

# **Dissertation Defense**

Young Eun Huh

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## **Essays on Consumption:**

### **Top-Down Motivational Processes in Food Consumption**

Given the prevalence of obesity in our society today, it is imperative to understand how food intake is regulated. Appetite and food consumption are not only influenced by the sensory properties of food such as smell, taste, or texture of the food (i.e., bottom-up sensory processes), but also by the mental representation of the food (top-down cognitive, affective, and motivational processes). While consumer research has traditionally investigated the former, the focus has recently shifted towards understanding how top-down motivational processes regulate food consumption. My dissertation investigates how exposure to a food influences the motivation to consume other foods, especially complements and substitutes.

The first chapter examines how exposure to a food increases consumers' motivation to consume complementary foods. Eating a food engenders habituation, a decrease in one's response toward—and motivation to obtain—that food. General-process theories of motivation posit that eating a food also sensitizes one to other foods, an increase in one's responsiveness toward that food. For which foods such cross-stimulus sensitization occurs, however, is unclear. I hypothesize that eating a food sensitizes one to foods that are typically consumed in conjunction with the eaten food (i.e., complementary foods), but not to foods that are unrelated to the eaten food or foods that are merely associated with the eaten food. In six experiments, repeated exposure to a food or consumption of a food reduced subsequent consumption of that food (i.e., habituation), increased consumption of a complementary food (i.e., sensitization), but did not affect consumption of unrelated foods. I show that cross-stimulus sensitization for complementary foods is due to changes in the motivation to obtain the food (wanting), rather than to an increase in the hedonic value of the food (liking). The results suggest that motivational top-down processes cause cross-stimulus sensitization, which is more specific than previously believed.

In the second chapter, I examine how consumption of substitutes influences consumption of a desired target food. Substitutes are goods that can replace one another by satisfying, at least partly, the same consumers' needs (Nicholson 1998). When a desired product is not available or its price is deemed too high, consumers may look for and switch to a substitute. Substitutes can be classified as

within-category and cross-category substitutes based on whether they belong to the same or a different product category as the target product. Within-category substitutes—by definition—share many features with the target and satisfy the same consumer needs. However, substitution can occur across product categories, too, where the cross-category substitute satisfies a higher level consumer need as the target. Although cross-category substitution is common (Park and Gupta 2011), surprisingly little research has examined how cross-category substitutes influence consumption experiences. In the second chapter, I examine how the consumption of cross-category versus within-category substitutes influences craving for and consumption of the desired target food. Specifically, I show that although consumers prefer within-category substitutes over cross-category substitutes when the target is not available, consuming a cross-category substitute is more effective in reducing craving for the target food rather than consuming a within-category substitute. Participants who had consumed a cross-category substitute subsequently consumed less of the target food than those who had consumed a within-category substitute. Compared to the consumption of a within-category substitute, consumption of a cross-category substitute decreased wanting—but not the liking—of the target food.

Overall, my dissertation adds to the growing literature demonstrating the involvement of top-down processes in the regulation of food consumption. The results of my studies deepen our understanding of the psychological processes that govern consumers' cravings for and intake of food.