John Peloza, Katherine White, & Jingzhi Shang

Good and Guilt-Free: The Role of Self-Accountability in Influencing Preferences for Products with Ethical Attributes

The market share of brands positioned using ethical attributes typically lags behind brands that promote attributes related to product performance. Across four studies, the authors show that situational factors that heighten consumers' self-accountability (i.e., activation of their desire to live up to their self-standards) lead to increased preferences for products promoted through their ethical attributes. They investigate their predictions regarding self-accountability in multiple ways, including examining the moderating roles of awareness of the discrepancy between a person's internal standards and actual behavior, self-accountability priming, and the presence of others in the decision context. Furthermore, they demonstrate that the subtle activation of self-accountability leads to more positive reactions to ethical appeals than explicit guilt appeals. Finally, they show that preference for a product promoted through ethical appeals is driven by the desire to avoid anticipated guilt, beyond the effects of impression management. Taken together, the results suggest that marketers positioning products through ethical attributes should subtly activate consumer self-accountability rather than using more explicit guilt appeals.

Keywords: self-accountability, ethical products, green marketing, sustainability, environment

Recent work suggests that consumers are reporting an increasing interest in ethical, socially conscious products (e.g., Cotte and Trudel 2009). However, research also indicates that the market share of products positioned using ethical attributes is relatively small (Luchs et al. 2010) and that consumer support for such products is not uniformly positive (Auger and Devinney 2007; Luchs et al. 2010; White, MacDonnell, and Ellard 2012). Thus, a problem marketers face is determining how to motivate consumers to choose products positioned on the basis of their ethical attributes over products positioned on self-benefit-oriented attributes, such as performance and price. The current research proposes that when self-accountability (i.e., a person's desire to live up to his or her internal self-standards) is heightened, consumers will be more likely to choose products positioned on the basis of their ethical attributes than products positioned on the basis of self-benefit attributes.

Previous research highlights two existing paths through which consumer support can be increased for products promoted through ethical attributes. First, because many consumers are unwilling to make assumed trade-offs for ethical products (Auger et al. 2008), marketers can reduce the uncertainty associated with the purchase of products promoted through ethical attributes. Research shows that negative responses stemming from uncertainty about the benefits of ethical attributes can be mitigated through the use of guarantees (e.g., Luchs et al. 2010). Second, the desire for impression management can lead consumers to engage in more prosocial, ethical behaviors when doing so is expected to result in a positive portrayal of their self-image to others (e.g., Griskevicius, Tybur, and Van den Bergh 2010; White and Peloza 2009).

The current research suggests a third route to encourage positive responses to ethical appeals by drawing on two research streams: work on self-standards (Stone and Cooper 2001; Thibodeau and Aronson 1992) and research stemming from self-discrepancy theory (Higgins 1987). We propose that people consider ethical behavior an important self-standard. Yet for many consumers, actual behaviors are not always consistent with this personally held standard. We refer to consumers' desire to live up to a salient, internally held self-standard as "self-accountability" and suggest that in contexts in which self-accountability is heightened, consumers will prefer products promoted through ethical appeals over those promoted through other types of benefits to the self. Furthermore, we propose that heightened self-accountability will subtly activate anticipated guilt associated with choosing an alternative, less ethical option. This anticipated guilt will, in turn, lead consumers to prefer...
products promoted through ethical appeals over products promoted on the basis of other attributes.

**Contributions of the Current Research**

First and foremost, the current research contributes to the marketing literature by proposing a framework wherein the activation of self-accountability subtly induces anticipated guilt and subsequent preferences for products promoted on the basis of their ethical attributes. This framework complements research that examines prosocial consumer behavior from an impression-management perspective (e.g., Griskevicius, Tybur, and Van den Bergh 2010; White and Peloza 2009) to demonstrate that, beyond impression-management concerns, positive responses to ethical appeals can also be driven by self-accountability. The current work focuses on how a person’s accountability to self-standards can subtly activate anticipated guilt, which in turn can drive prosocial, ethical choices. This notion is consistent with the proposition that not only normative social standards but also personal standards guide behavior (Aquino and Reed 2002; Stone and Cooper 2001). More important, to our knowledge, this is the first work to use a self-accountability approach to predict ethical consumption behaviors.

Our examination of the role of anticipated guilt in ethical consumption extends previous research that has largely examined explicit guilt appeals (e.g., Coulter and Pinto 1995; Huhmann and Brotherton 1997). For example, Cotte, Coulter, and Moore (2005) categorize guilt appeals as anticipated (i.e., the consumer will regret a decision/nondecision in the future), reactive (i.e., the consumer is reminded of previous transgressions), or existential (i.e., the misfortune of others is highlighted). In each case, the marketer makes a direct attempt to generate feelings of guilt on the part of the consumer. In our research, we examine situational factors that are likely to highlight self-accountability in a way that subtly activates anticipated guilt associated with thoughts of selecting a less ethical option. As such, our work extends previous research by demonstrating that the route toward guilt activation does not require the presence of an explicit guilt appeal. Indeed, we demonstrate that the use of an explicit guilt appeal can backfire, leading to a lower preference for products promoted through ethical attributes when self-accountability is activated versus not activated.

By studying the role of anticipated guilt in the domain of ethical consumption, we address calls from previous researchers who note that although other forms of guilt have been well studied, anticipated guilt and its ability to guide behavior is relatively unstudied (e.g., O’Keefe 2002). In his summary of guilt arousal, O’Keefe (2002, p. 335) states:

Not much is yet known about what alternative means might successfully arouse anticipated guilt, or about the nature of other elements that might be needed to connect such anticipated guilt to desired influence outcomes, or about when or whether efforts at creating anticipated guilt might evoke the negative reactions sometimes associated with guilt arousal mechanisms.

The current work answers this call. In doing so, we complement the wealth of research that examines how guilt experienced as a result of a consumption decision can guide future behavior (e.g., Dahl, Honea, and Manchanda 2003, 2005) by examining how the anticipation of future guilt can guide consumption decisions.

**Outline of Studies**

The article proceeds as follows: First, we articulate the nature of self-accountability by reviewing the literature on self-discrepancy and self-consistency theories. This is followed by a discussion of the proposed research framework. Across four studies, we demonstrate the role of self-accountability in activating anticipated guilt, which leads to preference for products promoted through ethical attributes. In Study 1, we test for the role of self-accountability by employing a manipulation that either makes or does not make the consumer aware that he or she has fallen short of a salient self-standard. We do this by varying the degree to which the consumer is aware of or “ought” standards in the domain of conservation behaviors and by demonstrating that self-accountability leads to preferences for products promoted using ethical attributes over those promoted through other self-benefits. In Study 2, we directly prime self-accountability and examine the effectiveness of appeals that promote ethical attributes versus those that use an explicit guilt appeal. In Study 3, we manipulate self-accountability through the use of a public consumption setting and demonstrate that preference for products promoted through ethical appeals is mediated by anticipated guilt, beyond the effects of impression management. Finally, in Study 4, we replicate our findings using a field study in a retail context.

**Self-Accountability and the Activation of Anticipated Guilt**

**Self-Accountability**

Typically, consumers respond positively to appeals that highlight the functional self-benefits of a product (Shavitt 1990). However, most consumers report that they should make consumption choices according to ethical and sustainability criteria (Cotte and Trudel 2009). That is, consumers hold the self-standard that they should behave in an ethical and sustainable manner. Therefore, we propose that when self-accountability to this salient self-standard is heightened, consumers will be more likely to choose an ethically positioned product over one positioned using more traditional self-benefit appeals. In our framework, we define self-accountability as the activation of a person’s desire to live up to internal self-standards. Our use of the term “self-accountability” notably differs from previous research (e.g., Passyn and Sujan 2006) that uses the term “self-accountability emotions” to refer to emotions that instill a sense of feeling responsible for the outcome. This previous research focuses on the types of emotions that will instill a sense of self-responsibility in a way that spurs the person to act (i.e., regret, guilt, and challenge). Our treatment of the construct
of self-accountability refers to the desire to live up to a personal self-standard, which specifically demonstrates how the person should act.

Our framework further proposes that the effect of self-accountability on consumer preferences for products promoted by ethical appeals will be mediated by anticipated guilt. We define anticipated guilt as “guilt that arises from contemplating a potential violation of one’s own standards” (Cotte, Coulter, and Moore 2005, p. 362). That is, when self-accountability is activated, ethical consumption choices will be driven by the desire to avoid potential future guilt associated with choosing an alternative, less ethical option. We discuss these effects, outlined in Figure 1, in the remainder of this section.

Researchers have proposed that guilt arises when a person falls short of his or her own personal self-standards (Baumeister, Stillwell, and Heatherton 1994; O’Keefe 2002). Work on self-discrepancy and self-consistency theories supports this view. For example, self-discrepancy theory proposes that distinct emotions arise from discrepancies between a person’s various “selves” and that these self-guides can motivate people to eliminate those discrepancies. These self-guides include the actual self (i.e., the present self that the person actually is), the ideal self (i.e., the self to which the person aspires), and the ought self (i.e., the self that the person feels a sense of responsibility or duty to be) (Higgins 1987). When a discrepancy exists between these self-guides, it shapes affect, motivation, and behavior. For example, when people assess their actual self as falling short of some personal ideal, this can lead to feelings of dejection (Higgins et al. 1986). Importantly, when a person’s actual behavior falls short of his or her ought self, this type of discrepancy highlights that he or she has not lived up to an important self-standard, something that may lead to feelings of guilt and regret (Higgins 1987). Thus, self-discrepancy theory proposes that guilt can arise as a result of a person’s assessment that his or her own performance does not meet the personally held ought self-standard. In our work, we take this theory further in an effort to examine how the situational activation of self-accountability to relevant self-standards can lead to anticipated guilt and subsequent prosocial response.

In addition, self-consistency theory (Stone and Cooper 2001; Thibodeau and Aronson 1992) points to the notion that people rely on their own personal standards for both competence and morality in evaluating their actions. For example, Thibodeau and Aronson (1992) suggest that when people’s actions are inconsistent with these personal standards, it motivates them to shape their attitudes and behaviors to be consistent with their personally held standards. This theory proposes that when personal standards are particularly salient, people are more likely to adhere to, and evaluate their behaviors against, such benchmarks. Although Thibodeau and Aronson (1992, p. 596) use the term “personal standards” rather loosely to include standards that are “culturally derived, and largely shared,” Stone and Cooper (2001) take this reasoning further to make the distinction in their self-standards theory that this process can be driven by not only normatively but also personally held standards. According to self-standards theory, when personal standards are situationally accessible in memory, a person’s actions will be evaluated against these personal standards.

We acknowledge that self-standards are heavily influenced by social norms. Higgins (1987) distinguishes a person’s own judgment of his or her behavior and others’ judgments of the person’s behavior and argues that both can be powerful motivators in shaping behavior. Haidt (2001) further argues that moral principles have their roots in cultural socialization. He argues that when societies deem certain actions to be desirable, people adopt these behaviors as standards for their own behaviors. Thus, the role of socialization and normative influences are the root of personally held self-standards. However, our conceptualization of self-standards suggests that these norms can become internal-
ized to the extent that people are motivated to meet them independently of their desire to please others.

In summary, drawing on self-discrepancy theory and self-standards work, we propose that situational conditions that heighten a sense of self-accountability will lead to anticipated guilt, which guides future ethical behavior (e.g., preference for products promoted through ethical attributes). Although the links between self-accountability and anticipated guilt have not been tested, some prior research is suggestive in this regard. For example, Smith et al. (1993) find that self-accountability (or more specifically, the failure to be self-accountable) is highly predictive of experienced guilt.

**Anticipated Guilt**

In general, guilt is defined as "an individual's unpleasant emotional state associated with possible objections to his or her actions, inaction, circumstances, or intentions" (Baumeister, Stillwell, and Heatherton 1994, p. 245). The examination of the experience of guilt as well as the use of explicit guilt appeals in marketing research is considerable (e.g., Cotte, Coulter, and Moore 2005; Coulter and Pinto 1995; Dahl, Honea, and Manchanda 2005; Huhmann and Brotherton 1997; Kivetz and Keinan 2006). Researchers have shown that consumer guilt influences a wide variety of decisions, such as purchasing expensive products, using recycled goods, smoking, and dieting (Dahl, Honea, and Manchanda 2003). Although previous research focuses on guilt related to a failure to meet social expectations, a relevant other is not necessary for guilt to emerge (Dahl, Honea, and Manchanda 2003). Indeed, work on self-conscious emotion suggests that while shame is more likely to be activated when a person's transgression is publicly exposed, guilt is more likely to occur at the level of the private self (Cohen et al. 2011; Smith et al. 2002; Wolf et al. 2010).

The study of guilt in ethical consumption typically involves either the use of an explicit guilt appeal (e.g., Basil, Ridgway, and Basil 2006; Coulter and Pinto 1995) or the examination of how experienced guilt resulting from a prior decision affects future behavior (e.g., Burnett and Lumsford 1994; Fisher, Vandenbosch, and Antia 2008; Hibbert et al. 2007; Huhmann and Brotherton 1997; Winterich and Barone 2011). In our research framework, we propose that the mere act of considering a product that is positioned using an ethical appeal in contexts in which self-accountability is heightened subtly activates anticipated guilt in a way that guides ethical behavior. That is, when self-accountability is activated, consumers will be more likely to select an ethical option to avoid the potential future guilt associated with choosing an alternative, less ethical product. Consistent with this reasoning, anticipated guilt is particularly germane when consumers contemplate responses to unethical behavioral alternatives (Steenhaut and Van Kenhove 2006).

Therefore, in contexts in which self-accountability is heightened, a marketing appeal based on ethical attributes can be considered a form of guilt appeal, albeit a soft one. This is an important nuance because research finds that explicit guilt appeals, which are direct attempts to heighten consumer guilt, can sometimes lead to negative consumer reactions (e.g., Cotte, Coulter, and Moore 2005). Whereas explicit guilt appeals are most often characterized as negative appeals because they create guilt, our framework proposes that ethical appeals are more positive because they guide consumer behavior toward positive outcomes and the alleviation of anticipated guilt. Although the role of guilt in pro-social behavior has been broadly studied, self-accountability and its potential for producing anticipated guilt remains unstudied within this domain. This represents an important gap because self-accountability can influence a wide variety of consumption behaviors, and there are potential pitfalls associated with explicit guilt appeals.

**Study 1**

In Study 1, we test our proposed theoretical framework by manipulating self-accountability through varying whether the consumer is aware of a discrepancy between an ought self-standard and his or her actual behavior (e.g., Aronson, Fried, and Stone 1991). The rationale behind this previously validated manipulation is that it makes salient a past instance when the consumer has not lived up to a particular standard that he or she holds and, as a result, leads the consumer to strive to meet the important self-standard in the future (e.g., Aronson, Fried, and Stone 1991; Dickerson et al. 1992). Following from the proposed framework, we anticipate that preferences for products positioned using ethical appeals (vs. products positioned using self-benefit appeals) will be enhanced under conditions in which self-accountability is high (i.e., the consumer is aware that his or her own behavior falls short of an ought self-standard) as opposed to neutral.

\[ H_1: \text{When self-accountability is high, consumers exhibit a preference for products positioned using ethical appeals over products positioned using self-benefit appeals.} \]

**Method**

**Pretest.** We conducted a pretest to examine whether people hold being environmentally sustainable as an important self-standard to live up to. Eighty-eight participants were asked the following questions: (1) "To what degree do you value taking care of the environment?" (2) "How much do you value making environmentally sustainable choices?" (3) "To what degree do you value conserving our natural resources?" and (4) "To what degree do you think it is important to consider our impact on the environment?" (on seven-point scales; \( \alpha = .97 \)). The results revealed that participants considered environmental sustainability an important self-standard to live up to (t-test vs. the scale midpoint; \( t(87) = 18.42, M = 5.85, p < .001 \)).

**Participants.** Eighty-six participants took part in the study in return for course credit. This study used a 2 (self-accountability: high vs. neutral) \( \times \) 2 (product appeal: ethical vs. self-benefit) between-subjects design. We examined environmental sustainability as the ethical attribute of interest. The dependent variable was intention to purchase a brand of juice that was positioned on the basis of either environmental or self-benefit attributes.

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Procedure. Participants were divided into small groups and were told that they would be taking part in two studies. To keep the context relatively private, participants completed their questionnaire packages in their own study space with their backs to the other participants. In addition, participants were reassured that all responses were anonymous and confidential, which has been shown in previous research to lead participants to view their responses as relatively private (White and Peloza 2009). In what was ostensibly the first study, they answered several filler questions about consumption behaviors and some personality items. Embedded in the personality items were four items in which participants reported their ought self-standard for environmentally sustainable values and behaviors (see pretest items; α = .79). As in the pretest, participants reported that environmental sustainability is an important self-standard to live up to (t-test against the scale midpoint; t(84) = 17.01, M = 5.63, p < .001).

Then, to activate self-accountability, we asked participants in the high-self-accountability condition the following: “Please describe a recent time in which you engaged in a behavior that was inconsistent with positive environmental values. That is, think of a time that you engaged in a behavior that was not good for the environment.” Participants in the neutral condition did not complete this task.

Participants then viewed an ad for apple juice, which was positioned using either an ethical or a self-benefit appeal. We manipulated appeal type through perceptual prominence with the use of images, colors, and placement (Gardner 1983), a common practice in contemporary ethical appeals, especially those related to the natural environment. Advertisements (see Appendix A) were designed professionally to ensure realism. Pretesting indicated that the advertisement positioned according to ethical attributes was viewed as focusing more on the ethical qualities of the product (and less on the benefits for the self) than the advertisement positioned according to self-benefits. (Across all the subsequent studies, pretests of the appeals were successful; we do not discuss this further.) The key dependent measure was product purchase intentions completed on a seven-point scale: (1) “How likely would you be to purchase the product?” (2) “How inclined would you be to purchase the product?” (3) “How willing would you be to purchase the product?” (adapted from White and Peloza 2009; α = .94). For a complete list of measures used in all studies, see Appendix B. A suspicion probe, administered at the end of the study, indicated that no participants were aware of the hypotheses, nor were they aware that the two parts of the study session were linked.

Results and discussion. A 2 (self-accountability: high vs. neutral) × 2 (product appeal: ethical vs. self-benefit) analysis of variance (ANOVA) on purchase intentions revealed the predicted interaction (F(1, 84) = 4.62, p < .05). As we anticipated, in the high-self-accountability condition, participants reported more positive purchase intentions in response to the ethical (M = 5.67) than to the self-benefit (M = 4.67) appeal (t(84) = 2.19, p < .05). No differences in purchase intentions emerged in the neutral self-accountability condition between the ethically positioned product (M = 4.32) and the product positioned on self-benefits (M = 4.71; t(84) = .85, p = .39), as shown in Figure 2. Thus, H₁ is supported.

Study 1 demonstrates that when accountability is heightened (by making a person aware of a discrepancy between actual behavior and a personally held self-standard), consumers respond more favorably to an ethical appeal than to a traditional self-benefit appeal. When consumers do not feel a heightened sense of self-accountability, we observed no preference for products positioned through ethical versus self-benefit appeals. This finding supports our proposed research framework and spotlights the potential for self-accountability to stimulate preferences for products promoted using ethical appeals. It represents an opportunity for marketers in that consumers potentially consider personal standards for ethical behavior in a wide range of markets and consumption settings.

Study 2

In Study 2, we build on the first study in several ways. First, we enhance the generalizability of the findings by extending our investigation of ethical appeals into another domain: fair trade. Second, we examine another product category: tea. We chose tea because it is a highly consumed fair trade product category (Fairtrade Foundation 2011). Third, we assign a greater cost to selecting fair trade over non-fair trade options to ensure enhanced realism. Ethically produced goods typically involve a trade-off for consumers: The consumer gains an ethical good but often must pay more for the product or lose some other desirable attribute (Auger et al. 2008; White, MacDonnell, and Ellard 2012).

The relative lack of commercial success of products promoted through ethical attributes suggests that consumers often perceive a trade-off between ethical attributes and product performance or value (e.g., Luchs et al. 2010). Fourth, we test our framework more directly by priming self-accountability. Consistent with our definition of self-accountability, we test our framework more directly by priming self-accountability.

![Figure 2](image-url)
accountability (i.e., that it relates to a person's own ethical standards), we expect that a task asking participants to sort words that include items related to self-standards (e.g., “accountable,” “standards,” “responsible”) will activate the accessibility of participants’ own self-standards. We anticipate that the activation of a person's own self-standards will be sufficient to motivate preference for products promoted through ethical appeals.

Importantly, however, we propose that the effect of self-accountability priming will be moderated by whether the explicit guilt appeal is present. Thus, a fifth way that this study extends Study 1 is through the comparison of appeals based on ethical attributes alone with those that combine the promotion of ethical attributes with an explicit guilt appeal. By including a condition that also presents an explicit guilt appeal, we examine whether there are conditions under which a more subtle use of guilt (i.e., in which anticipated guilt is activated through self-accountability) is more effective than appeals that explicitly elicit guilt in an attempt to influence consumer preference for ethical goods. The use of guilt appeals in marketing communications is pervasive, particularly in prosocial and ethical domains (Huhmann and Brotherton 1997). Thus, our examination of explicit guilt appeals has a high degree of relevance for marketing managers by benchmarking a common practice against a more subtle guilt-inducing alternative.

As we noted briefly at the beginning of the article, previous research has demonstrated that the efficacy of explicit guilt appeals is equivocal. For example, Coulter and Pinto (1995) find that consumers may respond to explicit appeals with feelings of anger. Moreover, consumers who perceive guilt appeals as overtly manipulative actually report feeling less guilty as a defense mechanism (Cotte, Coulter, and Moore 2005; Hibbert et al. 2007). These findings are based on reactance theory (Brehm 1966; Brehm and Brehm 1981), which proposes that when people interpret an advertising message as highly manipulative, they will respond negatively because of their perceived loss of freedom. Following from this line of reasoning, we propose that explicit guilt appeals may create feelings of anger and irritability, which mitigate any positive effects of self-accountability on preferences for ethical options and reducing guilt. Note that whereas our framework proposes that self-accountability will subtly activate anticipated guilt in ways that lead to ethical product preferences, we suggest that explicit guilt appeals will have the negative effect of activating feelings of anger and irritability. We propose that under conditions in which an ethical appeal is present and self-accountability is high, consumers will be more inclined to choose ethically positioned products. However, when an explicit guilt appeal is included, it will mitigate the positive effect of self-accountability on product choice. More formally, we predict the following:

H2: (a) When self-accountability is high, consumers are more likely to select ethical products when no explicit guilt appeal is present than when an explicit guilt appeal is present, and (b) when it is low, selections of ethical products do not differ as a function of the presence or absence of the explicit guilt appeal.

Method

Pretest. We conducted a pretest to examine our self-accountability prime. Fifty participants took part, half of whom received the priming manipulation. Participants completed an exercise involving the formation of thematic categories from a larger list of words (for a similar procedure, see Lockwood, Jordan, and Kunda 2002). All participants received some neutral words related to children (e.g., “play,” “sandbox,” “toys”) and some words related to cooking (e.g., “pan,” “spices,” “cook”). To achieve our self-accountability manipulation, we also presented participants in the self-accountability condition with accountability-related words (e.g., “accountable,” “standards,” “responsible”). In the neutral condition, participants received an additional set of neutral words related to furniture (e.g., “chair,” “rug,” “ottoman”). Our measure of self-accountability included three items: (1) “How accountable are you to behave in an ethical manner?” (2) “How strongly are you motivated to live up to your own self-standards?” and (3) “How accountable do you feel to your own self-standard?” (on seven-point scales; α = .78). The results reveal that participants in the self-accountability priming condition were significantly more self-accountable (M = 4.43) than those who received the neutral prime (M = 3.03; t(48) = 3.77, p < .001). Furthermore, those who received the self-accountability prime reported significantly higher self-accountability than the scale midpoint (t(24) = 3.90, p < .01). Therefore, we consider our self-accountability priming manipulation successful.

Participants. Seventy-nine undergraduate students took part in the study in return for course credit. Study 2 used a 2 (priming: self-accountability vs. neutral) x 2 (ethical appeal: ethical appeal only vs. explicit guilt appeal) between-subjects design. This study used fair trade as the ethical attribute of interest, examining consumer selections of fair trade versus regular teas as the dependent variable.

Procedure. Participants took part in small groups of four to ten people and were informed that we were interested in how cognitive style relates to evaluation of advertisements. As in Study 1, participants completed their questionnaire packages in their own study space with their backs to the other participants, and they were told that their responses were anonymous and confidential. As our ostensible measure of cognitive style, we asked participants to first complete the same priming exercise described previously in the pretest.

After completing the self-accountability manipulation, each participant viewed two advertisements from the same company, which sells both fair trade and regular teas. In all cases, participants viewed one ad for the fair trade line of teas (which focused on the ethical attributes of the product) and one ad for the regular line of teas (which focused on the self-benefit attributes of the product). The regular line of teas was always promoted with the attributes of quality and great taste: “Our tender tea buds are handpicked to allow us to ensure rich, yet delicate flavor. Our experts taste our teas weekly to ensure maximum flavor and consistency.”

The manipulation of the ethical appeal was carried out through the information presented in the advertisement for
the fair trade line of teas. In the ethical appeal condition, the fair trade teas were promoted only through their ethical attributes: "Our fair trade teas allow us to ensure fair wages for tea producers in developing nations. Our fair trade teas contribute to equitable conditions for workers." In the explicit guilt-appeal condition, the fair trade teas were once again promoted through their ethical attributes, but we included an additional tagline to explicitly invoke guilt: "How can you enjoy a cup of tea knowing that the people who produce it are not being treated fairly?" We counterbalanced the order of presentation of the fair trade and regular tea ads.

Participants then answered some questions about the advertisements, to be consistent with our cover story. In addition, we included a manipulation check for self-accountability: (1) "How accountable are you in protecting the environment?" (2) "How accountable do you feel to your own self-standards?" and (3) "How strongly are you motivated to live up to your own self-standards?" (a = .79). Finally, participants reported their current mood states, including items tapping into negative moods, on a five-point scale (i.e., "angry," "upset," and "irritable"; a = .80).

At the end of the study, participants were told that they could take some sachets of tea with them as a gift for their participation. The teas were all the same brand shown in the ads, and the different flavors were pretested as being similar in likability. Participants were informed that they could have $1.00 to spend and that fair trade teas cost $.50 each, whereas regular teas cost $.25 cents each. Thus, a greater cost was associated with choosing the fair trade teas (given that a greater cost is often attached to ethical products; Auger et al. 2008). For analysis, we coded the choice variable to reflect whether participants showed a preference for spending more money on the regular teas (−1), an equal preference for each type of tea (0), or a preference for fair trade teas (1) (for a similar procedure, see White, MacDonnell, and Ellard 2012).

Results and Discussion

Manipulation checks. A 2 (priming: self-accountability vs. neutral) × 2 (ethical appeal: ethical appeal only vs. explicit guilt appeal) ANOVA on the self-accountability index revealed only a main effect for priming. Consistent with our pretest, participants in the self-accountability condition felt more accountable (M = 3.56) than those in the nonaccountability condition (M = 2.69; F(1, 75) = 5.00, p < .03). In addition, an ANOVA on the negative mood index confirmed that participants in the explicit guilt-appeal condition reported more negative moods (M = 2.79) than those in the ethical-appeal condition (M = 1.79; F(1, 75) = 43.63, p < .001).

Fair trade product selections. We first examined the data using ordinal logit regression (allowing us to examine tea choice as an ordered choice variable), and the results revealed the predicted significant interaction between priming and appeal (Wald = 5.86, p < .05). Consistent with H2a, when we primed self-accountability, consumers showed decreased preference for the fair trade teas when the explicit guilt appeal was present compared with when it was absent (χ² = 8.31, p < .02; for choice percentages, see Table 1). Consistent with H2b, when priming was neutral, no significant differences in tea selections between appeal types emerged (χ² = 2.10, p = .35). There were no significant main effects or interactions with counterbalancing when predicting consumer choice.

We confirmed these results using an ANOVA approach to the data (F(1, 71) = 5.66, p < .05). In the self-accountability prime condition, participants were more likely to select fair trade teas when an ethical appeal was linked to the fair trade option (M = .79) than when an explicit guilt appeal was linked to the fair trade option (M = .30; t(71) = 2.58, p < .05). In the neutral prime condition, participants did not make differential fair trade tea selections when the explicit guilt appeal was absent (M = .40) versus present (M = .55; t(71) = 1.11, not significant), as we show in Figure 3. When examining responses in the ethical-appeal-only condition, participants in the self-accountability prime condition were

**Table 1**

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<th>Variable</th>
<th>Self-Accountability Priming</th>
<th>Neutral Priming</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No Guilt Appeal</td>
<td>Guilt Appeal</td>
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<tr>
<td>Regular tea</td>
<td>5.30%</td>
<td>10.00%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Combination</td>
<td>10.50%</td>
<td>50.00%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fair trade tea</td>
<td>84.20%</td>
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</table>
more likely to favor fair trade options (M = .79) than were those in the neutral prime condition (M = .40; t(71) = 2.05, p < .05). When selecting for participants in the explicit guilt-appeal condition, significant differences in preferences did not emerge across the self-accountability prime and the neutral prime conditions, though the trend was toward a decreased preference for fair trade options when we primed self-accountability (M = .55) rather than neutral concepts (M = .30; t(71) = 1.85, p < .07).

Study 2 directly tested our hypothesis that self-accountability, examined through a priming procedure, leads to increased preferences for products promoted using ethical appeals. We found that consumers with a heightened sense of self-accountability are more responsive to products promoted using ethical appeals, while consumers without a heightened sense of self-accountability show an equal preference for products promoted through ethical appeals and those promoted through more traditional self-benefit appeals. Importantly, and in support of previous research that demonstrates how explicit guilt appeals can have negative consequences, we found that when ethical attributes are promoted through an explicit guilt appeal, the positive impact of self-accountability is eliminated. Our analysis suggests that this is because explicit guilt appeals induce negative feelings such as anger and irritability.

**Study 3**

As our framework suggests, we expect the effects demonstrated in our first two studies to be mediated through anticipated guilt. Activating self-accountability will stimulate anticipated guilt when the consumer considers a decision outcome (the possibility of choosing a nonethical alternative) that does not adhere to his or her self-standards. In Study 3, we aim to extend the findings from the first two studies and examine our predicted mediation by manipulating self-accountability through the degree to which consumption decisions are public. Previous research has suggested that situational factors can activate guilt-related emotions (Baumeister, Stillwell, and Heatherton 1994; Tangney et al. 1996). Indeed, public contexts make people feel more accountable (Lerner and Tetlock 1999) and lead them to be more likely to behave in a manner consistent with personal self-standards (Baumeister and Tice 1984; Dickerson et al. 1992). We propose that the presence of others in the decision context serves to heighten consumers’ self-accountability. Previous research has suggested that accessibility to ought standards can be stimulated through contextual factors, such as priming or interactions with others (Camacho, Higgins, and Luger 2003; Higgins 1987, 1989). Thus, we propose that a consumption experience in a group setting can activate consumer self-accountability to uphold important self-standards. Following from our conceptual framework, we propose that self-accountability (activated through a public group setting) will lead consumers to opt for the product positioned through an ethical appeal over the product positioned through a self-benefit appeal. In private contexts, in which self-accountability is not activated, these differences in product choice should not emerge. Thus, we predict the following:

- **H3:** When self-accountability is activated (i.e., in a group context), consumers are more likely to choose a product positioned on the basis of ethical attributes than a product positioned on the basis of self-benefits. When self-accountability is low (i.e., in a private context), consumers no longer demonstrate a preference for ethically positioned products over products positioned on the basis of self-benefits.

A potential explanation for our predicted effect is that impression management accounts for the preference for ethical products in group contexts. Indeed, previous research has suggested that impression management (i.e., the desire to convey a positive self-image to others) is a motivating factor behind consumer adoption of products promoted using ethical attributes in public settings (e.g., Griskevicius, Tybur, and Van den Bergh 2010; White and Peloza 2009). We suggest that, in addition to impression-management motives, anticipated guilt will play a unique role in determining consumer choice. Our consideration of both anticipated guilt and impression management in our model is akin to the differentiation of moral identity into symbolization and internalization components (Aquino and Reed 2002). That is, we propose that while the effects might be driven in part by a desire to convey a particular social image to others (symbolization), they are also driven by a person’s desire to live up to his or her own self-standards (internalization). In Study 3, we aim to demonstrate the mediation of these effects through anticipated guilt. In addition, we want to examine the role of anticipated guilt beyond impression management. Therefore, we predict the following:

- **H4:** Preference for products positioned through ethical appeals versus self-benefit appeals while in the presence of others (compared with alone) is mediated through anticipated guilt, beyond impression-management concerns.

**Method**

**Pretest.** To test the effectiveness of our self-accountability manipulation, we conducted a pretest with 123 undergraduate students. We manipulated the presence of others by having participants complete surveys while alone in a room (with the experimenter) or in groups of four to seven people. In the group setting, to enhance participants’ sense of self-accountability, participants were asked to write their names on cards and display them on the table in front of them. Participants completed a series of survey questions that included a measure of self-accountability for environmental protection on seven-point scales (1 = “not at all,” and 7 = “very much so”): “How accountable are you for protecting the environment?” and “How accountable would you feel if meaningful damage to the environment occurs in the coming year?” (α = .82). Analysis of our self-accountability measure demonstrates that those in the group condition felt significantly higher levels of self-accountability (M = 4.69) than did those who were alone when viewing the ads (M = 3.47; t(122) = 10.16, p < .001). This demonstrates that the presence of others heightens a person’s self-accountability—in this case, to live up to a personal standard of being environmentally sustainable.
Participants and procedure. Participants were 121 undergraduate students who were recruited through posters placed around campus to complete a paper-and-pencil questionnaire in exchange for payment. We randomly assigned them, using a two-cell between-subjects design, to either a high or low self-accountability condition. We manipulated self-accountability as in our pretest, including the use of name cards. In each case, participants viewed two advertisements for granola bars, one containing an ethical appeal and another containing a self-benefit appeal (see Appendix C). We counterbalanced presentation order, as well as the assignment of brand to either the ethical or self-benefit appeal. After viewing the advertisements, participants were told that they could select the one of the two products being promoted.

After selecting one of the two products, participants completed a two-item scale adapted from Dahl, Honea, and Manchanda (2005). Because the focal mediating construct was anticipated guilt associated with the possibility of choosing the non-ethically positioned option, the question was worded to ask participants how they felt when they considered the decision opposite to the one they made. We coded the measures on a seven-point scale (1 = "no guilt at all/no remorse at all," and 7 = "a lot of guilt/a lot of remorse"); anticipated guilt index, \( \alpha = .85 \). Furthermore, to examine the role of impression management, we used a three-item scale adapted from White and Peloza (2009): "I want to present myself in a positive way to others," "I want to make a positive impression on others," and "I want to make myself look good to others" on a seven-point scale (1 = "strongly disagree," and 7 = "strongly agree") (\( \alpha = .91 \)). In addition, to control for the possibility that in public contexts people feel relatively more positive about the individual self (Greenberg and Pyszczynski 1985), participants completed a self-esteem measure (Rosenberg 1965): "I take a positive attitude toward myself," and "All in all, I am inclined to feel that I am a failure" (reverse-scored; seven-point scales, \( \alpha = .74 \)). Our dependent variable was actual product choice (i.e., whether participants selected the brand promoted through the ethical appeal or the brand promoted through the self-benefit appeal) because participants were allowed to take their selected product with them at the end of the study.

Results and Discussion

Product choice. As we depict in Figure 4, when participants viewed the appeals alone, 48.3% chose the product promoted using the ethical appeal, and 51.7% chose the product promoted using the self-benefit appeal. However, in the group setting, participants showed preference for the product promoted through the ethical appeal in 70.4% of cases (and for the product promoted through the self-benefit appeal in 29.6% of cases; \( \chi^2 (1) = 6.16, p = .013 \)). The results of logistic regression further demonstrate that the presentation order of the ads (ethical vs. self-benefit appeals) did not interact with the setting to predict product choice (\( \beta = -.177, \text{Wald} = .998, p = .754 \)). Therefore, these results demonstrate that when self-accountability is heightened (e.g., group settings), consumers respond more positively to ethical appeals than when they view the appeals in private settings.

Mediation analysis. First, we examined the influence of self-accountability activation (through a comparison of group vs. private context) on our potential mediators: anticipated guilt, impression management, and self-esteem. The results indicate that the self-accountability condition significantly influenced anticipated guilt (\( \beta = .359, p < .001 \)) and impression management (\( \beta = .533, p < .001 \)) but not self-esteem (\( \beta = .093, p = .31 \)). In particular, ratings of anticipated guilt were more pronounced in the group context (M = 4.58) than in the private context (M = 3.42; t(119) = 4.21, p < .001). In addition, ratings of impression management were higher in the group context (M = 4.54) than in the private context (M = 3.01; t(119) = 6.87, p < .001). Further analysis examined mediation through bootstrapping (Preacher and Hayes 2012). We tested a model in which we included anticipated guilt and impression management as parallel mediators of the effect of self-accountability activation on product choice (Hayes 2012, Model 4). The independent variable was the condition (high vs. low self-accountability), and the dependent variable was a binary coding of product choice. The results show that anticipated guilt significantly mediated the indirect effect of self-accountability on product choice (\( \beta = 1.47, \text{SE} = .52, 95\% \text{ CI} = .6885 \text{-} 2.570 \)). Moreover, a parallel pathway for mediation through impression management emerged (\( \beta = .86, \text{SE} = .56, 95\% \text{ CI} = .0538 \text{-} 1.246 \)). Notably, the standardized regression coefficients demonstrate the relative effect of both impression management and anticipated guilt, with the mediation effect from anticipated guilt over one and a half times the size of the impression management effect. Thus, the results support H4.

As we predicted, the presence of other people heightens preferences for products promoted using an ethical appeal over products promoted using a self-benefit appeal. When consumers selected products while alone, no differences in product choice emerged as a function of appeal type. In addition, we demonstrate a novel mechanism underlying...
these findings: anticipated guilt. Our results are consistent with our conceptualization: The group context appears to make people more self-accountable, in a way that makes them particularly sensitive to avoiding potential guilt associated with selecting a less ethical option. Notably, this process works in parallel to the process of impression management, suggesting that ethical consumption can be motivated by public self-image concerns, as well as a person's private self-standards for ethical behavior.

**Study 4**

Study 4 has three key objectives. First, we build on our initial three studies by demonstrating the observed effects in a real-world retail setting with consumers spending their own money. Whereas a benefit of the first three studies is that they afford us greater experimental control, the goal of Study 4 is to demonstrate our findings in a more all-encompassing, real-world context. Second, we want to enhance the generalizability of our findings to another sample. Age is often correlated with both awareness of environmental issues and attitudes toward the environment (Diamantopoulos et al. 2003), with younger people often being more sympathetic to social and environmental concerns than older generations. Therefore, Study 4 uses a community sample (rather than solely undergraduate students) to increase the generalizability of the results. Third, we also broaden our investigation by examining actual purchases of products in response to ethical and self-benefit appeals rather than product choice or intentions. Again, we predict that, when in a group setting, participants will be more likely to select the product positioned using an ethical appeal than one positioned using a self-benefit appeal. When evaluating the product in private, participants will not show a preference for products promoted using either appeal type.

**Method**

**Participants.** Participants were 165 customers who purchased coffee from a coffee shop located near a university campus. Due to the nature of the study, participant age is unknown. However, qualitative assessment places the average age of customers in our study at 40 years, ranging from 20 to 65 years.

**Procedure.** The study was a quasi-experimental field study, using a 2 (setting: group setting vs. individual setting) × 2 (appeal type: ethical vs. self-benefit) between-subjects design. The consumption of organic versus regular coffee was the key dependent variable. We chose organic coffee because this product category is relatively neutral on an indulgence–utilitarian scale (White, MacDonnell, and Dahl 2011), and it provides both ethical and self-benefit promotion opportunities, allowing for both types of appeals. This was quasi-experimental because although we randomly assigned blocks of people (in 30-minute time periods) to the appeal-type condition, the setting was naturally occurring and was recorded by coders.

The coffee serving area contained eight coffee carafes, each featuring a different roast (e.g., decaffeinated, hazelnut). A poster promoting the organic blend was placed on one carafe, which was prominently displayed among the others. The two versions of the poster were printed in color on 8 1/2” × 11” sheets of paper to make them clearly visible and to distinguish the organic carafe from the others. We achieved the manipulation of appeal type by varying the poster displayed on the organic carafe, such that it either promoted the ethical aspects of the organic blend or other benefits associated with the organic blend (Appendix D). The ethical appeal focused on the sustainability of habitats, water supplies, and soil, and the self-benefit appeal focused on taste and aroma resulting from the growing process. We changed the appeal type (ethical vs. self-benefit) in 30-minute intervals.

Because customers served the coffee themselves after purchasing an empty cup from the cashier, the price was constant for all coffee blends. The self-serve area was around the counter corner from the cashier and faced the opposite direction from customer seating in the shop (i.e., was private when other customers were not waiting to serve themselves). Informal pretesting confirmed that there was a variation in the presence of others, such that while consumers sometimes served themselves alone, there were also times when other customers were present in this area. Two coders observing from a distance recorded whether selection of either the organic blend or one of the nonorganic blends—the dependent variable—was made in the presence of others or alone, how many others were present, the product selection, and gender and estimated age of customer. Observation took place from the mid-morning to the afternoon until customer traffic slowed considerably (at approximately 4 P.M.). The overall sample included 87 women and 78 men, with 72 customers choosing while alone and 93 choosing while in the presence of others.

**Results and Discussion**

Logistic regression revealed a significant interaction between appeal type and setting on choice (β = −2.511, Wald = 13.07, p < .001). As Figure 5 indicates, when choosing alone, consumers were more likely to select the organic blend when it was promoted using a self-benefit appeal (57%; 17/30) rather than an ethical appeal (21%; 9/42). Conversely, consumers choosing in a group context were more likely to select the organic blend when it was promoted on the basis of the ethical appeal (46%; 21/46) rather than the self-benefit appeal (23%; 11/47; χ² (1) = 23.32, p < .001). Therefore, Study 4 provides additional support for the effects demonstrated in Study 3.

**Additional analyses.** This effect was not dependent on the number of people within the group. Regression analysis reveals a nonsignificant effect for the number of people in the presence of the consumer, from one to a maximum of seven (β = −.258, Wald = 1.69, p = .194). Therefore, the presence of only one other person is powerful enough to motivate a positive response to ethical appeals. Although the field study did not allow for the measurement of mediation as in Study 3, it is possible that the relative importance of the impression management and anticipated guilt mediators is affected by group size.
The purpose of Study 4 was to examine the role of physical setting in stimulating self-accountability in an involving, real-life context. The results offer several insights. First, because age is often correlated with both awareness of environmental issues and attitudes and behaviors toward the environment (Diamontopoulos et al. 2003), the use of a nonstudent sample enhances generalizability. Second, by examining customer purchases in a retail setting, we avoid the attitude-behavior gap prevalent in the study of prosocial consumption (Auger and Devinney 2007). Finally, although Study 4 demonstrates the same positive effect of ethical appeals in group consumption settings found in Study 3, in Study 4 we also find that consumers in the private condition preferred products promoted using a self-benefit appeal. This is consistent with the expectation that consumers tend to maximize self-benefits in the absence of self-accountability. This effect may have occurred in our field study because consumers were spending their own money and were therefore more highly attuned to the benefits they received as part of their purchase.

General Discussion

The current research demonstrates, across four studies, conditions under which ethical appeals are more effective than traditional self-benefit appeals in influencing consumer choice. Taken together, the studies suggest that when the decision-making situation activates consumer self-accountability, consumers prefer products promoted on the basis of ethical attributes over self-benefits. In Study 1, we heighten self-accountability by manipulating awareness of the gap between consumers’ actual behaviors and ought self-standards, demonstrating that this leads to preference for products promoted through ethical attributes. Study 2 then more directly manipulates self-accountability to expose its effects on product choice. This study confirms that while ethical appeals can effectively encourage consumer choice of ethical options, combining such appeals with explicit guilt-arousing messages can be counterproductive. In Study 3, we demonstrate the mediating role of anticipated guilt working in parallel with impression management and introduce a public consumption setting as a means to heighten self-accountability. Finally, in Study 4, we replicate our findings from Study 3 in a retail context using a generalizable sample. Our findings are consistent across a range of product categories, in both lab settings and a field study. Therefore, we present evidence of a robust effect that is generalizable to a broad range of products and consumption settings.

Theoretical Implications

The studies presented here highlight the role of self-accountability and anticipated guilt in consumer responses to ethical marketing appeals. We propose a theoretical framework suggesting that situational factors heighten self-accountability, which stimulates preference for products promoted through ethical appeals. This process is mediated by consumers’ desire to avoid guilt associated with a less ethical decision. Essentially, consumers will seek to avoid a mode of consumption characterized by falling short of their own internal standards—behaviors they believe they should exhibit—when their self-accountability is elevated. Importantly, we show that our proposed mechanism—anticipated guilt—works in parallel with impression management. Although impression management plays a mediating role, the desire to look ethical in front of others does not fully capture the motivation for prosocial choice in the current studies. Thus, on a theoretical level, we show the novel finding that a self-accountability to anticipated guilt pathway can drive prosocial responses, beyond other motivators such as impression management.

We also build on previous research by highlighting how explicit guilt appeals may be less effective than the more subtle activation of self-accountability in influencing positive responses to ethical appeals. Explicit guilt appeals represent an overt attempt to create experienced guilt. Consistent with previous work on guilt appeals, we find that consumers resist overt external attempts to change their behavioral standards. Thus, although advertising ethical attributes can generate anticipated guilt that leads to ethical consumer responses, this effect only occurs when subtle cues (rather than explicit guilt appeals) heighten consumer self-accountability. This represents an important first step toward understanding how anticipated guilt can motivate prosocial consumer behavior and complements the wealth of existing research on reactive guilt (either post hoc or through an explicit advertising appeal).

Practical Implications

The findings presented here offer insights for practitioners considering the use of ethical appeals and for policy makers who aim to encourage prosocial behavior more generally. First, for practitioners, appeals that highlight ethical attributes can be persuasive, but they are best used in situations in which consumers are likely to experience self-accountability. We advise marketers to use ethical appeals not as an overall
positioning strategy, but rather in a more targeted way such that the appeal type is matched to the setting. For example, in settings in which consumers are exposed to a message while alone (e.g., direct mail), a self-benefit appeal is more appropriate. Alternatively, in media that are consumed by groups of people or when responsibilities to others may be highlighted, ethical appeals may be more successful. As we show in Study 4, this may be particularly useful in retail settings, in which customers often encounter appeals in group contexts. Importantly, however, our work also points to the conditions under which ethical consumption choices will be motivated by self-accountability when the context is private. That is, if the communications can subtly activate self-accountability through awareness of the discrepancy between a person’s actions and his or her ought standards (as in Study 1) or if the message can prime self-accountability (as in Study 2), preferences for ethical options can be enhanced. Furthermore, our findings suggest that even when brands are built on an ethical positioning, or a product has a tangible benefit over the competition on ethical attributes, it may be appropriate to avoid ethical appeals in situations in which self-accountability is expected to be low.

Our work shows that marketers should not attempt to activate anticipated guilt through self-accountability in tandem with appeals designed to explicitly induce consumer guilt. Indeed, when the guilt appeal is explicit, this may lead to a backfire effect in which consumers exhibit decreased preference for the ethically positioned product. Thus, our work illustrates that the use of explicit guilt appeals is not necessary to generate positive consumer response to ethical appeals and may even have negative consequences. This is consistent with previous research demonstrating that appeals that induce high levels of guilt can lead to anger and irritability (Coulter and Pinto 1995). Our research shows the conditions under which guilt can motivate consumer response more subtly and in a way that allows consumers to ultimately feel more positive about the choice they have made. Because personal self-standards are rooted in the socialization process (Haidt 2001), policy makers who aim to encourage consumers to make prosocial choices can play a role in developing and communicating appropriate self-standards. Social marketing can be utilized to encourage consumers to consider their ought selves in their decision-making processes by subtly making the ought self more salient, similar to how priming in our studies served to motivate consumers to close the gap between their actual and ought selves. We expect the effects demonstrated with explicit guilt appeals in Study 2 to also be a potential pitfall for social marketers who aim to increase self-accountability. Namely, our research suggests that such attempts should be made using the relatively subtle techniques examined here rather than attempting to explicitly induce guilt.

**Directions for Further Research**

Several further research opportunities arise from the current findings. First, researchers could examine how the pervasiveness of ethical appeals affects their effectiveness. If a category is characterized by multiple ethical appeals from different marketers, will consumers react in the same manner as described here? Although the use of ethical appeals in advertising campaigns is still somewhat limited, if more marketers find success, they will surely face a more crowded media landscape, with competitors aiming to imitate their positioning. A worthwhile direction for further research, then, is to examine how marketers can best position products with ethical attributes against competing products positioned using similar attributes. Further research could explore tactical and design elements within ethical appeals to determine how best to communicate with consumers. Although advertisements in our studies used colors such as green to accompany environmentally based ethical appeals, perhaps other colors that suggest a loss of natural habitats would be more effective in stimulating prosocial consumption. Previous research has shown that loss framing can be more effective at motivating behaviors such as recycling (e.g., Obermiller 1995; White, MacDonnell, and Dahl 2011), which suggests an opportunity for researchers to examine how elements such as ad copy and color can influence the results reported here.

Further research could also explore other contexts or purchase decision variables that might lead to heightened self-accountability and/or consumer guilt. For example, because our findings suggest that alleviation of anticipated guilt is an important predictor of pro-ethical consumption, these appeals may be more successful in hedonic or indulgent product categories, in which a consumer’s sense of guilt is already heightened (Strahilevitz and Myers 1998). In addition, it may be that the consideration of more hedonic options makes people more self-accountable for their choices. In support of this notion, research finds that consumers considering the purchase of fair trade goods often feel more affected by the injustice experienced by others when their product choice is more indulgent (White, MacDonnell, and Ellard 2012). Furthermore, preliminary research from our laboratory demonstrates that anticipated guilt associated with not choosing an ethical option is enhanced when the product category is hedonic and reduced when the product is utilitarian.

Further research might also examine how appeal type can be used to decrease demand. Although our studies examine how marketers can influence consumer demand for products, many social marketing campaigns are aimed at reducing demand and consumption. Opportunities for positioning using either ethical or self-benefit appeals may operate in a similar way in a social marketing context. For example, antismoking campaigns could position the appeal in terms of self-benefits (e.g., cost savings) or on ethical criteria (e.g., secondhand smoke, societal health care costs). Researchers could also examine how appeal type can be used effectively to reach social marketing objectives in addition to those examined here.

Other possible research avenues involve the examination of consumer well-being by considering the impact of ethical appeals on guilt and consumption. For example, does the alleviation of guilt through the promotion of ethical attributes lead consumers to prefer one brand over another, or does it stimulate new demand? In other words, do consumers prefer one chocolate bar over another because their choice alleviates guilt, or do they feel entitled to consume...
more chocolate bars because they feel less guilt? Our studies examine the choices consumers made when faced with products that were largely similar, with the exception of the promotion of ethical attributes. Further research could examine when people expand their consumption or consume completely new categories as a result of guilt alleviation (i.e., licensing effects). The findings presented here represent a promising step in encouraging consumer support for ethical initiatives by marketers. This research provides insight into how marketers can more effectively use ethical attributes and positioning in marketing communications to encourage increased ethical consumption.

APPENDIX A
Materials for Study 1

Now with 10% more natural juice.
Uses only fresh ingredients.
juicy goodness.

help solve your thirst & climate change.
90% of our packaging comes from post-consumer recycled products.
Produced locally to reduce emissions in transportation.

APPENDIX B
Compilation of Key Measures

Study 1
The dependent variable was purchase intention, measured on seven-point scales (adapted from White and Peloza 2009):
• How likely would you be to purchase the product?
• How inclined would you be to purchase the product?
• How willing would you be to purchase the product?

Study 2
The dependent variable was the purchase of teas promoted in the study. We coded preference for regular teas as -1, preference for fair trade tea as 1, and an equal preference for each type of tea as 0.

Study 3
We measured anticipated guilt using a two-item, seven-point scale (adapted from Dahl, Honea, and Manchanda 2005):

When you were considering your product selection, how did you feel when you thought about selecting the other option available to you (i.e., the product you did not choose)?
• No guilt at all/A lot of guilt
• No remorse at all/A lot of remorse

To test for alternative explanations we also measured self-esteem (Rosenberg 1965):
• I take a positive attitude toward myself.
• All in all, I am inclined to feel that I am a failure.

We also tested for consumer-impression management (White and Peloza 2009):
• I want to present myself in a positive way to others.
• I want to make a positive impression on others.
• I want to make myself look good to others.

Study 4
Because Study 4 was a field study, measures included coding on the condition (alone vs. in the presence of others), the appeal type (self-benefit vs. ethical appeal), and the product selection of the respondent.
ORGANIC BLEND

THE NATURAL, ORGANIC GROWING PROCESS MEANS THIS COFFEE IS PRODUCED WITHOUT ANY DEGRADATION TO THE SOIL AND ENVIRONMENT WHERE IT WAS GROWN. IT PROTECTS NATURAL HABITATS AND WATER SUPPLIES.

The organic process also means this coffee has simply outstanding flavor. The taste and aroma are just the way nature intended, and unparalleled by other coffees.

The organic process also means this coffee is produced without any degradation to the soil and environment where it was grown. It protects natural habitats and water supplies.