

FEELING BAD FOR THE SELF, FEELING BAD FOR OTHERS: TWO ESSAYS ON
EMOTIONAL RESPONSES IN CONSUMER BEHAVIOR

by

THOMAS ALLARD

B.B.A., HEC Montréal, 2005

M.Sc., HEC Montréal, 2007

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Abstract

This research is aimed at deepening our understanding of the positive consequences of negative emotional states, in particular guilt and empathy. While past research has suggested that negative emotional experiences create aversive states that motivate actions aimed at addressing the source of the negative emotion, the current work shows that affective responses arising out of negative experiences can, at times, have positive implications for consumer behavior. The aim of this dissertation is to extend our understanding of the influence of such negative emotional experiences on consumer behavior in two separate domains—when feeling bad for the self (i.e., guilt) and when feeling bad for others (i.e., empathy). I do so by articulating conceptual frameworks for when each emotional state will lead to positive consumer consequences and by identifying novel mediators and boundary conditions for the observed effects.

In essay 1, I show that guilt, the negative emotion stemming from a failure to meet a self-held standard of behavior, leads to preferences for products enabling self-improvement, even in domains unrelated to the original source of the guilt. Importantly, I demonstrate that only guilt—not other negative emotions (i.e., shame, embarrassment, sadness, or envy)—has the unique motivational consequence of activating a general desire to improve the self. This desire for self-improvement subsequently spills into other domains and spurs self-improving product choices.

In essay 2, I propose that negative reviews, when perceived as undeserved, can trigger positive consumer responses towards the firm. Importantly, I demonstrate that such positive responses from undeserved negative reviews occur because consumers can experience empathetic feelings for firms being wronged.

Overall, I bring light to novel downstream consequences of two emotion experiences, guilt and empathy, in consumer behavior. I conclude by identifying potential avenues for future research and discussing the theoretical and managerial implications of the work.

Preface

I am the primary author of the work presented in this Ph.D. dissertation. I was responsible for conducting the literature review, developing the hypotheses, designing the experiments, collecting the data, analyzing the data, and preparing the manuscript. Additional contributions for the two essays are described below.

1 Essay 1: Cross-Domain Effects of Guilt on Desire for Self-Improvement Products

A version of this chapter has been published. Thomas Allard and Katherine White, “Cross-Domain Effects of Guilt on Desire for Self-Improvement Products,” © 2015 by JOURNAL OF CONSUMER RESEARCH, Inc. I am the first author of this publication. Katherine White assisted in designing the experiments and provided intellectual contributions.

2 Essay 2: Taking a Stand for the Firm: When Undeserved Reviews Create Empathetic Concern for Firms

I am the first author of this manuscript. Lea H. Dunn and Katherine White assisted in designing the experiments and provided intellectual contributions.

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this thesis. As a result, studies that used the student participant pool or field studies on campus tended toward sample sizes of 30+ per cell, whereas those that used an Amazon Mechanical Turk online sample used sample sizes of 60+ per cell.

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Dedication

To Meli, Marcus, and my family. And so the adventure continues...

Introduction

Researchers and marketing practitioners have traditionally approached emotions in consumer behavior by seeking to maximize positive emotions and minimize negative emotions that consumers derive from consumption experiences (e.g., Bagozzi, Gopinath, and Nyer 1999; Holbrook and Batra 1987; Luce 1998; Oliver 1993). On the one hand, this focus towards understanding the factors that increase consumers' experience of positive emotions was guided by desire to increase vital firm-focused outcomes such as positive word-of-mouth (Nyer 1997), patronage (Dawson, Bloch, and Ridgway 1990), and—more generally—consumer satisfaction (Westbrook and Oliver 1991). On the other hand, reducing negative consumer emotions was often promoted as a sensible strategy because consumers' negative emotions are linked to a variety of negative managerial outcomes such as, decreased product liking (Murry Jr and Dacin 1996), reductions in satisfaction with purchases (Dubé and Morgan 1996), lower firm evaluations (Porath, MacInnis, and Folkes 2010), and even consumer revenge behaviors (Grégoire, Tripp, and Legoux 2009).

Negative emotions are also often used in marketing communications using a goal-directed approach (e.g., Bagozzi and Pieters 1998), most often towards the prevention of undesirable outcomes. For instance, negative emotions are often used to motivate a variety of consumer behaviors requiring self-control such as a caloric restriction (Giner-Sorolla 2001), waste reduction (Viscusi, Huber, and Bell 2011), and responsible drinking (Agrawal and Duhachek 2010). In these contexts, negative emotions (or anticipated negative emotions), because they are associated with aversive states, can act as powerful motivators toward behavior that would prevent negative states of mind (e.g., Gross 1998) and outcomes (e.g., overspending).

This dissertation instead focusses on providing a better understanding of the conditions under which the aversive states arising from negative emotional experiences can lead consumers to seek positive outcomes for the self and for others. That is, while research has begun to uncover instances of negative emotional experiences being associated with motives to do good (e.g., Bohns and Flynn 2013; Flynn and Schaumberg 2012; Ochsner et al. 2004), the reality is that we know very little about better practices for promoting desirable consumer outcomes in response to negative emotions. This dissertation focuses on two types of negative experiences in consumption settings—feeling bad for the self and feeling bad for others—and extends existing models of emotion regulation by proposing and testing novel outcomes to two types of emotional states (i.e., guilt and empathy) arising out of negative appraisals.

Overview of the Dissertation

This dissertation is composed of eleven experimental studies across two essays. Essay 1 deepens our understanding of the motivational impact of feeling bad for the self on consumer choices. Specifically, this essay examines the notion that guilt, the negative emotion stemming from a failure to meet a self-held standard of behavior, leads to preferences for products enabling self-improvement, even in domains unrelated to the original source of the guilt. This research examines consumer responses to real products and demonstrates that such effects arise because guilt—by its focus on previous wrongdoings on the part of the self—activates a general desire to improve the self. This increase in desire for self-improvement products is only observed for choices involving the self (not others), is not observed in response to other negative emotions (i.e., shame, embarrassment, sadness, or envy), and is mitigated when people hold the belief that the self is non-malleable. Building on past work that focuses on how guilt often leads to the

motivation to either directly or indirectly alleviate feelings of guilt, this research demonstrates an additional, novel downstream consequence of guilt, showing that only guilt has the unique motivational consequence of activating a general desire to improve the self, which subsequently spills into other domains and spurs self-improving product choices. These findings are discussed in light of their implications for research on the distinct motivational consequences of specific emotions and on consumer well-being.

Essay 2 deepens our understanding of the motivational impact of feeling bad for another entity—in this case, a firm—on consumer preferences. While research has traditionally shown that negative reviews lead to negative outcomes for firms, this research instead proposes that negative reviews, when perceived as undeserved, can trigger positive consumer responses for the firm. Importantly, these constructive consumers responses following undeserved negative reviews can be even more supportive toward the firm than those following positive reviews. Across five studies, I show that such positive responses from undeserved negative reviews occur because consumers can experience empathetic feelings for firms being wronged (i.e., receiving an undeserved negative review). Furthermore, I test this proposed mechanism related to empathic responding by showing that positive consumer reactions in response to undeserved negative reviews are magnified under conditions that allow consumers to empathize with the firm. Furthermore, I show that managerial actions can facilitate empathetic reactions by using more personlike responses (i.e., having human-like or anthropomorphic qualities) to such negative reviews.

Taken together, this work highlights the importance of exploring the factors that allow transforming negative emotional experiences into positive outcomes for both consumers and

firms. In doing so, this research proposes and identifies two novel instances of such phenomena. First, this dissertation identifies a desire for self-improvement products as a novel positive outcome arising from the experience of guilt in consumption. Second, it proposes that consumers can feel empathy for firms when they are being mistreated and are undeserving of such mistreatment, leading to positive responses towards those firms (i.e., willingness to pay, patronage intentions, and purchase intentions). This work not only has the potential to stimulate future research and improve consumer well-being, but it also offers sensible recommendations for the strategic management of organizations.

The remainder of the dissertation is structured as follows. I present essay 1 and essay 2 in turn. In each essay, I first position the relevant consumer issues to be addressed (Essay 1: Desire for self-improvement products; Essay 2: Taking a stand for firms being mistreated). Next, I provide the conceptual background and develop my hypotheses for the above-mentioned studies, with respect to these outcomes and the underlying processes. Then, I report experimental studies that test the proposed hypotheses. Finally, I conclude each essay with a section that summarizes the theoretical and substantive contributions of the work and highlight avenues for future research. I then discuss the general implications and limitations of my dissertation and provide concluding remarks.

Chapter 1: Cross-Domain Effects of Guilt on Desire for Self-Improvement Products

On her way to the mall, Olivia walks past a blood donation clinic and sees a large poster calling for donors. She knows how desperately blood donors are needed and has always wanted to give blood, but somehow she has never taken the time to do so. She spends the rest of her journey feeling guilty for not having made a blood donation. How might Olivia's experience of guilt influence her subsequent behaviors?

Extant theories of emotion predict that Olivia could resolve her negative feelings *directly* and address the source of the guilt by making a donation of blood (Baumeister, Stillwell, and Heatherton 1994). However, this may not always be possible. Under such conditions, existing work predicts that Olivia could alternatively seek to alleviate her feelings of guilt *indirectly* in one of two specific ways. First, feelings of guilt might lead Olivia to carry out behaviors that would put her in a more positive mood. For example, she could engage in mood repair by donating money to charity or by watching a humorous sitcom (Ketelaar and Tung Au 2003). Alternatively, guilt may prompt Olivia to avoid further negative feelings by denying herself indulgences (e.g., avoiding ordering dessert or postponing an extravagant purchase; Zemack-Rugar, Bettman, and Fitzsimons 2007; Zemack-Rugar et al. 2016).

The current research highlights a novel downstream behavioral consequence of guilt—cross-domain preferences for choice options enabling self-improvement. I propose that when opportunities to engage in actions directly aimed at addressing the source of the guilt are not available, guilt activates a general motive to improve the self. I show that guilt can lead to

preferences for options geared toward improving important facets of the self, even in domains unrelated to the one where the guilt originated. In this example, self-improvement motives may drive Olivia to try to improve herself by making an appointment with a financial planner or renewing her gym membership.

By providing evidence for the unique effect of guilt on the desire for self-improvement options, I contribute to the literature emphasizing the distinct motivational consequences of specific emotions (Cavanaugh, Bettman, and Luce 2015; Griskevicius, Shiota, and Nowlis 2010; Wilcox, Kramer, and Sen 2011; Winterich and Haws 2011) and address previous calls to expand our understanding of the impact of guilt on consumption (Goldsmith, Cho, and Dhar 2012; O’Keefe 2002). I outline below the specific contributions I make to the literature.

First, I bring to light generalized self-improvement as a novel outcome of guilt in consumer behavior. Importantly, I show that the tendency to prefer self-improvement options over comparison options is a distinct consequence of guilt that does not emerge in response to other negative emotional states (e.g., shame, embarrassment, sadness, or envy).

Second, I highlight the motivational underpinnings of the observed effect by demonstrating that guilt has the novel consequence of activating a general desire to improve the self, which leads to a preference for the consumption of products with self-improvement features in domains unrelated to the original source of guilt. I further highlight the unique motivational properties of guilt by showing that they emerge only when the product is meant to be consumed by the self as opposed to others.

Third, this research contributes to the literature on the behavioral effects of guilt on subsequent consumption. For the most part, work in this area has focused on measuring preference for vice-over-virtue, hedonic-over-utilitarian, or luxury-over-necessity options (see Khan and Dhar 2006 for a discussion). Instead, I show that when selecting among equally positive options not requiring aversive effort, the unique nature of guilt—stemming from a failure to meet salient self-standards and triggering a generalized desire for reparative actions—leads individuals experiencing guilt to actively seek consumption options enabling self-improvement.

Finally, I also demonstrate the importance of a theoretically relevant moderator of the observed effects. My conceptual framework proposes that guilt activates a general desire to improve the self, which subsequently drives preferences for self-improvement options. As such, I propose and find that personal beliefs about the ability to change and improve the self moderate the observed effects (e.g., Chiu, Hong, and Dweck 1997). In particular, I find that individuals holding a belief that the self is malleable demonstrate a tendency to seek self-improvement options after experiencing guilt, but those holding a belief that one's personal attributes are fixed do not. I next turn my theoretical framework.

1.1 Theoretical Development

Guilt is part of a class of emotions referred to as “self-conscious emotions” which share the characteristic of involving a self-evaluation of one's current state of affairs (Smith and Ellsworth 1985; Tangney 1999; Tracy and Robins 2004). Guilt develops from the awareness of not having lived up to some important self-standard of behavior regarding what is deemed to be good, correct, appropriate, or desirable (Eisenberg 2000; Lewis 1971; Smith and Lazarus 1990;

Tangney, Stuewig, and Mashek 2007). Guilt is associated with a negative evaluation of the self (Baumeister et al. 1994) and the propensity to trigger reparative actions aiming to resolve the negative self-evaluation in some way (Frijda, Kuipers, and ter Schure 1989; Hoffman 1982; Tangney et al. 1996). Importantly, guilt is associated with high perceived self-efficacy in dealing with the specific negative feelings (Lazarus and Folkman 1984). Guilt acts as a feedback function by prompting people to reflect on their wrongdoing and to consider how to avoid similar aversive outcomes in the future (Baumeister et al. 2007).

1.1.1 Guilt and Reparative Actions

Previous work on the downstream consequences of guilt has demonstrated that guilt often results in reparative actions that either directly or indirectly resolve the feelings of guilt. First, the experience of guilt often leads individuals to engage in actions allowing for reparation of the wrongdoing in a way that can directly resolve feelings of guilt (e.g., Ainslie 1975; Hoch and Loewenstein 1991; Tangney and Dearing 2002). Indeed, guilt has been shown to trigger the goal of atonement for the particular guilt-inducing transgression (Lindsay-Hartz, De Rivera, and Mascolo 1995; Miceli and Castelfranchi 1998). Guilt leads people to wish that they had not committed their lapse or misdeed and to expend great effort to make amends in the specific domain of the wrongdoing (Baumeister, Stillwell, and Heatherton 1995; Frijda et al. 1989; Hoffman 1982; Miceli and Castelfranchi 1998). For example, customers who expressed guilt for not making a purchase in a clothing store despite a friendly interaction with a salesperson were subsequently more likely to credit that particular salesperson for future purchases in that store (Dahl, Honea, and Manchanda 2005). This mechanism, which relies on reparative actions directly aimed at addressing the source of guilt, is often used in the context of guilt appeals

(Coulter and Pinto 1995; Huhmann and Brotherton 1997). Guilt appeals attempt to make individuals feel guilty in a focal domain in anticipation that individuals will then directly address the feelings of guilt in that same domain (Agrawal and Duhachek 2010; Basil, Ridgway, and Basil 2008).

Second, guilt can lead to actions that are indirectly aimed at repairing negative mood—with conflicting perspectives on whether guilt ultimately increases (vs. decreases) self-control. That is, the activation of guilt in one context can lead to behaviors that have the potential to reduce the negative mood in a second, unrelated context (e.g., Elliott 1994; Kivetz and Zheng 2006; Sim and Zeman 2005; Snoek et al. 2007; Yi 2012). For example, guilt has been found to trigger mood-repairing consumption behaviors such as binge eating (Bybee et al. 1996) and shopping (O'Guinn and Faber 1989). Guilt has also been linked to a variety of prosocial behaviors unrelated to the source of the guilt (Cialdini et al. 1987; Strahilevitz and Myers 1998), including providing help to strangers, volunteering (Konecni 1972; Quiles and Bybee 1997; Regan, Williams, and Sparling 1972), and cooperating in social bargaining games (De Hooze, Zeelenberg, and Breugelmans 2007; Ketelaar and Tung Au 2003; Nelissen, Dijksterhuis, and de Vries 2007). Such behaviors may enable mood-management in ways that indirectly counteract the negative psychological experience of guilt. Similarly, self-conscious affect in general—and more specifically guilt—may also lead people to act in ways that aim to prevent further worsening of their mood. That is, a large body of literature has shown guilt's ability to trigger avoidance of consumption options perceived as wasteful, immoral, and irresponsible (e.g., Dhar and Wertenbroch 2000; Khan and Dhar 2006; Kivetz and Keinan 2006; Kivetz and Simonson 2002; Levav and McGraw 2009), because selecting indulgent options (ex. chips and CDs) can further

trigger feelings of guilt (e.g., Giner-Sorolla 2001; Hofmann and Fisher 2012; Ramanathan and Williams 2007; Zemack-Rugar et al. 2007).

1.1.2 Guilt and Self-Improvement

The current research introduces a third downstream consequence of guilt—its ability to induce a generalized desire for self-improvement. Past research suggests that the appraisal of guilt is associated with a salient awareness of a failure to meet a standard that is important to the self (Higgins 1987; Miceli and Castelfranchi 1998; Pelozo, White, and Shang 2013; Tracy and Robins 2004). I propose that when such a failure becomes salient and triggers feelings of guilt, this can activate a general desire to lift the self up to meet other important self-standards. In other words, guilt is associated with a general motivation to improve the self in self-relevant domains. I suggest that this motivation can in turn lead to preference for consumption choice options with self-improvement features compared to equally attractive comparison options that do not offer self-improvement features. Although such an effect related to guilt has never been demonstrated, this prediction is consistent with an emotional appraisal account of guilt suggesting that the appraisal of a specific emotion can activate a general cognitive predisposition guiding the interpretation of future events in line with the evaluative process that triggered the emotion (Lerner and Keltner 2000). I build on this reasoning to make the novel prediction that because guilt stems from the assessment of falling short of a relevant self-standard, it will activate a *general desire to improve the self*, leading to a preference for consumption options geared toward self-improvement, even in domains unrelated to the original source of the guilt. Specifically, I make the prediction that people experiencing guilt will be motivated to address this generalized (or cross-domain) desire for self-improvement through self-improvement

consumption choices, even if this consumption does not directly resolve the experienced of the guilt itself—because the source of the guilt is unrelated to the self-improvement domain.

I define self-improvement as the motivation to pursue outcomes that will facilitate bettering some self-relevant aspect of the self, including personal attributes or performance in domains important to the self, such as the intellectual, moral, social, or physical self (Sedikides 2009; Sedikides and Strube 1995, 1997). In consumption contexts, choice options enabling someone to become better at a task or to improve some facet of the self can fall in the self-improvement category. Examples of such consumption options include, for instance, reading a difficult book, learning a new language, or starting an exercise program. In sum, while past research has often examined either direct or indirect routes to resolving the negative emotion of guilt, I propose that one additional response to guilt is to seek out options enabling generalized self-improvement.

1.1.3 The Unique Nature of Guilt

The present research focuses on identifying a unique outcome of guilt that is not produced by other negative emotions (see Zeelenberg et al. 2008). Numerous accounts suggest that guilt is often confused in lay language with other negative self-conscious emotions such as shame and embarrassment (Baumeister et al. 1994; Lewis 2010; Tangney et al. 1996). With regards to guilt and shame, substantial evidence suggests that while these emotions share similar self-evaluative and remorse components, they activate different types of coping responses (Agrawal and Duhachek 2010; Lewis 1971; Sheikh and Janoff-Bulman 2010; Tangney et al. 1996). Specifically, most research suggests that people experiencing guilt evaluate the self in relation to the specific reprehensible behavior (i.e., I *did* something wrong), whereas those

experiencing shame undergo a more global negative attribution and perceive the self as the central object of negative evaluation (i.e., *I am a bad person*; Lewis 1971; Lewis 2010; Lickel, Schmader, and Barquissau 2004; Tangney and Dearing 2002). Shame is also associated with withdrawal, motivating escape or concealment (Tangney et al. 1996; Tracy, Robins, and Tangney 2007). Guilt is, therefore, typically more associated with problem-focused coping strategies whereas shame facilitates emotion-focused coping strategies (Duhachek, Agrawal, and Han 2012; Lazarus and Folkman 1984). In other words, people experiencing guilt tend to take action-oriented strategies aimed at pursuing positive changes (Ketelaar and Tung Au 2003) whereas people experiencing shame, due to a lack in their perceived efficacy to change their environment, tend to engage in withdrawal responses, adopting strategies aimed at regulating their negative emotion (De Hooij et al. 2007; Tangney et al. 2007).

In comparison to guilt and shame, embarrassment is defined as a failure to present the self to others in the way one would have wished (Edelmann 1987). Embarrassment, like guilt and shame, focuses on negative self-evaluation, but does so in a more benign manner. Embarrassment carries the connotation of being caused by an act that is merely socially improper or awkward rather than morally wrong (Tangney, Mashek, and Stuewig 2005), such as losing control over one's body (e.g., burping), public displays of cognitive shortcomings, or deviations in one's appearance (Keltner and Buswell 1996). Because of its focus on innocuous violations during social interactions, embarrassment typically leads to responses aimed at repairing the image of the self that is displayed to others (Dahl, Manchanda, and Argo 2001; Keltner and Buswell 1997). Drawing on this work, it appears that only guilt, not shame or embarrassment, is

associated with falling short of a desired self-standard in way that is likely to activate a generalized desire to focus on improving the self.

The current research also compares the effect of guilt with that of sadness because sadness is an emotion that is similar to guilt in terms of valence, intensity, and level of certainty about the source of the emotion (Smith and Ellsworth 1985) that is motivating some sort of reparative actions aimed at addressing the experiencer's negative state (Lerner, Small, and Loewenstein 2004; Salerno, Laran, and Janiszewski 2014). However, sadness and guilt differ greatly in their perception of self-control over the misdeed. Specifically, sadness is often associated with a perception that one's misfortunes are due to circumstances beyond one's control (Keltner, Ellsworth, and Edwards 1993), whereas guilt is associated with a sense of control and responsibility over one's misfortune (Lewis 1971). Accordingly, sadness is typically associated with the selection of rewarding options that will compensate for the heightened negative mood (e.g., spending time with friends over studying; Garg, Wansink, and Inman 2007; Raghunathan, Pham, and Corfman 2006). Hence, I expect guilt to yield more reparative actions consistent with self-improvement than sadness.

Finally, I also compare the effect of guilt versus the effect of envy on desire for self-improvement options. Envy and guilt share some similarities in that both are associated with the realizations that one has fallen short of a standard and may both trigger compensatory actions (e.g., Silver and Sabini 1978). Importantly, however, envy and guilt appear to have different antecedents and outcomes (Polman and Ruttan 2012). Envy focuses on social comparison and status (Smith and Kim 2007) whereas guilt focuses on the self and moral violations (Tangney and Dearing 2002). Envy often motivates direct competition with or even harm to the envied

individual (Miceli and Castelfranchi 2007; Smith and Kim 2007), but can also trigger a desire to better one's position through ownership of status products (van de Ven, Zeelenberg, and Pieters 2009, 2011). In a consumption context, I should observe a difference in how these two distinct emotions impact consumer choices. Guilt, by its focus on failing to meet self-standards should increase the desire for consumption options aimed at enabling one's potential for self-change. On the other hand, envy, by its focus on social comparison, should not lead to a generalized desire for self-improvement. Instead, envy should lead to the motivation to improve one's own status vis-à-vis others (Van de Ven et al. 2011; Youn and Goldsmith working paper). Overall, I expect that guilt, compared to shame, embarrassment, sadness and envy, will be more likely to lead to seeking out products with self-improvement qualities (i.e., that allow for self-change).

Formally, I hypothesize that:

H1a: Guilt (versus shame, embarrassment, sadness, and envy) leads individuals to exhibit increased preferences for self-improvement consumption options.

In addition, I suggest that this is driven by the activation of self-improvement motives:

H1b: The effect of guilt on desire for self-improvement consumption options is mediated by a general desire to improve the self.

I emphasize that the observed effects are driven by a desire to improve aspects of the self (e.g., Sedikides 1999), rather than by some cognitive association between guilt and a desire for any “good” option available (e.g., Merritt, Effron, and Monin 2010). Given that my framework highlights that guilt arises from the salient fact that one has fallen short of self-standards, guilt should activate a desire for products that are specifically designed to improve the self. In

contrast, this desire should not occur when the consumption choice options is not expected to improve the self (i.e., when the improvement option is for another individual). I examine this by comparing preferences for improvement products when purchasing for the self or for others. My theoretical framework predicts that I should observe guilt leading to a preference for improvement products only when the purchase is being made for the self, but not others.

Formally, I hypothesize:

H2: Guilt leads to a preference for choice options with improvement features when purchasing for the self, but not for others.

Our framework further implies that the extent to which guilt will lead individuals to prefer products with self-improvement features will depend on their perception of their own ability to change and improve (Jones et al. 1968). That is, self-improvement motivation is likely to be influenced by the individual's own implicit self-theory or lay beliefs about the malleability of the self. These beliefs have been documented and categorized in past research according to two types of orientation: entity or incremental self-theories (Dweck 2000; Molden and Dweck 2006). On the one hand, individuals who hold an entity self-theory see personal qualities as fixed and unchangeable, believing that no amount of personal effort can change the self. On the other hand, those holding an incremental self-theory believe that the self can be modified and improved if effort is invested. Further, people who hold an incremental self-theory are more likely to seize opportunities for self-improvement (Dweck and Leggett 1988; Heine et al. 2001). As such, I predict that whereas those who hold an incremental view of the self will demonstrate the tendency to pursue self-improvement options after experiences guilt, this effect will be mitigated among those who hold an entity view of the self. In particular:

H3: In response to guilt, participants holding an incremental self-theory will exhibit stronger preferences for self-improvement options than those holding an entity theory of the self.

1.2 Overview of the Research

This research sets out to examine the notion that guilt, the negative emotion stemming from a failure to meet a self-held standard of behavior, leads to preferences for products enabling self-improvement, even in domains unrelated to the original source of the guilt. I test this prediction in a series of six studies. In the pilot study, I conduct a field experiment that provides preliminary evidence that guilt (vs. no guilt) leads to a desire for products facilitating self-improvement. Study 1 replicates this effect in a lab setting and offers mediational evidence that the observed effects arise from a general desire to improve the self. Study 2 finds that although the selection of self-improvement options does not appear to alleviate feelings of guilt, it does reduce the desire to improve the self. Study 3 tests the notion that guilt leads to an increased desire for self-improvement consumption options over comparison options when compared to other negative emotional states or a neutral condition. Study 4 provides evidence that this effect arises only for products that are relevant to the self and not others. Finally, in study 5, I measure participants' belief in their ability to change (Dweck 2000) to test a boundary condition for observed effects.

1.3 Pilot Study

As an initial test of the hypothesis that guilt leads to preferences for products with self-improvement features, I conducted a field experiment. My key prediction was that individuals

will be more inclined to choose a product positioned as offering self-improvement benefits versus a comparison product under conditions where guilt is activated (as opposed to not activated).

1.3.1 Method

Participants and Design. Ninety-seven individuals recruited on the University of British Columbia campus (36% female, $M_{\text{age}} = 20.4$) took part in a one-factor (guilt vs. no guilt) design. The dependent variable was choice of product positioned on the basis of self-improvement qualities (self-improvement product) versus other qualities (comparison product).

Procedure. Passers-by were intercepted at a busy intersection during orientation week and invited by the researcher to participate in a short survey in exchange for a free drink. In the guilt condition, the questionnaire's first section directed participants' attention toward an easel displaying a full-sized poster and instructed them to write down a brief description of how the advertisement made them feel. The poster depicted a message from a local blood services organization which included a guilt appeal. The tagline read: "There is no substitute for blood. Your hesitation could cost someone their life." (Note that this wording has been used in an actual campaign by the Singapore Red Cross Society; see Appendix 1 for the materials). A separate test conducted with a sample taken from the same student population confirmed that this message does indeed activate feelings of guilt ("To what extent does this poster makes you feel guilty?" 1: not at all; 7: very much; $M = 4.86$, $SD = 1.63$; significantly above the scale midpoint, $t(34) = 3.11$, $p < .01$). Participants then reported their demographic information. In the no-guilt condition, the poster was not present and the questionnaire only asked about demographic information.

Every participant then read that, as a token of gratitude, they could take a sample of VitaminWater. Participants read a description of the benefits of two drink options presented along with black-and-white pictures of the products (see Appendix 2). The “Focus” flavor was positioned as a product that allowed for self-improvement. Its description read: “Improving your mental performance is key. Focus gives you the clarity and alertness to improve your mental performance.” The “Essential” flavor acted as a comparison product with a description that stated: “Getting the right hydration is essential for your body. Essential gives you the hydration that you need.” I chose mental performance as the improvement domain, because it is very self-relevant for this student sample. The key dependent measure was whether participants chose the flavor that was positioned in terms of its self-improvement benefits (called “Focus”) or the comparison product (called “Essential”). These products—and the ones used in all subsequent studies—were pre-tested to ensure that the self-improvement option was viewed as being higher in self-improvement qualities relative to the comparison option, yet perceived as being equally desirable. Pre-tests were also conducted to rule out the potential alternative explanation that guilt leads to preference for products associated with self-control, measuring the extent to which these products were perceived as being vice or virtuous options (Khan and Dhar 2007), hedonic or utilitarian options (Khan and Dhar 2006), or related to a need to exert self-control (e.g., Giner-Sorolla 2001; see Online Appendix 9 for a summary of all pre-tests). Completion rate amongst the passers-by who stopped by the researcher’s booth was 100%.

1.3.2 Results

Two participants in the guilt condition declined taking either of the drinks and were not included in the analyses. Results revealed that more participants chose the self-improvement

drink following exposure to the guilt-inducing advertisement ($P = 34/53 = 64.2\%$) compared to those in the no-guilt condition ($P = 17/42 = 40.5\%$; $\chi^2(1) = 5.28, p < .05$).

1.3.3 Discussion

In a field setting, the results of my pilot study provide preliminary support for the prediction that guilt leads to preferences for self-improvement products in domains unrelated to the original source of the guilt. While the field study methodology allowed us to examine consumers' actual choices in a naturalistic setting, I utilize more controlled lab experiments in my subsequent studies.

1.4 Study 1

Study 1 demonstrates my key effect in a more controlled laboratory context and examines the motivational process underlying how guilt influences desire for cross-domain self-improvement products. My framework proposes that guilt activates the general motivation to improve the self, which then leads to preferences for self-improvement products. Thus, I examine whether self-improvement motives mediate the relationship between guilt and the choice of a self-improvement product. In addition, I test my hypothesis that desire for self-improvement products can transfer to different domains from the one where the guilt originated by linking an emotional manipulation pertaining to the social domain to the choice of a product enabling self-improvement in the health domain (i.e., fitness).

1.4.1 Method

Participants and Design. One hundred sixty-nine participants recruited through Amazon Mechanical Turk took part in this experiment (50% female, $M_{\text{age}} = 34.1$). This study utilized a 2

(emotion: guilt vs. control) between-participants design. The dependent variable of interest was willingness to use a self-improvement product.

Procedure. Participants were randomly assigned to one of two emotional-recall conditions. In the guilt condition, participants were asked to write in detail about a recent time in which they let someone down and felt guilty about it (adapted from Tangney et al. 1996). In the neutral condition, participants wrote about a time they had a neutral (neither positive nor negative) encounter with someone else. Participants then rated their general motivation to self-improve using four 7-point items (-3: strongly disagree; +3: strongly agree): “I want to achieve success,” “I want to do better,” “I strive to be better,” “I want to prosper” (self-improvement motivation index: $\alpha = .82$).

Participants then were asked to evaluate a fitness-tracking mobile phone application or “app” that was positioned as a self-improvement product offering a number of improvement-related features including a pedometer, calorie counter, and sleep cycle visualization option (see Appendix for details). Participants rated their likelihood of utilizing this free app using two 7-point bipolar items: “very unlikely–very likely,” “very improbable–very probable” ($r = .98$). Participant also completed some demographic measures and an item that measured participants’ weekly average number of hours of physical activity. I used this as a covariate in the analysis because it serves as a proxy for how relevant participants perceive fitness to be (0.00 to 20.00 slider; $M = 4.42$, $SD = 3.16$, skewness = .75; log transformed ($x+.01$) to account for non-normality).

1.4.2 Results

Self-Improvement Motivation. Results from an ANOVA revealed that participants in the guilt condition ($M = 2.30$, $SD = 0.68$) expressed a stronger generalized desire to improve themselves compared to participants in the neutral condition ($M = 2.07$, $SD = 0.72$; $t(167) = 2.23$, $p < .05$).

Usage Likelihood. Controlling for weekly hours of physical activity, results from an ANCOVA, revealed that participants in the guilt condition were more likely to use the app ($M = 5.68$, $SD = 1.53$) compared to those in the control condition ($M = 5.19$, $SD = 2.01$; $F(1, 166) = 4.01$, $p < .05$; without the covariate $p = .07$).

Indirect Effect. Results showed a significant indirect effect of guilt leading to greater usage likelihood of the app through self-improvement motivation (indirect effect = 0.10, $SE = 0.07$, $CI_{95} [0.01, 0.30]$) when controlling for physical activity on the dependent variable. In other words, guilt activated a desire for self-improvement (coded: 0 = control, 1 = guilt; $a = .23$, $SE = .11$, $CI_{95} [0.02, 0.44]$). In turn, those with a high motivation for self-improvement were more willing to use the self-improvement product ($b = .43$, $SE = .27$, $CI_{95} [0.05, 0.80]$).

1.4.3 Discussion

Study 1 provides support for the notion that guilt leads to cross-domain preferences for self-improvement products and sheds light on the motivational nature of this effect by showing that it is mediated by a general desire for self-improvement. The next study provides additional evidence to support mediation by self-improvement strivings and tests whether the selection of self-improvement options addresses participants' feelings of guilt.

1.5 Study 2

Study 2 was designed to replicate the basic finding that guilt leads to a preference for self-improvement options. In addition, I examined the consequences of choosing self-improvement options. Our conceptual framework proposes that while the selection of a cross-domain self-improvement product should not alleviate the intensity of the guilt feelings (which are directly tied to an unrelated event), it should reduce the guilt-heightened generalized desire for self-improvement. Specifically, for participants in the guilt condition, if the selection of self-improvement options is serving a self-improvement function, I should observe a steeper decline in the intensity of the desire for self-improvement for those who selected a self-improvement product versus those who did not. On the other hand, I do not expect a steeper decline in the intensity of the guilt feelings for those who selected a self-improvement product versus those who did not. To further validate our conceptualization, I test both pre-choice measures of guilt and self-improvement strivings as mediators for the effect of guilt on the selection of the self-improvement product.

1.5.1 Method

Participants and Design. One hundred sixty-six undergraduate students took part in this lab experiment (60% female, $M_{\text{age}} = 20.4$). This study used a mixed design with a 2-level between-participants factor (emotion: guilt vs. neutral) and a 2-level within-participants factor (pre-choice vs. post-choice measure of guilt and of self-improvement strivings). The dependent variable of interest was whether participants exchanged a portion of their payment to obtain a self-improvement product.

Procedure. First, participants were seated at individual computers and randomly assigned to one of two emotional-recall conditions using the same procedure as in study 1. After this emotional manipulation, participants reported the extent to which the event they described made them feel guilty, using three 7-point scale items (guilty, repentant, blameworthy; Tangney et al. 1996; 1: not at all, 7: very much; $\alpha = .96$), and then rated their general motivation to self-improve using the same items as in study 1 ($\alpha = .84$). Participants were then shown a pack of sticky notes that was positioned as a self-improvement product: “Sticky notes for effective knowledge retention—the secret weapon of students wishing to improve” (see Appendix). Participants were offered the option to forgo a portion of their study payment (\$1) in exchange for receiving the product. After making their choice, participants reported their level of guilt ($\alpha = .96$) and motivation to self-improve ($\alpha = .88$) for the second time. Upon leaving the lab, they received their choice of the self-improvement product and/or money.

1.5.2 Results

Pre-Choice Guilt. Participants in the guilt condition ($M = 5.16$, $SD = 1.28$) expressed more intense feelings of guilt compared to participants in the neutral condition ($M = 2.48$, $SD = 1.55$; $t(164) = 12.15$, $p < .001$).

Pre-Choice Self-Improvement Motivation. Participants in the guilt condition ($M = 2.49$, $SD = 0.71$) expressed more intense desire for self-improvement compared to participants in the neutral condition ($M = 2.24$, $SD = 0.76$; $t(164) = 2.11$, $p < .05$).

Product Choice. Participants were more likely to select the self-improvement product in the guilt condition (64.7%) compared to participants in the control condition (49.4%; $\chi^2(1) = 3.98, p < .05$).

Pre/Post-Choice Guilt. A repeated-measures ANOVA revealed no significant three-way interaction for effect of the pre/post measure by the emotion conditions and the choice of the self-improvement product ($F < 1$; see table 1 for details) and no significant two-way interaction for the pre/post measure by the choice self-improvement product ($F(1,162) = 1.03, p > .30$). Instead, results did reveal a significant two-way interaction for the pre/post measures of guilt by the emotion conditions ($F(1,162) = 14.47, p < .001$) which reflects the fact that across product choice conditions (i.e., averaged scores), the difference between the two measures of guilt (post-score *minus* pre-score) was significantly greater in the guilt ($M_{Diff.} = -0.99$; $M_{Guilt-Pre} = 5.16$, $M_{Guilt-Post} = 4.16$) compared to neutral condition ($M_{Diff.} = -0.21$; $M_{Neutral-Pre} = 2.48$, $M_{Neutral-Post} = 2.27$). These results suggest that choosing the self-improvement product (vs. not) had no significant influence on the intensity of the guilt, beyond a decay of the guilt manipulation over time.

Pre/Post-Choice Self-Improvement Motivation. A repeated-measures ANOVA revealed a marginally significant three-way interaction for effect of the pre/post measure by the emotion conditions and the choice of the self-improvement product ($F(1,162) = 3.57, p = .06$) and no other significant interaction or main effects. This reflects the fact that, using a post-hoc LSD test, there is a significant decrease between the two measures of self-improvement for participants in the guilt condition who choose the self-improvement product ($M_{Pre} = 2.60$, $SD = .60$, $M_{Post} = 2.52$, $SD = .66$; $F(1,162) = 3.98, p < .05$), but not for participants in the three other conditions

($F_s < 1$). Thus, while no differences were observed in terms of the decay of the emotion of guilt when people selected the self-improvement option versus the control option, these results suggest that choosing the self-improvement product (vs. the monetary payment) reported a greater resolution of self-improvement goals.

Indirect Effect. To provide additional evidence for the role of self-improvement motives, I also conducted a mediation analysis. The results show a significant indirect effect of guilt manipulation leading to selection of the self-improvement product through the pre-choice measure of self-improvement strivings (indirect effect = 0.13, SE = 0.09, CI₉₅ [0.02, 0.39]). In other words, guilt activates a desire for self-improvement (coded 0 = control, 1 = guilt; $a = .24$, SE = .11, CI₉₅ [0.02, 0.47]). In turn, those with a high desire for self-improvement are more likely to choose the self-improvement product ($b = .53$, SE = .23, CI₉₅ [0.08, 0.97]). The analogous indirect effect linking guilt to the selection of the self-improvement product through the pre-choice measure of the intensity of the guilt feelings was not significant (indirect effect = 0.02, SE = 0.30, CI₉₅ [-0.54, 0.61]; this result is further discussed in the general discussion).

1.5.3 Discussion

Taken together, the results of study 2 corroborate the findings from study 1 showing that those experiencing guilt (vs. a control condition) demonstrate preferences for self-improvement options. Further, while I acknowledge that this study does not directly measure participants' underlying motivation for selecting a self-improvement option, it nevertheless provides evidence that selecting a self-improvement option does not directly alleviate the feelings of guilt, because it is unrelated to the self-improvement domain, but rather appears to be reducing the guilt-heightened desire for self-improvement. Taken together, the results of studies 1 and 2 suggest

that the selection of these self-improvement products in response to guilt is indeed serving a self-improvement function.

1.6 Study 3

Study 3 was designed to test for the unique nature of the effect of guilt on preferences for self-improvement options over comparison options. I compare the effects of guilt on subsequent preferences against those of three theoretically related negative emotions using a recall procedure. First, I compare guilt with embarrassment and shame, two other common self-conscious emotions. I also use the more general state of sadness as a point of comparison and incorporate a neutral control condition in which participants did not recall an emotion. Study 3 also directly tests for an alternative explanation that our effect of interest relies on punishment-seeking (e.g., Nelissen and Zeelenberg 2009). That is, one alternative explanation for the observed effects is that participants in the guilt condition are selecting self-improvement products because this reflects some sort of penalty for the self, while the comparison product does not. I test for this potential alternative explanation by measuring participants' desire to seek punishment or negative outcomes for the self.

1.6.1 Method

Participants and Design. One hundred fifty-seven undergraduate students took part in this experiment (53% female, $M_{\text{age}} = 20.4$). The experiment was a 5 (emotion: guilt vs. shame vs. embarrassment vs. sadness vs. neutral) x 2 (product type: self-improvement vs. control) mixed-model design with product type as the within-participant factor. The dependent variable of interest was willingness to pay for each product.

Procedure. This study consisted of two ostensibly unrelated tasks. First, participants were randomly assigned to one of five emotional-recall conditions where they were initially asked to read a short definition of that emotion and then to briefly write about a time where they experienced that emotion (adapted from Tangney et al. 1996). As noted previously, because most individuals have difficulty distinguishing among the different self-conscious emotions and often use the terms interchangeably in everyday language (Lewis 2010; Tangney et al. 1996), I presented participants with a short definition of the respective emotions before the recall procedure. The definitions described the typical antecedents and feelings associated with each emotion. For the three self-conscious emotions, participants read the same joint definition highlighting the differences and similarities among guilt, shame, and embarrassment that was adapted from the work of Tangney and colleagues (i.e., Tangney and Dearing 2002; Tangney et al. 2005; Tangney et al. 2007). In the sadness condition, the definition of sadness was adapted from Izard (1991; see Online Appendix 5 for both manipulations). Participants in the neutral condition proceeded directly to the second section of the questionnaire.

A separate pretest ($n = 153$) using 5-point items (1: the feeling is mild, 5: the feeling is extremely intense) supported the validity of this manipulation in activating the various emotional states. Contrast analysis revealed that participants expressed more intense feeling of “guilt” in the guilt condition compared to the four other conditions combined ($t(148) = 8.41, p < .001$). Analogous effects were observed for “shame” in the shame condition ($t(148) = 7.87, p < .001$), “embarrassment” in the embarrassment condition ($t(148) = 8.25, p < .001$), and “sadness” in the sadness condition ($t(148) = 10.34, p < .001$; see table 2 for details).

Second, participants read about two herbal teas that were part of a collection of herbal teas. The “Get Smart” and “Get Happy” flavors served as self-improvement and comparison options, respectively. Participants read the descriptions of the functional benefits of each flavor in counterbalanced order. The “Get Smart” tea was described as designed to improve “brain power,” “IQ,” and “mental stamina.” Alternatively, the “Get Happy” tea had the function of “lifting spirits,” being “mood-enhancing,” and helping to “keep the blues away” (see Appendix for details). After reading the description of both teas, participants were asked to use a slider to report their willingness to pay for a box of 20 individual teabags of this product: answers could range between \$0.00 and \$10.00. To control for an alternative explanation relying on desire for punishment, participants also rated the extent to which they were currently seeking punishment using four 7-point items (1: strongly disagree, 7: strongly agree): “I want to punish myself,” “I want to deny myself rewards,” “I seek penance,” and “I deserve to be penalized” ($\alpha = .89$).

1.6.2 Results

Willingness to Pay. Results from a repeated-measures ANOVA revealed a significant interaction between product type and emotion on willingness to pay ($F(4, 152) = 2.43, p = .05$; see figure 1) but no main effect of product type ($F(1, 152) = 1.10, p = .30$). Simple effects analysis for each type of emotion revealed that only participants in the guilt condition were willing to pay more for the self-improvement product ($M = \$5.14, SD = 2.36$) compared to the comparison product ($M = \$4.72, SD = 2.15; F(1, 152) = 4.25, p < .05$). In contrast, willingness to pay was not significantly different between the two products for participants in the embarrassment ($M_{SI} = \$4.78, SD = 1.79, M_{Comparison} = \$4.81, SD = 1.60; F < 1$), shame ($M_{SI} = \$4.51, SD = 2.30, M_{Comparison} = \$4.80, SD = 2.17, SD = ; F(1, 152) = 1.96, p > .15$), and neutral

conditions ($M_{SI} = \$3.85$, $SD = 2.17$, $M_{Comparison} = \$4.02$, $SD = 2.37$; $F < 1$). Although not foreshadowed in our predictions, I also found that willingness to pay in the sadness condition appeared significantly lower for the self-improvement product ($M = \$4.05$, $SD = 2.01$) compared to the comparison product ($M = \$4.43$, $SD = 2.25$; $F(1, 152) = 3.77$, $p = .05$).

Looking at the results in a different way, I computed a difference score on willingness to pay for the products ($WTP_{\text{self-improvement}} - WTP_{\text{comparison}}$). Contrast analysis revealed that participants were willing to pay relatively more for the self-improvement product in the guilt ($M = \$0.42$, $SD = 1.03$) compared to the shame ($M = -\$0.29$, $SD = 1.07$; $t(152) = 2.44$, $p < .05$), sadness ($M = -\$0.38$, $SD = 1.13$; $t(152) = 2.83$, $p < .01$), and control conditions ($M = -\$0.17$, $SD = 1.08$; $t(152) = 2.19$, $p < .05$). Willingness to pay did not differ significantly between the guilt and embarrassment conditions ($M = -\$0.03$, $SD = 1.20$; $t(152) = 1.56$, $p = .12$).

Punishment-Seeking. Results from an ANOVA revealed a significant effect of emotion on desire for punishment-seeking ($F(4, 152) = 2.81$, $p < .05$). Punishment-seeking tendency marginally differed when comparing participants in the guilt condition ($M = 1.91$, $SD = 1.91$) to those in the control condition ($M = 2.47$, $SD = 1.56$; $t(152) = 1.91$, $p < .10$). Unexpectedly, however, the general trend was in the direction of punishment-seeking being lower in the guilt condition. In addition, no differences in punishment-seeking emerged when comparing the guilt condition to the other conditions ($M_{Shame} = 2.31$, $SD = 1.34$; $M_{Embarrassment} = 1.56$, $SD = 0.58$; $M_{Sadness} = 1.94$, $SD = 1.02$). These findings cast doubt on the account that participants were choosing self-improvement options out of a desire to seek out negative consequences for the self.

1.6.3 Discussion

The results of study 3 provide additional evidence for the proposition that guilt leads to a heightened desire for consumption choice options that have the potential to improve the self over comparison options. Compared to other emotions such as shame, embarrassment, and sadness, only guilt led to an increased willingness to pay for self-improvement relative to comparison products. In addition, note that our comparison option for this study—“Get Happy” tea—carried mood-management features, which further supports our contention that self-improvement motives serve a different function than mood-management. Although not formally hypothesized, the pattern reversal observed in the sadness condition is consistent with previous findings linking sadness to mood-management-types of consumption choices (Raghunathan et al. 2006). Finally, our effects do not appear to be readily explained by a heightened desire for punishment-seeking among those who experienced guilt.

1.7 Study 4

Study 4 was designed to further highlight the motivational nature of the observed effects. In particular, this study sets out to demonstrate that participants experiencing guilt will exhibit preferences for products that offer improvement benefits when choosing for the self (i.e., self-improvement), but not for others. Our conceptual framework proposes that because guilt activates a desire to *improve the self* in ways that allow the self to meet other important standards. As such, I should observe those experiencing guilt preferring self-improvement products when the choice option is for the self, but not for others.

This study also helps to further rule out an alternative explanation for the effects, relying on the possibility that because guilt is associated with “bad deeds”, it activates a generalized

desire for options seen as “good deeds” (e.g., Sachdeva, Iliev, and Medin 2009). I note that our pre-tests suggest that the self-improvement options used in our experiments do not differ from the comparison options in terms of the degree to which they are seen as virtuous or vice products, which already cast doubt on this alternative account. In addition, in study 4, I use a product that allows for either self-improvement for the self or for others. If guilt simply leads to a preference for good options then I should observe an equal tendency for people to prefer the self-improvement option for the self or another person after experiencing guilt. If, however, guilt is linked to a desire to improve the self, I should observe that guilt leads to stronger preferences for improvement products only when they are relevant to the self as opposed to others.

1.7.1 Method

Participants and Design. Two hundred forty-four participants recruited through a university-wide subject pool took part in this experiment (65% female, $M_{\text{age}} = 21.5$). The experiment was a 2 (emotion: guilt vs. neutral) x 2 (purchase target: self vs. others) x 2 (product type: self-improvement vs. comparison) between-participants design. The dependent variable of interest was willingness to pay for the product.

Procedure. Using the cover story of a study measuring how vividness of mental imagery relates to product preferences, participants were first asked to recall a time when they felt guilty or to recall a neutral event (i.e., their last visit to the supermarket). Second, participants were asked to imagine that they had visited a drug store to buy some snacks. In the self (other) condition, participants were asked to imagine that they (a friend) had been working really hard lately and had been experiencing trouble sleeping. They were asked to imagine considering buying a product that facilitates sleep for themselves (for their friend). The product was an all-

natural oral dissolving tab aiding sleep (i.e., Sleep Sheets). In the improvement condition, the product facilitating sleep was portrayed as promoting the experience of “improved daytime energy,” helping to “stay focused longer at work,” and promoting “brain power and physical strength day after day.” In the comparison condition, the same product was portrayed as promoting the experience of “restful sleep and tranquility,” helping to “stay asleep longer in your bed,” and promoting “sleep comfort night after night” (see Appendix 7 for details). Participants were then asked to provide their willingness to pay for a box of 5 Sleep Sheets for themselves (for their friend).

1.7.2 Results

Willingness to Pay. Results from an ANOVA revealed a significant three-way interaction between emotion condition, product type, and purchase target on willingness to pay ($F(1, 236) = 4.16, p < .05$; see figure 2). For participants in the guilt condition there was a significant two-way interaction between product type and purchase target on willingness to pay ($F(1,236) = 8.73, p < .001$). For those in the control condition, no such interaction emerged ($F < 1$).

Simple effect analysis revealed that participants in the guilt condition were willing to pay marginally more for the improvement product when buying for the self ($M = \$5.00, SD = 1.69$) than when buying for others ($M = \$3.83, SD = 2.44; t(236) = 1.86, p = .06$). Participants preferred to pay more for the comparison product when buying for others ($M = \$4.97, SD = 2.37$) than when buying for the self ($M = \$3.54, SD = 2.45; t(236) = 2.32, p < .05$). Stated differently, I replicated our previous findings in showing that those buying for themselves were willing to pay more for the improvement product compared to the comparison product ($t(236) = 2.32, p < .05$). In addition, and not foreshadowed in our predictions, participants buying for

others were willing to pay marginally more for the comparison product compared to the improvement product ($t(236) = 1.85, p = .07$). An additional contrast analysis revealed that for participants in the guilt condition purchasing an improvement product for the self, willingness to pay for the product was higher than for all four of the cells in the neutral condition averaged ($t(236) = 2.78, p < .01$).

1.7.3 Discussion

Study 4 illustrates the self-motivational nature of the process by which guilt leads to preferences for improvement products. I show that guilt leads to preference for products positioned toward improvement when purchasing for the self, but not for others. This finding supports the proposition that guilt specifically activates a desire for improvement linked to the self. Importantly, I also provide support for the specificity of our framework—over previous studies comparing choices between two different options—by showing that the relationship between guilt and product evaluation is driven by the extent to which the product can help improve the self, not the positive nature of the product.

One unanticipated finding that emerged in the current study was that participants reported a higher WTP for the comparison product compared to the self-improvement product when buying for others in the guilt condition. One possible explanation for this effect could be that participants were motivated to address their negative mood associated with guilt (vs. neutral recall) by providing help to others (Regan et al. 1972), but were also trying to avoid further transgressions against others (Cohen, Panter, and Turan 2012). It may be the case that offering a product to another person that is specifically aimed at improvement might be seen as inappropriate because it could imply that the other person is falling short on some dimension.

Indeed, research does suggest that individuals are often reluctant to offer prescriptions of improvement to others (Taut and Brauns 2003). I conducted a follow-up study ($n = 159$) to examine this proposition (see Appendix 8). This follow-up study demonstrated the replicability of this finding and also provided mediational evidence that products aimed at improvement of an individual may be perceived as inappropriate and awkward when offered to others (“It would feel awkward to offer my friend this type of product,” “I would feel uncomfortable giving this product to my friend,” “I would feel embarrassed to give this product to my friend;” 1: not at all, 7: very much; $\alpha = .95$). While this finding is not the focus of the current article, it shows a novel effect that might be pursued in future research.

1.8 Study 5

Study 5 was designed to identify a theoretically relevant boundary condition for the observed effects. I expect that, because self-improvement involves a change in the self, lay beliefs about the malleability of the self should relate to how people approach self-improvement (Dweck 2000; Molden and Dweck 2006). Individuals who believe that the self can be modified and improved (i.e., incremental theorists) should be more likely to pursue opportunities for self-improvement following the experience of guilt. Alternatively, individuals who see the self as fixed (i.e., entity theorists) should not display such increases in preferences for self-improvement products after experiencing guilt. Based on our conceptual framework, this study tests the proposition that following the experience of guilt, participants holding an incremental self-theory should exhibit stronger preferences for self-improvement consumption choice options than those holding an entity self-theory.

This study also compares the effect of guilt with the effect of envy on the desire for self-improvement products. Envy is an emotion that also makes salient that one has fallen short of a standard, although in this case the standard has been set by another individual rather than the self. As such, envy is often associated with social comparison and status (Smith and Kim 2007) and often triggers the desire to better one's position vis-à-vis others, through ownership of status products (van de Ven, Zeelenberg, and Pieters 2009, 2011). I should therefore expect self-theories to affect differently participants in the guilt, envy, and neutral conditions. Specifically, individual differences in personal beliefs about self-theory should have a stronger effect in the guilt compared to the neutral condition because of a guilt-activated desire for self-improvement. Beliefs about self-theory should also have a stronger effect in the guilt compared to the envy condition because self-theories focus on one's ability to change the self through effort, a mechanism that does not immediately offer the status enhancement benefits sought by those experiencing envy.

1.8.1 Method

Participants and Design. Three hundred ninety participants recruited through Amazon Mechanical Turk took part in this experiment (45% female, $M_{\text{age}} = 34.0$) which uses a 3 (emotion: guilt vs. envy vs. neutral) x continuous (self-theory: incremental vs. entity orientations) between-participants design. The dependent variable of interest is the evaluation of a product with self-improvement qualities.

Procedure. First participants were asked to complete a questionnaire ostensibly designed to measure their level of visual imagery when thinking about life events. Participants were asked to write about a time where they experienced guilt, envy, or a neutral event. In the envy

condition, participants were specifically asked to recall a time where they “envied the superior qualities, achievements, or possessions” of someone else (Lange and Crusius 2014). This measure was followed by a manipulation check testing the validity of the manipulation in activating the desired emotion by asking participants to describe the extent to which they were currently feeling “guilty,” and “envious” using a two 7-point scales (1: not at all, 7: very much). Participants were then asked to evaluate the usefulness of a self-improvement product (same tea as study 3) using three bi-polar 7-point items: “uninteresting-interesting,” “boring-engaging,” “unhelpful-helpful” ($\alpha = .93$; adapted from Tamir, Mitchell, and Gross 2008). Participants then completed a 4-item individual difference measure that assessed the degree to which they held more entity versus incremental views of the self (e.g., “You can do things differently, but the important parts of who you are can’t really be changed;” 1: strongly agree, 6: strongly disagree; where higher scores are characteristic of a belief in one’s ability to change the self; $\alpha = .94$; Dweck 2000).

1.8.2 Results

Manipulation Check. As anticipated, contrasts revealed that participants experienced significantly more guilt in the guilt condition ($M = 4.49$, $SD = 1.76$) compared to the envy ($M = 2.74$, $SD = 1.78$; $t(387) = 9.16$, $p < .001$) and neutral conditions ($M = 1.40$, $SD = .88$; $t(387) = 16.09$, $p < .001$). Contrasts also revealed that participants experienced significantly more envy in the envy condition ($M = 3.76$, $SD = 1.92$) compared to the guilt ($M = 1.66$, $SD = 0.99$; $t(387) = 12.39$, $p < .001$) and neutral conditions ($M = 1.36$, $SD = .88$; $t(387) = 14.38$, $p < .001$).

Product Usefulness. A regression model with dummy coding (dummy 1 = neutral; dummy 2 = envy; illustrating the difference from the guilt condition) and participants’ score on

the self-theory scale (centered) as a predictor of product usefulness suggested a more positive score in the guilt condition ($M = 4.51$, $SD = 1.68$) compared to the neutral condition ($M = 4.07$, $SD = 1.68$; dummy 1: $b = -.49$, $SE = .21$, $t(384) = 2.27$, $p < .05$), and in the guilt compared to the envy condition ($M = 3.92$, $SD = 1.81$; dummy 2: $b = -.64$, $SE = .21$, $t(384) = 2.97$, $p < .01$). The results also revealed a significant effect of self-theory on product usefulness in the guilt condition (moderator: $b = .32$, $SE = .13$, $t(384) = 2.40$, $p = .01$). Yet, this effect of self-theory was significantly weaker in the neutral compared to the guilt condition (dummy 1 X moderator: $b = -.36$, $SE = .18$, $t(384) = 1.99$, $p < .05$), and weaker in the envy compared to the guilt condition (dummy 2 X moderator: $b = -.29$, $SE = .18$, $t(384) = 1.59$, $p = .11$). Next, I used the Johnson-Neyman technique to examine where along the continuum of self-theory participants evaluation scores differed significantly between the guilt and the neutral or envy condition. Results of a 5,000 sample bootstrap resampling method for multicategorical variables (Hayes and Preacher 2013) revealed that for participants who scored at 3.47 or above on the self-theory scale (46th percentile) the difference between the guilt and the neutral conditions was significant and for those who scored a 2.69 or above on the scale (21th percentile) the difference between the guilt and the envy conditions was significant. I illustrate these interactions by plotting the projected values for those holding a belief in entity (2.45: 1SD below the mean) and incremental (4.84: 1SD above the mean) self-theory in figure 3.

1.8.3 Discussion

Study 5 extends our understanding of the link between guilt and cross-domain desire for self-improvement products by highlighting a theoretically relevant boundary condition for our effects. Consistent with our theorizing, our effects are observed only among those who view self-

improvement as an attainable outcome. Among those who view the self as relatively fixed, guilt was not shown to lead to a preference for self-improvement options. In addition, this study found dissimilar effects of guilt and envy on desire for self-improvement suggesting that the two emotions may be activating different needs. As such, it is possible that the self-improvement product of interest (i.e., a box of herbal tea) did not carry the self-improvement features that those experiencing envy were looking for (i.e., status). I further discuss this point in the General Discussion section.

1.9 General Discussion

Taken together, the results of six studies provide converging evidence that the experience of guilt can lead to increased preferences for self-improvement consumption options in domains different from where the guilt originated. The pilot field study provides an initial demonstration of the effect of guilt in leading to preferences for self-improvement products. Study 1 replicates this effect and demonstrates how this effect stems from a generalized desire to self-improve. Study 2 provides further evidence for the notion that our effect of interest occurs because of a guilt-heightened desire for self-improvement while suggesting that choosing a self-improvement product does not directly alleviate the experience of feelings of guilt, but rather reduces the desire for self-improvement. Study 3 demonstrates that this effect occurs only for guilt, but not for other emotions such as shame, embarrassment, sadness, and neutral, while ruling out an alternative explanation relying on a desire for self-punishment. Study 4 demonstrates that our effect is self-related—it only emerges when the choice is applicable to the self, not to others. Study 5 examines an additional boundary condition, demonstrating that guilt-induced desire for self-improvement is attenuated for those who hold a belief that self-qualities are fixed and that

no amount of effort can change them over time. This last study also provides evidence for dissimilar effects between guilt and envy on the desire for self-improvement.

1.9.1 Theoretical Contributions of the Research

Our account of this unique downstream effect of guilt on consumption choices is consistent with the notion that discrete emotions are associated with distinctive goals leading to distinct behaviors (Roseman, Spindel, and Jose 1990; Roseman, Wiest, and Swartz 1994) or influences on judgments (Lerner and Keltner 2000). In the same spirit, the current research offers several theoretical contributions.

First, the results of the current work show that guilt increases preference for products allowing for self-improvement (studies 1 and 2), and these products are preferred over a variety of comparison options that serve different functions: hydration (pilot study), financial benefits (study 2), mood-management (studies 3), and relaxation (study 4). By suggesting desire for self-improvement as a novel outcome of guilt, this work builds on and extends past research showing that guilt can lead to behaviors aimed at uplifting one's mood (e.g., Konecni 1972) or denying oneself indulgence (e.g., Zemack-Rugar et al. 2007). Indeed, our findings suggest the results do not appear to be driven by the desirability or the hedonic attributes of the products (see Appendix), and the choice of self-improvement options does not appear to directly alleviate feelings of guilt (study 2). Our unique account of how guilt leads to cross-domain desire for self-improvement also differs from previous work on moral self-regulation (e.g., Effron, Cameron, and Monin 2009; Merritt et al. 2012; Monin and Miller 2001) suggesting that people track their moral and immoral actions and proceed to compensatory internal balancing of moral self-worth (e.g., a "bad" deed can be compensated for by a "good" deed; Jordan, Mullen, and Murnighan

2011; Sachdeva et al. 2009). The current findings depart from these previous results because they occur with products that do not differ on their positioning as vice or virtue options.

Second, I illustrate the underlying motivational process for this effect by showing how guilt-induced preferences for self-improvement products stem from an activated generalized desire to improve the self (study 1 and 2). I further illustrate the self-motivational nature of this process by showing how it is mitigated when the purchase is for others (study 4). These findings carry important implications in light of a growing body of work on compensatory consumption (e.g., Kim and Gal 2014; Rucker and Galinsky 2008; Williams and Steffel 2014) and on fluid compensation (e.g., Steele 1988) by improving our understanding of the role of emotions and their associated motivational responses leading to behavioral actions aimed at improving the self.

Third, the studies presented here extend the broad marketing literature focusing on guilt appeals and their effectiveness (e.g., Cotte, Coulter, and Moore 2005; Coulter and Pinto 1995; Duhachek et al. 2012; Huhmann and Brotherton 1997; O’Keefe 2002) by offering a novel mechanism through which guilt can influence consumer choices. While this literature has primarily focused on how guilt triggers an avoidance of options associated with future remorse (e.g., selecting the healthier food option because of the anticipated guilt associated with the indulgent one), I instead bring to light guilt’s ability to increase preference for consumption choice options aimed at bettering the self. Because guilt is often associated with important societal issues (e.g., over-eating, over-spending, failure to respect the environment, failure to donate to charity), improving our understanding of how the negative emotion of guilt—and promotional communications eliciting guilt (pilot study; see also Bohns and Flynn 2013)—can

serve as a motivator of self-beneficial actions bears important practical implications for addressing these crucial societal outcomes.

1.9.2 Practical Implications and Future Research

Marketers and policy makers wishing to encourage consumers to select self-improvement products or engage in self-improving behaviors might therefore consider drawing attention to guilt in alternative domains to facilitate action. For example, the 2012 award-winning campaign by Nike Spain tells consumers: “If something is burning you up, burn it up by running.” This campaign illustrated various remorseful situations and suggested that one response to this might be to improve the self in the physical domain. Because our research highlights the importance of a belief in one’s ability to change for positive cross-domain outcomes of guilt to emerge, efforts to promote desirable self-changes using cross-domain guilt should be done in conjunction with communicating that one can change the self. Further, because people regularly struggle with guilty feelings related to diverse aspects of their lives, our work suggests avenues that would allow people to more constructively respond to such guilt.

Our results are limited to the context in which I performed my inquiry, which opens the door to a number of opportunities for future research. For example, our experiments were run exclusively on North American samples (although a large sub-samples of UBC students grew up in Asia). Existing research has questioned the universality of guilt and suggested that in Eastern cultures, guilt might be an indistinguishable component of a family of negative emotions concerned with not losing face (see Haidt 2003). Previous investigations have also observed differences between independent and interdependent cultures in terms of their action-readiness (e.g., Heine et al. 2001; White and Lehman 2005) and have suggested that shame in Eastern

cultures might be one of the two emotions triggering reparative actions (Wong and Tsai 2007). In this context, it is possible that the observed differences between shame and guilt leading to preferences for self-improvement products are restricted to a Western context. Alternatively, it is possible to expect that our effect of interest occurs vicariously in Eastern cultures because research has demonstrated that people experience vicarious guilt in contexts where they perceive interdependency—high interpersonal interaction—with a wrongdoer (Lickel et al. 2005). Future research should seek to better identify differences in cross-cultural behavioral responses specific to each emotion.

In addition, I did not find evidence that our effect of interest was driven by a desire for punishment (Nelissen 2012; Nelissen and Zeelenberg 2009). Given that our options were viewed as being equally desirable and participants did not report greater desire for self-punishment in response to guilt, self-punishment seeking did not parsimoniously account for the findings in the current studies. One interesting possibility, however, is that our results were influenced by how I defined and manipulated guilt in our studies (see Basile and Mancini 2011). While our definition of guilt relies on the notion that guilt arises from an awareness that one has failed to meet an important self-standard, Zeelenberg and colleagues use a definition wherein guilt “does not necessarily require the violation of a moral standard, only the realization that another was harmed by one’s actions” (p.118; Nelissen and Zeelenberg 2009). Thus, the literature points to the possibility that there may exist different ways in which guilt can become activated. Future research should investigate how these dissimilar characterizations of guilt influence subsequent action-readiness and behavioral responses (see van de Ven et al. 2009 for a parallel with envy). Along a similar line of thought, recent inquiries have suggested that guilt and shame are not

always associated with adaptive and maladaptive approaches to failure, respectively, but that such orientations depend on the extent to which the source of the negative emotion is reparable (Leach and Cidam 2015). Future research would do well to improve our understanding of how factors specific to the domain of the transgression can influence the action readiness of self-conscious emotions.

Future research could also seek to improve our understanding of the relationship between the intensity of the guilt feelings and desire for self-improvement. One possibility is that there is an inverted U-shaped relationship where a moderate amount of guilt is energizing and triggers desires to self-improve, but too much guilt is depleting and paralyzing (Lucas 2004). The current findings also raise many questions about the conscious (vs. unconscious) nature of our effect. That is, all of our manipulations involve instances of consumers experiencing guilt consciously. However, previous research has found that guilt can also be primed or experienced without awareness (Goldsmith et al. 2012; Zemack-Rugar et al. 2007) which raises the question of whether or not desire for self-improvement occurs exclusively as a by-product of conscious guilt (see Fitzsimons et al. 2002). Evidence on the topic is mixed. On the one hand, previous research clearly suggests that goals can be non-consciously primed (e.g., Chartrand and Bargh 2002) and even that a lack of awareness about difficult or frightening realities offer the benefit of allowing one to better act upon them (Baumeister 1989). On the other hand, it has also been shown that a lack of awareness about negative self-information can prevent the occurrence of a motivation to compensate for one's shortcomings (Spalding and Hardin 1999). Further research is needed to fully understand the (non)conscious relationship between guilt and self-improvement.

Future research should also focus on improving our understanding of the nuances underlying the activation of self-improvement motives. For example, while previous research has linked the emotion of envy to a desire for improving one's own status vis-à-vis others (e.g., van de Ven et al. 2009), our results suggest that this motivation acts differently from the one activated by guilt. I believe that the nature of the self-improvement process I focussed on could explain such differences. For instance, because envy focusses mainly on social comparison (Smith and Kim 2007), it is possible that the self-improvement motivation arising from envy is predominantly concerned with status enhancement, whereas the self-improvement products I studied mostly focussed on enabling participants to better facets of their selves. Further inquiries on the motivational aspects underlying self-improvement should thus focus on better understanding how the public or private nature of a self-improvement option—and its implications for self-signaling (e.g., Dhar and Wertenbroch 2012; Savary, Goldsmith, and Dhar 2015)—affects the intensity of this relationship. For example, the various instances of successful public commitments to self-improvement (e.g., Weight Watchers, Alcoholics Anonymous) might suggest that the mostly private effects observed in this research would be strengthened when facing other's judgement because it would also answer the need for restoring self-image to others. Clearly, more research focussing on improving our understanding of the complex process underlying people's general desire for self-improvement is needed.

Future research could also examine additional potential moderators of the effect of guilt on self-improvement. For instance, as an alternative measure to self-theory, it could be interesting to determine the role of future-self connection (Ersner-Hersfield, Wimmer, and Knutson 2009). It may be that people high on connection with their future selves might be more

likely to seek self-improvement consumption choice options after experiencing guilt due to their long-term view of the self. While the present research points to multiple directions for future research, it is an important first step in demonstrating that the experience of guilt can lead to seeking out options enabling the self to improve.

Chapter 2: Taking a Stand for the Firm: When Undeserved Reviews

Create Empathetic Concern for Firms

1 star – “The ice cream was too cold” – restaurant review on Yelp.com

While many customers dealing with a disappointing consumer experience have toyed with the idea of writing a negative review, the above example illustrates that not all negative word-of-mouth (WOM) is deserved. The consensus within the literature on WOM is that reviews lead to opinions about the firm that are consistent with the valence of the review. In other words, research largely finds that negative reviews lead to lower firm evaluations and positive reviews lead to higher firm evaluations (e.g., Chevalier and Mayzlin 2006; Fornell and Westbrook 1984). Both negative and positive consumer reviews are important sources of information for consumer decision-making (e.g., Arndt 1967; Ba and Pavlou 2002; Basuroy, Chatterjee, and Ravid 2003; Godes and Mayzlin 2009; Leskovec, Adamic, and Huberman 2007; Trusov, Bucklin, and Pauwels 2009). Indeed, about 50% of consumers report referring to online reviews before making purchases (Nielsen 2013a; PWC 2016) and at least 70% of consumers trust online reviews (Nielsen 2013b). Furthermore, it is clear that online reviews directly influence firms' performance metrics such as sale volume (Zhu and Zhang 2010) and shareholder value (Anderson, Fornell, and Mazvancheryl 2004).

The current research highlights conditions under which this common congruent effect between the valence of reviews and the valence of the consumer response (e.g., negative reviews leading to negative consumer responses) does not emerge and may even be reversed. Building on research showing that cues within consumer reviews can influence consumers' attributions about

the responsibility for the service failure (Chen and Lurie 2013; Hamilton, Vohs, and McGill 2014), I extend the understanding of WOM inferences by highlighting the impact of perceived deservingness of reviews on prospective consumers' judgments and behaviors toward firms. Specifically, I refer to deservingness in reviews as the extent to which the review is perceived to be unbiased and reasonable. More specifically, does the review demonstrate that the service provider received the appropriate review given the described service delivery?

I argue that when the consumer perceives a negative review to be undeserved, empathetic concerns for the firm being wronged are activated. I suggest and find that, in turn, these activated feelings of empathy for a firm trigger positive consumer responses, including higher patronage and purchase intentions. Importantly, I show that positive consumer responses following undeserved negative reviews can be even more positive than those made when the review is positively valenced.

The current research makes several contributions to the existing literature. First, I provide initial evidence that consumers' perceptions of deservingness of the reviews can subsequently trigger positive behavioral intentions toward the reviewed firm. It is worth mentioning that these results also suggest that a negative undeserved review can even lead to more positive intentions towards a firm than a positive review. Second, I extend previous literature showing that consumers see firms as person-like entities (Aaker 1997; Aggarwal 2004; Fournier 1998). Drawing on this work, I suggest that not only can consumers exhibit empathetic responses toward other people, but that they can also experience feelings of empathy for firms. Third, I provide further support for our empathy-driven account by showing how these effects are magnified under conditions where the consumer can empathize with the firm, for instance,

among those who are moderate to high in individual differences in empathy. Fourth, and finally, I provide relevant recommendations for managers wishing to deal with undeserved negative reviews by showing that more personlike responses (i.e., with a firm representative, not a firm-entity) to such negative WOM magnify empathy-driven positive consumer responses. I next turn to my theoretical framework.

2.1 Theoretical Development

Consumers often consult reviews of products or services before making a purchase decision (Chen and Xie 2008) because they perceive such WOM communications as more credible than traditional marketing channels (e.g., Godes and Mayzlin 2004; Herr, Kardes, and Kim 1991). Due to the inherent trust that consumers place in WOM, reviews have been shown to impact dramatically responses to companies and firms, including increased willingness to pay (Houser and Wooders 2006) and product sales (Chevalier and Mayzlin 2006; Liu 2006). The consensus within this literature is that positive reviews lead to higher sales by enhancing positive attitudes and expectations about firms, while negative reviews lower firm evaluations and intentions (e.g., Chevalier and Mayzlin 2006; Godes and Mayzlin 2004; Liu 2006; Sonnier, McAlister, and Rutz 2011; Zhu and Zhang 2010). Furthermore, positive and negative reviews appear to have a differential impact on consumer responses. While positive reviews are more prevalent (Fowler and Avila 2009), negative reviews tend to have a stronger influence on product sales (Basuroy et al. 2003; Chevalier and Mayzlin 2006) and product evaluations (Herr et al. 1991; Mizerski 1982) because they are seen as more diagnostic of product or service quality (Baumeister et al. 2001; Wright 1974).

2.1.1 Factors that Impact Consumer Interpretations of Negative Reviews

Research has begun to cast doubt on the general assumption that positive and negative reviews always lead respectively to positive and negative outcomes for firms. For instance, Berger, Sorensen, and Rasmussen (2010) suggest that unknown firms can benefit from negative WOM because these negative reviews raise awareness about their products. Research focusing on review content has also identified some cues that can affect the impact of reviews on firms and products evaluations. For example, Laczniak, DeCarlo, and Ramaswami (2001) found that when consumers can attribute a negative review to the reviewer's dispositions, they will discount the informational value of the review, leading to lesser negative impact on product's evaluation. Similarly, Chen and Lurie (2013) found that temporal contiguity markers within reviews (i.e., markers suggesting that the review was published soon after the service encounter, for instance "today" or "just got back") increase the persuasiveness of reviews because they lead people to attribute the positive review to the product experience instead of to the reviewer's personal reasons. Research has also identified that elements within the reviews themselves can determine whether the reviews were written deceptively (Anderson and Simester 2014; Dellarocas 2006) either to enhance the reputation of a firm or to denigrate competitors (see Mayzlin, Dover, and Chevalier 2014). Finally, recent research by Hamilton et al. (2014) found that using dispreferred markers aimed at softening the negative information featured in reviews (e.g., "I'll be honest," "I don't want to be mean, but...") led to reviewers being seen as more credible and likable and thus to higher willingness to pay for the product being reviewed.

All in all, extant research demonstrates that inferences about the reviews themselves can moderate the effect of review valence on consumer reactions. I suggest that one of those

influencing factors is perceived deservingness (i.e., perceptions regarding the degree to which the review seems unbiased and reasonable) because undeserved negative reviews signal that the firm is being wronged. As such, I expect inferences about the undeserved nature of negative reviews to lead consumers to react to this review by displaying positive responses, such as positive behavioral intentions toward the firm due to feelings of empathy for that firm.

2.1.2 Deservingness

In the marketing literature, there has been significant work that examines the concepts of fairness and justice. While one could argue that the concept under which I couch our hypotheses is one of “fairness”, I suggest that the judgement consumers make is not fairness as is typically studied, but that of deservingness. The majority of work on fairness in marketing focuses on consumers’ concerns about how they are treated by firms (e.g., Tax, Brown, and Chandrashekar 1998). This stream of research, which is derived from social comparison (Wood 1989) and equity theories (Adams 1965; Hatfield et al. 1978), suggests that consumers seek various standards of comparison to evaluate whether they are being treated fairly by firms. For instance, this work proposes that consumers perceive a firm’s price to be unfair when the profit margins are too high relative to the consumer’s surplus (Bearden, Carlson, and Hardesty 2003). Perceptions of unfairness are also evoked when consumers perceive a discrepant treatment between their outcomes and those of other similar individuals receiving a better deal (Li and Jain 2015) or to a more positive prior consumer experiences (Campbell 1999). Consumers’ concerns about being treated unfairly lead to reduced purchase intentions (Anderson and Simester 2008), negative WOM for the firm (Huppertz, Arenson, and Evans 1978), and can even result in acts of retaliation against the firm (Grégoire and Fisher 2008; Turillo et al. 2002).

In the current research, I argue that a better term for the process is perceived deservingness. Despite being conceptually close to fairness, the notion of deservingness instead focusses primarily on is the relation between a person's actions and their outcomes (Feather 1999; Lerner, Miller, and Holmes 1976). In our case, the perception of deservingness stems from the relationship between the service provider's (e.g., firm's) actions and the outcomes (e.g., the valence of the review). As such, the current research is concerned with perceived deservingness as the extent to which the negative review is perceived to be unbiased and reasonable. I predict that perceptions of undeservingness in negative reviews about a firm will motivate consumer empathy and will lead to positive outcomes such as increased purchase and patronage intentions toward that firm as a mean through which consumers can repair the injustice experienced by the firm. This is in line with predictions derived from the Just World Hypothesis (Lerner 1980) which states that people are motivated to believe that everyone gets what they deserve. When these perceptions of justice are violated, people seek to restore balance, such as compensating the victim (Lerner 1965). These effects occurs primarily when people are able to identify with the victim, or imagine that the suffering was happening to them (Aldermann, Brehm, and Katz 1974)—key components of empathetic reasoning.

Deservingness and empathy are two concepts that are closely tied to prosocial behaviors. Previous work has shown that empathy can actually lead to equality driven decisions. For example, Batson and Ahmad (2001) found that people who were prompted to experience high empathy for their partner were more likely to make a cooperative choice during a Prisoner's Dilemma game. That is, participants who experienced empathy for their partner were more likely to assign substantial weight to the outcome of their partner, even at the expense of their own

outcomes. Empathy, in the context of iterated social dilemmas, has been shown to activate generosity wherein people allocate more resources to the other than they received (Rumble, Van Lange, and Parks 2010). Thus, empathy appears to facilitate helping others, even at the expense of the self. In addition, undeserved outcomes stimulate empathetic responding to others as a means to restore balance. I will discuss this below.

2.1.3 The Role of Empathetic Responding

Empathy is a vicarious and congruent emotional response to the assumed emotions of another (Eisenberg 1991; Eisenberg and Miller 1987; Eisenberg and Strayer 1987) which often arises as a response to observing or learning of the suffering of others (e.g., Jackson, Meltzoff, and Decety 2005). Empathetic processing involves viewing another person's situation from the perspective of that person and understanding how a person will react emotionally and cognitively to that situation as if it were affecting them directly (Granzin and Olsen 1991). While often activated by contextual factors, research shows that this ability to recognize the emotional experiences of others can also be reliably measured as an individual difference (e.g., Davis 1980). For example, people higher in trait empathy are better able to perceive the physical pain of others (Loggia, Mogil, and Bushnell 2008) and to experience empathetic reactions spontaneously in response to others in need (Mehrabian and Epstein 1972).

Within the realms of positive psychology and marketing, empathy has been consistently linked to altruism and a variety of prosocial behaviors (e.g., Bagozzi and Moore 1994; Basil et al. 2008; Batson 1998; Coke, Batson, and McDavis 1978; Hoffman 1977; Schimel, Wohl, and Williams 2006; Tangney 1991; Trobst, Collins, and Embree 1994; Unger and Thumuluri 1997). Specifically, empathy has been shown to activate moral concern for other people (Batson et al.

2007), often under conditions where the target has been perceived to have been wronged in some way (i.e., some a standard of fairness or justice has been violated; Hoffman 2001). This sensitivity to moral outcomes for others has been shown to be a powerful source of motivation to restore justice, either by compensating the victim or by punishing the wrong-doer (e.g., Batson et al. 2007; Carlsmith, Darley, and Robinson 2002; Darley and Pittman 2003).

I build on this previous work showing that empathy leads to positive and helpful responses to *other people* who have been wronged, to propose that the same might be true of *firms*. Indeed, brands can be seen as having person-like qualities (Aaker 1997), so much so that they can even be viewed as people (Fournier 1998). While previous work has shown numerous instances of consumers interested in the extent to which firms are experiencing empathy for them (e.g., Keller 1993; Parasuraman, Zeithaml, and Berry 1988), the current work proposes that such relationships may also lend themselves toward customers feeling empathy for firms—inclusive of firms' employees (see Brexendorf et al. 2010). Specifically, I draw on past work that shows empathetic responses are heightened under conditions where undeserved outcomes experienced by other people become salient (e.g., Batson et al. 2007; Haidt 2003). I propose that when the consumer perceives a negative review as being undeserved, this will activate empathetic concerns for the firm. In turn, I predict that feeling empathy for a firm that has received undeserved treatment will trigger consumer responses aimed at compensating that firm (e.g., likelihood to recommend, patronage intentions, purchase intentions). Importantly, analogous to a situation where people can experience empathy for strangers being mistreated, I predict that an ongoing relationship is not a necessary condition for the experience of consumers' empathy towards firms being mistreated. Therefore, our first prediction is that increased perceptions of an

undeserved review will lead consumers to have a relatively more positive response to firms.

More formally, I predict:

H1: Undeserved negative reviews will lead to more positive behavioral intentions toward the reviewed firm compared to both deserved negative reviews and positive reviews.

Also, I anticipate that feelings of empathy for the firm will mediate these more positive firm responses to undeserved reviews:

H2: Feelings of empathy will mediate the relationship between review type and positive consumer responses toward the firm.

Finally, given that empathetic responding is a focal mechanism of the effect, our rationale further predicts conditions that enhance or allow for empathetic responding will heighten positive responses to undeserved negative reviews. I investigate the effect of both an individual difference (i.e., propensity for empathetic concern) and two situational factors (i.e., the contextual suppression of empathetic responding and the presence of personlike firm responses) on positive consumer responses toward the firm following an undeserved negative review. While I discuss each distinct variable in greater detail in the studies themselves, our overall prediction is that individual differences and situational variations moderate the ability to empathize:

H3: Factors that increase empathic responding will moderate the effect of deservingness of a negative review on consumer responses. In particular, increases in the ability to empathize with the firm will lead to more positive reactions in the face of seeing an undeserved negative review.

As an initial test of our conceptual framework, I ran a pilot experiment linking undeserved reviews to positive consumer responses because of heightened feelings of empathy. Specifically, I asked ninety-six undergraduate students (64% female, $M_{\text{age}} = 20.2$) to read a negative review about their own school which contained various features relating to student experience such as large classroom size, expensive tuition, and poor placement services that could be perceived as undeserved (see appendix). I tested the extent to which they perceived such negative reviews to be undeserved as a predictor of their reported feelings of empathy for their school firm and their likelihood to recommend their school firm to another student. Our prediction was that the students who perceived the negative review as undeserved would express more feelings of empathy for their school firm and, in turn, would be more likely to recommend it.

Participants first read another student's negative testimonial about their school. Participants were asked to rate the extent to which they perceived the negative review to be deserved using four 7-point items: "fair," "deserved," "justified," "reasonable"; 1: Strongly Disagree; 7: Strongly Agree ($\alpha = .92$). Then, participants rated the extent to which they were experiencing feelings of empathy for their school firm using three 9-point items: "sympathy," "empathy," "compassion"; 1: not at all, 9: very much; ($\alpha = .91$). Finally, participants were asked to rate their likelihood to recommend their school to someone looking for a commerce degree using two 7-point bipolar scales: "unlikely-likely" and "improbable-probable" ($\alpha = .92$). Results showed that perceived deservingness of the review ($M = 2.06$, $SD = 1.05$) correlates negatively with feelings of empathy for the firm ($M = 5.34$, $SD = 1.73$; $r = -.24$, $p < .05$) and with likelihood to recommend ($M = 5.53$, $SD = 1.24$; $r = -.20$, $p < .05$). In addition, results revealed that feelings

of empathy for the firm correlated positively with likelihood to recommend ($r = -.29, p < .01$). Next, I tested if heightened feelings of empathy could explain the relationship between the perception of review deservingness and likelihood to recommend using a mediation analysis. Using a 5,000 bootstrap resampling method, there was a significant indirect effect ($B = -.07, SE = .04, CI_{95} [-.20, -.02]$) such that the less deserved a review is perceived, the more participants expressed empathy for the firm ($B = -.40, SE = .16, t(93) = 2.44, p < .05, CI_{95} [-.73, -.07]$). In turn, the more participants expressed empathy for the firm, the more likely they were to recommend it ($B = .19, SE = .07, t(93) = 2.54, p = .01, CI_{95} [.04, .33]$).

Taken together, the results from this pilot study provides initial evidence linking perceptions of deservingness in negative WOM with subsequent positive responses toward the firm due to heightened feelings of empathy. However, this correlational study does not allow us to test causal attributions for my effect and focusses on an in-group firm. I address these limitations in our main empirical work.

2.2 The Current Research

The current research predicts and demonstrates that negative reviews, when perceived to be undeserved, can inspire positive consumer responses due to feelings of empathy for the firm being reviewed. In study 1, I show this basic effect such that participants exposed to undeserved negative reviews display consumer responses that are more positive than those of participants exposed to a positive review. This study also provides mediational evidence for the role of empathy in explaining this effect. In study 2, I replicate this effect of undeserved negative reviews and identify a theoretically relevant boundary condition supporting our deservingness explanation. Specifically, I show that the effect of empathy in leading to positive firm responses

is mitigated if the undeserved review comes from an expert source. Study 3 supports our mechanism by showing that individual differences in trait empathy moderate this relationship. Study 4 provides additional support for our empathy-driven mechanism by showing that the observed effect does not emerge following an empathy-suppressing task. Finally, study 5 shows how managerial actions aimed at enhancing connectedness between the consumer and the firm—such as publicly responding to undeserved negative reviews in a personlike manner—can further promote empathetic feelings and positive responses toward firms.

2.3 Study 1

Study 1 tests our conceptual framework, which suggests that undeserved negative reviews can not only lead to more positive responses than deserved negative reviews but can also lead to more positive responses than positive reviews. I demonstrate this effect by measuring consumers' patronage intentions to a local restaurant after exposure to either a positive review, a negative-undeserved review, or a negative-deserved review while keeping other components of the descriptions of the service delivery constant. Specifically, participants read a review about a brunch experience. In order to vary the perceived deservingness of the negative review I varied the price of the coffee included in the meal across condition while keeping the total price of the meal constant in order to highlight perceptions of a good or a bad deal for the coffee (e.g., price partitioning; Bertini and Wathieu 2008). In other words, this manipulation aimed at making the negative review appear undeserved when it contained a complaint about a good deal (i.e., cheap coffee) while keeping the total cost of purchase constant. Similar to our pilot study, this experiment provides mediational evidence that heightened feelings of empathy for a firm explain positive firm support arising from undeserved negative reviews.

2.3.1 Method

Participants and Design. One hundred eighty-two participants recruited through Amazon Mechanical Turk took part in this experiment in exchange for money (44% female, $M_{\text{age}} = 32.7$). The experiment used a one-factor, 3-level (review type: positive vs. negative-deserved vs. negative-undeserved) between-participants design. The dependent variable of interest was patronage intentions toward the restaurant covered in the review.

Procedure. Participants experienced one of three conditions where they were asked to imagine reading an online review for a local brunch restaurant. Service delivery was kept constant across conditions by having each review describe enjoyment of a “tasty full meal breakfast” with coffee for a total of \$12 and by showing the same brunch picture. However, in both negative conditions, the review also contained a negative comment about the price of coffee within the \$12 combo. In the negative-deserved review, the meal and the coffee were priced at \$7.50 and \$4.50 respectively. In the negative-undeserved review, both items were priced at \$11.50 and \$0.50 respectively (see appendix 11). Participants rated the extent to which they experienced feeling of empathy for the restaurant using the same items as in the pilot study ($\alpha = .97$). Participants also rated the extent to which, if they were looking for a brunch in a near future, they would consider the restaurant described in the review using two bipolar 7-point scales: “unlikely-likely,” “improbable-probable” ($\alpha = .98$). As a check for our deservingness manipulation, participants also rated the extent to which they perceived the review to be deserved using the same items as in the pilot study ($\alpha = .97$).

2.3.2 Manipulation Check

Review Deservingness. Results from an ANOVA revealed a significant main effect of review type on perceived deservingness ($F(2, 179) = 60.67, p < .001$). A contrast analysis revealed that participants perceived the negative-undeserved review ($M = 2.98, SD = 1.48$) as less fair compared to the negative-deserved review ($M = 5.34, SD = 1.17; t(179) = 9.63, p < .001$) and the positive review ($M = 5.23, SD = 1.27; t(179) = 9.58, p < .001$). There was no difference in the review deservingness rating between the negative-deserved and the positive review ($t < 1$). These results validate our review deservingness manipulation.

2.3.3 Results

Empathy for the firm. Results revealed a significant effect of review type ($F(2, 179) = 25.98, p < .001$). Empathy for the firm was higher in the negative-undeserved ($M = 5.68, SD = 2.37$) compared to the positive ($M = 3.27, SD = 2.05; t(179) = 6.28, p < .001$) and the negative-deserved conditions ($M = 3.16, SD = 1.97; t(179) = 6.30, p < .001$). There was also no difference in the extent to which participants experienced empathy for the firm in the negative-deserved compared to the positive review condition ($t < 1$).

Patronage Intentions. Results revealed a significant effect of review type on patronage intentions ($F(2, 179) = 10.76, p < .001$; see figure 4). Importantly, patronage intentions were higher in the negative-undeserved ($M = 4.80, SD = 1.69$) compared to the positive ($M = 4.04, SD = 1.97; t(179) = 2.33, p < .05$) and the negative-deserved conditions ($M = 3.24, SD = 1.67; t(179) = 4.63, p < .001$). Patronage intentions were higher in the positive compared to the negative-deserved condition ($t(179) = 2.48, p = .01$).

Indirect Effect. Next, I tested whether reported feelings of empathy for the firm could explain patronage intentions to the restaurant described in the review using a dummy coding for a multi-categorical mediation analysis (Hayes and Preacher 2013). Results revealed that heightened feelings of empathy for the firm in the negative-undeserved WOM conditions could explain the difference in patronage intentions between the negative-undeserved and the negative-deserved condition ($B = 1.02$, $SE = .22$, $CI_{95} [.65, 1.54]$) and between the negative-undeserved and the positive condition ($B = .97$, $SE = .21$, $CI_{95} [.62, 1.43]$). In comparison, empathy for the firm does not account for the difference in patronage intentions between the positive and negative-deserved WOM conditions ($B = .04$, $SE = .15$, $CI_{95} [-.25, .32]$).

2.3.4 Discussion

Study 1 demonstrates that undeserved negative reviews can lead to positive consumer responses due to heightened feelings of empathy for firm receiving the review. In fact, study 1 suggests that such empathetic responses can be even more positive than those following exposure to positive reviews. Study 2 replicates these findings and identifies a boundary condition for the effect of consumer empathy leading to supportive responses by manipulating the expertise of the reviewers.

2.4 Study 2

Study 2 was designed with two goals in mind. First, while study 1 compared the effect of an undeserved-negative review against a control condition, study 2 test my effect of interest against a positive review condition. I note that because I focus on the effects of deservingness in negative reviews, I do not manipulate deservingness in the positive condition in order to create a more neutral and theoretically-relevant standard of comparison. Second, study 2 identifies a

theoretically relevant boundary condition for our empathy-driven mechanism linking undeserved negative reviews to positive consumer responses—reviewer expertise. Specifically, I show that the above effect is mitigated when the undeserved negative review comes from an expert source (vs. novice source). In other words, I suggest that the high source credibility of the expert will mitigate the empathy-driven positive responses to an undeserved review.

Source credibility refers to the extent to which a source is believed to be trustworthy and an expert (Hovland, Janis, and Kelley 1953). Sources with high credibility are believed to communicate accurate and truthful information. Information provided by an expert has been shown to increase consumers' certainty in their thoughts and decisions about a product (Briñol, Petty, and Tormala 2004; Fitzsimons and Lehmann 2004). These increases in confidence and certainty are due to the fact that consumers perceive information from an expert source to be more valid and diagnostic (Chaiken and Maheswaran 1994; Kruglanski and Thompson 1999). Thus, when comparing the same review coming from a novice or expert source, the information coming from an expert source should be perceived as more diagnostic, regardless of perceived deservingness. Therefore, I expect that high expertise will prevent consumers from providing responses that are inconsistent with the valence of the review (i.e., mitigate positive responses to the undeserved negative reviews). Specifically, I predict that when an expert source, as opposed to a novice one, provides an undeserved negative review, the resulting heightened empathy will not affect subsequent ratings of intention to patronize the firm.

2.4.1 Method

Participants and Design. A convenience sample of one hundred fifty-one male participants recruited through an undergraduate subject pool in exchange for course credit (M_{age}

= 20.3) took part in this study. The experiment used a one-factor, 3-level (review type: positive vs. negative-undeserved from novice vs. negative-undeserved from an expert) between-participants design. The dependent variable of interest was patronage intentions toward the restaurant covered in the review.

Procedure. All participants were told that they would be reading a restaurant review taken from an online blog post. After reading a description of the author and his qualifications, participants continued to the same local brunch reviews as in study 1. I manipulated the level of reviewer's expertise in both negative-undeserved conditions by asking the participant first to read the bio of the reviewer (adapted from Karmarkar and Tormala 2010). The author of the restaurant review (Jonathan Bauer) was either a novice or an expert source for restaurant reviews. In the expert condition, he was described as a well-known local food blogger with hordes of devoted followers, whose reviews have been seen as make-or-break for new restaurants. Moreover, the concluding line of his review indicated that he specializes in brunch reviews. In contrast, in the novice condition, the author was described as a local networks administrator who reviews restaurants on social media during his free time and gets dozens of views each month. His reviews are described as entertaining and easy to read. The closing line of this review indicated that he specializes in fast food reviews (see appendix 12). After reading the review, participants rated the extent to which they perceived the review to be deserved ($\alpha = .95$), their feelings of empathy for the restaurant ($\alpha = .91$), and the extent to which they would consider patronizing the restaurant described in the review ($\alpha = .95$) using the same items as in previous studies.

2.4.2 Manipulation Check

Review Deservingness. Results from an ANOVA revealed a significant main effect of review type on perceived deservingness ($F(2, 148) = 36.96, p < .001$). Contrast analysis revealed that participants perceived the positive review ($M = 4.80, SD = 1.14$) as more deserved compared to the negative-undeserved review by novice ($M = 3.17, SD = 1.21; t(148) = 6.83, p < .001$) and the negative-undeserved review by expert ($M = 2.91, SD = 1.25; t(148) = 7.91, p < .001$). There was no significant difference in review deservingness between the both negative-undeserved conditions ($t(148) = 1.08, p > .25$). These results support our review deservingness manipulation.

2.4.3 Results

Empathy for the firm. Results revealed a significant effect of review type ($F(2, 148) = 11.63, p < .001$). Empathy for the firm was lower in the positive ($M = 3.14, SD = 1.76$) compared to the negative-undeserved by expert ($M = 4.91, SD = 2.08; t(148) = 4.50, p < .001$) and the negative-undeserved by novice conditions ($M = 4.61, SD = 2.04; t(148) = 3.73, p < .001$). There was also no significant difference in the extent to which participants experienced empathy for the between negative-undeserved by novice and negative-undeserved by expert conditions ($t < 1$).

Patronage Intentions. Results revealed a significant effect of review type on patronage intentions ($F(2, 148) = 3.70, p < .05$; see figure 5). Consistent with our previous results, participants in the negative-undeserved by novice condition ($M = 4.40, SD = 1.25$) expressed more patronage intentions than those in the positive condition ($M = 3.69, SD = 1.26; t(148) = 2.63, p < .01$). However, there was no significant difference in patronage intentions between the positive and negative-undeserved by an expert ($M = 3.88, SD = 1.55; t < 1$). Furthermore,

participants expressed lower patronage intentions in the negative-undeserved by expert compared to the negative-undeserved by novice condition ($t(148) = 1.91, p = .06$).

Indirect Effect. Using the same approach as in study 1, I tested whether feelings of empathy for the firm could explain the difference in patronage intentions between the review type conditions. Consistent with our previous results, there was an indirect effect through feelings of empathy explaining the difference in patronage intentions between the positive review condition and the negative-undeserved by novice conditions ($B = .25, SE = .12, CI_{95} [.06, .55]$). However, the mediation by feelings of empathy did not explain the observed difference in patronage intentions between the negative-undeserved by novice and negative-undeserved by expert conditions ($B = -.04, SE = .06, CI_{95} [-.21, .05]$). These results support our prediction that source expertise mitigates the effect of undeserved negative reviews on positive empathetic responses toward firms.

2.4.4 Discussion

Study 2 replicates our main effect of interest that undeserved negative reviews can lead to consumer responses that are even more positive than positive reviews due to consumer feelings of empathy for the firm. Study 2 also identifies a boundary condition for this effect of consumer empathy such that expertise mitigates the effect of empathy on patronage intentions because their high credibility makes it harder for participants to respond inconsistently to their negative reviews. The next three studies focus on testing our empathy account for our effect of interest. For instance, study 3 provides additional support for this mechanism by showing how individual differences in trait empathy moderate this relationship.

2.5 Study 3

In study 3, I provide support for our process relying on empathetic feelings for firms by testing whether trait empathetic concern moderates positive consumer responses following exposure to undeserved (vs. deserved) negative reviews. I predict that individuals who have a higher predisposition to empathize with others will be more sensitive to the undeservedness of the negative review. This is because those high in trait empathy are more sensitive to the negative circumstances of others (e.g., Davis 1996; Loggia et al. 2008). As such I, propose that participants high on trait empathy will display more favorable responses following an undeserved negative review compared to those low on trait empathy.

2.5.1 Method

Participants and Design. One hundred twenty-two participants recruited through an undergraduate subject pool took part in this experiment in exchange for course credit (69% female, $M_{\text{age}} = 19.9$). The experiment was a 2 (review deservingness: negative-deserved vs. negative-undeserved) X continuous (trait empathy) between-participants design. The dependent variable of interest was patronage intentions toward the restaurant covered in the review.

Procedure. Participants were randomly assigned to one of two conditions where they read an online review for a local restaurant. In both negative review conditions, the customer complained about having to wait for the waiter to replace a bowl of soup that was served too cold. In the negative-deserved condition, the customer had to wait “30 long minutes” for replacement. In the negative-undeserved condition, the customer had to wait “5 long minutes” for replacement (see appendix 13). Participants rated the deservingness of the review ($\alpha = .97$) and their patronage intentions to the restaurant in a near future ($\alpha = .98$) using the same measures

as in previous studies. To test for moderation, I measured participants trait empathy using the 7-item 5-point empathetic concerns scale ($\alpha = .78$) from Davis (1980; e.g., When I see someone being taken advantage of, I feel kind of protective toward them).

2.5.2 Manipulation Check

Review Deservingness. Participants perceived the negative-undeserved ($M = 2.93$, $SD = 1.43$) as less deserved compared to the negative-deserved review ($M = 4.53$, $SD = 1.34$; $t(119) = 6.39$, $p < .001$) supporting our review deservingness manipulation.

2.5.3 Results

Patronage Intentions. Results revealed a significant two-way interaction between review type and trait empathy in predicting patronage intentions ($B = -1.33$, $SE = .46$, $t(117) = 2.47$, $p = .01$, $CI_{95} [.24, 1.85]$). There was a main effect of review type ($B = 3.45$, $SE = 1.71$, $t(117) = 2.02$, $p < .05$, $CI_{95} [.07, 6.84]$) and a main effect of trait empathy ($B = .98$, $SE = .37$, $t(117) = 2.66$, $p = .01$, $CI_{95} [.25, 1.71]$); see figure 6). Next, I used to the Johnson-Neyman technique to examine where along the continuum of trait empathy participants started to express empathetic responses toward the firm. Results revealed that for participants who scored at 3.51 or above on the empathy scale (31th percentile), the difference between the negative-deserved and negative-undeserved review on patronage intentions was significant.

2.5.4 Discussion

Results from Study 3 provide additional support for our key prediction that negative reviews can trigger positive consumer responses when they are perceived as undeserved. Importantly, our results suggest that such an effect starts to operate even among those low in trait

empathy but is magnified among those high on trait empathy. The next study was designed to test further empathy account by testing the effect of suppressing the consumer's ability to experience empathy for the firm.

2.6 Study 4

Study 4 was designed to provide further evidence for the empathy-driven account of our effects by showing how these positive firm responses arising from undeserved negative reviews can be mitigated when suppressing participants' ability to experience empathetic feelings for the firm. Prior work has shown that while consumers see non-profit organizations as warm, for-profits are not (Aaker, Vohs, and Mogilner 2010). It was also found that for-profit corporations are distrusted. For instance, 40% of Millennials believe that corporations are a source of fear and 49% believing that corporations' philanthropic efforts are for selfish reasons (cited in Lam 2014). Previous work has shown that simply priming consumers with an economic mindset (e.g., thinking about money, for-profit corporations) can decrease prosocial behavior and make consumers more solitary (Vohs, Mead, and Goode 2008). These monetary incentives lead individuals to see the self in a less relational manner, effectively decreasing empathetic accuracy (Ma-Kellams and Blascovich 2013) as well as dampening empathetic feelings toward others (Molinsky, Grant, and Margolis 2012). Therefore, I suggest that by reminding consumers of the rise of corporate profits at the expense of workers should dampen empathetic concerns and suppress any positive responses to undeserved negative reviews.

2.6.1 Method

Participants and Design. Two hundred forty-three participants recruited through an undergraduate subject pool took part in this experiment in exchange for course credits (55%

female, $M_{\text{age}} = 20.7$). The experiment was a 2 (negative review type: deserved vs. undeserved) X 2 (empathy-manipulation task: empathy-suppressing vs. control) between-participants design. The dependent variable of interest was purchase intentions for a meal for two at the restaurant covered in the review.

Procedure. In the first of two ostensibly unrelated tasks, participants performed an attention task where they were instructed to count the number of times the letter “X” appeared in a 500-word text (kept constant to three times). In the empathy suppressing condition, participants read a news report titled “US Corporate profits soar as wages stagnate” which described how the recent “economic recovery has been fueled by driving down the wage levels of workers.” In the control condition, participants read a Wikipedia article about the different types of whales (see appendices 14 and 15). A separate pre-test validated the ability of this manipulation to reduce empathetic concerns towards “local coffee shops” using the same items as in study 3 ($\alpha = .90$; $M_{\text{Control}} = 3.98$, $SD = 0.92$; $M_{\text{Empathy-Suppressing}} = 3.50$, $SD = 0.82$; $F(1, 62) = 4.92$, $p < .05$).

Then, in the second task, participants were asked to read a negative review for a local restaurant. In the review, the customer complained about not being able to get his meal warmed because the kitchen had closed and started cleaning 55 minutes before the restaurant’s closing time in the deserved condition (5 minutes before the restaurant’s closing time in the undeserved condition; see appendix 16). To validate our manipulation, participants then rated their perceived deservingness of the negative review using the same items as in previous studies ($\alpha = .96$). They then rated their purchase intentions for a dinner for two with drinks at this restaurant if offered for \$35 using a 7-point scale; 1: “very unlikely;” 7: “very likely”.

2.6.2 Manipulation check

Empathy-Suppressing Task. Results from an ANOVA revealed no significant two-way interaction and no main effect of the empathy-suppressing task (vs. control) on participants' perception of how deserved was the review ($F_s < 1$). Instead, results revealed a main effect of the negative review type such that the negative-undeserved review was perceived as less deserved ($M = 3.91$, $SD = 1.64$) than the negative-deserved one ($M = 5.07$, $SD = 1.27$; $F(1, 239) = 37.39$, $p < .001$). These results validate our manipulation of the review deservingness and suggest that empathy-suppressing task did not affect the perceived deservingness of the negative review.

2.6.3 Results

Purchase Intentions. There was a two-way interaction between negative review type and the presence (or not) of an empathy-suppressing task in predicting purchase intentions ($F(1,238) = 4.27$, $p < .05$; see figure 7). Simple effects analysis revealed that among participants in the control condition, purchase intentions were higher in the negative-undeserved ($M = 3.21$, $SD = 1.95$) compared to the negative-deserved condition ($M = 2.28$, $SD = 1.52$; $F(1, 238) = 9.33$, $p < .01$). This replicates our previous findings. However, for those who performed the empathy-suppressing task, the difference between the negative-undeserved ($M = 2.62$, $SD = 1.73$) and negative-deserved review ($M = 2.58$, $SD = 1.44$; $F < 1$) was not significant. Stated differently, for those who read an undeserved negative review, I observed a significant difference between those who underwent the empathy-suppressing task and those who did not ($F(1, 238) = 2.79$, $p = .05$), this effect did not occur among those who read a deserved negative review ($F < 1$).

2.6.4 Discussion

Study 4 provides additional support for the notion that undeserved negative reviews can draw positive consumer responses due to heightened feelings of empathy for the firm reviewed. In particular, our observed effects were mitigated among those who took part in an empathy-suppressing task before reading the negative review. In Study 5, I test how the type of firm response to negative reviews can be used to increase consumers' sense of connection with and empathy for the firm.

2.7 Study 5

Study 5 further tests our empathy-driven account by showing how the type of managerial response to negative reviews can increase empathetic concerns for the firm. For instance, social media strategists often suggest that using a person to represent a firm (e.g., @alicia_at_Honda) is more engaging to consumers than just a firm. The reasoning behind this managerial wisdom is that people are more likely to want to engage with a person rather than an amorphous logo (Epley, Waytz, and Cacioppo 2007). In fact, consumers often perceive firms to have humanlike traits (Aaker 1997; Kervyn, Fiske, and Malone 2012) and even think of firms as having intentions and abilities (Kervyn et al. 2012). Anthropomorphism is prevalent in marketing because humanizing a firm, for instance through spokes-characters (e.g., Pillsbury Doughboy, Tony the Tiger) or by using the first-person language in firm communication, makes the firm more memorable and distinctive (e.g., Aggarwal and McGill 2007, 2012). Drawing on these findings, I expect that firms facing undeserved negative reviews can activate more consumer empathy by responding with a personlike over a generic-type of communication (i.e., by

speaking as a firm employee instead of as the firm itself), leading to higher consumer willingness to purchase the firm's products.

2.7.1 Method

Participants and Design. Two hundred thirty-eight participants recruited through Amazon Mechanical Turk participated in this experiment in exchange for money (45% female, $M_{\text{age}} = 34.7$). The experiment was a 2 (review type: deserved vs. undeserved) X 2 (response type: generic vs. personlike) between-participants design. The dependent variable of interest was willingness to purchase from the firm.

Procedure. Participants were asked to read a negative online review about a failed order from a firm selling reusable water bottles. In the negative-deserved review condition, the customer voiced dissatisfaction about her inability to reach the firm to discuss an order. In the negative-undeserved condition, the complaint contained an extra passage specifying that this inability to reach the firm happened “during the Christmas holidays when they should be working.” Each review was presented with the same firm's response prompting a follow-up with the customer. In the generic (personlike) response condition, the response came from the firm's corporate account using the firm logo (an employee's account with the employee's picture; see appendix 17).

Participants rated the deservingness of the review ($\alpha = .96$) and their state level of empathy for the firm ($\alpha = .98$) using the same measures as in previous studies. Then, participants rated the extent to which they would purchase the firm's products using two 7-point bipolar scales: “unlikely-likely” and “improbable-probable” ($\alpha = .96$). As a manipulation check for the response type manipulation, participants also rated the extent to which they perceived the firm to

have positive anthropomorphic qualities using four 9-point items: “friendly,” “approachable,” “amicable,” “caring,” and “kind;” 1: not at all, 9: very much ($\alpha = .96$).

2.7.2 Manipulation Check

Review Deservingness. There was no significant two-way interaction between review type and response type in predicting the deservingness of the review ($F < 1$) and no main effect of the response type ($F(1,234) = 1.20, p > .25$). There was however a main effect of the review type condition ($F(1,234) = 37.07, p < .001$) suggesting that the undeserved review ($M = 3.75, SD = 1.61$) was perceived as less deserved than the deserved review ($M = 4.84, SD = 1.09$). These results suggest that the review type manipulation was successful.

Anthropomorphic Qualities. There was no significant two-way interaction between review type and response type in predicting the anthropomorphic qualities of the firm ($F < 1$) and no main effect of the review deservingness ($F(1,234) = 1.52, p > .20$). There was however a main effect of the response type condition ($F(1,234) = 5.30, p < .05$), suggesting that the firm had higher anthropomorphic qualities when providing personlike responses ($M = 6.02, SD = 2.04$) as opposed to generic responses ($M = 5.41, SD = 1.99$). These results support our response type manipulation.

2.7.3 Results

Empathy for the firm. There was no significant two-way interaction between review type and response type in predicting the empathetic feelings toward the firm ($F < 1$). There were, however, main effects of review type ($F(1,234) = 10.37, p < .001$) and response type ($F(1,234) = 5.78, p < .05$). Consistent with our previous results, a contrast analysis revealed that for

participants exposed to the generic firm response, empathy for the firm was higher in when the complaint was undeserved ($M = 4.70$, $SD = 2.32$) compared to when it was deserved ($M = 3.92$, $SD = 2.04$; $t(234) = 2.07$, $p < .05$). Similarly, those for who were exposed to the personlike firm response, empathy for the firm was higher when the complaint was undeserved ($M = 5.51$, $SD = 2.30$) compared to when it was deserved ($M = 4.47$, $SD = 2.06$; $t(234) = 2.46$, $p < .05$).

Importantly, when the review was undeserved, the personlike response led to more empathetic feelings than when it was generic ($t(234) = 2.01$, $p < .05$). However, when the review was deserved, response type did not have a significant effect on empathy ($t(234) = 1.38$, $p > .15$).

Willingness to Purchase. There was no significant two-way interaction between review type and response type in predicting willingness to purchase ($F < 1$; see figure 8). There was, however, a main effect of review type ($F(1,234) = 12.73$, $p < .001$) and a main effect of response type ($F(1,234) = 8.93$, $p < .01$). Consistent with our previous results, a contrast analysis revealed that participants exposed to the generic firm response, purchase willingness to purchase was higher when the complaint was undeserved ($M = 4.37$, $SD = 1.69$) compared to when it was deserved ($M = 3.69$, $SD = 1.54$; $t(234) = 2.59$, $p = .01$). Similarly, those for who were exposed the personlike firm response, willingness to purchase was higher when the complaint was undeserved ($M = 4.98$, $SD = 1.29$) compared to when it was deserved ($M = 4.25$, $SD = 1.49$; $t(234) = 2.47$, $p < .05$). Importantly, when the review was undeserved, the personlike response lead to more willingness to purchase than when it was generic ($t(234) = 2.18$, $p < .05$). A similar pattern of results was observed when the review was deserved; the personlike responses lead to a higher willingness to purchase than the generic response ($t(234) = 2.04$, $p < .05$).

Indirect Effect. Next, I tested whether feelings of empathy for the firm could explain the two observed main effects of the review type and firm response on purchase intentions. Because there was no two-way interaction between the predictors in predicting purchase intentions, I tested separate simple mediation models for each predictor, each time controlling for the effect of the other predictor. Consistent with our previous findings, I observed an indirect effect through empathy for the firm for the effect of review deservingness on purchase intentions when controlling for response type ($B = .40$, $SE = 0.13$, $CI_{95} [.14, .67]$). More importantly, I observed an indirect effect through empathy for the firm for the effect of response type on purchase intentions when controlling for review deservingness ($B = .30$, $SE = 0.13$, $CI_{95} [.05, .55]$). In other words, review deservingness and response type have an additive effect on consumer purchase intentions due to heightened feelings of empathy for the firm.

2.7.4 Discussion

Study 5 provides further evidence to support our empathy-driven account for the relationship between undeserved negative reviews and positive consumer responses. In particular, when the firm seemed more relatable and person-like, this led to greater empathy for the firm and more positive responses in response to undeserved (vs. deserved) negative reviews.

2.8 General Discussion

Results across five studies provide converging evidence that consumers who perceive negative reviews to be undeserved will subsequently display positive responses toward the relevant firm due to heightened empathetic feelings. Study 1 offers an initial demonstration of this effect while providing evidence that feelings of empathy for the firm mediate positive responses toward the firm following undeserved negative WOM communication. Study 2

replicates this effect and supports our empathy mechanism account by showing that these positive firm responses arising from undeserved negative reviews are mitigated when the undeserved negative review comes from an expert source. Study 3 further supports our proposed mechanism by showing how these effects occur for those who are higher in trait empathy. Study 4 shows that suppressing participants' ability to experience empathy will cancel our effect of interest. Finally, Study 5 demonstrates that managers can heighten consumers' empathetic feelings and responses by addressing negative reviews through more personlike communication.

2.8.1 Theoretical Implications

This paper contributes to the growing literature examining consumer inferences regarding online reviews (e.g., Chen and Lurie 2013; Moore 2015). While previous work has, for the most part, focused on identifying the conditions under which reviews lead to consumer reactions consistent with the valence of the review, I instead show that consumers' perceptions of deservingness in reviews result in reactions inconsistent with the intended valence of a review (i.e., negative reviews can enhance positive behavioral intentions toward firms). Thus, the current research offers several contributions that deepen our understanding of the factors influencing consumer responses to reviews.

First, by suggesting that negative reviews can lead to positive consumer reactions toward the firm being reviewed, our results build on and extend past research showing that cues within reviews and WOM can subsequently influence consumer judgments about the firm (e.g., Chen and Lurie 2013; Hamilton et al. 2014; McGraw, Warren, and Kan 2015). Specifically, the current research highlights the necessity of further exploring consumer judgments about reviews by

showing that perceived undeservingness of a negative review can facilitate more positive consumer reactions towards to firm.

Second, while research in consumer behavior has reported numerous instances of consumers being concerned about firms feeling empathy for them (e.g., Parasuraman et al. 1988), I suggest that such relationship may be bi-directional where consumers can also experience empathy for firms. Thus, by putting forward an explanation relying on the consumer experiencing emotions for firms, I contribute to knowledge on empathetic reactions in consumption (e.g., Aaker and Williams 1998; Argo, Zhu, and Dahl 2008; Escalas and Stern 2003). Specifically, the current research suggests an empathy-driven mechanism whereby negative reviews can get incorporated in consumers' judgments to trigger positive firm responses, even in light of negative information about the firm.

2.8.2 Practical Implications and Future Research

Set in a context where public shaming and even lawsuits over (undeserved) negative online reviews are becoming more common (see Sanders 2014; Zarrell 2015), this work suggests that consumers can experience feelings of empathy for firms and that managerial actions can foster consumer-firm empathy. While most firms would prefer to avoid negative reviews altogether, the implication of this research is that firms may also be able to cultivate stronger relationships and inoculate themselves against the impact of negative reviews. If consumers can feel empathy (a social, emotional experience) toward the firm, then methods that curate relationships and social engagement with the firm should create the foundation for positive consumer-firm interactions. While the media often relates stories of customers invariably defending their preferred firms (e.g., “fanboys,” believers, evangelists), I show that positive

consumer responses as a result of undeserved negative reviews can occur for unknown firms (studies 1-2-3-4-5). These results suggest that even relatively unknown firms can benefit from the strategic advantage offered by activating consumer empathy.

Furthermore, while previous research has focused on the strategic importance of various components relating to firm personality (e.g., Aaker 1997; Aaker, Garbinsky, and Vohs 2012; Fournier and Alvarez 2012), the results of study 5 suggest that making the firm more personlike as a key element for dealing with negative reviews. Future research should seek to gain a better understanding of the downstream consequences associated with promoting personlike firm personality factors (e.g., warmth and sincerity). As such, it would be important to understand better the impact of making the firm more personlike on consumers' perceptions of other components of firm personality components (e.g., ruggedness, sophistication, competence) and how it ultimately affects the firm's ability to draw the beneficial empathetic responses identified in the current work.

Future research should further explore the avenues through which firms can promote positive consumer-firm outcomes when facing negative reviews. For example, would the presence of remedial action in responding to the complaint—for example, by issuing an apology or denying the customer's claim—affect the empathy felt for the company? For instance, issuing an apology may warrant that the firm cares about their consumers, leading to more positive responses, but denial may also offer a better way to handle complaints because firm defensive reactions would highlight that the negative reviews are undeserved.

Whereas this research is limited to a context where customers' reactions are measured after being exposed to a single undeserved negative review, more work is needed to expand our

understanding of consumer inferences—and reactions—to reviews. For instance, future research could investigate how the interactions between multiple instances of negative reviews further shape consumer judgments. It is possible that exposure to repeated negative feedback could provide information that changes the consumer inference process. For instance, instead of empathetic responses, consumers could undergo a “where there is smoke, there is fire” appraisal process and conclude that service failures are indeed due to the firm—ultimately resulting in negative responses toward the firm. Finally, it would be important from a managerial perspective that future research seeks a better measure of how a firm’s ability to draw consumer empathy—and defensive consumer responses—relates to firm’s financial valuation metrics such as firm equity and firm’s capitalizations (e.g., Keller 1993). All in all, despite the vast quantity of research already sparked by the topic of consumer inferences about reviews and their impact on subsequent firm evaluations, I believe there is still much more to be learned.

Chapter 3: Concluding Remarks

This dissertation provides insights into consumers' reactions to negative emotional experiences. Through eleven empirical studies, the current research highlights how negative emotional experiences can act as powerful motivators, leading to various positive downstream consequences. In particular, I show that the experience of guilt motivates a generalized desire for self-improvement products (essay 1). I also show that undeservingness in negative reviews can lead to positive consumer responses towards firms due to empathy for the firms being wronged (essay 2).

Perhaps the most interesting outcome of this dissertation is the understanding that negative emotions can motivate consumers to go beyond simply avoiding aversive situations, but to seek actively positive outcomes, which can possibly have a long-term positive impact on general welfare. For instance, I show how the momentary experience of negative emotions can introduce a shift in preference towards consumption choices promoting intellectual excellence and a healthier lifestyle (essay 1), and towards promoting consumer support for firms (essay 2).

While I have discussed the specific limitations relative to each essay in their respective discussions, taken as a whole, the current research also has limitations that can seed future investigations. For example, while this research focuses on measuring the motivating power of negative emotional experiences (the “stick” approach to motivation), this work offers little guidance as to how these results would contrast with the ones emerging from positive emotional experiences (the “carrot” approach to motivation). A better understanding of the advantages and disadvantages of each approach—in terms of intensity, duration, domain-specific relevance,

etc.—could help the design of motivational strategies that would be more effective for both consumers and firms.

Another limitation revolves around the research methodologies used in these inquiries. Although I have conducted a variety of field, lab, and online experiments to document my effects, the current work could gain external validity and insights from an even greater multiplicity of research methods. For instance, using secondary data (e.g., scanner data of self-improvement product purchases, textual analysis of online reviews content and patterns) could help future research uncover unexpected predictors of these effects. By using a multi-method approach, future research could also gain better insights about the recurring and long-term nature of the effects described in this dissertation. Clearly, these opportunities for future research show that this area of inquiry is rich with potential to make strong contributions to the domain of motivation.

As a final comment, this study of negative emotional experiences leads me to conclude that while there is abundant research on the topics of emotion, motivation, and compensatory consumption, efforts towards integrating these different bodies of knowledge would allow increasing the impact of these inquiries beyond their own sub-topics. For instance, future research would benefit from a better understanding of the multiple—and often author-specific—definitions proposed for various general emotional experiences (see the many definitions of guilt). These distinctions are important because these different conceptualizations of emotional states can often lead to dissimilar predictions about people's reactions. Similarly, future research would also benefit from integrative work with regards to the predictions and overlap between various competing motivational models (e.g., Affect Regulation, Compensatory Consumption,

Mortality Salience, Moral Licensing, Fluid Compensation, Meaning Maintenance Model, Just World Hypothesis, etc.) to build better general predictions about consumers' reactions to negative emotional experiences. All in all, I hope this dissertation helps invigorate the discussion of the intricacies and depth of the positive effects of negative emotional experiences in consumer behavior, while providing easy-to-implement applications for consumer well-being and better managerial practices.

Tables and Figures

Table 1. Pre- and Post-Choice Guilt and Desire for Self-Improvement by Emotion Condition (Essay 1: Study 2)

Product Choice	Guilt Condition (n = 85)		Control Condition (n = 81)	
	<i>M_{Pre}</i> (SD)	<i>M_{Post}</i> (SD)	<i>M_{Pre}</i> (SD)	<i>M_{Post}</i> (SD)
Guilt Rating (1: not at all, 7: very much)				
Self-Improvement	5.24 (1.36) ^a	4.19 (1.64) ^a	2.38 (1.56)	2.05 (1.30)
Money Only	5.01 (1.11) ^b	4.12 (1.19) ^b	2.58 (1.56)	2.49 (1.44)
Desire for Self-Improvement (- 3: strongly disagree; + 3: strongly agree)				
Self-Improvement	2.60 (0.60) ^c	2.52 (0.66) ^c	2.37 (0.66)	2.40 (0.68)
Money Only	2.28 (0.86)	2.31 (0.82)	2.12 (0.84)	2.09 (0.99)

Note. Letters denote a significant within-condition difference between pre and post measure by choice.

Table 2. Results for the Pre-Test Validating the Emotional Manipulation (Essay 1: Study 3)

Experimental Condition	Emotional Rating (1: the feeling is mild, 5: the feeling is extremely intense)			
	Guilt <i>M</i> (SD)	Shame <i>M</i> (SD)	Embarrassment <i>M</i> (SD)	Sadness <i>M</i> (SD)
Guilt	4.04 (1.00) ^a	3.00 (1.55)	2.65 (1.50)	3.62 (1.39)
Shame	3.63 (1.28)	4.15 (0.99) ^b	2.78 (1.65)	3.59 (1.22)
Embarrassment	1.96 (1.26)	2.75 (1.38)	4.39 (0.79) ^c	2.18 (1.12)
Sadness	2.11 (1.05)	1.97 (1.25)	2.06 (1.41)	4.63 (0.55) ^d
Control	1.08 (0.36)	1.14 (0.48)	1.30 (0.88)	1.30 (0.57)

Note: Letters denote a value significantly higher ($p < .001$) than its closest experimental condition.

Figure 1. WTP for Self-Improvement and Comparison Products as a Function of Emotion Condition (Essay 1: Study 3)

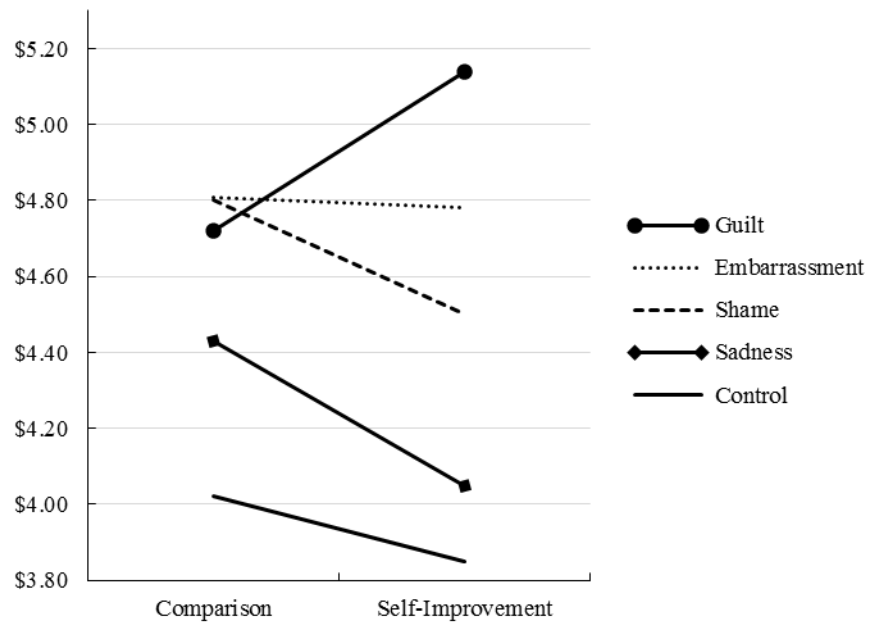


Figure 2. WTP for Self-Improvement and Comparison Products as a Function of Emotion and Purchasing for Self or for Other (Essay 1: Study 4)

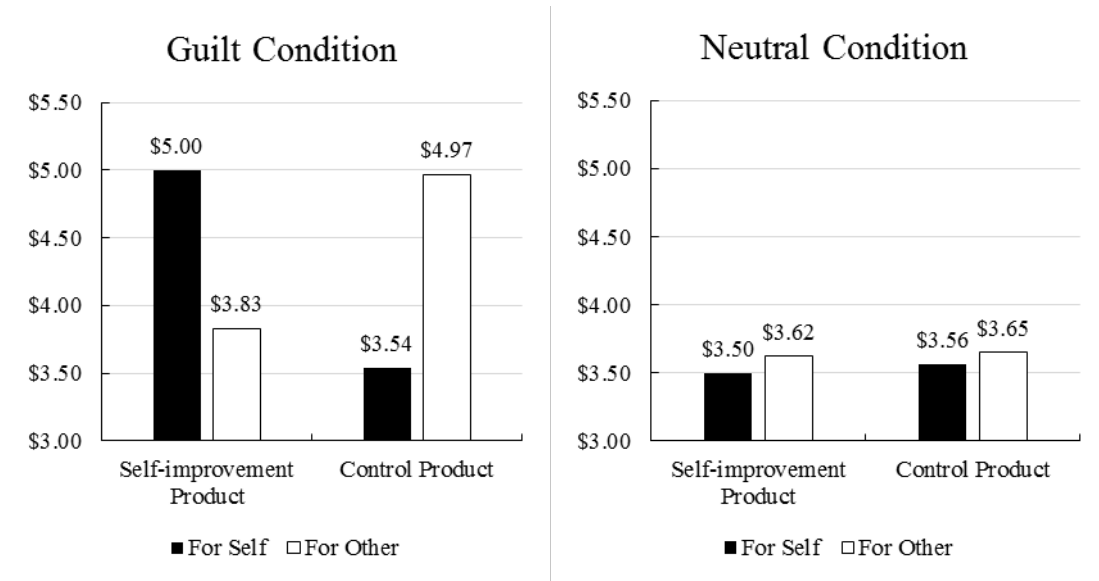
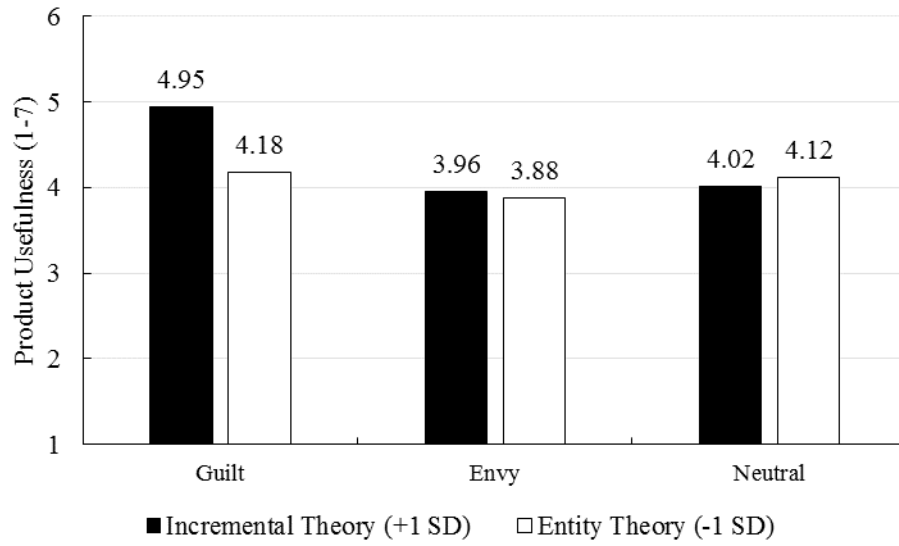


Figure 3. Product Usefulness as a Function of Emotion and Self-Theory (Essay 1: Study 5)



Note: Values denote projected scores.

Figure 4. Patronage Intentions as a Function of Review Type (Essay 2: Study 1)

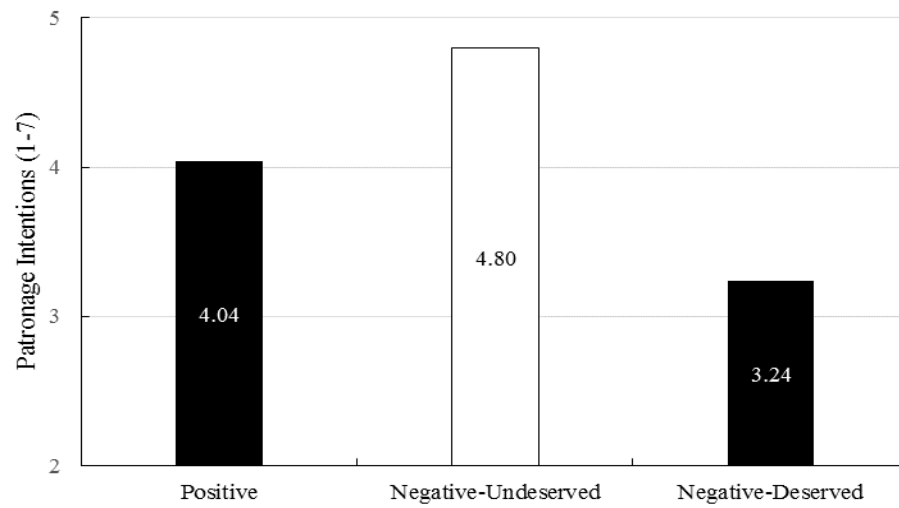


Figure 5. Patronage Intention as a Function of Review Type and Source Expertise (Essay 2: Study 2)

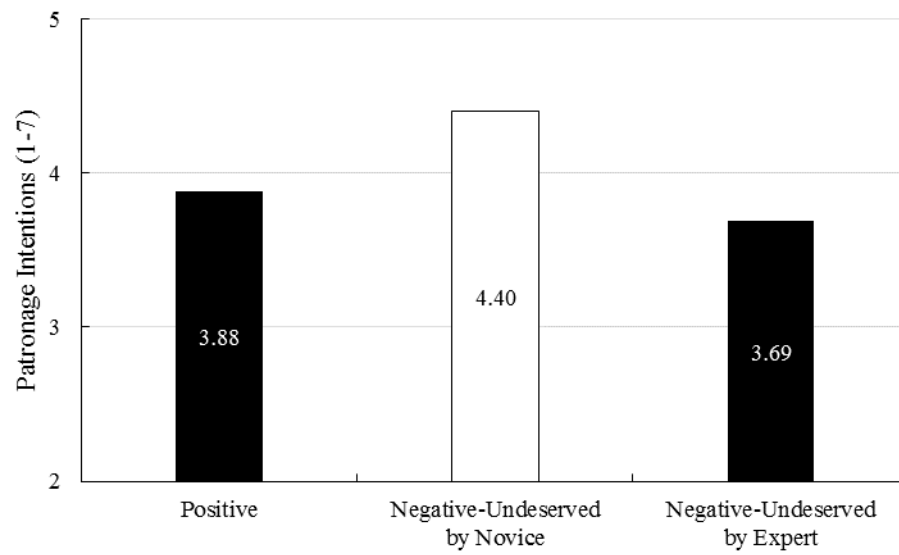


Figure 6. Patronage Intentions as a Function of Negative Review Deservingness and Trait Empathy (Essay 2: Study 3)

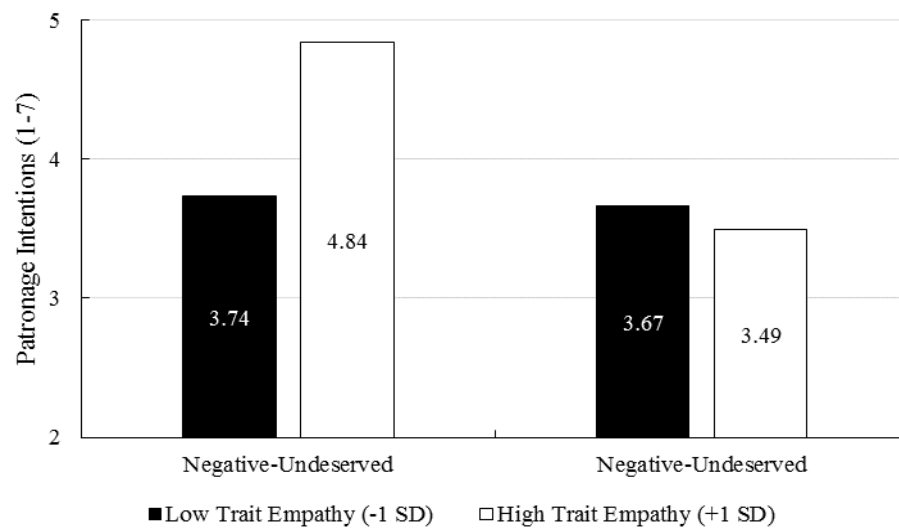


Figure 7. Purchase Intentions as a Function of Negative Review Deservingness and Empathy Suppressing Task (Essay 2: Study 4)

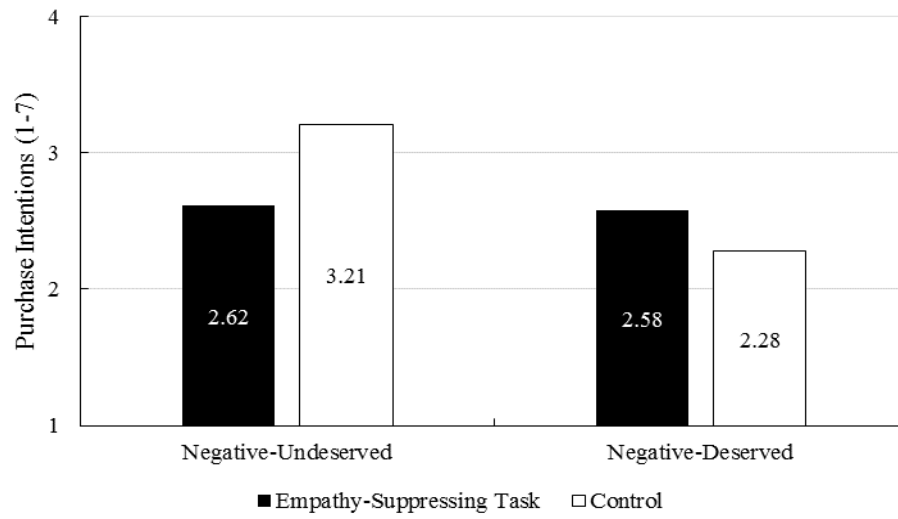
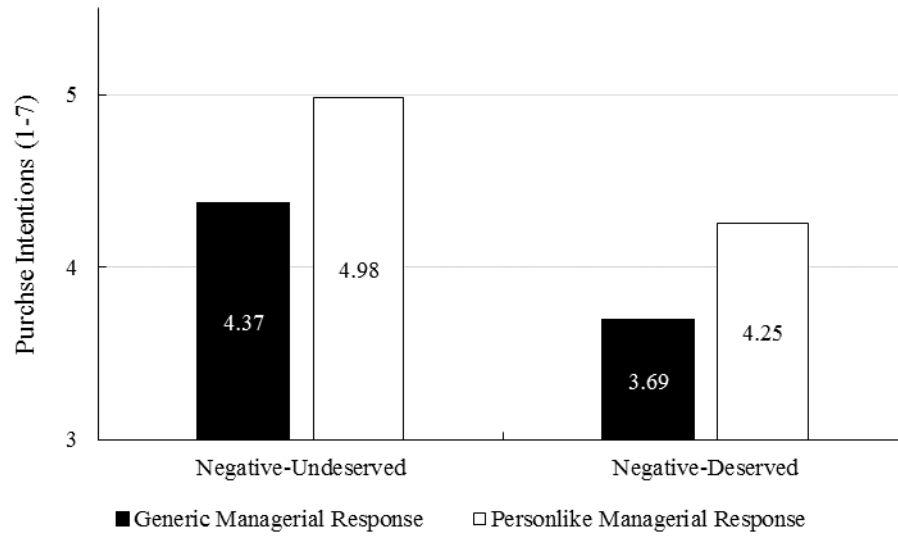


Figure 8. Purchase Intentions as a Function of Negative Review Deservingness and Firm Response Type (Essay 2: Study 5)



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Appendix: Experimental Materials

A. 1 Stimulus (Essay 1: Pilot Study)



**THERE IS NO
SUBSTITUTE FOR BLOOD
YOUR HESITATION
COULD COST
SOMEONE THEIR LIFE.**

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A. 2 Dependent Measure (Essay 1: Pilot Study)

We would like to thank you by offering you the chance to try a sample of one of these two *Vitamin Water* flavors.

Please circle the one you would like to try:

VitaminWater Focus:

Improving your mental performance is key. Focus gives you the clarity and alertness to improve your mental performances.



OR

VitaminWater Essential:

Getting the right hydration is essential for your body. Essential gives you hydration that you need.



A. 3 Product Description (Essay 1: Study 1)

Strive to improve your Fitness?
Argus monitors and manages your activities, food, workouts, sleep, hydration, weight and vitals, helping you to improve and to reach your health goals.



A. 4 Product Description (Essay 1: Study 2)

**Sticky Notes for Effective Knowledge
Retention
The Secret Weapon of Students Wishing to
Improve**



A. 5 Emotion Manipulations (Essay 1: Study 3)

Guilt, Shame, and Embarrassment conditions:

How do the emotions of shame, guilt, and embarrassment differ?

A fundamental difference between shame and guilt centers on the role of the self in these experiences: shame is about the self (“I am a bad person”) and guilt is about the behavior (“I am a good person, but I did something wrong”). In contrast, embarrassment involves less serious transgressions than guilt or shame and is more concerned with unwanted attention.

- Shame arises from objectionable behaviors seen as reflecting an objectionable self (“I did that horrible thing, and therefore *I* am an unworthy, incompetent or bad person”).
- Guilt is concerned with a particular behavior, somewhat apart from the self. Guilt involves a sense of regret or remorse over self-responsibility about a “bad thing” done.
- Embarrassment carries the connotation of being caused by an act that is merely socially unacceptable, rather than morally wrong. When embarrassed, people tend to focus on others' judgments of the behavior, but in a more harmless manner. Embarrassed people believe that others are likely to be amused by the embarrassing event, whereas shame-inducing and guilt-inducing events are amusing to no one.

Sadness condition:

What is sadness?

- Sadness is less tense and a lot more common than many other negative emotions. It consists of feelings of downheartedness, discouragement, loneliness and isolation.

Typical causes of sadness are the commonplace circumstances of everyday life, but especially those that usually involve a physical or psychological form of loss or separation.

A. 6 Product Descriptions (Essay 1: Studies 3 and 5)

Self-improvement product



Product Description:

Herbal Tea for Improving Your Brain Power! Feeling fuzzy when it comes to... um, what were we talking about? From names to numbers, we all tend to forget. But you can do something about it. Get a boost to your mental clarity by trying this caffeine-free herbal brew based on a blend of mental stamina improving ingredients.

Based on stimulating organic rooibos with notes of orange peel, rosemary and gotu kola, this combination is sure to improve your IQ. Now if you could only find that teapot. So sip away and you'll be mentally focused in no time.

Comparison product




Product Description:

Herbal Tea for Lifting Your Spirits! If the sky is gray and cloudy or your spirits could use a little lift, there are lots of mood-enhancing options out there. But few are as delightful as sipping this caffeine-free herbal brew based on a fusion of organic rooibos teas and other mood-lifting ingredients.

Our carefully balanced blend of pleasing lemon balm, St. John's wort and rhodiola does its part to help keep the blues away, improving mood and bringing a smile to your face So sip away and you'll be feeling better in no time.

A. 7 Product Descriptions (Essay 1: Study 4)

Self-improvement product


SLEEP SHEETS™

Strive to improve? Sleep Sheets™ promote restful sleep for those striving to perform at their best and meet their goals during the day. The natural active ingredients in Sleep Sheets are designed to help support your natural sleep cycle. Experience improved daytime energy.

- Sheets™ brand sleep strips help regulate your natural sleep cycle
- Stay focused longer at work
- Promotes brain power and physical strength day after day
- Feel more alert and creative
- All natural / Zero Calories

Try Sheets™

CAN'T SLEEP?



PLACE ON TONGUE...

PROBLEM DISSOLVED!

Comparison product

SLEEP SHEETS™

Need to unwind? Sleep Sheets™ promote restful sleep for those seeking serenity and rest at night. The natural active ingredients in Sleep Sheets are designed to help support your natural sleep cycle. Experience a restful sleep and tranquility.

- Sheets™ brand sleep strips help regulate your natural sleep cycle
- Stay asleep longer in your bed
- Promotes sleep comfort night after night
- Wake up feeling refreshed and relaxed
- All natural / Zero Calories

Try Sheets™

CAN'T SLEEP?



PLACE ON TONGUE...

REST AND RELAX!

A. 8 Follow-Up Analysis (Essay 1: Study 4)

Method

Participants and design. One hundred fifty nine participants recruited through Amazon Mechanical Turk took part in this experiment (45% female, $M_{\text{age}} = 36.1$) utilizing a one-factor two-level (product type: self-improvement vs. control) between-participants design with a pre-choice guilt recall held constant. The dependent variable of interest was willingness to pay for the product.

Procedure. Using the same procedure as in study 4, participants were asked to recall a time where they felt guilty, and then to consider purchasing either a self-improvement or control product for a friend. Participants first rated the appropriateness of this product as a gift for a friend using three 7-point items: “It would feel awkward to offer my friend this type of product,” “I would feel uncomfortable giving this product to my friend,” “I would feel embarrassed to give this product to my friend” (1: not at all, 7: very much; $\alpha = .95$). Then participants rated their willingness to pay for the product—for their friend—using the same procedure as in study 4.

Results and discussion

Gift inappropriateness. Participants rated the self-improvement product as a more inappropriate gift ($M = 3.38$, $SD = 2.06$) than the control product ($M = 2.79$, $SD = 1.63$; $t(157) = 2.02$, $p < .05$).

Willingness to pay. Participants were willing to pay more for the control product ($M = 3.98$, $SD = 1.85$) compared to the self-improvement product ($M = 3.27$, $SD = 2.05$); $t(157) = 2.26$, $p < .05$). Those results replicate the pattern observed in study 4.

Indirect effect. Next, I tested whether the perceived gift inappropriateness could explain the observed difference in willingness to pay for the product type (coded: 0 = control, 1 = self-improvement) when purchasing for a friend. Results show a significant total indirect effect for the mediation path through perceived inappropriateness (indirect effect = $-.22$, $SE = 0.12$, $CI_{95}[-.51, -.02]$). Stated differently, the self-improvement was perceived as a more inappropriate gift for a friend than the control product ($a = 0.59$, $SE = .29$, $CI_{95}[0.01, 1.17]$). In turn, the more inappropriate the gift was perceived, the less people were willing to pay for it ($b = -.38$, $SE = .08$, $CI_{95}[-0.53, -.02]$).

This follow-up study supports the explanation that purchasing a self-improvement product for others may have been perceived as an inappropriate gift.

A. 9 Summary of Pre-Tests for Dependent Variables (Essay 1)

Self-Improvement features (1: not at all, 7: very much):

- This [product] is positioned as a product that can help me improve.
- This [product] is positioned as a product that can help me become better.
- This [product] is positioned as a product that can help me address my shortcomings.
- This [product] is positioned as a product that can help me enhance my performance.

Study: Product Type (N)	Self-Improvement Mean (SD)	Control Mean (SD)	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
Pilot: Drinks (N = 39)	5.44* (1.17) $\alpha = .80$	4.45 (1.38) $\alpha = .82$	4.64	<.001
S1: App (N = 35)	5.81* (0.99) $\alpha = .89$	NA	NA	NA
S2: Post-it (N = 35)	5.21* (1.22) $\alpha = .87$	NA	NA	NA
S3/S5: Teas (N = 33)	5.53* (1.32) $\alpha = .93$	4.71 (1.68) $\alpha = .81$	3.34	<.01
S4: Sleep sheets (N = 35)	4.95* (1.15) $\alpha = .84$	4.31 (1.23) $\alpha = .81$	3.75	<.001

*denotes a value significantly above the center point of the scale at $p < .01$ for self-improvement products

Vice-Virtuous features (1: more of a vice, 9: more of a virtue; Khan and Dhar 2007):

Study: Product Type (N)	Self-Improvement Mean (SD)	Control Mean (SD)	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
Pilot: Drinks (N = 34)	5.94 (1.94)	5.76 (2.20)	0.57	>.50
S3/S5: Teas (N = 36)	5.68 (1.84)	5.94 (1.71)	0.26	>.80
S4: Sleep sheets (N = 43)	5.38 (2.02)	5.60 (1.98)	1.18	>.25

Note: This pre-test was performed only for studies comparing choice between both type of products

Utilitarian-Hedonic features (1: utilitarian, 9: hedonic; Khan and Dhar 2006),

Study: Product Type (N)	Self-Improvement Mean (SD)	Control Mean (SD)	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
Pilot: Drinks (N = 46)	5.70 (2.37)	5.67 (2.46)	0.06	>.90
S3/S5: Teas (N = 33)	5.33 (2.50)	5.85 (2.00)	1.22	>.20
S4: Sleep sheets (N = 39)	4.56 (2.44)	4.77 (2.21)	0.83	>.40

Note: This pre-test was performed only for studies comparing choice between two type of products

Self-Control Features (1: strongly disagree, 9: strongly agree; adapted from Giner-Sorolla 2001)

- It would take a lot of self-control for me to resist consuming this product.
- I would have to use a great deal of willpower to avoid consuming this product.
- It would be hard for me to resist this product.
- This is a very tempting product.
- This is the type of product that I would be motivated to limit my intake of.
- This is the type of product I would try to resist.
- I would be motivated to try to control how much of this product I consume.

Study: Product Type (N)	Self-Improvement Mean (SD)	Control Mean (SD)	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
Pilot: Drinks (N = 35)	4.29 (1.33) $\alpha = .80$	4.09* (1.16) $\alpha = .75$	1.11	> .25
S3/S5: Teas (N = 32)	3.94 (1.32) $\alpha = .68$	3.75* (1.50) $\alpha = .80$	0.89	>.30
S4: Sleep sheets (N = 34)	4.77 (1.23) $\alpha = .60$	4.83 (1.27) $\alpha = .60$	0.47	>.60

Note: This pre-test was performed only for studies comparing choice between two type of products

Desirability Ratings (1: not at all, 7: very much)

- This *flavor* looks appetizing.
 - This *flavor* looks tasty.
 - I would be interested in trying this *flavor*.
- **Flavor* was substituted for *product* in study 4

Study: Product Type (N)	Self-Improvement Mean (SD)	Control Mean (SD)	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
Pilot: Drinks (N = 34)	3.55 (1.85) $\alpha = .92$	3.61 (1.83) $\alpha = .92$	0.34	>.70
S3/S5: Teas (N = 42)	4.49 (1.77) $\alpha = .93$	4.71 (1.56) $\alpha = .96$	0.91	>.35
S4: Sleep sheets (N = 34)	5.13 (1.75) $\alpha = .94$	5.08 (1.81) $\alpha = .95$	0.52	>.60

Note: This pre-test was performed only for studies comparing choice between two type of products

A. 10 Review (Essay 2: Pilot Study)

YUCK! Sauder gave me the worst years of my life. I went against all instinct to go here in order to stay close to home and not pay for housing. Don't be fooled by all the positive rankings that Sauder gets. I'm not sure how the administration fooled them, but this was the worst experience ever.

Not only were the classes HUGE (30 students per class), but the professors themselves were laughable. I'm pretty sure that I could have taught the classes better than they did when I was 4 and have been more attractive while doing it. Considering the awful nature of the classroom, it is SHOCKING to me how much work they required you to do. How do they expect students to read AND write papers? It's absurd.

Given the price of tuition, they should just give us our degree, were paying for it anyway. Don't even get me started on the incredibly unhelpful and ridiculous staff there. Career services were the least helpful group of rude people I have ever met. I also know how to use Monster.com, no need to get superior about it.

Sauder Sucks!

A. 11 Reviews (Essay 2: Studies 1 and 2)



- Positive review

"Found this new breakfast place the other day. For \$12, I got the tasty full meal breakfast with coffee. I liked it."

- Negative-deserved review

"Found this new breakfast place the other day. For \$7.50, I got the tasty full meal breakfast. I liked it."

"But I can't believe they had the audacity of asking \$4.50 extra for coffee. This is unacceptable!!! I say we boycott these thieves."

- Negative-undeserved review

"Found this new breakfast place the other day. For \$11.50, I got the tasty full meal breakfast. I liked it."

"But I can't believe they had the audacity of asking 50 cents extra for coffee. This is unacceptable!!! I say we boycott these thieves."

A. 12 Expertise manipulation (Essay 2: Study 2)

- Expert source condition

Jonathan Bauer is a well-known food blogger in Seattle who enjoys hordes of devoted followers. He constantly posts about his various eating experiences in and around the city on social media and on his blog, which gets thousands of views a week. Restaurant owners around the country have feared his make-or-break reviews of new restaurants. Jonathan's specialty is brunches.

- Novice source condition

Jonathan Bauer is a network administrator in Seattle and a self-proclaimed food blogger. In his free time, he posts about his various eating experiences in and around the city on social media and on his blog, which gets dozens of views each month. His friends and colleagues like to see his posts about restaurants because his reviews are entertaining and easy to read. Jonathan's specialty is fast food.

A. 13 Reviews (Essay 2: Study 3)

- Negative Review Conditions (Deserved: 30 minutes; Undeserved: 5 minutes)

30(5) Minutes Too Long

There is no arguing the food and ambiance here are great. The fact people are willing to stand in line in the cold rain speaks for itself. As do all the positive posts about the food. What I can't get over is the total and utter arrogance of the employees and disrespect they seem to have for paying customers.

I ordered a fish and soup special (\$16), and the fish was really good. It was bourbon-glazed salmon with rice, but the soup wasn't warm enough. We politely told the waiter about it, and he offered to replace the soup with a fresh bowl. He left for the kitchen, but only came back after AT LEAST FIVE (THIRTY) LONG MINUTES.

I understand it was a busy moment for them, but his delivery took way too long and the rest of my food had gone cold by then. It was unacceptable, and I let him know as much. We asked to talk to the manager, but the manager declined to give us free drinks or dessert. That would have been the least he could have done. I felt completely offended and disgusted at this treatment. If I hadn't been so hungry, I'd have told the man what I thought and left.

Instead, I did not tip the waiter and wrote a note on the receipt to let him know exactly what I thought of his abhorrent service. Given the fact many places offer fabulous food like this with the added bonus of respecting and appreciating the guests, I wouldn't spend my money here ever again.

3 out of **6** found this review helpful

A. 14 Empathy-suppressing task (Essay 2: Study 4)

US corporate profits soar as wages stagnate

(from Economic Report Weekly)

March 2, 2015

With wages declining or stagnating, corporations are generating ever-greater profits off the backs of workers. According to revised government figures by the Bureau of Labor Statistics, hourly pay rose just 1.3 percent in the third quarter. Over the past year, average hourly pay is up 1.9 percent and average weekly earnings up 2.5 percent. That is barely above the annual increase in the consumer price index of 1.7 percent. For corporations, labor costs have risen just 1.2 percent over the past year, below the annual rate of inflation and well below the long-term average of 2.8 percent.

These figures show the extent to which the so-called economic recovery has been fueled by driving down the wage levels of workers. Increases in productivity and declining labor costs have led to a profit boom, with corporate profits at their highest level in at least 85 years.

In the third quarter, US corporate profits rose 1.7 percent over last year, an adjusted annual rate of \$1.873 trillion compared to \$1.842 trillion in the second quarter. That is the 12th straight quarter that profits have risen year over year. For companies listed in the S&P 500, profits have gone up nearly 12 percent from a year earlier.

Among the sectors seeing significant profit gains was banking. Commercial banks and savings institutions that are insured by the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation saw their aggregate net income increase to \$38.7 billion in the third quarter. That figure was up 7.3 percent from one year ago.

Retail giant Walmart reported net earnings of \$3.71 billion for the quarter ending October 31. The company's revenue beat expectations, rising to \$119 billion in the period.

Please identify how many times the letter "X" appears in the text above.

A. 15 Control task (Essay 2: Study 4)

Whale

(from Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia)

March 2, 2015

Whale is the common name for various marine mammals of the order Cetacea. The term whale sometimes refers to all cetaceans, but more often it excludes dolphins and porpoises, which belong to the suborder Odontoceti (toothed whales).

This suborder includes the sperm whale, killer whale, pilot whale, and beluga whale. The other cetacean suborder, Mysticeti (baleen whales), comprises filter feeders who eat small organisms caught by straining seawater through a comblike structure found in the mouth called baleen. This suborder includes the blue whale, the humpback whale, the bowhead whale and the minke whale. All cetaceans have forelimbs modified as fins, a tail with horizontal flukes, and nasal openings (blowholes) on top of the head. Whales range in size from the blue whale, the largest animal known to have ever existed, at 30 m (98 ft) and 180 tons (180 long tons; 200 short tons), to pygmy species such as the pygmy sperm whale at 3.5 m (11 ft).

Whales inhabit all the world's oceans and number in the millions, with annual population growth rate estimates for various species ranging from 3% to 13%. Whales are long-lived, humpback whales living for up to 77 years while bowhead whales may live for more than a century.

Human hunting of whales from the seventeenth century until 1986 radically reduced the populations of some whale species.

Whales play a role in creation myths, for example among the Inuit, and they are revered by coastal people in countries such as Ghana and Vietnam.

Please identify how many times the letter "X" appears in the text above.

A. 16 Reviews (Essay 2: Study 4)

(9:05pm: Deserved; 9:55pm: Undeserved)

[Cedric TEMPLE](#)

Diner from Vancouver

Joined Jan 2013

DOESN'T LIKE IT

Hard fail...

MAR 18, 2015

I was at the Caravan Coffee on Broadway. I was very unhappy that I was told that I could not have my delicious warm mozzarella and spinach panini. It could not be warmed up because the machines were all being cleaned. The time was only 9:55 *pm*!!! and they close at 10 pm. I had to take my panini home.

I was not happy at all. I am a paying customer and I should be able to have a panini warmed. It shouldn't be my problem that the employees would like to be home early, just pay them to clean after closure. I hope this doesn't happen again and that I can be compensated for this issue.

4 out of 6 found this review helpful

A. 17 Reviews (Essay 2: Study 5)

- Negative-Deserved Complaint with Generic Response



Donna A. Davis ▶ **Freedom Bottleworks**

DON'T DO BUSINESS WITH THIS COMPANY IF YOU WANT THINGS HANDLED RIGHT. THEY PROVIDE A PHONE NUMBER THAT NO ONE EVER ANSWERS. IF YOU HAVE A DEADLINE FORGET IT - product is great - COMPANY IS NOT.

[Comment](#) [Like](#) 24 hours ago via TweetDeck



Freedom Bottleworks We thank you for your order and your desire to support our business. We will inquire in the matter. If you would like to discuss your order, here's our phone number 410-563-0202.

23 hours ago • [Like](#)

- Negative-Undeserved Complaint with Personlike Response



Donna A. Davis ▶ **Freedom Bottleworks**

DON'T DO BUSINESS WITH THIS COMPANY IF YOU WANT THINGS HANDLED RIGHT. THEY PROVIDE A PHONE NUMBER THAT NO ONE EVER ANSWERS AT NIGHT. IF YOU HAVE A DEADLINE DURING CHRISTMAS HOLIDAYS WHEN THEY SHOULD BE WORKING FORGET IT - product is great - COMPANY IS NOT.

[Comment](#) [Like](#) 24 hours ago via TweetDeck



Bob Clark Bob Clark from Freedom Bottleworks here. We thank you for your order and your desire to support our business. We will inquire in the matter. If you would like to discuss your order, here's our phone number 410-563-0202.

23 hours ago • [Like](#)