



Consumption Avoidance



“I won't have what you can't have” : Avoiding consumption due to food restriction inferences

Shaaref A. Shah, Emily Prinsloo, Elizabeth A. Keenan & Rebecca Ratner

Summary

Background

- 60% of US consumers report that they monitor or restrict their consumption of at least one nutritional component in their diet (Sicherer & Sampson, 2018; Tang & Mullins, 2017).
- Dietary restrictions can be voluntary, e.g., for ideological reasons or cultural/religious reasons, or involuntary, e.g., due to health conditions.

Research Questions

- Do the dietary restrictions of others affect a consumer's own experience of a meal?
- Do consumers have more negative perceptions of meal partners with dietary restrictions, and vice versa?
- Will unrestricted consumers adjust their consumption behavior, avoiding items restricted consumers cannot consume? Is such behavior useful, in that it addresses a problem?

Literature and Predictions

- Food consumption is a ritualized behavior which positively influences social connection (Fischler, 1988; Kniazeva & Venkatesh, 2007; Ratcliffe, Baxter, & Martin, 2019; Vohs, Wang, Gino, & Norton, 2013)
- Dietary restrictions foster feelings of social isolation (Woolley, Fishbach and Wang, 2019).
- Consumers also match consumption to feel socially included (Mead, Baumeister, Stillman, Rawn & Vohs, 2011) and consume strategically in the service of affiliation (Liu, Campbell, Fitzsimons and Fitzsimons, 2013).
- Research in the health domain also suggests that consumers are good adapting to aversive situations through hedonic adaptation (Loewenstein & Ubel, 2008).

We predict:

- H1:** Consumers will be more likely to avoid a food or beverage item when another consumer has a restriction (vs. no restriction) related to the item.
- H2:** Consumers overestimate restricted consumers' negative reactions; when they consume an item restricted individuals cannot consume, they expect them to feel more offended and jealous than they actually do.

Conclusion

Three online studies and a pilot lab study (total $N = 1,115$) show that restricted consumers voicing their restrictions make unrestricted consumers feel uncomfortable and awkward (Study 1a). Additionally, we show that unrestricted consumers avoid consuming their desired choice especially if the restricted consumer voices their food restriction (Study 1b). Furthermore, we show that unrestricted consumers mispredict others' jealousy (Study 2). We also try to explore how different types of restrictions (voluntary restrictions versus involuntary) impact avoidance (Study 3).

Study 1(a): Food Stories

Method

- Open response text survey on MTurk. $N = 62$
- Have you ever had an experience where you had a meal with someone who had a food restriction (e.g. for health, moral, or religious reasons, etc.)?
- What was the food restriction of this individual?
- How did you feel when you had your meal with this person?

Results: Awkwardness, discomfort, and annoyance

- "[...] I felt **awkward and ashamed** for [...]. I felt bad eating meat in front of them as well."
- "It was tricky trying to find a restaurant to eat at because my friend's diet is so restrictive. [...] I **felt a little annoyed** [...] but I was respectful [...]."
- "[...] I **felt very nervous** that the food they ordered, even though it was on the gluten free menu, would actually have gluten in it and they would become sick."

Study 1(b): Real Choice Avoidance (Supports H1)

Method



2 conditions between-subjects:

- Confederate says, "I am allergic to dairy so I will have the pretzels please."
- Confederate says, "I will have the pretzels please."

Preliminary Results:

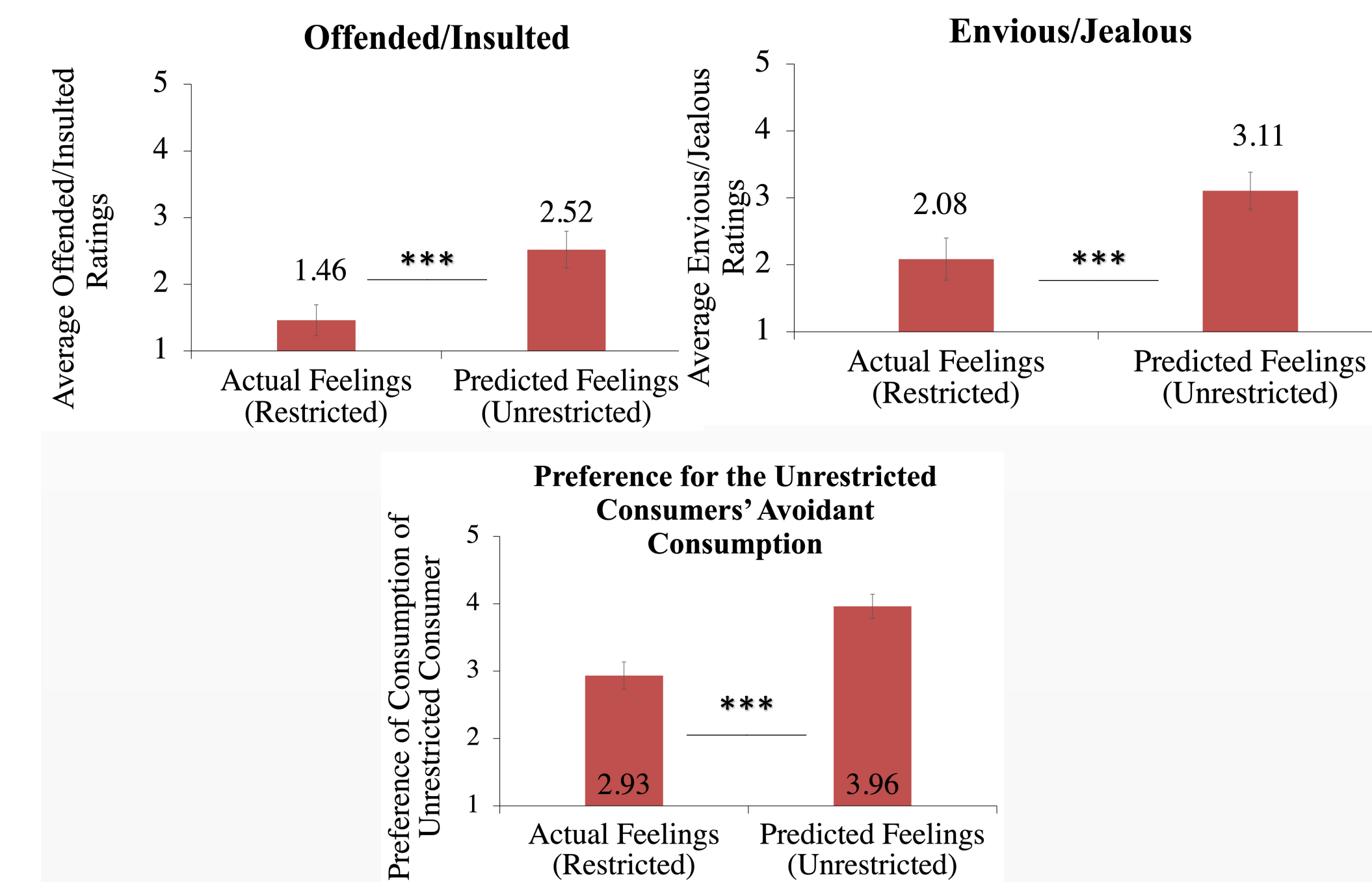
Participants ($N = 20$) were directionally more likely to select the pretzels over the chocolate in the treatment versus the control condition. Participants also feel less close to the confederate when the confederate voices his restriction versus when he does not voice his restriction. We are currently collecting data with a larger sample size to replicate the results.

Study 2: Consumer (Mis)Predictions (Supports H2)

Method

- MTurk study, $N = 402$
- Quasi-experimental design
 - Participants indicate whether you have a food restriction or not.
 - Restricted consumers rate how offended/insulted, envious/jealous they would feel if another consumer consumed an item they could not consume themselves. They also rate the extent to which they would prefer that the non-restricted consumer avoids the item.
 - Non-restricted consumers make predictions about restricted consumers' feelings and preferences.

Study 2: Results



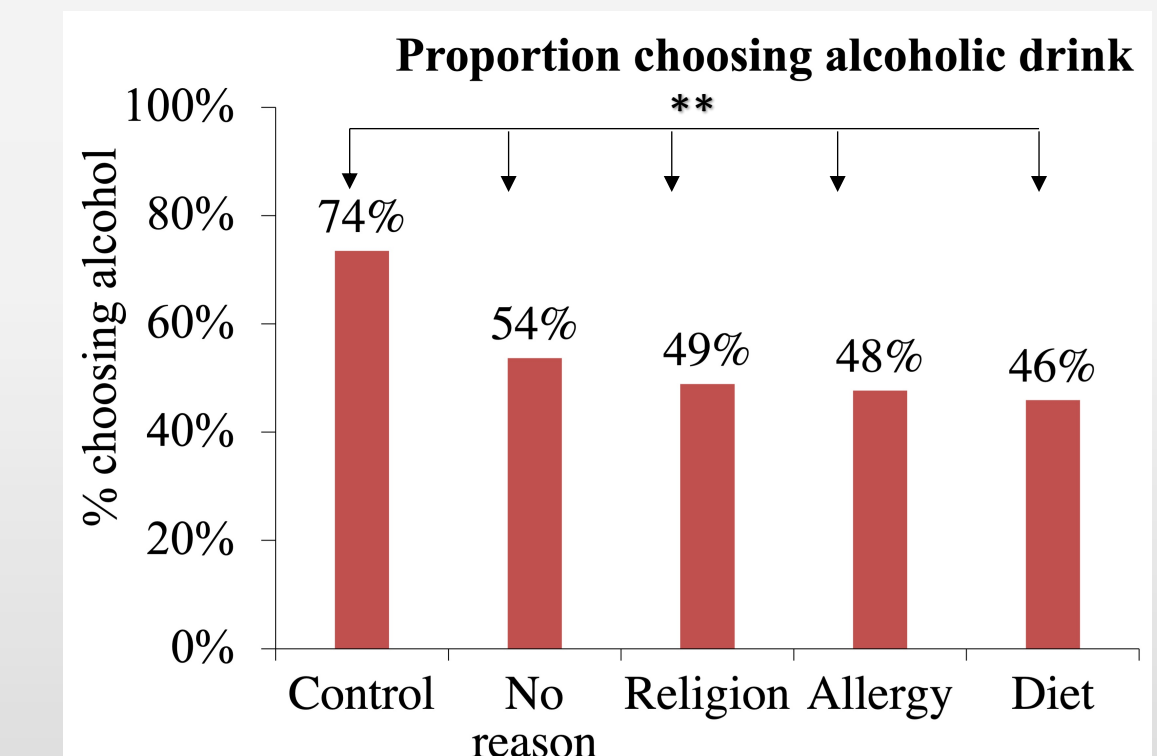
Study 3: Hypothetical Alcohol Avoidance (Supports H1)

Purpose: Examine whether unrestricted consumers avoid consuming alcohol in the presence of restricted consumers; disentangle reasons for avoidance.

Method

Participants ($N = 671$) imagined going out to dinner with a coworker and that they were thinking about having an alcoholic drink. They offer a drink menu to their coworker. Their coworker says:

- Control:** "Yes, thanks. I'm going to order a beer."
- No reason:** "No, thanks. I'm going to order some iced tea."
- Allergy:** "No, thanks. I'm alcohol intolerant or essentially allergic to alcohol, so I'm going to order some iced tea."
- Diet:** "No, thanks. I'm on a diet and cutting out alcohol, so I'm going to order some iced tea."
- Religion:** "No, thanks. I don't drink alcohol due to my religion, so I'm going to order some iced tea."



Control condition differed significantly from all other conditions (** $ps < 0.05$). There were no other significant differences between conditions.