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Reconnection Through Consumption: Socially Excluded People Adapt Consumption Patterns to Serve Affiliation Needs

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Humans have a fundamental need to affiliate with others and people might use consumption to accomplish this goal. Following this logic, three experiments tested whether socially excluded people were more likely than others to consume in a way that could enhance affiliation. Activating affiliation motives increased willingness to buy a product symbolic of group loyalty (Experiment 1), increased willingness to pay for conspicuous consumption products but not for utilitarian products (Experiment 2), and led people to shift consumption preferences to those predictive of acceptance (Experiment 3). Overall, affiliation motives produced consumption behaviors consistent with prediction from an evolutionary perspective.

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Symposia Summary

Homo Consumicus: Emerging Research in Evolutionary Consumer Behavior

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SESSION OVERVIEW

Evolutionary approaches to studying human behavior have led to broad theoretical advancements in the fields of biology, economics, anthropology, and psychology. In consumer behavior, the year 2007 marks the release of two books on evolutionary approaches to consumption: a textbook (*The Evolutionary Bases of Consumption*) and a forthcoming popular science book (*Faking Fitness: The Evolutionary Origins of Consumer Behavior*). Yet empirical research utilizing evolutionary models in our discipline's top journals have thus far been almost completely absent. Are we as a scientific discipline missing out by potentially neglecting this vastly under-explored theoretical perspective?

The objective of this symposium is to bridge the gap between evolutionary approaches to studying human behavior and mainstream consumer behavior research. Four papers—each consisting of a series of programmatic experiments—will demonstrate how novel insights into consumer behavior can be gained by drawing on an evolutionary perspective. The papers and the discussion that follows aim to demonstrate how an evolutionary approach can be useful for developing novel, unique, and testable consumer behavior hypotheses. Moreover, the session and discussion will emphasize the fact that evolutionary approaches do not aim to replace other theoretical approaches—but instead offer a wide-reaching theoretical framework that can help integrate a number of existing models of consumer behavior, and to explicitly connect them with broad theoretical developments in other disciplines.

While the four papers presented in this symposium use diverse experimental methodologies to test specific hypotheses, all of the papers center on a core evolutionary theme: How consumer behavior and consumption experience is influenced by two evolutionary human motives—the motive to attract romantic partners (papers 1 and 2) and the motive to affiliate with others (papers 3 and 4). Examining the motive to attract a romantic partner, Griskevicius, Tybur, Sundie, Cialdini, Miller, and Kenrick draw on costly signaling theory from biology to examine conspicuous consumption, altruism, and philanthropy. They find that activating a romantic motive leads people to strategically spend money on flashy conspicuous purchases to display wealth. Van den Bergh and Dewitte examine the effects of “sexy” ads on consumer behavior, showing that the consequences of sexual imagery in advertising extends much further than merely to the evaluation of the product or brand—including that seeing attractive members of the opposite sex in an ad leads men to display resources and leads women to display physical attractiveness.

Mead, Vohs, Baumeister, and Rawn examine how social exclusion, which can trigger the motive to affiliate, leads people to consume in a way that enhances their chance of forging new social bonds. For example, they find that participants threatened with social exclusion are more likely than others to mimic the consumption patterns of a new peer. Ramanathan and McGill examine the motive of affiliation by simultaneously tracking the second-by-second evaluations of individuals' shared consumption experience. They find that shared consumption experiences foster affiliation between strangers via the emergence of mimicked non-verbal cues.

Finally, Darren Dahl will draw on his expertise in consumer behavior research and marketing practice to initiate a dialogue between the audience and the presenters. Particularly, researchers

from myriad backgrounds are invited to engage in a discussion on whether and how an evolutionary approach could be integrated into consumer behavior research and practice. We hope to particularly emphasize that although evolutionary models clearly need more rigorous testing by consumer behavior researchers, an evolutionary approach provides fertile ground for a wide range of novel hypotheses and theoretical insights in consumer behavior.

EXTENDED ABSTRACTS

“Blatant Benevolence and Conspicuous Consumption: When Romantic Motives Elicit Strategic Costly Signals”

Vladas Griskevicius, Arizona State University

Joshua M. Tybur, University of New Mexico

Jill M. Sundie, University of Houston

Robert B. Cialdini, Arizona State University,

Geoffrey F. Miller, University of New Mexico

Douglas T. Kenrick, Arizona State University

On Valentine's Day 2003, Donald Trump pledged a million dollars to charity. A few years earlier, Ted Turner pledged a billion dollars to humanitarian causes. While such valiant spectacles of public philanthropy are actually fairly common, they seem somewhat puzzling. Trump and Turner, for example, epitomize many people's stereotypes of self-interested and self-serving capitalists; both men appear to obtain great satisfaction from lavish lifestyles and openly flaunt their extravagant private jets, luxurious yachts, and chauffeured limousines. Yet each of these seemingly selfish tycoons chose to give away a phenomenal amount of their own money to complete strangers. What motives might underlie such costly and apparently selfless deeds?

In the current research we investigated the idea that self-sacrifice might actually be self-presentation. Although it may have been a mere coincidence that Trump's donation was announced on Valentine's Day, there may indeed be a connection between philanthropic displays, lavish spending, and courtship. Deriving specific hypotheses from costly signaling theory, in three experiments we tested whether merely activating romantic motives in individuals might indeed elicit public philanthropy, conspicuous consumption, and blatant benevolence.

Donating one's own resources to a stranger is the essence of altruism. From an evolutionary perspective, altruism has always been somewhat of a puzzle—natural selection would not favor people to give away resources to people who aren't family members or to strangers who are unlikely to reciprocate such gifts. From an evolutionary perspective, for instance, it's difficult to understand why 70% of U.S. households give money to charity or why nearly 10 million Americans each year give blood to strangers whom they'll never meet.

A theory that may help explain such benevolent and often expensive behaviors is costly signaling theory (Miller 2000; Zahavi and Zahavi 1997). This theory was developed in biology and has garnered empirical support in studies of animals and of hunter-gatherer societies. Costly signaling theory suggests that individuals often engage in behaviors that are costly—behaviors that involve significant amounts of resources, energy, risk, or time—as a way of signaling to others useful information about themselves. According to costly signaling theory, such signals are ultimately adaptive

because they increase an individual's probability of attracting a mate.

According to a costly signaling theory, public philanthropy is a costly signal that displays two important features about an individual: That the person has abundant *resources*, and that the person is *prosocial*. According to the theory, just like a peacock's tail, such displays might ultimately serve to increase the signaler's ability to attract and retain mates. Following this logic, we examine whether merely activating mating motives in individuals would indeed lead people to produce displays of conspicuous consumption, blatant benevolence, and public philanthropy.

Three experiments found results consistent with costly signaling theory and with research on mate preference. Specifically, a romantic desire led men to increase their spending on conspicuous purchases—products that are luxurious, frivolous, and publicly consumed. But a romantic desire did not lead men to spend more on inconspicuous purchases—products that are necessities and are consumed in private. For women, a romantic desire increased blatant benevolence—helping that is social and public. However, mating motives did not increase women's inconspicuous helping—helping that is non-social and unlikely to be observed by one's friends or acquaintances. Romantic motives also led both men and women to increase their conspicuous financial generosity—to spend more money in publicly charitable ways.

The present research supports the hypothesis that blatant benevolence and conspicuous consumption are costly signaling displays that can function to attract and retain mates. That is, merely putting men and women in romantic state produce a cascade of strategic (although often non-conscious) behaviors such as conspicuous spending, public helping, and philanthropy. We believe that the present work and an evolutionary approach reflect only the tip of a data-rich iceberg that will serve as an impetus for novel and promising consumer behavior research.

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“When do Men Pay the Bill and Women Advertise Physical Attractiveness?”

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Advertisers search for a way to break through the clutter by using sexually oriented appeals in marketing campaigns. Advertisements became much “sexier” in past decades and the percentage of less-than fully dressed models in commercials continues to increase. Previous research on the use of sexual imagery in advertising has focused on consumers' brand recall and recognition, appeal evaluation, attention, purchase intentions, product perception, persuasiveness, and communication effectiveness. The present investigation differs from earlier work by showing that the consequences of using “mating primes” extend much further than the evaluation of the product or brand. Deriving specific hypotheses from an evolutionary framework, two experiments tested how exposure to opposite-sex advertisements influences consumption geared towards mate-attraction.

Given the centrality of reproduction in the evolution of humans, sensory stimuli from opposite sex individuals act as input cues that prime a psychological orientation directed toward attracting a mate (Roney 2003). We hypothesize that exposure to mating primes instigates consumption patterns that closely match prefer-

ences of the opposite sex. Women are more likely than men to seek non-appearance-related factors in a mate, such as cues to resource possession or acquisition, while men more than women seek attributes associated with reproductive value or fertility (Buss 1988, 1989; Schmitt and Buss 1996). Following this logic, after exposure to mating primes, men should be more willing to pay the bill, since this is an indicator of resource possession. In contrast, women should be more willing than men to display physical attractiveness to advertise their reproductive value.

Our results supported the basic cognitive model of mate attraction (Roney 2003). Ads featuring desirable women led to an increase in mate-attraction tactics among men: Levels of financial investment in a romantic relationship were dependent on exposure to advertisements featuring opposite sex individuals. Following mating primes, men desired to invest more in a romantic relationship in an effort to increase their romantic appeal. In contrast, after exposure to desirable men, women advertised their feminine morphology. Using a breast rating scale, consisting of five drawings of women ordered by increasing breast size, women indicated that they preferred larger breasts after exposure to desirable opposite sex individuals.

We investigated the interaction between relationship preference style (committed versus uncommitted) and type of advertisement (parenting versus ‘sexy’). Research indicates that individuals with a preference for committed relationships seek out romantic partners who will be likely to be good parents for their offspring. In contrast, individuals with a preference for brief uncommitted relationships prefer romantic partners who possess characteristic associated with physical attractiveness (Simpson and Gangestad 1992). Following this logic, we predicted that parenting primes (i.e., advertisements featuring individuals in positive interaction with a child) should affect individuals with a preference for committed relationships to a greater extent than physical attractiveness primes (i.e., advertisements featuring ‘sexy’ individuals). The opposite should hold for individuals who prefer brief uncommitted relationships. As predicted, commitment-focused men were more willing to invest in a romantic relationship (i.e., pay for a date) after exposure to parenting primes, whereas brief-relationship-focused men were more willing to pay after physical attractiveness primes. Similar effects were observed among women. Brief-relationship-focused women prefer larger breasts after exposure to physical attractiveness primes, whereas commitment-focused women prefer larger breasts after parenting primes.

The present research differs from earlier work by showing that the consequences of sexual imagery in advertising extend further than the evaluation of the product or brand. Two experiments demonstrate that advertisements featuring opposite sex individuals instigate consumption patterns geared towards attracting a romantic partner. Depending on the qualities one seeks in a potential partner, opposite sex individuals displaying specific desirable qualities (parenting vs. attractiveness) produce the strongest effects.

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"Reconnection Through Consumption: Socially Excluded People Adapt Consumption Patterns to Serve Affiliation Needs"

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Humans have evolved as a hyper-social species and have a fundamental need for affiliation (Baumeister and Leary 1995; Buss and Kenrick 1998). When this need for affiliation is thwarted (e.g., by social rejection), people search for ways to forge new connections with others to re-establish social ties (Maner, DeWall, Baumeister, and Schaller 2007). The present research examined how the motivation to affiliate with others influences consumption. Specifically, in three experiments we examined whether people who are socially rejected (compared to people who are not socially rejected or who are socially accepted) would use consumption to forge new social bonds and promote affiliation.

Much research indicates that people use consumption behaviors as a way to form impressions of others. People's clothing serves as cue to their personality, people ascribe personality traits to users of specific products (Shavitt and Nelson 2000), and people form impressions of others based on cultural tastes (Belk, Bahn, and Mayer 1982). Recent research also indicates that people use consumption as a means to try and help achieve a temporarily activated goal. For example, using an evolutionary theoretical framework, Griskevicius and colleagues (2007) demonstrated that after activating men and women's motive to attract a romantic partner, people's consumption patterns shift in a specific manner that could help them fulfill their motive. Men with a romantic goal, for instance, signal their desirability as a potential mate through increased conspicuous consumption that can display wealth. Conversely, inducing a mating motive in women resulted in increased public helping to display prosociality.

Although an evolutionary perspective suggests that affiliation motives are likely to be a particularly strong driver of human behavior, little work has examined the influence of affiliation goals on consumption. To begin redressing this imbalance, we examined whether merely activating a motive to affiliate would influence people's consumption behavior. Specifically, in three experiments we tested whether people who had been socially excluded (compared to those who received negative non-social feedback or who had been accepted) would engage in consumption behaviors that could enhance their chances of affiliation.

In experiment 1, participants were led to believe that their partner declined to have a face-to-face interaction with them. The reason for the partner's departure constituted the rejection manipulation. Participants in the non-rejected condition were told that their partner had forgotten about an appointment, whereas participants in the rejected condition were told that their partner left the experiment

because of a dislike for the participant. After the rejection manipulation, participants were given \$10 (ostensibly for their participation) and were allowed to peruse products for sale in a laboratory store. Results indicated that rejected participants were more likely than non-rejected participants to purchase school spirit wristbands, a product symbolic of group affiliation and loyalty.

In experiment 2, participants were asked to indicate how much money they would be willing to pay for 10 products that were categorized as either conspicuous consumption items that are usually displayed in public (e.g., Rolex, Audi) or utilitarian items (e.g., rug, coffee maker). As predicted, socially excluded participants (compared to controls) were willing to pay more for conspicuous consumption items. However, there was no difference between the groups in willingness to pay for utilitarian items, suggesting that the effect of affiliation motives are specific to products that would be consumed publicly and could therefore be used as symbols of status and group membership. Additional data indicated that these findings could not be explained by differences in emotion or mood between the experimental groups.

In experiment 3, participants were led to believe they could anticipate a life devoid of social connections (social exclusion condition) or a life full of strong social connections (social acceptance condition). After the manipulation, participants were told that they would be having a discussion with another person. Before the discussion, however, participants reviewed a questionnaire that was purportedly completed by their partner—the partner was depicted as either a lavish spender or a frugal spender. Participants' desire for an expensive watch (lavish product), a Sam's Club Membership (frugal product), and Netflix service (neutral product) were then assessed. As predicted, for participants expecting to meet a lavish spender, social exclusion increased desire for a luxurious watch. In contrast, for participants expecting to meet a frugal spender, social exclusion increased desire for a Sam's Club Membership. There were no differences in willingness to pay for Netflix service between groups.

In sum, the present studies indicate that people who are socially excluded adjust their consumption patterns in a manner that could increase their chance of forging social bonds. The present research highlights how social motivations such as affiliation can influence consumption patterns, and how an evolutionary theoretical perspective can provide a useful framework for understanding, predicting, and testing consumption behaviors.

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"Emergent Affiliation through Non-Verbal Goal Contagion Effects in Shared Experiences"

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Imagine going on a blind date to a movie with someone. Your partner in the experience may have very different goals during the experience compared to you. The question that we address in this paper is whether people are so sensitive to non-verbal cues during the experience that they can sense whether they share the same or different goals in the experience, and whether such a sense of rapport can predict subsequent evaluations of the experience.

Consistent with an evolutionary perspective on the goal of affiliation and social mimicry, recent work has shown that people tend to adopt others' moods and feelings upon observing their emotional expressions. A common finding in this research is that people's expressions of emotions may rub off on each other so that people acting together come to catch each others' moods, eventually even moving up and down together in a shared emotional rhythm (Neumann and Strack 2000; Totterdell et al. 1998). Further, people can often sense and adopt the goals of others outside of awareness (Aarts, Gollwitzer, and Hassin 2004). Thus, even if people do not initially know the goal that a partner is pursuing, they obtain emotional feedback that confirms or disconfirms their expectations of their partner's goal pursuit, which in turn leads to a feeling of being matched or mismatched. Thus, emotional expressions carry information not just about what a partner is feeling, but also about the goals that he or she is currently pursuing.

In our first study, we manipulated the goals that participants had during a viewing experience, whereby the goals were either matched or mismatched. Specifically, we instructed participants to observe a humorous video clip with the goal of enjoying it or evaluating it. These instructions thus created three possible combinations of goals that people might have while sharing an experience—a) both individuals may have a consummatory motive of enjoying the experience, b) both individuals may have an instrumental motive of critically evaluating or judging the experience, and c) one of the individuals may want to enjoy the experience while the other may want to evaluate it. Participants were not told what goal had been assigned to their partner. Online ratings on a continuous scale (0=dislike very much, 10=like very much) were collected every second for both participants via a joystick. We ran a cross-spectral analysis on the resultant time series to determine how people's evaluations covaried at different frequencies—that is, whether evaluations converged in short (every 2 to every 28 seconds) or long cycles (every 30 seconds or less often). Short cycle covariation would suggest that people were picking up non-verbal cues through frequent glances at each other, while long-cycle covariation would suggest that the effects were more subtle and indicative of long-run affiliation.

We found that matched goals (regardless whether goals were instrumental or consummatory) led to greater covariation in both the short and long cycle range. However, when both forms of

covariation were included as predictors of retrospective evaluations (controlling for individual level peak and end affect), only long cycle covariation was significant, suggesting that the enjoyment of a shared experience depends on subtle affiliation rather than overt agreement or disagreement on the goals one brings to the experience.

In a second study, we included an individual difference variable (self-monitoring) to see if the effects obtained above were moderated by the degree to which people were sensitive to social cues. Once again, we used the same humorous video clip and captured online evaluations via a joystick. The resultant time series were analyzed using cross-spectral analysis, which yielded measures of short and long cycle covariance. In the short cycle range of frequencies, we found two main effects—people with matched goals had a greater covariance compared to those with mismatched goals, and high self-monitors had a greater covariance compared to low self-monitors. In the long cycle range of frequencies, we obtained the same main effects, and also found an interaction such that for people with matched goals, covariance was higher for high versus low self-monitors; while for those with mismatched goals, there was no difference in covariance across levels of self-monitoring. It thus appears that high self-monitors seem especially adept at sensing subtle affiliation cues when they share the same goals with others.

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