

Comfortably Numb: How Relationship Reminders and Affective Numbing Influence Consumption Enjoyment

Marketers, service providers, and retail associates often remind consumers of close relationships (romantic couples, family, friends). Whether being seated at a café, shopping in a store, or traveling, consumers are reminded of relationships they have but also relationships they do not have. This research shows how such relationship reminders influence consumption enjoyment. We find that reminding consumers of relationships they lack causes them to derive *less* enjoyment from positive experiences but relatively *more* enjoyment from negative experiences. Building from research on adaptive coping, we propose that consumers deploy an emotional shield when faced with reminders of relationships they lack. This *affective numbing* dulls consumers' emotional and perceptual sensitivity to consumption experiences—good or bad. Thus, relationship reminders change not only the extent to which consumers feel but also the extent to which they derive enjoyment from actual consumption experiences. Together six studies (five lab and one field) show how relationship reminders and affective numbing shape actual consumption enjoyment (foods, beverages, music experiences).