

**Conspicuous Consumption in Committed Relationships: A Signal of Relationship Dissatisfaction by
Heterosexual Men**

by

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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my parents and my little brother.

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Abstract

Through conspicuous consumption, humans consume luxury goods or services to show off wealth and status. Conspicuous consumption has been considered as an honest signal that could convey the quality of the signaler to potential receivers, which is positively associated with sexual selection and men's mate attraction goals. Previous research on the function of men's conspicuous consumption within evolutionary psychology is mainly built upon the assumption that heterosexual men who buy luxuries are single. Little research to date has considered how being in a committed romantic relationship influences men's conspicuous consumption and how it will be interpreted by their female partner.

The current dissertation is the first study to date to investigate the relationship between conspicuous consumption and men's dissatisfaction with a committed romantic relationship. In a Pilot Study and three online experimental studies, the present dissertation examined (1) the perceived motivation of married men's conspicuous displays from a third-person perspective, including observers of both genders (Chapter II Pilot Study, Chapter III Study 1); (2) if being dissatisfied with a current relationship would increase committed men's conspicuous purchases for themselves (Chapter IV Study 2); (3) women's interpretation of their male partners' increased conspicuous consumption (Chapter V Study 3).

Results demonstrated that (1) from a third-person's perspective, married men with increased (vs. other patterns of) conspicuous consumption for themselves were viewed as having higher mating intentions; (2) from married men's perspective, with priming of the negative

memory, the more frequently they thought of leaving and/or the lower baseline trait satisfaction they had with their current relationship, married men purchased more conspicuous items for themselves; the higher baseline trait satisfaction they had with their current relationship, married men purchased more conspicuous items for their partner; (3) from committed women's perspective, increased conspicuousness of the consumption increased their suspicion of their partner's potential infidelity in the past, present, and future, as well as their assessments of their partner's potential dissatisfaction with the current relationship. The current dissertation provided a detailed framework for illustrating the motivation for and consequences of men's conspicuous consumption in the context of a committed romantic relationship.

Chapter I Introduction

Behaviors and signals in the animal world are traits. Behaviors or structures have specifically evolved in ways that can benefit the signaler by changing the behaviors of recipients. For example, in most songbirds, songs are typically directed at either resource defense or mate attraction. For instance, male songbirds use songs to attract females, including extra-pair partners, despite the risk of predation (Eens & Pinxten, 1995; Tobias & Seddon, 2009). Similar to these costly behaviors among male birds, humans consume luxury goods or services to show off wealth and status and attract others; this is known as conspicuous consumption, a term coined by the economist Thorstein Veblen in the late 1800s (Mason, 1981; Veblen, 1899/1965). Research guided by an evolutionary psychological perspective on the function of men's conspicuous consumption assumed that heterosexual men who buy luxuries are single. However, little research has considered how being in a committed romantic relationship influences men's conspicuous consumption and how it is interpreted by their female partner.

Conspicuous Consumption as a Mating Signal

Costly Signal Theory considers behaviors such as the conspicuous consumption of single men to be expensive and apparently “wasteful”, but designed to convey honest information about underlying qualities of signalers that could benefit both signalers and observers (Zahavi, 1975; Grafen, 1990; Johnstone, 1997). Here, being costly means the signalers must expend resources, energy, risk, time, or other prices to display their qualities, characteristics that are important to observers but are not directly observable (e.g., competitive ability and good genes; Zahavi,

1975). On the surface, such expenditures are like the tail of a peacock, which is costly to produce and maintain because the resplendent tail not only needs metabolic energy to maintain but also increases the potential risk of injury. However, these costs have value because the tail serves as an honest signal of the peacock's good health and ability to survive or acquire food in tough environments (Sundie et al, 2011).

Similarly, high expenditures in the form of conspicuous consumption can also be seen as an honest signal of being a good mate by implying the signaler's socioeconomic status, competitive ability to earn more money, and ability to support future offspring (De Fraja, 2009). Because of these assumptions, conspicuous consumption has been positively associated with sexual selection and signaling, and with men's mate attraction (Nave et. al., 2018; Sedikides et al., 2018). For example, Kruger (2008) found that financial consumption, in terms of the tendency to maximize purchasing rather than accruing savings, uniquely predicted the number of sexual partners men desired in the next five years regardless of their age, education, and marital status. This suggest that the goal of securing mates would be associated with higher conspicuous consumption in men. For example, Roney (2003) found that men were found to place a greater emphasis on obtaining wealth after being physically near women.

The mating signal sent by men's conspicuous consumption can be effective at attracting prospective mates. According to Trivers' Parental Investment Theory (1972), a sexual asymmetry in parental care leads females to prefer males who convey the costly and honest signals of their qualities as mates, resulting in higher reproductive success for males who engage in conspicuous consumption compared to those who do not (Buss, 1989). This has also been supported by findings from empirical studies. For example, women displayed increased attention

to status signals (Lens et al., 2012), and may use conspicuous displays to evaluate men for short-term partnerships (Gangestad et al., 2007; Li & Kenrick, 2006; Sundie et al., 2011).

A Two-Sided Set of Opportunities and Problems

As a mating signal, men's conspicuous consumption may increase the chances of securing sexual partners (Miller, 2009). Sexual success could be measured by behaviors that promote fertility (Boone & Kessler, 1999; Buss, 1999; Cosmides et al., 1992; Kaplan et al., 2002; Rogers, 1995; Turke, 1989), such as copulation frequency (Pérusse, 1993; Kanazawa, 2003). Increased mating signals by men in a committed relationship also bring up a two-sided set of opportunities and problems — a trade-off between the loyalty to the existing partner and the attraction to extra-pair partners (Campbell & Ellis, 2005). That is, men's mate-attraction behaviors that could attract extra-pair females' attention might also be viewed as inappropriate from their committed in-pair partner's perspective. In view of this trade-off, when taking men's relationship or marital status into consideration, men's conspicuous consumption will convey information that reveals more complex mate-attraction behaviors. Questions regarding the intention of committed men's increased conspicuous consumption, effectiveness in attracting extra-pair attention after becoming committed, and influences on the current relationship remain unanswered.

When a man commits to a long-term romantic partnership with a woman, this marks the time to shift their focus from mating effort to investing in their current relationship and potential offspring (Grinstein-Weiss & Sherraden, 2006; Miller, 2009; Saad, 2007). In other words, we would not expect to witness an increase in committed men's mate attraction behaviors, which run contrary to their loyalty and commitment to their current in-pair partner. Also, the

reproductive benefits associated with maintaining a long-term relationship also has been found to produce an inattentive to attractive alternative relationship partners (Maner et al., 2008).

Building on this logic, a sharp increase in mate attraction behaviors might be observed when a committed man contemplates switching his investments from the current partner to alternative sexual and/or romantic partners. That is, when men feel dissatisfied with their current relationship or partner, it is possible they may broadcast more mate attraction signals, for example, by increasing conspicuous consumption for themselves. This sudden increase in conspicuous consumption for committed men themselves could be interpreted as a mate-attraction signal, consistent with findings from single men's conspicuous consumption.

From a woman's perspective, sudden increase in conspicuous consumption for committed men themselves may be perceived as an infidelity-related signal. The underlying mechanism could be two-fold. First, the mate-attraction function of men's conspicuous consumption is observed by their female partner. This is not only because women are sensitive to infidelity-related behaviors (Ein-Dor et al., 2015), but also because a possession-related display is directly linked to a possible reduction in the partner's financial commitment to family and an increase in potential mate attraction motivation. When her partner displays an interest in involvement with other females, the in-pair woman may perceive this as a mate retention failure (Buss & Shackelford, 1997). This then can lead to more mate retention behaviors, such as "Snooping through my partner's personal belongings" to maintain control over the relationship (Buss et al., 2008). This change in behaviors has also been supported with evidence in pair-living antbirds (*Hypocnemis peruviana*), in which solos from male birds attract potential mates and coordinated duets from resident pairs serves as a joint defense; however, when unpaired rival enters their zone, songs from females become a mate retention signal, in which females

responded to the unpaired sexual rival by interfering with the signals of their own mates with a swift reply, further, in turn, thereby weakening her partner's songs (Seddon & Tobias, 2007; Tobias & Seddon, 2009a, 2009b).

Second, as stated above, when committed men engage in sudden increase in conspicuous consumption for themselves, this may signal decreased relationship satisfaction, which is also linked to greater likelihood of infidelity (Atkins et al., 2001; Glass & Wright, 1985; Shackelford et al., 2008). For example, a recent study using social media sites (i.e., Facebook) showed that greater infidelity-related behavior (i.e., friending romantic interests, or attractive alternative partners) on social networking was associated with lower relationship satisfaction (McDaniel et al., 2017). Similarly, a longitudinal study across 17 years demonstrated that infidelity was a consequence of marital distress (Previti & Amato, 2004). As relationship satisfaction decreases, the individual may display more infidelity-related signals (Atkins et al., 2001; Shackelford et al., 2008).

Given the accumulated evidence, I propose that having low satisfaction in a committed romantic relationship might motivate men to purchase and display more showy products. The increased conspicuous consumption or display here functions as both a mate-attraction signal to extra-pair females and an infidelity-related flag to in-pair females. Given the dual message of this conspicuous spending, therefore, it is also worth exploring how men's committed partners, the in-pair females, perceive men's increased luxury purchase after becoming committed.

The Recipient Matters

To understand conspicuous consumption among committed men, the products that they purchase cannot be ignored. As will be explored below, it matters whether products are

purchased by men for themselves or for their partner. While purchasing luxury goods for the female can express their consideration and commitment to the romantic relationship (Komiya et al., 2019), purchasing a luxury product for only himself limits its utility to the purchaser alone. Through such self-oriented consumption, men engage in greater resource display, thereby drawing more attention from females outside the committed relationship. Given this outcome, the current research will focus on the social function of conspicuous consumption for men themselves, but conspicuous consumption for the partner will also be considered.

As proposed by Belk and Coon (1993), gift-giving in a romantic relationship could function to strengthen and maintain the relationship and also as a sign of commitment. Previous studies also offered evidence showing that men, as compared to women, placed greater importance on the instrumental function of gifts, interpreting these as material evidence of love and to display their willingness to invest in the current relationship (Rucker et al., 1991; Saad, & Gill, 2003) or the value they attach to their current partner (Fischer & Arnold, 1990; Huang & Yu, 2000). For example, gifts like roses and chocolates typically have a romantic meaning and are used to express commitment to the current relationship (Belk, 1979).

Overall, the current study is the first to investigate the relationship between conspicuous consumption and men's satisfaction with a committed romantic relationship. This research question differs from and extends the current literature on conspicuous consumption and evolutionary psychology. By thoroughly testing (1) the perceived motivation of married men's conspicuous displays from a third-person perspective, including observers of both genders (Pilot Study, Study 1); (2) if being dissatisfied with their current relationship would increase conspicuous purchases committed men make for themselves (Study 2); (3) female spouses' judgments of and reactions to their male partners' increased conspicuous purchases (Study 3);

the current study will provide a framework for illustrating the motivation for and consequences of men's conspicuous consumption after marriage.

Chapter II Pilot Study

As an initial exploration, the Pilot Study had three goals. First, I investigated if there is a dominant recipient of married men's conspicuous consumption. Second, I examined if people have different expectations for products that single and married men buy for themselves versus that married men buy for their partner. Third, I explored the perceived intention of increased conspicuous consumption by single versus married men.

Method

Participants

Fifty heterosexual male and female participants were recruited via Amazon TurkPrime, a platform that has been widely used (Litman et al., 2017). Forty-two participants ($N_{\text{male}}=23$, $M_{\text{age}} = 42.48$ year-old, age range: 19-67 year-old) finished all questions and passed the attention check questions.

Materials

To assess men's conspicuous consumption and compare single men to married men, the Pilot Study consisted of both open-ended questions and Likert scale questions. The open-ended questions were divided into four sections. In the first section, participants were asked to report who they perceive married men bought luxuries for. I here define luxury items as "products that are not essential but are highly desired and expensive." In the following three sections,

participants were first asked to think about three categories of conspicuous consumption by men, respectively: single men who purchased luxuries for themselves, married men who purchased luxuries for themselves, and married men who purchased luxuries for their partner or family. Participants then answered three questions in each section regarding their perceptions of the men, types of products they would purchase, and their reasons for making these purchases..

In addition, participants also rated how likely it was that each motivation could explain why men suddenly increased their spending on luxuries along 18 motivations, using a 5-point Likert scale (1 = Extremely unlikely, 5 = Extremely likely; see the list of motivations in Table A.1 in Appendix A). Such ratings were provided for all three categories of conspicuous consumption by men (single men, for self vs. married men, for self vs. married men, for partner). Other demographic information was collected at the end of the survey.

Results

The perceived recipients of married men's luxury spending. Frequency of mentioned recipients were summarized and counted. Among 42 participants, 1/3 of the participants believed the man himself was the only recipient, 1/3 of the participants chose the man's romantic partner as the only recipient, and 21.4% chose both the men and their partners as recipients; the rest of them answered with other people. This reflected a balanced distribution for the perceived recipient of married men's luxury spending and revealed that both self and partner might be equally important when evaluating the recipient of the purchase.

The perceived types of products that men purchased. Frequency of type of products from the open-ended questions were summarized and counted for single men buying for themselves, married men buying for themselves, and married men buying for their partner or

family. The top four kinds of products for all three categories of conspicuous consumption by men (single, self vs. married, self vs. married, partner) are displayed in Table II.1 below.

Table II.1. The Perceived Types of Products Men Purchased

Single men, for self		Married men, for self		Married men, for partner	
Frequency	Product	Frequency	Product	Frequency	Product
26	Watches	24	Cars	24	Jewelry
20	Cars	16	Watches	14	Car
17	Clothes	10	Clothes	13	Clothes
11	Shoes	8	Houses	5	Houses

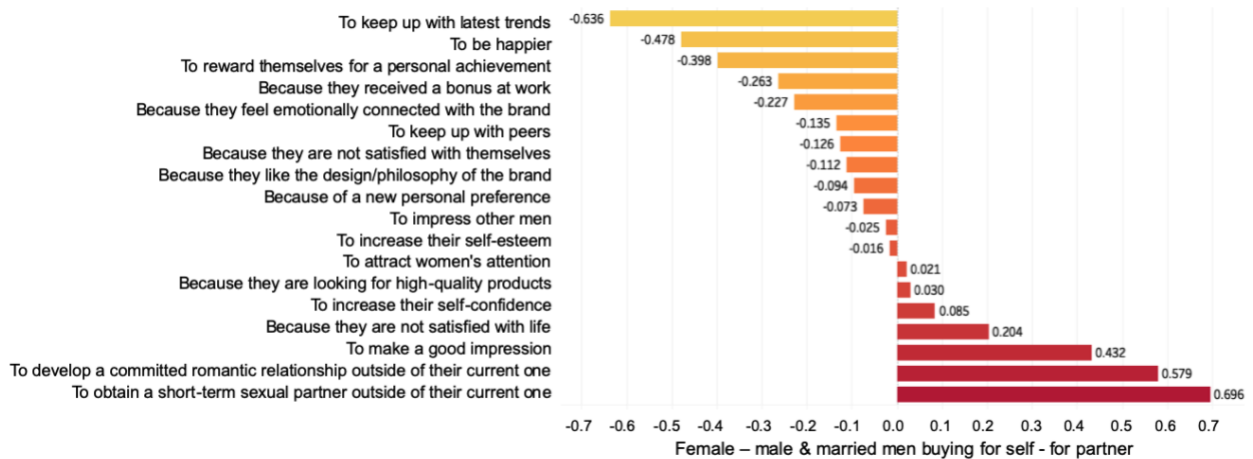
The perceived difference in motivations for men’s conspicuous consumption. I

calculated the average likelihood of each motivation for all three men’s consumption (single, self vs. married, self vs. married, partner). For single men who purchased conspicuous items for themselves, the most likely motivation of this purchase was “to attract women’s attention” (M (SD) = 4.357 (0.98)) and “to increase their self-esteem” (M (SD) = 4.357 (0.85)). For married men, I calculated the “motivation difference” for each motivation by subtracting the average rating for married men who spent for their partner from married men who spent for themselves. I found that the difference for the motivation “to obtain a short-term sexual partner outside of their current one” was the second largest ($M_{\text{self-partner}}$ (SD) = 0.619(0.328)), with the largest difference being “because they are not satisfied with life” ($M_{\text{self-partner}}$ (SD) = 0.690(0.292)). This demonstrated that, compared to married men who purchased conspicuous products for their partner, those who purchased the goods for themselves had greater infidelity intentions.

I also examined a possible gender difference in the above motivation evaluation. To make comparisons simpler, I first calculated the “motivation difference” using the same method described above for both female participants and male participants, and then subtracted male participants’ “motivation difference” from that of female participants’. The higher the score, the

higher the difference in females' perception in comparison to men's for these two spending patterns (married men for self vs. married men for partner). Results showed that female observers, as compared to male observers, considered married men who increased luxuries spending for themselves versus their partner, to have a greater likelihood of participating in a short-term affair and forming a committed relationship outside the marriage, see in Figure II.1.

Figure II.1. Women (vs. Men) Linked Married Men's Increased Conspicuous Consumption to Infidelity



Note. Women, as compared to men, interpreted married men's increased conspicuous consumption for themselves, than for partner, to have a greater likelihood to pursue a short-term affair and to develop a committed relationship outside the marriage.

Discussion

The Pilot Study revealed several important insights. First, the prior findings revealed that observers may have different interpretations of married men's conspicuous consumption when the recipients of the product are different. In general, people consider married men's luxury spending for themselves to be an infidelity-related behavior. Second, the results demonstrated the trend that women perceive married men's increased self-oriented, as opposed to partner-oriented, conspicuous consumption as a way to obtain extra-marriage affairs. This Pilot Study also

suggested ideas other opinions for experiment design in the following studies, such as with the selection of products.

The current Pilot study also has some limitations. For example, the small sample size in the current Pilot study could not provide a strong power when analyzing gender difference. Therefore, the generalization of the current results should be cautious. However, results from the Pilot at least provided some directional information and intuitive ideas for the following studies.

Chapter III Study 1

In Chapter II, the present dissertation identified that people perceive married men's increased luxury spending for themselves as a signal of interest in infidelity. Though results from the Pilot Study showed that both male and especially female observers demonstrated this tendency, whether such increased conspicuous consumption from married men is effective in attracting extra female partners in the mating market is still not known. Previous studies on single men have shown that conspicuous consumption can effectively attract fertile women's attention (Janssens et al., 2011; Lens et al., 2012). The nature of the conspicuous consumption would make it a costly and honest signal in mating markets; however, it is unclear whether signalers being married would decrease the effectiveness of such displays in attracting potential mates.

Based on this, the present dissertation Chapter III further investigates the effectiveness of married men's increased conspicuous consumption as a mating signal from a third-person perspective. The purpose of Study 1 was twofold. First, I tested whether married men displaying increased conspicuous consumption are rated as a desirable mate for women. Second, I aimed to showcase the positive association between this increased conspicuous consumption from married men with an increased mating signal using a clear experiment design with a broad sample.

In particular, the present study examined the above relationship from a third-person perspective. This was done for two reasons. First, conspicuous display as a signal should be easily captured by female observers in many environments, which might include potential mates.

This initial impression might foster additional attention to a romantic relationship with the male signalers in future. Investigation from the observers' perspective would reflect the potential mating target's thoughts. Second, considering the failure in replication of a series of studies on mating motivation and conspicuous consumption (e.g., Griskevicius et al. (2007) that demonstrated a positive association between increased mating goals and single men's conspicuous consumption) from Shanks and colleagues (2015), by replicating the assessments of married men's increased conspicuous consumption in the present study, I should be able to document the effectiveness of this as a mating signal.

As the present dissertation also included male observers in the sample, their interpretation might shed light on the reasons for married men's increased luxury spending from an intrasexual competition perspective. Being effective in attract potential mates would increase the fitness of married men and satisfy his mating motivation, which would not only increase the intrasexual competition for other men (Buss, 1988; Walters & Crawford, 1994), but also provided a basis for examining the causal relationship between married men's luxury spending and their marital dissatisfaction.

The present study also considered the potential connection between life satisfaction and conspicuous consumption. Previous studies on life satisfaction suggests that luxury consumption positively affects an individual's subjective well-being (e.g., Hudders & Pandelaere, 2012; Sivanathan & Pettit, 2010). For example, Hudders and Pandelaere (2012) found that frequent spending of money on luxury brands in categories such as clothing or travel are positively related to Satisfaction With Life (SWL). However, this positive relationship exists only in comparison to ownership of non-luxury products (Hudders, & Pandelaere, 2015). In turn, the sole use of luxuries decreases an individual's SWL (Hudders, & Pandelaere, 2015). That is, when

individuals compare having luxury products and having non-luxury products, those with luxury goods are more satisfied with their life; purely purchasing and displaying conspicuous products may not function as compensation for low relationship satisfaction. As the association is not clear for purchasing luxuries, the current study decided to also include evolution of the target's life satisfaction in the design.

In light of the above reasoning, I hypothesize that:

- H1a: Married men with more conspicuous consumption for themselves will be perceived as a desirable romantic partner for women.
- H1b: Married men's suddenly increased conspicuous consumption for themselves will be perceived to be associated with an increased mating goal.

Method

Participants

Five hundred heterosexual male and female participants were recruited via Amazon TurkPrime. Four hundred fifty-eight participants ($N_{\text{male}}=226$, $M_{\text{age}}= 40.05$ year-old, age range: 18-70 years) finished all questions and passed the attention check questions.

Design and procedure

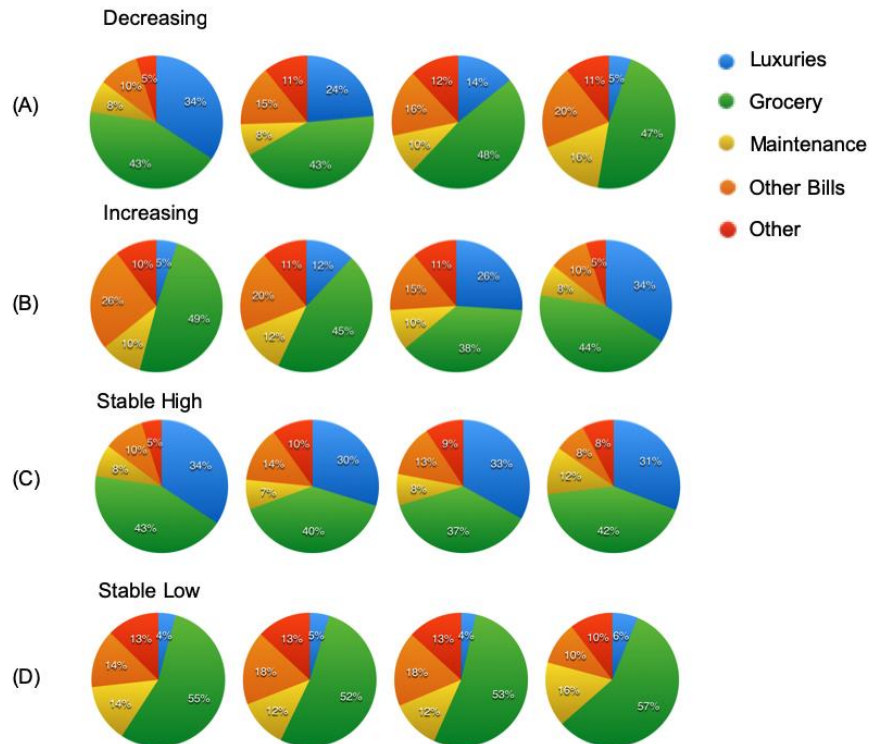
The current study was a 2 (Gender) x 4 (Spending Patterns) mixed design. Gender of the participants was a between-subject independent variable and the manipulated four spending patterns was a within-subject independent variable. All participants completed the four randomly displayed conditions and answered questions in each condition. After finishing all four

conditions, they completed the Sociosexual Orientation Inventory (SOI-R; Penke & Asendorpf, 2008) and other demographic information.

Manipulation

In Study 1, participants were informed that they would assess four contemporary businesspeople from the same affiliation, company G. All participants were given four descriptions of the targets, each of which included a series of four pie charts showing spending summaries for the past four months. The descriptions of the targets were adapted from Sundie et al. (2011), including information about the target's age (32), education (MBA), income (Average), hobbies (biking), leisure activities (going to movies, listening to music), and marital status (married), as displayed in Appendix B. The four series of pie charts were manipulated to show four different spending patterns (conspicuous consumption proportion: Decreasing versus Increasing versus Stable High versus Stable Low; see Figure III.1). The combinations of descriptions of the target and the pie charts were provided randomly in sequence to avoid sequential effects.

Figure III.1. Manipulated Spending Patterns in Study 1



Note. Spending patterns of the target during the past four months in terms of product category. Four different spending patterns were provided randomly to participants: Decreasing (A) versus Increasing (B) versus Stable High (B) versus Stable Low (D).

Sociosexual attitude

The revised Sociosexual Orientation Inventory (SOI-R; Penke & Asendorpf, 2008) was used in Study 1 to measure participants' sociosexual orientation toward uncommitted sex. Particularly, I aggregated three items to form the Attitude facet, which measured the acceptance of sociosexuality without love: "Sex without love is OK", "I can imagine myself being comfortable and enjoying "casual" sex with different partners", and "I would have to be closely attached to someone (both emotionally and psychologically) before I could feel comfortable and fully enjoy having sex with him or her." This evaluative sociosexual attitude assessed

participants' tendency toward uncommitted sex. Using a 9-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly disagree, 9 = Strongly agree), the higher the total score, the less unrestricted the attitude.

Dependent variables

There were two major indexes that I aimed to measure in Study 1. The first one was the perceived desirableness as a mate for women. I assessed this using a single 7-point Likert scale question (1 = Extremely not desirable, 7 = Extremely desirable): "To what extent do you think that women would find Z desirable for a romantic relationship?" The second one was the perceived mating intention. We assessed this along six dimensions, including the motivation to attract women's attention in general, the motivation to attract a short-term affair, the motivation to attract an extra-pair mate in general, the motivation to leave the current marriage and enter a different long-term relationship, and the perceived marital satisfaction with 7-point Likert scales (1 = Extremely unlikely, 7 = Extremely likely).

I found in the Pilot Study that observers believed that married men with increased conspicuous consumption were dissatisfied with their current life. I therefore in Study 1 asked participants to rate the perceived satisfaction with life for all four men using a 7-point Likert scale item: "To what extent do you think that Z is satisfied with his life" (1 = Extremely dissatisfied, 7 = Extremely satisfied).

Results

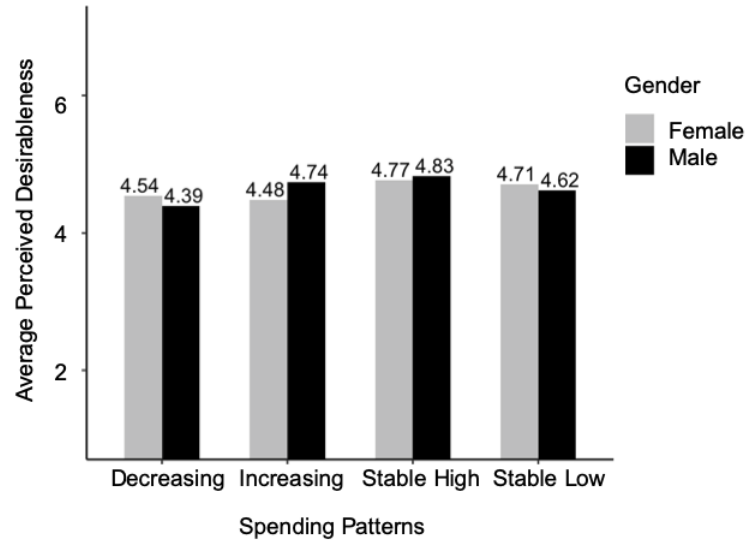
Linear Mixed models were performed in R Studio (RStudio Team, 2015) using *lmer*. For each mixed model, Gender and Spending Patterns were both entered as fixed factors, subject ID was entered as a random factor, and SOI-R Attitude was entered as covariate. Contrasts between

models showed no influence from SOI-R Attitude across dependent variables, so I did not include it in the results presented below.

Rated desirableness as a mate

As predicted in H1a, in general, married men with a stable high level of conspicuous consumption were rated most desirable ($M (SD)= 4.80 (1.24)$) as compared to men with other spending patterns (main effect of spending patterns: $F(3,1368) = 7.191, p < 0.001$). The main effect of gender failed to reach significance ($F(1,456) = 0.0675, p > 0.1$). Particularly, men rated married men with either increasing or stable high level of conspicuous consumption for themselves to be more desirable than married men with a decreasing spending pattern (Increasing > Decreasing: $t(1368) = -4.237, p < 0.001$, Stable High > Decreasing: $t(1368) = -3.381, p = .004$; Spending Patterns x Gender interaction: $F(3,1368) = 3.243, p = 0.02$). For women, married men with a stable high level of conspicuous consumption were rated more desirable than married men with an increasing conspicuous consumption pattern ($t(1368) = -2.830, p = .02$), as displayed in Figure III.2.

Figure III.2. Increased Desirableness as Conspicuous Consumption Increased

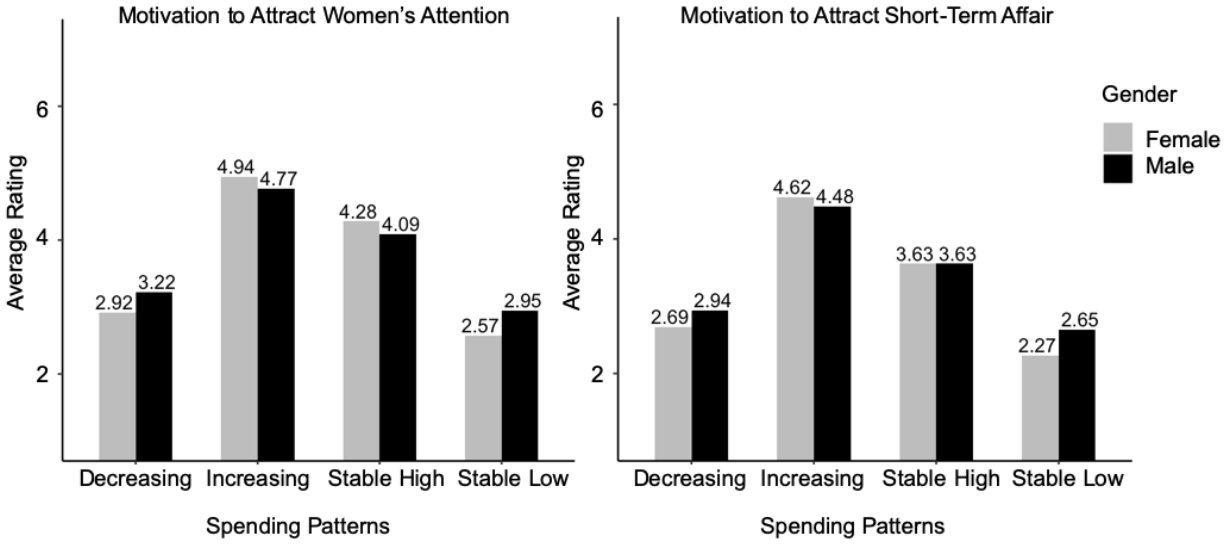


Note. Both female and male participants perceived married men with a Stable High pattern of conspicuous consumption to be most desirable to women. Particularly, men rated married men with Increasing and Stable High patterns of conspicuous consumption to be most desirable to women.

Increased mating intention

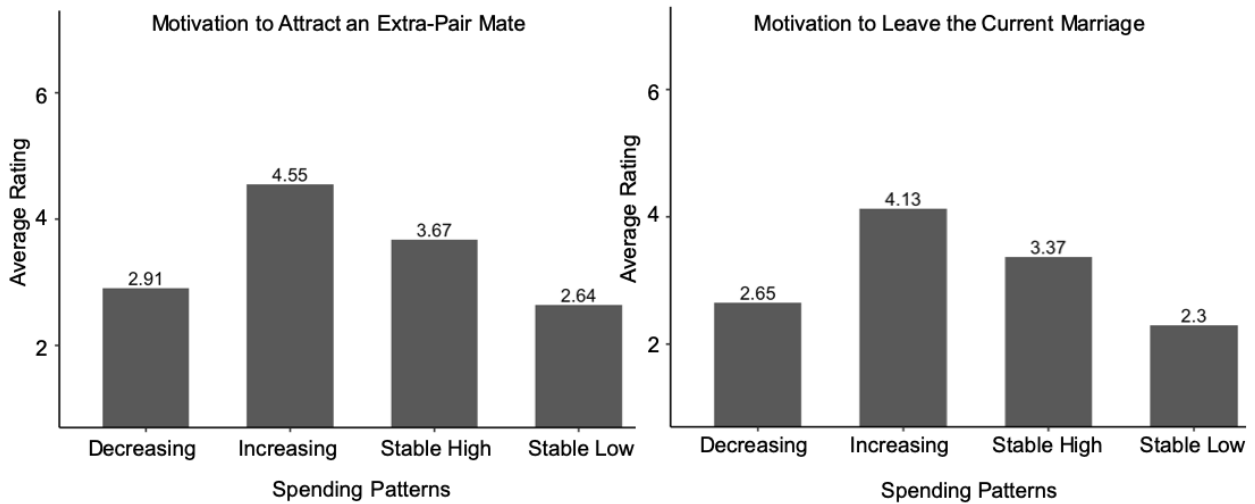
As predicted in H1b, both male and female participants rated married men with increasing conspicuous consumption for themselves to have the highest mating intention, as compared to other spending patterns. To be specific, married men with increasing conspicuous consumption for themselves were rated by both females and males to have the strongest motive to attract women’s attention in general ($M = 4.86, SE = 0.0703$), to attract a short-term affair ($M = 4.55, SE = 0.0707$), to attract an extra-pair mate ($M = 4.55, SE = 0.0712$), and to leave the current marriage and enter a different long-term relationship ($M = 4.13, SE = 0.0676$), as displayed in Figure III.3 and Figure III.4.

Figure III.3. Motive to Attract Mate Increased as Conspicuous Consumption Increased



Note. Married men with increasing conspicuous consumption for themselves were rated to have the strongest motivation to attract women's attention in general and to attract women for a short-term affair, as compared to married men with other spending patterns.

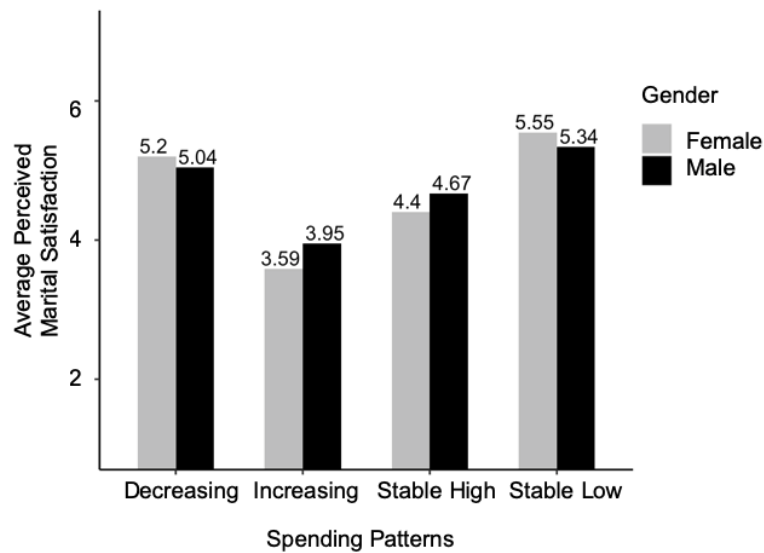
Figure III.4. Mating Goal Increased as Conspicuous Consumption Increased



Note. Married men with increasing conspicuous consumption for themselves were rated to have the strongest motivation to attract an extra-pair mate and to leave the current marriage, as compared to married men with other spending patterns.

Regarding relationship satisfaction, married men with increasing conspicuous consumption for themselves were rated by both females and males to have the lowest marital satisfaction ($M = 3.77$, $SE = 0.0628$), while men with a stable low level of conspicuous consumption were rated to have the highest marital satisfaction ($M = 5.44$, $SE = 0.0628$). Especially for female participants, married men with an increasing consumption pattern were rated to have the lowest marital satisfaction than with any other spending patterns, as displayed in Figure III.5 below.

Figure III.5. Decreased Marital Satisfaction as Conspicuous Consumption Increased



Note. Married men with increasing conspicuous consumption for themselves were rated to have the lowest marital satisfaction as compared to men with other spending patterns.

Though the gender by spending patterns interaction was observed for motivations to attract women’s attention, to attract a short-term affair, and for relationship satisfaction, as discussed above, the only gender difference when averaged over all spending patterns was observed for the perceived motivation to leave the current marriage, with both ratings very close

to a neutral viewpoint (i.e., between “slightly unlikely” and “neither likely nor unlikely”, M_{Female} (SD) = 3.02 (1.63), M_{Male} (SD) = 3.20 (1.58)). See detailed results in Table III.1.

Table III.1. Linear Mixed Model Analyses for the Mating Intentions

Model	Contrast	<i>t</i> / <i>F</i> value	<i>p</i> value
Motivation to attract women’s attention	Main effect: Spending Patterns	$F(3,1368) = 258.6$	$p < 0.001$
	Main effect: Gender	$F(1,456) = 0.069$	$p > 0.1$
	Spending Patterns x Gender	$F(3,1368) = 6.22$	$p < 0.001$
	Female: DecCC - IncCC	$t(1368) = -16.797$	$p < 0.001$
	Female: DecCC - StbH	$t(1368) = -11.329$	$p < 0.001$
	Female: DecCC - StbL	$t(1368) = 2.859$	$p = 0.022$
	Female: IncCC - StbH	$t(1368) = 5.468$	$p < 0.001$
	Female: InCC - StbL	$t(1368) = 19.656$	$p < 0.001$
	Female: StbH - StbL	$t(1368) = 14.188$	$p < 0.001$
	Male: DecCC - IncCC	$t(1368) = -12.746$	$p < 0.001$
	Male: DecCC - StbH	$t(1368) = -7.133$	$p < 0.001$
	Male: DecCC - StbL	$t(1368) = 2.173$	$p > 0.1$
	Male: IncCC - StbH	$t(1368) = 5.612$	$p < 0.001$
	Male: InCC - StbL	$t(1368) = 14.918$	$p < 0.001$
Male: StbH - StbL	$t(1368) = 9.306$	$p < 0.001$	
Motivation to attract short-term affair	Main effect: Spending Patterns	$F(3,1368) = 230.4$	$p < 0.001$
	Main effect: Gender	$F(1,456) = 1.665$	$p > 0.1$
	Spending Patterns x Gender	$F(3,1368) = 3.751$	$p = 0.011$
	Female: DecCC - IncCC	$t(1368) = -15.853$	$p < 0.001$
	Female: DecCC - StbH	$t(1368) = -7.696$	$p < 0.001$
	Female: DecCC - StbL	$t(1368) = 3.476$	$p = 0.030$
	Female: IncCC - StbH	$t(1368) = 8.157$	$p < 0.001$
	Female: InCC - StbL	$t(1368) = 19.328$	$p < 0.001$
	Female: StbH - StbL	$t(1368) = 11.171$	$p < 0.001$
	Male: DecCC - IncCC	$t(1368) = -12.504$	$p < 0.001$
	Male: DecCC - StbH	$t(1368) = -5.605$	$p < 0.001$
	Male: DecCC - StbL	$t(1368) = 2.300$	$p = 0.098$
	Male: IncCC - StbH	$t(1368) = 6.899$	$p < 0.001$
	Male: InCC - StbL	$t(1368) = 14.804$	$p < 0.001$
Male: StbH - StbL	$t(1368) = 7.905$	$p < 0.001$	
Motivation to attract extra-pair mate	Main effect: Spending Patterns	$F(3,1368) = 187.50$	$p < 0.001$
	Main effect: Gender	$F(1,456) = 1.994$	$p > 0.1$
	Spending Patterns x Gender	$F(3,1368) = 2.150$	$p = 0.092$
	DecCC - IncCC	$t(1368) = -18.465$	$p < 0.001$
	DecCC - StbH	$t(1368) = -8.517$	$p < 0.001$
	DecCC - StbL	$t(1368) = 3.140$	$p = 0.009$
	IncCC - StbH	$t(1368) = 9.949$	$p < 0.001$
	InCC - StbL	$t(1368) = 21.605$	$p < 0.001$
	StbH - StbL	$t(1368) = 11.657$	$p < 0.001$
Motivation to leave the current marriage	Main effect: Spending Patterns	$F(3,1368) = 210.306$	$p < 0.001$
	Main effect: Gender	$F(1,456) = 3.865$	$p = 0.049$
	Spending Patterns x Gender	$F(3,1368) = 1.912$	$p > 0.1$
	DecCC - IncCC	$t(1368) = -18.725$	$p < 0.001$
	DecCC - StbH	$t(1368) = -9.122$	$p < 0.001$
	DecCC - StbL	$t(1368) = 4.386$	$p = 0.001$
	IncCC - StbH	$t(1368) = 9.603$	$p < 0.001$
	InCC - StbL	$t(1368) = 23.111$	$p < 0.001$
	StbH - StbL	$t(1368) = 13.508$	$p < 0.001$
Relationship satisfaction	Female - Male	$t(456) = -1.966$	$p = 0.049$
	Main effect: Spending Patterns	$F(3,1368) = 166.714$	$p < 0.001$
	Main effect: Gender	$F(1,456) = 0.6878$	$p > 0.1$

Spending Patterns x Gender	$F(3,1368) = 6.661$	$p = 0.002$
Female: DecCC - IncCC	$t(1368) = 14.289$	$p < 0.001$
Female: DecCC - StbH	$t(1368) = 7.087$	$p < 0.001$
Female: DecCC - StbL	$t(1368) = -3.048$	$p = 0.013$
Female: IncCC - StbH	$t(1368) = -7.202$	$p < 0.001$
Female: IncCC - StbL	$t(1368) = -17.337$	$p < 0.001$
Female: StbH - StbL	$t(1368) = -10.136$	$p < 0.001$
Male: DecCC - IncCC	$t(1368) = 9.497$	$p < 0.001$
Male: DecCC - StbH	$t(1368) = 3.243$	$p = 0.007$
Male: DecCC - StbL	$t(1368) = -2.587$	$p = 0.048$
Male: IncCC - StbH	$t(1368) = -6.254$	$p < 0.001$
Male: IncCC - StbL	$t(1368) = -12.084$	$p < 0.001$
Male: StbH - StbL	$t(1368) = -5.830$	$p < 0.001$

Note.

DecCC = Decreasing Conspicuous Consumption,
 IncCC = Increasing Conspicuous Consumption,
 StbH = Stable High Conspicuous Consumption,
 StbL = Stable Low Conspicuous Consumption.

Life satisfaction

In general, married men with a stable low level of conspicuous consumption were rated to be most satisfied with their current life ($M (SD) = 5.46 (1.19)$) and married men with increased conspicuous consumption was rated to be least satisfied with their current life ($M (SD) = 3.75 (1.58)$), as compared to men with other spending patterns (main effect of spending patterns: $F(3,1368) = 147.964, p < 0.001$). The main effect of gender failed to reach significance ($F(1,456) = 1.836, p > 0.1$). See detailed results in Table III.2.

Table III.2. Linear Mixed Model Analyses for Life Satisfaction

Contrast	<i>t/F value</i>	<i>p value</i>
Main effect: Spending Patterns	$F(3,1368) = 147.964$	$p < 0.001$
Main effect: Gender	$F(1,456) = 1.836$	$p > 0.1$
Spending Patterns x Gender	$F(3,1368) = 6.22$	$p > 0.05$
DecCC - IncCC	$t(1368) = 14.902$	$p < 0.001$
DecCC - StbH	$t(1368) = 2.784$	$p = 0.028$
DecCC - StbL	$t(1368) = -5.442$	$p < 0.001$
IncCC - StbH	$t(1368) = -12.118$	$p < 0.001$
InCC - StbL	$t(1368) = -20.344$	$p < 0.001$
StbH - StbL	$t(1368) = -8.226$	$p < 0.001$

Discussion

Study 1 demonstrated three important findings: (1) women rate married men with a stable and high level of conspicuous consumption for themselves as more desirable than other married men as a mate; (2) men rate married men with either increased or a stable high level of conspicuous consumption for themselves to be more desirable in the mating market than married men with other spending patterns; (3) both women and men rate married men with increased conspicuous consumption for themselves to have higher mating intention than married men who displayed other spending patterns.

These findings provided evidence for the effectiveness of men's conspicuous consumption in the mating context. Women judging a married man on the desirability as a mate were affected by his levels of conspicuous consumption, especially when it is high and stable. Following principles of parental investment (Trivers, 1972), as men's abilities to procure resources could benefit the offspring, men who display such ability are valued in the mating market (Buss & Schmitt, 1993). Consequently, women also put considerable emphasis on wealth and resource status when searching for a potential mate (Lens et al., 2012; Griskevicius et al., 2007). The current research adds to the body of previous work by extending this association to married men. Whereas being in a marriage would not fully block men's mating opportunities, simply being married might signal their unavailability as a potential mate. The current study proved that the effectiveness of stable and high consumption of flashy displays in attracting mates was not weakened by marital status. Though married men with suddenly increased level of conspicuous consumption were rated to be least desirable than men with other spending patterns, the desirableness score was still high (4.48 out of 7).

It is also interesting that, for men, they rated married men with either increasing or a stable high level of conspicuous consumption to be most desirable as a mate for women. This

finding reflects the potential for intrasexual competition among men (Buunk & Massar, 2012). On average, men are more open to uncommitted sexual relationships than women are (Buss, 1988; Buss & Schmitt, 1993; Sundie et al., 2011). Hence, competition among men is greater than among women for the access to prospective sexual partners. The present study, consistent with previous literature (e.g., Griskevicius et al., 2007), evidenced conspicuous consumption as a signal for men to win the intrasexual competition and outcompete other men for potential mates, even if the signalers are married. This competitive aspect of conspicuous consumption among men has also been addressed in research on men's major sex hormone—testosterone. For example, when facing a male competitor with wealthy displays, men's testosterone level increases if a woman is present (Saad & Vongas, 2009). Similar research also showed status-related competition across different types results in changes in men's testosterone levels (see review from Archer, 2006; Edwards et al., 2006; Josephs et al., 2006). This further indicates that competition between males might also not be changed by the relationship status of their rivals, but instead is caused by the greater sexual selection pressures that men faced than women did (Baker Jr & Maner, 2008).

Most importantly, the present study found that married men's increased conspicuous consumption for themselves was associated with perceptions of increased mating intention. It was also worth noting that only the suddenly increased pattern of conspicuous consumption evoked this phenomena. Explanations of this could draw insights from the social functioning of conspicuous consumption from both women's and men's perspectives. Previous literature has demonstrated that women appear to be good at interpreting the mating function of men's conspicuous consumption and using it to judge men's mate quality (Durante et al., 2014; Sundie et al., 2011; Griskevicius et al., 2007). Hence, it is reasonable for a woman to link the increased

mating attention to a suddenly increased conspicuous consumption from married men. Also, as stated above, men are sensitive to competition among men, so it makes sense if other men interpret the increased conspicuous consumption as a signal of a stronger desire to win the intrasexual competition. Previous studies have also found that dissatisfaction with marriage is associated with extramarital sex (Brown, 1991; Vaughn, 1986). In particular, infidelity has been linked to men's sexual dissatisfaction (Maykovich, 1976). Following this revenue of reasoning, when taking the signalers' marital status into account, it is reasonable for both genders to rate the married man as having lower marital satisfaction or higher desire to leave the current marriage when he suddenly increases conspicuous consumption for himself.

I also found that people judge married men with increased luxury spending to have the lowest life satisfaction as compared to men with other spending patterns. To further understand if life satisfaction might interact with the proposed effect of relationship satisfaction on men's conspicuous consumption, I investigate this in the following studies.

The current study also suffered from several limitations. First, the current study only provided the spending patterns of the targets for participants to evaluate with no saving information. Though adding the saving information might change observers' opinions to some extent, the mere difference generated by different spending patterns also proved the effectiveness of consumption in people's judgement. Second, the current study used "luxuries" instead of "conspicuous consumption" in the material that might not be fully equivalent by definition. Although there is a big intersection, luxury products in general contain a broader range of products than conspicuous products do, as the former might also include the inconspicuous but expensive items that might not be showy in mate attraction, like the heated toilet seat. However, luxury spending in the current design could also take the same social signaling function as

conspicuous consumption do. The spending proportion and tendency provided in the current study explicitly and honestly reflected targets' wealth and their ways of resource allocation through spending. This is in line with the definition of conspicuous consumption from Thorstein Veblen (Veblen, 1899/1965), that conspicuous consumption is that humans consume luxury goods or services to show off wealth and status. To avoid the potential influence induced by this difference, Study 2 will provide a definition of conspicuous consumption for participants.

Chapter IV Study 2

In Chapter III, Study 1 addressed married men's conspicuous consumption in the mating context from a third-person perspective. I demonstrated the effectiveness of men's conspicuous consumption in attracting women even when these men are married. I also found that both female and male observers perceived married men's increased conspicuous consumption for themselves as indicating an increase in mating intention. Such increased mating intention was illustrated using perceived increased mate-attract motivation, increased motivation to leave the current marriage, and decreased marital satisfaction in Study 1. These findings highlighted the importance of romantic relationship dissatisfaction and the motivation to leave the current relationship in driving committed men's conspicuous consumption.

Although Study 1 identified this association, it does not allow the causal conclusion that relationship dissatisfaction drives men in a committed relationship to increase their conspicuous consumption. To test such a causal relationship, we conducted Study 2. In Chapter IV, Study 2 manipulated men's satisfaction with the relationship using a writing task and also measured their baseline or trait relationship satisfaction. In addition to the manipulation, I also considered possible influences induced by the recipient of the consumption in our design.

Rather than focusing only on men themselves as the recipient of the consumption as I did in Study 1, in Study 2 I also considered the situation in which their female partner is the recipient. While purchasing a luxury product for men limits the usage to the man himself, purchasing luxury items for a female partner expresses a man's commitment to the romantic

relationship (Komiya et al., 2019). As proposed by Belk and Coon (1993), gift-giving in a romantic relationship may function to strengthen and maintain the relationship and as a sign of commitment. Previous studies also offered evidence that men, as compared to women, place greater importance on the instrumental function of gifts, to display their willingness to invest in the relationship (Saad & Gill, 2003). As noted in previous chapters, married men who engaged greater resource display through self-oriented conspicuous consumption thereby drew more attention from women outside the committed relationship; in contrast, men might strengthen their committed relationship through partner-oriented conspicuous consumption. Based on the above reasoning, I hypothesized that:

- H2a: Committed men with low relationship satisfaction will relatively select more self-oriented conspicuous products than relationship-oriented ones.

- H2b: Committed men with high relationship satisfaction will relatively select more partner-oriented conspicuous products than self-oriented ones.

Method

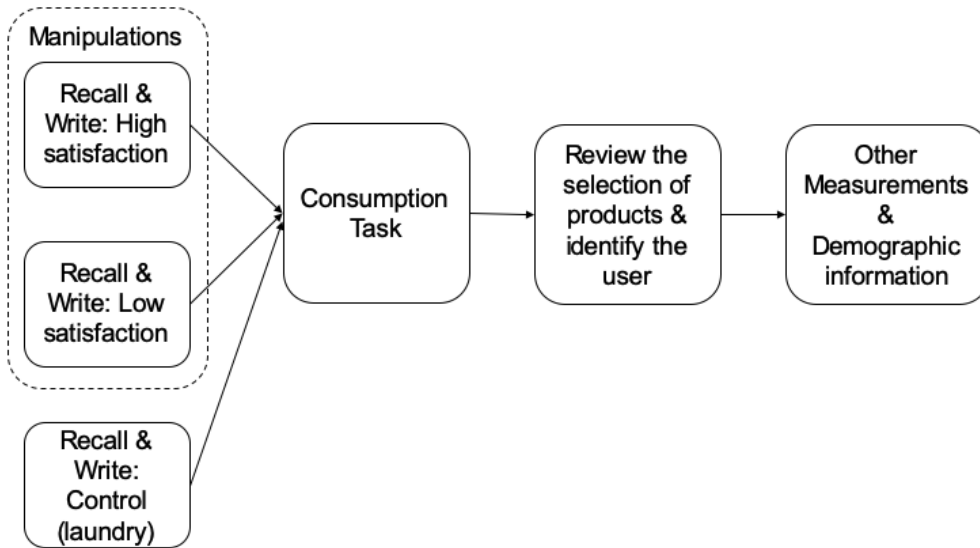
Participants

Three hundred eighty-five male participants were recruited for this study. After removing participants who did not finish the experiment or pass all five attention check questions, 278 participants ($M_{age} = 37.38$ year-old, age range: 18-70 years) remained. Assigned randomly in the present study, 96 male participants were in the high relationship satisfaction priming group, 94 male participants were in the low relationship satisfaction priming group, and 88 male participants were in the control group.

Design and procedure

All participants were randomly assigned to three groups: high relationship satisfaction priming (HRS) group, low relationship satisfaction priming (LRS) group, and the control group. Participants in all three groups were instructed that they would participate in two short and separate studies, the first of which was claimed to investigate their life experiences and the second of which was about their shopping habits, to better understand their behaviors. In the first part of the study, participants were asked to complete a writing task. After the writing task, participants were directed to complete a consumption task. In this consumption task, they were informed to participate in a study that investigates consumption habits by spending up to a maximum of \$2,000 among 42 products and services that varied in conspicuousness level (items adapted from Sundie et al. 2011). There was no restriction on the number of items they could buy, within the allocated maximum budget. And participants did not receive any instruction of potential receivers of the products to avoid the demand characteristics. At the end of this consumption task, participants were shown a summary list of all products they have selected in their shopping and asked to identify the expected receiver of each product, i.e., “me”, “her”, or “both”. Since all participants were males: by dragging and dropping products into ME box, it means that “I bought it ONLY for MYSELF”; by dragging and dropping products into HER box, it means that “I bought it ONLY for my wife/fiancée/girlfriend”; by dragging and dropping products into BOTH box, it means that “I bought it BOTH for my wife/fiancée/girlfriend and I, and we use this product together”. After the consumption task, participants completed other scales and their demographic information. In the end, participants were debriefed. The procedure was also illustrated in Figure IV.1.

Figure IV.1. The experiment procedure of Study 2



Manipulation

In the current Study 2, I manipulated participants’ relationship satisfaction using a writing task based on previous literature (i.e., Hofmann et al., 2015). For participants in the HRS or LRS group, they were asked to recall and write down an experience that was related to their current romantic relationship.


For this writing task, I provided detailed instructions to increase manipulation power. For the HRS group, I asked participants to recall the most positive experience they had in their relationship or with their partner in the past three months, “There are often pleasant moments in our romantic relationships. Using the space below, please think about and write a short paragraph (at least 20 words) recalling the most positive/happy experience you had with your relationship or your partner in the past three months. For example, the positive/happy experience could be an unforgettable vacation, a romantic dinner, a happy event, etc. Please write down as many details as you can, such as when these things occurred, what caused them, how you and your partner behaved, any emotions you felt, if other people were involved, and so on.”

Similarly, for the LRS group, I asked participants to recall the most negative experience they had in their relationship or with their partner in the past three months; for the control group, I asked participants to recall a typical laundry experience in the past three months. Instructions used in HRS group and control group are attached as Appendix C.

Materials

For the products used in the consumption task, these were carefully selected and manipulated to contain equal numbers of conspicuous and non-conspicuous products, a similar proportion for products used by men and by women. I also included both material products and experiential products in this consumption task (see examples in Figure IV.2). I attach the instruction for this consumption task as well as how participants saw and shopped in this task in Appendix D.

Figure IV.2. Example products used in the consumption task

	Conspicuous (21)	Non-conspicuous (21)	
Men (10+10)	 <p>Black Men's Loafers (21) \$120 Black Men's Loafers (21) \$120</p>	 <p>Henry Ferraro Men's Slip-On Black Casual Dress Loafers \$30 Men's Doctors Extra-Capacity Wallet \$35</p>	Men Use (10+10)
Relationship (11+11)	 <p>Women's Versace Heels \$300 Chanel N°5 Parfum (150ml) \$210 Swarovski Platinum-plated Crystal Necklace \$300</p>	 <p>Women's Versace Heels \$300 Patent IT Face Shade Palette \$30 Naked Stone Eyeshadow Palette \$20 Women's Necklace \$35</p>	Women Use (8+8)
	 <p>Woman and Man Dining at Restaurant \$100 Sony 4K Ultra HD 48" Smart TV \$1200</p>	 <p>Woman and Man Dining at Restaurant \$100 TCL 48" smart TV \$1200</p>	Both Use (3+3)

Products were rated by a separated sample ($N = 72$, $M_{age} = 40.73$ year-old, age range: 22-70 year-old) on TurkPrime for the conspicuousness and product type. Participants in this

validation rating study were given the following definition of conspicuous consumption derived from Veblen:

“Conspicuous consumption involves spending money in a way that shows others you have money. It involves ‘showing off’ in the sense that you may be buying these conspicuous products and services to gain status and impress others around you.”

Participants were also be given the definition of product type:

“For men, a self-oriented product will be exclusively designed for and used by the male buyer himself; and a relationship-oriented product can be either designed for and used by their female partner or both of them”

This separate sample of participants then rated each of the products in terms of conspicuousness (1 = not conspicuous consumption at all to 7 = definitely conspicuous consumption) and self-orientation score (1 = totally self-oriented for men to 7 = totally relationship-oriented). Results of *t*-tests showed that conspicuous items were rated as more conspicuous than the non-conspicuous items ($M_{\text{conspicuous}} = 5.37$, $M_{\text{non-conspicuous}} = 2.6$), $t(250) = 19.862$, $p < 0.001$). Also, products that designed for men were rated to be more self-oriented than products that designed for women or for both men and women ($M_{\text{self-oriented}} = 2.74$, $M_{\text{relationship-oriented}} = 5.51$), $t(243) = -22.063$, $p < 0.001$).

Questionnaires

In Study 2, participants were informed that they would assess two contemporary businesspeople from the same affiliation. A revised Sociosexual Orientation Inventory (SOI-R; Penke & Asendorpf, 2008) was also used in Study 2 to measure participants’ sociosexual orientation toward uncommitted sex. As in Study 1, I aggregated the same three items to form the Attitude facet, which measured the attitudes toward sociosexuality. This evaluative

sociosexual attitude assessed participants' increased tendency toward uncommitted sex. Using a 9-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 9 = strongly agree), the higher the total score, the less unrestricted the attitude.

A 7-item Relationship Assessment Scale (Hendrick, 1988) was used in Study 2 to measure men's baseline or trait satisfaction with their current romantic relationship. This scale measured using a 5-point Likert scale, and although the anchors on the scales vary across items, higher scores reflect a greater satisfaction. This questionnaire evaluates relationship satisfaction with items such as "In general, how satisfied are you with your relationship", "How well does your partner meet your need", and so on. Previous studies have evidenced this scale to be reliable and valid in assessing the general relationship satisfaction (Cann et al., 2008).

The 10-item Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (Rosenberg, 1965) was also used in the current study. It has been verified as a stable measurement across nations for individuals' trait self-esteem using items such as "I feel I do not have much to be proud of" on a 4-point scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 4 (strongly agree). Negative items were reversed scored.

A 5-item Satisfaction With Life Scale (SWL, Diener et al., 1985) was included in Study 2 to measure participants' general satisfaction with life. As shown the Pilot Study and Study 1, men with increased luxury spending were rated to have the lowest life satisfaction. I therefore included this scale in the current study and treated this variable as a covariate. This is a stable measure of global cognitive judgments of one's life satisfaction using a 7-point scale that ranges from 7 (strongly agree) to 1 (strongly disagree).

I also measured participants' emotions by asking participants to indicate how they felt after completing the writing priming task and the consumption task using a 4-point Likert scale

(1 = not at all, 4 = very much so), including calm, tense, upset, relaxed, content, worried, pleasant, satisfied with myself, lack of self-confidence, and secure.

In addition, to replicate the result from Study 1 that married men with increasing conspicuous consumption for themselves were rated to have a higher tendency to leave the current marriage for a new one, I measured the frequency of thinking about leaving the relationship (FTALR) by asking a 5-point Likert scale question: “In a typical week, how often do you think about leaving or ending the current relationship?” (1= almost never, 5 = very often).

Results

Manipulation check

Manipulation check for our priming task was done using a separate TurkPrime sample ($N_{\text{total}} = 98$, $M_{\text{age}} = 39.27$ year-old) to avoid participants anticipating the experiment design that would affect experimental conclusions (Hauser et al., 2018). I tested the effectiveness of the manipulation for each group ($N_{\text{high}} = 32$, $N_{\text{low}} = 35$, $N_{\text{control}} = 31$). In the manipulation check, I asked participants to finish the writing task and rate their relationship satisfaction using one 7-point Likert scale question: “How satisfied are you with your relationship with your partner at the moment”. One-way ANOVA was conducted to test the difference and post-hoc t -tests were performed to test the differences between groups. Results showed that participants in the HRS group reported a higher relationship satisfaction ($M (SD) = 6.34 (1.18)$) than did participants in the LRS group ($M (SD) = 5.37 (1.83)$; $t (95) = 2.717$, $p = 0.021$), and participants in the control group reported higher satisfaction ($M (SD) = 6.26 (1.24)$) than did participants in the LRS group ($t (95) = 2.457$, $p = 0.042$; main effect of group: $F (2, 95) = 4.575$, $p = 0.013$).

I also measured participants' emotions after the writing task as we did in the formal experiment design. I measure these by asking participants to indicate how they felt after taking the writing task, including calm, tense, upset, relaxed, content, worried, pleasant, satisfied with myself, lack of self-confidence, and secure. Results of the ANOVA showed that participants in HRS group were more calm than participants in LRS group after the writing task ($M_{HRS} (SD) = 3.44 (0.56)$, $M_{LRS} (SD) = 2.97 (0.82)$; $t (95) = 2.521$, $p = 0.035$; main effect of group: $F (2, 95) = 3.197$, $p = 0.045$), but there was no difference between groups for the rest of other emotions (all $F_s < 2.8$, $p_s > 0.05$).

Definition of two indexes

To better evaluate the consumption, I defined and calculated two dependent variable in the following way:

The proportion of conspicuous consumption for men themselves (Self CC Percentage) =
Total spending on conspicuous products for self / Total spending in the consumption task

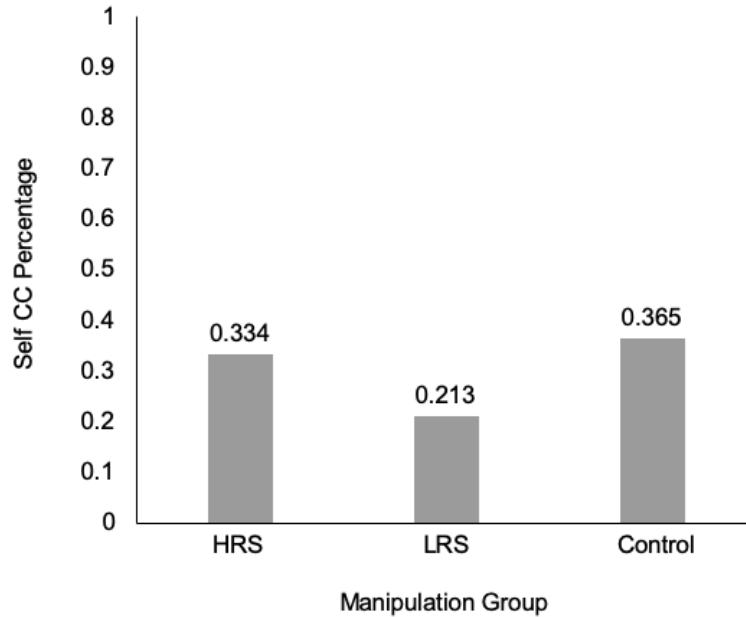
The proportion of conspicuous consumption for female partner (Partner CC Percentage)
= Total spending on conspicuous products for female partner / Total spending in the
consumption task

Linear regressions were conducted in R for the above two dependent variables respectively. All models were run with group, trait relationship satisfaction (Relation Assessment Score, RAS) as independent variables, materials values score (MVS), self-esteem, Sociosexual Orientation Inventory (SOI-R) attitude subscale, Satisfaction With Life Scale (SWL), and frequency of thinking about leaving the relationship (FTALR) as covariates.

Conspicuous consumption for men themselves

There was no significant difference between manipulation groups for the proportion of conspicuous consumption for men themselves among groups (main effect of group: $F(2, 252) = 1.89, p > 0.1$), see in Figure IV.3.

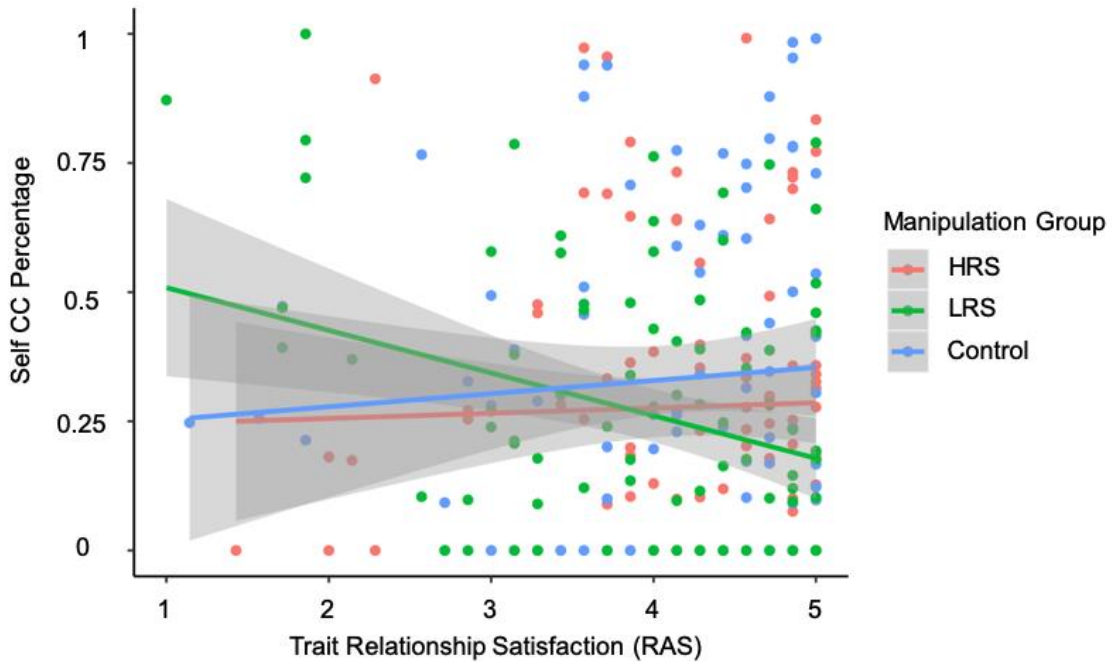
Figure IV.3. Group Difference of Conspicuous Consumption for Men Themselves



Note. There was no significant difference between manipulation groups for the proportion of conspicuous consumption for men themselves among groups. HRS = High relationship satisfaction priming group; LRS = Low relationship satisfaction priming group.

No results reach significance for participants in HRS group, but the manipulation group by RAS interaction survived ($t(252) = 0.75, p > 0.1$, group x RAS interaction: $F(1, 252) = 8.8777, p < 0.001$). In the LRS group, after being primed with low relationship satisfaction, men who had lower relationship satisfaction reported that they would buy more luxuries for themselves ($t(252) = -2.20, p = 0.03$). For the control group, the higher trait relationship satisfaction they have, the more luxuries they would buy for themselves ($t(252) = 2.63, p = 0.01$). See in Figure IV.4.

Figure IV.4. Relationship Dissatisfaction and Conspicuous Consumption for Men Themselves



Note. After recalled negative memories, men who are more dissatisfied with their current relationship would buy more luxuries for themselves. HRS = High relationship satisfaction priming group; LRS = Low relationship satisfaction priming group.

Results also showed that materialism could significantly drive men to buy more conspicuous consumption for themselves, regardless of priming group and their trait relationship satisfaction, $F(1, 252) = 14.08, p < 0.001$, see Figure IV.5. I also found that men with higher frequency of thinking about leaving the current relationship (FTALR) would buy significantly more conspicuous products for themselves, regardless of priming group and their trait relationship satisfaction, $F(1, 252) = 4.102, p = 0.044$, see in Figure IV.5. No significant effect on men's conspicuous consumption for themselves was generated by their self-esteem level, their attitude toward sex, and their satisfaction to life (all other $ps > 0.05$).

Figure IV.5. Materialism Increases Men's Conspicuous Consumption for Themselves

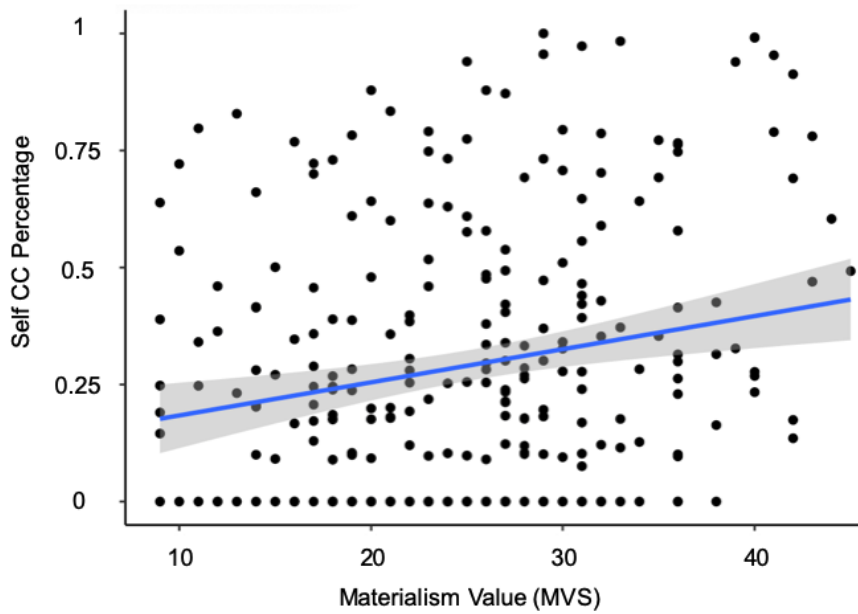
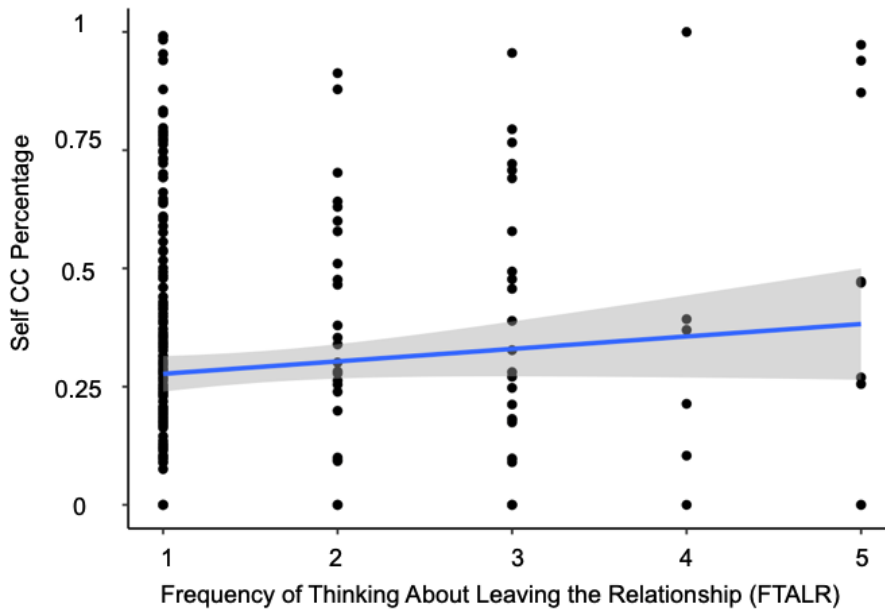


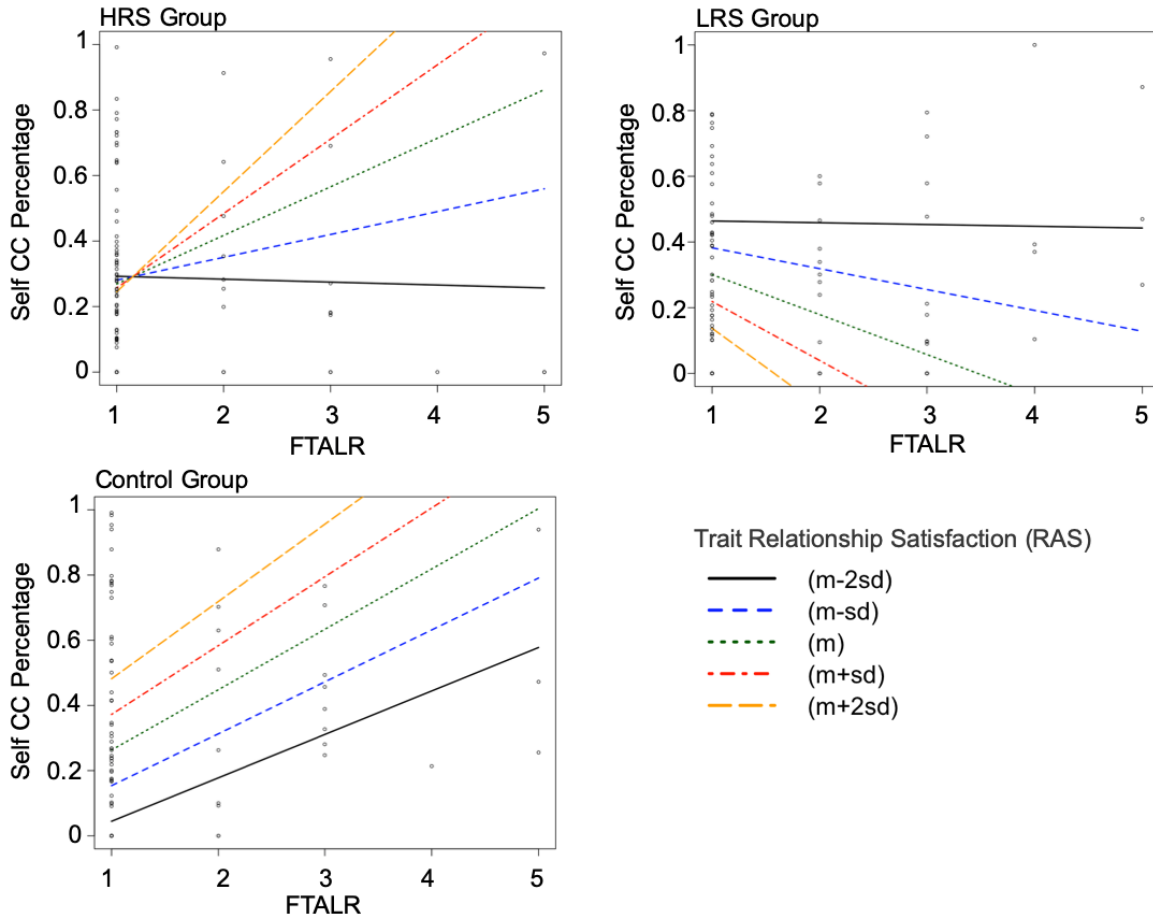
Figure IV.6. FTALR Increases Committed Men's Conspicuous Consumption for Themselves



Note. Committed men who are more frequently thinking about leaving the current romantic relationship (FTALR) would buy more conspicuous products for themselves.

I also obtained a three-way interaction between FTALR, RAS, and manipulation group ($F(1, 252) = 5.519, p = 0.005$) on committed men's conspicuous consumption proportion for themselves using Self CC Percentage index. Analysis was conducted by breaking the interaction by group. When primed with *positive* memories in the HRS group, for men who never thought about leaving the relationship, the more satisfied men were with their current relationship in general, the less they spent on self-oriented conspicuous consumption; while, as men thought about leaving the relationship very frequently, the more satisfied they were in general, the more they would spend on self-oriented conspicuous consumption (FTALR x RAS interaction: $F(1, 92) = 8.114, p = 0.005$; for slopes of RAS on average: $t = 2.538, p = 0.013$, average + SD: $t = 2.848, p = 0.005$, average + 2 SD: $t = 2.939, p = 0.004$; all other $ps > 0.05$). When primed with *negative* memories in LRS group, as men thought about leaving the relationship very frequently, the less satisfied they were in general, the more they would spend on self-oriented conspicuous consumption (main effect of RAS: $F(1, 90) = 9.328, p = 0.003$, FTALR x RAS interaction: $F(1, 90) = 6.385, p = 0.0133$; for slopes of RAS on average: $t = -2.627, p = 0.010$, average + SD: $t = -2.943, p = 0.004$, average + 2 SD: $t = -2.979, p = 0.004$; all other $ps > 0.05$). For the control group, the higher trait relationship satisfaction (RAS) they have, the more luxuries they would buy for themselves ($F(1, 82) = 7.802, p = 0.007$; all other $ps > 0.05$). See Figure IV.7 below.

Figure IV.7. Interaction Among FTALR, Trait Relationship Satisfaction, and Priming Group.



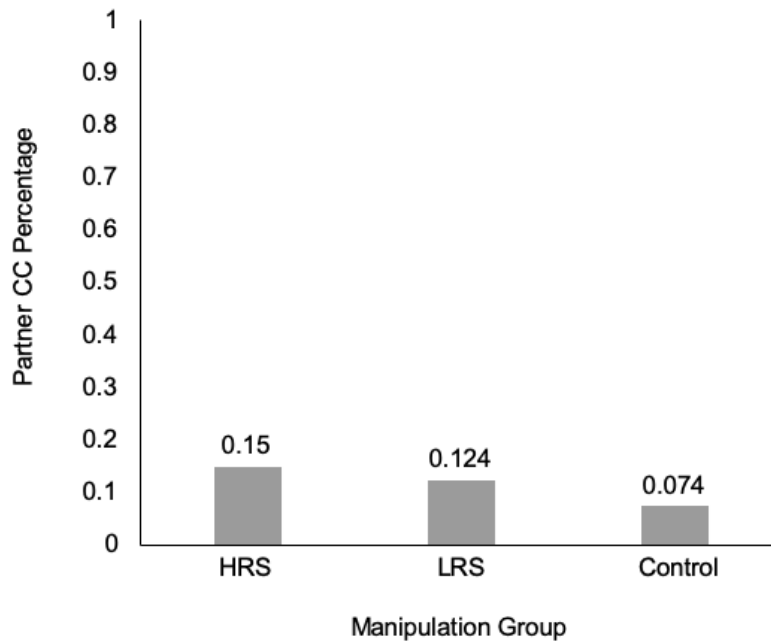
Note. When primed with high relationship satisfaction (HRS group, upper left), as men thought about leaving the relationship very frequently, when their overall trait relationship satisfaction was above the average, men’s spending on self-oriented conspicuous consumption increased from being lowest to highest. When primed with low relationship satisfaction (LRS group, upper right), as men thought about leaving the relationship more frequently, the less satisfied they were in general, the more they would spend on self-oriented conspicuous consumption. For control group, the higher trait relationship satisfaction they have, the more luxuries they would buy for themselves (lower left). FTALR = Frequency of thinking about leaving the current relationship.

Conspicuous consumption for female partner

Committed men primed with *positive* memories in HRS group, compared to men in the control group, spent higher proportions of money on luxuries for their female partner ($M_{HRS} = 0.15$, $M_{control} = 0.074$, $t(252) = 2.140$, $p = 0.084$; main effect of group: $F(1, 252) = 3.558$, $p = 0.030$). No significant difference in conspicuous consumption spending proportion for their

female partner (Partner CC Percentage index) was found between HRS and LRS priming group, or between the LRS priming group and the control group (both $ps > 0.1$), as shown in Figure IV.8.

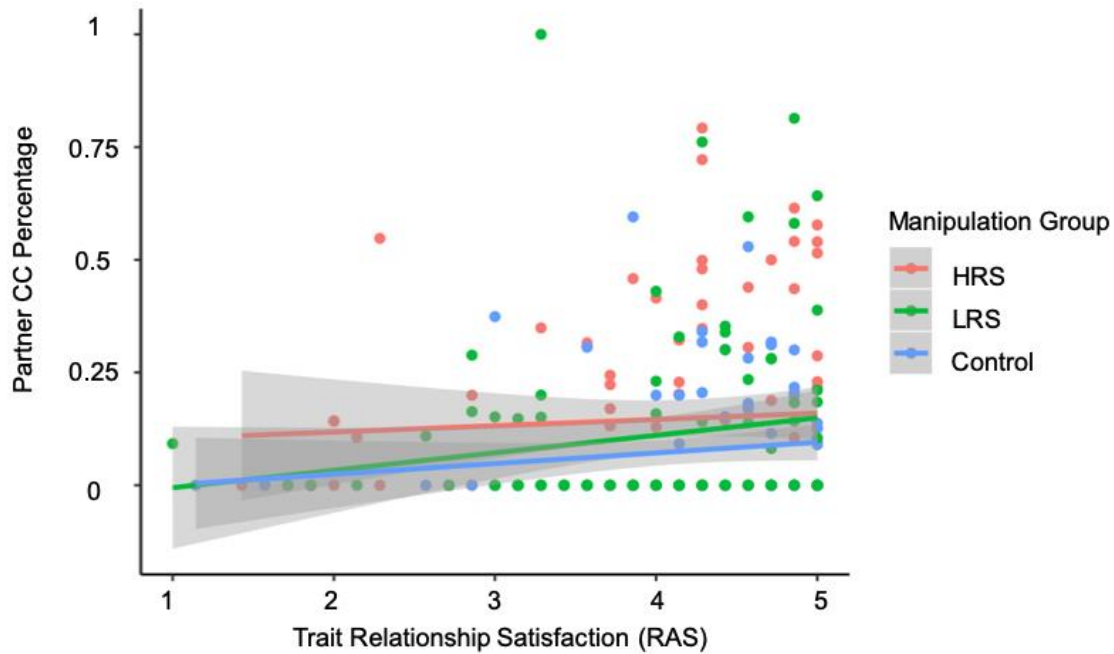
Figure IV.8. Group Difference of Conspicuous Consumption for Female Partner



Note. HRS = High relationship satisfaction priming group; LRS = Low relationship satisfaction priming group.

Interestingly, when priming participants with *negative* memories in LRS group, the more satisfied they were with their current relationship in general (higher trait satisfaction), the more luxuries they would buy for their female partner (Partner CC Percentage index: $t(252) = 2.47$, $p = 0.01$; group x RAS interaction: $F(1, 252) = 3.603$, $p = 0.029$; see Figure IV.9). No significant effect on men's conspicuous consumption for their partner was generated by their materialism level, the frequency of thinking about leaving the relationship (FTALR), their self-esteem level, their attitude toward sex, and their satisfaction to life (all other $ps > 0.05$).

Figure IV.9. Relationship Dissatisfaction and Conspicuous Consumption for Partner



Note. When priming committed men with low relationship satisfaction, the more satisfied they were with their current relationship in general (higher trait satisfaction), the more luxuries would buy for their female partner. HRS = High relationship satisfaction priming group; LRS = Low relationship satisfaction priming group.

Discussion

Study 2 provided three important findings about when men in a committed relationship would buy more conspicuous consumption for themselves. Without considering the situational priming, committed men would buy more conspicuous products for themselves when they (1) are more frequently thinking about leaving the current relationship; or (2) score higher on trait materialism. With a priming of *positive* memories about the relationship, committed men would buy more conspicuous products for themselves when they are very frequently thinking about leaving the relationship and, at the same time, are generally more *satisfied* with their current

relationship. With a priming of *negative* memories about the relationship, committed men would buy more conspicuous products for themselves when they (1) are generally more *dissatisfied* with their current relationship; or (2) are very frequently thinking about leaving the relationship and, at the same time, are generally more *dissatisfied* with their current relationship.

Study 2 also evidenced two findings regarding when men in a committed relationship would buy more conspicuous products for their partner. With a priming of *positive* memories about the relationship, committed men would buy more conspicuous products for their partner than those who did not receive the priming. With a priming of *negative* memories about the relationship, committed men would buy more conspicuous products for their partner when they are more *satisfied* with their current relationship in general.

Replicating the third-person's observations in Study 1 showing that people perceived married men with an increased conspicuous consumption for themselves to be more likely to leave the current marriage, Study 2 found that the more frequently a man in a committed relationship thinks about leaving the current relationship in a typical week, the more conspicuous products he would purchase for himself. And only conspicuous consumption for men themselves, not that for the partner, was positively predicted by this frequency. This further evidenced that committed men's suddenly increased conspicuous consumption for themselves signals stronger relationship distress.

Consistent with previous literature which addressed the robust connection between materialism and conspicuous consumption (Chacko et al., 2018; Frijters & Leigh, 2008; Podoshen & Andrzejewski, 2012; Vohra, 2016), the present research documented a positive relationship between materialism and increased conspicuous consumption only for men themselves, not for their partner. This might be because that, for individuals who are more

materialistic, they tend to give higher value to items that can be worn or seen in public, and may enjoy showing them to others rather than actually using them (Richins, 1994a; 1994b). We could also understand this by considering the connection between self and materialism. Higher-level materialism implies an underlying belief in which possessions could inform others about the self-image of the individual and therefore serve a communicative function in this individual's social life (Douglas & Isherwood, 1979; Wong, 1997). Driving by this communicative function, materialistic individuals attach much social meanings to products for themselves, as compared to products for other people. This also explains why materialism only increased committed men's conspicuous consumption for themselves, not for their partner.

Findings in Study 2 also suggested that, besides the trait drivers (i.e., materialism) that could motivate committed men to buy more conspicuous products for themselves, there should be some other situational triggers that underlie the lift of men's conspicuous consumption for themselves.

When priming people with the most *positive* experience in their relationship, I primed in participants a temporary high relationship satisfaction. This situational priming itself increased conspicuous consumption for their partner as compared to that without any priming. This priming of positive memory also jointly functioned with men's higher frequency in thinking about leaving and their high trait relationship satisfaction. This connection seems to be self-contradictory, but it is possible, for men who might feel satisfied with the current relationship, there might be some other reasons that lead them to more and more frequently consider leaving (e.g., children or other issues outside the marriage). As relationship satisfaction by nature is a subjective evaluation, it is a dynamic rating that can be influenced by people's global feeling about the romantic relationship and also contributes to the "climate" of the relationship (Hawkins

et al., 2002). It is also positively related to the degree of security between partners (Dalglish et al., 2015). Higher trait relationship satisfaction might, therefore, make these men feel like their actions and decisions should be safer, more secure, and better understood by their partner.

Priming positive memories might further boost the above feelings. Building on such a stable and secure base, even men's increased self-oriented conspicuous consumption signals the possibility of considering to leave the current marriage, it is possible that they believe it is safe enough to not affect the status of their current romantic relationship.

When priming committed men with their most *negative* experience in their relationship, their trait relationship satisfaction mediated their consumption. When men were *dissatisfied* with their current relationship, priming low relationship satisfaction with negative memories drove them to engage in more luxury consumption for themselves; while, when men were *satisfied* with their current relationship, such negative priming drove them to engage in more luxury consumption for their partner. Negative priming might exaggerate men's dissatisfaction with the current relationship thereby generated more self-oriented conspicuous consumption. However, such negative memory might trigger satisfied men to take this partner-oriented conspicuous consumption as compensation to this negative experience and a gift to express they are committed to the current relationship.

Chapter V Study 3

In Chapter IV, Study 2 demonstrated when men in a committed relationship would buy more conspicuous consumption for themselves and for their partner. Both trait and situational motivations were observed to drive committed men's conspicuous consumption.

Although both Study 1 and Study 2 addressed the motivations that underlie committed men's increased conspicuous consumption from multiple perspectives, it is unclear how their in-pair partner react to such an increase in consumption. Romantic relationships could be influenced by a complex network of interconnected interactions, which has been addressed in many research fields (e.g., the attachment theory: Hazan & Shaver, 1994). Inspired by the Self-Evaluation Maintenance (SEM) perspective (Beach & Tesser, 2000) and exchange theory (Clark, 1984; Kelley & Thibaut, 1978), Chapter V focused on female's reactions to their male partner's suddenly increased conspicuous consumption.

The Self-Evaluation Maintenance (SEM) perspective proposed two opposing processes that are critical for maintaining a positive self-assessment: reflection and comparison (Beach & Tesser, 2000; Tesser, 1985). It emphasizes that individuals will adjust their behaviors to maintain or increase self-evaluation, a process that might be impacted by a close other through comparison (Beach et al., 1996). Interaction between committed couples is a typical example under this SEM framework (Neff & Beretvas, 2013). Take the present dissertation project as an example: when a man is purchasing more conspicuous products for himself, his wife might feel threatened and react to maintain a positive self-assessment. Connecting this to perspective of the

social exchange theory in the context of a close romantic relationship (Arnott, 1972; Holmes, 1981), fairness in intimate relationships could be linked to satisfaction, commitment, and stability in these relationships (reviewed by Clark & Chrisman, 1994). Therefore, for females' potential reactions to their spouse's increased conspicuous consumption, whether she would feel under-benefited from this consumption could negatively impact her attitudes (Kamo, 1993).

In addition to the potential equity of devotion to the romantic relationship, the equity of mate value also matters. Previous evidence showed that mate value difference causes different mate retention patterns (i.e., Benefit-Provisioning or Cost-Inflicting; Starratt & Shackelford, 2012; Sela et al., 2017). When assessing reactions from females to their partner's increased conspicuous consumption, the discrepancy between partner and own mate value might change one's attitude. Previous research indicates that higher mate value women receive cost-inflicting mate retention behaviors from their partner (e.g., insulted by their partners) more frequently than women of lower mate value (Miner, Shackelford, et al., 2009; Miner, Starratt, et al., 2009). It is possible that men of lower mate value married to women of higher value might not feel justified. While for women who are independently rated as having higher mate value than their husbands report greater likelihood of divorcing him as a result of his infidelity (Shackelford & Buss, 1997).

Previous studies in the present dissertation compared the effect of spending patterns in interpreting men's conspicuous consumption and the proportion of conspicuous consumption among both conspicuous and non-conspicuous consumption. In Study 2, the proportion index introduced in the data analyses indirectly compared the difference between conspicuous and non-conspicuous products. On the basis of this, Study 3 directly compared the difference between

conspicuous and non-conspicuous products in understanding the infidelity-related signaling function of married men's increased conspicuous consumption.

Based on the above logic, I hypothesized that:

H3a: For married men with increased conspicuous consumption, as compared to non-conspicuous consumption, for themselves, their spouse will rate them to be less satisfied with the current relationship and have a higher chance for infidelity.

H3b: The less females could benefit from their male partner's increased spending, the more likely they are to perceive their partner to be unfaithful.

Method

Participant

313 heterosexual female participants were recruited for Study 3 from TurkPrime. After removing participants who did not finish the entire experiment or pass all the attention check questions, 277 participants ($M_{\text{age}} = 41.32$ year-old, age range: 19-70 year-old) remained.

Participants were randomly assigned to two groups (conspicuous consumption group (Increased CC group): $N_{\text{CC}} = 141$, non-conspicuous consumption group (Increased Non-CC group): $N_{\text{Non-CC}} = 136$).

Design and Procedure

The current Study 3 will be a between-subject (consumption: conspicuous versus non-conspicuous) online survey experiment. As the purchasing behavior might reflect the potential attitudinal changes originated from the past, happened in the present, or will occur in the future, the dependent variables were the likelihood of infidelity (in the past, in the present, in the future) and the perceived partner's relationship satisfaction.

Female participants were randomly assigned to either of the two manipulated groups and then were asked a set of 7-point Likert scale questions regarding the likelihood of infidelity, relationship satisfaction, likelihood of benefit from the purchase. Participants then finished two mate value scales to evaluate the both self and partner mate value. After finished all of above, participants were asked to imagine a man wearing each of the products and rate the man. SES, relationship duration, money management style, relationship style, other demographic information, and manipulation check of the products were collected at the end.

Manipulation

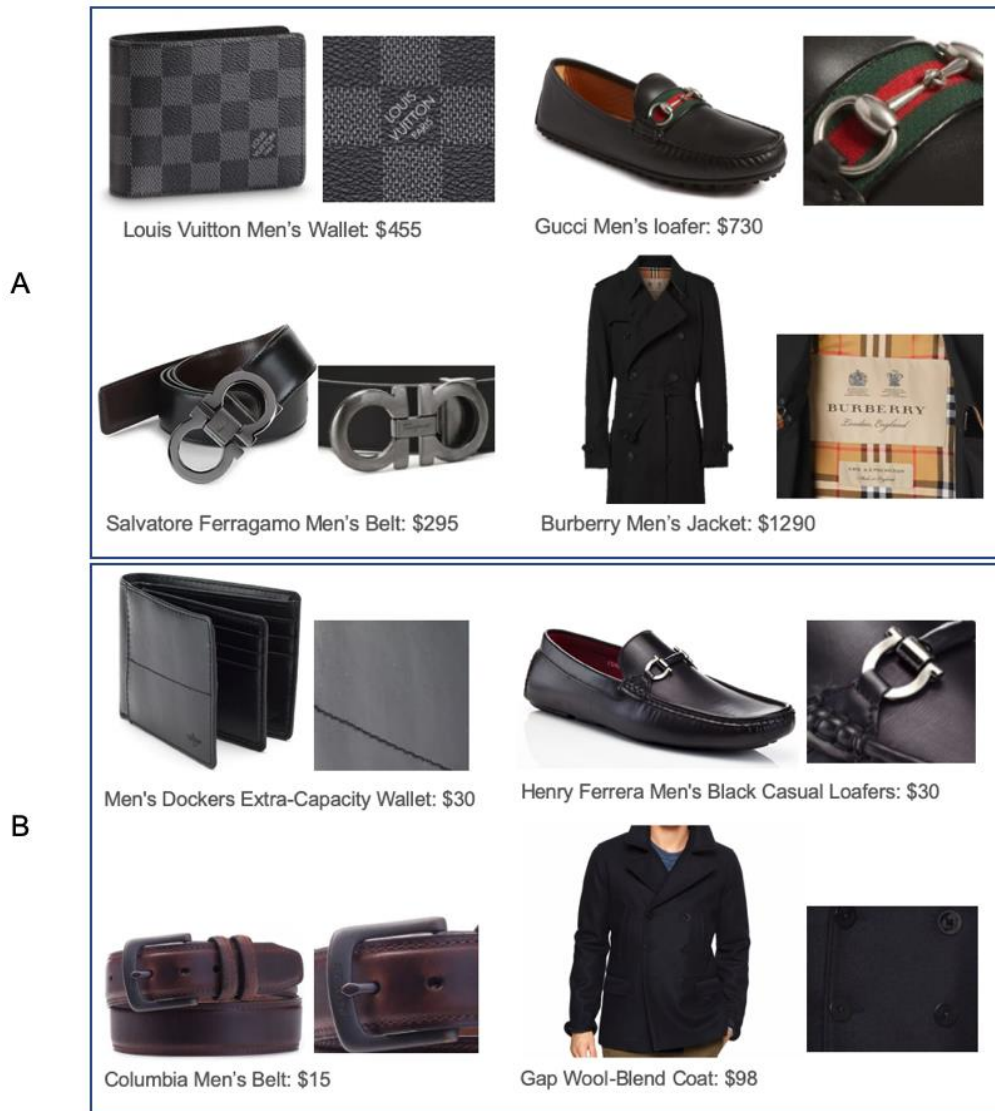
We provided the same cover story for both groups showing that their partner was buying more and more items in the past two months with a made-up list of four products (the difference between groups has been bolded, putting non-conspicuous group word in square brackets), except product conspicuousness level:

“Imagine that your boyfriend or husband has purchased **an increasing number of luxury** [ordinary] items for *himself* in the past two months, including purchasing these four products. Please read the following product information carefully and answer the following questions.”

In this made-up list, eight products from four categories (wallet, shoes, belt, jacket) were carefully selected to match their style and colors, and provided for both groups (Increased CC group versus Increased Non-CC group) with conspicuous and non-conspicuous version, as conspicuous items for conspicuous group and non-conspicuous ones for non-conspicuous group (see Figure IV.1 below). The product name, price, photo, and photo of details were provided for each product. To make sure the manipulation was valid, we asked every participant to rate all eight products on the conspicuousness level on a 5-point Likert Scale (1 = Not at all, 5 = A great a deal). We used the same definition of conspicuousness as we did in Study 2. The higher the

conspicuousness score was, the more they believed this product qualified as conspicuous consumption. Manipulation check was done at the very end of the study to avoid any influences caused by doing this manipulation check.

Figure V.1. Products Used in the Manipulation



Note. Materials used in conspicuous group (A) and non-conspicuous group (B). The product name, price, photo, and photo of details were provided for each product.

Measurements

Three 7-point Likert questions on the likelihood of their spouse's infidelity (in the past, in the present, in the future, respectively; 1 = extremely unlikely, 7 = extremely likely) and one 7-

point Likert question on the perceived partner's relationship satisfaction (1= extremely not satisfactory, 7 = extremely satisfactory) were used in both Increased CC group and Increased Non-CC group. The measurements of the perceived likelihood of spouse's infidelity in the past, in the present, and in the future were revised from Goetz and Causey (2009) using the instruction: "After making the purchases above, how likely do you think it is that your current partner was [is/will be] sexually or emotionally unfaithful to you in the past [now/in the future]?" And the question for perceived likelihood of spouse's relationship satisfaction was asked by "After making the purchases above, how satisfied do you think your current partner is with the current relationship?"

We also measured the potential benefits that females perceived from their partner's increased self-oriented consumption with a single 7-point Likert question: "How likely do you think it is that you would benefit from these purchases?", 1 = extremely unlikely and 7 = extremely likely. All of the above questions ratings were randomly displayed.

Assessment of Mate Value (Graham-Kevan & Archer, 2009) was also included. This multidimensional assessment consists of 6 different aspects of mate value. This is a self-reported evaluation of both self and partner mate value on physical attractiveness, personality, education, intelligence, career or job prospects and social status, relatively to other people they know. We extended the original a 5-point scale to a 7-point Likert scale (1 = very low, 7 = very high) to increase the variation of results and to avoid the ceiling effect (see details in Nowak & Danel, 2014).

After finished all of above, participants were asked to imagine a man wearing each of the eight products and rate the man on four dimensions (attractive, desirable, wealthy, and intriguing) using a 5-point Likert Scale (1 = not at all, 5 = extremely). Though we majorly

concerned about the effect of conspicuousness of the products in women's attitude towards their partner's increased consumption, it would be worthy to also take other possible influential factors into the consideration. We then tried to use this set of additional ratings to understand women's perception of these products besides the conspicuousness. All ratings were randomly displayed.

To eliminate other covariates, besides age and 12-month income, we also asked a series of questions measuring factors that might affect the way female perceived their partner's luxury spending. I first asked participants to report the length of their current relationship. To make this easier, participants could just report both the number of years and number of months their relationship lasts. I further converted all self-reported relationship durations in terms of number of months in our data analysis.

I then measured if participants were lived together with their partner by asking "Do you and your current partner live together?" with a list of options including "Yes, we live together", "No, we live in separate places/houses", "Occasionally (i.e., only live together during weekend)", and other self-defined styles (text entry allowed).

I also assessed ways that participants managed their money or assets by asking "How do you and your partner manage money or assets?" with a list of options including "We are financially independent or separate", "We are financially joint", "Mixed, a combination of separate and joint accounts", and other self-defined styles (text entry allowed).

Additionally, participants were asked to indicate their relationship type by choose from the list of dating partner, casual sex partner, boyfriend-girlfriend, a short-term committed relationship partner, long-term domestic partner, spouse without child/children, spouse with child/children, and other.

I also included a socioeconomic (SES) ladder to control participants' SES level, and a 5-point Likert question measuring COVID-19 related anxiety by asking "How much anxiety are you currently feeling regarding the spread of COVID-19 (coronavirus)?", 1 = not at all and 5 = extremely. This COVID-19 question was asked because the current study was conducted during the outbreak of COVID-19 in March, 2020.

Results

The degree of mate value difference was defined by a difference between total score (sums of all six items) of a woman's mate value self-assessment and her assessment of her partner's mate value: Mate value difference = Own mate value score – Partner's mate value.

Linear regressions were conducted in RStudio for the above three infidelity ratings and one relationship satisfaction rating, respectively. All models were run with group as independent variables, 12-month income, difference in mate value, perceived level of benefit from purchase, length of their relationship, if lived together, money management style, relation type, SES, and COVID-19 anxiety as covariates.

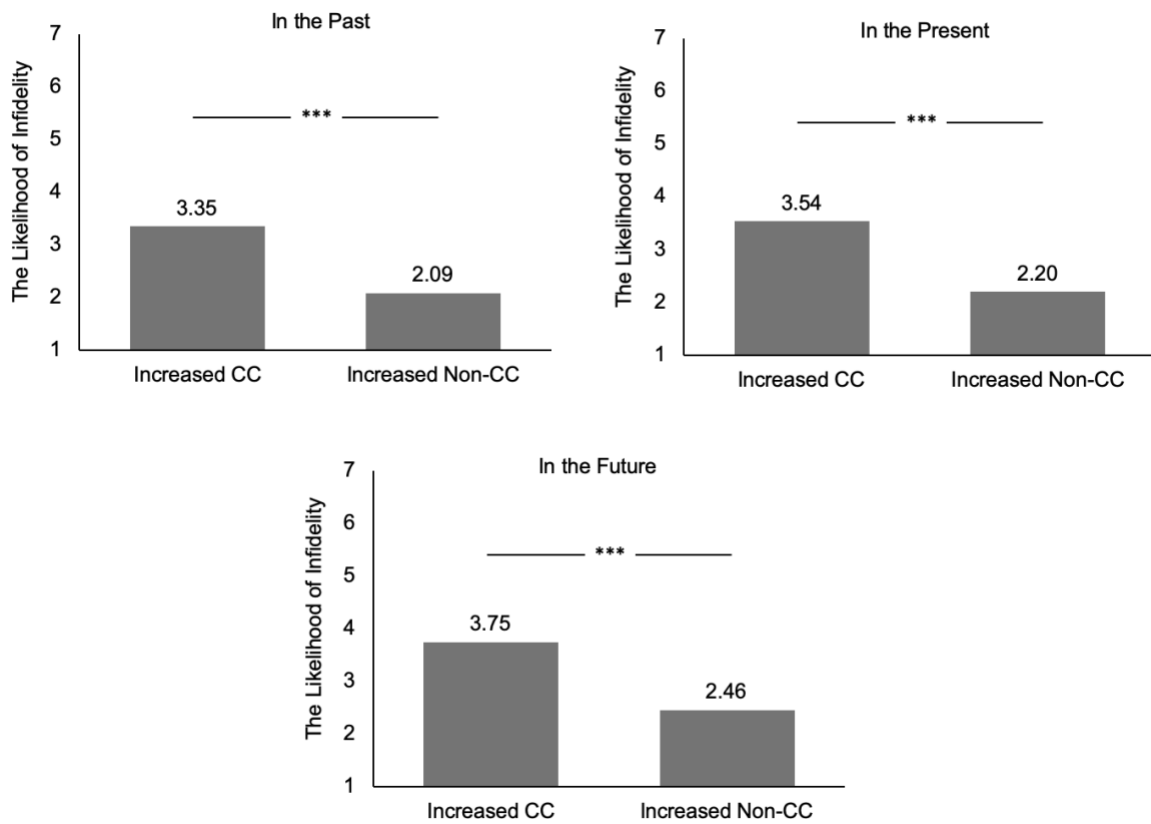
Manipulation check

Paired *t* test was performed in R using *t.test* function to evaluate the success of the manipulation. Results showed that conspicuous items were significantly more conspicuous ($M (SD) = 4.31(0.83)$) than that of the non-conspicuous items ($M (SD) = 1.82 (0.82)$), $t(276) = 34.1$, $p < 0.001$. This represented that the manipulation in the present study was successful.

Perceived likelihood of infidelity

Infidelity possibility in the past. We found that females suspected their partner to have *higher* likelihood of being unfaithful in the past when their partner purchased increased *conspicuous*, than non-conspicuous, products ($M_{CC} (SD) = 3.35 (1.86)$, $M_{Non-CC} (SD) = 2.09 (1.44)$, $t(255) = 5.33$, $p < 0.001$; main effect of group: $F(1, 255) = 43.6$, $p < 0.001$, see in Figure V.2); when they self-report a *lower* mate value to their partner, at the same time, their partner increased self-oriented *conspicuous* consumption ($t_{cc} = -3.34$, $p < 0.001$). However, without considering whether products men bought were conspicuous or not, self-partner mate value difference solely *positively* predicted the likelihood of past infidelity potential, indicating a tendency that overall higher rating on her own mate value than that of partner increase the perceived likelihood of their partner's infidelity in the past (main effect of self-partner mate value difference: $F(1, 255) = 7.39$, $p = 0.007$). See more details in Figure V.3.

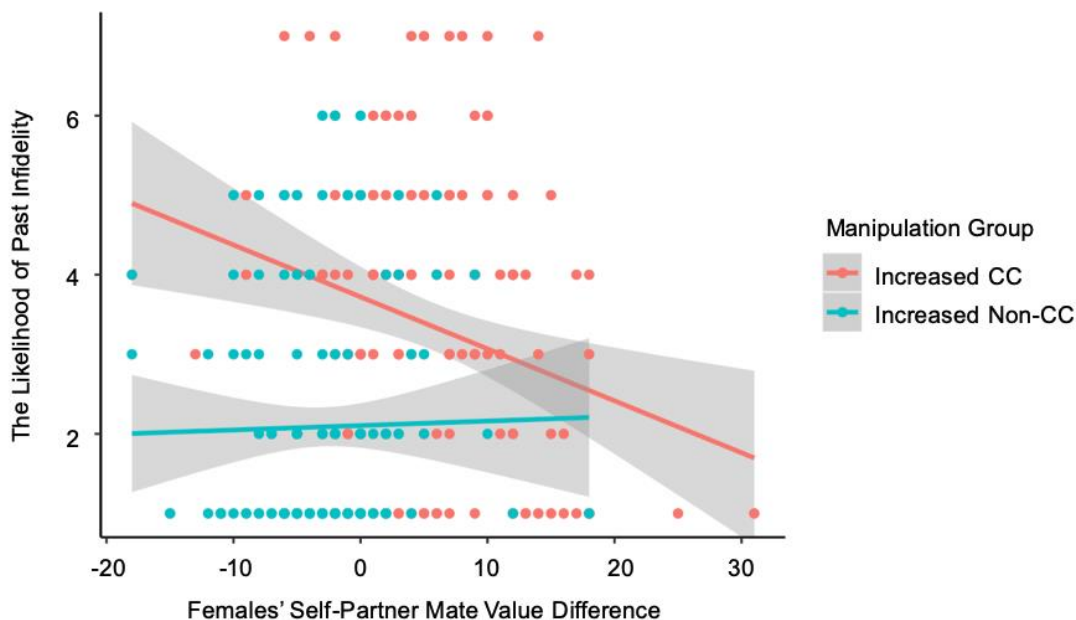
Figure V.2. Higher Infidelity Possibility for Increased Conspicuous Consumption



Note. Females rated their partner to be more likely to be unfaithful in the past, in the present, and in the future, when purchased increased conspicuous, than non-conspicuous, products. Increased CC = Increased conspicuous consumption for men themselves; Increased Non-CC = Increased non-conspicuous consumption for men themselves.

***: $p < 0.001$, **: $p < 0.01$, *: $p < 0.05$

Figure V.3. Mate Value x Group Interaction on Perceived Past Infidelity Possibility



Note. When male partner purchased more self-oriented conspicuous products, women of lower mate value than their partner were more likely to believe that him was unfaithful in the past ($t_{cc} = -3.34, p < 0.001$, self-partner mate value difference \times group interaction: $F(1, 255) = 5.40, p = 0.02$). The more positive the self-partner mate value difference is, the more females' mate value surpassed their male partner's. However, this difference in general positively predicted the perceived likelihood of partner's past infidelity (main effect of mate value difference: $F(1, 255) = 7.39, p = 0.007$). Increased CC = Increased conspicuous consumption for men themselves; Increased Non-CC = Increased non-conspicuous consumption for men themselves.

Females also suspected their partner with *greater* infidelity potential in the past when they perceived to receive *fewer* benefits from this purchase ($F(1, 255) = 4.79, p = 0.029$, see in Figure V.4); and when they managed their money in a mixed fashion including separate and joint accounts, as compared to who did separately ($M_{\text{separate}} (SD) = 2.15 (1.55)$, $M_{\text{mixed}} (SD) = 3.07 (1.89)$, $t(255) = -2.83, p = 0.014$; main effect of money management style: $F(1, 255) = 4.29, p = 0.027$, see in Figure V.5). All other variables were failed to reach significance (all F values < 4 , $ps > 0.05$)

Figure V.4. Perceived Higher Infidelity Possibility as Benefit Decreased

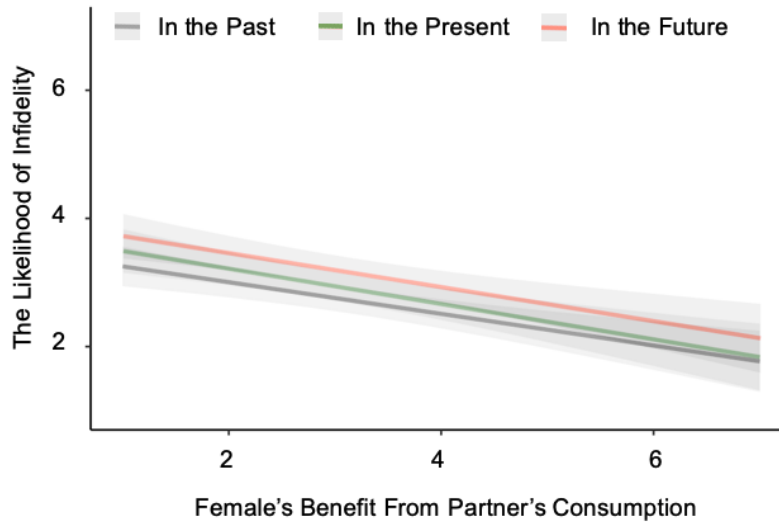
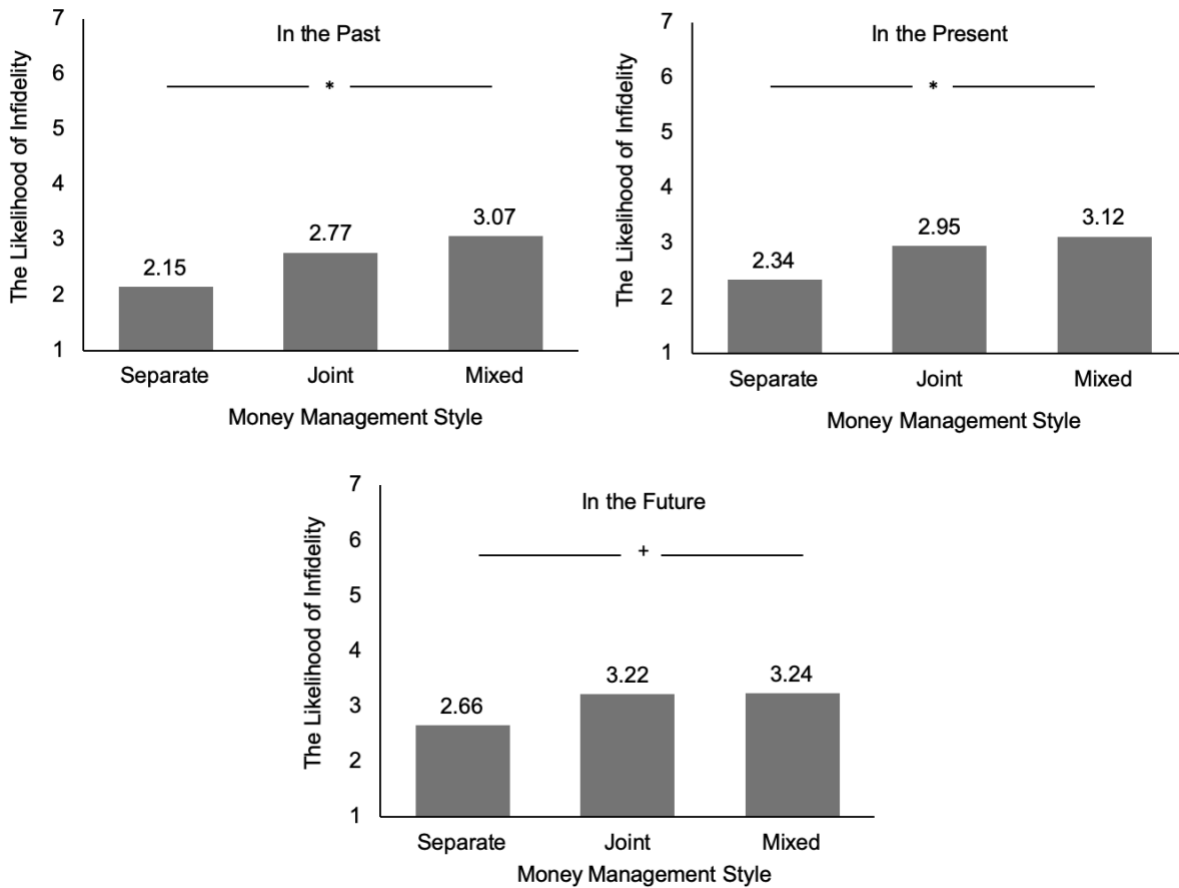


Figure V.5. Higher Infidelity Possibility With Mixed Money Management Style



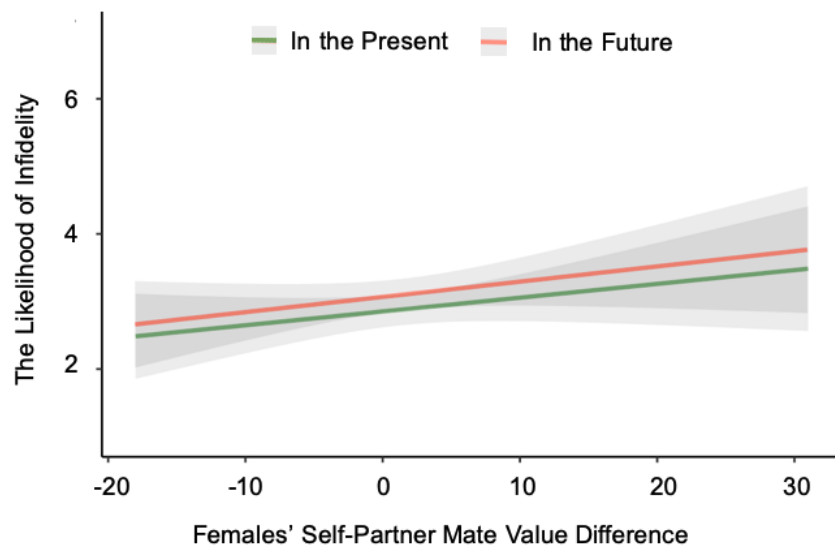
Note. Females perceived their partner to have a higher chance of being unfaithful in the past and present when they and their partner managed their money in a mixed fashion that contains both separate and joint accounts than who managed their money separately. No significant difference

Separate = financially independent or separate, Joint = financially joint”, Mixed = a combination of separate and joint accounts.

***: $p < 0.001$, **: $p < 0.01$, *: $p < 0.05$, +: $p < 0.07$

Infidelity possibility in the present. Results showed that females rated their partner to be *more* likely to be unfaithful in the future when their partner purchased themselves increased *conspicuous*, than non-conspicuous, products ($M_{CC} (SD) = 3.54 (2.02)$, $M_{Non-CC} (SD) = 2.20 (1.64)$, $t(255) = 4.77$, $p < 0.001$; main effect of group: $F(1, 255) = 38.48$, $p < 0.001$, see in Figure V.2); when they rated themselves to have a relative *higher* mate value than that of their partner ($F(1, 255) = 5.94$, $p = 0.015$, see in Figure V.6); when they perceived to receive *fewer* benefits from this purchase ($F(1, 259) = 5.703$, $p = 0.018$, see in Figure V.4); when they and their partner managed their money in a mixed fashion, as compared to who managed their money separately ($M_{separate} (SD) = 2.34 (1.59)$, $M_{mixed} (SD) = 3.12 (2.06)$, $t(255) = -2.673$, $p = 0.022$; main effect of money management style: $F(1, 255) = 3.40$, $p = 0.035$, see in Figure V.5). All other variables were failed to reach significance (all F values < 4 , $ps > 0.07$).

Figure V.6. Present and Future Infidelity Possibility Increased With Mate Value Difference



Note. The more positive the self-partner mate value difference is, the more females' mate value surpassed their male partner's.

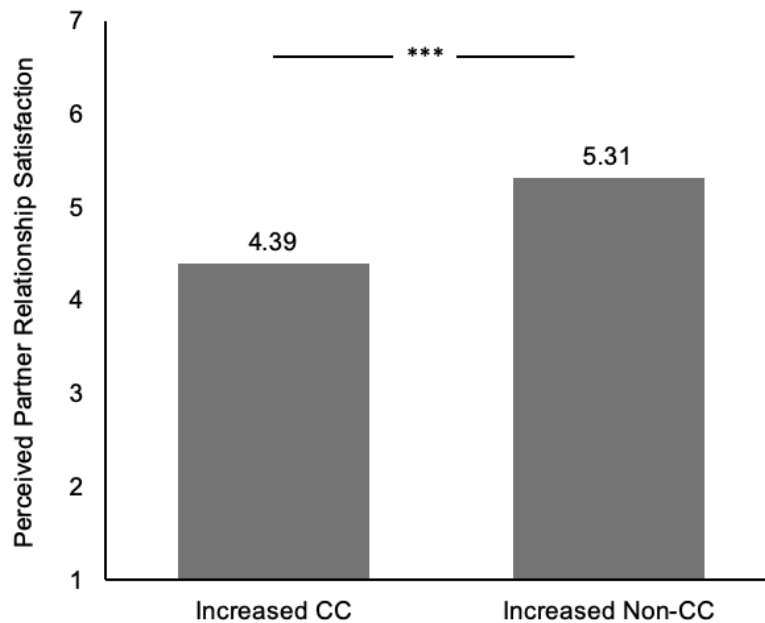
Infidelity possibility in the future. Results showed that females rated their partner to have *higher* likelihood of being unfaithful now when their partner purchased themselves increased *conspicuous*, than non-conspicuous, products ($M_{CC} (SD) = 3.75 (2.07)$, $M_{Non-CC} (SD) = 2.46 (1.67)$, $t(255) = 4.63$, $p < 0.001$; main effect of group: $F(1, 255) = 34$, $p < 0.001$, see in Figure V.2); when they rated themselves to have a relative *higher* mate value than that of their partner ($F(1, 255) = 4.19$, $p = 0.042$, see in Figure V.6); when they perceived to receive *fewer* benefits from this purchase ($F(1, 255) = 4.91$, $p = 0.028$, see in Figure V.4); when they and their partner managed their money in a mixed way, as compared to who did separately ($M_{separate} (SD) = 2.66$, $M_{mixed} (SD) = 3.24$, $t(259) = -2.521$, $p = 0.057$; main effect of money management style: $F(1, 255) = 3.10$, $p = 0.047$, see in Figure V.5). All other variables were insignificant (all F values < 4 , $ps > 0.1$).

Perceived partner relationship satisfaction

Regression results showed that females rated their partner to be *less satisfied* with the current relationship when their partner purchased increased *conspicuous* products, than purchased non-conspicuous products ($M_{CC} (SD) = 4.16 (1.94)$, $M_{Non-CC} (SD) = 5.46 (1.49)$, $t(255) = -4.286$, $p < 0.001$; main effect of group: $F(1, 255) = 47.88$, $p < 0.001$, see in Figure V.7); when they rated themselves to have a relative *higher* mate value than that of their partner ($F(1, 255) = 5.519$, $p = 0.02$, see in Figure V.8); when they perceived to receive *fewer* benefits from this purchase (main effect of benefit: $F(1, 255) = 35.23$, $p < 0.001$). Specifically, the more females felt they could benefit from their partner's increased self-oriented conspicuous consumption,

they rated their partner to be more satisfied with the current relationship ($t_{cc} = -3.37, p < 0.001$; group x benefit interaction: $F(1, 255) = 6.48, p = 0.01$; see in Figure V.9).

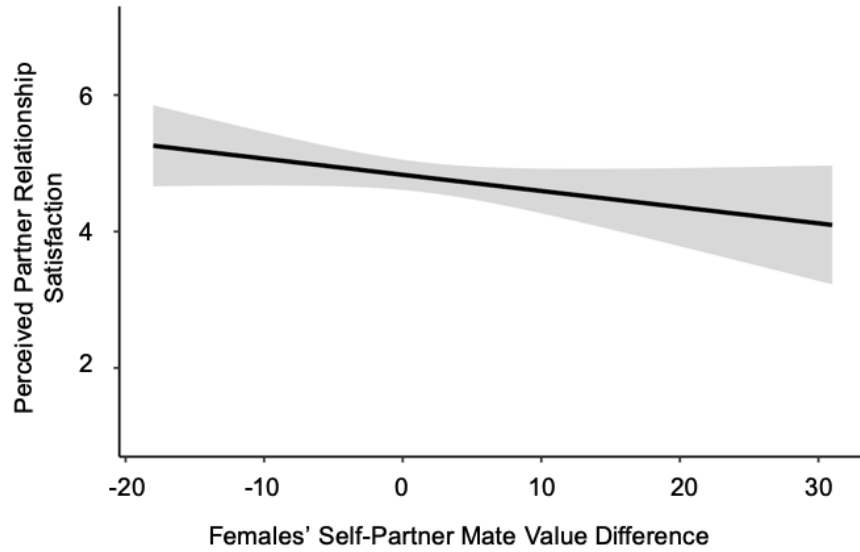
Figure V.7. Lower Partner Relationship Satisfaction for Increased Conspicuous Consumption



Note. Females rated their partner to be less satisfied with the current relationship when he purchased more conspicuous, than non-conspicuous, products for himself. Increased CC = Increased conspicuous consumption for men themselves; Increased Non-CC = Increased non-conspicuous consumption for men themselves.

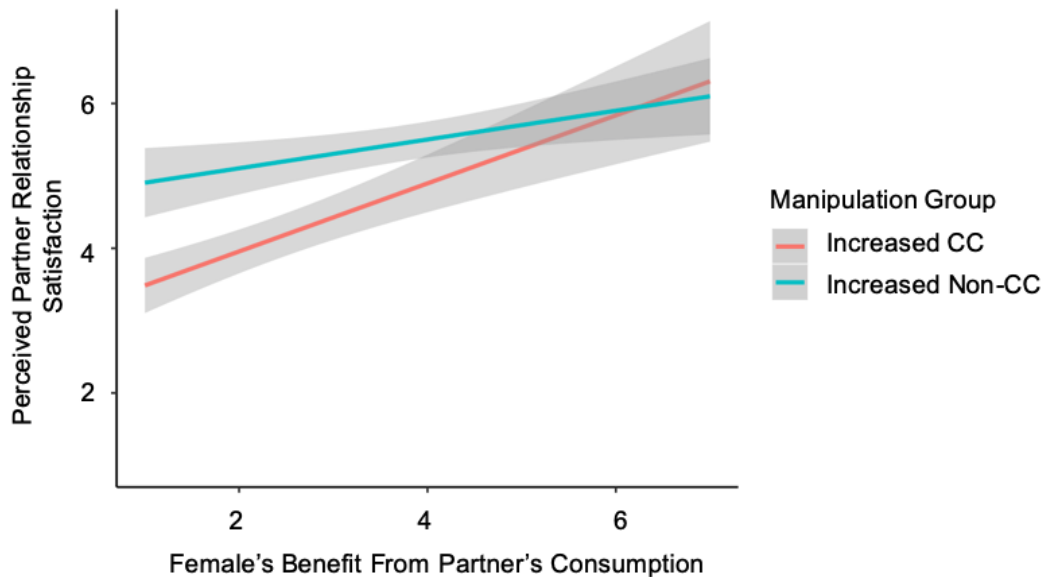
***: $p < 0.001$, **: $p < 0.01$, *: $p < 0.05$

Figure V.8. Partner Relationship Satisfaction Decreased as Mate Value Difference Increased



Note. The more positive the self-partner mate value difference is, the more females' mate value surpassed their male partner's.

Figure V.9. Conspicuous Consumption x Mate Value Difference Interaction

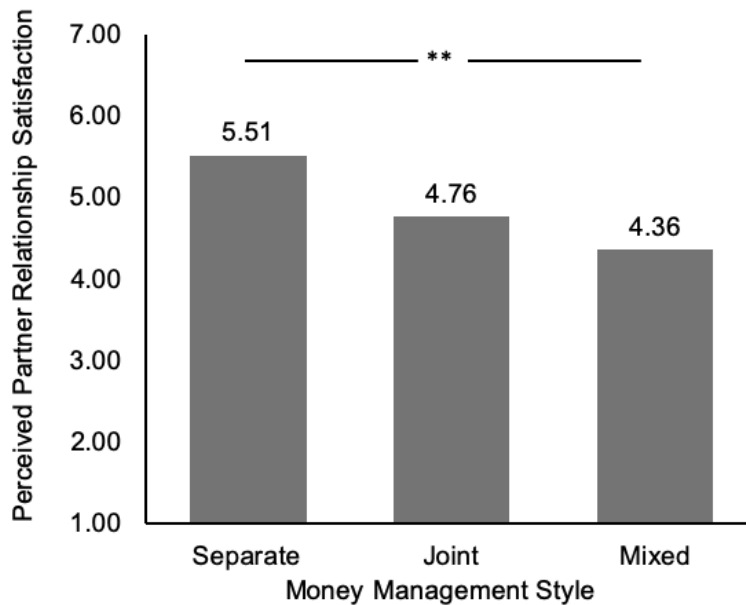


Note. The more females felt they could benefit from their partner's increased self-oriented conspicuous consumption, they rated their partner to be more satisfied with the current relationship ($t_{cc} = -3.37, p < 0.001$; group x benefit interaction: $F(1, 255) = 6.48, p = 0.01$).

In addition, females also perceived their partner to be less satisfied when their money was managed in ways that consisted of both separate and joint accounts, as compared to who

managed their money separately ($M_{\text{separate}} (SD) = 5.51 (1.48)$, $M_{\text{mixed}} (SD) = 4.36 (1.87)$, $t(255) = 3.61$, $p = 0.001$; main effect of money management style: $F(1, 255) = 6.29$, $p = 0.002$, see in Figure V.10); and when they ranked *higher* in socioeconomic status ($F(1, 255) = 5.02$, $p = 0.026$, see in Figure V.11). All other results were insignificant (all F values < 4 , $ps > 0.1$).

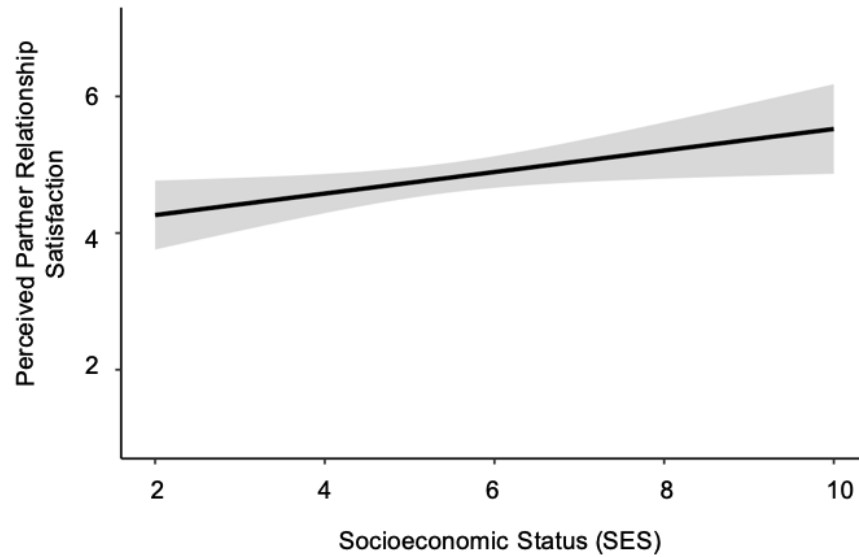
Figure V.10. Perceived Lower Partner Satisfaction With Mixed Money Management Style



Note. females also perceived their partner to be less satisfied when their money was managed in ways that consisted of both separate and joint accounts, as compared to who managed their money separately.

***: $p < 0.001$, **: $p < 0.01$, *: $p < 0.05$

Figure V.11. Perceived Partner Relationship Satisfaction Increased as SES Increased



Note. SES = Socioeconomic Status.

Men with conspicuous consumption

A series of *t* tests has been performed to examine how women rated men who uses these products. As shown in Table V.1, men using luxury products were rated constantly more wealthy than men using non-luxury products in the same kind. Except for the jacket, men who used luxury products were rated to be more intriguing than whom used non-luxury ones. Ratings for attractiveness and desirable were more likely to vary from product to products.

Table V.1. Group Difference in Rating of Men Wearing Products in Study 2

Product	Dimensions	<i>t</i> (CC - NonCC)	<i>p</i>
Wallet	Attractive	<i>t</i> = 2.455	0.015 *
	Desirable	<i>t</i> = 2.139	0.033*
	Wealthy	<i>t</i> = 16.05	<i>p</i> < .0001 ***
	Intriguing	<i>t</i> = 6	<i>p</i> < .0001 ***
Shoes	Attractive	<i>t</i> = -0.873	0.38
	Desirable	<i>t</i> = -0.419	0.78
	Wealthy	<i>t</i> = 10.548	<i>p</i> < .0001 ***
	Intriguing	<i>t</i> = 2.338	0.018*
Belt	Attractive	<i>t</i> = -2.307	0.022*
	Desirable	<i>t</i> = -1.071	0.285
	Wealthy	<i>t</i> = 14.543	<i>p</i> < .0001 ***
	Intriguing	<i>t</i> = 3.142	0.002**
Jacket	Attractive	<i>t</i> = -8.27	<i>p</i> < .0001 ***
	Desirable	<i>t</i> = -6.534	<i>p</i> < .0001 ***

	Wealthy	$t = 8.054$	$p < .0001$ ***
	Intriguing	$t = -2.698$	0.007**

Note. ***: $p < 0.001$, **: $p < 0.01$, *: $p < 0.05$

Discussion

In Chapter V, Study 3 demonstrated how heterosexual women interpreted their partner's increased conspicuous consumption for himself using an imaginary setting. Women's attitude towards their male partner's consumption was found to be changed by the conspicuousness level of products, self-partner mate value discrepancy, whether female could benefit from this accumulating purchase behavior, money management style, and females' socioeconomic status.

Increased conspicuousness of the consumption boosted females' suspicion of male partner's potential infidelity in the past, present, and future, as well as their potential dissatisfaction with the current relationship. In other word, the present study provided evidence that, as compared to men who spent a lot on non-conspicuous consumption recently, men who spent a lot of money on conspicuous consumption in a short time signaled a possibility of being unfaithful to their female spouse and their dissatisfaction with the current relationship. This was consistent with findings in previous chapters. As shown in Study 1 and 2, married men's increased luxury spending for themselves was observed as a sign of being dissatisfied with the current romantic relationship and was actually motivated by their low relationship satisfaction and a frequent thought of leaving. The current Study 3 evidenced that their female partner can accurately detect this infidelity-related signal. Women place considerable emphasis on wealth and resource status when searching a potential mate and will use this to evaluate male's mate quality (Lens et al., 2012; Griskevicius et al., 2007). The development of the sensitivity might be because the gain of capturing them is predictable and reliably beneficial, while the cost of ignoring them could be detrimental and highly risky. For example, women who are sensitive to

this could quickly find a high-quality mate in the mating market and could quickly identify the relationship dissatisfaction or a potential infidelity to prevent losing her efforts devoted to the relationship.

Self-partner mate value discrepancy was also associated with a greater perceived likelihood of a partner being unfaithful and dissatisfied with the current relationship. In general, the more a female's mate value surpassed her partner's, the more likely he would be perceived by her to be unfaithful in the past, in the present, and in the future. Previous research indicates that women of higher mate values receive cost-inflicting mate retention behaviors from their partner (e.g., insulted by their partners) more frequently than women of lower mate values (Miner, Shackelford, et al., 2009; Miner, Starratt, et al., 2009). As a result, perceptions of differences in mate value may affect perceptions of relationship stability and women might exaggerate the possibility of a partner's infidelity to maintain the relationship. Along this logic, Starratt et al., (2017) proposed that the likelihood of reporting intention to commit an infidelity is higher when that infidelity is more likely to result in an increase in one's own mate value. To avoid men using infidelity to gain mate value, women of the higher mate value thereby might be precautionary in interpreting their partner's infidelity and dissatisfaction.

However, when taking men's consumption type into consideration, the above tendency reversed in predicting the possibility of a partner's infidelity in the past. That is, women of lower mate value than their partner rated men buying conspicuous products to be more likely to be unfaithful in the past. As evidenced in previous literature, men of the lower mate value (vs. high value) may lack resources to perform sufficient benefit-provisioning behaviors to retain their partners because they have fewer resources (i.e., money; vs. high value; Miner, Shackelford, et al., 2009). It is possible that such display of conspicuous consumption reduces the mate value

discrepancy between the low-mate-value men and high-mate-value women, and increases the discrepancy between high-mate-value men and low-mate-value women. In this way, women mated to men of higher value than hers might attach more infidelity-related meaning to their partner's increased luxury spending.

The present research also demonstrated a link between perceived benefits from partner's purchase and women's understanding of their partner's consumption. The more women could benefit from their partner's consumption, even products in which were men-oriented, the lower possibility of their partner being unfaithful or dissatisfied with the current relationship. Particularly, when the benefit was extremely high, women rated their partner to be highly satisfied with the current relationship. This might be interpreted by social exchange theory and Self-Evaluation Maintenance (SEM) theory, which proposed that individuals will adjust their behaviors in a manner to maintain or increase self-evaluation, a process that might be substantially impacted by a close other through the comparison (Beach, & Tesser, 2000). Though the cost of conspicuous consumption could be high (e.g., large amount of money was spent), the increased benefits from the purchase counterbalanced the unfairness caused by the consumption, which thereby leads to the positive judgement.

In addition, the present study also showed that using a mixed money management strategy might also lead women to perceive their partner to have a higher chance of infidelity. It might be because this mixed management style allows the existence of a "secret" personal account, further provided a room for a potential of being financially unfaithful to the current relationship (Garbinsky et al., 2020). It was also interesting to observe a positive correlation between socioeconomic status and perceived partner's relationship satisfaction. As this was only

a self-reported rating from women's perspective, further examination is needed to claim the robustness of this association.

Chapter VI General Discussion

The present dissertation investigated two interconnected questions: (1) when and why a married men would suddenly buy more conspicuous items; (2) how their female spouse would judge and react to this behavioral change.

Examination Outside the Committed Relationship

As demonstrated in Chapter II, the costly signaling function of men's conspicuous consumption in the mating context is still effective even the male signaler has been committed in a romantic relationship. Consistent with previous work showing a positive association between increased mating goals and single men's conspicuous consumption (Griskevicius et al., 2007), the current research extended this association to committed men. Even being married, men with a stable and high level of conspicuous consumption for themselves rated by observers from both gender to be the most desirable as a mate for women. This is because that men's ability to obtain resources could further benefit the relationship and the offspring, so both single and married men who display such ability have been highly valued in the mating market (Buss & Schmitt, 1993).

Besides, both women and men perceived married men with increased conspicuous consumption for themselves to have a higher mating intention, than married men displayed other spending patterns. Normally, we would not expect a married man shows off mating-related behaviors, as it raises opportunities and the problems at the same time. Because when taking the signers' current marital status into account, an increased mating motivation sent out by the

conspicuous consumption would be connected to a potential unsuccessful marriage. Previous studies have found that dissatisfaction with the marriage was associated with extramarital sex (Brown, 1991; Vaughn, 1986; Treas & Giesen, 2000). In particular, infidelity has been linked to men's sexual dissatisfaction (Maykovich, 1976).

Examination Inside the Committed Relationship

Will such a signal actually be related to relationship dissatisfaction and potential infidelity? Chapter III and IV provided the answer by examining this inside the committed relationship.

Three important findings in Study 2 showcased when men in the committed relationship would buy more conspicuous consumption for themselves. Echoed findings from Study 1, Study 2 found that the more frequently a man in a committed relationship thought of leaving the current relationship in a typical week, the more conspicuous products he would purchase for himself. Through this conspicuous consumption, committed men signaling stronger relationship distress. Also, Study 2 found that with priming of negative memories about the relationship, committed men would buy more conspicuous products for themselves when they are generally more dissatisfied with their current relationship, or on the top of this, they are very frequently thought of leaving the relationship; they would buy more conspicuous products for their partner when are more satisfied with their current relationship in general.

While purchasing a luxury product for only himself limits the usage to the men himself, purchasing luxury items for their female partner expresses men's consideration and commitment to the romantic relationship (Komiya et al., 2019). Previous studies also offered evidence showing that men, as compared to women, placed greater importance on the instrumental

function of gifts, using which to display their willingness to invest in the current relationship (Saad & Gill, 2003). Through gift-giving using conspicuous consumption, men exaggerate this symbolic sign of commitment (Belk & Coon, 1993). Negative memory might trigger satisfied men to take this partner-oriented conspicuous consumption as a compensation to this negative experience and a gift to express their committed to the current relationship. While for men who are not so satisfied with their current relationship, negative priming might exaggerate men's dissatisfaction with the current relationship therefore generated more self-oriented conspicuous consumption.

In Chapter V, Study 3 tried to understand, from a female spouse's perspective, how they would interpret their male partner's increased self-oriented conspicuous consumption. As shown in Chapter II and III, married men's increased luxury spending for themselves was observed as a sign of being dissatisfied in the romantic relationship and was actually motivated by the low relationship satisfaction and a frequent thought of leaving. Study 3 evidenced that females are sensitive to and could accurately read men's increased conspicuous consumption as an infidelity-related signal.

Women are sensitive to infidelity-related behaviors (Ein-Dor et al., 2015), this might also because that a possession-related show-off is directly linked a possible reduction in men's financial devotion to family and a potential mate attraction motivation. Shown in our Study 3, females who had a mixed money and asset management fashion rated their partner to have higher likelihood of being unfaithful to them and lower relationship satisfaction. As secret saving would be considered as financial infidelity (Junare & Patel, 2012) and conflicts of spending pattern could decrease the marriage well-being (Rick et al., 2011), such mixed management

strategy might imply a potential for this and prevent women from keeping full control over the relationship (Buss et al., 2008).

Limitations

One limitation of the present work is that all the investigations were not conducted with both members of married or committed couples. Data were collected from men and women who were in a relationship separately and all of the ratings were self-reported based on the imaginary situations, which might decrease the generalizability of the present results. This does not mean that the current research is low in reliability. We conducted manipulation checks for each study to make sure our priming was effective and surveyed a broader sample that covered participants aged from 19 to 70. Especially, in our Study 3, the average relationship duration for females participants were 191 months (15.9 years) with a range from 4 months to 650 months, which ensured the effectiveness of the current research.

Another limitation of present work would be the likelihood of infidelity ratings in Study 3. When taking a closer look at these ratings, most of them were below 4 (out of 7), which represents a neutral attitude. Though we obtained statistically significant results in the present research, ratings below 4 on a 7-point Likert scale represents a relative lower likelihood of being unfaithful in general. This might also reflect a viewpoint that this infidelity-related signal sent by men's conspicuous consumption was not an explicit infidelity signal. Different from being emotionally, sexually, and finically cheating, increased conspicuous consumption for men themselves could be interpreted in many ways as we researched in our Pilot Study. Among all of the functions associated with the conspicuous consumption, the difference of perceived

possibility of being unfaithful generated by conspicuous consumption evidenced that being unfaithful could be one of them.

It is also worth noting that all of the studies in the present research were conducted online. Despite the changes and errors introduced by the software and hardware difference across laboratories, research conducted in the lab is more consistent than that is done online (Skitka & Sargis, 2006). For example, some people may participate in a given online study in the presence of others, while others may attend alone; some participants may be distracted by other influential factors in the environment, while others might not be distracted during the participation. To avoid such variance, the present study embedded a series of attention checking questions and was very conservative by dropping the participant who failed to pass any of these questions. Also, it has been provided that MTurkers was more attentive to instructions than are traditional subject pool samples (Hauser & Schwarz, 2016).

Conclusion

The present dissertation presents four studies to answer the questions proposed about married men's conspicuous consumption. I conclude that (1) from a third-person perspective, married men with increased (vs. other patterns of) self-oriented conspicuous consumption signals having higher mating intentions; (2) from married men's perspective, with a priming of negative memory, the more frequently they thought of leaving and/or the lower trait relationship satisfaction they have, the more conspicuous items they purchased for themselves; the more trait relationship satisfaction they have, the more conspicuous items they purchased for their partner; (3) from committed women's perspective, increased product conspicuousness increased their suspicion of their partner's potential infidelity in the past, in the present, and in the future, as

well as their partner's potential dissatisfaction with the current relationship. This detailed framework illustrated the motivation and consequences of men's conspicuous consumption after becoming committed.

Appendices

Appendix A Perceived Motivations in Pilot Study

Table A.1. Perceived Motivations of Conspicuous Consumption in Pilot Study

Motivations
To attract women's attention
To impress other men
To obtain a short-term sexual partner [outside of their current one]
To develop a committed romantic relationship [outside of their current one]
Because they are not satisfied with life
Because they are not satisfied with themselves
Because they received a bonus at work
Because they feel emotionally connected with the brand
To increase their self-esteem
To increase their self-confidence
Because of a new personal preference
To be happier
To keep up with peers
Because they like the design/philosophy of the brand
Because they are looking for high-quality products
To keep up with the latest trends
To reward themselves for a personal achievement
To make a good impression

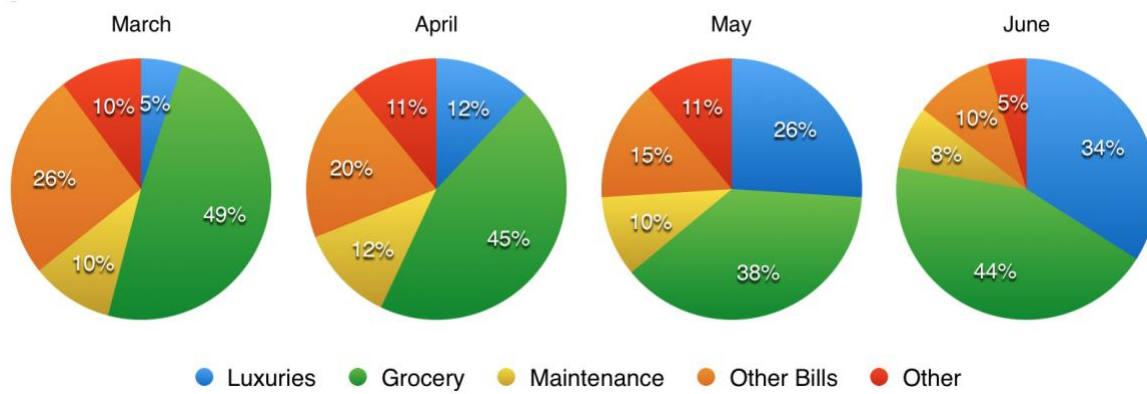
Appendix B Sample Instruction in Study 1

Below is the instruction for increasing conspicuous consumption condition:

Z is a 32-year-old man, is married, has an MBA degree, and works for company G. His annual income is considered average for someone in the US. He enjoys biking and listening to music in his leisure time. To better assess Z, we also provided Z's recent spending pattern for you.

The following pie charts show Z's spending summary from his **personal bank account** for the past four months.

It is divided into five major categories: luxury goods (**for himself**), grocery shopping, maintenance, bills, and other expenses.



Please examine these pie charts, paying attention to the **level and changes in his spending on luxuries for himself (the blue pie pieces)**.

You will answer the following questions based on his spending patterns over time.

Appendix C Instruction in Study 2

Instruction for high relationship satisfaction (LRS) priming group:

“Oftentimes, there are problems that arise in our romantic relationships.

Using the space below, please think about and write a short paragraph (at least 20 words)

recalling the most negative experience you had with your relationship or your partner in the past three months. For example, the negative experience could be the situation in which you felt irritated by your partner, you had a fight with your partner, or you experienced other negative emotions, etc.

Please write down as many details as you can, such as when these things occurred, what caused them, how you and your partner behaved, any emotions you felt, if other people were involved, and so on.”

Instruction for control group:

“Using the space below, please think for a moment then write a short paragraph (at least 20 words) about how you typically did your laundry in the past three months. If you did not do any laundry, you can write about any house chores or room cleaning you did in the past three months.

Please write down as many details as you can, such as when it occurred, where you did your laundry, how you behaved, any emotions you felt, if other people were involved, and so on. ”

Appendix D The Consumption Task in Study 2

Instruction:

“ Welcome to the 2nd study!

If you had a budget of \$2,000 and would like to go shopping, what would you like to buy?

There is no restriction on the number of items you could buy.

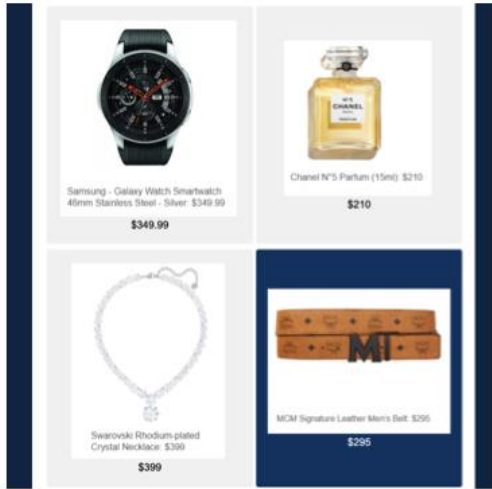
The total of your selection will be automatically calculated and displayed in the next page, where you will be able choose to go back to this page and change your choice, or to proceed to complete this shopping if your total does not exceed \$2,000.

Please select items that you want to purchase with a budget of \$2,000:”

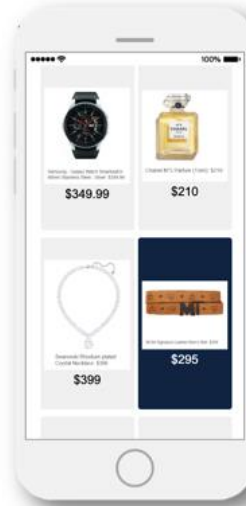
To illustrate how participants finished the consumption task in Study 2, we also provided the interface for the consumption task in Figure D.1 below. The consumption task was designed in Qualtrics survey platform using JavaScript to control the total amount of money that participants could spend (within \$2,000).

Figure D.1. Interface for The Consumption Task from Web and Mobile Brower

Task in Web Browser



Task in Mobile Browser



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