

Goal-Derived Categories: The Role of Personal and Situational Goals in Category Representations

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Prior research often emphasized a stimulus-based or bottom-up view of product category representations. In contrast, we emphasize a more purposeful, top-down perspective and examine categories that consumers might construct in the service of salient (i.e., highly accessible) goals. Specifically, we investigate how the point of view imposed by salient consumer goals might affect category representations assessed by participants' similarity judgments of food products. A key factor in our study is that we examine both individual and situational sources of variability in goal salience. In addition, we also vary the surface-level, visual resemblance of the stimulus pairs of foods used in the study. The results suggest that personal goals (e.g., health) and situational goals (e.g., convenience) act in conjunction and exert a systematic impact on category representations. Both types of goals, when salient, enhanced the perceived similarity of goal-appropriate products and reduced the similarity of product pairs when only one product was ideal for the particular goal. The similarity-enhancing effect was most pronounced when the surface resemblance between the products was low, and the similarity-diminishing effect was more apparent when surface resemblance was high. Implications are discussed for current theoretical assumptions regarding categorization in consumer research.

To try to fit a concept on an object is simply to ask what we can do with the object, and what it can do for us ... All knowledge, properly so called, is then oriented in a certain direction, or taken from a certain point of view. (Bergson, 1912, p. 41)

Stimulated by theoretical work in cognitive psychology, in recent years consumer researchers have investigated a variety of issues in product categorization. For example, studies have examined consumers' mental representations of many different product categories (e.g., Loken & Ward, 1990; Ratneshwar & Shocker, 1991; Sujan & Bettman, 1989), the relation between categorization and consideration sets (e.g., Hutchinson, Raman, & Mantrala, 1994; Nedungadi, 1990; Ratneshwar, Pechmann, & Shocker, 1996), and how categorization affects consumer preferences and choices (e.g., Carpenter & Nakamoto, 1989; Goodstein, 1993; Meyers-Levy & Tybout, 1989; Sujan, 1985).

A key construct in theoretical accounts of categorization is similarity, and perceptions of similarity are often assumed to be a primary influence on category representations (see, e.g., Murphy & Medin, 1985; Rosch & Mervis, 1975; Smith & Medin, 1981; Tversky, 1977). Indeed, similarity-based categorization is important for helping us understand many marketing and consumer behavior phenomena. For instance, it has been suggested that comparative advertising might induce perceptions of similarity between the advertised and the comparison brands and thus foster the former's categorization with the latter (Pechmann & Ratneshwar, 1991; Suján & Dekleva, 1987). Consumers' representations of product categories based on similarity judgments have also been linked with marketing strategy, as in the study of competitive product-market structure (e.g., Johnson & Fornell, 1987; Lefkoff-Hagius & Mason, 1993; Ratneshwar & Shocker, 1991; Srivastava, Alpert, & Shocker, 1984).

Theoretical explanations of similarity often imply a stimulus-based or bottom-up view. Such explanations typically suggest that people judge the similarity of one product to another by relying on the extent to which the two have common or shared features and also the extent to which each has distinctive features that are not shared by the other (see, e.g., Johnson, 1986; Rosch & Mervis, 1975; Tversky, 1977). This type of bottom-up view implicitly assumes that the product features involved in similarity judgments are intrinsically conspicuous or salient (e.g., visually) and, therefore, that similarity representations of products are grounded externally in the product stimuli themselves (see Johnson, 1986; Lefkoff-Hagius & Mason, 1993; Rosch, 1978, p. 41). Consequently, such a perspective connotes considerable rigidity in similarity representations, and it does not provide for shifts in similarity perceptions based on factors such as a person's individual or situational goals.

In contrast, in this research we take a top-down perspective and focus on categories that consumers often construct for achieving salient goals (see Barsalou, 1982, 1983, 1985, 1991; Bettman & Suján, 1987; Loken & Ward, 1990; Medin, Lynch, & Coley, 1997; Park & Smith, 1989; Ratneshwar et al., 1996; Ratneshwar & Shocker, 1991; Ross, 1996; Ross & Murphy, 1999). For our purposes, we construe goals at the level of benefits sought by the individual consumer in a particular consumption or use situation (see Huffman & Houston, 1993; Park & Smith, 1989; Ratneshwar et al., 1996). Thus, a health-oriented individual might construct a "breakfast substitutes" category of seemingly diverse foods such as an apple, a granola bar, and fruit yogurt. A nonhealth oriented consumer who is faced with a situation of having to eat a quick breakfast while away from home might categorize Dunkin Donuts with establishments such as McDonalds, but when the use situation is to take home pastries for the family, the same consumer might think of and classify Dunkin Donuts with supermarket bakeries. These examples illustrate that goal-derived categories have some unique characteristics. For instance, such categories often do not coincide with nominal product categories for which both consumers and

marketers have well-established labels or names (e.g., breakfast cereals and fast-food restaurants). Furthermore, goal-derived categories can include disparate products that share few, if any, features on the surface.

We report here a study in which we strive to further our understanding of goal-derived categories. Specifically, we investigate how the point of view imposed by salient (i.e., highly accessible) consumer goals might affect the perceived similarity of products. Note that prior research in categorization has already found considerable evidence that goals can alter category representations (see, e.g., Barsalou, 1982, 1983, 1985, 1991). Notwithstanding, our work seeks to advance our knowledge of this topic in three important ways.

First, the main theme of prior research on goal-derived categories has been the influence of situational or ad hoc goals (e.g., Barsalou, 1982, 1987, 1991; Ratneshwar & Shocker, 1991; Ross & Murphy, 1999; Roth & Shoben, 1983). Virtually no research has been done to examine whether enduring individual differences in goal salience would exert a similar influence on category representations. If evidence can be found that salient goals attributable to both person and situation impact similarity judgments in a predictable manner, it would provide important additional support for the concept of goal-derived categories. Furthermore, from a marketing theory perspective, it would tie the concept of goal-derived categories to very fundamental benefit-segmentation variables. It is well known that both individual and situational differences in goals or desired benefits need to be considered in segmenting markets based on consumer product preferences (see, e.g., Belk, 1975; Dickson, 1982; Haley, 1968; Srivastava et al., 1984). However, virtually no research has been done to examine consumers' similarity representations of products in terms of these two sets of variables.

Second, unlike prior research, we explore the joint or simultaneous influence of individual and situational goals on similarity judgments. Although we are not aware of any studies that have investigated the joint influence of personal and situational factors in the category representation area, the findings in other domains suggest intriguing possibilities. For example, social cognition researchers such as Bargh et al. (1986) found evidence of simple, additive effects for individual and situational factors in the realm of person perception (see also Srull & Wyer, 1986). In contrast, in the consumer research area, studies such as Belk (1975) and Ratneshwar, Warlop, Mick, and Seger (1997) found that situational influences often dominate or swamp individual differences when it comes to product evaluations and information processing. Given such opposing findings, it remains an empirical question as to whether and how personal and situational goal salience might combine to influence similarity judgments.

Third, when prior researchers in goal-derived categories investigated similarity judgments, they typically demonstrated that situational goals can enhance the perceived similarity of products that are visually quite different (e.g., bagel and bacon; see Ross & Murphy, 1999). Little research has been done to ex-

amine the effects of salient goals on products that are already highly similar in visual surface characteristics. As noted earlier, bottom-up views of categorization suggest that visually prominent, surface-level aspects of products are likely to be very important in similarity representations (see, e.g., Lefkoff-Hagius & Mason, 1993; Rosch & Mervis, 1975). If so, can salient consumer goals alter the mental representations of products that are highly similar on the surface? For example, can a health-orientation goal in foods diminish the perceived similarity of products that highly resemble each other, such as whole-grain bread and ordinary bread? Or are these similarity representations so rigid as to preclude any top-down intervention? We examine this question by systematically varying the surface resemblance of our stimuli in addition to the salience of personal and situational goals.

HYPOTHESIS DEVELOPMENT

We pointed out in the introduction that traditional, stimulus-based explanations of similarity usually implicate the common and distinctive features of products—particularly those features that are intrinsically salient or visually prominent (see, e.g., Johnson, 1986; Lefkoff-Hagius & Mason, 1993; Rosch, Mervis, Gray, Johnson, & Boyes-Braem, 1976; Tversky, 1977). Notwithstanding, strong arguments can be made for a more constructive, flexible, and pragmatic view of similarity representations. First, there is evidence that goals, in general, may be an important factor in determining consumers' mental representations of products (Barsalou, 1985; Loken & Ward, 1990; Nedungadi & Hutchinson, 1985; Ratneshwar & Shocker, 1991). Second, contrary to the notion that similarity representations are relatively invariant, such representations may be surprisingly flexible because they may be contingent on the goals that are salient in any given context (see, e.g., Barsalou, 1982, 1991; Ratneshwar & Shocker, 1991; Roth & Shoben, 1983). For example, participants in one of Barsalou's (1982) experiments judged the similarity of pairs such as raccoon–snake to be much higher when provided an appropriate context, such as “can be a pet.” Ratneshwar and Shocker (1991) found that product typicality judgments made in the context of specific product use situations (e.g., “snacks that people might eat at a Friday evening party while drinking beer”) were significantly different from judgments made in response to simple category cues (e.g., “snack foods”). Apparently, the contextual information had framed consumers' perceptions by focusing their attention selectively on situationally goal-relevant aspects of products (e.g., whether a snack is salty, crisp, and convenient for serving at a party).¹

Accordingly, in the study reported next, we tested the hypothesis that participants, in making similarity judgments, should focus on personal and situational goals that are currently salient or “top of mind.” Thus, a goal that has high (vs. low) salience should increase the perceived similarity of two products when both are appropriate for the goal and, conversely, decrease their perceived similarity when only one of them is appropriate. Consider, for example, an individual for whom the goal of eating healthy foods is very salient versus another for whom this goal is not a salient concern. For the more (vs. less) health-oriented individual, the personal goal should perceptually “push together” goal-appropriate products such as a granola bar and fruit yogurt, thereby enhancing their perceived similarity. As another example, consider a situational context—driving a car—that makes salient the goal of convenience. In this case, high (vs. low) situational goal salience should “pull apart” or perceptually discriminate products like an apple and an orange because only the former is goal appropriate, thus reducing their perceived similarity. With the assumption that personal and situational goals would have parallel effects (we had no a priori reasons to expect otherwise), we hypothesized as follows:

- H1: Higher levels of personal goal salience and high (vs. low) situational goal salience should each (a) increase the perceived similarity of product pairs where both products are appropriate for the particular goal and (b) decrease the perceived similarity of product pairs where only one of the two products is appropriate for that goal.

As noted in the introduction, we considered one additional factor: the extent of visual or surface resemblance between products. Prior research has strongly suggested that the extent to which two products resemble each other at a surface level should significantly influence consumers' similarity representations. For example, Rosch and her colleagues (Rosch, 1978; Rosch et al., 1976) found in several studies that the visual appearance of objects played an important role in determining category structure. In a study of consumer learning, Hutchinson and Alba (1991) found that participants often relied on superficial or nondiagnostic visual features in categorizing various brands of stereo speakers. In another consumer judgments study, Lefkoff-Hagius and Mason (1993) found evidence that surface aspects of product form (e.g., cube vs. wedge shape for a clock radio and liquid vs. gel form for a shampoo) explained considerable variance in similarity judgments. In relation to our previous hypothesis (H1), we wondered whether the anticipated effects of goal salience on perceptions of similarity would be found regardless of the degree of surface resemblance. Because prior research on goal-derived categories did not suggest any particular direction on this issue, we took an exploratory approach and simply included surface resemblance of product pairs as an additional independent variable in our study design.

¹Tversky (1977), in his contrast model of similarity, posited that the frame of reference or context of judgment can alter similarity judgments. Whereas Tversky emphasized the “local” context of the stimulus set itself, our research focused on how the perceiver's salient goals can frame perceptions.

METHOD

Study Overview

Participants were 127 undergraduate students who participated in small groups for extra course credit. The stimulus products were drawn from the food category. We chose this category because of its familiarity to our participants and because previous research (Belk, 1974; Ross & Murphy, 1999) demonstrated individual and situational influences on food preferences. We selected the personal goal of health—specifically, health orientation with regard to foods. This decision was based on a pilot study in which we measured the salience of this goal in our participant population and verified that there was considerable heterogeneity in health orientation. The main study was conducted in two ostensibly unrelated sessions. In the first session, a top-of-the-mind elicitation task was used to measure the salience of the health goal as an individual difference variable (see procedure details next). The second session, conducted 2 weeks later, involved the similarity judgments task. In this session, participants were randomly assigned to either a low- or a high-situational goal salience condition. The situational goal was selected as either convenience in consumption or a desirable food temperature, and its salience was manipulated by varying the judgmental context through suitable usage situation descriptions (see Table 1).

Stimuli for Similarity Judgments

All participants judged the similarity of eight pairs of food products (see Table 1). In four of these cases (henceforth referred to as Type P pairs), both products in a pair were appro-

priate for the personal goal, whereas only one was appropriate for the particular situational goal (e.g., plain granola bar and fruit yogurt). Correspondingly, in the other four product pairs, referred to as Type S pairs, both products were appropriate for the situational goal, and only one was appropriate for the personal goal (e.g., plain granola bar and candy bar). Note that these eight pairs comprised four sets, each consisting of a P and a S pair type. For control purposes, one product in each set of pairs (e.g., plain granola bar) was held constant, and it was appropriate for both the personal and the situational goal. The other product in each pair was varied so that it was either appropriate for the personal goal (e.g., fruit yogurt) or for the situational goal (e.g., candy bar). Furthermore, the stimuli were designed such that pair type (P or S) was crossed with surface resemblance (high or low), and each of the four resulting cells had two replicates (situational goal of either convenience or temperature; see Table 1). Pairs that were high in surface resemblance had products with many common (and few distinctive) visual features, such as shape and color. Pairs with low surface resemblance shared very few visual features and had many distinctive ones.

Manipulation Checks

We conducted two separate pilot tests to verify that our stimulus products individually were perceived as appropriate or inappropriate for the personal and situational goals in accordance with our design. In the first test, 27 participants rated on 11-point scales ranging from 1 (*not at all appropriate*) to 11 (*very appropriate*) the 12 stimulus products regarding their appropriateness for “people who are health-oriented.” A nested-design multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA)

TABLE 1
Stimuli for Similarity Judgments

<i>Product Pair</i>	<i>Pair Type</i>	<i>Surface Resemblance</i>	<i>Usage Situation (Situational Goal)</i>
Plain granola bar–candy bar	S	high	“Things people might carry along to eat in their cars” (convenience)
Plain granola bar–fruit yogurt	P	low	“Things people might carry along to eat in their cars” (convenience)
Frozen yogurt–ice cream sundae	S	high	“Things people might eat in the afternoon on a hot day” (temperature)
Frozen yogurt–plain popcorn	P	low	“Things people might eat in the afternoon on a hot day” (temperature)
Apple–orange	P	high	“Things people might eat as snacks when in a hurry” (convenience)
Apple–donut	S	low	“Things people might eat as snacks when in a hurry” (convenience)
Broiled chicken sandwich–sliced turkey sandwich	P	high	“Things people might eat for lunch on a very cold day” (temperature)
Broiled chicken sandwich–cheese pizza	S	low	“Things people might eat for lunch on a very cold day” (temperature)

Note. Pair Type S refers to product pairs in which both products are appropriate for the situational goal and only the first product is appropriate for the personal goal of health. Pair Type P refers to product pairs in which both products are appropriate for the personal goal of health, and only the first product is appropriate for the situational goal.

showed that the eight products appropriate for the health goal received significantly higher ratings (grand $M = 8.2$, range = 7.1–9.6) than the four health-inappropriate products (grand $M = 1.9$, range = 1.0–4.0), $F(1, 26) = 408.5$, $p < .001$. In the second pilot test, a different group of 26 participants, using similar scales, rated the appropriateness of each stimulus product for the corresponding use situation (see Table 1). Once again, a nested-design MANOVA showed that the eight products appropriate for their respective use situations were rated significantly higher (grand $M = 8.4$, range = 7.4–9.4) than the four situation-inappropriate products (grand $M = 3.7$, range = 2.9–4.1), $F(1, 25) = 152.6$, $p < .001$.

First Session Procedure: Measurement of Personal Goal Salience

We measured the salience of the personal goal (health) as an individual difference variable in the first session by using a method originally developed in the social cognition literature on individual construct accessibility (see Higgins, King, & Mavin, 1982) and later adapted for use in consumer research by Ratneshwar and his colleagues (Ratneshwar et al., 1996; Ratneshwar et al., 1997). In four separate tasks, participants were asked to list attributes or characteristics that came to mind when they thought about the type of food that they liked, disliked, sought, and avoided. Participants had to elicit attributes for filler products (banks and leisure activities) in between the four tasks related to the foods category; these filler products were inserted to clear previously listed attributes from working memory and to disguise the actual target product. Participants were asked to record their responses on 3" x 5" index cards in the order in which various attributes came to mind. Specifically, participants wrote down one attribute per card. Each card was then turned over and kept face down so as not to inhibit production of more attributes. Participants also numbered each card so that we could later code the order in which they listed attributes for each task.

Participants' responses for the four tasks related to foods were scrutinized by two judges ($r = .88$) who coded their responses in terms of whether the listed attributes were related to the health goal. A personal goal salience score was then created for each participant as follows (see also Ratneshwar et al., 1996; Ratneshwar et al., 1997). We took into account the frequency as well as the primacy with which relevant attributes were listed because both are potential indicators of top-of-the-mind accessibility or goal salience (Higgins et al., 1982). For each task, only the first five cards completed were counted. If a health-related attribute (e.g., "low fat" or "empty calories") was mentioned on the first card, it was given a score of 5. If such an attribute did not appear on any of the first four cards but appeared on the fifth card, it was scored a 1. Health-related attributes listed on the second, third, and fourth cards were scored proportionately. If several health-related attributes were mentioned within the same task, only the

first one was scored such that there was no double counting. If no health-related attributes were produced on any of the first five cards for the task, the score was 0. Finally, each participant's scores were summed across the four tasks to create an individual-level measure of personal goal salience (raw scores range = 0–20, rescaled as a 0–1 index for the analyses). Across participants, the mean rescaled value of this measure was 0.23.

Second Session Procedure: Similarity Judgments

Participants were informed that the experiment was a product judgments study in which they would be asked to rate the similarity or dissimilarity of different pairs of products. Before rating the test stimuli, participants were given several practice trials in which they rated the similarity of other foods. The judgments were made on 11-point scales ranging from 0 (*very dissimilar*) to 10 (*very similar*) in response to the names of the stimulus pairs. Participants in the low-situational goal salience condition were asked to rate the degree of similarity or dissimilarity of the stimulus pairs of foods "in the context of things people might eat." Participants in the high-situational goal salience condition judged the same product pairs but in response to use situation descriptions designed to make salient the critical situational goals (see Table 1); for example, the latter participants rated the similarity of plain granola bar and candy bar "in the context of things people might carry along to eat in their cars." Note that we did not explicitly inform participants about the situational goals; rather, these goals implicitly were evoked by the use situation descriptions in the high-situational goal salience condition. Similarly, we did not cue the personal goal of health; instead, we assumed that participants for whom this goal was chronically accessible would spontaneously evoke the goal (see Higgins, 1990; Higgins et al., 1982; Srull & Wyer, 1986). Across participants, four different sequences were used for presentation of the test stimuli; these sequences were selected randomly but with the restriction that product pairs involving a common product could not be juxtaposed.

RESULTS

Descriptive Results

Figure 1 provides a descriptive overview of the primary results. Panel A presents the similarity data across all participants regardless of their health orientation. As the results under low-situational goal salience indicate, participants generally viewed P pairs as more similar than S pairs. One interpretation is that without salient situational goals, features relevant to the (personal) health goal were more salient than features relevant to situations. Because each P pair (e.g., plain

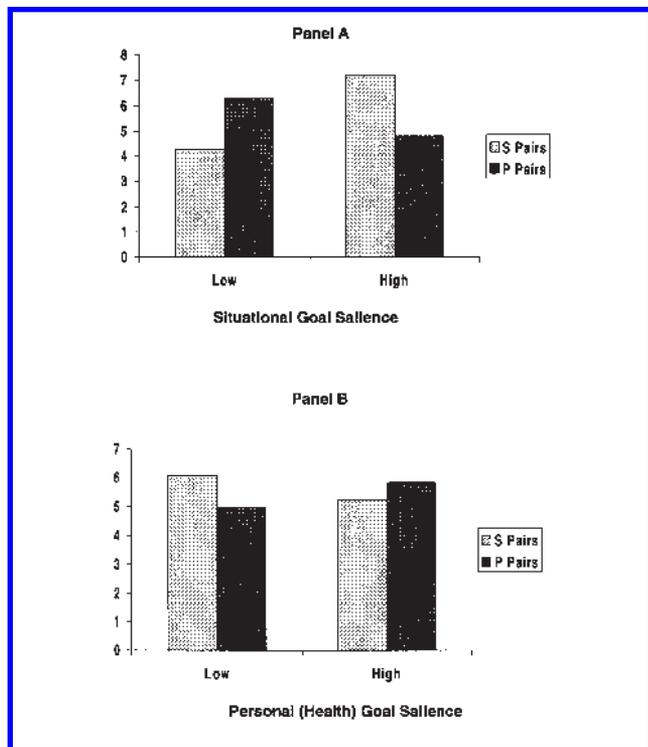


FIGURE 1 Similarity judgments. Pair Type P refers to product pairs in which both products are appropriate for the personal (health) goal and only one product is appropriate for the situational goal. Pair Type S refers to pairs in which both products are appropriate for the situational goal and only one product is appropriate for the personal goal. See Table 1 for details. Means for low and high personal goal salience are based on participants whose scores fell in the bottom and top one third of the overall distribution, respectively.

granola bar and fruit yogurt) shared a common health feature, participants on average viewed the P pairs as more similar than the S pairs (e.g., plain granola bar and candy bar) that always differed on health features. Once the situational goals were made salient, however, the S pairs became more similar. For example, the use situation “things people might carry along to eat in their cars” increased the perceived similarity of plain granola bars and candy bars. In contrast, the P pairs became less similar because only one item in each pair possessed the situational feature. For example, plain granola bar is something that participants most likely view as convenient for eating in a car, but fruit yogurt is not.

Panel B depicts the same similarity data from the perspective of individual differences in the salience of the personal (health) goal and collapsed across the situational goal manipulation. The participants, for whom the health goal was not salient, judged the S pairs to be more similar than the P pairs—most likely because they did not put much weight on the health feature that was shared by the P pairs. However, this pattern was reversed for the participants who were health oriented: They actually judged the P pairs to be more similar than the S pairs.

Omnibus Hypothesis Tests

To test our hypothesis, a MANOVA was first conducted on the similarity judgments with pair type (P or S), surface resemblance (high or low), and replicate situational goal (convenience or temperature) as within-subject variables; situational goal salience (low or high) as a between-subjects variable; and participants’ scores (standardized) for personal goal salience as an additional individual-level variable.² Note that Cohen and Cohen (1983) advised against creating categorical variables (e.g., high and low groups) from individual-difference scores because such a practice often loses valuable information from the original data. Therefore, both in the omnibus and individual hypothesis tests, we did not create and use median splits of participants on the personal goal salience variable. Instead, we used the standardized scores of participants on personal goal salience as a continuous variable in the analyses (see Pechmann & Ratneshwar, 1992, for prior consumer research that has taken a similar approach). All participants were included in the omnibus and individual hypothesis tests.

Before turning to the hypothesized effects, we note that the analysis revealed two significant main effects. First, as expected, participants rated product pairs with high surface resemblance ($M = 7.20$) as more similar than product pairs with low surface resemblance ($M = 4.15$), $F(1, 123) = 227.6$, $p < .001$. Second, our stimuli were such that Type S pairs ($M = 5.82$) were rated as somewhat more similar than Type P pairs ($M = 5.54$), $F(1, 123) = 60.6$, $p < .001$.

We predicted a positive effect for personal goal salience on similarity when both products are appropriate for the personal goal (i.e., Type P pairs) and a negative effect when only one of the two products is appropriate (i.e., Type S pairs). In support of this hypothesis, the MANOVA yielded a significant personal goal salience by pair type interaction, $F(1, 123) = 8.26$, $p < .01$. We followed up on this significant interaction by examining the correlations between participants’ personal goal salience scores and their similarity judgments. As predicted, there was a significant positive correlation between personal goal salience and the similarity judgments (averaged) of the four Type P pairs, $r = .19$, $p < .05$. In contrast, there was a significant negative correlation between personal goal salience and the similarity judgments (averaged) of the four Type S pairs, $r = -.21$, $p < .05$.

We also predicted that high (vs. low) situational goal salience should result in an increase in perceived similarity of Type S pairs and a decrease in similarity of Type P pairs. Accordingly, the MANOVA showed a significant situational goal salience \times pair type interaction, $F(1, 123) = 144.3$, $p <$

²We also conducted a multivariate analysis of variance with stimulus sequence included as an additional variable; however, it did not reveal any significant main effects for stimulus sequence, nor any significant interactions between this factor and our independent variables, $ps > .25$.

.001. Follow-up contrasts (*t* tests) confirmed that high (vs. low) situational goal salience resulted in significantly higher similarity ratings for Type S pairs ($M = 7.22$ vs. 4.31), $p < .001$. High (vs. low) situational goal salience also resulted in significantly lower similarity ratings for Type P pairs ($M = 4.82$ vs. 6.31), $p < .001$.

The MANOVA further revealed four higher-order interactions that involved key independent variables. First, there was a significant three-way interaction between situational goal salience, pair type, and replicate situational goal, $p < .01$. Second, there was a significant four-way interaction between situational goal salience, personal goal salience, pair type, and replicate situational goal, $p < .05$. Third, there was a significant four-way interaction between situational goal salience, pair type, surface resemblance, and replicate situational goal, $p < .001$. Finally, there was a significant five-way interaction between situational goal salience, personal goal salience, pair type, surface resemblance, and replicate situational goal, $p < .05$. These higher-order interactions, taken collectively, have no obvious theoretical interpretation. However, because all four interactions involve the stimulus-related factors of pair type and replicate situational goal, it is worth examining the hypothesis at the level of the individual stimuli.

Individual Hypothesis Tests

We used a general linear models approach (PROC GLM in SAS) to test our hypothesis individually for each of the eight similarity judgments produced by our participants. Specifically, for each product pair, the least-squares method was used to fit a linear model to the similarity data. In each case, the independent

variables in the model were situational goal salience (low or high), personal goal salience (standardized scores of participants), and their interaction. Descriptive statistics for each of the eight similarity judgments are provided in Table 2. For ease of interpretation, the means are shown for participants whose personal goal salience scores fell in the bottom and top one third of the overall distribution. However, the statistical tests were based on the data from all of the participants.

Regarding the effects of situational goal salience, our hypothesis was consistently supported across all eight product pairs. High (vs. low) situational goal salience had a significant positive impact on the judged similarity of all Type S pairs and a significant negative effect on the similarity of all Type P pairs (see margin *M*s and the last column of Table 2); $ps < .01$, in seven cases, and $p < .05$, in one case.

The results were a little less consistent for the effects of personal goal salience. For four out of the eight product pairs, significant effects were observed for personal goal salience and all in the hypothesized direction, $ps < .01$, in two cases, and $ps < .05$, in two cases. Note that in these four cases, personal goal salience either enhanced perceptions of similarity of Type P pairs when surface resemblance was low (plain granola bar and fruit yogurt; frozen yogurt and popcorn) or reduced judged similarity of Type S pairs when surface resemblance was high (plain granola bar and candy bar; frozen yogurt and ice cream). Thus, for both Type P and Type S pairs, the hypothesized effects of personal goal salience were most apparent in the four cases in which these effects were in opposition to (i.e., counteracted) surface resemblance. In two out of the other four cases (apple and orange; broiled chicken sandwich and sliced turkey sandwich), the di-

TABLE 2
Similarity Judgments as a Function of Personal and Situational Goal Salience

Product Pair	Pair Type	Low Situational Goal Salience			High Situational Goal Salience			Significant Effects
		Low Personal Goal Salience ^a	High Personal Goal Salience ^b	Margin <i>M</i> ^c	Low Personal Goal Salience ^d	High Personal Goal Salience ^e	Margin <i>M</i> ^f	
Plain granola bar–candy bar	S	6.45	4.42	5.34	7.36	7.00	7.62	S**, P**
Plain granola bar–fruit yogurt	P	4.77	5.26	5.34	3.04	4.10	3.56	S**, P*
Frozen yogurt–ice cream sundae	S	7.64	5.05	6.51	8.96	8.24	8.89	S**, P**
Frozen yogurt–plain popcorn	P	2.73	4.58	3.62	2.67	2.80	2.79	S*, P*
Apple–orange	P	7.95	8.63	8.34	5.80	7.00	6.74	S**
Apple–donut	S	1.55	1.58	1.72	6.60	4.95	6.21	S**, (S × P)*
Broiled chicken sandwich–sliced turkey sandwich	P	7.32	7.95	7.93	5.60	6.62	6.17	S**
Broiled chicken sandwich–cheese pizza	S	3.55	3.79	3.66	5.88	6.10	6.14	S**

Note. Similarity judgments were measured on an 11-point scale ranging from 0 (*very dissimilar*) to 10 (*very similar*). Pair Type S refers to product pairs in which both products are appropriate for the situational goal, and only the first product is appropriate for the personal goal. Pair Type P refers to product pairs in which both products are appropriate for the personal goal, and only the first product is appropriate for the situational goal. Means for low and high personal goal salience are based on participants whose personal goal salience scores fell in the bottom and top one third of the overall distribution, respectively. Significant effects are noted as follows: S for the main effect of situational goal salience, P for the main effect of personal goal salience, and S × P for the interaction. All participants were included in the hypothesis tests.

^a $n = 22$. ^b $n = 19$. ^c $n = 61$. ^d $n = 25$. ^e $n = 21$. ^f $n = 66$.

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

rectional trends in the data supported the hypothesized influence of personal goal salience, but the effects were not statistically significant, $p = .18$ and $.21$, respectively. In one of the remaining two cases (apple and donut), the effect for personal goal was not significant, $p > .80$; however, there was a significant personal goal salience \times situational goal salience interaction, $p < .05$. The pattern in this case suggests that when the situational goal (convenience) was not very salient, participants—regardless of the salience of the personal goal of health—judged the similarity of apple and donut as extremely low. When the convenience goal was highly salient, participants in general rated the similarity of this Type S pair higher, but health-oriented participants adjusted their judgments less. Finally, in the last case (broiled chicken sandwich and cheese pizza), there was virtually no evidence for the influence of personal goal salience, $p > .90$.

Discussion

Considered as a whole, the results suggest that similarity perceptions are influenced by salient personal and situational goals acting in conjunction with stimulus-bounded inputs, such as shared versus distinctive physical features. As previously noted, a large main effect was found for surface resemblance. Thus, aggregated across all participants and different judgment contexts, a plain granola bar was rated as more similar to a candy bar than to fruit yogurt ($M = 6.53$ vs. 4.42), and an apple was judged as more similar to an orange than to a donut ($M = 7.51$ vs. 4.06). Nevertheless, it is apparent that a consumer's goals also play a very important role in influencing mental representations. For example, the data suggest that health-oriented participants, in fact, judged a plain granola bar as more similar to fruit yogurt ($M = 5.26$) than to a candy bar ($M = 4.42$), provided a conflicting goal such as convenience was not salient. Furthermore, participants who were low in health orientation rated an apple as more similar to a donut ($M = 6.60$) than to an orange ($M = 5.80$), but only when a relevant situational goal, convenience, was sufficiently salient. Thus, the results strongly suggest that the perspective or point of view derived from salient personal and situational goals does influence consumers' category representations.

SUMMARY AND GENERAL DISCUSSION

Many theories of categorization imply a stable, stimulus-dominated, or bottom-up representation of products (e.g., Johnson, 1986; Lefkoff-Hagius & Mason, 1993; Meyers-Levy & Tybout, 1989; Rosch & Mervis, 1975; Smith & Medin, 1981). In contrast, the concept of goal-derived categories offers a top-down perspective—one in which the individual actively constructs cognitive representations toward achieving salient goals (Barsalou, 1982, 1983, 1985, 1987, 1991; see also Medin, Goldstone, & Gentner, 1993; Medin et al., 1997; Murphy & Medin,

1985; Ross, 1996; Ross & Murphy, 1999; Roth & Shoben, 1983). Over the last decade, consumer researchers have started exploiting the theoretical potential of goal-derived categories in issues such as the determinants of product typicality (Loken & Ward, 1990; Ratneshwar & Shocker, 1991), the formation of consideration sets (Ratneshwar et al., 1996; Ratneshwar & Shocker, 1991; Warlop & Ratneshwar, 1993), and decision making across product categories (Bettman & Sujan, 1987; Park & Smith, 1989).

The research reported here contributes to this stream of work by offering additional evidence and insights on how consumer goals impact category representations. We expected that when making similarity judgments, participants should focus on the extent to which products are appropriate to the goals salient to them at the point of judgment. Thus, when two products are appropriate to a salient personal or situational goal, participants should perceive them to hang together meaningfully and rate their similarity as higher. However, when only one of the two products can fulfill a salient goal, the contrast between the products on goal appropriateness should cause them to be distanced perceptually.

Overall, the results of our study were quite congruent with our expectations. Similarity judgments were influenced not only by inherent, surface-level resemblances but also by product aspects related to salient personal and situational goals. Although one might expect salient goals to be unable to distance items that are inherently very alike, and likewise to fail to bring together objects that are physically very distinct, our results suggest that the reverse may be the case. Personal goal salience tended to enhance similarity perceptions particularly when surface resemblance was low and to reduce judged similarity when surface resemblance was high. On the whole, the data revealed somewhat more robust effects for situational rather than personal goals. This is consistent with some prior studies that found consumers very flexible in changing their consumption patterns of different foods across different situations (see Belk, 1974; Miller & Ginter, 1979).³ Future research could determine the extent to which our findings are specific to the particular category and whether the manner of stimulus presentation (e.g., product names vs. actual products) affects the results (see Ward & Loken, 1986).

By showing that both personal and situational goals are likely to influence similarity judgments, this study suggests that goals impose a distinctive point of view on consumers' product perceptions. In this regard, there is a parallel in the multidimensional scaling literature in which models such as INDSCAL stretch or shrink the dimensions in a "group space" so as to reflect different individuals' perspectives

³The finding that the effects of situational (vs. personal) goal salience were somewhat stronger could also be due to the fact that our participants were drawn from the same undergraduate program and were relatively well matched on age and other demographics; thus, they may have been only moderately heterogeneous in their health orientation.

(Carroll & Chang, 1970; see also Kinneer & Taylor, 1973; Wish, Deutsch, & Biener, 1972). Our research helps to synthesize this older, primarily data-driven work with the more recent theory-grounded literature on goal-derived categories (Barsalou, 1991), as well as the effects of goals on social perceptions (e.g., Srull & Wyer, 1986). Furthermore, consistent with the social cognition literature (e.g., Higgins, 1990; Srull & Wyer, 1986), our findings suggest that both individual and situational sources of variability are likely to be important in how people perceive and represent their environments (see also Endler & Rosenstein, 1997). Note that our research assessed only mental representations of products and did not measure product use behaviors or behavioral intentions. However, based on Lord's (1982) research on the prediction of behavioral consistency, we speculate that when two products are judged as similar in the context of situational goals, use behaviors involving these products will be similar.

The findings reported here, along with prior research on goal-derived categories (e.g., Barsalou 1982, 1987; Ratneshwar & Shocker, 1991; Roth & Shoben, 1983), suggest a reconsideration of the assumption that consumers mentally represent products in terms of a relatively invariant hierarchical structure. Consider, for example, the literature on across-category choice in which it has often been assumed that the comparability of alternatives is determined by their inherent similarity and how well they are matched on surface-level, concrete features (Johnson, 1984, 1989). Our findings imply that this may be an oversimplification. Although surface resemblance is undoubtedly important in similarity perceptions, one cannot overlook the top-down influence of consumers' goals: The extent of comparability rests not only in the stimuli themselves, but also in the individual perceiver and the context or purpose prompting the comparison.

Consider, also, Meyers-Levy and Tybout's (1989) thesis that new product evaluations may be influenced by the degree of congruity of a product with the product category schema it activates. These investigators hypothesized and tested the effects of schema congruity by assuming a fairly stable hierarchical category structure. The results of our study suggest, however, that an individual may cross classify a product in numerous ways across different situational contexts (see also Barsalou, 1982, 1987; Medin et al., 1997; Ratneshwar & Shocker, 1991; Ross & Murphy, 1999; Roth & Shoben, 1983; Srivastava et al., 1984). Thus, ice cream may be categorized not only as "dessert" but also as "food to avoid while on a diet" and as "something to serve at a kid's birthday party." The particular mental representation or schema that is activated in working memory is likely to depend on the specific situational cues or constraints. Although Meyers-Levy and Tybout (1989) supplied only product-category names to their participants (e.g., "soft drink" or "fruit juice"), future research on schema congruity might examine how the observed effects on product evaluations are additionally influenced or moderated by situational information (e.g., about the use or consumption context).

The study reported here also has an interesting counterpart in the work of Wansink and his colleagues (Wansink, 1994; Wansink & Ray, 1996). They investigated whether, and how, advertising might persuade consumers to consider using a target product in an expansion or atypical use situation in place of a currently preferred alternative. For instance, the target product might be soup, the expansion situation might be breakfast, and the preferred alternative might be hot cereal. Consumers' desire for a hot and nutritious breakfast could presumably be satisfied by soup, and yet soup is generally not considered to be a breakfast substitute for hot cereal. The two products are in different nominal categories and also share few surface features. Hence, Wansink sought to determine whether certain advertising strategies might improve consumers' attitudes toward using the ill-favored target product in the expansion situation.

Their findings are relevant to our discussion because some of the advertisements in Wansink's (Wansink, 1994; Wansink & Ray, 1996) research did seem to push disparate products, such as soup and hot cereal, into the same consideration set. Furthermore, it appears that the most efficacious advertisements were those that increased the salience of situational goals that both products could fulfill. For example, in the case of hot cereal and soup, the most efficacious advertisements stressed hot temperature and nutrition. Wansink's findings suggested that by making situational goals salient, advertising could improve consumers' attitudes toward use of the target product in the expansion situation. Correspondingly, they found that consumers' attitudes and intentions, with respect to the target versus the alternative product, become more similar.

Wansink (Wansink, 1994; Wansink & Ray, 1996) did not measure situational goal salience or consumers' category representations; their focus was on advertising effects. Still, our results suggest that the effects they obtained on product use attitudes might be mediated by the effects of salient situational goals on categorization. When two disparate products can both deliver on the same situational goal, if this goal is made salient (e.g., through advertising), their perceived similarity should be enhanced. Furthermore, when consumers perceive two such products as somewhat similar in the context of a particular use situation and group them into the same goal-derived category, the likelihood of retrieval of the non-traditional alternative into a consumer's consideration set should be significantly increased (see Warlop & Ratneshwar, 1993, for further discussion of memory process issues).

In conclusion, our findings clearly suggest that both stimulus-driven (bottom-up) and goal-derived (top-down) inputs substantially affect category representations.⁴ The features

⁴Park and Hastie (1987) reported a somewhat similar finding in the person perception area. They found that participants employ a combination of category-level (i.e., top-down) and instance (i.e., bottom-up) information in making judgments of other individuals.

that intrinsically characterize different products contribute to a category representation that can be construed as a baseline or central tendency. However, this baseline may provide an inaccurate picture of the category representations instantiated by any particular segment of consumers or consumers in general for any specific use situation. Just as person–situation segmentation variables have proven very useful in understanding heterogeneity in consumer preferences (Dickson, 1982), individual and situational differences in goal salience appear to be quite important in category representations (see Ratneshwar et al., 1996; Ratneshwar et al., 1997). Perhaps our understanding of many other consumer behavior phenomena may also be enhanced if one makes the assumption that the significance of a product to the perceiver is a function of both the person and the situation.

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