 4.94$; $F < 1$, n.s.). However, participants who did not have the best friend relationship indicated spending less ($M = 4.10$) than both those that did have that relationship ($F(1, 144) = 5.46$, $p < .02$) as well as those in the control condition ($F(1, 144) = 4.47$, $p < .04$), in support of H_1 (see Figure 3, Panel A).

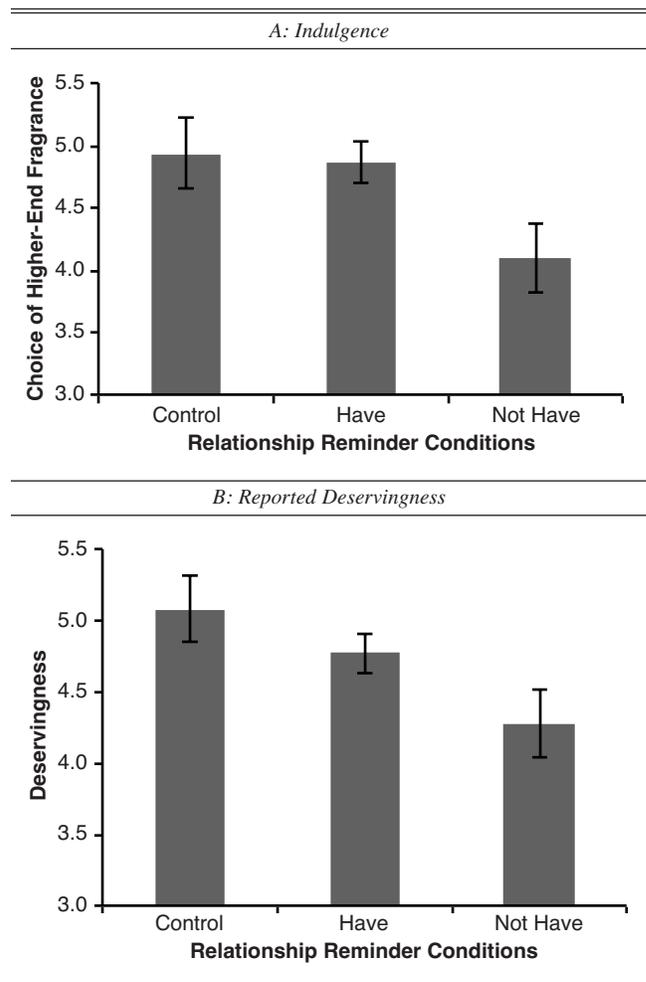
Deservingness. The results for perceived deservingness follow a similar pattern. Analyses revealed no difference in deservingness reported by those with a best friend ($M = 4.77$) and the control group ($M = 5.08$; $F(1, 144) = 1.28$, $p < .26$). However, participants who did not have a best friend ($M = 4.28$) felt less deserving than both those that did ($F(1,$

$144) = 2.96$, $p < .08$) and those in the control condition ($F(1, 144) = 5.54$, $p < .02$; see Figure 3, Panel B).

Mediation. The effect of not having a best friend on product preference was mediated by feelings of deservingness, in support of H_2 . I tested this result using Hayes’ (2013) PROCESS macro with 5,000 bootstrapped samples. To test mediation of a three-group independent variable (Hayes 2013, p. 196), I constructed two dummy variables, X1 and X2, representing the control and best friend groups, respectively. Because there were three groups, there are two indirect effects: (1) the indirect effect of control versus no best friend on product preference through deservingness and (2) the indirect effect of best friend versus no best friend on product preference through deservingness.³ The indirect effect of control versus no best friend was $B = .5667$ ($SE = .2471$), with a 95% bias-corrected bootstrapped confidence interval that excluded 0 (95% confidence interval [CI] = .0953, 1.0662), and the indirect effect of best friend versus no best friend was $B = .3470$ ($SE = .2098$) with a 95% bias-

³As Hayes (2013) outlines, running PROCESS twice, first with X1 as the IV and X2 as a covariate and then with X2 as the IV and X1 as the covariate, enables the user to recover each indirect effect.

Figure 3
STUDY 3: REMINDERS OF NOT HAVING A BEST FRIEND
REDUCE INDULGENCE AND DESERVINGNESS



corrected bootstrapped confidence interval that excluded 0 (95% CI = .0590, .7727).⁴

Study 3 provides direct evidence that thinking about a specific close platonic relationship (i.e., a best friend) that consumers lack makes them restrict indulgence. Using a different type of valued relationship, this study further demonstrates that perceived deservingness mediates consumers' willingness to choose indulgent products. Study 3 used a magazine article to remind consumers of having or not having a close friendship in the present. Study 4 replicates and extends these findings by using a different manipulation involving a brief reflection on a close friendship that either has or has not been maintained over time. Whereas Study 3 explored consumer deservingness when considering a best friend in the present, Study 4 examines whether consumers may also feel undeserving because of relationships in their past. People have numerous relationships over the course of their lives; however, many of those relationships are likely to languish. As such, Study 4 shows that both reminders of relationships that people do not have or have never had (Studies 1–3) and reminders of past relationships that people no longer have can similarly affect deservingness.

STUDY 4: CLOSE FRIENDSHIPS, DESERVINGNESS, AND INDULGENCE

Advertising, media, and consumption situations might remind consumers not only of relationships they currently do not have but also of past relationships they no longer have or have let languish. In Study 4, participants drew on their own life experience to think about a valued close friendship. The study tests whether reminders of a valued friendship that was maintained versus one that was allowed to languish also change people's perception of deservingness and indulgence.

Method and Procedure

Participants and design. One hundred thirteen adults participated in a five-minute online study for payment. The sample consisted of men (46.6%) and women (53.4%) ranging in age from 18 to 67 years ($M = 35.2$, $SD = 12.7$). Participants were randomly assigned to one of two conditions to manipulate perceived deservingness: (1) thinking about a friendship they currently have or (2) thinking about a friendship they no longer have.

Relationship reminder manipulation. Participants in the two groups were asked to read the following scenario:

Think of a friendship that you currently have [no longer have] that you really valued and still have [wished you still had] as a result. Specifically, please bring to mind a friendship that you currently have [no longer have] because of your own [own lack of] continued investment of time and energy to nurture and maintain that relationship. Please take a moment to bring that specific relationship to mind.

Measures. After the relationship manipulation, participants completed the product preference measure described

in Study 3. Subsequently participants also completed the perceived deservingness measures ($\alpha = .97$).

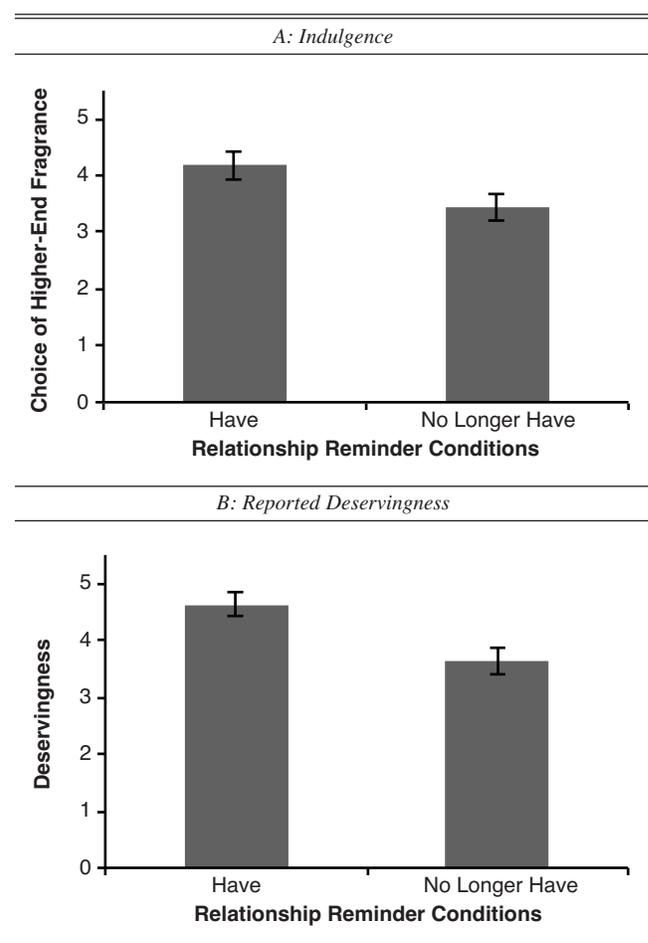
Results and Discussion

Deservingness. In support of H_1 , participants were significantly less likely to choose the higher-end product after thinking about a close friendship they no longer had ($M = 3.43$) than one they currently had ($M = 4.17$; $F(1, 111) = 4.77$, $p < .03$; see Figure 4, Panel A). Furthermore, participants felt significantly less deserving after thinking about a friendship they no longer have ($M = 3.62$) than those thinking about a friendship they currently have ($M = 4.63$; $F(1, 111) = 10.16$, $p < .002$; see Figure 4, Panel B).

Mediation. The effect of no longer having a close friendship on product choice was mediated by feelings of deservingness, in support of H_2 . I tested this result using Hayes' (2013) PROCESS macro with 5,000 bootstrapped samples. The indirect effect of no longer having a close friend versus having a close friend was $B = -.3493$ ($SE = .1497$), with a 95% bias-corrected bootstrapped confidence interval that excluded 0 (95% CI = $-.7447, -.1192$).

Consistent with Study 3, Study 4 shows that thinking about a specific past relationship (e.g., a close friendship) that one no longer has also reduces deservingness and indul-

Figure 4
STUDY 4: REMINDERS OF NO LONGER HAVING A FRIENDSHIP REDUCE INDULGENCE AND DESERVINGNESS



⁴Mediation of the effect also holds when the data are analyzed separately for control versus no best friend ($B = .5560$, $SE = .2531$; 95% CI = .1171, 1.1239) as well as best friend versus no best friend ($B = .3496$, $SE = .2149$; 95% CI = .0157, .7294), both with 95% bias-corrected bootstrapped confidence intervals that excluded 0.

gence. As such, both reminders of current relationships and past relationships may influence indulgence. This finding suggests broader relevance and implications of the proposed framework, because marketers regularly use nostalgia and appeal to memories of past experiences that may remind consumers of relationships that have languished or no longer exist. Study 4 further demonstrates that willingness to choose indulgent products is explained through a process of perceived deservingness.

All studies presented thus far have focused on relationship reminders as triggers of deservingness and provided process evidence through mediation. However, to provide additional support for the role of deservingness, Study 5 provides a direct test of the effect of deservingness through a manipulation. Furthermore, this study also addresses whether consumer mood constitutes another potential mechanism underlying these indulgence decisions.

STUDY 5: RESTORING DESERVINGNESS AND INDULGENCE

Study 5 examines whether feeling deserving for a reason unrelated to one's personal relationships may attenuate the effects of lacking a relationship on indulgence. In Study 5, after reminding individuals of having versus not having a particular relationship (as in Study 4), deservingness is manipulated directly through a scenario that focuses on deservingness experienced from having completed a task (i.e., cleaning one's closet). Furthermore, measures of deservingness used in Studies 2, 3, and 4 specifically assessed deservingness with regard to self-rewards. Study 5 uses a different measure of deservingness that is more separate from the dependent measure and also measures mood. The study provides evidence that perceptions of deservingness, but not mood, explain whether consumers indulge.

Method and Procedure

Participants and design. One hundred sixty-three students participated in a ten-minute lab study for course credit. The sample consisted of men (40.4%) and women (59.6%) ranging in age from 18 to 34 years ($M = 20.1$, $SD = 2.3$). Participants were randomly assigned to one of four conditions in a 2 (close relationship: no longer have, have) \times 2 (deservingness scenario: control, deserving) design.

Procedure. Participants completed the relationship manipulation used in Study 4 (i.e., thinking about a close friendship that they either currently have or no longer have) under the guise of a "Friendship Experience" task. Next, participants were asked to complete a "Visualization" task. Participants in the deserving scenario condition were instructed to imagine themselves in the situation presented by a brief pretested scenario about cleaning a closet, as described and validated in the pilot studies (for details, see the Web Appendix). Participants in the control condition were told to take a moment to bring to mind the specific relationship described previously before proceeding.

Clothing preference. Participants then made a clothing purchase decision on the basis of a measure from Laran (2010), which read,

Now imagine that after that... You see that they have two types of a particular piece of clothing you need. You wonder whether you should buy the lower-price

item or the higher-price item. Which item would you choose for yourself?

(A) Lower-price clothing item

(B) Higher-price clothing item

Participants indicated their response on a seven-point scale (1 = "definitely the lower-price clothing item," and 7 = "definitely the higher-price clothing item"). This clothing item choice was used as the dependent measure.

Deservingness and mood measures. After the clothing item measure, participants were asked to recall their overall visualization experience. For those in the control condition, their experience had consisted of the friendship task and brief reinstatement of that experience. In the deserving condition, their experience had consisted of the friendship task and the closet cleaning. Participants completed a single item deservingness measure, "How deserving did you feel?" and a single item mood measure, "How happy did you feel?" Participants entered their responses on seven-point scales (1 = "not at all," and 7 = "extremely").

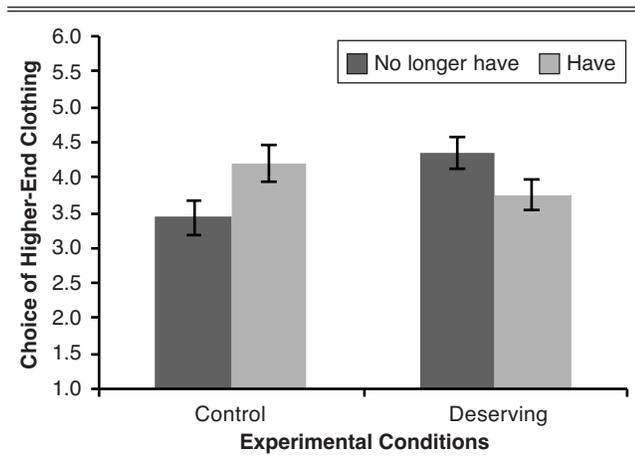
Results and Discussion

A model predicting choice of the higher-priced clothing item was estimated with the relationship reminder manipulation, deservingness manipulation, and their interaction as predictors. The analysis revealed a significant interaction of relationship reminder and deservingness manipulation ($F(1, 159) = 8.35$, $p < .004$) for product preference. At the baseline (control condition), participants were significantly less likely to choose the higher-end clothing item after thinking about a close friendship they no longer had ($M = 3.43$) than one they currently had ($M = 4.19$; $F(1, 159) = 5.35$, $p < .02$), in support of H_1 and replicating Study 4's result. However, after imagining something that made them view themselves as deserving, the effect was attenuated.

Participants who were reminded of a relationship they no longer had and who also imagined having done something worthwhile were significantly more likely to choose the higher-end item ($M = 4.34$) than those in the control condition, who were only reminded of no longer having a relationship ($M = 3.43$; $F(1, 159) = 7.57$, $p < .007$; see Figure 5). Indeed, the deserving-bolstered group's likelihood of choosing the higher-end item was equal to that of baseline participants, who recalled a relationship they had ($M = 4.19$; $F < 1$, n.s.). Analyses revealed no difference in choices for participants who recalled a relationship they had and those who in addition imagined doing something worthwhile ($M = 3.75$; $F(1, 159) = 1.77$, n.s.).

Deservingness. The relationship reminder \times deservingness manipulation interaction was again significant ($F(1, 159) = 5.75$, $p < .02$). Participants who were reminded of a relationship they no longer had and who also imagined having done something worthwhile reported significantly higher levels of deservingness ($M = 5.17$) than those who were only reminded of no longer having a relationship ($M = 4.15$; $F(1, 159) = 12.64$, $p < .0005$). The deserving-bolstered group's reported deservingness was also higher than that of baseline participants, who recalled a relationship they had ($M = 4.50$; $F(1, 159) = 5.59$, $p < .02$). Analyses revealed no difference in choices for those who recalled a relationship

Figure 5
STUDY 5: RESTORING DESERVINGNESS INCREASES
INDULGENCE



they had and those who also imagined doing something worthwhile ($M = 4.55$; $F < 1$, n.s.).

Mood. The interaction of relationship reminder and deservingness manipulation again was significant ($F(1, 159) = 18.74$, $p < .001$). Participants who were reminded of a relationship they no longer had and who also imagined having done something worthwhile reported significantly more happiness ($M = 5.32$) than those who were only reminded of no longer having a relationship ($M = 3.68$; $F(1, 159) = 31.97$, $p < .0001$). The deserving-bolstered group's mood was directionally higher than that of baseline participants, who recalled a relationship they had ($M = 4.88$; $F(1, 159) = 2.31$, $p < .13$). Analyses revealed no difference in happiness for those who recalled a relationship they had and those who also imagined doing something worthwhile ($M = 4.75$; $F < 1$, n.s.). Mood, however, did not predict or explain product preference (see the following subsection).

Moderated mediation. The first set of analyses examined deservingness as the mediator. The relationship reminder \times scenario interaction on product preference was mediated by perceptions of deservingness, in support of H_1 and H_2 . I tested for moderated mediation using Hayes' (2013) PROCESS macro with 5,000 bootstrapped samples.⁵ The indirect effect of the highest-order interaction (relationship \times scenario condition) was significant ($B = -.2728$, $SE = .1577$, 95% CI = $-.6869, -.0437$), providing the inference of moderated mediation, which implies that both the direct and indirect effects are conditioned on the scenario condition.

The indirect effect of having versus not having a relationship on product choice through perceptions of deservingness depends on scenario condition. For the deserving scenario, the indirect effect through perceptions of deservingness was significant ($B = -.1744$, $SE = .1135$, 95% CI = $-.4898, -.0164$). For the control scenario, the indirect effect was not significant ($B = .0984$, $SE = .0872$, 95% CI = $-.0255, .3413$). These results support the claim that when those who

did not have the relationship in question were made to perceive themselves as deserving (through the deserving scenario), they indulged more. Thus, deservingness mediated the effect.⁶

A second set of analyses examined both deservingness and mood as parallel mediators. In that model, the indirect effect of the highest-order interaction for deservingness was significant ($B = -.2267$, $SE = .1646$; 95% CI = $-.6847, -.0036$); however, the indirect effect of mood was not significant ($B = -.1805$, $SE = .2126$; 95% CI = $-.6442, .2111$). In summary, the results support the claim that deservingness, but not mood, mediates indulgent product preference.⁷

Study 5 manipulated deservingness directly by instructing participants to think about having done something worthwhile, and it shows that this instruction influences perceived deservingness and indulgence by those who previously felt undeserving (i.e., those reminded of a relationship they no longer have). These findings further demonstrate that willingness to make indulgent choices is explained through a process of perceived deservingness. Prior research has suggested that sad consumers indulge more (e.g., Cornil and Chandon 2013; Cryder et al. 2008). Study 5 reports that being reminded of lacking valued relationships can dampen mood in addition to deservingness. However, the analysis also finds that deservingness, but not mood, mediates the effects of relationship reminders on indulgence.

GENERAL DISCUSSION

This research highlights perceived deservingness as an important mechanism affecting consumer indulgence and shows how changes in momentary perceptions of deservingness influence indulgent choices. In general, consumers prefer to view themselves positively, and when they feel deserving, they indulge. However, when consumers feel undeserving, they restrict indulgence. My findings reveal that some common marketing practices used to promote consumption actually cause consumers to feel undeserving and restrict indulgence.

Five experiments and two additional replications demonstrate how reminders of the relationships consumers may or may not have can influence their perceived deservingness and ultimately whether they indulge or restrict indulgence. Reminders of having valued relationships (e.g., platonic, romantic) can make consumers feel deserving. However, reminders of lacking a specific valued relationship (e.g., romantic partner, best friend) can make consumers feel undeserving and thus reduce their indulgence. This effect was replicated across multiple social relationship types, including reminders of romantic relationships (Studies 1 and 2), platonic relationships (Studies 3–5), and a task independent of relationship status (Study 5). The effect holds for

⁶Mediation of the effect through deservingness also holds when the data are analyzed separately for those who no longer have the relationship versus those who no longer have the relationship and then visualized the deservingness scenario ($B = .3866$, $SE = .1769$; 95% CI = $.1099, .8351$); no significant change in deservingness occurs among those who have the relationship.

⁷Mediation of the effect also holds when the data are analyzed separately, comparing those who no longer have the relationship with those who no longer have the relationship and then visualized the deservingness scenario ($B = .3528$, $SE = .2513$; 95% CI = $.0746, .8800$); however, the effect does not hold for mood ($B = -.0430$, $SE = .2756$, 95% CI = $-.5637, .5226$).

⁵Model 8 was specified with Y = clothing choice, X = having the relationship, W = deservingness scenario manipulation, and M = perceived deservingness.

both reminders of current and past relationships (Studies 4 and 5). Across studies, consumers consistently reduced indulgence when reminded of a valued social relationship that they lack. Importantly, these consumers restricted their indulgence relative to both those who had the valued relationships and baseline controls. The mediational and moderational evidence suggests that perceptions of deservingness underlie the observed changes in indulgent choice.

The experiments used several designs and relationship reminders (greeting cards, advertisements, magazine articles, and scenarios), measured multiple indulgent choice outcomes (personal care products, clothing, and accessories), and tested the hypotheses on student and adult populations. This approach supports the robustness and generalizability of how deservingness influences indulgence and emphasizes the important influence that relationship reminders have on consumer choice.

Theoretical Contributions

This research identifies a novel factor—perceived deservingness—that predicts consumers' propensity to indulge and highlights how feeling undeserving leads to restrictions in consumer indulgence. I find consistent support for the proposed theory of consumer deservingness and demonstrate the important role of deservingness in predicting patterns of indulgence.

These results depart from commonly reported findings associating negative self-focused feelings and aversive states with increased indulgence (e.g., Cornil and Chandon 2013; Cryder et al. 2008; Rucker and Galinsky 2009; Sivanathan and Pettit 2010). In contrast, the current research highlights circumstances under which reduced feelings of deservingness decrease indulgence. This article further highlights the importance of distinguishing how people feel emotionally (i.e., affective reactions) and how they feel about themselves (i.e., deservingness). Previous studies have focused on feelings in terms of affect and emotion (i.e., "How do I feel?"). My studies highlight self-assessment (i.e., "How do I feel about myself?") as a critical determinant of indulgence that is distinct from feelings or affect. This research shows that relationship reminders consistently affect perceived deservingness. Notably, some relationship reminders are relatively more (e.g., remembering a lost relationship) or relatively less (e.g., viewing advertisements featuring relationships) likely to influence consumers' affective reactions as well. In cases in which affective reactions are likely to occur, it is important to account for both influences (e.g., Study 5). The current evidence shows that although perceiving oneself as less deserving may sometimes be accompanied by negative feelings, it is the perceptions of deservingness—not feelings or mood—that most accurately predict whether indulgence occurs in these cases (e.g., Study 5). Reexamination of previous studies linking emotion and indulgence may yield insights regarding the extent to which specific feeling states (e.g., sadness, guilt, embarrassment, pride) and the circumstances that led to those particular feelings trigger perceptions of deservingness. For example, no longer having a close friend may cause a person to feel sad and undeserving of indulgence, whereas being betrayed by a close friend may cause a person to feel sad and deserving of indulgence.

I identify relationship reminders as having an important and understudied influence on deservingness and indulgence. This research reveals that deservingness and indulgence can be driven by reminding consumers of relationships (e.g., platonic, romantic) that they have or lack. In particular, the results show that both lacking a relationship or having let a relationship languish reduce perceived deservingness and indulgence.

The study findings support the proposed deservingness framework explanation for how relationship reminders influence indulgence and provide evidence counter to what prior work involving relationship reminders might otherwise predict about consumer indulgence. Previous research involving mate value considerations has suggested that singles should choose in ways that increase physical attractiveness, status, and the likelihood of coupling (e.g., Buss and Schmitt 1993; Griskevicius et al. 2007; Janssens et al. 2011; Sundie et al. 2011). That is, singles reminded of romantic relationships should indulge more in higher-end products that enhance appearance (to signal attractiveness and status through products), and reminders of platonic relationships should have little effect. Instead, my studies show that singles consistently restrict indulgence on products related to appearance (i.e., personal care products, clothing, and accessories) after romantic reminders. In addition, I show that both platonic (e.g., best friend) and romantic relationship reminders can reduce indulgence on products related to appearance. One explanation for these differences in findings is that prior work involving romantic relationship cues has specifically emphasized sexual desire and mating motives, whereas the present research emphasizes long-term relationships and deservingness. Unlike the sex-specific effect of mating motives, perceived deservingness is found to have similar effects on appearance and non-appearance-related indulgences and also applies to relationships in which no mating motives exist (i.e., platonic). As such, deservingness and mating motives are two separate mechanisms, and each offers unique insights and implications for marketers.

Substantive Marketing Implications

The current research underscores the importance of understanding how depicting relationships in advertising and marketing influences consumer deservingness and indulgence. The findings have important implications both for consumer welfare and for marketers. Marketers commonly use depictions of "happy togetherness" (relationship reminders) to promote consumption. This research shows that this prevalent marketing practice can have negative consequences for multiple outcomes important to marketers: consumers' perceptions of deservingness and company sales. By inadvertently reminding consumers of relationships they lack, marketers are not simply mistargeting but may also be self-handicapping. With this practice, marketers may cause many consumers (e.g., singles [44.1% of adult consumers; United States Census Bureau 2013]) and people who report not having a best friend other than their romantic partner (45% of adult consumers) to feel undeserving of indulgence, thus limiting the firm's sales of indulgent products. Effects on such consumers may be particularly profound during certain times of year, such as holi-

days or wedding season, when the portrayal of relationships is especially prominent in advertisements, promotional e-mails, and on newsstands. Moreover, the effect of relationship reminders on indulgence occurs for reminders of both current and past relationships, broadening its implications for marketers.

Advertising and product placement. When promoting indulgent products, marketers may benefit from increased attention to the context of their advertising and product placement in television shows and movies. Specifically, if marketers are interested in encouraging consumers who do not have valued relationships to indulge themselves, it may be wise to place advertising in specific shows or episodes focused on celebrating general platonic relationship themes (e.g., friendships, neighbors, coworkers) as opposed to those focused on exclusive pairwise relationships (e.g., best friends, romantic couples).

Direct marketing. Although a consumer’s relationship status may not always be knowable, it would be worthwhile for marketers to evaluate their direct marketing efforts when customization can be leveraged. For example, retailers often send catalogs and promotional e-mails featuring the same image (e.g., a cozy romantic couple) to all consumers regardless of partnership status, a demographic variable that some companies may know. However, systematically varying the image (i.e., romantic couple vs. platonic others) placed on a catalog cover or with a promotional coupon using available demographic data (i.e., partnership status) may be beneficial. This practice may be particularly powerful with indulgent product promotions through e-mail, for which consumers can click through immediately to “shop now.” In addition, sales representatives who call consumers about promotional upgrades should be careful about making assumptions and using relationship-related language and references (e.g., husband, wife, children) that may directly remind consumers of relationships they lack.

Boundary Conditions and Further Research

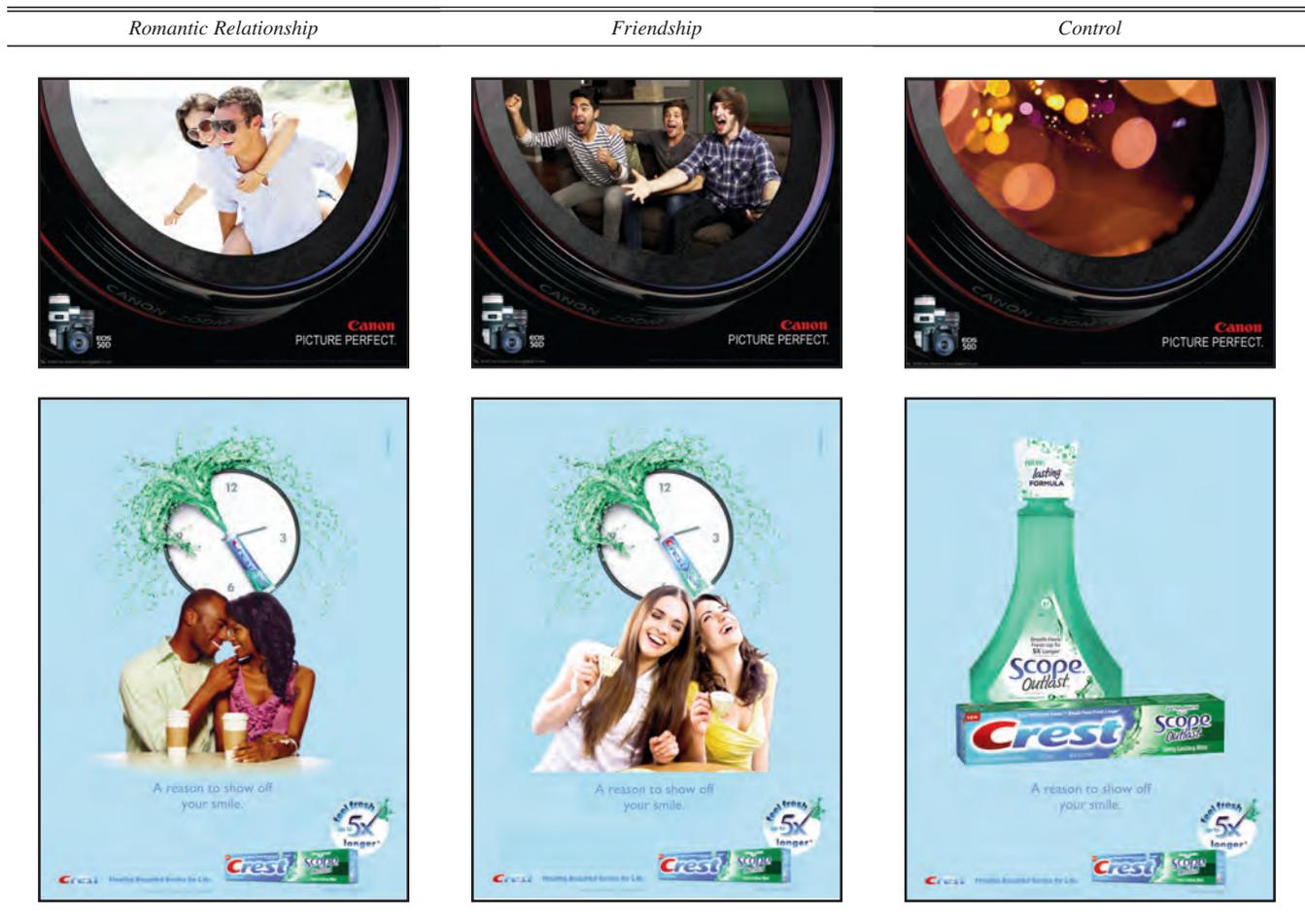
The current research focuses on how common relationship reminders influence perceived deservingness across a general population. However, there may be special circumstances, resulting from the nature of the relationship reminder or the individual, that present important boundary conditions for this demonstrated effect. The relationship reminders used in the current studies largely highlighted benefits of close relationships (i.e., “happy togetherness”) often featured in marketing and advertising. However, reminders that highlight the downside of close relationships (depictions of, e.g., unhappy couples, a needy best friend, an inconsiderate spouse) may validate consumers who do not have these relationships and thus attenuate these effects. In addition, consumers who actively reject the assumption or norm of these pairwise relationships (e.g., someone who refuses to be in a romantic relationship) are likely to be less susceptible to these influences. There also may be situations (e.g., a tumultuous breakup) in which more intense emotional experiences (e.g., extreme anger, depression) may overwhelm self-assessments and thus affect the impact of perceived deservingness on indulgence. However, to the extent that the consumer views him- or herself as responsible for dissolving the relationship (see, e.g., Studies 4 and 5), the effect on perceived deservingness is likely to hold.

This investigation suggests several other opportunities for further research, which could encourage theory building across theoretical perspectives. For example, an important topic for further research is to consider other important consumption outcomes, such as risk-taking and spending versus saving, which may also be influenced by perceived deservingness and relationship reminders. Given the prominent roles of deservingness and relationships in consumer choice, continued research on these factors could benefit both consumers and marketers alike.

APPENDIX A

STUDY 2: SAMPLE ADVERTISEMENTS FEATURING RELATIONSHIP REMINDERS

Romantic Relationship	Friendship	Control

APPENDIX A
CONTINUED

APPENDIX B: STUDY 3 ARTICLES

The Power of Best Friends, by K. Kinney

A key component to finding fulfillment in your life is to have a true best friend. It is important that this someone is not your romantic partner or a family member but a special person with whom you've continued to nurture a special bond over time purely by choice.

Best friends are loving, honest, and generous. In having a best friend, we lead richer lives and become better people.

What does a best friend have that makes that person different than all other friends? It's really not what that person has, but what the best friend doesn't have. A best friend doesn't have an agenda. A best friend listens, loves you and gives advice only when asked, based solely on what is best for you—not what would make one's self happiest. Do you have such a friend in your life? Are you such a friend to someone else?

Everybody should have a best friend who supports them unconditionally. You know the kind of friend we mean? Your best friend will tell you if you have spinach in your teeth. Go shopping with you and give your outfit the thumbs up or thumbs down. A best friend will listen when you complain about work or family and never bring it up again,

unless you do. A best friend is a precious gift and something to treasure. Do you have this kind of bond in your life?

The Power of General Education Models, by K. Kinney

General education requirements comprise, on average, approximately 30% of the undergraduate curriculum and therefore represent an important feature of the student academic experience in American colleges and universities.

Previous studies have not fully examined the origins of the most important models of general education, the distribution of these models among higher education institutions, or the causes for change in general education requirements over time. In this article we describe and analyze the organization of general education requirements in U.S. four-year colleges and universities over a 25-year period, 1975–2000.

We show that four models of general education persisted throughout the period. We will label these the "core distribution areas," "traditional liberal arts," "cultures and ethics," and "civic/utilitarian" models. We show that two of these models arose near the beginning date of the study. The rise of these new models is one important change in general education. Another is the addition of new subject requirements, particularly in areas related to basic academic skills, gender and racial-ethnic diversity, and non-Western cultures. These course-level changes, we will argue, reflect

responses to the deeper-lying forces of expansion and diversification of higher education, as interpreted by influential actors in the system.

Our study is in the tradition of social and institutional history. We are interested in the origin and diffusion of models of general education and the educational and political interest groups that have contributed to changes in this field of undergraduate education.

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