

The Compensatory Consumer Behavior Model:
How Self-Discrepancies Drive Consumer Behavior

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Abstract

Consumer goods and services have psychological value that can equal or exceed their functional value. A burgeoning literature demonstrates that one source of value emerges from the capacity for products to serve as a psychological salve that reduces various forms of distress across numerous domains. This review systematically organizes and integrates the literature on the use of consumer behavior as a means to regulate self-discrepancies, or the incongruities between how one currently perceives oneself and how one desires to view oneself (Higgins, 1987). We introduce a Compensatory Consumer Behavior Model to explain the psychological consequences of self-discrepancies on consumer behavior. This model delineates five distinct strategies by which consumers cope with self-discrepancies: *direct resolution, symbolic self-completion, dissociation, escapism, and fluid compensation*. Finally, the authors raise critical research questions to guide future research endeavors. Overall, the present review provides both a primer on compensatory consumer behavior and sets an agenda for future research.

Consumption provides significant psychological value beyond the mere functional utility offered by products and services (Ariely & Norton, 2009; Arndt, Solomon, Gao, Wheeler, & Shiv, 2009; Kasser, & Sheldon; Rucker & Galinsky, 2008). Indeed, a pure functionalist account cannot explain consumers' purchases of items such as \$250 blue jeans and \$15,000 watches. Previous research has established a variety of deeper psychological motives for consumption, such as status signaling (Veblen, 1899), experiential pleasure (Holbrook & Hirschman, 1982), and extensions of the self (Belk, 1988). In this review article, we focus on understanding how consumption helps people cope with self-discrepancies.

A self-discrepancy is an incongruity between how one currently perceives oneself and how one desires to view oneself (Higgins, 1987). For example, an individual can experience a discrepancy between his or her desired ambition (e.g., to be the CEO of a Fortune 500 company) and realized position (e.g., currently a manager at a small regional company). Discrepancies can occur in domains as varied as one's intelligence, sense of power, or belongingness in a social group. In this review, we present a theoretical model – The Compensatory Consumer Behavior Model – to understand why a self-discrepancy triggers a motivation to reduce that discrepancy, and how this motivation leads to an identifiable set of consumer behaviors. We introduce the term *compensatory consumer behavior* to indicate any purchase, use, or consumption of products or services motivated by a desire to offset or reduce a self-discrepancy (Gronmo, 1997; Rucker & Galinsky, 2008; Woodruffe, 1997). Moreover, we discuss how self-discrepancies can both increase and decrease consumption behavior.

In this review, we offer an integrative model to identify the sequence of steps through which self-discrepancies produce downstream consequences on consumption. Whereas prior work has reviewed the relationship between self-discrepancies and behavior broadly (e.g., Heine,

Proulx, & Vohs, 2006), we emphasize— and identify for the first time— five distinct strategies that consumers use to cope with self-discrepancies. We begin by providing an overview of our Compensatory Consumer Behavior Model (Section 1). Next, we review evidence suggesting that different sources of self-discrepancy affect consumer behavior (Section 2). Subsequently we discuss the cognitive, affective, and physiological consequences of self-discrepancies that give rise to a motivation to reduce the self-discrepancy (Section 3). At the heart of our review, we introduce, define, and provide evidence for five conceptually distinct strategies by which people use consumer behavior to cope with self-discrepancies (Section 4). We next present evidence that consumption can alleviate or reduce the negative psychological consequences of self-discrepancies (Section 5). With past research integrated into our Compensatory Consumer Behavior Model, we introduce future research questions (Section 6). Finally, we discuss the relationship between our model and other models of psychological compensation (Section 7). Ultimately, this review is intended to serve as both a primer for those interested in understanding the basic relationship between psychological self-discrepancies and consumer behavior, as well as a catalyst for future research.

1. Overview of the Compensatory Consumer Behavior Model

The human psyche attempts to maintain stable levels of psychological assets related to the self, such as self-esteem, belongingness, feelings of power, and feelings of control over one's environment (Crocker & Park, 2004; Kay et al., 2008; Leary et al., 1995; Whitson & Galinsky, 2008). As part of this self-regulation process, individuals monitor the distance between their present state (or actual self) and a goal state (or ideal self; Carver & Scheier, 1990; Higgins, 1987).

The potential for compensatory consumer behavior begins when a person perceives a self-discrepancy, or an inconsistency between one's ideal and actual self (Higgins, 1987). For example, a person who fails an important test might view himself as unintelligent, and thus experience a self-discrepancy between how he currently sees himself (i.e., unintelligent) and how he wants to see himself (i.e., intelligent). Typically, an event occurs that either triggers a self-discrepancy (such as scoring poorly on a test) or that makes an existing self-discrepancy more salient (such as being reminded about a recent failure). For instance, exposure to idealized (vs. average-looking) advertising models can increase the discrepancy between participants' ratings of their ideal and actual self-ratings (Sobol & Darke, 2014), social exclusion can increase the distance between one's actual and desired level of belongingness (Lee & Shrum 2012), and having fewer job offers than one's peers can make one feel less competent than expected in one's career (Wicklund & Gollwitzer, 1981, 1982). In our framework, we refer to such events as *sources of self-discrepancy*. Many previous researchers on this topic have not interpreted their findings explicitly in terms of self-discrepancy; in doing so, we synthesize and unify previously distinct findings (MacInnis 2011).

Self-discrepancies have several important features. First, they can arise in a variety of domains (i.e., a skill set or area of competence), such as intelligence, sense of power, or affiliation. Second, self-discrepancies are typically psychologically aversive (Higgins, 1987; Tesser et al., 2000). Third, due to the aversive nature of self-discrepancies, people are motivated to engage in self-regulation efforts to restore their desired state. These self-regulation efforts can manifest in different forms of consumer behavior. If compensatory consumer behavior is successful in addressing a self-discrepancy, it reduces the psychological discomfort created by the discrepancy.

Figure 1 depicts this sequential process. Once a self-discrepancy is activated, it can produce affective, cognitive, or physiological consequences that motivate people to resolve the discrepancy. The motivation to resolve the discrepancy can affect consumer behavior through at least five distinct strategies. Finally, consumer behavior, particularly in the form of consumption, has the potential to reduce the self-discrepancy. Next, we provide a brief overview of the evidence supportive of the general phenomenon of compensatory consumer behavior. Subsequently, we review each stage of the process.

Insert Figure 1 here

2. Sources of Self-Discrepancy and Evidence for its Effects on Consumer Behavior

Previous literature has identified several domains in which self-discrepancies can arise and produce downstream consequences in the form of compensatory consumer behavior. Table 1 provides a sample of the wide variety of self-discrepancies linked to compensatory consumer behaviors in past research. In this section, we review evidence of compensatory consumer behavior resulting from self-discrepancies related to one's self-concept (e.g., one's own skills, competence, or values), one's perceived standing relative to others, or important groups tied to the self.

Insert Table 1 here

2.1 Self-discrepancies Related to One's Self Concept

Receiving negative feedback on a dimension related to one's self-concept or perceiving oneself as inadequate with respect to an internal standard is one source of self-discrepancy. Early findings on the effects of self-discrepancies on behavior originated from an effort to understand how self-discrepancies related to the self-concept guide people's consumption habits. Braun and Wicklund (1989) found that first-year students at a university – who by virtue of their freshman status tend to be insecure about their identity *vis a vis* the university – listed owning more university-branded clothing articles than did (presumably more secure) fourth-year students. The authors replicated these correlational findings in two subsequent experiments, in which students who received negative feedback regarding their competence on an important aspect of their identities were more likely to express a desire to visit “prestigious and fashionable” vacation destinations compared to control participants. More recently, Gao, Wheeler, and Shiv (2009) found that participants who felt insecure (vs. secure) about their intelligence were more likely to choose a product related to intelligence (e.g., a fountain pen) over a product unrelated to intelligence (e.g., a candy bar). Elsewhere, researchers have shown that self-discrepancies affect consumption with respect to one's masculinity (Willer, Rogalin, Conlon, & Wojnowicz, 2013) and one's sense of personal space (Levav and Zhu 2009).

2.2 Self-discrepancies Related to One's Standing Compared to Others

Self-discrepancies can also arise from social comparison, in which an individual compares his or her own standing on skills or dimensions relative to another, particularly when making an upward comparison (to someone with superior skills; Mussweiler, 2003). For example, viewing images of thin models in advertisements can lower the ad viewer's self-esteem (Richins, 1991). Such unflattering social comparisons may in turn produce compensatory consumer behavior. For example, feeling less powerful than others can lead consumers to report

a higher willingness to pay for high-status products, in order to restore feelings of power (Rucker & Galinsky, 2008, 2009).

In addition, because humans have a strong need to establish and maintain social relationships (Baumeister & Leary 1995), self-discrepancies can occur when individuals feel socially excluded with regard to an important referent group. Several studies show that when self-discrepancies arise in terms of one's affiliation with others, people are more likely to buy products that signal status or membership in the social group (Dommer & Swaminathan 2013; Duclos et al., 2013; Lee & Shrum 2012; Mead et al. 2011; Wan et al, 2014, Wang et al., 2012). For example, Lee and Shrum (2012) found that consumers who were ignored, increased their levels of conspicuous consumption (in order to get noticed), whereas consumers who were rejected increased their donation behavior (in order to improve relational status).

A self-discrepancy in relation to others can also happen when individuals feel that their relationship status is less than ideal. For example, Lastovicka and Sirianni (2011) suggest that a failure or loss of a romantic relationship can cause individuals to form strong attachments and even feel love toward their personal possessions, such as automobiles. Here, the need to associate the self with another person—coupled with an inability to do so—prompts consumers to fulfill the need for affiliation by forming relationships with brands and possessions.

2.3 Self-discrepancies Related to One's Social Groups

Social identity is the part of the self that consists of group memberships, which can provide an important source of self-esteem (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). A group's identity may be devalued or stigmatized by others, due to race, religion, or socioeconomic status (e.g., Crocker & Major, 1989; Dovidio et al., 2000), leading to a perception that the social group's status is less than ideal. A negative value assigned to one's group by other groups can foster a self-

discrepancy between one's actual and desired social identity, leading to compensatory consumer behavior. For instance, Charles and colleagues (2009) reported that disadvantaged socioeconomic racial groups spent a larger percentage of their income than other demographic groups on conspicuous goods such as jewelry and cars (but not on nonvisible items), presumably to counteract the perception of low status.

An extreme example of a group self-discrepancy is one in which the dominant political, religious, or social system of an individual's country is challenged (Jost, Banaji, & Nosek, 2004). For example, in one experiment, Cutright and colleagues (2011, Experiment 5) had U.S. participants read a news article that portrayed the U.S. in a negative light (which created an ideal vs. actual discrepancy regarding how they wanted to view their American identity) or an article that portrayed the U.S. in a positive light (which created no such discrepancy). After reading the negative article, individuals with a high level of confidence in the dominant sociocultural system were more likely to choose products that directly defended that system (such as a t-shirt with an American flag and the text "Love It or Leave It"), whereas individuals with a low level of confidence in the system were more likely to choose products that indirectly defended the system (such as American brands vs. foreign brands; Cutright et al. 2011).

In brief, an extensive literature suggests that self-discrepancies—whether arising from individual, interpersonal, or group-level sources—can all affect consumption (see Table 1). We propose that, regardless of its source, once a self-discrepancy arises, it will motivate consumers to reduce or eliminate that discrepancy.

3. The Motivation to Reduce Self-Discrepancy

Self-discrepancies produce affective, physiological, and cognitive consequences that may give rise to the motivation to engage in consumer behavior to alleviate the self-discrepancy

(Carver & Scheier, 1990; Custers & Aarts, 2007; Sela & Shiv, 2009; see Figure 1). First, self-discrepancies can produce negative emotions such as disappointment, dissatisfaction, anxiety, or dejection (see Higgins, 1987; Packard & Wooten, 2013). According to Heine, Proulx, and Vohs (2006), the experience of a self-discrepancy is psychologically painful, resulting in distress and negative arousal. Similarly, self-discrepancies might produce specific emotional reactions such as shame, guilt, or embarrassment (Tangney, Dalglish, & Power, 1999), which in turn might lead to compensatory coping strategies.

The experience of social exclusion results in feelings of social pain, such as discontentment and nervousness (Mead et al., 2011); this social pain then produces similar neural activity as physical pain (Eisenberger, Lieberman, Williams, 2003). Relatedly, Randles et al. (2013) argued that self-discrepancies increase activity in the dorsal anterior cingulate cortex (dACC), a brain region that is activated when people experience both physical and social pain. Thus, in addition to affective consequences, self-discrepancies may even produce negative physiological consequences. This research offers preliminary support for the idea that compensatory consumer behavior might be partially motivated by a desire to reduce negative physiological consequences of self-discrepancies. Specifically, Randles and colleagues demonstrated that giving participants a dose of acetaminophen—known to reduce both physical and social pain—reduced prior effects of meaning-based self-discrepancies on subsequent behavior. Based on this finding, it appears that circumventing the experience of physiological pain reduced the need for compensation, which suggests a role of physiological pain in compensatory consumer behavior.

The fact that self-discrepancies foster negative affect and neural activity provides one reason why individuals are motivated to reduce self-discrepancies. However, cognitive

inconsistencies or dissonance might be sufficient to motivate a desire to resolve a self-discrepancy and evoke compensatory consumer behavior. Indeed, compensatory consumer behavior can occur independent of any measured change in one's physiological or emotional state. For example, manipulations of self-uncertainty (Gao et al, 2009), powerlessness (Rucker and Galinsky 2008, 2009), and social comparison (Sobol & Darke, 2014) typically do not influence participants' affective states. Self-discrepancies can also lead to rumination about the discrepancy, which is cognitively taxing and cumbersome (Brunstein & Gollwitzer, 1996; Lisjak, Bonezzi, Kim, & Rucker, 2015). Given the importance of healthy cognitive functioning, individuals may be motivated to resolve self-discrepancies for primarily—or purely—cognitive reasons.

Although research has found that affective, physiological, and cognitive processes may play a role in the relationship between self-discrepancies and compensatory consumer behavior, research has not established *when* each of these factors is the driving force. For example, the role of affect as a motivating factor is unclear. On the one hand, a large body of research has demonstrated that incidental negative affect can trigger strategies intended for mood repair (Atalay & Meloy, 2011; Cryder et al., 2008, Gardner et al., 2014; Garg & Lerner, 2013; Garg et al., 2007, Lerner et al., 2004). On the other hand, as noted above, compensatory consumer behavior can occur independent of changes in mood (e.g., Gao et al. 2009; Rucker and Galinsky 2008, 2009; Sobol & Darke, 2014). These mixed findings suggest both a need and an opportunity to investigate when and how negative affective, cognitive, and physiological consequences of self-discrepancies instill differential motivations to resolve them.

4. Compensatory Consumer Behavior Coping Strategies

Once a motivation to resolve a self-discrepancy is active, multiple strategies exist to reduce or resolve that self-discrepancy (Heine et al. 2006; Tesser et al. 2000). In this review we focus on examining strategies related to consumer behavior. Based on a review of the literature and the compensatory processes discussed or alluded to in published work, we introduce the argument that people use consumer behavior to respond to self-discrepancies in at least five distinct and separable ways: *direct resolution*, *symbolic self-completion*, *dissociation*, *escapism*, and *fluid compensation*. Table 2 provides a definition and example of each strategy.

Insert Table 2 here

4.1 Direct resolution

In direct resolution, consumers engage in behaviors that directly address the source of the self-discrepancy. This strategy represents a form of goal-directed behavior, where consumers purchase or use products that can directly resolve a self-discrepancy. For example, if consumers experience self-discrepancies with regard to their actual versus desired weight or appearance (e.g., Bagozzi & Dholakia, 1999), they might join a gym or undertake plastic surgery to improve their appearance (Schouten, 1991). Here, consumer behavior facilitates the reduction of the self-discrepancy by aiding the consumer to achieve his or her desired self-view. As another example, Park and Maner (2009) demonstrated that when an individual's appearance was threatened, he or she indicated an interest in shopping for appearance-enhancing clothes.

Kim and Gal (2014) also offer findings consistent with the idea of direct resolution. The authors demonstrate that self-discrepancies related to power and intelligence can lead consumers to seek products that allow them to reduce the self-discrepancy. For example, in one experiment, when participants experienced a power deficit, they were willing to pay more for a book

portrayed as “Power and Influence for Dummies.” In another experiment, the authors found that when participants experienced a self-discrepancy related to their intelligence, they were more interested in a subscription to a “brain training program.” Of note, Kim and Gal (2014) only found direct resolution when participants had first engaged in an act of self-acceptance, whereby they detached their self-worth from their self-assessment. This finding suggests that, at least in some cases, a direct resolution strategy may require some lessening of the threat caused by the self-discrepancy before confronting a self-discrepancy in such a direct manner.

4.2 Symbolic self-completion

The theoretical roots of compensatory consumer behavior largely originate from Wicklund and Gollwitzer’s (1981, 1982) writings on symbolic self-completion theory. A key conclusion from symbolic self-completion theory is that people can cope with self-discrepancy by engaging in behaviors that signal symbolic mastery on the dimension of the self-discrepancy (Rucker and Galinsky 2013). Unlike direct resolution, symbolic self-completion addresses a self-discrepancy without directly addressing its source. For example, Wicklund and Gollwitzer (1982) found that MBA students who lacked certain objective indicators of business success (e.g., a high GPA, multiple job offers) were more likely to display other, symbolic indicators of business success (e.g., expensive suits and watches). Although such compensatory consumer behavior was unlikely to change the reality of the students’ performance (i.e., it did not pave the way to a high GPA or additional job offers), it may still have mitigated or eliminated the perceived self-discrepancy. A similar example is the consumption of status markers: Harmon-Jones et al. (2009) analyzed university websites and found that lower-status universities listed

more professional titles on their departmental websites, and that less-cited professors displayed more professional titles in their email signatures (see also Rozin et al., 2014).

Researchers have also uncovered evidence consistent with a symbolic self-completion strategy regarding self-discrepancies related to one's academic ability (Dalton, 2008), appearance (Hoegg et al., 2014), sense of power (Rucker & Galinsky, 2008, 2009), and affiliation (Mead et al., 2011). For example, socially excluded (vs. included) participants with frugal partners were more likely to choose frugal products such as an ING savings account and a Sam's Club membership, but were not more likely to choose a luxury watch (Mead et al. 2011, experiment 2). In this scenario, selecting frugal products symbolizes agreement and thus affiliation with one's partner. Further speaking to the nature of symbolic self-completion, Mead et al.'s findings suggest that luxury consumption is not a panacea for all self-discrepancies. As another example, Cutright (2012) found that when individuals perceived a lack of personal control, they attempted to reassert control by choosing products that contained symbolic boundaries (such as a framed vs. unframed painting).

Symbolic self-completion need not result in an increase in overall consumption as in the preceding examples; instead, it can direct consumers to a specific set of options within a category without changing total consumption. For example, Levav and Zhu (2009) manipulated a discrepancy between participants' ideal and actual sense of freedom by placing them in a physically-confining space. The authors then gave participants an opportunity to select several pieces of candy from a bowl. They found that a loss of personal freedom led consumers to symbolically assert their freedom by engaging in greater variety seeking (i.e., wanting different types of candy bars). In a subsequent experiment, the authors showed that a self-discrepancy related to one's sense of freedom did not increase the overall amount of products taken. Thus, the

self-discrepancy did not increase the raw amount of consumption, but directed it in a manner related to the self-discrepancy. According to Levav and Zhu's argument, choosing variety represents a means for reasserting freedom, whereas increasing the sheer amount of consumption does not.

4.3 Dissociation

A third manner in which people may use consumer behavior in response to self-discrepancy is dissociation (White and Dahl 2006). Whereas the prior two strategies discussed above tend to affect consumer behavior by increasing consumption within a domain related to the discrepancy (i.e., consumers seek to acquire products to address the issue literally or symbolically), dissociation entails avoiding purchases in the domain of the self-discrepancy. The idea of dissociation is captured in Steele's (1998) influential writings on stereotype threat. Steele suggests that encountering negative stereotypes about a social group can lead individuals to "dis-identify" or dissociate with that group. For example, when women confront the gender stereotype "Women perform poorly in math," one means to respond to this self-discrepancy is to dis-identify from either the female gender or the domain of math. Murphy, Steele and Gross (2007) provide evidence for this phenomenon in an experiment where women who watched a conference video showing an unbalanced ratio of men to women in math and engineering reported a lower sense of belonging in math and engineering.

As further evidence of gender dissociation, White and Argo (2009) demonstrated that when women faced a self-discrepancy in terms of gender identity, those who scored low on collective self-esteem were more likely to choose a gender-neutral magazine (*US magazine*) over a feminine, identity-confirming magazine (*Cosmopolitan*). In essence, individuals coped with

self-discrepancies by actively avoiding products related to the self-discrepancy and gravitating to products not related to the self-discrepancy. Similarly, Lisjak, Levav, and Rucker (2016) provided initial evidence that, when faced with the choice between a product that represented a domain of an existing self-discrepancy (i.e., within-domain) versus a product in a different domain (i.e., across-domain), people sometimes chose the across-domain as opposed to the within-domain product; these individuals essentially disassociated with the part of their identity related to the self-discrepancy. Finally, Dalton and Huang (2014) found that when participants experienced a self-discrepancy related to their identity, they were more likely to forget advertisements linked to the domain of the self-discrepancy.

Dissociation may also occur when a self-discrepancy represents an undesired, feared, or no-longer-desired aspect of the self. For example, men were less interested in ordering a steak when it was labeled a “ladies’ cut” than when it bore no such dissociative label, particularly when they consumed their chosen food in public (White & Dahl, 2006). In some cases, the consumer may wish to suppress an undesired former identity (Ashforth, Harrison, & Corley, 2008). One way to achieve this goal is to dispose of possessions that are associated with the undesired self (Lastovicka & Fernandez, 2005). For example, a consumer who is going through a divorce may choose to sell her wedding dress on eBay as a means of dissociation from her married self.

4.4 Escapism

The cognitive, affective, and physiological consequences of self-discrepancies might persist because people tend to ruminate on activated self-discrepancies (Brunstein & Gollwitzer, 1996; Lisjak et al., 2015). One strategy to mitigate such negative motivational factors is to distract oneself or avoid thinking about the self-discrepancy. Escapism involves deliberately

directing one's thoughts away from a self-discrepancy by turning attention elsewhere; in the domain of consumer behavior, escapism can manifest in focusing one's attention to eating or shopping. Indeed, this notion of escapism is so pervasive that it has even been dubbed "retail therapy" (Atalay & Meloy 2011).

Heatherton and Baumeister (1991) argue that when people feel they have fallen short of societal standards, they can escape self-discrepancies by narrowing their attention to hedonic stimuli such as food and drinks. Fixating on and consuming food and drink has the potential, at least momentarily, to reduce the salience of any activated self-discrepancy. In support of this argument, Polivy, Herman, and McFarlane (1994) showed that individuals can reduce self-awareness, and thus salient self-discrepancies, by bingeing on chocolate or cookies. Similarly, people strategically consume comfort foods such as mashed potatoes or chicken soup to counter loneliness (Troisi & Gabriel, 2011). Cornil and Chandon (2013) found that sports fans consumed foods with more calories and saturated fat when their local team lost a match than when their local team won. In addition, people may watch escapist movies or "binge watch" a television series as a means to avoid self-focus (Moskalenko & Heine 2003). Notably, none of these behaviors necessarily resolve the problem by reducing the self-discrepancy; rather, they appear to serve as means to distract the individual, thus reducing the salience of the self-discrepancy.

4.5 Fluid Compensation

Finally, in fluid compensation people address a self-discrepancy by affirming the self in a domain distinct from the domain of the self-discrepancy (Heine, Proulx, and Vohs, 2006; Lisjak et al., 2015). The idea of fluid compensation is a core tenet of self-affirmation theory. Specifically, self-affirmation theory suggests that reinforcing valued aspects of the self can

reduce the importance of an activated discrepancy (Steele, 1988). Similarly, according to the Meaning Maintenance Model (MMM; Heine, Proulx, and Vohs, 2006; see also Proulx and Inzlicht 2012), an individual can overcome a discrepancy on one dimension of the self by finding meaning on another dimension. Note that fluid compensation is conceptually distinct from escapism: under fluid compensation, individuals affirm their identities on an unthreatened dimension, whereas under escapism, individuals engage in behaviors that are unrelated to the self, merely as a means of distraction.

As an example of fluid compensation, Martens et al. (2006) found that when female students had the opportunity to enhance the self via writing about their most valued characteristic, they were able to mitigate the negative impact of stereotype threat on math performance. Sobol and Darke (2014) demonstrated that consumers who compared themselves to idealized advertising models (thereby lowering their own perceived attractiveness) subsequently bolstered their perceived intelligence by making more economically rational consumption choices.

In further support of the idea of fluid compensation, Townsend and Sood (2012) proposed that aesthetics are an important and fundamental personal value and, as such, the choice of an aesthetically pleasing option could serve as a means to affirm the self. To test this idea, the authors demonstrated that choosing a beautifully designed product (versus a functionally superior one) works similarly to a traditional self-affirmation manipulation (e.g., Steele 1988), subsequently increasing openness to counter-attitudinal arguments.

5. Consumption Can Reduce Self-Discrepancies

At a broad level, people are motivated to resolve self-discrepancies because of a salient conflict between how they currently see themselves and how they wish to see themselves. This cognitive inconsistency can be resolved in several ways (Tesser et al., 2000). First, individuals could reduce a self-discrepancy by engaging in behavior or thinking that reduces the perceived discrepancy. Resolving the discrepancy can eliminate the accompanying negative cognitive, affective, and physiological consequences, and thus the need to take further action (e.g., Stone et al., 1997). Second, individuals could downplay the importance of a discrepancy; that is, they could recognize the gap exists, but view it as no longer central to the self; if a discrepancy is not important to the sense of self, it should be less bothersome (see Lisjak et al., 2015). Third, individuals could reduce the salience of the self-discrepancy. By not thinking about the discrepancy, it is neither resolved nor deemed unimportant, but it is not cognitively salient (Dalton & Huang, 2014). Each of these alternatives serves as a method to reduce the negative consequences of a self-discrepancy.

Building on the reasoning above, the five compensatory strategies can all effectively mitigate the self-discrepancy, but each one might do so through different paths. In the case of direct resolution, individuals acquire goods that are instrumental in resolving the underlying source of the self-discrepancy. In the case of symbolic self-completion, the consumer resolves the discrepancy through the acquisition of a symbol of his or her desired identity. Rather than address the source of the discrepancy, symbolic self-completion reduces a discrepancy by drawing on other signals of success within the domain of the discrepancy. Dissociation separates the individual from consumer goods that would reinforce the discrepancy. By distancing the self-discrepancy from the core self, this strategy likely reduces the salience of the self-discrepancy, but does not necessarily eliminate or reduce the importance of the discrepancy. In the case of

escapism, consumption serves to distract an individual from thinking about the discrepancy, which likely reduces the salience of the discrepancy. Finally, fluid compensation allows actors to find meaning in another aspect of the self, which likely reduces the importance of the self-discrepancy.

One limitation of the existing body of research is that it has not rigorously examined each of our five suggested strategies with respect to whether and how they reduce self-discrepancies. The proposed processes of eliminating a discrepancy, reducing its importance, and lowering its salience all remain to be tested. However, evidence does suggest that some forms of compensatory consumer behavior can alleviate the consequences of self-discrepancies, even if the precise process has not yet been specified. For example, symbolic self-completion through targeted consumer behavior appears capable of reducing a self-discrepancy sufficiently so that the subsequent need for compensatory consumer behavior is no longer necessary. In the work by Gao and colleagues (2009) noted earlier, the authors introduced a self-discrepancy in participants' intelligence and then gave them a sequential choice task. For the first choice, half of the participants chose from a set of objects associated with intelligence (e.g., bookstore gift certificates), and half of the participants chose from a set of objects unrelated to intelligence. Subsequently, all participants completed a second task, where they chose between a product related to intelligence (i.e., a fountain pen) and a product unrelated to intelligence (i.e., candy). The authors found that participants with an intelligence self-discrepancy who had not first been given a choice of intelligence-related objects were more likely to choose the intelligence object on the second task, but this effect disappeared if participants had previously chosen from a set of intelligence-related objects. Participants' initial choice among intelligence-related products appeared sufficient to address the self-discrepancy.

Elsewhere, evidence suggests that after experiencing social exclusion, consumers felt a stronger need to belong, but this need to belong dampened when participants consumed a nostalgic product, which reaffirmed their sense of belonging with significant others from the past (Loveland et al. 2010). In addition, in an experiment reported by Rucker, Dubois, and Galinsky (2011), individuals in a low-power condition reported feeling more powerful after receiving a pen associated with status, but did not feel any more powerful after receiving a pen associated with quality. Thus, physically acquiring an object associated with status appeared sufficient to restore individuals' lost sense of power. These findings, taken together, suggest that the act of consumption can, at least in some cases, potentially reduce a self-discrepancy.

Of course, the effectiveness of compensatory consumer behavior may depend on what the act of compensation ultimately does. For example, consider recent work by Lisjak and colleagues (2015), who demonstrate that engaging in compensatory consumer behavior can be ineffective when it serves as a reminder of the self-discrepancy. Specifically, when individuals engage in a symbolic self-completion strategy (e.g., buying a literary book when a self-discrepancy in their intelligence is present), they may ruminate on the self-discrepancy (e.g., "This book reminds me I'm not as smart as I want to be because that is why I bought it"), which can keep the self-discrepancy active in people's minds. Thus, rather than reducing a self-discrepancy, compensatory consumer behavior, at least in some cases, might actually strengthen a self-discrepancy because it evokes rumination through reminders of it. However, the authors also find that when the compensatory act is validated by others (e.g., "You must be smart to own that book"), it appears to alleviate the self-discrepancy.

6. Future Research Questions

Thus far, we have presented our Compensatory Consumer Behavior Model, which outlines a causal flow from self-discrepancy to compensatory consumer behavior (Figure 1). In this section, we propose future research questions about compensatory consumer behavior, regarding what products matter and when (Research Question 1), the role of individual differences and culture in compensatory consumer behavior (Research Question 2), whether positive self-discrepancies can produce compensatory consumer behavior (Research Question 3), and when self-discrepancies increase versus decrease consumption (Research Question 4). Our goal in presenting these questions is to spur researchers to pursue a more nuanced understanding of when a potential source of a self-discrepancy will—or will not—lead to compensatory consumer behaviors and when such behavior will serve as a successful remedy for the self-discrepancy.

6.1 Research Question 1: What Factors Affect the Strategy and/or Products Individuals Choose?

Our review of the literature provides consistent evidence that self-discrepancies can affect consumer behavior. However, at this point we know far less about *when* each of the documented compensatory consumer behavior strategies occurs. This question is critical for understanding how self-discrepancies shape the types of products consumers seek out. In this section, we propose several potential moderators that affect what strategy (and thus what products) consumers choose.

First, when do consumers prefer products that are related to the domain of the self-discrepancy versus products that are unrelated to the domain of the self-discrepancy? At its core, this question pits within-domain strategies (e.g., direct resolution) against across-domain

strategies (e.g., fluid compensation). One potential determining factor is the choice set presented to the consumer (Galinsky, Whitson, Huang, & Rucker, 2012). For example, Stone, Wiegand, Cooper, and Aronson (1997) induced a self-discrepancy by having participants advocate the importance of condom use and then report a personal failure to use condoms. Subsequently, some participants were given an opportunity to donate to the homeless, whereas others were given a choice to either donate to the homeless or to purchase condoms. When participants' only choice was to donate to the homeless, 83% donated. This finding is consistent with fluid compensation. However, when participants had the choice of purchasing condoms or donating to the homeless, only 13% donated to the homeless and 78% purchased the condoms. The latter is consistent with direct resolution: participants acted in a way that allowed them to directly resolve the self-discrepancy by providing the means to practice safe sex. This research provides preliminary evidence that, when given a choice of strategies, consumers might prefer within-domain consumption strategies. However, the majority of studies reviewed in the current review did not give participants a selection of strategies to choose from. Consequently, future research is required to better identify when people prefer within- versus across-domain strategies.

Second, consumers' self-esteem may moderate the strategies that they use in response to a self-discrepancy. People high in self-esteem have more positive self-views and feel more certain about them, and thus they may respond to self-discrepancies by reinforcing their competence and abilities, or even by dismissing such self-discrepancies as irrelevant (Crocker & Park, 2004; see also Gal & Kim, 2014). Individuals who lack self-esteem resources, in contrast, may protect the self via escapism, such as eating high-calorie foods, overspending, or binge drinking (Baumeister 1990), or via fluid compensation. Interestingly, research suggests that the opposite is also possible: those with high self-esteem might sometimes engage in fluid

compensation, whereas those with low self-esteem might engage in direct resolution. Specifically, Park and Maner (2009) found that when people received negative feedback related to their appearance, high-self-esteem individuals were likely to seek connections with others (fluid compensation), whereas low-self-esteem individuals made changes to their appearance (direct resolution; Park and Maner 2009). The results of Park and Maner (2009) suggest additional moderators may be at play. Future research should explore conditions under which distinct strategies are preferred by high- versus low-self-esteem consumers.

Third, two independent streams of research suggest that the timing of a self-discrepancy in relation to consumption can affect the strategy people utilize and thus the type of products purchased. Kim and Rucker (2012) examined consumption habits for individuals who either anticipated they would receive self-threatening feedback (i.e., pre-discrepancy) versus individuals who actually received self-threatening feedback (i.e., post-discrepancy). The authors proposed that in the absence of any self-discrepancy, individuals are more inclined to use consumption for symbolic self-completion, but less inclined to use consumption for escapism. The rationale for this prediction rests on the idea that symbolic self-completion can produce a buffer to prevent a discrepancy from emerging, but escapism has little benefit to offset a potential self-discrepancy. Supporting this hypothesis, individuals who learned that an upcoming intelligence test might return negative results listened longer to music related to intelligence compared to music unrelated to intelligence (i.e., a preference for discrepancy-related consumption; Kim & Rucker, 2012). In contrast to this pre-discrepancy condition, Kim and Rucker (2012) proposed that when experiencing a self-discrepancy individuals become more willing to use escapism strategies. That is, after the self-discrepancy has occurred, symbolic self-completion and escapism both become valid means to reduce the salience of the discrepancy,

albeit through different processes. In support of this idea, when individuals were first told that they performed poorly on a test related to intelligence, they listened longer to music regardless of whether the music was portrayed as being associated with intelligence or not; the music unrelated to intelligence served as a distraction from thinking about one's poor performance.

Hoegg and colleagues (2014) report a similar result with regard to people's opportunities to cope before or after a self-discrepancy. They examined product preferences as a function of whether individuals were engaged in an attempt to protect themselves from appearance self-discrepancies (i.e., pre-discrepancy) or to cope with appearance self-discrepancies after they had emerged (post-discrepancy). The authors demonstrated that affirming individuals' appearance beforehand protected them from subsequent appearance-related self-discrepancies (such as not being able to fit in one's usual pant size), but affirming them on their intelligence did not serve as an effective buffer. However, once an individual experienced an appearance-related self-discrepancy, both appearance- (e.g., scarves or jewelry) and intelligence-related (e.g., news magazines or language CDs) consumption seemed to reduce the self-discrepancy.

Finally, recent research suggests that the different types of self-discrepancies might elicit distinct preferences for problem-focused versus emotion-focused coping. Specifically, Han, Duhachek, and Rucker (2015) found that self-discrepancies that elicit approach motivations--such as intelligence--increase people's preference for problem-focused coping, whereby people express an interest to change the source of stress. In contrast, self-discrepancies that elicit avoidance motivations, such as personal control and social rejection, increase people's preference for emotion-focused coping, whereby people seek to regulate the emotional response to the stress. Although Han and colleagues did not directly examine product preferences, their findings bear on our theoretical framework. In particular, when consumers engage in problem-

focused coping, they might be more amenable to a direct resolution strategy, as this is most consistent with addressing the source of stress. In contrast, when consumers engage in emotion-focused coping, they might be more amenable to escapism, as it would facilitate removing the negative emotional response.

6.2 Research Question 2: What are the Roles of Cultural and Individual Differences in Compensatory Consumer Behavior?

An important question for future research is to understand how cultural and individual differences determine whether and how consumers engage in compensatory behaviors. Previous research suggests that culture is an important determinant. For example, Heine et al. (1999) suggest that members of collectivist cultures are less concerned than members of individualist cultures with the pursuit of individual self-esteem (Heine et al., 1999) or expressing their personal traits (Morrison & Johnson, 2011). Moreover, whereas individualists tend to use general self-affirmation as a means to reduce cognitive dissonance (Steele & Liu 1983), collectivists do not demonstrate dissonance reduction, and appear to have a reduced need for strategies such as general self-affirmation (Heine & Lehman 1997). Furthermore, when facing a self-discrepancy, individualists appear to seek symbolic self-completion by expressing themselves through their possessions, whereas collectivists do not (Morrison & Johnson, 2011). These findings suggest that culture can affect both what strategy is selected as well as whether a self-discrepancy provokes a motivation to resolve it. We therefore suggest that future research aim to better understand how culture shapes the use of a particular compensatory consumer behavior strategy. For example, we are not aware of any research on the moderating roles of power distance (Hofstede, Hofstede, & Minkov, 1997) or verticality (Shavitt, Lalwani, Zhang, &

Torelli, 2006) on compensatory consumer behavior. Attention to these factors might have important implications for how self-discrepancies are resolved. For instance, choosing a high-status product as a defense against a perceived self-discrepancy might be more effective in a vertical culture than in a horizontal culture because of the different values placed on status.

Previous research suggests that individual differences in consumers may also have implications for their choice of product or strategy. We earlier noted how one individual difference – self esteem – affects compensatory consumer behavior. Similarly, Cutright and colleagues (2011) found that individual differences in people’s level of confidence in the dominant sociocultural system bear on whether they chose products that directly defended the system or indirectly defended the system. Individual differences might also play out at other stages of our model, such as whether various consumer behaviors ultimately assuage the self-discrepancy. For example, consider research suggesting that individual differences exist in the extent to which people hold different implicit theories of abilities: incremental theorists tend to believe that ability is learned, whereas entity theorists tend to believe that ability is fixed and unchangeable (Dweck 2000). As a consequence, compensatory consumer behavior efforts, such as direct resolution or symbolic self-completion, might prove a successful means for incremental theorists to assuage self-discrepancies as incremental theorists would seem inclined to believe that such self-discrepancies are resolvable. In contrast, entity theorists would seem inclined to believe that compensatory strategies may have little effect because self-discrepancies are largely impossible to change. Thus, people’s naïve theories regarding consumption may hinge on the perceived malleability of self-discrepancies. Teasing apart when people view consumption as a path to self-restoration versus a path of perilous failure, in general, is an important direction for future research.

6.3 Research Question 3: Can Positive Self-Discrepancies Produce Compensatory Consumer Behavior?

Another emerging question is whether people engage in compensatory consumer behavior when the actual self is rated higher on a given desirable dimension than the ideal self. We introduce the term “positive self-discrepancies,” to capture such a situation because, unlike the typical self-discrepancy where the actual self falls short of the ideal self, here the actual self exceeds the value of the ideal self. Is it even possible that people engage in compensatory consumer strategies designed to offset “too much of a good thing?” (Grant & Schwartz, 2011).

Preliminary evidence supports the notion that positive self- discrepancies can occur. For example, some consumers believe that they have more self-control than ideal. As a consequence of feeling as if they have too much control, they may force themselves to spend money on indulgences, such as vacations, to reduce the discrepancy between their actual and ideal self-control levels (Kivetz & Simonson, 2002). Building on this idea, it is possible to imagine other scenarios in which positive self-discrepancies might cause discomfort. For example, earning the highest score on an exam or earning a higher salary than one’s friends may cause social discomfort or embarrassment. Indeed, preliminary evidence suggests that being endowed with more physical beauty, wealth, or self-control than others may lead individuals to attempt to downplay their positions relative to others (Sezer, Gino, & Norton 2016).

A discrepancy between one’s expressed emotions and one’s felt emotions can trigger emotional dissonance, and/or self-regulatory depletion, suggesting that even overly positive emotions can have aversive consequences (Huang & Galinsky, 2011; Muraven, Tice, & Baumeister, 1998; Pugh, Groth, & Hennig-Thurau, 2011). Supporting this idea, one study found

that when athletes felt less anger than ideal (for their athlete identities) and volunteers felt less sadness than ideal (for their volunteer identities), they wanted to drink an emotion-enhancing tea in order to intensify their negative emotions (Coleman & Williams 2013). One way to view this finding is that the actors felt more positive emotions than desired, and thus wanted to reduce these by experiencing more negative emotions. Positive self-discrepancies can also exist in the domain of attitudes (DeMarree, Briñol, & Petty, 2014). For example, a consumer may have a more positive attitude toward chocolate cake than he or she feels would be ideal.

Finally, people who feel that they fit in too well with others (i.e., have greater than desired affiliation or belongingness levels) sometimes assert their independence and distinctiveness (Brewer, 1991; see also Reis, 1990). For example, Chan et al. (2012) demonstrated that individuals can feel uncomfortable about excessive affiliation. In particular, because individuals possess uniqueness motives, learning they are too similar or close to members of their in-group can produce tension. As a consequence, exceeding their desired level of belongingness might lead them to seek out consumption that differentiates them from their group members. Of course, a limitation of this research in supporting our claim is that falling short of one's ideals of uniqueness may explain the results more so than exceeding one's ideal level of belongingness.

Admittedly, at present, the evidence that positive self-discrepancies can trigger compensatory consumer behavior is limited. However, to us, the lack of strong evidence makes it an exciting and ripe area for future research. Future research should examine whether excessively high levels of otherwise desirable states such as self-esteem, power, or affiliation can affect consumption choices or the overall quantities consumed, as well as the moderating factors that determine when recalibration is likely to occur.

6.4 Research Question 4: When Do Self-Discrepancies Increase Versus Decrease

Consumption?

A number of the findings reviewed in this article suggest that self-discrepancies produce compensatory consumer behavior that increases people's appetite for consumption. This argument might lead to the conclusion that self-discrepancies inherently increase the amount of consumption. However, compensatory behavior might not always lead to an increase in consumption. For instance, dissociation is a strategy that produces movement away from consumption: consumers may actively avoid purchasing and consuming products (or even dispose of their existing products) in order to avoid associating with an undesired identity.

It is also possible that other types of compensatory consumer behavior, such as direct resolution, may sometimes reduce consumption. For example, a desire to align one's desired and actual weight could lead consumers to consume less food overall. In fact, whether a self-discrepancy increases or decreases consumption can depend on people's naïve theories about consumption. To this point, Dubois, Rucker, and Galinsky (2012) found that a self-discrepancy with regard to one's power could increase or decrease the amount of consumption and the calories consumed based on whether people viewed small or large portions as more likely to be a signal of status. Specifically, given the association between low power and a desire for status (Rucker & Galinsky, 2008, 2009), the authors found that a lack of power caused consumers to choose larger portion sizes when they believed that size was positively associated with status, but to choose smaller portion sizes when consumers believed that size was negatively associated with status.

Put simply, the compensatory consumption strategies reviewed here may produce either increased or reduced consumption, depending on the circumstances. Future research should explore such boundary conditions.

7. Relationship of the Compensatory Consumer Behavior Model to Existing Models

Our Compensatory Consumer Behavior Model relates to other models of self-discrepancy such as the Meaning Maintenance Model (MMM; Heine et al., 2006) and self-verification theory (Swann, Pelham, & Krull, 1989). At the same time, the present model also has notable differences in both its intent and implications.

The Meaning Maintenance Model emphasizes that people cope with threats to meaning through fluid compensation. The authors propose four primary threats to meaning: threat to the self, feelings of uncertainty, interpersonal rejection, and mortality salience. Our self-discrepancy framework most directly relates to the MMM's threats to the self and interpersonal rejection. For example, receiving self-threatening information about one's physical appearance can produce a perceived self-discrepancy, leading to an effort to increase social connections (Park & Maner, 2009). However, the other forms of meaning threat specified in the MMM may fit into our framework as well. For example, the feelings of uncertainty produced from watching a surrealist movie (Randles et al., 2013) may be framed as a discrepancy between one's actual and ideal level of certainty.

Mortality salience holds a more nuanced relationship with self-discrepancy, but this relationship may also fit into our compensatory consumer behavior framework. Thus far in our review, we have focused discussion on events that increase the size of a self-discrepancy. However, sometimes an event may trigger compensatory consumer behavior not because it

creates a perceived self-discrepancy, but because it makes an existing self-discrepancy more salient or important. Consistent with this notion, we have proposed that the coping strategies of escapism, dissociation, and fluid compensation are effective because they reduce the salience or importance or the self-discrepancy, rather than the size of the self-discrepancy.

Likewise, events that magnify the salience or importance of a self-discrepancy can trigger compensatory consumer behavior. Mortality salience is one example of such an event. Thinking about one's inevitable mortality results in a heightened state of self-awareness (Arndt et al., 1998), in which discrepancies between one's actual self and the ideal self-concept become more salient, resulting in efforts to reduce such self-discrepancies (Scheier, Fenigstein, and Buss 1974). As a result, reminders of mortality can lead people to consume products that reinforce their sense of value in society, thereby reducing the perceived self-discrepancy between their actual and ideal sociocultural status (Mandel & Heine, 1999).

Our present Compensatory Consumer Behavior Model shares the view with the MMM that fluid compensation is an important process in how consumers respond to self-discrepancies. However, the present model differs in that it posits that fluid compensation is merely one of five distinct strategies that individuals can use to respond to self-discrepancies; in this regard our model is broader. Moreover, we suggest that fluid compensation is not always the preferred means to respond to self-discrepancies. For example, consumers may prefer direct resolution or symbolic self-completion over fluid compensation, as discussed in section 6.1.

The current work also relates to a foundational observation from self-verification theory. Swann and colleagues (1989) demonstrated that people with negative self-views often seek self-verifying feedback, even when such feedback is negative. Inherent in self-verification is a desire to know the self, whereas inherent in our theory is a self-enhancement motive to reduce an

undesired self-discrepancy. Indeed, in some circumstances, consumers might show behavior that is more consistent with a self-verification motive than a self-enhancement motive, particularly if they view a self-discrepancy as chronic rather than temporary. Our model also differs from self-verification theory with respect to the phenomenon it attempts to explain. As a testament to this distinction, preliminary research supports the idea that people might differentially seek to self-enhance or self-verify, depending on how they construe a particular situation. Brannon and Mandel (2016) found that when consumers were chronically low in power, they made product choices consistent with their low power (i.e., low-status brands), but only when they were primed to be in a self-verification versus self-enhancement mindset. Similarly, Rucker, Hu, and Galinsky (2014) found that attending to the experience of low power increased desire for high-status products. In contrast, when focusing on what others would expect of them in their high or low power role, low-power participants no longer showed a preference for high-status goods, consistent with the possibility that others' expectations led to self-verification concerns.

Conclusion

The present review offers a Compensatory Consumer Behavior Model that provides a parsimonious account for when and how compensatory consumer behavior results from self-discrepancies. In particular, we have articulated a Compensatory Consumer Behavior Model (Figure 1) that both synthesizes previous findings and calls for specific future directions. This model provides a lens for understanding the factors involved in, as well as the variety of, compensatory consumption behaviors (see Table 2). Perhaps equally important, we also offer an agenda for current and future researchers to help move our understanding of compensatory consumer behavior forward.

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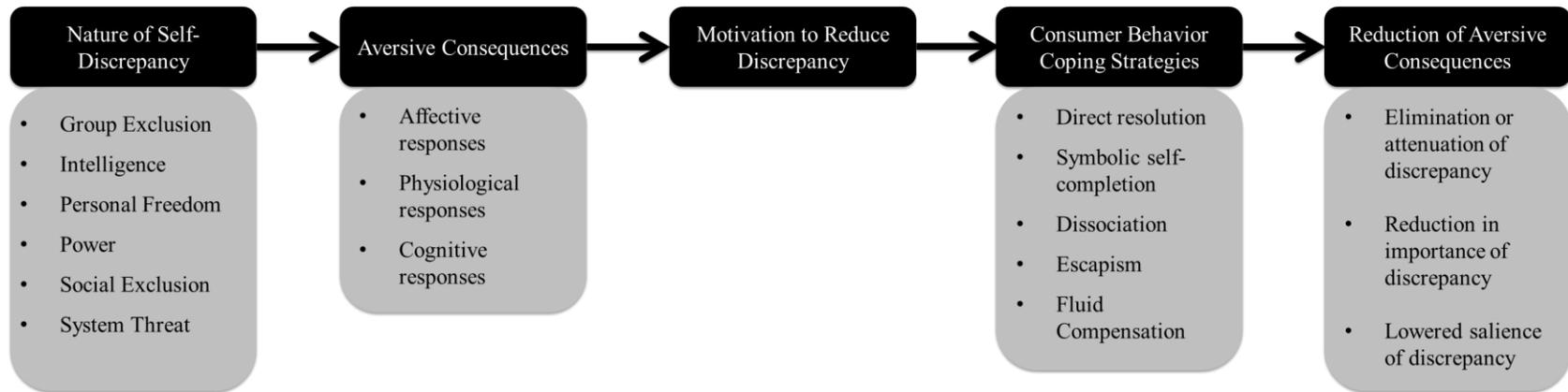
Table 1. Self-discrepancies linked to compensatory consumer behaviors in past research.

Domain of Self-Discrepancy	Coping Strategy	DV	Citation
Intelligence/Power	Direct resolution	Purchase of products to decrease discrepancy	Kim & Gal, 2014
Physical appearance	Direct resolution	Appearance-boosting activities	Schouten, 1991; Park & Maner, 2009
Academic ability	Symbolic self-completion	Trading up	Dalton, 2008
Business success	Symbolic self-completion	Ownership of symbolic success indicators	Wicklund & Gollwitzer, 1982
Control	Symbolic self-completion	Choice of products containing boundaries	Cutright 2012
Financial resources	Symbolic self-completion	Consumption of scarce goods	Sharma & Alter, 2012
First-year status (insecurity)	Symbolic self-completion	Ownership of university-branded clothing	Braun & Wicklund, 1989
Masculinity	Symbolic self-completion	Preference for masculine products	Willer et al. 2012
Personal freedom	Symbolic self-completion	Variety-seeking	Levav & Zhu, 2009
Physical appearance	Symbolic self-completion	Choice of appearance-enhancing accessories	Hoegg et al., 2014
Power	Symbolic self-completion	Preference for larger items in a hierarchy	Dubois, Rucker, and Galinsky 2012
Power	Symbolic self-completion	WTP for status products	Rucker & Galinsky, 2008, 2009
Self-concept certainty	Symbolic self-completion	Product choice	Gao, Wheeler, & Shiv, 2009
Self-concept certainty	Symbolic self-completion	Symbolic value of possessions	Morrison & Johnson, 2011
Social belongingness	Symbolic self-completion	Horizontal and vertical brand differentiation	Dommer, Swaminathan, & Ahluwalia, 2013
Social belongingness	Symbolic self-completion	Financial risk-taking	Duclos, Wan, & Jiang, 2013
Social belongingness	Symbolic self-completion	Conspicuous consumption or charitable contrib.	Lee & Shrum, 2012
Social belongingness	Symbolic self-completion	Nostalgic brand choice	Loveland et al., 2010
Social belongingness	Symbolic self-completion	Choice of products that signal affiliation	Mead et al., 2011; Wan et al., 2014; Wang et al., 2012
Social status	Symbolic self-completion	Professional titles listed in email signatures	Harmon-Jones et al., 2009
Sociocultural system	Symbolic self-completion	Choice of system-defending products	Cutright et al., 2011
Socioeconomic status	Symbolic self-completion	Conspicuous consumption	Charles, Hurst, & Roussanov, 2009
Gender identity	Dissociation	Sense of belonging in math	Murphy, Steele, & Gross, 2007
Gender identity	Dissociation	Avoidance of identity-associated products	White & Argo, 2009
Social identity	Dissociation	Motivated forgetting of ads	Dalton & Huang, 2014
Body thinness	Escapism	Food overconsumption	Heatherton & Baumeister, 1991
Mortality salience	Escapism	Food overconsumption	Mandel & Smeesters, 2008
Social belongingness	Escapism	Consumption of comfort foods	Troisi & Gabriel, 2011
Vicarious performance (of a sports team)	Escapism	Unhealthy eating	Cornil & Chandon, 2013
Intelligence	Escapism & Symbolic S.C.	Listening to music (amount of time)	Kim & Rucker, 2012
Counterattitudinal arguments	Fluid Compensation	Choice of high design	Townsend & Sood, 2012
Gender identity	Fluid Compensation	Writing about most valued characteristic	Martins et al., 2006
Physical appearance	Fluid Compensation	Rational decision-making	Sobol & Darke, 2014

Table 2. Five distinct compensatory consumer behavior strategies.

Strategy	Definition	Example
Direct Resolution	Behavior that resolves the source of the self-discrepancy.	A person who feels less intelligent than desired purchases and reads books to become smarter.
Symbolic-self completion	Behavior that signals mastery in the domain of the self-discrepancy.	A person who feels less intelligent than desired buys a conspicuous frame for his diploma and displays it above his desk.
Dissociation	Behavior that separates oneself from products or services related to the self-discrepancy.	A person who feels less intelligent than desired cancels his subscription to The Economist.
Escapism	Behavior that distracts oneself from thinking about the self-discrepancy.	A person who feels less intelligent than desired goes to the movies in order to direct his thoughts away from the discrepancy.
Fluid Compensation	Behavior that reinforces another aspect of one's identity distinct from the self-discrepancy.	A person who feels less intelligent than desired purchases a Rolex in order to feel financially successful.

Figure 1. Model of Compensatory Consumer Behavior



*Listed types of self-discrepancies represent samples and not an exhaustive list.