Too Impatient to Smell the Roses: Exposure to Fast Food Brands Impedes Happiness

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In two different experiments, we found that exposure to fast-food brands undermined people’s ability to experience happiness from pleasurable visual and auditory stimuli. Mediational analyses demonstrated that exposure to fast-food brands affected happiness by inducing greater impatience, measured by both subjective perception of time passage and self-reports of experienced impatience.

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The Time of Our Lives: The Role of Time in Consumer Well-Being and Virtue

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Paper #1: Too Impatient to Smell the Roses: Exposure to Fast Food Brands Impedes Happiness
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Paper #2: Happiness from Ordinary and Extraordinary Experiences
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Paper #3: Time, Money, and Morality
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Paper #4: Temporal Decay, Reinstatement, and Debiasing of Self-Deception
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SESSION OVERVIEW

Time is perhaps our most precious resource: the number of hours and days we are granted is decidedly finite. How can we spend the finite time we are allotted to most benefit ourselves and others? The four papers in this session examine time from different angles to highlight its central role in consumer well-being and virtue. Together, they demonstrate how our conceptualization of time, as well as its actual passage, is imperative to understanding the effects of our decisions on our own well-being and the well-being of others.

In particular, the first two papers examine the effects of time on happiness from people’s own experiences. The first paper shows that exposure to fast-food brands affects subjective time perception, making people impatient and less able to enjoy happiness from pleasurable experiences. The second paper demonstrates how perceptions of the time people have left in life impact the relative happiness they gain from ordinary and extraordinary experiences. The final two papers investigate how time influences immoral behaviors that could affect others’ well-being. The third paper finds that activating the concept of time encourages self-reflection and reduces immoral behaviors. The last paper examines how self-deception and immoral behaviors attenuate with the passage of time.

These four papers echo this year’s theme, “Making a Difference,” as all of them illuminate specific behaviors and choices that can make a difference in how well people live, in terms of both experienced well-being and honest behaviors. Each paper contributes to the study of consumer well-being or morality by highlighting the integral role of time. Given the fundamental importance of these constructs, we expect our proposed symposium to generate significant interest among a broad audience at ACR, including researchers with interests in well-being, time, aging, social connection, prosocial behavior, morality, and decision making. All four papers are either completed manuscripts or manuscripts in preparation.

The goal of the session is to incite questions and future research on the determinants of consumer well-being and virtue and the psychological influence of temporal factors. Each presenter will have fifteen minutes to present their paper, leaving about fifteen minutes for questions from the audience, integrative discussion, and ideas for future research.

While all of these papers relate to consumer well-being and time, each paper provides a unique perspective and proposes different answers to the fundamental question, “What can we do to live well?” By integrating different dimensions of time, measures of well-being and virtuous behavior, environmental triggers, and psychological factors, we hope to provoke a fruitful discussion at ACR that bears on both important theoretical and substantive issues.

Too Impatient to Smell the Roses: Exposure to Fast Food Brands Impedes Happiness

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

There is more to life than increasing its speed.
—Mahatma Gandhi

Innovative products and services offering convenience, speed, and temporal efficiency have brought remarkable changes to the use of time in our society. While we used to wait for weeks or months for letters to arrive, simultaneous global communication between individuals and groups for negligible cost is now only a few key strokes away. The processing of information is on a similar asymptotic trajectory approaching instantaneity: Sifting through piles of papers and books in libraries has largely been replaced by online search engines that deliver almost instant hits. This societal shift towards the instantaneous and the acceleration of activities with the explicit intention of saving time is infused into our very sustenance. Frozen prepared meals save us from having to spend time preparing food and the microwave saves us from having to wait for an oven to cook it. Better yet, fast food restaurants offer hot meals that can be picked up at drive-thru windows and are ready to be consumed on the go.

We tested whether exposure to the ultimate symbols of an impatience culture—fast-food brands—undermined people’s ability to experience happiness from pleasurable visual and auditory stimuli. The essence of fast food is not what you eat (e.g., tacos, fried chicken, burgers, or pizza), but how you eat it. This is meaningfully conveyed by the manner in which fast food is served. Fast-food packaging facilitates temporal efficiency because there are no dishes to wash, no waiter to wait for, and portable containers make meals easier to eat while multitasking (i.e. in the car or at your desk). To demonstrate that the implicit effects of fast food occurs independent of the type of food, we examined whether the same food served in different packaging would interfere with people’s enjoyment of pleasurable stimuli. Participants in the fast-food condition viewed pictures of food in ready-to-go branded packaging; whereas, participants in the control condition view the same food displayed on ceramic tableware.

To determine whether fast food impedes happiness directly or by interfering with enjoyment of pleasant experiences, Experiment 1 randomly assigned participants to rate their state of happiness after seeing 10 beautiful nature photos or not. We hypothesize that when participants view the beautiful nature photos, those primed with fast food would be less happy than those primed with control stimuli, but that when there are no photos, the priming stimuli would not cause any differences in people’s state of happiness. Therefore, Experiment 1 enabled us to assess whether fast food makes people less likely to “smell the roses.”

Two hundred fifty-seven participants were randomly assigned to a 2 (fast food vs. control) × 2 (pictures vs. no pictures) factortable.
rial design. Among participants who did not have the opportunity to view the nature pictures, those in the fast-food condition exhibited a non-significant trend to be slightly happier (M=4.64, SD=1.51) than those in the control condition (M=4.25, SD=1.62), t(107)=−1.28, p=.20. Among those participants who had a chance to view the nature pictures, however, those in the fast-food condition reported a significantly lower state of happiness (M=4.86, SD=1.34) than those in the control condition (M=5.45, SD=1.18), t(146)=−2.83, p=.005. This revealed that fast food does not have a direct negative effect on happiness, but rather impairs individuals’ positive emotional response to pleasant stimuli. Importantly, this suggests that impatience only manifests its deleterious emotional influence by interfering with the experience of pleasurable stimuli that have the potential to be relished.

In Experiment 2, one hundred and twenty-two participants were randomly assigned to the same fast-food vs control condition as in the first experiment but in this case all participants subsequently listed the first 86 seconds of ‘The Flower Duet’ from the opera Lakmé. Participants in the fast-food condition rated themselves as less happy after listening to the music, subjectively perceived of time passage of the music as longer (i.e., “how long do you feel you spent listening to the song you just heard”), and reported greater impatience experienced while listening to the music (e.g. “I was impatient for the music to end so I could finish the survey”) (all ps < .05). Follow-up tests indicated both the subjective experience of time and reported impatience while listening to the music mediated the effect of condition on participants’ experience of happiness. These findings suggest exposure to symbols of the culture of impatience can impair people’s ability to derive happiness from encounters with pleasurable things in life because they become too impatient to “smell the roses.”

Advertising the experience of happiness is a mainstay of most fast-food marketing. Consider the advertising of McDonald’s, the most prevalent and recognizable fast food company in the world. In 1979, McDonald’s launched the “Happy Meal” targeted at children. In 2003, McDonald’s officially named its clown mascot, Ronald McDonald, the “Chief Happiness Officer” of the company. Many of McDonald’s specific advertising campaigns depict customer’s enjoyment and pleasure emanating from the consumption of their food (e.g., “I’m lovin’ it” campaign). Ironically, the haste and impatience promoted by fast food appears poised to undermine people’s ability to smell the roses—experiencing happiness from enjoyable events.

Contrary to the associations with happiness typically proffered by fast-food advertisers in the appetitive domain, we find that the impatience induced by symbols of fast food can distract us from appreciating beauty emanating from other sensory domains where one might otherwise obtain happiness from smelling the proverbial roses. While fast food may promote instant gratification, it can also blind us to opportunities of greater happiness even when they are right in front of us. These findings lead us to pause and ponder an otherwise largely unquestioned aspect of speed and impatience: As we have become more hasty and efficient, what have we lost?

**Happiness from Ordinary and Extraordinary Experiences**

**EXTENDED ABSTRACT**

How should we invest our finite resources to maximize our happiness? One influential stream of literature finds that experiential purchases bring greater happiness than material purchases (e.g., Van Boven and Gilovich 2003). But which experiences lead to greater happiness? Prior work has not yet begun to categorize and compare experiences to see which ones most resonate and increase well-being.

While some researchers have suggested a special role for special, once-in-a-lifetime experiences in consumer well-being (Zauberman, Ratner and Kim 2009), others have highlighted the importance of savoring mundane, everyday experiences (DeVoe and House 2012). Hence, the current research investigates this important distinction and attempts to resolve these inconsistencies. While ordinary experiences are common, frequent, and within the realm of everyday life, extraordinary experiences are uncommon, infrequent, and go beyond this realm (Sussman and Alter 2012). Will consumers enjoy greater happiness from a lovely dinner with a close friend at a favorite neighborhood restaurant, or from a once-in-a-lifetime, gastronomically inventive feast at eBulli?

Because the very definition of happiness varies over time (Mogilner, Kamvar and Aaker 2011), we predicted that the answer to this question would depend on one’s perspective on time. Indeed, five studies suggest that extraordinary experiences lead to greater happiness among those with an extensive future. Meanwhile, when time is seen as limited, ordinary experiences are increasingly linked to happiness.

An initial study, mirroring Van Boven and Gilovich’s (2003) approach, asked participants to recall and describe a happy experience that was either ordinary or extraordinary, and to report their resulting level of happiness. Content analysis suggests that engagement in social relationships and indulgence in comforts accounts for most happy ordinary experiences. Conversely, life milestones or cultural travel are most representative of happy extraordinary experiences. To serve as a proxy for future time perspective, we examined experiential happiness by participant age. Among younger participants (whose future is more extensive), extraordinary experiences resulted in greater happiness than ordinary experiences (M = 7.86 vs. 6.69, F(1,217) = 13.20, p < .001); however, among older participants (whose future is more limited), no difference in reported happiness emerged (M = 7.84 vs. 7.59, F < 1). In other words, while happiness from extraordinary experiences did not vary with age (F < 1), ordinary experiences led to greater happiness for older (vs. younger) participants (F(1, 217) = 7.72, p = .006).

To further investigate whether these categories of experience naturally resonate, we asked a separate group of participants to rate 20 randomly selected experiences generated in the first study. This group was able to reliably distinguish between others’ described experiences, rating extraordinary experiences as significantly more extraordinary than the ordinary experiences (M = 6.61 vs. 3.62, t(120) = 19.60, p < .001). Importantly, their predictions of happiness followed the same pattern: younger participants reported that extraordinary (vs. ordinary) experiences would lead to greater happiness (M = 6.96 vs. 6.24, F(1, 119) = 27.34, p < .001), whereas older participants’ reports of happiness did not differ by experience type (M = 7.01 vs. 6.83, F(1, 119) = 1.57, p > .10).

Next, we examined a natural data source to see if the same pattern holds. A sample of Facebook users reported their last five status updates that reflected personal experiences and completed a measure of future time perspective (Lang and Carstensen 2002). They then rated and categorized these experiences as ordinary or extraordinary. Results indicated that future time perspective predicted both ratings (β = .16, t = 2.11, p = .04) and categorizations (χ²(1) = 4.81, p = .03) of reported experiences: even in this organic setting, those who saw time as extensive made more extraordinary updates, and those who saw time as limited made updates reflecting more ordinary experiences.

Given that our findings hinge on future time perspective, a fourth study tested for potential differences between past and future (planned) experiences. Participants described past happy experi-
ences or future experiences they expected to be happy, then rated these experiences on how ordinary or extraordinary they were. Finally, they reported their future time perspective. Regression results were consistent: regardless of past or future status ($t < 1$), those with a more extensive perspective reported more extraordinary experiences, while those with a limited perspective reported more ordinary experiences ($\beta = -0.28$, $t = -2.90$, $p = .005$).

Our final study sought convergent evidence by manipulating time perspective: participants were led to view their lifespan as either extensive or limited. A second goal of the study was to examine how associating a brand with consumer experiences would affect brand attitudes. Participants viewed an advertisement for a Flip video camera that urged them to “Capture life’s everyday [extraordinary] moments.” Results revealed a significant interaction of experience x time perspective on brand attitudes ($F(1, 210) = 5.74, p = .02$). In particular, those with an extensive time perspective viewed the brand more positively when it highlighted extraordinary (vs. ordinary) moments ($M = 5.60$ vs. 5.12). However, brand attitudes did not vary by experience among those with a limited time perspective ($M = 5.46$ vs. 5.66, $F < 1$). That is, while highlighting extraordinary experiences led the brand to be perceived similarly regardless of time perspective ($F < 1$), highlighting ordinary experiences was seen more positively among those who viewed their future as limited rather than extensive ($F(1, 210) = 7.29, p = .007$). Results for purchase likelihood were fully consistent.

Together, our findings highlight a previously unexamined dimension of experience, distinguishing ordinary from extraordinary experiences. Results show that this distinction is meaningful, resonates with people, and matters for brand attitudes as well as subsequent happiness. Follow-up analyses from our first study suggest that self-definition may drive these effects ($\beta = .01$, $t = 2.56, p = .01$): the experiences that define us vary with our perspective on time, and what defines us may bring us greater happiness.

**Time, Money, and Morality**

**EXTENDED ABSTRACT**

It seems a day doesn’t go by without some unethical behavior by a politician, movie star, professional athlete, or high-ranking executive splashing the cover of newspapers. Although less sensational, revelations of cheating have also crept into the sciences, and continue to show up in classrooms, businesses, and marriages. Sadly, such actions have ruinous consequences, hurting individuals, families, corporations, and entire academic fields. Given that decades of psychology research have shown that people strive to maintain a positive self-concept (Adler, 1930; Rogers, 1959) and that morality is central to people’s self-image (Aquino, Reed, 2002; Chaiken, Giner-Sorolla, & Chen, 1996), the prevalence of unethical behavior and the fact that even good people are prone to lose track of their moral compass is surprising (Ayal & Gino, 2011; Mazar, Amir, & Ariely, 2008; Shalvi, Eldar, & Bereby-Meyer, 2012). Are there simple ways to encourage self-reflection, thus decreasing individuals’ tendencies to behave immorally? Here, we focus on two triggers that are ubiquitous enough in the environment to have a chance at instigating a widespread effect on unethical behavior: money and time.

Prior research has shown that when people focus on money they behave in self-interested (but not self-reflective) ways. For instance, merely thinking about money leads people to be less helpful and fair in their dealings with others, less sensitive to social rejection, and to work harder towards personal goals (Vohs, Mead, & Goode, 2006, 2008; Yang, Wu, Zhou, Mead, Vohs, & Baumeister, 2012; Zhou, Vohs, & Baumeister, 2009). However, when focused on time, people become more generous in their charitable giving (Liu & Aaker, 2008) and are more motivated to connect with loved ones (Mogilner, 2010)—a behavior that is particularly treasured when reflecting on one’s life (Frederickson & Carstensen, 1990; Loewenstein, 1999). We thus predict that priming people to think about time, rather than money, will lead to more ethical behavior by encouraging people to reflect on who they are, making them more conscious of how they conduct themselves so as to maintain a positive self-image.

Study 1 tested this by priming either time or money and then measuring cheating. Participants were first presented with a sentence unscramble task which surreptitiously exposed them to time-related, money-related, or only neutral words (Mogilner, 2010). Next, participants played a “Numbers Game” in which they had the opportunity to cheat and receive additional money. The results show that participants were more likely to cheat in the money condition (87.5%, 28/32) than in either the control condition (66.7%, 22/33; $\chi^2(1, N=65)=3.97, p<.05$) or the time condition (42.4%, 14/33; $\chi^2(1, N=65)=14.44, p<.001$). Participants were also less likely to cheat in the time condition than in the control condition ($\chi^2(1, N=66)=3.91, p<.05$). In other words, money primes encouraged unethical behavior while time primes discouraged it.

Study 2 replicates these results while also providing initial insight into why time discourages unethical behavior. Participants were primed with time or money through searching for songs that had lyrics exemplifying how people feel about either time or money. Next, participants completed the same Numbers Game, but here it was framed as either an intelligence test or a personality test indicative of the person they are. The results showed a significant interaction ($F(1,138)=3.99, p<.05$): Only when the game was framed as an intelligence test did thinking about money lead to greater cheating than thinking about time ($F(1,138)=6.69, p<.01$); however, when the game was framed as a personality test, there was no difference in cheating between the money and time conditions, $F<1$.

Study 3 again tests for the role of self-reflection. Participants were primed with money or time by either counting a stack of 30 $1 bills or days in a paper calendar (1 page per day). Half of the participants completed this task facing a mirror while half did not. Participants then completed the same Numbers Game from Study 1. Results showed a significant interaction ($F(1,116)=4.30, p=.04$): Only when participants did not complete their tasks in front of a mirror did thinking about money lead to greater cheating than thinking about time ($F(1,116)=9.11, p<.003$). When a mirror was present, however, there was no difference in cheating between those in the money and time conditions, $F<1$.

Study 4 measured self-reflection directly through self-report measures. Participants were primed with time or money using the same sentence unscramble task from Study 1, and then asked to rate their amount of self-reflection. Next, they completed a word unscramble task which provided an opportunity to cheat for extra money. The results show that those in the money condition reported lower levels of self-reflection compared to both the control ($p=.001$) and the time condition ($p=.001$), and participants reported greater self-reflection in the time condition than in the control condition ($p=.024$). The same pattern of results was found for cheating: Those in the money condition were more likely to cheat than those in either the control ($\chi^2(1, N=143)=4.04, p=.044$) or time condition ($\chi^2(1, N=145)=16.44, p<.001$), and were less likely to cheat in the time condition than in the control condition ($\chi^2(1, N=138)=4.16, p=.041$). Finally, a mediation analysis revealed that self-reflection drove the effect of the prime on cheating behavior.

Taken together, these findings suggest that although priming money increases cheating, priming time reduces cheating because it
Temporal Decay, Reinstatement, and Debiasing of Self-Deception

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research on the individual psychology of ethical decision making tends to take a “one-shot” approach by examining the effect of one or more specific variables on one subsequent unethical act, or a global approach assessing general beliefs such as the tendency to view oneself in a positive light (e.g., Alicke, 1985; Chambers & Windschitl, 2004; Moore & Kim, 2003; Taylor & Brown, 1988). Along these lines, Chance et al. (2011) documented how a single act of cheating can lead to self-deception in the short term. The current investigation explores ethics over a longer time course, examining how an initial unethical behavior changes people’s beliefs in the longer term—and how those beliefs are impacted by both receiving more information about one’s abilities over time (Study 1) and being provided with subsequent opportunities to engage in further unethical behavior (Study 2).

People misbehave: They lie, they cheat, they steal, they betray. Yet most view themselves as good and moral individuals (Aquino & Reed, 2002). One means of resolving this apparent inconsistency between bad behavior and a positive self-image is through self-deception (Tenbrunsel & Messick, 2004): distorting negative behavior to reflect positively on the self—for example, by cheating on tests and attributing improved performance to ability. Given the costs of self-deception to both individuals and organizations, we explore two means by which self-deception can be decreased: natural decay and an attentional intervention. We show that self-deception diminishes over time when self-deceivers are repeatedly confronted with evidence of their true ability (Study 1); importantly, however, this “learning” fails to make them less susceptible to future self-deception (Study 2). Given the ease with which self-deception recurs, we test a mechanism for debiasing self-deception: asking participants to reflect on the fact that they may have cheated, thereby drawing their attention to the true cause of their high performance (Study 3). Taken together, these studies offer insight into when and how self-deception can be attenuated.

Cheating and self-deception paradigm

Participants are assigned to a control or an answer condition. Both groups complete a series of tests of general knowledge trivia such as “What is the only mammal that truly flies?” (from Moore & Healy, 2008). At the beginning of the study, they learn that for each test, they will earn an additional $0.25 for each correct answer. Participants in the answers condition have the answers to all ten questions printed in an answer key at the bottom of the page. Their instructions read, “It’s okay to check your answers as you go, but please do your own work.” (A pilot study showed that using the answers to achieve a higher score was perceived as cheating and unethical.) The control group has the same test questions, but no answer key. Everyone completes Test 1, and then receives a score sheet with an answer key on which they record their score. Thus, before continuing to Test 2, participants in both conditions have seen the answer key to Test 1 and know their Test 1 score. They then look over Test 2 before writing down their predicted score. After predicting their score, they complete the test, which does not have answers at the bottom. Cheating is measured by significant differences in performance between the control and answers groups on Test 1. Self-deception is measured by significant differences between predictions and scores on subsequent tests for participants in the experimental conditions but not the control condition.

In Study 1, we observed the natural decay of self-deception over time, finding that when faced with repeated exposure to counterevidence—in this case, scoring lower on three tests they could not cheat on—self-deceivers eventually come to terms with reality. In everyday life, however, people face repeated temptations to engage in questionable behavior, and thus repeated opportunities for self-deception. Therefore, Study 2 tested whether a second chance to cheat would reinstate self-deception, overwhelming the effect of learning from corrective feedback. It did. Self-deception is therefore sticky, therefore reducing it may require an intervention after cheating has occurred, but prior to making predictions of future performance. In Study 3, we tested whether drawing attention to the answer key before the prediction task would reduce self-deception. We added a new “answers/attention” condition in which we interrupted test takers before they predicted their scores on Test 2 to ask them to reflect on the effect that the answer key might have had on their performance on Test 1. Participants in the answers/attention condition predicted lower scores on the second test than those in the answers condition, despite both groups having cheated to a similar degree on the first test.

In our experiments, participants have the opportunity to cheat on a test, and then to self-deceive about their own ability. We explored two means by which self-deception may be decreased: by repeated counterevidence, and drawing attention to the root cause. Our studies demonstrate that time and repetition of unbiased feedback can reduce self-deception and eventually eliminate it (Study 1); however, the tendency can reemerge when the opportunity for cheating presents itself again (Study 2). Attentional interventions early in the process, however, may debias self-deception (Study 3). While we examined the impact of self-deception on people’s beliefs about their future performance, self-deception in contexts like these may also impact people’s subsequent behavior. For example, it may lead them to spend less time preparing for future challenges, thus reducing learning in addition to hampering the possibility of good future performance. Future research could examine this type of behavioral consequence, both in the context of academic cheating as well as in other contexts where people may inflate their performance by cheating and then deceive themselves.

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